

# GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (Sept. 2005)

By Rob Upson

## SIR JOHN MONASH

Sir John Monash was one of Australia's most distinguished citizens, probably best known as a military commander during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. However, it was as an engineer that Monash had a connection with Bendigo. To begin with here is a brief introduction.

John Monash was born in Melbourne in 1865 to Prussian migrants Louis and Bertha Monash. He was educated at Scotch College and went on to study arts, engineering and law at the University of Melbourne. He became interested in matters military when, in 1884, he joined the University Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Victorian Rifles. When they were disbanded he joined the North Melbourne Battery of the Garrison Artillery. In 1894 he joined with J.T.N. Anderson to form an engineering practice in Melbourne that later specialised in bridge building.

In 1867, Joseph Monier, a Frenchman, had patented a technique of making planter pots by using a grid of small diameter iron bars embedded in a coarse mortar. This technique was further advanced to build, among other things, arch bridges. It was introduced into Australia in the early 1890s and Monash & Anderson were to use this design to build eight concrete arch bridges in Bendigo (7 over the Bendigo Creek and 1 over Back Creek).

In October 1900, Bendigo Council awarded the contract for the eight bridges to Monash & Anderson for a total price of £6967. This was after a 14-month wrangle with local contractors, the brick industry and in particular the City Engineer, Joseph R. Richardson. (James Lerk covered this intrigue in detail in a series of *Discover Bendigo* articles published in the Bendigo Weekly in 1999).

Over the period 1901-02 Monier single-arch bridges were completed and put into service at Oak St., Weroona Ave., Booth St., High St. (Golden Square), Wade St., Abbott St., Myrtle St. and Thistle St. One of these constructions was not without its drama.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1901, the bridge at Weroona Ave. (known then as King's Bridge) collapsed when it was being tested in the presence of John Monash. The City Engineer had insisted that a steamroller and a traction engine be run repeatedly over the bridge. A crack appeared in the arch and when the roller and engine were run close to the edge for a final test the bridge collapsed and the traction engine fell into the Creek, killing one of the contractors. An inquest and enquiry was held but this did not cause any significant delays to the completion of the other bridges.

It was believed that one of the causes of the collapse was due to the angle of skew over the creek that made the single arch longer than the arches on the other bridges. The King's Bridge was rebuilt, this time with two arches instead of one. Nearly one hundred years later when Weroona Ave. was widened, the two arches of the King's Bridge were duplicated in a similar style. All but two of the Monier arch bridges are in use today. Those at Oak St. and Myrtle St. were demolished at some stage and rebuilt to another design to accommodate widening of the two streets.

After the outbreak of WW1, Monash was appointed commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the A.I.F., which saw action in the Gallipoli campaign. Later he was given command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Division in France and promoted to Major General. He was knighted early in 1918 and in June was promoted to Lieut. General and given command of the Australia Corps which had major successes in France contributing greatly to ending the war.

He returned to Melbourne and in 1920 became general manager of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria and then chairman the following year. He was vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne from 1923. When Sir John Monash died in 1931 he was afforded a State funeral and an estimated quarter of a million came to pay their respects.

His name is recognised today by the Monash University, the Monash Medical Centre, the Monash Freeway, the Monash City Council and his portrait on our \$100 note, to mention just a few.