

Friends of Soldiers Walk Inc: Newsletter

Issue 13

July 2004



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3 August: Launch of The Soldiers Memorial Avenue Management Plan

On **Tuesday 3 August**, the Lord Mayor Rob Valentine will officially launch the Management Plan for the Soldier Memorial Avenue recently endorsed by Council. The launch will take place at **12:30 near the Aquatic Centre**. The launch will involve a ceremonial opening of the plinths under the trees near the Boer War memorial. These plinths contain the surviving plaques removed sometime in the 1980s.

It is believed about 200 plaques survive in the plinths and these will be available for inspection on the day. An exhibition will be arranged in the near future. All are welcome and encouraged to attend to demonstrate what the Avenue still means to families. A full list of the nameplates will be published in the next issue. The day will also mark the 86th anniversary of the planting of the Avenue.

Hobart City Council Budget

The Hobart City Council recently endorsed its budget for the 2004-2005 financial year and it includes an allocation of \$20,000 per annum for tree propagation, clearing and maintenance along the Avenue. This is significant as it means that for the first time in decades the Avenue once again gets a specific allocation in the HCC Budget. It is also a clear sign of commitment by the Council to future of the Avenue.

Sunday 1 August: Next Working Bee

Sunday 1 August is our next working bee. Arrangements will be as always: meeting at the carpark at the northern end of the TCA at 10am. Work will focus on the central section of the Avenue and on removing understorey plants within the Avenue footprint. We will also be working to create a showpiece section of the Avenue.

The working program for this spring will be:

September 19th, October 17th and November 7th so mark out these dates on your calendars.

Monday 16 August : Annual General Meeting and Quiz Night

Our AGM will be held at **7:30pm on Monday 16 August at Legacy House** Macquarie Street. Legacy House is next door to the Astor Grill (cnr Victoria St and Macquarie St) and just down Macquarie St from St Josephs (cnr Harrington and Macquarie St). The early hour is so we can get through the AGM business and get on with the business of the QUIZ Night at 8pm. See page 6 for details of the business of the AGM.

Quiz night entry is \$10 which gives you tea coffee and a light supper. Premium entry at \$15 also gives two free drink tokens for those wanting an alcoholic beverage. We cannot directly sell alcohol due to licensing restrictions on the venue. Special arrangements will be made for those who find two drinks insufficient! The questions will be somewhat gentler this year with all teams assured of a good score. There will be a couple of obligatory Soldiers Walk questions, **the answers to which are in this issue**. We will be donating 15% of profits to Legacy for the use of their premises.

Please contact by phone or email by August 16th so we can arrange catering. Make a table, bring some friends.

Number Plates

In early July a number of committee members, organised by Mike Wilkie, began putting more durable number labels by all trees. These are highly visible, will make the trees easier to find and also indicate to the casual passer-by just how extensive the Avenue is.

Mike Wilkie has taken the leading hand in this designing the labels, making and testing a simple prototype and then producing the hundreds required. The numbers have been stencilled onto rectangular sections of wet area panel. Two large panels used to make these labels, were donated by Stephen Hardman for the Laminex Group and were valued at over \$170 retail. Mike then screwed these labels to sections of heavy garden stake donated by Michael Castle of Buckland. Michael donated 120 stakes. These number plates are making a difference already.

Orientation program

Work will begin soon on relining the main sewer pipe to Self's Point treatment works. A header pipe runs up from the main pipe (which runs along the Domain by the Tasman highway) to the middle of the Avenue near tree #172. The work will involve quite a bit of digging and messing about but the work will be carried out under strict guidelines in relation to minimal parking, rehabilitation of the site and fencing around all trees within the work area. The relining will involve 'squeezing' a polyethylene pipe inner sleeve into the existing pipe. The sections will be joined in the southern TCA car park and then slid down the hill into the exposed pipe running up the slope to the centre of the Avenue. Your committee will be keeping a close eye on things.

As part of the Management Plan all persons working within the Avenue footprint are required to undertake an orientation program so they understand just what and why the Avenue is. The first group of HCC and Collex workers received their orientation last week.



The program was well received and each participant was assigned a tree to find and provided with information about that soldier.

William Douglas Leitch

This is a name that sounds familiar to many and certainly resonates with football followers as the William Leitch medal is awarded to the best and fairest in the Tasmanian Football League grand final (now TSFL). William Leitch enlisted in May 1915 and served on Gallipoli and in France and though wounded on a number of occasions survived the war itself. He was to die of Spanish influenza in May 1919 in England. His was probably one of the last trees on the Avenue to be dedicated with most trees planted and dedicated in August 1918 (380) and February 1919. No photographs have yet come to light though there are many photographs of his father. The actual position of the tree is somewhat of a mystery: his name does not appear on the Council lists from the major plantings nor on the map from the 1930s. As such William's tree is one of the handful of unknowns. The description provided narrows the likely position down to #199, marked on the 1930s map as "unclear". This has yet to be confirmed as there are some other names needing allocation to trees.

The following information comes from James Gibson of Sydney.

William Douglas Leitch was the eldest son of William Douglas Leitch (of William Leitch Medal fame) and Jane Leitch (nee Littlejohn). He was born on 16th Feb 1885 in Hobart. He was the second of twelve children, the eldest being Elsie May Leitch, who married Louis Alexander McKay. During the course of World War I, Elsie and others in the family received correspondence from William Junior, known as *Will*. [Italics used for *Will* to avoid confusion] Some of the letters to Elsie are now in the possession of one of Elsie's daughters, Mrs Bess Reid, my mother-in law, now of Sydney. The letters which have survived are from Cairo, "Gallipoli Fighting Line" and "Somewhere in France". They are mainly written in pencil and are on a variety of scraps of paper including the inside of an envelope. Following his death in 1919, *Will* Leitch's service to his country was commemorated by his inclusion in the Soldiers' Memorial Avenue of trees on the Hobart Domain.

Bess has often spoken of her uncle *Will* and his tree on the Domain. Only recently I obtained his War Service Record from the National Archives and was able to piece together his exploits with the assistance of C.E.W. Bean's many volumes on the history of World War I. At this stage, unfortunately, we do not have a photograph of *Will*, but I'm still looking!

Will enlisted at Claremont on 25th May 1915 and joined the 12th Battalion, 6th reinforcements. *Will* was aged thirty at this time and had previously served two years with the Royal Australian Engineers. He was a mechanical engineer and was unmarried. He had served his apprenticeship for five years with R. Kennedy of Hobart and was working with Jones & Co at the time of his enlistment. He embarked on 15th June 1915, travelling to Adelaide and leaving Australia on H.M.A.T. A.30 "Borda" on 23rd June 1915, arriving in Cairo on 26th July 1915. The ship may also have stopped in W.A. as the 12th Battalion comprised men from Tasmania (about 50%), South Australia and Western Australia (together 50%).

Will was "taken on strength" at Gallipoli on 6th Aug 1915, the day the Allied attack on Lone Pine was launched as a "demonstration" or diversion in the greater plan of the August offensive on the Gallipoli peninsula. The Lone Pine demonstration cost the Australians over 2000 men, with 4 Officers and 164 O.R.s lost from the 12th Battalion. The majority were lost in the sheer hand-to-hand fighting (i.e. bombing) which marked the Lone Pine fighting (the Turks lost nearly 7000 men). *Will*'s battalion was entrenched at Lone Pine where he remained unscathed until succumbing to 'flu and dysentery (as did many of the troops), reporting sick to the 39th Field Ambulance on 26th Sep 1915. He moved to a casualty station on the 29th and was transferred to the hospital ship *Glenart Castle* on the 30th. He was dispatched to Alexandria, Egypt, on 4th Oct 1915 where he later developed appendicitis. One can imagine the concerns of the family when his father was required to write as follows:

Nov 30th [1915]
6 Arthur Street
Hobart

The Officer in Charge
Sir

I would thank you for information of the whereabouts and welfare of my son 2255 Private WD Leitch 6th Reinforcements 12th Battalion, 3rd Inf Brigade AIF. We received a letter from him date Oct 6th informing us he was ill on a hospital ship but he did not know his destination. and did not give the name of ship. That is eight weeks ago and we have heard nothing since nor has his name appeared in any official list which has been published

Yrs ffully
W^m Leitch

The reply from the Base Records Office at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne of 9th Dec 1915 stated that no official report had been received concerning *Will* but that "inquiries were to be instituted".

He recuperated at the 1st Australian General Hospital at Heliopolis and was discharged to duty on 23rd Dec 1915, spending Christmas at Shezireh before rejoining his unit at Tel-el-Kebir on 19th Jan 1916. All the Australian forces had, of course, been withdrawn successfully from Gallipoli by this time.

They later sailed for France to join the fray there, disembarking at Marseilles on 5th April 1916. *Will* was part of the deadly action on the Somme at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm. The 12th Battalion fought in the taking of Pozieres in July 1916 where the Battalion lost 14 officers and 407 other ranks, and again at Mouquet Farm in August where they lost a further 4 officers and 238 other ranks. A battalion comprised approximately 1000 soldiers so these were significant casualties. During this time *Will* was promoted to Lance Corporal. The 6th Brigade (21st to 24th Battalions) relieved the 3rd Brigade (9th to 12th Battalions) in the late afternoon and night of 22nd August. The battles at this time had been marked with a great deal of aeroplane activity, with the Allies having up to fifty machines overhead at times. Several German planes, it appeared, had observed the relief process on this particular day and as a result the whole area from Mouquet Farm to Pozieres was subjected to an intense barrage of shrapnel and high-explosive, lasting from 6 p.m. till midnight. The last platoon of the 12th Battalion was not relieved until dawn. The young officer in charge of this platoon, Lieut. E.L.A. Butler, [Tree#132] a well-loved Tasmanian cricketer, was mortally wounded in this barrage and several of his men hit.

At some time between 19th and 22nd Aug *Will* received a gun shot wound to his right wrist. He was not alone, of course, in being wounded in this particular action. The detailed losses from the 12th Battalion for Mouquet Farm were: 42 O.R.s killed, 1 officer and 48 O.R.s missing, and 3 officers and 148 O.R.s wounded. *Will* convalesced in Etaples, during which time he appeared to have been carrying out some sort of non-active duty as he was promoted to Acting Corporal on 18th Sept 1916, but reverted to Lance Corporal prior to his return to his unit on 24th Nov 1916.

Will's battalion was settling in for a winter on the Somme. The battlefield now resembled an endless brown wilderness of mud. Often trenches became invisible until within a few metres, and often men wandered into an enemy trench. Such was the case on 11th Dec 1916 when a party of 14 men carrying up morning rations for the 12th Battalion found themselves on the enemy's parapet, dropped the rations and rushed back to the Australian lines with the loss of four lives. During the long hard winter, the I Anzac Corps (of which the 12th Battalion was a part) was the only corps which had been called upon to put all its divisions into the line and hold twice the normal length of front. All the men knew a great offensive was imminent, and that they would be used as offensive troops – they vaguely expected “another battle like Pozieres and then the end of the war”. However, late in February 1917, it was discovered that the Germans were strategically retiring. The Allies steadily advanced during March and were preparing for a major British offensive on Arras set for April 8th. However, a number of “Outpost Villages” separated the right flank from the Hindenburg Line. The 12th Battalion was to attack at Boursies on 8th Apr. The action around this village was a feint to cover the more important target of Hermies. It developed, however, into a “stubborn twenty-six hours’ fight”, resulting in great loss to the 10th and 12th Battalions. The attack that followed on Hermies was successful but at great cost as over one in three Australians were lost. In the Boursies action, *Will* was fighting alongside Captain J.E. Newland (later Lt. Col.) and Sgt J.W. Whittle, both of the 12th Battalion. These two leaders, for their gallantry in this fight and during action on April 15th were both awarded the Victoria Cross.



Tree for Pte George Wood in 1919, details on the name board are clearly visible. Thanks to J Trethewey. The exact location of Will Leitch's tree is unknown

Will was wounded on 8th Apr 1917 when he received a severe gunshot wound to his left leg resulting in the fracture of his tibia and fibula. He was sent to England on the HS “*Aberdonian*” from Rouen on 24th Apr 1917, convalescing in a number of different centres at Lewisham, Weymouth, Hurdcott and Deverill. During this time in England he met Emma Elizabeth Georgina Thane.

They were married on 20th Sep 1917. They were to later have a daughter Elsie, undoubtedly named after *Will's* sister Elsie.

Will rejoined his Battalion on 5th Dec 1917 to spend another winter at the front, east of Amiens. Due to his left leg injury, *Will* was probably favouring his right leg and accidentally injured his right ankle with a severe sprain on 4th Mar 1918, and was again dispatched to England on 24th Mar 1918. Later in 1918, following a course of instruction with the Australian Army Ordnance Corps, *Will* was promoted to Corporal at Red Barracks, Woolwich, on 4th Sep 1918. He became an inspector of the Ordnance Mechanical Section and returned to field duty on 24th Sep 1918, and was attached to the 17th Ordnance Mechanical Workshop near Bourlogne. Following the armistice he again reported sick to hospital in Rouen on 11th Dec 1918, having problems with the old wound to his left leg. He returned to England, arriving at Weymouth on 23rd Dec 1918.

Having survived all this active duty and the raging influenza pandemic *Will* unfortunately was to “die of disease” as the Army Office described it. He was admitted to the 3rd Australian

Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford and died of pulmonary tuberculosis the following day on 4th May 1919. He was buried at the Australian Military Burial Ground at Harefield (Grave No: 105) on 7th May 1919. A letter to his father from the officer in charge of base records describes the occasion:

“.....He was buried in Australian Military Burial Ground, Harefield, separate single grave in Virgin Soil, Consecrated ground.

The late soldier was accorded a full military funeral, Firing Party, Bugler, and Pallbearers being in attendance. The coffin (of good elm with brass fittings) was draped with the Australian flag and conveyed to the graveside surmounted by several wreaths.... The grave will be turfed and an oak cross erected.

The utmost care and attention is being devoted to the graves of our fallen soldiers, and photographs are being taken as soon as possible for transmission to next-of-kin.”

And now to the Soldiers' Walk: I wonder was *Will* Leitch one of the last to be commemorated on the Walk, given that he died at a much later date? I note the Second Planting Day on Saturday 15th Feb 1919.... Was this the last official planting? It appears from the Governor's speech in the last newsletter that there were about 50 more trees to complete the scheme at that time “at the Government House end of the avenue”. This seems to concur with my mother-in-law Bess Reid's memory of the area. In my recent conversations with her she talks of her childhood recollections:

“ I recall being taken, as a child, to the football at what we referred to as “The Top Cricket Ground”. This is today the T.C.A. Ground. As the grand-daughter of Tasmanian football “guru” William Douglas Leitch (William Leitch Medal) I was a frequent visitor to the football with my family. We particularly followed the fortunes of New Town Club, as Alan

Leitch, younger brother of *Will* (jnr), was a prominent player and went on to Captain the side. My father used to park his car directly outside the ground. My sister and I would escort my mother Elsie, *Will*'s older sister, to "Will's Tree". (Prior to the war, *Will* played football for the North Hobart club, not with the same flair that his younger brother Alan was later to demonstrate with the New Town club, but no doubt sufficiently boldly to sustain the broken nose that was noted as a distinguishing feature when he enlisted.)

I remember the tree being some distance down towards the Cenotaph on the left-hand side (as viewed from the T.C.A. Ground) of the unmade road. I recall the tree, about five to six feet high, being enclosed by a wooden picket fence. A small metal plaque used to hang from the trunk by a chain. We also visited the tree to lay flowers on Anzac Day and Armistice Day, when my sister and I used to pick from the garden our own little bunches of flowers. My mother became increasingly infirm and our visits to the tree became less frequent over the late 1920s and early 30s. Unfortunately, I did not visit the tree in later years, so I was not aware of its condition or whether the plaque had been removed.

I recall talk of the war years when I was older; plans were underway for *Will*'s repatriation to Australia until the family were notified of his death. To my knowledge his wife and child did not ever visit Australia. His father William was very active in the welfare of dependants of soldiers who did not return, and in repatriation generally. I note with interest the Jones & Co involvement in the working bee in 1918 for the "Soldiers' Walk", as William Leitch, snr was the General Manager there."

In Newsletter No 5, I note that Tree 3147 was for Pte Walter Alfred Hurst, 12th Battalion, of 12 Arthur St, and that his cousin Dvr Edward Sweeney of 10 Arthur St also died. One can only imagine the grief in the street as *William* Douglas Leitch, also of 12th Battalion, and of 6 Arthur St had also died.** William Leitch not only lost his son *Will*, but his two sons-in law who also went to the War.

Will's sister Dorothy, known as Dora, married William George Drew, also known as Will. He is also on the Soldiers' Walk: 2nd Lt William George Drew, MM, Reg No 4036, 47th Battalion (transferred from the original 15th), K.I.A. near Flers, 24th Jan 1917, buried 277 Bulls Road Cemetery, Flers, France. [Tree#193]. Another sister, Edith Isobel, known as Edie, married Paul Berthon Jones of Sydney. He enlisted at Bondi, but disappeared mysteriously at sea on his way to Egypt, described on the AWM Roll of Honour as "lost overboard from Troopship Kanowna": Pte Paul Berthon Jones, Reg No 1735, 'died at sea' 12th July 1915, 41 Chatby Memorial, Alexandria, Egypt. Edie gave birth to their son on 22nd Nov 1915; she named him Paul Berthon Jones. A third sister of *Will*'s, Elvira Jean, known as Elvie, married Kenneth John Colbourn, following the war, on 4th Oct 1920. Ken enlisted 15th Feb 1915, Reg No 3754, 4th Coy, Australian Army Service Corps, returning to Australia on 27th March 1919.

James Gibson

**Cpt A E Palfreyman (Issue#12) lived over the road in 'Hardcastle' on the corner of Arthur and Edwards St, and five men from Mary St (including the Hall brothers featured in Issue#4), which intersects Arthur St between Nos 10 and 12, also have trees. At least 3 also came from Little Arthur St, which also comes to this intersection.

Infantry Units represented on the Avenue

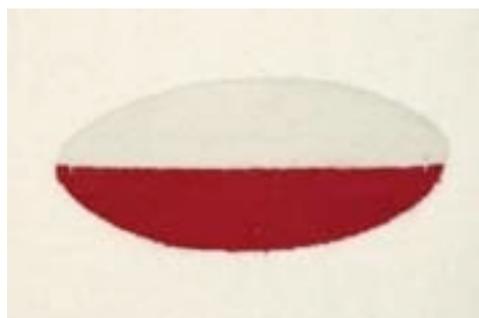
385 trees commemorate infantrymen, the classic footslogger, arguably enduring the worst the war had to offer and suffering the highest casualty rates. Casualties per 100 of nominal strength reached 244 for infantry compared with 75 for field ambulances.



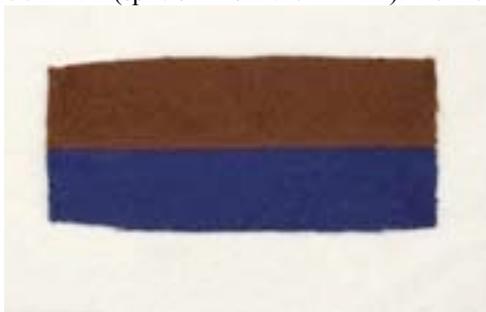
141 trees commemorate men of the 12th Bn, part of the 1st Division and formed in 1914. Tasmania provided half of the battalion with the balance from South Australia (including my uncle, Will Jacobs #707) and Western Australia. Despite continued reinforcements from other states. The 12th Bn became known as a 'Tasmanian' battalion. By war's end the 12th Bn had suffered total battle casualties of 3582, more than three times the original strength of about 1100 men. These were the second highest casualties of the 12 battalions in the 1st Division overall and the highest for this division in France. The resting rectangle indicates the 1st Division.

The only truly Tasmanian battalion was the 40th Bn formed in 1916 as part of the 3rd Division. 52 men of the 40th Bn are commemorated on the Avenue. The battalion suffered 2165 battle casualties (with 475 deaths in action, from wounds, disease or other causes). It fought in France from November 1916 onwards and its casualty rate was the highest in the 3rd Division. The oval shape was common to all 3rd Division units.

The colour patches served a practical purpose as they allowed instant recognition of unit in the midst of a noisy and confusing battlefield. At the pointy end and unit boundaries, men could work out relative positions quickly and have some sense of unit organisation. Shape indicated division, the colours the brigade in a division and battalion in a brigade. Unit associations used these colour patches as their logos; the covers of unit histories used the colours and/or featured the patch on the cover. A stake still stands next to the tree of Pte Charles QW Forster painted white and light blue indicating his service in the 12th Bn.



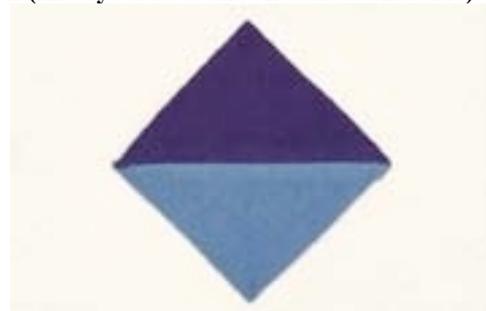
The other Battalions represented with a Tasmanian flavour are the 15th Bn with Queensland (23 men), the 26th Bn also with Queensland (49 men) and two ‘pup battalions’ the 47th Bn (formed by splitting the 15th Bn in Egypt in early 1916) and the 52nd Bn (split off from the 12th Bn). 10 men from the 47th Bn and 41 from the 52nd Bn are commemorated.



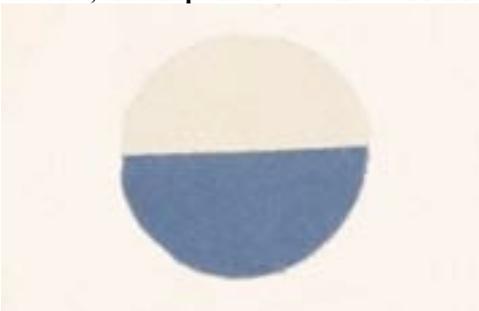
15th Bn (Always true to the chocolate and blue)



47th Bn (same colours, the shape indicates the 5th Division).



26th Bn (dark blue over light blue; diamond for the 2nd Division) 52nd Bn (same colours as the 12th Bn, 5th Div shape)



These battalions account for 264 of the men commemorated on the Avenue; 121 fell with other battalions. 6 were with Pioneer Battalions; 4 with New Zealand infantry units and 3 with British infantry. The balance comes from Australian infantry units: 34 of them. The Avenue thus commemorates a surprising number of different units: Tasmanian men enlisted in other States or were assigned to units not associated or explicitly linked by recruitment to Tasmania as men were needed and drafts need to be filled. As the war progressed this became more common and the practice of assigning reinforcements to units during their training stopped; they all became General Service Reinforcements. Thus instead of files being marked *TOS (transferred overseas) (date) 12th Bn 9th Reinforcements*, they are listed as *GSR*.

Business of the AGM

The business of the Annual General Meeting, as required under the constitution, will be:

- (a) to confirm the minutes of the general meeting held in March;
- (b) to receive from the committee and auditor of the Association reports on the transactions of the Association during the last preceding financial year;
- (c) to elect the officers of the Association and the ordinary committee members;
- (d) to appoint the auditor and determine his or her remuneration; and
- (e) to consider proposed rule changes as circulated to members.

Note that no rule changes are proposed.

A big thanks to Duncan Kerr’s office for photocopying.

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