

# ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

P.O. BOX 284 ORBOST VIC 3888



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## NEWSLETTER

No. 129 JULY, 2016

*AN ORBOST IDENTITY —*

## WILLIAM (BILLIE) BLACKMORE

This Newsletter has resulted from one of many requests for family information received by the Historical Society.

In 2012, Kellie Mowbray (nee Blackmore) contacted the Society requesting information on her grandfather's cousin, William (Billie) Blackmore.

Kellie provided copies of Billie's World War 1 records, and, as a follow up, I interviewed Danny, Norma and the late Glenis Leatham, and Betty Mehlert, who provided much of the information on Billie's time in the Orbost district.

Others who assisted with information and anecdotes were Trevor Perry and Marina Johnson.

Little is known of William Blackmore's early life, other than his World War 1 enlistment papers showing that he was born at or near Richmond, Victoria.

A search of the Victorian Birth Records listed the birth, at Richmond, in 1888, of William Henry Blackmore, a son to Charles Blackmore and Louisa (nee Sherwood).

Billie's war record states that both his parents were deceased when he enlisted in January 1916, with his next of kin being his sister, Miss Annie Blackmore, address unknown. (No record of Annie's birth was found in the Vic. Birth index).

His war record was later amended to list Mrs Martha Eaton, friend, of Orbost, Vic., as his next of kin.



The small house (shack) built by Billie Blackmore on Rupert Leatham's property located on the Orbost (western) side of the Brodribb River bridge. The property, in 2012, was owned by Mrs Aileen Welsh.



### WAR SERVICE

William Blackmore was aged 26 years and 9 months, single, and a labourer at Orbost, when he joined the A.I.F. in World War 1. He was 5 feet 7¾ inches tall, weighed 140 lbs. with brown eyes and hair. His Medical certificate stated he was referred to the Medical Board due to flat feet.

He enlisted at Melbourne on 13th January 1916 as a Private with the 57th Infantry Battalion, 16th Reinforcements; Service No. 5049.

Billie did his initial training at Royal Park, Melbourne, Castlemaine and Broadmeadows prior to embarking on HMAT 'Suffolk' from Melbourne on 1st April 1916.

He disembarked at Suez on 11th May, and after a few weeks in Egypt joined the British Expeditionary Forces, arriving at Marseilles on 30th June 1916.

While serving in France, he was hospitalised for a month with German measles, and following his discharge on 20th December 1916, Billie transferred to the 15th Machine Gun Coy. in January 1917.

### Wounded in Action

He was severely wounded on 12th May 1917, receiving gunshot wounds to the abdomen, right buttock, pelvis and bowel. He was admitted to the 8th Australian Field Ambulance, and seven days later was repatriated to England and admitted to the Grouped Auxiliary Hospital in Exeter. All letters from the Defence Department relating to his wounding and hospitalisation were sent to Mrs. M. Eaton, Orbost.

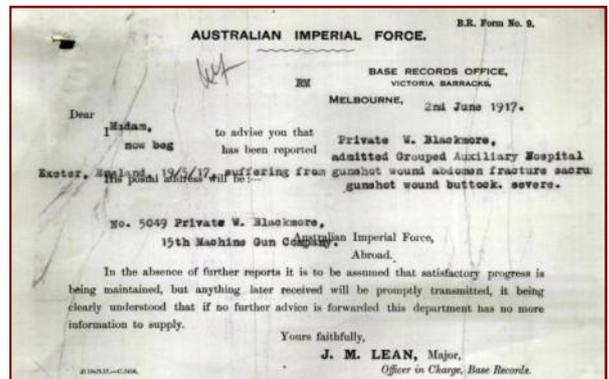
On 14th August 1917 he underwent an operation on an old hip wound at Harefield hospital. Following further hospitalisation at Weymouth and Harefield and then two week's furlough he was well enough to return home.

### Return to Australia

Billie left England on 31st October 1917, per 'Berrima', disembarking at Melbourne on 30th December. He was discharged as medically unfit from the A.I.F. at Melbourne on 2nd February 1918. His disability being a gunshot wound to the right buttock.



Above: Billie Blackmore's British War Medal  
Below: His Victory Medal - Front and Back



Letter from the A.I.F. advising Mrs Martha Eaton of the wounding of Pte W Blackmore

### Medals

He received the British War Medal, No. 39167, and the Victory Medal, No. 38703, on 27-8-1923.

War Medals Inscriptions:

5049 Pte W. Blackmore 15 M.G. Coy A.I.F.

V22323 M.M. 1914-1919 War

### BACK AT ORBOST

Billie returned to Orbost after the War and did farm work for George and Elizabeth Trewin (Betty Mehler's parents).

Betty recalled that when she was about 8 years old (about 1932), Billie was working for her father and rode a pony from Sale to Orbost.

He later lived in a slab and bark hut on public land near the Brodribb School site. He took up the hut property in 1935 and cleared the ti-tree and scrub with a bullock team. He was one of the first to recognise the kanooka tree.

While living there, an old war friend, Mr Fred Whelpton, would call on him. Mr. Welpton, who was appointed District Inspector of Schools in 1947, took the opportunity to call and have a cuppa with Billie whilst undertaking inspectorial visits at the Brodribb School.

When Billie had to move from the slab hut, he built himself a small house (shack) on what was then Rupert Leatham's property on the Orbost side of the Brodribb River bridge at Brodribb.

He had a tank for water, a basin on a stump for washing and used 'Lifeboy' soap. He got the power on in later years - the SEC connected the power at no cost to him, so he obtained a TV set. He had a garden and fruit trees, and ran a cow.

Billie owned a chainsaw and cut his own wood. He would walk up the hill with the chainsaw, a bag of wedges, and a sledge hammer. This he did right up until he was aged in his early 80s.

He was a heavy drinker and was bet £2 that he couldn't give it up. He stopped that day and didn't drink again, despite never receiving the £2. He was always well-dressed and well-groomed.

He rode his bicycle to Orbost every Thursday fortnight to obtain provisions. His bike was fitted with a home-made carry-all and a canvas bag to carry his goods.

Billie could turn his hand to woodwork and was a talented craftsman. He used only hand tools - a wooden plane, rasp, handsaw and chisel. For the Leatham family he made two Fiddleback Hall Stand Pedestals, a Fiddleback Walking Stick, and for the children, a wheel-barrow, Doll's Cradle, Stool and a Rocking Horse.



Billie's Returned Services Badges



Above and Left:

The Fiddleback Walking Stick made by Billie Blackmore.

This is one of a number of pieces crafted by him using hand tools only.

Billie fossicked for gold in the nearby creek and the story goes that he buried his coins around the property. He donated a set of gold scales to the Orbest and District Historical Society.

Like many returned World War 1 soldiers he never talked about his overseas war service.

**HIS LATTER YEARS**

Billie spent some time at the Home and Hospital (Old Peoples' Home) at Bairnsdale, where he was very contented, however, when a vacancy came up at the War Veterans Home at Baxter, he moved there expecting to meet up with some of his war friends. Sadly, this was not the case and he never really settled in at Baxter; he was also starting to lose his memory at the time.

Members of the Leatham family visited Billie on the morning of his final day, and later that evening received a phone call informing them that he had passed away.

Billie died on 17th January 1974, aged 87, at the War Veterans Home, Overport Road, Frankston, and was buried on 21st January, at the Frankston Cemetery.



Above: The set of gold scales that Billie donated to the Orbest and District Historical Society

*W. Mackintosh*  
Captain.  
Officer i/c Base Records.

WAR RECORDS  
BASE P66

Regtl. No. .... 5049 ..... Rank ..... Pte. ....  
Name ..... BLACKMORE W. .... Unit ..... 15th M.G. Coy.  
Embarked *April 1/1916* ..... Discharged *14/1/18* .....

I desire the undermentioned medal or medals awarded for service in the A.I.F. to be forwarded to me at the following address :- *Orbest, P.O.*

1914-15 Star .....  
British War Medal 1914/19 .....  
Victory Medal 1914/19 .....

Date *27/8/23* ..... (Signature) *W. Blackmore*

Above: Application, dated 27/8/1923, from W. Blackmore for his British War Medal and Victory Medal to be forwarded to him c/- Orbest Post Office.

AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE  
BASE RECORDS OFFICE,  
Victoria Barracks,  
MELBOURNE. 17th August, 1916.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your enquiry dated 11th instant, I have to inform you the postal address you require is as follows:-

No. 5049 Private W. Blackmore,  
16th Reinforcements,  
5th Battalion,  
2nd Infantry Brigade,  
1st Australian Division,  
Australian Imperial Force,  
Abroad.

Yours faithfully,  
J. H. GLEN,  
Major  
Officer i/c Base Records.

Mr. J. Gilbert,  
Tullagoota,  
Orbest, V.

DISPATCHED

Left: Letter dated August 11, 1916 from Mr John Gilbert, Tullagoota, Orbest, seeking a contact address for Wm Blackmore.

Right: Reply from the A.I.F. Base Records Office to Mr Gilbert.

*Sgt Mackay*  
*not the man*  
Tullagoota  
Orbest,  
Aug 11<sup>th</sup> 1916

To the Defence Dept  
Melb.

Dear Sirs  
Would you kindly send me no 9 particulars of address of *Wm Blackmore* enlisted at Orbest. as I wish to write him a letter  
Yours truly  
*J. Gilbert.*

WAR RECORDS  
214 AUG 1916  
RECEIVED

BR

14/18