

An Australian connection with Lincoln, written in recognition of ANZAC day, 2017

The Australian flag most widely used until 1954 when the Blue Ensign was adopted



Compiled by Chris Williams

From the Garton Archive: Item of Interest No.51

This article has emerged quickly following a succession of threads started by Charlie Partridge, Managing Editor of BBC Radio Lincolnshire, who recently walked through the Newport Cemetery in Lincoln. In the Commonwealth War Graves section, Charlie noticed that there were in fact five headstones of Australians who had died in Lincoln, took photographs and emailed them to a colleague working for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Alert to the imminence of ANZAC day she asked Charlie if he could record a piece for use on Tuesday 25th April. Consequently he came to Lincoln Christ's Hospital School to look at some of our Garton Archive collection relating to the Great War, our war memorial and most importantly the Library, once a ward in the 4th Northern General Hospital, where we recorded an interview. The 4NGH provided medical care throughout and beyond the First World War. Its full story is told elsewhere.

Much has been written about the Great War in general and also about the contribution of the Commonwealth countries. This article cannot hope to cover all this ground, but focuses on the five young Australians who travelled to Europe and now

lie at rest with their British, Canadian and other fellow combatants in Uphill Lincoln in a plot of 139 graves. However, the narration of their individual stories also reflects the social history of the last century and a half, which the writer hasn't been completely able to resist.

Background

Once a cluster of British possessions, Australia gained its independence in 1901 when six colonies were brought together. Canberra was developed as the capital. The Northern Territory brought in later. Edward VII and successive monarchs continued as Head of State. Its flag still includes the Union Jack. Blue was adopted as the background colour in 1954, the red shown in this article being widespread in the first half of the twentieth century

When World War 1 broke out, the Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders and many South Africans remained loyal to the British crown despite being independent and sent troops and ships to Europe. Closer to home HMAS Australia was involved in naval operations in German New Guinea as early as September 2014. However, the main conflict was in the northern hemisphere. In both northern France and western Russia there was stalemate and so it decided that a third front should be opened against Germany's ally, Turkey. One of the architects of the Dardanelles campaign was Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, who believed that it would be possible for Allied forces to break through from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea. After limited success from a massive naval bombardment, army units, including large numbers from Australia and New Zealand, were landed on Gallipoli on 25th April 1915. Historians have different view on whether the campaign was a success because it deflected some German attention away from the other fronts, but the Allies themselves evacuated in the early winter of 1915-1916. The losses were colossal on both sides. The defending Ottoman Turks lost at least 56,642 men, while the attackers had similar totals – British 34,972, French 9,798, Australia 8,709, New Zealand 2,721, British India 1,358, and Newfoundland (Canada) 49.

There were many strategic, military and political consequences for the participating nations on both sides, but for Australia and New Zealand the Dardanelles campaign was the first time both countries had gone to war as sovereign nations. According to the First World War page on the outstanding Australian War Memorial (AWM) website *"from a population of fewer than five million, 416,809 men enlisted, of which over 60,000 were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner. The latest figure for those killed is given as 62,000."* The first services of commemoration took place in Brisbane, London and ANZAC Day was recognised as a public holiday across Australia in 1923.

The men:

This narrative concentrates on the five young men who are buried in Lincoln. These are listed in the order in which they left Australia for the United Kingdom:

31st October 1914 from Fremantle on HMAT A7 "Medic": Harry Collier Warren

22nd December 1914 from Melbourne on HMAT A32 “Themistocles”: William Ernest Peart

19th February 1915 from Sydney on HMAT A54 “Runic”: George Charles Perring

25th October 1916 from Melbourne on HMAT A38 “Ulysses”: George Edmund Hansel

25th October 1916 from Melbourne on HMAT A38 “Ulysses”: Harold Strachan Kitson

We don't know this with certainty, but Hansel and Kitson will probably have known each other because they were in the same unit, the Australian Flying Corps and spent several months at sea on the 12,000 tonne ship.

Their journeys

The men all travelled from ‘Down Under’ in commercial ships requisitioned for war service. According to sources there were 74 HMAT vessels – His Majesty's Australia Transport. Information on each vessel can be found on the internet with ease, but there are some salient points to highlight. Typically the HMAT ships had a speed of 14 knots. According to a modern website the distance from Sydney to the Port of London is 13,508 miles and so this would be over 40 days at sea excluding the time at coaling stations. Moreover, the journey was made in convoys of merchant ships with a military escort in which the speed was dictated by the slowest vessels. From looking at the records of individual ships it seems that the round trip between Australia and the UK took about four months before they were ready to make a new journey. HMAT ‘Ulysses’ on which Hansel and Kitson came to Europe from Melbourne in 1916 made eight such journeys. However, some journeys might have been shorter, because in the first half of the war, many Australians were based in Egypt for strategic reasons. These were to guard the Suez Canal, a key location on the route to the Indian Empire and Australia, and also to prepare for action against the Ottoman Empire, an ally of the Central Powers i.e. Germany and Austria-Hungary.

These lengthy crossings to either Port Said or north-west Europe will have been used for drills and building team spirit as be seen from contemporary photos. Life on board will almost certainly have been enlivened by stops in ports such as Colombo, Aden and Port Said. For most of the men this will have been their first time abroad. However, in our small sample of five, two had already made the journey. George Charles Perring had emigrated from East London at some point between 1911 and 1914, and George Edmund Hansel represented his country at the coronation of King George V in 1911. All the travellers, experienced or first time, will also have experienced climate change in the old sense of travelling from the southern to the northern hemisphere through the tropics. The shipmates Hansel and Kitson will have left Melbourne in the Australian Spring, crossed the Equator and arrived in England in December.

The four ships, which brought these men to England, had differing histories. “Runic” was launched in 1900 for the White Star Line-Australia service. It was requisitioned for military use in 1917, later returned to civilian use and in 1930 bought by Christian

Salveson to be converted into a whaling factory ship. Back in military service in World War Two, "Runic" was torpedoed and sunk west of Islay by German submarine U-138 with the loss of two lives. "Medic", built in 1898, was part of the first convoy which left Australia in October 1914. Between the wars it was used as a base for a lengthy Antarctic expedition and like the "Runic" was also involved in whaling as a mother ship. In World War Two it became an oil tanker. On 11 September 1942 "Medic" was torpedoed and sunk in the Atlantic by German submarine U-608 at 48.55N/33.38W – south of Iceland, west of Ireland. "Ulysses", a troop-carrier in both wars, was also sunk by a U-boat in 1942, off Florida. In contrast to these three, "Thermistocles", built in Belfast in 1911, was ultimately scrapped in Troon in 1947.

Five men and five stories

These are written in the order in which the AWM Embarkation Rolls show they departed for the United Kingdom.

In writing this article it hasn't yet been possible to look into all the individual service records, so the present writer doesn't know whether any of them broke their journey e.g. Perring left Sydney on 19th February 1915. As the standard journey seems to have been across the Indian Ocean, perhaps via coaling stations at Colombo and Aden, and certainly up through the Red Sea and Suez Canal to Port Said in Egypt. Given the geography of the eastern Mediterranean it may be that HMAA A54 "Runic" disembarked its troops in Crete in time for the land assault on the Dardanelles which started on 25th April, so Perring and others in his Field Artillery unit might not have reached the United Kingdom until much later.



Harry Collier Warren, Bombardier, 3rd Australian Field Artillery Brigade attached to the Australian Flying Corps

Warren was first to leave Australia. His contact address was in Port Pirie, South Australia, some five hours by road from Port Lincoln, which is today twinned with

Lincoln. He sailed from Fremantle on HMAT A7 "Medic" on 31st October 1914. His occupation is described as Articled Clerk.

His cause of death, aged 23, on 4th April 1917 is described as "Accidental (injuries)". Further information from the Port Pirie Recorder is that Warren Street in Port Pirie, South Australia *"is named after Harry Collier Warren who served in Gallipoli but died in a plane crash in England."* Elsewhere it is described as a "training accident". The information is finally drawn together in the site of the Australian Society of WW1 Aero Historians. Cadet Warren *"was killed in an aircraft accident at South Carlton, near Lincoln, on 4 April 1917 while flying Avro 504B B389 with his instructor, 2Lt C P Lowry RFC, who was uninjured. The airmen had taken off in the Avro for a period of dual instruction, during which the aeroplane entered a spinning nose dive from about 150 feet. 2Lt Lowry reported afterwards that he was unable to use the rudder to recover from the spin. The Court of Enquiry opined that the rudder problem may have been due to Cdt Warren's attempted use of it."*



William Ernest Peart: Private, 4th Australian Pioneer Battalion

Peart, whose contact address was in Waratah, Tasmania, sailed from Melbourne on 22nd December 1914 on HMAT A32 "Themistocles". He initially served with the 12th Infantry Battalion and so is likely to have been based in Egypt and fought in the Gallipoli campaign before the unit was moved to the UK where it was reorganised. We know nothing about Peart's death, aged 21, except for the statement that he was "killed in Service, United Kingdom, 12 November 1916".

George Charles Perring, Driver, 1st Divisional Ammunition Column

Driver Perring sailed from Sydney on HMAT A54 "Runic" on 19th February 1915. George Charles Perring was a recent arrival in Australia. His family details show him as the son of George Charles and Eliza Perring of 4 Leigh Road, East Ham, Essex. UK census records support this. In 1901 George senior, a waiter and by then a

widower, and George junior, then aged 8, were living in Caulfield Road, just 12 minutes walk from Leigh Road. A recent aerial photograph suggests that these London houses are still there. By 1911 the younger George Charles Perring, then aged 17 and shown as born in Islington, was at the Field Artillery Barracks in Portsmouth, listed as a driver and a Special Reservist. So far it hasn't been possible to confirm when he went to Australia.

In the Lincoln group of five, Driver Perring is also unusual because he was the subject of a report written in January 1917 for the Red Cross Missing and Wounded files, one of 32,000 in total. His death, aged 23, occurred on 14th August when he *“was bringing up ammunition at the time and was driving a wheeler when he fell from his horse and dragged some distance, was taken to hospital in Albert and died”*. The file contains six reports, which are contradictory. For example one says he was killed at the scene of the accident, another that he was taken to hospital in England. There is no mention of Lincoln or 4NGH, but in the Roll of Honours he is described as having “died of wounds” in the United Kingdom. The contradictions and lack of information reflect the turmoil and confusion brought by war. Whatever the exact history it appears that George Charles Perring, the immigrant born in England is now buried back in England.



George Edmund Hansel, Air Mechanic, Australian Flying Corps

Hansel, whose contact address was 242, Edgecliffe Road, Woollahra, New South Wales, sailed from Melbourne on HMAT A38 “Ulysses” on 25th October 1916. On a recent aerial photograph the house still appears to exist. Hansel’s occupation was shown on the nominal roll as Mechanic Draftsman, a private in No.2 squadron.

George Hansel’s parents were of German origin. His father Gustav Adolph was born in the industrial city of Chemnitz, known as Karl-Marx-Stadt throughout the Cold War, on 31st July 1851. It isn’t clear when Gustav Adolph came to Australia, but in 1885 he married Margaret Scheibel, Margaret was born in Shoalhaven, New South Wales, on 7th March 1861. She was the seventh of nine children, the first six having being born in Niederaula, Hesse, although one died in infancy. It is hard for us to imagine the experience of the parents of five children under the age of 12 travelling from Germany to Australia by ship in 1859. Three more children were born in Australia before

George Edmund's maternal grandfather died in 1866 leaving Margaret's mother with eight children under the age of 20.

The first of George's and Margaret's children was born in 1887. George Edmund was the seventh, born in 1897. Gustav Adolph may have had some military experience in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. On arriving in Australia he was involved in engineering and by the time of World War One his business was manufacturing rifle-sights for the Australian forces.

Before joining up and heading for Europe October 1916, Air Mechanic Hansel's life was full of success. Indeed it is noted in his obituary in the Sydney Morning Herald that *"upon entering Fort Street (Model School) he won his age championship, but shortly after left for England with the contingent of cadets that attended the coronation of King George V"* which took place on 22nd June 1911. George Edmund will have been 14 or 15 when making his first journey to the other side of the world, a complete contrast to his second. Given the three or four months needed a century ago to make a return trip compared to today when the actual flying time between the UK and Australia can be less than 24 hours, it seems remarkable that parents and headteachers would allow their children to be away from home for so long, but different values were dominant, the concepts of patriotism and Empire i.e. national need being amongst them. And there were no telephones let alone laptops and mobiles for instant contact with someone 10,000 miles away. On the other hand, slow travel from Europe was in the family blood.

As a student at Woollahra Technical High School, George Edmund won honours in both sanitary and electrical engineering. A list of sporting medals shows that he was a high achiever, a champion at the Bondi Swimming Club and an outstanding amateur sprinter, clocking 10.4 secs over 100 yards to win the state title at Pratten Park in 1915. By modern comparison, a professional athlete, Usain Bolt, ran the same distance in 9.14 secs in Ostrava nearly a century later on 31st May 2011. In Hansel's obituary the writer observes that Hansel *"was always big for his age and wisely refrained from training while growing. As a result he did not prepare seriously for any of his races and it speaks volumes for his ability that he should have accomplished such feats"*. A modern coach might have a different view.

At the time of his death he was Acting Sergeant, aged 19, but probably less than six weeks after arriving in England in mid-winter he died on 13 February 1917. The cause was cerebrospinal meningitis. Air Mechanic Hansel was buried on 15th February. It is hard to imagine a more miserable and abrupt end to such a promising life.



Harold Strachan Kitson, Second Lieutenant, Australian Flying Corps

Second Lieutenant Kitson, whose contact address was 30 Studley Avenue, Kew, Melbourne, sailed from Melbourne on HMAT A38 "Ulysses" 25th October 1916. From a recent aerial photograph, the house appears to have been demolished and replaced by a tennis court. Kitson's occupation was shown on the nominal roll of "C" Flight of the 2nd Australian Flying Squadron as Engineering Student.

An Australian site states that Second Lieutenant Kitson died as result of "*Accidental (Injuries), United Kingdom, 15 June 1917*". He was 22. A record held by the RAF Museum in Hendon mentions a "*flying accident*" at "*S. Carlton, Lincs*" so possibly in a plane crashing in South Carlton while using its new and short-lived airfield returned to farmland in 1920. The plane number was B1734 and was powered by a Le Rhone 80hp engine. Again the information is finally drawn together on the site of the Australian Society of WW1 Aero Historians. Kitson "*was killed in an aircraft accident 3 miles north east of South Carlton, England, on 15 June 1917 while flying Sopwith Pup B1734 when the aeroplane did not recover from a spinning nose dive after an attempted loop and spin from 8000 feet. The Court of Enquiry determined that Lt Kitson had become giddy through spinning and lost control of the aeroplane*".

The Commonwealth War Graves plot at the Newport Cemetery, Lincoln

Newport Cemetery, Lincoln, opened in 1856. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission site states: "*During the First World War, the 4th Northern General Hospital was at the Grammar School in Lincoln. The hospital had 1,400 beds and during the course of the war, admissions numbered 45,000.*

Lincoln (Newport) Cemetery, which was near the hospital, contains 139 First World War burials, almost 90 of them forming a war graves plot. During the Second World War, this plot was extended and most of the 120 burials from this period were made there. The rest of the graves from both wars are scattered throughout the cemetery."

An unexpected footnote

At the beginning of the research for this article, I had expected to find five Australians from the Great War. However, I then came across the Commonwealth War Graves Registration for Newport Cemetery which listed a sixth Australian casualty commemorated there. The basic information is that this is 2/Lt G Sulman of the 51st Squadron RFC who died on 20th June 1917. A handwritten addition to the typed document states that he was cremated. For a few days I was unable to find any record of 2/Lt Sulman apart from this British document and a gravestone engraved with the words: ***"2nd Lieutenant Geoffrey SULMAN, 51st Squadron Royal Flying Corps, British Army. Died 29-6-1917 aged 23 years"***. Wikipedia suggests Geoffrey was killed in training before being passed for combat duties. There is no reference to Sulman having an Australian connection. Indeed the only Sulman in the 300,000+ records on the Australian War Memorials site was an Army lieutenant who was a prisoner of war and died in Malaya in 1942.

But then, just as going to press, a local contact found a lengthy obituary on Geoffrey's father, Sir John Sulman (1849-1936), a distinguished architect in both the UK and Australia, which spun the wheel again. From this we can see that Sir John emigrated to Australia in 1885 after typhoid and tuberculosis afflicted himself and his first wife Lady Sulman respectively. Geoffrey was in fact born to the second Lady Sulman in England, perhaps by design so that British nationality could be secured for the eldest child in this decade before the Commonwealth was formed in 1901. Although subsequent children were all born in Australia between 1896 and 1907, the suspicion must be that this wealthy family may have travelled between England and Australia fairly regularly, a detail which might be accessible through embarkation records. The desire for English identity might also explain the decisions that Geoffrey chose to fly for the Royal Air Force and that on his death he should be cremated, an urn being easier than a coffin to take back to Sydney. Perhaps there will be also a memorial in Sydney. After the war Sir John certainly endowed a lectureship in aeronautics at the University of Sydney and also art and architecture prizes. A new suburb in Canberra is to be named after him. On the grounds that Geoffrey Sulman still does not appear anywhere on the Australian War Memorial, I am going to stand by my position that he was British/English until someone can show me otherwise! I look forward to hearing from you

And finally

These five brief case-studies only scratch the surface of Australia's engagement in World War One. However, these five men and their stories are typical of the commitment and engagement are typical of the ultimate sacrifices so many made in the Great War on behalf of the United Kingdom, its Empire and Dominions, and other countries believing in democracy, freedom of speech and constitutional rule.. We should not forget this on Anzac Day or any other.

The writer

Chris Williams taught History at Lincoln Christ's Hospital School and elsewhere for 34 years before stepping down from his Deputy Head role in August 2007. He is still employed by the School on a part-time basis to support some of its international programme and as Archivist, mainly for the post-1974 collection. Occasionally, as in this case, he strays back in time to write articles on earlier material. He also works freelance as an International School Partnership Specialist home and abroad.

Additional sources

These include:

The Australian War Memorial

<https://awm.gov.au/people/> - a superb wide-ranging site in every way. The definitive starting-point for any researcher interested in this field

Other Australian sources

<https://rslvirtualwarmemorial.org.au/explore/people/72073> - some good links to individuals and much more

<http://www.portpiri recorder.com.au/story/> - an excellent local newspaper

https://www.fold3.com/page/642694857_harold_strachan_kitson/details/ - a specialist commemoration site

<http://www.ww1aero.org.au/members/roh/kitsonhs.html> - Australian aero history

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~neredon/Family-Pages/Milne/Gen5-1-JohnTroupMILNE.htm> - Hansel family history

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~neredon/Family-Pages/Milne/Documents/Hansel-Medals.pdf> - Hansel medals

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~neredon/Family-Pages/Milne/Documents/George%20Hansel-obit.pdf> - Hansel obituary

http://www.ausflag.com.au/red_ensign.asp - why the flag in the text isn't blue

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sulman-sir-john-8714> - Australia Dictionary of Biography

Non-Australian sources

<http://www.rafmuseumstoryvault.org.uk>

[http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/41578/LINCOLN%20\(NEWPORT\)%20CEMETERY](http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/41578/LINCOLN%20(NEWPORT)%20CEMETERY)

<http://www.abct.org.uk/airfields/airfield-finder/south-carlton>

Sue of the Greater Grimsby group of the Lincolnshire Family History Society

Occasional Papers (LCHS Website):

<http://www.christs-hospital.lincs.sch.uk/joomla35/index.php/our-school/lchs-history/school-archive>

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