

OUR HERITAGE

MR JOHN DE BAUN

Born in New Jersey, USA in 1852, our old friend John De Baun migrated to Victoria in the 1880s to try his hand at gold mining. Before long he moved to New South Wales where he worked on a station before setting up a business and was one of the earliest pioneers in Broken Hill. His fortunes were flourishing, and he opened the Grand Hotel, enabling him to invest in mining stocks, he then left Broken Hill for Adelaide where he continued his investment but lost his fortune in the recession. In 1892 he set his sights on Western Australia with the prospects of rebuilding his fortune in the goldfields. He settled in Coolgardie and embarked on commercial opportunities to supply the growing population. After paying off his debts incurred during the recession, he invested again in local mining stocks. Before not too long, he had a second hotel, the Great Western in Coolgardie. After success in Coolgardie, he saw an opportunity in Perth and acquired the Freemasons Hotel on the cnr of William Street and St George's Terrace, which he demolished and rebuilt the Palace Hotel. At the same time, he was also to construct The Melbourne Hotel.

John was well-known in Perth and had a reputation as a stout man and his belly, the joke of his friends. One day John ambled down the terrace and met a pal.

"Hello! John," said the latter; "You've got odd boots on".

"Have I?" said John

"Yes" said the friend, "Look at them".

"How can I look at them? Snapped John; "I haven't seen my feet for five years!"

John was also known to have a rather light feminine voice and he didn't care. One night staying at one of his hotels, was a young mining man and his pretty wife who could be known to be jealous, she accused her husband of kissing a waitress and stormed out of the hotel leaving her husband in their room. After thinking about the situation, she went back to apologise, tail between her legs but soon became further enraged, when she arrived to hear her hubby arguing lustily with a lady in the bedroom. Bursting in with gusto to break up this affair, she became very red cheeked and sheepish when she discovered her husband had been arguing with Mr John De Baun.

John de Baun lived to the age of 59 after suffering from lifelong diabetes, resulting in gangrene in his leg. It was decided to amputate the leg to prolong his life but regrettably he passed away following the operation.

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MR A. BIRD

Let us introduce you to another character from The Melbourne Hotel's past, Mr A. Bird, a Farmer and detective enthusiast from Wongan Hills. On Monday morning of October 21st, 1929, a safe was stolen from The Melbourne Hotel. The contents of the safe included 112 pounds in currency, six cheques and a fully loaded revolver of the Belgian service type. The brazen thieves carried the safe through a window to a waiting stolen car and transported it to an unfrequented area of North Perth where they broke it open using an axe and sledgehammer. Detective Sergeant Manning tackled the case and even came in possession of a suspicious anonymous letter claiming to have information about the robbery and seeking information of a reward to be advised through a newspaper column. With the case lingering and Sergeant Manning yet to solve it, "private detective" our friend Mr Bird or "Birdie" who often frequented The Melbourne hotel on his visits to Perth travelled to the city to solve the case.

"I am working on a theory quite my own" Birdie announced on his arrival to The Melbourne Hotel "and although I think I could tell you who was connected with the robbery now, I am going to keep quiet until I am sure".

Birdie then gave the window which was supposed to have been forced open "the once over" and the door through which the thieves made their exit. He tried the door, he tried the window, and then made the sensational announcement "I am convinced that the thieves entered through the window, opened the door, removed the safe and lifted it through the window not bothering to go through the door". Although Birdie was serious about his intentions, after his own investigation it was the town joke that it wouldn't be long until he would be returning to his crops. "Bird may be a good farmer, and a good sport, but he does not appear to be even a good amateur detective" wrote the Truth, Western Australia on October 27, 1929.

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PENNY WRAPPED NOTE

This story unfolds like an Edgar Wallace novel with notes wrapped around pennies and thrown out windows. This actually happened in April 1931. It was a Tuesday night when a man passing by The Melbourne Hotel was startled out of his wits when a small paper parcel hit him on the head. On opening it, he discovered a note wrapped around pennies alerting the reader to a violent burglar in the hotel. He hurried off to inform the Police and Detective George Smith who promptly arrested Godfrey Charles Wilson, a printer on the charge of being on the premises for the purpose of stealing. He was fined seven pounds, Godfrey proclaimed that he had, had an accident earlier and lost his memory in an effort to avoid the fine. This could very well have been somewhat the case with Godfrey's various reasons for being at the hotel, firstly it was to see a friend, then a girl and then a drink that attracted him.

