

Serendipity

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My “Concise Oxford English Dictionary”, published in 1952, has the following meaning for the word “serendipity”:- n. “*The faculty in making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident*”.

Recently I was given a tattered, yellowed, four-paged clipping from a “Richmond and Windsor Gazette” dated Friday 11 July 1919. It had been wrapped around an old recipe book and was discovered by Karen Stalker (nee Keegan) whose paternal great-grandmother, Mrs. G. Strachan, is mentioned in the following obituary, for my paternal grandfather Robert William Shepherd.

My parents married in 1935, I was born in July, 1937, my father’s mother died in September of ’37 so I had not known either grandparent. Receiving this clipping was a very pleasant surprise, I typed out the whole obituary and sent copies to my brother and three sons. Because the obituary shows such a good example of funerals of that era I thought about including it in this Journal. This must have been preying on my mind because that night I dreamt about my grandfather (we have very large framed portraits of both grandparents in the family) and when I woke I felt I had been speaking to him and been told to use the word “serendipity” if and/or when I wrote about him! I had heard the word but did not have a clue as to its meaning until I looked it up.

This is the obituary:-

Robert Shepherd, son of the late Mark Shepherd, of Clarendon, passed away at Riverstone on Monday after about three weeks illness with double pneumonia. After being in a precarious position for some days he seemed to rally during last week, and bright hopes were entertained of his recovery. But the fond hopes of his dear ones were not long encouraged, for alarming symptoms set in towards the end of the week and the end soon came. Bob Shepherd was one of the genuine, upright class of men that it was a pleasure to know. Quiet and reserved, he seldom went away from his home, and was much attached to his family. He was 54 years of age, and had been a trusted employee at Riverstone meatworks for about 30 years, and was always a favourite with his fellow workmen. He married Miss Barber, of Melbourne, who survives him with three children – Ivy, Garnet and Vera. A sad feature of Mrs. Shepherd’s bereavement was that her mother was being buried in Melbourne just about the same hour that her husband was being laid to rest in St. Matthew’s Anglican Cemetery, Windsor, on Tuesday afternoon last. A sister of the late Robert Shepherd, Mrs. G. Strachan, of Riverstone, also died a couple of weeks ago. The funeral of the subject of this notice was very largely attended. Many vehicles followed the remains from Riverstone, while a number of Riverstone friends, including fellow workmen, came up to Windsor by the 2.10 p.m. train and met the funeral at Moses’ corner. These, with several Windsor residents, marched to the cemetery in front of the hearse. After the service in St. Matthew’s Church, Rev. N. Jenkyn expressed sympathy with those who mourned, and paid a high tribute to the worth of the deceased as a citizen, and as a loving husband and affectionate father. The funeral was carried out by Mr. P.J. Chandler.

Obituaries usually say good things about the deceased but I now feel I have an understanding of the person my grandfather was. Those “good things” could have equally been said of my father who must have been “a real chip off the old block”.



Robert Shepherd