

Local History

HISTORY MYSTERY



The next of kin memorial plaque (sometimes referred to as the dead man's penny) featured in last month's History Mystery segment was minted in honour of John Andrew Cunningham.

John was born at Gordon near Ballarat in February 1888 and was 27 years and 11 months old when he enlisted on 8 January 1916.

His occupation was listed as a Driver, and he trained at Seymour in August 1916 with the Light Horse RIFs.

He died of malignant malaria on 17 October 1918 and was buried at the Protestant Cemetery, Damascus, Grave No 76 by Rev C.W Garton of Australian headquarters in Cairo, Egypt.

John's father William Cunningham lived in East Malvern, although he had changed address and was resident at 47 Thanet Street when notified of his son's death in 1918.

The next of kin memorial plaque was presented to William Cunningham on 20 May 1923. He had earlier received a Victory medal on 19 March 1923, and a War gratuity payment in February 1922.

The only other information we have on John Cunningham is that he had one sister, Annie Hayes (married) who was granted probate on his will on 13 April 1919.

The mystery is, how did the next of kin memorial plaque for John Andrew Cunningham, who died in October 1918 come to be gathering dust in a cardboard box in an old farm shed in Grantville until found almost 90 years after it was presented?

Did a Hayes or Cunningham family live in the area at sometime and it was just lost or left there as so many of these treasures are?

The only clue we have been able to come up with so far is a grave in the Grantville Cemetery.

The grave is of an A.L Cunningham, a pensioner from Kowera who was 84 years old when he was buried there on 2 April 1951.

Now it's over to you to take up the challenge and help solve the mystery!!!

GRANTVILLE 1896

Let's go back to Grantville in its heyday.

Catch the Cobb and Co coach at Dandenong on Saturday at 9am and head for Grantville.

Stopping at Cranbourne, Tooradin and Tobin Yallock. It's not a very comfortable journey as the Western Port road is unmade and very muddy and corrugated on the steeper slopes.

The driver tells tales of bogged coaches and drowned travellers to pass the time. We have to get out and push at several places along the way. Frenchman's and The Gurdies are famous for delaying the coach.

We arrive at the Grantville Hotel, one of three hotels that have been in Grantville.

We decide on a meal and read the locally produced paper The Western Port Times before we explore the busy little town.

The paper tells of the recent Grantville Show where horses, sheep, cattle, pigs and poultry were shown. The home produce section was also very popular with Mrs Newell winning the first prize for her bread, ahead of 13 other entries.

We cross the road and walk down Jetty road towards the pier where boats are gathered for the regatta. Maybe we will see Captain Johnson's schooner 'Dorothy S' or Mr Stewart's vessel 'Tyro'.

We pass the butcher's shop run by Richard and Samuel Sloss. Next door is Mr Smith's boot maker's business.

Charlie Williams the blacksmith has a fine property near the corner and it is his duty to keep the coaches running so their timetables can be met. He is always on hand to shoe horses and the many other blacksmithing tasks Grantville needs.

The newspaper has an office in Jetty road and Mr Manger runs his agency from the building as well. There is a drapery store run by Mr Fred Dowell and a small rented house next door where Mr Witt manages a branch of the Colonial Bank.

The Grantville Mechanics Institute are very excited to have obtained a loan from the Colonial Bank of 150 pounds to build in Grantville on the Western Port Road near Mr Paul's general store.

Back in the hotel the rooms are being used for meetings of local groups. We are interested to see the enthusiasm of the local people for their community.

The Grantville Railway League are meeting to discuss a proposed line with a spur to Grantville.

The Grantville Racing Club are planning their next race meeting to be held at the course at the back of the hotel near the saleyards, and the Grantville Mining Company are in the bar looking for suitable subscribers for their next speculative venture.

We go to the Post Office to send a Rose

Series post card home, it will be one of about 13,000 mail items sent this year. We see that the Post Office has a Savings Bank branch and that the posters are on display from the Police Station next door.

The Grantville Improvement Committee are working hard to make Grantville a prosperous place with every amenity for its community.

Sadly by the First World War very little remained of this exciting time in Grantville's life.

The improvement Committee has long gone, but now we an enthusiastic group of people just as anxious to improve facilities for Grantville. We now have a Bendigo Community Bank, Doctor and Pharmacy and with all the community interest being shown in local development it is easy to imagine an exciting future ahead for Grantville.

Written by Libby Skidmore, Bass Valley Historical Society.



The Western Port Cobb & Co

Agitation for a good road to Dandenong began in the early 1850's. The route was surveyed but little was done to make the road passable in all weathers. Many tales were told about the mud and the boggy state of the Western Port road. The blacksmith in Grantville, Charlie Williams, was often busy repairing coaches and harness so that time tables could be maintained.

Cobb and Co ran a coach service on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from Dandenong to Grantville and returned on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at a cost of five shillings. In 1913 the Country Roads Board was formed and the road was repaired and renamed the Bass Highway.

Grantville Show

The first Grantville Show was held in March 1885. This began a series of most successful shows with many entries in the various competitions in the pavilion and also in horses and livestock events. In 1894 there were 780 entries for all sections. The show was held every year until 1909.