

## Lenswood and Forest Range War Memorial Research Project

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This paper outlines new directions initiated by the Lenswood Cold Stores Co-operative Society Limited to restore a neglected World War I soldiers' memorial. My paper will also illustrate the impact of Australian deaths on overseas battlefields upon those left at home.

The ultimate goal initiated by the Co-op is to upgrade the memorial site and inform visitors of the war service of the men from the district, men who identified themselves as the 'Range boys'.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the Co-op plans to incorporate a picnic area that will be accessible to the public. The original purpose of the soldiers' monument, which was intuitive to the people who erected it and needed no explanation, now requires interpretation for younger generations.

The initiative proposed by the Co-op to restore the monument and upgrade the site of an added World War II memorial, has enabled the preservation and recording of local history on behalf of current and future generations of South Australians. To date research has concentrated on the service records of the 17 men named on the memorials and the service records of those ex-servicemen from the Lenswood Forest Range district who fought in and survived World War I



The memorial that the Lenswood Forest Range community erected as a communal headstone for absent dead in 1920 is located on the verge of the Adelaide to Lobethal Road.<sup>2</sup> It is not easy to see the memorial when travelling along the road because of the density and height of the pine trees surrounding it. Will Clough's Internet site [www.tributesofhonour.info](http://www.tributesofhonour.info) describes the memorial as quote: An unusual shaped monument in the form of a white marble cupola shaped top on a three tier base that in turn is supported by four white marble pillars surmounted on a concrete pedestal and slab. Between the pillars is a white marble effigy of a stylised cenotaph. On the pedestal face is a white marble panel.<sup>3</sup> [end quote].



The verse on the 1914-1919 memorial is from Dame Mary Gilmore's poem "These Following Men", a poem written in 1918.<sup>4</sup>

They are not dead; not even broken;

Only their dust has gone back home to the earth  
 For they – the essential they – shall have rebirth  
 Whenever a word of them is spoken.

Other lines inserted within the poem declare '*We are the women who mourn our dead. Yea! Let up weep for them*'. This refrain leads me to suggest that women were among the prime movers in arranging for the erection of this memorial. Both the memorials are unusual among Australian memorials because they name only servicemen killed in action or who died on active service.

The Co-op wanted the service details of all the men who served during World War I therefore the first difficulty faced was to find a means of determining the names of the Range boys who had returned to Australia after overseas service. In 1917 Lenswood was Jerry's Flat. An Internet search of National Archives of Australia service records yielded only a few names of men born in Forest Range. I asked the Co-op to look for an honour roll, suggesting churches, schools or sporting clubs as possible locations.

One of the Co-op Directors knew that there was a honour roll in the Lenswood Uniting Church. The Co-op Manager obtained a second honour roll found lying in a local shed. He also received a painting of a Military Medal recipient Charles Mason. Data gleaned from the National Archives and the honour rolls provides evidence that during the Great War, sixty men and boys born in, or from Jerry's Flat and Forest Range, enlisted for war service.

Further problems associated with the project result from community neglect of the memorials.

It is likely that the community still maintained the memorial site immediately after World War II because the headstone shaped memorial dedicated to men and women who served the Empire during World War II defines the land on which it stands as a memorial car park.





In other words, the car park is a 'living memorial', intended for community use. At the time this project began in 2006, a large bush had grown about the World War II memorial and partially hidden it.

There is a roughly defined path leading from that memorial going past the back of the World War I soldiers' memorial to the top of a hill on which a church once stood.



I believe that the obvious neglect of the memorial began during the Vietnam War, a war that caused protest and controversy amongst the Australian community. The neglect has continued, partially because of changes brought about by local council mergers. Lenswood and Forest Range are now part of the Adelaide Hills Council. Files previously listed as held by antecedent council bodies have been lost or archived in the State Records depository at Cavan. Despite contact with the Adelaide Hills Council and research at the Adelaide and Gepps Cross Research Centres, I have been unable to locate the old council files. For this reason I have been unable to find any documentary evidence relating to the residents' committee that raised the money necessary to erect the memorial.

Jerry's Flat is an example of the practice of naming South Australian towns after Great War battlefields. Sometime after a public meeting held in February 1917, Jerry's Flat became 'Lenswood'.<sup>5</sup> During the Great War, a number of South Australian place names with German connotations received new names. In January 1918, Grunthal became Verdun, Gebhardt's Hill became Polygon Ridge, Buchfelde became Loos and Klemzig became Gaza.<sup>6</sup>

The new name of Lenswood memorialised the Lens battlefield on the Western Front. Local legend claims that with the introduction of a Post Office, the town's name became 'Lenswood' because the 'Range boys' fought around Lens during the Great War. However, I should point out that C.E.W. Bean, the official Australian historian, credits Canadian forces with fighting for and securing Hill 70

during the Battle of Lens in June 1917. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Tunnelling Company, which was a Western Australian unit with a proportion of Tasmanians, was given the task of protecting the infantry against the possibility of the mining system at Hill 70 being blown up.<sup>7</sup> Only one Range boy served with a tunnelling company and it was not the 3<sup>rd</sup>. It is possible that at various times the Australian Imperial Force (the AIF) trained, rested, or bivouacked men from Lenswood and Forest Range in the area behind the Front Line in the vicinity of Lens.

I know that a number of Range boys did not see overseas service around Lens for although in some instances men from the district embarked together on the same ships, and most men were members of one of four South Australian battalions, namely the 10<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 48<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup>, others embarked and served with Light Horse units or with training, pioneer, howitzer, signal or medical corps. In *Stringybarks to Orchards*, Geoffrey Bishop records that Os Caldicott of the 48<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote to his parents in September 1917 saying 'we don't see or hear much about those in other battalions'.<sup>8</sup>

The bare facts ascertained from the service records of the 15 Range boys named on the World War I soldiers' memorial and the overseas deaths of the Range boys provide a history at the personal level of the battles of the AIF at Gallipoli, in Egypt and on the Western Front.

Gallipoli 1915: 2 deaths.

Walter Leonard East left Australia in October 1914. He died six months later in May 1915 killed in action while at the Gallipoli Peninsular. Trooper Charles Plummer, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Horse, died while in action at Quinns Post Gallipoli in August 1915.

Battle of the Somme 1916: 3 deaths

In France in 1916, Alexander Brockhoff was reported missing in August. William Henry East was reported killed in action in September. In December, Bert Norton of the 10<sup>th</sup> Bn died in hospital of Bronchitis and Asthma. Nineteen-sixteen was the first winter that the men of the AIF served in Europe. The history of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion records that November 1916 was the 'first and worst winter in France'.<sup>9</sup>

Egypt 1917: 1 death.

While the men of some battalions fought and died in France during the battles of the Somme, the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment was fighting in Egypt. After surviving the Boer War in Africa and the Gallipoli Campaign in the Dardanelles, Sergeant



Arthur Biggs died of a gun shot wound to the stomach while in transit from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Horse Field Ambulance at El Arish in January 1917. His body lies in Kantara War Memorial Cemetery in Egypt.<sup>10</sup>

Western Front 1917: 4 deaths.

Laurence Eglinton was killed in April 1917, Oliver Pollard in June, Clarence Eglinton in September in Polygon Wood and Norman Hocking in December.

Villers-Bretonneux 1918: 5 deaths.

William Norton was killed on Anzac Day 1918, Thomas Eglinton in May, Hugh McDonald in July, Arthur Lawson in August and Charles Mason in October.

After the Armistice, the Imperial War Graves Commission began the consolidation of war graves. The Graves Registration unit exhumed and re-interred the remains of the Range boys in various cemeteries throughout Gallipoli, France and Belgium. The Australian War Memorial lists four Range boys among the missing, two in Belgium and two in France. Correspondence in service records highlights the uncertainty of the final resting places of the fifteen soldiers named on the district memorial.

As we have heard, twenty-two year old natural born British subject Alexander Brockhoff was missing in 1916. Brockhoff was the grandson of a migrant from Schleswig-Holstein. Was it just coincidence that an informant stated that the Germans took Brockhoff near Contalmaison Wood? The informant aroused suspicions for he was unable to say whether Brockhoff was dead or alive. Subsequently, in May 1917, a Court of Enquiry reported Brockhoff as killed in action. Brockhoff's name is among those of the missing on the Australian National memorial at Villers-Bretonneux in France.<sup>11</sup>

Charles Plummer's headstone in Quinn's Post Cemetery at Anzac is a 'special headstone' that carries the caption 'believed to be buried in this Cemetery' because his actual grave could not be identified. Army authorities did not inform Plummer's parents of his death in 1915 because Plummer, a Kangaroo shooter, enlisted at Cunnamulla, in Queensland as Albert Anderson. In 1919, Plummer's father travelled to Woodside to make a statutory declaration testifying to the fact that Charles Plummer had written to his mother from Egypt saying that his unit was travelling to the Dardanelles. Charles's service record gives us no clues as to why he chose the name of Albert Anderson. Whatever the reason for Plummer's alias one can imagine the heartbreak of Elizabeth Plummer who repeatedly wrote to her son but received no news or further letters.<sup>12</sup>

The name of Oliver Pollard appears among the names of the missing on the Menin Gate. Norman Hocking is memorialised at Kandahar Farm Cemetery in Belgium. Authorities advised Hocking's mother of his burial site on April Fools' Day 1925.<sup>13</sup>

As you can see from the names on the memorial two families lost more than one son. The two East boys were both 19 at the time they died, one in 1915 and the other in 1916. Base Records advised Mr East that the Graves Registration Unit had exhumed and re-interred Walter's remains in Lone Pine Cemetery, Anzac. In September 1916 Charlotte East wrote to the AIF because she had heard a rumour that her second son William was dead. Base Records did not notify Mrs East of William's death until October 1916. The Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour lists William's name among those of the missing on the National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux. In October 1937, (21 years after William's death), Mrs East received a parcel of William's effects and notification that the Imperial War Graves Commission had identified the remains of an unknown soldier as William's and then reburied them in London Cemetery Extension, High Wood, Longueval.<sup>14</sup>

The Eglinton family lost three brothers killed in action. (Namely Laurence, Clarence and Thomas.) Base Records notified Elizabeth Eglinton that the actual grave of Twenty-Two year old Laurence Eglinton is unknown. The Imperial War Graves Commission erected a 'Special Collective Memorial' marked 'Buried in this Cemetery' in the Noreuil Australian Cemetery. Twenty-five year old Clarence Eglinton's name appears among the names of the missing on the Menin Gate in Belgium



Thomas Eglinton left a widow, Florence. The Graves Registration Unit exhumed the remains of Thomas from an isolated grave and reburied them in Adelaide British Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux.<sup>15</sup>

Two cousins from the extended Norton family died. Bert Norton died from illness. The army sent a photograph of Bert's grave in a Churchyard near Le Harve, in France to his mother Jane Norton in March 1921, five years after his death. William Norton, son of Sarah Norton, was killed in action at the time of the recapture of Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918 and buried 500 yards south of that town. However, in June 1919 Base records sent a photograph of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Memorial Cross to Sarah instead of a photograph of William's grave: his name is listed among those of the missing on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.



Although many of the unmarried boys named their mothers as next of kin, the 'Deceased Soldiers Estates Act 1918' instructed that fathers should receive war medals. After receiving a parcel of her son's effects that contained only a broken empty wooden handkerchief box, Sarah Norton wrote to Base Records quote: 'A Mother's lot is a hard one these times.' End quote.<sup>16</sup>

The action taken by the Co-op to restore the neglected memorial is not an isolated example. Nationally there is movement to restore soldiers' memorials. This action began with the commemorative programme 'Australia Remembers' initiated by the Keating Labor Government in 1995. It has continued through the 'Their Service - Our Heritage' programme under the Howard Liberal Government. Huntley Victoria has a Garden of Remembrance where one can read another mini history of AIF battles at Gallipoli, the Western front, New Guinea, Darwin and the Burma Thailand Railway. A history written on plaques, set in natural stones around the edges of the garden.

Restoring neglected memorials can only widen our knowledge of the service and sacrifice of ex-servicemen and women. Through the restoration of neglected memorials, Historians have an opportunity to record the stories of those who took part in the evacuation of Gallipoli and went on to fight in the battles of the Western Front. Far more Australians served and died on the Western Front than were left in the graveyards of Gallipoli. The restoration of neglected memorials also provides historians with the challenge to research the local history of communities who wanted to commemorate that service and sacrifice on behalf of the Australian nation.

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- <sup>1</sup> Geoffrey C. Bishop quoting Os Caldicott 14.9.1917, in *Stringybarks to Orchards A History of Forest Range and Lenswood*, (Lenswood Cold Stores Co-operative Society Limited, 1984), p. 198.
- <sup>2</sup> Bishop, *Stringybarks*, pp. 198-199.
- <sup>3</sup> South Australian War Memorials, [www.tributesofhonour.info](http://www.tributesofhonour.info).
- <sup>4</sup> Jennifer Strauss, (Ed), *The Collected Verse of Mary Gilmore*, Volume 1, 1887-1929, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004), p. xliv.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Register*, 17 February 1917, p. 17
- <sup>6</sup> *South Australian Government Gazette*, 10 January 1918, Nomenclature Act 1917, Change of Place names compiled from reports dated 10.10.1916 of the Nomenclature Committee, p. 37: (In 1935 Gaza reverted to Klemzig.) In what was Jerry's Flat, German Swamp Road is now just plain Swamp Road.
- <sup>7</sup> CEW Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War 1914-1918, Vol IV, the AIF in France 1917*, p. 698; p. 965.
- <sup>8</sup> G Bishop quoting Os Caldicott in *Stringybarks to Orchards*, 1984, p. 198.
- <sup>9</sup> *History of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion A.I.F. 1914-1918 Egypt, Gallipoli, France, Belgium*, (London: Cassell and Company, 1919), p. 35.
- <sup>10</sup> National Archives of Australia, Series number B2455, Biggs A J T.
- <sup>11</sup> Bishop, *Stringybarks*, p. 88. Johannes Joachim Freiderich Brockhoff, (1827-1905) left Schlezwig-Holstein: he arrived in Adelaide in 1856.; NAA, B2455, Brockhoff A G.
- <sup>12</sup> NAA, B2455, Anderson A.
- <sup>13</sup> NAA, B2455, Pollard Oliver Stanley; Hocking N 3567.
- <sup>14</sup> NAA, B2455, East W L; East W H.
- <sup>15</sup> NAA, B2455, Eglinton L; Eglinton C R; Eglinton T W.
- <sup>16</sup> NAA, B2455, Norton Bert Henry; Norton William Charles.