In Stockport, England in 1900 Maggie Kelly packed her Saratoga trunk before embarking on the greatest adventure of her life – a voyage half way around the world to Western Australia. Maggie placed all of her possessions in this sturdy trunk which, many years later yielded its secrets to tell the story of her life. The trunk accompanied Maggie to London to 53 Horseferry Road where she stayed overnight before watching the trunk and those of her fellow passengers being loaded onto a wagon and taken to Tilbury Docks where it was stowed in the hold of the ss Banffshire not to see the light of day again until the ship arrived in Fremantle. After an eventful 5 weeks journey, which was chronicled in Maggie’s diary, the trunk was transported to the Emigrants’ Home in Fremantle where Maggie stayed for several days and then to the home of the Colonial Secretary in Perth where Maggie had secured a position as a cook. Some six months later the trunk was packed again and this time travelled by train to Kalgoorlie where Maggie and her friend, Dora Pryce, went, looking for higher wages and probably the chance to meet eligible men. Very soon after arriving in Kalgoorlie in December 1900 Maggie met James Kane, an Irish miner, and they were married in All Hallows Church in Boulder City in April 1901. Maggie and Jim took the trunk with them to their first home on the Great Boulder Lease on the Golden Mile and, in 1903, after securing land at Roelands, near Bunbury, the trunk was packed again and taken by them to their new home. It spent the next 57 years in the farm house that Jim had built and after Maggie’s death it passed into the hands of Maggie’s eldest daughter, Margaret. After Margaret’s death in 1975 the trunk passed to her younger sister, Norah who lovingly cared for it and its contents. On several occasions during the 1980s and 90s my Aunt Norah and I would look at the contents of the trunk and Norah would tell me stories that her mother, Maggie, had passed on to her. Norah died in 2002 and Maggie’s trunk and its precious cargo was passed on to me. It is a time capsule which tells the story of Maggie’s life. In a 100 year old notebook are recipes that Maggie recorded during her years of service and several accounts books where she recorded the wages paid to her in England and in Perth and also household expenses for the farm.

There is a beautiful photograph album in the trunk with many photographs dating back to the middle of the 19th century. There are letters, postcards, greeting cards and photographs from family and friends in the UK and America, sprigs of heather and flowers, Maggie’s high school certificate, and letters from employers. There are prayer books and psalms along with Maggie’s bible dating back to 1897 and a reference from her local minister. Other items include books on etiquette when attending balls and detailed instructions on fashionable dances of the era. There is a concert program dating back to 1897, old newspaper clippings, commemorative medals recording the golden and diamond jubilees of Queen Victoria, the coronation of King George V and a Peace medal from 1919 commemorating the end of World War I. Also included are numerous small items including pens and nibs, purses, Maggie’s knitting needles, stays for corsets, hat pins and button hooks.
The photographs include several of people and streetscapes in the goldfields, photographs of Jim and other miners on the Golden Mile and Jim’s Miner’s Right dated 1906. Jim’s rosary beads which were given to him by his mother in 1883 when he left Ireland at the age of 16 to emigrate to America and which he always carried with him, have also spent most of the last century in the trunk. Maggie and Jim’s marriage certificate and the birth certificate of their eldest daughter, Margaret, are carefully preserved along with photographs of their children, locks of the babies’ hair and several nightgowns and baby clothes which Maggie had made herself.

Bereavement notices for relatives of Maggie’s including one announcing the death of her grandmother, Mary Murray in 1865 have been kept along with Jim’s and Maggie’s included.

This old trunk has preserved the Australian story of the Kane family so that Maggie and Jim’s descendants now know the hardships Maggie and Jim lived through to give their children and grandchildren a better life in a new country.