

PLOD ESSAY: ARCHIE BEVERIDGE

Research by Barbara Moyle, Memories by Jack Moyle

“It is feared that 13 lives have been lost in No. 20 shaft of the State Coal Mine at Wonthaggi following a terrific explosion, which caused the worst coal mine disaster in the history of Victoria. Because of the deadly nature of the carbon monoxide fumes encountered in the shaft, hope that any of the men will be found alive is remote.” The Age February 16, 1937

All of the thirteen men who died in 20 Shaft on that fateful day in 1937 have been remembered and mourned by the people of Wonthaggi ever since. For the Moyle family, one man’s loss is still – 86 years after the event – an especially deeply felt part of the family memory. For Jack Moyle, who was just two years old when the shaft disaster happened and remembers only the aftermath, the family memory is part of his history:

Archibald (called Archie) Beveridge, the son of David Beveridge and Isabella Tunstall, was born in Sauchie, Clackmannanshire, Scotland on 10th May 1899. He arrived in Australia on the *Largs Bay*, in June 1922. He was aged 23 years and his occupation was a miner. On the 27th June that same year his name appeared on the payroll at the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine.

The Census shows that in 1924 he was a single man living in Henry Street, North Wonthaggi. Moyle family members remember that he boarded in Henry Street with Jack’s Grandma, Mary Moyle, until he was married and that he had become more or less one of the family being included in all their celebrations and occasions. Archie Beveridge was a likeable fellow, and the Moyle family thought a lot of him.

Archie married Rosina Marea Maundrell (called Rose) at St John’s Church of England, East Malvern on the 8th of December 1934. Rose was working as a textile worker and living at East Malvern at this time. Their only child, a daughter was born on the 14th December 1935. They named her Rose Isabell, but from the beginning she was always called Rosie



Archie and Rose Beveridge

By the time Rosie was born, Archie had been promoted to Mine Deputy and, as fate would have it, he was one of the thirteen men left below while they were examining 20 Shaft for carbon monoxide gas on February 15, 1937. The presence of the gas along with methane and other gases throughout the Wonthaggi State Coal mine was causing concern amongst the whole mining fraternity and fortunately the majority of the miners were not at work that day; instead, they were attending a stop-work meeting at the Union Theatre to try to resolve the issue.

The meeting was about to start when the news of an explosion was announced. The men rushed from the meeting onto the mine bus that took them to the mine where volunteers quickly

offered to go below to try to find the missing men. Five hours later the mine manager, Mr McLeish announced that they didn't expect to find any survivors.

Archie Beveridge was among thirteen men killed by the massive explosion that occurred at about 10 o'clock in the morning. The coroner's report said that all the men would have been killed as a result of concussion from the explosion and those who weren't would have died quickly from inhaling carbon monoxide gas.

The thirteen men were working 700 feet below ground and had taken a pit pony down to carry their equipment. Bodies were brought to the surface as soon as possible but it took two days to get through rubble and rock to find and bring Archie Beveridge out. His clothing was torn to shreds and his body was badly mutilated. He was found beside the also badly mutilated dead pony.



Rescue Brigade & volunteers

Archie's daughter, Rosie, was fourteen months old when her father was killed in the explosion at 20 Shaft. Jack Moyle's older sister, Hilda, remembered walking from Turner Street across the paddocks to the mine with her mother (Bella Moyle) on the day of the accident but doesn't think that Rose ever went to the mine face that day because she had her baby to look after and possibly the fear of what she would find was too much for her.

Archie Beveridge's funeral, and that of Martin Bowman, was held the next day, the 18th of February. It must have been a moving sight to see the two coffins being led by the Wonthaggi Brass Band playing the Dead March and 120 miners marching ahead in four columns. The funeral procession left each man's residence and went almost three miles to the Wonthaggi cemetery. This process went on for days, until all of the dead miners had been buried. Almost everyone in Wonthaggi was affected by the explosion and the whole town was in mourning.

The secretary of the Australian Miner's Federation, the President of the Powlett branch, (Mr Idris Williams) and the secretary (Mr McVicars) marched at the head of the procession. Mr Falloon, representing the mine management and the Railway Commission, also marched.

As all of the businesses in Wonthaggi came to a stand-still, Bowman's coffin moved slowly past followed by 32 car loads of mourners and two buses filled with residents. Archie Beveridge whose funeral was conducted by J. Knox followed Bowman's coffin and was ahead of 30 more car loads of mourners and two buses with residents. Archie was buried in plot A 2/26, in the Presbyterian section at the Wonthaggi cemetery.

The Moyle Family had been close to Archie, and so they stayed close, having a lot to do later with both Archie's widow and his daughter, Rosie, who was close to Jack's age. Jack grew up calling young Rosie's mother, 'Auntie Rose', though she was really his first cousin from Grandma Moyle's first marriage to Alfred Faull.

A public fund was set-up in Melbourne called 'The Lord Mayor's Coal Miners Accident Fund'. Donations came from all over Australia and, by May 14th 1937, the fund had control of £29,000.

Due to the thinking of the time, it was decided that the widows should not handle this money and it was doled out as a pension. Widows got two pounds per week for twenty years. Dependent children under eighteen were to get fifteen shillings per week until they reached eighteen years of age.

Payments under the Workers Compensation Act meant many families were able to pay off all, or most of their mortgages. This meant that deceased miner's families did not suffer too much financially. This however did not, in any way, compensate for the loss of their loved ones. Should one of them require money for some reason they could apply for it and their request was usually granted.

Since Archie's wife, Rose, was a 'textile worker' at the time of her marriage, she must have applied for enough money to buy an electric knitting machine because she started a small business of knitting bands for jumpers and cardigans for Wonthaggi customers. Wool or garments were left at Rowlands shop in Graham Street and Rose took them home and did the required work.

There weren't any play groups or kindergartens for young Rosie to attend and this prevented Rose from seeking outside work, so she worked from home in a small lean-to or annex attached to her house. She had her knitting machine and all the spools with different coloured wool set up in there and no-one was allowed to go in. She was kept very busy and sometimes had to refuse outings because of her work.

Rose was one of a big family and her Maundrell family helped her after Archie's death. Her father had died in October the same year and so her widowed mother and one younger sister, Winnie, came from their home further up Wentworth Road to live with Rose in her home at Number 4. Another younger sister, Vivvie, lived with Rose until 1939 when Vivvie married Bill Lewis who went to the second war. He was taken POW and came home in very bad health as a result.

Rosie Beveridge grew up and attended the Wonthaggi Technical School. The two Roses (mother and daughter) left Wonthaggi soon after young Rosie left school about 1950 but before 1953. Rose and Rosie went to live with an older sister, Pheme (Euphemia nee Maundrell), who had married a Wonthaggi man, Frank (Jack) McHenry, and lived in Dandenong Road around the corner from Glenferrie Road. In later years Rose, Rosie and Winnie all worked and lived near each other around the Chelsea area.

Jack remembers that Rose had a neat little cream Vauxhall convertible car that she sold to 'Buster' Wilson when she went to live in Melbourne. She also had a camera in the days when very few people had them and a wind-up gramophone. She probably purchased the camera and the gramophone when she was a single working girl. She sold her knitting machine to Liz De Voogd when she left Wonthaggi.

Rose, wife of Archie Beveridge, died 14th May 1981. She was not buried with Archie in Wonthaggi but buried in the Cheltenham New Cemetery.

Rosie, daughter of Archie Beveridge and his wife Rose, died 6th November 2001; she was buried beside her auntie Winnie in Bunurong Memorial Park.

Rosie did not marry. She had a trip to Scotland and visited her father's relations.

edited by C.R. Landon