

Armidale and District Historical Society Inc.

'Dumaresq Chambers', Corner Faulkner St and Cinders Lane, Armidale
PO Box 692, Armidale, NSW, 2350

website: adhs.org.au

e-mail: contact@adhs.org.au

President Judith Grieve 6775 1205
Secretary Robyn Curry 6772 4700
Treasurer John Burrell 0438187848

Newsletter Editors *Judith Grieve
Ruth Thomas

Newsletter for May 2020

The current restrictions associated with control measures against the spread of Coronavirus infection preclude the Society from having a meeting in May and a monthly newsletter will have to suffice. For the same reasons, individuals had to be creative in marking ANZAC Day. The Dangarsleigh Service was videoed in its reduced form and the talk which Peter Elliott prepared and gave on the video is reproduced here for our members.

'We'll Meet Again Don't Know Where, Don't Know When': Any celebrations for the 70th Anniversary for that great day May 5th 1945, marking the end of WW2 in*were of necessity quiet and went relatively unnoticed. Vera Lynn's signature WW2 song applies to our current state of meetings. Social distancing will continue for many months and when larger groups are permitted to gather, we will make arrangements which comply with the spacing regulations for Covid19 protection to have our meetings.

Membership subscriptions for 2020/21: A reminder to those who have not yet renewed their membership and a thank you to those who have done so. A membership form with details of Direct debit etc accompanied the April newsletter and is also available on the Society website.

Death of 'Little Boy Lost' – The death has occurred of Stephen Walls who, in 1960 aged four, was the centre of a four- day massive search in bushland east of Guyra. This gave rise to the legend of 'The Little Boy Lost', recorded in film and song and in ADHS Journal 55.

Peter Elliott's Memories of Anzac 2019 given to an audience of nine at Dangarsleigh 2020

We are here at the Dangarsleigh War Memorial, 8kms from Armidale, for a very different Anzac Day 2020 due to Coronavirus. But we can't let this day pass without honouring our Australian and New Zealand soldiers who created this day in 1915 one hundred and five years ago and to all Service personnel who have served our country ever since. I have been running this service for over 35 years, because, as a child, I can remember my grandfather John Thomas Elliott running it, then Dad, Roy Elliott and Uncle Jack Elliott who was an ex-serviceman from WW2. I think I took over from Jack and have been doing it ever since. We have been pleased to see the attendance increase to around 350, which is pretty good for an out of town memorial service. Last year was the first time I have NOT been here and my place was filled very well by Warrick Grieve because my wife Eunice and I accompanied our son David, his wife Karen and their children, Grace Jacob and Eve, to France. Grace, our granddaughter (16), sings in the Brisbane Birralea Choir and they were invited to sing at the Anzac Dawn Service at Villers Bretonneux Memorial.

We arrived in Paris on the 15th of April and that evening stood with 1000s of others and watched Notre Dame burn. How shocked we all were. During our stay in Paris, Grace and the choir sang at the French Service, the Blessing of the Eternal Flame, under the Arc de Triomphe. We hired a mini-bus and drove about 100kms north of Paris to the attractive city of Amiens, a very important supply and railroad centre during WWI. A couple of days before Anzac Day we drove 17kms east of Amiens to the Villers Bretonneux Memorial to have a look around and find three graves for family and friends and put poppies on them. All cemeteries are tidy and well maintained by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and are well catalogued. The Australian Department of Veterans' Affairs and the French were in the process of setting up and were very helpful and grateful to us for being there. You walk up to the Memorial about 200 metres, flanked on each side by the soldiers' graves. The Villers Bretonneux Memorial is a huge white three-sided square on a rise in the beautiful rolling surrounding country. There are 10,763 names of Australian soldiers who perished on the Somme and Arras battlefields here. It is where, in 1918, the Australian troops repelled the German advance and prevented the Germans from capturing this prominent rise from which they would have been in artillery range of Amiens. Behind the memorial is the Sir John Monash Centre where you have a radio headphone tour of solange screens and each one deals with one aspect of the war, nurses, horses, rifle, machine gun artillery, mud, trenches etc and by the time you get to the twentieth, you are a bit stunned. Then you go into a small theatre with lots of warnings and with a surround screen you are on a battlefield in amongst allied and German soldiers in hand to hand battle – tracer bullets, smoke, mud, explosions, people hit by bullets, blood and within an armlength being bayoneted, clubbed, wrestling, screaming, shouting, wounded and dying – along with horses bolting on wounded and body parts lying about. This lasts for perhaps 10 minutes -and then you walk out into the sunshine. It is the most realistic and confronting thing I have ever been involved with. I could not speak without choking down for a couple of hours and I still get emotional talking about it.

We attended the Dawn Service and were seated at 3.30am having been advised to get there early for front row seats, as they expected about 5,000 to attend. We were able to see the Birralee choir sing and the service pretty much followed the traditional format, very ceremonial and in English and French. David and I followed the official party during the wreath laying and placed a posy made by the local Kellys Plains School children and poppies from the Armidale sub - branch of the RSL and a poppy on behalf of the Dangarsleigh War Memorial. A Very Proud Moment.

We spent the rest of the time touring the Somme battlefields, Posières, which was shelled off the map, Hamel with the trenches still there, shell holes and saw how close you were to the enemy and Albert village. The Canadian Memorial at Vimy Ridge is two tall white limestone towers engraved with 66,000 names. On the way, about two kms back to the Museum, areas are still fenced off because of an active minefield. We visited the Lochnagar Crater which is 91 metres across and 21 metres deep. British engineers spent weeks tunnelling under the German trenches, loading the tunnels with 27,000 kg of ammonal explosive which was detonated at 07.28 hrs on the 15th of July 1916. The mine was captured and held by British troops. The blast was considered to be the loudest man-made in history with reports suggesting it was heard in London. The attack on either flank was defeated by German small

arms and artillery fire except on the extreme right flank just south of the village of La Bouselle north of the crater. The crater is preserved as a memorial.

Theipval is a French Memorial in red stone, somewhat similar to the Arc de Triomphe and has 75,000 names engraved on it. Here (and in a number of other places we visited) are prominent signs saying NEVER FORGET THE AUSTRALIANS and Aussies are given free admission to the Museum. Cemeteries are many and varied, some just in a paddock, all very tidy and well catalogued and in all are crosses with the word "UNKNOWN" and underneath "KNOWN ONLY TO GOD". In the battle for Passchendaele it was estimated that 435 men, allied and German, died per square metre of land. I believe that this includes 36,000 Australians, 2,500 New Zealanders and 16,000 Canadians – 325,000 allied and 260,000 Germans in total. Each Memorial has an explanation of the Symbolism built into it and it dawned on us how well thought out our Dangarsleigh War Memorial is and that this privately built structure is equal to any monument anywhere. We are very proud of it.

LEST WE FORGET

A Trip Down Memory Lane: Topics for May meetings each decade.

1960: Symposium by Dr W. Walker, Mrs E. Warburton and Mr E. Dunlop – Aspects of the memoirs of Edward and Leonard Irby (N.E. pioneer settlers)

1970: No Meeting

1980: Mr J. Ferry – Squatting on New England and North Western Plains of NSW

1990: Dr B. Mitchell – Scottish Migration to Australia 1850, with special reference to New England and the Nivison Family

2000: R. Crosslè – The Turnbull Family

2010: J. Farrell – The St Kilda Hotel

Snippets of History: It seemed topical to look back 100 years in the *Armidale Express* to the circumstances in Armidale and District of the Pneumonic (Spanish) Influenza pandemic in 1918-1920 which affected 500 million people globally and claimed 12-15,000 lives in Australia.

With no satisfactory vaccination for 'ordinary' influenza, this disease was endemic and seasonal in the New England; some years such as 1860, in July it was reported that it is 'a miracle if anyone escapes the disease' and described in 1918 as 'rampant, raging, like a bushfire'. But pneumonia was rarely associated with these epidemics. European news in late 1918 indicated that the far more deadly pneumonic form was causing many more deaths than in the war. In December, in response to cases and deaths in men returning from Europe and quarantined in Sydney, the Board of Health indicated that country towns should prepare for an outbreak, arrange for isolation facilities, (but at no cost to the Government), closure of schools and their conversion to hospitals. It was April 1919 when **Mrs Russell Richardson** of Armidale succumbed to the disease after returning by train from Sydney. Florence Richardson was described as having 'a kindly charitable nature which endeared her to all who made her acquaintance. During the war she identified herself with many patriotic efforts and during her life her marked musical and artistic talents had been exerted in the cause of charity. **Phyllis** was her daughter and her son **Major Clifford Richardson MC** carried on the Richardson's business after the war, in the present building which was built by his father. The death of **Mr John Le Petit**, Armidale businessman (associated with the

early days of motoring) occurred a few days later having travelled from Armidale to Bellingen.

This situation prompted the local Influenza Administrative Committee to purchase a 'small inhalation outfit' to be available at Council, to warn parents, cancel meetings, recommend the wearing of masks and inoculation. They reassured the public that the Government Medical Officer had cleared all contacts who were uninfected following quarantine for the incubation period of 2-3 days. Armidale was 'redolent of disinfection'. Many meetings and sporting events were postponed or cancelled and an inhalation apparatus was reported to have been installed in Richardsons and a number of other businesses. Ozone was considered to be effective in prevention along with many patent remedies (Pectoral Oxymel of Carrageen, Boddington's Irish Moss, Dr Doyen's Mycolysin, Kay's Essence of Linseed), camphor.

In An Influenza Alphabet (1919) 'A' was for the 'Really No Use Antidote', 'G' for the 'Good, Restrictions Don't Do' and 'H' The 'Hardships they bring to You', but 'T' was for 'Tobacco with 'Nicotine, Far Better Than Any Preventive We've Seen, 'X' for 'Excuses to Close the Hotels', but 'N' was for the 'Nurses whose pluck stands alone'. Train timetables were curtailed and the Queensland border was closed in mid-January 1919 stranding 350 train passengers who were set up in tent accommodation at Tenterfield Showground. Calls were made for donations of beds and bedding, towels, dishes, clothing, kitchen utensils and food.

No further deaths followed that of Mrs Richardson, patients at the isolation camp at the Showground were discharged in early May, the Booloominbah quarantine was lifted. But many other country towns had cases and deaths and there were 100,000 cases reported in Sydney in May. Mining towns including Hillgrove and Emmaville had particularly high rates of infection and deaths as the second and third waves of infection spread. In June travelling restrictions to Brisbane were removed. But by late June Armidale Hospital was stretched to the limit as were the Red Cross workers and volunteers. The situation became more confused by many cases of the 'ordinary influenza' and the hospital restricted its intake of patients to only those from Armidale Local Area. Private cars and lorries were used for ambulance transport, volunteers delivered food to homes of the sick and isolated, taking all precautions in protection. A **Mrs Bath** from Rusden Street took in a young girl with a 'cold' for the night in mid-June 1919 and the following morning she and the girl were hospitalised, Mrs Bath died from pneumonic influenza and her husband became ill. This third and worst wave of infection (28/5/1919 – 30/9/1919) was responsible for 4,302 deaths in NSW, compared with the first wave with 50 deaths and the second (19/3/1919 – 27/5/1919) with 1,542 deaths.

The Annual Armidale Hospital report for 1919, given in January 1920 indicated an increase in admissions of 111 to 711, 66 deaths, 32 of which were from the 144 influenza patients. The average stay in hospital was 20.4 days, a decrease of two. The Board acknowledged the dedication, loyalty and self-sacrifice of nursing staff, VADs, ancillary staff, volunteers and **Doctors Harris, Ritchie and Coghlan**. But by this time, Wawns Wonder Wool which advertised its benefits to influenza was noting the value it had been in the 'Great Wave of Influenza of some months ago'. It seems that, by the beginning of 1920 the Spanish Flu was a problem of the past!