Biography

Robert Bugg (1837–1915)

Rope Manufacturer, Crimean War Veteran and Coburg Town Councillor



Robert Bugg was an English-born Crimean War veteran, rope manufacturer and respected member of the Coburg community in Victoria. Born in Essex, England, on 22 August 1837, he spent his early years in Halls Green, Roydon. Census records from 1841 and 1851 identify his father, William Bugg, initially as a farrier and later as a veterinary surgeon. Robert grew up with his brothers Richard and Henry and his sister Eliza, who appears to have died before the 1851 census.

As a young man, Bugg served in the Royal Navy during the Crimean War (1853–1856). He was stationed aboard HMS Leander, seeing service in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. His naval experience became an important part of his life story, and he remained one of the relatively few surviving Crimean War veterans in Australia during his later years.

Bugg eventually made his way to Australia. Passenger records for the ship Ella Gladstone list him as second mate on voyages arriving in Sydney on 28 May 1869 and 11 December 1870. These records describe him as English and give his age as 31 and 33 respectively. He was also associated with the delivery crew that brought HMVS Nelson to Victoria in 1868, serving as an able seaman. Although he arrived with the vessel, he did not subsequently join the Victorian Navy.

In 1872, Bugg married Agnes Julia Hentschel in Victoria. The couple settled in Coburg, where they raised a large family. Their children included William, Archibald, Edward, Harry, Theo, Leonard and Arthur, as well as a daughter who married a Mr Wyer. Their son Robert Archer Bugg, born in Coburg in 1877, later worked as a butcher.

Bugg established himself as a rope and twine manufacturer, operating the Old Coburg Rope Works during the 1880s. By 1903, he was recorded on the electoral roll as a rope manufacturer living in Cameron Street, Coburg. He also served for many years as a member of the Coburg Town Council, contributing to local affairs. Beyond civic life, he was active in Freemasonry, becoming Worshipful Master of Brunswick St John Lodge in 1891–92, and served as secretary of the Shamrock division of the Ancient Order of Druids.

Robert Bugg died on 31 March 1915, aged 77, at Nurse Ragg's private hospital in Eastern Hill, Melbourne. He had lived at his residence, named Leander, in Wolseley Street, Coburg, and had been a colonist of approximately 50 years. His funeral attracted a large attendance, including local councillors, Royal Navy veterans and a party from the Royal Australian Navy. Naval honours, including rifle volleys and the sounding of the Last Post, paid tribute to his service.

Bugg was buried in the Church of England section of Coburg Cemetery, in Section COE A, Grave 21. His life bridged naval history, industry and local government, leaving a lasting connection with the early development of Coburg.