

George Dainty, shopkeeper, 1896



Description

This is a sepia photograph, thought to show George Dainty and his dog, standing in front of his shop in Coolgardie on the Western Australian gold fields in 1896. The sign shows that the shop sells bread, groceries and water. The tank to the right of the building is a water tank, and the jug sitting on top of it is for scooping the water out. The shop is built from wooden poles, probably of local timber cleared from the area, with canvas walls and a tin and canvas roof. The front building has a flysheet over the roof to give extra protection from rain and sun. The photograph measures 7 cm x 10 cm.

Educational value

- This asset suggests the difficulty of obtaining water in the earliest days of Western Australia's eastern gold fields - with no permanent sources of fresh water, prospectors and pioneers bought water by the gallon; water sellers obtained the water from wells, bores, salt lakes, rock catchment dams, claypans and natural soaks; virtually all water in the eastern gold fields, with the exception of run-off from granite outcrops, was saline and was converted into fresh water by a distillation process; the jug sitting on the tank holds a gallon (4.55 L); the price per gallon would have varied from 6 pence (half a shilling) to 5 shillings, depending on the season and recent rainfall.
- It shows a typical stopping place along the route to the eastern gold fields - storekeepers were often among the first to arrive at new rushes, setting up shop in tents, and acting as post offices; in his 1895 diary, New Zealand prospector John Aspinall wrote, 'All these stopping places are composed of a pub, bakery and store and often run by the same individual and the sign that meets the eye everywhere is "Bread and Water" sold here'.
- It shows one of the earliest shops and its owner on the eastern gold fields - although most men travelled to the gold fields to try to make money from gold



Categories: Life on the Goldfields

prospecting, a better living could sometimes be made by those who supplied the needs of the travellers; food and water fetched high prices because of the costs of transport; before the railway line reached Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie in 1896 everything from candles to corrugated iron had to be brought in by teams of horses or by camel trains.

- It is an example of the supply of services to the rapidly increasing population in the gold fields - the population of the region doubled each year from the time when gold was first found; gold was discovered in September 1892 at what became Coolgardie; Coolgardie was declared a municipality in 1894 and by 1896 it had an estimated population of 9,000; the story was the same in Kalgoorlie, with 700 men on the fields within six months of the first find in 1893 and by 1901 Kalgoorlie had a population of 30,000.
- It gives an indication of living conditions in the eastern gold fields - before the Coolgardie Water Supply, later named the Golden Pipeline, was built, prospectors would not have had spare water to wash the dirt from gold or wash themselves or their clothes; miners paid high prices for enough water to drink; the vegetation in the desert regions where gold was found was very sparse and gold prospectors worked with no protection from the extremes of the weather; if there was a little water to spare, a prospector might wet a cloth to tie around his neck; evaporation of the water in the cloth would keep him cool.
- It is a photograph taken by Archibald Sanderson who travelled to the gold fields in search of a fortune - Archibald Sanderson had three older brothers, and therefore no immediate prospects in the family business; in 1895 he cycled to the gold fields with a camera and notebook to provide a valuable record of the region at that time.
- It is thought to be a photograph of George Dainty - a baker in the early days of Coolgardie, Dainty was possibly lured to his death by gold like so many others; the remains of a man were found in July 1903 near a gold mine in the Laverton district, north-east of Coolgardie; the trousers were identified as belonging to Dainty, who had been lost in the area more than two years earlier; a jury declared the remains to be those of Dainty and that he probably died of thirst; his death is listed in 'More Lonely Graves of Western Australia'.

Copyright Reproduced courtesy of Battye Library

Creator Archibald Sanderson, photographer, 1896

Identifier Battye Library number 009097D

Source National Trust of Australia (Western Australia) <http://valuingheritage.com.au/>



Categories: Life on the Goldfields