



Remembrance Day 11th November 2011 Alison Halliday on Ellis & William Hall and Roland Clark

On 20th December 1916 the following letter¹ was received by Base Records Office, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne (spelling unchanged):

Dear Sir,

In connection with the casualty reported on 14th inst. of this month to his relatives late of Glen Innes New South Wales I am send too (sic) you for as much information as it is possible to secure on behalf of his grieved mother and sisters. The report may have had a mistake in it somewhere as there is (sic) so many lads of the same name and there are enormous lot of little articles which we would very much like if they have not been buried with him. One thing in particular to be sent on two (sic) my own address and we would all very much like you to send a gold ring he wore on his fingers and it was stamped one (sic) the inside with the letters M.T.H. and we would also like two (sic) know what became of his personal effects, and where our loved one fell, and where death occurred, what were his last words, if he left any will, where he has been buried, if he was accorded a military funeral and so much moor (sic) as you may be able. The address I last had from him was as follows

No.4136

Pte William Hall

10th Reinforcements

18th Battalion

5th Brigade

AIF

France

And we will be very thankful to you if you will let us know or forward any of his belongings you may be possible to get or have.

[signed] yours truly C. Hall and M. Hanshaw

When we read the names on The War Memorial one of the things immediately apparent is how many surnames are repeated. Many who enlisted were from the same few families: brothers, cousins, sons and daughters, aunts and fathers. It is a reminder that as well as the trauma for the men and women who served in the armed forces, the families of every one of these people suffered heartache, loss, and fear. They too were irrevocably changed by the experiences of the family members who went to war.

Very occasionally the official war records give glimpses into the lives of those who stayed home, those who had to 'stand and wait'². The letter which I read to you at the beginning was written by Clarice Hall, and it concerned her brother William. Today I want to talk first about two members of the Hall family. The Hall family was based in Bell, so these names remind us that this Memorial is officially called The Mount Wilson and Bell War Memorial. Investigating the Hall men was another reminder of the limitations, and surprises, of research. William Hall enlisted in Armidale on 21 October 1915, number 4136. His name is here at Mount Wilson because his parents came originally from Bell, the marriage registered in 1893. His father was Richard, who may have died in 1910. His mother, Rachel Mary, then moved to Glenn Innes in northern New South Wales and later re-married becoming Mary Mahony. William was born in 1893, the birth registered at Lithgow and he had at least one sister, Clarice, born in 1895.

When he enlisted William was just over 22 years old, brown-haired and blue eyed; he was only 5' 8 ½" but weighed 11 stone so he must have been of solid build. After his

training, in January 1916, he joined the 10th reinforcements to the 18th battalion of The Australian Imperial Force, having been originally appointed to the 9th Reinforcements. There are only five entries in his record of service: 10/9/1916 o/seas to France from England; 11/9/1916 marched in to Etaples, 23/9/1916 marched out to unit, 30/9/1916 joined Battalion in 'Field', 18/11/1916 Killed in action, France. Private William Hall saw action for less than three weeks; he died without making a will. The following day a cable of notification was sent. By February 1917 he had been buried in Longueval Cemetery, France, at the corner of Longueval and Maricourt Roads, in the Somme district.³ The village of Longueval had seen fierce fighting in June and July, before William reached the front.

Clarice's letter was acknowledged in January 1917, saying that 'sufficient time had not yet elapsed for either personal effects or further particulars of his death to have reached Australia.'⁴ She was also told that any effects would be returned to the next of kin, William's mother. On 20th June 1917 William's mother wrote to the Records Office (Melbourne) asking that any personal belongings be sent to her. On the 6th August 1917 she received his effects, they having come to Australia on the 'Themistocles'. They are described as 'disc, belt, metal watch, 50 centime note'⁵. The records note that his kitbag had no personal belongings in it. Even coming to her the journey was not straightforward as the package was first sent to the wrong address at Ferguson Street (from where her daughter had written) and she was eventually found in Lambert St.

On 4th November 1920 she was sent details about his place of burial, three photographs of the grave and a description of the site. If she wished she could obtain extra copies of the photos at the cost of three pence each. A year later she received a request that she identify herself as William Hall's next of kin, vouching that there were no nearer relatives such as his father, so his war medals could be sent to her. By this time she was living in North Gosford, and had remarried. She replied: 'I am the nearest blood relation to the same, he was unmarried and his father is dead. I being his mother am entitled to the medal. He was the only son old enough to go to the war'⁶.

Another letter from William's mother is dated February 1922. I am not sure what she had been asked for but it says:

I am sending particulars with reference to Pte W. Hall and please do not put me to much expense as I am only a poor woman & cannot afford much as my son William was my sole support. Hoping the particulars I have sent will prove satisfactory.

In March 1923 she signed for receipt of one victory medal. It took over 6 years for the military bureaucracy dealing with a soldier killed in action to be completed. The only further information I have been able to find about his sister Clarice is that she married Walter Wroe⁷, and that they did have children. The other member of the Hall family is Ellis Hall. We know a bit more about Ellis's family. His parents were Dorothy and John Hall⁸. John Hall was a quarry man and the first postman for this district⁹. His work suggests that he may have been responsible for the building of Holly Lodge, to the east of Bell¹⁰. Many years ago this house had a second storey of wood but it is now just one storey of stone. I think the top storey was lost in a house fire. It is now not owned by the Hall family but they were there for a very long time. I am grateful to Peter Blatt, whose grandmother Irene Hall was born in 1901 at Holly Lodge, and Helen Reiner who is now the owner of Holly Lodge for much of the above information John and Dorothy had four children, Hannah was the oldest, born in 1868, then Ellis, 1871, George 1873 and Samuel in 1875¹¹. Samuel, the youngest, was part of the committee who instigated the building of The War Memorial in 1919. I have not been able to find out how William and Ellis were related but it seems most likely that they were. The Halls at one time owned portions 11 and 12¹² so the Hall family spanned both communities. John and Dorothy are buried in the Mt Victoria Cemetery, as I discovered by chance only a couple of weeks ago after the last bush walk (in October 2011). Dorothy died in 1898, aged 62 years and John in 1878 aged 72 years. Their children George and Samuel are also buried there, as is a Richard Hall, who died in 1910 aged 48. I think he is William's father.

Ellis enlisted on 22nd September 1915; he was 44 years old and already married¹³. His wife was Beatrice Victoria Barton and they married in 1900¹⁴. They were living at Bell and he was working as a labourer. He joined the 5th Squadron, 2nd Remount Unit. Ellis had previously served for 11 months in the Mounted Rifles and was discharged due to sickness. He was 5' 7" tall, blue eyed and grey haired, and he weighed a bit over 10 stone. Ironically there is less official information about Ellis, he survived the war to return home on 'Vestulia' in December 1916 on the disbandment of the unit. He left for home from Egypt.¹⁵

Ellis disappears from official view after the war. All I can find is that he had at least one child, his son Henry who died in 1975. He may well have had other children but I have been unable to trace them. Ellis died in 1942, in Sydney, he was 72.¹⁶

Where we know so little about the Hall men, we know a great deal about the family of Henry Marcus Clark. The Clark family has grown into a vast tree, spread across many generations and all well documented due to family and business histories, family trees and, it seems, a liking for photography. Like the Halls, there are two Clarks on the War Memorial. In 2006 Arthur Delbridge talked about Les Clark, and I now wish to briefly look at Roland Cuthbert Clark, who was known as 'Rol'.

The Clark family honoured their ancestors by repeated use of certain names. The family tree is further complicated (to an outsider) by the use of nicknames for almost everyone. The earliest use of Cuthbert dates from the late 18th century¹⁷, reappearing at least once in every subsequent generation while Roland seems to be a first. Born in 1889 Roland was the third child of Henry Marcus Clark and his first wife Martha Annie Day known as Pattie. Roland was only three when his mother died. His father remarried the following year, to Pattie's sister May¹⁸. Rol grew up in Sydney with repeated visits to Sefton Hall which was built by his father, and later became the home of his younger brother Les. Roland was educated at Sydney Grammar School as were his brothers. He was a real scholar, often coming top of his class and winning many academic prizes. He remained devoted to literature and to books all his life, his library included collections on subjects that specially interested him such as eastern religions. He was destined for a role in the family business, the department stores bearing the family name, Marcus Clark.

He left school in 1908, aged 18, and joined the family company.¹⁹ Rol (aged 19) went to England in March 1909 to gain experience, and worked with D & W Murray, Swan and Edgar, Millars, and finally at Seven Kings in Essex. While in England he joined King Edward's Horse (The King's Oversea Dominions Regiment) serving in it for nearly two years²⁰. Rol returned home, back to the company which continued to grow in Sydney, NSW country towns and in Victoria until the depression in the early 1930s. Then, for the first time, it made a loss and was unable to pay a dividend. Reg, who had been Chairman and Managing Director since his father's death in 1913, died on 13th July 1953, aged 69. Rol, aged 64, was appointed Chairman of Directors, only the third in its history. In 1962 Rol Clark retired as chairman after 54 years with the company.²¹



Rol had married Honor Sutton in 1914 and they had three children: Margaret (1916), Anthony (1920) and Frederick (1928). Their (or perhaps her's, during the war) address when first married was 'Wealwandangee', Victoria Street, Strathfield, New South Wales²²; after the war they moved to Clifton Gardens. Rol's niece Jan Hurrey (daughter of Rol's brother Les) remembers being very impressed that Rol had a key to a special gate that led through the grounds of next door Taronga Park Zoo which gave him a short cut down the hill to the ferry. But he got the bus back up the steep hill at the end of the working day. She thinks he was involved with the establishment of the Zoo. She says that he was a wonderful uncle, quite prepared to play games with the children. She also commented that during her school years whenever she went home to Dubbo for the school holidays (on the Bourke mail) her uncle Rol would turn up at Central Station with one of the 'Log Cabin' chocolates made by California Chocolates. She said he was 'gorgeous'²³. Christopher Clark remembers his mother, Marcia²⁴ saying never ask Rol to do something for you unless you are really sure, because if you change your mind it will already be done.

But to return to his war years, Rol and Les (his younger brother who had settled on the land at Dubbo in 1912) served together, with Harry Collins (an employee of the company who served there until his retirement in the early 1960s)²⁵. Rol enlisted in June 1917, given the number 16137, and described himself as a 'merchant'²⁶. A photograph²⁷ of him taken in uniform shows him to be a tall, slender and extremely good looking young man, officially described as having fair hair, blue eyes and 6' 1" tall; he was 27 years old. The official war record notes that he had a distinctive scar along both his index fingers.

Private Roland Clark, together with his brother Les, was placed in The Mechanical Transport Section; after training Rol went to the 4th Motor Transport Company, and Les to the 2nd. They left from Sydney on HMAT 'Runic' in March 1918. They travelled to England and in August 1918 Rol was sent to France where, for a short time only, he was a driver 'in the field'. Rol was not wounded and did not fall ill during his time of service but he did have some dental work done after enlisting.

At the end of the war Rol returned home via America, arriving in April 1919 on SS 'Sonoma', having been granted 6 months leave without pay²⁸. It seems that his wife was a little upset at not being advised of his arrival as a rather terse letter²⁹ from Base Headquarters indicates that they did not know which ship he was on either. Rol resumed his career at Marcus Clark, as I outlined earlier. Christopher noted that many employees became shareholders of the company, and asked one of them why she invested in the company. Her response: 'If you can't trust Mr Rol and Mr George, who can you trust?'³⁰ Roland retired in 1962 and died in 1973, aged 84.³¹ His grandson Anthony, (and I am delighted that members of the Clark family have joined us here today) recalled walking around Mt Wilson with Rol and noting that he treated everyone with the same courtesy and politeness. He is remembered as a 'natural gentleman'³².

- 1 Found in W.Hall's official record of service
- 2 Milton's sonnet: 'on his Blindness'
- 3 Australian War Graves Commission
- 4 Found in W.Hall's official record of service
- 5 As above
- 6 As above
- 7 NSW registry of Births Deaths and Marriages
- 8 NSW registry of Births Deaths and Marriages
- 9 Mary Reynolds
- 10 Now owned by Helen Rainer
- 11 NSW registry of Births Deaths and Marriages
- 12 Mt Wilson Historical Soc., from Dept. of Lands NSW
- 13 Official war record of E.Hall
- 14 NSW registry of Births Deaths and Marriages
- 15 Official war record of E.Hall
- 16 NSW registry of Births Deaths and Marriages
- 17 Family tree created by Marcia Clark for her family history 'Born to Rise'
- 18 NSW registry of Births Deaths and Marriages
- 19 from History by C Clark and R Gole, p5.
- 20 As above
- 21 As above
- 22 note Rol's given address on his application to enlist was 57 Redweyte (sic) Rd, Strathfield
- 23 interview by phone on 4/11/2011 with Jan Hurrey
- 24 Henry Marcus Clark's 9th child, born 1913
- 25 Christopher Clark's history 'The Firm that Kept Faith'
- 26 Official war record of RC Clark
- 27 In the possession of Christopher Clark, left to him by his mother Marcia.
- 28 Les' only son John Byron Marcus Clark (serving with the AIF 2/15th Field Regiment) died as a prisoner of war on the infamous Burma railway in 1943. Reg's only son Theodore Marcus Clark (Marc) died in action (serving with the Royal Australian Air Force) in 1942, days before the birth of his son Phillip Marcus Clark. The company maintained an Honour Roll of employees who served for their country. See also article by Arthur Delbridge in Hist. Society journal for 11/11/2006
- 29 Official war record of RC Clark
- 30 Notes on email from Christopher Clark concerning War record
- 31 History by Marcia Clark, and by Christopher Clark
- 32 Recollection of his grandson, Antony. (8/11/2011)