

# The Gympie Researcher

*The newsletter of the  
Gympie Family History Society Inc.*

Sept 2016

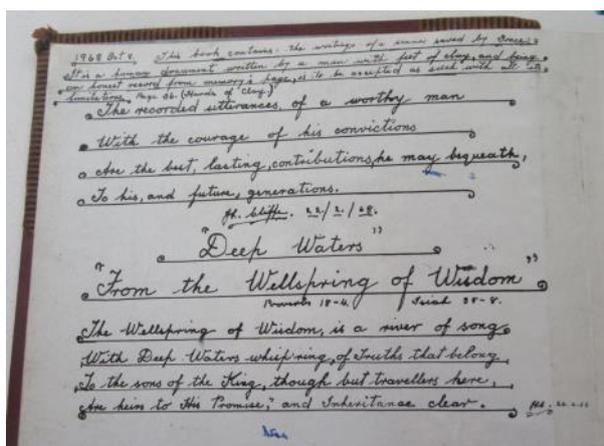
No. 84

I.S.S.N 1035 - 3534

**THREE MYSTERIES**

**ONE SOLVED**

**TWO MAY NEVER BE.**



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<b>MEMBERSHIP FEES:</b>	Annual fees are: All due by 31st August each year Single Membership \$35 Family Membership \$45 (Two members of an immediate family residing at the one address) PRO RATA till 31st August 2016:		
	Dec to Feb	Mar to May	Jun to Aug
Single Membership	\$30	\$20	\$10
Family Membership	\$40	\$30	\$20
<b>INFORMATION:</b>	Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Gympie Family History Society Inc.		
<b>WEB PAGE:</b>	www.gympiefhs.egympie.com.au		

### EDITORS COMMENT

Another year has passed and our AGM is coming up. We seemed to have made some advancements, we have gone from struggling to have enough people for a monthly meeting to 15 at our last meeting, a good sign. Our WW1 books are a large project and thanks to Di, Brett and Robyn the project is coming along well. Of course we still have to raise money to keep ourselves afloat as membership does not cover all our expenses, these projects also take a lot of research and organization. (we can't always rely on Di to do all the work, she has her own commitments) Which brings me to our lovely ladies in the back room who may be on the mature side, not overly computer savy but whose laughter invigorates and discussions inspire. These are the ladies who ensure our rooms stay open, turn up most days and do their best to help in any way they can, without them we might as well close our doors. They are also the ones who put their hand up for Committee because without them we would not find one. We are not professionals and a few mistakes can be excused, I have never seen a visitor go away with a complaint or a happy smile on their face, and Faye is always ready to accept a \$30 fee for her services, she has done a wonderful job as researcher and I salute her. I have put my name down again for Editor but would gladly hand the job to anyone who is interested. Lyn Fleming

### MEMBERSHIP: WE CURRENTLY HAVE 63 MEMBERS

#### PRESIDENTS REPORT:

Hello Members, This month has gone so fast I can hardly keep up. Things seem to be moving well in the rooms, everyone has something to do and all are working well. Di has been digging up dinosaurs so we have been coping without her—that makes things interesting. When having our coffee breaks, I can't remember if we thanked Robyn for the coffee she replaced after ours disappeared when we were broken into. Thanks Robyn. On Sat. 6th August some of our members went to Forest Glen to a Family History workshop. There were talks given by Shauna Hicks and others which proved very interesting. The day ended with afternoon tea at the Ginger Factory. Leaving the rooms with me (useless) was risky on Saturday. Luckily Brett came in and helped me out, as we had a visitor. Our back room is as noisy as ever, a lot of different subjects are discussed at great length. You never know what piece of history comes to light out there. That's all folks, I'm sure I have forgotten something. Don't forget A.G.M. Sat. 3rd September. MARGARET

#### **RESEARCH -**

Therese O'Callaghan, Re—Michael O'Shea and Hannah Roughan Paid/Sent  
 Karen McSweeney, Re—Jeremiah McSweeney and Jane O'Sullivan Paid/Sent  
 Cheryl Alldridge, - Thomas Arthur O'Neill and Elizabeth Salome nee Kendall Paid/Sent  
 Christine Fussell, - Re—Christopher Roy Barnes and Violet Cassidy Paid/ couldn't help  
 Alister Lindsay, - Re Victor Athol Lindsay and Elsbth Elde Herbert Williams Paid/Sent  
 Eileen Newcombe, Re— Hamill-Smith Paid/ Past client/ file missing  
 Estelle Harris, Re— Hoshua Brunt, Charles King, Laura Bunny Paid/Researching  
 Bradley Falappi, Re—James Cockburn, Mary Crawford Campbell, Esp their son Frederick  
 William Cockburn. Paid/Researching. FAYE KENNEDY

**RESEARCH FEES**

Members           Free (when visiting personally to the rooms and doing your own research although we are happy to help guide you or if you are from interstate and are not able to do your own research)

Non Members   (at our discretion)

Mail & Internet Inquiries

**\$30.00 Australia**

**\$35.00 overseas**

For Research Requests:

email c/- [gfhs@spiderweb.com.au](mailto:gfhs@spiderweb.com.au) or mail to: GFHS, P O Box 767, Gympie QLD 4570

The Research Process Explained:

You make your enquiry, we then look to see what information we can find quickly—then we contact you to see if you wish to proceed and advise of the fees.

If you do, we ask for \$30 (or \$35 overseas—to cover extra postage). Once payment is received, we then investigate either your specific queries or start at the beginning and check cemetery records, BDM registers, local registers, school registers, pedigree charts, some shipping, local history books, Gympie Times records, previous cemetery crawl presentations, previous research requests, mining, electoral rolls and so the list goes on.

We hold a lot of various local registers and cuttings and basic items you would find in a local history library. We also have access to the internet and can often suggest websites and ways of searching that you may not have thought of.

We do many hours of ongoing research and then either email the information to you as we go, or mail packets to you so you have the hard copies. We then also keep the information we have researched for you on file and it is then available to future people who may be researching your names too. Many times we have put people in touch with other searchers of their own trees.

Our research people do so much more work than you would realise to help you in your search for information. Please feel confident that everything possible is done by our volunteers to supply you with any relevant information we may have in our library.

The funds raised from your payments for our research, assist us with obtaining further records and to produce books and CD's for easy access of family details in Gympie and the surrounds.

Payment can be by either cheque sent to our P O Box as above or direct deposit into our Bank account is another option for those who feel comfortable with the method. Details of our bank account are: BSB 633000 Account# 153118963 and is with Bendigo Bank. We ask that you confirm by email to [gfhs@spiderweb.com.au](mailto:gfhs@spiderweb.com.au). if possible when you have made the payment. Then we can allocate your payment and get on with the research!

**Our research officer is Faye Kennedy.**

[www.gympiefhs.egympie.com.au](http://www.gympiefhs.egympie.com.au)

**11th September 2016**

Mark it in your diary so you don't miss out.  
We will be running our second  
Mystery History Tour  
It is going to places never been to before....  
Only 3 people and the driver know where we are going....

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WILL BE HELD AT THE  
ROOMS ON THE 3RD SEPTEMBER 1916**

**STARTING AT 1 : 30 p.m.**

**REMEMBER - MEMBERSHIP MUST BE RENEWED BEFORE  
THE AGM IN ORDER TO NOMINATE FOR COMMITTEE  
POSITIONS AND TO BE ABLE TO VOTE.**

**19th Oct—Gympie Cemetery Crawl**

Details—contact Di Woodstock 0419 224 628  
[gfhs@spiderweb.com.au](mailto:gfhs@spiderweb.com.au)

GFHS facebook page  
[www.gympiefhs.egympie.com.au](http://www.gympiefhs.egympie.com.au)

**LIBRARY HOURS**

Wednesday 9.30am to 2pm  
Friday 9.30am to 12pm  
Saturday 1pm to 4pm

**PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE {Please note that some prices have changed}**

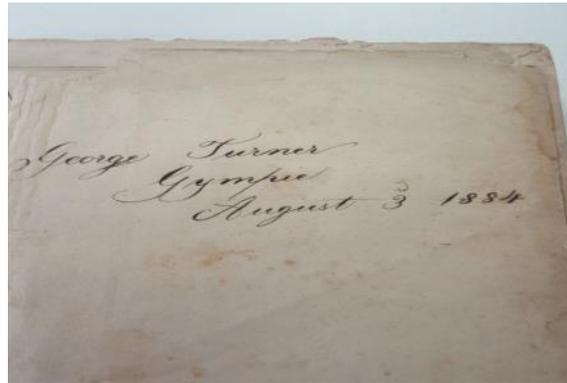
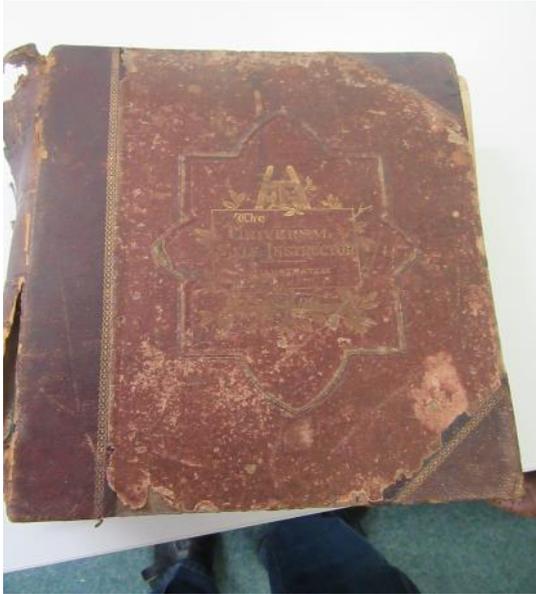
- **MINING ACCIDENTS SERIES** by Betty D'Arcy, information on mine accidents from the annual reports of the Mines Dept. (Qld) Volumes 1-14 (1878-1945). Cost per volume \$13 plus p&h **B**, order whole set add p&h **E**, order 5 copies add p&h **D**
- **PIONEER REGISTER** of families of Gympie and Surrounds (pre 1900) \$30 plus p&h **B**
- **PIONEER HEADSTONE BOOK** of Tozer Park & King Sts Gympie \$30 plus p&h **B** {updated}
- **A GOLDEN FUTURE 1867-1967** Stories, reports & photos of Gympie (photocopy version) \$15 p&h **B**
- **HISTORIC SKETCH OF GYMPIE 1867-1927** Stories & photographs of people & events of that period, includes index. (photocopy version) \$15 plus p&h **B**
- **The Gympie Chinese Vol 1** Stories of the early Chinese people of Gympie. \$15 p&h **B**
- **COOLOOLA COAST CEMETERY** (Tin Can Bay & Rainbow Beach) transcribed 2001. Headstones, burial register in date order. Cost \$15 plus p&h **B**
- **GYMPIE FUNERALS Cooloola Crematorium— funeral notices transcribed from their website**
  1. **2010 part year** \$10 plus p&h **A**
  2. **2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015** \$15 each plus p&h **A**
- **GYMPIE CEMETERIES**
  1. **Headstone Transcriptions to 1995** \$25 p&h **C**
  2. **Burial Register 1866-1994.** King Street, Tozer Park Road & Two Mile cemeteries \$35 p&h **C**
  3. **Burial Register 1995-1999** Two Mile Cemetery, Cooloola Coast Crematorium register of burials in other towns \$15 plus p&h **A**
  4. **Burial Register 2000-2004** Two Mile Cemetery, Cooloola Coast Crematorium register of burials in other towns \$15 plus P&H **A** **(Set of all 4 books) \$90 plus p&h D**
  5. **Cemetery Crawl on Tour #1 (Tiaro, Munna Creek, Miva & Gunalda)** \$15 plus p&h **B**
  6. **Cemetery Crawl on Tour #2 (Kenilworth, Brooloo, Bollier, Gheerulla)** \$15 plus p&h **B**
  7. **Cemetery Crawl on Tour #3 (Kilkivan, Woolooga & Boonara)** \$15 plus p&h **B**
  8. **World War 1 Crawl August 2014** \$10 plus p&h **B**
  9. **World War 1 Crawl April 2015** \$10 plus p&h **B**
  10. **World War 1 Crawl November 2015** \$10 plus p&h **B**
- **GYMPIE TIMES SERIES**
  1. **1868-1874** Births, deaths and marriages, funerals and miscellaneous
  2. **1875-1884** Births, deaths and marriages, funerals
  3. **1885-1889** Births, deaths and marriages, funerals
  4. **1890-1894** Births, deaths and marriages, funerals & in memoriam
  5. **1895-1899** Births, deaths and marriages, funerals & in memoriam
  6. **1900-1904** Births, deaths and marriages, in memoriam, wills/probates
  7. **1905-1909** Births, deaths and marriages, in memoriam, inquires/court

**(Set of all 7 books) \$95 plus p&h D or each book \$15 plus p&h A**
- **GYMPIE CEMETERY CRAWL BOOKLETS** Presentations of headstones by our members. Approximately 10 names described per booklet. Includes some photos of headstones. Cost \$5 each plus p&h **B** for 3 booklets (we are up to book 40 now) (see website for a list of names)

Postage codes: A=\$4      B=\$5      C=\$8      D=\$10      E=\$16      to any part of Australia

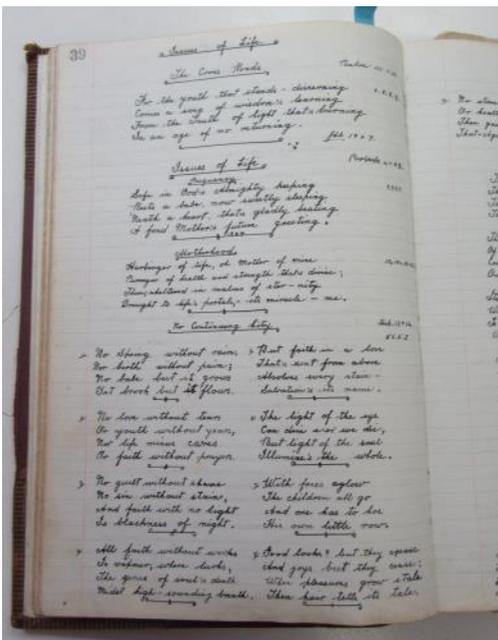
**GEORGE TURNER'S BOOK PRESENTATION:** Di Woodstock.

We had the privilege of returning a book from 1884 back into the family of George Taylor from Gympie. Pat Sellen, a great lover of books, has recently had to downsize her amazing collection and while looking through it, I found this book with the inscription in it that read, "George Turner Gympie 1884." Pat donated the book to our society and after sharing it with other members at one of our meetings, Tony White announced that he had found the family and would we like to return it to them. Well of course there was no option and so after 3 failed attempts to get



everyone together, Pat and the members of the family, we had the hand over. It was a lovely day with many members attending and lots of scrummy food on offer for afternoon tea. The book belonged to George Turner in the year be-

fore he married Joyce Saniland in 1885. They had about 16 children, 10 of them being girls who all survived. Present we had Joyce Hill (nee McKenzie) holding the book, she is a Granddaughter, with Graeme McKenzie, her baby brother, she was 19 when he was born, and then George and Alice's Great Granddaughters Sandy Simpson (nee Hill) holding the photo and Robin Preen (nee Heiniger) It was a lovely opportunity to bring history alive.



Meanwhile Marjorie Head was given a beautiful hand written book of poetry by James Lambert Cliffe, the book was left at Winston House after his death. Denis Juler has researched the family back to New Zealand and spoken to a family member who will be very happy to receive it. Well done everyone.

### The Mystery of James Lambert Cliffe by Denise Juler



At a recent meeting of the Gympie Family History Society one of the members brought with her a book, containing the hand written poetry of one James Lambert. Not knowing what to do with it she suggested it may be of interest to the Society as it would be a shame to throw it out. Interest sparked the mission now was to find out who was James Lambert Cliffe and why this collection of his works ended up here in Gympie. The mystery deepened when research revealed that James Lambert Cliffe (Jim) was born on 24 October, 1898 Auckland, New Zealand. He was the son of Charles Frederick Cliffe and Sarah Harriet Seward. According to the New Zealand Marriage Index, he married Ruby Evelyn Gibbins on 27 December, 1923. She was born on 28 October, 1899 in Te Koptu, North Wairoa, Northland, New Zealand, the daughter of John (Jack) Gibbins and Mary Catherine Vincent. There has been quite a bit of research on the New Zealand Gibbins family but it contains little detail about Jim.

New Zealand Electoral Rolls further revealed that Jim and Ruby spent most of their married life in Waiuku, Auckland where Jim was a blacksmith. After Ruby died in 1961, Jim lived on in Waiuku until 1978. The couple had four children James David, Robert Vincent, Jessie Evelyn and Fred. Only the birth date of his only daughter Jessie Evelyn could be found. She was born 11 February, 1945 in Waiuku. The mystery remained how did the book end up in Gympie?

Closer investigation of the book revealed that it contained a hand written letter dated 6 December, 1978. It was addressed to the members of The Church of Christ, Pine Street, Gympie and was signed Fred Cliffe who was living in Mosman in New South Wales. In the letter, Fred thanks the members of the Church for the help and sympathy they had expressed at the recent death of his father James Lambert Cliffe. A search of the Gympie Cemetery Index now showed that indeed James Lambert Cliffe died on 21 November, 1978 and was buried in the Gympie Cemetery on 24 November, 1978. The mystery deepened again so Jim had left New Zealand at the age of 80 and come to live in Gympie in Queensland where he died not long after his arrival.

More investigation of the letter revealed several other clues which had been either overlooked or dismissed. According to one researcher, Jim Cliffe's daughter, Evelyn Jessie Williams nee Cliffe died on 26 August, 1997 East Wenatchee, Douglas, Washington, United States. So his only daughter born in New Zealand had died in the USA? Can't be right can it? We return to Fred's letter, "We appreciate the fact that he was frequently helped in his time of need particularly since my sister and brother-in-law left for the USA." Bingo!

Jim had left New Zealand to come and live in Gympie where his daughter and her husband now resided. The letter also thanks the church members for visiting him while he was a resident of Winston House where he passed away. Some parts of the story are still a mystery. Why did Jessie and her husband, Bill Williams go to the United States in 1978 leaving Jim here with obviously no family and is that why he went to Winston House?

Special mention is made in Fred's letter of Helen and Barry Bestman and he thanks them for their hospitality and help with the funeral arrangements

It would also seem there was a dispute of some sort with Winston House as he writes, " I also appreciate the effort they made, on my family's behalf, to get a fair deal in respect to Winston House. Unfortunately, mine and your efforts have not been successful in that regard."

A final clue was found on the back of the letter. This undated note appears to be from Helen and Barry Bestman's son Len.

"This book was given to my father WB Bestman to take care of by Mr Cliffe who was a resident here. (Gympie or Winston House?) The family of Mr Cliffe have since moved back to New Zealand. I have no contact for them and I don't know where they are. I'll leave it to you to do whatever you think fit. Len Bestman." Whilst there are many people with the surname Bestman on the Queensland Electoral Rolls, none match those mentioned in the correspondence about the book. Neither are there any references to Jessie and Bill Williams except for the record of her burial and that on 30 January, 1987 Jessie Eveline Williams and her husband William Frederick Williams applied for US citizenship. This is, at least, is confirmation of that part of the story.

Now to the book itself. All the poetry is of a religious nature, hand written signed and dated. It reveals the work of a very religious man with extensive Biblical and technical poetical knowledge. Jim Cliffe would not be the first person to educate himself through studying the Bible. The content of the poetry is wide ranging. There are recounts of well known Bible stories; commentary and applications of psalms and New Testament messages as well personal philosophies which apply to the times such as TV The Voice of the Prince of the Power of the Air which is a strongly worded sonnet expressing fear that the voice of television is overpowering the voice of God.

The poetry dates from 1952 through to close to his death in 1978 and also reveals a man of high standards and attention to detail. Every piece of poetry is annotated with a Biblical reference and also the syllable count of each line. In the margins of some pages he has written a plan for the stanzas of the poem or a calculation for the number of lines. Here he shows himself to be quite a student of Shakespeare's sonnets which always contained 63 lines. He writes sometimes in free verse but even when using this technique it is tight and well balanced. It is lyrical and the language inspirational.

"This verse comes not of fancy's flight

Or inspiration born

Nor yet in visions of the night

Are life's word pictures drawn."

Surprisingly, he also attempted to write in the epic form. This is a form of poetry where a series of poems on a particular topic are written. Chaucer's Canterbury Tales is a well know example These epics include Jesus of Life and Issues of Life. One particularly beautiful group is called Audrey's Garden and contains verses of garden observations such as The Silkworm ,all in praise of the power of God.

Finally, the forward if this collection sums up the motivation of James Lambert Cliffe to leave behind such a remarkable body of work.

"8 October, 1968. This book contains the writings of a sinner saved by grace. It is a human document written by a man with feet of clay and being an honest record from memory's page, it is to be accepted as such with all its' limitations.

The recorded utterances of a worthy man

Are the best, lasting contributions he may bequeath

To his and future generations

JL Cliffe 22/2/68"

## THELMA CLARICE TROTT

Thelma Clarice Trott was born in Gympie on the 23rd August 1905. She was the youngest of six children of parents, Henry Trott, a joiner born in Scarborough, Yorkshire, England, and Ann Jane (nee) Clements who was born in Maryborough.

A talented child, she started performing at an early age.

*The Gympie Times 19th September 1914 :*

*Little Miss Thelma Trott, who is already well known to Gympie audiences—will make an appeal on behalf of the “Babies Milk Fund” in England, for whom a collection will be taken on the door after the performance. She will recite, “The Call of England” and will sing “Please give me a Penny Sir.”*

*The Gympie Times 12th November 1914 : Convent School Concert - “Only a Simple Picture,” sung by Thelma Trott and A violin solo of “Polonaise” by Thelma Trott, was well played.*

During the war years she donated to the Soldiers Sock Fund and Gympie Hospital Fund, she attended St Peters Church Sunday School and came second in the 1916 examination for Junior Intermediate Scholars in Church of England Sunday Schools. From 1915 she received high marks in all her music examinations held by the Trinity College of Music. Always doing well in the Gympie and Maryborough eisteddfods one such competition saw her receiving a special prize.

*Gympie times 4th May 1916 : A special prize—In the recent Eisteddfod, a little girl ‘Darkie’ (Thelma Trott), competed against all comers in the open recitation ‘Cromwell and Wolsey,’ and her merits so impressed the adjudicators in this section, that Mr. G.H. Shoebridge, one of the adjudicators, states that Mr. John Morris and himself had decided to award her a special prize of 5/- as from themselves ‘The adjudicators,’ he adds, ‘I believe she will yet shine in the sphere she so courageously entered, although out-classed, (one might say of necessity) by older competitors, and they hoped she would realise the high promise of her Eisteddfod attempts.’*



Thelma attended the Gympie High School until 1922, and obtained 13th place in the University of Queensland Scholarship being admitted for a Bachelor of Arts degree. Whilst a pupil she performed with the Queensland University Music Society, and enjoyed the social side of university life.

1926 she toured with the famous English Humphrey Bishop Musical Comedy Company. She was advertised as the beautiful Mezzo Soprano from Gympie, predicting her a brilliant career. 1927 she was singing on wireless broadcast 3LO Melbourne, by the following year she was broadcasting Australia wide. She continued to tour with the Bishop Music Show until the 1930's when she joined Ernest Rolls' Revue touring New Zealand.



It was here that Thelma met Freda Stark a dancer in the show.. Freda was born in Kaero New Zealand in 1910, she was the daughter of James Stark, a shopkeeper, and Isabella (nee) Bramley. A student of St Benedict's School and Epsom Girls Grammar School in Auckland, her father encouraged her to learn to dance. As with Thelma she began entertaining at the age of 9 and learned classical ballet acquiring an advanced examination certificate in the 1930's. After leaving school Freda worked as a secretary during the day and danced under the stage name 'L'etoile" at night. Taking up classical ballet she gained her Royal Academy of dancing advanced examination in the 1930's.



. Eric Mareo was born in Sydney on the 30th September 1891 to parents Raimund Leo Pechotsch, a member of a Viennese Band who settled in Australia and Elizabeth Mary Dolman a widow, with two sons by her first marriage to Peter Curtis.. Mareo's father was the Director of the St Stephen's Cathedral Choir in Brisbane, before returning to Europe where he was Musical Director of the Lyceum Theatre Orchestra in London. During this time Mareo as he was known, began his musical studies in Berlin under the Polish composer Xavier Scharwenka. Just before the outbreak of the 1st world war his family returned to Australia, Mareo stayed in England.

In 1913, Mareo befriended a Doctor Gray and his wife, resulting in Mareo running away with the Doctor's wife. Two children were born and the Doctor made generous allowances to Mareo for the children's education. The woman in question passed away and in 1930 Mareo returned to Australia with the 2 children Elizabeth (Beth) and Graham leaving numerous debts for school fees and hotel bills. At the same time as his liaison with Mrs. Gray, Mareo was living with a professional violinist. . Mareo conducted orchestras in Sydney for a short time before being unemployed for 18 months. It was at this time he became engaged to a professional dancer, he borrowed £300 from her mother and by the time he left for New Zealand had many debts in Sydney and was known to be a heavy drinker. He was known in the orchestra as "The Gentleman Crook." Mareo married Thelma Trott on the 18th October 1933.

As the musical director of the famous Australian Musical Company the Ernest C. Rolls revue Thelma and Mareo arrived in Auckland in September 1933 with 200 tons of theatrical equipment. After touring the North Island he secured the services of 45 musicians and formed the Mareo Symphony Orchestra *"The stage was decked in crimson roses . Every music stand trailed it's garland. Busts of great composers stood in the background and the name Mareo was outlined in flowers. For the first time a battery of bright lights was hung low over the orchestras, as at a wrestling match, while the rest of the hall was darkened. When Mareo entered, the players rose and clapped him."*

Mareo would often be seen with *"A cigarette holder in one hand, a cane and gloves in the other, that long white cigarette holder was by itself sufficient to attract attention to the man. He used to walk down Queen Street with one end of it in his mouth, the other sticking rackishly about a foot in front of him."* *"It was typical of Mareo that, when the success of his symphony concerts made him a well known figure in the city, he persuaded a well known tobacconist to place in his window a photo of himself, with cigarette holder. Underneath ran the legend: "we stock the Mareo cigarette holder."*

Eric's *alter ego* was Eric Dolman, and he had 5 true *Nom de plumes*: Edgar Martell, Guy Franklin, Evan Marsden, Gary Foster and Leo Varney, names he used professionally.

Thelma Trott married Eric Mareo on the 18th October 1933. Thelma was a very highly strung woman and not suited to being stepmother to 2 children. She also had a poor housework ethic, Freda on the other hand was more than able to compensate with the housework and children. Freda had many lesbian relationships during her life and on meeting Thelma in 1933 the pair became lovers. Freda was a frequent visitor to the Mareo home, mostly staying the night. Mareo was rarely home and seemed to accept the situation. Thelma had a horror of pregnancy, she was heard to say : '*She would kill herself rather than have a baby.*' When the stage doors of the theatre closed and Mareo was out of work, he took to drink and an early barbiturate, Veronal (a depressant). On hearing the drug was to be banned, he stockpiled the drug, not a good move when your wife is a depressive. At this time it was believed he was having an affair with his musical assistant Eleanor Brownlee. The marriage was in tatters when on the 15th April 1935, Thelma was found unconscious in her home from a lethal dose of veronal found in a glass of milk. The milk was given to her by Mareo. She later died in hospital.

#### The Conviction:

10 months later in February 1936 Eric Mareo was charged with the murder of his wife Thelma Trott. The evidence was circumstantial as no one had actually seen him put the poison in her milk glass. Mareo's womanising, drinking and flamboyant lifestyle didn't help his case and the sordid stories were aired during the trial which was attended by crowds of mostly women eager to not miss any of the proceedings. The trial lasted for 9 days and the jury took 4 hours to find a guilty verdict (with mercy). He was sentenced to death by hanging. The Attorney General was not satisfied with the verdict so there was a second trial where he was again found guilty and sentenced to death. New Zealand was in the process of advocating the abolition of the death penalty and in August 1936 he was sentenced to Imprisonment for Life. The main evidence against Mareo came from Freda Stark and on being sentenced for the second time he stated: "*I have been sentenced on the lying word of Freda Stark.*" The public believed justice had been done, but the Judge and medical experts were not so sure. Freda was anything but unbiased which was the reason for a second trial, but the second jury also found him guilty. Mareo spent 2 months in solitary confinement in the condemned cell, feeling bitter and cynical.



Central figures in the Mareo case: Eric Mareo, the late Mrs. Mareo and Miss Freda Stark (left)—a snapshot at a picnic last year.

His daughter Betty visited him daily, during the trial, he sent her a letter telling her she was not his true daughter and her father was Mr. Gray. Feeling depressed he remembered the words of his adored daughter Betty : *'Please darling daddy, for my sake say your prayers,'* after the second trial he did pray and said he felt a calm and knew there would be no hanging. Betty and Graham wrote to the Governor General and Attorney General pleading their 'Daddies' innocence.

During his confinement his beloved Betty died in England after an operation, 2 years later his father died. Graham signed up for service in WW2 where he was killed in France a few weeks after receiving the Military Cross for his part in the Normandy Invasion. A Lieutenant at the time he was shot by an unknown person while off duty in a French town. 3 days after Graham's death Mareo partitioned the court asking to be freed to return to England to help Graham's widow with his 2 Grand Children. His daughter in law wrote saying she wanted to break all ties with Mareo as Graham had been having a lengthy affair with another woman. Mareo was released in May 1948 after serving 12 years in jail. Soon after his release he married a wealthy heiress Gladys Ethel Andreae his physiotherapist in jail. He also changed his name to Eric Curtis his mothers first husbands surname. On the 24th April 1949 he suffered a severe coronary thrombosis. A week before Christmas 1958 he was finally granted a discharge from probation, two years later Gladys Curtis died. Two weeks later, the violinist, Nora Bailey the 2nd Mrs. Mareo had flown to Auckland and married him. He had not seen her for 28 years. A month later he died of heart failure.

In October 1946 Mrs. Trott requested Thelma's decade old remains be disinterred and cremated. Her reasons—We have no one there to look after the grave and the fear of that man expressing the wish to be buried there. Freda was despondent after Thelma's death and was



encouraged by theatre colleagues to begin dancing again. During the 2nd World War she entertained troops under the nickname 'Fever of the Fleet.' She danced painted in gold wearing only a G string and feather head dress.

Below Thelma's headstone Freda placed a plaque, 'Waiting till we meet again.... Freda.' After her death on the 19th March 1999 her ashes were placed on Thelma's grave. L'etoile D'or (Golden Star)

Whether Thelma's death was suicide or Mareo did poison her will never be known. The book 'Trials of Eric Mareo' by Charles Ferrall and Rebecca Ellis is a good read and is the main source of this story. Other sources Trove, New Zealand Truth.

Lyn Fleming

## A MOTHER'S SON

### WORLD WAR 1 MYSTERY OF PRIVATE RICHARD MELLOR

Written by: Tim Lycett and Sandra Playle.

This is the story of Elizabeth Mellor who is buried in the Gympie Cemetery and her search for her son Samuel Rowley Mellor

During 1939, in her last letter to the A.I.F.'s Base Records office, Elizabeth Mellor wrote, *"I had a son named Samuel Rowley Mellor, his number was 1709 or 709, I forget now it was so long ago, though my tears don't dry when I think of him. He joined up under the name Richard Rowley Mellor, that was his elder brother's name. He gave his age as 22 but my darling was only 17 years. I am now nearing the closing of life, I am 80. I would be very grateful to you for a reply."*

Two weeks later there arrived in the mail the same reply she had been receiving since her first letter 20 years earlier explaining that her son, Richard Rowley Mellor, had illegally absented himself from Rollestone Training Camp, Wiltshire, England on 29th May 1918 and that nothing had been heard of him since. What it didn't contain was the authorities' suspicions regarding Mellor's disappearance. Suspicions they had no way of verifying and therefore understandably couldn't pass on to his next of kin.

Samuel Rowley Mellor was born at Rockhampton, Queensland on 8th October 1898 to parents James and Elizabeth Mellor, his older brother, Richard having been born in 1893. Samuel was the 8th child to James and Elizabeth who would ultimately have 9 children altogether. In 1907, when Samuel was only 8 years of age, his father died and although several of the older children were adults by this time, it undoubtedly left Elizabeth widowed with several of her younger children to care for.

In 1909, Elizabeth and the family moved from Queensland to Sydney, NSW, where she married her brother-in-law, Herbert Mellor. The couple was to have no children during their 4 years of marriage, which ended in the death of Herbert in 1913. On the 3rd August 1915 a young lad enlisted in the A.I.F. at Warwick Farm, Sydney, giving his name as Richard Rowley Mellor, a 21 year old mechanic from 147 Wigram Road, Forest Lodge, Sydney. He was immediately accepted and assigned to the 11th Reinforcements, 1st Light Horse Regiment. After his initial training, Mellor finally embarked for Egypt on the transport ship, 'Hawkes Bay' in October 1915, arriving in late November to join his regiment. By February 1916, Mellor was in hospital with a case of mumps and over the coming months would be in and out of hospital on several occasions suffering from various ailments including anaemia, rheumatism and fever. During this period he transferred to the 4th Division Cyclist Company and was eventually shipped to England in June 1916.

In August 1916 he was again in hospital, this time suffering from a perforated eardrum allegedly sustained whilst in Cairo during February. The medical report of this injury assessed him as having a permanent disability and that he would be unfit for any further overseas duties, recommending that he be returned to Australia for home service. Why this never occurred is unclear but Mellor managed to remain in England and was sent to the Rollestone Training Camp in Wiltshire. It was from here that on the 7th November

1916, Mellor absented himself without leave until being returned on the 10th January 1917. A subsequent Divisional Court Martial, that interestingly listed his age as only 18, sentenced him to 6 months detention with 2 months of that being remitted. However in early March 1917 he again absented himself and this time managed to stay at large for quite some time. The following February 1918, he and a fellow absentee delivered a small hand written note requesting the authorities come and collect them. This does not seem to have been acted upon and it wasn't until 22nd May that he was finally apprehended and returned to Rolleston Camp. Indeed his absence had been so long that an Officer was sent to identify him, but there remains no record of the outcome. Perhaps the identification never even occurred because Mellor's return was very short lived and on the 29th May he absented himself once more - this time never to return or officially be heard of again.

At about the same time of Mellor's final disappearance, a young Englishman named Frank Oswald Wills was caught up in a British Army enlistment drive and joined as 253617 Gunner Wills, 'X' Trench Mortar Battery, 50th Division, Royal Field Artillery, subsequently being sent to France. Unfortunately, very little is known of Wills before 1919 as his service file was amongst those destroyed by the bombing of London during the 2nd World War. What has been discovered is that Wills deserted the army two weeks after the Armistice in November 1918 but was located and arrested in Paris the following March. It was during his alcohol-fueled arrest on 12th March 1919, at the Hotel de la Poste that Wills shot 2 military policemen with a revolver he'd been carrying. Tragically, one of the 2 wounded MP's, Lance Corporal Webster, died 3 days later.

Between 14-16th May 1919, whilst delivering his own defense at the Military court martial for murder, attempted murder and desertion, Wills made a surprising admission. He claimed he had originally joined the Australian army as a 16 year old in 1915 and had been in a number of engagements in both Egypt and Gallipoli but had been discharged during 1917 as a result of contracting a fever in Egypt that had left him with mental problems and memory lapses. He further stated he had joined the British Army in April 1918 but had got into bad company and began drinking and gambling heavily. At the conclusion of the court martial, Wills was convicted and sentenced to death.

Several days later, on the 19th May, Major Burford Sampson, Officer in Charge, A.I.F. Troops, Paris, received a telephone call informing him that Gunner Wills had expressed the wish to speak to an Australian officer. At 11 am the following day, Sampson visited Wills at the detention centre in Grand Roue where during the resultant conversation, Wills made the startling confession that he was in reality 1709 Private Richard Mellor. He then proceeded to give Sampson an extremely accurate and detailed description of both Mellor's personal and service life, adding that he had enlisted in the A.I.F. at age 16 and that after running away for the final time, he had been scooped up in the British enlistment during 1918. Being too scared to admit his true identity, he had given the name Frank Oswald Wills. His final request to Sampson during this meeting was that he contact his mother, Mrs. E. Mellor of 147 Wigram Rd., Forest Lodge, Sydney, and advise her of his fate. Knowing he was on the eve of his execution with no further hope of preventing it, why would Wills suddenly claim to be someone else and ask for a mother to be notified of her son's shameful death if he wasn't truly really that son? There is no logical reason for this unless Wills and Mellor were the same man.

After the meeting with Wills, Sampson returned to his office and that afternoon prepared a report regarding Wills' claims'. This was immediately forwarded to Lt. Colonel

Wynter, A.A.G. A.I.F. Headquarters, Charleroi, who in turn forwarded it to A.I.F. Headquarters in London on 23rd May, requesting an urgent reply with what action they wished taken regarding the matter. Unfortunately, as evidenced by a series of telegrams between Paris and London in early June, this report was mislaid and never reached headquarters in London until a second copy was forwarded on 7th June. The reply from London to Lt. Colonel Wynter on 12th June 1919 advised him that after being considered by the Judge Advocate General, it had been decided that there was no further action to be taken. By



that time it was far too late for Gunner Frank Wills anyway. He had been executed by a firing party at 4.14 am on 27th May 1919 and buried later that same day at St. Marie Cemetery, Le Havre.

It is probably fair to assume that since Wills was already dead and buried, understandably there was no possible means by which the Judge Advocate General's office could reasonably investigate nor verify Wills' admissions and therefore no further action could be taken to substantiate his claims. Thus they were to remain unproven.

It must also be noted that a careful examination of the trial transcript reveals that nowhere during the proceedings did Wills state who his next of kin was nor how they could be contacted. However in the weeks following his execution an Australian file was begun for the British soldier 253617 F.O. Wills, 'X' Trench Mortar Battery. The file is completely blank with the exception of several memo's requesting Mrs. Wills be located and notified of her son's fate. Unfortunately, Mrs. Wills could not be located at the address given, Wigram Road, Forest Lodge, Sydney—the same address as Elizabeth Mellor.

In replying to the request on 11th July, 1919, the commandant of the 2nd Military District in Sydney stated in a memo,

*"I desire to inform you that all efforts to trace the next of kin have been without avail. The matter was referred to the press but no response has been received"*

In the following years, Elizabeth Mellor continually wrote to A.I.F., Base records, Melbourne, requesting information regarding her son, Richard, and his service record is littered with her increasingly desperate pleas. At one point during this period she declared that her son must have been killed in action and at another time she claimed to have heard that he was in an English asylum. All these avenues were investigated by the relevant authorities and resulted in the same response; illegal absentee since 29th May 1918 with nothing further known.

However in one of her earliest letters during 1919, Elizabeth adamantly claimed to have recognized her son in a newspaper clipping.

This clipping published in The Sun Newspaper and the Anzac Bulletin, was of a soldier who claimed to have been a prisoner of war suffering from shell shock and whose identity was uncertain. The authorities eventually replied to her letter and advised her that the soldier in the photo had been identified as an Imperial deserter but not her son.



Coincidentally, this clipping had appeared in the newspaper only a matter of weeks prior to the Commandant of the 2nd Military District, Sydney, stating that the search for Wills' next of kin had been advertised in the press with no response. Of further interest, a hand written note in the margin of her letter made some time later by someone at Base Records makes the comment, 'Probably the photo was of her son'. This reference relates directly to the documents in Mellor's service file regarding the execution of Wills and his claim to be Mellor.

In 1933, at the behest of Elizabeth Mellor, J.T. Jennings MHR, made a personal enquiry with the assistant Minister for Defence., Joseph Francis, who in turn requested a report from Base Records about the matter. The subsequent minute paper from Base Records forwarded to Francis was headed 'secret' and contained the information regarding the claims made by Wills but stated that, following the instructions received from Army Headquarters, the practice was to advise any enquirers that Mellor had been discharged as a consequence of being an illegal absentee and that nothing further was known about his movements. Francis also adhered to this practice and Jennings was formally advised with the same response routinely provided to Elizabeth Mellor. The minute paper, along with other potentially sensitive documents relating to this matter were then filed together, marked 'secret' and kept in a locked steel cabinet inside the officer in Charge's office at Base Records.

What is of further importance from this exchange of letters and reports during 1933 is the fact that Elizabeth Mellor makes her first admission in a letter to Jennings that Richard Mellor is actually her younger son, Samuel

As further proof of his true identity it must be noted that upon initial enlistment with the A.I.F., Mellor claimed to be 21, the correct age had it been Richard. However during the 1917 court martial of Mellor he was listed as 18 and in the subsequent 1919 court martial of Wills, he made the admission to both the conveners and later to Sampson that he had been 16 at the time of his enlistment. Both of these events exactly add up to what would have been Samuel's age at the time

Recent investigations of birth, death and marriage records have proven that Richard Rowley Mellor survived the war years, having been rejected from enlisting in the A.I.F. three times during 1916 on medical grounds, later marrying twice and fathering several children. However of Samuel there is nothing. In a further successful search for Mellor descendants, those located were surprised to hear that a service record for Richard even existed as they were of the belief that he had not served during WW1. But when questioned about Samuel, they knew nothing, not even any anecdotal family stories except the fact that he had been born.

But when one Mellor descendant produced Elizabeth Mellor's death certificate, they inadvertently provided information that suggested a someone different outcome to this tale that deserves consideration. It has long been an unanswered question why Elizabeth

Mellor suddenly stopped writing to Base Records in 1939 after such long and persistent efforts. As suggested by her final letter, it was thought that she was simply elderly, ill and possibly just too heartbroken to continue.

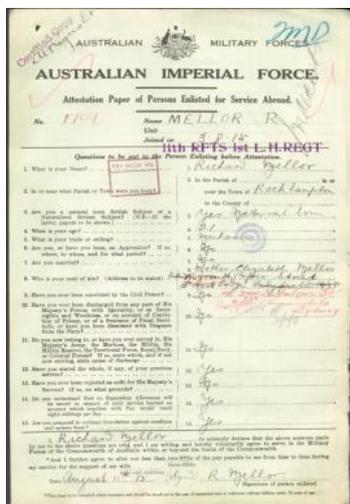
At the time of her death in 1951, Elizabeth Mellor was living with her son Richard, at his farm near Gympie, and it was he who provided the details for her death certificate. Interestingly, in the section of the certificate asking for details of her children, only 5 of her 6 sons are accounted for. Of these sons, 3 are named (Martin, Richard and Basil) and 2 not named, being simply listed as deceased. Presumably, the 2 deceased sons were Herbert and Rupert who had both died prior to 1951.

What then of Samuel and why is there no recognition of him on his Mother's death certificate? Richard would surely have known of his existence. Could it be that at some time after 1939, Elizabeth was quietly given "unofficial" notification of the Army's suspicions and rather than endure the public disgrace, Samuel's memory was simply erased from their family history? This certainly explains the sudden halt to her enquiries and would also account for the lack of knowledge about Samuel in later generations.

we assume this to be the likely reason, it follows that a belief existed amongst authorities at the time Mellor and Wills were the same person. This in turn, must add considerable weight to any examination of the Mellor/Wills debate.

Ultimately we must remember that the crimes committed by Wills were inexcusable and this is not an attempt to exonerate or justify his actions. He was fairly dealt with by the military justice system and received a punishment befitting the times.

To this very day, 253617 Gunner Frank Oswald Wills lies in the St Marie Cemetery, Le Havre, under a headstone bearing only his inscription. Although the destruction of Wills service file means that the relationship between these 2 men may never truly be solved, the question still remains. Is there enough evidence to suggest beyond reasonable doubt that the 2 men were the same person? If so, it is our belief that the headstone should be changed or at the very least have a notation added to reflect the true identity of the man who lies beneath it. Without wishing to begin a heated debate about the possible exhumation of a named Commonwealth War Grave for the purpose of DNA testing, it would seem the only certain way to be sure of the answer.



Unfortunately the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has a strict policy of not exhuming the remains already buried in CWGC cemeteries for the purpose of DNA or ID. Fortunately this doesn't apply to remains that are still being discovered in the fields and formally unknown graves outside any official cemetery. The mass battle field graves at Fromelles for example where bodies are exhumed and then reburied with honours in CWGC cemeteries thus, DNA can be obtained before the official burial.

Elizabeth Mellor lies in our Gympie Cemetery, she has no headstone. There are 213 pages in Richard's file.