

From Scotland to Donnelly's Creek

A tribute to one of our pioneering women, Christina Shaw



Born in Oban, Scotland in 1840, Christina Ferguson came to Australia on the ship 'Red Jacket' in August 1856, settling in Ballarat. She was twenty-one years of age when she married thirty-one year old miner, Donald Shaw, at the Edinburgh Castle Hotel in Ballarat on 17th October 1861, officiated by Reverend William Henderson.

Donald had arrived from Dores near Inverness in Scotland on the 'Countess of Cawdor' on 24th July, 1853, disembarking in Geelong. He was at that time of his marriage a working Director of the Albion Gold Mining Company based in Sebastopol near Ballarat.

Christina and Donald had their first child, John, in September of 1862, however, the baby died one day after being born. Over the next eight years, they had four more children, Mary (1864), Alexander (1865), Donald (1868) and Bessie (1870).

In 1875 after the Albion mine ceased operation due to flooding, Donald came to Donnelly's Creek to set up home in a new gold mining area, leaving Christina to tend the four children until he was established. Later that year, Christina and the children, left Ballarat to travel to Melbourne and boarded the steamer 'Murray' sailing to Bairnsdale, via Lakes Entrance, where they transferred to a smaller vessel, the 'Thomas Naughton' for the journey to Sale.

Met by Donald, Christina and the children began the journey from Sale to their new home at Donnelly's Creek, which took two days to complete. Two years later, in June 1877, their sixth child, Hugh, was born. Tragically, Christina passed away at home shortly afterwards, on 9th October, four months after Hugh's birth. She was thirty-six years of age. The death certificate stated that she died from insanity after

enduring nine days of illness. Christina was buried in this grave one day after her death and the witnesses attesting the burial are listed as W H Davenport and Donald McMullen. The family remained at Donnelly's Creek for some years until they went their separate ways as the children grew into adults. Donald (Senior) left the area and became a mine manager at Tumut, in NSW, and died in Tumbarumba as the result of a buggy accident in May of 1895.



Christina Shaw holding her baby (name unknown) with her husband Donald Shaw. Photo taken at Ballarat.

The copper plate memorial on Christina's grave was placed by her son, Alexander, and his son, Donald, when they went on a pilgrimage to the gravesite in 1930. Alexander had not been back to the area since he left in 1885 and he wanted something to mark the grave that would stand the test of time, and would be identifiable by future generations of family members wishing to visit the resting place of their matriarch. The memorial they placed has an inscription in Gaelic.

"Co a sgaras sinn o ghradh Chrìosd"

Which translates to: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ".

(Compiled from information held by the great grandchildren of Christina and Donald Shaw.

Jean Fredricksen, Alex, Neil and Ronald Shaw, Ewen and Gregory Nicholls, Donald and Bruce Casey).

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