

SIR JOHN MONASH 1865-1931

Sir John Monash's father came to Jerilderie in 1874 with his family to manage a General Store located where in 2011 the Newsagency and the Hairdressing Salon now stand.

If it hadn't been for the discernment of the local Schoolmaster William Elliott, Sir John may never have become one of Australia's greatest men, and a familiar face on the not so familiar \$100 note.

Elliott quickly recognized that he had a genius on his hands and after teaching him all he knew persuaded his parents that for young John to realize his full potential he should be enrolled in a leading secondary school in Melbourne. Mrs Monash did not need much persuading as she missed the social life of Melbourne and so towards the end of the 1877 academic year in which young John was Dux of the Jerilderie Public School, Mrs Monash returned to Melbourne with the children, and young John Monash enrolled at Scotch College. The rest is history.

Sir John Monash graduated from Melbourne University (an institution of which he was later to become Vice Chancellor) with degrees in Civil Engineering, Arts, and the Law, specializing in patents.

Sir John maintained a lifelong friendship with his former teacher William Elliott who, on resigning from the Education Department in 1885 purchased the local paper and continued in that profession up until his (Elliott's) death in 1934.

In Geoffrey Serle's biography of Sir John Monash published in 1982 Monash is quoted as writing in 1930 "Elliott still remembers me with affection".

In the Jerilderie Herald and Urana Advertiser dated 27 June 1918 Elliott inserted the following item in his paper:

"Public School Boy," Jerilderie writes:- The Old Scotch Collegians are greatly pleased at the promotion gained by Lieut General Sir John Monash, and have cabled him a message of congratulations. Why not a similar message being sent from the Old Boys of this school where Sir John spent nearly four years of his school life. (Nothing to prevent it. You could easily communicate with at least a score or thirty around these parts who were his school mates. So go ahead with the idea. In his private letters here he used to invariably inquire about you and how you were all getting along - Ed.)

Elliott himself later wrote an obituary for Monash and published it in his Jerilderie Herald and Urana Advertiser on 15 October 1931, ending it with the words: "To his teacher here, who was a young man in those early days, there was always a strong feeling of friendship to the last. They corresponded with each other from the time he left school. He sorrows and mourns the passing away of a sincere friend."

But perhaps the greatest indication of mutual regard that William Elliott and Sir John Monash had for each other occurred on Anzac Day 1933 when the only child of Sir John Monash, Mrs Gershon Bennett, visited Jerilderie and presented to the Jerilderie Public School a copy of the portrait of her father painted by Sir John Longstaff. The portrait was accepted

and unveiled by William Elliott in a special ceremony held at the School before a crowd of approximately 300 parents, citizens, and school children

The Jerilderie Museum has in its possession a copy of a letter written by Sir John Monash to William Elliott dated 6 June 1922, when Sir John was Manager and Chairman of the fledgling State Electricity Commission of Victoria.

One of Sir John's fondest memories of his time in Jerilderie was the herding of the goats "in from the plains at milking time" and "swimming our charges across the waist-deep river." No doubt the reference to the "plain" is the Common, located immediately south of the town's airstrip, whilst the reference to the "waist-deep river" may be those periods when the Wangamong Creek, between the township and the airstrip, had water in it. Equally it may also refer to the allotments of land once owned by Mrs Monash, being an allotment where the Jerilderie Museum now stands, and 2 acres of land in the bend of the creek immediately to the north of the Museum and over the Billabong Creek, now partly occupied by the mini rail.

Sir John had another connection with Jerilderie, in that during 1897/98 Sir John utilized both his engineering and legal skills to be an expert witness and adviser to pastoralists, farmers, and townspeople, who brought an action against David and Samuel McCaughey who were damming much of the water on the Billabong (Coree Station) and Colombo (Coonong Station) Creeks.

Monash later advised a notable Barrister at the time, Sir Julian Salomons, who appeared in the Blackwood v McCaughey Supreme Court action for damages.

Sir John was a spare time soldier and when World War 1 broke out the 49 year old Colonel was given command of a brigade. On cessation of hostilities Sir John Monash was a Lieutenant-General in command of the entire Australian army corps. Along the way he received a knighthood which was presented to him by King George V at his battle headquarters of Bertangles, France, on 12 August 1918.

At war's end Sir John was given the task of repatriating the Australian forces, until 1920 when he accepted the task of creating the State Electricity Commission of Victoria.

What is generally overlooked or down played in the life of Sir John Monash is that on 25 April 1916 at a training camp in Egypt, Monash initiated and conducted the first Anzac Day ceremony, and in collaboration with others, wrote the inscription on the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne: "Let all men know that this is holy ground. This shrine established in the hearts of men as on the solid earth commemorates a people's fortitude and sacrifice. Ye therefore that come after give remembrance."

Much has been made about whether Monash did or did not meet Ned Kelly. Both biographers of Monash, Serle (1982) and Perry (2004) agree that it was not possible for Monash to have met Ned on the occasion of the gang's raid on Jerilderie on 8, 9 & 10 February 1879, but because Monash never confirmed or denied stories to that effect, it may well have occurred in previous years when Kelly was in the area, either selling horses or looking for his step-father, George King, to tell him that Ellen Kelly was once again in jail.

Equally, it may well have been on the occasion when Sir John Monash recalls in his writings that his attendance at a state banquet at Buckingham Palace on 27 December 1918 was comparable to the occasion in which he had met Ned Kelly, 41 years earlier. Taken literally this statement means that Monash was claiming he met Ned during the school holidays of 1877/1878, and not during the raid itself, in February 1879.

What is fact though, is that Monash's former school teacher, William Elliott, was an unwilling helper in the robbing of the Bank of New South Wales, holding the bag while Ned scooped the safe's contents into it.

Another interesting coincidence is that the presiding justice at the naturalization ceremony of Sir John Monash's father, Louis', on 25 April 1856 (another coincidence within a coincidence?) was none other than Justice Sir Redmond Barry, the judge who presided over Ned Kelly's trial and the sentencing of Ned to be hanged at 10 am on the 11th day of the 11th month, 1880. If daylight saving had been in operation in 1880 another coincidence would have occurred!

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