

Back to the Beginning

Robert Punshon

To begin my story we need to go back to the beginning as far as I know it.

My great grandfather, Robert Punshon, was born on 17 December 1844, at Gateshead, Newcastle-on-Tyne in England. Gateshead-on-Tyne, as it is often referred to, is in the north of England, not far from the east coast.

At the age of only seven years, Robert arrived in the colony on the sailing ship 'Constance', in 1852. Two years later he returned to England to be educated and subsequently entered the engineering profession. He served his apprenticeship of seven years in the employ of the prominent engineering company of Messrs. George Stephenson & Sons.

Shipping records from the Victorian Public Records Office show Robert, arriving back in Melbourne, at the age of 20, aboard the 'Western Ocean' in March 1866. Shortly afterwards, he made his way to the settlement of Williamstown, located on the western shores of Port Phillip Bay and named after King William IV.

Anne McGeary

Unfortunately, I have no knowledge of how Robert met his wife to be, Johanna Innes, but they were married in the Melbourne suburb of Footscray, on 8 November 1870. Johanna was born in the town of Kirkcaldy in the County of Fife, on the east coast of Scotland on 12 December 1850.

It is interesting to note that most of the houses lived in by the extended family were also named 'Kirkcaldy'. Even a cousin who lived in Power Avenue, Kooyong, called his home by this name. This branch of the family, by the name of Wallis, owned a large pharmacy on the corner of Burke and Riversdale Roads, Glen Iris. I too would have been happy to carry on this tradition had our house not already been named.

Johanna and Robert lived in Stevedore Street, Williamstown from where Robert also conducted his business and it was here that their two daughters were born. Ella Louise Emily, born on 6 April 1883 was followed two years later by Una Florence, my nana, on 27 March 1885.

As the girls grew they attended Strathmore Grammar School which was established in 1867. The school still stands today on The Strand, Williamstown, but is now known as the Williamstown Campus of Westbourne Grammar School.

The area around the foreshore known as Nelson Place was the first area to be established in Williamstown, with jetties and large shipping stores being built by convict labour to service the many sailing ships arriving in the colony. These days it's just as busy, having become a very popular restaurant and café precinct. By 1855, shops and businesses had begun to spring up and Robert Punshon became involved in the grocery trade. He conducted a very successful business in Stevedore Street before deciding to build new and larger premises at 82-84 Ferguson Street.

The building was designed and the plans drawn up by architect C. J. Polain of Williamstown and work began on the construction of what was to be a very imposing building. The builder, James Rawsthorn and his workforce, had quite a job ahead of them, as can be seen in the photographs taken during construction in June 1889.

The photos show the cellars being carved out of basalt, forming the foundations. Internally the ceilings were installed diagonally as a form of

decoration and Kauri pine was used for countertops and shelving.

The history of Punshon's Federal Stores, Wine & Spirit Merchants, can be read on the Victorian Heritage database, but one of the most unusual points of interest is the bust Robert had made of himself. It was positioned on the highest point of the building; perhaps overseeing the comings and goings from his business!

Quoting from a local newspaper article of that time: "These premises were equipped with every modern convenience for a large trade, having splendid cellars and facilities for the handling of heavy packages equal to any wholesale houses in the city."

Apparently, Great-grandfather was a keen, enterprising businessman, highly respected in commercial circles for his integrity and capacity, and although he didn't take a prominent role in public affairs, was well known and an esteemed leading member of the Presbyterian Church.

Robert suffered from angina and it is written that he fought against his illness with remarkable tenacity. It was only during his last week that he abandoned any hope of recovery after a heart attack, and he passed away on 20 October 1898. This congenital defect seems to have been passed down through the generations as my Nana, Una, also suffered from angina. Sadly, her sister, Ella passed away in 1913 from an unknown cause at the young age of 30.

In 1998, I had my own heart problems and underwent emergency surgery to have a stent inserted to open up my arteries, probably saving me from the same fate as my forebears, at the early age of 54.

Robert Punshon's death at the age of 54 attracted a lot of attention and his funeral was attended by a large gathering of mourners, including members of societies to which he belonged. The Excelsior Lodge of Industry was represented, as was the Ancient Order of Foresters (Foresters' Friendly Society).

I have a newspaper cutting from a local newspaper printed in October 1898. Under the headline 'Funerals of Notable Residents', Robert Punshon's funeral is described as follows:

Burial of Mr. R. Punshon

Mr. R. Punshon, the well known late proprietor of the Federal Stores in Ferguson Street, was buried last Saturday afternoon in the Williamstown necropolis.

A brief notice of his career had appeared in The Times of that date. The funeral was largely attended, and was thoroughly representative in character, while a number of prominent commercial gentlemen from the city were present. The cortege was of commanding aspect, the brethren of the Excelsior Lodge of Freemasons in draped regalia preceding, while immediately succeeding the second mourning coach was a strong representation from Court Williamstown (Foresters), of which deceased was likewise a member. Following the hearse was the family phaeton laden with floral tributes. Some thirty vehicles brought up the rear. The coffin was of polished oak and beautifully mounted. The deceased was buried in the Presbyterian compartment of God's Acre, Rev. R. Murray, of Cecil Street Presbyterian Church, officiating at the grave-side. The rev. gentleman, as chaplain of Excelsior Lodge, likewise assisted W.M.Bro. Drewitt to perform the last rites of the Craft towards a deceased brother.

The pall-bearers were:- Commander Dennis, Messrs Hy. Brear, J.A. Smith, Hy Molls, E.E. Press, C. Richardson (ex-Governor Melbourne Gaol), Roberski (Ararat) and F. Brunning (St Kilda). Mr T. Lonsdale had charge of the funeral arrangements. From the portico of Dr Ellison's residence, Mr Sands, photographer, took two views of the funereal cortege, and these will be developed in due course.



The “family phaeton laden with floral tributes” refers to an open four-wheeled carriage drawn by a single horse or pair, which would have been used by the family to travel about in, and I am sorry that we do not have photographs of the funeral cortege that were said in the newspaper article to “be developed in due course”. I wonder if they ever were?

Five more members of the family have since been buried in the family grave, described in the 1898 newspaper as “the Presbyterian compartment of God’s Acre”, at Williamstown Cemetery: Robert’s wife, Johanna and their daughter, Ella, and later Una and her husband George McAdam. Finally, my mother, Nancie, interred with her beloved and devoted parents in 1994. Mum always said she would be, “the last one in this grave”. Having out-lived her two husbands and having her son predecease her, it seemed the right decision to me too.

Sometime after Robert’s death, Johanna sold The Federal Stores business and moved with her two daughters to Park Street, Parkville.

On one of our visits to Williamstown, Geoff and I were taking photographs of the Punshon building from all angles. It appeared to be unattended from where we were standing at the back of the building and, taking advantage of the situation, we entered the rear of the premises. From there, we were able to look down into the cellar where the barrels and large boxes of produce would have been delivered and manhandled into the depths of the building. It was also interesting to note that the massive foundations of this two-storey building are built on solid rock as can be seen in the photographs taken at the time of its construction. We brought home an old carrier’s hook, which would have been used to assist in the lifting of bales and packing cases, and several pieces of timber from one of the original stair handrails. These pieces have now been treated to preserve the timber and are hanging on the garage wall at ‘Farleigh’.

One hundred and twenty one years after its construction, the former Punshon’s Federal Stores is in excellent condition, well maintained and is still in use as a retail store. It has a National Trust classification, a fact of which our family is justly proud.

Anne McGeary

What's in a Name?

In many families, names are carried down through the generations for one reason or another. Looking back at the chosen names on both sides of my family, nearly every member has at least one name taken from a descendant. Some are obvious, others not quite so, e.g. Frank is my father's third Christian name and honours Frank Stephenson, an artist, on the Howard side. I have one of Frank Stephenson's watercolour paintings which was handed down to me from Auntie Dulcie. I can't quite remember the relationship, but he is buried in our family grave with Annie Howard at the St Kilda Cemetery in Dandenong Road, East St Kilda. It seems we are traditionalists!

According to my mother, the name Punshon is of French origin and the prefix to Punshon could have been Du, de or D'Punshon. I have since found out that Punshon is derived from the Old French 'pinchon' as in the bird, in particular a finch. It also meant a cheerful person or one with a good singing voice. Ironically, Mum and I had toneless singing voices. One funny thing that I remember was Mum saying that when she was young she wanted to be an opera singer! I wonder where this idea came from? What was she thinking! Perhaps she couldn't hear her own voice when she sang.

Anne McGeary

When I was born on 7 January 1944, at the Bethlehem Hospital on Kooyong Road, South Caulfield, my parents Nancie and Walter Howard named me Ann Laurelle; the name Ann, appearing several times through my father's family. I have always thought Ann to be a very plain name and when I was a young girl how I wished I had been named something more modern and fashionable, like Susan. I could then be called Sue or Suzie, much more 'with it'! But plain Ann it was to be for the time being, followed by my unusual middle name of Laurelle.

Robert and Johanna Punshon's daughters were named Ella Louise Emily and Una Florence. When Una and George had their first child they named her Nancie and decided on the middle name of Ella, in memory of Una's sister.

Mum told me she invented the name Laurelle, incorporating a version of the name Ella into a middle name for me; again, carrying on Ella's memory.

I know, as a young girl who wanted so much to fit in, I absolutely hated my unusual middle name and dreaded having to say it out loud, which we often had to do at school. I have since heard the name Laurelle occasionally, although it is spelt differently, so perhaps my middle name is not so unusual these days. I now realise how much Ella Louise Emily Punshon was loved by her family, in that her name has been carried on down through the generations in one form or another.

My mother-in-law, Hazel, named Geoff after her doctor, Geoffrey Chambers and aspired to her Geoffrey becoming a doctor too!

Geoff and I named Robert for his great-great grandfather, Robert Punshon and it was our favourite male name should we ever have a son.

Our daughter, Louise Ann, was named firstly, after my great aunt, Ella Louise Emily, and then incorporating my name, which we thought was a nice thing to do. A traditional family name being carried on to the next generation.

In the case of my brother, Russell McLean Howard, his Christian name, Russell, was a family surname a generation or so ago and his middle

name, McLean, has been carried through from our father's grandmother, who was born Annie McLean.

In more recent years, and after Mum had passed away, I came to the conclusion that Ann with a double 'n' looked unbalanced. I added an e to Ann, and believe it looks more suitable. Mum wouldn't have minded as she wanted to call me Laurelle, but Dad won the name stakes and Ann it was. I haven't changed my name by deed poll but, have since found out Ann is the French way of spelling my name, and Anne is the English way, which suits me much better anyway.

Anne McGeary

My Grandparents

George and Una McAdam

My maternal grandfather, George Ernest McAdam, was born in 1876 to John and Margaret, in Manchester in the north of England. His mother, Margaret, nee Bradley, was born in 1853 at Charlton-on-Medlock, which is now an inner city area of Manchester. We do not know where George's father, John, was born in 1851, but he died at the age of 84 in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada in 1935. I believe he would have been visiting a relative who was attached to the British Diplomatic Service.

George McAdam arrived in Australia in 1907 at about 31 years of age. He had travelled to New Zealand prior to this but made the decision, luckily for us, to settle in Melbourne. George married 25-year-old Una Punshon, on 10 December 1910, in a ceremony performed by the Rev. Robert Murray, M.A., in their family home. Rev Murray was also pastor of the Cecil Street Presbyterian Church in Williamstown, and had officiated at the funeral of Great grandfather Robert Punshon.

My grandparents were devoted to each other and although they were financially comfortable, my mother, Nancie Ella, born on 3 January 1913, was their only child.

She was very lucky in that she had such a happy and privileged childhood. The first school she attended was a small private school, known as Elsternwick Ladies College, after which she continued her education at Shelford Girls' Grammar School in Glen Eira Road, Caulfield.

While Mum was growing up, my grandparents employed a maid for quite a number of years, which indicates they must have been financially secure. It can be seen in the photographs taken at the time that Mum and Nana (or Noon as she was known), had stylish clothes and were always well dressed and groomed.

Enid McAdam was a relative of Papa's, probably his niece or cousin. In 1945, Enid married Michael Walker in the United Kingdom. He served as British High Commissioner in New Delhi from 1974 to 1976, and it was during this time that Mum enjoyed the luxury of staying with them whilst travelling in India. Michael Walker was later to receive a knighthood from the Queen and become known as Sir Michael Walker.

I remember Papa George working in the city in what was then known as 'The Rag Trade', where manufacturers produced clothing and fashion items from premises in Flinders Lane. Later, he held a managerial position with the well-known book publisher and retailer, Angus & Robertson and I recall him bringing home little books for me. Perhaps this is where my love of reading began. I was a terrible eater and Mum allowed me to read at the table which may have encouraged me to eat more whilst engrossed in my latest book.

I cannot fathom why Nana and Papa lived in so many different houses, seventeen according to Mum's recollections! In March 1997, I did some research at the Victorian State Library and came up with quite a list, mostly in the area of Elsternwick, Caulfield, Elwood, and Royal Park. I know they moved to Glenhuntly at one stage; the reason cited was to, "help Nancie" who suffered from asthma, by moving away from the damp sea air, further inland to higher ground. While in Glenhuntly they lived in two different houses in Royal Avenue, opposite the railway line which runs between Glenhuntly and Ormond. They also resided in three houses in Kooyong Road, two of which have since been demolished, and three homes along Ormond Esplanade at Elwood, including number 103. One was on the corner of Pine Avenue on the city side just up from 103.

I don't know if they bought and then sold all these houses or just rented each one for a time. What a mystery! These are the questions I should have asked, and now we'll never know the answer.

When Mum turned 21, her parents hosted a birthday dance. Imagine the panic, when the place chosen to celebrate her coming of age was burnt to the ground and my grandparents had to quickly find another venue. I have the typewritten letter, a copy of which had to be posted to all the guests advising of the change. It reads:

Mr. & Mrs. G. E. McAdam wish to announce that owing to the "Elektra" Beach Road, Black Rock being burnt down arrangements have now been made to hold the Dance at "Rotherfield", Hennessy Av. Elwood (off Tennyson Street) on the same date, February 3rd.

Number 103 was the last of three houses Nana and Papa lived in along The Esplanade, and I know they purchased it in 1938. This was the house from where my mother was married, and which I knew so well having spent my first few years there. It was to this house we would return to visit Nana and Papa. It was here that we marvelled at programmes on a black and white television set in the days before Mum bought one too. It was here that we stayed when Mum and Dad were able to take a short holiday, away from the rigours of looking after me and their handicapped son.

The house, unfortunately, is no longer there, going the way of so many beautiful old houses in suburban Melbourne these days. In 2007, I was driving past 103 and noticed a big wooden power pole on the fence line. My heart missed a beat, oh no, it can't be – was this a signal that the house was to be demolished? I couldn't stop thinking about it and drove past 103 as often as I could. Nothing more happened for months and months. Perhaps it's not going to come down I thought. Please no. I have so many memories there. But then the day I was dreading arrived. Huge machinery gouged a great hole in the wall – I was devastated. Our home, being destroyed; memories of Nana, Papa, Mum, Russell. There was nothing I could do! Nothing! I noted the phone number on the board, called Geoffrey, and pleaded with him to see if we could buy at least some piece of the house. I knew there were some lovely leadlight windows and beautiful, double front doors made up of small panes of bevel-edged glass.

Anne McGeary

They were lovely but they had already gone. There was nothing else left to buy - except the very piece I wanted; the fireplace surround and mantelpiece in front of which Mum had been photographed in her wedding gown. I did the deal and bought it for \$200 and now it's stored in our garage. What I'll do with it, I really don't know, but I have it and that's the main thing. I also have two ornate gold buckets among many other antiques from the old house. Nana and Papa's lovely home has now been replaced by an ugly, ultra modern house. Fortunately, for now, number 103's twin next door, still stands on the corner of Foam Street, but one wonders for how long!

My Parents

Nancie and Walter Howard

As a boy, my father, Walter William Frank Howard, lived in Andrew Street, St Kilda, just off Punt Road and very close to the Fitzroy Street oval with his mother, Florence Emma (nee Ryan) and father, Walter McLean Howard and his sister, Dulcie Dorothy Ann. He attended All Saints Grammar School and, having a good voice, sang in the choir at All Saints Church on a regular basis.

He and Nancie McAdam met whilst they were both working for the Electrolux Company where Dad held the position of Account's Manager with Mum working as his secretary. I know that Mum was very popular and had many boyfriends, and her diaries indicate her full social life, always with girlfriends and boys in groups. There are also many photographs showing Mum enjoying holidays away with groups of friends at places like Mt Buffalo and Cowes on Phillip Island. I don't know much about their courtship but, on 1 February 1941, they were married at All Saints Anglican Church in Chapel Street, East St Kilda. The reception venue, Tudor Court, in Kooyong Road, Caulfield, has since been demolished. I have a newspaper cutting of a paragraph in an unknown newspaper of the day describing my parents' wedding.

In White Tulle

‘A gown composed of four layers of white tulle over taffetas was worn by Nancie Ella, only child of Mr. and Mrs. G.E. McAdam, Esplanade, Elwood, at her marriage to Walter William, only son of Mr. & Mrs. W. McLean Howard, Lucan Street, Caulfield, celebrated by Canon J. A. Schofield at All Saints’ Church, East St Kilda, at a fully choral service. A triple necklace of pearls worn by the bride was her only ornament; her tulle veil fell in soft folds to form a long train and she carried a prayer book with a trail of gardenias and water lilies.

A Victorian frock of ice-blue watered taffetas was worn by the matron of honour, Mrs. J. Wilson, and she carried a sheaf of gladioli and delphiniums. Lieut. J. Wilson was best man. A reception was held at Tudor Court.



The Mrs J. Wilson referred to in the clipping was Dad’s sister, Dulcie, and his best man, was her first husband, Jack, who was a lieutenant in the Air Force. After a few years of marriage Dulcie and Jack divorced and she later married Victor Murn, whom we knew as Uncle Vic. Uncle Vic became a World War I veteran after serving overseas for several years in Egypt, North Africa, Italy and France. He suffered from severe bronchitis and upper respiratory problems as a result of being gassed during the war, but fortunately he lived a long life into his 94th year.

Dulcie died, a wealthy war widow, on 14 March 2007, leaving Robert, Louise and myself a nominal bequest. I was amazed to learn that her estate was valued at several million dollars which she bequeathed to two charities.

Mum and Dad had purchased a home at 22 Louise Street, East Brighton but, soon after their marriage, they were transferred to the Electrolux head office in Sydney. The tin trunk, with its ‘Yellow Express’ sticker, into

which they packed their belongings to take interstate, now sits in the TV room at Portsea. Dad's parents moved into the house as caretakers for the period that they were to be away.

Whilst in Sydney, Mum and Dad lived right on the harbour at Mosman. I remember Mum telling me about three two-man Japanese midget submarines which entered Sydney Harbour, attempting to sink our war ships. The submarines had a lot of problems entering the harbour and the crew of the first two committed suicide rather than be taken prisoner. The third submarine managed to get through and fired two torpedoes near Garden Island, killing about 20 Australians asleep on board HMAS Kuttabul. The Allies began a search for that sub and attacked it with depth charges. Again, the Japanese shot themselves rather than being captured. A pretty gruesome story!

World War II had now reached Australia. Dad joined the C.M.F (Citizens' Military Forces) on 28 March 1942, and from there enlisted in the A.I.F. (Australian Imperial Forces) on 21 September 1942. (Date of enlistment www.ww2roll.gov.au). Mum believed that Dad, along with most of their friends, signed up because they believed it was, "the right thing to do". Defence of Australia was crucial when Japan entered the war, intent on invading Australia, and my father was posted to our most northern city, Darwin. Holding the rank of Sergeant, he was attached to the Northern Territory Area Workshops in the Corps of Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers which had the responsibility for the maintenance and recovery of all land electrical and mechanical equipment. I have no idea what kind of work this entailed for my father, as he was an accountant by profession. Perhaps he held some sort of clerical position.

After Dad's regiment left, Mum moved back to live with her parents at 103. I daresay Dad must have had some leave back in Melbourne during that time, because I was born on 7 January 1944. Although it must have been hard on Mum, as it was for most women whose husbands were away during wartime, she had a wonderful relationship with her parents and, I suppose, they enjoyed the pleasure of helping to look after their only grandchild.

I was almost two years old when Dad was discharged from active service on 21 December 1945, nearly four years after he joined up. On his

return to Melbourne, he and Mum were very keen to move into the house they had previously bought but had yet to live in. Whether Flo and Walter couldn't find anywhere else to live, I don't know, but the way Mum put it was, "Ma and Poppo just wouldn't get out!" It's funny how you remember such phrases.

For a time we three had to live with Auntie Dulcie in her beautiful Tudor-style house at No. 89 Dendy Street, (at the top of Church Street) Brighton. I think I was about three years old by then. The house is still there and we have a photograph of Dad standing proudly in front of the house in his army uniform. It probably wasn't the easiest of situations as Dulcie and her first husband, Jack Wilson, had recently separated and even though there were no children from the marriage, she now had an extra three people living with her.

Ian Cox lived next door to Auntie Dulcie, and my earliest childhood memory is sitting on a piano stool in the Cox's living room and playing notes on the piano keyboard, as little children often do. I can't remember if Ian was playing the piano, but I do remember being perched on that stool and 'making music'.

Dad's parents eventually moved out of number 22 and moved into number 18 Louise Street! Mum was not thrilled that Ma and Poppo were now living two houses away!

Mum would say to me, "How would you like that?" On the corner of Louise Street and North Road, I distinctly remember a sign on the electric light pole which declared:

THIS IS A
WAR SAVINGS
STREET

I didn't know what that meant, but have since found out that the sign denotes a street where all the residents in that particular street participated in buying war savings certificates. These helped in making a monetary contribution to the war effort. One resident would take on the role of volunteer secretary and would sell the certificates to the neighbours, collect the money and hand it over to the authorities.

Anne McGeary