

John Conway Bourke.

OUR FIRST OVERLAND MAILMAN.

The Historical Society of Victoria recently decided to erect a memorial in the Catholic section of the Melbourne Cemetery, Carlton, over the remains of John Conway Bourke, Victoria's first mailman, who died on August 5, 1902, aged 87 years. Largely through the instrumentality of Mr. A. W. Greig, of the Melbourne University staff, who is one of the principal authorities on "Early Melbourne," sufficient funds were collected for the purpose, to which the St. Patrick's Society, of Melbourne, amongst others, contributed.

The memorial, which took the form of a richly-carved marble scroll, was unveiled by the President of the Historical Society, Mr. T. Latham, on Saturday afternoon, the 11th inst. Mr. Latham sketched the career of John Conway Bourke since he left his birthplace at Rathkeale, County Limerick, including his arrival in Australia, and his cattle-droving experience in New South Wales. It was on January 1, 1838, that he undertook the very dangerous task of carrying the first overland mail for Sydney through a trackless virgin bush, inhabited by various aboriginal tribes more or less hostile. Bourke's destination was Yass, N.S.W., over 200 miles away, where a Sydney mailman would meet him to receive the mail. He accomplished his adventurous journey in six days, after many exciting adventures, including the swimming of the Murray River. In 1837 he had rescued two drovers from drowning at Howlong. This young Irishman, who was only 23 years of age, had shown great courage and resource. Though not possessed of a compass, he showed a wonderfully accurate sense of direction. He had blazed the track for future use, and for his successors to follow. During 1838 he had ridden 11,000 miles on postal work. His achievements resulted in an uninterrupted postal service from then onwards. The Historical Society was proud to honour such a man, and to add his memorial to the others commemorating heroic deeds, or events connected with the early settlers of Victoria.

Early Official Reports.

Mr. J. C. Westhoven, Deputy Controller of Posts and Telegraphs, spoke on behalf

of Posts and Telegraphs, spoke on behalf of his department, and produced a number of the early official reports by Mr. Bourke. These indicated that he was not only a fine penman, but a writer of considerable ability and discernment. Mr. Westhoven paid a fine tribute to the courage and bushcraft of Mr. Bourke, whose services were highly appreciated by the postal officials of early Melbourne. The discovery of gold and other attractions had enticed Mr. Bourke temporarily away from the service. In later years, however, a prominent position was given him at the G.P.O., and an increased pension awarded by Parliament in view of his meritorious services. Comparative tables of the 1838 period, with the present one, were given by Mr. Westhoven, and proved very interesting. They showed the marvellous development of the postal service in so short a period.

Mr. J. F. Grogan spoke on behalf of the St. Patrick's Society, and thanked the Historical Society for its fine tribute to Mr. Bourke, who, like Sir John O'Shaunnessy, Edmund Ryan ("Garryowen"), Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Alderman O'Grady, and many other distinguished members of his society, were closely identified with the public life of early Melbourne.

Mr. E. B. Daly and Mr. J. B. Coghlan also represented the St. Patrick's Society. Mr. Coghlan spoke of the kindness shown him by Mr. Bourke, when he (Mr. Coghlan) joined the service as a lad. The juniors were ever questioning Mr. Bourke about his bush experiences, and always found his reminiscences very entertaining.

Mr. J. J. Sheedy, whose parents were shipmates to Melbourne, of the Bourke family, produced an excellent photograph and well-preserved letters of Mr. Bourke. They were relics of over 40 years ago, and were examined with interest by the gathering at the graveside.

Amongst those present were Miss Lilian Brack, grand-daughter of Mr. Bourke, and her father, as well as other old friends of the deceased. The widow of John Conway Bourke, junior, also of the G.P.O., who is now at Wodonga, sent her regrets for not being present. Mr. Patrick Bourke, of Cairns, Queensland, and his sister, Mrs. "Tilly" Thorne, of Greenwich Point, Sydney, are now the only surviving children of Thomas Conway Bourke. The memorial was executed by Messrs. Jageurs and Son Pty, Ltd., of Parkville.