

# THE QUARRY

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## To Live in the Memory

*'It is better to live in the memory of two or three than to be mourned & forgotten by all the world. Remembrance is a golden chain time tries to break.'*

— Recorded in the back of Illuminated Scripture Text Book  
belonging to Ada Bladwell (nee Mitchell)

At the front of a sandstone Gothic church in Newtown named for St Stephen, the first Martyr of Christianity, is an ornately carved wooden Roll of Honour: 'To the glory of God and the perpetual memory of the following men who made the supreme sacrifice at the call of duty in the Great War.' It is framed by two aging flags, the Australian flag on the left and the Union Jack on the right. Almost in the centre of this Roll, on a shiny brass plate, is the name 'H. Mitchell'. The parishioners of St Stephens are researching the names on this Roll of Honour and, as the centenary of ANZAC approaches, I can imagine many churches, villages and families are also researching their links to the Great War. I am no different. I have been sent the spreadsheet of their research and next to the name 'H. Mitchell' it reads 'Can't find him'. Only a week before, I would have said the same because I had no idea that H. Mitchell was a member of my family tree. Learning the identity of H. Mitchell was a journey of surprise discoveries and remembrance of forgotten relatives.

In 2005, for the commemoration of the ninetieth anniversary of ANZAC, I was writing a short, one-hundred word piece, for a local newspaper's competition. I used

my father's maternal grandfather's war diary as source material. Albert Joseph Hancock had been a Sapper in the 5th and 59th Broadgauge Railway Operating Company. His diary was a small, thin, black affair, with yellowing pages filled with pencil scrawl recording the daily weather, 'Fritz' dropping bombs nearby from their 'Taubes', some close calls with shrapnel and shells, the 'big push' (my research at the time revealed this was in Ypres, since Joseph never elaborated on locations), a visit to the King of Belgium's country residence and, towards the end, whether or not he had a 'good night' or not with the continual bombardment. On the last two pages there are double entries for certain days. My Dad always maintained that this showed signs of shell-shock, especially since he had been 'gassed'. This was the reason Joseph had given his family for being discharged 'medically unfit'. In 2005 I discovered the Australian War Memorial's online war service records and learnt that he was admitted to the Syphilis ward. He had never been 'gassed'. No one knew.

What an ignominious link to the 'war to end all wars' and, at that time, our family's only known link to World War One. No other family member had served in the armed forces until World War Two when my paternal grandfather, Alfred Frederick Mitchell, enlisted into the Army and then transferred to the Air Force.

Grandpa died in 1987 and all his papers were bundled into a box then stowed and forgotten under Mum and Dad's house. In the intervening ten years my Dad has been through these papers. Why it took Dad so long to go through them I doubt even he knows, but it was probably prompted by Mum's 'clean under the house drive' to farm out all the boxes of stuff belonging to my brother and me — both of us married and no longer living at home. The clutter under there had become a nest for cockroaches and mice and a potential fire hazard.

Among Grandpa's papers, Dad found a folder of tantalising letters, which had belonged to my great grandfather's cousin: Ada May Mitchell. There were two sets of letters: one from Servicemen at the end of World War 1, sending thanks to Ada and 'The Girls of the St Stephen's Patriotic Club Newtown', and the other set were personal letters from Henry Lachlan Cyrus Hailey, who signs off as 'Lock'. All are written by hand, some in ink, some in pencil, and all on fragile sheets of paper. Most of the paper is plain and faintly lined, but a letter from Private Cecil Rhodes MM comes on stationery from The Salvation Army, especially prepared for servicemen 'With the Australian Expeditionary Forces'. Some thank you notes come from Newtown local boys. Some are short, expressing heartfelt thanks for care packages

that finally arrived, but others go for a few pages describing how the packages were appreciated and how they were looking forward to coming home. Lock's letters, however, are crammed between the lines of ruled note paper and onto note cards recounting his war exploits, injuries, and giving replies to Ada's many letters.

Dad handed these letters over to me, the family historian and an author. 'You should write their stories, if you have nothing else to do.'

I identified all the servicemen using the Australian War Memorial's Record Search. Some had received the Military Medal, many had been punished for turning up to muster late. The citations for the Military Medals are harrowing such as this one for Private Atal Norman Spencer Elphinston.

*On the 3rd October, 1918, during the attack on the BEAUREVOIR SYSTEM, near the village of BEAUREVOIR, East of PERONNE, when his Platoon was held up by a strong enemy machine gun post, Private ELPHINSTONE worked round the position, bombed it, jumped in and killed five of the enemy and took 1 Sergeant Major and 10 other Ranks prisoners. This enabled the platoon to come up into line with the remainder of the advancing Company. Later under extremely heavy machine gun fire this soldier worked untiringly for three hours bringing in wounded from in front on our position when the Battalion had withdrawn to a defensive position.*

It makes me wonder what extraordinary feats were worthy of the more prestigious Victorian Cross.

And then there was Lock. Why were there so many letters back and forth between Ada and this man? Had they been in love? Yet Ada remained unmarried. Had Lock been killed in action, then? No, his service record showed a safe return to Australia. Was this a forgotten relative?

Henry Lachlan Cyrus Hailey signs off from his first few letters as 'Your old friend Lock'. The first letter is dated 16th March 1917 and Lock is sending a 'short note' to let Ada know his change of address because he is 'going back to France for another go'. Lock Hailey was in 'C' company of the 20th Infantry Battalion. After enlisting in August of 1915, he found himself in Alexandria and then on the Gallipoli Peninsula on 11th November 1915. His Battalion was involved with the effective retreat from Gallipoli. On 19th and 20th December troops moved from Gallipoli to Mudros maintaining the appearance of normality to fool the enemy into thinking the

trenches continued at full strength. There was to be no lights and no smoking. Orders were given in undertones and the word 'retire' could not be used. Socks were drawn over boots, bayonets were removed and rifles carried 'on the trail or over the shoulder' but 'not sloped' so as not to show over the trench tops. Mess tins and other equipment had to be arranged so there was 'no rattling or shining surfaces'. Reportedly the retreat resulted in only one casualty.

Lock's first deployment to France, in 1916, was during the Battle of the Somme and the Pozieres Offensive and during his second deployment he was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant and then Lieutenant. Lock's letters give a stark insight into the life lived by many soldiers in the trenches on the Western Front and also their confusion at the lack of support from home.

*12th November, 1917*

*Had a very rough time during the last few months and what with continual small doses of gas and continual wettings and exposure fairly flattened me. I left the front trenches or rather shell holes on the night of the 5th instant after four days toil without food or sleep. I had a rough time as the Germans kept coming over on to our line and as I was second in command of my company I had to take out fighting patrols all night to keep them from finding out where we were situated. And I can confidently assure you crawling about in no mans [sic] land in the shells full of mud & water looking for fight for a sick man was no bon. After doing four lovely days of this I was relieved just when I got to the "couldn't stand" stage and taken out & hunted before the doctor who gave me a terrific gravelling for not reporting before and sent me right off.*

*2nd February 1918*

*One gets use to hard knocks & bruises and I can assure you they take it very well. One of our Officers was shot through the thigh and kept going thinking he was the only Officer left. Until one the Sergts said to him "You had better go out as old Hailey's bound to be all right" and at that minute I came on him. One of my lads had just blown a German's brains out all over me & of course I was covered with gore & dirt. When I came on the scene the chaps & the wounded officer actually laughed, as they made sure I was hit at last' ... 'I tell you when I see my men lying all round I see red.*

*26th December 1917*

*What do you think of the Referendum regular fall through was it not and I expect the next thing we will all be attached to British Regiments as we have no men and no chance of getting any more for quite a long time.*

*24th Feb 1918*

*I wonder why the Catholics are so against conscription, they must surely see we must all go down together if we do not win.*

Lock talks much about his 'debility', convalescence in Scotland, a trip to London, Medical Board after Medical Board to determine if he was fit for service and his work at Camp Weymouth to return injured serviceman 'with arms and legs off and every other ailment' to Australia.

Lock returned to Melbourne in June 1918 and his last letter is sent on 17th July, 1918 from his home town, Yarra, just south of Goulburn (New South Wales): 'No doubt you will wonder what has become of me these days but the fact is I am giving up single blessedness on 23rd July.'

Henry Lachlan Cyrus Hailey married Sarah Jane Ward in Goulburn on that date. The 'matrimonial rush' was because he could be sent back into action.

Goulburn is certainly the link between Lock and Ada, but as friends, not relatives. Ada had many Mitchell Aunts, Uncles and cousins. All of them originated in Goulburn where her Uncle, Alfred Arthur Mitchell, was a respected member of the community and Grand Master of the Manchester United Oddfellows Lodge. There is a large and imposing black obelisk in the Goulburn general cemetery that marks Alfred's grave.

There was a small clue in Lock's letter dated 18th April 1918 that furthered my journey of discovery. Lock writes, 'Have not had the good fortune to run against Harry Nott so far and there are very few of the old Goulburn boys left.' Nott was a familiar family surname and Harry, or Henry William Nott, was one of Ada's many cousins, son of her Aunt Esther (nee Mitchell). All we knew of Henry was his birthday - 16th April, 1889 - and date of death - 22nd August, 1918. Why had we not connected this date to World War One?

Henry Nott was in the 55th Battalion which advanced on Albert in the Somme late in the night on 21st August. Henry Nott was killed in action on 22nd August 1918, aged twenty-nine years; one of five from his Battalion who died at the height of

the battle to retake Albert. Henry is now buried in Plot I, Row A, Grave Number 341 in French soil at Cerisy-Gailly Military Cemetery.

I delved more into the life of Ada May Mitchell hoping to find more clues. She had been named after her aunt, Ada Bladwell (nee Mitchell), known as Aunt Sis. Ada May remained a spinster who lived her whole life with her parents and likely cared for them into old age. She died alone in 1978 in her family home from atrial fibrillation suffering from senility. Only two black and white photos survive of Ada May. One shows a chubby faced cherub of, presumably, four years old in a white pinafore arranged for a formal photograph standing with legs crossed, an elbow leaning on a book with her other hand holding a little bouquet of ferns and flowers. Her shoulder length hair and short fringe has been curled in rags. Her face is wide. She has the distinctive Mitchell button nose and thick Mitchell bottom lip which shows the hint of a smile. The other photo is from a street photographer. Cut down the middle, it removes the person standing to her right. Ada May is on the left edge of the photo, grim-faced, caught unaware, older, maybe in her 50s or 60s. She is dressed in all black: black dress, a small necklace and something pinned to her left breast, a jacket draped over the hand carrying a handbag, and a stylish brimmed black hat with veiling. She still has the broad face, button nose and thick bottom lip but now carries the marks of age around her neck and jowls.

There is no one left who knew Ada. My Dad may have met her when he was young, but he doesn't remember. We do know she served over fifty years on staff as a Clerk at Grace Bros and carried herself with 'dignity and aplomb'. Dad has the impression that she was possibly like Mrs Slocombe from the British TV comedy *Are You Being Served* with a severe personality, tinted hair and finding solace in a cat or two. Ada and her parents lived at 3 King Street, Newtown, next door to modern day Moore Theological College and, later, 50 Wemyss Street, Newtown. Both are not far from St Stephen's Anglican Church in Newtown where she attended and was Secretary of the St Stephens Patriotic Club during World War One. The Patriotic Clubs raised funds to support the war effort and sent care packages to local boys serving at the front. So, I contacted St Stephens in Newtown. Did they have any records of parishioners or the Patriotic Club? An answer was slow in arriving but would arrive eventually, but not yet.

During this period of research my Dad found a small blue notebook with gold embossed writing on the cover: 'The Illuminated Scripture Text Book for every day

— 365 coloured illustrations with interleaved memoranda'. The spine is held together with aging sticky-tape, the cover is barely holding onto its contents and the pages are yellowing and rigid with age. The front inscription, in hardly legible ink script, reads:

*"Love your Enemies"*  
*To Ada Mitchell*  
*With best love & ??? wishes*  
*From E. ??Thompson??*  
*St Saviours Finishing School*  
*April 1879*

Ada May Mitchell was born in 1891, therefore this notebook had to belong to Aunt Sis, Ada Bladwell (nee Mitchell). Inside she has recorded the birth dates of friends and relatives, her wedding anniversary and the death of her husband, William Henry Bladwell. Also noted was the death 'killed at war' of Harry Nott on 22nd August 1918 and another name, an unfamiliar name, that had no place, yet, on the family tree: 'Harry G Mitchell killed at war 29th May 1917'.

Another discovery. Although, on reflection, I recall walking along the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in 2012 past the M's and noting the name Henry George Mitchell. Both Henry and George are common family Christian names (although, likely common in the Victorian era). I was almost certain this person could be a relative. I always read Rolls of Honour on church walls and obelisks in country towns; I wonder if there is not some long lost relative listed there.

Henry George Mitchell came up on the war records search; Service Number 159. On his enlistment attestation, Henry recorded his mother's name as Mrs Will Mitchell, with 'Will' crossed out and 'Martha Edith Lily' written above it. On another copy of this attestation his father's name was written in red ink: W.M. Mitchell. The family tree held William Milton Mitchell, brother to Ada Bladwell and Uncle to Ada May Mitchell. His wife was Martha Edith Lily Morgan but the names of his children were unknown and listed only as Child One, Child Two, Child Three, Child Four, Child Five, Child Six.

Henry George Mitchell had been in the 25th Battalion and likely died in the trenches in France during a 'quiet period'. His Battalion has no War Diary on record for the period he served and the 35th did not even enter its first major battle, at

Messines, until early June 1917. He died on 29th May, 1917, and is buried in Belgium: Plot I, Row D, Grave Number 11, Strand Military Cemetery, Ploegsteert.

Finally I received an answer from St Stephens in Newtown. They had never heard of the Patriotic Club and had no parishioner records from the early 1900s but they mentioned the Roll of Honour and sent me the spreadsheet of their research. Could my Henry George Mitchell be the H. Mitchell on the St Stephens Rolls of Honour?

Henry joined the 35th Battalion (Newcastle's Own) in Islington Newcastle. In Henry's service record is a letter from his father reporting the family's move from Newcastle to 42 Bucknell Street, Newtown; not far from Ada Mitchell and her parents. It would be safe to assume the families attended church together at St Stephens and, therefore, not a great leap to link H. Mitchell with Henry George Mitchell.

Family tree research is like having the pieces of a larger jigsaw and working out where they fit in the greater whole without the help of the picture on the box. I have consequently discovered many other relatives and more who served in World War One: Henry Mitchell's brother William Leslie who also enlisted in the 35th battalion at only age seventeen; Arthur Edwin Bladwell, Ada Bladwell's nephew, who received the Military Medal for gallant service in May 1915; John Digby Nott (Harry Nott's brother) who has a plaque commemorating his life on a wall at Lithgow Hospital in the Blue Mountains and Eric Henry Mitchell, son of Uncle Edward Mitchell, who *was* gassed and returned to Australia.

One hundred years ago, these men and women did their small part in that greater conflict. As a nation we remember the World War One every ANZAC Day, but it is up to families to remember the individuals who died or returned injured, ill or safe, or served from home. Yet, those who had no children, like Henry, Harry and Ada, where the golden chain of remembrance has been broken, become forgotten Uncles and Aunts. I wonder if anyone has sat by the grave of Henry William Nott in France or Henry George Mitchell in Belgium to consider their service, sacrifice and the circumstances of their deaths. I wonder if anyone else has thought about the contribution Ada May Mitchell and the girls of the Patriotic Club made to the war effort from home. I found Ada's grave in Rookwood Cemetery in Lidcombe and was



moved to tears to find her buried with both parents: Ernest Henry and Harriet Mitchell.

H. Mitchell is listed on the St Stephens Roll of Honour and he will be remembered and spoken about as tours are conducted to mark the centenary of his ultimate sacrifice. But now, with the centenary of ANZAC the Mitchell family will be able to remember their contribution to World War I with greater pride and personal interest. Sacrifices and lives will live on in the memory of two or three (or more) and not be forgotten by time.

