



CPL/SGT Alfred James FINCH

- 1) Cpl 4495 – Lord Kitchener's Horse
- 2) Sgt 25533 – Commander in Chief's Bodyguard

Born: 1873, Geelong, Victoria.

Parents: Alfred John & Isabella Finch

Occupation: Various occupations.

District Connection: Cumnock

Enlistment Age: 1) 27yrs - already in Capetown
2) 28yrs - already in Capetown

Fate: 1) Discharged medically unfit 28 Nov 1900
2) Discharged 14 Jun 1901 Capetown

Honour Boards: Cumnock Memorial Gates

Medals: Queen's South Africa Medal



Biography

Alfred James Finch was born in Geelong, Victoria in 1873, the eldest child of Alfred John and Isabella Finch.

Alfred John Finch was born in 1843 at Speldhurst, Kent, England, a son of John and Sophia Finch. John Finch and his family immigrated to Australia around 1852 and settled in Geelong, Victoria. John Finch soon became involved in community affairs in Geelong. He was elected as a Councillor for Bellerine Ward of Geelong Council in February 1859. John Finch died in Geelong on 15 Oct 1863, aged 46 years. His wife, Sophia, died on 18 Mar 1873, aged 59yrs, in Geelong.

Alfred Finch would have been about 9 years old when he came to Australia. He married Isabella Main in 1872 at Geelong. In August 1876, he was working as an assistant for Mr Thomas Flynn, Draper of Moorabool Street, Geelong (*Geelong Advertiser* – 26 Aug 1876, p3). By 1879 Alfred and Isabella and two sons, Alfred (B1873) and Walter (B1875), had moved to Sale, Victoria. Alfred opened his own store selling dress materials in Foster Street, Sale (*Gippsland Times* – 23 Jan 1882, p4).

Five more children were born to Alfred and Isabella at Sale – Robert (B1879), Alice (B1880), Charles (B1881) and twins, Lilian and Rose (B1884). Alice Isabel Finch died in Sale in 1884. Alfred Finch and his family moved from Sale, Victoria, to Cumnock, NSW, around 1890. He bought William Black's general store in Cumnock in December 1890, and advertised that he had a large and varied assortment of drapery, groceries, ironmongery, boots and shoes.

Alfred and Isabella became involved in many aspects of the Cumnock community. Their younger children, Robert, Charles, Lilian (Lily) and Rose attended the Cumnock School. Alfred Finch was a member of the Cumnock Show Committee, a partner in the building of the Cumnock Hall in 1891, Secretary of the Cumnock Progress Association and a member of the Cumnock Fire Brigade, as well as being involved in many other community activities. In 1895 the Finch family bought the Beehive Store from Caleb Parker Junior, and William Black rebought Black Bros store.

Finch and Sons (Alfred, Walter & Robert) ran the Beehive store in Cumnock until August 1906 when they sold the store to Mr A Barton. Alfred and Isabella were given separate farewells and gifts in Cumnock in August 1906, before moving to Sydney to live. They had spent 16 years in Cumnock and were enthusiastic in promoting the advancement of Cumnock during those years.

Alfred John Finch died on 30 Dec 1915, aged 72yrs, at his residence, Karitane, Florence Street, Neutral Bay, Sydney. Electoral roll indexes record that Isabella lived with her daughter Rose at Murrwillumbah in 1930 and 1932, and with her son Robert and his wife Elsie, at 3 Wingrove Avenue, Epping, in 1934. Isabella died on 19 Jun 1936, at Epping, aged 87yrs.

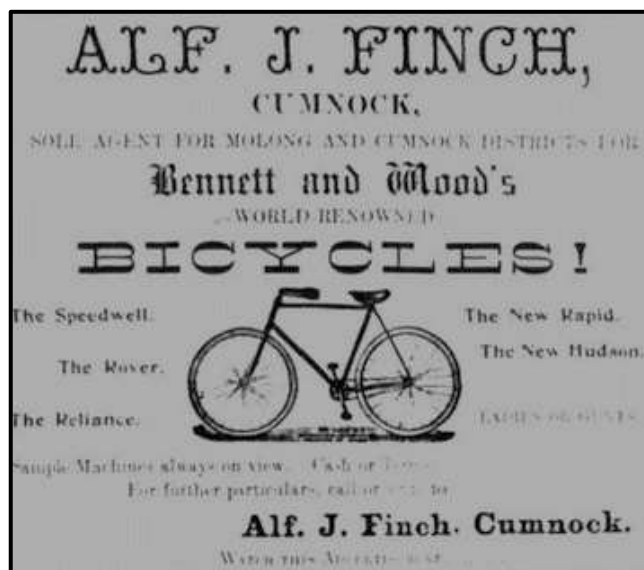
Alfred Finch Jnr worked at the Beehive Store in Cumnock and local news reports mentioned that in the 1890s he was Secretary of the Cumnock Mutual Improvement Society, and a committee member of the Cumnock PA & H Association. He was a keen cyclist (known as wheelmen) making long trips to Orange and other surrounding towns, and was the Secretary of the Cumnock branch of the Sydney League of Wheelman.

In June 1897 Alfred J Finch (Jnr) became an agent for Bennett & Wood's cycling equipment.

The Molong Argus – 10 Sep 1897, p2, reported:

"A farewell party was tended to Mr Alf Finch at Cumnock on Monday evening past to his departure from the town where he has so long resided, and was attended to by about 50 couples. Alf left by train on Tuesday evening. He goes, so we are told, to take charge of the business part of a trading steamer running up the Darling River. All wish Mr Finch success in his new sphere of action.

By 1898 Alfred was back in Cumnock selling harvesting machinery at the Beehive Store.



In 1900 he enlisted in the Boer War while in South Africa, and served with Lord Kitchener's Horse until being discharged on 28 Nov 1900 as being medically unfit. Lord Kitchener was one of the most controversial British generals in the war. Kitchener took over control of British forces from Lord Roberts and was responsible for expanding the British response to the Boers' guerrilla tactics.

Alfred Finch reenlisted as a Sergeant with the Commander-in-Chief's Body Guard in Capetown on 11 Dec 1900. "The Corps first saw action in the Orange River Colony when a detachment of Bodyguard 129 strong, belonging to General Charles Knox's force, encountered a superior number of the enemy near Lindley and experienced many casualties. In February and March the corps were several times engaged in the Orange River Colony. In April, May and June, the Bodyguard, 1000 strong, under Colonel Chesney, was in a column which operated in Eastern Transvaal."

(<http://www.angloboerwar.com/south-african-units/307-commander-in-chiefs-body-guard>)

The Corps was disbanded shortly after and Sergeant Finch was discharged on 14 Jun 1901.

The Molong Express and Western District Advertiser – 29 Sep 1900, p4, mentions Alfred Finch:

"ONE FOR ALF. FINCH – JE Gibson, who is serving with Lord Kitchener's Horse, in South Africa wrote a long letter to his brother, HN Gibson, Esq, JP. It appeared in 'Peak Hill Times' and therefrom we get the following extract: - 'Had it not been for Alf Finch, of Cumnock, I should have been either shot or captured. My horse was shot and I was retiring on foot completely knocked up, and the Boers in my rear, when one of section mates came along and I hung on to his stirrup iron for about 100 yards, when down went the horse, shot in three places. Hamilton and I took cover and peppered away at the Boers until we had no cartridges left, when Alf Finch and another trooper galloped back under heavy fire, we double banked their horses and got away to safety. Where we were lying down the rocks fairly smattered with bullets."

The Molong Express and Western District Advertiser – 18 May 1901, p6, published this report:

"AT THE FRONT – the following letter was received a few days ago from Sergeant J Hughes, formerly of Dubbo, and now of E Squadron, Commander-in-Chief's bodyguard, in South Africa. It is dated 'Intombi Spruit, Zululand, March 15,' and was addressed to Inspector GF Clarke, of the Railway Department: - Just a word or two to let you know that I am alive and well, hoping you are the same. Well, old man, since I last wrote you we have been on the move and covered a lot of country, but we have been delayed here for three weeks owing to the heavy rains and the flooded rivers; we have been having very hard time of it— we have been without tea, coffee, sugar and salt. We have been living on Indian corn most of the time, but what we suffered worst was the want of salt...

We are with General French's column, under General Dartnell, so if there is any fighting to do we shall be in the thick of it, being with the French. I must tell you that there a great number of Australian lads in my regiment, in fact there is a man in my troop by the name of W Evans— I knew him well in Dubbo... We have another man named Finch; he comes from about Obley way, and he is a Sergeant..."

Alfred Finch stayed on in South Africa after his second discharge and the *Western Champion* (Parkes) - 8 Aug 1902, p8, stated "It is reported that Mr Alfred Finch, late of Cumnock, is doing well over in South Africa. He is managing a dairy farm near Pretoria."

The *Molong Argus* – 5 Aug 1904, p20, reported: "A FINE COLLECTION – While at Cumnock on Saturday we had the pleasure of inspecting perhaps one of the finest collection of polished horns owned by any private individual in the State. Mr Alf Finch, who some years ago went to South Africa, is now Inspector of Stock in Kiamaland, Central Africa, and has been able to send his father, Mr AJ Finch, the collection above referred to, which includes the gems bok (horns 4ft in length), spring bok, setalongs, bush bok, eland, antelope, koodoo, and many others the names of which we do not know. The collection includes the horns of the terrible gnu (the local name for wild beast) which is the most savage animal on the Continent and shows no fear of the lion. [Insert - photo of a gnu] It is a cross between the horse and cow and is the only beast of which the natives are terrorised. A pair of wild boar tusks was also on view and originally belonged to a boar which had Inspector Finch bailed up in a tree for the best part of a day before it was shot. The collection has been beautifully polished by Mr Finch and is worth going miles to see."



A further news report from the *Molong Argus* – 24 Nov 1905, p18, gives further knowledge of Alfred: "BACK FROM AFRICA – Mr A Finch, son of Mr and Mrs AJ Finch, of Cumnock, who has been away in South Africa [and other parts of Africa] for the past five years, returned on a brief visit on Tuesday morning. Mr Finch has been on the sick list suffering from an attack of fever, and when he went on board ship for Australia at the Mauritius, he was very ill; the trip, however, has improved him somewhat. He has travelled over a great part of Africa, and has journeyed up as far as Cairo. For some time past he has been engaged in mining business; now he has taken up land for sugar culture in Madagascar, where, by the way, Mr WN Willis is said to have a lot of territory. Mr Finch tells us that Australians are in very bad odour in Africa— they do not adopt the paraphrased maxim that 'when you are in Africa you must do as the Africans do.' They will not leave their Australian monkey-tricks behind— so that they soon become marked. Speaking about the possibility of Australian products finding good markets in South Africa, Mr Finch states that whilst Mr George Valder is doing his work well, he is seriously handicapped by reason of the slipshod manner in which NSW shippers put up their wares. Argentine butter commands 6d per pound higher prices than Australian— and, says Mr Finch— 'it is worth the extra sixpence, too.' He looks to Africa as being a great country when things settle down; and he proposes to return about January, when the rainy season will have closed. Striking the Mauritius, which is a British possession, Mr Finch found that French was its universal language. On Tuesday, he along to his old home at Cumnock, where he will enjoy a few weeks' quiet."

The *Molong Argus* reported in their paper of 23 Feb 1906, p11, that "Mr Alf Finch left Cumnock Tuesday to return to Madagascar."

The Finch family moved from Cumnock in 1906 and no further information has been found in local news reports about Alfred, but he was mentioned in a Sydney news item as still being alive when his mother Isabel died in 1936.

References:

The Crossroads- a history of Cumnock by Joan Marriott, 1993
Australians in the Boer War, Oz-Boer Database Project –
<http://members.pcug.org.au>
Trove newspapers - <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>
Ancestry.com

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Cumnock Honour Roll for the Boer War – unveiled Anzac Day 2017, War Memorial Gates, Obley Street, Cumnock.

