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"Days of tears and longing": war, grief and memory in the Illawarra 1914-1925

Jennifer Hawksley

University of Wollongong

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"DAYS OF TEARS AND LONGING"

WAR, GRIEF AND MEMORY IN THE ILLAWARRA 1914 - 1925

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS (Honours) from the UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Jennifer Hawksley BA
School of History and Politics
Faculty of Arts
2004
“GREETING: EASTER 1918”

Now when others speed good wishes to the loved and living only
In the far lands, on the sea-ways, or wherever they may roam,
I am sending you a greeting lest your spirit should go lonely
In the Halls of Highest Heaven for a loving word from home.

First, I send you love most loyal (though on earth I shall not meet you)
From the land you loved, and died for; that is robed in summer sheen;
And I think that you will listen when my love goes out to greet you,
Though I may not hear you answer, for the starways lie between.

Know the things you loved recall you; for the well-known gully’s holding
Moss and fern and flickering shadow, as when we two wandered there;
And the rills go singing ever, and the woods are green and golden,
And the sweep of misty mountains at the dawn is still as fair.

And at night the grey road stretching where the moonbeams shift and glisten
Still is fringed with silken grasses, as when we two walked thereon;
And the dark pines o’er it whisper as they whispered – do you listen? -
When we strove to catch their meaning on a night forever gone.

Oh, I think you know, as memories of the dead days gather o’er me,
That I speak your name this morning with a passionate pride, and yet
Bitter tears of hopeless longing blot the blue hills out before me –
Pride is mighty, Heart’s Beloved, but it cannot curb regret.

- Nellie A Evans, 1919

- [From David Holloway (ed), Dark Somme Flowing, Robert Andersen & Assoc, Malvern, 1987, p.43]
This thesis is dedicated
to the families of the men
of the First AIF who never came home;
and to the three men who mean the most to me:
my father (1927 - 1996)
my husband
and my son.
I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work except where I have given fully documented references to the work of others, and that the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted for assessment in any formal course. The total length is 20,000 words.

Jennifer Hawksley
6 October 2004
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The examination of bereavement during the First World War has been a relatively new contribution to the historiography of Australia's experience of war; however, many of these studies have primarily focussed on metropolitan areas and war widows. This thesis seeks to address three key areas of wartime bereavement – knowing, coping and remembering – from the perspective of parents and families in a rural region, the Illawarra, between 1914 and 1925. Local newspapers, letters, diaries, official documents and private records have been used to examine the experiences of the families of thirty-two men from the area who volunteered to join the First AIF, twenty-eight of whom did not return.

Traditional mourning rituals had centred on physical access to the bodies of the dead, knowledge of how and when they died and a grave site. During the war, the bodies of the dead were unavailable to the bereaved, the knowledge of how and when the men died was often limited (and in some cases was never known) and there was no grave site the bereaved could easily visit. Old forms of mourning were turned to new uses and new traditions were developed to allow the bereaved to make sense of the devastating, and unprecedented, human cost of modern trench warfare. For many parents, patriotism and faith in the validity of the war was not rhetoric. A belief in the nobility of sacrifice on foreign battlefields was one of the few ways sudden death on such a vast scale could be reconciled.

While many of the responses of the people of the Illawarra are reflective of wider trends, others were shaped by the particular characteristics of the region. Despite the inventiveness of new rituals of mourning, and the close support networks generated among the rural communities of the Illawarra, many of the bereaved of the Great War never fully recovered. For most, their loss defined, and diminished, the remainder of their lives.
ABBREVIATIONS

AIF   Australian Imperial Force
AWM   Australian War Memorial
Cprl  Corporal
Cptn  Captain
DCM   Distinguished Conduct Medal
DOD   Died of disease
DOI   Died of Injury
DOW   Died of Wounds
Dvr   Driver
IWW   International Workers of the World
KIA   Killed in Action
L/Cprl Lance Corporal
Lieut  Lieutenant
MM    Military Medal
POW   Prisoner of War
Pte   Private
QMS   Quartermaster Sergeant
RSL   Returned Services League
RSSIL Returned Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Imperial League
Spr   Sapper
Srgt  Sergeant
Trpr  Trooper
UoW   University of Wollongong

CONVENTIONS

To avoid interruption to the narrative, I have not used [sic] to indicate errors and thus quotations from newspapers, letters and diaries appear as in the original.

Local newspapers often re-printed sections of personal correspondence without specifying the date of the letter, the author or the name of the recipient. Where these details are known, they are provided in the footnote.

In the Australian imperial currency, pounds, shillings and pence were expressed 1/4/10 or 1.4.10.

12 pence (d) to the shilling (s)
20 shillings to the pound (£)
ILLUSTRATIONS

"God Protect My Boy: Somewhere in France"
Postcard, MS3637, National Library of Australia
Bruce Scates and Raelene Frances, *Australian Women and the Great War*,

Dunegy family, Mt Kembla
*Courtesy of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society*

Private Dick Houghton, Keiraville
*Courtesy of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society*

Lieutenant Syd Duchesne, Wollongong
*Courtesy of Rev Dr David and Mrs Bernie Duchesne*

First Battalion, D Company roll call, 30 April 1915
*Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial*

Private Ted Austin, Corrimal
*Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial*

Sergeant Walter Farquharson, Kiama
*Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial*

Private Frank Farquharson, Kiama
*Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial*

Percy and Ellen Farquharson, Kiama
*Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial*

Private Rupert Quist, Wollongong
*Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial*

Anzac Day march through Crown Street, Wollongong, 25 April 1917
*Courtesy of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society*

Corporal Alf Shipp, Keiraville
*Courtesy of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society*

Thirroul War Memorial
*Courtesy of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society*

Coledale War Memorial
*Courtesy of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society*

Wollongong War Memorial
*Courtesy of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society*

Captain Wilf Appleby, Keiraville
*Courtesy of the Wollongong City Library and the Illawarra Historical Society*
Writing this thesis was more demanding and rewarding than I had imagined. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my principal supervisor, Associate Professor John McQuilton, and to Dr Anthony Ashbolt. John encouraged, agonised over, ruthlessly pruned and fearlessly eradicated ‘purple prose’, but in the end, vastly improved my writing. He showed faith in the project, and in this author, that was not always deserved. John’s knowledge of, and passion for, the human story of war motivated my research and tamed its excesses, while Anthony gave valuable assistance with the research essay component of the Honours course and helpful comments on thesis drafts. The importance of the guidance and friendship of these scholars is immeasurable and I thank them for their patience.

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Many staff and students provided journal articles, advice, coffee breaks, technical assistance, humour and friendship. Special thanks to Dr Damien Cahill, Dr Georgine Clarsen, Moya Collett, Associate Professor Susan Dodds, Susan Engel, Marg Hanlon, Mark Hutchings, Claire Lowrie, Karl James, Nathaniel King, Dr Glenn Mitchell, Dr Kristy Muir, Dr Peter Sales, Linda Wade, Professor Andrew Wells, Sophie Williams and Nathan Wise.

My mother, Bev Roberts, generously gave up an enormous amount of her time to act as proof-reader, baby sitter, chef and counsel. Mum has lived with my university journey(s), and this project, for many years; I hope she will see her sacrifices have not been in vain. Dr Charles Hawksley has given me unconditional love and encouragement for over eight years, but his patience and support have never been more important (and taxed) than during the last few months. While I may not have always taken his advice on academic matters, I am forced to admit he does know what he is talking about - except when it comes to thinking up thesis titles! Bob and Kay Hawksley were always reassuring and shared many books and ideas. I also want to say a very special ‘thank you’ to the light of my life, our three-year-old son Declan, who sometimes let me work in peace, sometimes ‘helped’ with the computer and often told people that “Mummy’s soldiers can’t talk because they are all dead”. Lastly, I extend my gratitude to a man I have never met, Associate Professor Bill Gammage, who nearly twenty years ago inspired my interest in the experiences of the Anzacs and the impact of war.
Adapted from Michael Organ (ed), *Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770-1850*, Aboriginal Education Unit, University of Wollongong Printery, Wollongong, 1990, p.xxix
Thursday 31st July 1902 dawned cold and clear in the Illawarra. In the mining villages of Mt Kembla and Kembla Heights, perched on the edge of the escarpment, the men were getting ready to go underground. By lunchtime, two hundred and sixty one men were working down in the mine, another twenty-two on the surface. Just before two that afternoon, what was claimed to be the safest mine in the world exploded in a colossal cloud of black smoke and earth. Ninety-six men and boys would be lost in the greatest single peacetime disaster in Australian history.

The residents of Mt Kembla knew immediately what had happened. Men began to clear a passage through the debris in a frantic and unorganised rescue mission that claimed additional lives. An urgent call was sent to Wollongong, “All the doctors are wanted at once at Kembla! A terrible accident has happened!” The women congregated in shocked silence at the mouth of the pit, waiting for news, some for upwards of sixty hours. When a stretcher was brought out, “you’d see these women rush at it, … if they recognised it was one of their own, they’d let out a scream and they’d throw themselves on top of these poor unfortunate devils”.

Frank Dungey, the mine deputy, had been decapitated by the blast. When Mrs Dungey insisted on holding the body in the morgue, his head, which had been washed and laid with the body, came away. As required by law, she identified her husband, quietly replaced the head at the top of the body, “moved a few steps away, fainted and fell”. When a plain white coffin was brought to the house, Mrs Dungey broke down and insisted a black coffin be provided instead. Having lost their eldest son to illness in 1894, the Dungey family had seven remaining children in 1902; including William, aged fourteen and John aged nine.

Mrs Dungey had buried her oldest son and her husband within an established ritual accompanying death. She had seen the bodies, she had followed the procedures, she had watched as they were committed to the earth and had completed the initial phase of grieving. John Brennan had not.
The body of Brennan’s twenty year-old son Micky was the only one never recovered from the mine. Various theories were put forward; that Micky, a wheeler, had wandered off into an old part of the mine; that a mistake in identification had been made and Micky had been buried under another name, or that it was his flame that had been the cause of the explosion and he had been blown to smithereens. John Brennan was haunted by the uncertainty of Micky’s death. He returned to the mine every weekend for two years to search for Micky, before committing suicide in Wollongong Harbour in May 1904. Local lore on the mountain attributed unusual happenings to the ghost of Micky Brennan, right up until the mine’s closure in 1970.

The Mt Kembla disaster permanently altered the lives of individual families and impacted upon the wider Illawarra region, yet the staunch community spirit already evident in the mining villages was strengthened by the shared memory of loss. Grief was partially assuaged by the knowledge of what had happened, immediate access to the bodies, the certainty of

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6 Ibid., p.85
7 Oral tradition had it that Micky had planned to resign from the mine the next day, claiming “this place will go up one day”, ibid., pp. 42, 85 and 86
proper burial and the opportunity to regularly revisit the site of the tragedy and, most importantly, the resting places of the victims. John Brennan did not have the comfort of these familiar mourning rituals to temper his grief. Nor would many in the Great War that was to come, including Mrs Dungey.

Private William Dungey would die of wounds at Pozières in August 1916 and Private John Dungey would be killed in France almost exactly two years later. Mary Dungey’s life was defined by grief; she placed an In Memoriam notice in the South Coast Times for her husband and sons every year until her death in 1942. A neighbour recalled:

> There was two days in her life she respected or honoured, Anzac Day and the 31st of July. On Anzac Day she’d always hoist the flag at half mast in her own yard and she’d put a wreath on the family grave out in the cemetery where the two sons’ names were recorded. On the 31st of July there was always flowers put on her husband’s grave, and she always attended the memorial service. 8

The bereaved of Mt Kembla had devised ways to cope in the aftermath of the mass death of their men, yet even such a tragic dress rehearsal could not prepare the Illawarra for the main event.

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8 Fred Kirkwood, cited in Piggin and Lee, *The Mt Kembla Disaster, op.cit.*, p.266
The social history of Australia’s participation in the First World War of 1914-1918 has been examined from several different perspectives, particularly since the 1970s. Gammage, Robson and Adam-Smith detailed the experiences and character of the First AIF, McKernan, Damousi and Lake have looked at the home front, Thomson the memories of diggers, Inglis the memorialisation of the war and Seal the creation of the Anzac legend. However, while the literature is extensive, it is often biased toward the metropolitan urban areas and the middle classes. McKernan, McQuilton and others have demonstrated that regional studies have a place in the historiography of war and that rural Australia responded to the war in different ways.

It is only recently that scholars have made wartime bereavement the focus of specific study. This is somewhat surprising, considering one in five of the men who embarked with the First AIF never came home. Inglis estimated that every second family was bereaved by the war; extended networks of relations who were all deeply affected by the loss of one of their own. Robson, borrowing from John Donne, wrote, if every man’s death diminishes me, "then..."
Australia was grievously diminished by the Great War. 6 Damousi and Luckins have both published studies on wives and families whose soldiers did not return, while Condé’s article on bereaved Australians is forthcoming. 7 Their emphasis, however, is primarily metropolitan: perhaps rural bereavement, like other responses to the war, was at variance with its urban counterpart.

The experiences of war widows have dominated the literature, yet only one in five of the First AIF was married. 8 There was a reason official historian Charles Bean often referred to the soldiers of the First AIF as ‘boys’. 9 Over three-quarters of those who enlisted from the Illawarra were aged 18 – 29 years; 10 of those who died, their average age was twenty-four. 11 This is not to deny that many young soldiers did leave behind a bereaved fiancé or girlfriend, but the bond between a parent and child is one of the strongest known to humanity, as is the pain when it is broken. The grief of parents remains an area for further investigation. Some historians have argued that the expression of mourning for parents was often absent, because a language of mourning did not exist. While the word ‘widow’, for example, immediately evokes a woman whose husband has died, there is no English, French or German term for a parent who has lost a child. 12

This thesis will examine wartime bereavement in a rural region, the Illawarra, between the years 1914 and 1925. 13 It will focus on the families of thirty-two young men from the area who enlisted in the First AIF between 1914 and 1917, twenty-eight of whom never returned. These soldiers ranged in age from eighteen years to twenty-nine, from the rank of Private to Captain, from the towns of Wollongong, Corrimal, Kiama, Balgownie, Austinmer, Jamberoo, Tarrawanna, Keiraville and Unanderra. They were blacksmiths and carpenters, miners and labourers, law students and drapers, surveyors and bricklayers. Only two were married. One pair of brothers returned, another did not. One did not survive that first Anzac Day, another died in Berlin after the Armistice. They were killed in action, died of disease, succumbed to

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9 Luckins, *The Gates of Memory*, op.cit., p.35
10 Caldwell, *Illawarra at War*, op.cit., p.18
13 For a summary of the region’s social characteristics and a profile of the men who enlisted, see Appendix A
wounds and were taken prisoner. They are buried in Fromelles, Pozières, Bullecourt and Villers-Bretonneux and are listed on memorials to the missing on the Menin Road and at Lone Pine.

The impact of their deaths on the people of the Illawarra will be studied using letters, diaries, private records, newspaper accounts and official documents. The purpose is to determine the manner in which traditional mourning behaviours were transformed, the extent to which private grief was in conflict with public commemoration and ways in which regional characteristics shaped the specific responses of the area.

At this point, it is worth noting that these sources have an inherently selective element to them. The nature of grief is private and subject to evolution and re-evaluation over time. To some extent, its nuances must be inferred and imagined. Letters were kept and shared only if they brought pride. Diaries were recorded for personal reasons. Newspaper editors determined what they would publish. Records donated to public institutions were, in the main, a positive reflection of the deceased. Oral evidence was obtained from a grandson of parents bereaved during the war and relies on memory twice removed from the event, as well as collective family reminiscences. Yet all offer different insights into bereavement in the Illawarra that allow some view of the whole.

Recent Western literature has drawn a distinction between the objective loss (bereavement), the emotional reaction to the loss (grief) and the socially defined behaviour following the loss (mourning). However, Walter has argued that this trinity is much less disparate than has been previously presumed and that studies of bereavement, grief and mourning are central to the understanding of what binds a society together, and how it reinvents and reinstates itself after tragedy. Jalland has concurred and noted that to study death, and a society’s responses to it, is to study the heart of a culture. Indeed, Hegel defined history itself as “the record of what man does with death”.

While specific rituals of death and displays of mourning differed according to region and class, the Australian experience of death in the nineteenth century was characterised by deathbed attendance, the funeral service, the grave, the headstone, its inscription and the

14 Walter, On Bereavement, op. cit., p.28
15 Ibid., p.xvi
16 Jalland, Australian Ways of Death, op. cit., p.1
physical act of visiting the grave site to place flowers or mementoes to mark special occasions and anniversaries.\textsuperscript{18} The \textit{Illawarra Mercury} reported that the number of visitors to cemeteries always increased on Sundays and Mother’s Day.\textsuperscript{19} The majority of funerals in the pre-war period were held in the home, and were defined by the religious rites and rituals that assisted the bereaved in making sense of death.\textsuperscript{20} For the devout, a belief in the resurrection consoled them as they looked to reunion in the afterlife and many saw death as a test of their faith.\textsuperscript{21}

The rituals accompanying loss were multi-layered and encompassed both the private and public. Until the increased ‘medicalisation’ of death in the post-war years,\textsuperscript{22} people died surrounded by family in the privacy of the home. The hostile Australian climate and lack of refrigeration made it imperative for the mortal remains of the deceased to be disposed of quickly, usually within forty-eight hours. Due to these constraints, many interments were private affairs attended by the immediate family. Public memorial services were held some days after the burial, especially for the more prominent members of the community. Many focussed on ornate trimmings and visible reminders of the deceased’s piety and social standing. In June 1912, a “very impressive memorial service” was held in the Wollongong Presbyterian Church for Mr J Richardson, at which many of his Masonic brethren were present “in regalia”. The local newspaper recounted the hymns sung and detailed the sermon in which Rev McKay Barnet made reference to Mr Richardson’s “strong Protestantism” and “his love of the Bible, which he evidently searched diligently”.\textsuperscript{23}

There were exceptions, of course. Irrespective of short notice, the burial of children could attract a considerable crowd. “A very large crowd” comforted Mr and Mrs Thompson as they buried their two-year-old son Colin in Berkeley in 1913,\textsuperscript{24} while “much sympathy” was felt for Mr and Mrs Sheridan on the loss of their newborn infant.\textsuperscript{25}

The connection between the body and the bereaved was primarily the domain of women; female family members, nuns or midwives would wash and dress the body, usually in the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Pat Jalland, \textit{Death in the Victorian Family}, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p.193
  \item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 18 May 1917
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Graeme M Griffin, ‘Defining Australian death: religion and the state’ in Allan Kellehear (ed), \textit{Death and Dying in Australia}, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000, p.46
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Jalland, \textit{Death in the Victorian Family}, op. cit., p.41
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Jalland, \textit{Australian Ways of Death}, op. cit., pp.326-327
  \item \textsuperscript{23} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 30 June 1912
  \item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 12 September 1913
  \item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 5 December 1913
\end{itemize}
home. While undertakers commonly fulfilled this function in the cities, this was not typical of the practice in rural areas, where the laying out and dressing of the body was the solemn “last attentions to the dead” by the living and “a charitable act of considerable significance”.

*In Memoriam* notices published in the local press were a common form of commemoration. These generally reflected on the qualities of the deceased, the comfort of religion, the sense of loss and grief, that the deceased had not suffered, or that suffering was now at an end and that eternal life was a reward. Many used poetry to express their grief, often awkwardly, borrowing heavily from an established popular literary canon. The pre-war practice of articulating personal grief in a public forum would serve the Illawarra well, because without a body, a grave or the ritual rites of funerals, the placing of *In Memoriam* notices was one of the few constants of mourning that were appropriate both during the war and in the post-war years.

Two realities were required to mourn within the comfort of these familiar customs: the presence of the body (and the rituals for women associated with preparation for burial) and the knowledge of how and when the person died. They were there for the victims of the Mt Kembla disaster, bar John Brennan, no matter how distressing they may have been for women like Mrs Dungey; they were not there for the bereaved in Australia during and after the Great War. Manuel has argued that the war rendered useless all the traditional mourning rituals that had assisted the grieving in making sense of sudden death, leaving them isolated and vulnerable as “suddenly, the established, reliable patterns of grieving [were] stripped away by war.” The overwhelming numbers of dead meant that the unique anguish of each family was unable to be honoured. As Winter has it, “the individuality of death had been buried under literally millions of corpses.”

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26 Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, op. cit., p.118
28 Piggin and Lee, *The Mt Kembla Disaster*, op. cit., p.88
29 These were published in the *South Coast Times*, in preference to the *Illawarra Mercury*, at a cost of 3/- per insertion, and multiple notices for the same person were often placed on the anniversary of death.
30 *South Coast Times*, 23 May 1913 and 1 August 1913
Some distinguished works have been published on cultural aspects of the European experience of wartime bereavement, but these have tended to place mourning in an overall context of public commemoration and nationalistic mythology, rather than at the microcosm of individual family sorrow. French historians Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker have cautioned against the use of platitudes and clichés that stifle the emotion of grief and have instead urged historians to pull the veil aside and answer, “How did people mourn? What was their suffering like?” With very few exceptions, mourning death in war has nothing in common with mourning in peacetime, and this is particularly true of the Great War where the mass death of young men in battle reversed the normal succession of generations. None had anticipated the devastation of modern trench warfare. It was without precedent and it brought the inadequacies of traditional rituals of mourning, best studied at the local and personal level, into sharp relief.

Although Australia shared the consequences of trench warfare with Europe, it differed in one fundamental aspect: distance. Not only were the bereaved denied the physical presence of the body, they were also denied the chance to visit any gravesite, no matter how simple it may have been. As Jalland has argued:

The lack of a corpse, a known burial place and an individual grave created fears, which could last for years, that their loved ones were not dead, but maimed, lost or helpless … many continued to grieve for the rest of their lives, traumatised by wartime losses that they never completely accepted.

Damousi and others have explored the importance of correspondence from comrades, nurses and chaplains to the bereaved as a means of meeting at least one of the requirements; the knowledge of how their men died:

... without the remnants of a body, or the ritual of a funeral, these descriptions were more than just words. Psychologically these details were crucial; they carried the weight of reality and truth, providing a presence which filled the empty void of unknown events.

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34 Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 14-18 Understanding the Great War, op.cit., p.212
36 Jalland, Australian Ways of Death, op. cit., p.322
37 Damousi, The Labour of Loss, op. cit., p.10
Of course, the Illawarra was not totally without experience of loss in war before 1915. The Imperial Bushmen Regiment, a group of “hardy lads” who could “ride, shoot and find their way about” had embarked for South Africa on 23 April 1900. On board was twenty-year-old Frank Andrews, a Wollongong local who had volunteered to fight the Boer, having supplied his own horse and saddle for the expedition. Under the command of Captain Ryrie, his company saw action at Eland’s River garrison, Marco River, Buffel’s Hoik and occupied the township of Ottoshoop, north-east of Mafeking, where on 27 August 1900, Trooper Andrews was shot in the back and killed.

The reaction to Frank’s death was an eerie, if diminutive, preview of the sorts of public displays of mourning and the private familial grief that would envelope the Illawarra fifteen years later. The Illawarra Mercury published the death notice on 8 September 1900, and Captain Ryrie wrote a letter of condolence to Mrs Andrews in which he described the manner of Frank’s death, praised him as a “true soldier” and assured her the church had buried Frank with military honours. Other Illawarra soldiers in Frank’s regiment also wrote to her. The importance of these letters to the bereaved is underscored by the fact that Mrs Andrews kept them.

On his return to Australia, Ryrie returned Frank’s personal effects to the family and became a regular visitor. He may well have been the “surrogate son” Damousi has identified as part of the response to death in war. In October 1900, Wollongong Council approved the construction of a monument to honour the Illawarra men who fought in the Boer War. It was unveiled on 2 June 1902 outside the Town Hall by the clergyman who had buried Frank in South Africa and three returned men were part of a large crowd addressed by the Mayor. Frank’s was the only name chiselled into the memorial. Mrs Andrews kept all the

40 Letter to Mrs Andrews from Captain Ryrie, cited in A P Fleming, *The Wollongong Rest Park at Globe Lane and Burelli Street with An Account of the Memorials Therein*, Illawarra Historical Society, Wollongong, November 1971, p.8
42 Damousi, *The Labour of Loss*, *op. cit.*, p.25
43 Estimates vary, with the *South Coast Times* reporting “a couple of hundred” and the *Illawarra Mercury* “not less than a thousand”, cited in Fleming, *The Wollongong Rest Park at Globe Lane and Burelli Street*, *op. cit.*, p.9. The fountain was removed in 1954 during preparations for the visit of Queen Elizabeth II and only re-erected at its current location in McCabe Park after representations from the Illawarra Historical Society.
correspondence relating to her son and had his stirrups silver-plated, but the people of the Illawarra, having paid their respects, retreated to their normal lives, safe in the knowledge that this strange little conflict had not had widespread impact. Such a conclusion would not be possible at the end of the four-year war that was to come.

This is primarily an empirical study that covers three broad themes of bereavement: knowing, coping and remembering. Chapter One will examine how the regional community kept track of its men, how the news of death was delivered, the importance of knowledge of the manner and place of death for the bereaved, particularly that conveyed through letters from the front, and the subtle ways in which the grief of widows and parents and even families differed. Chapter Two will primarily centre on the search for information. The confusion and despair caused by the notion of 'missing in action' and the lack of certainty regarding gravesites and the return of personal effects is discussed, together with the significance the bereaved attached to their loved ones lying with fallen comrades on foreign battlefields. Chapter Three will look at the role of memory, private and public methods of commemoration in the immediate post war years, including Anzac Day and war memorials, and the transformation of private memories into public records through the donation of material to the Australian War Memorial. It will also examine ways in which soldiers who died of wounds or disease after they returned home continued to be privileged, and the differences in the grief of their families as compared to those whose men had died overseas.

This is a study of pain and loss; it is an examination of a region as it struggled to come to terms with the fact that the ultimate cost of a war on the other side of the world would be measured by the sacrifice of their sons. Motivated by patriotism, peer pressure, economic concerns, revenge, adventure, mateship, propaganda or shame, the men of the Illawarra left their homes completely unprepared for the brutal reality of war. These men were sons, boyfriends, brothers and workmates; as Laurence Binyon had it, “they went with songs to the battle, they were young / straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow”. Their deaths not only devastated their immediate families, but also created a measurable impact on their communities for ensuing generations who lived with the memories of loss; their ghosts faintly echo still.

For a general discussion on motivations for enlistment, see Richard White, ‘Motives for joining up: self sacrifice, self-interest and social class 1914-1918’ in Journal of the Australian War Memorial, 9, October 1986, pp.3-16 and for the Illawarra specifically, see Caldwell, Illawarra at War, op. cit., pp.35-54

Laurence Binyon, Ode to the Fallen, first published in the London Times, 21 September 1914
CHAPTER 1

THE SHOCK OF THE NEWS:
FAMILIES IN MOURNING

"You are so far away. I wish we could have saved him for you"\(^1\)

Families with a soldier on active service existed in a state of perpetual anxiety between 1914 and 1918. One observer in 1916 wrote of parents, "every day, every hour ... they probe the unknown", and noted that all combatant countries experienced "the mother with her vacant stare, the father pacing, trying to convince himself that their son will be all right".\(^2\) English and French soldiers were able to return home on leave during the war and many of their families travelled to field hospitals to visit wounded relatives.\(^3\) Australians could not. Daily accounts of battles in the newspapers convinced many that few could survive the devastation. Some families would have been consumed with fear, many more would have depended on their faith in prayer and still more may have become fatalistic. Above all, they avidly sought news as to the whereabouts and safety of their men.

The men of the First AIF were prodigious letters writers and Illawarra’s volunteers were no exception. They frequently filled their letters with references to other men from the region. Twenty-one year old Fred Muir from Unanderra wrote home:

I still continue to run across a number of my old schoolfellows here ... McGillicuddy and young Hindmarsh of Balgownie hauled me out of bed last night to have a yarn with them ... a number of members of the first contingent from Wollongong and thereabouts had their photos taken in front of the Sphinx. It is really surprising to see the number of local people who are scattered about here.

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\(^1\) Correspondence dated 11 August 1916 from Matron Cecily Dale, Commandant of Bevan Military Hospital, Sandgate, to Mrs Houghton of Keiraville, Illawarra Mercury, 6 October 1916


\(^3\) The family of Malcolm Wakeman, a flight observer in the Royal Air Force, was able to visit him in a base hospital in Calais after his plane was shot down in October 1918. His mother spent the last week at his bedside as he died, and was able to attend his funeral. See Ibid., p.328-331
They have asked me to act as a kind of secretary to keep the names and addresses of all the Illawarra members, so that we may keep in touch with one another.

Fred's letter was not unusual. Private Cook of Wollongong reported the names of the Illawarra men he had met overseas and Trooper Fred Davies of Corrimal informed his sister of his surprise when "Rich Morgan (reported killed) came to my tent. He is still shaky, but then it's a miracle he's alive after all he has been through." Families with men at the front understood the value of correspondence and the need to hear any news, no matter how scant. Many sent these letters to be published in the local newspapers which acted as 'bulletin boards' to share news. Informal support networks developed where families passed on letters to other families whose sons were mentioned. However, death was an ever-present possibility and when the news came, most of the traditional mourning rites were impossible. Families in the Illawarra turned the established forms to new uses or substituted new forms for the old, a process clearly reflected in the importance accorded letters of condolence and the desperate search for information of how and where their men had died.

In Australia, the clergy was the official messenger of death. Having accepted the Government's request to convey news of death at the beginning of the war, the clergy of the Illawarra soon regretted its decision. Ministers and priests could not visit the homes of their parishioners "without frightening the relatives into a week's nervous sickness". The stress of their grim task was too much for many, who advised their communities that they

4 Correspondence dated 28 March 1915 from Fred Muir to his mother, South Coast Times, 14 May 1915
5 Correspondence from Private D G Cook to Alderman E H Figtree of Wollongong, Illawarra Mercury, 14 September 1917
6 Correspondence from Trooper Fred Davies to Miss May Davies of Corrimal, South Coast Times, 14 July 1916. One of the most famous examples of men 'returning from the dead' was captured by an advertisement in the London Times: "Captain Robert Graves, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, officially reported died of wounds, wishes to inform his friends that he is recovering from his wounds at Queen Alexandra's Hospital", cited in Jonathan Harwell, Myth and Monument: Memory of the Great War in Britain and Germany, BA (Hons) Thesis, Williams College, Massachusetts, 1999, p.5
7 By contrast, the class barriers so evident in the British Army persisted beyond life, where the relatives of enlisted men were sent a letter by ordinary post. Only the families of officers received telegrams, delivered by unlucky, and probably bemused telegraph boys. See J M Winter, 'Communities in Mourning', in Coetzee and Shevin-Coetzee (eds), Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War, op.cit., p.327
would no longer knock on the door to deliver bad news. The Rector of Bulli Anglican Church informed his congregation:

So many of our people are terrified when they see the minister come to their houses, even when he comes on ordinary business, or to make enquiries. It is not fair either to the minister or to the parishioners. If, then, the sad task of conveying bad news is ever imposed upon your Minister, you may rest assured that he will not call at your house as on an ordinary visit; but he will send the bad news by letter, by special messenger, or by post, and will follow in person as soon as possible; you need not be frightened every time you see him.⁹

Official notification was not always the first. McQuilton in particular, has looked at the confusion and anxiety caused when news reached families from informal sources, delivered before official telegrams.¹⁰ The Illawarra also had its examples.

Dick Houghton (seated) and his younger brother Will (standing) had enlisted together in Keiraville in August 1915.

Dick was shot through the right arm on 19 July 1916 during the battle of Fromelles¹¹ and was evacuated to a military hospital in Sandgate, England, where he died from an embolism on 5 August.¹² The Houghtons had only emigrated to the Illawarra in 1913 and Mr Houghton's sister, a Mrs White, still lived in Durham, some three hundred miles from Sandgate. Mrs White was informed of her nephew's death as she prepared to travel to the hospital and she

⁹ Piggin, Faith of Steel, op.cit., p.183
¹¹ See Appendices C and D for maps of the major areas and battlefields of the Gallipoli campaign and the Western Front. By coincidence, not design, there are no soldiers who fought in the Middle East and Palestine campaigns in this study.
¹² AWM 1DRL/0428 Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-1918 War, No. 2340 Pte Richard Houghton
telegraphed her brother in Keiraville on 9 August 1916: “Burying Dick with honours, deepest sympathy”.

It was the first indication the Houghton family had that their first-born had been lost. In one way, they were luckier than most. Mrs White was able to arrange for Dick’s body to be transported to Durham where members of his extended family buried him in the local cemetery. It gave his parents some comfort to know he had been properly laid to rest “near his native place”.

Having previously served as a Lieutenant in the Illawarra cadets, Fred Muir was among the first men to enlist from the area. He was a prolific correspondent and his mother, Mrs O’Donnell, who had re-married after the death of Fred’s father, kept all his letters in a scrapbook, passing many on to the South Coast Times, which published seventeen of Fred’s letters from the front during 1915. He had a lawyer’s eye for detail and his lyrical style and sense of humour infused his writing as he chronicled the First Battalion’s exploits on Gallipoli. Readers at home in the Illawarra followed Fred’s letters with great interest, not only for an insight into the life of an Australian soldier, but to hear news of their own men.

On 25 November 1915, he wrote to his mother that as he was about to go back into the line, “I may not be able to write again for some time”. In the early hours of the next morning, Fred was shot in the head. He was taken to the advance dressing station and from there, transferred to the hospital ship HM Glenart Castle, where his condition rapidly deteriorated. Private Fred Muir died at 2.50am on 28 November 1915. The South Coast Times published one of Fred’s letters on the morning of 10 December 1915. Mrs O’Donnell received the telegram that afternoon.

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14 AWM 145 Roll of Honour Cards, 1914-1918 War, Army. No 2340 Pte Richard Houghton
15 Mrs O’Donnell had lost her elder son some six years before the war when he was shot and killed during a bungled robbery of the Queensland bank where he worked. AWM file 2/DRL/0316, Frederick Warren Muir
16 South Coast Times, 17 December 1915
17 AWM file 2DRL/0316, Frederick Warren Muir
18 Correspondence dated 28 November 1915 from Matron H L Reddock to Mrs O’Donnell, AWM 2DRL/0316, Frederick Warren Muir

- 12 -
To live with the daily anticipation of loss is perhaps as stressful as the realisation of the loss itself. Some soldiers foresaw the effects of worry upon their families and cautioned them to be optimistic. Lieutenant Syd Duchesne (pictured left) embarked among the first contingent of the AIF in October 1914 and during the six months he spent in Mena Camp, Egypt, he became increasingly concerned with reports that his mother in Wollongong was not coping. He wrote:

[Rita] told me that Aunt Ada was not looking well and that Aunt thinks I shall never return. Well Dad I hope you don’t let Mother worry like that ... tell Mother and Aunt that I wish them to remember ... if by chance my time has come to leave this world, I wish not for a better death than one on the battlefield helping Englishmen to keep our Empire in freedom.

Dad, I often lay in bed of a night and wonder what you are all doing and if Mother is well because by the strain of her letters she seems to be worrying over me and that is the last thing that I wish for. Surely Dad, you and George can keep her mind from the subject. Well Dad this is not a very pleasant letter but it hurt me when I heard that Aunt was worrying and that I knew Mother would be doing the same ... my last wish will be that you all shall be proud and not grieve if I never return ... the chief thing I want Mother to understand is that she must not worry over me as I think by all the worrying she shan’t be able to decide whether I return or not as that part lays with the Almighty and if my time to die has arrived well I shall die a soldier as it was my wish to be a soldier and a man.

PS: Mother don’t worry. I am enjoying myself and am happy. Remember Mother that I am only a son and that many a husband with families are here and it is for them who we must pray that they may be spared to return to their wives and families and not for us single boys who have nobody depending on us.\(^{19}\)

Syd Duchesne was killed on 25 April 1915. In the transport boat heading toward Anzac Cove, Syd reportedly admitted he had had a premonition he would not survive that day.\(^{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Correspondence dated 31 January 1915 from Lieutenant Syd Duchesne to his father, private papers in the possession of Rev. Dr David and Mrs Bernie Duchesne, of Wollstonecraft, Sydney.

\(^{20}\) Private papers in the possession of Rev. Dr David and Mrs Bernie Duchesne, of Wollstonecraft, Sydney
Lieutenant Syd Duchesne was one of six officers and 25 men in D Company, First Battalion, on the morning of 25 April 1917. At this Company Roll Call on the morning of 30 April 1915, only one officer and 88 enlisted men answered their names.

Private Mitcheson also anticipated his own death and was concerned about his family’s reaction:

I am writing this in anticipation of what might happen ... in my mind I do not fear any consequences that might happen to me, and it is hard to have to part with all loved ones; but duty must be done, mother dear ... Should the worst happen you will know that I died to uphold the name of those who bore me to this earth, and that I died loving and thinking of you to the last. I will leave [this] in my pocket to be posted so you will know what I feel, mother dear.21

The letter was found on Private Mitcheson’s body after he was killed on the Somme in 1917, and posted to his parents. Did such a letter alleviate his parents’ suffering? Probably not, but when there were so few comforts for sorrowing parents so far from the site of tragedy, anything was preferable to silence. This letter was published in the *South Coast Times*.

Newspapers were conscious of their role in the mourning process and the language of reporting death served a two-fold purpose; firstly to reassure the bereaved that the death was honourable and purposeful and secondly, to ensure that recruitment numbers were not harmed by frightening off eligible men. Yet, there was no blue print they could use to justify the death of young volunteers on such a scale. The prose was awkward, often reverting to cliche and platitudes praising the heroism of sacrifice on the battlefield. In

21 Correspondence from Private A Mitcheson to his parents, *South Coast Times*, 19 January 1917
May 1915, the *South Coast Times* reported the deaths of Syd Duchesne and another of the early Illawarra casualties, Bob McClelland:

... true Australians who have honourably died at the post of duty. Every citizen feels a personal loss by the deaths of these brave and noble young men, and in our own midst there are many families who have been hastily thrown into mourning. The latter may rest contented in the assurance that their dear ones have died wreathed in honour, and that their fellow citizens mourn their loss as they do themselves. 22

Such reports did not alter very much during the course of the war, even after the onset of war-weariness in 1917 and 1918. In June 1917, the *Kiama Independent* reported that Private Wenty East, a member of the still-prominent South Coast family, was another of "Kiama’s brave and honoured young men who have fallen in the cause of justice and right". 23 A eulogy in the same year read:

To have to report the death of a brave soldier is at any time a sad duty, but to have to chronicle the death of one held dear by all sections of the community and one personally looked up to with admiration is indeed a sad task. Arnold Hoskings has died a soldier’s death, after facing death with unflinching courage in many battles, and today regret is universally expressed in the district in which he was held in such high esteem. 24

The reports represented a public acknowledgement of death, but it is unlikely they ameliorated the sense of loss. The private grief of families could only be relieved through intimate connection with their own soldier. Very often, this was facilitated by correspondence with strangers who were to become vital links.

The practice of sending letters of condolence after a death was not new, but correspondence from the comrades of those killed, and the nurses who cared for them, now assumed new importance. They provided information on how and when and where the men died, or the personal esteem in which the dead were held, or something personal about them: the letters offered some form of comfort.

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22 *South Coast Times*, 7 May 1915  
23 *Kiama Independent*, 30 June 1917  
24 *South Coast Times*, 5 October 1917
For example, Fred Muir’s mother received a letter from the Matron of the hospital ship:

He was brought on board to us very seriously wounded about the head and face ... He was quite sensible and did not seem to suffer much till just shortly before the end when he became unconscious. He will be buried at sea.... May I also send you my deepest sympathy in your great loss. It may be some small comfort to you to know that he had a woman’s care at the end of his young life for there are sisters in all wards on this boat and I know they personally looked after him and did all they could for his comfort and welfare.25

Likewise, Mr and Mrs Houghton received a long letter from the Matron of the military hospital in Sandgate, assuring them Dick had been treated well:

He was able to repeat the ‘Our Father’ with the Clergyman ... Your lad looked just like a boy asleep – absolutely at rest. I saw him put in the coffin and I placed beautiful flowers round him, mauve stock and white carnations, and I put white flowers in the middle of the Union Jack on the coffin. The ladies who nursed him and the staff sister told me how brave and patient he was. I enclose some letters from some of our workers who knew him, because I felt that any little thing about him would be welcome.26

Both letters offered the parents reassurance that their sons had not died alone and in distress and that someone had cared to see that they had been given a proper burial. Both letters were published.

The nurses were not the only ones to write. As Damousi has noted, letters written by mates at the front sought to fill the gaps left by the bland official notices of death, and that this was often uncomfortable territory for these men who experienced a change in their roles from “warrior to nurturer” 27

25 Correspondence dated 28 November 1915 from Matron H L Reddock, to Mrs O’Donnell, in AWM 2DRL / 0316, Frederick Warren Muir
26 Correspondence dated 11 August 1916, from Matron Cecily Dale, Commandant of Bevan Military Hospital Sandgate, to Mrs Houghton, Illawarra Mercury, 6 October 1916
Fred Muir’s mate George Lewis of Keiraville wrote a six-page letter to Mrs O’Donnell detailing how he had become firm friends with Fred at Mena Camp and how distressed he was to learn of his death:

This war has taken as victims most of my dearest friends of the first Division but none was more dear to me than your son. I feel consoled by the thoughts that he died a hero’s death fighting for freedom and justice against tyranny and military oppression. You have my heartfelt sympathy and I can realize how terrible your grief must be for I loved him too.28

Some letters provided families with the first detailed description of the circumstances of death. The Mercury published a letter from Alban Kirby to his father in Wollongong, describing Bob McClelland’s death:

This night, some one was noticed in front of the trench Bob was in, so he asked for a couple of men to go out with him to see who it was. He went out and challenged the figures and it proved to be a party of Turks creeping up. They shot him dead.29

The Sharples family of Corrimal received a welcome validation of their son Jim’s bravery under fire:

It was on his seventh trip on No Man’s Land that he was shot by a sniper. He had just finished dressing a wounded comrade and put him on the stretcher when he was hit. If he had come through this all right, he would have been awarded the DCM.30

Two of Dick Houghton’s best mates from Keiraville, Privates Matthew Tubman and James Dobing, wrote to Mr and Mrs Houghton, via the Mercury, from their camp on Salisbury Plain, extending their sympathies “in the loss sustained by them by the death of their son Dick, who died while doing his duty for King and Country”.31 The Tubmans, Dobings and Houghtons were all well known in Keiraville and their sons had attended the Mechanics’ Institute together. Matt and Jim had enlisted together in early 1916. They were so close

28 Correspondence dated 23 January 1916 from Gunner G Lewis to Mrs O’Donnell, AWM file 2DRL / 0316, Frederick Warren Muir
29 Correspondence from QMS Alban Kirby to his father, Illawarra Mercury, 16 July 1915
30 Correspondence dated 9 December 1916, from W E Hall to Mr and Mrs Sharples, South Coast Times, 9 February 1917
31 Correspondence dated 16 October 1916 from Pte M Tubman and Pte J Dobing to Mr and Mrs Houghton, Illawarra Mercury, 12 December 1916
they were known within the battalion as “the twins”.32 They were together in a forward trench on 22 January 1917 during a German bombardment when a large shell exploded in their section, killing them both. Their commanding officer offered his sympathies to Mr Tubman, assuring him that “they were very well liked by their comrades and I had noted both men were amongst the best soldiers in the company”.33 The Battalion chaplain informed Mr Dobing that Jim had been “buried in the military cemetery and a cross is being erected by his battalion to mark his grave”.34

Families cherished such letters. Mrs O’Donnell kept all the letters she received after Fred’s death, only surrendering them to the War Memorial in 1928.35 Along with the Tubmans, Houghtons and Dobings, she sent many to the South Coast Times and Illawarra Mercury for publication. It is possible that some families sought to publicise and validate their sacrifice. It is also likely that this was a substitution for the funeral, where condolence and tribute to the deceased’s life usually took place. The publication of the letters may have also offered a vicarious expression of affirmation for the parents who had lost their sons.

The letters, of course, offered a terrible certainty: there could be no possibility of mistaken identity. As noted in the Introduction, the body was an important part of the mourning process. These letters became a surrogate for the body that could not be viewed. The details of death were crucial in coming to terms with the loss, and those who did not have this closure were the more vulnerable for its absence.

Winter has argued that these were stylised accounts containing stock messages,36 an automatic and stark response of obligation rather than a genuine expression of shared grief.

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32 Correspondence from Jim Dobing to Mr and Mrs Tubman of Keiraville, “probably the last he wrote”, South Coast Times, 9 February 1917
33 Correspondence to Mr W Tubman, Illawarra Mercury, 11 May 1917
34 Correspondence from Roman Catholic Chaplain Cpt J Halpin to Mr and Mrs Dobing, Illawarra Mercury, 15 June 1917
35 AWM 93 12/11/1426 Australian War Memorial Registry file: Request for donation of private records: Private Frederick Warren Muir.
Luckins particularly ascribes a generic nature to the letters. It is fair to say that the descriptions of death sometimes glossed over the ghastly nature of wounds. There was often an emphasis on death as quick or as painless and comfortable but this was not necessarily for the benefit of the families. Very probably, the hospital staff and the men in the trenches could not have brought themselves to describe exactly what damage a machine gun or shell could do to the human body.

Both these scholars however, have mis-read the power that these letters had, both for the sender and the recipient. While they may have followed a common form, the level of individual detail, their length and their poignant candour spoke to the isolation of bereavement with an extraordinary emotion that belies the stoicism said to typify the digger. They were personal and distinct. They were treasured by the bereaved. They were kept for years, published in newspapers and would be donated in their thousands to the Australian War Memorial.

If loss brought doubts about the war, it was not evident in the four families examined in this chapter. Both Mr Tubman and Mr Dobing continued to participate in recruitment drives, patriotic committee work with the Mechanic’s Institute in Keiraville and assisted in the organisation of welcome home receptions for returned men during and after the war. Mr and Mrs Houghton placed a ‘Return Thanks’ notice in the newspaper, acknowledging “members of the Mechanic’s Institute and all kind friends for expressions of sympathy, letters and cards” and hosted farewell suppers in their home for men departing for the front. Mrs O’Donnell was the honorary treasurer of the Unanderra branch of the Belgian Fund. The evidence suggests that these families did believe that their sons had died a hero’s death and that the war was a righteous one, for how else were they to reconcile their loss? Their continued identification with patriotic causes also suggests that the loss of their sons may have renewed their commitment to the war as a

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37 Tanja Luckins, The Gates of Memory: Australian People’s Experiences and Memories of Loss and the Great War, Curtin University Books, Fremantle, 2004, p.48
38 *South Coast Times*, 30 August 1918
39 *Illawarra Mercury*, 7 February 1919
40 *South Coast Times*, 25 August 1916
41 *South Coast Times*, 30 August 1918
42 *South Coast Times*, 14 May 1915
means of making sense of their grief. They sought companionship and emotional support from other members of these organisations and committees who shared similar beliefs.

This is characteristic of Winter’s notion of ‘fictive kinship’\(^43\) where emotional support was found outside the blood-lines of families among others who had also experienced the trauma of war. It was not only the bereaved that needed the sympathy and support of their neighbours. For all those who had men at the front, the potential for bereavement was ever-present. It could take the form of formal associations like the Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Father’s Association in Melbourne,\(^44\) but in the rural towns and communities of the Illawarra, the close communities that had become well established in the years before the war served the same purpose. Many found camaraderie and encouragement through lodges, patriotic and fund raising committees, church groups and informal networks of friends and neighbours, who checked on each other, passed along news and provided acknowledgement of, and comfort for, the bereaved.

Luckins has made much of the wearing of mourning black as a “living embodiment of sacrifice” whereby community mourning found an immediate focus of attention in the woman in black.\(^45\) She has also questioned the absence of a discussion of mourning black from most social histories of the war, and claims it “was omnipresent and produced important cultural meanings of loss”.\(^46\) Yet her assertion is confused by her own caveat that “we may never know how widely mourning black was worn or whether or not it assuaged wartime grief”.\(^47\) Her own atypical example may well explain the limitation of the impact of mourning black.

Luckins drew on the experience of a bereaved middle-class Melbourne father, John Garibaldi Roberts, whose wife and daughter chose to exclusively wear mourning black as a public expression of their personal loss.\(^48\) The Roberts family also printed four hundred

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\(^{44}\) See Damousi, *The Labour of Loss*, op.cit., p.52-56

\(^{45}\) Luckins, *The Gates of Memory*, op.cit., p.53

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p.76

\(^{47}\) Ibid., p.53

\(^{48}\) Ibid., p.76
memorial cards for distribution, had large photographs made of their son Frank in uniform and a painted miniature portrait that Mrs Roberts wore in a brooch. But were the Roberts typical of most bereaved Australians? Mr Roberts had a monthly income of £58 - at least five times an ordinary working wage - a country home and prominent political and social connections. Although the Illawarra had its landed gentry, such costly and conspicuous displays of mourning were not demonstrated. Advertisements for the ‘mourning departments’ of Sydney’s department stores such as Mark Foys were not placed in the Illawarra press and local drapers did not advertise such wares. A prevalence of women wearing black is not obvious in local photographs, nor is it mentioned in any newspaper account of memorial services and commemorative ceremonies.

In terms of the available evidence from the Illawarra, the wearing of mourning black was neither obvious nor articulated as a common way of focussing community loss. In Sydney and Melbourne, bereaved women may have worn mourning black to claim their grief publicly. In the Illawarra, there was no need. Everyone knew who had been bereaved and who was waiting, for the entire community had experienced loss in one way or another when the men had enlisted; it was now just a matter of degree.

The Bulli Rector’s 1914 prophecy that the campaign “will be long and costly, both in money and in lives; and we must be prepared to share the loss”, did not discourage almost unanimous enthusiasm among the clergy of the Illawarra for the war. As the costs did begin to mount, however, the churches felt overwhelmed by the responsibility of comforting the bereaved. As noted earlier in this chapter, many local clergy no longer delivered the telegrams without advance warning.

In the absence of traditional funerals, memorial services took on even more importance and those in the first years of the war were notable for their attempts to emulate pre-war
tradition. A memorial service for Fred Muir was held in December 1915 at St Luke’s, Dapto where the altar was “beautifully draped, and the flags of the Allies were hung in conspicuous places. Over the pulpit the words ‘Be at Rest’ were worked in white flowers on a black background”.\textsuperscript{53} However, as the death toll increased, the Illawarra clergy were anxious to avoid being swamped by requests for individual memorial services. The Wollongong Parish Paper put a rather unusual spin on this in 1916: although the church had the “desire to do our utmost to all our fallen soldiers”, it was feared that memorial services would “become common and lose their value”. Far better, it argued, to “hold a general memorial service in each centre after the war”.\textsuperscript{54}

This was unacceptable to the bereaved. They needed acknowledgement of the individual’s death and a public display of religious ritual to replace a funeral that could never be held, and to give some legitimacy to their grief and finality to their loss. Memorial services continued throughout the war.\textsuperscript{55} They even, apparently, became an excuse for the shirker: the \textit{Illawarra Mercury} reported that men refused to enlist remarking, “No memorial service for me thank you!”\textsuperscript{56}

Memorial services remained, but they were not only used to commemorate the dead. Presbyterian minister Rev. McKay Barnet had been a prominent member of the Wollongong Recruiting Committee. He had occasionally rebuked from the pulpit those who refused to enlist as “cowards and shirkers”\textsuperscript{57} and used memorial services to preach on the virtues of sacrifice and duty. In October 1916 however, he was incapable of conducting one memorial service; it was for his own son Bob who had been killed near Poperinghe in Belgium. The press accounts of Bob’s memorial service do not demonstrate a commemoration of his own life, but rather an opportunity to shame eligibles into enlisting. The Rev. West, a military chaplain, conducted the service in front of a very large

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 24 December 1915
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Wollongong Parish Paper}, October 1916, cited in Piggin, \textit{Faith of Steel}, op. cit., p. 184
\textsuperscript{55} An individual memorial service for Matt Tubman was held in February 1917, \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 23 February 1917, while some churches held one service for several soldiers. Rev. McKay Barnet conducted a “very solemn” memorial service for Privates Irwin, Moore, Robertson and Ewing in front of a “large congregation” in November 1917 who had each been killed on the Western Front the previous month, \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 16 November 1917.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 16 July 1915
\textsuperscript{57} Piggin, \textit{Faith of Steel}, op. cit., p. 180
congregation that included representatives from other Wollongong churches and local aldermen. West decried those who refused to fight:

There are so many fully developed men who could go, but do not, because they allowed the lust for gold or pleasure to stand between them and their duty. Shame upon such men calling themselves Australians! ... A large number of able bodied men still follow sport whilst these young lads were fighting at the front ... [and noted that Bob] ... went out like the knights of old and gave his life for others, and now he had entered into the fullness and joy of the Lord.**58

While the Barnets’ patriotism and religious faith may have sustained them during the early stages of grief, it may not have been enough as time progressed. Despite his close identification with the war and a presumed Protestant’s sense of duty, Rev. McKay Barnet did not reply to three letters from John Treloar at the Australian War Memorial, sent between February and July 1929, asking for the donation of Bob’s letters.60 He did, however, use the Roll of Honour circular, distributed after the war for completion by the next of kin, to remember his son’s personal qualities:

He had keen insight and power of expression. He had a keen appreciation of the beautiful .... He was a lad of high ideals and strove to live up to them. He had one year to run before qualifying as a licensed surveyor. He matriculated with honours in mathematics in 1912.61

The memorial services, with the altar draped in black and the congregation standing for The Dead March,62 a familiar ritual, comforted the families who requested them. The region’s records, however, are curiously silent when it comes to those who thought otherwise. The Melbourne mother who lamented, “I want no Victoria Cross, I want my son”,63 found no reported echo in the Illawarra. Likewise Queensland’s Norman Ferguson who wrote after his brother’s death, “I am afraid that there is no clergyman alive that could comfort me or give me any reasonable explanation why this blow should have fallen”.64 It is logical to

**58 Illawarra Mercury, 10 October 1916
59 Luckins, The Gates of Memory, op.cit., p.227
60 AWM 93 Australian War Memorial Registry file: Request for donation of private records, file 12/11/1911, Barnet
61 AWM 145 Roll of Honour Cards, 1914-1918 War, Army. No. 2662 Driver Robert James Macgregor Barnet
62 Illawarra Mercury, 10 October 1916
63 Ellen Derham, cited in Damousi, The Labour of Loss, op.cit., p.33
assume that these responses must have existed in the region. The public voice of community, the local press, apparently chose not to report such sentiments.

As noted earlier in this chapter, most accounts of wartime bereavement have tended to focus on the experience of war widows, despite the fact that the majority of men enlisting in the First AIF were single. For the Illawarra volunteers, only 18% were married. Guy has claimed that the intensity of losing a son could be greater than that of a wife who had lost her husband. She argues it was more difficult for parents to bear the burden of loss than wives. A young widow had some opportunity to make a new life and re-marry, whereas aging parents could never replace an adult child. The families studied for this thesis illustrate her point. Widows may have grieved for the loss of the economic and social protection afforded by their husbands, and the end of dreams of a long life together with their children, but looked to the future. Parents, however, tended to dwell in the past, where mothers remembered when their sons were little boys and fathers (like McKay Barnet) the confidence in a future that had been abruptly ended.

On hearing of Fred Muir's death, the Patriotic Committee in Helensburgh moved a motion of sympathy for Mrs O'Donnell on the “loss of so promising a son”. Private George Blair’s mother, of Kiama, never recovered after receiving news that George had been killed at Polygon Wood. She passed away suddenly from heart failure on the first anniversary of his death. Private David Blake of Keiraville was killed not long after entering the line for the first time in early 1917. His mother died of a heart attack half an hour after receiving the telegram. His young wife however, had re-married and moved to Dapto by the time she completed his Roll of Honour circular in 1923.

67 South Coast Times, 24 December 1915
68 Kiama Independent, 25 September 1918
69 Illawarra Mercury, 2 March 1917
70 AWM 145 Roll of Honour Cards, 1914-1918 War, Army. No.6217, Pte D Blake
The women of the Austin family of Corrimal illustrate the subtle differences between the grief of a parent and a widow and even siblings. Ted Austin’s young wife Theresa had just given birth to their son Edward when he enlisted in July 1915 at the age of twenty-seven. Ted (pictured below) was killed in action on the Somme on the night of 19 July 1916. Theresa placed a death notice in August that year:

Sleep on, dear husband, in a far-off grave  
A grave I shall never see  
But as long as life and memory last  
I will remember thee.  

The following year, Theresa’s In Memoriam notice read:

My sorrow was great, my loss is hard to bear  
God knows, I have lost a good husband’s care  
I mourn for you, Ted, in silence unseen  
And dwell in the memory of days that have been.

His “sorrowing” mother published a notice in 1917 for the first time:

It seems but a day since he bade us good-bye  
His heart full of hope, his spirits so high.

Family and friends placed five other notices for Ted in 1917, including one from his sister and brother-in-law in San Francisco. In 1918, the seven were again published. This time, Ted’s mother made mention of his sacrifice:

He laid down his life for his country  
In response to his dear country’s call  
Australian is proud of our hero  
Who was only a private – that’s all.

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71 South Coast Times, 25 August 1916  
72 South Coast Times, 20 July 1917  
73 South Coast Times, 20 July 1917  
74 South Coast Times, 19 July 1918
Theresa wrote simply, “One of the very best, gone but not forgotten” and their son Edward was now referred to as “little Teddie”. By 1921, the immediate grief had faded and Theresa merely wrote “The Supreme Sacrifice” while Ted’s mother noted, “Sadly missed by his fond mother”. Theresa stopped in 1923. Perhaps she could no longer bear to live in the past, perhaps she had met someone new and felt uneasy about publicly commemorating a husband who had been dead for seven years; perhaps her grief had passed such that the anniversary was no longer as painful. It is possible that Theresa and little Teddie were able to move on with their lives. His mother and three sisters, however, were still publishing *In Memoriam* notices for Ted on the anniversary of his death in 1925.

Manuel has looked at ways in which Australian women articulated their grief through poetry and found that the poems written by grieving mothers, wives and sisters about their specific loss were “characterised by a[n] intimate register: by a deep pathos and sense of inner struggle with the personal consequences of loss and mourning.” While some of the stylised verses used in the *In Memoriam* notices tended to allude to higher ideals of duty and honour, the intimacy of women’s poetry often concentrated on personal vignettes of family life and childhood memories whose loss would never be consoled by the “public tropes of nationalism and noble sacrifice.”

Such personal pain was evident in some of the poetry written by women of the Illawarra. Essie Startin’s son was killed in 1917 and she lamented she had lost the physical connection to the child she had borne:

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So short a space it seems since his dear head
Covered with golden curls, lay on my breast;
And now, alas, to think that he is dead
And never more shall in my arms be pressed!

That grave has quenched ambition’s kindled fire
And fair, sweet hopes within its confines sleep
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76 *South Coast Times*, 22 July 1921
77 *South Coast Times*, 18 July 1925
What youthful pride, what eager heart's desire
What joy in full, free life are buried deep.  

Fourteen year-old Irene Short of Darkes Forest wrote of the loss of her brother in a poem entitled "A Young Australian":

Mother I will ever remember
The morning of anguish and pain
That father and brother did leave us
Perhaps, ne'er to return again

When mother got the message
To say her son was dead
She thought of the day he left us
And the last words that he said.

Many lived not only with their memory of loss, but also with family members who were permanently diminished by grief. The Sproule family of Jamberoo had three sons on active service, Hugh, Oliver and Thomas, who was known as Stan. In his later years, their youngest brother Les recalled the effect of war on their family:

Our newspapers were scanned daily for names of any Australians we may have known. Then the blow struck us. I will always remember the scene in our home when Miss Colley and a police officer brought the news that Stan, who was only 23 years old, was reported missing, believed dead, on the 4th of June 1917 at Messines. Miss Colley held Mother in her arms while her heart almost broke.

A sad mantle settled on our lives.

Loss and grief, however, did not always unite a family. Family lore had it that Mrs Duchesne never got over Syd's death and his younger brother always suffered by comparison. George had also fought in the war but had returned home, although he was psychologically traumatised by his experiences. The younger Duchesne, only a slight man of just over five foot, was kind and gentle but not as outgoing or as good looking as his

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80 South Coast Times, 26 October 1917
81 South Coast Times, 28 January 1916
82 Les Sproule, These were the best years, unpublished autobiography, in UoW Archives, file D158/2/1 Stuart Piggin Collection, p.9. It was very unusual for a woman to deliver the news of death, and in this case, accompanied by a police officer rather than a clergyman. The Sproules were a particularly religious family and prominent members of the Jamberoo Church of England. Why then did the minister not deliver the news? Miss Colley was a neighbour and the leader of the Sunday School. Perhaps in the minister's absence, responsibility was delegated to Miss Colley by the police officer who may have ridden out from Kiama with the telegram.
elder brother who was considered the ‘white haired boy’ of the family. Their younger sister Annie still spoke of her wonderful big brother “Syddie” eighty years after his death. The manner of Syd’s untimely death only exacerbated his mother’s ambivalence toward her surviving son, and although George “never showed any resentment about the favouritism, he mentioned it from time to time”.\(^8^3\) Some returned men paid a high price for their brother’s sacrifice.

While parents and widows may have experienced bereavement differently, initial among the families of the Illawarra reactions to the news of death were characterised by shock and sorrow. The close nature of the communities was demonstrated by both the camaraderie among the region’s soldiers and the support networks developed to comfort the bereaved, particularly through local newspapers. While memorial services, letters of condolence and participation in patriotic organisations brought some consolation and helped make sense of loss, the essential requirement was information. Detailed knowledge as to what exactly had happened to their sons was the closest substitute to having been there. Those who were able to gain this closure were much more likely to cope better than those who did not. In the end, families could confirm and finally accept the death of a loved one through corroborative evidence supplied by nurses, chaplains, mates and officers. Families notified that someone was missing in action faced the greatest torment of all.

\(^8^3\) Private family papers in the possession of Rev. Dr David and Mrs Bernie Duchesne, of Wollstonecraft, Sydney.
CHAPTER 2

THE SEARCH FOR CERTAINTY:
THE MISSING, BURIAL AND PERSONAL EFFECTS

"I am afraid there is little hope, but still, one hears very extraordinary tales of lost men re-appearing."¹

The worst notification a family could receive came with the simple noun: 'missing'. As one young woman wrote in 1917:

‘Killed’ is final; ‘wounded’ means hope and possibilities; ‘Prisoner of war’ implies a reunion in the glad time when peace comes again to a stricken world; but ‘Missing’ is terrible, in that one word the soldier's friends see him swallowed up behind a cloud through which pierces no ray of light.²

Over twenty-five thousand of the sixty thousand Australians who died during the war were either unidentified or unidentifiable. Men simply disappeared in the chaos of the front-line, or were lost in the mud or hastily buried in mass graves during brief cease-fires or at night.³ The sheer scale of warfare and fluctuation of the forward lines meant the collation and distribution of information was an arduous and protracted process. It was inevitable that some official communications were vague, confusing or inaccurate. The families of the missing were in an invidious position. They knew something dreadful had happened, but little more. They quickly turned to other sources to ascertain the fate of their men, particularly the Red Cross.

Brothers Walter and Frank Farquharson were born in Kiama at the end of the nineteenth century. They attended Kiama Public School and had both completed their compulsory

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¹ Correspondence dated 8 March 1917 from Beatrice Wood to Vera Deakin, regarding Sapper Herbert Ettingshausen of Kiama, AWM 1DRL / 0428 Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-1918 War, No. 5376 Spr Herbert Vaughan Ettingshausen
² Mary MacLeod Moore, cited in Joanna Bourke, Dismembering the Male: Men Bodies, Britain and the Great War, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996, p.230
³ J M Winter, 'Communities in Mourning', in Frans Coetzee and Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee (eds), Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War, Berghahn Books, Providence, 1995, p.333
military service in the years before the outbreak of war. Walter was twenty-two in 1914 and, having held the rank of Sergeant in the cadets, was among the first men from Kiama to join the colours. Frank was desperate to follow his big brother, but he was only sixteen. Their parents, Percy and Ella, told him to wait, at least until he was eighteen. Frank determined that if he had to postpone his plans, he would at least spend the time productively. He continued his work as a draper during the week, but slept in a tent in the backyard of the family’s Thompson Street home for two years to try to get as near to a soldier’s life as he could, to “harden himself” for the rough conditions ahead. Frank sailed for France on 13 March 1917.5

Walter (left) was severely wounded in early 1917 and repatriation papers were prepared for his return to Australia; officially, his war was over. Nobody, however, had told Walter. Rejecting the chance to accept a medical discharge and return home, he managed to cadge a staff appointment behind the lines where he proved to be an effective, and popular, leader. He was promoted and his commanding officer talked of a commission. Walter wrote to his parents in early March 1917 to tell them he had managed to arrange to re-join his Battalion, the Nineteenth, and was soon to return to France, although his right arm was still giving him trouble.6

In early June 1917, the Farquharsons were notified there were unconfirmed reports from C Company that Walter was missing after a trench raid at Bullecourt on 3 May 1917.7 The Farquharsons cabled Base Records for news and sought assistance from the Red Cross Enquiry Bureau in London, who tracked down a report that Walter had been wounded in “the stunt”, but not seriously.8 This news was greeted with relief.

4 Kiama Independent, 18 September 1918
5 Ibid.
6 Kiama Independent, 9 June 1917
7 AWM 1DRL/0428 Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-1918 War. No. 1689 Sergeant Walter Farquharson
8 Ibid.
The *Kiama Independent* reported:

> It is quite likely that their boy is in hospital where perhaps he has written and as the mails for Australia sent between May 20 and 31 inclusively went down on the *Mongolia*, that fact may account for no word being received. With all our heart we hope the news will be confirmed in the happiest fashion for the anxious parents.⁹

By mid-October 1917, however, nothing more had been heard. Percy sent numerous telegrams, but the Red Cross had not heard anything further, until Private Dawes told authorities that the original report had been only partially correct. Walter had been slightly wounded in the raid, but on making his way back through no-man’s land to the dressing station, he had been hit by a shell and killed instantly.¹⁰ Perhaps this was an error, another mistake? On 10 November 1917, the Red Cross confirmed that there was now no doubt that Walter was dead, and regretted that Percy and Ella had had to suffer “anxiety for many months in its alternating hope and fear”.¹¹ Sergeant Walter Farquharson had been killed on 3 May 1917. His promotion to the rank of Lieutenant had been gazetted the next day.¹²

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⁹ *Kiama Independent*, 30 June 1917
¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ *Kiama Independent*, 10 November 1917
¹² Ibid.
Frank was gassed in April 1918 and was admitted to hospital two months later suffering shell shock. Wounded again in July, Base Records could find no trace of him for a few weeks. For the Farquharsons, the nightmare was returning, if indeed it had ever gone away. This time, however, the wait was shorter. In early September 1918, another telegram arrived at Thompson Street. Frank had been shot through the stomach and had died at 10.45pm on 31 August 1918. The Independent extended to Percy and Ella

A sympathy that cannot be put into words, and it comes from the heart of the community, because the one they have lost just in his twentieth year was loved by all who knew him - a clean hearted lad with a brave soul - a deep sadness is theirs, but a record such as their sons have left them as a proud possession, will remain to comfort in the years to come.

This photograph of Percy and Ella Farquharson was found in Frank’s pocket after he died and returned with his personal effects. The Farquharsons also currently feature in a photographic display at the Australian War Memorial.

It is possible that their sons’ courage on the field of battle did give some comfort to the Farquharsons as they grieved. When Australian families were given the opportunity to submit an epitaph for known graves in France, the Farquharsons paid 15/9 to have inscribed on Frank’s headstone in the cemetery at Daours:

A brave young life
That promised well
At the will of God
A Hero Fell

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13 AWM 1DRL / 0428 Red Cross files, Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-1918 War. No. 5016 Private Frank Farquharson
14 AWM 1DRL / 0428 Red Cross files, op.cit., No. 5016 Private Frank Farquharson
15 Kiama Independent, 18 September 1918
16 AWM file PR 01559, Private Frank Farquharson
Walter’s body was never found; his name is one of the eleven thousand listed on the memorial to missing Australians at Fouilloy cemetery outside Villers-Bretonneux.

The Farquharsons are a snapshot of a story repeated innumerable times across the country. The families of the men confirmed as killed could at least begin the grieving process, but the doubt surrounding the fate of the missing meant that those families endured months, and in some cases, years of uncertainty and fear before they received closure.

The silence provided the opportunity for false hope to develop and conjecture to spread. Many clung to the possibility that the men could still be alive. “What if the man was a prisoner of war? What if he was lost and wandering around the battlefield? What if he was wounded and in need of care?”\(^{17}\) There was also denial, a refusal to accept that the missing were dead. It could last a lifetime. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, a mother whose two sons had been listed as missing at Lone Pine in 1915 was reported to have said, “Wouldn’t it be funny if they found the boys wandering around and they got their memories back!”\(^{18}\)

Organisations such as the Red Cross became vital conduits in the search for information. The voluntary officers led by Vera Deakin, daughter of the former Prime Minister, provided an extraordinary service to anxious relatives in Australia as they scoured “the hospitals, base depots, war fronts and prisoner of war camps for news of casualties and evidence of their survival or death”.\(^{19}\) However, their necessary reliance on accounts from men returning from the trenches, or comrades who were not eyewitnesses, often meant that a family’s distress could be prolonged by reports based upon mistaken identity or rumour.

\(^{17}\) Winter, ‘Communities in Mourning’, in Coetzee and Shevin-Coetzee (eds), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, op.cit., p.333
\(^{19}\) Winter, ‘Communities in Mourning’, in Coetzee and Shevin-Coetzee (eds), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War*, op.cit., p.333
This confusion is illustrated by the experience of the Ettingshausen family of Kiama. Sapper Herb Ettingshausen was first reported missing on 20 July 1916. His mother was “naturally in great distress” and twice cabled men of his unit, the 14th Field Company Engineers, seeking clarification, while his sister wrote to the Red Cross pleading for “some satisfactory news concerning his whereabouts”. No trace of Herb could be found and the Red Cross extended “sympathy in your great anxiety”. In early 1917, the Ettingshausens received word through the Red Cross that it had been reported Herb had been taken prisoner and was in Germany. One report noted that witnesses “state they absolutely saw him being taken [prisoner]”. The news that he was still alive, albeit in captivity, caused “rejoicing outside his home in his native town where it can be imagined how deep the joy would be at hearing such news”. Ettingshausen’s name however was not on German prisoner lists and in April, the Red Cross admitted that they now “placed little reliance on this rumour”.

The Red Cross received yet more reports. On 1 March 1917, a Lieutenant Merkel reported, “while he did not see Sapper Ettingshausen after the attack began [on 19 July 1916] he feels sure that he was killed during the night”. On 12 April 1917, Private Paxton did not “think he could possibly have recovered from his wounds” and described Herb as tall, slight, thin-faced and about thirty-five years old, while another report from March 1917 had described him as short, thickset and twenty-one years of age. Herb Ettingshausen was actually twenty-four years old.

On 19 May 1917, an AIF Court of Enquiry confirmed that he had been killed in action in the early hours of 20 July 1916. The news brought anguish to Mrs Ettingshausen’s “loving mother’s heart, and shattered hopes valiantly cherished through nearly a year of silence”. Despite the apparent certainty, the Independent continued to list Herb as

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20 AWM 1DRL / 0428 Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-1918 War. No. 5376 Sapper Herbert Vaughan Ettingshausen
21 Ibid.
22 Kiama Independent, 21 January 1917
23 AWM 1DRL / 0428 Red Cross Missing files, op.cit. No. 5376 Sapper Herbert Vaughan Ettingshausen
24 Ibid.
25 Kiama Independent, 12 May 1917
“missing” in the Roll of Honour throughout most of 1917. His name was not moved to the “Fallen Hero” column until November.26

While families were initially elated to discover their sons were being held by the enemy rather than dead, as they had feared, being a German prisoner was no guarantee of safety. John O’Neill had enlisted with mates from the North Wollongong Surf Club and embarked for the front in late 1915. He was taken prisoner on the morning of 20 July 1916, but assured his family and friends that he was in reasonable health and requested, “as many parcels as possible containing food, also tooth brush, comb, soap and writing paper”.27

Just after peace was declared, O’Neill contracted the Spanish Influenza that was about to sweep the globe. He was admitted to the camp hospital on 28 November 1918 and died two days later.28

The Red Cross, AIF Base Records and battalion officers were not the only avenues for enquiries. Many were directed along less official lines and often overwhelmed the recipients. Sister Wakeford of Wollongong was stationed at a field hospital on the Aegean island of Lemnos and reported receiving twenty-nine letters from people asking for information, “I can imagine how they feel and do all in their power to get into touch with any one who might have been near their dear ones. Unfortunately, I do not know any of them.29

One distraught Wollongong father, whose son had been missing in France for six months, reportedly wrote to several British Ambassadors, the Red Cross, and even United States President Woodrow Wilson, appealing for help. He received a courteous reply from Wilson’s secretary, but no information as to his son’s whereabouts.30

The communication facilitated by local newspapers, as discussed in Chapter One, was also used to obtain information about the missing. In early 1917, the South Coast Times noted

26 Kiama Independent, 28 November 1917
27 Illawarra Mercury, 24 October 1916
28 AWM 1DRL / 0428 Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-1918 War, No.4866 Private John Joseph O’Neill
29 Correspondence dated 31 July 1915 from Sister Wakeford, Illawarra Mercury, 7 September 1915
30 South Coast Times, 26 January 1917
that many local soldiers had been reported missing and “in some instances those notifications are months old with no subsequent information as to the fate of the missing men”. With a view to seeking updated information from men in the trenches, a “Missing Soldiers” column was published regularly from January 1917, containing the soldier’s name, unit and his family’s address in the Illawarra. Copies of the *Times* were posted to Illawarra men at the front in the hope that comrades “knowing anything of the missing men could communicate with the relatives and perhaps relieve in some measure the suspense and anxiety of those at home.”

The confidence that local soldiers would respond to such an appeal underscored the close ties of mutual support between the regional communities of the Illawarra and their soldiers, as there is no evidence of any equivalent initiative in metropolitan newspapers. The call to provide information directly to families also reflected a widespread conviction that official sources were not always reliable, and a poignant reluctance to accept that ‘missing’ usually meant the worst. It further demonstrates the fundamental part newspapers played in the solidarity of community networks.

Information from some soldiers may have only added to the uncertainty. Mrs Quist of Crown Street, Wollongong, received a letter from a comrade of her son Rupert (left) who had been missing for a year. The soldier wrote that, “he saw him after he was wounded; a bullet entered just below the ear and came out at the back of the neck. He applied first aid treatment and did not see him again”.

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31 *South Coast Times*, 19 January 1917
32 Ibid
33 *South Coast Times*, 21 September 1917
Some correspondents corrected rumours. Private Godfrey Williamson of Tarrawanna had been taken prisoner and in October 1917 received a large bundle of letters from home, some dated back to March and April 1916. His family must have been overjoyed to finally receive his cheery letter of 9 October:

Well, Mum and Dad, reading by the letters I have been killed, wounded, missing and goodness knows what has not happened to me, but thank God I am still alive and in good health at present ... There are two South Coast boys here along with me, Artie Crago of Bellambi and Jack Ashmore of Balgownie ... would you kindly put this letter in the "South Coast Times" and it will let the friends know who have written to me how I am situated regarding correspondence with them, as I am only allowed to write four cards and two letters a month.  

For other families, rumours could have a devastating impact. Private Percy Clout of Balgownie had been wounded during the battle for Pozières on 11 August 1916. His family was first notified that despite his injuries he had "remained at duty". No trace of him was found after that and his file was amended to note that he was "wounded and missing", a phrase almost guaranteed to cause panic. There was some confusion at AIF Base Records, however, between Percy, number 3732, whose initials were E.P. and another Clout, number 3733, whose initials were F.E., while one report indicated that Battalion scuttlebutt had it that Percy had only been wounded, not killed, and "may be a mental case". These rumours surfaced back in Balgownie, no doubt creating more anxiety for the Clouts.

In late 1916, Private Lionel Whitbread, a family friend from Balgownie, sent a long letter to Mr Clout in which he wrote:

You will have received official notification that poor Percy is now reported missing. You will also know that that means the worst and there is no doubt that he has fallen ... I am very sorry indeed to say that there is no hope of his safety ... He was the best of comrades and one whose loss I will always feel keenly, the friendship we formed in the old home at Balgownie strengthened and

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34 Correspondence dated 9 October 1917 from Pte G Williamson to his parents, South Coast Times, 8 February 1918
35 AWM 10RL / 0428 Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-1918 War. No.3732, Private Edward Percy Clout
36 Ibid.
cemented amid the toil and heroships of active service, still I realise that my sorrow is as nothing to that of his loved ones at home.\textsuperscript{37}

On 18 May 1917 A Court of Enquiry determined that Percy had been killed on 11 August 1916 and his parents placed the first \textit{In Memoriam} notice on 25 May, in part to dispel any further circulation of hurtful, and untrue, gossip.\textsuperscript{38} Mrs Clout continued to write to authorities for many years seeking any further news of her son. While she may have theoretically accepted that he was dead, it seems that the lack of any detail of the circumstances of his death played upon her mind. Percy’s body was never found and the Clouts were still publishing \textit{In Memoriam} notices in 1925 for the son who was “lost at Pozières”.\textsuperscript{39}

The lingering belief among families of the missing that their men were still alive was not always fanciful. Ironically, those rare occasions when hope did triumph may have given false expectations to those whose prayers would never be answered. In May 1915, the Fishlock family of Wollongong received telegrams from Gallipoli regarding both their sons: Lomas was missing and George was wounded.\textsuperscript{40} Private Payne wrote to his parents in July and said, “Tell Mr Fishlock I saw George and Lomas the other day and they are alright. George had a slight wound in the mouth but is back in the trenches again”.\textsuperscript{41} That Payne was confident his father would be able to pass the news along to Mr Fishlock illustrates the presence of the informal support networks among the families of the Illawarra.

George wrote to his mother on 21 July 1915 and explained Lomas’ situation:

\begin{quote}
Lomas has never got a scratch so far and the reason he was reported missing was because he was away from the firing line the first seven days after landing in the Dardanelles, as in company with two others he was cut off from the rest of the forces, and they had to dig a trench back into their
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} Wollongong Local Studies Library, file M/WHI, letter from LS Whitbread to E Clout 1916
\textsuperscript{38} Vivienne Caldwell, \textit{Illawarra at War. An examination of the characteristics and experiences of the Illawarra volunteers during World War I and the impact of death on the home front}, BA (Hons) Thesis, University of Wollongong, 1999, p.79
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{South Coast Times}, 8 August 1925
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 20 July 1915
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}
own trenches, so he had a bit of a rough experience. All this time they had plenty of food, but were a bit short of water.42

The Fishlock brothers were the first of the Wollongong men to return after the Armistice and hundreds attended a welcome home reception at the Town Hall, with many more crowding outside in the street. Mrs Fishlock was feted as the “heroes’ mother” and presented with bouquets of flowers by Sister Wakeford, who had also returned, while a toast was proposed to the “aged” parents “who had given two sons to fight for their country – two sons that any father and mother might well be proud of”.43

The Finlaysons of Wollongong were one of the few Illawarra families who did not have to rely on strangers in Europe to search for news of their son. When Lieutenant Ron Finlayson was first reported missing on 5 November 1916, his younger brother Malcolm was stationed at the London General Hospital. Malcolm started personal enquiries however, there was not only confusion at Base Records regarding Ron’s whereabouts, but even what he looked like. One witness described him as six-foot tall, clean shaven and thirty-three years old, while another claimed he was five foot nine inches, twenty-six years old with a brown moustache.44 There were reports that he had been killed by machine gun fire on the night he was reported missing but confirmation was not made for five months until his body was discovered beneath melting snow by an old school-friend who had been in the same Battalion.45 Private Ken Rixon of Bulli had seen Ron on the night he died and wrote to his mother in 1917:

On the 5th of November, oh that was a night I shall never forget ... We lost several of our officers that night, one of them being Lieutenant Finlayson of Wollongong ... the last seen of him was near the German lines with a smoking revolver in his hand, my word, he was a game and good officer and you know we could not afford to lose men like that.46

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42 Correspondence dated 21 July 1915 from Pte George Fishlock to his mother, Illawarra Mercury, 3 September 1915
43 Illawarra Mercury, 29 November 1918
44 AWM 1DRL / 0428 Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-1918 War. Lieut. Ronald Berry Finlayson
45 Correspondence dated 9 December 1927, from Mr R Finlayson to John Treloar, Director of the AWM, in AWM 93 file 12/11/561, Finlayson
46 Correspondence from Private Ken Rixon to his mother, Mrs Rixon of Bulli, in AWM 1DRL/0287, Lieut. Ronald B Finlayson. Pte William Rixon had been killed on Gallipoli on 16 June 1915.
How this letter came into the Finlaysons' possession is not known, but it is likely Mrs Rixon, whose younger son had been killed on Gallipoli, sought Mrs Finlayson out to give her the letter, knowing that news of a son's heroic act and the high regard in which he was held would be a comfort.

In the absence of detailed information about their sons, it was common for parents to become obsessed with having their sons' personal effects sent home. The return of discs, bibles, diaries, watches and wallets was important for two reasons; firstly it provided proof that the worst was indeed true and secondly, the small, familiar items provided a strong, almost physical connection to their sons that would be meaningless to strangers.

In April 1918, Mrs Sproule received a letter from a mother in Stratford in Victoria, whose son had been killed in June 1917. It appeared that there had been a mix-up and Mrs Swan had received a parcel containing letters, photographs, and a wallet belonging to Stan Sproule. Mrs Swan wrote:

If you will open up communications with me, I will forward them to you and if you should have received mine, which should have a ring enclosed, I would feel deeply indebted for same. I am yours in sorrow.

While Mrs Sproule was pleased to receive Stan's mementoes, she had nothing to return to Mrs Swan. Matron Reddock had specifically mentioned Fred Muir's effects to Mrs O'Donnell and promised the parcel containing his watch, letters, camera and books would be returned to her "through the government offices". A British officer assured AIF Base Records that he would bring the "ribbons from the wreaths and the personal effects" of John O'Neill back from Berlin to be sent to his family. The Shipp family of Keiraville was also in contact with Base Records in an attempt to obtain a death certificate for their son Alfred who was among the first from the Illawarra to die on Gallipoli. While their

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48 Correspondence from Mrs E J Swan to Mrs T Sproule of Jamberoo, *Kiama Independent*, 13 April 1918
49 Correspondence dated 28 November 1915 from Matron Reddock to Mrs O'Donnell of Unanderra, AWM 2DRL / 0316, Frederick Warren Muir
50 AWM 1DRL / 0428 Red Cross Missing files, *op.cit.*, No.4866 Private John Joseph O'Neill
correspondence inferred that the certificate was required to finalise his affairs, it is more likely that psychologically, they needed some tangible proof of their son's death.51

The returns, however, could be meagre. When Mrs Duchesne requested all Syd's personal effects be sent back to her, she received a small envelope. Inside was a rubber-stamped form:

Inventory of Personal Effects of the late Lieut. W S Duchesne, 1st Battalion, AIF.
Contents: Identity disc.52

One of the most difficult things for the relatives of the missing to come to terms with was that they may not have been accorded a proper burial. The exhumation of bodies from the fields of battle and military cemeteries had been banned early in the war and, after no small amount of divisive debate,53 the proposal to repatriate soldiers' bodies back to Britain was defeated. It had been forcefully argued that "the dead are certainly not the property of the State or of any particular regiment; the dead belong to their own relations"54 but repatriation was a financial and logistical conundrum and the dilemma of privileging the wealthy over the poor, and those whose men had known graves over those who did not, proved intractable. The creed of the newly formed Imperial War Graves Commission was that

a higher ideal than that of private burial at home is embodied in these war cemeteries in foreign lands, where those who fought together, officers and men, lie together in their last resting place, facing the line they gave their lives to maintain.55

51 Caldwell, *Illawarra at War*, op.cit., p.74. The ties between families in the region can be seen here. Alf Shipp was Matt Tubman's uncle. AWM145 Roll of Honour Cards, 1914-1918 War, Army. No. 289 Cprl A N Shipp
52 *Inventory of Personal Effects*, in private collection in the possession of Rev. Dr David and Mrs Bernie Duchesne, of Wollstonecraft, Sydney
54 Sir James Remnant, House of Commons, *Hansard*, Debate on Imperial War Graves Commission, 4 May 1920, p.1930
55 Peter Francis, Commonwealth War Graves Commission (formerly Imperial War Graves Commission), at www.legionmagazine.com/features/militarymatters/03.03.asp#3 [accessed 16 June 2003]
There is no evidence to suggest that Australians seriously considered that the bodies of the fallen would be returned; in fact, to lie beside comrades in a soldier’s grave was seen as significant by many. *In Memoriam* notices often mentioned such sentiments as, “in a hero’s grave he lies”, 56 “in a soldier’s grave he is sleeping”, 57 “his resting place a soldier’s grave”, 58 “he sleeps beside his comrades in a hallowed grave unknown” 59 and “our boy in a foreign land lies numbered with the fallen slain”. 60 Families of men with known graves were given the opportunity to pay for an epitaph for the headstone at a cost of 3½d per letter, with a maximum of sixty-six letters. 61 Most selected conventional Christian references, or like the Farquharsons, a suggestion of heroism. Some families laid their grief bare, and chose such sentiments as “Gone and the light of all our life gone with him” 62 and “A Mother’s All”. 63

The men who had not been identified before burial were given a headstone inscribed with a version of Kipling’s simple dedication, “An Australian soldier of the Great War, Known unto God”. 64 Edward Smith’s family in Corrimal found “his unknown grave is the bitterest blow”. 65

The image of heroic death on foreign battlefields was also used as a means of recruitment. Private Jack Eagleton had been invalided back to Australia suffering from meningitis where he died in Wollongong Hospital on 3 October 1915. Jack was accorded a full military funeral, becoming the only soldier who had embarked from Wollongong to be buried in his hometown cemetery during the war. Rev. Stubbin declared at the gravesite that Jack was “a brave young hero who has given his life for his country just as much as if he had died in the trenches at Gallipoli”. 66 Rev. Stubbin was a prominent member of the local recruiting

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56 *In Memoriam* notice for Srgt Jack Buckley of Corrimal, *South Coast Times*, 25 October 1918
57 *In Memoriam* notice for L/Cpl George Cheadle of Austinner, *South Coast Times*, 22 August 1919
58 *In Memoriam* notice for Pte William Trivett of Tarrawanna, *South Coast Times*, 17 October 1919
59 *In Memoriam* notice for Pte William Trivett of Tarrawanna, *South Coast Times*, 17 October 1919
60 *In Memoriam* notice for Srgt Albert Noldart of Corrimal, *South Coast Times*, 15 July 1921
62 Dennis et al, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, op. cit. p.647
63 Bruce Scates, ‘In Gallipoli’s Shadow: Pilgrimage, Memory, Mourning and the Great War’, in *Australian Historical Studies*, 119, April 2001, p.9
65 *In Memoriam* notice for Pte Edward Smith of Corrimal, *South Coast Times*, 30 July 1922
committee. It is possible he deliberately privileged death in battle, not particularly for the Eagleton’s benefit, but as a means to publicly endorse the spirit of duty and sacrifice, implicit in volunteering for the war, as righteous and honourable to other families and, particularly, eligible young men.

Correspondents knew how important the details of burial were for the peace of mind of bereaved families and if the information was known, it was readily shared. Matron Reddock told Fred Muir’s mother that he had been buried at sea, 67 while John O’Neill’s family were assured he had been “given a good burial by the British men and a small wooden cross was erected over his grave”. 68 Percy Merrick’s Kiama school friend Charlie Cornford’s determination was genuine but probably impractical when he assured Mr Merrick that he would arrange for Percy’s grave to be cared for, even after his battalion was “shifted somewhere else”. 69

Malcolm Finlayson had written to Vera Deakin requesting a photograph of Ron’s grave. 70 Photographs were available, free of charge, from the Director of Graves Registration. This was made feasible by the donation of funds from the Joint War Committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John, although families were cautioned that “weeks or months may pass before photographs can be taken” and it was not possible to arrange “for the distribution of flowers, plants or wreaths for individual graves”. 71 The placing of floral tributes and wreaths on graves was of course a central element of pre-war mourning ritual. When this was impossible, photographs of the graves were treasured. Mrs Bonner of Bombo received a letter from a Lieutenant Waterhouse in which he enclosed an enlarged reproduction of a photograph of her son’s grave near Pozieres, but apologised “it is so poor, but it is the best that could be done with the original print”. 72 It would seem Mrs

67 Correspondence dated 28 November 1915 from Matron Reddock to Mrs O’Donnell of Unanderra, AWM 2DRL / 0316, Frederick Warren Muir
68 AWM 1DRL / 0428 Red Cross Missing files, op.cit., No.4866 Private John Joseph O’Neill
69 Correspondence from Pte Charlie Cornford to Mr Jack Merrick of Kiama, Kiama Independent, 14 October 1916
70 Correspondence dated 20 November 1917 from Cpt Malcolm Finlayson to Vera Deakin, AWM 1DRL / 0428 Red Cross Missing files, op.cit. Lieut. Ronald Berry Finlayson
71 Kiama Independent, 28 November 1917
72 Correspondence from Lieut W Waterhouse to Mrs Bonner of Bombo, Kiama Independent, 15 August 1917
Bonner was not bothered by the condition of the photograph. She had it mounted and put on display in the shopfront window of Mr Cocks' store in the main street of Kiama.\textsuperscript{73}

So many of the bereaved in the Illawarra were hindered in their recovery by a lack of closure. Like John Brennan after the Mt Kembla mine disaster, they could not fully accept their loss until they were given accurate details of death and burial, but the nature of trench warfare meant that, for the missing, these particulars were often lost forever. At the opening of the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing at Ypres in Belgium, the Archbishop of Canterbury's opening prayer praised the "host of brave men who gave their lives ... 'missing', but not outside the Father's knowledge and the Father's love",\textsuperscript{74} a consolation to those who feared the repercussions of not having a Christian burial. It was Lord Plumer, the British Field Marshal who had led the defence of Ypres between 1915-1917, however, who summed up the meaning of the memorial for many bereaved, when he declared, "He is not missing. He is here."\textsuperscript{75}

During the war years, the Illawarra community mourned both the dead and the absence of survivors, with little evidence that either group of soldiers was privileged over the other. Most of the bereaved knew that this would change at the end of the war when the parades of returned men would finally indicate that for many families, all hope was now lost. Their men would not be found among the living.

The Sharples family of Corrimal knew in 1917 that "the hardest part is yet to come when the soldiers all return, and we miss among the cheery crowd, one who will never return",\textsuperscript{76} while Jack Buckley's mother still fantasised that peace would bring about a miracle:

\begin{quote}
But he is dead, the cable tells me
No more his native land he'll see
But when the war is over
Still I dream he'll come to me\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Kiama Independent}, 15 August 1917
\textsuperscript{75} Field Marshal Sir Herbert Plumer, \textit{London Times}, 25 July 1927, cited in \textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{In Memoriam} notice for Pte Jim Sharples of Corrimal, \textit{South Coast Times}, 9 November 1917
Many bereaved parents in the Illawarra dreamed this dream. The reality however, was different and the end of the war brought not only celebration, but also consternation as to how it would be possible for families to commemorate their sons and face the future, shackled by their memories of loss. Those families who never resolved the denial and doubt caused by the absence of a grave, or even a known date or place of death, would find it even more difficult in the post-war years to transform their private memories into public remembrance of the boys who remained forever lost.

77 In Memoriam notice for Srgt Jack Buckley of Corrimal, South Coast Times, 25 October 1918
In September 1918, reports from the Western front indicated the German Army was faltering and rumours of peace were started and stifled on a number of occasions, engendering some embarrassment when spontaneous celebrations were found to be premature. When it was confirmed that the Armistice had been signed on 11 November 1918, every church bell in the Illawarra was rung, including the bell of the Methodist Church at Bulli, which was wrenched so fiercely the rope broke. Searchlight displays that night in Sydney could be seen from the heights of the Illawarra and the churches were full to overflowing for thanksgiving services, after which young men and women careered up and down the streets in “tin can bands” making “a din enough to deafen one”. The South Coast Times cheekily reported that “a general IWW feeling prevailed ... and there was little work or business”. 

Crowds flocked to Wollongong Showground for official peace celebrations where they were addressed by Rev. McKay Barnet who claimed, “we are here to celebrate the greatest
victory that has been achieved in the history of the world” and the Rector of Wollongong who declared victory proof that “God had set his seal on the side of righteousness and truth”. 

For many of the bereaved however, the sounds of peace had a hollow ring and some would have identified with the British poet Robert Graves, for whom the news of peace “sent [him] out walking alone ... cursing and sobbing and thinking of the dead”. The end of the war also ended the possibility that the missing would be found alive, and parades of khaki emphasised the finality of loss. The depth of parental grief was such that the Armistice did not necessarily bring peace, and the pain did not diminish with time.

Stan Sproule’s youngest brother Les was in school at Jamberoo when it was announced the war was over. The children ran into the playground whooping, cheering and hugging one another. Les’s first thought was how long it would take his two surviving brothers, Oliver and Hugh, to return home. His teacher, Mr Cork, had lost his only son during the war, and in answer to Les’s hope-filled question, patted him on the shoulder and with tears in his eyes, said softly, “It won’t be long now Les”.

A gap between the families of the dead and those of the survivors was already palpable, and for more reasons than the immediately obvious. Many soldiers returned mentally and physically broken to families who hardly recognised them, and who could not comprehend the suffering of men who would never forget what they had seen and done.

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7 Illawarra Mercury, 15 November 1918
8 Ibid.
9 Robert Graves, Goodbye to All That, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1961 [1929], p.227
10 Sproule, These were the best years, op. cit., p.16
Oliver Sproule arrived in Jamberoo looking fit and well following an extended leave in Scotland and England after being de-mobbed, but Les and his family were shocked when Hugh stepped off the train at Kiama station in early 1919:

I remember the hug he gave me and said he couldn’t believe I’d grown so much in that time. I was so sad when I saw him. He was so thin and sick looking ... Hugh was suffering from diarrhoea, which later became chronic and he still had it until his death at forty-seven years on 1 October 1942.12

‘Welcome Home’ parades, dances and socials were held as the men returned to the region, with presentations made to mothers like Mrs Fishlock. The people of Thirroul held a “monster welcome home social” with a procession, bonfire and cracker night, while no one was allowed to dance at the welcome home ball unless they wore a Bulli Shire Peace Button, with proceeds going to the war widows’ fund.13

Celebrations were cut short by a scourge that was about to sweep the country. The Spanish Influenza, so named because the King of Spain was an early victim,14 was reaching pandemic proportions in Europe. Informing AIF Base Records of John O’Neill’s death in the German prisoner of war camp, Sergeant Camden wrote, “this terrible Spanish grip is slowly and surely carrying off our boys. You will be distressed to know that three have recently died”.15 Between twenty and thirty million people had died worldwide by 1920, including approximately twelve thousand Australians.16 The New South Wales government closed schools, hotels and churches and turned hospitals into quarantine stations. After officials called for united prayer, church services were permitted, provided the clergyman stood six feet from the congregation, who were required to wear gauze masks and sit three feet apart. The Rector of Wollongong “deplored alike the selfishness of

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12 Sproule, *These were the best years*, op.cit., p.16
13 *South Coast Times*, 1 August 1919
14 Piggin, *Faith of Steel*, op.cit., p.186
15 Correspondence dated 3 December 1918, from Sgt Camden to AIF Base Records, London, in AWM 1DRL / 0428 Australian Red Cross Society, Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-1918 War, No.4866 Private John Joseph O’Neill
16 Piggin, *Faith of Steel*, op.cit., p.186
people who congregated at cinemas and racecourses and the lack of faith of those who did
not congregate at church.\textsuperscript{17}

Many local families, who had been bereaved by the war, were now losing more members to
this modern-day plague. The Easts had lost Wenty at Messines Ridge in 1917; four
members of the family contracted the disease in early 1919. Two daughters died, and their
bodies were passed through the window of their Minnamurra home so their brothers would
not learn of their deaths while they themselves were gravely ill. Despite the fear of
transmission, a large number of mourners attended the double funeral, wearing masks
soaked in disinfectant.\textsuperscript{18} The clergy continued to visit the sick, in spite of calls that this
practice be banned, requests Father Dunne of St Francis’ claimed was blatant
discrimination against Catholics. Father Mahoney died in August 1919 after catching the
disease from a parishioner, Father Dunne became very ill but recovered while Father Byrne
was hospitalised with a nervous breakdown due to overwork, during both the epidemic and
the war itself.\textsuperscript{19}

The clergy had played a large role in the religious services and parades to mark Anzac Day
and the anniversary of the outbreak of war that had been held throughout the Illawarrra from
1916. During the war however, these were often infused with overt patriotism and used as
quasi-recruitment tools. At a united Protestant service on 25 April 1916 at the Wollongong
Town Hall attended by a “great congregation”, Rev. Stubbin read out the names of those
locals who had been lost at Gallipoli, including Syd Duchesne, Bob McClelland, Alfred
Shipp and Fred Muir, while the band played “\textit{Let Me Like a Soldier Fall}”.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p.187
\textsuperscript{18} Sproule, \textit{These were the best years}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.18
\textsuperscript{19} Piggin, \textit{Faith of Steel}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.188. Father Dunne contracted typhoid after returning from a
holiday in Ireland and died at the Sydney quarantine station on 2 March 1924
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{South Coast Times}, 28 April 1916
The presence of an AIF camp near Kiama gave the 1916 outdoor service an even more militaristic feel as the men paraded before the flag in full uniform. The account of this commemoration in the *Independent* was filled with drama and excitement:

In the background one of the finest scenes of our fair land that has given of the best of her sons, with mountains piled blue in the distance, green fields and golden beaches between. The hour of service was a typical one – ushered in under lowering clouds and falling rain typical it seemed of a nation’s sorrow and tears. As the hour struck when as a nation, we Australians were asked to hold in sacred memory our glorious dead, the sun broke forth gloriously as a symbol of our Empire victory.21

![Anzac Day parade heading west along Crown Street, Wollongong](image)

After the war, the focus shifted toward the legacy of the fallen, the returned men and the bereaved. In 1919, the message conveyed to the “fairly large” crowd was “do it in the same spirit as we did at Gallipoli” and “live up to the Anzac tradition”.22 The inmates at the influenza hospital in Crown Street had requested a view of the returned men and the procession was re-formed so the patients could peer out at them from the windows. For

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21 *Kiama Independent*, 26 April 1916
22 *Illawarra Mercury*, 2 May 1919
the first time, the newspaper accounts mention the large number of memorial wreaths placed at the Crown Street entrance to the Town Hall.\textsuperscript{23} In 1921, the wreaths were piled high and extended the entire length of the Town Hall railings, while at the service inside, Lieutenant-Colonel Blacklow distributed war medals. Lomas Fishlock received his, although George did not attend, while medals were handed to family members who accepted them on behalf of Syd Duchesne, Alban Kirby and Alf Shipp.\textsuperscript{24}

Many bereaved families continued to attend Anzac Day ceremonies well into the 1920s. In 1922, wreaths were laid for John O’Neill, Alban Kirby, Ted Austin, Fred Muir, Jack Eagleton, Rupert Quist, Matt Tubman, Syd Duchesne, and Alf Shipp,\textsuperscript{25} while in 1925 his brother and sister left a wreath for Percy Clout at the Town Hall.\textsuperscript{26} Mr and Mrs Clout were not present. Whether such services were a genuine salve to grief is debatable. Some may have attended out of obligation or a desire to demonstrate their pride in their sons to the wider community, or to seek solace among those who shared the experience of loss. Many of those who laid wreaths had been known for their patriotic work during the war and may have seen public commemorative days as an extension of this duty. Others, like the Clouts, may not have been able to bear to be reminded of their great loss by the sight of men in uniform and the eulogies to sacrifice and honour. It was not until 1925 that the newspapers recorded public acknowledgment of the sacrifice of those who had waited at home:

There was also the heroism of those who waited and theirs perhaps was even greater than those who fought, because they just had to stand by and wait for news of their beloved ones, while the latter in the heat of battle gave no thought but to the fight in hand.\textsuperscript{27}

A resolute determination to remember, or as Luckins has it, “conscious memory making”\textsuperscript{28} became a prominent feature of the \textit{In Memoriam} notices placed during the early 1920s.

The father of Private William Trivett of Tarrawanna wrote “Two years have passed, my

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{South Coast Times}, 29 April 1921
\item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 26 April 1922
\item \textsuperscript{26} \textit{South Coast Times}, 8 May 1925
\item \textsuperscript{27} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 1 May 1925
\item \textsuperscript{28} Tanja Luckins, \textit{The Gates of Memory: Australian People’s Experiences and Memories of Loss and the Great War}, Curtin University Books, Fremantle, 2004, p.18
\end{itemize}
heart is sore, as time goes on I miss you more”. Mr and Mrs Houghton noted simply, “Loving remembrance lasts forever” and the parents of Captain Wilf Appleby, “An Anzac”, claimed, “The memory of the brave never dies”, while Jim Sharples’ family was still wrestling with their grief. On the fifth anniversary of his death, they alluded to the unremitting pain of loss:

Days of sadness still come o’er us
Hidden, secret tears still flow
But memory keeps our loved one near us
Though he died five years ago.

Many declared the soldier “an Anzac” and particular battles were given distinction. A notice for Private Charlie Fell of Keiraville noted he had been “killed in action, Lone Pine Charge”.

Having been denied the comfort of pre-war mourning rituals and certain knowledge of their sons’ last hours or days, many parents found themselves living in the memory of the past, unable to reconcile their grief and move on. As Condé has noted, the passage of time into the 1920s was, for most parents, no time at all. Their grief had experienced no resolution and as they aged, there was “diminishing energy to keep trying”. It is probable that some Illawarra parents, like the Clouts, eschewed the pomp and public display of remembrance days, preferring their own private reflection. For those who had taken Mary Gilmore’s advice and would “creep into bed in the dark and weep”, the depth of their grief was so enormous that it caused many “constantly to live within, or even retreat from, the objective world to one sustained principally by memory or longings”. High Court Justice Henry

29 In Memoriam notice for Pte W Trivett of Tarrawanna, South Coast Times, 17 October 1919
30 In Memoriam notice for Pte Dick Houghton of Keiraville, South Coast Times, 9 August 1923
31 In Memoriam notice for Cpt Wilf Appleby of Keiraville, South Coast Times, 19 September 1919
32 In Memoriam notice for Pte Jim Sharples of Corrimal, South Coast Times, 11 November 1921
33 In Memoriam notice for Pte Charlie Fell of Keiraville, South Coast Times, 1 August 1919
35 Mary Gilmore, ‘These Following Men’ in Mary Gilmore, The Passionate Heart, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1918, p.2
Higgins, whose only child had been killed in Palestine in 1916, felt “my grief has condemned me to hard labour for the rest of my life”. 37

While some bereaved seemed to live perpetually in the past, others tried to remove themselves from the surroundings that prompted memory. Mrs Duchesne was thought by her family to have been a “fairly unhappy person, often cross and a bit sour”. She was pleased to have left their Manly home for Wollongong before the war, feeling that she could not have endured being surrounded by tangible memories of Syd’s childhood, 38 while Wilf Appleby’s parents left Keiraville just after the war, to start afresh in Sydney. 39

During the war years, the process of creating public memory had already begun with the unveiling of honour boards and commemorative photographs. In July 1915, the Rev. McKay Barnet and Mr Finlayson contributed 2/6 and 2/- respectively toward a Wollongong District School Old Boys’ Fund for a memorial tablet to be erected at the school, neither knowing that when it was finished it would record the names of both their sons. 40 A large crowd attended the unveiling of an enlarged photograph of Alf Shipp (reproduced right) at the Mt Kembla Public School where he had been a teacher, 41 while the Mechanics’ Institute at Keiraville installed a similar tribute to Dick Houghton the month after his death. 42 The Farquharsons dedicated a memorial tablet in the Kiama Methodist

38 Private family papers in the possession of Rev. Dr David and Mrs Bernie Duchesne, of Wollstonecraft, Sydney.
39 AWM93 Australian War Memorial Registry file: Request for donation of private records, file 12/11/772, Appleby
40 South Coast Times, 16 July 1915
41 South Coast Times, 12 November 1915
42 South Coast Times, 1 September 1916
Church to Walter in 1917. Beside his name was the simple inscription “An Anzac”. A second service was held in October 1918 to add Frank’s name.\textsuperscript{43}

At least twenty-five honour boards and commemorative photographs were unveiled between 1915 and the end of the war in the Illawarra in churches, halls, railway stations, lodges, surf clubs, workplaces and schools.\textsuperscript{44} New names were added when men enlisted while small crosses or stars were appended to denote those who had fallen.

Inglis has argued that these honour boards were “scoreboards of commitment” and recruitment devices, designed to encourage other young men to follow the example set by the local heroes.\textsuperscript{45} McKernan has also claimed that many rural towns erected honour boards and memorials during the war as progressive tallies of enlistment figures, demonstrating the district’s loyalty, and that this became a competitive race between towns.\textsuperscript{46} There is little evidence of such rivalry in the Illawarra. Lists of volunteers were sometimes identified by locality, but more often as part of a larger record of the entire region’s involvement. In addition, many honour rolls were instigated and maintained by members of the community who were not known to be actively concerned with recruitment.\textsuperscript{47}

The reported large attendances at these unveilings indicate that it was important to the communities that their men’s contributions to the war be honoured, but the archives hold little information to indicate whether bereaved families took much solace from these public tributes.

\textsuperscript{43} Department of Veterans Affairs, Memories and Memorabilia: Honour Rolls, Commemorative Plaques & Other Memorials, at http://www.dva.gov.au/media/publicat/memories/page_06.htm [accessed 15 September 2004]
\textsuperscript{44} Figure calculated from information in Illawarra Family History Group Inc., Illawarra Remembers: War Memorials of the Illawarra, University of Wollongong Printery, Wollongong, 1995
\textsuperscript{45} K S Inglis (assisted by Jan Brazier), Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 1998, pp.106-107
\textsuperscript{46} Michael McKernan, Australian People and the Great War, Thomas Nelson Australia, West Melbourne, 1980, p.187
\textsuperscript{47} Vivienne Caldwell, Illawarra at War: An examination of the characteristics and experiences of the Illawarra volunteers during World War I and the impact of death on the home front, BA (Hons) Thesis, University of Wollongong, 1999, p.82
When the survivors had returned home and the zenith of the influenza epidemic had passed, there was concern that the spirit of Anzac and the meaning of sacrifice would wane through lack of interest.\(^{48}\) Among politicians, prominent families, the press and some of the bereaved, there were increasing pressures to establish larger, more public and more permanent memorials reflecting the community’s loss in war throughout the region, although many were not completed until the mid to late 1920s. Most of the monuments in the Illawarra were classic cenotaphs, sculptures, arches or obelisks. However, Gerringong locals contributed to the construction of a Soldiers Memorial Hall in the main street, and the citizens of Dapto to a School of Arts building, where many subscribers agreed that in rural areas, “they should put up something useful, and not monuments”.\(^{49}\)

It is not entirely clear whether these monuments provided sites of private healing meditation in the minds of the bereaved,\(^{50}\) or were seen as more utilitarian public testament to a wider debt. As Inglis has stressed, “laying a wreath, seeing a name, hearing it read out, remembering a life and picturing death: we can only imagine the unreported acts of grieving”.\(^{51}\) A comparison between the constructions of some of the Illawarra memorials, however, provides a neat contrast between community-based initiatives and pompous officialdom.

Thirroul was one of the first towns in Australia to commence preparations for a permanent memorial when in early 1917 the Thirroul Progress and Ratepayers Association began an appeal for public subscriptions to “The Fountain Fund”. The leader of the project was Margaret “Granny” Riach, a seventy-year old widow who galvanised the local community’s commemoration. The Thirroul postmaster compiled the list of names to be engraved, a Wollongong architect and Bulli plumber

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\(^{48}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 2 May 1924  
\(^{49}\) *Illawarra Mercury*, 31 October 1924  
\(^{50}\) Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, 1995, p.115  
\(^{51}\) Inglis, *Sacred Places*, op.cit., p.223
donated their labour while builders offered cement and piping. Local labourers gave up their public holiday in October 1919 and worked free of charge to complete the foundations. The list of the men to be honoured was published to allow omissions and errors to be rectified, adhering to the peculiarly Australian practice of honouring the names of all volunteers, not just the dead. Granny Riach herself was given the honour of unveiling the pedestal, fountain and sandstone soldier (pictured previous page) on Anzac Day 1920 in front of a large crowd of bereaved families and returned men. The inscription reads:

Erected by public subscription in honour of fellow citizens who gave their lives and of those who gave their services in the interests of humanity during the Great War 1914-1919.

The memorial at nearby Austinmer also listed the names of all volunteers. It was unveiled on 26 January 1922 by Mrs Cheadle, whose son George had been killed three months before the Armistice. By contrast, the community memorial established in the northern mining town of Coledale (shown left) is the only one in the Illawarra to list just the dead. Caldwell has convincingly argued that the strong presence of IWW members among the miners was reflected in an anti-war sentiment that could only be extended to honouring the fallen, rather than all those who had volunteered to fight a capitalists’ war.

Such grass-root support for local decisions was not evident in Wollongong. Being the seat of local government, the organisation of Wollongong’s memorial, however, was characterised by more formal officialdom and nationalistic expression. A letter published in the Mercury in late 1918 urged the establishment of a memorial “to the patriotism, loyalty and self-sacrifice of those in the municipality and the immediate neighbourhood” lest the

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52 Ibid., p.127
53 Illawarra Mercury, 10 October 1919
54 Inglis has estimated that over half the Australian memorials to the Great War list all the volunteers from the area. See Inglis, Sacred Places, op.cit., p.181
55 Illawarra Family History Group Inc., Illawarra Remembers, op.cit., p.85
56 Ibid., p.10
57 Caldwell, Illawarra at War, op.cit., p.90
declaration of peace result in "the matter being allowed to drop and nothing be done". 58

The matter was still dragging on in April 1920 and it was felt embarrassing that "one of the largest country towns of the State ... has no memorial to the memory of those who died and those who returned from facing death". 59 The design was beginning to cause some dissension among the prominent local men who had assumed control of the project. Rev. Stumbles offered to donate £28 from patriotic collections but only if God was mentioned on the memorial. Mr Waters argued that the paltry £100 or so already raised was not ever going to grow to the £1000 needed for a decent memorial and that a hall for soldiers be established at the School of Arts instead, a proposal that was endorsed by the RSSIL. In 1921, the lady collectors reported that a door-to-door canvass would be lucky to yield £200 60 and a design was finalised only after the architect Varney Parkes offered to donate his services free of charge. 61

The Governor of New South Wales arrived in August 1922 to set the foundation stone amid great fanfare. Schools and businesses were closed for the afternoon while a military procession headed down Crown Street to the Town Hall, which had been decorated with four hundred flags. 62 The Governor General, Lord Forster, finally unveiled the Memorial itself on 3 June 1923, in front of an assembly of politicians, military officers and prominent dignitaries. The Mayor spoke of how exciting it was for Wollongong to have a vice-regal visit for the first time in twenty years, while Lord Forster recounted the importance of the Battle of Jutland in proving the reputation of the British Navy and said he and Lady Forster were envious of the lovely beaches in the area. 63 The families of the fallen were barely mentioned in the speeches and it was not recorded how many of them attended the ceremony. The memorial carried the names of three hundred and fifty eight locals, seventy-four of whom had lost their lives.

58 Correspondence from Ernest L Sutton, *Illawarra Mercury*, 22 November 1918
59 *Illawarra Mercury*, 23 April 1920
60 *Illawarra Mercury*, 29 July 1921
61 *Illawarra Mercury*, 7 July 1922
62 *Illawarra Mercury*, 4 August 1922
63 *Illawarra Mercury*, 5 June 1923
It is clear that while some memorials seemed to encapsulate the feeling of individual communities, others were probably useless to the bereaved as a surrogate grave, in the absence of access to the real article. Lloyd has argued that distance and cost made it impossible for most Australians to travel to known graves in Turkey, Palestine, Egypt and Europe and that this forced the bereaved to use local war memorials and commemorations as a surrogate for the gravesite.\(^{64}\) Ziion’s research, however, has shown that a surprising number of Australians did travel to Europe in the years immediately after the war searching for the last resting places of their sons. The agency Cook’s organised 450 visits to European graves in 1923, and over 1100 in 1924.\(^{65}\) Ziion has conceded that despite these numbers, there was a largely unspoken recognition that most would not ever see their boys’ graves or memorials in person. There was, however, a distinct impression that those few who could make the journey should act as unofficial proxies for the majority who could not, and report back to Australians on the conditions of the cemeteries and provide

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\(^{65}\) Bart Ziion, “‘The majority will never visit the graves’: Australian pilgrimages to World War I graves 1918-1939”, paper given at the *Australian Historical Association Conference*, Griffith University, July 2002, p.2
“a way for the bereaved to assert some personal agency in the commemoration of their dead overseas”. 66

This is reflected in the experience of the Illawarra. While many of the bereaved saw the foreign graves of the fallen as material testament to the ideal of sacrifice, as discussed in the previous chapter, there was also a general acceptance that for most, overseas travel to visit the graves would not be possible. Many took advantage of the offer to obtain photographs of the headstones from the Graves Registration Division, 67 as a substitute for being able to visit the cemeteries in person. Theresa Austin admitted that her husband Ted slept “in a grave I shall never see”, 68 while Essie Startin hoped “some day, when war’s loud thunders cease to swell, I may with eager footsteps journey there”. 69 There is no record that she did. As Zilko has argued, the impressions of those that did make the journey were of great importance, and comfort, to those who could not. The Independent noted, even while the war continued, that:

A measure of comfort should be brought to the hearts of those who mourn the loss of dear ones in the war by the knowledge that the graves of our soldier heroes in France and Gallipoli are being tended with every care and respect ... those who have control have seen to it that there shall be a fitting recognition and a proper record which will remain long after the noise of battle has passed. 70

An unnamed correspondent described the military cemeteries to the bereaved of Kiama:

I found that the cemetery was quite close to a [deleted by censors] camp and I went there by myself. The military cemetery adjoins the public graveyard and is situated on the main road close to the station. It was a typical winter morning, a white frost covered everything ... in tidy, well-kept rows are the mounds covering the bodies of those heroes who have fallen fighting to keep the whole of our universe, our homes and our people free. 71

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66 Ibid., p.4
67 Kiama Independent, 25 November 1917
68 Death notice for Pte Ted Austin of Corrimal, South Coast Times, 25 August 1916
69 Essie W Startin, ‘A Grave in France’ in South Coast Times, 26 October 1917
70 Kiama Independent, 30 May 1917
71 Ibid. There is no indication as to whom the correspondent is in this letter. It is possible that it was copied from a British newspaper as it is unlikely that any Kiama residents were visiting French war graves during 1917. Regardless of possible plagiarism, the fact that the paper printed it demonstrated the perceived need for the bereaved to know the conditions of the graves.
After the chance discovery of Ron Finlayson's body in 1917, it was exhumed and transferred to the Bancourt cemetery and his family were informed of the new location. The Finlaysons are the only bereaved family from the Illawarra in this study who are known to have travelled to Europe after the war. Mr Finlayson wrote:

We have just returned from a visit to England and France, visiting our lad's grave in Bancourt cemetery while we were there ... may I state that we were glad to see the condition in which the war cemeteries are being kept. 72

It would seem that the stark rows of uniform headstones were a source of bittersweet feelings for the bereaved. On the one hand, they represented a symbol of their pride in their sons' sacrifice and their connection with their comrades and their fears that graves may be neglected were allayed, but on the other, a source of concern that they could not be regularly visited.

The returned men who lost their battles with injury and disease in the immediate post-war years were accorded military funerals and privileged above ordinary citizens when, as Damousi has claimed, "the mythologies of war sustained the memories and the identities of these men". 73 The prolonged and painful death of Corporal George Fenton of Cordeaux provides an insight into the ways the Illawarra community continued to commemorate their soldiers who lost their battles at home. George was in the trenches with the Forty-seventh Battalion at Messines Ridge in 1917 when he was showered with shrapnel, opening a large gash across his face. As German bomber planes were sighted, the gas alarm sounded but George was unable to attach his gas mask over the wound and he was struck down by the fumes. It is likely his obituary was written by a returned comrade:

The din of battle died away. Australia, home, and instead of peaceful days, days of agony, nights of torture while "German Kulture" had its sway. Despite all medical attentions could do, devoted nursing from the hands of a loving wife and the indomitable courage of the true Digger spirit, [he]...

72 Correspondence dated 9 December 1927, from Mr R Finlayson to John Treloar, in AWM file 93/12/11/596, Australian War Memorial Registry file: Request for donation of private records, R B Finlayson
73 Damousi, The Labour of Loss, op.cit., p.95
passed away ... not one word of complaint hardly ever passed his lips - a smile covered the suffering that only he could tell of.\textsuperscript{74}

George Fenton died on Armistice Day, 1924, aged thirty-four and the RSSIL accorded him a full military funeral, attended by over forty of his comrades.\textsuperscript{75} Six separate \textit{In Memoriam} notices were placed in the newspaper in 1925; all mentioned his rank, his battalion, that he was "an Anzac" or that he "died through war service". His young wife wrote:

\begin{verbatim}
Your weary hours and days of pain
Your sleepless nights have passed
Your ever patient worn-out frame
Has found sweet rest at last
The silent grief that's in the soul
No human eye can trace
For many a broken heart lies hid
Beneath a smiling face
No space of time or lapse of years
Can dim my loved one's past
A loving memory holds it dear
Affection holds it fast.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{verbatim}

The families bereaved in the immediate post-war years suffered differently from those who had not had a chance to say good-bye during the war. The idea of noble death in war was quickly seen for the lie that it was by those who nursed their wounded and damaged men at home. The Sproule family lived through the inter-war years conscious of Hugh’s constant illness, and while George Duchesne became a devoted husband, father and grandfather, he remained psychologically tormented by his war service. Many parents who had lost their sons in the trenches yearned for the opportunity of a final farewell, but after watching her husband suffering through "days of agony and nights of torture",\textsuperscript{77} Mrs Fenton may well have been inclined to trade places.

The families of the fallen recalled vibrant young men who had yet to have their ideals crushed. The Mrs Fentons would only ever remember the unrecognisable shells of men who continued to suffer for those ideals well after peace was declared. The soldiers who had gone to war often returned very different men, and many families mourned, if not for a

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 14 November 1924 ...
\textsuperscript{75} RSSIL Annual Report for the Year 1924, in \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 23 January 1925
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{In Memoriam} notice for Cprl George Fenton, of Cordeaux, \textit{South Coast Times}, 13 November 1925
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Illawarra Mercury}, 14 November 1924
life, then for the loss of confidence in the future and of a potential that, for many wounded and injured men, always remained unfulfilled.

There is considerable evidence that many bereaved Australians in urban areas resorted to spiritualism to maintain a private connection with their sons. Jalland, Damousi and Winter have each explored in detail this phenomena of communicating with the dead through mediums and found it to be "one of the most disturbing and powerful means by which the living 'saw' the dead of the Great War, and used their 'return' to help survivors cope with their loss". Jalland has contended that many ceased to engage with ouija boards and séances when their raw grief diminished over time and they admitted to themselves that the practice seemed futile, although Dixon has claimed large crowds in Melbourne continued to attend public séances, 'spirit photography' exhibitions and lectures featuring such advocates as Arthur Conan Doyle well into the 1920s.

Neither McQuilton nor McKernan have found any public participation in spiritualism in rural areas, and there is no evidence that spiritualism was prominent in the Illawarra, either during the war or after. There is no mention of meetings, lectures or séances in the press, in advertisements or in the letters and diaries consulted for this study. This is not to say that the bereaved of the Illawarra did not attempt to contact the dead through spirit means or believe their men returned to them in dreams, but if they did, they did not articulate it. In the large cities, people had the advantage of anonymity to mask a reliance on unorthodox mourning behaviours, while the closeness of regional communities and lack of privacy in many small towns would have precluded the bereaved from publicising such a profane departure from Christian tradition.

Luckins and Winter have both examined textual, oral and visual ways in which loss was constituted as memory in the immediate post-war era. The conflict between personal

79 Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, op.cit., p.54
80 Jalland, Australian Ways of Death, op.cit., p.316
81 Robert Dixon, 'Where are the dead? Spiritualism, photography and the Great War', paper given at Identity and Culture Difference Occasional Seminar Series, University of Wollongong, 21 May 2004
recollections of individuals and public commemoration of the fallen as a homogenous group was always present, but to some extent these intersected when material about the war and its victims, both civilian and military, was collected. During the 1920s, Roll of Honour forms were circulated to the next of kin of all Australian soldiers who had died during the war. In one way, they were standard government forms, and from many, exacted standard, bland replies. However, like Rev. McKay Barnet, many of the bereaved in the Illawarra took the opportunity to personalise their loved one, knowing that the form was to be kept as part of the official record of the war. Question seven asked for “any other biographical details likely to be of interest to the Historian of the AIF or his regiment”. While their sons were one of so many lost, it became important to recall the individuality of those who comprised the tragic whole. Some noted the devastating personal impact of war. Private William Justin’s sister wrote she was “the only surviving member of the family”, while Percy Farquharson noted the death of the brother on each of Walter and Frank’s forms.

Some parents demonstrated their pride in their sons’ military careers. James Kirby wrote that Alban “was several times wounded at Gallipoli – killed Pozieres: No man’s land” and that he “enlisted on about 13 September 1914 and sailed by the troopship ‘Afric’ on 14th October 1914. He sailed as a private and his rank at death was CQM Sergeant”. Others wrote of more personal virtues. Mr Pountney wanted it known his son Claude had been “considered by Corps officers as a very smart and brave man”. William Tubman wrote Matt was “19 years, 11 months” at the time of his death, that he had trained in “music and typewriting” and was the “Secretary of the Methodist Christian Endeavour society and Asst. Secretary Glen Lodge of Druids, Wollongong”.

Curiously, of those who chose to add personal comments, the vast majority appear to be fathers. Perhaps their social conditioning precluded many from expressing their grief through poetry or letters. These men may have felt more comfortable articulating the
memories of their sons through the formal invitation of an official document. Modern-day pilgrims to war cemeteries at Gallipoli more than seventy-five years later were conscious of the pain that families endured as they attempted to summarise a life on a government form:

I constantly thought about the grief their family would have felt until the day they too died ... the inscriptions [were so] ... sad [and] moving ... I kept picturing the next of kin sitting there with the form to fill in ... the overwhelming grief and sadness. 88

Both Condé and Luckins have examined the process by which bereaved families were asked to donate letters, diaries and other wartime mementoes to the new Australian War Memorial in the late 1920s. The Mitchell Library in Sydney had offered to purchase soldiers’ diaries and letters immediately after the war if they were deemed historically interesting and detailed enough. By 1922, the Library had acquired two hundred and sixty manuscripts at a cost of between £1 and £50 each. 89 By contrast, the War Memorial waited until 1927 to send personal letters to returned soldiers and next of kin asking that these most prized possessions be given without compensation. Unlike the Mitchell, the War Memorial were more aware of the significance of letters and diaries to the bereaved and indicated that copies would be acceptable if families did not wish to relinquish the originals. 90

Condé has found these requests received responses ranging from enthusiasm to ambivalence to bitterness, while many of course did not reply at all. Mothers in particular found it difficult to go through letters and private effects, although some were “proud to think that among the thousands of letters there will be some of my Boys’ among them”. 91 Violet Gibbins responded to Charles Bean, “I cannot part with these sacred treasures. I would rather part with my life – and yet, I do not want to stand in the way of a fair and honourable memorial to him [her brother]”, 92 while a desperate father tried to enlist the

88 Bruce Scates, ‘In Gallipoli’s Shadow: Pilgrimage, Memory, Mourning and the Great War’, in Australian Historical Studies, 119, April 2001, p.15
89 Condé, ‘Capturing the records of war’, op.cit., p.7
90 Ibid., p.4
91 Mrs Ashdown, cited in Luckins, The Gates of Memory, op.cit., p.227
92 Violet Gibbins, cited in Condé, ‘Capturing the records of war’, op.cit., p.15
Memorial staff’s assistance in preventing his wife from having their son’s letters buried with her when she died.\textsuperscript{93}

Similar responses are evident among Illawarra families. Rev. McKay Barnet did not respond to the repeated requests,\textsuperscript{94} while Mrs O’Donnell immediately replied to Director John Treloar’s letter of 27 September 1928, informing him she intended to donate all Fred’s letters. The parcel she sent not only contained all the original letters he had sent from Egypt and Gallipoli, but his diary, caked with mud and smudged with black fingerprints, and the large scrapbook in which she had carefully pasted copies of the letters published in the \textit{South Coast Times}, letters of condolence and an obituary that had appeared in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}.\textsuperscript{95}

Wilf Appleby’s father Edward, who had settled in Hurstville after leaving Keiraville, wrote, “I am sorry but I have not anything I could send for the Australian War Memorial”.\textsuperscript{96} Mr Appleby may not have kept any letters from Wilf (pictured left), if indeed he wrote any. He may have genuinely felt the Memorial would not be interested in what he did have, or possibly, he could not bring himself to part with it: it is not possible to know. Mr Appleby did not respond to subsequent correspondence from the Memorial.

\textsuperscript{93} Condé, ‘Capturing the records of war’, \textit{op.cit.}, p.14
\textsuperscript{94} AWM 93 Australian War Memorial Registry file: Request for donation of private records, file 12/11/1911, Barnet
\textsuperscript{95} AWM93 Australian War Memorial Registry file: Request for donation of private records, file 12/11/1426, Muir
\textsuperscript{96} Correspondence dated 27 April 1928 from Mr E Appleby to John Treloar, in AWM93 Australian War Memorial Registry file: Request for donation of private records, file 12/11/772, Appleby
The Finlaysons however, were more amenable. In December 1927, Mr Finlayson assured Treloar that he and his wife

are entirely in sympathy with the proposal you outline and I propose, on my first visit to Sydney (during this month) to call on the Curator of the War Memorial Museum and see what can be done in the way suggested. My wife has copied out pretty well all the lad’s letters and I can show these to the Curator, with some other letters etc, and if he thinks there is anything worth while, they may be used.97

This letter was sent just after the Finlaysons returned from their pilgrimage to Ron’s grave at Bancourt but it seems that their enthusiasm to part with the precious correspondence waned. In January 1928, the Memorial wrote to enquire when Mr Finlayson might arrive with the letters. He apologised in March and assured them he was still coming but had not arrived by mid-April. On Anzac Day, 1928, Mr Finlayson finally brought some letters to the Museum in Sydney with the request that the originals be returned, but it was not the complete set he had initially promised.98 On 6 August 1928, the Memorial posted back Ron’s letters after they had been copied. Mr Finlayson did not correspond with the Memorial again, nor did he ever provide the additional material.

The War Memorial sent over five-thousand personal requests for material between 1927 and 1931. It has been estimated that less than five percent of returned men responded positively, while up to half the wives of fallen soldiers donated or loaned items. A random survey suggests three-quarters of the parents contacted eventually surrendered at least a portion of their last physical connection to their lost sons.99 This was not coincidence, nor did it necessarily indicate indifference on the part of the soldiers or widows. Kipling’s dedication “Their name liveth for ever more”, used on so many memorials, was not a meaningless sop to the generation of aging parents who had given their sons. It is likely that many feared the legacy of their sacrifice would be lost when they themselves were no longer able to perpetuate it. Their own deaths would mean the loss of their most important

97 Correspondence dated 9 December 1927, from Mr R Finlayson to John Treloar, in AWM 93, Australian War Memorial Registry file: Request for donation of private records, file 12/11/596, Finlayson
98 AWM 93, Australian War Memorial Registry file: Request for donation of private records, file 12/11/596, Finlayson
99 Condé, ‘Capturing the records of war’, op.cit., p.17
private memories, and many were grateful that a public institution would act as their proxy in preserving for all time the stories of the boys who did not come home and the parents who always missed them.

As the construction of private memory was transferred to public tribute in the post-war years, the focus shifted from acknowledging individual loss to commemorating the sacrifice of the region as a whole. Some took no consolation from the rhetoric of Anzac Day and the unveiling of memorials, but most parents in this study actively claimed their patriotism and role in the war as comfort. For those who watched their returned men struggle with war-related injuries or disease, the language of honourable sacrifice and heroic death must have seemed hollow. The change in the nature of *In Memoriam* notices show the evolution of grief over time. Some families ceased the public expression of private pain shortly after the war; others continued to define themselves as bereaved well into the 1920s and 1930s. Of these, many were likely to be parents whose grief did not lessen as the years went on. The loss of their sons had left a gap in their lives that with advancing age and perhaps, ill health, they were less inclined to try to fill.
Despite a considerable number of outstanding Australian histories on the impact of the First World War, the effects of wartime bereavement on parents and families, as distinct from widows, and on rural districts, as distinct from metropolitan areas, have not been given prominence. The grief of parents who lost sons during the war that was supposed to end all wars was different from that of widows. It was possible to replace a husband, but never a child.

As the realities of trench warfare became more apparent and the lists of wounded, killed and missing grew longer, the Illawarra families with men at the front lived with apprehension, as every telegram was a reminder of the ever-present possibility of bereavement. Traditional mourning rituals that had been centred on the physical presence of the body were impossible, so old forms were adapted or new ones found: letters of condolence, In Memoriam notices, memorial services, informal networks that passed along news, the public expression of sympathy and the use of local newspapers became important. Underpinning it all was the constant search for information.

The construction of public memory through memorials and ceremonies in the post-war years was not always in concert with personal grief, yet the commemoration of the men who had died, and of those who returned from cheating death, did not fade through lack of interest, as had been initially feared. The impact of the loss of over four hundred and fifty young men was so far-reaching that it could not be disconnected from the region’s consciousness. For the families who nursed their broken men at home into the 1920s, the impact was relentless and unforgiving.

Many bereaved families took solace that their sons were buried in a ‘soldier’s grave’ as it further vindicated their notions of honourable sacrifice on foreign battlefields. For the
families of the missing, however, even the small comfort of a photograph of a grave was
denied them. The detailed knowledge of death and burial that had been a comfort to
families like the Houghtons, Tubmans, Dobings and Mrs O'Donnell was not available to
the Clouts, Quists or the Ettingshausens. It is probable that these families always
wondered, for the rest of their lives, what really had happened to their sons, and, in
moments of fantasy, whether they were perhaps still lost and unable to find their way
home. From the evidence evaluated in this study, most of the bereaved of the Illawarra,
particularly parents, simply never recovered completely. They did not 'get over it' or
'move on'. They remained permanently diminished, both physically and emotionally, by
their loss.

All the parents examined for this thesis held an enduring belief in the rightness of the war.
This was not artificial, nor was it pretension. Legitimising the validity of the war itself was
the only way many parents could try to come to terms with the extent of their loss. The
devastation of trench warfare had been wholly without precedent and their only
consolation was that their sons had died for a laudable purpose; that they had done their
duty as men and had not been found wanting when it mattered. When the Duchesnes, for
example, were informed of Syd's death, his younger brother George immediately fronted
the local recruitment officer, demanding to take Syd's place at the front. He was not
accepted until height restrictions were relaxed in early 1916. When George returned home
to tell his father he had been refused, Mr Duchesne offered himself, only to be rejected on
account of his age.1 Mr Duchesne never fought in the war, but his entire family were
casualties nonetheless.

In some aspects, the Illawarra's experience of wartime bereavement reflected national
trends identified in other studies. Yet, there were marked differences. The close nature of
the communities throughout the Illawarra created informal support networks among the
bereaved, rather than formal organisations. Local newspapers were used as community
notice boards as neighbours and friends shared news and expressed sympathy and support.

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1 Private papers in the possession of Rev. Dr David Duchesne and Mrs Bernie Duchesne, of
Wollstonecraft, Sydney, and interview with Mrs Bernie Duchesne on 21 September 2004
Some mourning rituals found in cities, particularly the practice of spiritualism and the wearing of mourning black, were not in evidence, but at least one Wollongong family made the pilgrimage to the French gravesite of their son. Whether these trends are indicative of this particular region, or are common to other rural areas in Australia will only be determined through further research.

The one element that may well be common to all the bereaved of the Great War was the long-term effects of their loss. For some, grief became the primary motif for the remainder of their days; for most, the memory of their men haunted them into the immediate post-war years; for all, the war was to be a pivotal event of their lives, after which nothing would ever be the same.
APPENDIX A

THE ILLAWARRA REGION AND ENLISTMENT PATTERNS

Situated along the coast of south-eastern New South Wales, the Illawarra region was, and still is, considered to be the narrow strip of land from Helensburgh in the north to Gerringong in the south, bordered to the west by the escarpment and to the east by the Pacific Ocean. ‘Illawarra’ is an Aboriginal word meaning ‘echidna’,¹ and had been home to the Wadi Wadi, Thurawal, Wandandian and Jerringa peoples for tens of thousands of years before European settlement, begun in 1816 when Governor Macquarie granted tracts of land to ‘respectable New Settlers’.² Fertile land, abundant water supplies and plentiful coal seams ensured that the area prospered. Timber, dairy farming and mining industries developed, while the larger towns of Wollongong and Kiama not only became major ports but retail and commercial centres.

Settlement patterns and local natural resources gave individual villages their distinctiveness. Kiama and Jamberoo were known for their substantial estates, dairy cattle and a large proportion of Irish Protestant migrants;³ families from northern England, Wales and Scotland dominated the mining villages of Coledale, Scarborough and Coalcliff in the north, while the small leased farms around Dapto were noted for their high proportion of Catholics.⁴ The completion of the railway line to Sydney in 1889, and increased investment in heavy industry from 1908 bought many young men to the district and opened up the northern beaches to tourism.

A strong regional identification and sense of community was encouraged by the pioneers who had migrated to the area in the early to mid 1800s and tended to stay in the district for generations. Over time, their extended families scattered throughout the area; many of them are still prominent today. All classes were represented, from families with large land holdings in the south who had prospered through the cattle and timber trade, to the

² John McQuilton, ‘Settlement’, in Hagan and Wells (eds), A History of Wollongong, op. cit., p.24
³ Vivienne Caldwell, Illawarra at War, An examination of the characteristics and experiences of the Illawarra volunteers during World War I and the impact of death on the home front, BA (Hons) thesis, University of Wollongong, 1999, p.6
⁴ McQuilton, ‘Settlement’, in Hagan and Wells (eds), A History of Wollongong, op. cit., p.32

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successful businessmen of the financial and commercial centre of Wollongong, to the
rough mining shacks and strong organised labour movements of the villages of Mt
Kembla, Balgownie, Mt Keira and Coalcliff. Strong family networks, opportunities for
employment, an agreeable climate and scenic landscape influenced the sense of
community spirit and the stability of the population. It was as well that this solidarity of
kinship had had time to entrench itself, for the people of the Illawarra would have great
need of it in the years after 1914.

AIF enlistment patterns for the Illawarra echo state and national trends. In all, 2,336 men
from the district enlisted in the First AIF, being 8.4% of the total population, 16.2% of the
male population and 40.5% of the eligible male population. Of these, 77% were aged
between eighteen and twenty-nine, 81% were single, while 24% were classed as
labourers, 32% as miners and only 3% ‘professional’. In terms of religious affiliation,
47.2% identified as Church of England, 16.9% Roman Catholic, 12.9% Methodist and
19% Presbyterian. In all, 452 men of the Illawarra died on active service in Turkey,
Europe and Palestine, this being 19.3% of the total enlistments, and again mirroring the
national figure of 19%.

5 Caldwell, Illawarra at War, op. cit., pp.12-13. The national average for the entire AIF was 8.5% of
total population, 18% of male population and 38% of eligible male population.
6 Ibid., p.18
7 Ibid., p.19
8 Ibid., p.25
9 Ibid., p.21
10 Figures have been calculated from statistical data obtained from Vivienne Caldwell, Illawarra
## THE SOLDIERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Manner and Date of Death</th>
<th>Place of Death</th>
<th>Next of Kin</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<td>W L Appleby (Wilt)</td>
<td>Cptn</td>
<td>Keiraville</td>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
<td>KIA 20 September 1917</td>
<td>Menin Road</td>
<td>Father</td>
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<td>E G Austin (Ted)</td>
<td>Pte</td>
<td>Corrimal</td>
<td>Grocer's carter</td>
<td>KIA 20 July 1916</td>
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<td>R J M Barnet (Bob)</td>
<td>Dvr</td>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>Surveyor</td>
<td>DOW 27 August 1916</td>
<td>Poperinge</td>
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<td>D Blake (Dave)</td>
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<td>J Dobing (Jim)</td>
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<td>W S Duchesne (Syd)</td>
<td>Lieut</td>
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<td>J I Eagleton (Jack)</td>
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<td>W Farquharson (Walter)</td>
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<td>R B Finlayson (Ron)</td>
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<td>G Fishlock MM (George)</td>
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<td>F W Muir (Fred)</td>
<td>Pte</td>
<td>Unanderra</td>
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<td>J J O'Neill (John)</td>
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<td>Berlin</td>
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<td>R G Quist (Rupert)</td>
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<td>Dental mechanic</td>
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<td>Jamberoo</td>
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<td>W H Trivett (Bill)</td>
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<td>Tarrawanna</td>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
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<td>M Tubman (Matt)</td>
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<td>Keiraville</td>
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<td>G E Williamson (Godfrey)</td>
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<td>RTA 12 July 1919</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
<td>19</td>
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APPENDIX D

MAP OF THE WESTERN FRONT – 1916-1918

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AWM194 Allotment of 1914-1918 War Trophies
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