

Annie Get Your Guns: Women Gunsmiths in Bendigo

Firearms were a part of colonial settlement in Australia from the very beginning, the military garrison which accompanied the convicts being armed as well as settlers keeping weapons for hunting, protection and husbandry. A Colonel David Collins reported to the NSW Government in 1896 that 'several attempts had been made to ascertain the number of arms in the possession of individuals' but only 50 of undoubtedly many more could be accounted for.ⁱ Gun ownership in Victoria was certainly widespread, as evidenced from testimony about conflicts with bushrangers, and various rebellions – and also early inquests in Victoria. The very first inquest on an individual who died from a gun shot wound occurred in Bendigo, in 1853 – that of Edward Rogers.ⁱⁱ

The deposition files in Edward inquest, held at the Diggers' Bendigo Hospital, are quite unusual in that the deceased man's testimony appears alongside that of his doctor. With death apparently imminent, Rodgers dictates his evidence to Dr William Roche, coroner for the district. He explained that the gun shot to his groin came about as he struck another man in the face with the butt of his rifle. He had been in Kangaroo Flat that morning, and witnessed the stranger hit a woman in the face several times. When she ran to Rogers for help, he warned the man off. Laying off the woman, he swung at Rodgers instead, who struck him several times in the forehead before the gun accidentally discharged.

With guns, naturally, comes the need for gunsmiths – someone to repair, modify and build firearms, and often the ammunition that went along with them. The role was, particularly in the 19th century, a very skilled one, requiring an understanding of chemistry, ballistics, engineering, metalwork and blacksmithing. Often they would also offer locksmithing services. The first time the profession is recorded in the Borough of Sandhurst rate books is 1864.ⁱⁱⁱ Living on an allotment of land in Mitchell Street, John Robertson gives his occupation to the rate collector as 'gunsmith'. By the late 1860s, Francis O'Keefe and John Rae had started business in the town. Locally, the School of Mines was actively teaching gunsmithing, along with photography, draughting, coachbuilding, iron founding, printing and boiler making by 1880s.

Across the United States in 1870, 33 women were employed as gunsmiths and a further seven as gunpowder makers.^{iv} Almost 70 women listed their occupation as gunsmith in the 1901 Victorian census.^v Australian government statistics show that in 2023, 4% of those employed as gunsmiths are women.^{vi} In Bendigo, from the 1890s well into the 20th century, we know two women plied the trade – Annie McCallum and Anna Buchholz.

The Danish born Anna Buchholz arrived in Adelaide aged 24 in 1877 and three years later, married 38-year-old widower, Johann Buchholz, known as Julius. After a bout of typhoid, the couple travel to the goldfields in the early 1880s, setting up house in Williamson Street and Julius, a gunsmith shop, first in McCrae Street and later in Hargreaves Street. After retiring his commission from military service which had seen him take part in sixteen battles during the Franco-German war, he had worked as a gunsmith in Berlin. After stints in London and South Africa, he was appointed a railway engineer for the Government in South Australia.

The business was well advertised, appearing regularly in the classifieds of the local newspaper. 'Sold at almost cost price to render competition impossible', the adverts boasted, 'the only unrivalled gunsmith in this colony competent to repair all kinds of firearms'.^{vii} The Buchholz couple also offered lock smithing, fishing tackle, sporting goods, strong room doors, and sewing machine and bicycle repair. While Julius made the news in 1899 it was on the occasion of being awarded a medal from the

German Government in memory of the 100th birthday of William I and his service in the army. It had been cast from metal melted from captured guns, and Louis Order, publican of the Athenaeum Hotel also received one. The headlines weren't so good in 1902 when a fire took hold overnight in the gunsmith shop and the dining rooms next door. While the firemen were quickly on the scene, the exploding cartridges made the job of extinguishing the flames both difficult and dangerous. Over £100 in cartridges, bicycle tyres and tools were destroyed but much less than had the fire reached the wooden safe in which the explosives were kept.

**A H! If you want Bicycle, Gun, Rifle, Re-
volver, Ammunition, Fishing Tackle,
Cutlery, go to J. Buchholz, Hargreaves-street;
you will save money. Repairs done.**

'Classifieds', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 18 Nov 1897, p4

Anna did not have any family in the country. Her father Peder died at the turn of the century, and her mother several years later, both still in Denmark. Working in not traditional industries ran in the family – her widowed sister Margaret had moved to Illinois in America, and in 1900 was an auto worker, living with her son William and daughter Elsie. Anna and Julius did not have children, and the relationship seems to have been strained at times – indeed occasionally, they lived in separate residences. In 1905, Anna sought to recover the title deeds to a property in Queen Street from Julius through the courts, or alternatively £250 in damages. A much more public court case followed in 1907 when she sued her husband for £19, the value of 'use and occupation of a house in King Street'.^{viii} She had purchased the house with her own money, earned carting wood and working for Julius.

The exchange between Anna and her husband's barrister Adam Dunlop was printed *verbatim* in both local newspapers. Anna, described as 'at times vehement', told the court she had agreed to let her husband live in her King Street property for 18 months so long as that he made repairs.^{ix} At the end of the time, he refused to move out, so she insisted on collecting £1 per week for rent. After five payments, he told her she would have to summon him if she wanted more. A man she sent to collect on her behalf was hit on the head. The house by this time was so dirty that she could not let it.

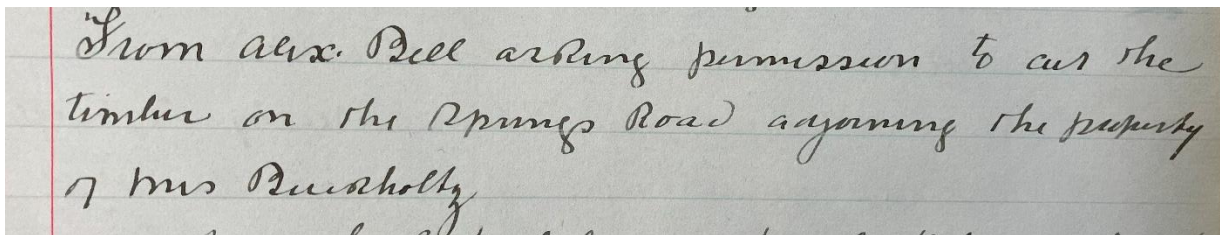
The transcript shows that Dunlop, and in many cases the court, were not particularly respectful to Anna. In the course of her examination, she explained that Julius had thrown her out, by the hair. Dunlop said, "Wasn't a man concerned?". Anna replied that according to her husband, there were dozens but it was only 'dirt'.^x He pressed further about whether a man was living with her currently, and she replied clearly that this was not the case before her barrister Frank Macoboy jumped in and maintained the line of questioning was unfair. "It is not a divorce court," he said. At times though, she gave as good as she got. After explaining that when her husband travelled to Germany, he left her with a large debt to work off and only a small amount to keep the staff and horses. "You could not do it," she told Dunlop, to much laughter in the court.^{xi}

In a 'long harangue', possibly partially in her native tongue, the transcriber simply notes that there were 'references to Germany, second wife, revolver, bullying and dog meat'.^{xii} Julius said that he had signed an agreement but that it stipulated Anna should come back and 'live as a good honest wife' after that time, but she had refused. He said it was his property and that although she had served at the shop counter and filled cartridges, she did not work for him regularly. He insisted that he had added a kitchen range, a stove and Victorian blinds while he lived at King Street. Ultimately the bench dismissed the case without costs but Julius soon moved out to a house in Joseph Street.

Anna suffered further losses when her chestnut horse is lost – or taken – from her home in King Street. Through the rate books and parish plans, we can locate Anna’s house in King Street – it is likely the house that still stands at 55 King Street, a very humble cottage between Audio Addiction and the AimBig car park. Still living separately in 1909, any feud between husband and wife ends in 1909 when Julius is taken to hospital, only to leave three days later in a hearse. The Bendigo Hospital Discharge book records a suspected cause as maxillary cellulitis, an infection possible in the sinus or other facial cavity.^{xiii} While it is noted here that he followed the Lutheran faith, Anna has him buried in the Church of England section of the Bendigo cemetery and places an advert to thank all those who sent letters and flowers, as well as the doctors at the hospital.

A fellow Berliner and locksmith, Franz du Rosey, came to Bendigo in 1894 and took up work with Julius. Franz was a keen cyclist, regularly competing in local carnivals, and having built the ‘lightest racing machine in the colonies’ (at roughly 6kg) likely drove the cycle side of the business.^{xiv} With Julius dead, and experience in the trade, Anna took up the running of the shop with Franz’s assistance, though she soon advertises for a further gunsmith to employ, as well as ‘an elderly woman, able to milk’.^{xv} She continues to advertise: ‘A Buchholz, practical gunmaker and locksmith, Hargreaves Street opposite City Market. All kinds of mechanical work done. Sewing machines repaired, workmanship guaranteed. All sportsmen’s requisites in stock’.^{xvi}

Franz purchased a farm at Sedgewick in 1904 on Springs Road but sells it to Anna in 1921, though in the community it had long been associated with her. Requests to the Shire of Strathfieldsaye for burn backs to take place ‘near Mrs Buchholz’ fence’ appear in 1910^{xvii}. By her death, she owned five blocks in that district, stretching from the current 49 Springs Road back to 36 Kerrs Road, and south past the Broadbent Road intersection, some 110 acres in all.



Public Record Office Victoria, VA 2513 Shire of Strathfieldsaye, VPRS 16137 P1 Council Minutes, Unit 6, p14

As a German national, life would have become difficult for Franz as hostilities broke out in Europe in 1914, and perhaps Anna as well with her German name, and her native Denmark choosing neutrality in the conflict. Franz was required to register, in Bendigo, under the *War Precautions (Aliens Registration) Regulations 1916*, and an intelligence section case file was kept on him from this time.^{xviii} However when he died in 1936, after 50 years in the district, his funeral at the Bendigo cemetery was well attended. A red granite headstone was erected – perhaps by Anna, given Franz had no family in Australia? Franz no longer lived at Sedgewick, but in King Street at this time. He does not appear in the rate books as a tenant or owner occupier – was he living with one of the widows renting from Anna? Or perhaps with Anna herself at number 55?

In 1931, Anna made her will and lodged it with the Farmers & Citizens Trustees Company of Bendigo. In it she names Franz as the beneficiary of her estate which by the time of her death in 1941 is not insubstantial, valued at £2,233, around \$175,000 in modern equivalent. It included nine properties – four at Sedgewick, a small weatherboard in ‘a poor state of repair’ in Hargreaves street, in the name of her late husband, three properties in King Street including her own three-roomed weatherboard with stables and workshop, and a five-roomed house in Queen Street. She owned a cow and calf, and a bay

mare, farming equipment and tools that were sold at auction, an expensive English gold chain and locket, a ladies' gold pocket watch, and savings in her account at the State Savings Bank of Victoria.

Her will directed that 'a suitable memorial' be erected over the grave she would share with Julius, at a cost left to the discretion of the Trustee.^{xxix} Since Franz had already died, her estate was divided among her nieces and nephews, children of her brother Hans and sister Margaret, then living in San Francisco and Seattle. It is unlikely they were able to make the crossing for the occasion of her funeral, being lowered in a polished oaken casket with silver mountings, engraved name plate after being delivered in a glass hearse.^{xxx}

Included in the inventory was a listing of stock – also auctioned – that featured a Hollis double-barrelled hammerless action gun and a Harrington & Richardson single barrelled shotgun, along with sundry guns, rifles, revolvers and ammunition, though much of this lot was confiscated by police following Anna's death. A note in these probate papers made by the Trustees confirms Anna's active role in the gunsmith trade – 'the possession of firearms is explained by the fact that deceased's late husband and later she herself carried on a gunsmith's business in Bendigo'.^{xxxi}

Long gone from the district when Anna took over the gunsmith shop in Hargreaves Street, it was Annie McCallum he headed an earlier family business in Williamson Street.

There are several members of the McCallum family who worked in the gunsmith trade and throughout the late 19th Century; David, Daniel and Annie McCullum are all recorded in the City of Sandhurst Rate Books with the occupation of 'gunsmith'. Annie was born in Bendigo to cab proprietor Morris Cook and his wife Louisa in 1868. As a 19-year-old, she married Scottish gun maker Daniel McCallum, 21, at St Paul's. At that same time, Daniel entered into a partnership with well known local firm, Rae & Co, who operated out of McCrae Street and where he had worked for some time as foreman.

In this early period of their marriage, and for the birth of their first children, the family live in Myers Street. By the early 1890s however, Annie rents a house from John McWalter in Williamson Street, not far up the street from her parents.^{xxxi} At the same time, Daniel is living in Brougham Street. Where the children are at this time isn't clear. The year beforehand, the Rae & McCallum partnership had dissolved – perhaps one address is a house being used as a workshop, but no has told the landlord or the rate collector?

Not long after the death of Annie's mother Louisa, the McCallum family relocated to Maryborough, where Daniel opened his own shop for gunsmithing and bicycle repairs, developing his own style of bike, the 'Caledonian'. The shop stock belonging to 'Mrs A McCallum' was auctioned off by Hobson & Co before they left Bendigo. The list of items includes 50 first-class breech loading guns, other guns by Walker & Co, Manton, Owen and Greener, Winchester repeating rifles, spring guns, cartridges, ammunition, gun caps, wads and cases, plus all the works required for gunsmithing – vices, stocks, dies, grindstone, portable forge, and an Erskine loading machine.^{xxiii} There were also shop fittings like show cases and a counter, as well as a workbench, tools and an amount of cutlery, razors, locks, keys and fishing tackle.

Soon after the turn of the century, the family moved again, this time much further away to Perth, and choosing Barrack Street to establish a gunsmith outfit. Here, their 18-year-old son Gavin has taken on the trade, working with his father until he tragically drowned when a boat he was in capsized in 1907. Only a year later, their 16-year-old son Morris was hospitalised after a massive storm brought down the building he was sheltering in. It's unclear in what capacity, if any, Annie continued in the business as electoral rolls record her simply as 'married'.

Through the City of Sandhurst Rate Records and TROVE, we can find a much longer list of gunsmith who operated in Bendigo across time, but Anna and Annie appear to be the only women recorded as such. Notes about how assumptions we can easily make about the roles of women in colonial Victoria can be disproven if we look at individuals and their occupations rather than just as a collective group based on gender. If someone was capable of repairing a firearm and managing gunpower, why couldn't they also be considered responsible and intelligent enough to vote?

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Other Gunsmiths in Bendigo

Francis O'Keefe (Calvin Street)

John Rae (McCrae Street)

Edwin Rae

Abrahams & Co (Henry & Edward Abrahams, Pall Mall)

Drewes & Meakin (Frederick and George, McCrae Street)

Henry Jackson & Co (View Street)

Alfred Turnbull

Ambrose Frigerio

Thomas Baker

John Parsons

Other PROV records featuring local gunsmiths:

VPRS 515 P0000, Central Register for Male Prisoners – Thomas Rae, prisoner 11131 (1873) tried and convicted at Sandhurst Criminal Sessions for attempting indecent assault on a girl under ten

FURTHER RESEARCH

- What was the Diggers' Bendigo Hospital where Edward Rodgers' inquest was held?
- What were the controversies surrounding the hospital in the early to mid 1850s and how was Dr Roche involved?
- Where women were recorded as gunsmiths, what work were they actually undertaking?
- Did women undertake this work as part of family businesses? Did a guild system exist in Australia as it did in Britain?

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ⁱ COLLINS, David Col *On account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, A Strahan, London, 1804

ⁱⁱ Public Record Office Victoria, VA 2889 Registrar-General's Department, VPRS 24 Inquest Deposition Files, 1853/571 Edward Rogers, 16 Nov 1853

ⁱⁱⁱ Public Record Office Victoria, VA 4862 Borough of Sandhurst, VPRS 16267 Rate Book, 1864

^{iv} 'What females can do', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 23 Jun 1873, p2

^v WOOD, Katie 'Disturbing the silence of women metal workers', *Archives & Manuscripts*, Vol 46 No 83-89, 2018

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- vi 'Gunsmiths – occupation profile overview', Labour Market Insights, Jobs & Skills Australian Government, <https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/occupation-profile/gunsmiths?occupationCode=323312>, accessed April 2023
- vii 'Wanted known', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 Jun 1886, p3; 'For sale', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 21 Dec 1889, p6
- viii 'Buchholz v Buchholz', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 7 Sep 1907
- ix 'Buchholz v Buchholz', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 7 Sep 1907
- x 'Buchholz v Buchholz', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 7 Sep 1907
- xi 'Buchholz v Buchholz', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 7 Sep 1907
- xii 'Buchholz v Buchholz', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 7 Sep 1907
- xiii Public Record Office Victoria, VA 1264 Bendigo Hospital, VPRS 18855 Admission & Discharge Register 1902-1911
- xiv 'Bendigo', *Launceston Examiner*, 8 Nov 1895
- xv 'Advertising', *Bendigo Independent*, 20 Nov 1913
- xvi 'Advertising', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 31 Dec 1910
- xvii Public Record Office Victoria, VA 2513 Shire of Strathfieldsaye, VPRS 16137 P1 Council Minutes, Unit 6, p14
- xviii National Archives of Australia, MT269/1 VIC/GERMANY/DU ROSEY, Item ID 5968060, 1916
- xix Public Record Office Victoria, VA 2624 Master in Equity, VPRS 7591 P2 Wills, 330/783 Anna M Buchholz
- xx North Central Goldfields Regional Library, Index t Local Bendigo Undertakers Burial Records 188601968
- xxi Public Record Office Victoria, VA 2624 Master in Equity, VPRS 28/P3 Probate & Administration Papers, 330/783 Anna M Buchholz
- xxii Public Record Office Victoria, VA 4862 Borough of Sandhurst, VPRS 16267 Rate Book, 1891, 1892
- xxiii 'Advertising', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 14 May 1892