

11 November 2014



Ruth and Bill Scrivener, Helen Naylor and Mary Reynolds during Alison Halliday's 2014 Remembrance Day talk

Introduction

As we all know 2014 marks 100 years since the start of World War I. I wish to talk numbers for a bit:

- Australian population 1914–18: approximately 4.9 million
- Australia officially entered the war 4 August 1914, when Britain declared war against Germany.
- The monetary reserves in the whole of the Commonwealth amounted to approximately £45,000,000¹.
- By 1918 there were 22 allied nations and four enemy nations².
- Around 420,000 Australians enlisted for service in the First World War, representing 38.7 per cent of the male population aged between 18 and 44.
- About 136,000 horses left Australia, only one returned. Sandy belonged to Major General Sir William Bridges, who was killed at Gallipoli.
- During the period 4 August 1914 to 11 November 1918 there were 59,357 deaths; more died before discharge from the AIF – formally disbanded on 31 March 1921³.
- 5,533 Australians fell in the first 24 hours of the attack at Fromelles, it was the worst day of fighting in the war for the Australians.
- On average, 38 members of the Australian armed forces died per day during the 1,560 days of the war.
- 63 Victoria Crosses were awarded to members of the Australian armed forces in World War I.
- As best I can estimate there may have been over 100 adults living at Bell, Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine in 1914. There are 27 names listed on the War Memorial for WWI, 3 people died.
- Three men were awarded the Military Cross and one was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (one of only 8,981 awarded throughout the Empire)⁴.

Terrible as these figures are, it is only when we place names to these numbers that the true enormity of Australia's participation is realised. But, now we are 100 years since these events, we need more than names; we need to bring these people away from statistics and out of the silence.



The first of the 11 November ceremonies of remembrance at Mt Wilson was held in 2001, but it was 10 years ago in 2004 that Arthur Delbridge began our young tradition of talking about and remembering those whose names are listed on the War Memorial. Arthur died this year, so I think it is appropriate for us all to remember his first question: who are all these people on the War Memorial? I will also remember him every time I use my Macquarie dictionary for which he was the editor-in-chief while Professor of Linguistics and Director of the Speech and Language Research Centre at Macquarie University. It was published in 1981.

Medals awarded to Denys Hake OBE (father of Libby Raines) for his service in the British Army in WWI

As is the custom, I have chosen two names from the War Memorial, both from our group of first settlers⁵ and both fought in WWI.



The Mt Wilson choir performing at the 2014 Remembrance Day service

Edward Jesse Gregson was born 26 April 1882⁶, at Newcastle where his father was the manager of the A.A. Company. (Note that his WWII record gives a date of birth as 26 April 1891). He was usually known as 'Greg.', but to avoid confusion I am going to refer to him as Edward. His father, Jesse Gregson, had built Yengo, on Queens Avenue as a summer holiday home for the family between 1878 and 1880. His mother was Catherine 'Katie' Maclean. Jesse Gregson, commented that 'we never missed a summer at Yengo, generally going there in early December and remaining till April. Yengo was to me, and to all the children, a home we were always glad to come to and sorry to leave'⁷.

The boys, Edward and his older brother William, were sent to school at All Saints College at Bathurst. The mother's diary notes that 'both my boys owe almost everything of their reverence for all that is good to the teaching they received and the example they saw at All Saints'. Both in turn served as head boys at this school and went on to Sydney University. Edward, graduated as Bachelor of Arts in 1903 and, like his older brother, went on to do engineering⁸. The Gregson family travelled widely and war broke out while Edward was in Canada where he was working as a draughtsman⁹; and he enlisted in the Canadian forces He describes himself in his attestation paper as an engineer¹⁰.

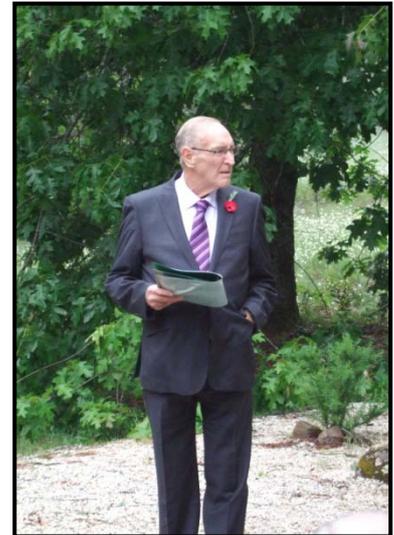
On enlisting he was 32 years and 7 months old and 6 feet 1 1/2 inches tall. He is described as having a 'swarthy' complexion, blue eyes and brown hair, His religion is given as Church of England and he was already vaccinated (left arm). He was declared 'fit' for the overseas Canadian Expeditionary Force on 3 September 1914. A pencilled note on his record suggests that he joined

the 9th Battalion, 3rd Brigade¹¹. There were approximately 500 to 800 soldiers in a battalion, and three to five battalions made up a brigade (1500 to 4000 soldiers).

Unfortunately his full service record is not yet available. The Canadian government are digitalising their records as part of this year's centenary of the outbreak of WWI¹². He served until 1918.

After the war Edward returned to Canada. There, in Schenectady, New York State, he worked in a mica factory, Mica Insulating Co. owned by Charles Wilkin Jefferson, for about eight years where he met Margaret, Jefferson's daughter. I do not know if he had been working there before WWI¹³. In 1920 they returned to Australia, married, and came immediately to live at Yengo. Edward and his wife Margaret lived there for three years (Jesse Gregson died in 1919) and then Yengo was sold to Fred Mann (1923). Edward and his wife then moved to the newly built Wyndham, named after the original surveyor of Mt. Wilson. It was built on land that was part of the original holdings of Yengo, but not sold with Yengo.

Edward and Margaret had three daughters, Helen, Meg and Troath. In the 1920s and 1930s he introduced his children to the delights of the bush around Mt Wilson, walking and picnicking. Helen describes them: 'the billy was boiled and sometimes chops grilled. Then there were the Bogey Holes, a series of dark waterholes overshadowed by rocks – there surely must be a bunyip'¹⁴.



Ron Green conducting the 2014 Remembrance Day Service

At Wyndham Edward set up an apple orchard, mainly on the other side of the road, behind Yengo. As part of this business a packing shed was built adjacent to Wyndham; and later extended to become the cottage, Applecot. Like apple orchards elsewhere on the mountain it was unprofitable by the mid-1930s. I am deeply indebted to Helen Warliker's memoir *A Mount Wilson Childhood* for much of the following information. Who better to tell about the character and life of Edward Jesse Gregson than his daughter.

She wrote:

Dad's room was full of notebooks recording rain, and trees and plants identified in the bush, matters relating to the farm, and so on. He also kept a daily diary right up to the time of his death. The smell of paper, old and new, pervaded this room stuffed full of books and maps. Maps were one of his obsessions and some were his own work. Adjoining this room was his own shower with a hand pump and a kerosene tin for hot water. The mysterious workings of this shower were known only to dad, which was used exclusively by him.

Life in the Depression was hard and Helen comments that

Dad took us there [to the swamp below Ferny Corner] to help him collect sphagnum moss which he sold to nurseries and florists during the Depression. Today he would have been a 'Greenie' and frowned on such activity but there were 'bread and butter' issues to be confronted in those hard times.

There were small events that were typical of life on Mt Wilson in earlier days. For example:

The Gregson family pumped water from a dam on the creek (above from where the spring from Bebeah joined it) and she comments that the pump had 'a will of its own and there was a love/hate relationship between it and my father'.

There was the 'periodic' event in which [the] children participated, 'accompanying Dad on Sunday morning sometimes to Syd's house and sometimes to the mill. At Syd's house the hair cut took place on the verandah...The other hair cutting venue was at the mill when on a Sunday the machinery would be at a standstill.'

It was during the Depression and after the failure of the apple orchard that Edward's wife opened the tearoom at Chimney Cottage, helped by her father 'Daddo' and Emma Ashdown. Helen comments that:

Dad was often the chief washer-upper assisted by us children from time to time when we were not at school. He hated the job but had no choice as the orchard and farm no longer occupied him full time. However he performed these new duties stoically. My mother always said he was not cut out to be a farmer either, that he should have been a surveyor and she was probably right. His first love was the bush, and he might have found a career in this field also.

Edward continued his father's passionate interest in the botany of the indigenous plants with a focus on eucalypts, one of which bears his name: *Eucalyptus gregsoniana*¹⁵.

Edward was fully involved in community life. He was one of the three original trustees for the Post Office, he was an active member of the local church, ensuring that the services were continued; and he was a founding member of the Mount Wilson Group of the Blue Mountains Site Reserves, protecting various pieces of crown land around the mountain. He was the President of this group from the meeting in 1930 through to 1935, and he still maintained an active interest in the group, and the wider Mt Wilson community, for many years after he stepped down. He was also an active participant in the Progress Association.



Christopher Carey (grandson of Robert Chesney) playing The Last Post during the 2014 Remembrance Day service

In memory of his father and family on 7th June 1940, Edward gifted 3 roods of the Chimney Cottage property to His Majesty King George VI; this parcel of land in effect then became Crown Land and then Gregson Park.

On 13 March 1941 he enlisted in the army in WWII, becoming one of a group who served in both world wars. He gave his age then as 50 years and 11 months. Helen Warliker notes that he deliberately put his age back (by nine years!) in order to enlist¹⁶. It is recorded that he then had only two children (Helen and Meg). He gives his occupation as orchardist, despite the failure of the apple crops. He was 'taken on strength' and promoted to corporal. He served for 2 years and 135 days¹⁷, in a 'pen-pushing job in Sydney'¹⁸. On 27 July 1943 he was discharged for 'services no longer required [SNLR] for other than disciplinary reasons'¹⁹. A research officer at the Australian War Memorial told me that 'in 1943, the Army was downsizing and people who were from essential occupations were being discharged to go back into food production, in particular as they needed to support the Americans in the Pacific'²⁰. His discharge papers note that the colour of his hair is grey. He may well have been discharged for compassionate reasons as his wife died in 1943 and the third daughter, Troath was only young. For a brief period he then worked in 'his old profession as an engineer in the Department of Munitions before retiring'²¹.

Edward Gregson retreated to Applecot, having sold Wyndham in 1946, and it became his last mountain home, living there until 1955 when he died.

Herbert Kirk's middle names were Charles Leslie, and he was always called 'Bert'. He was born in 1894. He grew into a big man who was fond of animals and, by all accounts, had a quiet demeanour. Herbert (or Bert) was the fourth child, and the second eldest of the seven Kirk brothers, sons of Sydney William Kirk and Mary Marceau, who have now all passed on yet in much of the last century they played a constant and vital role in this community²². On his enlistment document he gives his occupation as gardener, which is the only evidence we have of his occupation before WWI.

Bert enlisted on 8 January 1916 when he was 21 years and 2 months. He is described as being just over 5 feet 9 inches, with light brown hair and hazel eyes. He has a small scar on his face and on his right hand as well as vaccination scars. His next of kin is his father, Sydney William George Kirk. He took his oath at Lithgow and was part of the second reinforcement for the 45th Battalion. His service number was 1707A (due to duplication of number) and he held the rank of Private.

He left Australia on 14 April on HMAT 'Ceramic'. By 31 September 1916 he had arrived in France and two weeks later he was 'in the field'. In June 1917 he suffered a gunshot wound to his right forearm, described as 'mild'. He was taken to Ilford Emergency Hospital in England, his father was informed by telegram received from Base Records on 21 June and by mail on 14 July 1917.



Herbert Kirks's WWI medals

On 9 February he re-joined his unit but in September he suffered a hernia, eventually being transferred to England. On 16 February 1918 he re-joined his battalion in the field. In April 1918 he was wounded for a second time, in his right thigh; again his father was advised, on 20 April 1918, simply that he had been 'wounded, 2nd occasion'. On 18 April he was discharged 'to AIBD' Australian Infantry Base Depot, and re-joined his unit on 17 May. On 5 November 1918 he was still with the battalion and was then granted leave to the UK on 18 January 1919²³. He was lucky!

He set off back to Australia 12 May 1919 on the 'Port Napier', to be discharged on the 19 September 1919²⁴.

During the war Bert made a money allocation to his mother, deducted from his army pay. It seems as though he was always a kind and thoughtful person²⁵.

Herbert's name has recently been placed on the Garden of Remembrance Wall in Woden, ACT. This is a remembrance site for returned service men and women who died not on active service, but as a result of his service. It is a means of acknowledging their war service. Bert's name is placed with that of his older brother Syd²⁶.

Bert married Mary Robb in 1925, she had been working as a house maid for Miss Sloan at Bebeah and had come from the western NSW town of Ungarie, the Sloans came from Cowra. Coincidentally, Bert's daughter-in-law Margaret's mother and Mary's mother were step sisters. It was a small world in country NSW in those days. Mary tragically died in the 1930s, she was only in her early 40s and had thyroid problems²⁷. She is buried in the Mt Victoria Cemetery. He was left with five young children, in order they were Edith, Betty, Norma, Donald and Roma Kirk. All have now died. This seems to be the right place to offer my deepest thanks to Don's wife Margaret for her generosity to me in talking about Don, Bert and the family. I would also like to warmly welcome members of Bert's family who have joined us today.



Members of Herbert Kirk's family after the 2014 Remembrance Day talk with Milba Kirk, Peter Kirk's daughter (2nd from right)

After the war Bert found work in Little Hartley before moving back to Mt Wilson to live and work there. First for his brother Syd at the mill, photographs shows him with the bullock team and loading timber onto the bullock wagon but it is said that he preferred horses as bullocks were 'too slow'²⁸. He also worked for many others in the community such as Edward Gregson at Wyndham, for Helen Gregson at Windy Ridge where a photo shows him scything the grass in the 1920s, George Valder at Nooroo and Dr. Currey but his main work was for Miss Marjorie Sloan as caretaker and as the 'much valued' gardener²⁹. Helen Warliker recalls that at Bebeah there was 'the big vegetable garden, beautifully kept by Bert Kirk'³⁰. Helen also recalls the 'beauty of the garden'³¹ at Bebeah for which Bert was also responsible. He began work as caretaker at Bebeah in the late 1920s when more diversified employment was necessary³². Alison Vaughan, a niece of Miss Marjory Sloan, remembers growing a plant from 'a cutting from the hedges on the side of the path leading to Bert's Cottage'³³ (Bert's Cottage is, today, Bebeah cottage).

Miss Sloan had a cottage in Sydney and she allowed Bert and his family to go there for holidays. He would drive to the outskirts of Sydney and then get the NRMA to drive him through the suburbs and city³⁴.

In 1943 he married Mabel Cooper, the local Post Mistress, and both were respected and admired for their help and support in the community³⁵. They are remembered by Helen Warliker as 'a kindly couple who would always come to our rescue if help was needed, as it sometimes was when Dad [Edward Gregson] joined the army during the war [WWII]³⁶. After this marriage Don stayed on with Bert and Mabel but the girls left.

Margaret married Don and has warm memories of Bert. She says that Bert was 'absolutely wonderful' and welcomed her into the family, taking on her own two boys as his own grandsons. Margaret called Mabel 'Ma', and remembers that after a visit they were always given a packet of adora cream wafers, as well as nuts and a nut cracker for the drive home. Margaret remembers Bert as being like his brothers but she feels that he had less opportunity, perhaps because he was less outgoing³⁷.

Like Edward Jesse Gregson, Bert was fully involved with community life at Mt Wilson. When the two communities of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine united in 1957 after the devastating fires of that year to form the local Bush Fire Brigade Bert became the Captain for a number of years. In 1936 Bert was the school caretaker, a time when three of his children, Don, Betty and Norma were pupils at the school. I suspect he held this role for some time, not just the one year!

During his life on the mountain he was the person who shod the horses, and I remember him still doing this in the 1950s. He charged 'one shilling per shoe'. He also played the accordion, with his brothers, travelling around the mountain at Christmas time with a piano on the back of a truck. Also he must have been a capable builder for he built Tom's first home in Queens Avenue³⁸.

Margaret says that Bert never changed. When she and Don went to stay with him and Mabel he would always bring them a cup of tea first thing in the morning, at 5am! He took one to Mabel every day of their married life.

In the last years of his life Bert went to live, first to Tom and Tood after Mabel died in 1970³⁹ and then with Don and Margaret in West Wyalong. He 'filled up with fluid' despite injections to get rid of it. Margaret remembers that he was 'very easy to look after'⁴⁰. He had made arrangements with his youngest brother Tom to be buried at Mt Wilson.

On his grave stone, in the church yard of St Georges here at Mt Wilson it says, simply, 'In loving memory of our dear father Herbert C H Kirk died 31 July 1974 aged 79 years'. Mary Reynolds remembers his son Don Kirk as a 'gentle, quiet, modest man'⁴¹ and it seems he was very much his father's son. His name has been placed on Bert's grave. Margaret said to me that Bert was one of the nicest people and if the world was full of Bert Kirks it would be a better place⁴².

Two photographs in the Historical Society archive show the connections between Edward Gregson and Bert Kirk. The first shows EJ Gregson and Bert Kirk culling trees in July 1922. The second photo shows Bert Kirk with two bullock teams hitched together to haul a load of bricks for Wyndham in October 1922. We are told that the lead bullock is called Pilot. Such connections, as we have seen through the lives of those on the War Memorial, are not uncommon in this community. Long may they continue.



Richard Prentice pauses after laying the wreath at the 2014 Remembrance Day service

References and Notes

Warliker, Helen *A Mount Wilson Childhood* 1990

Wynne, Lesley *Seven Good Men* 2000 Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine Historical Society Inc.

¹ <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/2447518/wwi-in-the-herald-august-6-1914/?cs=305>

² <http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww1/anecdotes/stats01.html>

³ www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/enlistment/ww1

⁴ <http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/dso.htm>

⁵ See plaque on stone seat at Founders Corner

⁶ Army Enlistment record. Helen Warliker's memoir

⁷ from Jesse Gregson's memoir, held in the Mitchell library

⁸ 2008 Remembrance Day transcript of talk by Arthur Delbridge in Historical Society newsletter

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/pages/item.aspx?idnumber=430712>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Speech given by Mary B. Reynolds at the opening of the new bridge over Waterfall Creek.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Commonly known as the Wolgan or Mallee Snow Gum, it is distinguishable by its mallee habit. This main attribute makes it a unique member of the snow gums.

¹⁶ Warliker, Helen *A Mount Wilson Childhood*

¹⁷ Official Australian Army records for WWII

¹⁸ Warliker, Helen *A Mount Wilson Childhood*

¹⁹ Official Australian Army records for WWII

²⁰ Email in 2014 from: Reference officer, Information Service Section info@awm.gov.au

²¹ Warliker, Helen *A Mount Wilson Childhood*

²² Mary Reynolds in No 15 Historical Society Newsletter Feb 2007 pp14/15

²³ From official army records

²⁴ Official war service record, held in national archives, Australia

²⁵ Reminiscences of Margaret Kirk as told to Alison Halliday, October 2014

²⁶ From Milba Kirk

²⁷ Reminiscences of Margaret Kirk as told to Alison Halliday, October 2014

²⁸ Wynne, Lesley *Seven Good Men*

²⁹ Mary Reynolds email, 2014

³⁰ Warliker, Helen *A Mount Wilson Childhood*

³¹ Ibid

³² Mary Reynolds email, 2014

³³ Newsletter No 17 Historical Society Newsletter February 2008

³⁴ Reminiscences of Margaret Kirk as told to Alison Halliday, October 2014

³⁵ Mary Reynolds email, 2014

³⁶ Warliker, Helen *A Mount Wilson Childhood*

³⁷ Reminiscences of Margaret Kirk as told to Alison Halliday, October 2014

³⁸ Wynne, Lesley *Seven Good Men*

³⁹ NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

⁴⁰ Reminiscences of Margaret Kirk as told to Alison Halliday, October 2014

⁴¹ Mary Reynolds email, 2014

⁴² Reminiscences of Margaret Kirk as told to Alison Halliday, October 2014