

(I went to the Man From) Snowy River museum with a thing that's been of considerable importance to us in the family and they actually said to us something about it not necessarily being significant and I can't make head or tail of this.

Anyway the story behind it is I've got this coin that's in a case and my father gave it to me.

We migrated here to Australia from England in 1959 and my father's family came from Ayrshire. They'd been in that district for many hundreds of years as far as we can make out and my Uncle Bob, who had been the mayor of Ayr, went to the First World War and unfortunately was injured, in fact lost his leg. He'd been a carpenter and came back from the War and was an undertaker but went on to become very successful in that profession and ultimately became the mayor of the city of Ayr in Scotland. I'd just seen it on the wall at home and then my father as he got older decided he wanted to disperse family relics and things and he gave me this case with the half sovereign and written on the back it says:

*'The half sovereign herein enclosed was presented by me John Bowman to my son Robert on his proceeding to France on active service where he was subsequently wounded. Out of gratitude for his return home again I herewith preserve it as a memento of the engagements which it came through and at my decease it is my wish that it be handed to my son Robert mentioned above. John Bowman Great War 1914 - 1918'*

And in the fullness of time when my great uncle died it was given to my father and ultimately it's been given to me. So it's been in our family for a long time and the thing I thought was really interesting about it was the fact that this has considerable historical significance all over the British Commonwealth, the engagement in the First World War, and this custom that people would give a memento or something to a relative at home then they'd go away to the war and if they came back they would reclaim it as a means of showing continuity of their experience in battle. There must have been millions of people, literally, over the years of 1914-1918, who went away with the best wish of coming home and didn't. And obviously in a small country town like Corryong we've got a Returned Servicemen's monument and there are names of all the people in the district that died. And I think this would be a real addition to the collection that the museum has because it's got that sort of living connection in terms of a family's experience.

Our family lives in Corryong; we're part of the community. I can't see that our experience can be sort of neatly chopped off because our relative wasn't actually living in the district at the time. I mean, Goodness Gracious, if that's the case you wouldn't have anything in the museum because everyone has something that belonged to somebody who didn't actually originate in the district. The only thing you could have is aboriginal artifacts and we don't have many of them.

So this artifact is beautifully made as you can imagine - a cabinet maker - he was obviously an undertaker but primarily a cabinet maker. He made this lovely little container and it's got glass and the coin sits on velvet in the background and then in handwriting on the back it says what it is.

Andrew Bowman, September 2008