

MONUMENTALLY SPEAKING

National Boer War Memorial Association – New South Wales



NEWSLETTER NUMBER 22 – AUGUST 2014

NATIONAL BOER WAR MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION

National Patron:

Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshall Mark Binskin AC

NSW Committee of NBWMA Inc

Chairman: David Deasey

NSW Chairman's Message

This MS finds us in the happy situation of being about to authorise construction of a half scale model of the second Trooper. The design subcommittee is currently completing the detailed specifications for this Trooper. This has been brought about by a good performance in fundraising for which we thank all of our supporters. There is however still a way to go and we cannot complete this Trooper without a lot more funds. We hope that all of you will continue to support us in the future.

The Boer War Day activities seem to have gone off very well around the state, however we would dearly love reports from all centres who conducted services.



Artist's impression

Our valiant newsletter editor Keith Smith has chosen to step down. The committee keenly feels his loss and gives him its profound thanks for all the efforts he has put into the project over the years. We wish him well in the future.

The New South Wales committee will conduct the annual Elands River Reception at Victoria Barracks Officers Mess on 14 August at 6 PM. If you are interested in attending, please contact Jilly Warren or Bernadette Mottram.

Finally I'd like to congratulate several of our members who have received OAMs in recent times. This includes the secretary of the Queensland committee, Bill Cross and New South Wales supporters Colin Ferguson and Margaret Snodgrass. Well done to you all.

David Deasey

Monumentally Speaking is an occasional newsletter of the New South Wales – National Boer War Memorial Association
Correspondence and donations to Building 96, Victoria Barracks, Paddington, NSW 2021.

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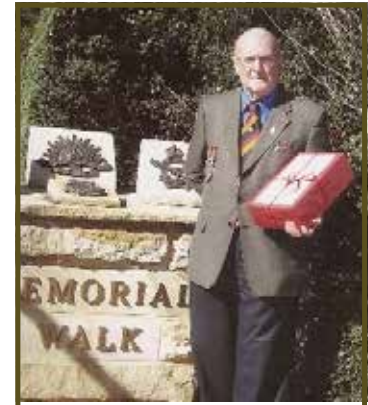
Defence of Sydney

Each year there is an annual service to commemorate the Defence of Sydney. The service is dedicated to the memory of men and women of the Armed Forces of Australia and volunteer organisations who served and worked to protect the Port of Sydney throughout the Second World War.

This took place this year on Friday 30th May at the Defence of Sydney Monument on North Head. The service was organised by the Manly Electoral Office of Tony Abbott and he always takes a personal interest in the proceedings. All wars are commemorated by plaques in the area including the Boer War.

A large attendance was present, including representatives of the armed services and local organisations who on this occasion were privileged to hear an address by Mr Les Carlyon.

Our Boer War Memorial Association is always represented, and on this occasion our State committee



Les Perrett with the endorsed copy of Robert L. Wallace's publication of 'The Australians at the Boer War'

member, Mr Les Perrett attended. Les presented a copy of Robert Wallace's famous book entitled 'The Australians at the Boer War'. The book has been endorsed by the State committee and will be available in the Manly Regional library.

Les Perrett

The Port Macquarie War Memorial

The Port Macquarie War Memorial was first dedicated in March 1921, sited in the junction of Horton and Clarence streets which are the two

main thoroughfares in the town. Initially it was to commemorate those locals who volunteered for World War I. By the 1960s,

it was clear that the site had huge problems. Traffic had increased alarmingly and the site no longer contained those who attended at commemorations such as Anzac Day. It took until November 1969 to agree on a better site and the memorial was rededicated in the Town Green about 100 metres closer to the port itself.

By the 1990s there was a strong move to recognise people from Port Macquarie who had served in all conflicts. In 1997 Port Macquarie RSL Sub-Branch, formed a committee to review the best way of achieving this. A circular placement of Kempsey cream

exposed aggregate and paving blocks was added around the memorial as well as eight small pedestals of the Imperial black granite on the northern side. Names from the Boer War to East Timor were added to these on bronze plaques.

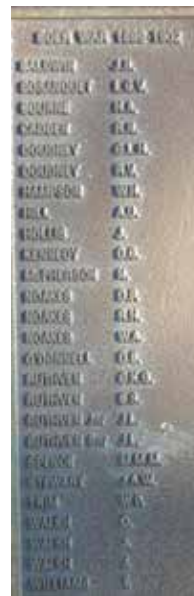
There are 26 names of veterans from the Boer War.

The whole structure was again rededicated in November 2000. The NBWMA salutes those who were responsible for this Memorial in particular Port Macquarie RSL Sub-Branch, Port Macquarie Historical Society, Hastings Council, Chamber of Commerce and the two local members of the time, Mark

Vaile and Rob Oakeshott.

Port Macquarie is a model of what a vibrant community can do and NBWMA hopes that other communities will follow this example.

David Deasey



Book a Speaker for Your Association

An invitation from David Deasey Chairman, NSW Committee of NBWMA

Don't hesitate to contact me to arrange a speaker for your association. Our lively presentations are about 40 minutes allowing time after for questions, but are often adapted for both shorter and longer periods to meet your needs, lunchtime or a conference.

The story of Australia's contribution to the Boer War is little known and our presenters are delighted to put

our first war as a nation into context. 23,000 Australian soldiers and nurses served, 1,000 did not return. We are remembering them.

Regardless of the duration of the presentation requested, our speakers need a working computer, video projector and screen for supporting visuals, and for larger groups, a microphone.



To arrange for a speaker contact

David Deasey

0409 585 877

david.deasey@bwm.org.au

NSW SCHEDULE OF PRESENTATIONS

12 Aug ..Parramatta Legacy.....	Keith Smith
4 Sep...Thornleigh Probus Club.....	David Deasey
11 Nov...Merewether Combined Probus	Les Perrett
TBC...Kincumber Probus Club.....	Brian Walters

DIARY DATE FOR NEXT YEAR – NEXT BOER WAR DAY IS SUNDAY 31 MAY 2015

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<http://www.bwm.org.au/site/Donate.asp>

Boer War Day Services

Several Boer War Day services were held around the State

REID (ACT)



On Saturday, 31 May 2014, Reverend Paul Black and the ACT NBWM Committee conducted their third annual commemorative service, held at Saint John the Baptist Anglican Church in Reid, located directly behind the NBWM site on ANZAC Parade.



SYDNEY

In Sydney, Boer War Day was commemorated on Sunday 1 June at the ANZAC Memorial in Hyde Park. This year the theme was the gallant Australian Bushmen Regiments of 1900 and also Australian poet AB Banjo Paterson, who went to the war as a war correspondent, but wrote many poems about Australians in action in the Boer War. Earlier this year the 150th anniversary of Paterson's birth was celebrated.

Her Excellency, Prof Marie Bashir AC CVO delivered the Prologue and the commemorative address was given by Major-General Iain Spence CSC RFD, Head Cadet Reserve and Employer Support Division. The national anthem was led by a descendant Mrs Catherine Bouchier. We were pleased to have two Sydney students participating, Gladys Lai from Sydney Girls High School who read the Ode and Cadet SGT Declan McGuinness AAFC, Sydney



Grammar School read Banjo Paterson's poem *The Song of the Federation*. The pipe band of Sydney's Scots College played for the assembled audience. Wreaths were laid by a number of dignitaries including the Governor, General Spence, Ms Bronwyn Bishop MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr Philip Ruddock MP, representing the Prime Minister, Mr Matt Thistlewaite MP, representing the Leader of the Federal opposition, Mr Charlie Lynn MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Veterans Affairs NSW, Ms Amanda Fazio MP, representing the Leader of the State Opposition and CR Irene Doutney, Sydney City Council. Representatives from all three services, the RSL, war widows, other service organisations and descendants all laid wreaths.

GOSFORD



On Friday 30th May, Gosford RSL Sub-Branch conducted their first commemoration service by the Sub-Branch at Gosford's Boer War Memorial. Even with a small number of attendees present, the President stated it would be repeated next year. FR Rod Bower led prayers during the service and two Henry Kendal High School students, who were fortunate to have visited ANZAC Cove, had researched and spoke on the Boer War.

MOSMAN



On Friday 6 June 2014, Boer War Day was commemorated in Mosman. Torrential rain forced a change of venue from the Cenotaph to a nearby hall, where COL Rob Shoebridge delivered the Commemoration Address, CR Roy Bendall, Deputy Mayor of Mosman, read the Commemoration of the Fallen, and FR David Strong SJ recited prayers and gave the benediction.



Clarence Town ANZAC Committee held a commemorative service at their Boer War Memorial, one of the very few in that area of New South Wales

Reports and photographs from Canberra, Clarence Town, Gosford, Goulburn, Maitland, Mosman, Nowra, Randwick, St Mary's and Sydney can be viewed at http://www.bwm.org.au/site/Boer_War_Day2014.asp



MAITLAND

Maitland RSL Sub-Branch held a combined memorial service to honour those who served in the Boer War and in the Sandakan death marches. Their President, Mr Eric Bell said "We remembered the 13 men from the Maitland area who went away and never came home."

The service was attended by Joel Fitzgibbon, Federal Member for Hunter and Shadow Minister for Agriculture, as well as the Mayor of Maitland, Mr Peter Blackmore.

Photo shows Rae Williams with her grandson, Azland Askew, wearing the WW1 medals of his great-great-uncle Osborne Chilcott who fought in the Boer War with the NSW Lancers prior to volunteering again for World War 1.



NOWRA

Sunday 1 June saw the fourth Boer War Day service held by the Nowra RSL Sub-Branch at the Boer War Memorial in Rauch Park. The address was given by the Commanding Officer of HMAS Albatross, Captain Simon Bateman RAN, with commanding officers from HMAS Creswell and Parachute Training School, and state and federal politicians in attendance. Members of RSL Sub-Branches, other ESOs and quite a number of Boer War Veteran descendants were also represented. Despite atrocious weather, an estimated 60 people attended, more than in previous years.



RANDWICK

A service to commemorate Boer War Day was held on 25 May by the City of Randwick at the memorial at High Cross Park. Around 200 people watched as Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, unveiled a Boer War Memorial



plaque for the Memorial. Members of the Boer War Memorial Association were in attendance, as well as a number of descendants and supporters, so lots of BW ties present. David Deasey spoke briefly on the war and our project.



ST MARYS

On Sunday, 25 May St Marys RSL Sub-Branch held its annual Boer War Commemoration Service at Guns Cenotaph. It was attended by 56 interested persons including local Mayor, Federal and State members, Patrons, members of the St Marys

RSL Sub-Branch, and local community groups. Their Catafalque Party comprised students from Colyton High Trade School. Two (Banjo Paterson) poems were read by a Colyton student and a local Army Cadet.

SCOUT TROOP AT MAFEKING

Following the article on the origins of scouting at Mafeking in MS21 here is a photo of the Mafeking cadets, the first scouting troop in the history of the Scouting Movement



NOW

PLEASE DONATE FOR THE NATIONAL BOER WAR MEMORIAL

SO THAT IT CAN BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO 31 MAY 2017

<http://www.bwm.org.au/site/Donate.asp>

The Australian Bushmen of 1900

VREDEFORT MEMORIAL TO SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DEAD

In October 2012, and again in October 2013, I visited Vredefort in Orange Free State where on 24 July 1900 the 4th South Australian Imperial Bushmen (4SAIB) and other Australian units were engaged in a sharp encounter with Christiaan De Wet's forces.

4SAIB was part of a column which had pursued De Wet from the Brandwater Basin, near Bethlehem, in what became known as the first De Wet hunt. At Palmieitkuil farm, near Vredefort, the column's advance guard caught up with five wagon loads of Boer flour which De Wet defended in force. 4SAIB took the wagons and withdrew with them in a fighting retreat; a grizzled sergeant of the Gordons described the South Australians' withdrawal under heavy fire as one of the finest he had ever seen.

Led by Captain AEM Norton - who would later be awarded the DSO for an action at Leeuwkop three weeks earlier - 16 South Australians from B' Squadron took refuge in a mud hut where they were besieged by a hundred or more Boer riflemen. Troopers Moore, Nicholas and Tothill fell and Norton escaped by the skin of his teeth. A bullet pierced his cap taking hairs off his head, another lodged in the heel of his boot. In breaking away from the hut his horse was shot dead, rolling on him and smashing open veins in his leg. It was the end of his war.

Later Frederick Howland, an American newspaper correspondent, spoke to a weary Norton as he led his troops in. Two similar incidents involving young officers came to his notice that day, Howland wrote. The other was Dr Howse's VC action.

I had two reasons for visiting Vredefort. The first was personal: Norton was my grandfather (the

grandfather also of Michael Norton, immediate past chairman of the SA-NBWMA) and if the Boers had shot straighter I would not be here today. My mother was born seven years later.

The second is that I am well advanced in writing a unit history of 4SAIB and the Vredefort story will form part of it. In 4SAIB's 15 month tour of duty 24 July 1900 was rivalled only by the appalling day at Rhenoster Kop on 29 November 1900.

Moore, Nicholas and Tothill were buried, with a Western Australian, in the Vredefort cemetery and there is a remarkable story to the memorial erected there four years later.

In Adelaide, a committee chaired by Miss Hettie Clark had set about

***if the Boers had
shot straighter
I would not be
here today***

raising funds to erect memorials over the graves of South Australians who did not return from the war, and the committee was fortunate that in Captain SC McFarlane DSO, a young South Australian who settled in South Africa after the war, it had an able emissary. The committee resolved that the memorials should be fashioned by Tilletts, monumental masons in Adelaide, and shipped to South Africa, where McFarlane took it upon himself to erect them over the graves of fallen comrades. This he did with great energy and when he fell, in action against the Zulus in the 1906 rebellion, his death was mourned in Adelaide.

The Vredefort stone is a fitting tribute to the courage of these three young



Major Norton C1905

men from Lyndoch, Gumeracha and Gawler but the death toll could have been much worse.

Twenty metres short of the mud hut Joe Tothill was shot through the abdomen and his right arm smashed to pulp by an explosive bullet. Defying an order from Norton to leave him and make for the safety of the hut, Nicholas, Corporal Catchlove, Lance Corporal Thorn and Troopers Tate and Ayliffe rushed to Tothill's side. Nicholas was promptly shot through the head while Catchlove took a bullet in the calf and Thorn one in the thigh. Moore was killed afterwards as the small party made a break from the mud hut.

As for the stone itself, it is the committee's standard design, a simple cross bearing the names of the men and 'Erected by the people of South Australia.' The stone was certainly carved in South Australia and shipped from Adelaide but it is not clear if the marble is South Australian or imported Italian stone. David McGowan, Chairman of the SA-NBWMA, is investigating the origin of the stone and Tilletts - the firm still exists - have been asked to comment on how best to repair the memorial for the cross is shaky.

Fortunately repairs are now in the good hands of Captain Charles Ross and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in South Africa and I have been told the Vredefort memorial to 4SAIB's fallen is on the works schedule for early 2014.

***Dr Tony Stimson
SA-NBWMA***

South Australia Committee National Boer War Memorial Assn Inc

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John Hutton Bisdee

Recently some memorabilia relating to John Hutton Bisdee, came to light, which caused some excitement amongst the experts. As a Trooper (No24) Bisdee served in the 1st Tasmanian Bushman and was awarded his VC for an action on 1 September 1900 near

Warm Bad, Transvaal. He rescued wounded comrades under heavy fire. He returned for a second tour of duty in 1901. Enlisting in the AIF in 1915 he served with 12ALH before commanding 'C' Squadron of the 1st Australian Composite Light Horse Regiment in operations against the Senussi. He retired from the army as a

Colonel having received an OBE for World War 1 service.

The items are called Advertising Cinderellas. They feature the face of Bisdee. These were in the form of stamps and were commonly produced by companies in the early part of the 20th century to advertise products. These particular ones were from the



Citizens Life Assurance Company who had awarded Bisdee an annuity of £52 per annum. The pair are apparently quite valuable and whilst known are not particularly common.

David Deasey

Reserve Forces Day Council

The support the RFDC has given fundraising for the National Boer War Memorial has been invaluable, as has the side-effect of spreading the message about it.

The RFDC has now moved on towards doing similar work for

the centenary of the First World War in August when the combined naval and military Australian Expeditionary Force went into battle in the German Pacific in 1914 only a week after the Australian government joined Great Britain in declaring war against the Kaiser. As we know, nearly 30% of

early enlistments were by Boer War veteran soldiers and nurses.

The RFDC will continue to make their Descendants and Supporters medallions, and the War Bars for descendants of multi-war enlistees available, and pass the proceeds to the National Boer War Memorial project.

RFD Medallions and War Bar clasps still available

for Boer War veterans who also served in WWI and WWII

These bars may only be worn with the Boer War Descendant's Medallion

Applications to:

www.rfd.org.au/documents/BWM_Medallions/Claspapp.pdf

OR telephone RFD on 0403 160 750



Non-descendants "IN MEMORY" Medallions may be worn by all supporters of the National Boer War Memorial project to any Boer War related event.



For more information
and order forms

Reserve Forces Day website:
www.rfd.org.au/BWM_Fundraise

Unique – VC awarded though not serving in an Australian Unit

Are there living descendants of Australia's sixth BWVC?

James Rogers VC was born and schooled in Moama on the NSW side of the Murray River. When he was 13 his family moved to farm at Heywood, north of Portland in western Victoria and not far from the South Australia border.

At 25, in 1898, his urge to do something as well as being a farmer had him joining the local troop of Victorian Mounted Rifles. In August 1899 the Boer War broke out and Rogers quickly joined the 1st Victorian Mounted Infantry (VMI) that the colonial government had promptly offered for active service in South Africa.

His military career is an example of why it is so difficult to give exact figures about Australians in the Boer War (see David Deasey's article on page 9). Rogers' service was counted for the first time when he boarded the troopship *Medic* on 10 October 1899 as a Private of the VMI. It may have been counted anew when he was transferred to the Provincial Mounted Police as a corporal to serve in the Orange Free State. Instead of returning when his contract year was up he joined the South African Constabulary (SAC) as a sergeant.

Could he then have been counted as Australian, South African or British? Rogers was involved in the action

on 6 June 1901 when he rescued, under heavy rifle fire, first the troop commander, LT Dickinson, two other members of the troop (separately lifting each up behind him on his horse) and then their runaway horses. For this bravery he was awarded the VC. Did the researchers perhaps count this brave man again?

At Federation, 1 Jan 1901, the colonial



Lt James Rogers

Photo: Australian War Memorial

armies became Commonwealth of Australia troops. Rogers again volunteered and went back to South Africa as a lieutenant in the 6th Battalion, Commonwealth Horse.

Just 12 years later, in December 1914, he joined the AIF, was wounded at Gallipoli, repatriated and then returned in the Provost Corps. On discharge he continued farming in Victoria, then retired to Roseville in Sydney, dying in Concord Hospital in 1961.

If there are living descendants they have every reason to be proud of this consummate soldier.

Keith Smith

Further information about Rogers VC on the Boer War Memorial Website

www.bwm.org.au at http://bwm.org.au/site/James_Rogers.asp

and in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, at

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rogers-james-8257>

Royal Australian Mint gets it right

The Australians at War series is now being progressively released, beginning with a tribute to the Australian Light Horse (ALH). The Mint has carefully researched the ALH's beginnings and produced a Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) cupro-nickel 50c of 15.55 grams mounted on a card.

First coin in the series of three has on its reverse the forerunner to the ALH, the mounted soldiers sent at first from each colony, then after Federation from the Australian Commonwealth, to our nation's first overseas conflict, the Boer War 1899-1902.

Designed by Aaron Baggio, one of Australia's most prolific designers, the scene is a simple depiction of a mounted infantryman reining in his horse in response to seeing



or hearing something significant. The pose shows calm alertness of horse and rider. It is fairly similar to our National BW Memorial's second horseman, the one just being started by sculptor Louis Laumen now that the first one has gone to the foundry for casting.

Baggio's 50c trooper's horse stands on a bar showing in colour the ribbons of both the King's and Queen's South Africa medals.

Don't expect any of these coins to turn up in your change though, there are only 50,000 being minted, scarcely enough for avid collectors around the world.

Courtesy of

The Australasian Coin and Banknote

Vol 17 No 6 July 2014



Morning tea at Victoria Barracks

The NSW Boer War Committee held a very successful Morning Tea on 9 April at Victoria Barracks. 74 descendants and supporters attended on a day that was filled with sunshine and lots of laughter. Following morning tea a talk was held in the Museum on the role of Nurses in the Boer War, and in the crowd there were some descendants of the nurses who were thrilled to hear their ancestor quoted. A tour of Victoria Barracks with the Guides was also well attended, one Guide even dressed in Colonial costume. The Raffle was drawn and many winners were present much to their delight.

How many Australians ACTUALLY fought in South Africa 1899-1902

Part Two – Will we ever know?

Given that Murray actually contains 17,280 names or tours of duty, how many actually went?

If we add names from units which don't appear in Murray or are not correctly accounted for at least another 400 names need to be added to the list. Then there are the individuals who went with official units but who were never recorded. This would include those who went as servants to Special Service Officers of the rank of major or higher. So we would then add names such as Edwin Schofield, John Felix O'Connor and others.

Then there is the case of Lance Corporal George Bloy. He was a member of the second Victorian contingent commanded by Colonel

Tom Price. Yet several days before the departure the press reported that sadly George had been thrown from his horse and badly kicked. Later it reported his sad return from Melbourne to his country home to be commiserated by his friends. His name does not appear in Murray. However in October 1900 he is shown returning invalided from South Africa with a bad case of enteric fever. On checking he also appears in the medal roll of the 2nd Victorian Mounted Rifles. How did he get to South Africa? Did he pay his own way? We probably will never know.

These are not rare cases we could also mention Major Charles Myles Officer, the Victorian SSO who turns up only on the roll of the South African Mounted Irregular Forces as serving with the 3rd NSWIB. The list is numerous of these cases. So an educated guess would put the numbers of official tours of duty at near to 18,000.

Unfortunately Murray did not have access to the medal rolls and these have never been reconciled with the official lists. This of course does not take into account those who did multiple tours.

Recently one historian estimated that there were only 10,000 individuals actually involved in official contingents. True or false? Assuming that he was basing his estimate on Murray's own statistics of 16,465 then that makes a repeat rate of 40% by individuals. This at any casual glance at Murray seems far too high. A repeat rate of 10% which is more realistic would still leave us with a figure of close to 16,000 individuals going as part of official Australian contingents. Then of course there are those who took themselves to South Africa and joined non Australian units – but that is another story.

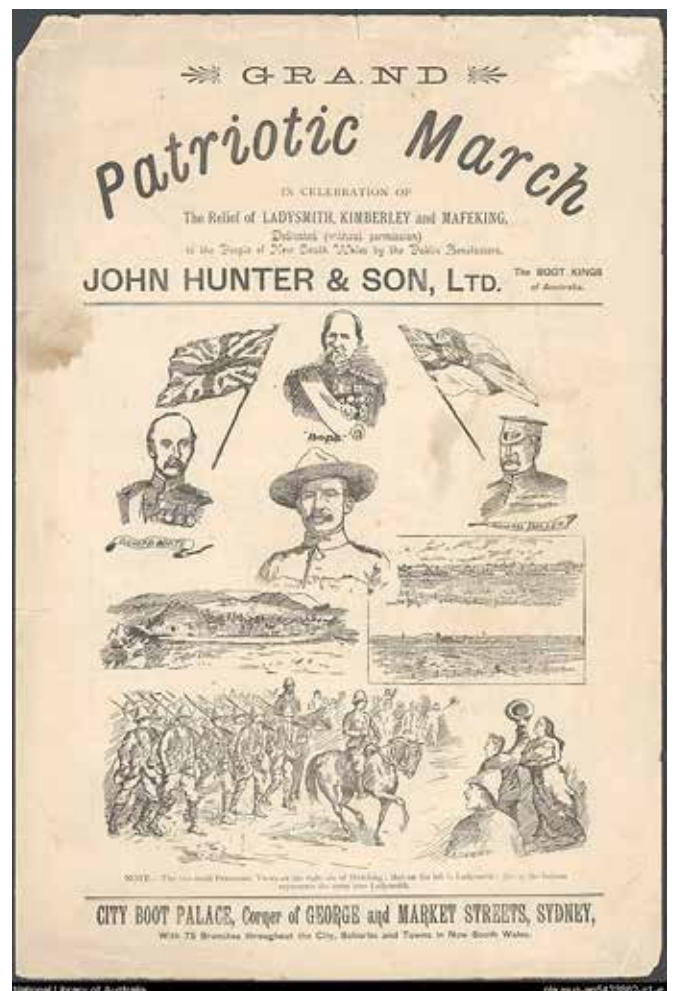
David Deasey

Piano music

Christina Whitely has sent us a wonderful article. Piano pieces

were written to commemorate the service of Australians during the Boer War. These pieces fell into four

basic categories: marches, drawing room music, songs and battle pieces. *More in our next issue.*





Sydney Grammar School was founded in 1854 by an Act of the NSW Parliament as a secular 'nursery' for the fledgling Sydney University. Although it remains a government school it retains much of this historical independence.

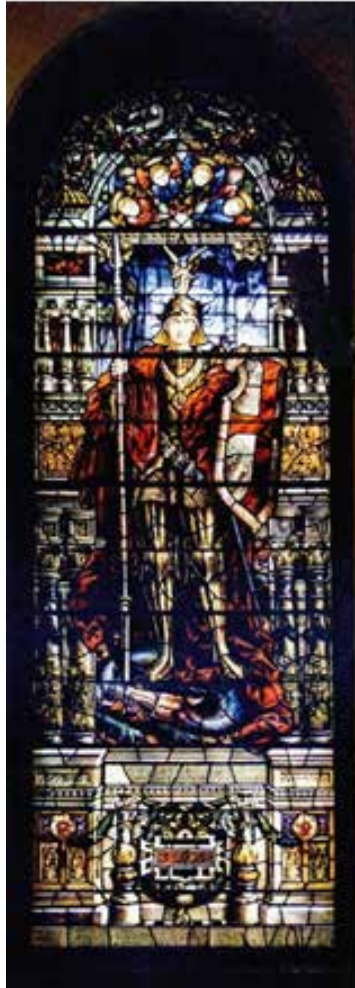
Sydneians and the Boer War

Part One

The military spirit at Sydney Grammar School had waned considerably up until the Boer War commenced, which had lapsed into an 'unpopular institution' and in need of 'resuscitation'. An attempt to resurrect the Sydney Grammar cadet corps cited the South African War as the impetus for a revival, by the editorial of the School's periodical *The Sydneian*.

The Sydneian thus encouraged Old Boy correspondents to write from their post in the War, inviting a contribution from Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Paterson, an old Grammar School boy and war correspondent, commissioned by the Sydney Morning Herald and the Melbourne Age. Unfortunately for the editors, he never actually found the time to write a piece exclusively for the School during his time in South Africa.

However, *The Sydneian* was lucky enough to receive a paper from



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of Images for Business

Lieutenant Keith Kinnaird Mackellar of the 1st Australian Horse, entitled *Bloemfontein at Last*. Mackellar reported on the (in his opinion an unfortunate) lack of action experienced by his division, claiming "our main regret was that we had not seen a shot fired and we may pray in our hearts that the Boers whom we saw in the distance would fire a couple of shots at us, for we had definite orders not to follow them". Lieutenant Mackellar, shortly after the publication of his letter, was commissioned to the 7th Dragoon Guards in Pretoria. Near there on the morning of 11 July 1900, he was shot "through the back of his head and fell dead without a groan."

Mackellar, a brother of the poet Dorothea Mackellar, had his remains reburied in Sydney over 100 years ago, after they were brought back from the Boer War. His body returned without ceremony in 1905, simply to ease the family's grief. Mackellar's parents paid 1000 pounds (£1000) to have his remains shipped to Sydney in a container labelled "Curios" to minimise the attention of customs officers and superstitious sailors. Keith Mackellar is also immortalised in a stained glass window in St James's Church in King Street, Sydney featuring the image of St George with Mackellar's young face.

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<http://www.sydgram.nsw.edu.au/>



<http://www.bwm.org.au/site/Donate.asp>

Lapel badge - a Horseman of Memorial's design

\$15 including postage

Order from Brian Walters at brian.walters@bwm.org.au

or by mail:

NSW Boer War Memorial Association Inc.,
Building 96, Victoria Barracks,
Paddington, NSW 2021



110TH ANNIVERSARY
BOER WAR
Sth Africa 1899 - 1902

From NSW

Late in 1900 Kipling produced a poem that related to the New South Wales Imperial Bushmen's operations around Lichtenberg in the West Transvaal



Rudyard Kipling and Banjo Paterson became firm friends and colleagues during the Boer War. They both produced material for the British Army's soldier's newspaper, *The Friend*. Paterson in particular travelled widely with the forward troops. Whether he was the one who recounted the incident to Kipling is not clear but late in 1900 Kipling produced a poem that related to the New South Wales Imperial Bushmen operations around Lichtenberg in the West Transvaal. The poem Lichtenberg is evocative and captures the mood of the Australians well.

Early in September 1900 the New South Wales Imperial Bushmen joined No2 column of Lieutenant-General Methuen's force. For four days from 9 September, the Bushman pushed down the Ottoshoop-Lichtenberg Road. Clashes with the Boers occurred at Wonderfontein on 10 and 11 September and the Manama (4 miles east of Lichtenberg) on 12 September. Lichtenberg itself was occupied on the 13th. The column clashed with General Lemmer's commando in the Leeupan district on 20 and 21 September before returning to Lichtenberg. 27 September saw a significant clash as the Australians attempted to intercept a Boer convoy. The following day, the 28th, was when the most significant and controversial incident occurred. On that day a patrol of Australians searching for the escaped convoy located it in the vicinity of a group of farm buildings at Riet Kuil about 10 miles to the south of Lichtenberg. These men were mainly from 'E' and 'F' companies of the regiment. What happened is still disputed. Several Australians reported seeing a white flag and, believing that the Boers wished

Lichtenberg

*Smells are surer than sounds or sights
To make your heart-strings crack
They start those awful voices o' nights
That whisper, "Old man, come back!"
That must be why the big things pass
And the little things remain,
Like the smell of the wattle by Lichtenberg,
Riding in, in the rain.*

*There was some silly fire on the flank
And the small wet drizzling down –
There were the sold-out shops and the bank
And the wet, wide-open town;
And we were doing escort-duty
To somebody's baggage-train,
And I smelt wattle by Lichtenberg –
Riding in, in the rain.*

*It was all Australia to me –
All I had found or missed:
Every face I was crazy to see,
And every woman I'd kissed:
All that I should n't ha' done, God knows!
(As He knows I'll do it again),
That smell of the wattle round Lichtenberg,
Riding in, in the rain!*

*And I saw Sydney the same as ever,
The picnics and brass-bands;
And my little homestead on Hunter River
And my new vines joining hands.
It all came over me in one act
Quick as a shot through the brain –
With the smell of the wattle round Lichtenberg,
Riding in, in the rain.*

*I have forgotten a hundred fights,
But one I shall not forget –
With the raindrops bunging up my sights
And my eyes bunged up with wet;
And through the crack and the stink of the cordite
(Ah Christ! My country again!)
The smell of the wattle by Lichtenberg,
Riding in, in the rain!*

to surrender, closed in. It is believed that approximately 200 Boers were present. Some commentators believe that the Boers thought they were facing a superior force but realising the small size of the Australians pulled the white flag down. The engagement started at a range of 15 metres Private George Woods states that when they were close to the Boers, the Boers suddenly picked up their weapons and began firing. The burst of fire left Australians critically wounded. Sgt H Tebbutt 'E' company was hit and taken prisoner. His statement shows that the Boers were using 450/577 Martinis as well as Mausers. Other Australians reported the use of soft nose or explosive bullets. Ultimately eleven Australians were wounded, nine of them seriously, and eventually three would die of their wounds. One of these was Private Alick Aberline, shot in the groin with a Martini Henry. Hospitalised in Lichtenberg, Aberline would die on 4 October. He was just 20 years of age. Whilst there, he would be nursed by a Boer nurse, Edith Matthews (her brother was away fighting in a commando). In November after his death she took the opportunity to write a long letter to Aberline's mother in Australia. When Robert Wallace was writing his book on *The Australians at War*, he was in contact with Edith's sister who recorded that Aberline's death not only deeply affected her sister but the whole family.

"I cannot remember the lad's name, it has slipped my memory. I am nearing 82, but I remember the occasion as if it were yesterday. I have never seen Edith so upset. She truly mourned his loss. For many years we put flowers on the three graves of the Australians."

Private James Collins noted in a letter home that he was now looking after Aberline's dog and he would try to bring it home.



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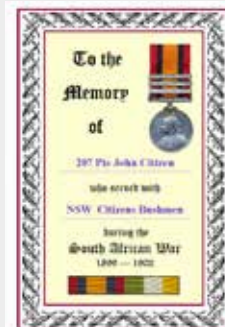
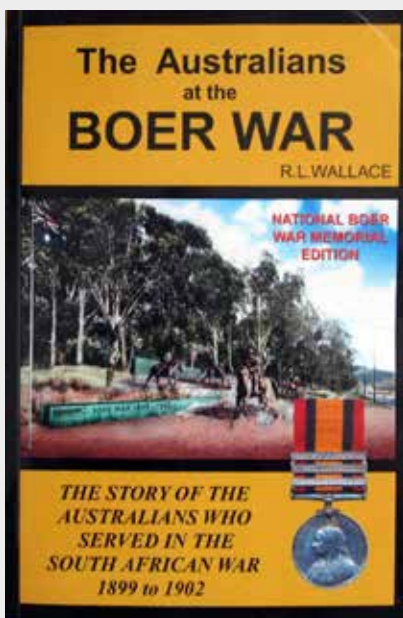
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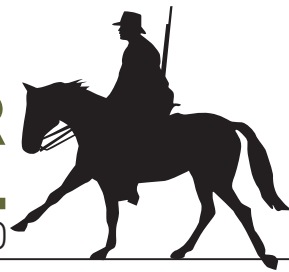
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