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The Great War (part 1)

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The Aims of the Society are to discover, record, preserve, advise on and teach the history of Maitland and the district

Cover image: Unknown Australian Official Photographer, Australian infantry wounded at a First Aid Post near Zonnebeke Railway Station, Australian War Memorial E01202.

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Lecture meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month from 5:30-7.00pm as a forum for lectures, talks and presentations.

Committee meetings are held on the third Tuesday of even months from 5:30-7.00pm.

General meetings are held on the third Tuesday of odd months from 5:30-7.00pm.

Members are invited to attend all monthly meetings.

Meetings are held at the Society's rooms, 3 Cathedral Street, Maitland.

Membership fees: $25 (single) and $35 (double / family)

The rooms are open between 11 and 3 on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

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Editor's Notes: This edition of the *Bulletin* has one focus: the First World War, the Great War, "the war to end all wars". One hundred and ten years ago the world was fighting in what we now know was certainly not the war to end all wars. The people of Maitland and its environs were fully enmeshed, in one way or another, in the conflict. Many men enlisted and travelled to the other side of the world in order to do their part for King and Country. Sadly, many did not return, or returned physically or psychologically damaged. Nursing sisters travelled abroad to care for the men, often at risk of their own lives. The people on the home front carried on, raising funds and providing comforts for the troops.

The articles in this *Bulletin* deal with different aspects of the war which need to be remembered.

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Imaging Maitland and the First World War

Janis Wilton

The Maitland and District Historical Society (MDHS), the Australian War Memorial (AWM) and a number of other public and private collections care for emotive and potent items that bring home the nature and impact of the First World War. In 2017, the Historical Society, in collaboration with other groups, supported a series of events that drew on these items to share stories to mark the centenary of the Battle of Passchendaele, the involvement of the 34th Battalion – 'Maitland's Own', and the immediate and long-lasting effects of the First World War on Maitland.[1]

The late Peter Bogan, in his gently persistent way, was the inspiration. He lobbied, asked and cajoled. Behind and in the exhibitions and events were many, many powerful and evocative images. Their power increases when people and places are named, and when stories ebb and flow from an image.

The focus here is on a very small selection of photographs and the ways in which they both anchor and inspire stories and reflections about the First World War and Maitland. They also remind us that keeping and documenting photographs and other memorabilia can provide insights into our history, especially into the micro-histories of a locality and the people who lived - and live - there.

Photographs are not simply illustrations of history. Each has its own history: who made it, why it was taken, who was meant to see it, whether it was staged or altered, who kept it, and how it eventually entered a public or private collection.

A name written on the back, a studio imprint, a familiar backdrop or a family memory can transform an otherwise anonymous image into evidence from which a much fuller story can be reconstructed.

‘What an awful scene of desolation!’[2]

Frank Hurley wrote these words in his diary soon after arriving on the Western Front in August 1917.

Our lasting images of the fighting during the First World War are anchored by the photographs (and moving images) created by Hurley and other official war photographers. The images evoke the mud, mayhem, bravery and destruction of the battlefields.

There is a wealth of research and writing about these photographs. We are reminded that each image is shaped by the photographers' perspectives, expertise, values and aesthetic practices; that some photographs are composites – images created by combining two or more photographs; and that some photographs are carefully staged or composed. However created, they remain confronting and evocative, providing graphic visual contexts for the traumas experienced by those who participated.[3]



Australian infantry wounded at a First Aid Post near Zonnebeke Railway Station, 12 October 1917. Left: unaltered photograph, unknown Australian official photographer (AWM E01202). Right: composite version attributed to Frank Hurley and an unknown photographer (AWM P04060 005).

These are two versions of the same scene. The photograph on the left starkly portrays the aftermath of Passchendaele: wounded soldiers, mud, stripped trees, battle debris and devastation. The same image provides the foreground of

the composite photograph on the right. The narrative is enhanced and arguably altered by the addition of cloud formations and dramatic rays of light, perhaps visually recalling the AIF's Rising Sun badge. The message is about the destruction and mayhem of the battlefront.

Portraits of soldiers

Portraits and group photographs of service personnel offer different perspectives. They forcefully remind us that the battlefields portrayed in official war photographs were populated by individuals with families and stories, and that proud, fresh-faced portraits often belie the realities of war and can gloss over the personal and family stories of the people in them.

Photographs were created before and during the war in various circumstances. Commercial photographers produced formal studio portraits for servicemen and their families; photographers also worked in and around training camps; and formal portraits continued to be sought once soldiers were overseas. Many of these images have survived. Some remain within families; many have been deposited, often along with other memorabilia, in public collections.

Local commercial studios were therefore part of Maitland's wartime visual culture. Cameron Studios and Webb & Woolston photographed local servicemen and families, while Newcastle's Charleston Studios produced Clarence Jeffries's portrait (see below). Their studio settings, mounts and imprints can themselves become historical evidence, helping to identify where - and sometimes approximately when - otherwise uncertain photographs were made.[4] While official photographers recorded the war overseas, studio photographers at home helped shape how military service was seen, exchanged and remembered.

Drawing together the life-threads of the people in the photographs honours and recognises their lives and their connections with Maitland and district. It builds a picture of the war from and around the experiences of those who fought in it and supported it.

The following small number of examples highlight different experiences and ways photographs are documented, shared, viewed, used and reused. They also highlight how each individual portrait and story is both unique and representative: unique because they anchor individuals' life stories and family connections, and representative because they are part of a large collection of images and other memorabilia that marks the participation of people from Maitland and district and the various ways in which that participation is remembered and imagined.

‘I hope I am lucky enough to get back’

Charles Taylor in a letter to his family dated 30 July 1917.[5]

Charles Herbert Taylor (1897-1935) was one of the many Maitland residents who enlisted. The son of local builder Charles Taylor and his wife Eva (née Dee), he was working for the railways when, in January 1916, he enlisted in the AIF and joined the 34th Battalion. He was a member of the Battalion's band. Taylor survived the war, including the fighting at Passchendaele, and returned to Australia.



Charles Taylor, 1918 (left) and the 34th Battalion Band en route to England in 1916. Taylor is at the front right holding drumsticks. (AWM PR03112)

The apparently benign band photograph reminds us not to read military portraits too literally. Band service did not remove men from danger. In April 1918 Taylor was in charge of a Lewis gun near Villers-Bretonneux when, as he wrote in his diary, ‘I was wounded with five other bandsmen. … I stopped a piece of steel in the left thigh’.[6]

Two men from Abermain

The people in the photographs are not always identified. For some, the main public identification is their name and, through the online availability of AIF records, details about their military service and fragments of their personal lives. By contrast, other individuals are well documented. This is brought home by comparing portraits of two men from Abermain who were members of the 34th Battalion and died in October 1917 during the Third Battle of Ypres, in the fighting at Passchendaele.





Robert Wilson, c.1916, and (right) on the Abermain honour board. Wilson is second from the right in the top row. The board, presented by the women of the Abermain Comforts Fund, commemorates 25 men from Abermain who lost their lives during the First World War. (AWM P01920.005 and P01920.001)

Robert Wilson (1884–1917) was born in Scotland. In 1916, he was working as a miner and living in Abermain when he enlisted. His AIF file indicates that he was survived by his mother, who received a small war pension. Wilson was killed on 13 October 1917 and has no known grave; his name appears on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial. He is also memorialised in Abermain and on the AWM's Roll of Honour.[7]

To date, little else is readily known about him. What brought him and his family to Abermain? When did they arrive? What was their background in Scotland? What inspired him to enlist? What interests did he have? How was he remembered within his family? Are there descendants who hold further records? The questions themselves are important. The contrast between Wilson and more fully documented men reminds us that historical visibility often depends on which records survive, who keeps them, and which lives later attract sustained commemoration.

By contrast, much more information is readily available about Clarence Jeffries (1894–1917). Born and educated in the Newcastle district, Jeffries was apprenticed as a mining engineer to his father, Joshua Jeffries, the General Manager of the Abermain Collieries. By the time he enlisted in February 1916, he was in charge of the Collieries' surveying department. He also had extensive militia experience. Jeffries was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross - the

only VC awarded to a member of the 34th Battalion - for his actions during the attack at Passchendaele on 12 October 1917, in which he was killed.





Clarence Jeffries, 1916, photographed by Charleston Studios, Newcastle,(AWM P0373.001) and the commemorative portrait created for the Abermain RSL (AWM P01920.028)

Given Jeffries' VC, it is not unexpected that his life and military career are remembered through a variety of memorials, publications and online accounts.[8] The contrast with Wilson is nevertheless pertinent. For so many of those who served during the First World War, aside from their military service records, their stories have largely disappeared from the public record.

'we … can hear the big guns growling'

Herbert Halpin to his father, published in the *Maitland Daily Mercury,* 28 August 1916.

Some families have kept rich records. The exhibitions held during Maitland Remembers Passchendaele in 2017 drew on several of these private collections – some still held within families, some now in public collections. Family connections, personal stories, photographs, memorabilia and local newspaper reports can ensure that the people in the photographs emerge with fuller lives. Here I focus on one example.

Herbert John Halpin (1892–1974) was an engineer and railway fitter from West Maitland. He enlisted in July 1915, initially serving with the 30th Battalion and later with the 8th Machine Gun Company. He returned to Australia in April 1918 and was discharged in August following prolonged ill health.

The Herbert Halpin papers held in the Maitland and District Historical Society Collection (MDHS 1334) contain photographs and documents that locate his military service in the context of his life.

Herbert Halpin's birth certificate records that he was born on 6 March 1892 in Church St, West Maitland. His parents were John Charles Halpin, a 32-year-old bootmaker, and Gertrude Ethel Adams, age 23.



The Halpin family, photographed about 1900. Herbert is on the far left. Seated left to right next to him are his mother, younger brother Wilfred and father. (MDHS 1334)

Certificates in the MDHS file record that Halpin served with the Citizen Forces (1st Battalion, 4th Australian Infantry Regiment) for about three years. Discharged in 1911, he had gained a Bugler's Certificate in 1908. We also learn that from 1908 to 1928 he was employed as an 'apprentice and journeyman fitter' with the South Maitland Railway, and in 1911-1912, presumably as part of his apprenticeship, attended West Maitland Technical College, gaining certificates in Mechanical Drawing and Fitting and Turning.



C.M. Form A. 17.

MILITARY FORCES OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

CITIZEN FORCES.

CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE.

This is to Certify that No. 3611 Pte. H.J.HALPIN

was Discharged* Term of enlistment expired

from the 1st Bn.4th Australian Infantry Regiment

on the 1st February 1911 at† West Maitland

Character Goods

Total Service Three yrs. ----- mm

Effective " In Ranks Three yrs. ----- mm

Lt.-Colonel,

COMMANDING 1st BN. 4th AUST. INFNT. REGT.

Comdg.

* Here state conditions of Discharge. † Place.

Certificate of Discharge from the Citizen Forces, 1911 (MDHS 1334)

Halpin enlisted in 1915. The MDHS file has the photo below of him in uniform. His military service is documented in his AIF file held in the National Archives and in letters and reports in the *Maitland Mercury.*[9] From the newspaper we learn, for example, that he was farewelled in August 1915 by his fellow employees at the East Greta Workshop; his brother Wilfred was also serving; his father was attached to the Rutherford Camp; and, by November 1916, he had learnt that reinforcements were on the way:

> *I am glad to hear they are sending such a splendid lot of lads as you say the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th Battalions are. They want all the reinforcements over here. You have no idea of the wastages, but I guess you will see the lists of our killed and wounded…*[10]



Herbert Halpin, about 1916

Halpin's AIF file establishes that he enlisted as a private and was placed with the 30th Battalion. In March 1916 he was transferred to the 8th Machine Gun Company (8th Brigade). He served in France where, in July 1916, he suffered the first of two bouts of shell shock. On this occasion he returned soon afterwards to his unit. In September 1916 he was promoted to Corporal. A few weeks later he suffered a more serious episode of shell shock. From this point on, his record is dominated by hospitalisation, convalescence, medical classification and attempts to return him to effective service.

It was about a year before he returned to France. That return lasted only a couple of weeks before poor health saw him sent back to England. In April 1918

he was sent home to Australia and in August he was discharged, the final annotation recording ‘asthma’.

Halpin’s AIF file contains his marriage certificate. He married Jessie Holmes in England in January 1918. Photographs in the MDHS file take up the narrative.





Left: Jessie Halpin holding daughter Jessie on board ship, with Herbert Halpin in uniform beside her. Right: Herbert, Jessie junior and Jessie, Maitland, c1919 (MDHS 1334)

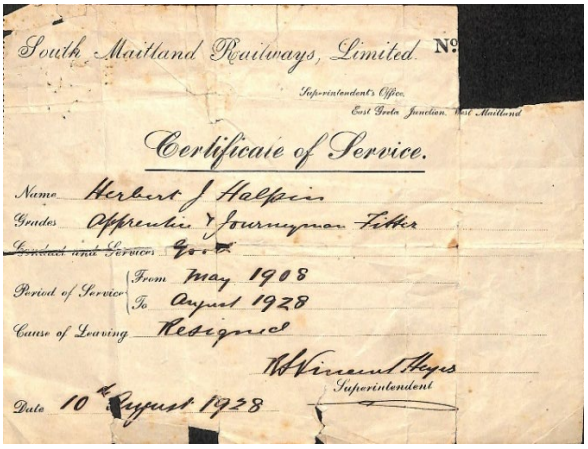
Jessie and Herbert had two more children: Arthur and George, both born in Maitland in 1920 and 1923 respectively.



Horseshoe Bend Public School, c.1927. The photograph is captioned on the reverse ‘Horse Shoe Bend Kindergarten, West Maitland’. (MDHS 1334)

The children's clothing and hairstyles are consistent with a mid-to-late 1920s date. Presumably the group includes one or more of Herbert and Jessie Halpin’s children.

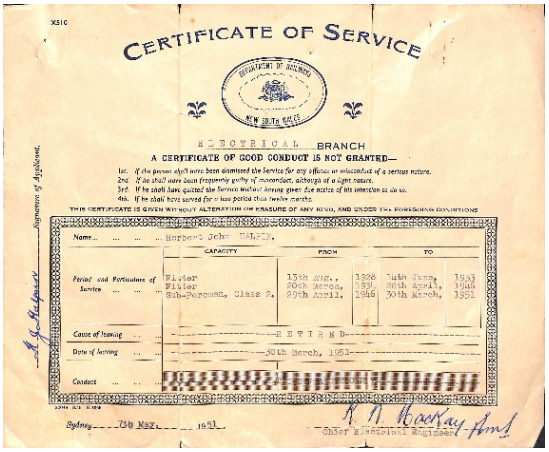
In Australia, Halpin returned to work with the South Maitland Railway Company. In 1928 he resigned and took a position with the electrical branch of NSW Railways, remaining with the Railways until his retirement in 1951. Certificates in the MDHS file record the dates; his Railway Personal History Card held in the NSW State Archives provides more details of his employment with NSW Railways, noting on the second page that he retired on 'the grounds of ill health'.[11]


South Maitland Railways, Limited No

Superintendent's Office,
East Greta Junction, West Maitland

Certificate of Service.

Name Herbert J Halpin
Grades Apprentice & Journeyman Fitter
Conduct and Services Good
Period of Service From May 1908 To August 1928
Cause of Leaving Resigned
R S Vincent Hayes
Superintendent
Date 10th August 1928


CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

ELECTRICAL BRANCH

A CERTIFICATE OF GOOD CONDUCT IS NOT GRANTED—

1st. If the person shall have been dismissed the Service for any offence or misconduct of a serious nature.
2nd. If he shall have been frequently guilty of misconduct, although of a light nature.
3rd. If he shall have quitted the Service without having given due notice of his intention so do so.
4th. If he shall have served for a less period than twelve months.

THIS CERTIFICATE IS GIVEN WITHOUT ALTERATION OR ERASURE OF ANY KIND, AND UNDER THE FOREGOING CONDITIONS

Name ... Herbert John HALPIN.

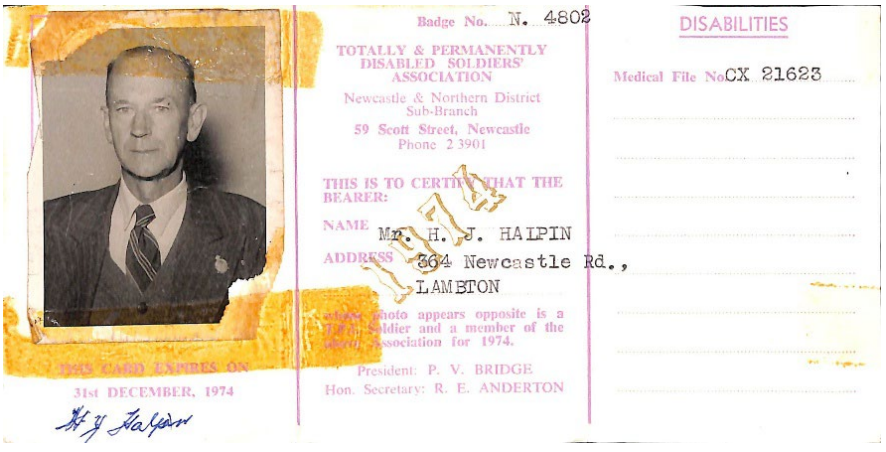
	CAPACITY	FROM		TO	
Period and Particulars of Service	Fitter	13th Aug.,	1928	14th June,	1933
	Fitter	20th March,	1931	28th April,	1946
	Sub-Foreman, Class 2.	29th April,	1946	30th March,	1951

Cause of leaving ... RETIRED
Date of leaving ... 30th March, 1951
Conduct ...

Sydney 7th May, 1951
Chief Electrical Engineer

Certificate of Service, South Maitland Railways (left), and Certificate of Service, NSW Railways – Electrical Branch. (MDHS 1334)

The MDHS file also contains Halpin's 1974 membership card for the Totally and Permanently Disabled Soldiers' Association (TPDSA). The card shows that, nearly sixty years after his enlistment, Halpin was recognised as a totally and permanently disabled ex-serviceman; the surviving card does not specify the nature of the disability.


Badge No. N. 4802

TOTALLY & PERMANENTLY DISABLED SOLDIERS' ASSOCIATION
Newcastle & Northern District Sub-Branch
59 Scott Street, Newcastle
Phone 2 3901

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE BEARER:
NAME Mr. H. J. HALPIN
ADDRESS 364 Newcastle Rd., LAMBTON

1974

whose photo appears opposite is a Total Soldier and a member of the Total Association for 1974.

President: P. V. BRIDGE
Hon. Secretary: R. E. ANDERTON

THIS CARD EXPIRES ON 31st DECEMBER, 1974

DISABILITIES

Medical File No CX 21623

Inside Herbert Halpin's 1974 TPDSA membership card. (MDHS 1334)

Halpin died on 8 December 1974.

At some stage, a descendant deposited with the MDHS papers and photographs that hint at the shape, tone and challenges of Herbert Halpin's life.

The collection allows us to see him not only as the young man in a First World War uniform, but as a child, apprentice, soldier, husband, father, railway employee and ageing returned serviceman. In this sense, the archive restores a whole life around a single military portrait.

‘Baby is 7 months old’

Nellie Simmons on the back of a photograph she sent to her husband, George Simmons, who was serving in France.



George Simmons’ family, 1917. From left to right: Joyce, George, Nellie, Jack. A Webb and Woolston Studio photograph. Handwritten on the reverse of the photograph: ‘To dear Daddy, from Joyce, Jack, Georgie and Mum. With heaps of love and good wishes for a bright and happy birthday. Baby is 7 months old.’ (AWM P11668.002)

Surviving photographs of family members anchor the stories of soldiers and other service personnel to their lives beyond military service. They were treasured mementos from home, much-handled images of loved ones. Sometimes they arrived too late. Among the most poignant are those sent to men like George Simmons who were killed in action.

George Simmons's story can be pieced together from his AIF file, newspaper reports, a family history by his nephew Ken Simmons, and the collection of photographs and papers his granddaughter, Angela Wheeler, deposited with the Australian War Memorial.[12]

Born at Captain's Flat in the Braidwood district in 1887, Simmons moved to Maitland with his family when he was about six. His mother, Mary Ann Rourke, was born in Greta and grew up in Luskintyre.



Mary Anne Rourke with her children,1899. George, aged about 12, is second from the right. (Ken Simmons, *1851 to 2001,* p 15)

In 2017, then Maitland local studies librarian, Judy Nicholson, suggested that, from the background, this looks like a Cameron Studios photograph.[13]

Simmons was working as a fireman at Branxton when he enlisted in September 1916 and joined the 35th Battalion, 5th Reinforcements. He, his wife and two eldest children were living at 28 Hunter Street, West Maitland. Before leaving, Maitland's Cameron Studios took his portrait.



George Simmons, 1916. Cameron Studios photograph. (AWM P11668.002)

Simmons served on the Western Front with the 35th Battalion. In June 1917 the Battalion fought its first major battle at Messines. On 12 October 1917, during the First Battle of Passchendaele, Simmons was reported missing and later confirmed killed in action. His body was never recovered.

His birthday was on 3 December. It is therefore possible that he never received the family photograph that included his first image of his youngest child, born after he had left for overseas. The photograph is more than a record of appearance: it is an act of communication between a family at home and an absent husband and father at war.

Back home, Nellie Simmons continued to hope that George would be found alive. Her desperate letters survive in Simmons's Red Cross Wounded and Missing File.[14]

Eventually, she accepted that he had been killed. Tragically, his few personal effects – 'wallet, postcards, photos, badge' – did not reach her, as they were on board a ship that was lost at sea.

By 1921 Nellie Simmons was living in Bourke, where she worked as a cook at the Bourke Hotel. Her mother was a housekeeper at nearby Lila Station. Nellie remained in Bourke until about 18 months before her death in February 1945. At the time, her two sons were serving with the AIF.[15]

George and Nellie's experiences live on in the collection held at the Australian War Memorial and in the memories and stories shared by their descendants. In 2017 some of the Simmons material returned to Maitland when it was included in the exhibition at Maitland Regional Art Gallery. Simmons family members visited the exhibition.



Ken Simmons viewing his uncle George Simmons' photographs and memorabilia in the exhibition at the Maitland Regional Art Gallery, 2017.

Collecting, remembering, sharing

Collecting, keeping, documenting and sharing First World War photographs and memorabilia within families and with the broader public remain important ways of acknowledging, documenting, imagining and interpreting the impact of the war on individuals, families and localities. The stories they evoke feed into local and family histories. Lives and contributions are remembered; trauma, heroism and survival are documented.

The photographs discussed here move between very different scales. Official battlefield photography gives us the vast devastation of war: mud, ruined landscapes, casualties and shattered infrastructure. Local studio portraits and family photographs restore individuals to that landscape. They reconnect soldiers with parents, wives, children, workmates, schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods.

The survival of the images also has its own history. Robert Wilson's portrait survives within an honour board; Clarence Jeffries's image was reproduced and memorialised after his Victoria Cross; Herbert Halpin's family archive preserves a life extending decades beyond his war service; and the Simmons family photograph and other memorabilia travelled, through family custody and public collecting, from Maitland and elsewhere to the Australian War Memorial and back to a Maitland exhibition a century later.

Acknowledgements

This article acknowledges and builds on the research and exhibitions created for the Maitland Remembers Passchendaele events in 2017.

Endnotes

1 Janis Wilton, 'Maitland remembers Passchendaele', *Maitland: Our Place, Our Stories,* July 2023, https://maitlandstories.com.au/stories/maitland-remembers-passchendaele for an overview of the commemorative events in 2017.

2 Frank Hurley, Entry for 23 August 1917 in My diary, official War Photographer Commonwealth Military Forces, 21 August 1917-31 August1918, National Library of Australia. The NLA has digitised Hurley's diary, https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-223125823/view?partId=nla.obj-223190731

3 Starting points are provided by the online version of Shaune Lakin's *Contact: Photographs and the modern experience of war,* Australian War Memorial, https://www.awm.gov.au/about/our-work/publications/contact; and Alison Wishart, *Frank Hurley's World War I Photography,* State Library NSW, https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/frank-hurleys-world-war-i-photography

4 For more details on Maitland's commercial photograph studios, visit Judy Nicholson's *Photographers of Maitland,* https://www.photographersofmaitland.org/

[5] Charles Taylor, Private record (diary, letter, photographs, newspaper cuttings, typescript), Australian War Memorial, PR03112, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C998449 .

[6] Diary of Charles Herbert Taylor, 1918, AWM PR03112, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/PR03112. See also AIF Service record of Charles Taylor, NAA: B2455, https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=1928494

[7] AIF Service record of Robert Wilson, NAA: B2455, https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=2014083; Red Cross Wounded and Missing File for Robert Wilson, AWM, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1409584; Roll of Honour – Robert Wilson', Australian War Memorial, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1667952

[8] A good starting point is J. B. Hopley, 'Jeffries, Clarence Smith (1894–1917)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1983, https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/jeffries-clarence-smith-6832. See also Abermain War Memorial, Jeffries Memorial Park, https://vwma.org.au/explore/memorials/2009, and Captain Clarence Smith Jeffries, Australian War Memorial, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P10676249

[9] AIF file of Herbert Halpin, National Archives of Australia: B2455, https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=4265134; *Maitland Daily Mercury,* 23 August 1915, 4 November 1916, 31 July 1917, 3 May 1918, 20 June 1918, 10 July 1918.

[10] 'Australians at the Front: Corporal Halpin', *Maitland Daily Mercury,* 4 Nov 1916, p 4. For the service records of his father and brother see AIF File of John Halpin, NAA: B2455, https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=4265136 ; and AIF file of Wilfred Halpin, NAA: B2455, https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=4265148 Note: Wilfrid's first name is misspelt as 'Winifred' in the NAA list.

[11] Railway Personal History Card of Herbert John Halpin, NSW State Archives: NRS-12922-1-[11/16622]-[116], https://search.records.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/1ebnd1l/ADLIB_RNSW114193336. A digital copy of the card is available online.

[12] George Simmons AIF file, National Archives of Australia: B2455, https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=8083982 ; Ken Simmons, *1851 to 2001: Celebrating 150 years in Australia of Francis Rourke and Catherine Gilligan and their family,* The author, Sydney, 2001; and Private records of George Simmons, AWM: PR05502, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/PR05502/

[13] Judy pointed to the studio setting in the 1901 Cameron Studios photo of Cecil and Doris Vercoe available online at https://www.flickr.com/photos/98887654@N05/9425140663

[14] Australian Red Cross Wounded and Missing File of George Simmons, Australian War Memorial, https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1500144

[15] Angela Wheeler, personal communication, May 1917 and *Western Herald* (Bourke), 23 February 1945, p1.

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The Dorrigo Boys

By Kevin Short

Our *Bulletin* editor, Lisa Thomas, has asked me to submit an excerpt from my 2018 book, *Son of the Mountain – the Story of 3824 Sgt Francis Alfred Kemp MM.*

Lisa's request came from a paper I wrote for the Hunter Valley Socratic Society regarding the changing face of ANZAC Day, profiling a group of young men from the coastal plateau of Dorrigo who enlisted together at Armidale and what became of them as a consequence of their war service.

My story was principally about a great uncle, Frank Kemp, who was tragically killed on 3rd October 1918 during the last engagement of the 20th Battalion. The story was about four 'mates' who enlisted and served together for the entirety of their respective war service. My grandfather, John Gater, joined them in 1917, although he is not part of this story. Frank Kemp and Mick Gater were both great-uncles but from different sides of my maternal family.

Our story begins when Frank Kemp, Mick Gater, Mel Harrigan and Roy Vincent enlisted together on 17th September 1915 at Armidale. Frank and Mick were both aged 19 and gave their occupations as 'bush labourers'. Mel was 24 and Roy 23, and gave their occupations as 'rough carpenter' and 'reporter' respectively. Despite all four signing their initial enlistment papers on different days, they began their military careers together and, except for illness, injury and death, remained by each other's sides as mates for the entirety of their service.

When I began this exercise, I speculated as to how they got to Armidale. The *Don Dorrigo Gazette* and Trove provided the answer in two articles. The first was on Saturday 28th August 1915 and the second on Saturday 25th November 1915:

> *On Thursday (2nd Sept) next, sixteen recruits are leaving Dorrigo to go into camp at Armidale. On Tuesday evening a farewell is to be tendered to them in the local School of Arts hall, when a concert and presentation will be held. The following are the volunteers who will be leaving: — Messrs. Chas. Kirby, Roy S Vincent, HS Gater, FA Kemp, SA Walker, Fred Cotmore, FS Dowling, JA Sheather, WA Ellis, SP Johnston, MW Harrigan, DC Menzies, AE M'Phall, Ed.Sackley, Chas. Sybolom and J M'Donnell. This is the largest number of recruits to leave here at one time, and we have no doubt the residents will give them a rousing farewell.*

Dorrigo Recruits:

Mr Roy Vincent who is in training at the Armidale Camp writes:

"All of the recruits are deeply grateful for the many manifestations of goodwill shown them by the residents of Dorrigo. It was rather a wrench to part from our many friends; and, I think one and all felt it very keenly. I am of the opinion that all of the volunteers felt slightly depressed as the cars pulled out of Dorrigo on the 2nd [September]: but as the motors sped along our spirits revived under the exhilarating influence of the warm sunlight and whistling wind, and the grand prospect of what was before us. We passed along Deer Vale Rd [Waterfall Way] *at a fair bat – being cheered at every house. At Deer Vale Mrs ST Walker and her daughters were waiting to meet us with refreshments, of which we partook thankfully ….. At Ebor we dined and the drivers overhauled one of the cars – a task which occupied about two hours. Thus we did not get away from Ebor until after 3pm. The 56 mile stretch to Armidale was covered without mishap, save a puncture which took a little while to remedy. As we did not arrive at Armidale until 7 o'clock we decided to stay overnight at a hotel …."*

One can easily imagine the cavalcade leaving Dorrigo: noisy cars covered in bunting, Klaxon horns, young men whooping and hollering, mothers crying into cotton handkerchiefs, stoic men trying to pacify their wives while silently praying for their sons' safe return, younger siblings in awe of their elder brothers! Stopping at Deer Vale, where Mrs Walker and her daughters refreshed the group and then repeated the farewell; Syd Walker, who joined the group, was after all their son and brother. One can even imagine the girls swooning just a little. Ebor provided another round of back-slapping and good wishes, and maybe even a sense of foreboding as the men crested the top of the range near Point Lookout and felt the icy chill of early spring in the afternoon sun's faltering warmth.

The following photograph features all but two of the group farewelled on 2nd September, courtesy of Eric Fahey and his book *The Settlement of Guy Fawkes and Dorrigo*, and tells a fascinating story in its own right. Although initial enlistment papers were signed by each soldier on a variety of dates, all were probably told to report to the Armidale Depot Camp on 17th September although a couple were a bit earlier. Each has his own story to tell.



Dorrigo Boys at Armidale Depot Camp
Back: J Berry, FG Dowling, RS Vincent, JO Sheather, MW Harrigan, HS Gater, CP Kirby.
Middle: SP Johnston, AE McPhail, J McDonnell, FA Kemp, SA Walker
Front: WA Ellis, ED Hutton, E Sackley, F Cotmore
Photo Courtesy of Eric Fahey, *The Settlement of Guy Fawkes & Dorrigo.*

James Berry was 34, born at Dungog and lived at North Dorrigo with his wife. He enlisted on 17th August 1915 but his service was short-lived as he was discharged with 'flat feet' and 'varicose veins' on 15th November without being allocated to a battalion. So flat were his feet that it was determined that his ability to earn an income was impaired by 25%.

Francis Gilbert Dowling was born in Hertfordshire, England and enlisted on 18th September 1915. He was 24 and also lived at North Dorrigo. Frank embarked at Sydney on 11th May 1916 and saw action with the 27th Battery of the 7th Field Artillery Brigade. He was slightly wounded but remained on duty in the aftermath of 2nd Bullecourt on 21st May 1917. This was the same action at which Frank Kemp was awarded his Military Medal. Frank Dowling was wounded again on 6th June 1917 during German shelling and was unfortunate enough to be killed in action on 11th September 1917 during the artillery build-up to Menin Road.

Roy Vincent was born in Uralla, the son of a family that owned and operated several New England and North Coast newspapers, including the *Don Dorrigo Gazette*. Roy suffered from 'shell shock' from the very first engagement of the 20th Battalion at Armentieres on first arriving on the Western Front from Egypt in

March 1916. Roy was eventually repatriated to Australia, arriving back and being discharged in November 1916. Roy went on to be an advocate for servicemen and was elected to parliament representing the seat of Oxley in 1922, a seat he held until resigning in 1953 due to ill health. During his parliamentary service he served as Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Mines.

Melville Walter (Mel) Harrigan was born at Kangaloon in the NSW Southern Highlands in July 1892. Mel was promoted to sergeant. His war was relatively uneventful until wounded in the thigh at the First Battle of Bullecourt in May 1917. He was repatriated to England where his left leg was amputated. He was eventually repatriated to Australia, arriving in April 1918.

Francis Alfred Kemp was born at Mortdale in south-west Sydney, adjacent to the suburb of Peakhurst, named after his great-grandfather John Robert Peake. Like Mel Harrigan Frank was promoted to sergeant and was even offered a commission. His war was 'colourful'. He received a Military Medal at the Second Battle of Bullecourt, coincidentally on his 21st birthday. He was later court-martialled for being AWOL. He was killed in front of Estrées on 3rd October 1918.



3824 Francis Alfred Kemp and 3802 Harold Stanley (Mick) Gater

Harold Stanley (Mick) Gater was born at Joadja in the NSW Southern Highlands, his family being one of the earliest settlers on 'The Dorrigo', arriving in 1898. His family lived across the Bilsdown River from the Kemp family, Frank Kemp being his best mate. His brother Jack married Frank's sister Ivy, coincidentally on his last leave prior to joining the others in the 20th Battalion in July 1916. Mick was promoted to corporal and was wounded twice, first in the

head at Armentières when they first arrived in France and, in September 1917, at Menin Road. Jack Gater was severely wounded in this same engagement.

John Oliver [Jack] Sheather was 20 years old and born at Rooty Hill near Paramatta. Jack gave his occupation as carpenter although he certainly dairied at Dorrigo after the war. Jack was initially assigned to the 20th Battalion. This was as far as his association with the others in the photograph went. He was discharged on 15th March 1916 medically unfit, well after the others had embarked and were in fact in France.

Charles Parker Kirby was born in Swindon, England. Charles was 25 years old and was a married farmer [his wife was Ileena] from Tyringham. Charles enlisted on 17th September 1915 with the others, but by the 27th was at the Army depot at Rutherford. Charles rose through the ranks, eventually becoming a 2nd lieutenant, and was assigned to the 33rd Battalion. He embarked on 4th May 1916 and saw service on the Somme, Baupaume and Armentières where he was wounded on 8th February 1917 whilst bringing in a wounded man. Charles died of his wounds 10 days later.

Stanley Percival Johnston was born in Berrima, a farmer and 22 years old. He was the only son of the headmaster of Dorrigo School and enlisted with the others on 17th September 1915. Stan was assigned to the 5th Artillery Brigade as a driver and embarked from Sydney on 5th June 1916. Stan almost survived the war, being severely wounded in both legs and his left thigh by a German bombardment during Haig's second push towards the village of Bray on 24th August 1918. He died of his wounds later the same day.

Alexander Edwin McPhail enlisted on 3rd September, was aged 21 and was a bank clerk at Dorrigo. Even though he was born in Sydney, his family was from Casino. He was certainly with the others on 17th September 1915 at Armidale but his papers were amended to show an enlistment date of 3rd September. Initially he was with the 3rd Battalion as a private, was promoted in the field to corporal and saw action with both the 3rd and 2nd Battalions until his transfer to the Pay Corps which had occurred by the time Frank Kemp wrote home in September 1916. In his letter Frank referred to Alexander's 'good soft job' gained from being a bank clerk!

John McDonnell was born at Braidwood and was aged 24. Like Alexander McPhail, his enlistment papers were amended from 17th to 3rd September 1915. As a lance corporal with the 2nd Battalion, he was awarded the Military Medal for bravery on 20th November 1917, although oddly, the award wasn't gazetted until 21st January 1919, and his father at Bangalow wasn't informed until June 1919. Someone obviously forgot the formalities!

Sydney Albert Walker was another whose enlistment papers were amended from 17th to 3rd September 1915. Syd was originally from Albion Park and aged

19 years. Initially, he was with the 3rd Battalion when it sailed in January 1916 for Cairo, but he had transferred to the 2nd when he was wounded on the Somme on 20th July 1916. In December 1917 Syd was charged and fined 14 days' pay for being outside his billeting area without identification and then in late January 1918, was hospitalised with 'trench feet'. On 24th June 1918 he was wounded again, this time probably from artillery as the 2nd Battalion wasn't in the line at the time. He returned to Sydney in May 1919 and was discharged on 9th July 1919.

William Alfred Ellis was aged 21 and born in Cawnpore [now Kanpur] India, his father was probably in the British Army. Bill was listed as a farmer. His enlistment papers are dated 3rd September and were not amended. Bill Ellis may well have been the 5th Dorrigo lad to whom Frank Kemp refers in his letter of 27th September 1916 when he talks of being the only one of the five Dorrigo lads still in the line with the 20th Battalion. Bill embarked with the others but was transferred to the 56th Battalion on 2nd April 1916. Bill Ellis had a couple of trips to hospital, notably one with 'scalded feet' in January 1917 and another with 'trench feet' in May 1917. In April 1917 he transferred to the 62nd Battalion but in November, went back to the 56th. William Ellis returned to Australia as one of the very few not to be wounded, at least not physically.

Ernest Daniel Hutton's papers are devoid of almost any information save that he enlisted on 17th September 1915 and that his father lived at Lilydale, Black Mountain. One assumes this is the Black Mountain west of Dorrigo. Ern Hutton was a 2nd lieutenant with the 15th Machine Gun Company by November 1916 but, interestingly, resigned his commission in February 1919 to join the Indian Army. Whether or not he returned to Australia and Dorrigo is unknown.

Ed Sackley [misspelt by Fahey as Slockley] was born at Berry and lived at Megan. Like his fellows, Ed enlisted on 17th September 1915 and joined the 3rd Battalion as part of 16th reinforcements. He was transferred to the 1st London General Hospital with 'fistula-in-ano' on 27th May 1917, a rather nasty complaint where an abnormal hollow tract or cavity that is lined with granulation tissue and that connects a primary opening inside the anal canal to a secondary opening in the perianal skin. Without really knowing, it seems that Ed developed a second backside, apparently caused by a 'cryptoglandular' infection, whatever that is? He returned to his battalion on 31st August 1917 only to be wounded along with Mick and Jack Gater at Menin Road on 20th September. Ed's wounds must have been slight as he returned to duty less than a week later. He was again hospitalised for 2 months in May 1918 with VD [naughty, naughty]. Ed rejoined his Battalion on 2nd July only to be wounded again just over a month later on 9th August although again the wounds must have been slight, as he rejoined his unit on 26th August. Ed was promoted to Lance Corporal on 1st September and remained this way until the war's end. He was a part of the forces that remained

in France and was finally returned to Australia, being discharged on 20th August 1919. When coupled with a charge for being AWOL that cost him four day's pay, Ed Sackley had an interesting war!

Frederick Cotmore from North Dorrigo is the last of the soldiers in the photograph. He enlisted on 17th September 1915, aged 22 and was the only member of the group who was in the Light Horse. Fred embarked on 3rd May 1916 and was taken on strength by the 6th Light Horse on 27th June 1916. He was hospitalised five days later with bronchitis so severe that he was repatriated home to Australia on 2nd September 1916. Fred, however, returned to the front with the 23rd Reinforcements and was taken on strength by the 6th Light Horse on 11th March 1917. On his repatriation from Suez, Fred became sick, dying on 4th March 1919. He was buried at sea.

I have deliberately detailed the service of the soldiers in our photograph as it gives the reader a perspective on the outcomes for any 'group' of soldiers in the Great War. The outcomes for this 'group' can be précised as follows:

Number in photograph	16
Discharged medically unfit	2
Soldier and/or circumstances unknown	1
Killed in action [includes died of wounds]	4
Died at sea	1
Repatriated to Australia early	2
Returned to Australia after war	3
Returned elsewhere	1
Wounded in action [includes shell shock]	10
Honours	2

Of the thirteen known to have served overseas, five did not return, of whom four were killed and one died at sea. Two others were repatriated early, one with shell shock and the other with an amputated leg. Collectively, they were wounded ten times outside the occasions when death occurred. Only two escaped the war relatively unscathed.

Lest We Forget

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Editor's Notes: Carol Johnstone's great-uncle had a short yet eventful life. Another word which might appropriately be applied to his life is poignant. The author is a member of the Maitland Branch of the Country Women's Association.

Trooper 168 Peter Zeisser, my great uncle

Carol Johnstone

Anton Francois Zeisser arrived from Hamburg as an immigrant to Australia on 10 March 1872. He married Magdalena Brunner, who travelled with him, on 11 March 1872 in Maryborough, Qld. They separated after having 6 children. Their second child was Therese Walters (Zeisser), my great-grandmother. Anton started a relationship with Isabella (Bella) Keys and they had three children including Peter, born 10 December 1894, but his birth was not registered until 10 August 1914. They lived in Glebe, Sydney.

Peter was a bit of a terror as a child, apparently uncontrollable. He spent time in Carpenterian Reformatory School at Brush Farm. He was mentioned in a cricket game between Brush Farm and NSS Sobraon (Nautical School Ship for delinquent and disadvantaged boys) as taking 1 for 8 in December 1906. At the school the boys were taught a trade and farm work. On 30 August 1907 he was sent to the Mittagong Farm Home for Boys, a "probationary training home". He then had a number of guardians - briefly at Parramatta in November 1907, then Dr Meredith in Raymond Terrace.

Peter became a member of the local Raymond Terrace football team. Peter had undertaken compulsory military training and served one year of cadets with the 14th Infantry. At the time of enlistment he was a serving member of the 6th Light Horse Regiment (Hunter River Lancers) serving under his guardian and then employer Colonel Doctor Meredith. Peter worked as a labourer and tended the doctor's horses. He volunteered to serve overseas and was readily accepted into the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF).

He enlisted at Raymond Terrace on 22 August 1914, embarked at Sydney aboard HMAT Star of Victoria on 20 October 1914. He was a member of the Australian 1st Light Horse Regiment, arriving in Egypt on 8 December 1914. The antics of the Australian Light Horse in Egypt have been well documented. Like many of them, Peter contracted what was politely referred to as the 'Scarlet Scourge' which was in fact gonorrhoea. This was classed as a self-inflected wound and soldiers were punished, for Peter this was seven days no pay.

A fellow Raymond Terrace recruit, Martin Hussey, wrote home from Ma'adi, Egypt:

> *All the Raymond Terrace boys are well……Peter has grown a lot and got very strong. He never passes without trying to upset me, telling me I'm not a john (no bon, Trench French for no good) now, and he wants satisfaction. He is a great bit of fighting material.*

Peter arrived in Gallipoli on 12 May 1915 and was attached to the New Zealand Australian Division, performing defensive tasks in support of other units. He was later made the orderly for Doctor Meredith. Peter wrote to Ivy Deamer, Mosquito Island, dated 27 July 1915:

> *We are having a quiet time here just now. We take our turn in the trenches - a week in and a fortnight out. Hussey is here with us; he and another chap, Alfred Poole, cook for four of us; he is making duff for dinner, and we are poking fun at him. We have a swim every day we are out of the trenches, and the Turks shell the beach; they get some of the swimmers sometimes. Remember me to all at home.*

Peter was killed in action during the Lone Pine assault, apparently running messages for the doctor, on 7 August 1915. This was the only offensive task his regiment was involved with.

He is laid to rest in Shrapnel Valley Cemetery, Gallipoli. This location at the time was only 914 metres from the Turkish lines and was constantly exposed to enemy sniper fire. I had the pleasure of laying a floral tribute to him in July 2015.

News of Peter's death was carried in the 3 September 1915 edition of the *Raymond Terrace Examiner*.

> *Killed in Action - When the cabled news was received here that Private Peter Zeisser had met his death whilst fighting in Gallipoli profound regret was expressed for the loss of a soldier so young and gallant - he was only in his 21st year. Private Zeisser had been a resident of this town for a number of years, coming here when only a mere lad. He was amongst the first to enlist from the district and was attached to the First Light Horse under Lieut-Colonel Meredith, for whom he acted as orderly until a short while ago, when he went across the Dardanelles, where, apparently, he met his end, facing the enemy. Always of a fearless nature, and brave to a fault, it was felt by those who knew him that if given the opportunity he would be fighting in a place where the battle was fiercest, heedless of the danger surrounding him. Poor Peter was always the same when taking part in games of football here, always in the front of the ruck and taking the hardest knocks without a murmur. A memorial service will be conducted in the Church of England by the Rev. M. Garbett on Sunday, 12th inst., when the military, rifle club, cadets, and band are asked to be present.*

The following week the paper also carried a photo of not only Peter but his mate Alfred Poole. These were the only two photos the paper ever published providing evidence of the shock that their losses had on the local community. The memorial service organised for Peter at St Johns Church in Raymond Terrace became a bigger event when the news of Alfred's loss came through. A

combined service was held for both soldiers to allow the community to grieve together.

Peter's brother Frank enlisted on 17 February 1916 in Bathurst, where he was a coach driver. Frank was a Private in the 3rd Pioneer Battalion. He embarked to go overseas in Melbourne on HMAT Wandella on 6 June 1916. Although injured with trench fever, he returned home, commencing the trip on 24 December 1918 on HMAT Takada, disembarking on 11 February 1919 in Melbourne before travelling to Sydney. Frank was medically discharged on 16 May 1919 and died in Liverpool, Sydney on 18 May 1955.

Peter's name can be found on memorial panel 3 of the Australian War Memorial, the Glebe War Memorial and the Raymond Terrace War Memorial. He was awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal. The originals have been lost over time, but my son Matthew proudly wears replicas on his Navy uniform.

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Editor's Notes: David Brouwer's *The Paterson at War,* C B Alexander Foundation, 2009, includes a section on the effects of the Great War on the Tocal region. The following lists are from that publication.

A list of the men who enlisted in World War I who were born in Paterson

Bradford, Harold Paterson

Bradford, Jack Compton

Brooker, Cecil William Frank

Brown, Clifford Le Brun

Burt, William Henry

Butler, Barry

Campbell, Archie Hamilton

Cann, Frederick William

Cann, James

Cardow, Harold Clive

Clarke, William Oliver

Cook, Charles

Corner, Lancelot Stewart

Cory, Edgar Edward
Crittenden, Claude
Duggan, Bernard Sidney
Duggan, George
Duggan, Harold Herbert Vincent
Easom, Woodley Cole
Edwards, Edward James
Garland, Solomon Leslie
Gillies, Argyle Dugald
Hartup, Harold Charles
Hartup, Reginald
Hume, John Edward
Hungerford, Septimus Clive Moore
Joliffe, Alfred
Keppie, Arthur Ernest
Kidd, Aubrey Leonard
Kidd, Sidney John Claud
Kidd, Vincent Rudolph
Lantry, Charles John
Lawrence, Cecil Gordon
Lawrie, George Keith
Martin, Robert George
McDonald, Hugh
McDonald, Walter
McMahon, Bartholomew Patrick
Moloney, Patrick Clarence
Nicholson, Alexander Douglas
Parish, William Charles
Patfield, Joseph
Phillips, George Albert
Puxty, Alfred Elhanan
Reynolds, Arthur Rens
Reynolds, Harold Alexander
Reynolds, Kenneth Carlton
Richardson, George

Ronan, Maurice James
Rowe, Arthur Reginald
Rowe, Edward Stanley
Sagnol, Arthur Edmund
Sherwood, Reginald Williamjoseph
Taylor, Ernest Albert
Tiedemann, John Arthur
Tinkler, Usher
Tucker, George Benjamin
Warden, Aubrey Airlie
Wells, Frederick William
Wynn, Darcy Merle

A list of the men who enlisted in World War I who were born in Gresford

Arthur, Charles Gladstone
Arthur, William Quinn
Ashard, Martin Stanley Claude
Barling, Julian Peter
Barry, Bernard Francis
Byrnes, John
Capararo, Angel Gabriel
Cowley, Reginald Thomas
Ebbeck, Archibald Cecil
Flory, Alfred George
Hicks, William Raydon
Jupp, Gordon Leslie
King, Austin David
Lawrence, Harold Henry
Leake, Wilfred James
Lill, Victor Elwood
Lindeman, Arthur Holden
Lindeman, Edward Bramhall
Magennis, John Beri
O'Neill, Benjamin
O'Neill, Noel William

Randall, Arthur Sydney
Randall, Frank Bennett
Randall, Rowland Arthur
Reynolds, Rex
Sales, Arthur Joseph
Short, John Herbert
Soper, Leslie James

A list of the men who enlisted in World War I who were born in Martins Creek

Crittenden, John Waterford

A list of the men who enlisted in World War I who were born in Trevallyn

Dagg, Joseph

A list of the men who enlisted in World War I who were born in Wallarobba

Kellner, George Joseph Mate
Herbert, Clarence

A list of the men who enlisted in World War I who were born in Vacy

Clements, Alfred James
Clements, Leslie Gilbert
Hipwell, John Lawrie
Tucker, William Eric