



BIRKENHEAD HERITAGE SOCIETY INC.



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Newsletter September/October 2016

Coming Events:

Saturday 10th September – Helensville Bus trip
Cost \$30 each

Helensville Pioneer Museum and the Railway Museum

Bookings: Contact - Mavis Throll 483 - 7230, paying in advance ensures a seat.

Cost: \$30.00 including Museum entrance fee. (By chq., cash or Electronic Transfer

Account Number 12 3035 0511576 00 – need to add ‘name’ and ‘bus trip’.)

Times: Leave Verran’s Corner 9:30, Farrington House 10:15 **Return:** 4.15pm.

Sunday October 9th 2.00pm

Members are invited to Farrington House Museum,

to enable members to be shown the displays by the Committee, share their memories, and take part in the Auckland Heritage Festival.

Afternoon tea will be provided.

Auckland Heritage Festival

- **Birkenhead Heritage Society Farrington House Museum at 44 Mahara Ave will be open three Sundays 25th September, 2nd October and 9th October 2.00 and 4.00pm.**
- **Living History Walks – two guided tours of Birkenhead Village Wed. 28th September: 11am - Noon and 1 - 2pm. Bookings Colleendurham104@gmail.com or phone number above.
Meet by the War Memorial in Nell Fisher Reserve
Brought to you by the Birkenhead Town Centre and Birkenhead Heritage Society**

Also at Nell Fisher Reserve, by Birkenhead Library, corner Rawene Road & Hinemoa Street -

- **Clydesdale horse and cart rides – Fri. 30th Sept. 11am -3pm & Sat. 1st Oct. 11am – 1pm plus Night Ride Sat. 1st October 5-8pm. Leaves from top of Rawene Road Taxi Stand**
- **Art Deco period (1927 – 1950), vintage cars and jazz - Saturday 1st October – 11am – 2pm**
- **Heritage Farm – sheep, goats, piglets and rabbits: Wed. 28th & Fri 30th Sept. – 11am – 2pm.**

Brought to you by the Birkenhead Town Centre and Kaipatiki Local Board

Henderson and the donkey at ANZAC Cove

In August our guest speaker Ross Henderson spoke about the real story behind the famous Gallipoli painting that had been called 'Simpson and his Donkey ANZAC 1918' painted by Horace Moore-Jones. We learnt how the photo of his father, Richard Alexander Henderson had been collected during a tour of New Zealand after WWI, and later used for the memorable painting. (The photo was actually taken by Private James Gardiner Jackson, a New Zealand Medical Corps comrade of Henderson. Moore-Jones was shown the photo in Dunedin in 1917 by Jackson's brother. At the time, the stretcher-bearer's identity was not known, as Jackson was still overseas.)

Ross showed copies of the original photo, and a copy of a painting recently on sold at an art auction in Auckland for \$420,000 to a private NZ collector. No precipice fell away beside the track in the original photograph, and the injured soldiers head lay at a different angle, otherwise the painting was an obvious representation of the photograph.

The soldier in the painting.

Private Richard Alexander Henderson was born at Waihi on August 26, 1895. A popular trainee teacher at Mt Roskill (later renamed Three Kings) School, he enlisted as a stretcher bearer with the NZ Expeditionary Force on 10th August 1914, giving his birth date as 1893 to make him nearly 21 instead of only 19.

Within days of landing at Gallipoli he saw Australian stretcher bearer John 'Jack' Simpson using donkeys to ferry the wounded and when, on May 19, Simpson was killed, Henderson continued the work, using one of Simpson's donkeys, named Murphy. At one stage he was hospitalised with gastroenteritis but returned to action.

After Gallipoli, Henderson served in Moascar, Ismailia and France, according to Richard Stowers' book *Bloody Gallipoli: The New Zealanders' Story*. At the Battle of the Somme he was awarded the Military Medal on October 22, 1916 for repeatedly bringing in wounded men under heavy shell fire. The citation reads: "During operations on the Somme on 15th September he went out repeatedly under heavy shellfire and brought in wounded who were exposed to it. He set a fine example to other bearers."

During 1917 he was posted to light duties at No 3 New Zealand General Hospital in Codford, England. He returned to France only to be stricken by gas poisoning at Passchendaele on October 12, 1917. He was discharged on medical grounds on May 21, 1918 and awarded the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Henderson resumed teaching in Ponsonby, Towai (in Northland) and Tomarata, near Wellsford. But he never fully recovered and was forced to give up teaching when he went blind in 1934. Sick for most of his later life, he died in Green Lane Hospital, aged 63, on November 14, 1958.(1)

The Artist

Horace Moore-Jones enlisted with the British section of the NZ Engineers in October 1914, aged 46. His artistic talents were soon recognised at Gallipoli and he was employed to make topographical sketches of enemy positions and terrain.

Wounded in his right hand, he was invalided back to England in November 1915 and, while recuperating in hospital, made a series of watercolours of Gallipoli. Back in New Zealand, he toured the Anzac pictures in aid of the newly formed NZ Returned Soldiers' Association.

Rose Young, curator of history at the Auckland War Memorial Museum, says while giving a talk in Dunedin the subject of Simpson's donkey work came up and Moore-Jones "implied that he knew him". He was shown a photograph taken at Gallipoli of a stretcher bearer leading a wounded man on a donkey to safety. The photo gave no clue as to the identity of the subject but

Moore-Jones used it as the model for several paintings of "the man and his donkey", one of which he dedicated to Simpson.

After the war, Moore-Jones offered to sell his Gallipoli paintings to the New Zealand Government but was turned down. The Australian Government bought the collection for £1500 in 1920 and it is held by the Australian War Memorial.

In 1922 Moore-Jones was staying overnight in the Hamilton Hotel when it caught fire. He escaped but returned to save others trapped in the building. He died soon after in hospital of severe burns. (1)

On the RSA website can be found a photo of a New Award, described below.

“The Award is a bronze statuette based on the famous Gallipoli image “Man with the donkey” and designed by official New Zealand Defence Force artist Captain Matt Gauldie. The ‘Man with the donkey’ is one of the most recognized symbols of Gallipoli representing the qualities of the Anzac spirit. The now-legendary image of medic Richard Henderson and his donkey at Gallipoli was painted by Sapper Horace Moore-Jones, based on a photograph taken by a fellow New Zealand soldier, (James Gardiner Jackson of Dunedin) but confusingly referred to as Simpson with his donkey.

The RSA commissioned New Zealand Defence Force artist Captain Matt Gauldie to make a bronze depicting Henderson and his donkey at Gallipoli. The bronze stands 700mm tall and Gauldie has brought a touch of realism to his commission. The base depicts the Maori hammerhead shark motif, signifying Tumatauenga, the God of War. Recipients also receive a framed bronze medallion engraved with Henderson and the Donkey, to retain.” (2)

At the National War Memorial in Wellington

A bronze sculpture by Paul Walshe of Richard Alexander Henderson as "The Man with the Donkey" stands outside the National War Memorial in Wellington. It is based on Jackson's photograph, and is a "tribute to all medical personnel, stretcher bearers and ambulance drivers who served alongside New Zealand troops in wartime".(3) Commissioned by the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association, it was unveiled by Henderson's son Ross in 1990 for the 75th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings. The inscription on the plaque reads: "The stories of Simpson and Henderson are the stories of all stretcher-bearers ... these men exposed their lives to danger to save comrades and so built up the tradition of unselfishness and cool courage that is a feature of their service." (3)

Sources :

1. NZ Herald article researched by Geoff Cumming in 19th April 2008.
Wikipedia article contributed to Geoff Cumming.
2. RSA Website
3. Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 27 February 2013

For those at Ross' presentation it was incredibly moving to actually listen to a recording of his late father talking about his life, his experience in World War I, of the health issues and his demise in turning to alcohol for many years, and in his later years through his local church in Mt. Roskill regaining sobriety and being able to finally talk about past experiences. Many remarked on how special it was to listen to the recording from a previous time and appreciated Ross sharing his own difficult times with an older father who had suffered for so many years from the effects of exposure to gas poisoning during the First World War. The impact on families of those injured either physically or mentally during wars and conflicts linger on far beyond the events. I am sure many of those brought up after both World Wars know of others who had ongoing issues with traumatized returning servicemen or women long after peace was declared in 1918 and 1945.

It is appropriate at this time to continue the theme commemorating WWI.

In September 2016 we remember the loss exactly one hundred years ago of a Birkenhead son.

Clarence Ralph Bicknell
Lance-Corporal and Signaller
2nd Battalion New Zealand Rifle Brigade
Who fell in action at the Battle of the Somme,
With his faithful Comrade-in-arms, Eric Mannington Austin
Signaller and Rifleman,
15th September 1916.

Clarence Bicknell, son of Mr and Mrs A.R. Bicknell of Birkenhead, had his 22nd Birthday in the Somme just two weeks before on the 28th August. He had kept dairies of his experiences. He enrolled at the Defence Office in Auckland one day after war had been declared on the 4th August 1914. Due to complications from surgical removal of his tonsils he was not accepted for service until 14th May 1915. After training he left New Zealand on the 9th October 1915. The meticulous notes in his dairies tell of his training, the repeated drills and friends made, the travel and the living conditions, and finally of going into action.

“22nd May 1916....The phones were disconnected this afternoon, and we returned to B Company’s Billet at the Hospice this afternoon. Received orders to roll overcoat and oilsheet, also pack 24 hours rations, and any small requirements into haversacks, and hand blankets and valise into Q.M.G. preparatory to going into trenches.” (1)

23rd May....We were awake by 1.30a.m. and five of us, company signallers, joined up with the other signallers at 2.00a.m.. So, after just on 12 months, military life, we are in the firing line.Several ‘whiz-bangs burst near us this morning, and we think must have damaged the wires as the phone is not working well. Took over station from other New Zealanders at 2.00p.m. Our battalion came in tonight, and, by chance, my own platoon is in the trenches nearest here.” (1)

Later an extract from the last entry:

“August 31st/September 7th 1916

Had mislaid my dairy, but fortunately it has turned up again. Anyhow we are getting near our Big Push now, and shall have to leave this behind.We have been training hard at Vause Marquenville and district. Since then we have been on the move frequently. We moved from Vause Marquenville 2/9/16, to Quesnoy-s-Airaines. This is just past the town of Airaines, where the Black Prince and his troops are said to have rested prior to Crecy.....To-day 7th September we have come further on to Allonville, and the sound of heavy guns is continuous. We expect to be into it in a few days - certainly a week,...I hope I shall be able to get this home,.... everyone is thinking of the big Push, which we expect to be short and strenuous. ...” (1).

Clarence Bicknell sent home the poem below to his parents -

“ In poetry is very cleverly described a trench telephone dug-out and life therein. I would like you to keep this, as it so exactly describes my own experiences when in the trenches last month”.

“The Battery ‘O.Pip’

The Observation Post (“O.Pip”) of the Field Artillery, is usually placed as close to the Hun as possible.

Cramped in a crumbling dug-out
Adjoining “No Man’s Land”
And chilled to the bone I squat at a ‘phone
That sits on a sandbag stand.
My ticker points to midnight –
I’ve two more hours to do,
And keeping awake would wrest the cake
From the torture Tantalus knew.

'Tis here the "eyes" of the battery
Detect the Hun at work;
And targets fair we 'phone to where
Our eighteen-pounders lurk.
Then shoals of high explosive
Frustrate the plans of Frits,
Who runs to ground as we promptly pound
His parapet to bits.

When Tommy in the trenches
Is suffering special "hell"
From "whiz-bang, mine, and five-point-nine,
"Turnip" and tear-shell,
He calls for retaliation,
And our waiting gunners know,
When we pass that through, the devil's due
Is more than quid pro quo.

It's up to us – the peeping
At Frits through a periscope;
Likewise to go a creeping,
And out in the darkness grope,
For the "break" where a bursting "Johnson"
Has cut the telephone wire,
Whilst the peeved O.C. of his infantry
Bawls for our battery fire.

Cramped in a crumbling dug-out,
Too near to "No Man's Land"
To be without a lingering doubt
As to how your "home" would stand
A "coal-box" split upon it,
Or a "liquid fire" rain!
Hello! Hello!! Gee Whiz!! Hello!!!
The line is "out" again.

W.D.D". (2)

Source:

1. The Dairies of Clarence Ralph Bicknell; donated to Birkenhead Heritage Society in 2016
2. Poem from "Daily Chronicle" dated 9/8/16.

Recorded history of World War I explains more of the details from that time.

The Battle of Flers-Courcelette

The **Battle of Flers–Courcelette** (15–22 September 1916) was fought during the Battle of the Somme in France, by the French Sixth Army and the British Fourth Army and Reserve Army, against the German 1st Army, during the First World War. The Anglo-French attack of 15 September began the third period of the Battle of the Somme but by its conclusion on 22 September, the strategic objective of a decisive victory had not been achieved. The infliction of many casualties on the German front divisions and the capture of the villages of Courcelette, Martinpuich and Flers had been a considerable tactical victory but the German defensive success on the British right flank, made exploitation and the use of cavalry impossible. Tanks were used in battle for the first time in history and the Canadian Corps and the New Zealand Division fought for the first time on the Somme. On 16 September, Jagdstaffel 2, a specialist fighter squadron, began operations with five new Albatros D.I fighters, which were capable of challenging British air supremacy for the first time since the beginning of the battle.

The attempt to advance deeply on the right and pivot on the left failed but the British gained about 2,500 yards (2,300 m) in general and captured High Wood, moving forward about 3,500 yd (3,200 m) in the centre, beyond Flers and Courcelette. The Fourth Army crossed Bazentin Ridge, which exposed the German rear-slope defences beyond to ground observation and on 18 September, the Quadrilateral, where the British advance had been frustrated on the right flank, was captured. Arrangements were begun immediately to follow up the tactical success which, after supply and weather delays, began on 25 September at the Battle of Morval and was continued by the Reserve Army next day at the Battle of Thiepval Ridge. In September, the German armies on the Somme lost about 130,000 casualties, the most costly month of the battle. Combined with the losses at Verdun and on the Eastern Front, German Empire was brought closer to military collapse than at any time before the autumn of 1918.

The New Zealand infantry went over the top at 6.20 a.m. on 15 September. About 6000 of them saw action that day, and although nothing went quite to plan, by nightfall the division had secured its immediate objectives and had helped take the village of Flers.

It was an expensive victory, like so many in this war. Some 1200 men of the division were wounded or missing, and about 600 were dead. Among the casualties were 52 members of the Pioneer Battalion (which included the Maori Contingent) who were building vital communication trenches under heavy artillery fire. At the time, it was the greatest loss of life in a single day in New Zealand's post-1840 military history, but in 1917 it would be surpassed by the horrors of Passchendaele. 1.

Source:

1. New Zealand's Somme experience from: *First World War, New Zealand History on line*.

To finish on a lighter note Clarence also wrote down this poem, as reproduced below:

“Black within and without
Save a lamp-circle falling
On the page at midnight
I sit peacefully scrawling

Crash and book, from afar!
Life seems suddenly dearer!
I must warm all the household.
Boom and crash – it is nearer!

Then a zigzagging flash
Splits my terror asunder
Thank God, it is only
His lightning and thunder!

The verse appeared in Nash's by Israel Zangwill”.

Editors Note: *Israel Zangwill*, wrote a four part play “*The Melting Pot*” 1907, and other works. Nash may refer to a publisher.

Editor; Marcia Roberts