
Remembrance Day 11th November 2013

Alison Halliday on Alfred Mann and Leslie Lemessurier

The first line on our war memorial is the phrase 'lest we forget', obviously referring to the list of names below. We also repeated this phrase 'lest we forget' this morning in the poem or hymn known as 'The Recessional'. This phrase originally referred to the possibility of people forgetting the sacrifice of Christⁱ and it has since taken on a wider significance. The poem, and its inscription on war memorials, assumes that forgetting is inevitable and perhaps there are many reasons for forgetting about wars: they belong in the past; to remember is to remember the horror, the bloodshed and the terrible losses; for WWI there are no people still living who fought, so memory lives on at second hand or in documents; it is part of human nature to forget; and perhaps the only way to continue after such suffering is to try to forget. Against the desire and inevitability of forgetting, this community comes together every year to not only recall all of those who fought but also to focus specifically on two people. It is through the particular details of a person's life that we may stem the tide of forgetting. As always I am grateful to the families who have remembered and shared their memories so that I can say something about two people from the Memorial. I hope that the reiteration of these memories contributes a resistance to the pull of forgetfulness.

Alfred Thomas Osborne Mann was born in April 1891 in Sydney (Paddington) His parents were Flora Helena (nee Farrell) and James Elliot. He had an older brother James Ferneaux and a younger brother Frederick, as well as two sisters, Eva and Esmeⁱⁱ.

The association of the Mann family with Mt Wilson began with the purchase of Dennarque. After the death of Merewether, the first owner of Dennarque, it was sold to Flora Helena Mann in 1894, wife of James Elliot Mann, 'for her separate use' the land title states—a curious comment. As Mary Reynolds noted it appears that Flora Mann was the sole owner as records in the following years refer just to Mrs Mann and her childrenⁱⁱⁱ. His family refers to him as 'Alf' and it seems as though this is how he was always known (Rodgers, 187).

It has been necessary to discover some of the details of the life of Alfred through a variety of sources, including his family, some of whom are here today and I very much appreciate their input. It is tempting to speculate about the young Alf, he seems to have slipped through his school life without making much of a mark. Perhaps he was overshadowed by his older brother^{iv} or perhaps he simply lacked the taste for academic study. Alf went to St Aloysius primary school but the school's records for that time are sketchy or, in the case of Alf, non-existent^v. We know nothing about his early pre-schooling; St Aloysius takes boys from 3rd grade. From St Aloysius Alf went on to St Ignatius' College or Riverview as it is more often known. Both schools focused on the Ignatian tradition of education^{vi}; that is, the Jesuit mode of Catholic scholarship.

There is very little information about Alfred's life at Riverview^{vii}. He did not sit for any public examinations and he did not win any academic prizes. However he did appear in a number of dramatic productions. In 1905 (then aged 14), he appeared in the chorus for the college musical, *The Mikado* and in 1906 he was in the chorus of *The Gondoliers*. In 1907, he appeared in *Utopia Limited* and in 1909 he appeared with Bob Macken (also killed in 1916) in a performance of *Furnished Apartments*. In 1910 he was in the football team (town)^{viii}.



Alf had two other interests at school. He seems to have had an early interest in aircraft as one of his classmates wrote about 'his drawing aeroplanes on the margins of his books during class and then making model planes which he would launch from the main building into the Quadrangle' (Rogers 187). He had also shown a keen interest in astronomy, helping Fr Pigot, first director of the school observatory, in making careful drawings of sun spots (Rogers 188).



Alfred Mann (top row, far right) in the football team (town).



Photo by]

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Second Row—Lord Dramaleigh, Sir Bailey Barre, K.C., M.P., Capt. Sir Edward Corcoran, K.C.B., R.N., Capt. Fitz-Battleaxe.
 (B. Veech) (A. Mann) (E. Lenehan) (A. Malone)

Front Row—A "Guard." Tarara. Prince Zaro. King Paramount. A. "Guard."
 (T. Wilkinson) (E. O'Halloran) (H. McArdle) (G. Ward) (J. Deery)

We know little of his life between leaving school and enlisting, a period of about four years. He seems to have studied architecture (Rogers 187). At that time architecture was studied at Sydney Technical College. This was before there was a university architecture course available in Sydney^{ix} Architectural students usually worked during the day, at an associated job, and went to Tech. at night. Our own Historical Society archives note that after leaving school Alfred worked for a short time at Dalton Brothers, merchants and importers. I have not been able to verify this information, and I do not know if this was associated with his architectural studies or quite separate^x.

He sailed for England in 1915 on the 'Orontes' with his younger brother Fred, and Fred's friend Gilbert Hughes. It was not unusual for young Australian men to travel to England to enlist; it is possible that they thought they would see action sooner by enlisting there; or they may have thought they were more directly serving the 'mother-land' by so doing. In England Alfred joined the Royal Naval Air Service. At the beginning of WWI the Royal Air Force did not exist; the predecessors of the RAF were the RFC (Royal Flying Corp, existed 1912- 1918) and the RNAS (Royal Naval Air Service, existed 1914 - 1918). The RAF was founded in 1918, toward the end of World War I, by merging the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service.

By 1915 he was at Officers training school in Camberley^{xi}.

His father was listed as the next-of-kin, giving his address as care of the Bank of NSW, Threadneedle Street, London^{xii}. Alf's father James stayed at the Rembrandt Hotel during WW1 to be near his three sons (Alfred, Fred and Furneaux) who had enlisted with the British forces.^{xiii}

Alfred's rank was Flight Sub-Lieutenant, serving in the Royal Naval Air Service having enlisted in the UK on 6 November 1915 (Rodgers 187). After training at officer's training school in Camberley, England he was appointed a temporary Flight Sub Lieutenant^{xiv}. Various training courses followed, including an engineering course at Fishgard, a gunnery course on HMS Excellent and a short sea course on HMS Penelope. He underwent basic flying training at Redcar and further training at

Cranwell. He was confirmed as a pilot on 19 September 1916.(official War Record, England War Archives, Rodgers). He was described as a ‘steady keen pilot [and] v[ery] good officer’^{xv}.

He was in one of two planes that returned from the Schleswig-Holstein raid (Rodgers 187). He was killed on 29 November 1916; while flying a Sopwith plane.

‘Killed in aeroplane accident in France 29.11.’16’. The record also gives a fuller explanation:

Report and Finding of Court of Enquiry into the above fatal accident. The Cause of accident was due to the Pilot attempting to loop the loop after having done so once successfully allowing a/c [aircraft] to get into difficulties from which he was unable to extricate it. 8.1.17 Father to be informed in the sense of last paragraph of finding of Court of Enquiry.^{xvi}

He is buried at Luxeuil (also known as Luxeuil-les- Bains) Communal Cemetery, plot number 9^{xvii}. The site is described ‘In the Military Plot near the West end are buried four Naval airmen of the detachment which preceded the Independent Air Force.’^{xviii}

There are at least two lasting consequences of Alf’s death.

First, in 1922 his father James Mann, presented to Riverview Observatory the ‘Cooke’ telescope as a memorial to his son, (Rodgers 188). Lieutenant [sic] Alfred Mann, who attended the College with his brothers in 1905-1910 and was killed at Luxeuil, France in 1916. The ‘Cooke 7-inch refracting telescope was imported by H.W. Fitchett of Melbourne and at that time was the third largest privately-owned refractor telescope in the country and was capable of useful research. The second owner was Dr. W.E. McFarlane of Irvinebank, Queensland. Riverview has had it now for 90 years and it is still in use.

Second, as Arthur Delbridge noted ‘this death [of ATO Mann] in the family was undoubtedly a heartfelt motive with Flora for her donation of a portion of Dennarque land as the site for the war memorial — our war memorial.’^{xix}

The life of **Leslie Wilfred Lemessurier** has three sources, and rather than make his life into a neat sequence I am going to look at each of these sources and examine what each tells us about Lemessurier.

He was first mentioned to me by Jan Hurrey^{xx}. Jan now lives in Queensland and she contacted me several years ago and while we were talking she mentioned an experience from her childhood.

Jan was a young girl living at Sefton Hall, daughter of Les Clark, while Lemessurier lived at Sefton Cottage and worked at Sefton Hall. She remembers him as being very kind to children, and she was upset that he and his wife had no children. So she wrote a letter to the fairies asking them to bring a baby to his wife Isobel, and eventually, after two letters, a baby arrived, and was called Dawne. At this time Jan had whooping cough so she could not visit and she was bitterly disappointed at not being able to see the baby immediately. However Isobel carried Dawn outside so that Jan could see her from a safe distance.



Isabel, Dawne and Les Le Messurier c 1942

Lemessurier worked at Sefton Hall for about 12 years and after the war he returned to work at Marcus Clark's store in Dubbo. Each Christmas Jan got a letter from Isobel and years later when Isobel died her daughter Dawne continued the correspondence. Jan commented that this connection was not surprising as anyone who had worked at Marcus Clark kept in touch with those they had known there. Recently Jan added that she remembered Lemessurier as a kind and gentle man.

After hearing this story I decided to take Lemessurier as one of the two men to talk about on Remembrance Day, 2013. The delay of a year or more, after first speaking to Jan, was due to the difficulty of finding his war record. Do not have a name with several possible spellings when searching official sites!

The official individual war records are rather different for WWII than those of WWI. There seems to be less personal detailed information and rather more 'form-filling' by the record keepers^{xxi}. Lemessurier was born on 12 April 1912 at Gilgandra.

The 'Mobilization Attestation Form' shows that he enlisted on 19 January 1942 then aged 29 years and 8 months. Physically he was 5 foot, 6 inches tall, of fair complexion with brown eyes and hair. By 13 May 1942 his permanent address is given as 140 Morts Rd, Mortdale.

His occupation is given as gardener and caretaker. On a checklist he is shown to have no office skills (typing, shorthand, keep accounts) and could not drive or cook. His army number was N346865; he did not make a will before enlisting.

He had been married on 2 July 1938, to Isobel Ella and he had a young daughter, Dawne. At the time of enlistment his address is given as Sefton Hall, Mt Wilson and his employer, Marcus Clark Co. Ltd, of Central Square, Sydney.

Lemessurier served in Australia and overseas in New Guinea, the latter from 2 May 1945 to 19 December 1945. In total during the war he served for 1334 days, in Australia for 1102, and overseas for 232 days. He was initially part of the CMF (Citizens Military Force), (13 May 1942 – 15 July 1945) and was then transferred to the AIF (16 July 1945 – 5 January 1946). He served in the 18th Australian Field Ambulance.

My third source is from his daughter Dawne (she who arrived with the help of the fairies!)^{xxii}. Dawne began by confirming the correct spelling of his name and saying that Lemessurier was known as Les. Dawne was 12 years old when they left Sefton Hall to move to Dubbo where Lemessurier continued to work for Marcus Clark.

Lemessurier was born in Gilgandra^{xxiii} and married Isobel Brook on 2 July 1938. Before the war he did odd jobs in Dubbo, such as wool classing and gardening before moving to Sefton Hall after they were married. Isobel had worked as a dress maker before her marriage doing alterations. Dawne was born 30 July 1940, she had no siblings as her mother nearly died having her; in the hospital at Leura.

During the war Dawne and her mother lived in Manly where they rented a place they shared with Isobel's sister Ethel and her son who was a companion for Dawne. When Lemessurier was transferred to Townsville they moved and stayed with Isobel's mother's family on a farm between Molong and Orange.

After the war Lemessurier returned to Mt Wilson, working for Les Clark at Sefton Hall. The family left there in 1952 so Dawne could go to high school and Les became a greenkeeper at the Mudgee bowling club. Mr Mace had been the teacher at Mt Wilson and he was transferred to Mudgee, living in town. The Lemessurier family moved into Mr Mace's house; his wife having died. In 1954 Les moved back to Dubbo to work as a 'collector' at Marcus Clark. Dawne remembers this move was for her mother's health as she had suffered from severe hayfever while in Mudgee. Being a 'collector' meant that he collected the lay-by payments in the Dubbo area. He then became a salesman in the furniture department. The store was taken over by Waltons and Les retired from that business. He was diagnosed with cancer and died three weeks later; at Dubbo on 25 March 1982, aged 69 years.

Lemessurier had two brothers, Harry and Bert. He loved sport and was good at cricket, tennis and roller skating. While at Mt Wilson he helped to set up the two ant-bed tennis courts on Silva Plana. He played tennis there and at Sefton Hall and Dennarque.



References and Notes

Rodgers, James *To Give and Not to Count the Cost* 2009 Lane Cove NSW: Saint Ignatius College, Riverview

ⁱ From the poem 'Recessional' by Rudyard Kipling composed on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

ⁱⁱ Except where otherwise indicated information for Alfred Mann is sourced from the archives of the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society

ⁱⁱⁱ Ms Fleur Herscovitch, recently made a life member of the Society, is the great grand daughter of Flora Mann, her grandmother being Esme Burfitt, Alfred's sister, and her mother Esme Herscovitch. So Albert Mann is Fleur Herscovitch's great uncle.

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- iv Even his own entry in the Riverview history of its pupils who died during WWI begins with detail about Furneaux and his younger brother Frederick (Rodgers, 187)
- v : Information from the school archivist of St Aloysius
- vi The website of St Aloysius states: 'The College aspires to assist and support parents in the formation of their sons in the Ignatian tradition of education, producing *'men for others'* who are balanced and motivated, integrating spiritual maturity and academic excellence with a rounded social and physical development; men of competence, conscience and compassion.'
- vii Much of the following information about Alf at Riverview comes from Riverview School archivist, Catherine Hobbs]
- viii During the early 1900s sporting teams made up of country boarders would play against boarders from the city.
- ix Sydney Technical College web site (Dictionary of Sydney).
- x Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society records
- xi Detail of service from Australian Society of Aero Historians:
MANN Alfred Thomas Osborne; FLT SUB-LIEUT RNAS; of Randwick and Mount Wilson NSW; s/o J E Mann of Sydney NSW; Born: APR 1891; Died: 29 NOV 1916 France; Bd: Luxeuil-les-Bains Communal Cemetery France, Grave 9;
 British War Medal (B.W.M.)
 Victory Medal (V.M.)
 1905-1910 Educated Saint Ignatius' College (StIg) Lane Cove, Sydney StIg
 1914 Left for England AWM 140
 1915 At Officers Training School Camberley England StIg
 1915? Initial training at RNAS Redcar LB/PRO*
 06 NOV 1915 Temporary FLT SUB LIEUT RNAS "N" Course AWM 140, LB
 06 DEC 1915 Fishguard "E" Course AWM 140
 03 JAN 1916 to HMS *Excellent* "G" Course AWM 140
 29 JAN 1916 to HMS *Penelope* sea Course AWM 140
 23 MAR 1916 to Redcar AWM 140
 25 AUG 1916 to Cranwell AWM 140
 25 OCT 1916 Confirmed in rank 6/11/15 AWM 140, LB
 25 NOV 1916 No 3 Wing RNAS AWM 140, LB
 29 NOV 1916 Died France aeroplane accident AWM 140, Hob* p.10
 29 NOV 1916 Died following raid on Schleswig-Holstein StIg
 16 DEC 1916 Court of Enquiry found a/c crashed following loss of control during aerobatics (Australian Society of World War I Aero Historians Inc).
- xii Official war record from National Archives, UK
- xiii Helen Burfitt, email, 5 August 2013
- xiv Official war record from National Archives, UK
- xv *Ibid*
- xvi *Ibid*
- xvii Commonwealth war cemeteries
- xviii *Ibid*
- xix From report on Fred Mann by Arthur Delbridge in Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Society newsletter, 2007
- xx Jan is the granddaughter of Marcus Clark who built Sefton Hall
- xxi Lemessuier's war record is from the National Archives of Australia
- xxii I had several phone conversation in 2013 with Dawne
- xxiii Official war record