

**Nibbles:** In this issue of Nibbles we're reprinting a fascinating article that appeared in Coastal Current of June 2012 about the first shot fired in the First World War. You may have heard it recently discussed on ABC Radio. Museum Curator Susan Clarke has written about Bruce Bairnsfather's cartoon of "The better ole."

**OBEY YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER – STOP THAT SHIP!** Colonel John Purdue has an unique claim to fame.



Portrait of Colonel John Purdue that hangs in the Anglesea Museum

He is credited with firing the first salvo marking Australia's entry into World War 1. His historic shot was fired from the fort at Port Nepean on 5 August 1914. Colonel Purdue enjoyed a distinguished military career, as well as being a well-known Anglesea resident.

The months leading up to WW1 were bleak days as the world waited for the possibility of a long conflict in Europe. Then, ties between Britain and its Empire (later known as the British Commonwealth of Nations) were strong and powerful. If Britain declared war, her colonies were at war with her. Any nation that was an enemy of Britain was automatically an Australian enemy too. Because Germany was seen as the enemy, any of its ships were declared articles of war. So when Britain declared war in London at 11.30 pm on 4 August, it was 9.30 am on 5 August in Australia. Communications between nations were not as sophisticated or as rapid as they are today. According to a report in the Geelong Advertiser (26 March 1980) word did not actually reach the Australian Government until 12.30 pm that day.

The German ship that was destined to receive the famous salvo was the Pfalz. It had left the Port of Melbourne at 7.30 am on 5 August, heading for the entrance to Port Phillip Bay, where it would have to negotiate the treacherous waters known as The Heads. The captain and crew of the Pfalz could not be expected to know that a nasty surprise awaited them. Anyone serving in the armed forces knows that you obey the orders of a commanding officer without question. Disobedience would probably lead to a court martial. So Colonel Purdue had no choice but to obey his commanding officer, and fire the shot over the bows of the Pfalz.



Fast track half a century and we learn more about this historic event. On Monday 2 December 1968 the Melbourne Age features a story about two guns which fired the first Allied shots of the two world wars being officially mounted at the gates of the Officer Cadet School at Portsea the previous day. A picture accompanying the article shows the well retired Col. Purdue shaking hands across the gun with his commanding officer, Lt-Col. Moreton Williams. Of course Col. Purdue was not a colonel when he fired the shot. He was only 24 at the time with the rank 'Bombardier'. In the Age article, Lt-Col Williams is recorded as saying, "The Pfalz was steaming down past my post with flames coming from her funnel. I asked her for the correct signal, but she couldn't give it. I was the only one with the right signal. I gave her the signal to stop instantly. When she disobeyed, I gave the order for a single shot to be fired across her stern." The gun that fired the shot was a massive six- inch 21 foot long monster. Lt-Col. Williams is recorded as saying he could not put a shot straight through the German vessel for fear Swan Island would have been blown to pieces.

Colonel Purdue went on to serve with distinction in his chosen career. He was born at Camperdown in May 1890. He spent most of his childhood at Barwon Downs, Werribee and Neerim, where he was dux of the school in 1902. His parents were farmers. Col. Purdue joined the army in 1912. Following the incident with the Pfalz he served overseas for four years. He married in England and returned to Australia late in 1919, stationed at Queenscliff. Returning to London, he did a course in munitions inspection as well as studying chemistry and metallurgy at Melbourne University. He returned to active service in WW 2. As the Inspector of Munitions he had a staff of 8000. Col. Purdue built his home in Anglesea in 1950, and his services to the military were recognised when he was awarded an OBE in 1952. The Colonel was a founding member of the Anglesea Golf Club, an active member of the RSL, and the Anglesea Lions Club. Col.

John Purdue died at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital on 24 March 1980, aged 89. He deserves a place in the history of Anglesea as a distinguished member of the armed forces and the community.

*(Acknowledgment – The Geelong Advertiser, 26 March, 1980; 6 October 1990, The Age, 2 December 1968; thanks to Ken Mollison, also undated notes from Col. Purdue where he recalls the first shot being fired. It is interesting that the first shot in WW2 also occurred in Australia).*

Now that our Historical Society is able to get its program somewhat back into swing, make sure that you put these three events in your diary.

**Surf Coast Family History Group Meeting - 10am Thursday 13th May at History House**

Our guest John Stewart will speak on the topic of "Searching Births, Deaths & Marriages in Australia" Entrance is free and all are welcome.

**Speaker - Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> JUNE**

Our speaker planned for the June meeting has had to cancel. Instead of one speaker we are now having a panel of people to tell us about the buildings in Anglesea and Aireys Inlet with Heritage overlays at Shire level. This will be followed by a panel that will answer questions about buildings in Anglesea. We would like questions for the panel to be sent to us in writing (PO Box 98 Anglesea Vic 3230) OR by email ([anghisthouse@gmail.com](mailto:anghisthouse@gmail.com)) by Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> May.

**July Mid-Winter Feast**

Due to Covid we are not able to hold our usual mid-winter feast of finger food. This year instead we will be holding our mid-winter meet at the Anglesea Hotel. The cost of \$20 per person will include a light lunch and entertainment by the First Fleet Fellowship Victoria. There is a need to book. Payment with booking please.

**Bruce Bairnsfather's cartoon of "The better ole" (Susan Clarke)**

This pin dish (Item 1928 below) was recently donated to our collection. It is a promotional item for Varleys Pty Ltd, a printing company. It features a First World War trench warfare cartoon by Bruce Bairnsfather, and it is one of the most famous cartoons ever published.

Captain Charles Bruce Bairnsfather (9 July 1887 - 29 September 1959) was a prominent British humourist and cartoonist. His best-known cartoon character is Old Bill. Bill and his pals Bert and Alf featured in Bairnsfather's weekly "Fragments from France" cartoons published weekly in *The Bystander* magazine during the First World War.

Despite the immense popularity with the troops and massive sales increase for *The Bystander*, initially there were objections to the "vulgar caricature". Nevertheless, their success in raising morale led to Bairnsfather's promotion and receipt of a War Office appointment to draw similar cartoons for other Allies forces.

[source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce\\_Bairnsfather](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Bairnsfather)]

