

# Roundabout

Monbulk Historical Society Newsletter



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## Monbulk's unsolved murder mystery

Les McAllister and his brother Clarrie owned and ran the butcher shop in the main street of Monbulk during the 1930s.

himself but along with his cash he carried cheques that had been previously cashed at the shop so would be useless to anyone else.

Les, who lived on his own behind the shop, would drive his International van to the meat market to pick up the meat for the Monbulk shop. However on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January 1939 he was murdered at Dandenong Creek while on his way to the meat market in North Melbourne.

His routine was to leave Monbulk at about 4 o'clock in the morning for North Melbourne and arrive back at the shop around 8 o'clock. He would put clean straw on the floor of the van to carry the meat.

At first it was thought to be an accident and was not discovered that he had been shot until later that morning. It was said he paid cash for his meat and in a sense he did, as he did not write cheques



Les McAllister aged 23  
1922

Jack Dennison worked for Les McAllister for a number of years and found him to be a 'good clean living bloke' with, as far as he knew, no enemies. The first Jack knew of Les's death was when he went to the Post Office on that Friday and Miss Anne Siddle, the Postmistress, said to him, "It's bad luck about your boss". When he asked her why, she told him he had been in an accident at Dandenong Creek and was killed.

After offering Les's brother Clarrie help with the shop, Jack ran the shop for nearly twelve months until Jim Gray Senior bought the business around Christmas 1939.



Les McAllister's delivery van parked outside the butcher shop in Monbulk's main street 1938.  
Emerald-Monbulk Road can be seen on the right.



Jack remembered;

"On Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> January we were having lunch in the kitchen behind the shop when someone came into the shop. I said to Clarrie "Your turn" and he went in to serve the customer. I heard a lot of talking and a little later I was called into the shop, and what a shock! There were five big detectives standing around. Clarrie asked one if it was true that Les had been shot, and Inspector Carey, answered 'yes'.

The detectives were Inspector Carey, Detective Rosewarne and Detective Simpson who was the fingerprint expert, and they seemed reasonable men.

The other two were Detectives Davis and Adams, and they weren't so nice. From then on we were asked questions. The same ones over and over again. This went on for weeks. Lots of people in Monbulk were questioned but nothing came of it.

I had a Buick car and it was ransacked by Detectives Davis and Adams. They fingerprinted me and quite a few others during their investigations. The police kept the van for a while and even after we got it back we were not allowed to wash the blood from the seat and sides of the van."

Jack Dennison delivered the meat on his horse with a large basket over his arm to local homes and businesses. He later did the marketing for the butcher shop but wasn't very happy driving to Melbourne at 4 o'clock in the morning, especially in the winter.

Sixteen years later on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1955 *The Argus* reported the unsolved murder of Leslie McAllister of Monbulk.

## MONBULK BUTCHER MURDERED AND ROBBED

### Found Dead In Motor Van On Way To Market

**Handicapped by a delay of 24 hours, detectives are seeking the murderers of Leslie McAllister, 38, butcher, of Monbulk, who was shot and robbed in his motor van last Friday morning, at the new bridge over Dandenong Creek, in Burwood Road, Wantirna.**

**P**OLICE believe the crime was planned and carried out by criminals from the city, who were aware of his movements, and knew he carried a large sum.

It was thought that McAllister had been the victim of a crash, when he was found unconscious in the seat of his motor van off the road, but a post mortem examination revealed that he had been shot through the head with a pistol of small calibre.

McAllister died at Alfred Hospital without regaining consciousness at 11.30 a.m. on Friday.

Although two smashed posts and marks on the roadway showing the van had swerved to the wrong side of the road indicated an accident, suspicion was aroused when it was found that between £40 and £50, which McAllister was known to be carrying was missing.

McAllister was on one of his regular trips from Monbulk to the Metropolitan Meat Markets to buy supplies of meat. It was known that he kept fairly large sums in his possession.

Although his mother and two brothers, Harold and Clarence, live at Monbulk, Leslie McAllister lived alone at the butcher's shop. He was heard leaving about 4.45 a.m. on Friday by Ernest Le Juge, who has a pastry-cook's shop next door.

Mrs Le Juge said that McAllister always carried his money in a black leather wallet. When he was found this wallet was missing.

It is believed that the murderers watched McAllister's business deals at the market, noted he always paid in cash, followed his movements to and from Monbulk, and planned to hold him up.

One theory, which is being considered by the detectives, is that the bandits tried to force McAllister to

stop. When he refused, they drove alongside and fired through the window of the near side door, which was open. McAllister then lost control of his van. The bandits then robbed McAllister as he lay dying in the seat of the van.

An alternative theory is that he was forced off the road and shot and robbed after the van came to a stop. The police are inclined to accept this view, as a pool of dried blood was found on the grass underneath the near side door of the van.

The police also think it possible the slayer may have been concealed inside the van, or was some person known to McAllister, to whom he had given a lift.

On the previous Tuesday night McAllister's shop was broken into while he was at a local picture show, but only 5/ and a fountain pen were stolen. There was no other money in the shop.

Senior-Detective Simpson has been investigating a mysterious shooting at Upper Ferntree Gully early in December, when Mrs Irene Clarkson, 30, wife of Cecil Clarkson, 34, carrier, was wounded by an intruder who fired two shots. Mrs Clarkson was wounded by a bullet of the same calibre as that which killed McAllister.

It was 5 a.m. on Black Friday, January 13, 1939, as Leslie McAllister, a 38 year old Monbulk butcher, drove his truck along Burwood Road towards Melbourne.

A few hours later his truck was found crashed through the Wantirna bridge over Dandenong Creek, not far from Ferntree Gully.

The truck had crashed through the guide posts on the right-hand side of the bridge, and McAllister was found unconscious in the truck. He was rushed to the Alfred Hospital, where he died the next day from head injuries.

At first it was thought McAllister had died of the injuries he received. But it became very much a murder after Dr. C. H. Mollison, Government pathologist, found a .25 calibre bullet in the brain!

A large squad of detectives, including Superintendent Rosewarne and Det. Sgt. F. "Bluey" Adam, worked continuously on the case for six months.

They questioned more than 2,000 people and found McAllister had been robbed of £70. A £10 note taken from his pocket was later traced, but neither the killer nor the gun was found.

*The Argus* January 12, 1955

Mystery still surrounds his death as no-one was ever charged with his murder.

Weekly Times January 21, 1939