

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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NEWSLETTER

No. 88 JUNE, 2012

From The Collection



an example of a commercial souvenir

This beautiful, small ruby coloured glass mug is a souvenir from the 1909 Melbourne Show. Costing 1/- this mug was a memento made for Ruth Richardson who would have been 6 years old at the time.

It was donated to the museum by Ruth in later years as Mrs Ruth Woodward.

Souvenirs in the Collection

What is a souvenir?....

Why do people collect souvenirs?

and.....

How do they make their way into museums?

A souvenir is generally some kind of token which reminds the owner of a special event or place. The word itself is derived from the French word "**souvenir**" meaning "**to recall**".

Sometimes the object collected has no real significance apart from its connection with the owner, so that without input from the owner it is meaningless.

Occasionally its historical significance is obvious and it ends up as a donation to a museum.

In the Orbost museum there are both kinds of souvenirs.

Local Souvenirs



This is a small white plate with a black and white illustration of the bridge over the Snowy River at Orbost. Made in England, it was donated by Mrs M. Winchester.

A small ornamental, gold-rimmed plate, white plate, this also has a black and white illustration of Orbost. In a boat on the Snowy River is a family group out fishing.

According to records, this illustration shows Ethel Smooker with son, Lindsay on her knee. Also depicted are Harry, Elsie Anita and H. Hermann more than 60 years ago. They are on board "The Ripple" built by George Winchester.

Do you know anything about these families?

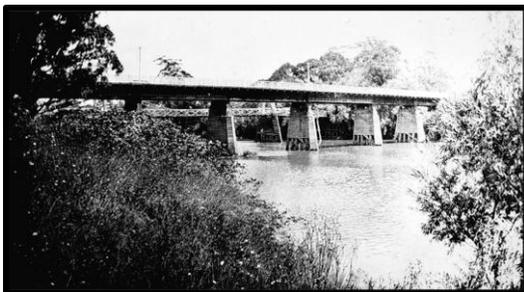
Have you seen a plate like this?

Where were they available in Orbost?

Do you have a similar plate?



The bridge over the Snowy circa 1915.



Circa 1930. The bridge shown on the plate.



Collecting Plates as a Hobby

The practice of collecting "souvenir" plates was popularized in the 19th century by Patrick Palmer-Thomas, a Dutch-English nobleman. He wowed Victorian audiences with his public plate displays which featured transfer designs commemorating special events or picturesque locales - mainly in blue and white. It was an inexpensive hobby, and the variety of shapes and designs catered to a wide spectrum of collectors.

Bridges Over The Snowy at Orbost

The bridge at the top of the photo on the previous page was officially opened in August, 1893 (ref. S.R.M. 12.8.1893) by Mrs W. Watt, the mother of Councillor Watt, who presided over the opening of the 1922 bridge. This bridge was extensively damaged when a herd of cattle allegedly stampeded over it causing the cable to snap. Even after repairs it became obvious that a new bridge was needed.

This second bridge, shown below it, was built by the Victorian Railways and the Country Roads Board. Constructed at a cost of 35,000 pounds, it used second-hand girders from the Flinders Street- Spencer Street viaduct.

On July 4 1922 it was officially opened by Mrs James Cameron. Unfortunately, her husband, who had long championed the building of the bridge so that it would be ready for the railway to continue to the border, was too ill to attend the ceremony. In fact, James Cameron died on July 13 after a long and severe illness (ref. S.R.M. 20.7.1922).

Souvenirs kept by enthusiastic spectators at this event have helped to preserve the history.



Examples of non-commercial souvenirs

It was while I was cataloguing these items that the interest in souvenirs as museum collection items arose.

These souvenirs have a real history. As can be read on the cards, they are both pieces of ribbon used for the opening of the snowy River Bridge on July 4 1922. The ribbon was made to represent the red, white and blue of the British flag.

Snowy River Bridge

Official Opening.

Mrs Cameron then cut the ribbon, and declared the bridge open for traffic.

Three cheers were then given for the opening of the bridge.

The scissors which cut the ribbon were then presented to Mrs Cameron in memory, said the president of the shire, of this most important event in the history of Orbost.

The Hon. G. H. Wise said: I have been asked to thank you for the honor bestowed upon Mrs Cameron in asking her to declare this bridge open. It is gratifying that the honor was conferred upon a pioneer of the district and particularly upon a woman of the district. We do not always give to the women pioneers the honor due to them. They had to endure greater hardships in the early days than their husbands. The latter got out of doors and their time was occupied, while the women, except for the care and interest of their children, had nothing to occupy their minds. I advocate the extension of the telephone into the country with a view to doing away with that isolation. I am glad that Mrs Watt's mother, who declared the old suspension bridge open, is still alive and hearty, and hope that Mrs Cameron will live to as ripe an age, so that she may see the proper development of this great country. (Hear, hear).

- All photos of items in the collection were taken by Barry Miller.

This article is taken from The Snowy River Mail of July 6, 1922.

Councillor Watt made a long speech detailing the history of the bridge's construction and praising the Country Roads Board which contributed to the costs (still unknown at the time). He lamented the absence of James Cameron and recognised his contribution and efforts.

Just before he asked Mrs Cameron to cut the ribbon, he declared, "*I have no doubt that it will not be long before the railway crosses this bridge and before its extension to Sydney is begun*".

Unfortunately this prophecy was never fulfilled.

Further into the article it is mentioned that the scissors used were presented to Mrs Cameron "*in memory of the event*".

Question: Where are those scissors?

People collect all sorts of different things – from mass produced souvenirs such as snow domes, T-shirts, plates, spoons, postcards and stationery to their own personal photos and odd mementos.

Which, then, are suitable for museum collections?

