

# ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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## NEWSLETTER

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### THE GREAT WAR MEMORIAL PLAQUES AND SCROLLS

The story of the memorial plaques and scrolls gives an indication of the sincere effort of the Empire to honour those men and women who died as a result of the War. The stories of recipients paint a picture of the lives lost and the cost to the families and the nation. It is both fascinating and deeply moving.

In 1916, it was decided that some form of memorial would be established for presentation to the next of kin of those whose deaths were attributable to the war. A committee, selected from the House of Commons, the House of Lords and some government departments was headed by the then Secretary of the War, Sir Reginald Brade, MBE, JP with the task of overseeing the project. It was agreed that the memorial would take the form of a bronze plaque, produced and paid for by the British Government.

The committee decided to also issue a commemorative scroll which would accompany the plaque.

#### *Plaque Design*

In August, 1917, a competition to design the plaque was held with a winning prize of 250 pounds. The competition was open to all British-born subjects.

The rules and application forms were provided by the Admiralty and the War Office and published in The Times on August 13, 1917. The design could be either round or rectangular. The circular design was to be 4 ½ inches in diameter; the rectangular one 5 x 3 3/5 inches. Entrants provided a relief model in either wax or plaster and the chosen design was to be cast and have a precision finish.

There were two other design stipulations: the design had to incorporate a symbolic figure and to carry the inscription "He died for Freedom and Honour". The plaque was also to include space for the name, initials and military unit of the deceased serviceman.

The closing date was November 1, 1917. Designs were submitted with a pseudonym or a motto and the winning design became the property of the British Government with the name of the winning artist incorporated into the finished design of the plaque.

Interest in the competition was very high. The closing date was extended to December 31, 1917 so that servicemen on active service overseas would have the opportunity to enter.

Over 800 entries from within the United Kingdom, countries of the British Empire and the theatres of war were received. The judges were the committee plus a sub-committee comprising the Directors of the National Gallery, the Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in Kensington and the Keeper of the Department of Coins and Medals at the Victoria & Albert Museum.

The sum of 250 pounds was awarded to two entries submitted under the pseudonym "Pyramus". The winning design was chosen from these two entries from Mr Edward Carter Preston (1894-1965), founder of the London Studies Society, Liberty Buildings, School Lane in Liverpool. He was a painter, sculptor and medallist. Other monetary prizes were awarded: 2 entrants received 100 pounds, while three others received 50 pounds. Six of the seven winning designs were circular. There were another 19 highly recommended designs and the designs were put on public display in an exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum.

### *The winning design*

The design incorporated the figure of Britannia. She is facing to her left and holding a laurel wreath in her left hand over the box where the commemorated serviceman's full name was to be placed. The box does not include either rank or regiment since there was to be no distinction made between sacrifices made by officers and other ranks.

In her right hand she is holding a trident. In representation of Britain's sea power there are two dolphins facing Britannia on her left and right sides. A lion is standing in front of Britannia at her feet, also facing to the left with a menacing growl. As specified, the words "He died for freedom and honour" are written around the margin of the circular plaque.

A very small lion, with his head facing to the right can be seen underneath the larger lion's feet, biting into a winged creature representing the German Imperial eagle.



*This plaque is in the Orbost and Historical Society's collection.*



The results of the competition were announced in *The Times* on March 20, 1918, the day before the German Army launched a massive surprise attack in the British on the Somme. By the end of the following day, March 21, there were several thousand more names added to the list of recipients of the plaque.

The winning design details were published in *The Times* on March 23, 1918. Not every response was positive. A letter to *The Times* from the zoo at Clifton, Bristol complained that the lion was not very life-like and looked a bit feeble as it was too small in scale compared to Britannia.

## ***Production***

Production did not start until late in the autumn of 1918 as the metal for the bronze was difficult to obtain in wartime. In the first month after the war, the first plaques were produced at the Government's Memorial Plaque Factory in Acton at 54-56 Church Road, London W3. Early Acton-made plaques did not have a number stamped on them but later ones have a number stamped behind the lion's back leg. The manufacture of the plaques got into trouble at the Acton factory and production was moved to the Woolwich Arsenal munitions factory in South London. Plaques produced at Woolwich have a capital letter W with a line across the centre of the W, forming a W and an A for the Woolwich Arsenal, set inside a circle on the otherwise blank reverse of the plaque. A number was stamped between the tail and leg (in place of the number stamped behind the lion's back leg).

*See images below.*



Small alterations to the design were required for some plaques. The 'H' of He was made narrower to allow for an 'S' to be inserted for female service personnel. When the "S" was removed, the narrower "H" was left on the mould.

Plaques from the original mould were mostly issued to the families of Army personnel.

The finished cast bears the letters E CR P near the lion's right paw. These are the initials of the designer.



The shape and appearance of the plaque earned it nicknames such as the 'Dead Man's Penny', the 'Death Penny' and the 'Widow's Penny'.

## ***The Memorial Scroll Design***

It was decided that the scroll would be printed on high quality paper, 11 x 7 inches. The committee found the choice of words difficult and sought the advice of numerous well-known writers, including Rudyard Kipling, whose only son John was missing in action, believed killed, at the Battle of Loos in 1915.

However, even with this assistance, the committee could not make a decision. Dr Montague Rhodes James, Provost of King's College Cambridge, was asked to write a draft for the wording. With a few changes and with King George V asking if 'the King' could be included in the wording, resulting in "at the bidding of their country" being changed to "at the call of King and Country", the final wording accepted by the committee is seen below.

The text was printed in calligraphic script beneath the Royal Crest, followed by the name of the commemorated serviceman, giving his rank, name and regiment, this time written individually in calligraphic script.

Paper was also in short supply. The production of the memorial scrolls began in January, 1919. They were printed from a wooden block by artists at the London County Council Central School of Arts and Crafts.



**H**E whom this scroll commemorates was numbered among those who, at the call of King and Country, left all that was dear to them, endured hardness, faced danger, and finally passed out of the sight of men by the path of duty and self-sacrifice, giving up their own lives that others might live in freedom. Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten.

*Pte. Edward Vincent Lawless,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Bn. A.I.F.*

*This scroll is in the Orbost Historical Society's collection*

### ***Distribution***

1,355,000 plaques were issued. This included 600 plaques issued to commemorate women. 450 tonnes of bronze was required. The plaques continued to be issued into the 1930s to commemorate people who died as a consequence of the war.

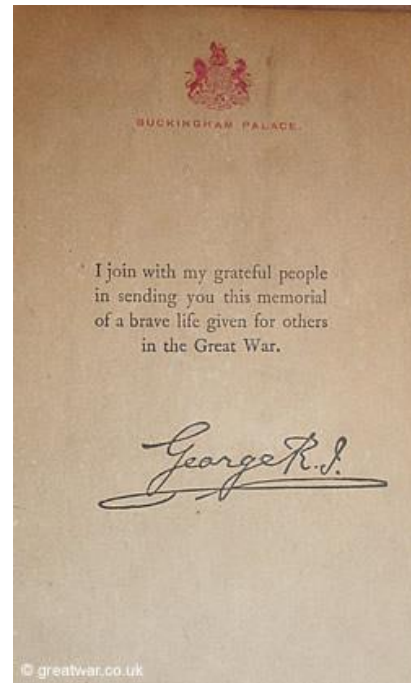
All those who died between August 4, 1914 and April 30, 1919 whilst in military service in the battlegrounds of the theatres of war and in the Dominions, as a result of sickness, suicide or accidents in the Home Establishments, or as a result of wounds incurred during their time in military service were commemorated with a plaque and a scroll.

The next of kin of the 306 British and Commonwealth military personnel who were executed following a Court Martial did not receive a memorial plaque.

Approximately 600 memorial plaques were issued to the next of kin of women who died as a direct consequence of their involvement in the War.

### ***Packaging***

The plaque was sent out to families in an "On His Majesty's Service" white envelope with a printed Official Paid stamp. Inside this outer envelope there was another white envelope with the Royal Crest embossed on the reverse, enclosing a letter with a copy of King George V's signature.



Inside the outer envelope, a cardboard envelope protected the bronze plaque.



The scroll was sent separately inside a cardboard tube 18.5 inches long.

Due to the vast numbers being produced, in many cases the plaque and the scroll were received by families some significant time apart.

## The Orbost Connection

There are three Memorial plaques and one Memorial scroll known to be in Orbost. The Historical Society has the plaque awarded to *James Pullar Cameron* and the scroll for *Edward Vincent Lawless* in its collection; there is one plaque held by the recipient's descendants; and one plaque held by the RSL. The stories of the recipients, gleaned from their Army records, paint an outline of their service, their deaths and hint at the experience of their bereft families.

**James Pullar Cameron (Service No 605)** enlisted in the 8<sup>th</sup> Light Horse at Orbost on September 11, 1914 aged 23 years 5 months. His medical was done by Dr James Kerr. He was 6 ft 1 in tall, 11 st 6 lbs, of dark complexion with dark eyes and hair and a chest measurement of 34 ½ / 38 inches. After training, he embarked the *Armada* on February 12, 1915. He was shot in the chest at the Dardanelles on May 29, 1915 and taken aboard the *HT Neuralia* for transfer to Malta. He was admitted to the military hospital 'Cootenara' and after 10 days treatment, he re-embarked for Gallipoli aboard the *HMT Southland* on June 14, 1915. He returned to duty at Gallipoli on June 20, 1915. On August 7, 1915 he was killed in action. His body was not recovered. His name is on the memorial at Lone Pine. His memorial plaque has a wide H and a number behind the back paw of the lion, indicating that this plaque was made at the Acton Factory, one of the later ones cast there.



Record showing the dispatch of plaque, scroll and medals

Not every family was happy to receive the plaque and scroll. For some, they were reminders of their pain and loss. Some plaques were simply misplaced or lost.

The plaque of *John Simister Deam* was dug up in an Orbost backyard where it is thought to have been lost by his sister who lived in Orbost in her later years.

**John Simister Deam (Service No 4167)** was born in Bairnsdale and enlisted in Melbourne on August 2 1915, aged 25 years 8 months. He was 5ft 8 ½ in tall, 14st 7 lb, with a fresh complexion, light grey eyes and fair hair. His chest was 38/40 ½ in. John was an accountant and joined the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF, 13<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements unit.

He embarked the 'Demosthenes' on December 29, 1915. His records then show that he embarked to join the B.E.F. on March 29, 1916 and disembarked at Marseilles on April 4, 1916. On April 17, he was admitted to the 26 General Hospital, Etaples, for treatment for a hernia. On May 25, he was discharged to duty at the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division Base Depot.

On July 30, he rejoined the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion and on August 15, he died from multiple gunshot wounds at the No 3 Casualty Clearing Station ("In the Field"). He is buried in Pudewillers British Cemetery, 7 ½ miles SSE of Doullers, France. His records show that 3 photographs of the grave were sent to Miss Deam, Francis St., Bairnsdale (his sister).

His plaque has no number and no marking on the back. The 'H' is similar to the thick ones on the other plaques we have for comparison. His record contains the dispatch notices for the plaque and the scroll and the signed receipts for both.



Record of receipt of the Memorial plaque, No 304083, signed by his father, Mr JS Deam of Bairnsdale.

The scroll was received on December 10, 1921 and the plaque on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1922.

The third plaque, on display at the RSL headquarters in Orbost, was awarded to **Walter Chalcraft**. There is no record of a serviceman of that name in the Australian National Archives but there is in the British records. The RSL has no provenance for the plaque but it must be assumed that it was brought to Australia by a relative of Walter's and later donated to the Orbost RSL. The plaque has the number 67 between the lion's tail and hind foot which indicates that it was cast at the Woolwich Ammunition Depot. This is confirmed by the mark on the reverse side of the plaque. The 'H' is wide, indicating it was cast before those for the women who died.

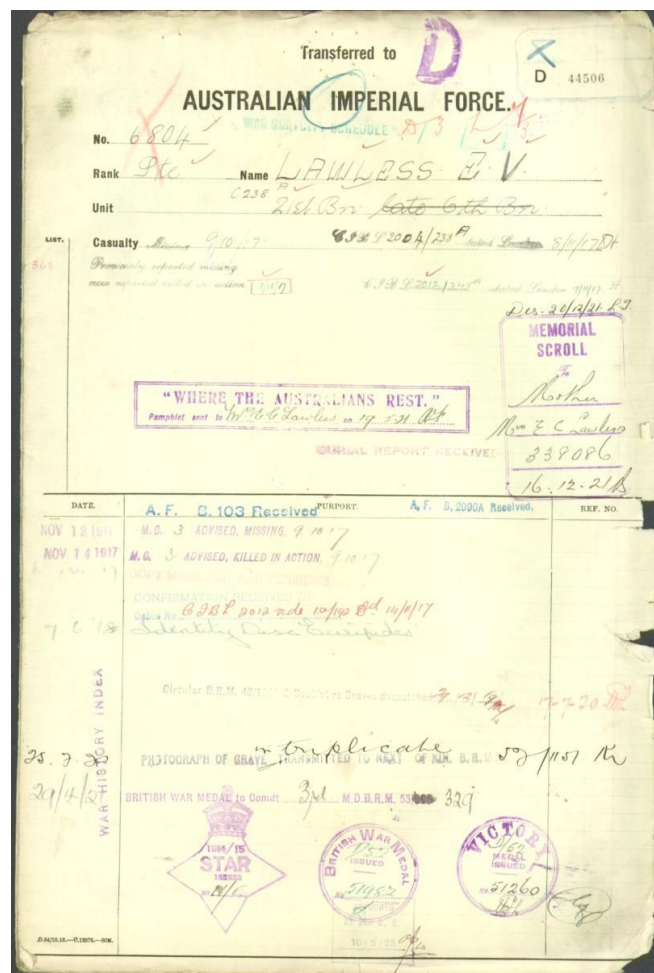
**Edward Vincent Lawless (Service No 6804)** enlisted at Royal Park, Melbourne on September 6, 1916. He was 21 years 3 months and a blacksmith. He was 5 ft 8 ½ in tall, 12 st 1 lb, with a fresh complexion, grey eyes and dark brown hair. His chest measured 34/37 ins. His mother, Mrs Elizabeth C Lawless was listed as his next of kin as his father was deceased. His unit was the 22<sup>nd</sup> Reinforcements, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

He embarked on the *Ulysses* in Melbourne on October 25, 1916 and arrived in Plymouth on December 28, and was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Training Battalion. He was admitted to Fargo Hospital, sick, on February 16 and discharged to duty 5 days later. On August 20, he went to France via Southampton, arriving at Le Havre the next day. His record shows he joined the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion on August 31 and the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion the next day.

On October 9, he was first recorded as missing in action and then confirmed killed in action. He was initially buried at Tyne Cot British Cemetery and then exhumed and buried at Passchendaele New British Cemetery, Plot 14, Row 2, Grave 2.

Correspondence in his file dated April 7, 1925 providing the grave details show that his mother was still seeking that information. It was possibly due to the fact that his body was exhumed and reburied. While there is no correspondence to his mother about this move on file, the correspondence that is there indicates she had not received the specific information on his grave until 1925.

His file contains the dispatch notices for both the scroll and the plaque but not the signed receipts. The scroll was sent on December 20, 1921 and the plaque on October 11, 1922. The fact that the scroll survives and is in our collection shows that it was treasured by his mother and his family.



The story of these servicemen also sketches the progress of the war and its cost. The bare details hint at the terrible experiences we now know they lived through.

The words of the scroll sum up the reason for the detail of this newsletter: "Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten".

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