

Address for the Re-dedication of the St Peters Heroes Memorial, 24th April 2019.

Your Excellency, Premier Marshal, Mayor Bria and most importantly the descendants and relatives here today.

I would firstly like to acknowledge the support for this project given by Mayor Bria and the City of Norwood Payneham & St Peters, and, for hosting and organising this commemoration service.

In May 1915 the St Peters Council asked relatives of the men and women of the district who had enlisted for overseas service to submit a photo for a permanent Roll of Honour to be displayed in the St Peters Town Hall.

Later the citizens of the Town erected this memorial which was unveiled by the then Governor in 1922. It had no names on it, but reference was made by the Governor to the Roll of Honour in the Town Hall which, by then, contained over 600 named photographs.

This Roll of Honour was removed during renovations to the building in the 1960s and has subsequently been lost.

Two years ago, the St Peters Residents Association felt that those who died should, after 100 years, be remembered by the addition their names to the memorial. The Association applied for, and received, a \$4000 grant from the Veterans SA - Anzac Day Commemoration Fund to research the names and to prepare and fix bronze name plaques to the memorial.

As the grant was less than the amount required for this project, the Association was fortunate to obtain additional funding from Oren Klemich and Judy Morris of Klemich Real Estate, and Ken Otto of Otto Timbers and Hardware.

Research using various sources, including the Australian War Memorial, Council Minutes, old newspapers, genealogy records, the Virtual War Memorial, and the support of historian Denise Schumann, identified 145 men from the former Town of St Peters, who did not return home, almost 25% of those who left these shores.

These names included 12 pairs of brothers. Mayor Bria has already spoken of the Emmins brothers.

One can only imagine the grief of grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters, and in some cases wives and children. To have lost one loved-one would be bad enough, but lose more, would be absolutely heart breaking.

Edward Castle Oldham was the first of those twelve pairs of brothers to be killed. An army officer since 1904, he had been the Area Officer for the St Peters District. The Oldham family home was off Hackney Road and fronted what is now the main entrance into St Peters College. After his marriage he & his wife lived on Bakewell Road, Evandale.

Edward Oldham was one of the first officers appointed to the South Australian-raised 10th Battalion which was in the first wave of troops ashore before dawn on the 25th of April 1915. Major Edward Oldham was one of the Company Commanders and was shot later that day while directing his troops near Lone Pine.

His brother, Dudley Castle Oldham, went to South Africa with the first South Australian Contingent in 1899. When the Boer War ended, Dudley remained in South Africa, married and settled in the Transvaal. When war came again, he joined the South African Infantry and died of wounds in April 1917.

Both the Oldham brothers were 38 years of age when they died.

James and Sarah Symons had nine children and the family home was on Hackney Road. Five of their six sons served in the Great War, and two were killed.

The eldest, Reginald James Symons, joined the Royal Navy in 1902, and was a Leading Stoker aboard the light cruiser HMS 'Conquest'. On the 25th of April 1916, the first anniversary of the Gallipoli landings, German ships shelled the English towns of Yarmouth and Lowestoft and 'Conquest' was hit by a 12-inch naval shell that killed 25, including Reg.

Shortly after Reg's death, his brother, Parker Whitley Symons, joined the AIF as a motor driver. After arriving in France, he transferred to the Australian Flying Corps and was selected for pilot training at Oxford in England. He graduated as a Lieutenant in June 1918, and was posted to No 4 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps.

On the 5th of November 1918 his fighter squadron escorted bombers on a successful raid on a German airfield in Belgium. On the return to base Parker and 2 fellow airmen were shot down and killed. They are recorded by the Australian War Memorial as being the last Australians to be killed in action in the Great War, barely 6 days before the Armistice.

Three Padman brothers enlisted in the AIF, and two were killed, Clarence in November 1916 aged 23, and Eric in September 1917 aged 21.

In March 1919, the third brother, Vernon, while awaiting repatriation home, obtained permission to go to Belgium and France to find his brothers' graves.

Vernon kept a detailed diary of his trip and took many photos. His illustrated diary describes the scene of deserted battlefields, abandoned trenches and destroyed equipment as he made his way to Ypres in Belgium, where he found the city

completely destroyed with only fragments of the famous Cloth Hall and Cathedral standing.

He located the spot near Polygon Wood where Eric died and there, he erected a cross to his brother's memory.

Vernon wrote in his diary: -

"I thought it a privilege even to be at the place where Eric was.

I knew I had walked up the road from Ypres along which our boys advanced, and had walked along duckboards that he had trod, and now I stood on the ridge where he was killed, and could see the country which had seen and where he lived and had fought and had died for an ideal, which, please God, may never be lost sight of.

Right has triumphed because of such as he.

I thought of our last parting at the tram terminus at home, and thought I looked into his frank open face and dear grey eyes, as I shall always remember him.

Somehow, I believe I shall see him again."

Vernon then made his way to the Somme region in France and found where Clarence lay. He wrote: -

"I found the cross which his comrades erected at the grave, undamaged, and strong and firmly placed.

There, all alone on the windswept battlefield with only the grey sky above I knelt at the graveside and realised Clarence's nearness.

I thought of our own parting - - when he waved farewell to me as I left, of our days as boys together, and of what our love for each other had always meant.

I felt too, that you home folks were there in spirit, and that death does not divide, but that we are still a complete united family even though our two brothers have given their earthly years that the world might be a better place than it has ever been before.”

The dedication on this memorial is to the memory of the St Peters Heroes who died in the Great War.

Just as a century ago Vernon Padman remembered his brothers, we too remember today each one of these 145 men who are now added to our memorial, to be forever remembered.

Lest we Forget.

David Cree

St Peters Residents Association Inc

24 April 2019