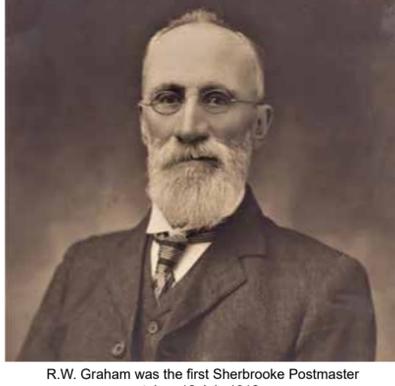


R.W. GRAHAM AND THE HISTORY OF SHERBROOKE POST OFFICE

By David Graham, great grandson of R.W. Graham

This article may raise more questions than it answers regarding the history of the Sherbrooke Post Office, but hopefully it fills in some gaps starting with the first Sherbrooke Post Master, Robert William Graham.

Robert William Graham was born in Ludlow Shropshire, England in 1836. After careers as a merchant seaman (he called himself Captain Graham, but officially he at least held the rank of Second Mate) and a land valuer/auctioneer, he moved the family to Quebec, Canada in 1882. He took up 100 acres of land at St Cecile de Whitton province of Quebec in 1882 but in 1884 left the land after finding the land no good for farming. The family moved to Victoria, Australia about September 1887. Their son Henry's death certificate indicated he had lived in Victoria for 4 months before he passed away in Richmond on the 4th January 1888.



R.W. Graham was the first Sherbrooke Postmaster taken 12 July 1912.

In 1892/3 Robert William Graham was farming a 38 acre lease, Lot 63 A in Scoresby in the Centre Riding of the Shire of Ferntree Gully. On 31st August 1893, he applied for 10 acres of land, Lot 47 G in the County of Evelyn in the Dandenong State Forest. His occupation was described as a nursery stock salesman in Ascot Vale, but at the time was unemployed and living on his land since June 1893.

He was granted a Certificate of Registration for the lease on the 2nd September

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1893 and received permit 3347 to occupy the land. After 3 years of compliance with the conditions of permit he applied for the lease of the land on 15th November 1897. The lease was granted for a 20 years period on the 1st December 1897 for 1 shilling per acre per annum. He built his first house on his Lot circa 1893 from hand split timber logs and shingles, some of which can still be seen on the original sections of the house "Merrimu" in Merrimu Lane, Sherbrooke¹.

In the edition of the Melbourne Age dated Wednesday 13th December 1893, there was an article with the heading "Destructive Bushfire in the Dandenongs, Sherbrooke" in which a fire had started in Sassafras Gully, Dandenong Forest.

"... The fire just stopped short of the place of R.W. Graham". This is the first mention of "Sherbrooke" in the Dandenong Ranges area found in the TROVE database. On the 6th February 1894 Graham wrote a letter to the Minister for Lands pertaining to his application for land giving his postal address as Graham's Loose Bag, "Sherbrooke", Dandenong State Forest. It is the first occasion "Sherbrooke" appears in his correspondence with the Lands Department².

The Friday 6th April 1894 issue of the Government Gazette notified the appointment of R.W. Graham as deputy registrar of births and deaths at Sherbrooke³ and he became a JP on 10th September 1912 and sat at the Ferntree Gully Court House.

In relation to the Sherbrooke settlement, Coulson⁴ referred to R.W. Graham as "the leading spirit in the early settlement of who may be justly described as the "father" of Sherbrooke".

According to other sources such as Barrett⁵, Winzenreid⁶, Reid et al⁷, Williams⁸, Freeman et al⁹ and Monbulk Historical Society¹⁰ R.W. Graham became a postmaster at Sherbrooke circa 1894. Unfortunately there is a dearth of information concerning the history of Victorian Post Offices; however, Land Department records provide a glimpse of R.W. Graham's postal activities. In a letter he wrote to J. Thomas esq. in the Department, dated 30th September 1895, he states that "The 5 shilling per week I receive for carrying the mail twice per week is only enough to provide flour and groceries for us (five in the family), nearly all the cash I have received from the Dept. has been spent on the land."

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The earliest mention of R.W. Graham and Sherbrooke Post Office in the National Library of Australia TROVE data base was found in a Government GPO Melbourne Advertisement on the 25th December 1895¹¹, requesting tenders for the conveyancing of mail in 1896-99 with the following services required: -

To and from Bayswater railway station and Sassafras (Goode's), two days a week: or to and from Bayswater railway station and Dandenong State Forest (Andrade's), via Goode's and Sherbrooke (Graham's), two days a week. (Alternative tenders). Tenderers to state route.

To and from Upper Ferntree Gully railway station and Dandenong State Forest (Andrade's), via Goode's and Graham's two days a week: or to and from Upper Ferntree Gully railway station and Dandenong State Forest (Andrade's), via Sherbrooke (Graham's), two days a week. Tenderers to state route. (Alternative tenders).

This confirms R.W. Graham's role in the Sherbrooke postal service. His office was also mentioned in Electoral Roll Notices for elections in the district.

John Francis Waghorn has compiled information concerning postmasters and postmistresses of Victorian Post Offices but was unable to find records for Sherbrooke Post Office prior to 1901. However, he did record that R.W. Graham was postmaster at Sherbrooke from 1901 to 1918. After R.W. Graham's death in February 1918 his wife Kate Graham became postmistress at Sherbrooke but only to the end of 1918. Waghorn's list extends to 1975.

Graham and local volunteers had been carrying mail to and from Ferntree Gully Post Office for years, and at some stage Graham delivered a loose bag to South Sassafras three times a week¹. However, it wasn't until many years later that the postal services for the area were enhanced. On 29th June 1908,^{13,14} a Sherbrooke deputation consisting of T. Heath, R.W. Graham, Raynes Dickson, Mrs Oldham and Miss Fawcett met the Post Master General to ask for increased postal facilities. Mail was only delivered twice a week and if postal notes or money orders were required, residents had to travel to Sassafras Gully three miles away or upper Ferntree Gully five and a half miles away. The deputation was successful in that the Post Master General consented to the establishment of an "allowance Post Office" to be operated for a trial period of twelve months at Sherbrooke. Allowance Post Offices provided postal services from pre-existing business with the proprietor being paid a modest allowance for the hours spent on providing the additional postal services.

SHERBROOKE POST OFFICE

In reply to a deputation from the Sherbrooke General by Mr. W.H. Irvine, M.P., the Post master introduced yesterday promised to allow the experimental establishment for a year of an allowance post office in that district. The Minister was impressed with the evidence of increasing settlement supplied by the deputation.

The Age Tuesday 30 June 1908 page 8

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R.W. Graham had operated a loose bag service at Sherbrooke as early as 1894. Helen Coulson's research notes contain conversations she had with Sherbrooke local identities circa 1953 who remembered the early settlers. Several mention R.W. Graham and the Sherbrooke Post Office. T. Breen provided the following information: -

"Old Mr. Graham carried the mail from Gully. Had first PO up Graham's Lane, which runs off Clematis Avenue. Geo. O'Neill where PO is now???" (Now Gason).

At his wish Mr Graham was buried in Mr Breen's wagon - 4 wheeled covered wagon" (he died in February 1918).

"Griffiths had an open-air church 1894/95 at Sherbrooke. Later services were held at Grahams, who came about 1893."

Sherbrooke: "Named by Graham, who went in to see about a P. O. "Well, what are you going to call it?" Sherbrooke, after the place he came from in Canada!"

Mrs Tom Heath provide the following: -

Graham: "Came from Canada. Came from Gully for mail, hence name. He had to walk to Gully for mail. Graham's place there 44 years ago. Therefore by 1909. (Note: Coulson therefore must have taken these notes circa 1953). Before that, letters went to Sass. Two Houses. Old One, second one built by Perc Chandler, father-in-law". (Note: this comment is addressed later)

"Graham was thrown out of pony and trap and killed". "Walked to Council. Wouldn't take horse, starting to 1 to 2 in morning".

Post Office: "Graham's first house or second house. Heath got it moved to site of Convalescent Home." (Note: A convalescent home for boy was established in Sherbrooke when Mr C. Wilson donated 4 acres of land the Royal Children's Hospital in 1936)

Mrs. Geo. O'Neill (Miss Beattie) took it over at Graham's. Ruby Hartney next Norman Gason next. He had it in old home first then N. Gason built a new one 3 or 4 years later.

Storrie (possibly the wife of James Storrie, 1895 selector on Sassafras Creek), provided the following: -

"Graham had two little ponies and trap". "Graham had first open-air pictures. Showed them on stormy night with wind"

Coulson writes: The first post Office at Sherbrooke was opened about 1894. Prior to that year, mail was collected from Ferntree Gully twice a week and delivered to the boxes of residents by a person travelling on foot. The first Postmaster was Mr R.W. Graham who served for 24 years until 1918. The present Postmaster, Mr W. F. Craig, states that he was reliably informed that Mr Graham was responsible for naming the locality. It seems that he was requested to furnish the name of the district when applying for the Post Office, and as it was then not named, he submitted the name "Sherbrooke". Which was the name of the town in which he was born in Canada. This last

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sentence is not entirely correct. Whilst R.W. Graham lived in the small town of Sainte-Cécile-de-Whitton, close to Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada from 1882 to at least 1884, he was actually born in Ludlow, Shropshire, England in 1836.

There does not appear to be any official Government photographs surviving for Sherbrooke Post Office, however two photos from private collections do exist. Unfortunately their provenance when taken, what location and by whom are missing. There is evidence that Sherbrooke Post Office resided in at least three different locations at Sherbrooke over the first 50 years of its existence.

We know that R.W. Graham operated the first Sherbrooke Post Office from the first house he built on his allotment. Whilst it became known in later years as "Merrimu", Graham and his wife Kate never used that name. He actually referred to his Sherbrooke property as "Delaware", with the first reference to this name given in a letter he wrote to the Land Department on the 19th February 1903. He used that name until at least 1914.

On the Lands Department Permit Compliance document signed on 25th Oct 1895, it states that the following building improvements had been made on his allotment: -

- 3 roomed house, slabs, shingle roof, good floored, lined walls, valued at 80 pounds.
- His lease application to the Lands Department on the 15th Nov 1897 provided the following information:

- his postal address was Sherbrooke, via Postal Town Bayswater
- His neighbours were Clarke, Mitchelson, Water Trust
- Front house, 3 roomed, 27ft X 16ft, made of horizontal slab
- Back house, 2 roomed, 20ft X 12ft, made of palings and lining
- barn 20ft X 12ft, for pigs, hens & hamp, made of palings

He had been residing on the land since 6th June 1893 continuously. The lease application asked if he had any other businesses or employment and he said yes, Registrar of Birth and Deaths for Dandenong Forest district called "Sherbrooke". Interestingly he didn't mention Post Master!

In an application for a Grant of a Conditional Purchase Leasehold, on 8th September 1905, he declared that he had cultivated 7 acres of land, had resided on the property for 4 years before the lease and 8 years under lease, and the boundaries of the land were ploughed and cultivated.

- The buildings consisted of: -
- house 27ft X 15ft, wood and iron (previously termed the front house)
- annex 20ft X 12ft (previously termed the back house)

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The photograph above appears to be Sherbrooke Post Office at Merrimu c. 1915

It appears to be a view of the rear verandah, probably of R.W. Graham's original residence, which has become known as "Merrimu", and the small outbuilding seen in the photo is purported to be the actual first Sherbrooke Post Office, although this is far smaller than a "back house" or "annex" of 20ft x 12ft! Whilst the photo may have been taken in 1915, by then R.W. Graham would have moved into his new house (mentioned earlier by Mrs Tom Heath), so it is doubtful that this building was being used as a post office at the time this photo was taken.

Percival Bertram Chandler, a local builder for whom R.W. Graham's son Fred Graham worked, married Graham's youngest daughter Rose. Rose and Percy had one daughter Doris Kate Chandler, born about 1901. When she was in 4th grade at school, Doris wrote a post card to her cousin Rea containing the following: "... papa is building a house for grandpa Graham" (R.W. Graham). The post card is not dated but given her age and school grade the new house would have been built around 1910.

The story of R.W. Graham and the Sherbrooke Post Office will continue in the Autumn 2022 edition of Monbulk Historical Society's Roundabout

Vale Janet Wilson

On Friday November 5th, a memorial service for Janet Wilson was held at the Wattle Park Chalet in Surrey Hills. Her husband David had passed away in 2016. David and Janet first met aged five and six, while holidaying with their parents on the Mornington Peninsula. They remained close friends and married in 1962.

Both were valuable members of the Monbulk Historical Society. David was the Societies earliest resident of Kallista, going back to 1937, when he enrolled as a student at the Kallista Primary School.

Before moving to Sherbrooke in 2010 to live in new home lovingly built by David, they had lived in Somers where Janet was a member of the Hastings Historical Society.

Janet developed a great interest in genealogy and was a long-time member of the Australian Genealogical Studies in Blackburn, and the Australian Society of Victoria. She extensively researched both hers and David's family trees.

They both had a great love of family, being very involved in the lives of their children, grandchildren and their two great grandchildren, who Janet was able to meet before her death.

Janet supported David in his love of the Dandenongs, particularly Sherbrooke Forest and the township of Kallista. David was a Committee Member for many years of the Friends of Sherbrooke Forest. He also participated in the Kallista Centenary in 1993 and the Kallista Mechanics Hall centenary in 2014.

Janet and David lived a simple but significant life and left a legacy which serves as an inspiration to all who knew them.



Monbulk Historical Society wishes everyone a Merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year

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References for R.W. Graham and the history of Sherbrooke Post Office.

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¹² The Waggon Index, Victorian Postmasters and Postmistresses, 1901 to 1975 (G 383.49945 P8458W)
¹³ Herald (Melbourne) Monday 29 June 1908, page 3
¹⁴ Age (Melbourne) Tuesday 30 June 1908, page 8
¹⁵ Helen Coulson notes - South Belgrave Historical Society.

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