‘He belonged to Wagga’: The Great War, the AIF and returned soldiers in an Australian country town

Ian Hodges BA (Asian Studies) Hons., MA (Asian Studies)

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I declare that this thesis is my original work except where due acknowledgement has been made.

Ian Hodges
15 February 2017
Acknowledgments

This thesis is my mother’s legacy. Jan Hodges, daughter of a Light Horseman and a milliner, who was widowed too young and endured much, was a remarkable women and a model of gentle integrity. That she never knew of this project is a source of deep regret, but her influence lives on every page.

Of the many debts I have accrued in writing this thesis none is greater than that to Bill Gammage. Bill is from Wagga. When I approached him for advice on whether a study of the district’s returned men was a likely proposition, he generously offered to supervise. He has shared his knowledge of Wagga, the First World War and the AIF, as well as his feel for language, never rushing me and assuring me that being a slow writer is not the worst sin. His guidance and insightful comments have been invaluable.

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records available and allowing me access on days when the Archive was closed to the public.

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During the early stages of research I spent months in Wagga’s Charles Sturt University Regional Archive (CSURA). It is a great privilege to be able to delve deeply into an archival collection and I owe thanks to Jillian Kohlhagen and Paul O’Donnell for sharing their knowledge of the records and of the district. Don Boadle offered early advice on Wagga’s history and on the archives, giving me the confidence that my proposed topic was indeed worth pursuing.

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Abstract

This thesis follows the First World War generation from the Wagga Wagga district in southern New South Wales through the late nineteenth century to the mid-1930s. The environment in which Wagga’s soldiers grew up, their months or years in the army and their lives as returned men touch on the war’s most enduring themes.

Wagga’s volunteers were the country men of AIF lore. Yet many earned their living in the same professions and occupations as city dwellers. While those who laboured on farms or worked as tradesmen might have been the bush men described by contemporaries like Charles Bean, a significant proportion of Wagga’s soldiers were not. Many of the local men who survived the war were profoundly affected. Some never recovered. But the evidence also indicates the breadth of returned soldiers’ involvement in the community. As well as the unemployed, the destitute, those who needed constant care and those who turned to crime, there were veterans who had jobs and families and managed to live what could be considered normal lives.

Local war veterans who succeeded in business or politics, or who were active in community organisations, feature heavily in Wagga’s civic record, but most of the district’s returned men appear only fleetingly. While little of their personal and family lives can be gleaned from these sources, this absence is balanced by the often detailed and sometimes first-hand accounts of individuals’ circumstances in Repatriation Department files. Although these voluminous records are becoming better known they have not previously been used to inform an in-depth study of a single locale’s returned soldiers.

The Government and civic records on Wagga combine to reveal the nuances that underlie the broader national story of the war and the AIF. On many important themes the district’s example suggests both the truth behind commonly accepted views and the extent to which they obscure a more complex reality.
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New South Wales showing Wagga Wagga and the Murrumbidgee
The Wagga Wagga district
Fitzmaurice Street runs from the bridge over the lagoon from the end of Baylis Street. Map courtesy of CSUWA.
Note on Sources

This thesis draws on diverse range of local, state and national records, many from collections that to date have been little used by students of rural Australia and the First World War.

Wagga’s newspapers, particularly the *Advertiser* which was syndicated with Reuters, are a vital source for understanding both life in a rural community and what people knew about the district and the world. They provide context and remind readers that however significant the war’s impact, it was never the only subject of news. The Wagga press also provides an invaluable record of the meetings and activities of local entities – patriotic funds, the comforts fund, the War Service Committee and its many sub-committees – established during the war, disbanded once it was over and for which records no longer exist.

In Wagga, the Charles Sturt Regional University Archive holds a significant collection of state and regional records on the Riverina from the earliest period of European settlement to the present day. CSURA’s collection offers deep insight into Wagga’s social, political and economic life, and demonstrates the important role regional sources can play in furthering our understanding of the Great War’s impact on Australia. I left none of the collections covering the decades described in this thesis unexamined. Most proved a rich source of material on the war years and post-war years. Some were disappointing. The local Red Cross records for example appear promising but are far more concerned with the Second World War than the First. While the war and returned soldiers feature heavily in some personal papers and in the records of other important local institutions, with the exception of the Legacy Club papers, none of the regional collections specifically concerns these subjects. Returned soldiers appear in CSURA’s files mostly outside the context of their war service, making the extent of their participation in the community’s day-to-day life clear.

Government records are generally the most reliable source of biographical information. For veterans of the First World War, the Repatriation Department files are the most comprehensive. Comprising pension, medical and hospital records, they bare on two of peoples’ most pressing concerns, health and income. They have been used, often in small numbers, in several important studies of war damaged veterans, in at least one history of a battle and its aftermath and in studies of soldier settlers. To date, they have
never been used in telling the story of the war’s impact on a single locale over decades. Their value to any study of returned soldiers is obvious, particularly where medical issues are the focus, but also for works of social or labour history.

As they concern only those who entered the repatriation system, the Repatriation Department files do not represent the entirety of the returned soldiers’ experience. The veterans most in need of help, who had the most frequent contact with the department, generated both the thickest files and often those most revealing of people’s personal lives. Many offer a rare insight into the domestic sphere. In other repatriation files lengthy gaps indicate periods when their subjects sought no assistance, usually because they recovered their health in the years after the war or because wounds or other conditions that had been bearable became painful or troublesome in middle or old age. The biggest Repatriation Department files include the most compelling material, those made up of fewer papers tell a different but equally important story.

It is difficult to think of any First World War history that has not drawn on the AIF service dossiers. Mostly concerning only the years that their subjects were in the AIF, some include correspondence written after, sometimes long after the war. They are a record of a man’s enlistment and provide the details of his movements and postings, citations for decorations, the dates and places where he was wounded, the hospitals he stayed in, and the date of his discharge from the service or the details of his death if they were available. For more specific details on battles a soldier might have been in, when and where his unit was resting, training, in support or in the line, the AIF unit diaries and post-war unit histories are a valuable resource. If he was not wounded, killed or decorated neither service records nor unit diaries can be relied upon to confirm an individual’s participation in a particular battle.

The other significant government records on returned soldiers are the state Lands Department soldier settlement files. For the settlements in the Wagga district, these files are held in CSURA’s collection. They are a valuable record of individual soldier settlers’ circumstances and, like the Repatriation Department files can include material on a settler’s domestic life and financial circumstances, but they also refer to settler’s stock, the work done on their holding, the weather and climate, natural disasters and how they were regarded by government inspectors. Used in conjunction with the Wagga Experiment Farm records and the Repatriation Department files they tell us
much about the services that were provided to soldier settlers and about how these men fared on the estates outside Wagga.
Prologue

On an early December morning in 1829 Captain Charles Sturt and his party of explorers became the first Europeans to see the riverine country where the town of Wagga Wagga later grew. Sturt was an officer in the 39th Regiment, and a war veteran. Long before anyone imagined that a settlement of some significance would take root on the ground over which he travelled, the site knew the tread of a soldier’s foot.

Over the next seven decades the area’s indigenous people were dispossessed of their ancestral lands and Wagga grew from sheep run, to settlement, to village, to town. As Europeans settled in ever increasing numbers, other war veterans walked this ground. John Crummy, a warder at Wagga Gaol, who lived in Wagga between the late 1860s and the end of the nineteenth century, had fought in the Crimea, as had another man whom Crummy must have known, police sergeant Joseph Vizzard. Vizzard lived in Wagga from 1887 until 1890 and was known in town as ‘an old military man’. John McGrath, an Irishman and a tailor in Wagga for more than three decades, served with the British Army during the Maori Wars in New Zealand, and Edwin Boswell had served in India. John Mansfield enlisted in the AIF in November 1915, 33 years after having served with the British at Tel el Kebir in Egypt in 1882, and more than a decade after fighting in South Africa.

Before the mid-1880s war veterans in the Australian colonies had mostly served in the British Army or Navy, but in March 1885 eight men of Wagga’s recently formed local volunteer force, G Company of the 1st Infantry Regiment, joined the New South Wales contingent to the Sudan. They arrived as the campaign was nearing its end and after just a few weeks the New South Welshmen embarked for home, reaching Sydney in June and becoming the first soldiers to have served Britain in the uniform of an Australian colony.

While the contingent was still on its homeward voyage, The Wagga Wagga Advertiser ran an article arguing that returning Sudan volunteers must not find themselves without

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1 The correct name for the town is Wagga Wagga, but it is generally known as Wagga. This thesis uses both terms but for the most part refers to it as ‘Wagga’.
2 S. Morris, Biographical Index of Wagga, 2002, Charles Sturt University Regional Archive (CSURA) RW2495, p. 1495. See also Crummy’s obituary in Daily Advertiser, 21 October 1919.
3 S. Morris, 2002, CSURA RW2495, np. The chapter of the Biographical Index covering surnames beginning with Mc and variations thereof does not include page numbers but is organised alphabetically. Edwin Boswell appears on p. 134.
4 Sydney Morning Herald, 20 September 1917.
work, having given up their jobs to fight for the British Empire. Urging large employers to take on a couple of extra men, the paper suggested they consider the additional salary cost akin to a ‘patriotic fund’ subscription. For the first time Wagga’s residents were asked to weigh up the promises made to wartime volunteers against the practical and longer-term issues associated with honouring those undertakings.5

Too few local men were involved in the Sudan for the issue to linger. The soldiers’ service, rather than their ability to take up the jobs they left behind, lived longer in Wagga’s memory, and on the evening of 8 July 1885 they were given a rousing public welcome. Somewhere around 200 people filled the Freemason’s Hall to greet the Sudan volunteers. G Company formed a guard of honour, the mayor offered a toast and 20 year old Corporal Alfred Bennett, who had just taken an important early step in what became an illustrious military career, spoke on behalf of the veterans. Dancing continued until five o’clock the next morning.6

Wagga was proud of the men who had volunteered to fight Britain’s enemies in the Sudan, prouder still fourteen years later when six members of G Company departed for service in the Transvaal.7 Eclipsed long ago by the world wars, the Boer War was the largest conflict in which the Australian colonies were involved. It was also, in its final months, the first to involve soldiers from the newly federated Commonwealth of Australia. G Company provided Wagga’s first recruits for South Africa, but volunteers from the town continued to come forward until the Boers surrendered on 31 May 1902.8

Almost 100 Wagga men served in South Africa, some twice. Four died and at least twelve were invalided home because of wounds or illness.9 The majority of Wagga’s Boer War men returned home in late 1900 having completed their twelve months’ service. As the day of their arrival drew nearer, the Advertiser ran a series of articles about the approaching welcome home festivities, inviting returned men from nearby towns to participate and asking men who had already come back from the war to contact the welcome home committee so that they might be included in the celebrations.10

5 Wagga Advertiser, 2 June 1885. The Australian War Memorial’s Sudan nominal roll lists 809 men as having served with the contingent. Only two, Henry Baylis and Alfred Bennett, are listed as having been born in Wagga, while newspaper reports indicate that eight men from the town’s G Company went to the Sudan.
6 Australian Town and Country Journal, Saturday 18 July 1885.
7 Wagga Advertiser, 24 October 1899.
10 Wagga Advertiser, 12 January 1901.
On the morning of 15 January 1901 when the Sydney mail pulled in to Wagga’s station, the town’s first South Africa veterans alighted to the deafening cheers of hundreds of well wishers. The reception inside the station was supposed to be limited to local dignitaries, families and close friends but more than 200 people bought platform tickets to be among the first to glimpse the returning warriors.\textsuperscript{11}

The eager throng drowned out the mayor’s attempts to speak and the soldiers, with some difficulty, were ushered outside to waiting horses. Then more cheers as the people of Wagga were treated to the sight of ‘a band of bronzed, hardy, and fearless veterans’ sitting astride their mounts ‘with the careless ease of thoroughly trained troopers.’\textsuperscript{12} With the returned soldiers and the town band at its head, the parade, which included representatives of local clubs, societies, cyclists and the police, began its slow march through streets crowded with people from all over the Wagga district.

The march ended with a large reception in the Town Hall gardens. On a platform under welcoming shade the soldiers and the crowd who had come to see them heard speeches from local dignitaries, each ringing with pride in Britain, her empire and the local men who had fought in her cause. Then the returned soldiers, those who had arrived that morning and others who had come back earlier but had yet to receive such a welcome, were introduced individually before a boy’s choir sang God Save the Queen.

During an interval the soldiers were taken into the Council Chambers for a more formal welcome and a toast to ‘Our returned Soldiers of the Queen’ that prompted the assembled veterans into song.\textsuperscript{13} Called upon to speak, Sergeant-Major Edney confessed his exhaustion after a long train trip that permitted little sleep followed by the unexpectedly large and enthusiastic reception. What they wanted, said Edney, was a ‘rest, and … as soon as they could, to see their people.’\textsuperscript{14} Corporal Cameron pleaded a severe cold but others spoke of their appreciation for the welcome they had received. One man, not from the district, explained how he had promised his Wagga comrades that he would be with them when they returned from the front while another, from nearby Lake Albert, said he had been known to his mates in South Africa as ‘Wagga’.

\textsuperscript{11} Wagga Advertiser, 17 January 1901.
\textsuperscript{12} Wagga Advertiser, 17 January 1901.
\textsuperscript{13} Wagga Advertiser, 15 January 1901.
\textsuperscript{14} Wagga Advertiser, 15 January 1901.
That night the weary Edney needed to draw further upon his reserves of stamina when the returned soldiers were entertained at a ‘smoke concert’ in the flag and banner festooned Oddfellows Hall. Never before had the hall been so densely packed. More than 900 people crowded inside. The guests of honour made their entrance to another round of cheers. Toasts were made, songs were sung and the people of Wagga, swept along on a wave of pride and patriotism, celebrated until exhaustion eventually brought an end to proceedings.

Alfred Bennett was still in South Africa and missed the reception. He was a lieutenant when he sailed and a major when he returned in December 1902. His voyage home took him via Britain where he was one of two Australian field grade officers invited to attend the coronation of King Edward VII. When he reached Wagga Bennett was greeted with a public welcome in the Town Hall. More than a hundred people, including other returned soldiers, turned out in his honour.

Answering the toasts, Bennett thanked Wagga for the welcome and modestly gave all credit for his success in South Africa to the men under his command. Then he went on to give the most candid speech yet heard by Wagga’s well wishers. Bennett spoke plainly about what the war had taught him, declaring himself wary of assumptions that Australians were born soldiers. Any troops experiencing their introduction to war, he said, would be ‘found to be new chums, until they got the hang of the thing’ and Australians must not allow themselves to get ‘swelled head(s)’ about their growing reputation for military prowess. Bennett described fighting for Britain as a ‘privilege’ and also a ‘duty’, an insurance policy whose premium was well worth paying. More perceptive guests may have recognised the essential honesty in Bennett’s remarks and wondered whether he was right when he suggested that the next war might not be fought under ‘colonial conditions’.  

If, as boys, any of Wagga’s next group of returning soldiers had seen the welcome extended to Boer War men, their own public welcomes might have stirred distant memories. The bunting and flags, patriotic speeches and toasts were little changed. But their war had been of an entirely different magnitude. They came home to a country changed by the conflict and they came home changed within themselves. They had

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15 All of the above material on Bennett is from, *Daily Advertiser*, 9 December 1902.
seen parts of the world few could otherwise have hoped to visit, they had fought in some of history’s biggest battles, suffered grievous losses and been part of a military force now deeply ingrained in their collective identity. They came home to heartfelt and enthusiastic welcomes and then each had to make his own way. The days of small groups of men returning from colonial adventures, steeped in glory and greeted by crowds whose own lives had been little affected by the war, were, as Bennett had foreseen, gone.16

16 Bennett served overseas for more than two years, commanded the 3rd New South Wales Mounted Rifles, was twice mentioned in despatches and, in addition to the Distinguished Service Order received the Queen’s Medal with three clasps and the King’s Medal with two clasps. See, S. Morris, ‘Colonel A. J. Bennett’, Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society Newsletter, no. 281, April – May 1993, pp. 3-8, and Daily Advertiser, 9 December 1902.
Introduction

Charles Hussey came home from Gallipoli in August 1915 to a hero’s welcome. At The Rock where he had grown up people crowded the platform to see him step from the train. Less than a year before Hussey had been a butcher. Now he was a returned soldier missing part of his left arm, the first wounded man to arrive back in the Wagga district. Hussey’s days as a slaughterman were over. He had to find a new trade and a way back to civilian life in a community increasingly consumed by the war.¹ Many others followed him over the next four years and by the end of 1919 returned soldiers were a significant presence in Wagga. This thesis explores the lives of these men from their school days into the post-war decades, and through them Wagga’s experience of the war and its aftermath.

With a population approaching 7000 in 1914, Wagga was southeast Australia’s pre-eminent inland town.² At the centre of a rich agricultural hinterland, it was home to rural industries and also to the kind of trades, businesses and bureaucracy found in the cities. There were all manner of leisure activities, pubs on every street, and clubs and associations to cater for most interests, from the Freemasons and the Eight Hour Association to sporting bodies and the Wagga Wagga Literary Institute.

Many of Wagga’s businesses and social organisations left detailed records of their membership and activities. The council kept minutes of every meeting, the police documented every arrest and the courts every trial. Both of the district’s newspapers, the Daily Advertiser and the Wagga Express, covered a wide range of local stories, and some families left personal papers. Repatriation and Lands Department files complement these locally created records. Together they tell us much about life in Wagga and the circumstances of its people during the decades spanning the turn of the century, the war and the Great Depression.

Wagga’s history is also the subject of a substantial secondary literature. Keith Swan’s, A History of Wagga Wagga, focusing mainly on the nineteenth century, remains the most comprehensive work on the district’s first seven decades of European settlement, while Sherry Morris’s, Wagga Wagga, A History is the standard text on the district’s

¹ Hussey, Charles, Repatriation Department File, M9213.
² Wagga’s population at the 1911 census was 6419. See John B. Trivett, The Official Yearbook of New South Wales, 1914, Government of New South Wales, Sydney, 1915, p. 95. Trivett estimated that Wagga’s population would reach 6900 in 1913.
twentieth century history.³ Morris is Wagga’s most prolific historian. She has written a series of full-length studies and shorter pieces, from her work with Harold Fife on the local sub branch of the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL), the Wagga RSL Club and the Kangaroo recruitment march, to biographical sketches of Wagga’s European pioneers and articles in the Journal of the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society.⁴

Rural centres have long been the subject of local histories and the World Wars or Australia’s wartime past more generally are popular subjects.⁵ Some of these studies are essentially nominal rolls giving bare biographical details based mainly on service records and sometimes local newspapers. They are an accounting of who went to war from a particular district and of their fate, published versions of the war memorials and honour rolls that are commonplace around the country. Others have a more specific focus and offer more detailed biographies. Glenda Ellis’s, Our Soldiers, Bungendore and the Great War, for example, is based mainly on the 29 local men who lost their lives in the war.⁶ Of the more expansive local histories, John McQuilton’s study of northeast Victoria, Rural Australia and the Great War is the best known.⁷ Richard Reid and Cheryl Mongan’s, We Have Not Forgotten, Yass and Districts War 1914-18 adopts a more thematic approach and describes the war mainly at the individual and family level, while Peter Donovan’s, Storm, about Kapunda near Adelaide, presents a detailed discussion of that district’s experience of the war years.⁸

Rather than considering the war in isolation as each of these works does, in this thesis I view it as part of the continuum of the soldiers’ and the district’s late nineteenth and early twentieth century life. The Great War has a start and end date, but in Wagga the process by which people became accustomed to being at war and then four years later,

⁵ See for instance, Richard Patterson, Beechworth at War, a country town through three conflicts, Richard Patterson, Beechworth, 2013.
returned to peace, was fluid. Some people were drawn in more quickly than others and when it was over, many found the war very difficult to leave behind.

Jay Winter recently lamented the absence of studies that separate the story of ‘a return to rural life from that of a return to the urban world.’ This study seeks to make that separation, focusing on the rural but recognizing also the interdependence between city and country, and the movement of individuals between them. No previous study views the war’s impact on Australia through the lens of a single district over the span of decades covered in this thesis. Throughout, Wagga’s example largely reflects the national experience. The questions and issues with which the community grappled – recruitment, conscription, loss, grief, anxiety, how to return veterans to civilian life and how to commemorate the war – were also national preoccupations. But the way in which the district responded to the war and returned soldiers reveals nuances and complexity often overlooked in studies of only to the war years or of damaged veterans. In Wagga’s people and institutions can be found many stories whose relevance extends far beyond the district’s borders.

Returned soldiers have traditionally been peripheral to studies of Australia and the First World War. Apart from works on the Repatriation Department or the scheme more generally, like those by L. J. Pryor in 1932, A. P. Skerman in 1961, Clem Lloyd and Jacqui Rees in 1994, and Stephen Garton in 1996, it is only in recent decades that returned men have become the focus of historical writing. Marilyn Lake’s, *The Limits of Hope*, published in 1987 is an early example, followed in 1994 by Alastair Thomson’s *Anzac Memories* and more than a decade later by Marina Larsson’s, *Shattered Anzacs* and *Anzac Legacies* co-edited with Martin Crotty, and Elizabeth Nelson’s, *Homefront Hostilities*. While each casts veterans as either victims of an ill-conceived soldier settlement scheme, physically or mentally damaged men, or criminals and alcoholics who inflicted suffering on their families and struggled to return to civilian life, Scates and Oppenheimer’s, *The Last Battle*, acknowledges that not all

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returned men were afflicted by wounds, criminality or ill-fortune.\textsuperscript{11} Bleakest of all perhaps is Bruce Scates, Rebecca Wheatley and Laura James’ 2015 work, \textit{World War One, a history in 100 stories}, an unrelentingly grim series of biographical portraits.\textsuperscript{12} Never professing to be representative, but claiming to reveal a hidden side to the war, the authors are nevertheless part of a tradition that focuses on the most terrible stories and which characterises returned soldiers as men doomed to live in the war’s shadow.

Wagga was home to many such men during and after the war, but the story of the district’s war veterans was not always such an unhappy one. Harder to find in the record and often overlooked are the returned soldiers whose lives were not blighted by hardship and suffering. In this study I consider those who fit within the prevailing narrative, but I look also at veterans who returned to apparently comfortable, even successful lives, providing a perspective on returned men that is often lacking.

Where I refer to Wagga the context indicates the town or the district, a term that itself requires explanation. The limits of the locale that I describe variously as Wagga, the Wagga district and the district, reflect the area from which people came to the town for business, for socialising, for medical appointments, even to attend court. Its boundaries are imprecise but run broadly from Ganmain in the northwest to The Gap, Uranquinty and The Rock southwest, then eastwards to Ladysmith, Tarcutta and Humula, north to Borambola and Wantabadgery, and west again to Brucedale and Marrar. Wagga’s hinterland was a function of the economic and the social rather than the political, and the area described here bears no relation to shire boundaries in this part of New South Wales. Men from the farms, stations and centres within this locale are described as locals, Wagga men, or the district’s soldiers.

The terms ‘man’ and ‘men’, used throughout this thesis reflect the AIF’s overwhelmingly male makeup. Only a few women enlisted from Wagga, Morris names six, one of whom served in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. They do not often


\textsuperscript{12} Bruce Scates, Laura Wheatley and Laura James, \textit{World War One, a history in 100 stories}, Viking, Australia, 2015.
appear in Wagga’s records. When I discuss the local women who volunteered their gender is clear from their name or the context.

The great majority of soldiers who appear in these pages spent significant amounts of time in Wagga or in the district, some living most of their lives there, or had sufficiently close ties that their fate affected local residents, mostly relatives but also friends. Local newspapers and cards and letters in the Charles Sturt Regional Archives’ collection illustrate the extent of these ties.

It is impossible to arrive at a definitive figure for the number of AIF men who were associated with Wagga. The district’s own record is problematic. What might seem the most readily accessible source, the Memorial Arch’s nominal roll, is too opaque to be reliable. There is no record of how the roll was compiled and while some of those included on it appear in this thesis, the relationship of many others to the district is no longer easy to determine. The uncertainty and lack of evidence required the compilation of a fresh and verifiable roll based on Morris’s 2002 biographical database of Wagga, the National Archives’ Mapping our Anzacs site, the University of New South Wales’ AIF database and the local press.

From an original list of 2600 men who appear to have had some connection with Wagga, I draw mainly on the records of 309. These men were born, went to school or lived in the district for at least several months, visited regularly or had close relatives in Wagga. Occasionally a man not from Wagga but accepted by the community as a local, is also included. Readers will notice that some individuals appear far more frequently than others. In part this is a function of the evidence, but my approach also acknowledges the difficulty of remembering large numbers of names and people throughout a lengthy narrative. Those who feature most heavily in the following chapters speak to many different aspects of the Wagga soldiers’ wartime and post-war experience. Their circumstances and experiences might resemble the circumstances and experiences of

14 See for example, Condon family papers, CSURA RW5/11, Cox family papers, CSURA RW2208, Dunn family papers, CSURA RW256, Edney family papers, CSURA RW5/76-93, Florance family papers, CSURA RW253/6, Fred Booty photographs and postcards from the private papers of Peter Gissing.
many others, or they might have been in some way unusual. Rarely though are they unique. Together they tell of the Great War’s impact on an important rural community.

While the war touched every aspect of life in Wagga, local sources are largely silent on some important issues. Sectarianism and its role in the conscription debates is an important question for historians of Australia during the First World War, but it scarcely features in Wagga’s record. At least one local clergyman was prominent in the ‘yes’ campaign, and in recruiting more generally, but of serious division between the denominations in Wagga there is little evidence. Similarly the great strikes that caused so much unrest in New South Wales 1917 were never a major story in Wagga’s press though some local men went to Sydney as strike breakers. A mouse plague that year appears to have been of more immediate local concern. Although German families began arriving in the district, many from Albury, in the late nineteenth century, the local press said surprisingly little about their presence in the community during the war. Several Wagga soldiers were of German background, but there is no record of how many local residents were. I do not suggest that Wagga avoided division around these significant issues, but limited or non-existent evidence prohibits detailed discussion.

This thesis is divided into three parts. A brief first chapter presents an outline of Wagga’s history in the decades before the war. The second chapter describes the early lives of the men who grew up to enlist, their circumstances, schooling and work, how they understood war and how they prepared for it. In the following six chapters I explore Wagga’s experience of the war, looking at life in the district, the local men on active service and those who returned home before the Armistice. The final four chapters concern the post-war years, remembrance and commemoration, returned soldiers’ lives in town and on the land, and the part they played in the community through the 1920s and the Great Depression.

From the influence of country men on the AIF, to the war damaged soldier and the despairing veteran and his family battling impossible odds on soldier settlement blocks, Wagga’s experience both intersects with, and challenges common understandings of the war’s most important and enduring themes. How Wagga went through the war and how the district and its returned soldiers negotiated the peace tells us much about the broader national experience, but the district’s example also cautions against accepting prevailing

or one dimensional views as the sum of that experience. In focusing on a single district over an extended period, I have sought to avoid the limitations of studies that treat the war as a discrete episode and returned men only as human wreckage. The following chapters reveal a more complex and more interesting reality.
I. ‘A handsome town’: Wagga before the war

For more than 1400 kilometres the Murrumbidgee River flows across southern New South Wales. From its source in the alpine country the river runs towards Cooma before looping northwards through the Australian Capital Territory then past Yass where it turns to the west and its eventual confluence with the Murray. In the river’s eastern reaches where the hilly country begins to meet the plain, broad valleys bordered by gently sloping hills stretch out towards the flat lands to the west. Rich soils, laid down over millions of years by the weathering of metamorphic rocks and the alluvium of floodwaters from the river and its tributaries feed a rich plant and animal life.

People hunted, fished and gathered in this bountiful region for millennia. The Wiradjuri lived between present day Yass and Hay and across much of the area from the Murray to the Lachlan Rivers. They called the river ‘Morrumbidgee’, the ‘Big Water’, and on a wide bend between the hills and the plain was a camping spot, Wagga Wagga, the ‘place of many crows’. Early European explorers heard of the Murrumbidgee in 1820 from people in the area around the lake known today as Lake George north of Canberra. The following year Charles Throsby came upon the river in the area where the village of Tharwa now stands. Three years later, further northwest, the explorers Hume and Hovell crossed the Murrumbidgee near Yass and in 1829 Charles Sturt’s party embarked on an exploration of its course.

As they traversed the area from the Great Dividing Range’s southwestern slopes towards the plains, Sturt’s party saw night-time fires but little of the people who lit them. Only when he gained the services of local men who guided his expedition through the area did Sturt have any substantial interaction with the Wiradjuri.

Sturt’s encounter with the people who lived along the river was peaceful, but it was an early step towards the demise of their traditional life. Within three years other Europeans came. The first sheep runs appeared in the Wagga Wagga area in 1832. During the early years of white settlement the Wiradjuri continued to roam the river

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corridors and through the back country much as they had always done. Basil Bennett, Alfred’s father and one of the district’s first European settlers, recalled between four and five hundred Wiradjuri gathering at Wagga Wagga for corroborees on several occasions during the early 1840s, as well as a battle between indigenous groups from the Tumut area and Wagga Wagga involving, he said, up to 1000 men.  

No one can be sure of how many Wiradjuri inhabited the Murrumbidgee when Sturt passed through the Wagga Wagga area. He commented on their ability to remain invisible in the landscape and saw just a few hundred people along the whole course of the river. Swan, basing his conclusion on A. R. Radcliffe-Brown’s analysis, suggested that the Wiradjuri population on the eve of the European appropriation of their land was in the order of 1000, but observed that already, even before Sturt’s appearance, foreign diseases against which there was no local immunity had spread as far as the Murrumbidgee. 

The very things that made the Murrumbidgee of Wagga Wagga, Wollundry, the ‘place of stones’ and Unanoreena, ‘home of the warrior Eunong’ so attractive to the area’s indigenous people – the abundance of fish, wildlife, flora, rich soils and the fords that made crossing the river relatively easy – were the same things that brought Europeans. They came because land was bountiful and they came illegally, as squatters beyond the limits of location prescribed by Governor Darling in 1829. 

The Tompson and Best families were the first. Pastoralists Charles Tompson and Frederick Best established sheep runs on each side of the river, Tompson on the north bank and Best on the south. Neither man moved their families, but each sent their sons – 18-year-old Peter Best, his brother, 17-year-old Robert, Frederick Tompson who was also 18 and Edwin, his 13-year-old brother – along with experienced stockmen and shepherds. In 1837 Charles Tompson got a licence to graze stock after five years of illegal settlement and by 1840 he ran large herds of sheep and cattle, had 30 horses and

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6 Back to Wagga Souvenir, Official Souvenir, Back to Wagga Celebrations, October 16th -22nd 1927, p. 17.
7 K. Swan, 1970 pp. 7 & 11, Swan cites Sturt’s experiences and a later visitor to the Wagga district, N. Bartley, who professed amazement at his guides’ sense of direction.
9 On the indigenous names of locales in the Wagga Wagga area, see Back to Wagga Souvenir, p. 18.
had sown twenty acres of wheat. Across the river the Bests had a smaller holding that in the early years comprised nothing more than a single hut and stockyards.\textsuperscript{11}

Best and Tompson chose their land well. As other graziers appeared in the district, they agreed that the best place for crossing the Murrumbidgee in that area was a ford on Best’s station. Here Wagga, as a European settlement rather than an indigenous locale, began to grow.\textsuperscript{12} To the southeast Thomas Mate settled on Tarcutta Creek in the mid-1830s and other Europeans occupied land along Kyeamba Creek, Hillas Creek and as far away as Adelong.\textsuperscript{13} Wagga had become the fastest developing area outside the New South Wales limits of location.\textsuperscript{14} European settlers occupied all the good grazing country along the Murrumbidgee and its tributaries. Only some unwatered back areas remained unclaimed.\textsuperscript{15}

Within a few years, the Wiradjuri came to be seen both as a problem for the newly arrived Europeans and a source of free labour. Henry Angel and his family kept loaded guns and a careful watch, fearful of the people who took fish from a river now regarded by the Europeans as theirs, and who helped themselves to the vegetables in his garden at night.\textsuperscript{16} In the Ganmain area, recalled one early resident, indigenous people used to spear cattle ‘and were a treacherous lot’ who nevertheless ‘did not merit the harsh treatment meted out by the whites’. Early squatters ‘hunted and shot them down like dogs.’\textsuperscript{17}

On Borambola station, 20 kilometres from Wagga, John Peter had up to twenty Wiradjuri working as domestic staff, shepherds and stockmen for no more recompense than rations and occasional warm garments in winter.\textsuperscript{18} On Eunonyhareenyha station Charles Tompson was pleased that, ‘For five or six pounds of flour, a few figs of colonial tobacco, or even a little of the offals of a beast when slaughtered’ the local indigenous people would build labourer’s huts.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{11} E. Irvin, 1953, pp. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{12} J. H. Shaw, \textit{The Urban Evolution of Wagga}, University of New England, Armidale, 1960, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{14} K. Swan, 1970, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{15} K. Swan, 1970, p. 21
\textsuperscript{17} Author unknown, H. Freeman, CSURA RW 1980/1/8.
\textsuperscript{18} B. Montgomery, 2011, pp. 8-9.
By 1847 Wagga had gone from being a frontier police post, to a village with a court of petty sessions, a courthouse and a lock up, with which some in the pages to follow became well acquainted. Even before the buildings were complete, the bench sat in ‘a very primitive temple of justice, constructed of props and saplings, walled in and covered in bark.’ At the same time, befitting any growing rural Australian settlement, Wagga’s first public house and inn opened. The village had two blacksmith’s shops, though one, its owner an alcoholic, did not last long, and in 1849 Robert Davison, successful proprietor of a large general store in Gundagai, opened a local branch.

When Wagga was proclaimed a town on 23 November 1849 it had become an important crossroads for travellers on the east-west track along the river and on the route between Sydney and southern New South Wales and Melbourne. In 1851 the first punt crossed the river, to be replaced five years later by a larger vessel.

The discovery of widespread gold deposits in south eastern Australia in the early 1850s sent Wagga’s population into decline as people, including at least two constables, the blacksmith and a prominent carpenter and builder, left for the diggings. Growth stalled and Wagga faced a labour shortage. Work on a new court and watch house was held up when the cost of construction proved prohibitive. Although not endowed with the precious metal and having lost a proportion of its population to the gold fields, Wagga ultimately benefitted from increasing traffic between the New South Wales’ central west and Melbourne.

By the early 1860s more than 620 people lived in Wagga. Within a few decades of the first European settlement the town had become the Murrumbidgee’s chief centre. Some of the largest buildings – the Australian Family Hotel, Whitehand’s Royal Hotel, the Pastoral Hotel, the hospital dining room, the school building in Tarcutta Street and the

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23 See for example, The Argus, 19 April 1865 and NSW Government Gazette, 23 November 1849, in K. Swan, 1970, p. 37. Wagga Wagga and District, in, Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society Newsletter, February 1968, p. 3. This article or parts of it appear in several places. The earliest iteration appears to be a 1909 version. The Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society published it under the above title and noted that the article was compiled and published by J. Edward Robertson in 1914.
flour mill – were made of brick. Businesses like Fred Tompson’s new venture, the Australian Warehouse, sold everything from ‘a needle to a bullock dray’ and supplied the needs of settlers and workers throughout the district. Fred Tompson introduced Wagga’s first banking facilities and for years to come he and his friend George Forsyth had a monopoly on retailing and stock and station agency in Wagga. 

In 1860 a group of residents, including Tompson, formed the Wagga Wagga Bridge Company to build a permanent river crossing. Punts were no longer sufficient to carry all the people and goods passing through the town, especially when bad weather and even minor flooding disrupted traffic and made the river dangerous. Fears that floods would wash any bridge away kept people from buying shares in the company and subscriptions came in slowly. Two years passed before construction began. Then, before a crowd of about 200 on New Year’s Day 1862, Fred Tompson, now a Bridge Company director, announced that the bridge would lay the foundation for Wagga’s future prosperity. His wife, Eliza, herself one of Wagga’s earliest European residents, pulled a string, released the pile driver and drove the first pile about an inch into the earth beside the Murrumbidgee. The bridge opened eleven months later.

Businesses that catered to the growing traffic through Wagga prospered. Joseph Emblen and his brother Jeremiah opened a blacksmith’s shop in Gurwood Street in 1859, and coachbuilders began setting up workshops. John ‘Jack’ McGrath came from Sydney in the early 1860s and in 1865 took up what is reputed to be the first trades apprenticeship in Wagga where he was taught harness and saddle making. He worked for local saddlers before setting up his own saddle and harness making business, the Riverine Saddle Factory, which ultimately employed thirteen men. McGrath also became a successful grazier and horse breeder. He held directorships in local companies and was instrumental in securing the Wagga Experiment Farm for the district.

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28 J. Gormly, 1901, pp. 8-9, and K. Swan, 1970, p. 84.
29 K. Swan, 1970, p. 84.
In 1893 McGrath moved his business into new premises. Like many important buildings ‘south from Cootamundra to the border – court houses, railway stations, schools and other Government buildings, churches, convents, hotels, bridges, breweries, factories’, it was built by Charles Hardy and Co. 33 Hardy’s company built the Methodist Church, the railway stations at Bomen and Wagga, the council chambers, the Union Bank and manager’s residence, the Murrumbidgee Co-operative Milling Company Mill, the court house, many of the town’s school buildings, the clock tower and a large number of homes. He was also active in local politics, serving as an alderman and mayor.34

One traveller in 1875 remarked that Wagga’s ladies were ‘dressed with style and fashion equal to anything in Sydney and Melbourne.’35 Adopting fashions that might have been seen in Sydney did not mean that Wagga had a close connection to that city. From its earliest days, local trade was directed mainly to the south and west, to Victoria and South Australia. Sydney, on the far side of a mountain range and with no rail connection, was less accessible and twice as expensive to send goods to. Even the mail took longer to reach Wagga from Sydney than from Melbourne. The Victorian capital could be reached by train from Echuca, a long bullock ride away, and paddle steamers and trains also carried goods to South Australian ports. River and rail made Melbourne and Adelaide natural destinations for Wagga’s trade. In 1878 an Evening News correspondent reported that there were no travelling merchants from Sydney businesses in Wagga and that the locals knew little of the colonial capital.36 Only when the railway line opened to the cheers of 2000 people on a stormy September Monday evening in 1879, did Wagga’s gaze move from Melbourne to Sydney, which was now hours, rather than days or weeks away.37

The railway station was built at the base of Willans Hill, south of the town centre. With the railway came more workers, and as the town extended to meet the new station some of the more well-to-do families also moved to the area. Their children and those of the recently arrived railway workers needed an education, and eleven years after the first train pulled into Wagga, work began on South Wagga Primary School. By now Wagga

was almost six decades old, had shady public gardens, reticulated water and kerbed and guttered main streets illuminated at night by gaslight. One observer called it a ‘handsome town … (with) good streets and fine buildings’ including four churches, as many banks, two newspapers, a number of good stores, a hospital to the west of the railway station, public schools and, of course, pubs. In the early 1890s Wagga boasted 39 licensed hotels and had supported several breweries since the early 1870s.38

Wagga supported all manner of trades, professions and businesses. Charles Hardy’s holdings grew to include a timber and joinery works, a steam joinery, steam sawmills at Ganmain, brick and tile works in Docker Street, stone quarries near Narrandera and a local brick and pottery works.39 Wagga’s ‘good stores’ employed staff and provided the day-to-day needs for town dwellers and rural workers alike. David Copland and his partner opened the grandly named Hall of Commerce in 1872. During the 1880s, selling ironmongery, groceries, clothing and footwear proved sufficiently lucrative for Copland, now the sole proprietor, to purchase the adjoining premises. By 1888 he was employing 25 people.40

The railways employed manual workers, engine drivers, clerks and station attendants, and as the lines reached through the district, the wheat industry prospered. Wagga had had flour mills since the 1850s and by 1880 there were at least three. Visitors today would probably be oblivious to Wagga’s milling history, but no one who travels along Edward Street could miss an important part of that history, the remnants of the Murrumbidgee Co-operative Flour Mill that opened in 1890 and whose façade, now flanked by newly built apartments, remains an imposing local landmark.41

At the cross roads of southern New South Wales’ stock routes and as one of southeastern Australia’s most important stock centres, Wagga also became home to several stock and station agents. Fred Tompson and his partner George Forsyth were Wagga’s only such agents in the early 1860s but within 15 years six local firms, all representatives of Sydney or Melbourne concerns, competed for the district’s business.


By 1891, when almost 4600 people called Wagga home, the good times were fading as depression and drought took hold. South Wagga Public School’s headmaster routinely, and not always successfully, visited local families to collect unpaid fees. Often he waived them. Every school morning he watched children arrive for lessons, some having walked barefoot for miles to get there.\footnote{43 R. Lewis, ‘The History of South Wagga Wagga Public School’, Journal of the Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society, no. 8, 1991, p. 31, and R. Lewis, The Belltower, A History of South Wagga Public School 1892-1992, South Wagga Public School Parents and Citizens’ Association Centenary Committee, Wagga Wagga, 1992, p. 6.} One Riverina resident remembered, ‘times were hard in the nineties and if the settlers had depended wholly on wheat growing for a living they would have had a very miserable existence.’\footnote{44 Author unknown, H. Freeman, Riverina Reminiscences, CSURA RW 1980/1/8.}

An 1889 infestation of rust fungus in the crop, a three-year long economic depression and then a drought cruelled the farmers’ lot and made the 1890s difficult years around Wagga.\footnote{45 J. Sutherland, 1996, From Farm Boys to PhDs, Agricultural Education at Wagga 1896-1996, Charles Sturt University, Wagga, p. 2, and F. Tome, CSURA RW1400/1/12.} Wool prices, already declining steadily through the 1880s, fell further.\footnote{46 K. Swan, 1970, p. 136.} A rabbit plague in the winter of 1897 destroyed crops, but also provided opportunity – trapping them became the ‘general occupation.’ Rabbit drives caught up to 500 of the animals at a time and the carcasses fetched 10 shillings a pair in Sydney.\footnote{47 H. Freeman, CSURA RW1980/1/8, p. 9.}

Even in tough times some were able to find work. Bomen, eight kilometres from Wagga, was a ‘tent town full of navvies and workers on the (railway) viaduct.’\footnote{48 J. Sutherland, 1996, p. 9.} At the same time shearing gangs and shed hands congregated in Wagga before moving out to work in large sheds about the district, where during the 1891 season more than two million sheep were shorn. In June 1892 the Advertiser reported that ‘numbers of men are beginning to pass through here from Victoria in anticipation of the commencement of the shearing.’\footnote{49 On shearing gangs and railway navvies, see J. Sutherland, 1996, pp. 2 & 9. On the number of sheep shorn, see W.J. Garland, 1913, p. 18, and Daily Advertiser, 14 June 1892.}

Children too did their share of work. An Experiment Farm student recalled of dairying during his youth in the early years of the twentieth century that ‘four persons milked by
hand 45 cows, in time to catch the 9 A.M. milk train for Sydney, which in my case meant taking the milk nine miles with horse drawn vehicle. To do this we were obliged to start milking at 4 A.M. the days were very long, we seldom finished the days (sic) work before 7 P.M. ..."\(^{50}\)

After the economic stagnation of the 1890s Wagga was showing signs of neglect. In 1898 the town’s drainage system comprised little more than an open sewer carrying waste and refuse from the town into the Murrumbidgee.\(^{51}\) A year later, with little money available for public works, the streets were in a ‘deplorable condition’, to the point where ‘it has been impossible to cross from one kerb to the other … without sinking up to the boot-tops in mud.’\(^{52}\)

At nearby Bomen where construction of the viaduct provided work in hard times, so did the Wagga Experiment Farm. Land clearing began in 1892 and the Farm opened in 1893. Three years later, in November 1896, the first students arrived, and the following year the farm ordered a horse-drawn wagon with moveable seats for more than 30 passengers.\(^{53}\) As the farm grew, hundreds of young men arrived to study agricultural theory and techniques, many later fondly recalling their years at Bomen.\(^{54}\)

By the early twentieth century this important local institution was contributing to Wagga’s social life, providing sporting teams for local competitions and connecting the town with the world beyond the Riverina by attracting visitors from overseas, interstate and elsewhere in New South Wales.\(^{55}\) The Farm, with its need to house and feed staff and students, and its need for agricultural equipment and stock, relied on Wagga’s businesses and the district’s farmers. Local boys could get unskilled work there as kitchen hands, mail boys, labourers, cleaners and house stewards, and if they were qualified or experienced, as clerical staff, cooks, mechanics, engine drivers, agricultural professionals, while experts were also in demand.\(^{56}\)

\(^{50}\) F. Keen, letter to June Sutherland; research papers for From Farm Boys to PhDs, memorabilia, minutes, photographs and audiotapes, 1942-95, CSURA 1400/1/s.

\(^{51}\) Daily Advertiser, 6 August 1899.

\(^{52}\) Daily Advertiser, 12 August 1899.


\(^{54}\) Wagga Experiment Farm, CSURA, RW1400/1/3 and RW1400/1/7.

\(^{55}\) Wagga Experiment Farm, CSURA, RW1400/1/3 and RW1400/1/7.

\(^{56}\) See RW1400/1/12, RW1400/1/1, Copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/116) and Copies of letters sent to the Department of Agriculture, 1912-29 SA473/31/174-175 (31/174).
With the new century Wagga began to emerge from the years of economic hardship and drought. Wheat remained the dominant crop and the pastoral sector continued to be the mainstay of the economy. The Riverina Division was considered the most important wheat growing area in the state, with a larger area under cultivation than any other in New South Wales. When a group of military officers visited the Experiment Farm in May 1903, Brigadier General Henry Finn, the Commonwealth force’s second most senior officer, mentioned his surprise at Wagga’s size and resources as well as its having made such a good recovery from the ‘ravages of drought.’ Wagga’s population grew to almost 6500 in 1911, and more than 1,200 houses made up the central district. In a sure sign that people were feeling free to enjoy themselves, Wagga got a skating rink, ‘one of the finest in Australia’. Within five months of opening in April 1910, 35,000 visitors passed through its turnstiles. The Wagga Citizen’s Band played ‘high class music’ and fancy dress carnivals attracted a steady stream of skaters and spectators that winter.

Well-off families had the means to enjoy longer periods of leisure than a few hours in ice skates. Tony Dunn, born in Wagga in 1906 to a well-known local grazing family remembered their annual summer holiday train and ferry trip to a rented house near the sea at Manly. They also took holidays at Yarrangobilly Caves and at Mount Buffalo in Victoria. At home, the Dunns had ‘substantial help on the property and inside the house’. Their domestic lives were made more comfortable by the services of indigenous people on whose land they now lived. Tony recalled in particular his grandmother’s maid, Florrie, whose father was a black tracker in the police force.

In 1913 J. Edward Robertson wrote about Wagga’s population of ‘keen, energetic business men from various parts of the Commonwealth’ who had been drawn to this ‘pulsating centre.’ In the ‘quality, quantity and price of goods the public recognise that they are being well and liberally served.’ So much so, wrote Robertson, that little trade actually left the town. Robertson was a ‘booster’ but the town did enjoy a healthy

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59 The quote ‘one of the finest in Australia’, is from The Sydney Mail, 10 August, 1910. See also ‘Extracts from the “Sydney Mail”’, Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society Newsletter, no. 233, February–March 1985, p. 4.
60 J. Fricke, 1991, CSURA RW256.
commercial life in the decade before the war. David Copland contracted Charles Hardy
to build new premises on Fitzmaurice Street in 1910. The three-storey building retailed
clothes, boots, drapery and ‘fancy goods’, housed a millinery workroom and fitting
rooms as well as a basement for reserved stock.\textsuperscript{62} William Huthwaite, who took up
business in 1905, sold very similar goods but was most successful with his store’s
produce section.\textsuperscript{63}

Even with the return of drought, Wagga in 1914 was enjoying better times than the
district had known for more than a decade.\textsuperscript{64} Social clubs catered to all sorts of tastes.
Musicians could play for one of the town’s two major bands, the Wagga Wagga Brass
Band and the Wagga Wagga Citizens’ Band. There were amateur dramatic societies, a
masonic lodge, and a thriving horse racing scene able to support a 2000 seat grandstand
at the local track. Cricket and football were popular, as were tennis and bowls. By
contrast with Wagga’s circumstances, a local man wrote from Albany as the first
Australian Imperial Force (AIF) convoy gathered in November 1914, that ‘people here
… are as poor as church mice … everybody was very poorly dressed.’\textsuperscript{65} To locals, at
least, Wagga seemed a prosperous place.

On the eve of war, Wagga was of the bush but with some of the professions, amenities
and entertainments of larger cities. It was an important regional centre dependant on
and depended on by the surrounding farms and the people who laboured on them. In
August 1914, the district was getting ready for its annual agricultural show while
Europe was going to war. Everything was about to change.

page number, and \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 13 August, 1910.
\textsuperscript{63} ‘Huthwaite’s the Friendly Store’, \textit{Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society Newsletter}, no. 368, December
\textsuperscript{64} Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to the Department of Agriculture, 1912-29, CSURA
SA473/31/174-175 (31/174).
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 28 November 1914.
II. ‘Good raw material’: Wagga’s wartime generation before 1914

Alfred Bennett was born at Brucedale, ten kilometres from Wagga, in January 1865. His father, Basil, who had seen corroborees on the banks of the Murrumbidgee, claimed to have been the first white child to live on the site of the future town. Basil had arrived in early October 1840, two months after his second birthday, when the only European settlement was the Best and Tompson runs. Alfred was among the oldest of Wagga’s wartime volunteers, most of whom were born in the 1880s or 1890s. Like him, some were from families that had been in the district since the earliest years of European settlement, but most were more recent arrivals. They included the scions of prominent pastoralists, business and political figures, as well those of more ordinary background.

As children they lived mainly outdoors. William Bluett, Alfred Bennett’s peer, described his Wagga childhood as a ‘delight’: a time when boys stayed out until midnight, took honey from bee hives, gathered birds’ eggs, speared native animals, skinned and cooked possums over open fires, swam in the river, and caught fish and crayfish. In 1893 and again in 1904 a teacher’s magazine observed that; ‘Climatic conditions cause our children to spend the greater part of their time in the open air.’ With time on their hands, some got into trouble. In 1901 the Advertiser complained that local children were throwing rocks at the telegraph line, a ‘senseless amusement’ that was both common and damaging to commerce when the insulation around the lines was broken. Some boys were also threatened with arrest for destroying people’s letterboxes, hardly a crime confined to the early twentieth century.

In December 1913 Maurice McKeown, manager of the Experiment Farm wrote a stern letter to Sylvester Mitchell, whose children had been on the Farm’s land ‘interfering with sheep troughs, and pelting sheep … (interfering) with stud lambs and (removing) poison baits set for foxes.’ The Mitchell children were often found on Farm land and McKeown insisted that they stick to paths where they could be watched. However annoyed McKeown was, the Mitchells, it seems, enjoyed the chance for mischief. The

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4 Daily Advertiser, 2 February 1901.
5 J. Sutherland, Research Papers for From Farm Boys to PhDs, memorabilia, minutes, photographs and audiotapes, 1942-95, CSURA 1400/1, letter 11 December 1913 to Sylvester Mitchell, and B. Butts, 1977, Wagga Experiment Farm, CSURA, RW1400/1/3.
Dunns too were happy to misbehave outdoors, annoying farm workers and younger children alike.6

These somewhat idyllic descriptions of pre-war Wagga childhoods ignore another, less happy reality: the inevitable accidents and illnesses that befell children. Schoolboy Ted Drake’s broken arm was at one end of the spectrum, the death of James Dennis’s young sister in a fire was at the other.7 Some families knew tragedy long before war intruded into their lives. Hugh and Sarah Lord died within twelve months of each other in the 1880s, leaving their six children orphaned. Jim Corbett lost his father to typhoid in 1905.8 James Dennis’s father died in 1913 when James, the third of nine children, was thirteen.9 Two of Allan Bruce’s siblings died in infancy and another at 18.10 Ronald ‘Ron’ Birrell’s older brother and sister both died before they turned four. When Wagga’s wartime volunteers were growing up the death of young people was common enough that it was a real possibility for any family. Over the six decades before 1910, the average mortality rate for New South Wales’ infants under one year of age was higher than 9 per cent.11

In 1894 and again in 1903 The New South Wales Educational Gazette described Australian children as ‘resenting correction, opinionated and easily led’.12 The obvious remedy for these unattractive qualities was discipline. At school it was applied frequently and firmly. Children were taught that ‘the teacher is supreme and must be strictly obeyed.’13 Disobedience was often met with corporal punishment. Teachers’ magazines counselled the maintenance of discipline ‘at any cost’ and encouraged their readers to place having the school under control above anyone’s individual reluctance to belt children.14 A rural student recalled of the 1890s that ‘teachers were very cruel … and often inflicted severe punishment for the slightest misdemeanours … the teachers

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6 J. Fricke, 1991, Dunn Family Papers, CSURA RW256.
7 Ted Drake, Repatriation Department File, M37174, and Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File, M24707.
8 Corbett, James, Repatriation Department File, M44194.
14 What Constitutes Successful Teaching, vol. 1, no. 1, 1 June 1893, p. 7.
were brutal, but it was accepted – that was the way it was.’ At Oura School, 13 kilometres outside Wagga, Tony Dunn’s teacher, Miss Fraser, was considered ‘a bit of a dragon’ who wielded a cane on the end of a feather duster.

The Advertiser advocated drill being part of the ordinary curriculum suggesting that it would teach the habits of ‘order and discipline which would not in the majority of cases be acquired otherwise.’ Children from years one to five learnt military drill as part of their weekly lessons, while High School students did ten minutes a day of physical exercises.

Discipline and corporal punishment were meant to change children’s behaviour, but just as important was the teachers’ role in shaping their pupils’ thinking. They were instructed that outside formal lessons, schools should teach the values of egalitarianism and cooperation, depending on others, being dependable and accepting of the authority of teachers, the government and the law. Teachers had the chance to instil in children a ‘righteous indignation at wrong do-ing, and a detestation of meanness, as well as a love for what is noble and brave.’ When Wagga’s wartime volunteers were children, nothing was nobler than the British Empire and no one was as brave as her soldiers and sailors. From a young age Australian school children learned that their loyalties lay as much with Britain and the Empire as with Australia, and that they had a duty to be physically fit to defend both.

The British Empire and its military forces were enduring themes in the classroom, in the papers and in popular children’s publications. One of Tony Dunn’s favourite past times was reading Chums every week and the ‘huge’ annual at the end of each year. In each issue he would have seen regular series like ‘Under the Queen’s Flag’, ‘Out-of-the-way scenes in naval and military life’ and ‘Records of Famous Regiments, what British soldiers have dared and done’, as well as adventures and a healthy dose of war stories.

Sometimes Australia or Australians featured. In a magazine full of military tales, the

17 Course of Instruction for Primary Schools, NSW Department of Public Instruction, 1905, pp. 3-12, and Courses of Study for High Schools 1911, New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, p. 11.
22 See for instance, Chums, vol. 8, no. 363, 23 August 1899 and vol 8, no. 383, 10 January 1900. After Queen Victoria’s death the title changed to Under the King’s Colours, see for instance, vol. 10, no. 470, 11 September 1901, vol. 10, no. 492, 12 February 1902.
Boer War was manna. In March 1900, amidst stories predominantly about British units, appeared one full of praise for the New South Wales Lancers, ‘giants’ with a knack for fighting the Boer, they were ‘favourites wherever they go’. 23

In the classroom, children read The Australian School Paper and its successor The Commonwealth School Paper. Both were full of stories like ‘A Brave Deed’, ‘A Gallant Trooper’ and ‘The Hero of Rorke’s Drift’, as well as poems of which ‘Where is the Briton’s Home?’, ‘The Soldier’s Dream’, ‘Our Colours’, ‘Duty First’ and ‘Victoria Cross’ were typical examples. 24 Not every child would have been interested – a boy like Austin Kelly, who described himself as ‘not a very good scholar’, may have found such lessons uninspiring – but in its focus on patriotism, duty, honour and martial valour this reading matter was part of the background to school children’s everyday lives. 25

Almost all of Wagga’s volunteers went to school, even those described by Mary Gilmore, who once taught at Wagga’s Superior Public School, as ‘dull and very ignorant.’ 26 In 1900 Wagga, including North Wagga, was home to at least four public schools while the growing farming population in the surrounding district led to 69 one-teacher rural schools being established in the late 19th century. 27 By then some of the older volunteers had already left school. Alfred Bennett, being the son of one of the district’s most prosperous citizens, was a pupil at Wagga Superior Public School and then Fort Street in Sydney before the colonial government introduced compulsory education for all children between six and fourteen in 1880. In 1885, the year he went to the Sudan, Bennett returned to the Superior School as an assistant teacher having

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25 Kelly, Austin, Repatriation Department File, MX3251, document titled ‘Personal History’.


27 There were the National School and Lake Albert both founded in 1861, Wagga Wagga North Public School founded in 1880 and Newtown, later South Wagga Public School, founded in 1892. See also S. Morris, 1999, pp. 79-81, and K. Swan, 1970, pp. 120-123. Private schools, some lasting only a few years, also came and went in Wagga during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, see Swan, 1970, p. 121.
completed his training in Sydney. Thomas Blamey attended Wagga Wagga Superior Public School from the age of six in the early 1890s. Others, younger than Bennett but older than the average Wagga soldier, completed school more than a decade before the war. Blamey’s contemporaries Charles Boswell and John Alchin who were in third class at the same school in 1894 were among them.

The younger boys later to enlist went to school in the early years of the twentieth century as Wagga emerged from drought and depression. In contrast to the barefoot children of the 1890s, South Wagga’s students in the next decade were well attired. Boys wore light coloured shirts, dark, hard wearing knee length trousers, braces, lace up leather boots and broad brimmed hats. If they lived too far away from school to go home for lunch they carried sandwiches of thickly sliced home made bread wrapped in cloth. Under the shady trees inside the school fence, they played football, games with ‘highly prized’ cigarette cards, and fought mock battles with sharpened sticks. At speech nights children from the Alchin, Bruce, Blamey, Castle, Boswell, Hale and Hardy families stepped forward to receive awards. During the following decade, the same surnames and those of other boys were listed on the school’s Great War honour roll.

The length of a boy’s education varied. Wagga’s volunteers included men like George Dean and Neil Boomer whose schooling did not extend beyond the primary years, some like Ted Drake who completed secondary school, and a handful, like Alfred Bennett and Thomas Blamey, who had been to university or completed some other form of post-secondary training.

Like the majority of New South Wales children – of whom, by 1901, all but 130 of 10,000 who were aged between 10 and 15 could read, write or both – Wagga’s soldiers were a literate cohort. Precise figures for the district do not appear to exist, but evidence for the extent of literacy does. The town’s Police Charge Books record the

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29 Blamey went on to become, and remain, Wagga’s best known soldier and Australia’s only Field Marshal.
30 Register of Admissions of Superior Public Boys School at Wagga, CSURA SA1621/1. The register notes that Blamey began 2nd class in July 1890 and was in 3rd class from September 1892.
32 R. Lewis, 1992, p. 13
34 On literacy levels, see H. C. L. Anderson, 1907, pp. 52-56.
educational level of anyone who was arrested. Of the 113 men charged with crimes in Wagga between 1911 and 1933, mostly labourers or manual workers of some description who either went on to enlist or had returned from the war, at least 102 could read and write.  

Accompanying the advent of widespread literacy, government school publications and popular children’s magazines, was a burgeoning Australian literary scene. During the 1880s and 1890s, rural Australians increasingly became the subject of writing, both by the authors of children’s classroom reading and those whom Russel Ward called ‘accredited literary men.’ Novels and short stories featured characters whose personalities were expressed chiefly in what they did, not what they thought. They were practical and ‘hard-bitten’ people who had to accept the hand they were dealt. To be hard-bitten was one of the era’s ideals, necessary to face the tough times of the late 19th century. If they read these stories, country boys and men might have seen glimpses of themselves or their neighbours. Manual labourers, in particular, were a hard-bitten lot, used to straitened times and measured more by their actions and physical ability than by their intellect.

At the end of nineteenth century these characteristics, later to be ascribed to the AIF, were beginning to feed into a growing belief that rural Australians possessed intrinsic martial qualities that, with drill and training, would make them fine soldiers. In 1895, Kenneth Mackay, a colourful author who spent much of his life in rural Australia and whose military and political careers brought him to public attention, published an invasion novel, The Yellow Wave. In it appears a ‘wicked Russian’ who observed that ‘Australia has no army, merely good raw material for one.’

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35 The Charge Books are held in CSURA under the accession number SA1519. I consulted those covering the period from 1911-1933. I say ‘at least’ here as the Charge Books do not record the level of an individual’s literacy in the eleven cases that make up the difference between the total number of men arrested and those I refer to as being literate. In every other case, people charged with a crime were rated on a 1-4 literacy scale: ‘1. Read, 2. Read and Write, 3. Neither, 4. Superior Education’. Almost every Wagga soldier whose name appears in the charge sheets was rated 2.


The Russian’s view was echoed in Wagga’s press during the years when the wartime generation were growing up. In August 1897 the *Advertiser* reported on the creation of a new formation, the 1st Australian Horse, raised by Mackay in the rural districts of New South Wales. Detachments were formed all over the colony but the recruitment effort came no closer to Wagga than Gundagai.\(^{41}\) Lamenting that Mackay sought no local detachment, the *Advertiser* pointed to the district’s surfeit of young and enthusiastic horsemen who could form a ‘very strong and efficient troop’ and be a credit to the new corps. Military training, said the article, taught young country men that patriotism is ‘the surest indication and guarantee of good citizenship.’\(^{42}\)

Almost a year later, in early August 1898, the *Advertiser* returned to the importance of training for local soldiers when it emerged that the town’s respected drill sergeant was being transferred to Young. His replacement’s duties now included Albury, leaving both it and Wagga with a part-time instructor. As well as training G Company, Wagga’s sergeant had been drill instructor for local public schools, prompting the paper to declare that his having to work two important centres was ‘decidedly against the interests of the defence force generally and of the local company in particular’.\(^{43}\)

Within days another military themed article advocated building a dedicated drill hall after G Company’s orderly room was taken over by the court house. Three years later, in 1901, an English visitor to Australia, Colonel E.G.H. Bingham, remarked on the quality of drill halls in the ‘principal towns’ as well as their suitability for ‘social entertainments’. This aspect of Wagga’s having a dedicated drill hall had not escaped the *Advertiser*’s notice. The article referred to the hoped-for hall as a ‘social centre’ that would hold the men together, establish ‘a feeling of camaraderie’, and provide ‘the benefits of drill and training.’\(^{44}\)

Early the following year, the *Advertiser* complained that Sydney and northern New South Wales received generous assistance for training riflemen, while Wagga was overlooked. Given the same resources, the paper argued, Wagga, part of a region that

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\(^{41}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 17 August 1897, and http://www.awm.gov.au/units/unit_21538south_africa.asp.

\(^{42}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 17 August 1897.

\(^{43}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 4 August 1898.

was home to some of the colony’s most efficient infantry companies, rifle clubs and many good riflemen, could supply a cohort of excellent shots.\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 7 January 1899.}

Spanning the final three years of the nineteenth century, these articles were written when debates about how best to defend Australia were being aired in the \textit{Advertiser}, as they were at the highest levels of colonial government. Advocates of compulsory cadet training for all boys argued their case against those who wanted compulsory citizen soldiering for all men. In the 1890s ideas about compulsory, but limited, military training for young men were popular, supported by the likes of one-time Experiment Farm visitor and rising young permanent officer, Gordon Legge, and often over the following years by the local press.\footnote{C. Wilcox, 1998, p. 44.}

In 1899 the war in South Africa animated Wagga’s interest in Britain’s cause and martial spirit. South Africa gave Wagga’s soldiers the opportunity to experience warfare that the Sudan had not. When the first members of G Company began leaving in 1899, war and military matters assumed a prominent place in Wagga’s newspapers. In late February 1900 William Lyne, the Premier of New South Wales, boarded the \textit{Warrigal} at Circular Quay to address ‘A’ Battery before they sailed for South Africa. Complimenting the men on their willingness to go to a brutal war, Lyne added that many of them ‘who understood country life would be particularly useful in South Africa.’\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 2 January 1900.}

After more than a year of war, in March 1901 the \textit{Advertiser} observed, ‘If we desire a boy to dance, ride or play a game of skill we set him at it early. Horses and other animals are broken in young. So boys should be drilled when young, especially in physical drill’.\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 9 March 1901.} At his welcome home in December 1902, when he warned against believing that men were good soldiers just because they were Australian, Alfred Bennett also told his Wagga audience that in South Africa he commanded ‘a very fine body of men from the country, and those men did not require any leading.’\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 9 December 1902.} Being Australian did not necessarily make one a good soldier, but being an Australian from the country made it more likely.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[45] \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 7 January 1899.
\item[46] C. Wilcox, 1998, p. 44.
\item[47] \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 2 January 1900.
\item[48] \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 9 March 1901.
\item[49] \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 9 December 1902.
\end{footnotes}
Country soldiers were ‘already stereotypes’ when the first contingents sailed for South Africa, and the image of the bushman soldier dominated popular impressions in the bush and the cities during the Boer War. With their distinctive bearing, bronzed skin and imposing physiques they, along with other colonials, were conspicuous, and observers invested men from the Australian colonies with the most positive physical and emotional qualities.  

The view of rural men as good soldiers gained further currency after the war. In June 1902, just a month after the Boer surrender, an Australian veteran published one of the earliest pieces of Australian war literature. Written from the point of view of a man in the ranks, Jack Abbott’s novel *Tommy Cornstalk* described most of the rank and file troops who went to South Africa as being from the bush. The cornstalk – the country New South Wales soldier – was, he said, a generally … long-limbed fellow, with a drawling twang, to whom anything in the nature of sport appeals most strongly … The bushman – the dweller in the country as opposed to town-abiding folk – the real Cornstalk is, to all practical purposes, of the same kind as the Boer … His soldiering is mainly of the present. The only discipline he really knows is the “discipline of enthusiasm” … until he has signed his attestation paper, almost until he has embarked upon the troopship, he has never thoroughly been “under the whip”!

*Tommy Cornstalk* was widely read and sufficiently popular to bring Abbott a degree of fame early in what became a long literary career, even if their experience of schooling meant that many Australian soldiers had already ‘been under the whip’.

Shortly before the end of the Boer War, Federation changed Australia’s military landscape, as the colonial forces were integrated and high level decisions made about the make up and role of Australia’s armed forces.  


writhe role.\textsuperscript{54} However upset members might have been by the decision, some joined the more than 80 men who applied for 38 places in a new local artillery battery, No. 3 battery of the Australian Field Artillery.\textsuperscript{55}

In 1905, with the war in South Africa still fresh in memory, Wagga’s press considered the changing nature of warfare and the value of citizen soldiers, cadets and skilled marksmen, many of whom were rifle club members. Rifle clubs were not organised as a formal military reserve, but were considered a source of wartime recruits. Alfred Deakin’s administration encouraged mass voluntary military training through increased club membership.\textsuperscript{56} Based in all likelihood on the experience in South Africa, the Advertiser suggested that the ‘old distinction between “regulars” and volunteers’ would carry less weight than it once did. A regular soldier might consider rifle club members amateurs, but ‘the very reverse is the case when it comes to the handling for deadly purposes of the soldier’s special weapon. In the majority of cases the tables are then turned, and it is the “regular” who has to confess himself the amateur as compared with his skilled but despised volunteer comrade.’\textsuperscript{57} Within the decade, local men Dan Byrnes, Tasman Rae and Tas Douglas were among those who brought the country man’s skill with the rifle, honed by training in the club, to military service.

Children at bigger schools also had to join the cadet corps, in which could be found the link between schools, the volunteer forces and, after 1911, the militia.\textsuperscript{58} While the local press looked back to the Boer War in evaluating the rifleman’s value, many of Wagga’s volunteers for the next war were getting their first taste of military life in the cadets. Senior among them was Thomas Blamey. As a trainee teacher at Lake Albert Public School and then Newtown (South Wagga) Public School, he took a keen interest in the cadets, becoming second in command at South Wagga, where he engaged in a fierce rivalry with Wagga Wagga Public School in Gurwood Street. If this was a device to develop esprit de corps, Blamey succeeded, and when he left in 1902 his cadets bought him several expensive gifts.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{54} C. Wilcox, 1998, p. 52 and Daily Advertiser, 7 July 1903.
\textsuperscript{55} Daily Advertiser, 7 July & 13 August 1903. On the formation of a new battery, see the 7 July edition. On the number of vacancies and applicants, see the 13 August edition.
\textsuperscript{56} C. Wilcox, 1998, pp. 50 & 54.
\textsuperscript{57} Daily Advertiser, 20 July 1905.
At other schools too, the wartime generation were getting their first taste of drill. Colville Armstrong was in the Christian Brothers School Cadets, as were Herbert Brunskill and Patrick Lourey. Leslie Black was a cadet before joining the 16th Battery of the Field Artillery. Jack Bruce was a cadet at Wagga High School as was George Hill from Traill Street. Frank Davis, who had had flat feet since birth, was a cadet in Wagga, as was Edgar Headley. Tas Douglas was a cadet and a member of the rifle club.

In 1907 Major General John Hoad and former major, Henry Heath, both Boer War veterans, were among a group of military men to attend a parade of 176 of the district’s 198 cadets. Hoad told the boys that they were Australia’s future defenders. Training, he said, taught soldiers their work, but common sense kept them fit for marching or fighting. He promised new rifle ranges so the boys could learn shooting side-by-side with school work.

The cadet movement was already well entrenched in Wagga when compulsory membership for boys aged 12-17 began in July 1911. At the local coronation festivities that year, cadets paraded in the packed showground alongside the town’s soldiers and among members of friendly societies, the town bands and the broader school community. At the Wagga Eight Hour Association’s 1912 ‘demonstration’ – a day of events at the showground, William Garland, Wagga High’s Principal, mustered ‘two or three squads of boys’ to compete for an £11 prize before a crowd that the organisers hoped would reach 5000.

Being schoolboys, cadets’ time could be marshalled more easily than could that of men whose need to earn a living demanded unceasing labour. The Advertiser pointed this out, suggesting that compulsory training might be all right for members of the leisured classes many of whom,

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62 On Jack Bruce, see S. Morris, December 2001-January 2002, p. 4. See also Hill, George, Repatriation Department File, R63503.
64 Cadets for this parade came from Wagga, Murrumburrah, Cootamundra and Junee, Daily Advertiser, 7 November 1907.
65 Daily Advertiser, 7 November 1907.
66 Wagga Wagga Eight Hour Association Minute Book 10 June 1912 - 3 October 1917, CSURA RW5/7/244, see minutes for 10 June, 12 June, 15 July, 5 August and 2 September 1912, quote from 5 August 1912. The Eight Hour Association ordered 5000 tickets printed with the Association’s name for the event.
would be better for a period of restraint and exercise every year’ but who also represented a small proportion of the population. On the other hand, the majority, the workers, could ‘only contrive to keep going by continuous and unbroken labour, and uninterrupted earning capacity. Yet the Government has the hardihood to ask the Legislature to say that these people shall be obliged to give up two or three weeks of the year to the service of the state without remuneration."

In a rural district, with its heavy requirement for labour, the *Advertiser*, having for years argued the importance of drill, came out firmly against compulsion.

In 1912, the paper revisited the hard-working rural Australian and the idea that he was already, as Charles Bean later said, ‘half a soldier’. ‘In our time and our country… the best and the sturdiest citizens have been produced in the rural districts … hardy, strenuous, independent types … developed by … systematic labour, hard work and the pressure of necessity to struggle resolutely to win and maintain material success in life.’ So it was for most of Wagga’s wartime volunteers. Rarely were they fresh-faced school boys with little experience outside the classroom or the family home. Some of the older men, like Alfred Bennett, Thomas Blamey, Dan Byrnes and Charles Boswell – those who had been to school in the 1890s or before – had more than a decade of work behind them when they went to war. But most of the younger men too were able to answer question 5 on their attestation form: ‘What is your trade or calling?’

Their responses reflect the range of occupations in the district, and those represented in the AIF more broadly. William Worth worked as a fireman at the Wagga Waterworks for two years before he enlisted. Lendon Shaw was a ledger keeper in the Commonwealth Bank’s Wagga branch. Harry Belford worked for the *Daily Advertiser*, Lawrence Atherton was an assistant chemist and Athol Follers a clerk in the Stamp Duties Office. Frederick Emblen, Joseph’s grandson, was a postal assistant. Charles Hussey, a 21 year old from The Rock, was a butcher. Two of the Castle brothers, Walter Roy ‘Roy’ and Allen worked for the railways. Roy joined as a railway porter having previously been a grocer. Allen described himself as a railway booking clerk on

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67 *Daily Advertiser*, 3 October 1908.  
70 S. Morris, 1996, p. 17.  
71 Hussey, Charles, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 175.
his discharge form, but as a junior porter on his attestation papers.\textsuperscript{72} One of their brothers, William, was a printer and the other, Herbert ‘Bertie’, was a carpenter.\textsuperscript{73} Ron Birrell was a painter and labourer. Tas Douglas worked for Huthwaite and Co. as a draper. Hubert Meagher had been an accountant with T. Edmondson & Co. before setting himself up as a fruiterer and café owner in Fitzmaurice Street.\textsuperscript{74} Aged 29 when the war began, Meagher was particularly successful. By 1914 his shop was popular, with a good clientele. He had spent £200 on a soda fountain, sold fruit salads and ice cream, tea, and confectionary and was ‘universally esteemed for his liberal, straight methods in business’\textsuperscript{75}.

Brothers Garnet and Robert Hale, whose grandfather had owned land in the district since the 1850s, worked as a grocer and a farmer respectively. The Brunskilss, Allen, George and Robert, members of one of the district’s oldest farming families, were also farmers. Fred Booty, a bank manager and well-known local cricketer, and Hugh Condon, a grazier, both married into the Brunskill clan. After Dan Byrnes left school he worked on farms before becoming a clerk and then managing clerk at L.A. Fosbery & Co, a successful Wagga stock, station and general commission agent.\textsuperscript{76}

Brewer Edgar Headley and his brother Leslie, a manager, were the grandsons of well-known local brewer, Connecticut born William Eaton, who came to Wagga via the Victorian goldfields and Grenfell.\textsuperscript{77} Jack, Charlie and Allan Bruce, who had lost three siblings before the war, were all carpenters like their father, George, a one-time apprentice under Charles Hardy whose son, Charles Junior, was also a carpenter.\textsuperscript{78} Another of the town’s woodworkers was, appropriately enough, self-employed Harold ‘Bill’ Carpenter, as was Alfred Foot.\textsuperscript{79} George Hill was an iron moulder’s apprentice.

\textsuperscript{73} S. Morris, 2002, pp. 227-231.
\textsuperscript{74} Douglas, Tasman, Repatriation Department File, M9176/2, Birrell, Ronald Leslie, Repatriation Department File, MX29757 and S. Morris, 2002, pp. 397 & 967-8. Hubert Meagher’s name was often spelt ‘Meager’ in the Advertiser but appears as both Meagher and Meager on his service record. A note on this record confirms that ‘this officer used to sign himself as H. R. Meagher’. See Hubert Meagher, NAA B2455.
\textsuperscript{79} Carpenter, Harold Charles, Repatriation Department File, MX133960, and Foot, Alfred, Repatriation Department File, M6473.
At the turn of the twentieth century Wagga was on the cusp of modernisation, and some new trades attracted men with a mechanical bent. Colville Armstrong, Reginald Duke and Oscar Hinton were all mechanics. Leslie Black was an ‘engine cleaner’. Alfred Haberecht was an engineer while Frank Davis described himself as a ‘mechanical expert’, a motor driver and a fitter and turner. Patrick Lourey, Herbert Brunskill and Stanley Belford were all motor drivers. 

Motor vehicles were becoming more common, but, as one Experiment Farm student recalled, their drivers were warned against frightening the still more numerous horses. In 1910 the Pastoral Hotel on Fitzmaurice Street had ample stabling for horses alongside ‘an enormous shed for the housing of motor cars, buggies and other vehicles.’ Four years later locally owned cars were still relatively scarce but there were enough for Dick Heydon’s blacksmith shop to be converted into a service station, for the Newtown Motor Hire Company to offer cars for hire, provide a twice-weekly service to Tumbarumba and run a mechanics shop, for the council to restrict bullock traffic to certain streets and for T. Edmondson and Co.’s hardware store on Gurwood Street to stock petrol, motor oil and engine lubricants for those who might ‘run a motor car’.

In August 1914 Maurice McKeown commented that none of the Farm’s Bomen neighbours owned a car. Of the few motor vehicles in Wagga, most belonged to local stock and station agents who used them for work. When he needed a vehicle to carry three English visitors to the Farm, McKeown turned to ‘Mr Brunskill’, presumably Herbert, for help. A young Riverina jackaroo remembered life in the ‘far off days’ before the widespread use of the motor car as ‘very calm, serene and peaceful’. By the beginning of August 1917, three years into the war, Wagga and the surrounding

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80 Armstrong described himself as an ‘assistant mechanic’ on his attestation form and Duke described himself as a ‘motor mechanic’. See Armstrong’s and Duke’s service records at NAA B2455.
81 Haberecht, Alfred Leonard, Repatriation Department File, M053407 pt. 1, and Davis, Frank Reginald, Repatriation Department File, M15786
82 Davis, Frank, Repatriation Department File, M15786, and Belford and Brunskill’s service records, NAA B2455.
83 B. Butts letter to J. Sutherland in, J. Sutherland; Research Papers re Publication, From Farm Boys to PhDs, Memorabilia, Minutes, Photographs and Audio Tapes, 1942-95, CSURA, RWI 400/1/3.
84 The Sydney Mail, 10 August 1910, Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society Newsletter, no. 233, February-March 1985, p. 4.
86 Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926, CSURA, SA473/31/101-128 (31/116), letter 28 August 1914.
district out to 20 miles was home to 112 cars, taxis and lorries as well as 86 motor cycles.\textsuperscript{88} The days of serenity were quickly passing.

More traditional rural trades employed skilled and unskilled alike. William Blake’s grandson, Richard, was a stock salesman. Thomas Hoye and Albert Hurst were saddlers. Wilfred Baker was a blacksmith, and Bert Mansfield a shearer.\textsuperscript{89} Drovers were still to be seen leading stock on the hoof by day and passing the nights at one of the prescribed camping grounds set roughly every ten kilometres along the stock routes.\textsuperscript{90} One was Richard Blamey, Thomas’s father who also owned land in the district, was a Freemason, and was sufficiently well off to be a shareholder in the Murrumbidgee Milling Company.\textsuperscript{91} Another was James Kelly who lived at Tattersall’s Hotel in Fitzmaurice Street.\textsuperscript{92} His oldest son Leo followed James into droving when he left school. Austin, James’ youngest son, was a labourer who worked with the railways ‘for a while’ after leaving school.\textsuperscript{93}

In the detailed statistical tables in his \textit{Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services}, A. G. Butler suggested one in three members of the AIF were labourers before enlisting. 30 years later, Lloyd Robson declared the figure to be 22 per cent and more recently Dale Blair’s study of the 1st Battalion revealed that 22 per cent of its members had been labourers.\textsuperscript{94} The number of Wagga’s volunteers who described themselves as Austin Kelly did, as ‘labourers’ or variations thereof, such as ‘farm hand’, ‘station hand’, ‘farm worker’ or ‘bush worker’ was in keeping with Robson’s and Blair’s conclusions. Of more than 2600 volunteers known to have had an association with the district, 472, or almost one in five was a labourer of some description.\textsuperscript{95}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{88} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 29 August 1917.
\bibitem{89} Mansfield, Bert, Repatriation Department File, R97817.
\bibitem{90} J. N. I. Dawes and L. L. Robson, 1977, p. 17.
\bibitem{91} Murrumbidgee Milling Co. Ltd. Wagga Wagga, list of shareholders 1914, CSURA RW10 32/152 and Lodge Harmony Arch Chapter No. 19, Minute Book 1908-1940, CSURA RW2463/32/377. See for instance meeting notes 23 February 1915.
\bibitem{92} Wagga Wagga Superior Public School, Register of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal, 1882-1894, CSURA SA1621/1, S. Morris, 2002, p. 766, and Kelly, Austin, Repatriation Department File, MX3251.
\bibitem{93} S. Morris, 2002, CSURA, RW2495, p. 766, and Kelly, Austin, Repatriation Department File, MX3251, Austin Kelly's record is contradictory, stating that he was a labourer before enlisting and elsewhere stating that he went straight from school into the AIF.
\bibitem{95} These figures come from my database of volunteers who had an association with Wagga and are based on details provided on attestation forms or in the Wagga Police Charge Books, CSURA, SA1519.
\end{thebibliography}
George Dean left school at twelve to work as a labourer, saying later in life that he had worked with horses before the war.96 James Dennis, third of ten children, left school at thirteen to work as a labourer, cutting sleepers, shearing and doing general bush work.97 Roy Dowsett’s foot was crushed by a wagon when he was four: the injury troubled him his whole life, but kept him neither from labouring nor the AIF.98 Jim Corbett, a labourer and farm worker, worked for W. Conway at Yathella, always setting some of his salary aside to support his widowed mother.99 When he enlisted, Sam Barrow, who also worked to support himself and his mother, described himself as a farmhand and when he was discharged, as a wheat farmer who had worked for ‘Lyon’ on the Tarcutta Road.100

Labouring was unskilled, insecure and, as the type of work done by James Dennis indicates, included any number of jobs in town or on farms. Outside Wagga, where ‘the Clydesdale farm horse reigned supreme’, paddocks were cleared and ploughed by teams of men and horses. Horsemen rounded up stock; labourers felled trees, cut wood, dug post-holes by hand – the kind of toil usually done by men of modest backgrounds.101 Robert Humphries from Bomen worked for the railways for 30 years, and his son Reginald became a labourer after leaving school.102 August Arndt, who lived with his mother in Tarcutta Street, described himself as a labourer when he enlisted, and after the war declared instead that he’d been ‘an experienced axeman having followed falling timber for saw mills’.103

All sorts of men worked as labourers. English born Charles Boswell was in his mid-30s and a father of six with ‘heart trouble and rheumatics’, while Reg McCurdy was a twenty year old in 1914 who had been on his own for six years.104 He had ‘come up the hard way … battled more or less on my own, a long way from home. Lived among grown men up to enlisting’, he said many years after the war. For a man like this, the army might have seemed a natural milieu and the decision to enlist relatively straightforward.105

96 Dean, George, Repatriation Department File, M46872.
97 Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File, M24707, see ‘Service Documents’.
98 Dowsett, Roy Stanley, Repatriation Department File, C27236.
99 Corbett, James, Repatriation Department File, C44194, Corbett calls himself ‘Jim’ in documents on this file.
100 Barrow, Samuel, Repatriation Department File, M57224.
101 B. Butts letter to J. Sutherland, CSURA, RW1400/1/3.
103 Arndt, August James, Repatriation Department File, M75366 and attestation papers.
104 Boswell, Charles Edwin, Repatriation Department File, M10915.
105 McCurdy, Reginald, Repatriation Department File, C17563, document 19 September 1964.
Men who led tough lives of hard work and long hours could find release in one of Wagga’s many hotels. When drink got the better of some, they found themselves under arrest. Almost 40 of the district’s volunteers had spent time in the local lock up between 1911 and joining the AIF. Almost 60 per cent of them were labourers and only five did not do some kind of manual work. Mostly they were arrested for minor offences, usually relating to drink, and were in and out of custody relatively quickly, staying in the 7 x 5 x 3 metre cell just long enough to sober up or to get fine or bail money together. Sometimes though, the crime was more serious. Labourer Robert Florance, and two other men who assaulted Fred Brentnall, the Experiment Farm’s Chief Steward, at the Farm in 1913, were arrested and spent almost a week in the lock up before being let out for the considerable sum of £20 bail.

In some ways, Wagga’s volunteers lived up to the stereotype of the rural Australian as a natural soldier. As a group, whether or not they had any previous service, their experience of life in the country gave them some exposure to situations and pursuits that proved useful in the military. Sleeping rough, working long exhausting hours, shooting and hunting (various species of bird could be hunted almost year round) being frequently on the move and subject to discipline and instruction are the stuff of army life. The contradictory ideas with which they had grown up – that they lacked discipline even though discipline was central to their schooling and their jobs, and that they were natural soldiers, but needed training nonetheless – sat comfortably side-by-side. They possessed what Lloyd Robson called the ‘values and strengths’ of life in the country, and they were the ‘very ones which are called upon in a war.’ But as men who grew up in an era of mass education, when the military arts were practised by children and adults and when work occupied most of the week, the discipline and

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106 The figure of 37 comes from the 309 men on whom this study is based and represents almost 12 per cent of the total having been arrested between 1911 and the date of their enlistment. 107 Fifty seven per cent, or 21 of 37, local volunteers who were arrested before they enlisted were labourers. Of the remainder, 3 were blacksmiths. The others included a compositor, a plumber, a plasterer, a cook, a steward, a clerk, a horse trainer, a groom, a hairdresser, a boot maker and an engine driver. See Wagga Wagga Police Charge Books 1911–1933, CSURA SA1519. 108 Clyde Collins, for example, was picked up with the clientele of a ‘common gaming house’ in Trail Street. Payment of a £2 fine got him out, Wagga Wagga Police Station, Charge Books 1911–1933, CSURA SA1519/9, week ending 7 December 1912. Other men who later enlisted were arrested for crimes including a failure to pay maintenance to deserted wives or children, for maintaining an illegitimate child or making a person resist arrest; Wagga Wagga Police Station, Charge Books 1911–1933, CSURA, SA1519. 109 Wagga Wagga Police Station, Charge Books, CSURA, SA1519/9, week ending 1 March 1913. 110 Shooting was banned on Lake Albert, a designated reserve, but elsewhere in the district, only in December and January could no birds be shot. Open season varied according to species. See for example, NSW Police Gazette, No. 2, Wednesday 14 January 1914, pp. 15-17. The same information on hunting seasons appears at regular intervals in this source. 111 L. L. Robson, 1973, p. 737.
regimentation evident in the lives of Wagga’s wartime generation reflects the broader national experience. If the AIF had a problem with discipline its roots did not lie in the absence of discipline from daily life in the pre-war years.

In August 1914 the first Wagga men to enlist donned the uniform of the AIF. Over the four years to come many more followed. Their departure left gaps in local homes, clubs, associations and businesses. They were on the other side of the world but remained a conspicuous presence in district life; so did the war. Over the years to come it brought unity, division, worry, grief and exhaustion, destroyed some lives and gave purpose to others. Alfred Bennett had been right in 1902. This was no ‘colonial affair’; in this war empires were at stake and Wagga was ready to play its part.
III. ‘The hour of national peril’: Wagga goes to war

Australians, it is often said, greeted the declaration of war in 1914 with great enthusiasm. Sometimes described as generating a state of euphoria, ‘an almost festive’ atmosphere and ‘complete and enthusiastic harmony’, news of the war was not everywhere received with such rapture.¹ In Wagga, the tone was more subdued. When the mayor and aldermen toasted the King and sang the national anthem after the council meeting of 6 August, there was no hint of celebration. This was a demonstration of loyalty to the Empire in ‘a time of crisis’, not an expression of joy at a war described in the Advertiser as a ‘universal calamity’ and a ‘fight for life’.²

Without necessarily welcoming the war, some businesses stood to profit nonetheless. The Advertiser’s editors might have considered it a bonanza. Newspapers were already the only source of news in Australia, and the war, as the managing editor of London’s Daily Mail put it, created both a supply of news and a demand for it.³ In August 1914 1843 newspapers and periodicals were being published in Australia.⁴ The Advertiser, published six days a week, from Monday to Saturday, ran stories from Reuters overseas news services, filling columns with news of the war from the world’s oceans to western Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific islands. On 5 August readers saw the words ‘War Special’ printed on the front page for the first time. Perhaps they stopped noticing when the same words became a feature of every front page until 22 November 1918.⁵ The war led to a ‘great increase’ in circulation, boasted the paper, without ever publishing figures to support the claim, but it was probably true.⁶ Newspaper readership did go up when the war began, and country newspapers, ‘served their people well, producing special editions, making the news as widely available as possible.’⁷ In towns across the Riverina during the war’s early months, newspapers gave more and more space to the crisis in Europe, usually relying on telegrams from agents in Sydney.

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² Daily Advertiser, 4 and 7 August 1914.
⁴ See for example, N. Blacklow, 1999, p. 223, and M. McKernan, The Australian People and the Great War, Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, 1980, p. 179. On the number of newspapers and periodicals, see E. Scott, Australia During the War, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1937, p. 67.
⁷ M. McKernan, 1980, p. 178 and J. Williams, 1999, p. 3.
for their stories. When the non-dailies didn’t go to print, they issued special notices to keep the public up-to-date.\(^8\)

Anyone in Wagga with access to a newspaper or to those who bought them could not help but be aware of the massive battles being fought in France and Belgium and on Germany’s eastern front. Before the end of August, the Advertiser reported that the war had captured the public’s attention ‘to the exclusion of everything else.’ Politics and the increasingly severe drought – in 1914-15 Wagga experienced its lowest rainfall on record – said the paper, were insignificant compared with the ‘great European war in which our Empire is engaged.’\(^9\) At that early stage though, Australia was scarcely affected. People may have been thinking about the war and those who volunteered early and their families certainly were, but life in Wagga went on much as normal in August 1914, and the months that followed.

Neither war nor drought was allowed to disrupt the Murrumbidgee Pastoral and Agricultural Association’s (MPAA) 50\(^{th}\) annual show. The first major civic occasion since the war began, the three days of sideshows, exhibits, competitions and events, drew large crowds. On Wednesday 26 August, the Show’s main day, local families and visitors from further afield wandered the showground, dressed for summer even though it was not yet spring. Among the 18,000 people to pass through the turnstiles that day were the Mayoress, Margaret McDonough, a host of local and state politicians, at least some of the Brunskill clan, Fred Booty’s sister Ethel, later, like her brother, to marry into the Brunskill family, and her mother, Charlotte.\(^{10}\) The Wagga Brass Band entertained the crowd, people filled the exhibition hall and the ring events performed to packed grandstands.

Even with water carts spraying the dry ground, the grand parade early on Wednesday afternoon kicked a cloud of dust into the still air. The drought had Wagga in its grip and the few days of socialising and entertainment were a welcome distraction for people who knew that ‘the district was up against a difficult situation.’ A poor season was in

\(^8\) N. Blacklow, 1999, pp. 224-225.
\(^9\) *Daily Advertiser*, 19 August 1914. The rainfall figures are from, Wagga Wagga Experiment Farm, Annual Report for the year ended 30 June 1915, Copies of letters sent to the Department of Agriculture, 1912-29, CSURA SA473/31/174-175 (31/174).
\(^{10}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 27 August 1914.
prospect under ‘the shadow of a European war’. Before anyone could realise the war’s cost, the Show’s organisers treated it lightly. The program included the ‘Victoria Cross Competition’, ‘one of the most entertaining events of the day’. This mounted and dismounted steeplechase involved competitors carrying a dummy around the circuit, mimicking the carrying of a wounded comrade.

Continuing the theme developed over several decades, and bringing the story back to the war, the Advertiser declared the Show crowd to be ‘the robust, hardy types of men and women who may only be met with in large bodies on a Show ground’. Country life, said the paper, produced ‘the courageous, self-reliant types upon whom the Commonwealth must depend in the hour of national peril’. At least some of Wagga’s citizens felt the same way, and by the time recruiting entered its third week 157 local men had answered the Commonwealth’s call, 124 were accepted into the AIF. More local men volunteered within a month of the war beginning than had served in South Africa, and perhaps as many as one in six of those who enlisted.

While local volunteers and their families were most immediately affected, the war quickly became a preoccupation for people who felt the need to busy themselves with charitable work or war work. For others, fighting on the far side of the world did not easily disrupt day-to-day life. At the gentleman’s Riverine Club in July 1914, Percy Williamson, a stock and station agent, sportsman and billiard champion, urged buying at least a dozen new billiard cues and balls, and demanded to know why the competition then being held was played on a single table using one set of balls. The declaration of war did nothing to deflect members’ interest in the state of their competition and in August another club member urged that ‘a boy or another Steward be engaged’ so

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11 Daily Advertiser, 27 August 1914.
12 The Murrumbidgee Pastoral and Agricultural Association show was first held in Wagga in 1865, see Back to Wagga Souvenir, 1927, p. 113. Lengthy reports on the show appear in, Daily Advertiser, 25, 27 and 28 August 1914. The ‘Victoria Cross Competition’ is in the 28 August edition. The Show ran from 25-27 August.
13 Daily Advertiser, 29 August 1914.
14 Daily Advertiser, 26 and 29 August 1914.
15 Exact figures for the district in this period do not exist. Swan lists Wagga’s male population in 1901 as 2,559 and in 1921 as 3,047 while the New South Wales Government 1914 Year Book indicates that 26% of the state’s male population was of enlistment age. Extrapolating this to the Wagga district, based on an eligible population in the order of 3,000, some 780 men might have been eligible. See K. Swan, 1970, p. 152 and J.B. Trivett, The Official Year Book of New South Wales 1915, Government of New South Wales, Sydney, 1917, pp. 116-117. For the AIF’s enlistment standards see L.L. Robson, 1970, p. 23 and C.E.W. Bean, 1921, pp. 59-60.
16 This suggestion was dated 7 July 1914. Riverine Club Suggestion Book, CSURA RW2633/7/41 and S. Morris, 2002, pp. 1560-61.
members could play through the marker’s ‘frequent absences.’ Ten months later, three days into the fighting on Gallipoli, Williamson resumed his campaign for improved ‘billiard playing accommodation’ at the club. While Australia and the British Empire, on whose aesthetic the Club was modelled, went to war, members were concerned with billiards, a dispute with the owner of an adjoining property and the introduction of poker machine counters.

Yet even in this genteel corner of Wagga’s social scene, the war could not be ignored for long. Duty, both individual and collective, soon ensured that thoughts turned to members who joined the AIF. At the 15 August meeting, local crack shot, stock, station, land and financial agent, and member of several local clubs, John ‘Dooley’ Mulholland’s enlistment was raised, as was the question of how best those who could not or would not volunteer might contribute to the war effort. At a general meeting to discuss a donation to the Patriotic War Fund, men like Enoch Booty, Fred’s father, George Fosbery’s father Leonard, the stock and station agent, and well known local James Baylis were firm supporters of making a contribution. Arguments raged not around whether money should be given, but how much – £100 or £200. In the end the club agreed on £200.

The war prompted a variety of responses in Wagga. McKernan noted that in 1914 the people of Yass, less than two hundred kilometres away, cancelled their annual show. In Wagga, some local organisations followed Yass’s lead and some long-planned events were cancelled. While the MPAA was busy organising its annual show during July and August, the Wagga Wagga Eight Hour Association was putting together an extensive program of events for their annual ‘demonstration’. With a procession, races, school and horse events, art union prizes, and a smoke social to organise, Association members worked hard right up until the last day of peace. Their efforts came to nought. When war was declared the Eight Hour Association postponed their demonstration day indefinitely ‘on account of the unsettled state of the Empire at present.’ Instead,

17 Riverine Club Suggestion Book, CSURA RW2633/7/41, 13 August 1914.
18 Riverine Club Minutes, CSURA RW2633/1/2a, 28 April 1915.
19 Riverine Club Minutes CSURA RW2633/1/2a, 8 July, 12 August and 9 September 1914.
20 Riverine Club Minutes CSURA RW2633/1/2a, 8 July, 12 August, 9 September and 14 October 1914.
21 Riverine Club Minutes CSURA RW2633/1/2a, 11 September 1914.
22 Riverine Club Minutes CSURA RW2633/1/2a, 11 November 1914 and Report of Committee for year ending 31 March 1915.
members agreed to take out advertisements advising of the postponement ‘on account of
the war’.  

Other local organisations also began to adjust to wartime life. At the Lodge Harmony
No. 22’s meeting on 11 August 1914, the newly declared conflict went unremarked, but
the following month the brethren discussed correspondence from the Masonic Club
requesting a contribution to the ‘war fund’. While it is impossible to know what
members talked about outside the formal meetings, the minutes of this and other local
lodges and other associations record no further mention of the war during its opening
months.  

The local council was in a similar position. It is difficult to imagine aldermen not
speaking among themselves about a war that was dominating the press and for which
local men had already volunteered. But in the last five months of 1914 it scarcely
intruded on the council’s agenda, which was dominated by matters like limiting the
number of bullocks on local streets and the number of boats on Wollundry Lagoon, a
shopkeeper’s application to erect sunblinds over his shop window, labourer Edwin
Boswell’s request for water to be supplied to his garden outside the Showground, the
state of the water and gas mains in Bolton Street and applications from local bands to
perform in public spaces, among many other things. More than a month had passed
since the war began when, on 17 September, a circular letter from the Belgian Clothing
Relief Society was referred to the mayor for action. When the war was next raised, in
October the council agreed to take steps to proclaim 25 November a public holiday for
the Licensed Victuallers’ Race Meeting, proceeds from which would be donated to the
Patriotic Fund.

By December enough local organisations were trying to raise funds for the war effort
that their representatives were asked to establish their bona fides with the Wagga Red

24 Wagga Wagga Eight Hour Association Minute Book 10 June 1912 - 3 October 1917, CSURA RWS/7 item 244,
24 July, 3 August and 17 August 1914.
25 Lodge Harmony No. 22 United Grand Lodge (UGL) of NSW, Minute Book 1906-1917, CSURA RW2463/5/62,
meeting 8 September 1914 and Lodge Harmony Arch Chapter No 19, CSURA RW2463/32 item 377.
26 Wagga Wagga Amateur Picnic Race Club Minutes, CSURA RW2131/1, 1914 meeting minutes. Wagga Wagga
Literary Institute Minute Book, CSURA RW117/1.
27 Daily Advertiser, 7 August 1914.
28 See for example the Council Minutes of 17 September, 22 October, 26 November and 23 December 1914.
Wagga Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW2608/19.
29 Wagga Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW2608/19, 22 October 1914.
Cross League. But beyond these limited intrusions, the war remained in the background.

At nearby Bomen, as a temporary home to its male students and a more permanent abode for its staff, the Wagga Experiment Farm’s population included many eligibles – men of enlistment age who met the AIF’s standards. Often students’ time in the district was limited to the length of their course, but their interaction with the town through sports and other social activities gave them a local presence. Experiment Farm students and former students spent some of their formative years in Wagga learning to become successful farmers. At least some remembered their time there for decades after they left. In 1989, John Crowley, who apart from his time at the Farm didn’t live in the Wagga district, wrote, ‘I still feel … all the land knowledge that helped me through life was provided by Wagga Experiment Farm’. Joyce Barker’s father, Eric Shelley, was a pre-war student who was ‘thoroughly socially integrated in the district’ when he enlisted in 1915, so much so that her mother was a local girl who met her father during his time at Bomen. Some Farm employees who lived in the district had equally deep roots and formed strong links with the community.

The Farm’s manager and public face, Maurice McKeown, was a particularly memorable character. He maintained a prodigious correspondence with the Department of Agriculture, businesses, agricultural institutes in Australia and overseas, farmers, and the parents of miscreant students who he felt needed to be frankly informed about their offspring’s misdeeds and the reasons for the punishment he had meted out. His letters were usually to the point and often very frank, but those he wrote to staff, students or former students who joined the AIF, or to their families, took a different tone. They were respectful, proud, and keen to acknowledge the men and boys who were doing their duty. His first, written on 24 August 1914 to Richard Erle Barker, expressed pleasure at Barker’s acceptance into the AIF, and mentioned three others from the Farm who were rejected and had returned from Sydney. By the end of June 1915 only 33 of

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30 Daily Advertiser, 5 December 1914.
31 John Crowley, letter, 27 May 1989, June Sutherland, CSURA RW1400/1/1.
32 Joyce M. Barker, letter, 21 January 1995, June Sutherland, CSURA RW1400/1/1.
33 CSURA holds in its collection copies of Farm correspondence to private individuals, business and government offices for the period 1896-1938. Most volumes number in the hundreds of pages, some in the thousands. The Farm collection also includes student rolls and examination results.
34 Letter to R. Erle Barker, 24 August 1914, Wagga Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to firms and private individuals, 1896-1922 SA473/31/129-172 (31/161).
the 75 students who lived at the Farm during the previous twelve months remained. Fourteen left to enlist before completing their course, and three of the five who received the Farm Certificate were in uniform before the 1914-1915 Annual Report was written.\textsuperscript{35}

As it took volunteers away from the district, the war spawned new local organisations or local branches of national institutions. On 19 August the \emph{Advertiser} published a letter from ‘Britisher’ suggesting that the mayor call a public meeting to consider how best Wagga might assist ‘our Empire at this crisis’ and offering hearty congratulations to the ladies who established the Wagga Red Cross League the previous week.\textsuperscript{36} Among the League’s founders were some of Wagga’s most prominent women. Margaret McDonough, the mayor’s wife, was president. Her deputy was Elizabeth Copland, a schoolteacher known for her work for charity and her strong support for the Wagga Wagga District Hospital, who was also president of the Gould League of Bird Lovers and a founding member of the Wagga Wagga Shakespearian Society. Businesswomen like Annie Juppenlatz, the ‘courteous, kindly natured and business-like’ daughter of Polish immigrants and owner of the Wagga Wagga Hotel near the railway station, were also active in the local League.\textsuperscript{37} Within twelve months, Annie had eleven nephews serving in the AIF.\textsuperscript{38}

On Friday evening 21 August, as ‘Britisher’ had suggested, Mayor McDonough hosted a ‘patriotic meeting of citizens’. They were there to discuss the Patriotic Fund, a group established to ‘assist those who were dependent on the men who had been called to the battle field.’ Like those who hastened to bring the Red Cross to Wagga, the people in the Empire Hall that night recognised that they were living through the opening days of a long conflict. That many more volunteers would come forward was the unstated understanding behind the gathering. Dr Henry Stoker of Gurwood Street, a well-known Wagga resident, uncle of the soon-to-be celebrated submarine \emph{AE2}’s captain, keen sportsman and member of several clubs and the Lodge Harmony, moved that the

\textsuperscript{35} Wagga Wagga Experiment Farm, \emph{Annual Report for the year ended 30 June 1915}, Copies of letters sent to the Department of Agriculture, 1912-29 SA473/31/174-175 (31/174).
\textsuperscript{36} J. Hurcum, ‘Wagga Wagga Red Cross’, \emph{Murrumbidgee Ancestor, the Journal of Wagga Wagga and District Family History Society}, no. 107, October 2012, p. 17, and \emph{Daily Advertiser}, 19 August 1914.
\textsuperscript{38} \emph{Daily Advertiser}, 9 September 1915.
Sydney Lord Mayor’s Patriotic Fund ‘be supported by a branch in Wagga.’ To continuing applause, the motion was carried. Enoch Booty was appointed honorary treasurer; McDonough was elected president. The 40-strong committee – the Fund’s organisers and the collectors of subscriptions – included Henry Stoker and other well-known locals; among others, members of the Copland and Brunskill families, Charles Hardy Senior, and Church of England minister Canon Joseph Pike, an outspoken cleric then beginning four years of unwavering devotion to the local war effort. In three days the Patriotic Fund collected £642. Contributions large and small came from all over the district. The Murrumbidgee Milling Company pledged £100, the drover Richard Blamey put in a little over £1, Dr Stoker gave £25, Canon and Mrs Pike contributed £3.

Wagga’s early contribution to the war effort was not confined to money and comforts. Before the end of August the Advertiser’s editors grasped that the ‘demand for troop horses and … for transport work will be enormous’ and the Government was keen to acquire as many as could be spared from rural areas. On 1 September the paper carried a small but prominent piece under the heading ‘Australian volunteers wish to join the Light Horse, more remounts wanted’. The Department of Veterans’ Affairs suggests that more than 20,000 men served in the Middle East of some 330,000 who served overseas. If these figures are an indication, it seems that the Light Horse comprised between five or six per cent of the AIF. In Wagga, looking at those on whom this study is based, eight per cent – 27 of the 309 – served in the mounted arm. They were men like Edward Crouch of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment. A well-known Wagga horse breaker, he was described as an ‘expert rough rider’, who while training in Egypt won £10 for breaking an ‘outlaw horse’ said to have already thrown 30 riders. Like successive generations of Wagga boys, Crouch had probably spent countless hours in the saddle. Alfred Bennett’s peers rode whenever they could, so did Alick Smith and his mate Richard Cox, while younger children like Tony Dunn rode miles to school and

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41 Daily Advertiser, 25 August 1914.
42 Daily Advertiser, 27 August 1914.
43 Daily Advertiser, 1 September 1914.
44 Daily Advertiser, 1 September 1914.
back. One Wagga High boy reckoned on having covered more than 5500 kilometres getting to and from school on horseback.46

In 1913, Australia had more than 2,500,000 horses for a nation of five million people. During the war the Australian Army Remount Department bought about 125,000, or five per cent.47 Sometimes volunteers supplied their own, which were then bought by the army. In December 1914 a Wagga farmer presented twenty year-old Allan Stinson, one time student at Wagga Primary and Wagga High, who had enlisted in the Light Horse in October, with ‘a very fine charger’.48 Most men relied on what the Army could provide, and a few days after announcing that remounts were wanted, the Advertiser ran a story on sales coming up in Junee, Lockhart, Coolamon and Wagga.49 The following day, with the government buyer, Mr Evans, in town the Wagga saleyards, dust mingling with manure, were crowded with people and animals. Evans’ requirements were very specific. The AIF needed broken in horses between four and ten years old that could carry 14 stone. In Wagga that September he found 91 such animals, a good result considering that only six per cent of the horses in Australia complied with the army’s standard.50

These sales became a periodic feature of district life in the second part of 1914. In early December a Brunskill and another local farmer made a handsome profit when between them they sold 130 remounts and artillery horses to a government buyer who paid up to £25 for ‘superior sorts’, and who bought ‘a small draft of specially selected horses’ privately.51

Sheep too were needed for the war effort. In late August at least two Wagga farmers offered to have 500 of theirs slaughtered, frozen and sent to help feed the people of

48 Daily Advertiser, 3 December 1914.
49 Daily Advertiser, 4 September 1914.
50 On the sale and number of horses sold, see Daily Advertiser, 8 1914. Further advertisements for horses appeared in the Daily Advertiser, 11 and 16 September 1914. On the percentage of horses complying with the army’s requirements, see J. Bou, 2010, p. 238.
51 Daily Advertiser, 3 and 9 December 1914.
England. Their gesture might have meant a windfall for a local business. The Southern Riverina Inland Freezing Company, in which businessmen Robert Brunskill was a shareholder, was able to freeze sheep as well as any number of other beasts slaughtered in the district.

As McKernan observed, trade was always a ‘topic of concern’ for rural Australians. In some instances, it could seem more important than the war, particularly in the months before Gallipoli. Robert Wilkinson, the stock and station agent, now based in Sydney and with offices in Wagga, wrote regularly to his nephew David in Bombala. Barely mentioning the war until two days before the Gallipoli landing, when he took a group of female relatives and friends, to watch soldiers march past the Australian Club on Macquarie Street, Wilkinson was far more concerned with the weather, farming and his own business interests.

In September 1914 a small Australian force, the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF), fought a brief campaign against German colonial troops on New Britain. For Wagga boys, Jack Bruce, Carl Hely – both of whom joined the AN&MEF on 11 August – and Athol Eldershaw, who joined the next day, the expedition to Rabaul offered a taste of war, not only the violence and discomfort but also exposure to modern military technology. Bruce, who may never have seen the sea before joining the AN&MEF, was particularly taken with the naval escorts that accompanied the expedition from Port Moresby: nineteen vessels, transports, warships, colliers and the submarines AE1 and AE2, ‘a sight that will never be forgotten by those who had the pleasure to see it.’ On New Britain they experienced another side to soldiering: Australians killed in action, and a long march under the tropical sun in full kit that ended with a brief skirmish when they fired at a group of retreating Germans. Harry Gissing in the Field Ambulance, who made his post-war life in Wagga, happened to be in Sydney cashing cheques to pay his men’s wages when he saw the troops

52 *Daily Advertiser*, 28 August 1914.
56 Bruce’s account of the expedition appeared in *Daily Advertiser*, 24 November 1914.
returning from Rabaul in mid-January 1915. He noticed that they looked rather ‘worn out’.

Reminiscent of the district’s response to the Boer War, there was a sense that the AN&MEF’s campaign had been an adventure. No Wagga blood was spilled on New Britain and the few Australians who died were unknown in the district. By comparison with the battles awaiting the AIF, the AN&MEF’s expedition to Rabaul was a small affair that cropped up in the Advertiser on just a few occasions. Mostly, although no Australian military forces were in action in Europe, Wagga’s focus was on the theatre to which everyone believed the AIF would be sent – the Western Front.

In October Canon Joseph Pike delivered a public lecture and lantern slide show on the war in France, based on his ‘personal knowledge of the country in which the European conflict is waging’. When the Wagga Licensed Victuallers’ Racing Club held its patriotic meeting on a humid mid-November day, the Wagga Brass Band played ‘martial airs’ on the Grandstand Lawn, while on the track horses raced in the Allies’ Hurdle Race, and in the Belgian, King George, Marseillaise and Expeditionary Handicaps. No races were named for the AN&MEF’s work in the German colonies a few hundred miles from Queensland. On Christmas Eve local women took up a collection for Lady Dudley’s Australian Field Hospital for men wounded on the Western Front. They raised £12, ‘a gratifying result’, as well as gathering a collection of hospital clothes, all of which were later sent to London and on to France. If people in Wagga imagined the war, they imagined France, Belgium and Britain.

As 1914 passed, Wagga continued the transition from peace to war. Change had come, though the war was still not as all consuming as suggested by the Advertiser in August. In early 1915 the paper’s editors declared that the district’s 200 unemployed men, many ‘capable and industrious’, were out of work ‘not because of the war but because of the drought which has had a much more serious effect upon the labour market in the Riverina than the world crisis which is shaking dynasties to their foundations.’

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58 See for instance the 14 and 22 September, 22 October and 24 November editions.
59 Daily Advertiser, 6 October 1914.
60 Daily Advertiser, 25 November 1914.
61 Daily Advertiser, 25 December 1914.
Advertiser had several suggestions about what could be done with the unemployed, but enlisting was not one of them. However momentous the war, however much it was discussed and however many men had left to enlist, it was not the entirety of Wagga’s experience. Lloyd Robson observed that until Gallipoli, ‘Australians at home had suffered more from … drought … than from war.’ In a rural district, the battle against drought and flood and fire did not relent even when many local men left to fight more deadly battles overseas. But their absence was a constant reminder that these were not, as Reid and Mongan observed, ‘normal times.’

People sensed that worse days probably lay ahead. On New Year’s Eve Wagga’s streets were crowded with people dressed warmly against a strong south easterly. The Citizens’ Band and the Wagga Brass Band moved about the town playing in one place and another until, in the hour before midnight, realising ‘the more solemn aspect of the close of the old year and the dawn of the new’, people congregated in the town’s churches. When the Court House clock chimed midnight, about 1000 locals gathered at the intersection of Fitzmaurice and Gurwood Streets and sang Auld Lang Syne as the bands played in 1915.

The expectation that the AIF would soon be committed to action lay behind the community’s understanding of the new year’s ‘more solemn aspects’. In no sphere of community life was this more manifest than in the increasing number of men leaving home and work to volunteer. Where one scholar found that northeast Victoria had ‘almost lost sight of the war’ by March 1915, in Wagga it remained very much in view. Earlier in the year the Wagga Wagga Amateur Picnic Race Club learned that Hugh Hutton was, as he put it, ‘leaving the country’. Hutton, a shy man much interested in birds and horses, who owned a racehorse and had an approach to farming that won plaudits throughout the Riverina, asked a friend to look after his farm and joined the Light Horse. The Council meeting that month received a request from Herb

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62 Daily Advertiser, 7 January 1915.
64 R. Reid & C. Mongan, “We have Not Forgotten”, Yass & District’s War 1914-1918, Milltown Research and Publications, Yass, 1996, p. 3.
65 Daily Advertiser, 1 January 1915.
67 Hutton, Hugh, Service Record, NAA B2455. On Hutton’s personality, interests and reputation, see S. Morris, 2002, p. 695. On his enlisting, see Daily Advertiser, 12 March 1917. Hutton was also a member of the Murrumbidgee Turf Club Committee, and the Murrumbidgee Pastoral and Agricultural Association.
Henningham, a clerk, to take indefinite leave to join the AIF. A couple of weeks before the landing at Gallipoli, Dooley Mulholland’s Riverine Club boasted that four of its members were representing the club ‘at the front’. The Wagga Wagga Lodge Harmony chapter exempted its members who were on active service from paying their regular dues. Bill Dunn, a local farmer who was also on the MPAA committee, enlisted in November 1914 and was one of the first members of the Lodge to join the AIF. By November 1918, 24 men, a quarter of its membership, had volunteered.

Local businesses and associations were also losing employees to the war. In August 1914 Tas Douglas left Huthwaites, Alexander Malpage stopped working on George Lindon’s property at The Gap, and Dooley Mulholland quit his stock and station agency. Hubert Meagher left his Central Fruit and Refreshment Café, the Rowing Club and the Choral Society of which he was a founding member. Mechanic, Reg Duke left his family’s farm in September. By the end of January 1915 at least 230 local men had enlisted.

The first to volunteer had been in Egypt since December. Those who sailed with the second contingent began arriving the following February. Later that month Advertiser readers would have seen the first of many wartime references to the Dardanelles when reports of the Allied naval assault reached the Australian press. But for the people in Wagga who were volunteering their time and money in support of the war effort, there was still little thought for what was happening in the eastern Mediterranean. On Empire Day on 24 May, the new mayor, Hugh Oates, explained that the emphasis on Belgium in local fund raising was simply because ‘he believed the Australian soldiers were well equipped and were not in need of assistance.’

68 Wagga Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW2608/19, meeting 8 March 1915.
69 Riverine Club minutes CSURA RW2633/1/2a, Report of Committee for year ending 31 March 1915.
72 Daily Advertiser, 29 August 1914 & 11 February 1915.
73 Daily Advertiser, 22 February 1915. Long time Advertiser readers might have recalled reading about the Dardanelles several times over the years; in 1897 during the Greco-Turkish War and through the early years of the twentieth century when the strategic waterway was often an item in the rivalries between Europe’s empires. See for instance, the Advertiser of 18 May 1897, 10 January 1903, 6 and 8 December 1904, 28 November 1911 and 3 May 1912.
74 Daily Advertiser, 25 May 1915.
On the evening of 8 March 1915, at a public meeting introduced by the Wagga Brass Band, Mayor Oates made his hopes for the town’s charitable endeavours very clear. Wagga, he said, was the one town in Australia that would do its duty, a reflection of the boasting and rivalry that characterised many districts’ approach to the war. Traditionally expressed on the sporting field, at agricultural shows and in the cultural sphere, the war added another, more serious, layer to the competition. Yass’s local paper declared that the town would take ‘an equal, if not superior rank with any provincial town in the state of similar area and population’ in supporting war related causes.\(^\text{75}\)

Oates wanted the ‘very best that Wagga could do for the Belgians’ and sought a list of contributors – people who would donate a regular weekly amount that was ‘worthy of Wagga.’ Canon Pike was there, urging that the Patriotic Fund Committee become part of the Belgian Fund Committee, and Dr Stoker proposed inviting the ladies of the Red Cross League, which had just sent a £12 cheque to the Belgian Consul in Sydney, to also join, saying ‘all those working in the same interests should be on the same committee’. The motion was agreed. Enoch Booty, already committed to war work, became treasurer. His duties began the next day when the first pledges and donations came in.\(^\text{76}\) With them came evidence of the wartime rivalries beginning to develop within communities. When Wagga Primary School gave the substantial sum of £7 and the High School just over £1, the High School’s headmaster explained that this small donation represented just one week’s collection and that in future the school could ‘probably’ contribute £2 a week. The names of donors and the amounts they gave were published in the \textit{Advertiser}, a device that if never explicitly declared or intended as such, guaranteed gossip and fed the competitive instinct. Anyone who was interested could see, for instance that Alick Smith gave £23 while Mrs Hoddinett contributed £1/1. Charles Hardy’s staff each pledged 1/ per week.\(^\text{77}\)

Two weeks after Hugh Oates declared that Wagga would do its duty, the local branch of the National Belgian Relief Fund held its first house-to-house appeal. In teams of two, the Fund’s collectors, working their allotted divisions, knocked on every door in Wagga

\(^{75}\) On local rivalries see for example, M. McKernan, 1980, pp. 181-2. See also J. McQuilton, 2001, p. 21.

\(^{76}\) The ‘the very best that Wagga could do’ quote, is from, \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 9 March 1915 and the ‘worthy of Wagga’, quote is from \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 13 March 1915. See also, \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 9 and 10 March 1915.

\(^{77}\) \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 13 March 1915.
over a couple of days. Rather than asking for money on the spot, they wanted people to commit to a regular donation. The Commonwealth had guaranteed £75,000 per month for Belgium and the Advertiser urged the town to do its share.\textsuperscript{78}

In the months after the war began, Belgium assumed an importance in Wagga that would have been impossible to imagine before August 1914. Some of the town’s most prominent and industrious individuals, people unlikely to have any connection with Belgium, devoted themselves to charitable works for the country’s ‘mothers, sisters and orphans’.\textsuperscript{79} A week after the appeal began, Enoch Booty reported that the Fund had received just over £157 and announced that at that rate Wagga could contribute some £800 a month.\textsuperscript{80} On 14 April another arm of the Belgian Relief Fund, the Sports Committee, held a carnival, and local organisations were invited to participate in the parade. At least one, a local chapter of Lodge Harmony, among whose members were men like Richard Blamey with sons already in the AIF, and others who later enlisted themselves, declined.\textsuperscript{81}

The Lodge’s failure to support Belgium, a strongly catholic nation, likely arose from the enmity between the Masons and the Catholics but did not appear to attract any public ire, a state of affairs that members were keen to maintain. Sensing perhaps that the AIF was soon to be cast into battle and that the war, until now a distant and largely abstract affair, was becoming more serious for Australia, the Lodge refused to put on a lavish celebration for the installation of office holders. Worshipful Master Crane declared that under ordinary circumstances he would have proposed a ball but ‘doubted whether in view of war (sic) it would be advisable.’ The brethren had to settle for a banquet ‘which should be arranged quietly.’\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{78} On the establishment of the Organising Committee, the method of collection and the nature of the appeal, see, Daily Advertiser, 23 March 1915. On the collectors’ progress, see Daily Advertiser, 24 March 1915. On the amount collected, see Daily Advertiser, 30 March 1915. The figure of £75,000 is from Daily Advertiser, 9 March 1915. On the Patriotic Funds more generally, including the Belgian Fund, see E. Scott, 1936, Chapter XXI and p. 882 and M. Oppenheimer, All Work No Pay, Australian Civilian Volunteers in War, Ohio Productions, Walcha New South Wales, 2002.

\textsuperscript{79} Daily Advertiser, 23 March 1915.

\textsuperscript{80} Daily Advertiser, 30 March 1915.

\textsuperscript{81} Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW, Minute Book 1906-1917, CSURA RW2463/5 item 62. Meeting minutes 6 April 1915.

\textsuperscript{82} Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW, Minute Book 1906-1917, CSURA RW2463/5 item 62. Meeting minutes 6 April and 4 May 1915.
Almost to a man, Lodge members were of British descent. The list of Masters for the first decades of the twentieth century; Dobney, Bellair, Henningham, Emblen, McNickle, Blamey, Smith and Day, and the names on the Lodge’s honour roll; Crane, Dunn, Cameron, Carver, Mawdesley, Roberts, for example, are typical. Only one, George Wunsch, whose grandfather came to Wagga from Heidelberg during what Williams called the ‘heyday of German emigration’ between 1850 and 1880, was obviously of German descent.\(^83\) A Wagga resident from birth, prominent in the Lodge, in cricketing circles, and a tireless worker for David Copland & Co., his family’s loyalty to Australia does not appear to have been questioned.\(^84\) Other Germans in the district were accorded less consideration. ‘Great Mount’ attended a Red Cross and Belgian Fund concert at Uranquinty in late March 1915 and ‘was astounded to find that in an audience of some three hundred people there were but three persons who could claim German descent!’ Where, wondered ‘Mount’ were the district’s other Germans? How could they claim loyalty ‘to the flag under which they have prospered’ when they were unwilling to contribute to Belgium?\(^85\) The war’s most dramatic chapters were yet to play out when some of the divisions it engendered, more serious than the race to be the most patriotic or the most charitable, began to emerge.

Knowing that the Australians would not be forever kept from the fighting, people wondered which enemy they might meet. Not everyone any longer believed that it would be the Germans. At least one correspondent to the *Advertiser* hedged, suggesting that the AIF would soon be in the fighting, ‘either in Turkey or in France’. Wherever it was to be, people were starting to realise that the war would be ‘no picnic’ and that ‘many of our boys may never see Australia’s sunny shores again, others who return may be maimed or injured for life.’\(^86\) Three weeks later, eighteen-year-old Light Horseman, John Mulholland, Dooley’s cousin, caught measles, then pneumonia, and died at Liverpool training camp in Sydney with his sister, a nurse, by his side. He was buried with military honours.\(^87\) Mulholland was the first Wagga man in the AIF to die.\(^88\)

\(^{83}\) J. Williams, *German Anzacs and the First World War*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2003, p. 15.
\(^{85}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 30 March 1915.
\(^{86}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 11 March 1915.
\(^{87}\) On the nature of Mulholland’s illness and for his obituary, see *Daily Advertiser*, 6 April 1915. On Mulholland’s funeral, see *Daily Advertiser*, 9 April 1915. For general biographical details, see S. Morris, 2002, pp. 1031-1034.
\(^{88}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 6 April 1915.
never left ‘Australia’s sunny shores’. Most of those who joined him on the district’s roll of honour lost their lives thousands of miles from home.
IV. ‘A red hot game’: Wagga’s soldiers, Egypt and Gallipoli

On Monday morning 17 August 1914, Major Alfred Bennett was at Sydney’s Victoria Barracks surveying a ‘scene of confusion’. Five months shy of his 50th birthday, Bennett stood over six feet tall, ‘loose limbed’, with a thick moustache. Described by one soldier as the ‘kindest, most sympathetic and helpful counsellor’, he was also strict, serious about his twin professions, and brooked no malingering.1 In the three decades between his joining the Sudan contingent and his accepting a commission in the AIF, Bennett went from being a trainee teacher at Wagga Superior School to a headmaster at Broken Hill. He had been an officer in the citizen forces and spent more than two and a half years at war in South Africa.2 By 1902 Bennett wore the proverbial chestful of ribbons: the Egyptian Medal with clasp, the Khedive’s Star, the DSO, the CMG, the Queen’s South Africa Medal with three clasps and the King’s South Africa Medal with two clasps. He had been badly wounded in action once and Mentioned in Dispatches twice. After he returned from South Africa teaching was Bennett’s vocation, but his interest in the army never waned. In August 1914 he was given the rank he held at the end of the Boer War and ordered to form the 3rd Battalion.

Before January 1915 men who had been officers in the militia or the cadets and men with previous military experience could be given direct appointment as officers in the AIF.3 Bennett was one such and he soon selected his own officers and NCOs for the 3rd Battalion. Like him, many were experienced soldiers, men who had served in South Africa or in other British campaigns. Others had been citizen soldiers or cadets. Now they were trying to impose order on a parade ground crowded with eager recruits, still in civilian clothes, milling about ‘talking and laughing excitedly’. Hubert Meagher might have been mingling in that sea of men. With twelve years service in the British Army behind him, Meagher had enlisted on 13 August and was an original member of the 3rd Battalion. Other Wagga men, school teacher Allan Galvin, engine driver William Worth and farmer Arthur Belling, soon followed him.4 Bennett was in a cheerful frame

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4 Hubert Meagher enlisted on 14 August, Allan Galvin on the 19th, Arthur Belling on the 28th and William Worth on the 29th.
of mind as he left the square to get a meal, happy to be back in uniform with the soldiers he expected to command.  

The men crowding into Victoria Barracks that winter morning joined the AIF when its standards admitted only the biggest and fittest of volunteers; those aged between nineteen and 38 years, five and a half feet or taller and measuring at least 34 inches around the chest.  

Ron Birrell, an original 1st Battalion man, told a doctor after the war that in August 1914 he was ‘in perfect health … with no imperfections … in those days one had to be perfect to get away.’  

Physical imperfections were relatively easy for the AIF’s medical officers to detect; more difficult were the character flaws or aspects of men’s pasts that, had they come to the attention of recruiting sergeants, might have kept some of Wagga’s volunteers from being accepted.

In 2010 Peter Stanley commented that ‘the AIF became a bolthole for wrong-doers’, and quoted Bean’s observation that the force included ‘a leaven of wasters’.  

A few came from Wagga. Among the local men who might have paused at question nine on their attestation forms: ‘have you ever been convicted by the civil power?’, were Les Britten, a labourer and James McDarra, a plasterer. Both joined the AIF in December 1914. Britten could not have done so much earlier: he was doing hard labour in Goulburn Gaol when the war began, having been convicted of robbing a Wagga woman, Dora Miller, of more than £2 in April.  

When he came to question nine, Britten simply lied and responded ‘no’. McDarra, whose appearances in the Wagga Police Charge Sheets dated back to at least 1912, usually for offences relating to drunkenness, was also imprisoned before the war and, like Britten, neglected to mention this when he enlisted.  

Twenty one year old farrier Wilfred Baker was cleared of an assault charge in February 1911 but that July he was deemed insane. In 1914 Baker was arrested for

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5 E. Wren, 1935, pp. 7-10. Bennett, having been commissioned to form the 3rd Battalion by Colonel McLaurin, commander of the 1st Infantry Brigade, expected that he would be given command. In the event he became second-in-command to his old friend, Lieutenant Colonel R.H. ‘Bob’ Owen. See Wren, 1935, pp. 7-14. In May 1915 Bennett was given command of the 4th Battalion, which he led for a time on Gallipoli, and in July he took command of the 1st Battalion with which he also served on Gallipoli.  


7 Birrell, Ronald Leslie, Repatriation Department File, HX29757 pt. 1.  

8 P. Stanley, Bad Characters; Sex, Crime, Mutiny, Murder and the Australian Imperial Force, Pier 9, Sydney, 2010, p. 45.  

9 Wagga Wagga Quarter Session Minutes, CSURA RW1508/139, and Wagga Wagga Police Charge Book, CSURA SA1519/10, see for example entries for the week ending 14 July 1914.  

10 Wagga Wagga Police Charge Book, CSURA SA1519/10, see for example entries for the week ending 21 December 1912 and 26 July 1913.
the theft of more than £7 and some gold from local man James Clarke, but his chequered past proved no barrier to his being accepted into the AIF in November.\footnote{Wagga Wagga Police Charge Book, CSURA SA1519/8 and SA1519/10. See for example weeks ending 18 March 1911, 7 February and 16 May 1914. Baker appears almost weekly through the first part of 1914 having been remanded in custody.}

These were not the sort of men whom Bennett had in mind when he sought recruits from southern New South Wales. On 20 August he wired Captain Sheppard in Wagga to let him know that infantry vacancies were being reserved for Riverina men.\footnote{Daily Advertiser, 21 August 1914.} Some were quick to heed the call, and at one o’clock the following morning a group of citizen soldiers and civilians including Tas Douglas and Dooley Mulholland left for Sydney to join the AIF. The previous day, when the first group of local volunteers boarded the train, no crowds had attended their departure, just a few friends and family, their parting marked by ‘a grip of the hand and a “Good bye old man, and good luck”’.\footnote{Daily Advertiser, 20 August 1914.} This time ‘a considerable’ number of townspeople were on the station to cheer as the train pulled out.\footnote{Daily Advertiser, 21 August 1914 and Eric Wren, 1935, p. 8.}

Wanting still more volunteers, Bennett arranged to visit Wagga in the last week of August. He sent a telegram to the mayor, Frederick McDonough, explaining that there were still vacancies in the infantry and he wanted ‘as many good men as possible from my native town and district to go with me to the front.’ During the early part of the war, the AIF had a distinctly ‘local’ character. Battalions, or in the less populous states companies, were drawn from particular districts. Bennett was after men with experience in the regular forces, or the militia or a rifle club, who were deemed fit for active service by the local area medical officer. With perfect timing he asked McDonough to arrange public meetings for the following Wednesday, the Wagga Show’s main day.\footnote{Daily Advertiser, 25 August 1914.} That evening in the Masonic Hall, guests who had each paid 2/6 to attend, welcomed Bennett back to his home town as a guest of honour at a ‘smoke social’.\footnote{Daily Advertiser, 22 August 1914.}

Warning that anyone who failed to take the war seriously ‘was simply a fool of fools’, Bennett told his audience that they were part of a clash of empires, already engulfing
Europe and involving millions of men. When he returned from the Boer War, Bennett declared that no new troops performed well until they gained experience. If he still held this view in 1914, he cast it aside. Experience, he told the gathering, taught him that rural Australians made the best soldiers. In South Africa he had thought very little of ‘Bondi and Woolloomooloo roughriders’ – city men who couldn’t, like real roughriders, ‘ride any horse, either broken or unbroken’. They lacked initiative, while country men ‘may not be so sharp on parade, … they could last the job out much longer than the city trained men.’ Not all Australians were naturally good soldiers, but country men, Bennett told his country audience, were. In a few sentences, uttered to persuade a rural crowd into a war that had barely begun, Bennett foreshadowed two of the most enduring characterisations of the AIF.

Wagga’s volunteers soon began heading to recruitment centres and camps in Sydney. Hubert Meagher caught the express on the night of 19 August with the first volunteers to depart. He left behind Maude, his wife of two years and their baby girl, Winifred. Posted to the 3rd Battalion, he had to pass John Bean’s medical inspection. Bean declared the country men ‘Funny fellows … dare-devils many of them, but … quivering all over with nervousness in my extremely mild presence.’ In Bean’s hands lay the volunteers’ immediate future, but Alfred Bennett, it turned out, was far more to be feared. He set such high standards for the battalion, especially where dental health was concerned, that only four the first 50 recruits passed his rigorous test. Even so early in the war this was an extraordinarily high rate of rejection, so fit men were passed on the condition that they get their teeth fixed.

Bean recognised that in many cases the country men had given up their jobs and travelled hundreds of miles to join the battalion. Some had been feted as heroes when they left their homes and, he said, ‘would rather die than go back there rejected.’ Months later the Advertiser ran a piece under the title, ‘Rejected country recruits, an unenviable position’, pondering what men who had been farewelled and presented with gifts were to do if they were found to be ‘deficient in a couple of molars, or half an inch

17 For details of Bennett’s address see, Daily Advertiser, 28 August 1914. On ‘roughriders’ see E. G. H. Bingham, 1901, p. 1169.
19 E. Wren, 1935, p. 11.
20 E. Wren, 1935, p. 11.
is wanting in the chest, or their toes are not in alignment’. Perhaps because there was no real answer, the question of how rejected men should be regarded arose only occasionally. At a meeting during the surge of patriotism surrounding the Kangaroos recruitment march of late 1915, one speaker, a man in uniform, was asked why he did not praise the rejects as he praised the successful volunteers. Once prompted, the soldier declared them ‘deserving, equally with the accepted, of public regard.’

Bennett’s 3rd Battalion began its life at Randwick Racecourse where the recruits slept fully dressed in the grandstands with a blanket or perhaps an overcoat for warmth. Training started before the men had either uniforms or rifles. Often characterised as ‘roughing it’, this was the life to which many country men, or at least that class of country men who made their living by manual labour, were accustomed and to which they were often claimed to be particularly well suited. The training was elementary, and exhausting. One Wagga recruit wrote that training went from morning to night and was ‘hard, very hard.’ A member of Tas Douglas’s 1st Battalion described his early training as ‘damned monotonous’, but Douglas, said a fellow Wagga soldier, ‘likes the game’. George Cowell, a Wagga man, declared that he ‘wouldn’t be out of it for the world’ and looked forward to ‘popping a few Germans off’.

In October they boarded transports waiting in Sydney Harbour. The Afric, with Tas Douglas on board, sailed on the 18th. Hubert Meagher, one of some 2300 men on the once luxurious liner Euripides, embarked under cloudy skies and a light rain late the next afternoon. They sailed next morning into heavy rain, a strong south easterly and an ‘angry sea.’ A week later, during which the bad weather, on the first day in particular, sent many first-time seafarers racing to vomit over the side, the transports weighed anchor in King George’s Sound off Albany. George Cowell took a few minutes to write to the Advertiser. ‘All the boys went half silly with fun’, he said, and on his ship,

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21 Daily Advertiser, 2 July 1915.
22 Daily Advertiser, 6 November 1915.
24 Daily Advertiser, 28 November 1914. See also E. Scott, 1936, p. 227. On training and roughing it, see for instance, B. Ziino, Journeys to War: Experiences of Australian Recruits in the Great War, MA Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1999, Chapter 1, the quotes on drill, from the Melbourne Age, are also drawn from this source. For Tas Douglas quote see Daily Advertiser, 28 November 1914. The 3rd Battalion began route marches in mid-September, see Wren, 1935, p. 20.
25 Daily Advertiser, 28 November 1914.
27 E. Wren, 1935, p. 22
the *Suffolk*, ‘there was much ragging and singing’ even though the troops, excepting those who were sick, were not allowed to go ashore. ‘So far’, said Cowell, ‘it has all been like a holiday’. In his *Bad Characters*, Peter Stanley used similar language, describing ‘hundreds of excited young men enjoying the longest holiday most of them had ever known’.28

In reality, men’s views varied. Reg Cox, also from Wagga and a member the 3rd Field Artillery Brigade, recalled a ‘fairly pleasant’ voyage that left he and his fellow soldiers in a ‘in a very fit state.’30 The 3rd Battalion’s Arthur Belling had just one fond memory, the daily 11:00 am beer parade at which, for 6d, men could buy one pint of beer served from casks set up over the wash tubs. He recalled that when *Sydney* defeated the *Emden*, the celebrations ran to a second pint.31 Otherwise, Belling was among those who found shipboard life monotonous and uncomfortable. Describing conditions on the *Euripides* as ‘appalling’, he wrote that men were ‘packed like in like sardines, head to tail in hammocks … the stench and heat was awful. The cooking was atrocious.’32 Belling, a farmer, might have found the physical conditions distressingly unfamiliar, but the fixed, repetitive daily routine would have been recognized by many farm workers or labourers. Hammocks were unhitched and stowed by 6:00 am, when Reveille sounded. Breakfast was at 7:00 am, dinner at noon, tea at 5:00 pm, and lights out at 9:00 pm.33

At sea, bored soldiers usually amused themselves. Gambling, officially frowned upon but widely indulged in, and boxing, were popular. In quieter moments, so was music. Oliver Hogue, who became a well-known chronicler of the war in the Middle East under the name ‘Trooper Bluegum’, wrote that homesick men from Wagga, Narrandera, Hay and Coolamon sung ‘It’s a long way to Riverina’ to the tune of ‘Tipperary’ with lines about ‘bushmen from the ‘Bidgee who can fight and shoot and ride’ and the chorus:

> It’s a long way to Riverina  
> It’s a long way to go;  
> It’s a long way to Riverina,

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28 *Daily Advertiser*, 28 November 1914.
30 *Daily Advertiser*, 9 and 25 December 1914.
And the sweet bush girl I know;
Good-bye Wagga Wagga,
Farewell dear old Hay,
It’s a long way to Riverina,
But I’ll come back - some day.”

While at sea NCOs also took exams. Hubert Meagher, a colour-sergeant, was among the first to be tested in what was said to be a relatively easy exercise, at least for men of this rank. Meagher was sufficiently proud of his results to describe himself in a letter from Colombo, as a ‘successful candidate’, without explaining what that meant. A few weeks later he celebrated New Year’s Day with news of a promotion to sergeant major.

After six weeks at sea, during which the AIF learned, to the disappointment of many, that rather than disembarking in England they would be put ashore in Egypt for further training, most of the convoy reached Port Said on 2 December 1914. Having spent the past four months imagining their soldiers in Europe, people in Wagga now had to get used to their being in Egypt. While England was familiar through personal acquaintance, family connections or literature such as the material read by children at school and at home, Egypt, outside of bible stories and tales of its antiquities, was far more foreign. The Advertiser offered local comparisons, likening the Nile to the Murray River ‘about Euston or Mildura or Renmark or Murray Bridge’. The AIF’s camp at the foot of the pyramids near a plantation of gum trees and wattles was described as being ‘for all the world like a bit of Australia itself.’

Tasmanian soldier Archie Barwick remembered the first night at Mena. Too tired to pitch tents the battalion slept on the sand, surprised at the cold of the desert night. ‘I was absolutely frozen stiff’, he said, mentioning his mate, ‘Wagga’, who it later emerges, was Reg Duke, the Wagga mechanic. The two ‘slept alongside one another’

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34 Daily Advertiser, 9 December 1914.
35 E. Wren, 1935, p. 23, the ‘successful candidate’ is from the Daily Advertiser, 10 December 1914. On Meagher’s promotion, see Meagher, Hubert Richard William: Service Record, NAA B2455.
36 C.E.W. Bean, 1921, p. 114.
37 Daily Advertiser, 16 January 1915.
and continued to do so, outside every night in the soft sand, each under four blankets.\textsuperscript{39} The next morning the pair climbed the great pyramid and carved their names on the top ‘like everyone else’. Whether Duke signed his real name, or ‘Wagga’, is not revealed.\textsuperscript{40}

Lionel Sheppard, a Wagga surveyor whose father George designed the Riverine Club’s building, and who was now a sergeant major in the artillery, wrote to his parents from Mena Camp, describing his surrounds as ‘nothing but sand.’ Leave, he said, was plentiful, ‘a little better than it was in Sydney’, but, knowing that the AIF contained some hard cases, Sheppard was pessimistic, expecting that men would ‘play up the way they did in Sydney and spoil a good thing.’ He also commented very favourably on the ‘splendid’ local pilsner and the ‘best English spirits’, which could be had for half what they cost in Australia.\textsuperscript{41}

Sheppard may have been unusual. In Egypt, said Stanley, ‘men had to be determined to get drunk.’ Few ‘favoured Egyptian beer’ or the ‘indescribably bad’ beer sold under Greek labels, or adulterated spirits, drunk by some despite their mates’ warnings.\textsuperscript{42} In early 1916 Colin Smith, recently arrived in Egypt, wrote to his family at the station master’s residence in Wagga that men were ‘warned about the bad beers in Cairo’, adding that there were not many places in Cairo where ‘good liquors can be obtained’ and they were generally open only to officers.\textsuperscript{43}

Alcohol, however unpalatable, was always a temptation for some. Les Britten was already destined for serious alcoholism when he enlisted, and a score of other Wagga men were arrested for crimes relating to drunkenness before they volunteered. In the AIF they were well paid, a long way from home, exposed to all manner of temptation – Harry Gissing declared it ‘impossible to find a worse city for open vice’ than Cairo – and in the early days in Egypt, they were subject to little censure.\textsuperscript{44} Sheppard’s doubts proved well founded.

\textsuperscript{39} A. Barwick, 2013, pp. 19 & 21.
\textsuperscript{40} A. Barwick, 2013, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 22 January 1915.
\textsuperscript{42} The drinks are described in, P. Stanley, 2010, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 22 March 1916.
\textsuperscript{44} H. Gissing, 2003, p. 111.
In January 1915, 131 soldiers, guilty of ‘leave-breaking, desertion, attacks upon natives, robbery’, as well as 24 who had contracted ‘disease’, were sent home. At the commander, General Bridges’ request, Charles Bean sent a despatch explaining why. He called them ‘uncontrolled, slovenly, and in some cases, what few Australians can be accused of being – dirty’, but neglected to say that the ‘disease’ some were bringing home was venereal disease. He left that ‘to the imagination of the Australian people.’ After Bean’s cable appeared in the Australian press, the AIF’s less savoury elements became a widespread topic of conversation. In Wagga the *Advertiser* pointed out, as Bean did, that these disciplinary cases were very much in the minority, Bean suggested ‘1 or 2 per cent’. If the figure is accurate, across Australia much was made of relatively few. People in Wagga knew or knew of men like Britten, Baker and McDarra, who stole, drank too heavily, brawled outside pubs and spent nights or longer in the lock up. They also knew that most of the locals in the AIF were far less prone to criminality.

At the same time the Wagga men now in Cairo held the prejudices and beliefs of their time, and what today would invite censure, in 1915 was barely remarked upon. In January, Bert Roulston, a 21 year-old farmer from Henty, in the 4th Light Horse Regiment, wrote from the ‘edge of the great Sahara Desert’ to Daisy Simpson on the Gregadoo Road, on the edge of Lake Albert, in similar terms to many other AIF correspondents. The Egyptians, whom he and most Australians called ‘niggers’, were, said Roulston, a ‘very dirty lot’, always trying to sell him and his mates some ‘useless thing’, and Cairo was a ‘very dirty place … not at all like towns in Australia’. Nineteen year-old Cedric Ryan, whose parents lived on the Esplanade, wrote that ‘the “niggers” hate Australians and are only kept in their proper place by force.’ The contempt in which many Australians held the Egyptians is well documented. Suzanne Brugger argued that soldiers considered such attitudes as neither shameful nor reprehensible, regarding the poor treatment of the Egyptians with ‘unembarrassed candour’.

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47 Daily Advertiser, 9 February 1915, and A. Thomson, 1994, p. 51. See also J. Williams, 1999, pp. 58ff. Regarding the discussion having taken place in Wagga and beyond, see for example, the *Melbourne Argus* for the week of 21 January 1915.
49 Daily Advertiser, 24 September 1915.
Their views of the local people didn’t keep Australians from taking an interest in Egypt’s antiquities. Duke and Barwick were two among thousands who explored the pyramids, but for some Wagga men another aspect of Egypt’s ancient culture seemed more remarkable. A couple of weeks before he embarked for Gallipoli, Dooley Mulholland penned a long letter to the Advertiser telling readers that Australians could learn a lot about irrigation from the Egyptians, who, on the one hand, ‘brought (it) to a very fine art’ but who, on the other, remained ‘decidedly primitive; in fact, so much as to be amusing’.51 Bert Roulston expressed similar sentiments, and later in 1915 Brian Clancy, formerly a clerk in the Wagga Petty Sessions Office and now a corporal in the 6th Light Horse, commented on the ‘great irrigation area; small canals on either side and queer old water wheels letting the water out into channels onto the land. The banks of these canals form the highways of the country’.52

Mulholland joked that Egypt’s main crops were ‘cotton, wheat, barley, tomatoes, corn, and donkeys’ while Roulston had an eye for Egypt’s fine Arab horses, especially the ‘beauties’ ridden by the local mounted police.53 His own horse was in much poorer shape. The tough training was exhausting for men and horses: ‘after seventeen weeks hard training in the … heavy sand of the desert’ they were worn out.54 For these country men, ways of farming and the state of their horses were concerns not far removed from their civilian lives. Working with horses, the smell of eucalypt, the sight of the wattle’s yellow bloom, and being in a dry country nourished by a mighty river, turned Wagga men’s thoughts to home. In March Lionel Sheppard’s brother, Everard, a second lieutenant in the 1st Divisional Artillery, wrote to their sister, Lorraine Raleigh in Trail Street; ‘Please, for goodness sake, do send me some papers, of any kind at all … old and new alike are acceptable’, and asked her to remind her friends that ‘small parcels sent to us about once a week, or one at a time, will be heaven to us … and will help we poor, lonely miseries when we are soaking wet and shivering.’55 While Sheppard was making his plea, in Wagga the mayor was declaring that the town would do its duty for Belgium. The needs of Wagga men overseas were not yet the focus of

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51 Daily Advertiser, 10 April 1915.
53 Mulholland’s letter appears in, Daily Advertiser, 10 April 1915. See also Bert Roulston, CSURA RW5/9/280, letter 17 January 1915.
55 Daily Advertiser, 1 April 1915.
local charitable efforts, but as the war went on Wagga’s response was increasingly directed to the district’s soldiers and far less to the AIF in general.

The AIF began its first campaign early on the morning of 25 April 1915. Alfred Bennett and the man who succeeded him as Wagga’s best-known soldier, Thomas Blamey, were both there. For Bennett it was another chapter in a military career begun in 1885. For Blamey it was his first experience of battle. Other Wagga men, including Privates Ron Birrell, Tas Douglas, Reg Cox, Roy Wunsch, William Worth, Reg Duke and Sergeant Hubert Meagher were also at the Landing.56

Front line service quickly engulfed and changed them. Meagher described his men’s demeanour when they got their first rest a week or so after the Landing: ‘Flippant words, witty quips, and merry smiles were general whilst work went on but beneath it all was a seriousness previously absent.’57 Medical Officer Harry Gissing was overcome by a feeling of ‘pleasure and excitement’ when he first heard the sound of firing on 25 April, only to declare shortly afterwards that this ‘was soon to be changed.’58 George Cowell, who looked forward to ‘popping a few Germans off’ and sent breezy letters from his transport ship and from Egypt, wrote mournfully after a few weeks on Gallipoli, ‘No amount of description could make you understand what this war is like – you must be actively in it to realise’, adding, ‘of my twelve good mates only two now remain.’59 Mary Nash from Wagga, an Army nurse since 1911, joined the AIF in November 1914 and was at No. 2 Australian General Hospital in Cairo when the Gallipoli wounded began coming in. Responding to the same realisation as Meagher, Gissing and Cowell, she wrote simply, ‘We realise how terrible war is’60.

True to what he said the previous August at the Wagga Show, Alfred Bennett told his wife that the lists of casualties would have let Wagga know ‘the fact that there is war.’61 Tas Douglas was struck in the foot by a piece of shrapnel eight hours after coming ashore on 25 April. He considered his brief time at the front ‘a great fight’, but his next

58 H. Gissing, 2003, p. 120.
61 Bennett, Alfred, Service Record, NAA B2455, Lieutenant Colonel, and Daily Advertiser, 26 June 1915.
contact with home came from a Maltese hospital. Roy Wunsch was also in the firing line for about eight hours before a bullet tore into his left shoulder, ending his part in the fighting. Charles Hussey, in the 13th Battalion, was shot in the arm a day after the landing and evacuated, never to return to the fighting, even though his wound was originally described as ‘slight’.

Ron Birrell developed a poisoned hand within a few weeks of the Landing and was evacuated, spending three weeks in hospital before returning to the peninsula. On 1 May, Alfred Bennett was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and given command of the 4th Battalion. Two days later he joined the list of wounded, but his injuries were not serious enough for him to leave the battlefield. Bennett later explained that he took a ‘bang on the head from a high explosive shell’ and was knocked unconscious. William Worth was shot in the neck and shoulder during the Turkish attack of 19 May. Paralysed, he was sent to Malta and cared for in Valletta Hospital for eleven weeks before being sent to England. Thomas Geale got to Gallipoli on the day that Worth was wounded and ten days later suffered serious wounds to his chest, elbow and face, ending his part in the campaign.

On 6 July former blacksmith’s striker, twenty year-old George Cummins in the 3rd Field Company, was buried in his dugout by a bursting shell, injuring his back and a finger. Reg McCurdy volunteered to act as a runner for the 13th Battalion on the night of the British landings at Suvla in August and was shot in the hand. He lost his thumb and was evacuated to Gibraltar and later England, his front line service at an end. Dooley Mulholland was shot in the arm and spent a month in hospital before rejoining his unit. On Malta, Narelle Hobbes, an Australian nurse with the Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve, wrote to William Worth’s mother about the

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62 Daily Advertiser, 26 June 1915.
63 Daily Advertiser, 9 June 1915.
64 Hussey, Charles, Repatriation Department File, C9213, and Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 175.
65 Birrell, Ronald Leslie, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 374.
66 Daily Advertiser, 26 June 1915, Bennett, Alfred Joshua, Service Record, NAA2455.
68 Geale, Thomas Harold, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 490/33063.
69 Cummins, George, Repatriation Department File, R036203.
70 McCurdy, Reginald, Repatriation Department File C17563, document 28 September 1962.
71 Mulholland, John Andrew, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 421.
wounded Australians; ‘Oh you mothers you must be proud of your sons, they are splendid, the things they have done and the way they stand their pain.’

August reinforcement Sergei Rosenberg from Baylis Street, who had attended Wagga Wagga Primary School and South Wagga Public School, called the war ‘a red hot game’ and a ‘nerve-racking business.’ Men could be wounded or killed at any moment, but illness was also rife on the peninsula. After recovering from his bullet wound, Mulholland fell ill and was two months recovering on Malta before returning to Gallipoli for the last time in mid-November. Where health was concerned, rank was no privilege on Gallipoli and Alfred Bennett suffered along with almost everyone else. In June he spent a few days ill on a hospital ship. In July he took command of the 1st Battalion and led them through the Lone Pine fighting, but was hospitalised a few weeks later with ‘debility and insomnia’ and before the end of August was in hospital in England. He did not return to Gallipoli.

Neil Boomer, in the 5th Light Horse, reached Gallipoli in May. Almost three months later, on 14 August, he was evacuated with enteric fever (typhoid), one of the illnesses of most concern to the Australian Army Medical Corps. In early August the 1st Division’s Assistant Director of Medical Services reported that 30 per cent of the men on Gallipoli were unfit and the remainder not fresh. Most were suffering from some kind of intestinal disorder. Boomer’s case was so serious that he spent much of the rest of the year in hospital, first in Malta, then in England. Decades after the war, he told a doctor that he had suffered from enteric, typhus and dysentery and was struck in the head by shrapnel while being evacuated in August 1915. His service record, tells a different, less dramatic, story, mentioning only that he had enteric and was no longer fit for duty. Alfred Foot, having left his carpenter’s job to enlisted when he was seventeen, wrote after the war, ‘whilst on the Peninsula I contracted Dysentery. I had treatment in

73 The quote is from, Daily Advertiser, 24 November 1915. On Rosenberg’s background, see S. Morris, 2002, p. 692.
74 Mulholland, John Andrew, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 421.
75 Bennett, Alfred Joshua, Service Record, NAAB2455, and Australian Imperial Force Unit War Diary, 1st Battalion, AWM 4, 23/19/2-4, July - September 1915.
77 Boomer, Neil Livett, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 686, and Boomer, Neil L. Repatriation Department File, M4826.
Egypt’.\textsuperscript{78} One of what Tyquin described as ‘massive numbers’ of men suffering from dysentery, Foot, like Boomer, never returned to Gallipoli.\textsuperscript{79}

The Anzac area of the Gallipoli peninsula was a warren of rugged gullies and ridges, narrow paths and snaking trenches. Units were separated by the terrain and, as Cochrane observed, ‘a soldier’s experience of Gallipoli could be largely the experience of his own unit and its localities. There were men who arrived with a brother or mate and didn’t see them again for weeks.’\textsuperscript{80} Wagga’s soldiers were spread across this confusing, isolating battlefield. Often they were able to name other men from the district who were also on Gallipoli and tried to seek them out. Enough men made the effort to visit mates in other units that in the 4\textsuperscript{th} Battalion Alfred Bennett forbade his soldiers from leaving their unit to look for friends.\textsuperscript{81}

Before Gallipoli, writing from the transports or Egypt, Wagga’s soldiers were usually able to say that a particular Wagga man was doing well, or enjoying soldiering. On Gallipoli, the tone changed. What might have been a casual encounter on board a ship, in Egypt or on Gallipoli might be the last time one Wagga man saw another alive. In the chaos of the early fighting, a 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion man, 32 year old Lance-Sergeant Basil Newson, who worked at the Wagga branch of the Bank of New South Wales before the war, became separated from his unit and joined a group from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion. He saw Hubert Meagher. They greeted each other briefly and never met again.\textsuperscript{82} Shortly afterwards Newson found Alfred Bennett taking charge of a group of ‘strayers’ like himself. Enough Wagga men were in action that morning, particularly in the 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalions, for Newson to encounter two from another battalion within a few minutes.

When Newson saw Meagher and Bennett, the fighting on Gallipoli was just a few hours old. As the weeks and months passed Wagga men continued to see or hear about each other and to convey what they knew about men from the district to people at home. Newson, writing about the campaign’s opening hours, described a chaotic, deadly environment where confused, scared men sought leadership and tried to stay alive. In

\textsuperscript{78} Foot, Alfred, Repatriation Department File, M6473.
\textsuperscript{79} M. Tyquin, 1993, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{80} P. Cochrane, \textit{Simpson and the Donkey, the Making of a Legend}, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1992, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{81} R. Austin, 2007, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{82} S. Morris, 1990, p. 6.
July, when another Wagga soldier, Bill Darby, wrote home, he was able to tell people in the most matter-of-fact manner, that Bert Eastcott, the son of a very successful Wagga cab proprietor, ‘had his arm blown off this morning’, while mentioning equally casually that he ‘bumped against Mr Wally Oaks, of Wagga, the other day’, as if meeting one man from home carried the same import as another being maimed. In Egypt, Mary Nash was pleased to see Gunning ‘Gun’ Plunkett, an older Wagga man. Plunkett was there to visit his brother, Fred, a fellow Light Horseman hospitalised with rheumatism and dysentery.

Some Wagga men arrived on Gallipoli with a very good knowledge of who else from the district was already there. Archibald Redhead, of Gurwood Street, was a lance corporal in the 4th Battalion who arrived at Anzac on 31 May. Having gone to school in Wagga, sung in a local church choir, been a member of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Rifle Club and Rowing Club, and an employee of the Murrumbidgee Co-Operative Milling Company, Redhead had a strong Wagga pedigree and knew people from all walks of local life. In early August, one of his letters appeared in the Advertiser. Lamenting the fact that he had not ‘met any Wagga folk here yet’, Redhead went on to focus his tale entirely around soldiers from the district. He had a list of 19 local men from privates to officers – almost a roll call of Wagga men on Gallipoli – whom he hoped to meet, including Everard Sheppard, Hubert Meagher, Roy Wunsch and Bill Darby. Despite his claim, Redhead had met at least one Wagga man, Alfred Bennett. The two, he said, ‘chatted a long time about Wagga and the boys’. That a battalion commander would stop to chat at length with a lance corporal says something for Bennett’s good nature, and for the strength of the home town bond. Redhead mentioned that Thomas Blamey, who was also keen to hear ‘home news’, wanted him on his staff. Professing to prefer ‘signalling and the firing line’, he declined.

Herbert Ferrall was less sure of exactly who from Wagga was on Gallipoli, but told his mother late in the campaign; ‘There are a large number of Wagga boys here, and as far as I know, are all doing well. I saw George Kelly, Foot (presumably Alfred Foot), and

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84 S. Morris, 1991, p. 5, and Plunkett, Frederick Coventry, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 64.
86 Daily Advertiser, 11 August 1915.
several others whose names I forget just now. Ferrall’s letter must have been written some two months before, as he left the peninsula with pneumonia in mid-September and did not return. On a small battlefield, crowded with soldiers, they sought each other out, wrote about which other Wagga men they had met and passed on word of those who were wounded or killed. Gallipoli has been described as both reflecting and influencing the Australian character, but the example of Wagga’s soldiers suggests that local associations meant more than a nascent nationalism.

By the time Ferrall’s letter was published in early December, Advertiser readers were generally well aware of who had become casualties. In addition to the brief stories in the ‘Personal’ column and sometimes longer articles in the general news section, the Advertiser ran regular casualty lists. On 26 August 1915 the paper published its 69th such list, almost one for every two days of the campaign to that time. On it were the names of the AIF’s killed and wounded from places close to home like Naranderra, Gundagai and Cootamundra, and from farther afield, England, Brisbane, Lismore and Haberfield. By late August Advertiser readers would have been accustomed to these regular roll calls of dead and wounded. That day no local name appeared on the casualty list, but the neighbouring column brought distressing news for the district. Hubert Meagher was dead, killed at Lone Pine three weeks before.

In the seven years he had lived in Wagga, Meagher had become a well-known figure recognised by the many people who bought ice cream and cool drinks from his café during the long drought. He enlisted as a private in August 1914 and died almost exactly twelve months later as a Second Lieutenant. Meagher’s letters to the Advertiser kept him in the public mind. People knew when he was on a troopship, when he was promoted, when he was in battle and, through the local press, when he was killed.

Nancy Blacklow suggested that the Advertiser published letters, like Meagher’s, to foster the Anzac mythology, to portray local soldiers as ‘bush heroes’ and to promote

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87 Daily Advertiser, 3 December 1915. Alfred Foot appears to have been the only Wagga soldier on Gallipoli with that surname.
88 Foot, Alfred, Repatriation Department File, M6473.
89 Daily Advertiser, 26 August 1915.
90 Australian Imperial Force Unit War Diaries, 3rd Infantry Battalion, April 1915, AWM 4 23/20/3, 27 April 1915.
recruitment. Meagher’s first letter was published in December 1914, before recruitment became a major theme in the Advertiser, before the term ‘Anzac’ had been coined and before the associated mythology began to take hold. Having proclaimed the suitability of rural men for soldiering since before the Boer War, the Advertiser continued doing so after August 1914. Meagher lived in country Australia but he was no bushman. He was born on the Isle of Wight and spent twelve years in the British Army before coming to Wagga. He worked in town as an accountant for Edmondson & Co. before opening his fruit shop and café on Fitzmaurice Street. He never worked on the land and his abilities as a soldier were born of long experience, not the part of Australia in which he lived.

Marina Larsson observed that by providing correspondence to local newspapers, soldiers’ families ‘passed hundreds of letters out of the private sphere into the public domain’. Blacklow points out that there are no records detailing the means by which the soldiers’ letters that appeared in the Advertiser were chosen for publication, but Richard Ely, quoting a December 1915 correspondent to the Bulletin who questioned whether such letters were ‘strict confidences specially prepared for general circulation’, suggested that correspondence of this type was ‘audience-conscious’.

In some cases this may have been true, but when men wrote to their families they likely believed that their audience would be limited to relatives and perhaps friends. In Meagher’s case, no appeal to the creation of the Anzac legend or the bush ethos is necessary. His and others’ letters were published during the war’s early months, it seems, because they would cause no offence to local sensibilities or the censor, because they were of interest to the paper’s readers, and perhaps also because they were written with a broader audience than just his family in mind. Once the AIF was committed to battle, the understandable desire of the local paper to run stories from and about local soldiers carried the obvious risk that they might be killed or wounded. When someone like Meagher, who was familiar to people, whose army life had already been

92 C.E.W. Bean, 1921, pp. 124-5.
93 S. Morris, 2002, pp. 967-968. For an example off the paper proclaiming the suitability of rural men for soldiering, see, Daily Advertiser, 10 December 1914. Meagher’s first war related mention in the paper appeared on 20 August 1914.
94 M. Larsson, Shattered Anzacs, Living with the Scars of War, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2009, p. 53
documented in the paper, and whose correspondence gave people a feeling of personal connection, was killed, the loss was felt beyond the circle of his family and friends.96

If Meagher’s letters in the *Advertiser* don’t necessarily point to the paper wanting to present a particular image of the AIF, the way it dealt with his death, does. On 16 October, three months after he was killed and with the campaign on Gallipoli stalled, the *Advertiser* ran two pieces about Meagher’s dying moments. Cliff O’Regan of the 3rd Battalion, a former Wagga Christian Brothers High student, wrote that he ‘just called out to us not to bother about him but to pour heavy fire into the Turks, who were then only a few yards away. He was indeed a brave man and very popular.’97 ‘Poor Bert’, wrote another man to Meagher’s wife, he ‘lived and fought and died a model of pluck and bravery, self-denial and thoughtfulness … he was hit by a bullet about 20 yards from the Turkish trench. He just rolled over and said: “Go on boys; don’t mind me.”98 Meagher had time to utter the kind of last words that people in Wagga might have expected of such a man. Other Wagga men died less inspiring deaths. ‘Wagga’, Archie Barwick’s friend Reg Duke, was killed in late May while Barwick sat in the bottom of a trench eating breakfast. Standing above him, ‘Wagga’ was sniping, when ‘without any warning he fell at my feet, with half his head blown off’.99 ‘Wagga’, said Barwick, ‘was as game a lad as ever looked through the sights of a rifle, & I shall never forget him.’100 Barwick wrote to Duke’s mother describing her son as ‘a splendid shot – few better – and absolutely fearless’, reassuring her that Reg had received ‘a decent burial attended by a clergyman.’101

Duke died in a relatively quiet period, between the campaign’s first weeks and the August battles when Meagher was killed. August was a bloody month on Gallipoli. A failed offensive cost thousands of lives. Wagga was not spared. Hugh Hutton, by then a lieutenant in the 4th Battalion, lost an arm in the attack on Lone Pine.102 Howard McKern, a wheat farmer, known in the district from his years at the Experiment Farm, died during what another Wagga man called ‘that great struggle from the 6th to the 12th of August.’103 He was hit in the leg at Lone Pine and seen ‘laughing and talking’ as he

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96 *Daily Advertiser*, 26 August 1915.
97 *Daily Advertiser*, 16 October 1915.
98 *Daily Advertiser*, 16 October 1915.
99 A. Barwick, 2013, p. 42.
100 A. Barwick, 2013, p. 42.
101 *Daily Advertiser*, 4 September 1915.
103 *Daily Advertiser*, 2 September and 20 October 1915.
was carried from the trenches. He died from the subsequent infection and was buried on Malta.¹⁰⁴ Allan Galvin, the Wagga schoolteacher, was also killed at Lone Pine on 7 August. He was, said one man, ‘riddled with Machine Gun fire and could not possibly survive. It was during an assault on Lone Pine. He belonged to Wagga.’¹⁰⁵

After the fruitless August battles, the campaign on Gallipoli returned to stalemate. Fighting continued along the front, men continued to suffer illness, wounds and death, but there were no more major battles, no further attempts to break out of the beachhead. Archibald Redhead, by then a staff sergeant, wrote in some detail about the final weeks of the campaign in a series of diary entries that found their way into the Advertiser. ‘Things here’, he said, ‘have been much of a muchness … weather decidedly wintry … operations – in a big way – nil … activity of enemy very much increased … our activity increased correspondingly … big numbers of Turkish deserters coming into our lines’. He also described the new tactic of holding fire, without recognising it as the beginning of the evacuation, and the bitter cold that heralded the coming of winter.¹⁰⁶ The evacuation was completed on 20 December and on the 22nd the Advertiser editorialised about the loss of thousands of the ‘bravest and best men in the Empire’, stating the ‘melancholy truth that it has all been in vain’. There would, said the paper, be a universal feeling of relief that the campaign was at an end.¹⁰⁷

While some Wagga men, like Hubert Meagher and Reg Duke, were buried on the peninsula, others, like Alfred Bennett, were in hospital or convalescing. Wagga’s Gallipoli veterans could be found around the Mediterranean, in Egypt, and on Malta. Ron Birrell was in Cairo. Neil Boomer was in hospital in England, and others were already back in Australia.

Before anyone knew that the AIF would leave Gallipoli, many Wagga women and some men spent hours packing Christmas Billys. Recipients usually found amongst the food, cigarettes and playing cards ‘cheerful letters’ from the person who had packed their billy. Often they responded. Mrs Boyton got a note from a ‘very grateful’ Trooper Victor Ross of Bomen. Driver Bert Pendrick, a grocer from Gurwood Street, who had been in uniform since August 1914, wrote to thank Mrs Warden for her billy that had

¹⁰⁴ Red Cross Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files, 1914-1918 War, AWM 1DRL/0428, 454 Corporal Howard Taylor McKern.
¹⁰⁵ Galvin, Allan St Clair, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 512.
¹⁰⁶ Daily Advertiser, 12 February 1916.
¹⁰⁷ Daily Advertiser, 22 December 1915.
‘reached him in good order’. Pendrick added that he hoped to ‘be back in Wagga for next Christmas’. He was bound for disappointment. Another two Christmases passed before he got Anzac leave and saw home again. A lieutenant told his uncle in Kooringal that, ‘Every man got a billycan; these were issued to the troops whilst we were at Lemnos on Christmas Eve … The motto printed on them was a bit sarcastic, under the circumstances. A picture of Gallipoli and underneath, “This bit of the world belongs to us.”’ Mrs Daly, who included a note asking that her billy go to a Wagga man, was rewarded with a letter from Private Hillas Bishop, from Downside, thanking her for ‘the thoughtful present.’ Sometimes, when a billy’s intended recipient was no longer on overseas service, his mates benefitted. Sergei Rosenberg was already back in Wagga when the billy bearing his name reached his unit. His former sergeant ‘took the liberty’ of opening it and sharing the contents among the private’s old friends.

The billys were deemed ‘too bulky for restricted transport’ and authorities forbade a repeat of the exercise. Packed by Wagga women specifically for the district’s soldiers, billys were a sign of the district’s war effort taking on an increasingly local flavour. In 1916, the Wagga Red Cross League organised Christmas gifts for sick and wounded Australian soldiers and sailors in the hospitals of Egypt, France and England. When the district’s men received their parcel they could be in no doubt about who sent it: the Cadbury’s chocolate bore a special greeting from the Wagga Red Cross League. The strength of local associations for Wagga men on active service suggests the importance of local ties in the AIF more generally. Wagga’s soldiers were volunteers in a national force, but their home district remained an important point of reference throughout the war.

Gallipoli bought the war to the fore in Wagga. Local men continued to enlist and small numbers of wounded began coming home. As 1915 went on, the peril volunteers faced was beyond doubt, as was the fact that more men were needed. In the year of Gallipoli

108 On the Christmas billys, see Daily Advertiser, 29 February and 9 March 1916, S. Morris, 2002, p. 1142, and Pendrick, Robert, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 567. ‘Anzac leave’ was instituted in September 1918 for men who had been on overseas service since 1914.
109 Daily Advertiser, 22 March 1916.
111 Daily Advertiser, 11 March 1916.
112 On the billys being banned, see Daily Advertiser, 9 August 1916.
113 Daily Advertiser, 16 December 1916.
114 Daily Advertiser, 14 August 1916.
the pressure for eligible men to join the AIF grew, and Wagga began to understand the war's true impact.
V. ‘I don’t want your cheers – I don’t want that – I want men’: recruitment and returned soldiers, 1915

In late April 1915, Wagga Council discussed a letter from its counterpart in Sydney’s Newtown suggesting that public meetings be called to ‘discuss the advisability of following the example set by His Majesty King George V in regard to abstinence from alcoholic liquors during the war.’ The letter, noted the council minutes, was ‘received, no action being taken.’ People in Wagga were already sacrificing their time, their money, their energy and sometimes their family life to support the war effort. Giving up alcohol for the duration was one sacrifice too many.

While Wagga avoided a diverting discussion about the merits of King George’s pledge, other questions about the war and the district’s role in it soon demanded more serious consideration. 1915 marked a new phase in the district’s wartime life. As the casualty lists lengthened and the first wounded men came home, the local recruiting effort became more intense and more organised.

Through the year’s early months the number of recruits remained steady at between 8-10,000 per month across Australia. If this was, as Robson said, ‘evidence that enthusiasm still ran high’, by April, when just over 6000 men came forward, it was waning. The decline was arrested when news that the AIF was in action prompted a surge in enlistments. Recruiting reached a peak of more than 36,000 in July, before falling again towards the April figures. Enthusiasm and appeals to patriotism were no longer enough to get the replacements the AIF needed.

In the months after the AIF went into action, eligibles and those who volunteered began to be viewed in a new light. Herb Henningham enlisted at the end of March 1915, a few weeks before the Landing. Visiting Wagga before he sailed in early May, Henningham was farewelled at the Town Hall by the mayor and council aldermen, his former employers. Hugh Oates spoke of his admiration for volunteers now enlisting with ‘full knowledge of the dangers in front of them’, overlooking the fact that Henningham had enlisted before that knowledge was available. Apart from referring to the fighting on

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1 Wagga Council Minutes, 29 April 1915, CSURA, RW2608/19, p. 537.
3 E. Scott, 1936, p. 871.
4 Daily Advertiser, 8 May 1915.
Gallipoli, Oates’s words, and from the reports his tone, differed little from speeches at other farewells – the formula was well established by the middle of 1915. For Henningham, the future seemed to weigh heavily. He was sorry to be leaving Wagga, and hoped ‘if he returned safely’ to take up his old position with the council.\(^5\)

When Oates spoke of volunteers possessing ‘the courage and fighting qualities characteristic of the British race’ at Henningham’s farewell, he drew on the community’s deeply ingrained sense of duty and loyalty to the empire. One man, not from Wagga, recalled; ‘If you were born before the turn of the century you would understand … When I was a boy everyone spoke of Britain as home and England could do no wrong’.\(^6\) On 24 May 1912, Empire Day – the anniversary of Queen Victoria’s birth – Victoria’s premier told an audience that they ‘must be prepared to die for the flag’.\(^7\) On Empire Day 1915 Australians at the Dardanelles were doing just that.

Falling almost exactly a month after the AIF went into battle, in 1915 Empire Day ‘achieved a peak of popularity’.\(^8\) In Wagga flags flew from vehicles, public buildings, businesses and private homes.\(^9\) School children sat through patriotic speeches delivered by the likes of Canon Pike, other members of the local clergy and politicians. At Wagga High, Mayor Oates, confident that ‘the pupils … would do their part well should occasion arise’, spoke to the assembly about Empire and loyalty.\(^10\) In the afternoon, as the Wagga Brass Band played, children paraded through town, saluting one another ‘like true allies’ when they met outside the court house to hear more speeches. Empire Day, having been born in a spirit of peace, said one speaker, in 1915 was associated with a ‘perfectly horrible and terrible war.’ Now, he continued, ‘all men of military age (should) prepare themselves to serve their country … men who were physically fit … should make themselves ready to fill the breech.’\(^11\) Three weeks later the British Government requested ‘every available man that can be recruited in Australia’.\(^12\)

\(^5\) Daily Advertiser, 8 May 1915.
\(^8\) A. Thomson, 1994, p. 134.
\(^9\) Daily Advertiser, 25 May 1915.
\(^10\) Daily Advertiser, 25 May 1915.
\(^12\) E. Scott, 1937, p. 292.
Even though more men were enlisting than ever during the opening months of the Gallipoli campaign, in Wagga the call for volunteers grew louder and more insistent. On 10 July, shortly after the federal parliament was asked to consider ‘the urgent necessity of a more definite and systematic basis of organisation of recruiting’, a police constable walked the town’s streets, approaching ‘a good many young and middle aged men’ to ask if they were willing to serve their country.\(^\text{13}\) Of the 50 he bailed up, only four were brave enough to say no. Greater intrusions soon followed. The Advertiser mentioned that in a few days the police would be doing house-to-house canvassing.\(^\text{14}\)

That month a statewide recruitment campaign was launched by the New South Wales Recruitment Association and some 270 recruiting associations were formed in major centres.\(^\text{15}\) Police Magistrate C. J. B. Helm chaired the Wagga branch, which comprised local businessmen, school headmasters, land board officials, bankers, the Clerk of Petty Sessions and church leaders like Canon Pike, who along with Major Heath was described as one of the most enthusiastic members.\(^\text{16}\)

While public calls for volunteers became louder, not everyone wanted to see men leave, particularly when they were considered to be doing important work for their community. On 4 July Hubert Florance, who as a boy in the early 1900s studied at the Experiment Farm and whose parents later ‘put him on a farm’, wrote to his mother from Baan Baa between Gunnedah and Narrabri about a local school master, Mr Gilbert, who announced that he and another man, ‘Jim’, were going to town to enlist. They didn’t get very far before ‘the townspeople made such a fuss that he decided to wait for a month’. Gilbert had four children and wanted to join the AIF because they would ‘want to know what their father did’. Having postponed his own enlistment, Gilbert spent the month trying to ‘induce some of the localites to enlist.’\(^\text{17}\) Florance was of enlistment age, but was repeatedly rejected and never got into the AIF.\(^\text{18}\)

If people in Wagga made a similar effort to stop a popular local from volunteering, records of it no longer exist. Wartime evidence points towards public attempts to get men into uniform, not keep them out of it. Weekly recruiting meetings in Little

\(^{13}\) Daily Advertiser, 12 July 1915. The quote ‘the urgent necessity ...’ is from E. Scott, 1937, p. 291.

\(^{14}\) Daily Advertiser, 12 July 1915.

\(^{15}\) On the number of recruiting associations in New South Wales, see, J. Beaumont, 2013, p. 105.


\(^{17}\) Florance Family Papers, CSURA RW253/6/10, letter 4 July 1915.

\(^{18}\) Letters from Frank Florance to Hubert Oakley Florance, Florance Family Papers, CSURA RW253/6/20, undated letter and letter 12 July 1918. See also, J. Sutherland, 1996, pp. 31 and 33.
Gurwood Street featuring the Wagga Brass Band became a fixture in July.\textsuperscript{19} Sometimes the crowd heard from a new recruit or the father of a man or men already on active service, but well-known local businessmen, clergymen and politicians were the usual speakers. Their appeals were generally directed at eligibles’ patriotism, sense of honour and conscience. Having explained that physical defects kept him from enlisting, one recruiter at an August meeting enthused about ‘palship’, urging Wagga’s ‘eligible manhood’ to go and ‘share the honour of forcing the Dardanelles’.\textsuperscript{20} A week later Reverend Eldred Dyer, a Methodist Minister described by Morris as ‘sincere and scholarly’ made a more direct, self-assured pitch, ‘I believe you will go. You have been thinking about it … and you will go’, he said.\textsuperscript{21}

As Wagga’s recruiting effort gained momentum through the second half of 1915, some of the AIF’s original volunteers were on their way home. On 18 July the \textit{Kyarra}, carrying the first Gallipoli wounded to return, along with men afflicted with VD, docked in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{22} Within hours they were on a train to Sydney and early next morning pulled into Wagga station. Most were asleep when the train stopped, oblivious to the lone reporter walking from carriage to carriage in search of an officer. Directed first one way by a man whose right puttee ‘had been replaced by bandages’, then another by a soldier who stuck his head out a carriage window to offer help, the reporter was still on the platform when the whistle sounded and the train lurched forward. Leaning out the window, the second man forgot about finding an officer and called out, ‘the best track in the world is through the recruiting office. It leads to Gallipoli. They are wanted there.’\textsuperscript{23} The \textit{Advertiser} ran the story under the title ‘Scenes on the train, Grim realities of war’, on the same page as the 53\textsuperscript{rd} casualty list. If the reporter hoped to encounter a Wagga man among the wounded, he was disappointed, but he did get a story and a quote.\textsuperscript{24}

Had no reporter been at the station that night, Wagga’s first encounter with wounded veterans would have gone unnoticed, but the trainload of returned soldiers was the clearest sign yet of why the AIF needed more volunteers. Maurice McKeown, writing

\textsuperscript{19} On weekly recruiting rallies see, \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 15 November 1915.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 23 August 1915.
\textsuperscript{22} E. Scott, 1937, p. 828.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 19 July 1915.
\textsuperscript{24} Details on the train and the casualty list from \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 19 July 1915.
from the Experiment Farm on 22 July with a mixture of melancholy and pride, commented, ‘our farm list of wounded is growing fast which is evidenced (sic) that, like all the rest of the Australians, they were not backward when required. Their work has been splendid’. Those of McKeown’s students who had been wounded were not from Wagga, but soon the district’s own wounded began returning, their presence in the community testifying both to the need for men to replace them at the front and to the risks of enlisting.

Describing wounds sufficiently serious to end a man’s active service as ‘a form of deliverance’ – a sentiment shared by soldiers who hoped for such a wound as a means of escaping combat without being killed – Marina Larsson added that news of a loved one having been wounded nevertheless began an anxious time for a soldier’s family. At the waterworks in Wagga William Worth’s parents, Edith and William, endured an agony of uncertainty about their son’s condition. In late May Sister Narrelle Hobbes wrote telling her that William’s right shoulder blade was ‘severely shattered, he also has partial paralysis of the whole body & is slightly deaf …’. There is little sense that either Hobbes or Worth regarded his disabling injuries as being a ‘deliverance’ even though William asked her to make the letter ‘as OK & bright & hopeful as you can’. A year passed before he was well enough to make the journey back to Wagga.

Michael Tyquin observed that distance spared Australian civilians any real glimpse of the war’s reality until as late as the closing months of 1916. Before then people could read about the war in the press or in letters from soldiers at the front, but personal contact was almost non-existent. In the Wagga district, that began to change, albeit gradually, when Charles Hussey came home. On 6 August his parents received a telegram; ‘Private Hussey arriving Melbourne per “Ballarat” today.’ Men from rural Australia, wrote Larsson, usually arrived by train and ‘were met at the station by their families and the local welcoming committee’. So it was for Hussey, the district’s first returned man. On 19 August, a month to the day after a wounded soldier called to a reporter from a carriage window on Wagga station, Charles emerged from a rail

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25 Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to firms and private individuals, 1896-1922 CSURA SA473/31/129-172 (31/162), letter 22 July 1915.
29 Hussey, Charles, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 157.
30 M. Larsson, 2009, p. 73.
carriage at The Rock to cheering school children lined up two deep along the platform. A woman handed him a bouquet of flowers before Hussey, accompanied by some friends, made his way from the station along Uranquinty Street. A few days later, on 22 September, he was given a civic reception in The Rock Hall. The Advertiser reported his arrival and his reception, but never mentioned that Hussey’s hand had become so badly infected that his forearm was amputated in Alexandria the previous May, or that he continued to be plagued by ‘sharp pain’ in the stump.

The following month Basil Newson, convalescing from a serious wound to his jaw sustained within a few days of the landing on Gallipoli, stopped in Wagga to visit friends and propose to Vivienne Dobney. Vivienne’s parents were well known in the district. Thomas was an alderman and former mayor and Agnes was president of the Wagga Wagga District Hospital Ladies Advisory Committee. The couple married on 27 October 1915 at St. John’s Church and war veteran Newson became a member of one of Wagga’s oldest and most prominent families. His sojourn in the town and wedding to Vivienne made the pages of the Advertiser. Returned soldiers were already newsworthy, and even though the wedding might have made the ‘Marriages’ column regardless, Newson’s having fought on Gallipoli gave him a status in Wagga that his pre-war role as a bank clerk never could.

Whether struck by illness, accident or wounded, men were returning to the community who had experienced action on Gallipoli – men to be honoured and listened to. As Marilyn Lake suggested, the returned soldier was a ‘new and powerful figure in Australian society … he was the supreme repository of patriotic values.' More than 6,000 soldiers returned to Australia in 1915. Of the relative few who came from Wagga or who found reason to go there once back in the country, some offered their services to the district’s recruiting effort. Writing about north eastern Victoria, McQuilton commented that returned soldiers did not appear on the recruiting platform.

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31 Daily Advertiser, 19 August 1915.
32 Daily Advertiser, 22 September 1915.
33 Hussey, Charles, Repatriation Department Files, M9213 and C9213.
34 Daily Advertiser, 12 October 1915.
36 M. Lake, A Divided Society, Tasmania During World War 1, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1975, p. 69.
until 1916. In Wagga they were quicker to take the stage, a local manifestation of what one historian called ‘the cult of the wounded’. Returned men participated in two rallies in mid-October, cheered by large crowds as the latest recruits marched through town to board the Cootamundra train at Wagga station.

On 23 October a wounded soldier visiting Wagga from Victoria spoke at a recruiting meeting about his months on Gallipoli, and of being sent home after he was ‘finally badly damaged’. When someone called for three cheers the wounded man objected, ‘I don’t want your cheers – I don’t want that – I want men’. Four came forward. A fortnight later, in early November, four returned men gave speeches and moved among the Little Gurwood Street crowd urging men who looked eligible to volunteer. Thirty responded with a public declaration of their intention to enlist at what proved to be Wagga’s most successful meeting to date. Returned soldiers were both direct and persuasive. A man who had not been to the war might baulk at accusing someone in the crowd of refusing to go ‘until the bullets were made out of blanc-mange’. Coming from a returned soldier it was a challenge that some would have found hard to dismiss.

While local returned men were busy urging others to take their place at the front through October, the Advertiser, which had consistently supported the recruiting effort, earned the censor’s ire for publishing a couple of stories on the disaster at the Nek without first submitting them for ‘scrutiny’. The editor was asked to provide an explanation for having made ‘extremely serious statements’ in an editorial headed ‘War or Butchery?’ describing the slaughter as a ‘futile sacrifice of gallant men’ and asking why ‘Australians should be asked to make greater sacrifice in proportion to their number than that of the other forces controlled by the Allies’. But even in an editorial and articles as damming as any it ran during the war, the Advertiser found a way to appeal for volunteers.

Of course our stay-at-home friend … says, “A lot will soon be patched up and sent back to fight again.” That is one of the blessings of our voluntary

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38 J. McQuilton, 2001, 45.
40 Daily Advertiser, 19 and 20 October 1915.
42 Daily Advertiser, 8 November 1915.
system. Some men fight again and again until they are either killed or crippled. The majority stay at home in comfort and safety, talk patriotism, and generally enjoy life. The thought of all the wonderful men in the 8th and 10th Light horse going out as they did is too much, when you compare it with some of our “knuts” at home.44

After the AIF had been in action for a few months, the federal Government decided to make ‘an accurate registration of the resources of Australia, both in men and materiel.’ Known as the War Census and applying to ‘wealth as well as to manhood’, the bill, passed by the Parliament on 23 July 1915, required all males between the ages of 18 and 60 to fill in census cards. Even though reports suggested that 180,000 Australians refused to return their cards, the census results led the Commonwealth Statistician to conclude that there were 600,000 ‘fit’ men of recruitment age, 18-44 years, in Australia.45

Armed with this information, local recruiting organisations were expected to contact eligibles and determine whether they had a sound reason for not being in uniform.46 Some recipients found the cards confusing. Writing to his nephew David in Bombala, Robert Wilkinson referred to the ‘differences of opinion as to the proper way to fill up the red War Census paper.’47 The red paper concerned Wilkinson’s assets and in the end David filled one out for his uncle.48 To assist people like Wilkinson, newspapers published instructions, but this was not always enough.49 In mid-September Wagga’s Local Government Office wrote to Wagga Council ‘asking that assistance & advice be given to the public in filling in War Census Cards.’50 Responding to this and other instances of people needing help, the council arranged for a committee of aldermen and citizens to attend the Town Hall from 3 o’clock every afternoon to answer people’s questions.51

44 See the Daily Advertiser, 4 and 5 October 1915, and Censorship Office letter of 18 October 1915 see, CSURA, RW5/269. This quote is from the Daily Advertiser, 4 October 1915.
45 E. Scott, 1936, p. 310. Under the census’s definition men were considered fit if they described themselves ‘as being in good health, not having lost a limb, and being neither blind nor deaf.’ On cards not being returned, see L. C. Jauncey, The Story of Conscription in Australia, Allen and Unwin, London, 1935, p. 123.
46 E. Scott, 1936, pp. 310-311.
49 Sydney Morning Herald, 1 September 1915.
50 Sydney Morning Herald, 1 September 1915, and Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW2608/20, p. 63.
51 Daily Advertiser, 9 and 10 September 1915 and Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW2608/20, p. 63.
During the following month a new form of recruiting caught Wagga’s attention and prompted the town’s best known effort to attract volunteers. On 10 October 1915 a group of recruits calling themselves the Coo-ees, marched out of Gilgandra just over 460 kilometres north of Wagga, bound for Sydney. Along the way they appealed to other eligible men to join them, becoming known as the first ‘snowball march’. The Wagga Recruiting Association, chaired by Hugh Oates, took notice, and at the 25 October meeting, while the Coo-ees were still on the road, decided that Wagga would hold a similar march.\(^{52}\) As enthusiastic as ever, Canon Pike, Major Heath, and wool broker and alderman Edward Collins, offered their support.

Mark Redhead, a 20 year old clerk who had been in both the junior and senior cadets and had spent two years in the militia, was the third member of his family to enlist.\(^{53}\) He joined the AIF six days before the October Recruiting Association meeting and after a brief period of training at Cootamundra became one of the Wagga march’s two secretaries. Every day between 10 am and 1 pm and 2pm and 4pm, Redhead could be found at Gurwood Chambers in Gurwood Street, just near his home, ready to take the names of volunteers.\(^{54}\) At his swearing in, each volunteer received a badge – optimistically numbered from one to 500 – in ‘blue and gold with a kangaroo in the centre and two long streamers bearing the words Wagga-Yass Route March and Off to Berlin, via Sydney.’ Redhead was given badge number one.\(^{55}\)

People, said Robert Wilkinson, were ‘anxious about the war, which seems to be coming to a crisis in Europe, Bulgaria having turned dog (joined the war on Germany’s side) … it looks as though there is a lot of hard fighting still to be done.’\(^{56}\) The pressure on eligibles to enlist and exercises like the recruiting marches confirmed Wilkinson’s view that the fighting was far from over. In early July, Australia’s Attorney General, Sir William Irvine, had spoken in the federal parliament of a war that ‘may last for years.’\(^{57}\)

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\(^{53}\) Mark Redhead, Repatriation Department File, M93798.


\(^{57}\) E. Scott, 1937, p. 291.
Those involved in Wagga’s war effort would have agreed. Their work anticipated a long conflict. Some of the district’s most prominent individuals were already devoting considerable energy to ensuring Wagga’s continuing support for the AIF and other patriotic causes. The mayor, aldermen like Edward Collins, clergymen like Canon Pike and Reverend Dyer, Major Heath and local businessmen like David Copland and Charles Hardy, all with their own jobs and businesses to take care of, were on several committees and attended regular meetings and functions. For such men, who had already faced challenges and tests in their business or political lives and who had experienced success in their fields, the war proved an irresistible opportunity to further enhance their position in the community. They were accustomed to leading, respected enough to have influence, and had wide-ranging networks. That their wives often also played a prominent role in civic life, particularly in marshalling women to give their time and their energies to the war effort, was less often mentioned, but clear nonetheless. Unlike many others, these prominent locals gained from the war – in prestige, in being seen to be doing their duty and encouraging others to do theirs, and in the publicity they received when their names were associated with almost every wartime initiative.

In late 1915 and early 1916 the route march not only gave already well-known locals another chance to demonstrate their loyalty and their support for recruiting, but also brought Wagga into direct contact with a string of towns and villages in southern New South Wales. Describing the country around Coolamon and Matong to Wagga’s north west during the inter-war years, Hank Nelson wrote that people ‘knew one another in the way that country people knew about each other, they sometimes saw each other, or heard talk about one another when they were at dances, sheep sales or waiting at the wheat silos.’\(^{58}\) This was equally so of country life for the previous generation. The Wagga district was connected to the surrounding area and beyond by commerce, the need for rural labour to follow work from town to town, annual shows, sporting competitions, contact between clubs and associations, friendships and the spread of extended families. The extent and long-standing nature of these ties found their most succinct and obvious expression in the *Advertiser’s* advertisements over several decades before 1914. Among those for local events and businesses were others for the regular steamer and coach services between Wagga and Narranadera, for stock and station agents in Forbes, Hay, Condoblin, Goulburn, Melbourne and Sydney, for auctioneers in

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Cootamundra and Narrandera, for hotels in Albury, saw mills in Coolamon, for David Jones in Sydney and for a bank at Yerong Creek.\textsuperscript{59}

During the war, letters from and stories about soldiers from outside Wagga appeared regularly in the local press, particularly in the \textit{Advertiser}’s ‘Australian Heroes’ and longer-lived ‘Personal’ columns. While they suggest the enduring strength of the links between Wagga, other Riverina towns and southeastern Australia more broadly, these stories also tended to concern men who had some connection to the district. Wagga’s view of the war through the lens of its resident’s own contribution and experience points to a national effort based on local preoccupations.

When news of M. M. McGrath going missing on Gallipoli was published, the \textit{Advertiser} explained that his brother worked in the Wagga Lands Office. A report that J. Haydon was ‘dangerously wounded’ appeared in paper because his brother worked in the Wagga Branch of the Commercial Bank.\textsuperscript{60} Private J. Salisbury of Woonoona on the New South Wales south coast was reported missing in the Wagga press because he was one of Annie Jupenlatz’s nephews.\textsuperscript{61} In June 1915 the paper ran a letter from Private Williams of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion mentioning a couple of men from Junee, Joseph ‘Long Joe’ Clampett, an ‘axe man’ who had been wounded, and Billy Knight, killed at the Landing.\textsuperscript{62} Early the following month Private Joe O’Connor from Lockhart wrote to the \textit{Advertiser} to let his friends know he had been shot through the lung. The paper also carried stories about Reg Wise, whose father lived in Narrandera, having been wounded in the knee, and about twenty year old Jim Flinn from Tootool, a well-known rugby player, having enlisted.\textsuperscript{63}

However deep the personal connections, inter-town and inter-district rivalries in fund raising and recruiting had been a feature of country life since the war’s beginning. In late 1915, the march promised to replace rivalry with cooperation, but the early signs were not good. Wagga was not alone in planning to imitate the Coo-ees. The Yass

\textsuperscript{59} For examples see, the \textit{Advertiser}, 14 January and 7 August 1880, 1 January 1887, 18 October 1887, 20 September 1892.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 1 June 1915.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 10 September 1915.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 10 June 1915. Clampett never went back to Gallipoli. He returned to Australia in July 1915 and when fit enough went back to the war. He was killed in July 1917, see Joseph Clampett, Service Record, B455, service no. 10021. Clampett’s original service no. was 196 in keeping with his early enlistment. See also Reginald Humphries, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 6854 and Reginald Ernest Humphries, Repatriation File M33761.
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 21 & 30 July 1915.
Recruiting Association had the same idea. Their preference was to have the march depart after the harvest in January or February 1916 while Wagga wanted an earlier, mid-December departure. Recruiting associations in towns along the proposed route – Junee, Booroowa, Young, Yass, Gunning, and Goulburn – all favoured a 12 January start, and the associations in Coolamon, Grenfell and Temora each offered assistance after the harvest.64 Despite the overwhelming support for an early 1916 march by the towns whose cooperation Wagga sought, Wagga, at a more advanced stage of preparations, with 52 local recruits ready to leave and twelve other men permitted to join the march from the camp in Cootamundra, prevailed. Yass and other towns considered proceeding independently, but the impracticality of having two marches pass through the same country within a couple of months was clear to everyone and the idea went no further.65

The march quickly came to dominate the district’s war effort during the summer of 1915-1916 and Wagga raised £230 before the recruits left town.66 By December 1915, when people were asked to put their hands in their pockets for the march, no one would have been surprised at requests for money. This was just the latest in a series of organisations or events vying for donations.

The Belgian Fund remained an important and popular cause, holding appeals and events like a mid-May 1915 concert that included ‘a performing dog’ to encourage contributions.67 Local people ‘could not all go to the front’, said the Advertiser, but they could ‘do the next best thing – help in a pecuniary way to relieve the suffering of those who were in dire need of assistance through fighting to slay the common foe.’ Seventy-five local men and women collected weekly contributions to the Belgian Fund, which, by May 1915, had raised almost £1000 in Wagga.68 A few days later Annie Jupenlatz held a Belgian Fair on the balcony of her Wagga Hotel, attended by more than 150 children.69

67 Daily Advertiser, 13 May 1915.
68 Daily Advertiser, 15 May 1915.
69 Daily Advertiser, 20 May 1915.
Once the AIF went into action, wounded soldiers also became a popular cause, and all sorts of means were used to encourage people to give their support. At the beginning of July, Hanson’s Co-Operative Butchery in Gurwood Street held a guessing competition about the weight of ‘the record price fat sheep’. Tickets cost 6d each and the prize was a turkey, a ‘fine, fat, dressed gobbler’. Proceeds went to the Red Cross ‘for the benefit of our wounded soldiers.’

There were no wounded soldiers in Wagga yet, but before the end of the year the local Red Cross was helping wounded returned men find work, and recommending that the Sydney and Melbourne executives take steps to establish a labour bureau ‘for the benefit’ of these men who, they suggested, should be engaged in place of men who had left for the front. The local Red Cross’s charitable efforts were wide ranging during the war. At its annual meeting in September, members announced that during the previous twelve months 3683 ‘articles of wearing apparel’ were sent overseas, just over £138 had been sent to the Belgian Consul’s funds ‘in addition to 500 garments for babies and quantities of food.’ By April 1916, people in New South Wales had contributed more than £121,000 to the Red Cross.

£90 of Wagga’s donations was meant to buy a travelling kitchen for the AIF, but the Defence Department declared itself unable to guarantee the kitchen’s arrival at the front. Mayor Oates, President of the Wagga Red Cross League, sought each donor’s permission and arranged instead for some of the money to be used to buy prostheses for soldiers who had lost a limb in battle, and for some to be sent to Lady Helen Munro Ferguson for dispatch to the Egyptian hospitals in which Australian wounded were being nursed.

At Bomen, the Experiment Farm sent regular packages of newspapers to the Red Cross Book Depot in Sydney for dispatch to the AIF. Local children were also involved in fund raising for the Red Cross and other organisations. Young Bobbie Rake of Tarcutta

70 Daily Advertiser, 3 July 1915. The Red Cross Fund was devoted to ‘the needs of sick and wounded soldiers and sailors.’ See J. B. Trivett, 1917, p. 769. For a discussion on the Red Cross’s humanitarian work, such as that referred to here, and its seeming contradiction with the militarism of Anzac, see, M. Oppenheimer, ‘Shaping the legend: The role of the Australian Red Cross and Anzac’, in Labour History, No. 106, June 2014, pp. 123-142.

71 Daily Advertiser, 4 December 1915.

72 Daily Advertiser, 16 September 1915.


74 Daily Advertiser, 17 July 1915.

75 See for instance McKeown’s correspondence of 10 November 1915, 24 January 1916 and 30 January 1917, Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to firms and private individuals, 1896-1922, CSURA SA473/31/129-172 (31/162-164).
Street put together a ‘juvenile concert for the soldiers’ to raise funds to buy cigarettes that the Red Cross League could send to ‘the Wagga soldiers.’ The Mother’s Fund for wounded soldiers benefitted when students at the Wagga and Newtown (South Wagga) Public Schools held a sports afternoon with sideshows and football matches on the Wagga Cricket Ground on 23 July 1915.

That month ended with another major fundraising event in Wagga, this time on ‘Australia Day’. Not being a public holiday, the town’s shops and businesses remained open, but by the time the festivities began in the afternoon about 3000 people crowded the streets, and at 1pm, the people of Wagga sang the national anthem to the accompaniment of both local bands before the crowd dispersed to the various stalls ‘where they spent freely to provide funds for the wounded soldiers’. So freely did they spend that Wagga raised almost £5,000 on the day, and reached £5224 by late September. This, complained the Advertiser was ‘despite the painfully obvious truth that, as usual, a considerable section of the community were not even capable of rising to this great occasion with any degree of spirit or in a manner to indicate they were equal to exercising some little self-denial in the interests of the heroic souls who have done so much for them and the freedom and safety they enjoy under the British flag.’

Throughout the war, the Advertiser, consciously or otherwise, overlooked the fact that not everyone in the district possessed equal means, nor had the leisure to devote themselves to the war effort as did local leaders of business, the church and politics. Stephen Garton argued that ‘even a small contribution meant hardship’ for ‘some poorer households’ and noted the effect of ‘rampant’ wartime inflation on families of limited means. As Michael McKernan observed, ‘solid enlistments in the AIF had come from the workers’, and Wagga’s working class homes, as the number of labourers to enlist suggests, were deeply committed. At the same time, in a further expression of the wartime rivalries that led people to compare their or their district’s or state’s contribution with those of other parts of the country, Wagga residents were assured that

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76 Daily Advertiser, 19 October 1915.
77 Daily Advertiser, 21 July 1915.
78 In 1915 Australia Day was a day set aside for nation wide carnivals. It bore no relationship to 26 January which was then known as ‘anniversary day’ in New South Wales. See J. Connor, P. Stanley and P. Yule, The War at Home, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2015, p. 167.
79 Daily Advertiser, 31 July 1915.
80 Daily Advertiser, 2 August. For the Australia Day Fund’s final tally see the 24 September 1915 edition.
82 M. McKernan, 1980, pp. 7-8.
their support of wounded soldiers was greater than that of many other regional centres. To illustrate the point the *Advertiser* published a table showing that only Orange and Bathurst eclipsed Wagga’s contribution.83

There were few limits to the number of ways local people were expected to support the war effort. In September 1915 they were asked to ‘buy and fill a “Billycan” for our soldiers’ for Christmas or, alternatively, to pay extra to have one filled and sent in their name. A well packed billycan, said the *Advertiser*, held ‘a tin of fruit, cream, bovril, potted ham, sardines, tobacco, cigarettes, playing cards, or tin of plum pudding, herring in tomato sauce, cream cheese, chocolates, tobacco, cigarettes and cards. Cheerful letters, jokes etc., will also be enclosed.’84 People were asked to send the names and addresses of friends and relatives in the AIF to the Wagga Red Cross League and close to 400 billies ‘filled with an assortment of necessaries and luxuries’ were packed and addressed to Wagga soldiers, each one including a ‘cheery Christmas message from a relative or friend.’85 Mrs Daly of Kincaid Street, wanting to be sure that her billycan reached a Wagga man, ‘placed a note saying that her gift was for a soldier, preferably from Wagga, who had not received a present’. She asked that the recipient drop her a line ‘so that she might know the billy had been received.’86

Writing about patriotic funds, McKernan observed that in providing parcels and raising funds for soldiers’ comforts, women ‘found their greatest area of identification with the AIF’, an institution that dominated Australian life during the war but which, unless they were nurses, they could not join.87 Women in Wagga devoted themselves to all sorts of war-related causes. Some, like the concert and picture show arranged by local women for the ‘1st, 2nd and 3rd Batteries, Australian Field Artillery’, were specifically directed at individuals or units in which men they knew were serving.88 Others, like Wagga woman Mary Giles’s proposal that people contribute funds towards the purchase of

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83 *Daily Advertiser*, 2 August 1915.
84 *Daily Advertiser*, 18 September 1915.
85 An advertisement calling for people to send the names and addresses of relatives on overseas service to whom billies could be sent appeared in, *Daily Advertiser*, 2 October 1915. A story on the garden fete held to raise funds for the billies appears in the 7 October 1915 edition of the *Advertiser* and the quotes are from the 9 October 1915 edition.
88 *Daily Advertiser*, 18 September 1915.
‘sandbags for the boys’, were meant to benefit the AIF more generally but related also to civilians wanting to feel involved and useful.

Giles appealed especially to local girls, telling them she had heard that a single sandbag might save twelve lives. As ever, there were people in Wagga who gave the initiative their wholehearted support. At the Experiment Farm students had already begun ‘turning out bags’ and by 5 November had made 550, while the Wagga Committee – a local branch of the Sydney Committee – agreed that rather than make their own they would send money to Sydney to buy sandbags, unless enough material was donated to make it possible to make them in Wagga. On 16 November the Advertiser reported that the Tarcutta Public School was also making sandbags and expressed the hope that other children in the district would follow suit. Wagga was one of the first towns to take up the call for sandbags, many others followed and so many were made around the country that eventually the AIF announced that they were receiving more sandbags than were needed. There were thousands of bags ‘in reserve’ and the evacuation from Gallipoli was ‘responsible for the slump in demand.’ At the end of March 1916, the ‘Wagga Sandbag League’ was thanked for its work by Mrs Harvey of the ‘Central Executive’, but, they were told, there was no need for more.

Contributions in kind, like the Christmas billies and sandbags, were often just as welcome as money. Under Maurice McKeown, the Experiment Farm was always a keen benefactor for the AIF. In January 1916, after a successful harvest, the Farm offered the Red Cross up to three tons of pears for canning and the same weight in prunes for turning into jam. The previous month, the recruitment march began to benefit from several offers of materiel or services. One recruit provided a vehicle and a horse, and a North Wagga man offered a horse and wagon. Local farmers donated fodder and Julius Rohr, a German immigrant and Wagga resident of more than five decades, provided the services of his freezing works to keep the marchers supplied with cool drinks and ice. Other local residents and businesses gave food and tobacco.

89 Daily Advertiser, 29 September 1915.
90 On the Experiment Farm’s contribution, see Daily Advertiser, 23 October 1916. On the establishment of a local branch of the Sydney committee, see Daily Advertiser, 26 October 1915. On the decision to send funds to Sydney, see Daily Advertiser, 5 November 1915.
91 Daily Advertiser, 16 October 1915.
92 Daily Advertiser, 4 and 28 March 1916.
94 Daily Advertiser, 23 November 1915.

In mid-November 1915 Mayor Oates presided over a meeting of women wanting to form a Ladies’ Committee to provide comforts for the recruits.\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 18 November 1915.} Among the names in the attendance book were Emma Collins, Edward’s wife, Agnes Dobney, whose husband Thomas was throwing all of his energy into the march, and Mayoress Hannah Oates.\footnote{S. Morris, 2002, pp. 385-386, and L. Hetherington, 1995, p. 19.} In late November the Ladies Committee held an evening garden fair in the Town Hall Gardens. Both the Wagga Wagga Brass Band and the Citizens’ Band played and the volunteers paraded before enjoying the fair ‘en masse.’\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 26 November 1915.} On the following evening a children’s concert, also in support of the march, was held in a Gurwood Street front yard adorned with ‘patriotic’ decoration.\footnote{L. Hetherington, 1995, p.19.} Wagga Primary School’s children banded together to buy a kettledrum for the marchers. When they presented it to former student and returned soldier, Major Heath, Private Charlton, a Gallipoli veteran, told the children that the beat of a drum might encourage tired soldiers to ‘march five or six miles further’.\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 24 November 1915.} On 18 November the Advertiser announced that the marchers would be known as the ‘Kangaroos’. As their departure drew near, attempts to encourage volunteers ranged from festive to hectoring.\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 18 November 1915.} Returned soldiers were central to the effort. In late November Private Charlton spoke at Tarcutta one day and the next at Humula, where he convinced 18 railway workers to enlist.\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 29 November 1915.}

On the eve of the march, the Brass Band played at the ‘citizen’s send off’ before a procession of recruits, local dignitaries, rifle club members, school children and returned soldiers, who persuaded 23 men to give their names to Mark Redhead.\footnote{\textit{Daily Advertiser}, 29 and 30 November 1915. On the number of men who gave their names to Mark Redheas, see the 29 November edition.} The next day, to enormous fanfare, 88 recruits were farewelled by thousands of locals and visitors from Junee, Ganmain, Coolamon and other nearby centres. People filled
Wagga’s footpaths and spilled onto the road to watch the Kangaroos embark on the long march to Sydney. They got underway shortly after 2pm under a scorching sun, exactly the type of weather the organisers hoped to avoid. Outside Wagga the marchers urged young men they passed along the road and a swagman resting under a tree to ‘hop in’. The next day the early summer heat sparked the district’s first bushfire of the season.

The _Advertiser_ proclaimed the Kangaroos ‘sunburnt, hard-looking men’. Most were rural workers accustomed to roughing it, said the paper. But there were also clerks, transport workers and men from the commercial sector. There were men new to Wagga, and men from the district’s oldest European families. Twenty two-year old John Mobey, born in Stawell, left his job as a gardener with Wagga Council to enlist and march with the Kangaroos. Roy Wild, a local farmer, and his second cousin, Sid Keyes, a groom, were both descendants of George Best, the former convict who helped himself to land along the Murrumbidgee’s south bank where Wagga grew. Nineteen year old Archie Box’s grandfather had managed properties for the Macarthur family before taking up his own land in the Wagga district. Both of his parents were active in the Wagga Wagga Political Labor League and his father, Benjamin, devoted himself to Wagga’s recruiting effort. Archie went to Wagga Wagga Primary and Wagga Wagga High then worked as a clerk for Charles Hardy & Co. before enlisting. On the Kangaroo march he was appointed acting Quarter Master Sergeant. Eighteen year-old apprentice carpenter William Murphy was well known in town because his father, also William, was the local police sergeant. Murphy senior’s name appears on the arrest sheets of more than one Wagga volunteer. William was rejected several times,
probably because of a back injury he suffered at work in 1913 and the scoliosis that several doctors later mentioned in his medical files, before leaving Wagga as the Kangaroo’s drummer.\textsuperscript{113} He was accepted into the AIF on Christmas Eve 1915.\textsuperscript{114} George Stearman was a brewery worker and his cousin Arthur was a labourer when they enlisted, Harold Gill was a share farmer at Harefield, and George Schremmer, whose parents had grazed stock in Wagga for almost three decades after coming from Germany in 1888, was a farmer and harness maker who had also worked as a packer at the Murrumbidgee Flour Mills.\textsuperscript{115}

Their send off from Wagga was extraordinary. Over the previous sixteen months a steady stream of men from the district had left to join the AIF, but never had such a large group departed to so colourful a farewell. The carnival atmosphere, the cheers, flags, music and speeches, were a genuine reflection of Wagga’s affection for the Kangaroos, but they were also the public face of an event darkened by the shadow of war. By December 1915 it was impossible for people to deny the march’s true meaning. The \textit{Advertiser} commented that, ‘the majority of those present realised the possibilities of life-long sorrow … for some, and more especially for the patiently suffering heroic mothers who have to remain at home in heart-rending suspense’.\textsuperscript{116}

All along the route, the Kangaroos were given receptions, meals and refreshments, an expression of what Scott described as ‘the never-failing hospitality of the Australian countryside.’\textsuperscript{117} The Murrumburrah-Harden community’s contribution gives both a sense of the march’s scale and of the generosity in supporting it. The district’s residents gave the Kangaroos 114 puddings, nine sheep, 200 loaves of bread, 850 potatoes and 360 eggs.\textsuperscript{118} At Yarra southwest of Goulburn, Harry Eady, the Kangaroos’ head cook, reported that the ‘carnivorous’ marchers needed 135 pounds of beef and five sheep for just two meals, their tea and breakfast.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{113} William Murphy, Repatriation Department file, M6867.
\textsuperscript{114} S. Morris and H. Fife, 2006, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{115} S. Morris and H. Fife, 2006, pp. 19 & 20. See also George Stearman, Repatriation Department File, M15041, and George Schremmer, Repatriation Department File, M8112.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 2 December 1915.
\textsuperscript{117} See for example, \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 17 December, and S. Morris and H. Fife, 2006, p. 48. See also E. Scott, 1937, p. 315.
\textsuperscript{118}‘Kangaroo Route March – A Century On’, Kangaroo March Centenary Re-enactment Association Inc., Bulletin No. 3, April 2014. Another example of the types and quantities of food provided to the Kangaroos is in the \textit{Murrumburrah Signal}, 9 December 1915.
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Yass Courier}, 10 January 1916.
The Kangaroos were followed by rumours of drunkenness and poor behaviour, giving lie to a report in the *Temora Herald* that the march was being run ‘on teetotal principles’.\(^\text{120}\) At Junee there were claims that heavy drinking rendered several men unfit to continue even though local hoteliers had been asked to refrain from serving alcohol to the Kangaroos.\(^\text{121}\) From Illabo too came reports that the recruits had got into drunken brawls. On 15 December two men ‘who had misbehaved themselves’ at Galong were publicly dismissed with warnings that any others who brought disgrace upon the march would be similarly expelled. A week later another two men who were picked up some 70 miles from Wagga and pleaded guilty to ‘beer humming’ were also sent home. They departed to ‘cheers from the Kangaroos, who were determined to maintain their good name.’\(^\text{122}\) Keen to limit any damage to the AIF, the New South Wales Recruiting Association declared reports on the Kangaroo’s drunken misbehaviour to be rumours circulated by someone under ‘German influence’. When more stories of poor behaviour emerged after the march passed through Bowning, ‘shirkers’ replaced German sympathisers as the alleged source.\(^\text{123}\)

*Advertiser* readers would soon encounter the term ‘shirker’ with considerable regularity. As early as August 1915 at least one metropolitan newspaper described not only men who refused to enlist, but also those who weren’t pulling their weight in financing the needs of returning wounded men, as ‘shirkers’. Along with the word ‘slacker’, it described a class of men who were regarded as fair game for insult and abuse. Scott described the use of these terms as being ‘in many cases deeply unjust’, but they remained in vogue well into the inter-war years.\(^\text{124}\) When a Wagga soldier, known as ‘Jack’, wrote to Jo Cox of Mount Peter in 1917, he railed against ‘those despicable cowards & curs who are too cold footed to come over and fight’, blaming ‘slackers’ for spreading lies about him around the district.\(^\text{125}\) In May 1917 a Cootamundra soldier, Frank Florance, wrote to his family from France about his father’s reaction upon encountering a man he believed should be in uniform; ‘By jove’, he said, ‘Dad seems to be going some. I’d like to hear him opening up on a slacker. It would be worse than

\(^{120}\) *Temora Independent*, 8 December 1915.

\(^{121}\) *Temora Independent*, 8 December 1915.

\(^{122}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 20 December 1915.

\(^{123}\) S. Morris and H. Fife, 2006, p. 52.


\(^{125}\) Cox Family Papers, CSURA RW2208/11, letter 17 April 1918.
fifty whizz bangs and a few 5.9s thrown in.¹²⁶ On their arrival in Sydney, one speaker
told the Kangaroos that the country was being ‘bled white’, while the city was home ‘to
slackers in their thousands’.¹²⁷

All along the Kangaroos’ route, there were people willing to balance the negative
reports with praise.¹²⁸ One man described them as ‘a fine lot of fellows’ who had been
‘decent, orderly and well-behaved all the way.’ They were, he said in an interesting
twist on Bean’s description of the AIF’s ‘wasters’ as ‘dirty’, ‘the finest, cleanest and
bonniest lads that he had ever met’.¹²⁹ When a group from the Kangaroos took a detour
to Young seeking more recruits, the local paper reported that the ‘Wagga boys won the
admiration of the entire populace.’¹³⁰ At Sutton Forest a local politician, wanting to
‘stop the slanderous statements’ about their conduct, told a crowd that the Kangaroos’
behaviour was ‘of the very best’.¹³¹ James Catts, the Organising Secretary of the State
Recruiting Committee, described anyone who ‘spread gross libels’ about the marchers
as an ‘unmitigated, unadulterated and liquid liar’.¹³²

However stridently and often stated, the testimonies and denials never completely put to
rest stories of drinking and poor conduct.¹³³ Approaching Goulburn, the Kangaroos
learned that their Christmas leave was revoked so that the march could continue on
Boxing Day. They went on strike. When leave was restored, the Wagga men found
that, not being on final leave, they were ineligible for rail passes. ‘Shy and slight’ Fred
Farrall, a farmer from Ganmain who joined the Kangaroos at Galong, remembered that
the aggrieved men ‘swarmed on to the trains, just telling the ticket collectors to “send
the bill to Billy Hughes”’.¹³⁴ In Wagga the still indignant recruits threatened to overstay
their leave. Not wanting any further stain on theirs’ or Wagga’s reputation, Edward
Collins announced that he would supply their fares to Marulan, where the march was to
resume.¹³⁵

¹²⁶ Dorothy Florance letters received 1879-1929, CSURA RW253/6 item 17, letter 7 May 1917.
¹²⁷ Sydney Morning Herald, 8 January 1916.
¹³⁰ Young Witness and Burragong Argus, 14 December 1915.
¹³¹ The Scrutineer, 1 January 1916. The Scrutineer was a Moss Vale paper.
¹³² Sydney Morning Herald, 8 January 1916.
On 8 January 1916, the Kangaroos, now numbering about 230 men, were played into Sydney’s Domain by the Wagga Brass Band accompanied by a Sydney cadet band. Author and soldier Kenneth Mackay led the march on horseback, while family and friends who had come from Wagga and other regional centres walked alongside the volunteers. They had been ‘showered’ with ‘fruit, cigarettes, nuts and other tempting offerings’ along Parramatta Road but their welcome to the centre of the state capital was as subdued as their departure from Wagga had been festive; ‘There was no enthusiasm of cheering crowds’, said the Sydney Morning Herald, ‘no crush of thousands to hear the speeches outside the Domain gates in Macquarie-Street’. Described as ‘disaffected’ by the lacklustre reception, the Kangaroos were furious to learn that rather than getting an expected pay and three day’s leave, they would be put on a train to Goulburn that afternoon. ‘Most of the men had never seen Sydney, the ocean, or even a tram, and were excitedly looking forward to three days’ sightseeing’. They went on strike again. Told that they would get no pay until they agreed to go, they were also reminded that they were under military orders: ‘we were no longer in blue dungarees, but in khaki army uniforms, and no longer in the bush’, explained Fred Farrall. The Kangaroos left Sydney that afternoon. In April 1916, during their final leave, the Wagga establishment planned an official send-off and asked that the military authorities permit the Kangaroos a few extra days in town. When permission was denied, a large group of men refused to leave, despite the mayor, Major Heath and Canon Pike urging them to return to Goulburn.

In the march’s aftermath Wagga sought to bring the AIF into other areas of the district’s wartime life. While the Kangaroos were en route, Wagga Council turned its attention to the Riverina Recruiting Depot in Cootamundra. In July the Advertiser had carried a story on the depot’s opening, advising readers that from then on, local recruits would go there rather than to Sydney. There was some envy in Wagga that the depot was not established at the local Showground. On 14 December 1915, the council carried

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136 Daily Advertiser, 8 January 1916 and Sydney Morning Herald, 8 January 1916. Reports on the number of marchers vary. Les Hetherington notes that one source gives a figure of 230, another 213 and, depending on the date, the Advertiser claimed 217 and then 222, L. Hetherington, p. 25. E. Scott, 1937, p. 316, gives a figure of 230.
138 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 January 1916.
139 L. Farrall, 1992, p. 45.
140 L. Farrall, 1992, p. 45.
143 Daily Advertiser, 24 July 1915.
Alderman O’Reilly’s hopeful motion that ‘in the event of the Cootamundra Military Camp being closed … steps be taken to support the claims of Wagga as a suitable place for a new camp.’ On 6 January Thomas Dobney ‘asked if all that could be done had been done in regard to the establishment of a military camp’, and Alderman Cunningham moved that the mayor and Edward Collins ‘proceed to Sydney to interview the military authorities and urge the establishment of a camp at Wagga.’ In Sydney they received little encouragement. ‘You have no rifle range and that is vital’, they were told. Wagga did have a range on Willans Hill Reserve, but abutting a road and in the vicinity of houses, it was considered unsafe. Oates declared Cootamundra unsuitable due to a lack of potable water, but made little headway.

Wagga Council revisited the matter in February when Collins announced that Wagga was likely to get a military camp. Rumours about Wagga getting a camp began to spread and people remembered that in the war’s first month the MPAA had offered the army the use of the Showground. The army never took up the offer. While the idea of Wagga getting the camp remained alive long after one was established in Cootamundra, rumours emerged that Mayor Oates had played a double game. Despite his having lobbied on the Wagga’s behalf in Sydney, in January Oates was reported to have made only a token effort. Perhaps with the experience of the Kangaroos still fresh in his mind, Oates observed that soldiers did ‘not always behave themselves as they should.’ In Sydney, he continued, ‘they had given a good deal of trouble.’ The Advertiser reacted angrily, pronouncing as slanderous the mayor’s suggestion that soldiers were not fit to be camped a mile from the town. Oates may have had a point. In the middle of 1916 the Cootamundra Police Court heard that ‘any publican who unnecessarily supplied a soldier with liquor was worse than a German sympathiser. “It is something pitiful … to see the condition of our young men on a Sunday.”’

The mayor had his way. Wagga never got a camp and so many men passed through Cootamundra that the number of recruits awaiting dispatch to Liverpool often exceeded...
the depot’s stated limit of 200. In May 1916 there was a small but revealing postscript when the Cootamundra Camp adjutant offered to send the camp band to help Wagga’s recruiting effort. It can only be read as a dig, and the reply, that ‘it would serve no purpose’ and that Wagga already had two bands ‘whose services were always available for recruiting purposes’; was surely stating the obvious. Insignificant in itself, the exchange suggests that the rivalry sometimes found humorous expression.

The question of the camp’s location was resolved by January 1916, but Wagga’s rifle range continued to be the subject of debate. In February, a correspondent wrote to the Advertiser mocking suggestions that the range posed a danger to passers-by and nearby residents, asking ‘why by embankments of earth all danger from stray bullets could not be averted?’ A few days later ‘an old rifleman’ suggested that hoisting a flag on Willans Hill when the range was in use could further avert the ‘very limited danger to life and property’. In the middle of the year the Defence Department wrote to Wagga Council suggesting that the owners of property in the vicinity of the rifle range be offered inducements to ‘withdraw their objections’. The inducements, of which no record exists, worked. In August Alderman Cameron announced that he ‘had been informed that people in the vicinity of the Rifle Range had waived their objections, & the Range was open for use again.’

By the end of 1915, the war might have seemed a time of strange contrasts, subjecting people to what Scott described as ‘the keenest alterations of emotions.’ Anyone who read the newspapers knew the extent of the casualties. Some of the district’s families had lost loved ones – seventeen local men had died on active service by 1 April 1916. Others had what must have been the unsettling experience of farewelling a man, only to have him return wounded or ill before a year had passed. Everyone who knew members of the AIF worried that they too would suffer loss or receive word that their soldier had been wounded. In August 1914 Maurice McKeown congratulated Richard Barker on

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152 The first quote is from Daily Advertiser, 3 February 1916 and the second, from ‘old rifleman’ is from the 8 February 1916 edition.  
154 Wagga Council Minutes, meeting of 17 August 1916, CSURA RW2608/20.  
155 E. Scott, 1936, p. 289.  
156 Daily Advertiser, 1 April 1916.
his acceptance into the AIF, as if he had experienced an amazing good fortune.\textsuperscript{157} Just under a year later, having learned that an Experiment Farm student had enlisted, a more sombre McKeown wrote to the man’s father, ‘I can quite understand that it is a time of sore trouble for you in parting with him and for him to be leaving home and family.’\textsuperscript{158} Early the next month he sent words of comfort and sorrow to the parents of former student, J. I. McBride, recently killed on Gallipoli.\textsuperscript{159} A man’s joining the army was now regarded with considerable anxiety.

Still the war retained a colourful, noisy and busy face in Wagga. The district had never before been host to so many functions, fetes, carnivals, public meetings and social gatherings. But the cloak of bad news shrouded every war-related event. Every request for support, for funds, for men, stemmed from the inescapable fact that the men going to war were being killed or maimed in large numbers. For school children it was a time when the loss of a father or older brother, whether permanent or temporary, might forever change their family life. But it was also a time to be in the adult world, to raise funds, hold carnivals and sporting events and be a part of a communal endeavour of enormous significance. For adults it was a time when one’s generosity or otherwise was on the public record, when membership of committees or participation in public events gave people the chance to catch up with friends and acquaintances, to gossip, to share worries. For people who enjoyed the company of others, public entertainments and contributing to community life, particularly for those who had no relatives at the front, the war may not have been an entirely negative experience.

Gallipoli had been the first test and Wagga seemed to weather it relatively well. A very few families were grieving, most were not but they must have been increasingly anxious. The most discomforted may have been eligibles who had not enlisted. After Gallipoli, there was disappointment and also relief, relief for the survivors and relief that the AIF had performed creditably in action, though having acquired a less stellar reputation away from the field of battle. As the Kangaroos marched into Sydney the men who had enlisted during the preceding months were arriving in Egypt, reinforcing the depleted

\textsuperscript{157} Letter to R. Erle Barker, 24 August 1914, Wagga Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to firms and private individuals, 1896-1922, CSURA SA473/31/129-172 (31/161).
\textsuperscript{158} Letter to Cecil Hordern, 22 July 1915, Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to firms and private individuals, 1896-1922, CSURA SA473/31/129-172 (31/162).
\textsuperscript{159} Letter to B. McBride, 5 August 1915, Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to firms and private individuals, 1896-1922, CSURA SA473/31/129-172 (31/162).
units that had fought in the Dardanelles. The AIF was expanding and being readied for new campaigns. For the mounted units the war in the Sinai and Palestine waited, but most of the AIF was bound for France and the Western Front. The need for volunteers would soon become acute.
VI. ‘No sense of shame or decency’: conscription and returned soldiers in Wagga, 1916-17

The Kangaroos march was the culmination of the district’s 1915 recruiting effort, and a very public symbol of Wagga’s loyalty and commitment to the Empire’s cause. In March 1917 Kangaroo, Private William Ledwell, presented Wagga with a framed photograph of the group at Goulburn (see figure 20). People in Fitzmaurice Street on the last Saturday of the month could have seen the picture in Hunter Bros. window. Some might have lingered to pick out familiar faces. Having seen the Kangaroos in person, a Sydney Morning Herald reporter was moved to compare their ‘boyish faces’ to ‘the great Napoleon’s boy soldiers’.1 At least nineteen of the Kangaroos – about one in twelve – were eighteen or younger and anyone looking at the photograph would have noticed how youthful some of the recruits seemed.2

Measured by the number of recruits it garnered, the march was a success. Eighty eight men set out from Wagga in December and some 230 entered the Domain in January. More, unable to join the march, enlisted along the way.3 Nothing like it was attempted again from Wagga. With a couple of notable exceptions, albeit on a lesser scale, the days of local men volunteering in large numbers were over.

A week after the Kangaroos arrived in Sydney, the Advertiser reported that between 60 and 75 per cent of eligible men refused to enlist. Locals who had family members serving in Europe or the Middle East were sometimes envious, sometimes resentful of households from which no man had enlisted. How must a woman feel, pondered an editorial, ‘when she cannot go a block from her own doors, … without seeing whole families intact, with not a single member offering for service; and in the streets industrially useless, hulking individuals of military age … with … no sense of shame or decency’.4 Rarely did the paper consider people’s reasons for not volunteering. Subtlety had no place in Wagga’s recruiting campaigns of the war’s middle years.

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4 Daily Advertiser, 14 January and 9 February 1916. The quote is from the 9 February edition.
With the considerable assistance of the *Advertiser*, Wagga’s political, religious and civic leaders put eligibles under great pressure to either volunteer or present with a good reason why not. As scarce as reliable evidence about an individual’s decision to enlist is, evidence of why someone did not is rarer still. An old soldier recalled that plenty of men who might have been expected to enlist did not. Robson offered several reasons why this might have been, from a genuine and deeply held opposition to the war, or parental pressure to remain at home, to trade unionists who wanted no part of a conflict caused by ‘greed among conflicting economic interests’. Men who did not go, he said, ‘went through hell’.\(^5\)

However much some people in the community might have wished to avoid the war, such as the local man who wrote on his War Census card ‘I am a socialist and I’ve got cold feet’, others were devoted to ensuring that they could not.\(^6\) Eligibles who stayed at home are less visible in the historical record than their peers who enlisted, but in the community during the war years they were far more to be seen. By remaining in Wagga when volunteers did not, they were an affront to people who did not share their views or who knew little or nothing of their circumstances or reasons for remaining civilians. Fred Farrall was given a piece of advice by Bill Fraser, a swagman who worked with him on the family’s Ganmain farm, that surely reflected the man’s own reasons for not enlisting; ‘Stay here and look after your health, let the rich men fight their own wars. While soldiers are being shot to pieces on the battlefields, the rich are making fortunes.’ The police sergeant at Coolamon who handed Farrall his attestation papers was also ‘against the war and didn’t want to give them to me’.\(^7\)

When the federal government announced in January 1916 that 50,000 men were wanted for overseas service, the *Advertiser* published Wagga’s quota. The district was expected to provide 71 men towards the country’s 50,000, as well as 23 volunteers per month – 276 men a year for the duration of the war – to maintain the flow of reinforcements.\(^8\) Eleven local men came forward the day after the figures were published, and a week later, after hearing an address by a veteran of the Crimean War, 

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\(^5\) L. Robson, 1970, p. 3.  
\(^6\) *Daily Advertiser*, 13 January 1916.  
\(^7\) L. Farrall, 1992, p. 39.  
\(^8\) *Daily Advertiser*, 21 January 1916.
another eleven volunteered. Wagga was well on the way towards meeting the first month’s quotas, but men would need to enlist every week to maintain momentum.

The question of conscription was first raised in Wagga’s press in May 1915 and was revisited occasionally for the rest of the year. In the opening months of 1916, it became a more serious topic for the *Advertiser*’s editorial writers and reporters, who were invariably in favour. Support was less certain in the wider community, particularly because, as Thomson said, opposition to conscription ‘was not necessarily opposition to Australia’s participation in the war’. On the national level, the Political Labour League’s stance against conscription, but support for the Government’s efforts to send an additional 50,000 men to the war, is one example. In Wagga Canon Pike proved a local case in point. During early 1916 he was busy pursuing local men who refused to hand in their census cards, but was unwilling to cross the line into supporting compulsion. No one in the district worked harder for the war effort than Pike, who was said to be living with the ‘constant and strenuous effort … required to bring forth five or six recruits once a week out of some 3000 men of military age’. The *Advertiser* did its bit to make sure people understood the ‘painful truth’ about who these 3000 men were. One couldn’t go about one’s business without meeting ‘living evidence’ of their existence, said the paper. ‘Shirkers’ were everywhere. There were 400 able-bodied men on the Wagga-Humula railway works whom the editor considered eligible. Others could be ‘seen idling about the streets’ and still more who ‘club together to burn their census cards’ – a protest that might cost a man a minimum £50 fine or three months in prison.

At the end of February the Recruiting Committee abandoned its weekly outdoor meetings in Little Gurwood Street. The last one, like others before it, passed with a degree of rancour. A sign, rarely explicitly acknowledged, that despite the pro-recruiting sentiment in Wagga’s public discourse, there were some locals, like those who tore down or defaced recruiting posters ‘about the town’, who opposed the

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9 *Daily Advertiser*, 2 February 1916.
10 See for example, *Daily Advertiser*, 15 and 17 May 1915.
14 *Daily Advertiser*, 17 and 23 February 1916. The quote is from the 17 February edition.
15 *Daily Advertiser*, 17 and 23 February 1916. The quote is from the 17 February edition.
16 *Daily Advertiser*, 17 and 28 February 1916.
ceaseless efforts to get men into uniform.\textsuperscript{17} At meetings, speakers were constantly interrupted and treated so ‘unpleasantly’ that ‘they would not come forward.’ Men who worked hard for the war effort, but were not themselves fit for military service, shrank from speaking in public because of what was said to and about them.\textsuperscript{18} On 1 June the \textit{Advertiser} argued that shirkers got the better of the meetings because the public ‘lacked the robust moral courage’ to put them in their proper place.\textsuperscript{19} Until then the \textit{Advertiser} had given the strong impression that while these meetings were robust, the speakers usually had the upper hand with their arsenal of pithy ripostes and telling put downs. People might have been surprised that within a few months of the district farewelling more than 80 recruits in a single day, the Recruiting Committee seemed to be conceding defeat. They might have been less surprised when the meetings were reinstated within the month.\textsuperscript{20}

In early April the \textit{Advertiser} published a list of 547 local men who had enlisted since 15 May 1915, and another naming 119 men who had volunteered but were unfit.\textsuperscript{21} The unstated implication was that they came forward when the risks of doing so were clear. But if the gesture was a device to shame men into enlisting, it had a limited effect. The next meeting yielded just three volunteers, one of whom was a returned soldier.\textsuperscript{22}

For the families of men who did enlist and who lost their lives, the Recruiting Sub-Committee of the War Service Committee, which had been established the previous December and which provided the \textit{Advertiser} with the list of local volunteers referred to above, offered consolation in the form of ‘an illuminated certificate’, each signed by Mayor Oates and Canon Pike and bearing the municipal seal, ‘which may be framed as a permanent family or personal record.’\textsuperscript{23} Elizabeth Willis described such documents as ‘a common form of recognition’ that originated as mementoes for volunteers and came also to be keepsakes for families who had lost men at the war. They ‘signified that the officials of the community recognised and shared the family’s pride and grief.’\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 27 July 1917.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 28 February 1916.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 1 June 1916.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 28 March 1916.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 1 April 1916.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 28 March, and 1 and 3 April 1916.
\textsuperscript{23} On the War Service Committee, see S. Morris, 1999, p. 123. On the volunteers’ certificates, see \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 28 March. The quote is from \textit{Daily Advertiser} 1 August 1916.
Wagga’s case they were paid for with funds left over from the Kangaroo’s march. By the time the certificates were ready at the end of July, the district was beginning to learn of the carnage on the Somme.

While the recruiting meetings were in abeyance through late February and March, people began thinking about how the district should observe the anniversary of the Gallipoli landing. The Council agreed to local business requests that Anzac Day ‘be proclaimed a public holiday in the Municipality’. Len Francis, a returned soldier and one of Wagga’s two recruiting sergeants, suggested that every household be approached for donations to the Red Cross and the Wagga Soldiers’ Comforts Fund. He also wanted all eligible men to provide their names to the War Service Committee and to state when they would be available to join the AIF. The brothers of the Lodge Harmony considered their involvement and resolved that they would not ‘take part in the procession’, but would attend the memorial service. Invoking the spirits of the dead and presuming to speak for the wounded, the Advertiser declared that everyone should make a personal sacrifice on the day. It was to be a sombre occasion in Wagga, a day for honouring the dead, but it was also another chance to remind ‘able bodied shirkers’ of their duty. In Sydney there were up to nine recruiting meetings. In Wagga there was one. It yielded just three recruits, one of whom, James Ryan, was arrested later in the year as a deserter, sent to the Wagga lock up and shortly afterwards handed over to the military authorities.

Anzac Day morning was showery in Wagga, befitting what turned out to be a forlorn anniversary. People turned out ‘en masse’ despite the weather, but the march, such as it was, was a small affair. The Brass Band led, followed by the town’s recruiting sergeants, a couple of returned soldiers, some new recruits, the cadets and the Citizen’s Band. In the town’s churches worshippers gathered, many perhaps because the first Anzac Day fell on the day after Easter Monday, and others to pray for friends or

25 Wagga Wagga Express, 19 August 1919.
26 Wagga Council Minutes, meeting of 30 March 1916, CSURA RW2608/20.
27 Daily Advertiser, 5 April 1916.
29 Daily Advertiser, 6 April 1916.
relatives in the AIF.\textsuperscript{31} Outside, throughout the day, people moved through the flag bedecked streets collecting money for war-related causes. Those passing Coplands & Co. might have paused to look at the Wagga Primary School Roll of Honour in the window. Described by Ken Inglis as ‘scoreboards of commitment’, honour rolls began appearing in Wagga during the first year of the war. This one had been officially unveiled the previous September, but was among the first to be put on public display.\textsuperscript{32}

By late April the issue of conscription was attracting widespread attention, and sometimes opposition, in Wagga. But in the absence of a scheme that compelled men to join the AIF, some local institutions adopted their own measures to encourage enlistments, or at least make life more difficult for men who didn’t volunteer.

At the Experiment Farm, Maurice McKeown decided over the first half of 1916 that he would no longer employ eligible men. On 6 January the Farm advertised for a cook, stating simply ‘Good cook wanted apply Manager Experiment Farm’. Within three weeks, the formula changed and an advertisement for a House Steward expressed a preference for a man exempt from military service. By the middle of the year Farm vacancies were open only to men who were ‘ineligible for military service.’\textsuperscript{33} The \textit{Advertiser} applauded McKeown’s stance, suggesting that just as culpable as the district’s shirkers were businesses that gave work to a man with the effrontery to ‘seek employment when (their) country is vainly calling upon him to do his duty’. If the Experiment Farm’s policy was widely applied, said the paper, ‘we should have compulsion in spirit if not in name’.\textsuperscript{34} Among those ineligible for military service were men who had already been in the AIF, and the Farm employed two returned soldiers between 1 July 1916 and 31 August 1917. One, a House Master, described as ‘generally unsatisfactory’, was ‘dispensed with’ after three and a half months, and the

\textsuperscript{31} On Anzac Day’s proximity to Easter, see http://www.anzacwebsites.com/tradition/anzacday/easter-anzacday.pdf.
\textsuperscript{33} Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926, CSURA SA473/31/101-128 (31/119), letters 6 and 24 January 1916, \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 22 June 1916.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 22 June 1916.
other, who was promoted from Steward to Head Steward during his four months at the Farm left, apparently for India, and was likewise deemed ‘unsatisfactory’.35

At its 17 August meeting Council reaffirmed a decision carried twelve months previously that it too ‘should confine its employment to married men and single men not eligible for military service.’36 Alderman Hurst, whose son Roy had died on overseas service, proposed a slightly more flexible approach, moving that ‘under special circumstances’ the Council might consider employing men who were ‘honestly doing (their) duty by not enlisting’.37 After losing a son, and having been an active trade unionist, Hurst might have felt some sympathy for men who were reluctant to join the AIF.38

Whether restricting employment increased enlistments is doubtful. If it were ‘compulsion in spirit’ as the Advertiser suggested, it was far from compulsion in reality. Calls for a formal scheme grew more insistent after news of the AIF’s return to action reached Wagga in July.39 Mayor Oates and most aldermen favoured conscription and believed its introduction was inevitable.40 They might have been pleased in late August when Canon Pike threw his support behind the cause. Announcing his ‘reluctant’ change of heart at a War Service Committee meeting, Pike explained that he ‘had been fashioned and trained in different principles’. He now wanted to form a local branch of the Universal Service League, which advocated for ‘equality of sacrifice’ through universal compulsory war service ‘whether at home or abroad’. League members feared that without conscription, Australia, robbed of its fittest young men, faced ‘unnatural selection’ after the war.41

35 Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/120), letter 10 September 1917.
40 Daily Advertiser, 4 August 1916.
The Canon’s timing was good. On 8 September 1916, after Pike joined Wagga’s pro-conscriptionists, Prime Minister Hughes stood before a crowd of ‘thousands’ at the Sydney Town Hall to launch the ‘yes’ campaign for a referendum to be held at the end of October.\textsuperscript{42} His manifesto appeared in the \textit{Advertiser} on the same day and the writ was issued four days later.\textsuperscript{43} Hughes urged supporters like Mayor Oates to convene local meetings ‘to form a strong national referendum committee embracing all individuals who will work for the triumph of the Government’s proposals.’\textsuperscript{44} Oates was quick to comply, calling a public meeting to form a committee ‘to assist Mr Hughes in his great patriotic work’.\textsuperscript{45} Insisting that the committee be ‘representative of all classes of the community’, the \textit{Advertiser} nevertheless demanded the exclusion of several: the parents of unmarried sons who have ‘not so far offered their services to the Defence Department’, eligibles without the sort of family responsibilities ‘to justify them in remaining at home’, and ‘all men who are themselves eligible and who would “be only too glad to get into khaki and have a go at the damned Huns – if only their business interests would permit of it being done.”’\textsuperscript{46}

On the rainy evening of 29 September 1916, Wagga’s keenest supporters of conscription crowded into Oddfellows Hall. After the speeches 100 people nominated for positions on the local committee. As ever, many of the names were familiar: Mayor Oates, Canon Pike, Reverend Dyer, Edward and Emma Collins, and Thomas Dobney all came forward.\textsuperscript{47} On the other side, at least until the result of the ballot became known, the extent of anti-conscription sentiment in Wagga is difficult to determine. Opponents received little publicity, and large anti-conscription meetings outside Wagga, such as that involving between 60-100,000 people in Sydney’s Domain on 13 August, were ignored by the Wagga press.\textsuperscript{48}

Historians have written much on the deep divisions both exposed and caused by the conscription debate. Robson considered it the death knell for the last vestiges of ‘optimism and basic unanimity which had characterised the Edwardian era in  

\textsuperscript{42} L. C. Jauncey, 1935, p. 168.  
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 26 September 1916.  
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 27 September 1916.  
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 29 September 1916.  
Thomson wrote that the referendum was conducted with ‘great rancour’ while Beaumont described it as ‘possibly the most bitter and divisive debate in Australian political history’ adding later that it was also violent. At Wallendbeen, near Cootamundra, ‘eggs, stones and other missiles’ were thrown at a politician speaking in favour of conscription. The meeting ended when a local constable drew his revolver. In Cootamundra, people stopped a meeting by dragging away the trolley that was being used as a speakers’ platform.

Wagga’s experience seems to have closely resembled that of northern Victoria where, wrote McQuilton, meetings ‘were “lively” and “willing”, rowdy and divisive, even spiteful.’ Never quite arousing the intensity of feeling to descend into violence, the tone of Wagga’s meetings depended on whether they were for the pro or anti cause. Supporters of the latter, who all over Australia were working against the institutional support of ‘the state, the media and the education system’, were consistently ridiculed. Writing about a 7 October anti-conscription meeting, which he described as ‘a miserable fiasco’, the Advertiser’s reporter tied himself in knots, suggesting first that the crowd listened ‘with admirable patience, and none of the speakers can say that they did not get a fair hearing’ before adding that there was a ‘running fire of interjections’ in a meeting that was constantly disrupted.

Operating without the support available to proponents of the ‘yes’ case, Wagga’s anti-conscription groups nevertheless had at the core of their cause Australia’s extensive union network and were supported by a majority of the working class, which made up a significant percentage of the district’s population. In June 1916, months before the referendum was announced, the Wagga branch of the Australian Workers’ Union put forward a resolution opposing conscription and registering members’ ‘disgust at the attitudes of those who would force other men into uniform.’ In October one of Wagga’s main anti-conscription groups, the Political Labor League, expelled three of its most prominent members, each of whom supported compulsion. But the League and

51 P. Caskie, 2000, p. 238.
52 Daily Advertiser, 13 October 1916.
55 Daily Advertiser, 13 October 1916.
57 Daily Advertiser, 5 June 1916.
the local union movement fought what seemed to be an uphill battle when the ‘yes’ case was so widely publicised in the local press and the ‘no’ case was reduced to lists of speakers’ names, ridicule and the strident rebuttal of any anti-conscription arguments. Opponents of compulsion, said the Advertiser, were part of an ‘infamous campaign of allied cowardice, ignorance and selfishness’.  

On 23 October, five days before the referendum, local supporters of the ‘yes’ case received support from the highest quarters when Prime Minister Hughes came to Wagga. That night he addressed a full Strand Theatre while ‘several thousand’ others, unable to squeeze in, milled outside. People came from all over the district to hear the prime minister, whose audience that night was said to be ‘representative of the portion of the Riverina of which Wagga forms the capital.’ With such high level backing and little dissent in the local and national press, it might have appeared to many people in Wagga that a ‘yes’ vote was a foregone conclusion. Had they been to the Domain recently, they might have reconsidered. Jauncey wrote that ‘record crowds answered no in no uncertain terms the question of what would happen in Sydney’. Reports from rural New South Wales ‘indicated that farmers … would vote against conscription.’ A canvas of Wagga, where the tide ran in favour of compulsory service, would have led to a different conclusion.

Anticipating a victory, the prime minister, in what proved to be a serious miscalculation, before the referendum was held ordered that all single men aged between 21 and 35 be called up for service in Australia. In New South Wales more than 69,000 men registered, of whom some 24,000 were found to be either unfit or doubtful. Another 33,000 applied for exemptions. On 10 and 11 October 408 men reported to the Wagga Drill Hall. Some had come from as far afield as Humula, more than 50 kilometres away, missing a couple of days work, having to pay their own fares, and in many cases being told they had to come back again later. Although most of them looked fit, in a local reflection of the state wide figures a ‘considerable percentage’ were rejected after the medical examination, and another ‘large percentage’, often the sons of farmers and

59 Daily Advertiser, 24 October 1916.
63 Daily Advertiser, 12 October 1916.
grazers who were needed at the shearing or the harvest, applied for exemptions. Of the more than 400 men, only 22 elected to go into camp within the week.64

Under the shadow of compulsion, some men decided it was better to volunteer than be conscripted. One, an unnamed Wagga man who was studying at Sydney University wrote that he was going to ‘try my luck about Saturday, and by doing so will escape the general mobilisation called for October, and with it the slur of being a conscript.’65 At a time when other men were also enlisting so they could call themselves volunteers rather than conscripts, the district could still only be sure of fewer than six percent of single, eligible men going into the AIF, and in reality fewer than this.66 More than two thirds of the 600,000 Australians believed to eligible had failed to answer the Prime Minister’s call up.67

Here was a hint that by mid-October the case for conscription was faltering. Those most affected, men who after two years of war had not found a good enough reason to enlist, were unlikely to vote themselves into uniform. But people more generally, who, said Jauncey, had ‘been willing to accept the pleas of conscriptionists’ were growing hesitant, particularly once Hughes’ call-up came into force and the referendum drew closer. ‘Besides the cheering hosts at every meeting’, he wrote, ‘the all-important silent vote was making up its mind.’68

On the day of the referendum artilleryman Frank Florance from Cootamundra, who had enlisted in August 1914 and spent more than two months on Gallipoli, wrote home asking ‘how is conscription going out there. (sic) We had a vote out here and I voted for altho I think the majority in our battery voted against.’69 By the time his letter reached its destination, the results were long since known. On 31 October the Advertiser published the returns. Wagga defied the rural trend whereby ‘farmers voted heavily against conscription in order to assure sufficient labour to harvest their crops’,

64 Daily Advertiser, 11 October 1916.
65 Daily Advertiser, 27 September 1916.
66 On men volunteering to avoid being called a conscript, see for example J. N. I. Dawes and L. L. Robson, 1977, p.111.
69 Dorothy Florance letters received 1879 – 1929, CSURA RW253/6/17, letter 28 October 1916.
and voted ‘yes’ by 253 votes – 1894 to 1641. Seven other sub-divisions in the Hume electorate of which Wagga was a part voted the same way. The thirteen that did not reflected the national vote. Australia rejected conscription.

Soldiers in the field were said not to have taken much interest in the referendum, but some Wagga men had strong views. Writing from Egypt in late October, Lindsay Rich, from Dhulura to Wagga’s northwest, said that he had seen all the fighting he wished to see and wanted to go home to Wagga. Lamenting that ‘still the war continued and unfortunately was likely to do so for some time’, he suggested that was ‘the chief reason why the boys there voted so strongly for conscription.’ Underlining the words for emphasis, he added, ‘We want to get it over and all must help.’ Fred Booty learnt the result within a week and shortly before going up to the trenches in the bitter winter of 1916/1917 wrote to his sister Ethel, ‘I don’t know what they were thinking of in Australia to vote “no” to conscription’. Private Manwaring, also writing to a sister in Wagga, said he was glad conscription had been ‘thrown out in Australia’ and continued, ‘We don’t want conscripts over here. If they won’t come and do what they must know is their duty to God and Country, well, let them stay at home.’ From Melbourne, the prime minister, who later described 28 October as a ‘black day for Australia … a triumph for the unworthy, the selfish and the treacherous’, acknowledged Wagga’s status as the largest town in New South Wales to carry a ‘yes’ vote, with a telegram conveying his thanks.

Wagga’s recruiters had to continue the hard grind of trying to get men into uniform voluntarily, feeling perhaps as Scott suggested that ‘further exertion was futile’. In late November 1916, hidden in the ‘Items of News’ column was a notice that the next weekly recruiting meeting in Little Gurwood Street would be the last. No reason was given for this second cancellation and the story would have been easy to miss. After what must have been a devastating loss in the referendum, the district’s recruitment effort threatened to fade. As another of the Florance boys, Victor, a Cootamundra

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70The quote is from L. C. Jauncey, 1935, p. 229 and the figures are from, *Daily Advertiser*, 31 October 1916.
73*Daily Advertiser*, 11 December 1916.
75*Daily Advertiser*, 1 February 1917.
77E. Scott, 1937, p. 400.
78*Daily Advertiser*, 27 November 1917.
solicitor who had been in the AIF since August 1915, wrote from a camp in Britain that month, ‘the war has fairly “searched” the Empire.’ The small corner by the Murrumbidgee had indeed been ‘searched’ and the war had found hundreds of recruits. Wagga’s War Service Committee and others concerned with getting local men into uniform had worked hard for months, but the year ended with what might have been weary resignation for recruiters.

After the referendum, changes were made to Australia’s recruiting system. The job of garnering volunteers was taken from the Defence Department and placed in the hands of a Director-General of Recruiting who nominated a State Recruiting Committee in each state, which in turn oversaw all of the country’s local committees, one for each federal electorate. Recruiting officers were deployed to the main centre in every electorate. In Wagga they worked from the Town Hall where they were available to take names six days a week. Local committees were urged to ‘enlist all the public help that you can’ and, in contrast to the disagreements before the conscription vote, to ‘avoid discussions which cause difference of opinion.’

Mayor Oates told a public meeting that the energy of every citizen was needed given the ‘very serious’ present position.

A week later in the Masonic Hall, Oates hosted the Recruiting Conference of War Service and Recruiting Committee delegates from centres in the Hume electorate to discuss the new scheme. Twelve months after the Kangaroo march, Wagga was again at the centre of a broadly based regional recruiting effort. Where there had been friction with other towns over the summer of 1915-1916, now there was unity: no one could understand the new scheme. One delegate described the committee’s situation as akin to having ‘erected a new hotel without beer in the bar, without feed in the pantry, without beds in the bedrooms, and yet they expected to get boarders.’ They had been handed a scheme that ‘proposed to do nothing’. Delegates wanted to know what inducements they could offer eligible men. The question was never adequately resolved. A few months after the meeting Len Francis proposed that the Council make up the difference between the civil and military pay of council employees who enlisted. Even

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79 Victor Florance, CSURA RW253/6/18, letter 6 November 1916.
80 E. Scott, 1937, pp. 399 & 400.
81 Daily Advertiser, 14 December 1916.
82 Daily Advertiser, 15 December 1916.
83 Daily Advertiser, 21 December 1916.
84 Daily Advertiser, 22 December 1916.
if he had been successful, the Council was a small pool from which to draw recruits and the difficulties of getting men remained.  

Just before Christmas, Edward Collins looked back on the old recruiting scheme, during which nearly every eligible man in the district had been spoken to. Some, he said, declared themselves unafraid to fight, but remained steadfast in their refusal to go. ‘How then’, he wondered, ‘were (we) now going to get men to volunteer?’ It was no easy task. But there were always some willing to come forward even though around the country the number of recruits was falling, never again to reach the level of even the slowest month before the 1916 referendum. In Wagga the number appears to have hovered at between nine and ten men a week. Usually some of these, sometimes the majority, were rejected. 

After May 1915, and even more so after the middle of 1916, volunteers for the AIF could not, as one man who enlisted that year remarked, have been unaware that ‘casualties were coming through very thick and heavy’. Why they decided to join the AIF is not often documented, but some men did discuss their reasons. Edward Lynch from the Bathurst area believed that his mates had volunteered for ‘a blending’ of reasons, while another returned soldier recalled that recruits ‘were very conscious of the many forces at work on them’. Ted Drake, a Wagga High student, travelled to Queensland to enlist under age and under a false name in January 1917, not long after finishing his leaving certificate. Decades later he told an interviewer it was ‘essential that we should do all we could to help, and that the only way that you could help was to volunteer’. Fred Farrall, who enlisted at 18, said long after the war that ‘loyalty to the British Empire was the strongest motive’ but mentioned also that he had been ‘impressed’ by a recruiting sergeant at Coolamon. When an Australian padre asked men in France to write down why they volunteered, the answers ranged from flippant to serious. 

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86 Daily Advertiser, 23 December 1916.
87 E. Scott, 1937, p. 397.
88 The Advertiser regularly listed figures for the previous week’s enlistments, and often the names of the volunteers. The paper also noted how many men had come forward at the weekly recruiting meetings and incorporated the number into the weekly figures. In April Canon Pike had observed that ‘the proportion of men now being rejected was steadily increasing.’ See the Daily Advertiser, 17 April 1916.
91 T. Drake, Oral History Interview, 25 April 1984, Australian War Memorial, S00225.
earnest; ‘To stop Billy Hughes sending my sister’, joked one respondent, ‘Leg-swing’
said he volunteered ‘because my wife would not’. Other men offered more thoughtful
replies; ‘Conscience for the right. At first I tried to throw it aside, but I am not sorry it
overpowered’, said one man. Another enlisted ‘for the old flag of England’ and a third
because ‘I did not hold my manhood cheap, therefore I donned the uniform of the
A.I.F.’. One soldier, four years at the war, considered that ‘under all the superficial
jocularity the motives of the great majority were sincere, and based on lofty ideals.’

Some Wagga men, often those who joined the AIF in the war’s first eighteen months,
tried to explain their decision in letters to family and friends. Sometimes this
correspondence found its way into the Advertiser. While Richard White wisely urged
cautions in trusting this kind of source, written for a particular audience after the author
was already in the AIF, local soldiers’ letters give us a sense of how people in Wagga
understood why men enlisted even if they reveal only a part of what really lay behind
the decision.

On the eve of his first battle, twenty year-old Sergei Rosenberg, a March 1915 volunteer,
wrote to his mother assuring her that he ‘did not just rush in and enlist never using a
thought.’ Howard McKern enlisted in 1914 citing patriotism and his desire to ‘fight in
a cause which we are proud … practically the first attempt of any importance that
Australia has made to assert herself amongst the nations of the world.’ Jim Reid’s
reasons were less high-minded. Writing to his mother in Thompson Street, he was, he
said, only doing ‘what the rest of our boys have done, and you know it was not your
fault I came. I was mad to come.’ Henry Stoker enlisted when he recognised that his
medical knowledge was needed.

William Beaver joined the AIF in August 1915. If he listed his reasons, the record has
been lost, but his wife’s correspondence suggests that Beaver was keener to leave his

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Robson, 1977, pp. 90 & 104.
Australian War Memorial, no. 9, October 1986, p. 3. Other scholars have also written on why men enlisted, see
for example, L. L. Robson, 1970 and L. L. Robson, 1977, Part II. Discussions about why individuals chose to
enlist are comparatively rare, probably reflecting the lack of evidence.
96 Rosenberg, Sergei, Repatriation File, H3741 and Daily Advertiser, 23 September 1915.
97 Daily Advertiser, 2 September 1915.
98 Daily Advertiser, 18 October 1915.
family in Fitzmaurice Street than they were to see him go. Elsie Beaver wrote to her local member requesting that her husband’s enlistment be stopped, ‘He never got my consent or I never signed any papers of any sort’ she explained. Elsie could have added that five days before the Gallipoli campaign began, William was arrested for stealing three bags of chaff at Toole’s Creek and given the choice of paying a £1 fine or doing a month’s hard labour in Albury. Even without reference to his conviction, her protest had its effect. Beaver was sent back to Wagga after 46 days in camp, his record marked ‘Discharged, wife’s request’. In January the following year, apparently still keen to escape his domestic obligations, Beaver left his labouring job at the Wagga Experiment Farm and succeeded in getting overseas with the AIF, serving as a member of the Imperial Camel Corps.\footnote{Elsie Beaver’s letter is in, Beaver, William Thomas Henry, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 1003, See also Daily Advertiser, 13 August 1915. Evidence of Beaver’s work at the Experiment Farm is in, Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to Government offices, 1897-1926, CSURA SA473/31/101-128 (31/119), letter 3 January 1916. On Beaver’s arrest, see Wagga Police Charge Book, CSURA SA159/11, week ending 24 April 1915.}

In early October 1916, the Sydney University student who wanted to volunteer before conscription came in, wrote to his parents:

> I am sorry to hear you were cut up about my enlisting, but things have come to a point when it was almost dishonourable to temporise further … To enlist does entail a certain amount of sacrifice. In my case it will mean the loss of years of my time, which may mar my career … I think a man who neglects his obvious duty in this crisis though by doing so he may accumulate the wealth of Croesus, has failed damnably in all the attributes and qualities that render a man ‘the greatest work of God’.\footnote{Daily Advertiser, 4 October 1916.}

More common were men whose reasons were either never committed to paper or which have since been lost. Sometimes a clue might lie in what we know of a man’s circumstances. Reg McCurdy, who recalled having had a tough upbringing and having lived ‘among grown men up to enlisting’ while still a boy, might have found the army a natural milieu not so very different from his civilian life, making the decision to enlist a less weighty one than it might have been.\footnote{McCurdy, Reginald, Repatriation Department File C17563, document 19 September 1964.} George Dean, the labourer who enjoyed boxing and dancing, was fit enough to have enlisted at any time since August 1914. Why he did enlist in January 1916 aged 22 can only be guessed at. Dan Byrnes,
Leonard Fosbery’s managing clerk, was almost 29 when he enlisted in May 1916. No record exists as to why he volunteered then and not earlier. Allan Bruce, the carpenter from Morgan Street, enlisted in June 1916. His brother Jack had been in uniform since the war began and another brother, Charlie, had joined the AIF in April 1916. No records explaining their reasons for joining the AIF survive. James Dennis was the subject of voluminous Repatriation Department files, in which all manner of personal information was recorded, but of his decision to enlist in October there is nothing. Aged 30, ‘of fair education’ … a big strong chap … weighed about 14 stone … He was unmarried, of a jovial nature and interested in sport of all descriptions.’ Dennis was by those measures perfect for the AIF, yet for reasons unknown held back until the war was more than two years old.

Eligible men were told where their duty lay and a ‘willingness to enlist in the AIF’, said McKernan, ‘quickly became the ultimate test of loyalty’. Country men, he wrote, were under the greatest pressure. At recruiting rallies and other public events their ‘private circumstances, employment and marriage status would have been known to some, at least, of the other members of the audience’. Rural men who resisted the call had no way to retreat into anonymity.

The newly constituted Wagga Recruiting Executive of which the Mayor was chairman and Canon Pike honorary secretary met at the Town Hall and agreed to resume weekly outdoor recruiting meetings, to hold periodic meetings in settlements on Wagga’s outskirts and to institute an exchange with speakers from Albury, Culcairn, Tumut, Junee and Cootamundra. Wagga’s recruiting office was attended by a recruiting officer daily between 10:30am to 4:00pm. The outdoor meetings began again in Little Gurwood Street on the night of 6 January 1917, but attendance was ‘moderate’ and the audiences were mostly women.

104 Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File, M24707.
106 Daily Advertiser, 2 January 1917.
107 Daily Advertiser 15 January 1917.
Meetings were one way to get people’s attention, but the Advertiser’s wide reach made it an ideal vehicle for returned soldiers to encourage enlistments. In late January one used the paper to urge:

Get busy people! Think hard and oft, and act! What about quarter hour relays of speakers nightly from 8 until 11 o’clock? Novices and ladies preferred. Are you prepared to put your girls into khaki, and let them defy the slackers and change apparel? … What about insisting on a short recruiting speech at public entertainments, to catch the fish which are shy of recruiting rallies?

Recruiting had become a many faceted undertaking in Wagga. Canon Pike invited people to walk the length of the town from the railway station to Hampden Bridge and ‘make a note of all kinds of men in Baylis and Fitzmaurice streets’ and to later ask themselves ‘why should I associate with (them) when I can associate with men who are with the war workers for the vindication of the greatest cause the world has ever known.’ Had people done as Pike had asked, they might have found, as Reverend Dyer did, that the previous Saturday night ‘was made hideous by a procession of men along the street until after midnight.’ Shortly afterwards another man claimed to have counted 63 men ‘many of whom he was sure were eligibles’ at a ‘local place of amusement’. No one considered, as the Advertiser did much later in the year, that ‘the fallacy of pointing to this man or that as an eligible who is neglecting his duty has been proved over and over again.’ As Frank Florance said to his brother Hubert who had been rejected more than once by the AIF, ‘everyone who is worth bothering about knows how things are and the others don’t count.’

Major Heath made the obvious point that ‘fit men of military age studiously kept away’ from recruiting meetings, and suggested that the only way now to reach them was ‘by personal canvas’. Canon Pike disagreed, arguing that the street corner meetings were still worth having. He believed that ‘besides yielding recruits (meetings) also had an influence on people far away from Wagga’. On a Monday morning in Junee Pike found people reading newspaper reports of the previous Saturday’s Wagga recruiting meeting.
They might also have read a letter from a man badly wounded at Pozières who wrote to his parents in Wagga describing the terrible condition of other wounded men, who ‘have to get knocked about like that for those crawling cowards in Australia who won’t enlist.’ Local women were urged to ‘let their men go forward and win their spurs.’ One young Wagga lady, ‘who was about to marry a returned soldier, was reported to have said ‘I could not marry him if he had not gone to the war.’

As the effort to get volunteers continued through early 1917, the mayor, 44 year old Hugh Oates, made a dramatic gesture. He enlisted on 20 February, and announced that he was forming his own unit (see figure 23). At the Council meeting on 5 March, Alderman Dobney added words in praise of Oates to those already spoken by other local and federal politicians, and by the local press. He received unanimous support for a motion formally expressing the Council’s ‘appreciation of the actions of the Mayor in taking up arms in defence of his country.’

On Saturday night 10 March 1917, the usual outdoor meeting took place in Little Gurwood Street. Major Heath presided. Among those on stage with him were Edward Collins and Hugh Hutton who had lost an arm on Gallipoli and wanted volunteers to replace men like himself. Described as having a ‘retiring disposition’, and despite his wounds Hutton declared ‘young men who were fit and free and did not go were fools, because they were missing the time of their lives.’ There was, he said, ‘no game like it’. He had ‘never met a finer lot of chaps, and would go back to them if the authorities would have him’. John McGrath, Wagga’s first trades apprentice who had become one of the town’s most successful citizens, described Hutton as a ‘doer’, reminding people that ‘if any man had the opportunity of amassing wealth he did; but instead he handed over his farm to a friend and went to the war.’ McGrath’s own sons, Charles and William, both now in uniform and the children of wealth and privilege, could be said to have made a similar sacrifice. Among the fourteen local men accepted into the AIF that week were some of far lesser means, the labourers Charles Boswell, father of six who had already been thrice rejected due to heart troubles and rheumatism, and his brother,

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114 Daily Advertiser, 7 and 10 February 1917. The quote is from the 10 February edition.
115 Daily Advertiser, 12 February 1917.
116 Daily Advertiser, 23 February 1917.
117 Wagga Council Minutes, 5 March 1917, CSURA, RW2608/20.
Henry. Shortly afterwards Charles’ son, Edwin, followed his father and uncle into uniform. 118

Some in the community took the view that men who did not do their duty should be denied popular entertainment. In March the Wagga War Service Committee considered the merits of closing stadiums and stopping horse racing for the duration of the war, not least because shirkers enjoyed it. There was some opposition. Fred Emblen argued that racing bred better horses. Major Heath proposed banning betting, believing this would be just as effective in shutting down races. John McGrath suggested that if racing was banned so too should be cricket, tennis and a host of other sports. The meeting agreed ‘to take no action’ on horse racing but resolved to press the defence authorities to close stadiums for the duration of the war. 119

In March Hugh Oates, in uniform but still in office and set to remain there until 30 June even though he would be in camp by then, was home and ready to speak at recruiting meetings and at local schools before his departure for camp. 120 When the Mayor’s Unit, a collection of 51 local recruits formed around Oates, departed Wagga on the eve of Anzac Day, they were given the biggest public send-off since the Kangaroos’ seventeen months before. 121 Volunteers, Edwin Boswell among them, paraded through town along with police mounted and on foot, the local boy scouts, school children, returned soldiers and members of the War Service Committee and the town’s two bands. Flags and banners flew all over Wagga and as was now customary the farewell included a recruiting rally, but the only man who came forward had already been rejected. The ladies of the local Red Cross provided refreshments and each recruit was presented with a piece of silk ribbon printed in gold with two verses from the litany. Len Francis praised the Red Cross women and assured the recruits that they would come to appreciate them for their ‘great and noble work’. Then, like almost every other man who had enlisted in Wagga, they boarded a train bound for Sydney, and departed to the cheers and applause of well-wishers. 122

119 Daily Advertiser, 4 April 1917.
120 Brief reports on Oates’s return to Wagga before departing for camp appear in the Daily Advertiser, 13, 14 and 17 April 1917.
121 The figure of 51 is from S. Morris, 1999, p. 125.
122 Daily Advertiser, 25 April 1917.
Other local men followed. In early May Mary and John Castle held a function at their home to farewell their sons, Roy and Allan. Their brother, Bertie, was already overseas with the AIF as was another Castle boy, their cousin Victor. There was food and dancing, and a friend from Junee gave each boy presents. Three other recruits were there, as was George Pratt, a member of the Wagga Brass Band in which the Castle boys had played for about four years. Mary Castle was given a gold broach coloured with purple and gold, her sons’ 30th Battalion colours. The Castles and their guests ended the evening by singing the national anthem.\textsuperscript{123} 

The Castles, like many local families, must have reflected on the possibility that Wagga railway station might be the last place they ever saw a beloved father or son. Those who went to see an AIF transport sail from Sydney Harbour were witness to scenes as heart wrenching as the farewells at Wagga station, perhaps made more so by being repeated hundreds of times as people clung to each other in a final dockside embrace. In 1934 Wagga Presbyterian padre, James Rentoul, recalled, ‘Again in my dreams I watch the troopships casting off their lines and dropping down the stream. I see on the fading pier the multitude of dear ones, with all the passion of the human heart let loose in a storm of tears … Then I hear the hoarse roar from a thousand throats on the ship, breaking in a sob … It is a titanic and tragic memory.’\textsuperscript{124} 

Eventually Len Francis decided to return to the war. A year previously during a visit to Sydney he discovered a white feather in his pocket: ‘that hurt him’, said the Advertiser, ‘It was a thing he hated.’\textsuperscript{125} Whether he was the sort of man to dwell on such a moment we do not know, but after more than six months as Wagga’s recruiting officer he volunteered to return to France and was farewelled in the Town Hall on a Thursday night in late July 1917.\textsuperscript{126} Speakers praised his dedication and generous concern for returned men in the district. Had they known a little more about Francis they may have gone further with their praise. The wound that ended his campaign on Gallipoli – a

\textsuperscript{123} Daily Advertiser, 11 May 1917.  
\textsuperscript{125} Daily Advertiser, 17 April 1916.  
\textsuperscript{126} Daily Advertiser, 26 July 1917.
bullet passed through his groin and exited his buttock – left him in considerable pain and discomfort over the years that followed.\textsuperscript{127}

From Wagga Francis went to Sydney to get married, and then into camp and overseas for the front. He had, he said, heard ‘a sort of coo-ee from the trenches. I seem to hear the few of my old pals who are left calling for Francis, and Francis feels he ought to go.’\textsuperscript{128} The Lodge Harmony, of which he was a member, marked his departure, ‘raising’ him to ‘the sublime degree of M.M.’, an honour whose specific meaning remains opaque and which Francis took some time to receive. In February 1918 the Lodge was still having trouble ‘locating Br Francis’s whereabouts’.\textsuperscript{129}

Wagga observed the second Anzac Day the day after the Mayor’s Unit left town. At a ceremony outside the Court House people ‘bowed their heads in meditation’, and feelings of ‘sadness that the brave men whose memory was being honoured would never return’ mingled with ‘gratification that when duty called there were so many men from the district ready to respond’. Ultimately, reported the \textit{Advertiser}, the spirit of patriotism triumphed over sadness. The Red Cross, having provided the local press with a list of 42 local men, including Hubert Meagher, Reg Duke and Bill Darby, who had lost their lives in the war, held a ceremony in the Town Hall gardens, complete with a large ‘floral’ cross that had been erected on the lawn. The cross was the centrepiece of what the paper described as a ‘soul stirring ceremony’.\textsuperscript{130} By the end of the day about 300 wreaths presented by local organisations, families and returned soldiers lay at its foot, and the deputy mayor expressed his hope that after the war it would be replaced by a permanent monument. The \textit{Advertiser} agreed, suggesting that:

\begin{quote}
there is no town … that has a better right to an Anzac Memorial. When from the town and district 1500 men have answered the call for the greater service and when of that 1500 many have paid the greatest sacrifice … at some spot in the town there should be a lasting public reminder of that service and sacrifice. We must not forget, in the
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{127} Leonard, Arthur Francis, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 551.
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 27 July 1917.
\textsuperscript{129} Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW Minute Book 1917-1930, CSURA RW2463/6/64, meetings of 4 September 1917 and 26 February 1918.
\textsuperscript{130} On the origins of the cross, see Wagga Council Minutes, 19 April 1917, CSURA RW2608/20.
\end{flushright}
erection of such a memorial, that the debt to the living is as great as the debt to the dead.131

At Wagga High School several returned soldiers took the stage. Sergeant Wilson, who had been at the landing, spoke of men who ‘could see nothing but death ahead of them’ resolving to ‘fight as bravely and effectively as they could while life remained.’ Another returned man spoke of losing his mate at Lone Pine and then being wounded himself by Turkish machine gun fire. Cedric Ryan was there too, ‘but owing to the state of his health refrained from speaking.’ Ryan was ‘still suffering from a nervous affliction due to shell shock’, the first time his condition, until then described as ‘concussion’, had been so named. At Wagga Primary School two former students, Privates Cohen and Campbell, both wounded on Gallipoli, spoke at the assembly. At South Wagga Primary School Sarah Birrell, who had four sons, including Ron in uniform and a fifth preparing to depart, along with Jane Bruce, Jack, Charlie and Allan’s mother, addressed the students. In an echo of the previous year’s Anzac Day, Wagga Primary School’s honour roll, on which the names ‘Bruce’ and ‘Birrell’ were etched, was joined on public display by rolls from the Rifle Club, the Brass Band and Copland and Co., in whose window they appeared.132

Until 1916 there had been no occasion like Anzac Day. It had no history and no precedent. Empire Day, on the other hand, illustrated how the town’s experience of the war had evolved since the days before the AIF went into action. By 1917, the excitement and anticipation of glory earned in battle had long worn off. The war was almost three years old and the AIF had seen more action than anyone could have imagined before Gallipoli. Wagga’s toll of dead was approaching 50 and returned wounded men were an increasingly familiar sight. On 24 May 1917 flags once again waved in the breeze above Wagga’s streets, but no parades passed under them and no public festivities brightened the occasion. For school children and their teachers the day was full of speeches and patriotic songs. It was a joyless affair. Too much had happened since May 1915 for it to be otherwise.133 In early August the ‘celebrations’ of the war’s third anniversary provided another example of Wagga’s weariness, attracting what the Advertiser called ‘not a large crowd.’ The people who did turn up at

131 Daily Advertiser, 8 May 1917.
132 All of the material on Anzac Day 1917 in Wagga is taken from Daily Advertiser 26 April 1917.
133 Daily Advertiser, 25 May 1917.
the Court House heard Reverend Tulloch and the mayor give speeches, but neither offered any more than platitudes and the promise of more suffering to come.\textsuperscript{134}

A few weeks later, the Murrumbidgee Pastoral and Agricultural Association held its annual show. Taking advantage of the crowds, recruiters made appearances at Wagga’s ‘various picture shows’ and at a circus that was in town.\textsuperscript{135} At the show ground the war was just as conspicuous a presence. Visitors could spend their money at patriotic stalls, the Soldiers’ Comforts Fund held a weight-guessing competition and a raffle, the Wagga Red Cross League sold a bullock, and the Lone Pine Memorial Band played and took up a collection for the Returned Soldiers’ Association. A recruiting stand, attended by returned soldiers and other men in uniform, occupied a prominent position. Unfortunately for the MPAA the show was marred by steady rain, few men attended the recruiting rally, and the stalls were deserted, save for the lone, wet bullock whose weight was the subject of the Soldiers’ Comforts Fund guessing competition.\textsuperscript{136} A couple of recruiting meetings were held outside the court house on consecutive nights in late July under bare deciduous trees, coinciding with the Show’s meeting and featuring the same returned men, Sapper Hunt, Lieutenant Baker, Major Heath, Corporal Finch and Private Seymour. In a new twist the audience was treated to the sight of British, French and German rifles and hand grenades, along with other trophies: a German helmet and bayonet, bombs and an album of ‘images of German atrocities’.\textsuperscript{137}

In November the question of conscription began to be discussed seriously once more. The \textit{Advertiser} ran several columns on moves to call another referendum, and then on the announcement that a second vote would be held on 20 December 1917. As in 1916, the ‘yes’ case had the backing and support of the district’s most well-off and respectable business people, farmers and politicians, with Edward Collins becoming president of the reconstituted Reinforcement Referendum Council.\textsuperscript{138}

An Anti-Conscription Local League was formed in Wagga under the presidency of J. F. O’Regan. While it relied on ‘pennies from the poor’, supporters of conscription had

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 5 August 1917.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 24 August 1917.
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 17 July and 22 August 1917.
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 24 August 1917.
\textsuperscript{138} S. Morris, 1999, p. 125.
'money to burn’. Whereas proponents of conscription met in halls and attracted high profile speakers from beyond the district, supporters of the ‘no case’ spoke on street corners. Beaumont describes the debates surrounding this second conscription campaign as ‘perhaps even more bitter and divisive’ than the 1916 referendum, but the Wagga press conveyed a less fevered atmosphere. In mid-November the Advertiser ran parallel columns setting out the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ cases. The remarkably civil and even-handed arguments stood in contrast to the far more strident treatment of the subject twelve months before. Even though the opposition to the ‘no’ case was not as vehement as in the previous year, and even though more space was given its proponents, the paper remained a supporter of compulsion.

Pro-conscription campaigners were keen to have the support and involvement of returned soldiers, and of course there were more such men in the district than in the previous year. Although they were generally considered to favour conscription, some returned men took the opposing view and the national Returned Soldiers’ No-Conscription League issued a manifesto against compulsion. On 15 December 1917 the Advertiser published a ‘call from Wagga soldiers’ quoting men on active service lamenting that they could not get ‘the required reinforcements to give our splendid men a rest now and then.’ The message, delivered in the week before the referendum, was clear. Local men on active service supported a ‘yes’ vote.

The Advertiser published the referendum results on 29 December 1917. Australia again voted no, this time by a larger margin. In Wagga the majority also voted no this time, 1914 to 1401. In North Wagga it was 472 in favour and 563 against, and in the Hume electorate as a whole the count by the end of December was 9131 for and 14,102 against. With no obvious progress having been made in the war and with fewer and fewer volunteers coming forward the local recruiting effort had to continue though it must have seemed pointless. Almost everyone from the district who was willing to enlist had already done so. The community was exhausted by the war and no amount of

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141 Daily Advertiser, 16 November 1917.
142 Daily Advertiser, 24 and 26 November 1917.
143 Daily Advertiser, 12 November 1917.
145 Daily Advertiser, 15 December 1917.
importuning by the district’s prominent and successful individuals proved sufficient to sway those without a similarly public voice.

Robert Wilkinson wrote to his son John, an officer in the British Army, ‘You will have heard about Australia turning down conscription again. I don’t like to say what I think of the selfish, cowardly, disloyal brutes, it makes me despair of human nature.’¹⁴⁷ Still smarting, the next day he wrote on the subject again: ‘Australia is just England’s spoilt child, and is behaving like one.’¹⁴⁸ A Wagga soldier just returned from the war having lost a leg, expressed surprise at the ‘no’ vote, and said ‘a man is no sooner out of the line than he is sent back again because he is badly needed there and because nobody else is available to relieve him … the Australians are being worked to death, all on account of lack of reinforcement.’¹⁴⁹ In France, a freezing Harry Gissing, just returned from a ‘splendid’ leave in England, sat beside a fire and wrote in his diary deploring the result but commenting that among soldiers ‘the matter had been dismissed as of no importance’.¹⁵⁰ Wagga entered 1918 as it had 1917, believing that the AIF would never be a conscript army.

Conscription was the most divisive issue that confronted Wagga during the war. On most questions the local press suggests a degree of public unity that while it may have masked what people said or thought in private nevertheless lasted until the Armistice. The district’s vote both for and against conscription in 1916 and 1917 put a figure on the extent of division, or at least disagreement, in the community on the question of compulsion. People’s views on other matters – fundraising, commemoration and how to respond to returned soldiers – were not so easily quantified. But those who had worked hardest for the war effort generally continued to do so, directing their energy increasingly to providing comforts to the men on active service and, from the end of 1917 on, to repatriation.

¹⁴⁹ Daily Advertiser, 5 January 1918.


4. Hubert Meagher. Australian War Memorial C01780.


7. Allan Bruce on the day of his homecoming. Museum of the Riverina.

8. Clarence Wiesner. CSURA RW5/25


18. The Kangaroos leaving Wagga, December 1915. Hubert Meagher’s fruit shop and café is on the right. Museum of the Riverina.
26 and 27. Funeral procession for returned soldier, George Sullivan, Wagga, 6 April 1918 (cnr Edward and Baylis Streets). Wagga Wagga and District Historical Society.
29. The Monument to the Dead and the Memorial Arch at the entrance to the Victory Memorial Gardens. The image is undated but was taken before the inscriptions ‘1914 For God King and Country 1919’ and ‘1914-1919’ were added to either side and top of the arch, but when the gardens were well established. State Records of New South Wales.
VII. ‘I don’t think I will get any harm, but I might’: Wagga’s soldiers overseas and at home

With the fighting on Gallipoli over, the AIF faced the campaigns in the Middle East and on the Western Front. The signs of what the war held in store became clear after the Landing on Gallipoli but only in what we now call the war’s middle years did Wagga’s soldiers experience the full measure of modern, industrialised warfare. More and more wounded and ill men came home, while those who remained on active service wrote, sometimes explicitly and sometimes guardedly, of battle, wounds and death.

Wagga’s Gallipoli veterans had some idea of what the future held, and knew that new men had little more grasp of what they faced than did their friends and relatives at home. ‘Their drill is nothing compared with the strenuous work ahead of them’, wrote one local man, ‘but they do not, cannot realise what is before them … they are longing for adventure … I wish they could realise what is ahead’.1 Perhaps he too had once ‘longed for adventure’. When he reached Egypt in early 1916, Colin Smith, formerly a clerk in the Wagga Lands Office, was detailed to escort men who had gone absent in Cairo to the ‘clink’. Most were Gallipoli veterans and the curious Private Smith, eager to learn everything he could, quizzed them about their experiences at the front.2 Well-known Wagga district tennis player and cricketer, Henry Slater, declared in mid-1916 as his unit approached the Somme for the first time that everyone was ‘anxious to get up to the trenches as soon as possible’.3

Other men were less keen and kept themselves out of harm’s way. Smith wrote of a ‘surprising number of cold feet attacks’ in his unit, which lost, he said, twelve men to base jobs before it left Egypt: ‘They came away to fight and just when near the seat of war, they take these jobs’, said the puzzled private.4 If twelve seems an unusually high number, Smith’s comment suggests at least a degree of reticence on the part of some of his comrades. Les Corbett reached England at the end of January 1917 and spent much of the next eighteen months alternating between being absent without leave and being

1 Daily Advertiser, 14 September 1917.
3 Daily Advertiser, 8 September 1916.
punished for it. He once escaped six months hard labour by spending seven months in hospital. Corbett managed to avoid the front until July 1918.\textsuperscript{5}

Fred Farrall told of another Ganmain man, Bun Lynam, who, having got as far as the base camp at Etaples in France, decided that he could not face the front line. Making the most of his long-standing asthma, Lynam succeeded in being repatriated to Australia.\textsuperscript{6} Dale Blair once suggested that returned soldiers ‘who believed they had not performed creditably … were unlikely to volunteer their private experience for public consumption and possible ridicule.’\textsuperscript{7} But Lynam did exactly that. Welcome home as a hero, he told lurid tales of the trenches, until after a night of drinking he confessed the truth and shortly afterwards left the district, only to take his own life in Sydney a few years later.\textsuperscript{8} Whether his suicide related to his having exaggerated his war service is impossible to know, but some regarded avoiding combat as shameful. Mount Peter girl Jo Cox told a local soldier called ‘Jack’ that she had stopped writing to another Wagga man, Lendon ‘Len’ Shaw. Jack, wanting both to know why and to cast Shaw, who he said, ‘was once my friend’, in a poor light, confided he was ‘a fool to carry on the way he does and I’m perfectly certain he has never seen the firing line.’\textsuperscript{9} Jack was wrong, but the imputation of cowardice was clear.

On the Somme, Fred Farrall remembered thinking he would have been better off if he had taken swagman Bill Fraser’s advice and stayed on the farm, ‘I wouldn’t be scared to death here in the middle of the night.’\textsuperscript{10} Farrall, Corbett and Lynam were all country men, yet none were the natural soldiers of Australian lore. Alone among the three, Farrall accepted the consequences of having enlisted. Another country boy, Ted Drake also recognised the gravity of his situation. You ‘didn’t go in thinking you were going to have a real good Cook’s tour’, said Ted Drake in an interview before his voice tailed.

\textsuperscript{5} Corbett, Leslie Raymond, Repatriation Department File, M90383/1.
\textsuperscript{6} L. Farrall, 1992, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{7} D. Blair, 2001, p. 181.
\textsuperscript{8} L. Farrall, 1992, pp. 60ff.
\textsuperscript{9} Cox Family Papers, CSURA RW2208/11, letter 17 April 1918. ‘Jack’ was also known as ‘John’, but none of the correspondence in the CSURA collection gives any further clue to his identity. Evidence from his writing suggests that ‘Jack’ was from Wagga. He had known local men and former Wagga Wagga Primary or High School students, Lendon Shaw and Dick Blake for a long time, commented on happenings in the town with obvious local knowledge, and was nominated to receive Comforts Fund packages from the district.
\textsuperscript{10} L. Farrall, 1992, p. 85.
off, ‘we went in knowing it was going to be …’ – the whispered final word is inaudible.11

Experienced men who were able to withstand front line service often took a fatalistic view of returning to the fighting after a rest. ‘Jack’ called the front ‘the land of “big things” and strafe’ and put his faith in experience as he prepared to return in April 1918; ‘I’ll be quite alright & if I’ve gone through for 2 years out there I can do it again.’12 Jack Bruce, now a sergeant, took a similar view. On 22 July 1916, as he prepared to go into action at Pozières, Bruce dashed off a quick note, ‘I don’t think I will get any harm, but I might.’13 Then, describing his ‘hottest go’ so far, he asked his family to imagine ‘thousands of guns going off at one time’, but could offer no words to help them understand.14 Other Wagga men were more able to convey the experience. When George Burns wrote of the terror and strain of fighting at Pozières, his dream-like prose – ‘men with staring eyes … with set faces … of falling men, of agonising cries’ – left a strong impression.15

If the war’s true nature was beyond the understanding of those who had not been there, no veil could be drawn over the number of dead. When Leonard Thomas, one time Assistant Town Clerk in Wagga, wrote that Pozières ‘must have meant a great deal of sadness for Australia’, he shared an insight that must have struck many other men.16 People didn’t need to know the soldiers’ lives in every gruesome and often tedious detail to know the war was a bloody affair that exacted a heavy toll on body and mind.

In contrast to what men like George Burns and Jack Bruce were writing about the Western Front, some correspondents presented the war as the kind of adventurous experience offered in magazines like Chums. Austin Kelly, Leo’s younger brother, who had enlisted at the age of fifteen in July 1915, had a riveting story to tell. In September 1917 the Advertiser ran a piece about his daring escape from German captivity. The Wagga boy, claimed the story, had been a German officer’s orderly, starved and ill

13 All of the excerpts from Bruce’s Somme letters appeared in the Daily Advertiser, 13 September 1916.
14 Daily Advertiser, 13 September 1916.
treated, until one day the officer, dismounting from his horse, tossed Kelly the bridle. Seizing his chance, Kelly leapt into the saddle and fled, riding 40 miles to British lines. His wild bid for freedom apparently went unnoticed by any Germans as ‘a terrific fight was in progress and a galloping horse was no novelty.’ The young soldier, in a letter to his father, says he was offered furlough on his return, but preferred to ‘have another go at the Huns.’

By the second half of 1917, Advertiser readers, used to story after story of death and injury, and hundreds of casualty lists, may have found this tale of derring-do a welcome change. No one in Wagga apart from returned men could have known that none of it was true. Nothing in his service record or his Repatriation Department files confirms that Kelly was ever a prisoner of war. The truth or otherwise of Kelly’s letter matters less than the fact that it could be accepted by the same readers who, twelve months earlier, were confronted with George Burns’ mournful recollections of Pozières; ‘I try to forget what I have seen, to get away from the awful mental tortures I have endured’. People knew that the war had many dimensions, and in far-off Wagga Kelly’s story was as credible as any other, particularly at a time when people at home, even those like Maurice McKeown at the Experiment Farm who were well aware of the number of dead and wounded, could write almost flippantly of a volunteer, ‘If he makes things as lively for the enemy as he used to do for the Lake footballers he will leave many victims in his track.’

Burns’ letter might have made difficult reading for anyone who had a loved one on active service, particularly if they were on the Western Front. People with relatives in the Middle East, on the other hand, may have taken comfort from a letter on the same page. When Light Horseman Charles McGrath, John’s son, wrote about repelling a Turkish attack on the Suez his letter was described in the paper as ‘breezy’, an early example of the difference in tone between reports from the Middle East and those from the Western Front.

17 Daily Advertiser, 27 September 1917.
18 Kelly, Austin, Repatriation Department files MX3251 and R108077, and Service Record NAA B2455 Service no. 1667. Aaron Pegram is writing on Australian POW’s of the Germans and advised that he has found no evidence of Kelly having been a POW, personal correspondence 22 May 2014.
19 Wagga Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to firms and private individuals, 1896-1922 CSUSA SA473/31/129-172 (31/165), letter 6 November 1917.
20 Daily Advertiser, 25 September 1916.
In early August 1916, while the Australians were suffering grievous losses at Pozières, the Light Horse took part in the battle of Romani in the Sinai, Sid Wild among them. On 10 August the Advertiser ran a small excerpt from a letter he wrote before the battle: ‘Things are getting pretty lively about here; there will be big things doing shortly.’ Wild was right, the official historian described Romani as ‘the decisive engagement of the whole Sinai and Palestine campaign.’ More than 700 Australians were killed or wounded in five day’s fighting. Coming after Gallipoli it seemed a dreadful toll, but on the Western Front, the AIF’s casualties already numbered in the thousands.

Australian official photographer Frank Hurley spent time on both AIF fronts. Shortly after arriving in Palestine during a quiet period in December 1917 he wrote, ‘There is not the strain of war nor the eternal fear of death. It would be a man’s bad luck to be killed here in action, whilst in France he might consider himself fortunate to escape with his life. France is hell, Palestine more or less a holiday.’ On the Western Front, said Hurley, it was possible ‘to almost doubt the existence of a deity.’ In 1918 ‘Jack’ used similar terminology, calling France and Flanders a ‘living hell’ where ‘one can’t believe there’s a God in the world with us’. In the Middle East, on the other hand, McGrath felt able to liken comrades going into battle to ‘school boys’.

Hurley conceded that there were ‘arduous times’ in Palestine, even if comparatively short lived. His experiences of the Western Front coincided with the fighting at Ypres in the second half of what Beaumont called ‘the worst year’ of the war. Few of the men who lived through the malarial summer of 1917 in the Jordan Valley or who fought at Romani, Gaza, Beersheba or the final offensive in 1918 would have considered their service a ‘holiday’.

At least one Wagga man in the Middle East sought to dissuade friends or relatives from following him to the war. When he learned that his friend Robert Dunn was

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21 Daily Advertiser, 10 August 1916.
25 Letters to Jo Cox, CSURA RW2208/11. See also C. R. McGrath’s letters describing a skirmish on the Suez and the battle at El Rafa, Daily Advertiser, 23 February and 3 July 1917.
considering enlisting. Light Horseman Allan Stinson counselled, ‘take a fool’s advice and stay where you are as this fighting is no place to be you would soon find out that there is no place like home.’ For a man facing death or wounds in the Middle East, the fact that his survival was more likely than if he were on the Western Front, may have meant little.

There were brighter moments in a soldier’s life. As Victor Florance wrote to his brother Hubert (Hugh) in November 1916, ‘In France it was hell some of the time but I had some good times there too’. ‘Jack’, Jo Cox’s suitor, wrote to her at greater length but in a similar vein, ‘I’ve seen some wonderful places and sights – seen the times when I’ve gone without food for days and days and fighting furiously all the time. Those days will live in my memory forever. On top of it all Jo I’ve had good and gay times’.

Along with good times, service in the AIF presented some men with what Richard Holmes called the ‘strangely wonderful sights which counterpoint the horrors of war’. During his earliest days in uniform Jack Bruce was struck by the sight of the AN&MEF’s naval escort in Port Moresby harbour. At that stage Bruce had yet to encounter horror. By the war’s later years he and many other Wagga men were hardened veterans who had seen everything that it was the lot of infantrymen in a major war to witness. In April 1918 ‘Jack’ wrote to Jo Cox about a vision of such naval might that he was held ‘spellbound and jolly near frightened.’ The British fleet lying at anchor in the Firth of Forth ‘as grim and silent as the devil’ was, he said, ‘the sight of a lifetime.’ The antithesis, vivid moments of terror and brutality, were just as imprinted on Jack’s memory. He was saved from being killed by a German soldier in close combat when a comrade bayoneted the enemy, before being mortally wounded. ‘I have a photo of his grave’, said ‘Jack’, who never named the man, but declared ‘so long as I live I’ll never forget his deed.”

27 For Allan Stinson’s letter see Dunn Family Papers, letters from Allan H. Stinson in Egypt to Mr Dunn and Robert 1915 and 1917, CSURA RW256 and RW256/2, letter 27 September 1916. It seems likely that Robert Dunn’s father, John, was the man who gave Stinson a charger when he enlisted. The letters between Stinson and the Duns are very affectionate and he appears to have lived with them before the war, see letter 15 May 1915.
28 Florance Family Papers, CSURA RW253/6/18, letter from Victor to Hue Florance 6 November 1916.
29 Letter to Jo Cox, CSURA RW2208/11, letter 17 April 1918.
31 Cox Family Papers, CSURA RW2208/11, letter 17 April 1918.
32 Cox Family Papers, CSURA RW2208/11, letter 17 April 1918.
In the small hours of 7 June 1917, George Schremmer saw the massive detonation of nineteen mines beneath Messines Ridge, ‘a sight I shall never forget’. For him, the counterpoint to this awesome moment, the largest man-made explosion to that time, was the brutal slaying of fleeing Germans – men from the land of his parent’s birth – who cried ‘kamerad’ and begged Schremmer and his mates for mercy, ‘we gave them kamerad’, he wrote.\textsuperscript{33} Allan Brunskill, with measured understatement, said; ‘In the line I have had some great experiences and witnessed some undesirable sights.’ He found bombardments were a ‘great sight and yet an awful one’, declaring it ‘impossible to conceive what a battlefield is like until one sees it, and it is just as impossible to describe it.’\textsuperscript{34} Twelve months after pressing veterans to share stories of their time in the Gallipoli trenches, Colin Smith had come to view the war in much the same way as Brunskill. Thanking the Wagga Comforts Fund for a recently arrived parcel, his gratitude was both heartfelt and suggestive of great weariness: ‘Unless you have been here and seen things as they are’, he wrote, ‘you cannot realise what these things mean to us.’\textsuperscript{35}

‘To a footsoldier’, wrote British poet Louis Simpson, ‘war is almost entirely physical’.\textsuperscript{36} In training, in the line, on route marches, on fatigues and in the many other tasks that filled soldiers’ time, physical activity is a recurring theme. In their pre-war lives many of Wagga’s soldiers made a living doing hard physical work, developing the stamina and strength that, honed by military training, helped them endure the draining grind of active service. The Kangaroos marched hundreds of miles before even beginning their training. From Egypt and then France Fred Booty wrote several times about the exhausting regimen. Route marches across the Egyptian desert, he said, were ‘good for the appetite’, and in France, preparing to move up to the trenches, Booty did a ten mile walk in full kit to get to the camp, which after a period working as a clerk in the rear areas ‘made me stiff for a day or two’.\textsuperscript{37}

In the line men were almost permanently exhausted. During the Fromelles fighting in July 1916, Harry Gissing wrote that when the ‘rush’ of wounded was at its height ‘it

\textsuperscript{33} Daily Advertiser, 3 August 1917. On the explosion at Messines, see R. Prior and T. Wilson, Passchendaele, the Untold Story, Scribe, Melbourne, 2003, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{34} Daily Advertiser, 3 December 1917.
\textsuperscript{35} Daily Advertiser, 15 May 1917.
\textsuperscript{37} Fred Booty, Postcards, one undated, the other 8 September 1916, from the private collection of Peter Gissing.
Carrying a stretcher on the Somme in 1916, Lawrence Atherton slipped off a duckboard injuring his back. He didn’t seek treatment ‘as we had to stay carrying for 9 days’. Les Jackson, a Wagga blacksmith, worked in a similar fashion to bring in wounded at Bullecourt; ‘We had to work hard for over 20 hours to get them out’, he told his mother, ‘it is not an easy job carrying men over shell holes. I had to do all the carrying over land – the trenches were too narrow to work in. I was kept going all day, until 3 o’clock next morning.’

Ted Drake remembered the 17th Battalion’s hurried march to Villers Bretonneux on 5 April 1918 after they had already been on the move for days, ‘fifty minutes flat out, ten minutes on the side of the road; fifty minutes flat out, ten minutes on the side of the road’. Nathan Wise observed that Australian soldiers reaching the Western Front trenches for the first time quickly came to realise that their daily duties ‘revolved not around fighting, as they had expected, but around work, particularly manual labour.’

Even in quiet times, recalled Drake, there was no let up, ‘fixing up the trenches, or putting extra stuff on the parapet … either one or the other … you might be fixing up the A-frames and putting new duckboards down. You were doing something.’

Periods of rest offered welcome respite and in rear areas there was a chance to take stock, experience relative comfort and, the further back one went, safety. Fred Booty wrote dozens of postcards to his family in Wagga during the war, mentioning in many that he was safely behind the lines, ‘billeted well out of the fighting area’, ‘resting in a small French village some distance behind the lines’, or ‘out of the line and leading a very quiet life.’

A Wagga bombardier writing under the pseudonym ‘Wattlebark’ described his rest from the front as ‘glorious days of leave (which) passed like the sweet smoke of some inchanted (sic) fag’. ‘Jack’ remembered one leave as ‘14 days of glorious freedom’.

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39 Atherton, Lawrence, Repatriation Department File M94826.
40 S. Morris and H. Fife, 2006, p. 94.
41 T. Drake, Oral History Interview, 25 April 1984, Australian War Memorial, S00225, and 17th Infantry Battalion, Australian Imperial Force Unit War Diaries 1914-18 War, AWM 4, 23/34/33.
42 N. Wise, Anzac Labour, workplace cultures in the Australian Imperial Force during the First World War, Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom, 2014, p. 49.
43 T. Drake, Oral History Interview, 25 April 1984, Australian War Memorial, S00225.
44 Peter Gissing private collection. See for example those from 11 August 1916, 17 January 1917, 6 and 24 June 1917, and 7 July 1917.
45 Daily Advertiser, 26 May 1917.
46 Cox Family Papers, CSURA RW2208/11, letter 17 April 1918.
Leave generally took men no further from the front than Britain or, if in the Middle East, Cairo. Until late 1918 home leave was a remote possibility. People in the district sought to overcome the distance by providing comforts, like the Christmas billies. Tasman Rae wrote from France that ‘all the boys thought it was a grand idea for each town to have its own Comforts Fund and for each parcel to be addressed to a different soldier from the town and district.’ Henry Boswell wrote to thank Miss Peacock in Forsyth Street for the parcel she sent, assuring her that ‘we are so pleased to get any little thing from Australia’. In early 1917 Colin Smith spoke of how much the soldiers appreciated the Comforts Fund’s soup kitchen, ‘about four miles behind the lines … where soup, cocoa, biscuits, cheese, and cigarettes are supplied to us as we come out or go to the lines … We are generally fagged on reaching this spot, and it makes the last mile or two to the rest camp much easier.’

While people in Wagga sent local soldiers letters, cards and parcels full of warm clothing, food, tobacco and other reminders of their civilian lives, the mail coming in the other direction could be far more varied. Harry Gissing had several conversations with German prisoners in November 1916. One mentioned that he was surprised at the Australians’ lust for souvenirs. Another arrived at Gissing’s dressing station minus nearly all of his buttons, and left with none: ‘had I allowed it’, said Gissing, ‘the beggars would have taken his cap, knife etc, it being the perfect mania amongst the chaps.’ Some objects of this mania were sent home. Jack Bruce sent a few boxes of ‘curios’. One included a German identity disc taken from ‘our first prisoner’ and a couple of bullet casings – one from Egypt and one from the Western Front. The other items, he said intriguingly, ‘speak for themselves’. In early January 1917 Roy Wunsch’s father, Edward, received a collection from his son that included a ‘number of German cheap brass decorations … a watch of French make, German 5-mark and 1-mark notes … a collection of French, Belgian and German coins’. A collection of war souvenirs featured at the Wagga Show that year. In December 1916 William Ledwell, who had worked for the Advertiser and was one of the first Kangaroos wounded, sent

47 Daily Advertiser, 11 December 1916.
48 Daily Advertiser, 15 May 1918.
51 Daily Advertiser, 13 September 1916.
52 Daily Advertiser, 6 January 1917.
his father in Edward Street a gas helmet ‘with which he was supplied at the front’. The helmet later appeared on display in a Baylis Street shop window.\textsuperscript{53}

Local men on active service longed for home and everything that was familiar. When Sid Wild of the 7\textsuperscript{th} Light Horse Regiment wrote to his mother in Best Street at the end of February 1917, he mentioned that, even though he was in the Middle East, he wished for ‘some Wagga heat’ to guard against the cold.\textsuperscript{54} Writing to his brother Hugh and perhaps offering a glimpse of his off-duty pursuits, Frank Florance compared the farm he missed to a ‘coquettish damsel that has to be wooed very carefully and diligently before she bestows her favours’, adding wryly, ‘That sounds good doesn’t it. You didn’t think I was a bit of a rough poet.’\textsuperscript{55} George Dunn found reports about the weather in the Riverina and told his brother, Robert, it looked like being a good season.\textsuperscript{56}

Earlier in the war, men feeling similar pangs for Wagga, seeking out the familiar in a land that was so very foreign, wrote about the irrigation and farming systems they saw along the Nile’s banks.\textsuperscript{57} In France and England, both more reminiscent of home, they still took an interest in farming and rural life. Of the many differences between Egyptian and European agriculture, Wagga’s soldiers were struck most by the glaring absence of young men working French and Belgian fields. Henry Slater, a farmer, commented that where once he thought that the Riverina was ‘a wonderful place for wheat’, he now believed France was ‘the spot.’ ‘The crops are magnificent’, he continued, ‘and I cannot help wondering how they manage it, considering there is hardly a man to be seen in the fields, excepting those who are too old or physically unfit for driving back the invading Huns. The womenfolk do a great deal of the work’.\textsuperscript{58} Ernest Ferguson wondered whether Wagga was in a similar situation, ‘fairly empty (with) most of the boys being in khaki’, but recognised that no one in Australia could be

\textsuperscript{53} Daily Advertiser, 9 December 1916.
\textsuperscript{54} Daily Advertiser, 8 April 1916.
\textsuperscript{55} Florance Family Papers, CSURA RW253/6/20. Letter 12 July 1918.
\textsuperscript{56} Dunn Family Papers, Letters from George (Andrew George Dunn, service no. 1212) to his brother Bob (R]. Dunn) 1916-1917, CSURA RW256/1, letter 14 October 1917.
\textsuperscript{57} See Chapter iii of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{58} Daily Advertiser, 8 September 1916.
forced into uniform.\textsuperscript{59} For men from the country, there was no clearer sign of what the war was costing their allies than the scarcity of working-age men on the land.

Farmers like Mark Redhead were interested in the crops that the tiny plots of northwest Europe could support. ‘(E)very square yard of earth seems to be made use of; vineyards everywhere, even on hills … which … have a slope like this /. … Small farms are the order … the land seems able to produce anything sown. … Words fail me to make you understand what a productive, go-ahead, beautiful country this is … it is a country well worth fighting for.’\textsuperscript{60} Redhead wrote of England in similar terms, describing ‘good grazing land, carrying fine, well-conditioned cattle … the way the thatching on the haystacks is done is a work of art’.\textsuperscript{61} In farming, men from Wagga’s rural locales continued to find a convenient point of reference, knowing that those to whom they wrote would understand and could perhaps even visualise the scenes they were describing.

Nothing could evoke home in the same way as meeting another Wagga man. Soldiers from the district continued to seek each other out and mention running into friends or acquaintances in letters. Fred Booty, newly arrived in France from Egypt, wasted no time trying to locate two brothers he knew, Ross and Charlie Evans, ‘so far without success’.\textsuperscript{62} Reg Cox began 1916 in an Egyptian hospital with a ‘septic ankle’ and drew a direct connection between his improving health and his having come from Wagga. Cox was in the care of Henry Stoker, who was ‘very surprised to see me … I am now getting the proper sort of treatment’.\textsuperscript{63} Attentive Advertiser readers might have been reminded of Archibald Redhead’s encounter with Alfred Bennett on Gallipoli, when the bond of having come from Wagga transcended the gulf in rank and responsibility. In October 1916, Light Horseman Lindsay Rich mentioned that since his regiment’s last fight in August, presumably Romani, he ‘had charge of postal affairs’ and so ‘got to know all the Wagga boys through dealing with the mail.’\textsuperscript{64} Sid Wild was always keen

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\textsuperscript{59} Daily Advertiser, 18 October 1916.
\textsuperscript{60} Daily Advertiser, 8 October 1916.
\textsuperscript{61} Daily Advertiser, 8 October 1916.
\textsuperscript{62} Fred Booty, undated postcard, Peter Gissing private collection.
\textsuperscript{63} Daily Advertiser, 1 January 1916.
\textsuperscript{64} Daily Advertiser, 11 December 1916.
\end{flushleft}
to see familiar faces and in late February 1917 asked his mother in Best Street for the ‘number etc., of any Wagga boy who may be leaving’ for the Middle East. 65

William Miller was at a training camp in Britain early in 1917 when he met ‘a chap who had humped his swag through Wagga’. The two chatted for a while and later on Miller got a pleasant surprise: ‘someone came to the door of the hut and asked: “Is there anyone here from Wagga,” … on rising I saw that it was Roy Wunsch, who has been wounded three times.’ 66 About six weeks later Mark Redhead wrote to his parents from England to let them know he had met Everard Sheppard, a couple of the Kangaroos and eleven other Wagga men. Redhead was travelling around England selecting horses for front line artillery units and seems to have spent as much time as he could seeking out men from home. 67 Private William Fitzgerald wrote from Salisbury Plain in mid-August that he had ‘struck all the Kangaroos here the other day … they had just come over here from Egypt and I was kept busy for a couple of hours shaking hands and talking.’ 68

The AIF emerges from literature and lore as a brotherhood, but not every man felt bound by ties of mateship or duty. 69 Unlike the men in Colin Smith’s unit who found base jobs in Egypt, or Bun Lynam who managed to parlay a long-standing medical condition into a ticket home, a few chose to simply disappear from their unit or camp. Some deserted before they left Australia. In October 1915 the Yass Courier reported that 50 recruits had deserted from Goulburn Camp. Having claimed the credit for enlisting, said the paper, they failed to return from their first leave and were never seen again. 70 There were always at least a few Wagga men wanted for desertion in eastern Australia, like 1916 Anzac Day volunteer James Ryan, who, to use Peter Stanley’s

65 Daily Advertiser, 8 April 1916.
66 Daily Advertiser, 3 January 1917. Wunsch had been wounded in the left shoulder in May 1915, the left knee in August that year, and in the left shoulder again in August 1916. Wunsch, Roy H., Repatriation Department File, H39630, pt. 1.
67 Daily Advertiser, 27 February 1917.
68 All of the above comes from Daily Advertiser, 18 October 1916.
70 Yass Courier, 18 October 1915.
phrase, thought the better of having enlisted and ‘bolted.’ Ryan was arrested, but many deserters from camps in Australia remained at large until the end of the war.

Les Britten enlisted in December 1914 when he was twenty. He was accepted into the AIF on the proviso that he got his teeth ‘attended to’, but for reasons not clear in the record left the army shortly afterwards. Britten re-enlisted in October 1916, now sporting a tattoo on his hand, and embarked for England. He fell ill with the measles in Capetown, convalescing there for three months before returning to Australia in February 1917. That was as close as he got to the war. In mid-June he deserted but was caught and returned to the army, only to desert again in March 1918. When Britten was arrested the following August, he found himself in the familiar confinement of the Wagga lock up until he was returned to the military authorities in Sydney.

Sherry Morris described Charles Brooker, a labourer from Benalla, as the Kangaroos’ ‘worst offender’. He avoided trouble in Australia, but was sentenced to a year’s hard labour commuted to six months detention in England for deserting ‘when under orders for embarkation’ two days before his draft sailed to France. In February 1917, after a month in prison, Brooker was released to the 55th Battalion in France. In March he was arrested for ‘neglect of duty while on active service’, and in May a court found he had ‘illegally absented himself … in the field’. He was brought back to the battalion under escort in January 1918. Brooker got a life sentence, suspended in July 1918 when he was sent back to the battalion from which, three days later, he absented himself again. Declared an ‘illegal absentee’ in October, he was finally discharged from the AIF in 1920. Brooker stayed in Europe after the war. Writing to the Base Records Office in Melbourne from Belgium under the name C. Brown, he explained his serial desertion from the AIF, ‘I lost two brothers in the war and had gone through a lot myself. I got bad feet and it was impossible for me to do the marching.’

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71 In 1915 there were four warrants out in New South Wales for Wagga men who had deserted, in 1916 there were eleven. NSW Police Gazette Compendium, 1 November 1916, p. 536, and Wagga Police Charge Book, Ryan, James Francis, CSURA SA1519/13, 2 and 4 October 1916. See also P. Stanley, 2010, p. 45.
73 Britten, Leslie George, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 6962, and Wagga Wagga Police Charge Book, CSURA SA1519/10-26. See also NSW Police Gazette Compendium, 28 August 1918, p. 386.
75 Brooker, Charles, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 1619.
76 Brooker, Charles, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 1619.
With a century’s distance, Ryan, Brooker and Britten are all sympathetic figures whose stories call for understanding. During the war their peers may have taken a less charitable view, seeing them as men who broke the code of mateship, leaving the job and the enormous risks to their more dutiful comrades.\(^\text{77}\) Brooker stood out in that group, but there were others – Sid Keyes disappeared for several days during the Passchendaele fighting, Ernie Foster remained at large for seven months.\(^\text{78}\) Spared the prospect of the death penalty, Australians deserted out of all proportion to their number in France and Belgium.\(^\text{79}\) Britten and Ryan deserted without having been anywhere near the war, if they imagined that they might blend back into the Wagga district, or go unnoticed, they were mistaken. Both were arrested in town. Wagga was a difficult place for eligibles to remain anonymous, and, it seems, was equally so for men seeking to evade the military authorities.

After July 1916, when AIF casualties in any major battle were counted in the tens of thousands, and even quiet periods permitted few days without loss, many local families had their worst fears realised. Leo Kelly, the drover who was educated at Christian Brothers High in Wagga, survived Gallipoli only to be reported missing on the Somme. His body was never found and it took more than a year before he was officially listed as having been killed at Pozières on 26 July 1916.\(^\text{80}\) Clarence Wiesner went to Wagga High, became a farmer and enlisted just after his nineteenth birthday. On 3 May 1917 a shell obliterated him. A school friend in his section remembered looking around when the smoke cleared to find one man dead on the ground, another two badly wounded and everyone else covered in mud. Of Wiesner there was no trace, only a shell hole ‘where he had been.’\(^\text{81}\) After his death, postmen brought cards ‘in loving memory of Private Clarence Wiesner 18\(^{\text{th}}\) Battalion’ to his parents’ home, at least one featuring crossed flags and the battalion colours.\(^\text{82}\) On 16 October 1917, George and Harriet Alchin published a note in the \textit{Advertiser} on behalf of their family thanking ‘Canon Pike, Adjutant Maclure and all kind friends for letters, cards, and messages during their recent

\(^{77}\) See P. Stanley, 2010, pp. 185ff.

\(^{78}\) S. Morris and H. Fife, 2006, p. 96.


\(^{80}\) Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files, 1914-18 War, AWM 1DRL/0428, 906 Private Leo Kelly, 20\(^{\text{th}}\) Battalion, and \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 27 September 1917.

\(^{81}\) Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files, 1914-18 War, 6160 Private Clarence William Wiesner, 18\(^{\text{th}}\) Battalion, AWM 1DRL/0428.

sad bereavement – the death of their son and brother, Private Gordon Alchin. Alchin had enlisted in January 1916 as one of the Kangaroos and died at the age of 23 in late September 1917.

Reminiscent of the announcement that Hubert Meagher had been killed at Lone Pine, in the second half of March 1917 the *Advertiser* reported that Jack Bruce, once a schoolboy cadet, and lately one of Wagga’s best known soldiers whose military life had been documented in the paper since he sailed with the AN&MEF, had been killed in action on 25 February. In mid-July his mother, Jane, received a letter from one of Jack’s comrades explaining, kindly perhaps, that a sniper’s bullet killed him instantly: ‘His end came especially hard’, wrote the man, ‘as he was on the eve of gaining his commission … The men would have … followed him anywhere.’ Jack’s brother Charlie was killed the following September. If Jane or her husband George were *Advertiser* readers they might have seen William Castle’s letter to his father in the 27 February 1918 edition. Mrs Bruce knew Castle well. He had been her ‘newsboy’ before enlisting and he had been Charlie’s school friend. In December 1917 Castle wrote to his father ‘about poor Charlie Bruce, who was in my Company … He was killed on 20/9/17 in the first stunt in which I took part.’ Bruce died under artillery fire as his battalion went in to relieve another unit on the Menin Road.

Often death came more slowly and painfully, sometimes far behind the lines and sometimes after a man had been repatriated to Australia. In December 1916 the *Advertiser* published a letter from the 3rd Stationary Hospital’s Roman Catholic Chaplain to Mary Anne Benson in Docker Street, describing the passing of her son, Francis, at Rouen. Four operations on his wounded shoulder failed to clear an infection that had taken hold and even though Francis received constant care and spent his days outdoors in the sunshine, he could not be saved. He died with the ‘loving attention’ of doctors and nurses and was buried in a private grave.

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83 *Daily Advertiser*, 16 October 1917.
85 *Daily Advertiser*, 20 March 1917, see also S. Morris, 2002, p. 176.
86 *Daily Advertiser*, 18 July 1917.
87 *Daily Advertiser*, 27 February 1918.
The ‘loving attention’ Benson received during his last days did not end with his death. Just as French women were routinely seen tending farms in the countryside, so were they to be found working as ‘grave gardeners’. Many were themselves recently bereaved, and Fred Farrall commented on the ‘disturbing … number of women wearing black dresses.’ The war, he said, ‘had reached this lovely countryside in the form of mourning.’

Some of the cemeteries, wrote one man, ‘are in old apple orchards; others are just strips of farm land made beautiful by planting long stretches of annuals in carefully chosen colour schemes.’

Individual burials were sometimes referred to in the Wagga press, but very rarely were people able to read about the large cemeteries near the front, even though, as Bart Ziino wrote, families who had lost a loved one craved the certainty that their soldier received a decent burial in a well-tended grave. Two years after learning of Jack’s death in 1917, Jane Bruce received a letter from Base Records explaining that her son had been buried ‘in an isolated grave, just north of Warlencourt Baucourt and 3 miles West South West of Bapaume’. His remains, she was told, would be ‘re-interred in the nearest military cemetery… in the presence of a chaplain and with the greatest care and reverence’. ‘Jack’ wrote to Jo Cox of Bluey Taylor’s ‘cold bleak grave in Flanders’. ‘My best of pals gone under and buried by my own hands – without even a clergyman to read the last rites – only a rough wooden cross to betray his remains in the shell torn blood red fields of France.’ Bereft, ‘Jack’ ‘cried for 2 hours on his grave … it broke me up, as nothing has done before. He was my best pal and now he’s gone – what’s it all for?’ Safe in England, ‘Jack’ confided, ‘I’ve never written this way before – do forgive me, but I can’t help thinking of those poor devils out there now.’ Most Australians knew that the chances of ever visiting such makeshift graves, thousands of miles from home, were remote. They expected the government to recognise its ‘specific responsibility to the bereaved.’ In early 1918, for the first time, people in Wagga were assured that the care of their dead was ‘a sacred obligation’, safeguarded by the Prince of Wales in his role as President of the Imperial War Graves Commission.

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89 L. Farrall, 1992, p. 56.
90 *Daily Advertiser*, 18 January 1918.
92 Bruce, John Ernest Alexander, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 1011, letter 15 October 1919.
93 Letter to Jo Cox, CSURA RW2208/11, letter 17 April 1918. ‘Jack’ made no distinction between northern France and Belgium, describing Taylor’s grave as being in ‘Flanders’ and ‘France’.
94 B. Ziino, 2007, see especially Chapter 2, ‘The Sacred Obligation’. The quote is from p. 57.
95 *Daily Advertiser*, 18 January 1918.
People in Australia had been holding services for soldiers killed overseas since early in the Gallipoli campaign.\(^{96}\) In Wagga these occasions of public mourning gave the community and a deceased soldiers’ family the chance to honour a local man. A few weeks after writing his letter of gratitude to the Comforts Fund, Colin Smith was killed in action. In May, a ‘sad and impressive service’ was held at St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church on the banks of the Murrumbidgee. Extra seats had to be found for a congregation swollen by the presence of returned soldiers, other members of the military forces and the Wagga Brass Band. Len Francis arranged a military procession with at least one of the wreaths crafted in Smith’s battalion colours.\(^{97}\)

Sometimes a group of individuals were honoured in this way. On 1 July 1917 St John’s Church held a service in honour of four of the district’s fallen, one of whom, Frank Duke, was Reg’s brother. The Duke family were enduring a difficult time. Frank’s father had not only lost two sons, his farm had been ‘swept by two disastrous fires’ before the war, and the 1914 drought compounded his losses. Shortly before he heard that Frank was dead, Arthur had lost his wife.\(^{98}\) At a mid-November service at St John’s, Canon Pike spoke in memory of yet more local men, Captain Hinton, Lieutenant Heath – Major Heath’s nephew – Sergeant Birrell, Corporal Davis, Private Marshall, Private Brown and Private Smith.\(^{99}\)

Some services for men who died overseas were held independently of religious institutions. Clarence Wiesner’s took place in a house in Sandy Creek.\(^{100}\) Clubs and associations also commemorated members killed in action. When a member lost his life on overseas service, the Lodge Harmony’s Worshipful Master conducted a ‘Lodge of Sorrow’. The last appears to have been held eight days after the Armistice in honour of Trooper Charles Stone who died of malaria in Damascus shortly before the end of the war.\(^{101}\)

\(^{96}\) B. Ziino, 2007, p. 42.
\(^{97}\) Daily Advertiser, 7 May 1917. Letters 16 and 22 October 1917.
\(^{98}\) Daily Advertiser, 2 July 1917.
\(^{100}\) Daily Advertiser, 4 August 1917.
Always more men were wounded than killed.\textsuperscript{102} Depending on the severity of their injuries, wounded men either rejoined their units, were assigned base duties, or sent back to Australia. As more and more of them returned to the district, Wagga became home to men who though generally robust when they sailed, were now in poor health. Some died before the war was over. On the same day that it ran the story of Francis Benson’s death in France, the \textit{Advertiser} reported on another local’s death. Samuel Stewart, a 24 year old, passed away on 27 December 1916. In 1914 he left his job as an accountant in a local bank to join the AN&MEF and came home incapacitated by the malaria that ‘laid the foundation of his late troubles, which he was unable to survive’. Like Francis Benson’s, Stewart’s was a slow death, his final illness lasted six weeks, during which his father, who had come from Taree to Wagga to be with his son, remained by his side.\textsuperscript{103} Stewart was buried with military honours. His pallbearers and the firing party, led by Len Francis, were all returned men, while local artillerymen formed a guard of honour.\textsuperscript{104}

Charles McLeod, a 49 year old Scot who had worked on the railway viaduct at Wagga before joining the Kangaroos, returned from the war suffering from rheumatism, ‘age’ and ‘senility’ in April 1917. He was discharged from the AIF in early July. McLeod’s wartime illness, coupled perhaps with the long-term effects of the malaria he once contracted in the ‘South Seas’ and the typhoid he suffered as a younger man, led to his ‘sudden’ death on 30 October 1917. His body was found at the Wagga railway bridge the next day. McLeod was given a military funeral and buried at Wagga cemetery. His coffin was draped in the Union Jack and covered in wreaths made up of 55\textsuperscript{th} Battalion colours. As they did at every such occasion, the Brass Band played the ‘Dead March in Saul’. McLeod had no relatives in the district, or it seems in Australia. When he enlisted he nominated his friend Con Hogan, the secretary of the Railway Workers Union in Sydney, as his next of kin, but local individuals, families, as well as several organisations and businesses provided floral tributes.\textsuperscript{105}

Another local man, John Archer, one time Christian Brothers High School student who had enlisted in April 1916, returned to Australia the following January but died in

\textsuperscript{102} G. Butler, 1943, p. 895. Butler gives a figure of 213,000 Australians wounded while the Australian War Memorial’s Roll of Honour lists 61,530 killed.
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 28 December 1916.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 29 December 1916.
\textsuperscript{105} See McLeod, Charles, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 1707, S. Morris, 2002, no page number, and \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 5 November 1917.
Manly Military Hospital in August 1918. His body was brought home to Wagga on the Sydney mail train and met by his father, brother and two sisters. Others were in attendance too, Mayor Collins, Robert Emblen, Council Clerk and secretary of the local war service committee, Hugh Oates, and Annie Juppenlatz among them. The Union Jack covered coffin was carried in a procession that included residents of Wagga and surrounding towns from the station to the Roman Catholic cemetery. The pall bearers were six returned men and wreaths were provided by the Mayor and Emma Collins along with other local individuals and organisations.106

Less than a month after learning that her son Jack was dead, Jane Bruce received a letter from the assistant matron of the 6th General Hospital in France. Another of her sons, Allan, was ‘seriously ill’.107 A week earlier he had been struck by shell fragments at Baupaume, ‘a big hole’ was blown through (his) right knee’, and both of his hands and his left knee were injured. His right leg and two of his fingers were amputated on 14 March. More of his leg was removed a week later. At the beginning of August a doctor pronounced his ‘General condition good. Right stump not quite healed … foot drop complete but no loss of sensation. Both hands healed’. Thus did Allan Bruce’s three months at the front end in his ‘incapacity permanent and total’.108 His parents might have been relieved that he had been spared to come home to them, but their grief was profound. Three of their children had died before the war, now another two sons were buried in France and another would return home maimed.

Shortly afterwards, Sarah Birrell received similar news about her son Ron, one of five Birrell boys at the front. Ron was hit at Bullecourt. Shrapnel fractured his shoulder and his hand, tore off a finger and left him with other wounds that were described as ‘large but superficial’. After a series of operations doctors recommended his return to Australia. He arrived home on 2 October 1917, having not long before passed through the town on a Melbourne-Sydney train, and in November 1917 a medical board recommended his discharge from the AIF.109 When Birrell and another Wagga man, Sergeant Percy Kem, arrived home, the Mayoress, Emma Collins, and members of the local War Service Committee met them at the station. Both men were taken home by

107 Daily Advertiser, 14 May 1917.
108 Bruce, Allan, Repatriation Department File, C23313.
109 Birrell, Ronald Leslie, Repatriation Department File MX29757.
car, Birrell to Best Street and Kem to his sister’s house in Kincaid Street. Within hours, Kem visited the ‘sewing room where members of the Wagga Soldiers’ Comforts Fund were busy packing the last lot of Christmas parcels for soldiers at the front’. Having been the grateful recipient of three Comfort Fund parcels during his time overseas, Kem was very interested in seeing how hard local women worked to send these very welcome packages to men like himself.\textsuperscript{110}


Tas Douglas, his foot healed, returned to the 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion in Egypt early in 1916 and sailed for France in March. On 23 July he went into battle at Pozières and was so badly wounded that his left leg was amputated at the thigh the next day.\textsuperscript{111} During the same month Neil Boomer, recovered from typhoid, was travelling in the opposite direction, from England back to the Middle East. He was transferred from a Light Horse Machine Gun Squadron and remustered as a shoeing smith. Boomer’s capacity for active service was further diminished after a horse kicked his knee and in March 1917 he succumbed to the synovitis that had plagued him for months. Describing Boomer as ‘otherwise well’, a Medical Board declared him ‘suitable for a sedentary occupation’ but ‘unfit for General Service’. In mid-July, after further stints in hospital, he boarded an Australia-bound ship. He reached Sydney in late August 1917 and was discharged on 20 October, ‘very nervous and a bit lame’.\textsuperscript{112}


Albert Hurst, the saddler, enlisted in July 1915, arrived in Egypt in October and began the first of several periods in hospital, until in August 1916 the medical officer in charge of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Australian General Hospital at Abbassia in Egypt described him as never having been ‘well and fit for hard work since December last.’ Depending on which form one consults, Hurst was suffering from ‘subacute rheumatism [and] anaemia’, or malaria. At the beginning of September 1916, ‘pale and thin and much under weight’ he boarded the Ascanius and left Egypt for Australia.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{110} Daily Advertiser, 3 October 1917.
\textsuperscript{111} Douglas, Tasman, Repatriation Department File, M9176/2, and Service Record, NAA B2455, service no. 646. His name is spelt ‘Douglass’ in this record.
\textsuperscript{112} Boomer, Neil L., Repatriation Department File, M4826, and Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 686.
\textsuperscript{113} Hurst, Albert, Repatriation Department File, M85605. The ‘pale and thin’ quote is from Hurst, Albert, Repatriation Department File, C85605 pt. 1. A discussion of his malaria appears in Hurst, Albert, Repatriation Department File, C85605 pt. 1.
In early October 1917 the *Advertiser* published news that Tasman Rae, formerly a Wagga post office employee, had been wounded in both legs on 20 May after almost twelve months at the front.\footnote{Daily Advertiser, 5 June 1917.} At around the same time Sergeant Murphy received word that his son, William, the young man who had joined the Kangaroos as a drummer, had been wounded in the left shoulder.\footnote{Daily Advertiser, 12 June 1917.} Murphy was hit by a piece of high explosive shell on 18 May 1917 in the support line near Bullecourt. Some medical officers described a wound to his shoulder, others to his neck. All agreed that it was ‘severe’ and within three days he was in a hospital in Brighton. In late August he embarked on the *Benalla* for his return to Australia, deemed fit only for home service.\footnote{Murphy, William, Repatriation Department File, M6867.} Murphy arrived in Sydney in November 1917 and a few days later his disability was declared permanent. Doctors noted that his back had been weak ever since his pre-war injury, and in June as he recovered from his wounds, he hurt his back again while swimming. Murphy was discharged from the AIF on 28 November 1917.\footnote{Murphy, William, Repatriation Department File, M6867.}

A few days later Dooley Mulholland was the subject of a piece in the *Advertiser*. Mulholland, a member of several local clubs and associations, mentioned in many men’s letters from Egypt, Gallipoli and later England and France, and rightly described as ‘well and favourably known throughout the Wagga district’, was invalided home, arriving in Wagga on 26 October 1917. He was suffering from a ‘slight “touch of gas”’ but was otherwise unwounded after more than three years in the AIF. The *Advertiser* played his exposure to gas down and although he suffered from its lingering effects, Mulholland threw himself back into Wagga’s community life.\footnote{S. Morris, 2002, p. 1032, and Daily Advertiser, 27 October 1917.}

Sylvester Finn was first wounded during a training exercise in England when he fell hard against a rifle butt, held fast by its bayonet jammed into a sandbag. He was still recovering when he was buried by shellfire at Polygon Wood. ‘How I got out I don’t know’, he wrote, ‘we lost more than half our number’. Finn was pulled unconscious from a shell hole and reported killed. He spent a freezing, soaking night in the open before two prisoners carried him to a dressing station. He went to a Canadian Casualty Clearing Station at Poperinge, then to Bolougne and later England. In December 1917
Finn returned to Belgium and was gassed near Messines. That was the end of his war service and he was home in late May.\textsuperscript{119}

Once they got home, most of Wagga’s returned men and women remained in Australia. But among them were some whose duty bade them return to the war and others who, under no compulsion, decided to go back. Mary Nash came home to Wagga in August 1916. She received a joyful public welcome and a civic reception. A woman could do ‘no nobler work … than to help the sick and wounded in their hour of greatest need’, said Canon Pike.\textsuperscript{120} Nash went to Sydney and nursed at Randwick Hospital before returning to the war in April 1917.\textsuperscript{121} After Gallipoli and more than two years ‘absent ill and on sea transport’, Alfred Bennett also sailed back to Europe. With two extended periods in Australia, during which he was feted in Wagga, and a base command in England behind him, in March 1918 Bennett was asked to take temporary command of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Battalion. A few months previously he had been rated by instructors at Senior Officers’ School as ‘reliable, conscientious and determined’.

When Bennett went back to Europe at the age of 53, he put himself within artillery and machine gun range of the enemy and was lightly wounded in April 1918. He shared some of the experiences of the lower ranks, He had been wounded several times on Gallipoli and in France, was evacuated from the front with illness and, having recovered, returned to duty. In other respects, in his age, his education, his experience of civilian and military life, and his responsibilities, Bennett was very different to the men he commanded. While he pursued his military career through his third war, many of his peers in Wagga were worrying about the fate of their sons.\textsuperscript{122}

People who attended memorial services, read the casualty lists, looked at the names on rolls of honour, or encountered maimed returned soldiers, needed no reminder of what service in the AIF could mean. More easily overlooked was that for other local men the war brought honours and promotion. In August 1914 Alfred Bennett was Wagga’s most senior soldier, but after the privations and demands of the Gallipoli campaign his health declined. The early months of the war proved to be the pinnacle of his

\textsuperscript{119} Finn, Sylvester, Repatriation Department File, C16613, document 1 July 1935 and letter 17 February 1943.
\textsuperscript{120} Daily Advertiser, 18 August 1916.
\textsuperscript{121} S. Morris, 1991, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{122} Material on Bennett is from, Bennett, Alfred Josua, Service Record, NAA B2455.
distinguished military career. For Thomas Blamey, twenty years younger, and a major when the war began, service in the AIF laid the foundations for his later becoming Australia’s highest ranked soldier. By November 1918 Blamey was a temporary brigadier-general and Chief of Staff to the Australian Corps.

Bennett and Blamey stood apart from the mass of Wagga’s soldiers, if only because of their senior rank. Another soldier of far more humble station, and for very different reason, came to a level of prominence in Wagga that he could never have expected when he enlisted. Edward John Francis ‘John’ Ryan was from Tumut. His father was a bullock driver and labourer, and when he left school John worked in the post office before also becoming a labourer. His background resembled that of many other soldiers who had an association with Wagga and he was one of the railwaymen recruited into the Kangaroos. Ryan joined the 55th Battalion a few months after the disaster at Fromelles and spent half of 1917 in a light railway construction unit. At the end of September 1918 he took part in the assault on the Hindenburg Line at Bellicourt, one of the AIF’s final battles. Threatened with being cut-off, in a few minutes of astonishing courage Ryan led a group of men in a charge against a German position, using his bayonet and then bombs to kill some of the enemy. The rest fled. Ryan was wounded in the shoulder. In December, a few weeks after he returned to his unit, the London Gazette announced that this ‘gallant soldier, whose example of determined bravery and initiative was an inspiration to all’, had been awarded the Victoria Cross (VC). Wagga quickly claimed Ryan as its own.

Between the relatively few men distinguished by decoration or rank and those disgraced by desertion were most of Wagga’s soldiers. Since Charles Hussey came home to The Rock in August 1915, wounded and ill men had been returning to the district, sometimes to the kind of welcome experienced by Hussey or Mary Nash, sometimes almost unnoticed. Returned men, alone in the community, understood the true suffering that lay behind the casualty lists, and unlike their comrades who remained in the field, they also knew how the war was affecting Wagga. They occupied a privileged place in the community, but many were badly affected by the war and public esteem did nothing

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to address their concerns about work and how to make their way through civilian life after service in the AIF.
VIII. ‘The biggest job in Australia’: repatriation and the end of the war in Wagga

With peace seemingly as distant as ever, the war and the pall it cast must have seemed an almost permanent state by 1918. While repatriation became a more pressing concern through the year, the district’s recruiters continued their dispiriting labour until the Armistice in November. On that long awaited day people poured into the streets to celebrate, but behind the scenes simmering tensions overflowed, marring the festivities and creating lasting bitterness. Even the joy at the soldiers’ coming home was tempered by the influenza epidemic in 1919. If the war had eased its grip, death and sorrow continued to take a toll on the district.

The *Daily Advertiser* began 1918 with a plea for a return to the unity that rallied Wagga to the British Empire’s cause in 1914, while at the same time urging readers to ‘forget the past and to fix their gaze only on the goal ahead’. ‘Pessimism cannot be helpful’, cautioned an editorial, but the following day, the paper conceded that; ‘People’s spirit has gone’. The war’s intrusion into civil life had become irresistible. There were few places or events that were not steeped in patriotic sentiment and wartime displays. Reminders were everywhere – in the homes of people who had had men killed or wounded, in the constant appeals for money or labour or time, in the regular casualty lists, the growing number of local honour rolls, the regular street meetings, the public readings of letters from local soldiers, new commemorative events like Anzac Day, and in the public occasions – Empire Day and the Wagga Show – that had once been peacetime pleasures.

On days like these, said an *Advertiser* editorial, people hid their real anxieties. But on Anzac Day, born at least in part in sorrow, there was no expectation that people would wear a mask of merriment. On 25 April 1918 bereaved families laid flowers around a framed picture of Lord Kitchener. At noon under a heavy sky, people with heads bowed paused for a minute before Edward Collins told them with considerable

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1 *Daily Advertiser*, 3 and 4 January 1918.
2 Many local institutions commissioned rolls of honour during the war, some long before it ended; South Wagga Primary School in September 1915, Wagga Rifle Club in June 1916, the Anglican Church in August 1916, Half Holiday Tennis Club in September 1916, Wagga Wagga Primary School in April 1917, Wagga Wagga High School in September 1918, and Lake Albert Church of England in May 1918 are some examples.
3 *Daily Advertiser*, 4 January 1918.
understatement what everyone had known since 1916: the sacrifice on Gallipoli was being repeated on the Western Front. As ceremonies continued in the afternoon, downpours soaked the flag covered cross in the Town Hall Gardens and the wreaths that lay at its base. At the end of the day Emma Collins took the dripping floral tributes and laid them on the graves of local returned men who had died after arriving home.4

The weather and the general mood during the crisis of the German Spring Offensive conspired to make 1918’s Anzac Day a bleak occasion in Wagga. A few weeks later Empire Day was clouded by the mood of a district now almost four years at war. In 1915 the celebrations had come as the last echoes of peace were fading, shortly after news of the Gallipoli Landing but before the magnitude of the AIF’s ordeal was apparent. By 1918 the day was a shadow of what it had been. At an ‘open gathering’ in the Town Hall Gardens, people sung patriotic songs in ‘a commendable display of enthusiasm’, but it was largely the enthusiasm of children. ‘Very few adults attended’, wrote the Advertiser. The town’s schools provided the audience for speeches by men who were ‘prominent in war work at home or have taken part in active service in the field’. When Hugh Oates took the stage to speak of his regret at being unfit for overseas service, the Mayor’s Unit flag under which he had recruited men to join him in the AIF flew overhead, alongside Union Jacks and the Kangaroos’ flag from 1915. Dooley Mulholland urged ‘greater respect to be shown to the flag of the Empire, to the National Anthem, and to any outward symbol of … association with Great Britain.’ A figure familiar to some children, William Garland, Wagga High’s ailing former headmaster, remembered Empire Days past and mourned ‘the loss of so many of my old pupils’, but spoke with pride of his part in making ‘such men of them when they went and did their duty.’ If he recovered his health, said Garland, ‘I will have my own honour board of my former pupils.’5

The war had turned a once vibrant, celebratory occasion into one that many adults now avoided, and on which support for the Empire had become synonymous with support for the war. Empire Day always had a strongly martial element, but since the Boer War this had been expressed as pride in Britain’s colonial conquests. Now those bygone days might have seemed almost quaint. Anzac and Empire Days were for reaffirming

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4 Daily Advertiser, 26 April 1918.
5 Daily Advertiser, 25 May 1918.
ties to the Empire, for reflecting on the past and remembering the dead rather than anticipating a future that seemed to offer only more war.

In August 1918 Edward Collins wrote that the district was tiring of public displays. When the Council received a letter from the state premier’s office requesting local cooperation in observing the anniversary of the war’s beginning, suggesting a public demonstration at the Town Hall ‘at which prominent people might give short addresses suitable to the occasion’, Collins referred to Wagga’s recent ‘demonstrations’, arguing that a repetition would not ‘be much appreciated by the people.’ When he commented that the community had had enough of ‘street functions’, he may have been thinking of how few adults attended the recent Empire Day function. These things might still work in Sydney, he said, but ‘there were not the same facilities for making impressions in country towns.’ When the question of whether to publicly observe the anniversary was put to a vote, Collins lost. Services were duly held in each of the local churches. People gathered near the Court House at midday to hear the Wagga Brass Band and speeches, including by Collins, who presumably disguised his reluctance.

Since 1915 these public occasions of mourning and patriotic feeling had been a reminder that the dead and wounded had to be replaced. In February 1918 the Advertiser suggested that there were still 3500 eligible men in the Hume electorate, but in March reported that 531 Wagga men had enlisted since the beginning of 1917, a little over ten men a week, or 40 a month. Since the nation was averaging 3392 recruits a month over that time, if these figures were reasonably accurate Wagga’s contribution represented just over one per cent of the AIF’s recruits, a healthier total perhaps than locals realised. Recruiting in Wagga continued well into October 1918 and locals were enlisting right until the end. Two men came forward at what seems to have been the district’s last recruiting meeting on 19 October. Walter Kahlefeldt, one of Wagga’s last volunteers, joined the AIF on 7 November 1918, a month after his nineteenth birthday. Kenneth McEachern had enlisted in September and was granted leave the

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6 Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW2608/21, minutes of meeting 1 August 1918.
7 Daily Advertiser, 5 August 1918.
8 Daily Advertiser, 19 February and 30 March 1918.
9 The figures are from E. Scott, 1937, p. 872.
10 Daily Advertiser, 21 October 1918.
11 Kahlefeldt, Walter, Service Record NAA B2455, Service no. ‘Depot’.

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following day. His attestation papers were stamped ‘joined on Nov 11 1918’, probably making the eighteen year old the last local man to go into camp.¹²

With the AIF suffering losses so severe as to almost cripple it as a fighting force in the last year of the war, the recruiting effort had to continue, but in Wagga during 1918 it began to take second place to the district’s preparations for the soldiers’ return. Formal planning for the AIF’s repatriation dated back to the second half of 1916. In December that year state premiers, senior state ministers, the prime minister and other national political figures assembled in Melbourne to discuss the development of a formal national scheme. Over the months that followed, the country’s approach to repatriating returned soldiers, described by a delegate to a 1917 Premiers’ Conference as ‘the biggest job in Australia’, took shape.¹³ The Australian Soldiers’ Repatriation Bill was introduced into the Senate on 18 July 1917. It attempted to bring organisation to the ‘sincere, emphatic … vague and indefinite’ promises made to soldiers when they enlisted, and ‘reinstate in civil life all those who are capable of such reinstatement.’¹⁴ After more months of hard work the Department of Repatriation was established on 8 April 1918.¹⁵

A few weeks later, responding to federal developments, Edward Collins called a public meeting to discuss the formation of a local repatriation committee. A solid cohort of Wagga people had served on all sorts of committees during the war. People noticed who was making the greatest contribution, and in the lead up to the meeting a man, apparently a returned soldier, calling himself ‘One of ’em’, wrote to the Advertiser praising the local War Service Committee, until then the body most responsible for looking after returned men, and which had been seeking donations towards their support since at least March 1916. But ‘One of ‘em’ added that ‘it has not been credible to our town and district to find that only a small section of the community ever attended the fortnightly meetings.’¹⁶ ‘One of ‘em’ wanted people to show that they weren’t ‘shirkers’ by coming to the mayor’s Town Hall meeting.¹⁷

¹² McEachern, Kenneth, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. ’Depot’ N91993.
¹⁶ On collections for returned men, see Daily Advertiser, 2 March 1916.
¹⁷ Daily Advertiser, 29 April 1918.
Also urging a good attendance, the *Advertiser*’s editorial writer declared that there was ‘no more important purpose’ than repatriation, adding, ‘it is highly improbable that a subject presenting more difficulties could be found.’ Readers were reminded of the ‘debt to pay’ returned soldiers. Helping them was ‘the business of everyone who has shared the safety insured by (their) deeds’. People must have agreed. The meeting attracted a good crowd, including a ‘large number of ladies’ and representatives of many local public clubs and associations. \(^{18}\)

A few days later people gathered at the Town Hall appointed a 50 member local Repatriation Committee. ‘One of ‘em’ must have been pleased that so many people came to the mayor’s meeting, but may have been less impressed when the committee was announced. He had reminded *Advertiser* readers that it was ‘everyone’s duty to attend and help in this vital problem’, and he didn’t want to see the job left to the ‘few usual “hard heads”’. \(^{19}\) The ‘hard heads’ were well represented nonetheless, including Mayor Collins, Charles Hardy, John McGrath, Major Heath, Alick Smith, Robert Emblen, Canon Pike, Thomas Dobney, Hugh Oates, and Dooley Mulholland. \(^{20}\)

For most of the war, working at getting men into uniform had been the truest expression of one’s patriotism, but in May the *Advertiser* described repatriation as ‘the acme of patriotic effort’, observing that people accepting a place on the Wagga Repatriation Committee ‘have laid hold on a task which is likely to sink into their lives and become part of themselves. The magnitude of the work is hardly recognisable in the present perspective, any more than a due appreciation of the struggles on the Western Front can be gleaned from printed news read in comfortable surroundings.’ \(^{21}\) Most of the committee’s members had nevertheless worked for the war effort for years and knew how dreadful the losses had been. At least one, Dooley Mulholland, had long front line service and might have had some understanding of the work that lay ahead.

An important part of what the committee had taken on involved getting returned soldiers back to work once they were discharged from the AIF. In August 1918

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\(^{18}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 29 April 1918.
\(^{19}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 23 April 1918.
\(^{20}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 8 May 1918.
\(^{21}\) *Daily Advertiser*, 9 May 1918.
members asked the local press to advertise jobs for returned men for free. They also sought the local federal member’s help in getting the Repatriation Department to set up a school for ex-soldiers’ vocational training.

The Wagga Repatriation Committee did its best with limited resources, were pleased to see five out of six local returned men get recently advertised jobs in August, and protested when they heard of local firms failing to give veterans preference. Some local employers needed no prompting. At the Experiment Farm, Maurice McKeown had required that job applicants ‘must be ineligible for military service’ or be returned soldiers since 1916. In his determination to give preference to returned men, McKeown seems to have made life difficult for himself during the war’s latter years when many local returned soldiers were unfit for the kind of work the Farm offered, or for very much else. He complained in September 1918, ‘It is hard enough to get satisfactory workers for even the roughest class of labour’.

No one could assume a man’s fitness for work simply by judging the extent of his disability, nor could anyone be sure that every returned man was as poorly as he may have seemed. The local Committee dealt with men whose circumstances varied enormously, from those who were either unable to find work or who could only manage short-term jobs, to others whom some thought to be malingerers, and others still who refused to accept that their injuries might prevent them working. Then there were men who returned home with no physical wound or illness, but whose mental condition made normal life impossible.

Charles Hussey’s wounds left little doubt that his return to civilian life would be difficult. He had been celebrated at The Rock in August 1915. At his reception in the Oddfellows Hall there were speeches and songs in his honour. He was called a ‘hero’. Men shook his hand and women kissed him. Twelve months before, Hussey had been a ‘slaughterman in constant employment’, now, missing part of his arm, he was no

22 Daily Advertiser, 7 September 1918.
23 Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926, CSURA SA473/31/101-128 (31/119-120), see for example letters 24 January 1916, 13 and 20 September 1917, 8 August 1918, and document titled ‘Employment of Returned Soldiers Period 1/7/1916-31 August 1917’.
25 Daily Advertiser, 26 August 1915.
longer fit for that kind of work and no one at The Rock or anywhere in the district would give him a job.\textsuperscript{26}

More than two years later, in February 1918, Allan Bruce, who had yet to enlist when Hussey came home from Gallipoli, arrived at Wagga station on the Sydney mail to great fanfare. Leaning on crutches, one hand missing some fingers and his trousers pinned high above the knee where his right leg had been, he was driven home to Morgan Street where some of Charles Hardy’s staff had put up foliage and flag covered arches. A sign bidding Allan welcome home hung above the door.\textsuperscript{27} But Hardy couldn’t give Bruce his old carpenter’s job back. He was still unemployed in 1919.\textsuperscript{28}

Reg McCurdy lost a thumb at Suvla and after eight days at a Wagga chaff cutting plant realised that he couldn’t manage the work. Another nine days labouring at Borambola was, he said in March 1917, ‘all the work I did since my discharge. I refused jobs of wheat bag sewing, driving harvester and such like. I did this class of farm work prior to enlisting, but I am unable to do it now … I have no property or money in the Bank.’\textsuperscript{29} A relative agreed that McCurdy was ‘not in a fit state of health to earn his own livelihood at ordinary farm work’, as he had before the war.\textsuperscript{30}

William Worth came home limbs intact, but seriously disabled nonetheless. The bullet that tore into his neck on Gallipoli paralysed him. In October 1915 his nurse at Valletta, Sister Narelle Hobbes, wrote to William’s mother, Edith, ‘I’m afraid it might be a long time before he is able to get about on his feet, but it is wonderful really that he is alive at all’.\textsuperscript{31} It took twelve months, most of which he spent convalescing in England, before Worth was well enough to make the voyage back to Australia. Before he left, another nurse, Carine Pennefather, assured him that the

\begin{quote}
voyage will benefit you wonderfully – and Winter in Wagga generally means lovely weather – how glad your mother will be to kiss her boy again – and you
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26}Hussey, Charles, Repatriation Department File C9213, documents 22 September 1915, 29 March and 5 April 1916, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 175. See also C. Lloyd and J. Rees, 1994, pp. 21-22.
\textsuperscript{27}Daily Advertiser, 21 February 1918.
\textsuperscript{28}Bruce, Allan, Repatriation Department File H23313 pt. 1 and C23313, document 8 March 1919.
\textsuperscript{29}McCurdy, Reginald, Repatriation Department File C17563, document 5 March 1917.
\textsuperscript{30}McCurdy, Reginald, Repatriation Department File C17563, document 5 March 1917.
\textsuperscript{31}William Worth letters, 1915-1916 MLMSS 6980/1/4, letter 20 October 1915. Hobbes’ affection for Worth is evident in all of the letters she wrote to him during the war.
must not neglect doing everything to make you quite strong once more – your youth will do a lot, but it needs helping also.32

Worth had recovered some movement by the time he got home, but doctors described his condition as ‘not good’. He had lost a stone and a half, and the muscles in his shoulder were wasted.33 Returned soldiers seeking a pension had to prove that their disability or illness was caused by their service.34 Worth’s case was clear and in July four medical officers agreed that he looked like living with a permanent 75 per cent disability. He was granted £3 a fortnight pension.35

Athol Follers came home from Gallipoli in the second half of 1915 with a less serious but still disabling injury. The bullet that ended his service remained lodged half an inch from his spine.36 He took a job in the Stamp Duties Office, but left after a few months. By May 1916 he could neither ‘sit or walk in an upright position for any time’, had a ‘slight stoop’ and ‘severe pains in the back.’37 Apparently unfit even for clerical work, and receiving £3 a fortnight pension, Follers, for reasons not apparent in the record, was among those, like Alfred Bennett or Mary Nash, who decided to go back to the war. His condition was either not as serious as it seemed when he left his job, he was able to disguise it, or it was simply overlooked by eager recruiters.

Follers arrived in England in July 1917. Four days later he was in hospital with bronchitis. He had had the illness in Egypt as he recovered from his Gallipoli wound, then in camp in Sydney just after he re-enlisted. When the bronchitis returned in early October, doctors declared Follers’ case to be chronic and sent him back to Australia.38 He was by no means unusual. The number of men found ‘unfit for general service’ was growing. Follers was one of more than 8600 such men to have reached the United Kingdom to that point in the war, and bronchitis was a common cause of their being

32 William Worth letters, 1915-1916 MLMSS 6980/1/4, see for instance letters 20 April and 2 May 1916, and 8 December 1917.
33 Worth, William, Repatriation Department File, M23148, document 6 March 1916.
34 On returned men having to prove the connection between their condition and their military service, see for example, S. Garton, The Cost of War, Australians Return, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 86-87.
36 Follers, Athol Herman, Repatriation Department File, C15943 pt. 1, document 9 February 1936. In this letter Follers describes the object lodged near his spine as a ‘percussion shell’.
37 Follers, Athol Herman, Repatriation Department File, C15943 pt. 1, document 9 February 1936.
38 Follers, Athol Herman, Repatriation Department File, C15943 pt. 2.
returned to Australia. By early 1918 authorities in Australia and in the AIF, particularly the medical services, were in a dispute that had ‘billed out into a major issue’ about the quality of recruits being sent overseas. On the one hand, the AIF wanted fit men for what was essentially a front line force; on the other, the prime minister was angry at the number of men being rejected. For local recruiters domestic pressure was the more immediate. They took men like Follers and the AIF sent them home again.

Now with a chronic chest condition, at the end of 1918 Follers wrote; ‘I am still under medical attention and am still suffering with my lungs and heart. I have been trying to work, 3 months with the Lands Dept. I had to give up on account of sickness each time. I have not been employed in the past 5 weeks but am looking for work.’ Unfit for either work or military service, Follers ended 1918 without a job. With his wounded back, Follers had been an unlikely recruit in 1916, but other local men, perhaps even less suited to soldiering than Follers was at his second enlistment, also succeeded in getting into uniform.

Charles Boswell, a volunteer for the Mayor’s Unit, who also arrived in England in July 1917, was another Wagga recruit whose appearance in Europe must have vexed medical officers. On the voyage over he was hospitalised with joint pain, and in November he developed myalgia. With the pressure to find volunteers, and during the comparative rush when Hugh Oates announced his intention to deliver a body of local men for service overseas, Boswell, a 37 year old with heart trouble and rheumatism, got into the AIF on his fourth attempt, although he did not admit this until he was on the way home. Both before he enlisted, and once he was finally in the AIF, Boswell was afflicted by myalgia, weight loss, insomnia, tachycardia and bouts of unconsciousness. In mid-January 1918 a doctor described him as being in generally poor condition. He

40 A. G. Butler, 1940, pp. 474 and 843.
41 A. G. Butler, 1940, p. 844.
42 Follers, Athol, Repatriation Department Files M15943, C15943 and R15943, documents 13 April 1916, 24 May 1916, 15 June 1916, 1 November 1916, 15 September 1917 and 12 December 1918. See also Follers, Athol, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service No. 327/33794.
44 Boswell, Charles Edwin Repatriation Department File, C10915 pt. 1, and Boswell, Charles Edwin, Service Record NAA B2455, Service no. 4988.
was declared permanently unfit, but not because of ‘war service, climate or ordinary military service’.\(^{45}\)

Back in Australia, a doctor certified that Boswell was ‘suffering from dilated heart and unable to do any laborious work.’ Apart from having had two week’s ‘pruning about the town’ since his discharge, he ended the war unemployed. With four children to support and one son at the front, Boswell might have considered himself fortunate that his brief sojourn in England garnered him a 25 per cent pension for conditions aggravated by but not the result of his service in the AIF.\(^{46}\)

In April 1917, after Gallipoli and seven months on the Western Front, Alfred Foot came down with ‘trench fever’ and was evacuated to England.\(^{47}\) He returned to Australia, was discharged with a pension in October, and picked up casual work as a carpenter, but remained in poor health.\(^{48}\) In 1918 he reported having got worse since coming home.\(^{49}\) A doctor agreed, writing that at the age of twenty Foot continued to suffer the ‘remote effects of Trench Fever’ resulting from the ‘strain of active service two and a half years’, and was ‘not equal to sustained hard work.’\(^{50}\) Less than a fortnight before the end of the war, Foot complained; ‘My condition does not seem to have improved at all … Any change of weather affected me particularly. I am still engaged as a carpenter but lose a good deal of time.’\(^{51}\)

When Boswell was diagnosed with myalgia, insomnia, heart trouble and a host of other conditions, people would have understood what those illnesses were, how they affected sufferers, and that one needn’t have enlisted to contract them. Obviously unfit men like Hussey or Bruce presented relatively unambiguous cases. On the other hand, men with wartime illnesses, like Foot’s trench fever that would have been unfamiliar to civilians in Wagga, were less easily understood. Local authorities were sometimes sceptical of returned men during the war. Asked to base their inquiries on the assessment of

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\(^{45}\) Boswell, Charles Edwin Repatriation Department File, C10915 pt. 1.

\(^{46}\) Boswell, Charles Edwin Repatriation Department File, C10915 pt. 1.

\(^{47}\) The Official History described trench fever as an illness of the "environment", nutrition and fatigue, caused more specifically by lice. Trench fever was not fatal and presented with vague pains and aches, an exasperating absence of objective evidence of "disease". See A. G. Butler, 1940, pp. 499 and 580.

\(^{48}\) Foot, Alfred, Repatriation Department File M6743.

\(^{49}\) Foot, Alfred, Repatriation Department File M6743, document 26 April 1918.

\(^{50}\) Foot, Alfred, Repatriation Department File M6743, document 26 April 1918.

\(^{51}\) Foot, Alfred, Repatriation Department File M6743, document 1 November 1918.
‘disinterested persons’, sometimes local police were led to conclude that a returned man was not trying hard enough to find a job, or that he simply didn’t want to work.52

Reg Humphries caught pneumonia on the voyage to England: ‘was in bed for two weeks on the boat and two weeks in England.’ In June 1917 he went to France, collapsed on a route march and was taken unconscious to hospital. Humphries returned to his battalion but recurring fevers forced his evacuation to England after ten weeks.53 On 5 February 1918, back in Australia, he was discharged with a pension. When he first got back, the police considered Humphries unfit for work, but he got a job as a farm hand, and later at the Murrumbidgee Milling Company in Wagga. Neither lasted, and his efforts to find work tailed off, even though by then the police believed that his chances of getting a job were ‘all right’. Humphries, said Inspector William Duprez, whose sons, Arthur Duprez MC, Alex and Hamilton, were in the AIF, and whose other son, Offord, had been killed in the Middle East in 1916, could have done ‘light work’ if he had tried.54 Duprez seems to have been persuaded that Humphries wasn’t interested in working.55

The local police were equally blunt about Albert Hurst’s attempts to find a job. In the two years before 1914, Hurst had had rheumatic fever, pneumonia and pleurisy. When he reached Egypt in October 1915 his apparently already fragile health quickly declined. He was ‘never … well and fit for hard work’ after December, and by July 1916 Hurst was in hospital with ‘subacute rheumatism and anaemia.’ Active service, said doctors, aggravated his ‘pre-existing tendency’, while another observed that ‘exposure at Romani … August 1916’ was responsible for his condition.56 He came home to a constant round of short-term jobs interrupted by illness, and complained that he had not had ‘any place to go since my services as a member of the forces ended. I have not earned any money.’57 Hurst suffered ‘malarial attacks’, rheumatism in his right shoulder, hips and knee, and was ‘unable to do any laborious work’. He was still

52 The cases of Reg Humphries and Albert Hurst in the following paragraphs are good examples.
53 Humphries, Reginald Ernest, Repatriation Department, File M33761.
55 On people’s attitudes towards men in receipt of pensions of which they were felt to be unworthy, see S. Garton, 1996, p. 87.
56 Hurst, Albert, Repatriation Department Files M85605, document 21 August 1916 and C85605, part 1, document 17 February 1919.
unemployed in January 1917. On 3 October Wagga Police Constable Thomas Ledger reported that Hurst ‘has made no effort to obtain employment and has illness … He has every opportunity to obtain work’. Ledger conceded that Hurst had suffered from ‘his nerves’, but believed he was now ‘in the best of health.’ A Commonwealth Medical Officer disagreed, declaring him unfit for work for six months. Two weeks later another doctor endorsed Ledger’s view, writing that Hurst ‘Is not at present in employment. He was offered work as a Saddler … but up to date has not done any work. He has refused … on ground that he does not desire work.’

Hurst’s is a confusing case, with implications that he simply didn’t want to work standing alongside evidence that he was genuinely ill and unable to hold down a job. It is impossible now to know where the truth lay. Ledger had to test Hurst’s claims and report what his informants told him. Hurst appeared to make an effort, working for a few weeks at Copland & Co’s. in Wagga before moving to Dullah, near Ganmain, where he got a job as a saddler. But in six months he could only manage six weeks at work and he found labouring at harvest time made his right arm swell. Doctors could not agree on how serious his condition was. Direct accusations of malingering are rare in Wagga men’s medical files, but it is clear that the police and at least one medical officer thought Hurst wasn’t really trying to get work.

The First World War gave us the term ‘shell shock’, and some of Wagga’s most tragic cases were men whose wounds were psychological. Sometimes described as ‘nerves’, returned men’s mental condition could present as far more serious than the term implies. At the premiers’ repatriation meeting in December 1916, former Prime Minister Chris Watson described psychological casualties as ‘mostly “shattered men”’.

Not every Wagga man who came home with ‘nerves’ was ‘shattered’, but war-related mental conditions could plague veterans for decades. George Schremmer arrived home

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59 Hurst, Albert, Repatriation Department File C85605 pt. 1, document 3 and 4 April 1917.
60 Hurst, Albert, Repatriation Department File C85605 pt. 1, document 18 April 1917.
61 Hurst, Albert, Repatriation Department File C85605 pt. 1, documents 13 July and 11 November 1917.
62 At least one doctor considered that Charles Boswell was malingering and committed this view to his medical records. Boswell, Charles Edwin, Repatriation Department File, M10915, 1932 report. Boswell is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
at the end of November 1917. He’d been in good health before the war and told a
doctor that he had never suffered ‘from nerves or chest trouble’ before he served in
France.⁶⁴ After he was taken from the battlefield at Messines, his first and only battle
and perhaps the most intensely lived hours of his life, Schremmer had a bad wound to
his hand and the beginnings of a ‘nervous disorder’ that led to his becoming a heavy
drinker and a life-long smoker.⁶⁵ Decades later his wife, Eliza, told Repatriation
Department officials, ‘The experience of Trench Warfare and conditions in those days
… caused his heavy smoking to relax his nervous condition. In defence of his
experience for a period he resorted to lose himself with alcohol’.⁶⁶ Schremmer was able
to find work. His pre-war employer, the Murrumbidgee Milling Company, honoured its
promise to keep his job, but within six months he’d left to work as a labourer.⁶⁷

James Dennis was far more seriously affected. A large, jovial man when he enlisted
aged 30 in October 1916, he was destroyed by the war. His service record suggests that
he was in the 3rd Battalion’s major battles around Ypres, taking part in the hard training
in the lead up to the fighting and in all of the associated operations during the second
half of 1917. The battalion’s battle honours for this period include Menin Road,
Polygon Wood, Broodseinde, Poelcappelle and Passchendaele, a series of actions that
cost the AIF tens of thousands of casualties and the 3rd Battalion hundreds of officers
and men killed or wounded.⁶⁸ In 1918 Dennis told a doctor that he had been ‘all
through the big battles, suffered from bad feet and got something else wrong with him
from the shell shock.’⁶⁹ ‘Something else’ was indeed very wrong. Dennis was
tormented by terrible visions, described at length in his medical records. He told
doctors that he was ‘damned’, and that he heard

God talking and has seen him’, that God was ‘against him and he has been a
wicked man … and he will never die. He hears God talking to him telling him
he is going to get Hell for ever (sic), that he will be the last man on earth and

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⁶⁵ Schremmer, George, Repatriation Department File C8112, document 4 October 1986.
⁶⁸ See for instance E. Wren, 1935, pp. 247ff and ‘Battle Honours’ after p. 331. See also 3rd Battalion War Diaries,
AWM4 Australian Imperial Force Unit War Diaries, 23/20/30 August 1917 – 23/20/33 November 1917.
⁶⁹ Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File H24707, and Dennis James Leslie, Service Record, NAA
B2455, Service no. 6986.
the last man in Hell, that all the rest will be heaven. He says he saw God in
the Convalescent Camp and he thought he told him to go to Hell.\textsuperscript{70}

In a lucid moment, Dennis said that ‘active service and predisposition’ caused his
illness, but such moments were rare. He joked about going off his head and spoke of
‘doing away with himself’.\textsuperscript{71} He had the ‘heavy, silly look and fatuous smile of the
dementia praecox type’, and by April 1918 had become a ‘confirmed masturbator’ who
thought nothing of exposing himself ‘even in the day room’.\textsuperscript{72} He got back to Australia
in September 1918, described by his brother Samuel as a ‘nerve case’, someone whose
condition told those who knew him of a war that could damage men to the depths of
their being.\textsuperscript{73}

People also sometimes saw and read of local soldiers whose unfortunate circumstances
or behaviour played out in public, at the cost of their dignity and sometimes their liberty.
Les Britten, whose chequered service history included several incidents of desertion,
had appeared in the local police’s charge sheets regularly since at least 1914 for
offences ranging from evading railway fares to theft, desertion and drunkenness.\textsuperscript{74} On 19
September 1918 he was found in front of the Pastoral Hotel in Fitzmaurice Street
‘frothing at the mouth’. Constable James Cooper took him to the police station and
found in his ‘purse’ a military discharge certificate and a returned soldiers’ badge. The
\textit{Advertiser} reported that Britten had tried to poison himself but police declared that it
was drink, not a suicide attempt, that caused his collapse. They kept him in the lock up
and eventually released him with a fine.\textsuperscript{75} More such episodes followed for Britten, but
in 1918 his condition was likely associated with his having been a soldier even though
he never got closer to the fighting in Europe than Cape Town. As far as the local press
was concerned he was a ‘discharged soldier’ making it easy for readers to connect his
apparent suicide attempt with his having been in the AIF.

\textsuperscript{70} Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File H24707.
\textsuperscript{71} Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File H24707.
\textsuperscript{72} Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File H24707.
\textsuperscript{73} Dennis James Leslie, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 6986. See also Dennis, James Leslie,
Repatriation Department File M24707, letter 21 February 1933.
\textsuperscript{74} See for example, Wagga Police Charge Books, CSURA SA1519, weeks ending 18 and 28 April 1914, 4 and 18
July 1914, 2 July 1915, 1 December 1917, 28 January 1918, 17 August 1918, and 21 September 1918.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 20 September 1918, and Wagga Wagga Police Charge Book CSURA SA1519/14, week ending
21 September 1918.
In such men Wagga could see that having returned soldiers in the district meant dealing with men in some way disabled. While many found work difficult there were local veterans who refused to accept that their disability made looking for a job seem hopeless. Butler suggested that among the men who ‘suffered great hurt and were subject to terrible disablement’ were some who showed how ‘far it is possible given a “fair go”, to rise above physical handicap’. William Worth, regaining some mobility but still seriously disabled, particularly in his arms, didn’t see his condition as the barrier to working that his doctors believed it to be, and he was looking for work soon after getting back to Wagga. In November he asked his pre-war employer, the Wagga Waterworks for a reference. The Engineer-in-charge described him as being suitable for any position ‘he feels competent to undertake’, despite his disability. Apparently the Waterworks had no such position to offer. By April 1917 Worth felt fit enough to apply for land under the soldier settlement scheme. In this he was unsuccessful, but Worth got his ‘fair go’ and in March 1918 was working as a temporary clerk in the Staff Office for Invalids and Returned Soldiers at Sydney’s Victoria Barracks.

Ron Birrell, whose injuries were less serious, was also determined to find work. In May 1917 the Gallipoli veteran was wounded at Bullecourt. Peppered ‘with shrapnel, suffering injuries to his right shoulder, left hand, left knee and left leg’, he was evacuated to England before being sent back to Australia and discharged from the AIF on 8 December 1917. The next month he was working on Buckanbee Station even though ‘laborious work’ was too much for his wounded shoulder and arm. By August 1918 Birrell was unemployed, not because of his injuries, but because he had gone to Sydney ‘with the intention of taking up land.’ In Butler’s estimation, returned men like Worth and Birrell, in seeking to overcome their disabilities and get work, demonstrated that the ‘the moral is to the physical as three to one.’ Whether they saw
it this way is impossible to know. Their experiences are documented as a series of encounters with bureaucracy that rarely offer explicit insight into what a man may have thought outside of this paradigm, but it seems that Worth in particular was possessed of a positive spirit and a resolve that led him to try for a future not defined entirely by his wartime injuries.

While Birrell was in Sydney trying to get land in August, some were beginning to hope that the war might soon end. That month Robert Wilkinson, who had followed the news closely over the years, wrote of how pleased he was to learn that ‘Allenby’s army seem(s) to have cleared the enemy out of Palestine altogether, and the Allies in France and Flanders seem to be in a fair way to soon clear those countries of Germans’. Wilkinson’s optimism may not have been shared by the AIF in France, where the end seemed as far away as ever. Harry Gissing remembered August on the Western Front as a ‘critical period’. But in September the Advertiser began running editorials and articles on the growing likelihood of peace.

Months before the end of the war began to seem imminent, Charles Hardy, whose son, Charles Junior, had recently been gassed on the Western Front, was keen to get started with the work of repatriation. At the 17 May 1918 Repatriation Committee meeting he demanded to see a repatriation office with the sign up and a returned soldier as paid secretary “quick and lively.” He was certainly aware of Allan Bruce’s plight and recognised the need to offer returned men, particularly those with injuries, more than a lavish welcome home and public praise. But in his haste Hardy overlooked the more pressing need to establish the committee’s full make up and reach.

At the 29 April 1918 meeting, Mayor Collins, Canon Pike and Charles Hardy were scornful of counsellors from Kyeamba and Mitchell shires who failed to either arrange their own meetings or attend Wagga’s. The Advertiser, stating what it called the ‘obvious’, declared that the development of a successful repatriation scheme required

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86 H. Gissing, 2003, 441.
87 See the Daily Advertiser for the period 1 September – 11 November 1918.
88 Daily Advertiser, 18 May 1918.
89 Daily Advertiser, 30 April 1918.
that ‘the most central place in the areas concerned shall be the head-quarters, and in this instance Wagga is undoubtedly such.’

With its head office in Melbourne, the Department of Repatiation had little grasp of the rivalry and parochialism that sometimes pitted Wagga’s war effort against that of neighbouring and sometimes more distant rural centres. A departmental officer assured Frederick Emblen that with ‘Wagga Wagga being such an important town, there is little likelihood of there being any difference of opinion as it is a most suitable place from which to administer both the Shires of Kyeamba and Mitchell as well as the Municipality of Wagga’. Both shires had been administered from Wagga since 1906, and took a less sanguine view. In late May Dooley Mulholland signed a letter to Kyeamba Shire Council demanding cooperation and reminding them of Wagga’s centrality. Wagga, said Mulholland had kept eight vacancies on its committee, ‘in case some worthy representative may have been overlooked.’

Kyeamba relented when one counsellor, Rupert Kiddle, convinced his shire to ‘work in harmony’ with the Wagga body. As long as Kyeamba was ‘properly represented’, the shire council agreed to nominate people to fill its share of places on the Wagga committee and pledged to give ‘all the assistance that it could’.

Just over a month before the war ended, the Repatriation Committee held the sort of ‘public display’ that Collins believed people had long since tired of. Saturday 5 October 1918 was ‘Local Repatriation Day’, a new occasion and a reflection of the extent to which repatriation had surpassed recruitment as a local pre-occupation. The community was once again asked to part with money, this time to support ‘the cause that needs assistance and the good that we can do’ to ‘help the brave boys who fought and are still fighting for us’, and to ‘help the “Anzacs”, “Billjims” and “Diggers” of your own district’.

Reflecting Wagga’s rural character, Repatriation Day included a stock drive. On the days leading up to the festivities, stock, in many cases led by local women, converged on the Wagga sale yards, where more than £2000 was raised on what the Advertiser
called a ‘farmers’ day. Next day, ‘townspeople’ day, crowds competed at games, bought buttons, and spent their money on food and drink until the Committee had raised more than £450.\textsuperscript{97} With its stalls, games, rural displays and appeals for money, Repatriation Day resembled other wartime public occasions with one notable exception. It appears that for the first time since the early part of the war returned men did not feature in any formal capacity, and no-one was engaged in recruiting.

Repatriation Day was Wagga’s last major wartime event. Though no one could know it, it coincided with the AIF’s last battle, at Montbrehain in France. Some arms of the AIF remained in action until the end of the war, but the infantry, by far the force’s largest body, were at the end of their long ordeal. As they began returning to the line after several weeks rest, the soldiers learned that the war was over. Ted Drake, a Wagga high school student when the war began and a private in the 17\textsuperscript{th} Battalion when it ended, recalled the relief but remembered, ‘we were dumbfounded in a way, too … you didn’t expect it to sort of finish like that, we thought we might have to go a lot further. … a lot of them danced for joy – but at the same time, it was hard to realise that it was over’.\textsuperscript{98} Fred Farrall of Ganmain, who never felt he had been ‘cut out’ for soldiering but who marched into Sydney with the Kangaroos, remembered celebrating ‘if it could be called a celebration – in a very quiet way … as far as I was concerned, I didn’t do anything.’\textsuperscript{99}

Harry Gissing was on leave in early November. He arrived in Paris on the 5\textsuperscript{th} and was whisked away from the train by the New Zealander, Ettie Rout, whom he mistakenly called Miss ‘Rent’. Rout delivered her frank advice on avoiding VD to a crowd of soldiers embarking on a few days fun in the French capital. Whether Gissing availed himself of the condoms she proferred he did not say, but he didn’t stay long in Paris. Soon he was on a train, enjoying coastal views along the Cote D’Azure, far from the trials of the Western Front. He was on another train, leaving Monte Carlo after lunch on 11 November, when he saw people ‘beginning to get excited from the news of the signing of the Armistice. Bunting was appearing everywhere and we were greeted on all sides by happy smiles … all along the route we were cheered lustily’. That evening he celebrated in Nice where, ‘The Aussies, being tired of being taken for Yanks, lined

\textsuperscript{97} Daily Advertiser, 7 October 1918.
\textsuperscript{98} Ted Drake, Oral history interview, AWM S00225, 25 April 2002.
\textsuperscript{99} L. Farrall, 1992, pp. 116-117.
up with an Australian flag and paraded the streets.’ Gissing must have had a great night, and woke up the next morning ‘rather seedy’.  

In Wagga a few days before the Armistice the Council considered Charles Hardy’s ‘scheme for illuminating part of Baylis Street on the occasion of the peace celebrations’. People now believed that the end truly was close. On 8 November, Maurice McKeown wrote in stiff, formal tones to a Mr Chenery in Albury, that; ‘News from the front is very satisfactory and it makes us reasonably hopeful that peace will soon follow.’

By 8 November the atmosphere in Wagga ‘was electric with rumours’. Expecting them soon to become fact, the War Service Committee met in the Town Hall to arrange the celebrations. They planned parades, church services and, in keeping with the habit of years, formed a sub-committee to ‘communicate the news per telephone, to country residents.’

While there was general agreement on the nature of the celebrations, there was one point of contention. Which of the town’s two bands, the Brass Band or the City Concert Band, would lead the parade? The discussion quickly descended into acrimony. Dooley Mulholland, referring to the Brass Band, urged that the musicians who ‘had always played at the recruiting rallies since the outbreak of war … have precedence’. When others disagreed just as strongly, the committee held a vote only to have the result come in at an even thirteen for each side. Edward Collins used his casting vote in favour of a ballot between the two bands, ‘the first name out of the hat to take first position’.

On many of the war’s big questions, particularly, recruiting, the form that Anzac Day would take and fund raising, most of Wagga’s religious, political and business leaders had been as one. Only conscription appears to have sparked serious public disagreement. Dissent was rarely mentioned in the local press. Men who refused to enlist and the few recorded instances of people being challenged at recruiting meetings

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101 Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW2608/21, meeting of 7 November 1918.
102 Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to firms and private individuals, 1896-1922 SA473/31/129-172 (31/167). Letter 8 November 1918.
103 Daily Advertiser, 9 November 1918.
104 Daily Advertiser, 9 November 1918. The quote is from Daily Advertiser, 13 November 1918.
hint at a degree of division, as do stories of families with men on active service resenting those who did not, but on the details and the extent of friction between people and groups, the public sources are largely silent. Now, on the eve of peace, as the pressure of four years of war was released, the War Service Committee began to fracture. The matter of the bands had at its heart questions about who had had the strongest association with the AIF, and how those who had been seen as the war effort’s staunchest supporters regarded others whose commitment had been less.

The City Band’s win in the ballot was unpopular with at least half of the Committee.105 A worried deputation visited the Mayor on 11 November, anxious about the ‘divided feeling’. Some local veterans had marched out of Wagga and into Sydney behind the Brass Band with the Kangaroos. Others had stepped forward at recruiting meetings made more lively by the Brass Band’s music. The City Band was not unpopular, but theirs was not the music to which men had marched off to war, it was not the music that greeted them at the station when they returned, and it was not the music heard at the funerals of local men who passed away after they returned from the war. The deputation wanted Collins to use his influence to get the City Band to forgo pride of place. Collins and the Band leader, Ernie Hoemann, spoke in the Repatriation Office. The Mayor, who tried hard to remain neutral, explained the situation but making no appeals himself, agreed to speak to the band that evening. Before he got the chance, news of the Armistice reached Wagga.106

A cablegram from the Reuter’s Agency in Vancouver, Canada, reached the Advertiser’s office at 7:25 that evening and copies of the paper, prepared and ready to be rushed out when the momentous news arrived, were delivered by ‘runners’ to the public. A hooter sounded, alerting the town and bringing people into the streets. The crowd hardly dared believe it after a week of false alarms. The war was over and Wagga was ready to celebrate.107

Not everyone joined in the festivities. The people who had directed much of the district’s war effort, the War Service Committee, hurried to convene a meeting to consider whether or not to hold the official parade immediately or wait until the

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105 Daily Advertiser, 13 November 1918.
106 Daily Advertiser, 13 November 1918.
107 Daily Advertiser, 13 November 1918. On the arrival of the cable in Wagga, see Daily Advertiser, 12 November 1918.
morrow. While some members, desperate to join their neighbours, shuffled in their seats, others paced the floor arguing their case as if it were still within their power to influence the spontaneous gathering outside. In the end the Committee decided to hold the formal parade in the morning and an informal procession right away.  

Outside, the night was illuminated by the word ‘victory’ shining through lamps provided by the Gasworks’ manager. Edward Collins and Hugh Oates climbed onto a car that had been stranded in the midst of the swelling crowd, but couldn’t make themselves heard, until people seized on the word ‘holiday’ and prepared to enjoy the revelry for as long as they could. The two bands were already there. When they began to play, the crowd divided and the musicians led off – in opposite directions. An outpouring of joy and relief continued until people retired exhausted. Thus, said the Advertiser, ‘ended in peaceful tranquility the most wonderful night Wagga has ever experienced’. The question of which band would lead the next day’s formal procession remained unresolved and their parting of company in the streets that evening boded ill for the morrow’s parade. By the end of the next day, the first day of peace, Edward Collins must have wished that the talk of ‘peaceful tranquility’ was true. The one in two chance that put the City Band at the head of the march changed the shape of Wagga’s formal Armistice celebration, turning the longed-for day into a fiasco.

People crowded into the streets again the next morning. Vying for space alongside the line of decorated horse-drawn and motorised vehicles, they squeezed onto the backs of lorries, singing with ‘their flags and bunting set like schooners in full sail.’ Pedestrians milled about, content to just be ‘making a noise’. As the crowd gathered, it seems that no other wartime event could match this one for colour, enthusiasm or sheer excitement. But, said the Advertiser, reflecting on what had seemed inevitable since the previous evening, ‘just on the point of marching time a hitch occurred.’

After the Mayor’s discussion with Homann, the City Band offered to ‘mass’ with the Brass Band, but it came to naught. Then it looked like Dooley Mulholland’s solution – that the Mayor allow the AIF men to march in front of, rather than behind the City Band – might be the answer to the impasse. When it came time for the victory procession to begin, local returned men, the Mayor and the alderman marched off down Baylis Street

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108 Daily Advertiser, 12 November 1918.
109 Daily Advertiser, 12 November 1918.
110 The foregoing is taken from the Daily Advertiser, 12 November 1918.
towards the lagoon, followed by the City Band. The Brass Band stepped away from the crowd, waited for the City Band to cross the bridge where Fitzmaurice Street begins, started playing, and marched in the opposite direction, along Baylis Street towards the railway station, followed by a ‘major proportion of the procession’.

Collins, the aldermen, the ‘AIF men’ and the City Band reached the Australian Hotel before Collins realised that something was wrong. He turned to find the main part of the procession was nowhere to be seen. The small group stood where they were, waiting while the band played the national anthem. When no one appeared, Collins hailed a cab and went to investigate. Finding that the Brass Band had led the main part of the procession the other way, the Mayor went to the Town Hall and waited for them to pass on their way back from the station. He stood in the band’s path on Baylis Street but the drum major ignored his order to stop ‘and practically marched his band over him’. Collins did manage to explain the situation to the rest of the crowd and signalled the end of the proceedings. His disappointment must have been acute as he, the aldermen and members of the public dismantled the unused speaker’s platform. Some of the people who had worked hardest for the war effort and the district’s returned soldiers had seen the parade ruined when they might have felt that they, more than many others, had earned and deserved to enjoy this moment.

After years of local politics and vast experience of committee work, Collins appears to have felt himself bound by procedures and protocol on the one occasion when no one could impose order or control events. Where half the War Service Committee favoured the Brass Band leading the parade, Collins, who must have been well aware that they were more closely associated with the AIF than the City Band, used his casting vote to leave the decision to a ballot. Whether his appeal to the City Band would have persuaded them to yield to the Brass Band we can never know, but it is surprising that he found himself in a position where it was even necessary. Had he accepted that local returned men would have preferred to march behind the Brass Band and voted to ensure this outcome, the celebrations might have gone ahead in a manner equalling the occasion.

With the official part of the program in tatters, people marched along Fitzmaurice Street into Baylis Street, the majority still following the Brass Band. They stopped opposite

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111 Daily Advertiser, 22 November 1918.
the Exchange Hotel near the lagoon, where Canon Pike, followed by a group of returned men, addressed the crowd from the balcony. Ron Birrell went first, then Dooley Mulholland and the current recruiting sergeant, Sergeant Bohm, a friend of Mulholland’s since their days on Gallipoli. People sang the national anthem and the crowd dispersed. But few people went home.

They refused to see the collapse of the formal program as the end of a party that many in the district had waited years for. In the afternoon crowds gathered once again and that evening another procession formed, marching to the station and then back to Hampden Bridge, gathering more people as it went. Finally the march stopped in front of the Town Hall to hear more patriotic speeches. Small gatherings remained in the streets well into the early morning.\(^\text{112}\)

The dispute between the bands on Armistice Day was a dramatic expression of the importance people placed on having an association with the AIF and the war effort. The Brass Band’s aggravation at not having its leading role in wartime occasions recognised with a place at the head of the victory parade sparked the most serious of its disputes with the City Band and prompted lengthy discussion at the 20 November 1918 Council meeting.\(^\text{113}\) Mayor Collins reminded the aldermen that the Council subsidised each band to the tune of £15 per annum, placing them on an equal footing. Collins was right. The Council favoured neither band with a greater share of public funds nor with permission for one to play at more events than the other.\(^\text{114}\) But the public status of the district’s official wartime band was not within the council’s gift. It meant a great deal to the bands, whose ‘bitterness’ towards each other had been evident for years despite the best efforts of the Council to get them to work together. The Brass Band once refused to play at the Court House if the Citizens’ Band were going to be there.\(^\text{115}\)

Collins distanced himself from the fiasco. He said that had been in Melbourne and that the War Service Committee ‘took it on themselves to arrange celebrations in connection with the armistice.’ With several aldermen on that committee, Collins fell in with the arrangement when he returned. Much to his embarrassment some council members

\(^{112}\) All of the foregoing is taken from the Daily Advertiser, 13 November 1918.
\(^{113}\) Daily Advertiser, 19 November 1918.
\(^{114}\) Daily Advertiser, 22 November 1919.
\(^{115}\) Rivalry between the bands pre the war, see for instance, Daily Advertiser, 6 November 1913. An interesting summary of the rivalry appears in, Wagga Express, 12 and 14 December 1918.
were involved in the Brass Band’s move to take over the proceedings. It was ‘an insult to the civic authorities and an insult to the soldiers’, said Collins; ‘on account of a band and its ill-advised supporters the greatest day in the history of the world had been muddled up in such a way as to be a disgrace to Wagga.’ ¹¹⁶

The argument about the bands’ contribution to the war effort swayed between those who felt that the City Band should have withdrawn, and those who wanted the Brass Band punished for flouting the Mayor’s authority. In the end they reached a unanimous agreement that ‘in public functions in the future both bands be on the same level, positions to be drawn for, and the subsidy to be cut out if a band objects to its position.’ ¹¹⁷ Now that the war was over it might have been a relatively easy agreement to make.

Disappointment over the Armistice Day debacle festered for weeks. Bill Bentley, the Brass Band’s drum major, wrote to the Wagga Wagga Express in December 1918. Every day, he said, people asked him to explain the Band’s behaviour on Armistice Day. Bentley reminded readers of the Brass Band attendance at every recruiting committee meeting and function, of their association with the Kangaroos, that ‘a very large number’ of band members enlisted, five of them in the Mayor’s Unit, and that the Band held the appointment of ‘Official Recruiting Band of the War Service Committee’. The Brass Band, he concluded, deserved ‘preferent’ treatment and to underline how unworthy the City Band was, Bentley wrote of the time that they responded to a request for the music to ‘The Dead March in Saul’ for the military funeral of the first returned soldier to pass away in Wagga by sending the comic piece Yip-I-Addle. ‘Needless to say, we felt grieved at such inhuman conduct’, said Bentley. If it were true it was a remarkably insensitive gesture. Bentley concluded by saying that the Mayor should have realised that something was wrong when the returned soldiers refused to march behind the City Band. ¹¹⁸

Collins relations with the district’s returned men over the years to come made it increasingly clear that he did not care for veterans. This incident appears to be either an earlier manifestation of his dislike or part of the reason for it. As the story of Wagga’s

¹¹⁶ Daily Advertiser, 22 November 1918.
¹¹⁷ Daily Advertiser, 22 November 1918.
¹¹⁸ Daily Express, 12 December 1918.
monuments in chapter X will tell, Collins grew willing to make his enmity with local returned soldiers very public. His actions over the bands suggests in him a need to remain in control of events and a perverse desire to work against local returned men once the war ended.

The bands’ dispute eventually faded from the papers and from council discussion, though it is fair to imagine that those associated with the Armistice Day farce remembered it for a long time. Wagga had waited for this moment for more than four years. The war, greeted with a degree of foreboding in the district in 1914, passed with general unity of purpose, but ended with a rift hinting at deeper divisions that had been held in check while hostilities continued.

Now that the fighting was over, the district prepared to welcome more soldiers home. Yet for some families the long hoped for reunion that must now have seemed so certain was not to be. The Spanish influenza pandemic took millions of lives in late 1918 and 1919. At Tootool Henry Taylor and his wife learnt that their son, David, had died of the illness on 25 November 1918. He had been through the war on the Western Front only to die two weeks after the Armistice.\textsuperscript{119} In mid-December Mena Armstrong from Collins Street received word that her son, Colville, who had also survived the Western Front was dangerously ill.\textsuperscript{120} One of Colville’s nurses, Sister Gray, wrote explaining; ‘Everything that is possible is being done for him, but the medical officer is afraid there is very little hope of recovery. It is so sad because he is such a dear boy and so young. This is such a bad form of influenza that a number of the boys are having … How sad for you to be so far away because it takes such a long time for a letter to go.’\textsuperscript{121} On 19 December Gray wrote again. Colville had died and was to be buried the next day.\textsuperscript{122}

Taylor and Armstrong were among more than 200 Australian soldiers who died of influenza in England.\textsuperscript{123} At least one Wagga man also died of the illness in Italy. Robert Picone followed an unusual path to war, joining the Italian forces in 1918. He

\textsuperscript{119} Daily Advertiser, 11 December 1918.
\textsuperscript{120} Daily Advertiser, 18 December 1918.
\textsuperscript{121} Armstrong, Colville Frederick, Private Record, AWM 1DRL/0056, letter 14 December 1918
\textsuperscript{122} Armstrong, Colville Frederick, Private Record, AWM 1DRL/0056, letter 19 December 1918.
died of influenza shortly after the fighting ended. Other Wagga men who caught the disease were more fortunate. Artilleryman Samuel ‘Sam’ Barrow was admitted to the 58th Casualty Clearing Station with influenza on Armistice Day. A week later he was sent to a convalescent depot and returned to his unit in the new year, having made a full recovery. George Dean from Fitzmaurice Street suffered a series of illnesses once he got to France – rheumatism, myalgia, tonsillitis, and was accidentally wounded in the thigh in July 1918. In September he was gassed at Peronne and caught influenza while he was in hospital in England in October 1918. When he boarded a ship for Australia on 25 January 1918, Dean said he felt ‘O. K. except for occasional headache’ and when he reached Australia in late March, was in ‘perfectly good health’. Harry Gissing wrote of having to spray everyone on his transport with a two per cent solution of zinc sulphide for ten minutes, ‘the prevention of influenza being aimed at’, when the ship carrying him home was sitting off Fremantle.

The disease reached Wagga in February 1919, just over a month after the first innoculation depot was established at the Town Hall. Local cabman, Mr O’Moore, received the council’s thanks for taking one of the district’s first patients to hospital and then submitting himself to quarantine. Many soon followed O’Moore’s passenger to the infirmary. In April the New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry sent two military tents to accommodate influenza nurses at Wagga Hospital. The Board of Public Health took over South Wagga Public School and converted into a convalescent hospital. Yellow quarantine flags hung outside houses if any occupants became ill, public assemblies were restricted, primary schools and Sunday schools were closed along with libraries, race courses, theatres and other public entertainments. People were expected to wear masks. The council protested against sending local cadets to the Easter Camp at Liverpool when the risk of infection seemed so obvious.

Hugh Ross, the Experiment Farm’s new manager, wrote assuring families that he had stopped students from visiting town ‘whether for pleasure, business, church or other purposes’, and insisted that new students sign a statutory declaration that they had not come into contact with anyone suffering from the illness over the seven days before

125 Barrow, Samuel, Repatriation Department File, M57224.
126 Dean, George, Repatriation Department File M46872.
127 R. Gissing 2003, p 489.
129 Tents appropriated by the Dept. of Labour and Industry for emergency accommodation at Wagga – influenza, NAA A2487 1919/4575, letters 16 April and 16 May 1919.
130 Wagga Council Minutes, 19 March 1919, CSURA RW2608/22.
their arrival at Bomen. The Farm was affected nonetheless and with several staff members away ill, those who remained found themselves having to work seven day weeks until the epidemic abated.

By June Wagga’s hospitals were treating 95 influenza patients and more than 170 people were in isolation, including a returned soldier and his mother who were detained having evaded the quarantine guard at Albury by crossing the Murray River in a boat and getting on the mail train to Sydney. When the epidemic began to abate in July the district had had 320 cases, one in ten of whom died. Restrictions were lifted in July 1919, to the concern of the Government Medical Officer who had only yielded when the council assured he and the Police Inspector that dancing, which was, said the doctor, ‘a fruitful cause of spreading the disease’ would not be permitted. The council minutes observed that ‘notwithstanding this, dancing was still going on.’

Businessman Fred Sanderson, who owned a pharmacy next to the Australia Hotel, was among those who died from the illness. His death changed Harry Gissing’s life, and through Gissing’s work, Wagga’s future. Back from the war and home in Sydney, Gissing moved to Wagga to help with Sanderson’s business during his illness, fell in love with Ethel Booty, brought the pharmacy from Sanderson’s widow for £4000 – some borrowed from his father and the rest mortgaged against the business – and settled in town.

Gissing arrived in Wagga when returned soldiers were a growing presence in the community. Less than a year before most of the local men who had come back from the war were ill or wounded, regarded with sympathy and not in large enough numbers to be influential. If they sought assistance from the Repatriation Department returned soldiers were subject to regular medical exams, the judgement of local police and perhaps also accusations of malingering. Never more than during the war did they most

131 Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to firms and private individuals, 1896-1922 SA473/31/129-172 (31/167), letters 8 and 11 April 1919.
132 Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government offices, 1921-1922 SA268/7, letter 21 September 1921.
133 The Farmer and Settler, 4 February 1919.
134 Unless otherwise stated the foregoing is from S. Morris, 1999, pp. 134-5.
135 Wagga Council Minutes, 17 July 1919, CSURA RW2608/22.
136 Daily Advertiser, 31 May and 13 September 1919, and S. Morris and H. Fife, 1999, p. 35. Ethel Booty’s engagement to Harry Gissing was announced in the Advertiser on 16 June 1920 and they married at St. John’s Church of England in Wagga on 30 November that year.
closely resemble the damaged men of historical literature, but then and later they counted among their number those who tried hard to get and keep work and who sought a role in the community beyond that which defined them as veterans.

After the war local returned men played an important role in the district’s civic affairs. Some did devote themselves mainly to veterans’ causes, but others, including Harry Gissing, were involved in many facets of Wagga’s business, political and social life. As the war receded into the past, returned men were to be found in every strata of society. Once the elation of having the soldiers home faded, former soldiers had to face a future that many had expected would be denied them. How they did so depended on their physical and mental health, on the place they had held in the community before they enlisted, on their own industry, and sometimes on fortune.
IX. ‘The old grooves’: warm welcomes, war-damaged veterans and a ‘mob of outlaws’

In December 1918, Hugh Oates, who had tried to get overseas with the AIF, told a reception that with ‘the boys … coming back, Wagga was beginning to look like Wagga’. But the district could never go back to 1914. A month after the Armistice, peacetime Wagga was not yet very different from the Wagga of the Great War. The AIF was still at the centre of the district’s civic life as the soldiers, now arriving in greater numbers, received a series of public and private welcomes.

Garton observed that Australia’s most enthusiastic receptions took place late in 1918 ‘when the exaltation of victory was fresh.’ In Wagga, where the majority of soldiers returned in 1919, the celebrations continued to attract large crowds until the end of the year. Ted Drake, who was guest of honour at a ‘large party’ at St John’s Hall in May, remembered that ‘when we first came back, the people’s attitude was A1. You know they did anything they could. We returned soldiers, we’d fought for our country …’. If the Reception Committee knew of their arrival, returned men were met at the station, often by a crowd of well-wishers, committee people, a band and local dignitaries. From there they might have been driven home to a house decorated by Charles Hardy’s staff.

In mid January 1919 Wagga held a ‘continental’ for returned soldiers in the colourfully decorated Town Hall Gardens. More than 1500 people passed by the Kangaroos’ flag hung on the gate and under the ‘Welcome Home’ sign strung overhead. Over the next few hours the Red Cross Committee handed out ice creams, cool drinks and food, the Brass Band played and Edward Collins praised the men now back from the war. Ten returned soldiers, including Dooley Mulholland, mounted the platform to prolonged cheering and rounds of song, until a rousing rendition of the national anthem brought proceedings to a close.

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1 Daily Advertiser, 20 December 1918.
2 S. Garton, 1996, p. 15.
4 On returned men being driven home, see S. Morris and H. Fife, 2006, p. 120.
5 Daily Advertiser, 15 January 1919.
The Kangaroos’ flag hung once again at the entrance to the Town Hall Gardens with other flags on display through the grounds two months later when Wagga put on another public reception. ‘There must have been over 2000 persons present’, said the *Advertiser*. The Brass Band played and the mayor, Joseph Pike, now Archdeacon Pike, and other public figures gave speeches. Some of Wagga’s returned men stood in the rotunda before an admiring public, while others mingled with the crowd.\(^6\)

Local organisations, religious and secular, held their own functions. St John’s welcomed home more than 100 members of the congregation at a celebration and honour roll unveiling in July 1919, the mood tempered by the crosses etched against seventeen names on the Church’s roll.\(^7\) The Methodists held their welcome at Wagga Methodist Hall on 25 July, a musical and social evening featuring fifteen returned men.\(^8\) The Church of Christ welcomed four returned soldiers home at the Empire Hall on 24 September.\(^9\) A few weeks later the Hall hosted another welcome home, this one for ‘about 20’ veterans, members of the International Order of Oddfellows.\(^10\)

Returned soldiers were feted in the district’s halls, parks, clubs and private functions, there was food and drink and dancing, or outdoor games, at one event after another. Every community, Lake Albert, The Rock, Ladysmith, Uranquinty, held welcomes public and private for their soldiers, often more than once as new men arrived. North Wagga welcomed eight soldiers home on 5 September.\(^11\) At The Gap in September 1919 a crowd of 300 people welcomed ‘about 20’ returned soldiers and AIF nurse Sarah Proctor, each of whom received an inscribed medal cast in gold.\(^12\) People came to Wagga from around New South Wales and farther afield to see friends and family back from the war. Dan Byrnes had relatives come to Wagga from ‘different parts of this and other states’ to welcome him back.\(^13\)

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\(^6\) *Daily Advertiser*, 19 March 1919.

\(^7\) *Daily Advertiser*, 17 July 1919.

\(^8\) *Daily Advertiser*, 26 July 1919.

\(^9\) *Daily Advertiser*, 25 September 1919.

\(^10\) *Daily Advertiser*, 2 October 1919.


\(^12\) *Daily Advertiser*, 11 September 1919. Sister Proctor’s name is rendered as ‘Proctor’ on her service record, NAA B2455, but is spelt ‘Proctar’ in the Wagga press. Proctor was from Victoria and appears to have lived in Sydney after the war. The nature of her connection with Wagga is unclear even though her name is inscribed on the Memorial Arch. She was obviously a welcome guest at welcome home functions. It is possible that she was nursing a returned soldier in the district at the time.

\(^13\) Byrnes, Daniel Terrance, Repatriation Department File M39058, letter 22 February 1919.
Families were anxious to find out when their soldier might be coming home, and local men, as they had done since the beginning of the war, passed on news in their letters. Hilary Coveny wrote to thank Mrs Baker for a Comforts Fund parcel, mentioning that he’d seen her nephew George recently, who ‘I daresay … is on his way home.’ George was with Jack Redhead and ‘other Wagga boys’. Shortly afterwards Coveny met Herb Henningham in London along with Bob Norman, another local man. ‘I often meet Wagga lads over this way’, he wrote.14 Local newspapers too carried news of soldiers returning to Wagga. Through 1919 the personal columns in Wagga’s papers regularly carried news on local men who were either embarking for home from British ports, arriving in Sydney or Melbourne, or recently returned to Wagga.15 Robert Wilkinson wrote a heartfelt letter to his son John ‘to bid you a most hearty welcome home. I don’t attempt to tell you how very glad and thankful we are to have you back again, for I could not if I tried’.16

Gallipoli veterans Reg Cox and Wallace Irvine came home soon after the end of the war to exactly the kind of welcome described above. They were met at the station and driven to houses bedecked with flags and foliage, and to families mourning the loss of other sons in the war.17 How could any parents truly celebrate the return of one son when another would never be coming home? The Bruce family in Morgan Street knew how it felt, perhaps even more strongly for their one surviving son having lost his leg and several fingers. A photograph of Allan surrounded by family and friends at his home on the day he returned to Wagga shows him leaning on crutches, the play of light and shadow obscuring the space where his missing leg should be. It is a joyless scene. Every adult’s face bears testimony to the ordeal through which they have lived since the heady days of 1914 when Jack Bruce, now more than a year dead, sailed for German New Guinea with the AN&MEF. It is hard to imagine Jane Bruce cheering passing troops ‘with the light of victory shining in her eyes’, as one magazine suggested of bereaved mothers in 1919.18

After months of welcome home functions, Edward Collins apparently without asking local returned men what they thought, still felt that not enough was being done for them.

14 Daily Advertiser, 7 May 1919.
15 Both the Wagga Express and the Advertiser carried news of local returned men as their arrival home drew near.
17 For Cox and Irvine’s welcome see Daily Advertiser, 11 and 12 December 1918.
18 The Soldier, vol. 4 no. 166, 29 August 1919, p. 4.
He was concerned at ‘the lack of interest … in the movement to provide some suitable entertainment for returned soldiers, to show an appreciation of their brave sacrifices during the war.’ In September 1919 he convened a Town Hall meeting. Collins wanted to hold an event for the entire district, one that ‘is always to remain a red-letter day in the minds of the community’. Edward Crouch recalled that when the welcome committee was originally formed, the Town Hall ‘was not large enough’ to hold the meeting. Now, at the end of 1919 far fewer people were willing to organise public functions for returned soldiers.

Lamenting people’s waning interest, the Advertiser, with a hint of nostalgia for the war years, reminded its readers of a time when the thought of soldiers on overseas service ‘gave a zest to the wartime functions, and the presence of returned men was a principal feature of armistice and peace rejoicings.’ If the public were losing interest, so too were the soldiers. The paper acknowledged how hard it had become to generate ‘sufficient enthusiasms’ among returned men who were ‘diffident’ about ‘wanting anything that was for their benefit’. Local veterans were mostly men of modest background – labourers, farm workers or tradesmen – unaccustomed to and not necessarily wanting the kind of public attention that they received in the months after the war. Private McClellan of The Rock joked at his reception that ‘it was easier to “go over the top” any day than make a speech.’ Many other veterans, carrying memories of friends who had died, of the awful brutality they had seen, of killing and fear weren’t always inclined to celebrate their own return.

Writing as one of the ‘ones who came back’ and reflecting on absent comrades, Fred Farrall said that there ‘is no compensation for the loss of such fine men, no replacement for such steadfast mates.’ ‘Jack’ explained to Jo Cox, ‘the war has affected us all’. The loss of close friends left him ‘feeling that wretched that I could almost kill myself’. It was, he said, ‘all for nothing … we’ll be a deuce of a lot worse off than when we started’. Lavish welcomes might have seemed an indulgence when such depths of emotion and uncertainty remained in the hearts of returned men.

19 Daily Advertiser, 25 September 1919.
20 Daily Advertiser, 27 September 1919.
21 Daily Advertiser, 11 December 1919.
22 Daily Advertiser, 27 June 1919.
24 ‘Jack’, letter to Jo Cox 17 April 1918, CSURA RW2208/11.
Mayor Collins’ ‘red-letter’ carnival went ahead on 10 and 11 December 1919. By 9:00pm on the first night 5,000 people had crowded into the Union Theatre grounds. Everything was free for returned soldiers, ‘a large number’ of whom were in attendance. Both bands played in Wagga’s main streets, but to the Brass Band went the honour of playing inside the grounds while the City Band remained outside. Roles were reversed the following night, but the Brass Band’s pre-eminence was clear.

Two of the most popular stalls were run by Madames Zanoui, a ‘gypsy’, and Rosette, a palmist. At a time when spiritualism and a desire to find comfort in communicating with the dead were a popular response to the war, people queued all evening to see them. There were films, and speeches by Edward Collins, Jack Ryan – the ‘brave and fearless soldier’ who had marched out of Wagga with the Kangaroos and returned with the Victoria Cross – and Thomas Blamey, who reminded people that the ‘illuminated and gay’ grounds outside Wagga’s Union Theatre were a stark contrast to the ‘devastated fields of Belgium and France!’ The Mayor gave Jack Ryan a wallet of money collected by Charles Hardy, to add to the cash he had been given at welcomes at Blowering and Tumut.

The carnival’s first evening was a high point in Wagga’s long series of welcome home functions. By the second night waning enthusiasm on the part of returned men and the rest of the community saw far fewer people attend and takings were down by half. Functions for returned soldiers tailed off after the carnival.

While the community welcomed its soldiers, and at a time when regard for returned men was at its height, there were people in Wagga who sought to take advantage. After the war the district’s itinerant population included returned soldiers looking for work. Locals neither knew or recognised them, making it relatively simple for imposters to trade on peoples’ respect and sympathy for war veterans.

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27 Daily Advertiser, 11, 12 and 13 December 1919.
Charles McMullen’s service took him no closer to the front than Egypt and lasted just a few months. He arrived in Wagga before Armistice Day, took a room in the All Nations Hotel in Baylis Street, and wore the uniform of a 3rd Divisional Artillery sergeant with the Gallipoli veterans’ Anzac ‘A’ on his colour patch. His left sleeve was empty and he wore a conspicuous bandage around his right thigh. He spoke of losing an arm and suffering severe shrapnel injuries at Passchendaele, telling people that he was on furlough awaiting a ‘serious and painful’ operation. McMullen introduced himself all over the district, befriending returned soldiers and being given money and clothing. The All Nations’ owners gave him free room and board and their daughter, a waitress, cut up his food. On 13 November he spoke before a large crowd at an Armistice Day celebration.

Shortly afterwards Hugh Oates heard McMullen asking people for money in Gurwood Street. Sergeant Fred Bohm, the district’s recruiting officer, brushed up against his empty sleeve and felt a well-concealed arm. McMullen turned out to be in good health, limbs intact and without any hint of shrapnel injuries. Only the leather thigh strapping was real. He had worn it since falling from a horse near Crookwell. The police charge sheet describes him as a ‘rogue and a vagabond.’ McMullen went from his comfortable circumstances in the All Nations Hotel to a lock up so unpleasant that its condition had been raised by the local council earlier in the year. He was sentenced to six months in prison.

Dooley Mulholland said that McMullen had ‘good information … he was well pruned for the adventure he undertook’. McMullen, who was more experienced than Mulholland might have realised, had been arrested in Narrabri during the war for ‘forgery and uttering’ and was described in one newspaper as a ‘military deserter’. He made a decent sum of money playing violin and posing as a blind Anzac named Alexander Mack in Junee and Albury. After he was arrested in Albury for illegally wearing a military uniform, the prosecutor, Warrant Officer O’Donnell, sought a heavy penalty and McMullen was given another six months in Albury Gaol. Cases like

28 Wagga Police Charge Book, weeks ending 23 and 30 November 1918, SA1519/14, and Daily Advertiser, 25 and 30 November 1918.
McMullen/Mack’s were, said O’Donnell, ‘of frequent occurrence, and were very difficult to deal with in country districts.’

Distance and a large itinerant rural workforce ensured that men claiming to veterans were unlikely to be recognized, but Mulholland was already wary. In February 1918 he had suggested that the Riverina Returned Soldiers Association (RRSA), of which he was a founding member could help spot imposters, but as he later said, men like McMullen who had polished their story were not always easy to recognise as fakes.

The magistrate at McMullen’s trial in Wagga warned against accepting returned soldiers without ‘any kind of credentials’. His experience in the district taught him to take care in whether ‘or not a man was genuine in the story which he told’. The fledgling local branch of the Returned Soldiers & Sailors Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) addressed the issue in late 1919, when Frederick Middlemiss, a local returned soldier, spoke about ‘bogus peddlars’ posing as returned men. He suggested when people were approached they should demand the Wagga RSSILA certificate authorising them to ‘peddle their wares’. There were far fewer ‘bogus peddlars’ in Wagga after that, said the Advertiser, but they did appear in the district from time to time.

McMullen was in town when returned men’s stocks were at their highest and just as the twelve month-long round of welcomes was beginning. Six months after it ended John Owen was arrested for drunkenness on Fitzmaurice Street in May 1920. He swore so loudly in the lock up that passers by in Fitzmaurice Street, on the far side of the lagoon, could hear him. Owen carried a letter saying he was a returned soldier and told people he’d been shot in the head on Gallipoli. The police soon discovered that he had never been in the AIF and had been convicted of wearing military decorations to which he was not entitled. Like McMullen, he was declared a ‘rogue and a vagabond’.

While con men traded on the AIF’s standing, genuine returned soldiers had been negotiating their way back into civilian life in Wagga since 1915. More than a year before the war ended, a delagate to a conference on soldier settlement at the Wagga

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30 Barrier Miner (Broken Hill), 3 April 1920. On the forging and uttering charge, see The North Western Advocate and the Emu Bay Times, 6 December 1918.
31 All the above is from Daily Advertiser, 5 February 1918.
32 Daily Advertiser, 30 November 1918 and Wagga Police Charge Book, weeks ending 23 and 30 November 1918, SA1519/14.
33 Daily Advertiser, 25 November 1919. See also The Soldier, vol.4 no. 181, 12 December 1919, p. 10.
34 Daily Advertiser, 24 May 1920.
Town Hall warned people not to expect too much of returned men. The war, he said, would change them and they wouldn’t be ‘able to get into the old grooves under three years.’ For many local men it would take far longer. Since before the Armistice there had been in the ranks of local war veterans men who were not, to use the Advertiser’s phrase, in ‘full vigor’. Trying to find their place in the community after the extraordinary times through which they had lived, some of Wagga’s returned soldiers needed time to come to terms with the experience, and also perhaps with their own survival. Some never rediscovered ‘the old grooves’.

At the RSSILA’s September 1920 meeting, Frederick Middlemiss moved that the League’s representatives on the local Repatriation Committee raise the matter of assisting needy local returned men and their dependants. Dan Byrnes, who, as Committee Secretary, was already well acquainted with the needs of Wagga’s returned men, seconded the motion, observing that ‘there were many cases of hardship where people were battling against fearful odds.’ Byrnes was right. There were many returned men in Wagga who suffered varying degrees of mental or physical ill health. The toll on these men and their families was measured in poverty, drinking, arrests, and family breakdown.

In the Hilda Freeman papers is an undated, unpublished and uncredited short story, Brunskill. Brunskill was a ‘weary war veteran’ who sought ‘peace and relaxation’ to ease his ‘shattered nerves’. His mate Jack also came back from the war a ‘nervous wreck’ spending most of his time in doctor’s surgeries or Randwick Hospital. Mary, Jack’s fiancee and once the object of Brunskill’s affections, is now ‘a tired woman’ living a life of ‘emotional starvation’ who rather than marrying Jack ‘mothers’ him. Jack has long forgotten that they were engaged anyway. The story ends abruptly as he tries to strangle Brunskill, believing that radio waves are compelling him to assault his friend. Both returned men in the story bear the psychological effects of their service; one is prone to violence. Mary, who saw them off to the war, is a careworn figure who seems destined for a lonely, unhappy life. Such people were perhaps a more interesting subject for an author than well-adjusted veterans.

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35 Daily Advertiser, 28 May 1917.
36 Daily Advertiser, 6 September 1920.
37 Hilda Freeman papers, CSURA RW1890/1. Freeman’s papers cover the period 1914-1937. Brunskill, set in the post-war years, could have been written in any year from the war’s latter years until 1937.
When George Johnston published *My Brother Jack* in 1964, returned soldiers were a largely unstudied group. His powerful opening chapter, describing a house full of wounded and maimed returned men, and the effects of the war on his home and family, anticipated by many decades the scholarship that has brought these subjects into focus. Since the mid to late 1990s, the war damaged veteran has become an increasingly common figure in Australia’s historical literature. Books like Larsson’s *Shattered Anzacs*, Nelson’s *Homefront Hostilities*, Stanley’s, *Men of Mont St Quentin* and most recently Scates, Wheatley and James *World War One, a History in 100 Stories*, explore this compelling, sometimes pitiful figure. All but Stanley place wounded or traumatised returned men and their families at the centre of post-war Australian life. If, as they suggest, these veterans and their families have often been overlooked by historians, in Wagga during those years they were a visible part of the community in town and in the hinterland. Over the years and decades after the war, many left the district. A few recovered from their ordeal over time, but many lived in the war’s shadow for the rest of their lives.

They were men like Edwin Boswell, the two other members of his family who had been to the war. While there is strong evidence that at least one of the Boswell’s sought to gain whatever advantage he could from his brief time in the AIF, each of the others suffered some kind of physical or mental wounds as a result of their war service. If they were married and had families, their wives and children shared their trauma, if they were single, their parents or siblings often bore a similar burden.

In 1918 eighteen-year-old Edwin Boswell was on a burial party, taking the personal effects from the bodies of men killed by gas. The next day his temperature soared and he spent the next three months in hospital. He came home too unfit to farm his own land, working instead on his returned soldier father Charles’s block. Boswell remained ill after the war, but he never appealed to the ‘medical board’. He was, he said, ‘too sick to do so and could not stand the “smog” in Sydney’. Even so, in 1921 he began what became a series of regular hospital visits to the city. At home he managed to do

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only light work, which, he said many decades later, ‘I am sorry for now.’ Boswell remembered always having been able to make a living, modest though it may have been. But poor health, exacerbated by alcoholism, plagued him into old age. In 1976, almost 60 years after his discharge from the AIF, Boswell’s daughter described him as still suffering from ‘after war’. His wife wrote that she was ‘frightened’, as he sometimes flew into uncontrollable violent alcoholic rages.

Edwin’s cousin Henry, ‘Harry’, was hospitalised with synovitis in early 1918 and was later gassed. Before he enlisted Harry had worked as a nurseryman with his father, but in second half of 1919 wrote: ‘Since my return from the war I have not been able to do hard work. I have not got a permanent position. I have a wife and child to support. I have no means.’ In January 1920, almost a year after his discharge, a doctor examined Boswell, noting his ‘giddiness’, that he was ‘short winded when working and tires quickly, everything he eats gives him pain.’ Over the next few years, as he did some ‘light’ labour on the railway viaduct, his pension went down, first to 25 per cent, which said one doctor, made Boswell look ‘rather depressed’, and in 1925 to fifteen per cent. Harry had been sick for the best part of six years, his employment record was very patchy and he and his wife, Marie, now had two children to support.

The 1920s were a difficult decade for Boswell, but over the years his circumstances improved. He was eventually able to go back to work with his father and ended up running the Riverina Nursery until the late 1960s. Marie died in 1956 but Henry lived in Kincaid Street until his death at the age of 83 in 1975.

The pension must have helped the Boswells in the early post-war years, when he and his family had little else to rely on, but it was never given to him, or any returned man, without thorough and regular medical examinations. Some returned soldiers believed that they did not always get a fair hearing, and Repatriation Department staff were not convinced that some veterans were as poorly as they claimed. Doctors believed that at

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47 See for example, S. Garton, 1996, p. 88.
least several Wagga men were exaggerating their symptoms. They were almost certain that Charles Boswell, Edwin’s father and Henry’s uncle, was one of them.

For a while after the war Boswell worked as a drover and farmed his block at Toole’s Creek, often losing time because of ‘sickness’. By 1926 his wife, Minnie, and his sons, Edwin among them, did most of the work while he was likely to be found in his sick bed, or ‘supervising’ Minnie and the boys. One doctor reported that Boswell smelt of liquor and was

over anxious to represent himself as very ill … a gross exaggerator his symptoms being out of all proportion to signs and in many respects unreasonable … (lying) … (?alcoholic) … Gives an extraordinary exhibition whilst lying on his back as heart was being listened to which he called a giddy turn (?hysterical? Malingering) … Altogether a most unsatisfactory examinee.\textsuperscript{48}

His performances didn’t stop doctors from often describing Charles as ‘well conditioned’ with ‘good colour’. For more than a decade he succeeded in garnering a pension of between 75 and 100 per cent, despite never having served in a theatre of war. In 1932 it was reduced to just fifteen per cent, when doctors decided that his conditions were mostly unrelated to war service.\textsuperscript{49}

The Repatriation Department’s need to establish the bona fides of men who applied for assistance could lead to what Garton described as an ‘adversarial’ relationship between it and veterans.\textsuperscript{50} Ron Birrell, wounded on Gallipoli, missing a finger, the back of his hand ‘smashed’ and having had shrapnel removed from his knees, had little to do with the Department until the 1930s. When he did, he was angry with a decision to cut his pension and combative in his correspondence.

If my wounds are not permanent, I don’t think anyone else in Australia can be wounded. The fact of my having a pension for nine years without an examination and then only because I asked for it shows that I am disabled somehow. When I got my examination I was assessed at 35% disabilities, to-day I am worse than then and they drop me on one man’s

\textsuperscript{48} Boswell, Charles Edwin, Repatriation Department File, M10915, report from 1 November 1928.

\textsuperscript{49} Boswell, Charles Edwin, Repatriation Department File, M10915, document 17 November 1932.

\textsuperscript{50} S. Garton, 1996, p. 86.
say … Is it fair that one man’s decision can over-ride that of the Tribunal composed of 2 doctors, Chairman, etc. 51

John McEachern’s experience was equally confrontational. He was wounded in the leg, thigh, groin and right shoulder in September 1918 and by the end of 1919 was living at Wolseley Park ‘via Wagga’ but closer to Humula and Tumbarumba. His wounds meant that he couldn’t resume his pre-war work as a farmer. 52 In 1920 McEachern’s being asked to attend medical exams in Wagga led to a lengthy battle with the Department. He resented having to buy what were for him expensive rail tickets for the 70 mile trip when Tumbarumba was just nine miles from his home. 53 That October Tumbarumba police, reporting on his circumstances, described McEachern as ‘practically an invalid’, but the Department still wanted him to be examined in Wagga. 54 As Ron Birrell put it more than a decade later; ‘No dinkum digger complains of a fair examination. What the Tumbarumba diggers complain of is the expense the Government went to in sending them all to Wagga, instead of the doctor coming to Tumbarumba.’ 55 McEachern upped the ante in April 1921, claiming he could only get to Wagga by car, which was prohibitively expensive. In December he agreed to go if the Department paid his fares. With the situation unresolved, he moved to Sydney to be an outpatient at Prince of Wales Hospital, but found that his pension didn’t ‘nearly cover expenses, board & etc.’ 56

McEachern stayed in Sydney with his wife and two children. In the early 1930s, doctors, suspecting he was malingering, began questioning his motives and the severity of his condition. One described him as an ‘unsatisfactory patient’ who contradicted himself and was ‘after all he can get from the Department.’ 57 Eight years later, looking back over two decades to the time when he was living at Wolseley Park, another doctor reported that McEachern had got worse, possibly because of the pain he had endured since 1918. He had become an unpleasant character, uninterested in doctor’s questions, ‘grouching’ and evincing ‘a sort of veiled insolence’. 58

52 McEachern, John, Repatriation Department File, C35667, 31 December 1919.
56 McEachern, John, Repatriation Department File, C35667, letters 1 April and 11 July 1922.
57 McEachern, John, Repatriation Department File, C35667, document 24 June 1931.
58 McEachern, John, Repatriation Department File, C35667, document 8 August 1939.
The distance that convinced conmen try their luck in rural districts, took on very
different meaning for genuinely disabled veterans. Other local men, whose medical
conditions were far less open to question than McEachern’s, also had acrimonious
exchanges with the Department over the need to travel, often to Sydney, for medical
appointments. James Corbett, who lost his left leg below the knee in June 1918, came
home to Best Street and then moved into the Australia Hotel. He had little contact with
the Repatriation Department until he was asked to travel to Sydney for medical
appointments. Getting there was difficult for a man with his disability and he missed
several.\(^{59}\) In July 1924, having received a summons to the city but no rail warrant to get
him there, he refused to attend and had his pension cut off. Corbett had had enough.
He reminded the Department that as there was a repatriation doctor in Wagga, ‘why
should I be put to the inconvenience and expense of traveling (sic) to Sydney. And as I
am an amputation case if it would be any information to you to know that another leg
has not grown.’ He told staff that he hadn’t been near the ‘Repatriation more than once
in three years and I was under the impression you were annoyed enough with cases of
starvation and misery without trying to swell the throng.’\(^{60}\) Corbett seems the
embodiment of veterans’ adversarial relationship with the Department, and in that
moment he was, but not afterwards.

When the Deputy Repatriation Commissioner agreed that Corbett could see a
Departmental Medical Officer when he next visited Wagga, he might have decided that
the system was more flexible than he imagined.\(^{61}\) Corbett’s case was persuasive, if
sarcastically put, and over the course of his infrequent dealings with the Department he
had little further reason to complain. In 1932, for instance, his artificial leg needed
repair at the Artificial Limb Factory in Sydney. The spare, said Corbett, ‘was not too
clever in the foot work’ and he wanted the good one back quickly.\(^{62}\) It was fixed and
returned to him within a week. After that his main dealings with the Department
concerned pension increases with the birth of every new child. By 1945 he and his
wife, Eileen, had seven.\(^{63}\)

\(^{59}\) Corbett, James, Repatriation Department File, C44194, letter 23 April 1924.
\(^{60}\) Corbett, James, Repatriation Department File, C44194, letter 26 July 1924.
\(^{61}\) Corbett, James, Repatriation Department File, C44194, letter 8 August 1924.
\(^{62}\) Corbett, James, Repatriation Department File, R44194, see document from 1921-1950.
\(^{63}\) Corbett, James, Repatriation Department File, C44194, letter 27 February 1945.
Victor Castle’s contact with the Department was far more frequent. His limbs were intact, but he bore agonising pain in his hip and back from a 1917 shrapnel wound that remained open, exposing bare bone, for seven months. Back in Wagga he took on labouring jobs but couldn’t work enough to make a living, managing only a few days at a time before having to ‘lay up through physical weakness and exhaustion.’ That was in late 1919 when he was just 21. Over the next few years Castle’s pension fluctuated, from 100 per cent after an operation in March 1920, to half a few months later.

Castle’s spirits may have lifted when he married Alice Atherton in December 1920. But her marriage to Victor cannot have been easy. He was rarely well, plagued by his chronic bronchitis, suffering coughing fits and stomach trouble. Nothing seems to have troubled him more than the pain of his wound, which could sometimes only be eased with painkilling injections. In mid 1927 Dr Weedon described him as being ‘in a highly nervous condition and markedly hysterical.’ In August Alice wrote to the Repatriation Department about her husband’s pension. ‘He is only allowed 7/- a week and he is in the hospital through war wounds. I have four small children and I am unable to work to keep things going and I thought you might allow Mr Castle a bigger pension while he is unable to work.’ At the end of October with his pension set at sixteen and two thirds per cent, Castle wrote, ‘I am a long way from being right … I have a continual pain in my hip.’ When he got a job as lineman in December he lasted just four hours before succumbing to crippling pain. A few months later he was in such agony as to need a straightjacket when doctor’s examined him.

Castle spent the rest of his life visiting doctors, requesting – sometimes begging – for treatment and asking that his pension be increased. Sometimes he couldn’t walk. During the Depression Castle worked on government relief schemes until the pain stopped him as it always did, worsening with every recurrence. The gap in his record for the decade from 1939 to 1949, apart from comments that he missed periods of work through the pain in his hip, suggests that Castle’s condition improved enough for him to keep a job for longer than a few weeks or months. Apparently lacking the skills, education or experience to find a less painful occupation, he seems only to have ever done physical labour and by the 1960s, when Castle was in his 60s, his wound and

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64 Castle, Victor, Repatriation Department File, NM017637-01, document 22 December 1920.
bronchial condition exacerbated the ailments and stiffness of aging. In 1963 he was given a full pension. Castle died in 1967 after a lifetime of pain and illness.\textsuperscript{66}

For families like the Castles and the Corbetts, the Repatriation Department was, to quote Stanley, ‘more than a department; it became a state of mind, and an insistent fact’.\textsuperscript{67} Though unlikely to articulate it in this way, many other Wagga veterans and their families would have recognised the sentiment. They might have spent decades dealing with the Department, mostly, as the Castle’s did, as supplicants subject to the staff’s decisions and judgements. Where recent scholarship has often leaned towards cases that paint the Department as a heartless, unyielding bureaucracy – a conclusion that one might be tempted towards from some of Wagga’s examples – James Corbett’s case shows that this was not always so.

The police reports in the Repatriation Department case files make clear that the state of veterans’ health and whether or not they had been able to find work was known beyond their immediate families. Some returned men or their representatives told staff that people in the district knew of their condition.\textsuperscript{68} Sometimes public knowledge of a man’s condition led him to leave the district. Other returned men stayed in Wagga for several years and sometimes for decades before moving on.

Charles Hussey followed the well travelled path to Sydney during 1920, and got occasional work as a lift-driver. In 1921 the District Court gave him ‘four or five days work a month’. It wasn’t enough so Hussey sought a higher pension, got a fruit barrow and set himself up as a barrowman at Circular Quay where he became a fixture until his health collapsed in the early 1970s. It seems that he never returned to The Rock to live.\textsuperscript{69}

Allan Bruce, one of Wagga’s most seriously wounded soldiers, spent years in Wagga after the war before also leaving the district. His amputation was too high for him to wear an artificial limb, and foot drop in his remaining leg made it impossible for the

\textsuperscript{66} Castle, Victor, Repatriation Department File, NR017637-01. All of the preceding material on Castle is from the Summary of his medical and military files.
\textsuperscript{67} P. Stanley, 2009, p. 221.
\textsuperscript{68} See for example the narrative on James Dennis below.
\textsuperscript{69} Hussey, Charles, Repatriation Department File, C9213.
former carpenter to work. In December 1922 his 100 per cent pension and additional fortnightly payment for the loss of a leg were made permanent. Bruce remained unemployed for the rest of the decade and appears never to have had a regular job. He moved to Sydney in 1931 for reasons never stated in the record but likely to have related to his need for medical care. He lived the rest of his life in the southern part of Sydney, at Bexley, Cronulla and Brighton Le Sands.

Once they went to live elsewhere, whether it was during the war or months or years after it ended, never to return as residents, the district’s returned soldiers stopped being a visible presence in local life. Who in the Wagga of the post-war decades would remember a man like Dennis Kelly who had left the district when he enlisted in 1915, never really to return? On the other hand Allan Bruce, who stayed in town until the early 1930s, must have been a familiar sight in Wagga for more than a decade after returning from the war. His family and their loss were well-known and Allan, negotiating the streets on crutches, one leg of his trousers pinned high and fingers missing from both hands was more conspicuous than many returned men. He was a local embodiment of the war’s cost but must also have eventually faded from most people’s memory once he left. Bruce lived until 1973, Charles Hussey until 1976. Over more than forty years they would have become better known as returned men in Sydney than in the district they left to go to war.

While ill or injured returned soldiers are well represented in the historical record, their wives and children, as both Larsson and Nelson argued, are often far less visible. Here too the Repatriation Department’s case files throw light on an often overlooked area of returned soldiers’ lives. Women like Alice Castle, Leila McEachern, Marie Boswell and her cousin by marriage, Minnie, all of whom married returned soldiers from the district, were condemned to years of poverty and hardship. Their inner

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71 Bruce, Allan, Repatriation Department File, H23313 pt. 1.
72 Material on Bruce’s medical history and his addresses in Sydney is from, Bruce, Allan, Repatriation Department Files. Bruce was the subject of five Repatriation Department files; those on which these paragraphs are based are numbered C23313 and M23313.
74 Lands Department Files also feature material about and by women, usually the wives of soldier settlers but these records have a more singular focus than the Repatriation Department files. See B. Scaife and M. Oppenheimer, 2016, pp. 85-6 and ch. 8.
feelings are unknowable, but the evidence suggests that their circumstances permitted little happiness or pleasure.

By the late 1920s Minnie and Charles Boswell had given up the farm and moved back to Wagga. Charles seems to have contributed little, managing some ‘light gardening’ and about two weeks a year on the turnstiles at the Murrumbidgee Turf Club at £1 a day until June 1928 when the Club closed that particular turnstile and had no other work for him. He depended on Minnie, laying responsibility for the family at her feet, telling the Department that it was ‘impossible for my wife to manage on what we are at present getting’, which at the time was a 75 per cent pension. Minnie had to find more than £1 rent every week as well as money for food and clothes for the children. She had, said Boswell, ‘to go out herself at times dressmaking to get a few extra shillings to try to make things meet a little’. She wrote often to the Repatriation Department pleading for money.

While doctors pondered Charles’ performances in their surgeries, Minnie was genuinely unwell. When her health began to fail in the mid-1930s she worried about how she would feed and clothe her children. In 1935 she had an operation for ovarian cancer, staving off the illness for a few years until her death in January 1940. Unable or unwilling to look after himself, Charles turned to another female relative, moving in with his married daughter. He remarried in 1943, if not for love, then, as he said, ‘so as to have somebody to look after me’. Marion Lugton, his second wife, was a war widow. Her husband James, also a Wagga man, died of wounds in late 1918. Almost as soon as they were married, Boswell wrote to the Repatriation Department seeking a pension for her. Their marriage proved very brief. Marion was killed in an accident at Taylor Square in Sydney in 1946. Charles never really stopped complaining about his health or trying to get money out of the Repatriation Department. By the time he died at the age of 93 in 1974, several generations of the department’s staff had become familiar with the details of his long life, much of which was spent in an effort to attribute his many ailments to a few months in the AIF.

76 Boswell, Charles Edwin, Repatriation Department File C10915 pt. 1, document 'Review of Entitlement'.
77 Boswell, Charles Edwin, Repatriation Department File C10915 pt. 1, letter 1 July 1943.
Where married men relied on their wives, single returned men often turned to female relatives. James Dennis, tormented by visions of God and the threat of Hell after his experiences near Ypres in 1917, seemed to be improving when he first got home, but his recovery was shortlived and he soon grew restless, wandering about aimlessly, too frightened to sleep in his own bed at night. In 1919 his brother Samuel took him to Sydney for medical help. Dennis was sent to Callan Park where he was ‘set upon’ by other inmates, stripped naked and beaten, another shattering experience for an already fragile man. After that, wrote Samuel, ‘it was impossible to get him (James) to go to the Repatriation Department.’

Without a pension, Dennis went home to Wagga and moved in with his mother. Confirming that people in Wagga were aware of Dennis and the state in which he had come back from the war, his brother commented that as ‘everyone knew his history he found it very hard to get work’. After about twelve months James went back to Sydney to live with his sister, Eliza Gray, in Dulwich Hill, where he spent most of his time ‘pottering around the home’. For Eliza and her husband, James would have been a difficult companion. He ‘often mentioned the mental hospital’, she said, and was ‘very difficult to handle … quiet and (did) not take much interest in anything’. James was either ‘very restless’ or ‘did nothing but doze on a bed or couch’. She tried unsuccessfully ‘on numerous occasions’ to get him to reapply for a pension.

Tragedy seemed to stalk Dennis’s family. As a youth James had lost his father and a sister, about a year after the war ended one of his brothers was injured in an accident and died on the way to hospital. A sister was kicked in the hip by a horse and died after a long illness, and a second brother was killed in a work accident. Of the nine children born to Dennis’s parents, only five were alive in 1932. To his surviving siblings, it might have seemed that the war had taken James from them just as surely as accidents had taken four of their brothers and sisters.

79 Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File, M24707, letter 21 February 1933.
80 Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File, M24707.
81 The fact that ‘everyone’ knew of Dennis’s condition reflects the closeness of rural communities and is of a piece with people knowing who in the district had enlisted.
82 Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File, M24707.
83 Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File, M24707, letter 21 February 1933.
84 Dennis, James Leslie, Repatriation Department File, M24707, ‘Summary of Particulars of Application for Assistance’.
The women who looked after and lived with these men knew better than anyone what the war had cost them and their families. They were often condemned to years of caring for an invalid whom they might have once known as a healthy, mentally well man. Other Wagga women experienced different kinds of trauma, or worse, at the hands of returned soldiers. It was ‘reasonable to suppose’, said a Repatriation Department medical officer, ‘that discharged men who have been for any length of time exposed to the strain and stress of battlefield conditions’ might be unbalanced, particularly ‘those who have become neurasthenic resulting from shell shock and severe head injuries’. Drink and ‘allied abuses’, he continued, led some to commit crimes ‘that in normal circumstances would be quite foreign to their temperament and disposition.’

Long before the war ended, mental health experts expected shell shocked men to commit crimes. During the twenties, wrote Tyquin, ‘the courts were no strangers to errant neurotics brought before them on all sorts of charges for anti-social behaviour from obscene language to murder.’ Wagga’s experience mostly bears out Tyquin’s observation, although it would be unfair to characterise all of those who were charged with offences in Wagga of being neurotic. Nor is it possible to attribute all crimes committed by returned men to their war service. Les Britten, who has featured in earlier chapters, was proof that not every veteran who came before the law was there because of the war, and James Dennis is proof that shell-shocked men did not necessarily become criminals.

A telling vignette from Wagga’s 1923 Empire Night Rally nevertheless suggests that just as people might have perceived a significant proportion of returned men to have been physically or mentally damaged by the war, people were also familiar with the idea that war veterans were social misfits. When Harry Gissing was on his long campaign to get a soldiers’ room in Wagga he argued that veterans should have the use of Wagga Town Hall for meetings and socialising. Walter Hardy, Charles Junior’s brother, responded that the Town Hall was for the public. Gissing bristled. ‘I maintain’, he said, ‘that the soldiers are as much the public as any one else’. Then, to a chorus of knowing laughter, a man in the crowd called out, ‘Anyone would think the

Diggers were a mob of outlaws. The comment and the reaction left no doubt that people believed it to contain an element of truth.

The crimes committed by local returned men were so varied as to make it impossible to know which were war related, though one rarely has to delve too deeply to find the war somewhere in the background. Sometimes it was as simple as a couple of returned men going for a drink together, as Valentine Leighton found when he visited Wagga from Victoria during September 1920. He ran into a friend from his battalion and the pair went to a pub. Later, when a policeman refused Leighton’s drunken request for money, the former soldier swore at him and was arrested. Claiming to recall nothing of the incident Leighton said he was from a ‘highly respected’ family and pleaded for lenience. He was fined instead of being given two months’ hard labour. A reunion with his army mate led Leighton to the lock up, a development, he argued, that was out of character.

The war intrudes into Leighton’s story only insofar as his companion was a friend from the AIF. For other returned men, it was more central. It is difficult, for instance, to separate Tasman Rae’s run in with the police from his war service, and it is tempting to imagine that his misdemeanour was meant to provoke a reaction. Rae was outside a Wagga hotel on a February 1920 afternoon when he rolled up his sleeves, revealing on his upper arm a six inch long tattoo of a naked woman. ‘Was it offensive to the public’, asked the magistrate when Rae went before the Police Court. ‘Yes, your Worship’, responded the arresting constable, ‘He would have been severely handled by the crowd if he had not been arrested.’ Rae showed the court his tattoo, prompting the magistrate to remind him that ‘people took exception to such figures in the Domain or in shop windows’. He was discharged with a warning not to show his arm again.

The episode paints Rae, who had been wounded at Bullecourt and was tattooed during his time in the AIF, as a provocateur. It is impossible to know why he got the tattoo. Perhaps he was going along with mates, perhaps having been in battle he had come to

\[87 \text{Daily Express, 25 May 1923.} \\
88 \text{Daily Advertiser, 14 September 1920.} \\
89 \text{Barrier Miner (Broken Hill), 17 February 1920.} \\
90 \text{Rae did not have a tattoo when he enlisted. His service record makes no mention of such an obvious marking. He was arrested shortly before his discharge.} \]
view life as precarious and short and wished to please himself, perhaps it was a touch of individuality in the regimented AIF. If Rae was embittered by the war, the gesture in Wagga that day may have been a deliberate affront. Or he might have had a few drinks and found it amusing to roll up his sleeve higher than normal on a late summer’s afternoon, even though it was only 21˚C that day.91 His great niece called Rae ‘a character’.92 Perhaps he was looking for a reaction. Other Wagga men, including some who were wanted by the police, got less offensive tattoos while they were in the AIF. George Robinson’s, for example, was the evocative word ‘Egypt’ and a wreath of flowers. The details were listed as identifying marks in the New South Wales Police Gazette when Robinson was sought for deserting his wife and infant child in 1920.93

Some returned soldiers who were arrested sought leniency, though not always sympathy, based on their having been soldiers. In mid-January 1924 Bertram ‘Boof’ Williams, who had been a gunner on the Western Front, was at the Royal Hotel with Michael Ryan, his partner on a chaff cutter, and another man named Thomas Heslop. After hours of drinking Williams called Ryan a ‘long-tongue who carried yarns to the boss’, and the argument turned violent.94 Williams hit Heslop over the head with a fence paling, putting him in hospital for almost a month. ‘I was forced to it’, said Williams. ‘If a man of my weight had used his full force in a blow with a paling it would have killed the man. I did not make use of the bravado: “I am used to killing them on the other side.”’95

Witnesses agreed that Heslop provoked Williams. A local linesman said that Ryan told him later that he’d ‘been after Williams and would have murdered him.’ Another witness said Williams appeared to be ‘squibbing’. The defence argued that Williams acted in self-defence and deserved to be acquitted.96 There is no evidence that Williams was normally a violent man or that his war service caused him to become one. He used his having been a soldier in his defence, not to suggest that it drove him to violence, but

92 Rae was known as ‘John’. That he is the same person was confirmed in a personal communication by his great niece, Leanne Diessel, of the Wagga Wagga Family History Society, dated 20 August 2012. Ms Diessel wrote, ‘I have spoken to my dad and he said that Tas Rae had a tattoo of a naked lady on his arm. My dad would have only been 9 when Tas died in 1942 but as Tas was rather a character I think something like a nude lady would stick in the mind of a young boy.’
93 NSW Police Gazette Compendium, 2 June 1920, p. 328.
94 Daily Advertiser, 4 March 1924.
95 Daily Advertiser, 12 March 1924.
96 Daily Advertiser, 12 March 1924.
rather to suggest that, having been to war, he knew how to defend himself against Heslop without killing him.

The Crown Prosecutor at Williams’ trial almost seems to have agreed with him, telling the jury that if ‘one man was being attacked by a greater force than his own the use of dangerous weapons in self defence was scarcely a great offence’.\(^97\) This man also happened to have been one of the AIF’s most distinguished infantry officers and knew very well what it was to confront a ‘greater force’. He was Percy Storkey VC, now working on the New South Wales legal circuit. It took the jury less than an hour to find Williams not guilty.\(^98\) Their decision seems to have been the right one: he was never charged again, worked for the local council until he retired in 1948, and lived with his family until his death in 1959.\(^99\)

Others hoped that just having been in the AIF was sufficient defence. Herbert Denyer, going by the name Nelson McGlynn, was charged with assault in July 1924. He and another man were accused of robbing and assaulting Arthur Hallcroft outside the Bridge Hotel. Denyer denied his part in the afry, telling the court that he was a returned soldier, as if this alone were proof of his good character, while admitting to having been convicted of theft four times in New Zealand. He had also been before the court in Wagga in December 1923 for ‘illegally using a motor vehicle.’\(^100\) His record suggests that returned soldier or not, he was no stranger to criminal behaviour.

John Thomson also tried to use his war service as a defence. In December 1918 he and Thomas Phillips were charged with assaulting Hughie Foot, an indigenous labourer, in the tent he shared with his wife on the river bank. Thomson, said the defence, was an original Anzac with a Military Medal and was thus unlikely to make such a cowardly attack. The magistrate, already recognising that being a returned man was no barrier to this type of crime and sometimes a reason for it, rejected this flimsy argument and reminded Thomson that his being a returned soldier ‘would not assist him on the present charge.’ Thomson’s drunkenness that night, not his war record, was taken into account

\(^97\) Daily Advertiser, 12 March 1924.
\(^98\) Some details on this story are from Daily Advertiser, 19 and 26 February, but the main content is from the court reports in the editions of 4 and 12 March 1924. See also Wagga Wagga Quarter Sessions Minutes, Williams, Bertram James, SAI508 11/3/1924 and Wagga Wagga Police Charge Book SAI519/20, week ending 12 January 1924.
\(^100\) Daily Advertiser, 30 July 1924.
and both he and Phillips were given the choice of paying a £5 fine or spending a month in prison.101

Thomson’s story brings us back to the way women were affected by the behaviour of the district’s returned soldiers. If Foot’s wife wasn’t hurt she was witness to a violent assault at the hands of at least one returned soldier in the place where she and her husband slept. More often though, women living with returned men were in danger of being assaulted by their husband or partner than by drunken strangers. In April 1919 Mary Crawford had her estranged husband, Charles, charged with assault after he’d gone to her house in a drunken rage and beaten her in front of their two screaming children. Later Crawford claimed to have no memory of the alcohol fuelled violence that he periodically inflicted on Mary. Arguing that she had assaulted him, he said ‘I’m an Anzac and supposed to be a hero … it was not quite the thing to be assaulted by a woman.’ A £10 bond and an undertaking to ‘keep the peace’ kept him out of prison.102

Crawford was in trouble again in August. The ‘respondent in a matrimonial suit’ in Wagga, he turned up to the court drunk, was committed for contempt and sentenced to eighteen hours in the cells. He was given a couple of blankets, and used a strip he tore off one to hang himself.103 Crawford survived and spent the rest of the night in the lockup, not the hospital. Joseph Cooper, the constable who found him, asked, ‘what do you mean by trying to hang yourself?’ Crawford said he didn’t know. ‘I would sooner be dead’, he told Cooper. The doctor who examined him told the court Crawford was an alcoholic but quite sane. He was sentenced to three days light labour in the Wagga lockup for his suicide attempt.104 He and Mary remained married, how contentedly we do not know, until he died in 1950.105

Stories like Mary Crawford’s did not often appear in the press, but a doubling in Australia’s divorce rate between 1911 and 1921 and the fact that, for the first time, most petitions were brought by women, suggest that domestic violence was relatively

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101 Daily Advertiser, 17 December 1918.
102 Daily Advertiser, 6 May 1919. Crawford’s service record confirms that he was an Anzac. He took part in the landing, was evacuated in early May, returned late in the campaign and was repatriated home in 1916 with heart trouble. See Crawford, Charles, Service Record, NAA B4255, service no. 492.
103 Daily Advertiser, 19 August 1919.
104 Daily Advertiser, 20 August 1919.
105 Crawford, Charles, Service Record, NAA B4255, service no. 492.
common in returned soldiers’ households. Larsson cautioned against assuming that it was all due to the war, though the inference must have been easy to draw when so many men, as the *Advertiser* put it, had been ‘mora... and then killed himself six weeks after returning from the war. No evidence remains to explain the murder/suicide. Eight years later in May 1927, when Cedric Ryan of the Esplanade murdered his girlfriend Nellie Howard, few doubted the role his war service played in the crime. Various versions of Ryan’s story went around the country. Most mentioned his shell shock, head injuries, or both. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Ryan’s friends thought him ‘always strange in his behaviour since returning from the war’. He turned up at Wagga Post Office, where he worked, after midnight on 7 May 1927 and told friends that his sister-in-law, the wife of a brother killed in the war, had been injured in an accident, adding almost as an afterthought, ‘I also killed a girl tonight; but I suppose I will have to put up with that.’ His mates ignored it. They were used to Ryan’s ‘peculiar moods’. He began drinking and later held up a knife, asking ‘have you ever seen one of these ripped into anybody?’, then slept a little before calling an ambulance. Fred Roffe, Wagga Motor Amulance Brigade Superintendent, took Ryan to the river near the end of Gurwood Street. They stopped under a willow and Ryan pointed, ‘there’s your case’ he said. ‘There’s another man in it. We had several rows about it, we had a row tonight. I lost my block and stabbed her.’ Nineteen-year-old Howard’s body was under Ryan’s overcoat.

At the inquest, fellow veteran Dr Stephen Weedon recalled that after his arrest Ryan ‘did not appear to be in possession of full normal mental faculties … he did not appear to realise the enormity of the act he had committed, and of which he talked quite

107 Larsson wrote on the limitations in the evidence where returned soldiers’ family lives were concerned. She is careful to point out that domestic violence was prevalent in Australia before the war and that returned soldiers had no monopoly on this behaviour. The extent to which it happened in Wagga is undocumented. See M. Larsson, 2009, pp. 15 ff and 138-141. In 1911, to take one example, the *Advertiser* ran at least thirteen stories on Australian women being murdered by men. The ‘morally scorched’ quote is from *Daily Advertiser*, 13 May 1919.
108 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 June 1919.
109 NSW Police Gazette Compendium, 1 June 1927, p. 310.
111 *Tumut and Adelong Times*, 24 May 1927.
112 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 May 1927.
His wartime experiences were central to Ryan’s story: ‘when I stabbed her it sounded just like putting a bayonet in on the other side – I knew what that was like, I had experience. I knew the feel and the sound. I just drove it in and pulled it out quickly.’ But his vivid description of killing did not reflect the true nature of Ryan’s war service. He was never at the front, never heard the sounds of battle. Ryan was repatriated from Egypt with ‘a dilated heart and rheumatism’ shortly after arriving in 1915.

Although people attributed Ryan’s crime to war trauma, it could not have been. To the extent that a reason must be sought, it must be sought elsewhere. Larsson wrote of violence inflicted on women by men like Ryan who never saw active service, observing that the perpetrator could be ‘mentally affected or quite sane’. Nelson explored this question in more depth, concluding that a man’s failure to fight might itself have been a cause of domestic violence. Men who had never seen action, suggested Nelson, took out their feelings of powerlessness or inadequacy against women (like Nellie Howard) when they returned home.

Ryan’s sanity was obviously questionable and the jury took just twenty minutes to find him guilty. He told the judge that he ‘had nothing to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon me’, and the judge pronounced that he be hanged. Ryan, wrote a journalist, ‘left the dock as unmoved as he had entered it, as unmoved as he had appeared throughout the whole trial.’ His first appeal failed, but in August Ryan’s sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He was eventually released, married a woman called Annie and moved to Victoria where he died in 1958. Annie seems to have been unaware of Ryan’s past. In 1959 she wrote to the Repatriation Department citing her husband’s ‘severe shell shock, and the condition of his head’. She knew of his ‘rheumatic heart’ but believed also that he had worked full time until July 1958. She had clearly been lied to about her husband’s war service, made no mention of his having

113 Tumut and Adelong Times, 24 May 1927.
114 Tumut and Adelong Times, 24 May 1927.
115 Ryan, Cedric, Service Record, NAA B2455, Service No. 80, and Ryan, Cedric Victor, Repatriation Department File, VM116929-01.
116 Larsson, 2009, p. 140.
117 E. Nelson, 2014, pp. 103ff. Nelson looked at 52 cases of domestic violence perpetrated by war veterans, of which ten involved men who had never been in battle.
118 Truth, Sydney, 19 June 1927.
119 See for example Cootamundra Herald, 16 August 1927.
been gaoled for murder and, having been just seventeen when he killed Nellie Howard, seemed oblivious to her husband’s once having killed a young woman in Wagga.\textsuperscript{120}

Less dramatic than Howard’s death at the hands of a returned soldier, less likely to make the news, were cases like George Robinson’s, the tattooed returned soldier who deserted his wife and children. Said to be common after the war, Wagga’s record shows wife desertion to have been a relatively rare cause of returned men coming before the law. The ‘Deserting Wives and Families columns of the \textit{NSW Police Gazette},’ wrote Stanley, ‘show returning soldiers becoming wanted men.’ Through 1919, he said, at least one third of warrants taken out by deserted wives concerned returned soldiers.\textsuperscript{121} In Wagga the figure was lower, about one in eight, and this ratio remained similar over the next few years.\textsuperscript{122}

Local women who became entangled in the legal system because of their husband or partner’s war service, were not necessarily the victims of either violence or desertion. Most local returned men who found themselves under warrant or in police custody were there because of crimes they committed outside the home – small comfort perhaps to their wives or partners, many of whom were already carrying much of the responsibility for keeping their households running. Beatrice Finn’s husband Sylvester was a local returned man who had been injured in training, gassed at Messines and wounded at Polygon Wood. He had chest trouble after the war, couldn’t keep a job for very long or get a full pension, and struggled to look after his wife and children, one of whom died at the age of seven. In April 1924 Finn was hospitalised for six days after being ‘pinned beneath a telegraph pole’ he’d been working on.\textsuperscript{123} During the next month he was arrested for being drunk and disorderly in the Strand Theatre and again shortly afterwards for passing a worthless cheque.

Finn went on to assault and steal £5 from Frank Thomas, a much older man, well-known in the community as a bank manager, for his wartime volunteer work and for his

\begin{footnotes}
\item[120] Ryan, Cedric Victor, Repatriation Department File, VM116/929-01.
\item[121] P. Stanley, 2010, p. 231.
\item[122] \textit{NSW Police Gazette Compendium}, 1919, 1920, 1921. Notices of warrants for men who had deserted their wives, or their wives and children, appeared weekly in the \textit{Gazette}. Further material on the subject is likely to be found in the Deserted Wives and Children’s files held by the Wagga Wagga District Court. For reasons of privacy, based on the fact that some of the children may still be alive, I was unable to gain access to these files even if pseudonyms or anonymity were used to conceal an individual’s identity.
\item[123] Finn, Sylvester, Repatriation Department File, C16613, document 5 May 1924.
\end{footnotes}
pro-conscription stance. Then he was caught poisoning opossums, a protected animal, with illegal strychnine and was given a twelve month good behaviour bond. In early 1925 he became ill, ‘vomiting most vile’ said Beatrice, and in such pain as to ‘almost put him in a state of unsound mind.’ When Stephen Weedon examined Finn he was vomiting and nervous, his hands and feet were swollen, he had gastric pain, palpitations and insomnia. All of his teeth had been removed but he had no artificial dentures. He couldn’t chew and was thin and sallow. Even in this dire state, Finn was arrested again for robbery and assault, but got away with paying a £2 fine, which must have hurt his family.

Apparently too ill to continue committing crimes, in October 1925 Finn made a forlorn attempt to get his pension in a lump sum and open a business. Beatrice, who wrote most of the family’s correspondence to the Repatriation Department, pleaded,

What is going to become of us.(sic) Heaven only knows we are head over heels in debt everywhere and he is unable to hold a job. His health is continuously breaking down he has had to fore go (sic) 3 different jobs inside a fortnight only through stomach and nerve trouble … he gets so low in spirits of late … I fear he may do something that would deprive us of a good Husband & father.

Her appeal came to nought but neither did Finn commit suicide. The marriage does not seem to have survived. By 1938 Beatrice was in Granville while Finn lived mostly in Bathurst.

In late 1931 local returned soldier, lawyer and playwright Harold Cunningham told a Wagga Rotary audience that ‘it is in the aftermath of a war that an ex-soldier suffers most.’ As a Gallipoli veteran, he spoke from experience, but might have added that the women with whom returned soldiers lived shared that suffering. Few women went to the war. The wives and other female relatives of men who did were denied the camaraderie of the AIF that was such a comfort to many returned soldiers. When on Armistice Day 1931, Cunningham acknowledged that veterans could ‘never repay the

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125 Finn, Sylvester, Repatriation Department File C16613, document 16 February 1925.
126 Finn, Sylvester, Repatriation Department File C16613, document 17 October 1925.
127 Wagga Police Charge Book, CSURA SA 1519/20, weeks ending 20 June 1925.
128 Finn, Sylvester, Repatriation Department File C16613, document, 16 February 1925.
129 Finn, Sylvester, Repatriation Department File C16613, document, 3 December 1925.
130 Finn, Sylvester, Repatriation Department File C16613, document, 8 December 1925.
131 Finn, Sylvester, Repatriation Department File C16613, documents, 3 June 1938 and 18 May 1940.
women of Australia for what they have done and are still doing’, his words carried far
deeper meaning than he might have realised.133

For those women whose lives were ruined by domestic violence or who lived with
poverty and anxiety as a result of a man’s service in the AIF, the war must have cast a
long shadow. By the nature of their situations much of what they lived through never
reached the public record. Wagga’s example shows us some of the ways in which the
women who lived with the district’s returned soldiers gave of themselves to keep
families intact, fed and clothed, and of how leaving the war behind proved impossible.

Wagga’s veterans went from being celebrated figures upon their return from the war to
sometimes becoming the objects of pity, fear and anxiety. This chapter offers examples
of local returned men who fell on hard times, but also of men who tried hard to find and
keep work, often carrying on through severe pain or ill health. The idea that returned
men were prone to crime was abroad in Wagga after the war, but neither those who
found themselves under arrest or who lived diminished lives as a result of physical or
mental wounds represented the entirety of Wagga’s veteran community. Bleak though
local returned soldiers’ tales often were, Wagga was also home to veterans who devoted
themselves to remembering and commemorating the district’s contribution, and to
keeping the comradeship that had sustained them in the AIF alive.

133 Daily Advertiser, 11 November 1931.
X. ‘Reviving the old comradeship’: returned soldiers’ associations and commemoration in Wagga

After returning from the war and as they began the sometimes difficult transition from soldier to civilian, many returned soldiers, to quote Garton, hungered for the old ‘trench mateship’.1 Australia’s first returned soldiers association was formed in Western Australia in August 1915 by 11th Battalion men.2 Wagga did not follow until the end of 1917 when Sergeant William Melville visited to canvas interest in a local branch of the New South Wales Returned Soldiers’ Association.3 He found an enthusiastic advocate in Dooley Mulholland who convened a meeting in the Baylis Street Recruiting Office on 3 December. Major Heath was elected patron and the new association pledged to be ‘non-denominational, non-political’ and open only to ‘bona fide’ returned men. Then began discussion of a subject that not only brought later incarnations of Wagga’s returned soldiers’ association directly into local politics, but which would endure unresolved until the end of the following decade. The returned men at the meeting wanted ‘to find a home’ where they could relax and enjoy a few simple amenities like a ‘billiard table and equipment, books, magazines, periodicals and other reading matter’.4

Mulholland and the meeting’s chairman, former AIF sergeant J. B. Stephenson agreed that the Wagga branch should consider affiliating with the Sydney Returned Soldiers’ Association. They got a copy of the Sydney body’s constitution, but a week later the newly formed committee filed back into the Recruiting Office where they agreed to form an independent Riverina Returned Soldiers’ Association (RRSA) taking in ‘all the surrounding districts’. They decided against affiliating, in part so they could control their own funds and, as Mulholland later said, because ‘country interests could only be served by country people’.5 Jim Scott, owner of the Australia Hotel, offered a room for the Association’s meetings, and local men and women, among them Charles Hardy, Edward Collins and Annie Jupenlatz, formed an Advisory Committee.6 The Town Clerk, Robert Emblen, wrote to the federal member for the Riverina, John Chanter MP,

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1 S. Garton, 1996, p. 51.
3 Daily Advertiser, 5 December 1917.
4 Daily Advertiser, 5 December 1917. Melville was referred to in the paper as Sergeant W. A. Melville. There was one Sergeant W.A. Melville in the AIF – William Arnold Melville. See William Arnold Melville Service Record, NAA B2455, Service no. 1024.
6 Daily Advertiser, 11 December 1917.
requesting official recognition under the Repatriation Act. He attached a copy of Association’s rules and objects which included a clause limiting membership to returned soldiers.  

Less than a fortnight later Nicholas Lockyer, the Repatriation Department’s Comptroller, responded with bad news. The Minister for Repatriation, Edward Millen, had advised him that an association representing the Department must ‘comprise in their membership citizens of all classes who have the interests of the Returned Soldiers at heart.’ The RRSA could not restrict membership solely to veterans. 

On the day that Emblen wrote to Chanter, the Advertiser ran an RRSA notice asking returned men to attend a recruiting rally. Between thirty and forty turned up, many of them in uniform, but without official recognition the association in whose name they appeared soon lapsed. The next attempt to form a local returned soldiers body came in mid-December 1918 when the New South Wales Returned Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) convened a meeting in the Wagga Town Hall. Captain Arthur Tarleton, vice-president of the New South Wales branch, appealed to local members and other returned men to form a Wagga sub-branch. Tarleton had served in the 3rd Battalion alongside Wagga men early in the war and wanted to see the district represented by the RSSILA. He explained that a sub-branch had recently been formed in Albury, one of thirty three now in New South Wales, each one part of an association with between twenty five and thirty thousand members.

While new associations for returned men began forming, the need for the community organisations that had been central to Wagga’s war effort was passing. The War Service Committee met on 10 December 1918 having, said Major Heath, ‘served the function for which it was formed’. Archdeacon Pike remembered the Committee’s ‘valuable recruiting work’ in garnering some 1100 local men for the AIF. It had been

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9 S. Morris and H. Fife, 1999, p. 27.
no easy task and Edward Collins spoke of having ‘become disgusted’ with the results of appeals and with poorly attended recruiting rallies. Major Heath, he said, had ‘carried on under very adverse circumstances.’ John Jeremy reminded everyone that almost all of the patriotic bodies in Wagga had ‘sprung from this war committee.’ They agreed to meet for the last time on 4 March 1919.\(^{11}\)

Dooley Mulholland, a member of the soon to be disbanded committee, was already looking to his role in local post-war associations. After Tarleton’s visit to Wagga, Mulholland became president of the local RSSILA sub-branch. After two meetings in January 1919 the secretary, Herbert Beresford, had to leave the district in search of work. His replacement met with an accident the following month, the sub-branch fell into debt and lapsed in February.\(^{12}\)

So far those who had worked to establish returned soldiers’ organisations in the district had been back from the war for some time and, because they had returned before the Armistice, were not yet part of a large cohort. By the end of 1919 most of the district’s soldiers were home. Some, past the very early stages of finding their way back into the community and perhaps realising that the promises made to them when they enlisted might not be honoured, began calling for a local organisation to represent their interests.

Returned men Jack Harrison and Roy Tapscott responded in September, convening a meeting to re-establish the local RSSILA sub-branch ‘on a sound footing’. Harrison, as chairman, told the gathering that the branch was being revived with a view to ‘retaining the old camaraderie, arranging social gatherings and generally to promote the interests of returned men’ as well as the interests of bereaved families.\(^{13}\) Like its predecessor, the Wagga sub-branch agreed to be ‘non-political and non-sectarian’. The AIF had included men of ‘all occupations, creed and classes’ and the ‘bond of the diggerhood’

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\(^{11}\) S. Leah, *Wagga Wagga Community Heritage Study, Thematic History*, vol. 2, City of Wagga Wagga, New South Wales Office of the Environment and Heritage, and Heritage Council of New South Wales, 2013, p. 34, and *Daily Advertiser*, 11 December 1918. The Committee also agreed at this meeting to destroy its records.


\(^{13}\) S. Morris and H. Fife, 1999, p. 29 and *Daily Advertiser*, 19 September 1919.
meant that RSSILA did not want the words ‘returned soldier’ to be used for party political purposes.\textsuperscript{14}

Some of Australia’s early returned soldiers’ associations were nevertheless overtly political. Among the documents kept by the local sub-branch from this period is a flyer advertising a ‘mass meeting of soldiers and citizens’ at the Sydney Town Hall on 9 September 1918, held by the Returned Soldiers’ and Citizens’ Political Federation. ‘Organise! Organise! Organise!’, urged the notice, calling for the privilege of having served in the field to now be matched by giving ‘a second measure of service’ in politics.\textsuperscript{15} Five months before, in May 1918, the RSSILA national executive proposed, unsuccessfully, a change to their constitution so that the League could become directly involved in parliamentary politics.\textsuperscript{16} Wagga’s RSSILA did not have a similar discussion until its September 1923 meeting when Jack Harrison argued that returned men needed a political organisation to defend their rights. Dan Byrnes, embroiled in a long fight to get local veterans the memorial that they wanted, agreed, saying ‘the only hope returned men had was for their organisation to become political’. The league in Wagga, said Harrison, represented 3000 votes and ‘meant a win or lose in an election’.\textsuperscript{17} As he and local man, Henry Mitchelmore, faced conspiracy charges in Sydney’s Central Criminal Court for attempting to bribe a politician to get a favourable outcome in land purchases, Harrison might have kept the suggestion that returned soldiers could swing an election to himself.\textsuperscript{18}

Thomson found that prominent loyalists – supporters of the war and believers in the Empire – were usually the driving force behind the establishment of local RSSILA branches, while much of the state and national leadership came from former officers, men of the business and professional class.\textsuperscript{19} In Wagga the situation was slightly different. There were loyalists, like Harry Gissing, among the men who worked to establish the local branch. Only a few, however, had been officers, and those few were medical officers, commissioned because of their peacetime profession rather than their

\textsuperscript{14} M. Crotty, 2010, p. 170, see also J. Rees and P. Sekuless, 1986, p. 24. For ‘all occupations, creeds and classes’, ‘the bond of the diggerhood’, and a report on the sub-branch’s annual reunion dinner in 1922, see \textit{Daily Advertiser} 15 September 1922.
\textsuperscript{15} Wagga RSL Papers, CSURA RW2863/1/11, meeting notice 9/9/18.
\textsuperscript{17} S. Morris and H. Fife, 1999, p. 41. See also \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 11 September 1923.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 27 September 1923.
\textsuperscript{19} A. Thomson, 1994, p. 121.
military attainments. Gissing, Mulholland and Middlemiss were sergeants, Hardy had been a corporal while Tapscott was a private. Outside the AIF they were businessmen, professionals or, in Mulholland’s case, a grazier. Several, including Gissing, Mulholland, John Graham, and the two medical officers, Edwin Tyrie and Stephen Weedon, enjoyed membership of the exclusive Riverine Club and the local Freemasons – for which initiation cost more than £10, the annual subscription more than £2 and each degree conferred another £1/1. These associations seem to have carried more weight than the nature of their wartime service when local returned men chose the sub-branch’s leadership.

At a 1921 Empire Day rally attended by ‘1000 citizens and every section of the community (except Bolsheviks)’, Chaplain Major John Calder affirmed the gathering’s ‘unswerving loyalty to King and Empire’. Harry Gissing said; ‘There are some who would term this meeting jingoistic’, but he joked ‘those who used the term jingoes should be called dingoes’. When the laughter and applause died down, he added that such rallies were necessary to keep disloyalists ‘in check’. At the same time though, Gissing was careful to emphasise that the RSSILA which had organised the rally ‘stood for comradeship irrespective of creed or class’.

During the League’s early years in Wagga this was largely true. Its membership, like its executive, included professionals – doctors, businessmen, farmers, a solicitor, a policeman, a bank officer and a fire chief – but in July 1920 when there were more than 300 men on the sub-branch’s books, many must have come from labouring and other blue collar backgrounds.

With so many men having joined the local sub-branch, the Advertiser ever keen to boost Wagga, declared it the ‘largest in any country centre’. Over the next decade though, men drifted away from the League in Wagga and around the country. In 1919 national

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20 Lodge Harmony No. 22 By Laws 1921, CSURA RW2463/10/86, pp. 7-9.
21 For membership of the Riverine Club, see Minutes of the Riverine Club’s Annual General and other meetings 29 April 1920, 9 May 1922, 10 May 1923 and 31 March 1924. In these documents are the names of several local veterans including Anthony Brunskill, Daniel Byrnes, Harry Gissing, Les Headley, and Stephen Weedon. The Club’s annual reports record membership numbers over several decades. See Riverine Club Minutes, CSURA RW2633/1/2a and 2b for the years 1919 – 1933. See also see N. Blacklow, 1992, appendix, ‘Table of membership of Wagga and Riverina associations’.
22 The Soldier, no. 258, vol. 5, 3 June 1921, p. 11.
membership stood at more than 100,000 eight years later fewer than 35,000 former soldiers had paid their subscriptions. In Wagga just 58 men were in the local sub-branch in 1926.

For some, the lack of interest in membership appears to have stemmed from a dislike of the men who ran the association. When returned man William Docketty died in Morrow Street, his lonely passing became the subject of a fierce exchange in the Advertiser’s letters page. An anonymous correspondent, ‘Australia’, whose tone and comments suggest that he too was a returned soldier, claimed that Docketty was a ‘well known figure in Wagga’. ‘What were our public men doing in this emergency?’, demanded ‘Australia’. These men were always willing to ‘push themselves into the limelight when there was the sound of drum and music in the air, when there was a large concourse to hear their words and admire their zeal for the welfare of the Digger bulging in their bosoms’, he said, accusing the public men of ‘parading a manufactured patriotism’ and the RSSILA of being ‘bankrupt’ of decency for letting Docketty be buried in a ‘shabby and nameless coffin’ without a service or ceremony. If senior members of the RSSILA died, he continued, their passing would be attended with great ceremony, and Docketty, who ‘took equal risk and was prepared to make equality of sacrifice’ deserved the same.

Walter Higgins, the RSSILA’s president, a popular local sportsman and a close friend of Charles Hardy Jr., was quick to respond to this ‘most venomous and vindictive’ correspondence. Chiding ‘Australia’ for choosing anonymity, he regretted that five years after the war a returned man should be laid to rest in a pauper’s grave, but told readers that Docketty was not a member of the League and had never been to a meeting. No one in the League knew of his circumstances but nor should the League necessarily interest itself in the welfare of diggers who refuse to join and thus ‘weaken our influence’. The League had never turned down an appeal from a non-member if it was in a position to help, said Higgins, before asking why, if ‘Australia’ was so well...

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25 M. Crotty, 2010, pp. 166ff. Crotty provides detailed evidence on the unreliability of the membership figure for 1919, indicating that the widely accepted 150,000 is too high.
26 Daily Advertiser, 27 January 1927.
27 The man’s name first appeared as Docketty, but was spelt in some later articles as Doherty.
28 Daily Advertiser, 18 June 1923.
acquainted with Docketty’s situation, did he did not notify the League or take care of arrangements himself.  

The contrast with public ceremonies to mark the passing of veterans during the war and in the months immediately after it ended is clear. One of, if not the first, to die after the Armistice was Hugh Hutton, the well known local farmer who had lost an arm at Lone Pine and declared at a 1917 rally that there was ‘no game’ like the war. In October 1918 he fell from a buggy and was found lying on the road with serious head injuries. He died of cerebral meningitis almost a month later and received a military funeral. A couple of days later 27 year old Lionel Eeles died of heart disease after more than twelve months in a Sydney hospital. The former private, who had become ill in France, was one of the district’s earliest volunteers. Eeles’ body was brought to Wagga on the mail train. Returned soldiers were asked to attend the funeral which began at the station when the train arrived.

Five years later, when Docketty died, ‘Australia’s’ seemed a lonely local voice demanding recognition for the former digger. When the story emerged in the local press people felt that as a returned soldier Docketty deserved better than an unmarked grave. In October 1923, local teacher Miss Fisher organised a children’s concert at the Oxford Theatre to raise money for ‘a kerb and cross’ on Docketty’s grave. The circumstances of his death and burial suggest that Docketty was not the ‘well known figure in Wagga’ that ‘Australia’ claimed, or if he was, he was not well connected. Had he been, his passing is likely to have been mourned in a very different manner.

One of the district’s best known former soldiers, Major Heath, died of a heart attack on 6 September 1922 at the age of 58. A lifelong Wagga resident, he was a lawyer who had served in South Africa and during the First World War on a host of local committees associated with Wagga’s war effort. His very public funeral was conducted by Archdeacon Pike. Of Heath’s commitment to the war effort and to local returned soldiers, Pike said that he ‘will be fondly remembered by the men for whom he

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30 Daily Advertiser, 23 June 1923.
31 See for example the material on Samuel Stewart, Charles McLeod and John Archer in chapter VII.
33 Daily Advertiser, 6 December 1918.
34 Daily Advertiser, 20 October 1923.
35 Daily Advertiser, 7 September 1922.
spent himself”, and expressed his belief that it was during his tireless work for the war effort that he contracted the condition that eventually killed him. Each of Heath’s pall bearers was a returned soldier, while other returned men were prominent in the guard of honour.  

Former sergeant Eric Wallace DCM MM died suddenly in Junee at the end of 1923. His body was bought to Wagga and met at the Hampden Bridge by ‘a number of returned soldiers and other friends of the deceased’ and the Wagga sub branch of the RSSILA contributed a wreath.  

When another returned soldier and ‘esteemed’ member of the RSSILA, John Minogue, died of appendicitis shortly afterwards, he was given a requiem mass at St Michael’s Cathedral and a funeral that was attended by RSSILA members. Walter Higgins led the returned men marching behind the hearse. At the graveside Reverend Father Hoyne spoke of Minogue’s war service.

In July 1924 the RSSILA voted to guarantee the expenses for the burial of a ‘Digger who died in the previous month.’ Members were dismayed that it was being left to returned soldiers to provide funds in ‘such a wealthy town as Wagga’. Men like Docketty, Wallace and Julius Beynon, ‘quite unknown in Wagga’, who died in the Wagga Hospital with nothing more in his pockets that some papers identifying him, all died in different circumstances, but the local RSSILA wanted to ensure that no more returned men were buried in a pauper’s grave.

Even ‘Australia’ might have understood, and not begrudged, the League’s desire for a large number of local returned men to attend the funeral of one of the local branch’s founding members and its first president. Dooley Mulholland never truly recovered from the effects of gas inhaled on the Western Front. Not one to hold back from involvement on committees, and a popular member of local clubs, by the mid 1920s Mulholland’s health demanded a quieter existence and he had moved out to a family property in the Humula district. In late October 1925 he became seriously ill and was driven to Wagga in the care of local nurse, Sister Hume. Stephen Weedon hurried to

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36 Daily Advertiser, 9 September 1922.  
37 Daily Advertiser, 7 December 1923.  
38 For Minogue’s obituary and the cause of his death, see the Daily Advertiser, 20 July 1923. On his funeral see the 21 July 1923 edition.  
39 Daily Advertiser, 7 July 1924.  
40 On Benyon, see Daily Advertiser, 29 November 1923. On Wallace see 7 December 1923 edition.
meet a rapidly deteriorating Mulholland after Hume’s car passed Alfretdown, but was too late to help his fellow returned soldier. Mulholland died before reaching the hospital.  

His funeral in St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church was a large affair, attended by Red Cross workers, returned soldiers, well-known graziers and prominent residents of Wagga and surrounding districts … prominent residents in the commercial life of Wagga, a number of members of the Returned Soldiers’League, of which he had been one of the most esteemed members, and a number of ladies. All of the pall bearers were returned men. Before a large gathering of mourners at the graveside, Reverand Galloway spoke the ‘great part’ Mulholland played in the war.

‘Australia’s exaggerated criticism of the local RSSILA’s leaders seems less about Docketty’s death than his view of prominent returned men, men, in fact, like Mulholland. But his impulse to farewell a returned man who had died was shared by many. Returned soldiers’ funerals in Wagga were well attended if the man was known in the community. On these days of mourning people were able to farewell the dead in a way that was never possible for those who lost loved ones on active service. Perhaps ‘Australia’s remarks would have been better directed at the community’s response to living veterans, for whom there was not always the same respect. To honour the dead was the work of hours, but meeting the needs of the living returned soldiers in the community required consistent effort, often over years, and the patience of people whose daily concerns were no longer with the war.

Returned men continued to work not only for those who died in Wagga, but also for those who were ill, stepping in when the Government announced in the second half of 1924 that it would cease providing comforts to soldiers in hospital as a result of war injuries. The League set up a three man ‘visiting committee’ to visit returned soldiers in hospital and ‘supply them with comforts from the funds of the branch.’ At its annual meeting in early 1928 the sub-branch’s president, William Creagh, announced that in the past year members had obtained pensions for six returned men who were in

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41 Daily Advertiser, 29 October 1925.
42 Daily Advertiser, 30 October 1925.
43 Daily Advertiser, 8 September 1924.
44 Daily Advertiser, 8 September 1924.
the District Hospital. Ninety per cent of the League’s relief fund had been spent in helping local returned soldiers who were out of work.\textsuperscript{45}

The RSSILA emerged from the Depression in poor shape, but much still needed to be done for veterans, their families and the children of men killed in the war or died since. Twenty local returned men met at the Commercial Hotel on Armistice Day 1932, including Jack Harrison, William Creagh, Victor Harding, and Sydney Pinkstone to discuss establishing a local branch of the Legacy Club.\textsuperscript{46}

Legacy had been founded in Tasmania by Major General Sir John Gellibrand in 1923 as the Remembrance Club of Hobart, originally to bring together men who had had field service in the AIF for ‘the mutual advancement of their business interests’. The Melbourne branch of the club, established later that year, quickly changed its name to the Melbourne Legacy Club, moving away from the Remembrance Club’s focus on returned soldiers’ business interests and by 1925 had included in its objectives, ‘reviving the old comradeship, esprit de corps of the AIF’.\textsuperscript{47}

Veterans were very receptive to the idea of setting up a local branch.\textsuperscript{48} Sixty returned soldiers attended the Wagga club’s inaugural meeting in the Commercial Hotel on 19 November 1932, including men from Sydney and Albury. After they stood in silence ‘for a few minutes’ to honour the fallen, Legatee K. A. Morris, President of the Sydney club, explained their obligations to the gathering. Thirty seven Wagga men accepted the terms of membership. They included familiar figures – the ubiquitous Harry Gissing, and Les Barrand, Don Bertram, and Clem Sheekey were all foundation members. Charles Hardy Junior sent his apologies, but joined later, as did Hugh

\textsuperscript{45} Daily Advertiser, 26 January 1928.
\textsuperscript{46} Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1, document 19 November 1932. On the RSSILA having been in poor shape, one observer wrote in 1930 that the local sub-branch was practically defunct. See Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai), AWM93 21/11/1/5, document 13 February 1930.
\textsuperscript{48} Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1, First Annual Report, 28 October 1933.
Condon and six other Wagga veterans. A few months later Lendon Shaw, another local veteran, became the Club’s librarian.

Harry Gissing and Clem Sheekey helped form an Executive Committee for child welfare and by 1933 they were helping veterans’ children in and beyond the district. Several junior Legatees were living in tents in Batlow, depending on casual employment to get by. Sheekey, Gissing and another veteran named Jennings set about finding them work. To this end and to help others in the district, the Club held a fund raising dinner for local employers in June 1933. The Club also arranged for local accounting firm, Hemingway & Robertson, to run courses for the sons of deceased soldiers who needed assistance. Requests for places came from as far afield as Lockhart and Tumbarumba.

Members found work for two boys, D. Joyes and Frank Greening, at a returned soldier’s farm. Joyes’s mother was grateful but decided her son would fare better if he remained at school. The Club also made a successful approach to the Repatriation Department on behalf of Jean Erlington, believing she was eligible for an allowance to help her remain at school. Jean’s brother Colin had finished high school to intermediate level and the club found him work with a local butcher, but the Repatriation Department agreed to assist him if he returned to school to finish his Leaving Examination, or moved into clerical work. His mother received a ‘Scholarship pension’ while he studied commerce. In February 1936 Jack Harrison told the Club that Erlington was ‘doing well and earning good money.’ Members tried to get Arthur Johnstone from Batlow work in the ‘wireless industry’ in Sydney. If he wasn’t successful, Arthur was also offered help to get back to Batlow for the fruit picking season. Winnie Meagher, the daughter Hubert Meagher never saw, was found a job with a local accounting firm.

51 Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1, Board of Management, 24 June 1933.
52 Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1, Board of Management, 24 June 1933.
In 1935 the club helped 29 children, six more than in the previous year, secured Repatriation Department vocational allowances for eight wards from the Experiment Farm, found a deserted wife work, and ensured that another ward with ‘spastic paralysis’ received decent medical attention. The Club reported that the children in its care were generally in poor shape. Many had bad teeth and each child was sent to local dentist and returned soldier, Norman Coates, for treatment. The Club continued this practice over the years, making sure that their wards received the dental care they needed.

When Sid Dodwell caught pneumonia in 1934 and was being cared for in the Wagga District Hospital, the Club insisted that he be transferred to Randwick, enlisting Stephen Weedon’s help. Local widows also received help. Mrs van Every, whose returned soldier husband had died the previous year, was given a hem stitching machine so that she could set up a business. Members paid for her to have stickers printed and advertisements distributed.

Wagga’s legacy Club illustrates the extent and nature of the returned soldiers’ network in Wagga two decades after the war, and of the depth of some local veterans’ concern for the fallen and their bereaved families. Legacy’s main concern was providing practical assistance to its wards and to the families of struggling or deceased veterans. The local RSSILA and its forerunners had a wider remit. For much of the Association’s life, along with agitating to better returned soldiers’ circumstances, members devoted considerable energy to ensuring that the war, the dead and their own service were commemorated in Wagga with suitable monuments and memorials.

Returned soldiers’ funerals were an expression of the district’s continuing loss, but they were infrequent occasions that made few demands on the community. Monuments and memorials were a different matter. They cost money, required bureaucratic approval

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55 Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1, President’s Reports, 26 October 1934 and 25 October 1935.
56 Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1, Meeting of the Board of Management, 17 February 1936.
57 Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1, Board of Management, 20 November 1933.
59 Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1, minutes of combined meeting of Legacy, Apex and Rotary Clubs, Christmas 1933 and Board of Management, 19 March 1934.
and as they were to be permanent structures, a general consensus on the form that they should take. If people welcomed returned soldiers helping bereaved families, or veterans who had struck hard times or were wounded or ill, there was less support for a memorial commemorating their service.

The idea for a memorial in Wagga dated back to 1916 when the War Service Committee suggested a district honour roll be displayed in the Town Hall’s vestibule. When it became clear that there wasn’t the room for the more than 1700 names he had compiled Canon Pike argued that ‘the town must have a permanent memorial, placed in a conspicuous position and accessible to the public.’ Among the returned soldiers in town, a memorial hall was a popular option, while men from the country districts outside Wagga were less enthusiastic. Rather than agreeing to back the construction of a ‘building of doubtful utility’, they wanted a monument.

Wagga was embarking on a debate repeated many times in Australia – a monument or a hall? The Soldier, the official magazine of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers’ Imperial League of New South Wales, suggested that councils generally wanted monuments, while returned soldiers wanted halls. The Advertiser threw its support behind the hall, arguing that it would ‘be more than merely a block of granite’, it would be ‘part of the welfare of Wagga’. While memorials should be built in ‘outlying places’, said the paper, Wagga, ‘as the natural centre of the district, ought to contain the war record of the district.’

The impasse was resolved democratically, by ballot. At a March 1919 public meeting called by the mayor to discuss the soldiers’ memorial, all manner of proposals were put forward and delegates came from distant districts to have their say. There were suggestions that Wagga should concentrate all of its efforts on repatriation. One proposal, that the district develop an ‘industrial concern’ on which no one but returned men could be employed, was lost on the voices. In the end the meeting voted to have

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61 Daily Advertiser, 27 January 1919.
63 All of the foregoing is taken from the Daily Advertiser, 27 January 1919.
64 Sydney Morning Herald, 12 May 1919.
up to six proposals put to a referendum of subscribers to the memorial fund.65 Five were submitted: a monument with an honour roll like the one at Manly in Sydney – a globe showing Australia and New Zealand with the word ‘ANZAC’ atop a corinthian column and an honour roll at the base; a ‘suitable building’ including an honour roll and room for returned men; an extension to the public hospital for ‘the treatment of sick children’; an extension to the hospital and an honour roll in the Town Hall; and an extension to the Town Hall for the use of returned men. Estimates for the cost went as high as £10,000 and the meeting discussed fund raising schemes.66

Some of Wagga’s public figures made their preferences publically known. Hannah Oates wanted a monument like that at Manly, believing it would tell future generations ‘that we in our day appreciated what (the soldiers) meant to us’.67 Harry Gissing argued for a hall where soldiers could hold their meetings, but which could also ‘be used by the citizens’. If the monument was only for the fallen, said Frederick Middlemiss, then it would be fitting, ‘but for the men returned a hall would be more appropriate.’ When it came to the vote, the majority agreed with Hannah Oates, prompting Robert Emblen to suggest that with the war still fresh in people’s minds, especially the bereaved, it was ‘more in their sympathy that a monument was decided on.’68

Wagga’s only other war memorial, to a local man killed in the Boer War, was in Newtown Park (now Collins Park) away from the centre of town. Now it would be overshadowed by a more imposing construction listing the almost 400 district men who had lost their lives in the Great War.69 The local RSSILA still wanted a hall as a memorial to all of those in the district who had enlisted, but were considering other, cheaper, alternatives. In August 1920 the sub-branch asked aldermen Dan Byrnes and

65 Daily Advertiser, 7 March 1919.
66 On the memorial’s cost, see Daily Advertiser, 8 March 1919 and on the Manly memorial see K. Inglis, 1998, p. 107 (2008 edition). On fundraising see Daily Advertiser, 8 March and 31 July, 24 September and 27 October 1919, and 22 and 25 September 1920. Over the next twelve months fundraising suggestions or activities included selling buttons on Show day, a Soldiers’ Memorial Committee market day fundraising event, a sports day held by local sporting bodies and in 1920 returned men and ‘lindred bodies’ were asked to provide people to man sideshows at the White City Carnival with half the takings going to the Soldier’s Memorial Appeal. It was clear that no one really had any idea how the memorial would be paid for, and the question arose from time to time over the next year.
67 Daily Advertiser, 11 October 1919.
68 Daily Advertiser, 18 May 1920.
Roy Tapscott to recommend to the council that a memorial garden with an archway at
the entrance or in the grounds be established on a local reserve.  

With the winning entry of the 31 submitted for the design of Wagga’s monument to the
dead chosen, on Anzac Day 1921 Brigadier-General Thomas Blamey unveiled the
foundation stone before a crowd of ‘at least 3000’ spilling across Baylis Street from the
front of the Town Hall. Neither the returned soldiers, some in uniform, standing
before the flag bedecked platform, the people laying wreaths to honour the fallen, nor
the crowd gathered to witness the occasion would have known that there was nothing
for Blamey to unveil. No foundation stone was yet in place but, said the Advertiser
twelve months later, it had ‘been laid in spirit at least’. 

In early 1922, with the question of a hall, the archway and the gardens still far from
resolution, the Soldiers’ Memorial Appeal Committee made the contentious decision to
have the foundation stone for the monument to the dead laid for the second Anzac Day
in a row, this time by Edward Collins, and to have Thomas Blamey unveil it on Empire
Day. A woman calling herself ‘One Mother’ wrote to the Advertiser in protest. She
had heard Thomas Blamey say, ‘I declare this stone well and truly laid’ in front of
‘some hundreds of people’ the previous year. Why now insult Brigadier Blamey, ‘an
old Wagga boy’ of whom ‘we old Waggaites are proud’? She asked. ‘If a soldier
cannot do this job well, then no other man can do it better’, apparently more concerned
with who was laying the foundation stone than with the previous year’s deception.
The Advertiser declared the decision to have Collins, rather than Blamey, lay the stone
‘grotesque’, calling the second ceremony a ‘travesty’ and arguing that to ‘burlesque a
matter of this sort will be taking a big risk with public opinion.’ 

Public opinion withstood the controversy. On 17 September 1922, eighteen months
after he laid the foundation stone ‘in spirit at least’, Blamey unveiled the Soldiers’
Monument. He had seen the great monuments of the world but told the gathering that

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70 Wagga Council Minutes, 12 August 1920, CSURA RW2608/22.
71 Daily Advertiser, 23 and 26 April 1921.
72 ‘Memorials for Wagga Wagga and District World War 1 soldiers’, April-May 2015, p. 13, Daily Advertiser, 10
April 1921 and 16 April 1922.
73 Daily Advertiser, 29 March 1922.
74 Daily Advertiser, 6 April 1922.
75 Daily Advertiser, 10 April 1922.
he could say that his home town’s was ‘equally beautiful’. Frederick Middlemiss, now president of the Wagga RSSILA sub-branch expressed his gratitude to the district. It was, he said, most fitting that Wagga’s ‘most distinguished soldier’ should unveil the monument. Hugh Oates spoke in similar terms and reminded the gathering that the district’s memorials would not be complete until local soldiers had a room ‘that they could call their own to meet in’. 

Harry Gissing feared that they would never get their hall. In 1922, hinting at a growing resentment, he said moves to prevent the hall were against the League’s interests and would lead to ‘ill feeling.’ But, four years after it ended, the war was no longer the town’s most immediate concern. Returned soldiers’ interests had to be balanced against other community needs. Mayor Hugh Oates worried that the soldiers were being forgotten now that they had been back a few years and felt that they deserved the council’s support. At the same time, he knew as well as anyone in Wagga could have, the high cost of other more pressing public works.

In 1921 the council borrowed £55,000 to build an electricity generating plant and to buy and put in place ‘cables, wires, poles and all other necessary apparatus … for the purpose of supplying electric current to the public.’ The following year the mayor announced that the council needed to raise a special loan of £20,000 to complete the work. It was far enough advanced for Hannah Oates to flick the switch and turn on the power two days later, and costly enough to put Wagga into debt until March 1951. Other projects also demanded attention. In early 1923, ‘permanent street and footpath work were the crying need of the moment’, and the Beckwith Street Bridge needed rebuilding over the lagoon.

As debate continued in the Advertiser, in the council and among returned soldiers, some were more concerned with how the lack of progress on a memorial reflected on Wagga than with whether money should be spent on returned men. In 1920 Harry Gissing had said while the Wagga sub-branch was the largest in New South Wales outside Sydney

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76 Daily Advertiser, 18 September 1922.
77 Wagga Council Minutes, 3 March 1921, CSURA RW 2608/23.
79 Daily Advertiser, 20 April 1923.
and Newcastle, it was also one of the few not to have its own hall. The town, thought Edward Collins, suffered in comparison to Yass, which had a memorial hall ‘similar to what was proposed in Wagga’. It was a ‘disgrace’ that places a quarter of Wagga’s size had better town halls, said Collins. For representatives of the Riverina’s main centre, the idea that Wagga was being outdone in such an important civic matter must have been galling.

In April 1923, 500 of the district’s 1972 rate payers, including returned men who owned property in town, signed a petition calling for a poll on whether the council should borrow £4000 towards remodelling the Town Hall to include construction of a memorial hall. Announcing that the poll would go ahead, the Advertiser urged a vote against borrowing money that ‘does not benefit the citizens’. A soldiers’ hall that set returned men apart from the rest of the community and over which they would never have proprietry rights was, said the paper, unwise.

While the Advertiser wrote of ‘returned soldiers or citizens’ as though the district’s veterans could only be one or the other, arguments against spending any council money solely on their behalf implied that they were also expected to act in the community’s interest. When Frederick Middlemiss suggested that rate payers who petitioned for a poll had ‘an axe to grind’, he was quickly rebuked by the local RSSILA president, Walter Higgins MC, who announced that he had signed the petition ‘as a rate payer and not as a returned soldier.’ Harry Gissing said in the Advertiser; ‘We do not wish to be segregated from our kind … we are mostly young men, engaged in making homes and regaining the positions we vacated to go to war.’ He thought the fact that a soldiers’ hall could never really belong to veterans was to everyone’s advantage. ‘We are only here for a time’, he wrote, ‘when that time comes the whole reverts back to the municipality.’ The memorial would be incorporated into the town’s only public building ‘for our children’s children to see and be inspired thereby.’

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82 Daily Advertiser, 16 April 1923.
83 Daily Advertiser, 5 May 1923.
84 Daily Advertiser, 9 May 1923.
Gissing thought that 70 per cent of Wagga’s returned men supported a hall, but fewer than half of the people who voted wanted the council to borrow money to make it possible. Only 473 of 1151 eligible voters turned out, suggesting a degree of apathy even among those who had subscribed to the memorial fund. The ‘no’ vote prevailed, 275 against 189 with nine people voting informally.85 In none of the town’s four polling booths did a majority vote ‘yes’ and in North Wagga not a single vote was cast in favour of a hall.86 Archdeacon Pike, a long-time supporter of local soldiers, questioned whether ‘any loan whatever would have been entrusted to the present council?’87 In a community that had been willing to vote for conscription during the war, people were now voting against giving the men who had been soldiers the memorial that they wanted.

Dan Byrnes suggested that the money raised for a memorial be used to place tablets in the Town Hall vestibule listing the names of everyone in the district who enlisted, with the balance to go towards a memorial garden on the foreshores of Wollundry lagoon between Baylis and Trail Streets. RSSILA members liked the idea and proposed that rather than include a nominal roll in the Town Hall, the memorial arches, first discussed in 1920, with a district honour roll forming the façade, be built at the garden’s entrances.88

Byrnes put the idea to the council’s November 1923 meeting. The Gardens would be in lieu of the Town Hall scheme and would occupy the current police station site. His pleasure at the council agreeing to look favourably at ‘beautifying the lagoon’ faded when nothing more happened.89 ‘This thing is beginning to get on my nerves’, he said in January 1924. The May 1923 vote had done nothing to alter delegates’ thinking: the War Memorial Committee continued to favour a hall. Having banked the funds under the designation ‘War Memorial Hall’, it could not, or would not spend the money on any other form of memorial without an Act of Parliament.90 Walter Higgins countered that he had read the War Memorial Committee’s minute books and found no specific

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85 Wagga Express, 28 May 1923.
88 On Byrne’s suggestion for gardens by the lagoon, see Daily Advertiser, 8 October 1923. On the memorial arch, see 5 November 1923 edition.
89 Wagga Council Minutes, 1 November 1923, CSURA RW2608/24.
90 Daily Advertiser, 14 January 1924.
reference to the memorial having to be a hall. A frustrated Dan Byrnes, like Harry Gissing, worried that if no action was taken soon, Wagga’s soldiers would never get a memorial. ‘In other parts of the Commonwealth’, he said ‘fitting memorials have long been constructed’.91

Several examples were far closer to home. A Memorial Avenue had been dedicated at The Rock in July 1918, while a soldiers’ memorial – a digger on a plinth and an honour roll for the dead – was unveiled in Urana Street there in 1921.92 Uranquinty’s memorial to the dead was built in 1919, Ganmain’s memorial gateway and park were unveiled by Major General Charles Cox in 1924, and Ladysmith’s memorial hall in 1925.93

The Gardens scheme, said Byrnes, was ‘entirely practicable’ with the funds that the War Memorial Committee already had, but Wagga’s returned men had been ‘turned aside by a few individuals who hold to some other scheme.’94 Byrnes told the February RSSILA meeting that Wagga’s veterans were a ‘patient and reasonable body of people’ who, though they had been ‘humbugged for some time’, had acted in ‘a manner befitting such a body.’ Jack Harrison spoke of the invidious position Wagga’s veterans were in ‘asking for a memorial for ourselves and our mates’. Now, he said, ‘we have to come and almost beg for a memorial out of the money collected for that purpose’.95 Reporting on the March 1924 council meeting, the Advertiser said the memorial ‘was again dragged from its resting place’, as if the issue had become tiresome.

Harry Box, a thrice rejected volunteer and secretary of the Soldiers’ Memorial Committee, told the February 1924 RSSILA meeting that a conference of council representatives, the Soldiers’ Memorial Executive and the RSSILA recommended proceeding with the Memorial Gardens, but the Wagga Wagga and District Soldiers’ Memorial Appeal, of which he was secretary, objected, wanting council agreement for bronze tablets to be placed in the Town Hall’s vestibule as Byrnes had originally

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91 Daily Advertiser, 14 January 1924.
92 Daily Advertiser, 17 December 1918.
94 Daily Advertiser, 14 January 1924.
95 Daily Advertiser, 5 February 1924.
Edward Collins described a memorial garden as a permanent and unwarranted expense on Wagga’s rate payers, which also represented a failure to carry out the subscribers’ wishes. Dan Byrnes reminded people of the conference’s unanimous decision in favour of a garden. Tempers flared, personal abuse drowned out the discussion and the mayor, saying he ‘was very sorry to see behaviour so unbecoming of Wagga’ had to caution the aldermen. The RSSILA asked for a ‘meeting of citizens of the Wagga district to discuss the war memorial and bring the matter to a finality.’

The meeting, in the Wonderland Café on 28 April, agreed unanimously to have the mayor request a ‘short Act of Parliament’ enabling funds raised for the memorial to be used for the gardens. Shortly afterwards the mayor reported to the council and the returned soldiers that an amicable arrangement had been made with the memorial executive. It seemed there would be no need to take ‘the drastic action’ of involving parliament. But after another year of inaction Byrnes, who was now mayor, felt compelled to raise the subject again. He did so on a day when returned soldiers were certain to be the focus of attention, the tenth anniversary of the Gallipoli landings.

The saga dragged on. Another year passed. Collins’ intractable opposition, couched at first as concern about the cost, seems based, at least in part, on resentment. In June 1926 he wrote to the Advertiser as President of the War Memorial Committee that the money spent on a garden would mean ‘we, the council’ would have to continue working ‘in a hovel of a Town Hall’.

Before the first sod had been turned for the gardens, work began on the memorial arch. Today it stands a few metres from the bridge at the end of Baylis Street. If visitors think about it at all, they might wonder at the arch’s odd angle to the street. It was laid in a diagonal line to the fence around the police buildings that were once on Morrow Street. Few would know of the animosity that attended its construction, or of the

96 Wagga Council Minutes, 6 March 1924, CSURA RW6208/24.
97 Daily Advertiser, 7 March 1924.
98 Daily Advertiser, 7 April 1924.
99 Daily Advertiser, 29 April 1924.
100 Daily Advertiser, 27 April 1925.
101 Daily Advertiser, 14 June 1926.
depth of antipathy between two of the town’s most prominent figures that seemed to render any question of memorials to the district’s soldiers impossible to resolve without rancour. Just after work began in June 1926, Dan Byrnes sought an injunction in Sydney’s Equity Court to stop construction on the arch. Neither he nor the defendants, Edward Collins, Hugh Oates and other members of the Memorial Committee, appeared in person but each had prepared lengthy affidavits.

Byrnes argued that the arch was badly placed, obstructed Baylis Street, and was neither in harmony with its surrounding nor serving its intended purpose. He was not alone; the explanatory notes accompanying many of the memorial designs referred to the difficulty of designing the gardens around the poorly placed memorial arch.\(^{103}\) Now, with work already begun, it would be ‘difficult and expensive to remove’. Byrnes was also concerned that construction had gone ahead without council or ministerial approval.\(^{104}\) Later he described the arch as ‘the quickest piece of work that he had ever seen in Wagga.’\(^ {105}\) The matter was settled out of court in July 1926 and the arch was unveiled under ‘brilliant sunshine’ on Anzac Day 1927 before a crowd of ‘more than 3000 people’. Edward Collins, then in the early months of his third term as mayor, presided. There is no record of whether Dan Byrnes was there, but many of Wagga’s returned soldiers were. They marched ‘upright, with firm and regular tread’ in procession to the Strand Theatre.\(^ {106}\)

Neither of Wagga’s two monuments to the AIF was the hall or gardens wanted by the district’s returned men. Ten years after Edward Collins had described them as ‘the worst … in the state’, the police buildings were still intact and in use, and would remain so.\(^ {107}\) RSSILA members and some on the council wanted to keep one building on the garden site for the soldiers’ use.\(^ {108}\) They needed a place to meet and transact the ‘overgrowing business of the sub-branch’ which at the moment, said William Creagh, was being done ‘on the foot-walks’.\(^ {109}\) This time Dan Byrnes agreed with the council’s decision to demolish all of the police buildings. He had spoken with the garden

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104 Daily Advertiser, 3 July 1926.
105 Daily Advertiser, 27 July 1926.
107 Wagga Express, 8 June 1917.
108 Daily Advertiser, 9 June 1927.
109 Daily Advertiser, 30 September 1927.
designer who had assured him that they were too unsightly to be left. Demolition began on 29 October 1928.

While progress on the gardens inched forward, hostilities between Edward Collins and Wagga’s returned men opened on a new front. William Creagh had written to the Advertiser suggesting that the veterans, unhappy with previous ceremonies, conduct their own short Armistice Day service at the Monument at eleven o’clock on 11 November 1927. Collins pointed out that Armistice Day commemorations were a matter for the civic authorities. The Advertiser reported that Collins called Wagga’s returned men ‘Johnny upstarts’ who were trying to tell the council what to do. The soldiers took offence. Collins claimed he had called them ‘Johnny-come-latelys’, but the next day’s paper said that people who remembered the Great War, and those who served, would object to Collins’ ‘lapse’. For a man who had worked so hard for the district’s war effort a decade before, Collins had sunk low in the estimation of local returned men.

The following decade he sank still further. In 1935, just returned from a visit to the United States, he ‘bitterly attacked aldermen and the Returned Soldiers’ League’ when he found the council, at the League’s behest, had moved an enemy gun given to Wagga as a war trophy, though they knew he was opposed. Announcing that he was ‘tired of the peevishness of returned men’, Collins said he ‘regretted the passing of the Returned Soldiers’ Preference Act’. Soldiers, he said, had done no more than their duty, as had many who could not go to the front. One alderman, who had not lived in Wagga during the war mentioned hearing that Collins had been among the most ardent of those urging young men to enlist, ‘promising all sorts of things’.

Collins became an unusual voice in Wagga’s public discourse. He had been among the district’s most dedicated recruiters for the AIF and after the war had been secretary of the Repatriation Committee. Over the years since, after the bitter disagreements about Wagga’s memorials, Collins’ antipathy to the men he once held up as exemplars

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became increasingly strident. While he earned the enmity of a section of the district’s returned soldier population, his disagreements with the returned men on the council did nothing to hinder his career in local politics.\(^{116}\)

In January 1929, after the Victory Memorial Gardens Committee ran out of money, the council agreed to ‘take over the balance of the work’.\(^{117}\) The Soldiers’ Monument and Memorial Arch were now features of central Wagga’s landscape. Wagga’s big public question about how to remember the district’s soldiers had been answered with an area near the Town Hall distinguished by commemorative monuments. On Armistice Day 1931 the gardens were finally officially opened after the council rushed to employ labourers to complete the works.\(^{118}\) Thirteen years after the end of the war Wagga had finally given the district’s returned men the memorials they wanted. Even the hall was now a reality. When the local fire brigade moved into a new station, the Council agreed to lease the old building to the RSSILA. Jack Harrison declared it open at the Association’s September 1930 meeting.\(^{119}\)

With the lists of the dead and wounded having appeared in the local paper on hundreds of wartime days, the sight of wounded men home from the front, the knowledge that some couldn’t find work and others were dying young, the war had been an undeniably dark episode in Wagga’s history. But this was not the entire story. The Victory Memorial Gardens were so named for a reason. People might have been comforted by knowing that the men listed on the Monument had contributed to the Allied victory, that perhaps their deaths had not been in vain. The district wanted to commemorate the dead and the men and women who had served, but people also wanted public mementoes of the victory.

After the war the AIF had an enormous number of weapons, pieces of equipment and other items taken from all the battlefields on which the AIF fought. The collection included 25,000 trophies, not including captured guns, machine guns and trench

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\(^{116}\) Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW2608/25, 4 December 1930.

\(^{117}\) Daily Advertiser, 4 January 1929. Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW2608/25, 6 December 1928 and 3 January 1929.

\(^{118}\) S. Morris and H. Fife, 1999, p. 90. See also Wagga Council Minutes for the final twelve months of the gardens’ construction, CSURA RW 2608/25.

\(^{119}\) S. Morris and H. Fife, nd, pp.13 ff.
Wagga men in the AIF had sent souvenirs home, but they had to be small enough to fit into a parcel and were generally for friends or relatives, even if a few found their way onto public display. Now the district sought some of these larger trophies as permanent memorials to the war.

In mid-September 1919 Wagga’s Town Clerk wrote to the Federal Member for the Riverina explaining that Mayor Edward Collins was keen to ‘secure for the Municipality of Wagga Wagga some of the War trophies’. Collins wanted captured enemy guns, ‘which might be placed in a public park or other prominent position’. Communities outside Wagga were equally keen to get trophies. In May 1920 the Trustees of The Gap Recreation Reserve applied for a captured gun for the recreation ground ‘in honour of the splendid work done by our Australian soldiers in bringing about the defeat of our enemies’. Thirteen local men had lost their lives in the war, wrote the Trustees, and The Gap felt ‘entitled to some memento of the great service rendered by our Boys.’

Unfortunately for the Trustees, the New South Wales State Trophy Committee had decided to distribute the trophies on a population basis, the larger trophies going to the larger towns. The trophy for that part of the state was going to Wagga. Other settlements in the district tried to get trophies for school grounds, but the Minister forbade this, so Bullenbong Rd and Collingullie, having no other suitable location, had to forego mementos.

In mid-1920 the New South Wales State Trophy Committee allocated an artillery piece to Wagga on the proviso that the town appoint three trustees, one of whom had to have been a member of the AIF. Dan Byrnes filled this role, and served alongside Robert Emblen, the Town Clerk, and Alderman Cullen, the Mayor. With this formality complete, Wagga council agreed to accept the gun, which under the State Trophy Committee’s rules had to be ‘permanently housed in a public park, garden or building.'

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121 The material on The Gap is from ‘Allotment of 1914-18 war trophies, Wagga Wagga’, AWM 194 N11, 16 September and 1 October 1918, 10 May 1920, and Wagga Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW6208/22, 3 June 1920.

122 Allotment of 1914-18 war trophies, Wagga Wagga, correspondence, AWM 194 N11, 16 September and 1 October 1919, and 10 and 19 May 1920.

123 Allotment of 1914-18 war trophies, Wagga Wagga, AWM 194 N11, 10 and 19 May 1920.
within the town’. The Committee also required a ‘simple ceremony, at which (the gun) will be formally taken over’. Finally Wagga had to meet ‘all expenses connected with transport and installation after arrival at the nearest railway station’. Thus did Wagga become home to ‘Gun No. 16’, a 105mm piece captured by the Light Horse in Palestine.¹²⁴

Gun No. 16 proved a popular local attraction and in April 1921 the council agreed to let the organisers of a fundraising carnival display it, along with a print of George Lambert’s famous painting, *The Landing*.¹²⁵ A few weeks later the council accepted the offer of a second field gun from the State Trophy Committee. Harry Gissing suggested a plaque for the town’s first gun so people would know ‘the particulars as to its capture’.¹²⁶ When Wagga requested a third trophy in 1923, there were none left for the State Committee to give.¹²⁷

While Wagga was keen to acquire war trophies and mementoes, the Australian War Memorial in Melbourne was approaching returned men or the families of deceased veterans for donations to its own collection or for material to be used in writing the *Official History*. Sometimes this quest for personal letters or diaries meant an unwelcome intrusion into a family’s grief. The Great War left such legacies of sorrow that, as McKernan observed, ‘some simply did not want to be reminded of it.’¹²⁸

Second Lieutenant Allan Jackson had been shot in the head at Bellicourt in September 1918 as he and a sergeant attacked a German machine gun. Jackson was a 29 year old wool classer who had gone to Christian Brothers in Wagga. He enlisted with the Kangaroos and spent two years on the Western Front. In 1928, ten years after Allan’s death, Charles Bean, the Official Historian, wrote to Jackson’s mother seeking records of her son. A series of letters, all unanswered, followed during the next few months. It turned out that Mrs Jackson had been in hospital and knew nothing of the correspondence. She finally replied in late July while she recovered from her illness and from a death in her family. Of Allan she wrote, ‘In his letters he never mentioned anything relating to the war’ before turning to her other son, Leslie Jackson MM, who

¹²⁵ Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW6208/23, 19 May 1921.
¹²⁶ Allotment of 1914–18 war trophies, Wagga Wagga, AWM 194 N11, 26 May 1921, and Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW6208/23, meeting 2 June 1921.
¹²⁷ Wagga Council Minutes, CSURA RW6208/23, meeting of 5 January 1922.
¹²⁸ M. McKernan, 1991, p. 75.
offered the War Memorial nothing more than the kind of information that could be found in Allan’s service record. The Jacksons seem to have resented the intrusion and they were unwilling to surrender anything they had left of Allan, ‘I have no diaries’, said Leslie, ‘and all letters are personal.’

The War Memorial made the same request of Mena Armstrong, Colville’s mother, in February 1928. Her daughter, Colville’s sister Amelda Goodman, with whom Mena appears to have been living, obliged, sending letters, cards and photos of Colville along with another man, Reg’s, diary, cards and photo. We know nothing of why the Armstrongs decided to donate Colville’s records to the War Memorial, or why the Jackson’s chose not to. Perhaps Mena Armstrong felt it important that evidence of her son’s service reside in the national war museum, believing, as one journalist said, that the parents of the fallen would ‘visit the Memorial in grief, and come away in pride’.

Others either did not receive, or ignored, the War Memorial’s requests. In 1931 the Memorial’s Director, John Treloar, wrote three times to former Lieutenant John Davidson, who never responded. Nor did Harold Cunningham. Their reasons can only be guessed at, but the War Memorial was persistent. An institution devoted to honouring the dead, to reflecting the soldiers’ experience and to explaining the war to their relatives could not be shy in requesting material for its collections from bereaved families or veterans.

A war memorial yet to be built in Canberra might have seemed a distant abstraction, including in its collection items from Wagga’s soldiers but not associated with the district. Wagga needed its own monument and memorials, but seeing the process through from idea to construction became the work of more than a decade. People who followed this long saga would have been aware of the public role some local returned soldiers played in their development. Men like Harry Gissing and Dan Byrnes who were forging a local profile in business and politics devoted much of their time to the public causes that concerned the district’s returned men. At the same time many of

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129 The foregoing is from AWM93 12/11/807, Mrs E. Jackson, Wagga Wagga.
130 AWM93 12/11/551 Mrs M. Armstrong, Wagga Wagga.
131 M. McKernan, 1991, p. 75.
Wagga’s war veterans were occupied with the far less visible need to make a living either in town or on the land. While the last of the town’s memorials reached completion, local returned men were confronting what for many was the most difficult test since their time in uniform, the Great Depression.
XI. ‘The cry of no money’: employment, Depression and Wagga’s soldier settlers

At the end of July 1918 Mayor Collins stood before a public meeting in the Oddfellows Hall and, quoting the Minister for Repatriation, Senator Edward Millen, said, ‘Australia is determined that every returned soldier shall have a full opportunity to again establish himself in civil life’. Another delegate spoke of the ‘grand response’ to the call for volunteers early in the war and to the promises made to men when they enlisted. ‘We should keep the compact’, he said, and see ‘the boys properly treated.’

In some quarters the compact lasted barely twelve months after the Armistice. A speaker at The Rock’s 9 September 1919 reception said that Australia would honour its promises to returned men, but added that they must also ‘help themselves.’ Six days later, an Advertiser editorial backed away from the paper’s long-standing support for employing discharged soldiers. Arguing in response to an Ironworkers’ Union threat to strike because members were losing jobs to returned men, the paper said it was unreasonable to let employees go, especially married men with children, in favour of a single returned man. An employer, the editorial continued, ‘need not re-employ a soldier or sailor who is physically or mentally unfit’.

After more than four years of lauding the district’s soldiers, the Advertiser now implied a wilful laziness on their part. Seeming to deny the magnitude of what they had been through, the paper argued that returned men demonstrated ‘a curious want of application, which is unsatisfactory to any employer’. Although many of the men discussed in chapter IX, and those like them, were never fully fit, others were simply in need of rest or time to take stock when they returned.

During the second half of 1919, with the district in drought, Edward Collins, as secretary of the Repatriation Committee, was having trouble finding employers who had jobs for returned men. Dan Byrnes, his successor, said that getting work for veterans in the year to June 1920 was ‘not always … of a pleasant nature.’ The committee received

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1 Daily Advertiser, 1 August 1918.
2 Daily Advertiser, 12 September 1919.
3 Daily Advertiser, 15 September 1919.
4 Daily Advertiser, 15 September 1919.
548 applications from returned soldiers, found work for 381, provided money to men who had been certified unfit for work, and issued 119 rail warrants for unemployed returned men needing hospital treatment or training outside Wagga.\(^5\)

At Bomen in March 1920 the Experiment Farm’s stock assistant, who had been rejected for the AIF, commented that there were ‘so many Returned Soldiers seeking positions’ around Wagga.\(^6\) Some were fortunate, finding an understanding employer in the Farm’s new manager, Hugh Ross, described by a former student as an ‘aristocrat’ with a ‘teutonic accent’.\(^7\) In June 1920 Mr Newman, an AIF veteran who worked at the Farm, wrote to Ross about his incessant migraines, asking for a transfer so that he could seek treatment. Ross agreed, commenting that although Newman was a capable and cheerful worker, he would be unable to carry on for much longer.\(^8\) Later that year Ross indulged Bernard Brader, who had been discharged from the AIF with shell shock and failed to appear to take up his cook’s job at the Farm. Ross accepted Brader’s apology and gave him more time but eventually had to employ someone else when Brader didn’t show up.\(^9\) In 1919 Ross wrote, ‘there are no officers at this Farm returned from active military service, who consider they have suffered an injustice through the advancement of other officers during their absence on service.’\(^10\)

To see that this continued to be the case, Ross had to sometimes weigh the concerns of staff who had not enlisted against the interests and pleas of men who had. In early March 1920 the stock assistant, responsible for looking after a valuable new flock of sheep, wrote to Ross arguing that it would be wrong to give his job to Mr Elliott, a returned soldier who would be arriving during ‘one of the worst droughts Australia has

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\(^5\) The Dan Byrnes quote and figures are from Daily Advertiser, 3 August 1920.

\(^6\) Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/125), letter 27 March 1920.

\(^7\) Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/124), document 3 March 1920. The quote on Ross is from June Sutherland, CSURA RW1400 1, document supplied by Bob Butts, March 1977. Another former student said that Ross’s being of German background was no more than ‘hearsay’. He did have a ‘hard to define accent’ and was described as a ‘low profile gentleman’ who was a recognised authority on wheat farming. See John Waugh’s correspondence 6 April 1994 in CSURA RW1400/1/1.

\(^8\) Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/125), letter 22 June 1920.

\(^9\) Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/126), letter 17 November 1920. There is no direct evidence in the correspondence that Brader was a returned soldier, but Ross’s giving preference to returned men, Brader’s unusual surname corresponding with that of a man in the AIF with the same initials and a background as a labourer, among other blue collar jobs, fits what is known of him and with his having applied to be a cook at the Farm.

ever known’. The sheep were being hand fed and it would have been ‘hardly fair to Mr Elliott to have to take over during a time like this’ when he had already ‘spent practically his prime of life fighting for his country’. Elliott, argued the stock assistant, ‘deserves something better to make his start in civilian life’ and should be given preference for a job at North Bangaroo. Having spent more than four years in the AIF, most of it in the Middle East, and having tended flocks at Glen Innes and Nyngan, Elliott might have been the archtypal bushman/soldier. Ross employed him against the stock assistant’s wishes, and when Elliott asked for a pay rise based on his military record, his experience as a stock man and the length of time he had spent in Government employ, Ross gave him that as well.

Ross was also sympathetic to staff who had been rejected by the AIF. In July 1920, when a long-time employee, Walter Keating, was dismissed from the Farm, criticising men who had not been to the war as he got ready to leave, Ross was quick to their defence. He described one as ‘the best worker on the Farm’ and the other as ‘not a cold footer’ while declaring their accuser ‘the least useful man in the place and particularly slow.’ Slandering rejected volunteers was no way to win Ross’s favour. Assuming that a man who had not been to the war had made no effort to enlist proved a dangerous approach when dealing with an employer who granted his staff leave when their returned soldier relatives came home, and whose support for those who had served guided some of his decisions at the Farm.

Wagga Council was similarly concerned with employing returned soldiers during the immediate post-war years. When fifteen men applied for a temporary position – Assistant Inspector of Public Nuisances – in May 1919, the council gave returned soldier Edward Crouch the job. In November, upon his return from the war, assistant

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11 Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 CSURA SA473/31/101-128 (31/125), letter 27 March 1920.
12 Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/125), letter 10 July 1920.
13 Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/125), letter 21 July 1920. The Keating in this correspondence had been at the Farm since at least 1916 and apparently before. There is no record of his having enlisted despite his willingness to slander other Farm workers who had not been to the war.
14 In correspondence dated 21 July 1917, Ross offers a man the chance to supplement his sick leave with recreation leave so that he can go to Melbourne to welcome his returned soldier brother home. See Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/123).
gardener John Mobey was given his old job and a pay rise. John Lorimer was appointed Council Auditor in mid-1920 against four other men on the basis of his being a returned man. When in early 1922 the Sydney RSSILA asked the council to cooperate with a newly formed Employment Bureau, Wagga’s representatives replied that it was already their policy to give preference to returned soldiers, with local men given first chance. In April that year war veteran Sydney (Sid) Broad got the job of caretaker and gardener in Newtown Park, becoming one of 22 returned men then working for the council.

For many other returned soldiers, particularly itinerants, work remained hard to get. According to a story circulating in Wagga in 1922, even the most esteemed veterans had trouble. The RSSILA heard that an unnamed VC had come from Queensland to Wagga having been unable to find a job in the towns along the way. With ‘many men out of work in Wagga’, it seems the VC had no more luck than anyone else. By November 1923, as more returned men from Sydney and Melbourne came to the district looking for harvest work, the Wagga Branch of the Government’s Labour Bureau had 250 men on its books. Most arrived before the harvest and local farmers had no work for them. Some went on the road, knocking on farm doors for work. Each day about ten such men sought help from the local Repatriation Committee.

At around the same time the council began to reconsider its hiring practices. With two returned soldiers among the three leading candidates for a council engineer’s position in June 1923, Henry Chaston, who hadn’t been to the war, was given the job. In late November that year, with work still scarce, the council received 22 applications for a junior clerk’s job. Six were from returned soldiers and three from women, including a war widow. When the returned men were found to be less suitable than other applicants, Alderman Arthur Chandler declared himself in favour of employing returned soldiers, but said that the council must get ‘the very best’ as it had chosen to do in Chaston’s

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16 Wagga Council Minutes, 24 June 1920, CSURA RW 6208/22.
17 Wagga Council Minutes, 27 January 1922, CSURA RW 6208/23.
18 Wagga Council Minutes, 6 and 20 April 1922, CSURA RW 6208/23.
19 Daily Advertiser, 10 April 1922.
20 Daily Advertiser, 15 November 1923.
21 Wagga Council Minutes, 8 March, and 14 June 1923, CSURA RW 6208/24.
case. Returned soldiers were not always considered ‘the very best’ and were no longer necessarily given preference if they were not.

Three years later, in 1926, the RSSILA wrote to the council reminding aldermen of their obligation to veterans. After replying somewhat disingenuously that ‘returned soldiers were always given preference’, council later conceded that in some circumstances council officers could use their discretion in employing casual labour. In April that year the League complained again when the council failed to appoint a returned soldier as storekeeper.

Over the next few years more returned men were given council jobs: a gardener, a building inspector and an assistant engineer in 1927 for instance. But, perhaps surprisingly given the clear association with returned soldiers, when a gardener was needed to work on the new Victory Memorial Gardens in 1929, the staff committee recommended a man who had not been in the AIF. While aldermen Hugh Condon and Frederick Middlemiss were strongly opposed to anyone but a returned soldier getting the job, the mayor explained that it had gone to the most suitable applicant. Still the council’s returned men believed that a former soldier could be found for the position. In the end they prevailed and the man ranked second, a veteran already working for the council, got the job.

The final stages of the Gardens’ construction coincided with the onset of the Depression, Wagga’s sternest test since the war. Most of the district’s returned men were in middle age when they confronted this new and very different battle for survival. In the AIF they had the solace of close comradeship and the country’s gratitude. Afterwards, in some sectors at least, they were given preference in employment, but the institutions whose records remain available – the Council and the Experiment Farm – suggest a decline in this practice as the years passed. Once the Depression hit in 1929, returned soldiers became part of the great mass of unemployed, distinguished less by having been to the war than by being out of work.

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22 Daily Advertiser, 30 November 1923.
23 The quote is from, Wagga Council Minutes, 26 January, CSURA RW 6208/24. On using discretion in hiring casual labour, see the minutes of 4 March 1926.
25 On more returned men being given jobs, see Daily Advertiser, 13 January 1926, on the council gardener position, see the 15 March 1929 edition, and on council jobs in 1927, see Wagga Council Minutes, 26 May and 24 June 1927, CSURA RW 6208/24.
In March 1930, when ‘the cry of no money’ was heard all over the district, the council discussed a petition from thirty locals requesting a ‘public meeting of citizens to devise means of overcoming the prevalent distress through unemployment.’ Mayor Collins, who could not have been oblivious to the level of distress in the district, responded that as a Benevolent Society existed in Wagga he did not consider a public meeting necessary. Perhaps recognising how badly his remark had been received, the following month Collins did call a meeting of local business representatives ‘to consider means to be adapted for the relief of unemployment.’

People could now be seen on Wagga’s streets wearing pieces of military uniform sent to the town by the Public Works Department for ‘needy unemployed’. At this stage, although the council was no longer referring specifically to unemployed veterans, but to the district’s unemployed in general, some returned men did get jobs with the local government. In November 26 people applied for a temporary clerk’s job. The position went to returned soldier Donald Bertram who must have fallen on hard times. Before the war he had worked for the Bank of New South Wales. In 1922 he co-founded a stock and station agency, but by 1930 was out of work.

The district’s unemployed, said the Advertiser in May 1931, included many returned men, and the sub-branch appointed a committee of three, Dan Byrnes, Lendon Shaw and Les Caddy, to try to find jobs for veterans, inviting anyone who might be able to help to contact them. Soon afterwards the RSSILA applied to use part of the old rifle range on Willans Hill Reserve as a community camp for homeless veterans and their families. The situation became so grim that the council agreed to provide sanitary, garbage and water services for the Drill Hall which was used as a ‘shelter for families in necessitous circumstances’. By July 391 local unemployed men had, as the Mayor

26 Wagga Council Minutes, 27 March 1930, CSURA RW2608/25. The ‘cry of no money’ quote is from Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai) AWM93 21/11/1/5, letter 11 February 1930.
27 Wagga Council Minutes, 10 April 1930, CSURA RW2608/25.
29 See for example, Wagga Council Minutes, 3 July and 14 August 1930, CSURA RW2608/25.
31 Daily Advertiser, 12 May 1931.
32 Wagga Council Minutes, 11 June 1931, CSURA RW2608/25.
suggested they should, registered with the Benevolent Society and 570 by September.\textsuperscript{33} The council’s scheme of works to give the unemployed work used other criteria; applicants had to be the primary or only supporter of a family, and have lived in Wagga for at least six months.\textsuperscript{34} The RSSILA contributed funds to ensure that returned men were looked after too – between £20 and £50 on a pound for pound basis with the council to provide work for AIF veterans.\textsuperscript{35}

A delegation of unemployed visiting the mayor in March 1931 was told that ‘the council had done all it could and could do nothing more’.\textsuperscript{36} Shortly afterwards the council’s own employees agreed to take periods of leave without pay under a scheme of ‘voluntary rationing’.\textsuperscript{37} At the end of the year council set up another scheme to give all of Wagga’s unemployed men a few days work before Christmas. Aldermen wanted ‘every unemployed man (to) participate and in such a manner that they would not be deprived of their right to the dole.’ Once again there was no distinction between returned men and others: the council said ‘no discrimination would be shown’ in selecting participants.\textsuperscript{38} While local bodies no longer gave preference to returned soldiers, there remained in the district people who still expected the promises made to men who enlisted more than a decade before to be honoured. When the council appointed as head gardener a man from outside the district who had not been to the war, more than 270 locals signed an RSSILA petition in protest.\textsuperscript{39}

While aldermen discussed the many issues confronting Wagga during the Depression, the council acquired a series of artworks for the Council Room wall – a signed print of Will Longstaff’s \textit{The Menin Gate at Midnight}, sent to the council from England in 1929, and prints of George Lambert’s \textit{The Landing} and Sir John Monash bought from the Australian War Memorial in late 1931 – each a reminder of the district’s last great period of upheaval and perhaps also a source of inspiration in troubled times.\textsuperscript{40} If \textit{The Landing} called to mind one of the war’s defining moments and \textit{Monash} one of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} S. Morris, 1999, p. 169.
\item \textsuperscript{34} S. Morris, 1999, p. 169.
\item \textsuperscript{35} S. Morris, 1999, p. 170.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Wagga Council Minutes, 5 May 1931, CSURA RW2608/25.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Wagga Council Minutes, 6 August 1931, CSURA RW2608/25.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Wagga Council Minutes, 10 December 1931, CSURA RW2608/25.
\item \textsuperscript{39} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 14 and 18 July 1932.
\item \textsuperscript{40} On the council purchasing prints from the Australian War Memorial, see Wagga Council Minutes, 19 June 1930 and 29 October 1931, CSURA RW2608/25. On the council’s acquisition of the Longstaff print, see Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman, (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai), AWM93 21/11/1/5.
\end{itemize}
Australia’s most respected soldiers, *The Menin Gate at Midnight*, portraying the ghosts of the fallen parading past the Menin Gate in Ypres, had more sombre connotations. Described by McKernan as ‘one of the icons of the Memorial’s collection’, it was seen by thousands of people as it was toured around Australia during 1929.\(^{41}\) The War Memorial’s Board of Management responded to the painting’s popularity by commissioning a company to produce prints, with returned soldiers employed as framers, packers and door-to-door salesman across the country.\(^{42}\)

Thus did two former soldiers, A. T. Owen who had been an officer in the British Army, and Bill Rees who had served in the AIF, arrive in Wagga in 1930 to sell *Menin Gate at Midnight* prints. Rees and Owen were in regular contact with their boss at the War Memorial, McAulay. Their correspondence offers a glimpse of Depression era Wagga through the eyes of two returned soldiers, outside the familiar prism of veterans’ interactions with the Repatriation or Lands Departments. The pair moved into a house in Gurwood Street, stayed for months, and naturally took a very keen interest in the district’s economic circumstances.\(^{43}\) They carried with them letters of introduction from the War Memorial to the Presidents of Mitchell and Kyeamba Shires, the Wagga RSSILA and Mayor Edward Collins. But with the Depression driving people into poverty and a drought that wouldn’t break, although it was ‘trying hard to rain’, Wagga was, said Owen, ‘a pretty hard nut to crack’.\(^{44}\)

In February 1930 Rees didn’t think ‘many more sales could be knocked out of the town of Wagga’. Writing to McAulay, whom he knew well enough to call ‘Mac’, he said; ‘To give the whole thing a soldiers (sic) summing up. Dear Mac aint (sic) it a B-[ugger].’\(^{45}\) Owen, in turn, wrote a colourful if exaggerated description of how people in Wagga responded to their circumstances, ‘some curse under their breath, other bolder spirits swear openly, while others again roll about as though they had just received a

\(^{43}\) Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman, (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai), AWM93 21/11/1/5.
\(^{44}\) The ‘hard nut to crack’ quote is from, Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman, (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai), AWM93 21/11/1/5, letter 11 February 1930. On the letters of introduction see, Mr W.B. Rees, Salesman (Sale of “Menin Gate” reproductions by AWM Wagga & Echuca), AWM93 21/11/1/6, the ‘trying hard to rain’ quote is from letter 13 February 1930. For a description of conditions during the drought, see for example, letter 21 February 1930.
\(^{45}\) Mr W.B. Rees, Salesman (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by A.W.M. Wagga & Echuca), AWM93 21/11/1/6, letter 13 February 1930.
severe blow on the solar plexus’. Orders, he said, were not coming ‘as freely as one would like’.\textsuperscript{46}

McAulay, driven by the War Memorial’s own need to raise funds, urged Owen to be a ‘hard salesman … don’t let up because of the cry of poverty, unless your reason tells you the particular instance … is genuine’. He called people’s reservations about spending money on the prints ‘calamity howling’.\textsuperscript{47} Rees took a more sympathetic view, telling McAulay, ‘Men are being put off from the stores here every day and there seems to be no end in sight to it yet. I don’t know how many unemployed there are in the town but the number is very considerable’.\textsuperscript{48}

Owen, who doesn’t seem to have needed McAulay’s prompting, proved a canny salesman and perhaps also its corollary, a decent judge of character. ‘(I) sold the mayor today’, he wrote. Collins ‘proved a tough nut but I won through on flattery.’ He also managed to have Rees, whom he considered an inferior salesman, dispatched to Echuca.\textsuperscript{49} Owen was a charismatic, resilient and imposing character, physically courageous, sporting an eye patch and an injured arm. His appearance alone suggested that he was a veteran, and the fact that he was working for the War Memorial confirmed it. He ended up selling some 250 Menin Gate prints in Wagga and elsewhere during the Depression.\textsuperscript{50}

Rees and Owen covered the district thoroughly. In the rural hinterland they might have found some customers on the soldier settlement blocks, a sure place to find veterans, but in tough times those on the land were likely to have had more pressing demands on their money. In February 1930 Rees wrote to ‘Mac’ about difficulties in the ‘wool and wheat belt’.\textsuperscript{51} Among those trying to survive on the land were returned soldiers living on the soldier settler estates in the Wagga district, Toole’s Creek and Mate’s Estate. Both

\textsuperscript{46} Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman, (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai), AWM93 21/11/1/5, letter 10 February 1930.
\textsuperscript{47} Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman, (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai), AWM93 21/11/1/5, letter 11 February 1930.
\textsuperscript{48} Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman, (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai), AWM93 21/11/1/5, letter 15 February 1930.
\textsuperscript{49} AWM93 21/11/1/5 Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman, (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai), letters 15 and 17 February 1930.
\textsuperscript{50} AWM93 21/11/1/5 Mr A.T. Owen, Salesman, (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM at Wagga, Tumut and Gundagai), letters 15 and 17 February 1930.
\textsuperscript{51} Mr W. B. Rees, Salesman (Sale of Menin Gate reproductions by AWM Wagga and Echuca), AWM93 21/11/16, letter 17 February 1930.
were set beside creeks in the Ladysmith or Tarcutta areas. During the war and the
decade that followed, many veterans saw rural locales as offering the best opportunity
of getting work.

In the early twentieth century, as the state’s population grew, and needing to make land
available for closer settlement, the New South Wales Government began to divide the
big estates, putting more farmers on the land. During the century’s second decade, as
soldiers returned from the war, encouraging them onto rural blocks fitted with the
existing policy of encouraging smaller holdings. In this respect, wrote Lloyd and Rees,
‘the war and the large pool of displaced labour that it created could not have been better
timed.’52

On 19 April 1916 the New South Wales Legislative Assembly passed an act to ‘make
provision for the settlement of returned soldiers on Crown lands or lands acquired under
the Close Settlement Act’.53 Settling returned soldiers in rural areas became a central
aspect of the repatriation system, and in June 1918 the Lands Settlement Sub-committee
of the Wagga Repatriation Committee observed that while in the cities repatriation had
to be ‘confined to Vocational training and many matters other than “land settlement”’,
in rural districts it should ‘form the main method of Repatriation’.54

In August 1918 the Advertiser announced that the State Government would acquire
28,434 acres of William Mate’s creekfront Tarcutta Estate on the Wagga-Tarcutta
railway line.55 William’s father, Thomas, one of the district’s earliest European settlers,
had chosen his land well. The family’s holding was described in the paper as mostly
‘highly productive … suitable for intense culture, (with) the balance … being fit for
wheatgrowing and grazing, and in parts for orchards, vineyards, etc.’56 When Wagga
born William Ashford, State Minister for Lands, visited the Tarcutta Estate in 1918 he
spoke of a general recognition that ‘Tarcutta was a good proposition, well suited for
growing wheat; 10 per cent of it is fair lucerne country, and a good deal of it is high-

52 C. Lloyd and J. Rees, 1994, p. 44.
53 New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Notes and Proceedings, Fifth Session of the Twenty-Third
54 Wagga Wagga Local Repatriation Committee Lands Settlement Sub Committee Report 1918, NAA A2485
C/341, document 21 June 1918.
55 Daily Advertiser, 26 August 1918.
56 Daily Advertiser, 24 August 1916.
class grazing country, and adapted to mixed farming.\textsuperscript{57} Morris described the land here as ‘one of the richest tracts of country in the Murrumbidgee.’\textsuperscript{58}

Twelve months after the Government decided to acquire Mate’s land, the state Minister for Lands announced the purchase of the Gregadoo and Toole’s Creek Estate for soldier settlers.\textsuperscript{59} The 11,688 acre property, between twelve and twenty miles from Wagga and about a mile from Ladysmith railway station, was cut by the Wagga-Tumbarumba line. Lucerne had been successfully grown for many years along local creek frontages, including Toole’s Creek, while, said the \textit{Advertiser}, ‘other parts comprise excellent wheat-growing land. The estates are abundantly watered by creeks, springs, dams, etc.’\textsuperscript{60} Local real estate agents described land at Toole’s Creek in equally positive terms. When an 831 acre block came up for sale, the creekfront grazing property was advertised as being ‘eminently suited to dairying, whilst the higher country is first class grazing, fattening or farming land … The Owner has a good reason for disposing of this property and we … strongly recommend it to anyone in search of a dairying and grazing proposition.’\textsuperscript{61}

There was a degree of pessimism in the New South Wales parliament, and more generally, about the soldier settlement scheme’s prospects.\textsuperscript{62} In July 1918 the Clerk of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly read out a piece from \textit{The Sun} which argued that ‘most definitely a large area of land has been purchased for soldier settlement that is not suitable for that purpose … the money paid for this land is in excess of its market value.’\textsuperscript{63} Arthur Trethowen MLC, quoting one of his own recent speeches, said

\begin{quote}

a large number of the estates that have been purchased are not suitable for the purpose for which they have been acquired … a very large area has been purchased for returned soldiers, and if they are placed on it – I don’t care under what conditions – they are going to have a harder battle for the rest of their lives than they have had in France.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

In the estates outside Wagga, Trethowen might have found reason to be more hopeful.

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\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 20 April 1918. On Ashford’s having been born in Wagga, see \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 28 May 1918.
\textsuperscript{58} S. Morris, 2002, p. 960.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 27 February 1917.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 27 February 1917.
\textsuperscript{62} See for example B. Scates and M. Oppenheimer, 2016, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{63} New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Notes and Proceedings, Fifth Session of the Twenty-fourth Parliament, 17 July 1917, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{64} New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Notes and Proceedings, Fifth Session of the Twenty-fourth Parliament, 17 July 1917, p. 5.
\end{flushleft}
In June 1918 the Mitchell Shire Council declared that success in settling returned soldiers on the land required ‘the brains of the country to a greater extent than the brains of the town.’\textsuperscript{65} The following week, when the Wagga Repatriation Committee learnt that a board in Sydney judged a returned soldiers’ suitability for life on the land, one member asked whether the board was better qualified than the Committee to make that judgement. The chair replied, ‘I should not think so.’\textsuperscript{66} Not since the beginning of the war, four years previously, when Alfred Bennett spoke publicly about the martial worth of rural men, had the distinction between city and country been so sharply drawn in Wagga as it was in mid 1918 around the question of training soldier settlers.

When the war began, the idea that rural men made natural soldiers was widely held, and over time people accepted the dubious corollary that returned men would naturally become successful farmers.\textsuperscript{67} Lake observed that most of Australia’s parliamentarians, putting aside concerns about the ability of returned men to manage what often proved to be marginal land, ‘drew solace from the precepts of the “Australian legend”’. Perhaps the returned soldiers would succeed against the odds, because they were consumate Australians, ‘best fitted for rural occupations’. The leader of the Victorian Labor Party said that ‘the soldiers’ experience in “rouging it” in the trenches would fit them to tackle land settlement and put up with inconvenience’.\textsuperscript{68} In short, to quote Garton, people who shared this view believed that ‘war had transformed the soldier, equipping him with a new willingness and love for the farming life.’\textsuperscript{69}

Many of Wagga’s public figures and at least one state politician were less inclined to leave the matter to trust in returned soldiers’ instincts, ‘willingness’ and natural temperament. Ashford’s solution, explained at a May 1918 meeting in Wagga, was to place soldier settlers ‘under the instruction of a practical farmer’. Edward Crouch agreed, suggesting that tutelage should begin with selecting the land. The Farmers and Settler’s Association preferred a local committee of experts who would inspect blocks set apart for returned soldiers to ensure that the holdings were sufficient to enable them to raise a family ‘in a reasonable state of comfort’.\textsuperscript{70} Whether it was by committee or

\textsuperscript{65} Daily Advertiser, 8 June 1918.
\textsuperscript{66} Daily Advertiser, 15 June 1918.
\textsuperscript{67} On the idea of soldiers being naturally good settlers, see for example, M. Lake, 1987, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{69} S. Garton, 1996, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{70} All the foregoing is from the Daily Advertiser, 28 May 1918.
by the knowledge of a ‘practical farmer’, those responsible for settling soldiers on the land in the Wagga district were united in wanting the scheme to succeed. The Advertiser argued in June 1918 that the ‘worst thing that could be done to a returned soldier was to put him on a block of land if he were not suited to the task of obtaining a livelihood from the soil. It would in fact be a cruel thing to do.’

The Repatriation Committee’s Lands Settlement Subcommittee explained to the Repatriation Department that each settler in the district had to do three-month’s probation before they were allotted a block. Then, only after twelve months would the holding be considered theirs. During this time, perhaps recognising that men attuned to the comradeship of the AIF, might ‘suffer the solitude of land settlement’, the Wagga body had returned men work in groups, helping each other to clear their holdings.

After 48 supervised hours a week, a settler could then ‘do such work as he wished on his future farm.’

Wagga was home to many ‘practical farmers’ whose stations had been productive and profitable for years or decades and who had a great deal of knowledge to share. But as farming practice adapted to the latest scientific techniques, the architects of the Returned Soldiers Settlement Act perceived the need for a more formal approach. They allowed for the Minister for Lands ‘to provide and maintain training farms or settlements’ where discharged soldiers could learn the techniques of ‘agricultural, pastoral, horticultural, viticultural … or dairying pursuits, pig raising, fruit growing, poultry or general farming.’ In Wagga, the Experiment Farm, a fount of local expertise, already performed this role for its students, hundreds of whom had enlisted, and had been at the forefront of farming research since the late nineteenth century.

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71 S. Garton, 1996, p. 125, discusses the idea of providing instruction, suggesting that is was ‘indicative of the determination to ensure success.’
72 Daily Advertiser, 8 June 1918.
73 The quote is from S. Garton, 1996, p. 122. The idea that the New South Wales authorities favoured Group Purchases of the type offered in the Wagga district in part to overcome ‘the perils of isolation’ is discussed on p. 125. Scates and Oppenheimer also comment on siblings whose fraternal bonds had been strengthened by shared war service working blocks together; B. Scates and M. Oppenheimer, 2016, p. 241.
74 Wagga Wagga Local Repatriation Committee Lands Settlement Sub Committee Report 1918, NAA A2485 C/341, 3 August 1918, document 21 June 1918.
75 Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to the Department of Agriculture, 1912-29 SA473/31/174-175 (31/174), Report for the year ending June 1918.
76 On the application of science to farming, see Lake, 1987, pp. 80ff. While Lake implies that this was a new development, farming had always relied on scientific method based on an understanding of the seasons, and techniques of soil, crop and livestock management. It would be more accurate to suggest that farming in the First World War era and in the post-war years reflected advances in science and technology rather than representing a first encounter with these disciplines.
Hugh Ross began offering free courses of between three and six months to returned soldiers in 1918. Training included instruction in 'general orchard work, farm work including ploughing with single, double and three furrow ploughs, management of horses, dairy work including milking, butter-making and testing and management of pigs.'

So successful was the initiative that the following year Ross needed to put on extra staff to help his overworked employees – a cook working thirteen hour days every day, and stewards who were having trouble coping with the extra students. When the Farm began to run out of students’ rooms as well as bed linen and towels, Ross had to limit the number of men doing the course.

Some returned soldiers proved unsatisfactory students and were asked to leave, but most passed their course before moving on. By mid-1921 the flow of returned men through the Farm was waning and in August Ross was in a position to send a large quantity of no longer needed linen and towels to the Yanco Experiment Farm. In October, almost three years after the end of the war, Ross authorised the Bank of New South Wales to close the account through which transactions relating to training returned men were conducted, ending the Farm’s formal association with men destined for soldier settler blocks. After this returned soldiers, as a specific group, fade from the Farm’s record.

The post-First World War soldier settlement scheme is often seen as a disaster. Morris said Wagga men ‘faced almost insurmountable difficulties’ and a short animated film, Luck of the Draw, on the Museum of the Riverina’s website presents the local experiences of the Wagga soldiers.

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77 Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/124), letter 19 November 1918. The quote is from a letter concerning one individual but the content appears indicative of the type of training given to returned men at the Experiment Farm.

78 Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to the Department of Agriculture, 1912-29 SA473/31/174-175 (31/174), Report for the year ending June 1918. On employing extra staff, see copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 SA473/31/101-128 (31/123), letters 22 July 1919, and 7 and 11 August 1918. On overworked staff see letter 15 September 1919.

79 Wagga Experiment Farm, Copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 CSURA SA473/31/101-128 (31/123), Report for the year ending June 1918. There is much correspondence confirming that most trainees completed the course and that most were not from the district, see for example the 1920 correspondence in, Copies of letters sent to Government Offices, 1897-1926 CSURA SA473/31/101-128 (31/124, 125 and 126). These files include numerous letters to the Repatriation Department requesting rail passes for students needing to leave the district on completing of their course.

80 Wagga Experiment Farm, copies of letters sent to Government offices, 1921-1922 CSURA SA268/7, letter 16 August 1921.

scheme’s gloomiest aspects.\textsuperscript{83} State Lands Department files, which, wrote Garton, are full of stories of ‘hardship and failure’, along with the press, provide ample evidence of the scheme’s flaws and the difficulties that confronted returned men who took up rural holdings.\textsuperscript{84}

In January 1918 the \textit{Advertiser} cited the \textit{Gundagai Times} claiming that a returned soldier who appeared at the paper’s office and who had a block at Tarcutta ‘wants to know how he is going to make a living off it.’ He had been advanced £500 with which to fence his holding, ‘build a house, yards, etc., and live also.’ The funds were to be ‘repaid from the product of his labor as soon as earned.’ He wanted to know how he would feed his wife and eight children unless they ate nought but rabbits ‘which are as thick as bees’ and would require ‘another £500’ to rid from the block.\textsuperscript{85} While this man, who seemed set for failure, could only have been allocated his holding a short time before, over the following decade and longer at least several local soldier settlers proved unable to survive on the land.

Wounded and invalided veterans began taking blocks on Tarcutta’s Mate’s Estate in 1917. On 19 April George Fosbery, who had been repatriated after contracting enteric fever on Gallipoli, became one of the first.\textsuperscript{86} He began work on his block by planting an orchard and wheat. His tenure was confirmed in early 1919.\textsuperscript{87} By 1925, although he was three years in arrears on his repayments to the Lands Department, an inspector called Fosbery a ‘Decent sort of man … Intelligent’, and suggested that if the price of sheep held up, he would ‘come out well.’\textsuperscript{88} Fosbery’s repayments were postponed, a gesture for which he was sufficiently grateful to write a letter of thanks to the Lands Department, a sentiment not often preserved in the files. ‘These concessions’, said Fosbery, ‘give us a good fighting chance to get on our feet and the Minister deserves a considerable amount of gratitude for his action in the matter.’\textsuperscript{89} He received further concessions in 1927 but in November that year decided to offer the block for transfer. Apparently unsuccessful, Fosbery was still on his holding in 1928 seeking another

\textsuperscript{84} The quote is from S. Garton, 1996, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Daily Advertiser}, 24 January 1918.
\textsuperscript{86} Fosbery, George Vincent, Service Record NAA B2455, service no. 1322.
\textsuperscript{87} Fosbery, George Vincent, Lands Department File, CSURA SA226/3, document 21 January 1919.
\textsuperscript{88} Fosbery, George Vincent, Lands Department File, CSURA SA226/3, document, 1 November 1924.
\textsuperscript{89} Fosbery, George Vincent, Lands Department File, CSURA SA226/3, document, 27 May 1925.
extension to his repayments. Outside of working his holding, Fosbery was an active member of the community. His file yields little further information on his life as a farmer. Sometime after October 1928 he was admitted to Wagga Hospital. Hugh Belling, the son of Fosbery’s friend Arthur Belling, remembered being taken to visit Fosbery and finding him strapped down and in a straightjacket. Hugh thought Fosbery was in a mental hospital when he died in 1939.

As chapter IX suggests, many returned men had trouble making a living because of wounds or illness they suffered during the war. Ron Birrell, who left Buckanbee Station to apply for a holding under the soldier settlement scheme despite his painful wartime injuries, succeeded in getting a block at Toole’s Creek. He was still on a 25 per cent pension when he took up his holding in 1918. Birrell’s crippled left hand, the shrapnel wounds in his knees and the splinters of bone in his leg had made his life hard before he started work on his own land. In 1920 Stephen Weedon operated to remove shrapnel from his left knee.

Even though Birrell told a doctor in 1923 that his hand was repeatedly ‘disabled completely a week or more from pain’, after a little more than five years he appeared to be making progress. By April 1924 his block was clear of noxious weeds, had sheep and horse yards, sheds, an insured house and was bordered by fences. But Birrell was running into trouble. However substantial the improvements he’d made to the property and however handicapped he was by his injuries, a handwritten note at the bottom of the District Surveyor’s 1925 report declared ‘Birrell has not been a satisfactory tenant and his arrears are over £520.’

In March that year an inspector reported that Birrell was ‘drifting’. His crops had been damaged, yields and returns were less than hoped. The inspector urged him to sow a larger area. Doing so was beyond him. In early May 1925 the inspector returned to the holding to find another man, Mr T. Pumpa, and his wife living there. ‘Later in the

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90 Fosbery, George Vincent, Lands Department File, CSURA SA226/3, documents, 29 October 1927 and 17 April 1928.
92 On Birrell’s wounds see chapter IX.
93 Birrell, Ronald Leslie, Repatriation Department File, MX 29457, document 14 February 1933.
94 Birrell, Ronald Leslie, Soldier Settler File CSURA SA15/18.
95 Birrell, Ronald Leslie, Soldier Settler File, CSURA SA15/18.
day’, the inspector wrote, ‘I met settler Birrell (whose) prospects … are bad and thus it is to the Department’s interest and his own, that he should transfer.’ Pumpa could put a large amount of money into the holding and ‘had a strong plan’, while during his years on the block Birrell had paid ‘little, if anything’. Birrell left his property in 1925 and took up work as a casual labourer. By 1933 he was one of many unemployed returned men in the district and was living on his wife’s child endowment and his war pension.96

During the early post war years Birrell’s willingness to undertake hard physical labour might have made him seem a fine example of Official Historian A. G. Butler’s dictum, referred to in chapter VIII, that the ‘moral is to the physical as three to one’, but over time the pain of his wounds and the nature of his work proved that moral strength was not always sufficient to overcome physical limitations.97

For some returned men, mental rather than physical ill-health rendered them unable to continue on the land. George Fosbery might have been one. Michael Mooney, a former farmer, seemed the ideal candidate for a soldier settler’s block. He grew up in Wagga, went to school at Christian Brother’s, and in July 1915 enlisted in the AIF, serving as an artilleryman through the Pozières fighting. As a farmer, Mooney was accustomed to making his living from the land, but he came home from the war in May 1917 suffering from shell shock and lumbago. A Lands Department Inspector described his health as ‘indifferent’ noting that he ‘is generally considered to be mental.’ Mooney spent about two years in hospital after taking up a holding at Toole’s Creek in late December 1918. By 1925 there were tools lying about and no trace of the 200 sheep he had purchased with the Department’s advance. Mooney had yet to pay any money back and owed £689. He was still ‘digging out the rabbits’ and, said the inspector, ‘so far as making a success of his holding his position is hopeless.’ He was given three months to transfer the land to another holder, and if this proved unsuccessful, faced forfeiture.98

Mooney had tried to arrange a transfer earlier in the year, but the District Court ruled against him.99 By January 1926 he had spent more time in hospital and was ‘neither

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96 Birrell, Ronald Leslie, Soldier Settler File CSUWA SA15/18, letter 14 February 1933.
97 See also B. Scates and M. Oppenheimer, 2016, p. 34.
physically nor financially qualified to work the block successfully. On 11 February the Lands Department ordered Mooney to ‘forfeit your holding, and instruct the District Surveyor at Wagga Wagga to re-possess and dispose of the remaining advance assets.’ After a few weeks it seemed that he had done so. But Mooney was not so easily removed. When experienced local farmer and returned soldier, Robert Brunskill, tried to acquire the block in August 1926, Mooney was still there and showing no inclination to leave. The District Surveyor reported that Mooney believed ‘the block was given him for going to the War and also that he will not be moved … without a good deal of trouble.’ Believing that the land could be profitable if the right man farmed it, the District Surveyor recommended it be sold.

Mooney’s holding went up for sale on 30 October 1926. Francis Baker won the tender and Mooney relented, giving Baker possession. As the District Surveyor expected, Baker proved more successful than Mooney had been, getting good yields. By 1931, when an inspector described him as a ‘first class settler’, Baker had paid his arrears to the Lands Department. He was still farming the block in 1940.

Birrell’s, Fosbery’s and Mooney’s stories fit the widely accepted narrative of the soldier settlement scheme having condemned large numbers of men and their families to debt, hardship and often ruin. None of these three men lasted a decade on the land. Birrell and Mooney show that in Wagga this was not necessarily due to the quality of the holdings. When the local press, politicians and real estate agents spoke of how rich the land around Tarcutta was, they were not being entirely boastful. Often, if one settler proved unable to make a go of his holding, another could. In the Wagga district the story of the soldier settlement scheme is more than a simple tale of returned men’s broken hopes and dreams.

Should Sid Broad, for instance, be rated a failure for having left his block in the early 1920s? Or could he be judged a success for going back and remaining until the late 1930s?
1930s? Broad took up his block at Toole’s Creek near Ladysmith railway station in late 1918. An inspector wrote that he lived there until May 1923 before moving to Wagga; other evidence suggests that he may have left the previous year for his job in Newtown Park. An inspector’s 1923 report declared it unlikely that Broad could succeed on his holding. He seems to have agreed and applied to sub-lease the land. Broad appeared to have given up. The inspector declared that he had already ‘practically left the place.’

There is little in Broad’s file to explain his wanting to leave Toole’s Creek, nor is there anything to explain why he returned. But when he did, he remained until 1938. Inspector’s reports and other Lands Department documents tell us that Broad went through difficult years, particularly during the Depression when his hopes of making a go of the block were described as ‘slender’. But he hung on for another seven years, sometimes making money from the land, sometimes not. In this Broad was little different from other local returned soldiers of the time, whether they were on the land or in other occupations, and he was more fortunate than many in town who had neither property nor work.

If success is measured in the level of debt carried by local returned men, many of them, like Broad, and perhaps other of the district’s farmers, might have been deemed failures. If a different metric, longevity on the land, or the willingness of others to take up a vacated block, is used, the scheme in the Wagga district might be viewed more favourably, as might the experience of men like Sid Broad. Scates and Oppenheimer cite one example of ‘residency on a property matter(ing) more than success’, but for some in the Wagga area residency seems to have equalled success. Among the district’s settlers were men and their families who stayed on their holdings for decades, who did not write pleading letters to the Lands Department or local repatriation bodies, and who survived the Depression without having to give up their property.

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110 Broad, Sydney Francis Percy, Soldier Settler File CSURA SA15/18, report 10 June 1924. Wagga Council discussed his employment in April 1922.
111 Lands Department File, CSURA SA15/18. The document is undated but a note on the bottom of the page indicates that it was written in March 1923.
112 Broad, Sydney Francis Percy, Lands Department File, CSURA SA15/18, documents 27 and 31 January 1928 and 22 December 1931.
113 Broad, Sydney Francis Percy, Lands Department File, CSURA SA15/18, document 23 September 1938.
114 B. Scates and M. Oppenheimer, 2016, p. 36.
In some cases, like that of John Vincent, it is hard to explain how he managed to last as long as he did. If morale provides much of the answer, for Vincent it was never quite enough. Vincent took up his block near Ladysmith in February 1919.\textsuperscript{115} In 1932 an inspector commented that he ‘has not always been satisfactory in the past’. He was more than £800 in arrears and was unwilling to answer the District Surveyor’s questions about his circumstances.\textsuperscript{116} Vincent had overstocked his land and had little prospect of paying his debts. His situation was, said one inspector, ‘hopeless’. Unable to ‘produce sufficient to live and meet his payments to the Crown as they become due’ he had no way of paying his arrears.\textsuperscript{117}

In 1938 after Vincent had spent almost twenty years on the holding, an inspector declared him to ‘have made efforts to the limit of his ability. He is not, however, adapted for the strenuous life on the land.’ The inspector believed that he ‘would be more suited to a clerical position.’ He had been in an office job before enlisting and though apparently ill-suited to farming, carried out that occupation for as long as many other men who had a much better understanding of agricultural practice.\textsuperscript{118}

Wise observed that soldier settlement ‘gave families new homes, and the opportunity to be their own master’, acknowledging the failures but noting that the scheme ‘succeeded for many others.’\textsuperscript{119} Of the subjects of 46 Lands Department files on soldier settlers in the Wagga district, twenty could be viewed as having been successful, in so far as they remained on the land for more than a decade, were the subject of favourable reports to the Department, and appear to have made a reasonable living on the land. Those who did not fail played an important part in the district’s life and commerce. Local soldier settlers patronised local businesses, bought seed and stock from the Experiment Farm and other local farmers, and often managed to stay in work, sometimes employing others. In 1940, after twenty years of work, Carl Burcher described his block, ‘Warrangee’, as a ‘show place’.\textsuperscript{120}

George Fosbery’s friend and neighbour at Mate’s Estate, Arthur Belling, who had been wounded at Lone Pine in August 1915 and who had served with Fosbery on the

\textsuperscript{115}Vincent, John, Lands Department File, CSURA SA15/18, document 14 May 1924.
\textsuperscript{116}Vincent, John, Lands Department File, CSURA SA15/18, document July, 1932.
\textsuperscript{117}Vincent, John, Lands Department File, CSURA SA15/18, document 18 August 1932.
\textsuperscript{118}Vincent, John, Lands Department File, CSURA SA15/18, document 10 September 1938.
\textsuperscript{119}N. Wise, 2014, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{120}Burcher, Carl, Lands Department File, CSURA SA15/17, document 6 March 1940. Burcher’s home was destroyed in a bush fire that year.
executives of the RSSILA and the Tarcutta branch of the Farmer’s and Settler’s Association, was allocated a holding in October 1918. He gave up his pension, and didn’t apply for it to be reinstated until 1939. Life on the land was good for Belling. The District Surveyor considered him ‘a desirable type of settler’ and the Bellings lived comfortably. By 1939 they had ‘rooms in Wagga’, rented for 15 shillings a week, where Mrs Belling lived from Monday to Friday with two of their sons who went to school in town. Arthur and another two sons stayed on the block. The Bellings lived on their holding into the 1940s.

Hugh Belling recalled growing up on Mate’s Estate fondly, describing a side of life not reflected in departmental files: the times spent away from crops and stock, the companionship of other children, roaming the countryside, Sunday afternoon social gatherings with the families of other returned men, his parent’s membership of the Parents and Citizens’ Association, his father’s staunch support for the RSSILA, and the times when Arthur stopped at the pub for a drink and told his children on the way home that the car went better after a few beers. While working their land was vital to a soldier settler’s ability to remain on their holdings, there was, as Belling’s example suggests, room for other pursuits.

Neil Boomer, a farmer before the war who had been repatriated with an injured knee, was another early settler on Mate’s Estate who seems to have had few complaints and who involved himself in Wagga’s civic life. Boomer was of modest background and circumstances. For his move to Tarcutta on 30 October 1917, he requested a mattress, pillows and blankets to put on his stretcher, a dixie, a couple of mugs, 3 plates, 3 spoons, a fry pan and some saucepans, some waterproof sheeting, and a wash basin. By September 1923 he had erected miles of fences, was running a herd of cattle, had built a cow shed, yards, a storage shed, planted seventeen acres of lucerne and 60 of corn, built a labourer’s house and dealt with the rabbit problem. He owned more than £200 worth of plant. Boomer farmed 608 acres for more than thirty years. He

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123 Belling, Arthur, Lands Department File, CSURA SA18/19, document 3 May 1939.
124 Belling, Arthur, Lands Department File, CSURA SA18/19.
125 Belling, Hugh, in ‘A Land Fit for Heroes?’.
126 On the Tarcutta Estate, see S. Morris and H. Fife, 1999, p. 60.
suffered occasional bouts of depression, but worked hard raising a family – his wife and four children – and though his married life was less rosy than this sketch suggests, Boomer considered life mostly ‘pretty happy in Tarcutta’.  

Boomer and his wife left the block shortly before she died of cancer in 1951. A psychiatric report written six years later, says that Boomer was ‘never satisfied with this marriage’, describing his wife’s periods of ill health and her inability to accommodate his ‘highly sexed’ nature. But, the report continued, since she died ‘he has been in trouble.’ He was described by one psychiatrist as a ‘self-centred individual’ who had formed one-sided relationships, ‘all the give on the wife’s side and the take on his’. Boomer fell into depression and ‘lacked confidence in his ability and outlook for the future’. At Tarcutta during what the psychiatrist called his ‘hey day’, Boomer was an RSSILA delegate and had run for parliament, and he looked back on these years as a time of satisfying physical activity. By 1957 he was divorced from his second wife, paying £3 a week maintenance for a daughter he never saw, and just emerging from an acrimonious split in a business venture. As a soldier settler in the Wagga district, Boomer fared better than many other local returned soldiers. His problems began after he left the land.

Oliver Baker took up his land in 1919. Two years later an inspector described him as ‘satisfactory from all points of view’. His annual reports describe a successful farmer about whom the Department need not be concerned. Baker had a few bad seasons during the late 1920s, but in 1928 or early 1929 he bought a block from a neighbour and took up dairying. Commenting on the recent good rains and prospects for the coming season, the District Surveyor recommended that Baker’s payments be postponed, citing his record and obvious efforts to make the venture a success. Baker managed to survive the Depression. His milk business grew, he employed two men and had a van and two milk runs. Like his namesake Francis Baker, Oliver Baker was still on the block into the 1940s.

130 All the foregoing is from Boomer, Neil L., Repatriation Department File, M4826, document 5 July 1957.
131 Baker, Oliver Septimus, CSURA SA15/38, document 30 March 1921.
132 Baker, Oliver Septimus, CSURA SA15/38, document 7 May 1929.
133 Baker, Oliver Septimus, CSURA SA15/38, document 18 October 1929.
Outside Mate’s Estate and Toole’s Creek, about five miles from Junee on the other side of Wagga, George Downie, who after more than a year in the AIF, and having served in Egypt before being declared unfit for further service, was allocated a block two days before the war ended. Downie had only really had two jobs in his life, farm labourer and soldier. Feeling himself fortunate to have all of his limbs and to not have malaria, he never applied for a pension, asking instead for an advance of £500 for stock, equipment and ‘improvements’.

By 1923 Downie was married, with a child, and had made ‘substantial’ improvements to what he described as once ‘virgin land’. He had worked hard readying the soil for stock and crops, had fenced the holding, cleared it of all but some shade trees and got rid of noxious plants and animals. In 1925 he took out a second mortgage and appears to have had little contact with the Lands Department for the next seven years. In 1932 an impressed inspector described this one time parcel of bushland as now having on it a home, a blacksmith shop, a garage, stables, tanks, and fences along the external and internal boundaries. ‘As to methods and working etc.’, he wrote, ‘this settler has the right methods and is working the land in the best possible manner … very little other improvements are necessary for some time to come.’ Downie remained on the block that had become home to he and his family until at least 1939. Other returned men stayed for far longer. Melville Chamberlain at Marrar farmed his land until 1951. Edward Hardwick kept his farm, ‘Lone Pine’, passing it on to his son David who lived there until his death in 2009, while Arthur Belling’s descendants live on his block outside Tarcutta to the present day.

During the early post-war year many local veterans had trouble finding work. Not every employer honoured promises they made to men who enlisted, but through the 1920s returned men did receive preference from at least some businesses and institutions. Circumstances changed with the Depression. Perhaps surprisingly, some among those who withstood the economic crash were soldier settlers who fared as well,

135 Downie, George Jeffries, Lands Department File CSURA SA15/6, document 29 January 1919.
136 Downie, George Jeffries, Lands Department File CSURA SA15/6, document 27 August 1919.
137 Downie, George Jeffries, Lands Department File CSURA SA15/6, document 1 July 1923.
138 Downie, George Jeffries, Lands Department File CSURA SA15/6, document 30 March 1932.
139 The last date confirming Downie’s occupancy of the block in his Lands Department File was in 1939. Downie, George Jeffries, Lands Department File CSURA SA15/6, document 11 June 1939.
141 This material was provided by Michelle Maddison, curator of the ‘From Barbed Wire to Boundary Fences: The soldier settlers of Tarcutta and Wantabadgery 1917-1949’ exhibition at the Museum of the Riverina. Personal communication, 29 July 2016.
if not better than many of their fellow veterans in town. Even in the most difficult times after the war, some of Wagga’s returned soldiers survived without falling into poverty or destitution. They participated in community activities and enjoyed their leisure. Such men are not always easy to find in the historical record. The following chapter considers their experience of post-war life.
XII. ‘The old “Spit & Polish” brigade’: returned soldiers in Wagga’s civic life

In July 1919 Wagga held a gala celebration to mark the formal return to peace. Proceedings opened with a ‘happy laughing throng’ spilling out of the Town Hall grounds, filing up and down Baylis Street and into Morrow Street. The City Concert Band played as local school children were marshalled for a parade. But when the parade started the Brass Band struck up, marching over the Wollundry Bridge and into view ahead of a military party that included local returned soldiers. At this moment ‘of great enthusiasm’, the Brass Band were once more to the fore. Then the festivities moved to the show ground, where the ‘whole of Wagga’ seemed to be present, said the Advertiser, only ‘a handful of people … did not see the great show’.

Returned men were given ‘special’ seats at the back of the grandstand. They were a main attraction, but this was less a welcome home than a celebration of the new peace. ‘The war and its horrors was forgotten this day’, the Advertiser said, ‘every face lit up with a sunny smile, as the cheers went from the crowd, handkerchiefs were waved and salutes exchanged between passing soldiers and their friends.’ They were just one of many groups to feature. Most of Wagga’s clubs and associations took part, and the Experiment Farm put together floats symbolising wheat and wool, the Commonwealth’s ‘two great primary industries’. The local Federal member, George Beeby MLA, and venerable local politician James Gormly MLC were there, as was the mayor who spoke of his belief that the war just ended was the last war. Turning to the district’s returned men he said that it was up to them to make the future ‘better and brighter’.¹

Jack Harrison once remarked that all diggers were ‘more or less knocked about’.² Returned men nevertheless took part in every area of the district’s civic and social life, and, consciously or not, did help make post-war Wagga ‘better and brighter’. Many never troubled the civic authorities and left little trace in the historical record. It is unfortunate that what appears to have been the experience of many is documented in the cases of only a few.

¹ All the foregoing is taken from the Daily Advertiser, 21 July 1919.
In no sphere can we be less certain of how returned men made their way through civilian life than the domestic. Mostly the stories that have emerged are tales of women caring for a damaged man or suffering violence at his hands. Occasionally though, the record permits a glimpse into a happier, more equal relationship. Wagga provides a particularly detailed and compelling example of a returned soldier’s devotion to his de-facto wife.\(^3\)

Reg McCurdy, who lost a thumb at Gallipoli, was recovering in Weymouth when, as he told it, ‘though being a digger’ he struck a friendship with Special Constable George Rendall. Rendall used to look after drunk Australians. If they weren’t causing trouble he’d make sure that they got past the picquets on a local bridge and safely back to their billets. ‘A lot of Diggers will remember him’, said McCurdy who visited Rendall’s home and became friendly with one of his daughters, Nell. McCurdy and Nell ‘kept company’ until he was offered the chance to return home at very short notice.

McCurdy gave Nell the colour patches of his brothers’ units, asking her to see if anyone she saw wearing them knew the McCurdy boys. Nell met and later married a 22\(^{nd}\) Battalion man, Charles Helman, who knew Stan McCurdy. When Helman was also invalided home she followed him with their three month old baby, only to be met in Sydney by her husband ‘arm in arm’ with his new girlfriend. Nell left. Helman refused to pay maintenance and as she pondered how to get home to England Nell wrote to McCurdy in Wagga. She was going to stay at a friend’s house in Katoomba, just west of Sydney. McCurdy went to meet her. A ‘heavy punter’ in those days, he didn’t have the money for her voyage home, so he took her back to Wagga. ‘After a time’, he said, ‘we became more than just friends and a little one came along two months before time’. The baby lived just a few hours, Nell was fortunate to survive. She and Reg stayed in Wagga and went on to have six sons, but Nell’s judicial separation from Helman meant she couldn’t get divorced. ‘No one knows our position’, said McCurdy.

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\(^3\) The following is from a series of letters written between 1960 and 1970 in McCurdy, Reginald, Repatriation Department Files, C17563 and M17563.
None of this is to say that Nell and Reg had easy lives. In some respects he fits comfortably into a narrative of returned men who experienced hardship after the war. He had trouble keeping work when he came home and after the war ended he ‘had a go at everything in the bush. 3 railway construction jobs, road contracts wool pressing, packers at flour mills, clover refinery plants, dozens of travelling chaff-cutting plants & chaff mills.’ But his life with Nell was very harmonious. The couple were still living in Wagga when Nell died with Reg by her side in 1970 after decades together that, though perhaps not materially easy, might have been the envy of some women fated to live with men of far less gentle disposition.\(^4\)

Outside the home, local veterans were often found on the sportsfield, golf course, cricket pitch or tennis court. Most were still young and if they were in good health were often also fit, hardened by military life and keen to get involved in local competitions. Every week the papers reported on local sport, and every week Wagga’s returned men featured in stories about a recent match or one to come. The link between sport and war has been often remarked. Less has been made of the continuing association between sport and the AIF in the post-war years though it was an obvious means by which Wagga’s returned men could hold onto the comradeship that many soldiers felt was the brightest of part of their wartime service.

When Ted Drake turned out for his regular tennis matches during the 1920s, he would have played against other returned soldiers. Drake, Charles Hardy Jr., Lionel Sheppard, Jack Harrison and Awdrey Headley were all members of the Wagga Wagga Lawn Tennis Club. Drake served as club secretary twice, in 1921 and 1924-25, and Hardy was the club’s treasurer in the 1923-1924 season.\(^5\) Enough members had enlisted for the committee to consider having a roll of honour made, in 1922, four years after the war.\(^6\) The Wagga Half Holiday Tennis Club unveiled its own roll of honour in 1916 after 32 men and boys from the club had enlisted.\(^7\)

\(^{4}\) McCurdy, Reginald, Repatriation Department Files, C17563 and M17563, letters written between 1960-1970.
\(^{5}\) Morris, 2002, p. 400. See also Wagga Wagga Lawn Tennis Club Minutes 1922 – 1929, CSURA RW5/242. On Hardy being treasurer, see the minutes of the 19 February 1923 meeting.
\(^{6}\) Wagga Wagga Lawn Tennis Club minutes 1922 – 1929, CSURA RW5/242, meeting of 14 September 1922.
\(^{7}\) Daily Advertiser, 21 September 1916.
In August 1920 returned soldiers formed a Wagga AIF cricket team, the sixth team to enter the local competition. Harry Gissing, seemingly involved in every aspect of Wagga’s social and political life, was elected club president, though does not seem to have played. In 1923 he became president of the Wagga Cricket Association. For a man who never gained a commission in the AIF, Gissing seems to have had a gift for leading and persuading others. Sydney Pinkstone from Cootamundra, a popular local figure who had risen through the ranks to end the war as a captain, had fought at Fromelles and received the Military Cross for his courageous leadership at Mont St. Quentin in 1918, was appointed team captain. He was succeeded by Jack Harrison in 1923 when another veteran, Harold Cunningham, was club secretary. The team was closely associated with the RSSILA sub-branch, which encouraged all Wagga’s diggers who were cricketers to join. Prizes were awarded to the best players at RSSILA meetings.

The newcomers proved too good for the opposition. Knowing that they were ‘far too strong for any of the other Wednesday teams’, the AIF players declined to take part in the mid-week competition. They turned out to be too strong for the weekend teams too. A photograph of them as undefeated premiers of the 1920-1921 season shows Pinkstone, who also played rugby league, standing next to Stephen Weedon, with Jack Harrison sitting proudly in the front row. Sid Wild, Jack Cox and Wally Higgins are there too, along with Awdrey Headley. When he was killed in a 1925 railway crossing accident Headley had a guard of honour of AIF and cricketing mates.

In 1931 the local RSSILA challenged the Wagga Rifle Club to a competition on the town’s new rifle range. No other sport came as close to using skills honed at war as shooting, and the returned men were keen to show that they had ‘lost none of the art so arduously attained during their service with the AIF’. Some veterans, including Les Barrand MM, a founding member of the local sub-branch who had won the King’s Prize for shooting in 1919, and Stan Edwards, who won the same coveted prize four times,
were long-time members of the Rifle Club, but shot with the ‘diggers’ team for the day. The returned men, led by Barrand and said to be rusty after not having handled rifles for years, prevailed nonetheless. Barrand and Edwards remained highly regarded riflemen, continuing their ‘annual trek to the Victorian Rifle Shoot’ for many years and making the Wagga Rifle Club ‘one of the strongest in New South Wales’ in the 1930s. Barrand won the King’s Prize at least once more, in 1931, was elected President of the Wagga Rifle Club in 1936, and served as an alderman on Wagga Council for 25 years, including three years as mayor in the 1940s.

Some of Wagga’s returned men were keen golfers. Edwin Tyrie, a doctor turned grazier who served in the Middle East during the war, was a well known on the Wagga golf scene, as was James ‘Clem’ Sheekey, a successful local solicitor and member of the Riverine Club, who had been wounded on the Western Front. Sheekey’s family owned the well-known Wagga soft drink factory. He was also a foundation member and first president of the Wagga Country Golf Club and a member of the Murrumbidgee Turf Club.

The Legacy Club held golf ‘Service Cup’ competitions during the 1930s. The former soldiers were, said the Legacy Bulletin, sending ‘the old “Spit and Polish” brigade (into) action.’ Through the 1920s and 1930s people who spent time in the company of returned soldiers would have become familiar with wartime slang and nods to their days in the AIF. Bill Stillman, a local veteran and golfer, was said in 1933 to have ‘headed the field at the town club’s hop-over and landed his second “tin hat” for the year.’ Reporting on a 1934 Lake Albert golf tournament organised by Dudley Creagh, the Legacy Bulletin gave participants jovial nicknames, some of which evoked their wartime service: ‘Gilly’ Gilchrist, ‘Tres Bon’ Eastbrook, ‘Medicine and Duty’ Tyrie, ‘No. 9’ Gissing, ‘Inky’ Pinkstone ‘(Parley Voo!)’ and ‘Peter Pan’ Barrand. They played on 8 August, a date of ‘special significance for the diggers’ – the anniversary of

15 Daily Advertiser, 5, 21 and 31 May 1931. The quote, ‘lost none of the art’ is from the 5 May edition as is the news that that Barrand and Edwards would shoot with the ‘diggers team’ for the day.
16 The quote is from The Australasian (Melbourne), 1 August 1936. On Barrand and Edwards competing in Victoria see Legacy Club of Wagga Wagga, Bulletin No. 3, 23 March 1933, CSURA, RW151/1/1.
18 N. Blacklow, 1992, p. 27, and Evening News (Sydney) 30 April 1925. See also S. Morris, 2002, pp. 1168-69. Sheekey’s middle name was Clement, hence the name ‘Clem’.
19 Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1, Bulletin no. 8, 1 September 1933.
the great Allied offensive that finally broke the German Army on the Western Front. How interesting it would be to see the film that Harry Gissing made at Lake Albert that day.\footnote{Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932–1938, CSURA, RW151/1, President’s Report, 26 October 1934. No trace of the film appears to exist.}

Gissing, long since one of the district’s best regarded returned soldiers, lived out his dedication to the memory of the AIF through his work on the council and as an RSSILA member. He must have spent a great deal of his time in the company of returned soldiers and may have preferred it this way. In his private life too, it seems Gissing sought the company other veterans. He and a couple of other local returned men appear to have enjoyed packing rifles and fishing lines and heading to the Murray River’s upper reaches where they would camp away from the cares of work and duty. Club President ‘Gilly’ Gilchrist and Don Morrow also enjoyed trout fishing together in the mountains.\footnote{Legacy Club of Wagga Wagga, Bulletin No. 3, 23 March 1933 and No. 14, March 1934. Wagga Wagga Legacy Club minute book 1932 – 1938, CSURA, RW151/1/1. Masonic Lodge Installation certificates, CSURA RW2773/1/11, honour roll in Brother Allan H Smith’s installation booklet.}

When they played sport, particularly in AIF teams or tournaments, returned men were conspicuous as war veterans. In other areas of community life, a man’s having been in the AIF could quickly fade into the background. Wagga’s Masonic Lodge Harmony had 24 men enlist, all but two of whom returned from the war.\footnote{Masonic Lodge Installation certificates, CSURA RW2773/1/11, honour roll in Brother Allan H Smith’s installation booklet.} Senior among them were the two doctors, Henry Stoker and Stephen Weedon. Of the other surviving men listed on the Lodge’s roll only Len Francis, who left Wagga before the end of the war, has featured in this thesis. After the war though, other returned soldiers joined and, by the nature of the association, the same men who were well-known in other areas of Wagga’s civic life were also to be found in the Lodge.

Thomas Blamey’s brother proposed that Roy Tapscott be conferred with the Lodge’s third degree in March 1919.\footnote{Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW minute book 1917-1930, CSURA RW2463/6/64, Minutes of 18 March 1919 meeting.} Tapscott, whose service in the AIF had been brief and involved no time in the front line, was one of several returned men joining important local social institutions. At first new members who had been to the war were identified as veterans in the Lodge’s books. ‘J. G. King A.I.F. just returned from Mesopotamia’
was admitted to the Lodge at the 27 May 1919 meeting. Two months later William Rich, a 27 year old farmer ‘late of the A.I.F.’ was proposed for admission. Rich was pronounced ‘all clear’ for membership on the same day that Stephen Weedon received the ‘all clear’ to become a Lodge official. On 9 September 1919 Sid Wild and Allan Broadribb both ‘late of the A.I.F.’ were proposed for membership. Wild was inducted on 18 November 1919 and Broadribb in January 1920. In early May when Ron Birrell was proposed for membership, no mention was made of his having been in the AIF, though the thrice wounded veteran’s service had been far longer and far more arduous than Tapscott’s. He is described as a ‘grazier’, but was, as we have seen, a soldier settler. From then on other returned men were also described by their occupation rather than whether they had been in the AIF. When John Dodwell and Hugh Condon sought Lodge membership in late 1919 and early 1920 respectively, neither man was referred to as ‘late of the AIF’. It took less than eighteen months for the lodge to stop referring to brethren and applicants who had war service as returned men.

The Lodge was a popular local institution that members left to enlist and returned to when they came home. Some men joined while they were in uniform and others did so after the war. As former soldiers continued to seek membership through the 1920s their service went unremarked in official documents. Apart from a photograph of the honour board, the Lodge Harmony’s own short history does not mention the war. But those years could not be entirely ignored and on Anzac Day 1929 Grand Chaplain, Archdeacon Davies, gave an address at the Lodge’s service, going to considerable rhetorical lengths to associate the Lodge with the Anzacs. Both entities, he said, were pledged to the ‘three great loyalites which are inextricably linked together – belief in God, love of brethren, and that patriotism which is expressed in loyal service to King

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25 Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW minute book 1917-1930, CSURA RW2463/6/64, Minutes of 22 May and 22 July 1919 meeting.
26 Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW minute book 1917-1930, CSURA RW2463/6/64, Minutes of 9 September 1919 meeting.
27 Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW minute book 1917-1930, CSURA RW2463/6/64, Minutes of 9 September 1919 meeting.
28 Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW minute book 1917-1930, CSURA RW2463/6/64, Minutes of 18 November 1919 and 6 January 1920 meetings.
29 Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW minute book 1917-1930, CSURA RW2463/6/64, Minutes of 21 December 1920 and 22 February 1921 meetings.
30 Lodge Harmony No. 22 UGL of NSW minute book 1917-1930, CSURA RW2463/6/64, Minutes of 25 January 1921 meeting.
31 Lodge Harmony Royal Arch Chapter No 19 correspondence 1912-1917, CSURA RW2463/33/378. See for example H. R. Nutt’s correspondence, 1 October 1916.
32 A Brief History of Lodge Harmony, Wagga Wagga 1936, CSURA RW2463/10/93.
and country’. Davies argued that though they may have been unaware of it, the Anzacs were fighting against what he called the cause of the world’s misfortune, materialism.  

Davies’ speech, coinciding with a growing interest in artistic and dramatic representations of the war in the late 1920s and early 1930s, reflects the times more than it does any serious connection between the ideals for which men fought and the Lodge’s principles. A decade after it ended the war was beginning to be seen in part as a cultural artefact. It had been a shared experience, touching everyone in the community, holding different meanings for different people, but whose profound impact was generally understood.

Returned soldiers were active in the local arts scene since shortly after the war. Hugh Oates, as mayor, was patron of the Wagga Wagga District Eistedfod in 1922 and 1923, as was Dan Byrnes in 1924. Ted Drake sang in the Riverina District Eistedfod in the Wonderland Theatre in September 1926. Jack Harrison was in the orchestra for the Wagga Wagga Choral Society’s production of Floradora, a popular Edwardian musical comedy, in 1929, and the Ladysmith Diggers Dramatic Company put on a play called The Light in 1931. At the following year’s eistedfodd local under 18s recited Gallipoli and Western Front veteran Geoffrey Dearmer’s poem The Turkish Trench Dog.

Through most of the 1920s, returned soldiers involved in the arts performed popular material of the time, most of which made no reference to the war. Donald Bertram, who later needed a temporary Town Clerk job with the Wagga Council, wrote the lyrics to a song, Wagga You’re Calling Me Back in 1927. At least one local veteran preferred the songs of the war years to contemporary material like Bertram’s offering: ‘What vivid memories they recall’, said Les Douglas, ‘even today their tuneful melodies can bring a thrill to those who heard them in those turbulent times’. Songs like ‘Long Long Trail’, ‘Rose of No Man’s Land’, ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning’, ‘Tipperary’, and

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33 Anzac Day address by Archdeacon D. J. Davies Grand Chaplain, Masonic Anzac Service 1929, Freemasonry Collection, CSURA RW2 463/10/96.
34 Wagga Wagga Eisteddfod Society, CSURA RW625/3, 1922, 1923 and 1924 programs.
35 Wagga Wagga Eisteddfod Society, CSURA RW625/3, 1926 program. See for example RW625/3/100, Australian Recitation, and RW625/3/105, Recitation in Character.
36 Wagga Wagga Eisteddfod Society, CSURA RW625/3, 1931 program, pp. 11 and 32.
37 Wagga Wagga Eisteddfod Society, CSURA RW625/3, 1932 program, p. 47.
others ‘brought some slight ray of cheeriness and gaiety against the dark background of War’. The 1920s by comparison, said Douglas, seemed ‘more or less a blank’.39 If music reminded them of old times, veterans might also have felt the stab of melancholy in other local performances. In 1930 Joyce Wallace won the under 12s age group for her recitation of the poem The Shrine, about a child whose father was killed in Flanders and for whom a painting of poppies became a family shrine.40

No memoir or novel of the Wagga soldiers’ war joined the burgeoning international war literature of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Local manifestations were far more low key, and in one case, Hilda Freeman’s unfinished story Brunskill, referred to in chapter IX, quite bizarre. The Brunskills were a very well known local family, many of whose descendents still live in the district. Several Brunskill boys went to the war but there is no evidence that any came back with obvious signs of mental trauma.41 If Brunskill’s main character is based on any of the Wagga Brunskills the connection is loose indeed, but the story is an interesting relic of Wagga’s post-war literary scene.42

Better known at the time was returned men Harold Cunningham and Victor Harding’s Anzac, A Play in 3 Acts, first performed on Anzac Day 1931 at the Oxford Theatre. Where Brunskill painted a bleak picture of returned soldiers’ lives, with one of the main characters a feeble, largely helpless man, Cunningham and Harding’s play and the manner of its production tells a different story. Set in the Gallipoli trenches over a few hours, it concerns only the war. There are no asides about home, and little of the characters outside this time and place is revealed. Wagga’s returned soldiers seem to have considered the play a worthy reflection of their experience, whether they had been on Gallipoli or had enlisted later. Local veterans, all members of the RSSILA, produced, organised and performed Anzac, A Play in 3 Acts and a ‘fair sprinkling’ of returned soldiers were in the audience.43

With the play as main feature, the night’s entertainment, befitting the date, was entirely war related. Major H. Jacobs put on a lantern slide show of pictures he was said to have

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40 Wagga Wagga Eisteddfod Society, CSURA RW625/3, 1930 Program, p. 16.
41 Peter Gissing, Harry’s grandson, is also a member of the Brunskill family and has shared material on the family’s history in Wagga with me.
42 Hilda Freeman papers, CSURA RW1890/1/42.

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taken at Gallipoli, and eight year old Billie Kerr recited C. J. Dennis’s *The Singing Soldiers*. No one in the audience could have known that they were watching an early performance in what would become the long career of one of Australia’s most successful actors. As Bill Kerr, Billie went on to act in a host of films and theatre productions in Australia and overseas, including as an older man in a series of First World War related films or television shows. Kerr played Uncle Jack in *Gallipoli*, General Chauvel in *The Light Horsemen* and General Monash in *The Anzacs*.

Kerr’s story is an interesting aside on that generation’s relationship to the war. Born after the Armistice, Kerr and his peers grew up when returned soldiers were found in all walks of life, accepting the war as a presence without having lived through it. He played Harold ‘Micky’ Martin, one of the Second World War’s pre-eminent bomber pilots, in *The Dam Busters*, 26 years before his first role in a film about the Great War. For Kerr’s generation the First World War came to be overshadowed by the Depression and the Second World War. Their fathers’ war faded into the background of popular culture where it remained until a revival of interest by historians and film makers, in the 1970s and early 1980s brought it back into the public consciousness.

Men who devoted their time to Wagga’s sporting and cultural life, particularly those like Harry Gissing, who held office in several associations or clubs, were generally from the more comfortable end of Wagga society. Among those discussed in this and the previous chapter were some of the district’s most affluent citizens. Charles Hardy Junior’s family owned real estate all over Wagga, from houses and flats to subdivisions, development sites and business premises. At least twenty properties are listed in his father’s or his father’s company name in the 1920s Town Property Sales Registers. Lendon Shaw, Dan Byrnes, Hugh Condon, George Brunskill, Roy Tapscott, Clem Sheekey, Sid Pinkstone and several other returned men were also property-owners in Wagga. Some had more than a single property to their name, but none came close to matching the Hardy family’s impressive portfolio.

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44 *Daily Advertiser*, 21 April 1931.
46 Town Property Sales Register 1925-1960, CSURA RW5/5/205.
Hardy, more than any other local returned soldier, sought influence beyond the district, leaping from ‘mild prominence’ in Wagga ‘into the wild fame of glaring newspaper headlines’, said a Melbourne weekly. Described by a gushing profile writer in 1931 as ‘a vigorously active young man of 32: tall and broad-shouldered … the possessor of a striking personality’ but who, said a less flattering observer, ‘did not shrink from describing himself as a Fascist’, Hardy spent much of the 1920s as an active member of the local RSSILA before taking up a senior position in the secessionist Riverina Movement. In 1931, this ‘man of action’, who ‘wastes no time in long speeches, but is never happy unless he be “up and doing”’, who advocated that Riverina businesses stop paying taxes until they received favourable treatment from state and federal governments, became chairman of the United Country Movement. He was elected to the Senate as a United Country Party candidate in December 1931 and became Country Party leader in the Senate in 1935.

Opposite to Hardy in almost every respect, former Kangaroo Fred Farrall left his conservative upbringing behind, questioning his opposition to trade unions and left wing politics as he experienced war and life as a returned soldier. Where Wagga men like Hardy and fellow veteran and Riverina Movement committee member John Graham believed that organised labour was a ‘menace and always has been’, Farrall joined a union in 1922, became first a member of the Labor Party and in January 1930, of the Communist Party. When he was in his 70s Farrall was elected mayor of Prahran in Melbourne. Long after the war he traced his socialism back to ‘the advice I received from Bill Fraser on the farm, the terrors of the Somme, the wanton, useless killing of my mates, my disillusionment on returning home to battle through the Great Depression’.

Hardy came from wealthier circumstances than Farrall’s comfortable but modest farm upbringing. His father was one of the district’s most prosperous businessmen, whose

47 Table Talk (Melbourne), 2 April 1931, pp. 11-14.
48 For the ‘fascist’ quote see A. Moore, ‘Hardy, Charles Downey [1898-1941]’, in Australian Dictionary of Biography, vol. 9, 1983, online version. Another observer wrote of Hardy’s charisma, his ‘expressionless’ blue eyes, ‘as hard as flint’, and his ‘magnetism’ of the type only found in natural leaders. For these quotes and on Hardy’s agitating against paying taxes, see John Graham’s undated paper on the Riverina Movement, CSURA RW2005/1/1. The quotes come from pp. 5-6. Graham was a returned soldier and Wagga stock and station agent when he became a Riverina Movement committee member in 1931.
49 John Graham, CSURA RW2005/1/1, p. 22.
50 For Farrall’s story, see L. Farrall, 1992 pp. 120ff. On his joining the Communist Party, see p.132.
51 L. Farrall, 1992, p. 139.
name was known across the Riverina. Charles Junior was educated at Geelong Grammar School before joining the family business. Both Farrall’s and Hardy’s fathers held similar political views, but no evidence points to Hardy Junior’s time in the AIF having shaped his own politics in the way that Farrall’s did.52

Between the extremes that Hardy and Farrall represented were most of the district’s returned men, who if they became involved in politics, did so mostly at the local level in Wagga, often taking their first steps as local representatives in returned soldiers’ associations. Dan Byrnes, one of Wagga’s best known returned men, lived in the district before the war, returned when it was over and remained until 1955 when he moved to Maroubra in Sydney.53 He had injured his back trying to lift the trail of an artillery piece, but was otherwise in good health and was discharged from the AIF on 7 March 1919.54 He spent a short time in Sydney working for an insurance agency, but was soon back in Wagga, becoming secretary of the local Repatriation Committee, apparently his first elected position.55

Pleased as he was to have been voted secretary, Brynes knew that although it was a full-time job it was also unlikely to last. Anxious about his future and worried that he had no time to pick up his pre-war accounting studies, he asked the Repatriation Department whether there was any scheme to help men in his position find work: ‘if no provision is made, or will be made to assist me, I must needs turn my attention to my Repatriation before it is too late.’ The Department was unsympathetic, explaining that no officer had security of tenure. It was an ‘honorary’ position, in the gift of the local repatriation committee.56 ‘You’, said the Department in a second letter to Byrnes, ‘are no worse off than any of the officers at present engaged in this Department.’57

Byrnes called on Major Heath’s help. Heath wrote to the Repatriation Department seeking ‘a grant of fees in connection with the course of instruction in Accountancy’ on

54 Byrnes, Daniel Terrance, Repatriation Department File C39058 pt. 1. Byrnes was discharged on 7 March 1919.
56 Byrnes, Daniel Terrance, Repatriation Department File R39058, Byrnes’ correspondence is stamped as having been received by the Department on 4 May 1920.
57 Byrnes, Daniel Terrance, Repatriation Department File R39058, letter 27 May 1920.
Byrnes’ behalf. The committee’s executive supported the request, noting that a grant would ‘be of advantage and benefit to Mr Byrnes and very materially assist him in permanently re-establishing himself in civil life.’58 The committee endorsed Byrnes’ application, he paid Messrs Hemingway & Robertson the £18 course fee on 18 July and started shortly afterwards.59 But the demands of repatriation work kept him from his studies and in May 1921 the Repatriation Department demanded to know whether he wanted to continue.60 Byrnes obliged, writing on his own letterhead, ‘D. T. Byrnes, late A.I.F. Stock and Property Salesman, Land and Insurance Agent, Specialises in Town Lands Work’, to explain that he hadn’t begun his training earlier, ‘owing to the fact that my work here as Secretary of the Local Repatriation Committee and my starting in business as well on my account as a Land and Commission Agent has more than fully occupied my time.’61

Byrnes’ path differed from those taken by Hardy Junior and Farrall. He chose a formal involvement in Wagga’s political and business life, seemingly in the interests of his fellow veterans, to serve the community more broadly and to safeguard his own future. He had, said one historian, ‘always believed that Wagga Wagga would become an important city’ and early in his career used his connections with the local veteran community to get elected to council.62 Byrnes and Roy Tapscott were nominated to sit as aldermen by the RSSILA in 1919 and were followed by Harry Gissing in 1920. Three years later Byrnes was elected mayor, and the following year he became president of the local RSSILA.63 Dismissing complaints that returned men were ‘butting in’ when he was elected to the council, Harry Gissing assured people that returned soldiers were not trying to run Wagga and reminded them that war veterans were entitled to seek representation on public bodies.64

Such men sought membership or leadership positions in local associations through what seems to have been a genuine desire to contribute to the community. They were members of the local RSSILA sub-branch, but also devoted themselves to organisations

58 Byrnes, Daniel Terrance, Repatriation Department File R39058, letter 21 June 1920.
59 Byrnes, Daniel Terrance, Repatriation Department File R39058, letters 8 and 27 July 1920.
60 Byrnes, Daniel Terrance, Repatriation Department File R39058, documents 13 September 1920 and 12 May 1921.
61 Byrnes, Daniel Terrance, Repatriation Department File R39058, document 16 May 1921.
62 S. Morris, 1999, p. 139.
63 Daily Advertiser, 14 December 1923 and 14 January 1924. On Byrnes being elected mayor, see 14 December 1923 edition and on his being president of the Wagga RSSILA, see 14 January 1924 edition.
64 S. Morris and H. Fife, 1999, p. 41.
unrelated to returned men, like the Greater Wagga League, its successor the Riverina Development League and later still, Charles Hardy’s Riverina Movement, each of which had returned soldiers as members but were solely dedicated to the rapid development of the Riverina. The returned men who wanted a hand in running Wagga were interested in more aspects of community life than just the needs and interests of local veterans. They were concerned with the district in which they lived and the many issues brought before the local council and other civic bodies through the decade and a half after the war.

Before the war Gissing wrote, ‘my life so far, has been set in easy places … I have wanted for nothing.’ During his years in the AIF he was able to pursue his peacetime profession and he had the means after he was discharged to acquire a successful business in Wagga. He quickly became a popular figure and in 1920 was elected to the council, receiving more than 500 votes, 111 more than the next candidate in a ballot of more than 1600 people. In a strange echo of Brunskill, he was also interested in wireless, becoming involved in the Riverina Wireless Supplies company in 1924 and launching Wagga Wireless Distributors in 1928. By the early 1930s Gissing owned two pharmacies in Wagga, one on Fitzmaurice Street and one on Baylis Street. In 1937 he was elected mayor, the first of two terms in Wagga’s highest municipal office, played an important role in establishing Wagga’s ambulance service and station, was a leading figure in the boy scouts and the rotary club, raised funds for the Wagga Base Hospital, was president of the Red Cross, and a member of the Southern Riverina County Council along with many other roles referred to in this and previous chapters.

The war affected Harry Gissing deeply, but it did not destroy him. He was extraordinarily active in Wagga’s social, business and political life. Unlike many veterans who appear in the literature on returned soldiers, Gissing was not the subject of Repatriation or Lands Department files, his story emerges from Wagga’s civic record

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67 Wagga Council Minutes, 2 September 1920, CSURA RW2608/22.
68 Personal communication with Peter Gissing, 27 November 2015.
69 Wagga Wagga Eisteddfod Society, CSURA RW625/3, 1931 program, advertisement p. 43.
and his own wartime diary and is therefore not a tale of pain, illness or disability. He was more energetic than most of his fellow veterans, but in his having forged a post-AIF life not darkened by his years as a soldier Gissing was like many others. Wagga’s network of returned soldiers was complex and diverse, reaching into every aspect of local life. Their associations extended far beyond wartime ties and demonstrate the importance of looking outside the ‘damaged veteran’ paradigm to understand them. Having withstood the privations, horrors and trials of war, many local returned men came home with, as Nelson said, ‘their selves intact’ and were able enrich rather than threaten or be a burden on their community.\textsuperscript{71}

Wagga’s returned soldiers took part in sport, clubs, associations, the arts and politics. They were a significant local presence through the post-war years. For many residents veterans were neither strangers nor men to be feared, they were family members, the man sitting at the next desk in an office or a fellow labourer on farms or public works. They were the family doctor or dentist, a teacher, a local aldermen or mayor, well-known businessman and committee member, driver or mechanic, tradesman or cook. In short, many became regular members of the community whose day-to-day lives and concerns differed little from the lives and concerns of those who had not been to the war. Today their service in the AIF tends to define veterans. Wagga’s example reveals that the war was an intense and deeply affecting episode, but for men whose lives were often measured in decades it was not the sum of their experience.

\textsuperscript{71} E. Nelson, 2014, p. 111.
Conclusion

Six days after the war ended Harry Gissing wrote, ‘With the prospect of an early return to my folk in Australia the future looks bright’.¹ He could not have known then that his future lay in Wagga, but his optimism was well placed and his contribution to his adopted community substantial and enduring. Men such as Gissing and the sentiment he expressed rarely appear in histories of returned soldiers. They are overwhelmingly represented as men doomed to lives of suffering, far more in need of assistance than able to contribute to society. With its broad temporal but narrow geographical focus, this thesis reveals the extent to which Wagga’s returned soldiers conformed or did not conform to commonly accepted narratives about the AIF and its veterans. It uncovers often overlooked complexities and offers a deeper understanding than can be found in much of the literature on these subjects.

Though country men have often been credited with giving the AIF its character, many of Wagga’s soldiers lived and worked in town in professions that were not peculiar to rural areas. They were rural Australians, but were not all the bushmen of Bean’s writing, nor were they free spirits who knew neither discipline nor regimentation. Both were part of their lives from an early age, at school, at work and in the part time soldiering that occupied local men. If the AIF, as has often been said, was an ill-disciplined body of men, it was not because its country soldiers were unaccustomed to living by rules both formal and informal.

The bush, nevertheless, was central to Wagga men’s identity, not for the role it played in their soldiering, but for the role it played in their inner lives. As men severed from home and loved ones by a brutal war, their part of rural Australia was a place they loved and missed and longed to return to. Local volunteers enlisted to serve in a force formed to help Britain in a time of crisis, but which is forever thought of as having forged important elements of Australian identity. Yet, for both her soldiers and for people at home the district was far more a point of reference than was the newly federated nation. On active service local men sought each other out and wrote about each other in letters home. Wagga’s women directed their support for the war effort to local soldiers far more than to the AIF in general. The local press ran lengthy lists of the local men who received comforts parcels as well as regular pieces by or about the district’s soldiers. Those who worked hardest for the war effort wanted Wagga’s contribution in charitable

¹ R. Gissing, 2003, p. 441.
works, financial donations, comforts packages and enlistment to be greater than that of other regional towns and centres. While no one could have doubted the war’s global nature and importance – local newspaper readers had been well served with international stories for years before the war began – in Wagga it was also a very parochial concern. This local focus is suggestive of a national war effort prosecuted by people whose gaze remained firmly fixed on their own community.

While the war has been studied from all sorts of angles, returned soldiers have been far less written about. In this thesis I have presented local examples of veterans who resembled the subjects of Larsson’s *Shattered Anzacs*, Nelson’s *Homefront Hostilities* and Scates et al.’s *100 stories*, but I have also demonstrated that returned men included community leaders and others who were involved in every sphere of Wagga’s civic life, as active participants in sporting teams and competitions, clubs and associations, and local politics and business.

This thesis has argued that although Wagga’s veterans shared the experience of going to war, in other areas of life they were as driven by personal concerns, upbringing, profession and political leanings as any other segment of the district’s population. Peacetime inevitably loosened the bonds of the AIF, but for some local returned soldiers they were never entirely sundered. Those who were active in local returned soldiers’ organisations were devoted to their fellow veterans, maintaining wartime comradeship and easing the burden of bereaved families and returned men who suffered misfortune.

During the immediate post-war years and through the 1920s the Wagga RSSILA sub-branch was the only local returned soldiers’ association to help veterans and their families. But this was not its only purpose and for much of the decade members were concerned with getting a soldiers’ room and with seeing Wagga’s monuments and memorials built. The other significant organisation formed by local returned men, Legacy, did not come into being in Wagga until the battle for symbolic recognition was over.

In the drawn out process that kept Wagga’s veterans from having the memorials and rooms they felt were their due until more than a decade after the war, can be seen evidence of the camaraderie they shared, how some in the district, particularly Edward Collins, seemed intent on thwarting them, and how people expected them to understand
their place in the community. While there was always support for the commemorative sites, and that which perhaps held the deepest meaning for local families, the Monument to the Dead, was the first by many years to be completed, there was less public enthusiasm for costly memorials when the district had other pressing financial concerns. Some felt that returned men shouldn’t demand priority for public funds for causes seen to be exclusively their own.

While the town’s memorials were never solely for the men who went to the war, getting them proved a lengthy, frustrating process. However pleased Wagga’s returned soldiers and the community more generally were with the gardens and memorial arch, the decade of fighting to have them constructed must have made at least some of the district’s returned men feel that where their war service was concerned, they would always be men apart.

Wagga’s returned men were at their most visible in organisations specifically associated with the AIF – the RSSILA, Legacy and AIF sporting teams – but their dealings with other returned soldiers in the district were just as likely to be professional or social. They met on the sporting field, in local clubs and associations, drank together in the district’s pubs, sung in local choirs and eisteddfods, and took part in the local drama scene as audience members, writers and performers. If they were ill, local veterans could visit Drs Tyrie, Stoker or Weedon; for medicine they might go to Harry Gissing’s pharmacy. Returned men made representations that were considered by other veterans on the local council. Wagga’s business community included returned soldiers and in the ranks of the district’s tradesmen and labourers were many men who had been to the war. In the court a returned soldier in the dock might be questioned by a VC and judged by other returned soldiers on the jury.

Local returned men’s social and working lives were most closely intertwined on the soldier settler estates out towards Ladysmith and Tarcutta. This thesis shows that there too tales of heartbreaking failure were only part of the story. Not every settler in the district succeeded, but from the estates also emerge stories of happy childhoods, returned men working together on each other’s blocks, socialising with each other’s families, doing business with the Experiment Farm and businesses in town, and of families remaining on the land for many years, surviving good seasons and bad through
the 1920s, the Depression, the Second World War and in some cases for decades afterwards.

On many areas central to Australia’s experience of the war and its aftermath Wagga provides examples that call common orthodoxies into question. Works that explore a single theme or a broader geographical area suggest a commonality of experience that is not borne out in this study. Wagga’s returned men both embody and defy common understanding of how the Great War affected the men who fought and the community they returned to. Theirs is a more complex story than can be found in contemporary literature. While the district’s veterans included men who struggled to find their way through the post-AIF years, we must remember that in their ranks were also men who went through months or years of war and returned to lives of contentment and sometimes success. When local people look back to the First World War it is important that they see the likes of both Harry Gissing and Allan Bruce. Only then is it possible to understand the war’s impact on the district and on local men who served in the AIF.
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