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# The Granville Guardian

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**The next general meeting of the Granville Historical Society will be held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 22 May 2010 at our Centre at 62 Railway Parade Granville Executive Meeting 1.00 pm**

**Speaker:  
Judith Dunn**

The Granville Historical Heritage Research Centre is open every Wednesday from 10 am to 4 pm and on the fourth Saturday of the month for personal research. Visitors and members of family history societies are welcome. A fee applies for non-members

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## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

This is May folks, another month gone, where is the time going? June and I have spoken to the Liverpool Family History Group and the Lodge Widows at Punchbowl. Both talks were received with interest and with pleasure.

Daphne Wiles, as most of you know, is now in rehabilitation at Mt Wilga Hospital at Hornsby. After a pretty rough start she is now progressing quite well, and is expected to be there for three months. Many of the members have been visiting; Daphne has asked us to pass on her thanks for the lovely flowers, thoughts and wishes that she has received.

Stephanie Humphreys has progressed quite well. Maureen McManus is still receiving treatment; she sees us every two weeks and manages to keep up to the enquiries that keep coming in. June Parkins is back to the society, don't know how she does it, can't keep a good woman down. Our hopes and prayers are with our members, we hope that you are all coping with the trials that are set before you.

Our quest to find another home is taking a lot of time. As you are aware we lost the fight to obtain the Police Station. It was always a big ask to expect the politicians to understand that Heritage is important and how much the community relies on us for information. Take for example Joel, the year 10 student we taught how to research World War 1. He had chosen Les Bale, Maureen McManus's uncle, to research. We showed him how to go onto the web and what sites to look at for information, as well as providing a photo. He obtained 98% for his efforts; it was 40% of whatever the school had set him for the year, great work Joel. This is one of many requests we have handled this year. Students from all places receive our assistance and the resources to complete their assignment free of charge, thanks to the support of Parramatta City Council.

June and I went to investigate the Pioneer Hall in New York Street as a possible new home, however we found that the hall was in bad repair, needs a lot of money to restore it to its former glory and as other groups use it, it would be impossible to have our equipment and resources in public view. We will keep you informed on this very important issue

Our Guest Speaker this month is historian, author and tour guide Judith Dunn.

**Barry G Bullivant OAM, President**

**DEATH BY  
HEMLOCK – A  
MEMBER’S STORY**

**By Steph Humphreys**

**Family history researchers sometimes uncover dark secrets, information that our ancestors might have concealed during their lifetime. Some have been shocked to find, for example, that a respected forebear was an unmarried mother when in her teens.**

**Recent research in my family revealed that my great great grandfather accidentally caused the death of his own father 165 years ago. The death, by hemlock poisoning, was reported in medical journals because witnesses’ accounts of the unfortunate victim’s final hours gave a graphic description of the effects of the poison. Few cases of hemlock poisoning had hitherto been published, and none in such detail. A family member recently found the contemporary reports of the case, using a name search in Google Books.**

**The story begins in mid-afternoon on Monday 21 April 1845. Two children, a boy aged ten and a girl aged six, were playing on a bank under the Sir Walter Scott’s monument in Edinburgh, Scotland, when they saw what they thought was parsley growing there. The children were Duncan Gow and his sister Elizabeth. Knowing their father, Duncan Gow (senior), an impoverished tailor, was particularly fond of parsley and had not eaten all day, they picked a bunch and took it home to give to him. He greedily ate the vegetables with a piece of bread, remarking more than once how good they were. When he had finished his meal, he rose saying he would go out in order to get some money to buy food for the children; and at this time he was in perfect health.**

**From his house at the head of the Canongate, he walked about half a mile to the house of Mr Wright in the West Port, with the intention of selling him some small item. When he arrived, Mr Wright thought he was intoxicated because he staggered when he was walking, and on passing through the door, which was narrow, he faltered in his gait and afterwards sat down very hastily.**

**He stayed there for about ten minutes, and during this time conversed readily with his host, driving a hard bargain, and obtained four pence for what he had sold. He did not complain of pain or uneasiness, was calm in the manner of his speech, and his face was pale and wan. As he went to rise from his chair Mr Wright’s son observed that he fell back again, as if he was having some difficulty in rising, then on making a second effort he got up and was seen by Mrs Wright to stagger out of the house and down the steps.**

To some children who were sitting on the steps he said 'Get out of the way of the lame horse'. This was a little after four o'clock.

On leaving the Wright's house he was next seen, standing with his back against the corner of the street by Andrew M'All, a meal-dealer in the Grass Market, about 200 yards from the Wright's house. M'All saw him leave the corner and stagger to a lamp-post a few yards further on, where he paused for a few minutes before again moving forward in the same manner, tottering from side to side, past M'All's shop and sat down at the opening of the common stair next to it. According to Mr M'All, he could not walk rightly, and was staggering 'as a man in liquor'.

The way he was walking attracted the attention of a number of children who laughed at him, believing him to be intoxicated. He was heard to speak to them; it isn't known what he said. He was seen by two women who went to the police and requested that he be removed. A policeman, James Mitchell, finding Gow sitting at the foot of the common stair thought he was drunk; but on speaking to him Gow asked to be taken to his own house at the top of Canongate. He told the policeman that he had completely lost his sight and could not control his legs, but expressed his willingness to go forwards, until the policeman could obtain the assistance of his comrade in Cowgate.

The policeman then assisted him to rise and, supported by the arm, he managed with difficulty to walk past four or five shops, when his legs buckled under him and he fell to his knees. Mitchell then gave him some water to drink, which he was unable to swallow, and left him to get a barrow. When he returned he found Gow surrounded by women who were pouring water on his head and sprinkling his forehead. A second policeman, James Hastie, helped to lift him onto the barrow. One of the women, a Mrs Anderson, observed that he made no attempt to walk, but that as he was pulled away by the policemen, his legs were dragged after him.

The second policeman, Hastie, on first seeing him told Mitchell that it was not drink, but a fit, that was the matter with him. He lifted his eyelids and found the eyes dull. He seemed sensible and endeavoured to say something, but could not speak. He was now slowly conveyed to the main police office in the High Street, where he arrived about six o'clock. Mitchell told the police lieutenant on duty that from the manner in which the man was lying, and the loss of power from his legs, he was *not* intoxicated. Although his limbs were completely paralysed, his intelligence was still perfect, for he told the turnkey his exact address in the Canongate, in reply to a question.

Dr Tait, surgeon to the police force, was now sent for, and saw Gow at quarter past six o'clock. He at first thought him to be intoxicated, but on speaking to him found that he was sensible but unable to move his head. He was unable to respond when his armpits were tickled, and he could not vomit; his pulse, breathing and the heat of his skin were natural. When he next visited him at ten minutes to seven, all motion of the chest appeared to have ceased, his heart was feeble and his face had a cadaveric expression.

He was conveyed to the Infirmary by Hastie and another policeman, M'Pherson. After he was placed on the stretcher, Hastie saw him draw his legs gently upwards, as if to prevent them hanging over the iron at its end. This was the last movement he was seen to make. On being carried into the waiting room he was visited by the house clerk on

duty, who found him to be pulseless, and declared him to be dead. This was shortly after seven pm.

The pathologist who performed the post mortem examination took the children to where they had found the parsley and discovered that what they had picked was in fact *Conium Maculatum*, or Hemlock. He concluded there was no doubt that death was caused by eating hemlock, the poison used to kill the philosopher Socrates in 399 BC.

Six years after Duncan Gow's death, the 1851 census showed that his son, then 16, had followed his father in the same trade as a tailor apprentice. The daughter, Elizabeth, aged 12, was a general servant. Their mother Jane died in 1853 from consumption. Young Duncan qualified as a tailor journeyman, and in 1860 married a girl from the Shetland Islands, Ursula Mouat. They had eight children, although three of them died in infancy. Ursula's brother sponsored them to come to Australia in 1877. They settled initially in Orange and later in Sydney. Their eldest daughter Martha Jane was my great grandmother.

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