



Whatever we think of war, the bravery of those who serve will never be in dispute. They are the reason we commemorate ANZAC Day. The stories in this brochure are some small acknowledgement to a few local people who have served, though of course we can never mention them all. The greatest acknowledgment and thanks we can offer is to never forget.

As always I would like to thank the RSL sub-branches for their assistance with this brochure, and for their continued work for remembrance. This 100th Anniversary of the ANZAC landing gives us even greater cause to attend a service, and remember the sacrifices of those before us.

**Clayton Barr MP**  
State Member for the Electorate of Cessnock



### ANZAC Day 2015— Services and Ceremonies Commemorating War, Celebrating Peace

- Reflection Service** at St Paul's Church, Kurri Kurri on Sunday 19th April at 6.00pm. All Welcome.
- Abermain** The march to move off from corner Bathurst Street and Cessnock Road at 8.30am. March to Jeffries Park Cenotaph for service. Breakfast at Abermain Bowling Club afterwards.
- Branxton** Dawn Service at Branxton Rotunda, John Rose Avenue, 5.20am. Main march at 11.15am from corner New England Highway and Elderslie Street to Rotunda for Service.
- Cameron Park** Closest Service West Wallsend (see below)
- Cessnock** Dawn Service at the Memorial in Darwin Street at 5.30am. Service at Veteran's Park Aberdare Road 9.30am. March from Ex-Services Club at 11.15am to Memorial for Service.
- Edgeworth** Closest Service West Wallsend (see below)
- Greta** Dawn Service at 5.30am at the Cenotaph on New England Highway. Main march at 9.30am from corner of Nelson Street-New England Highway. March to Cenotaph for Service.
- Holmesville** Closest Service West Wallsend (see below).
- Kearsley** March from Tennis Courts at 4.50am for Dawn Service at Community Hall at 5.00am.
- Kurri Kurri** Dawn Service at Cenotaph Rotary Park at 5.00am. Day Service march to begin at 9.45am (from Mitre 10) to Cenotaph for 10.00am Service.
- Neath** Service at the Neath Hotel from 10.00am, including the lighting of the Miner's Lamp.
- Millfield** Gather at St. Luke's Anglican Church at 5.15am, for the march to Millfield Public School for the Dawn Service.
- Paxton** Meet at corner McDonald and Anderson Avenues at 5.10am, march to Paxton Public School for service. Breakfast at the Bowling Club afterwards.
- Weston** March to begin from Sub-Branch Hall on Cessnock Road at 9.00am. The march will proceed along Cessnock Road, Hall, First and Station Streets prior to Service at the Cenotaph.
- West Wallsend** Service at Memorial Park starting at 10am.
- Wollombi** Service at ANZAC Reserve at 5.45am, followed by breakfast.

# ANZAC DAY

*100 Years*



*25 April 2015*  
*Lest We Forget*



## 100 Years Ago

*100 years ago Australian history took a violent turn. In the darkness of the early morning boatloads of young Australians and New Zealanders, guns in hand, rode the tides of the Dardanelles towards Gallipoli.*

*Many had gone seeking an adventure. Few around the world knew the way developments in military technology had changed the way wars were fought. It was no longer a contest of rifle against rifle and bayonet against bayonet, it was the rattling of the machine gun and the whirring of heavy artillery against prone human bodies. In England, footage of the war shown in cinemas drew shocked cries of 'Oh my god they're dead!' from the audience. Few of the men on those boats on that morning had any idea of what awaited them.*

*It was carnage. The Australians were showered with shards of fiery metal before they had even reached the shore.*

*It is hard to find glory in Gallipoli, or any part of the First World War. Glory is not what it was about. It was a profound human tragedy, where international politics claimed the lives of at least 15 million of the world's people.*

*We know that Australia wore a great burden. A small nation of 4 million, Australia lost 60,000. 60,000 lives, mostly young, ended in the mountains in Turkey or the mud of France and Belgium. Today most of us can only try and imagine what effect that had on local communities. In towns like Cessnock, Kurri Kurri, Branxton and West Wallsend the shortage of men of a certain age must have been noticeable for generations. Men from these and many other local towns lay buried all over Turkey and Western Europe.*

*In the following pages are a few of their stories. We tell them in order to give faces and background to the names we see on Cenotaphs and Memorials across our region.*

*The cover of this year's brochure features the Kurri Kurri War Memorial Cenotaph, one of the many which will be hosting an ANZAC Day service this year. A full list of all the ANZAC Day services across the Cessnock State Electorate can be found on the back page of this brochure.*

## The Local Cost of Gallipoli

The Gallipoli campaign lasted eight terrible months, from the original landing on the 25th of April until the final troops were evacuated from the peninsula in December. Over that time, our local area lost many young lives. Dozens of men from our region and more specifically this Electorate were part of the most infamous battles of the campaign. A few are mentioned here.

Several locals were there on the beaches in the darkness of the dreadful first morning. **James Howe Sharp of West Wallsend** appears on the Honour Roll as having died of wounds on the 26th of April, 1915, only one day into the campaign. **Jack Patrick Whiteford of Greta** and **Alfred Edward Wood of Kurri Kurri** were killed in action a week later on the 2nd of May. They were both only 21 years old. **Joseph Schmitt of West Wallsend**, a fellow member of the 2nd Battalion, fell that same day at the age of 20. Before the end of the first month **George Putland of West Wallsend**, **Edward Reece of North Rothbury** and **Michael Melloy of Abermain** had also fallen.

The campaign lurched on into the northern summer, and in August the Australians incurred some of their worst losses during two famously savage and largely futile assaults. The name Lone Pine is widely known. Between the 6th and the 9th of August, 1915, a total of 4,600 Australians fought there, and around half were either killed or wounded. Among the dead were **Herbert Schofield and George Simpson of Kurri Kurri**. As mentioned earlier, **Tom and Frank Brown from Cessnock** were wounded in the battle.

The Charge at the Nek was launched the next day, August 7, and is one of the most tragic episodes of the campaign. Hundreds of Australian soldiers hopped the bags into a near-impenetrable wall of machine gun fire, and less than half survived. Official War Historian Charles Bean called it "A deed of self-sacrificing bravery which has never been surpassed in military history - the charge of the Australian Light Horse into certain death at the call of their comrades need during a crisis." Among the men who charged and fell were **Mark Reed of Weston**, **Garnet Tinson of Cessnock** and **Frank and Stanley Villis of Aberdare**.

It is possible that the families of these local men found some consolation in the now famous words of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who was a commander of the Ottoman forces at Gallipoli and later became President of the Republic of Turkey:

***'Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives ... you are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours ... You, the mothers, who sent their sons from far away countries wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well.'***

## The Ginger Haired Devil from Pelaw Main

A previous edition of this brochure told the story of Captain Clarence Jeffries VC, Abermain's Victoria Cross winner, and made brief mention of James Bruce MC, DCM. Bruce, known as the 'Ginger Haired Devil' by German soldiers, was a friend of Jeffries' father. He was Scottish by birth, and was 38 years old when he enlisted in early 1916. His story is worth telling in its own right.



Bruce's actions are notable for their extraordinary bravery. He first earned the Distinguished Conduct Medal on the 12th of October 1917 during the Battle of Passchendaele, after launching a daring attack on a machine gun position which captured four machine guns and 35 men. His citation for the award stated that "his courage and resourcefulness set a magnificent example to the men."



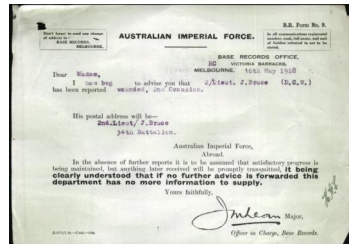
He then received the Military Cross for another attack on a machine gun position on the 8th of April, 1918. Bruce's apparent disregard for danger saw him lead a crew of men to rush and capture the machine gun position. One can only imagine the risk involved in such an action.

The Ginger Haired Devil's audacity could not endure however. On the 17th of July, 1918, James Bruce was killed during the famous Australian victory at Villers-Brettonneux.

The war would only run for another four months.

Bruce's military service has been wonderfully documented through Government archives, and tells a story not only of his time in the Army, but of his wife's endeavours to learn of his fate and make arrangements after his passing. The chaos of the war meant that information was hard to come by. Mrs Bruce received numerous telegrams and letters informing her of James being wounded.

Her only way of writing to him was to address correspondence to 'Australian Imperial Force, Abroad'. Her requests for more information were regularly denied, as with so many soldiers receiving treatment it was nearly impossible to trace individuals. Sadly many on the home front suffered throughout the war without knowing much of their loved one's fate. After her husband's death Mrs Bruce was left with a package of his belongings, and had to write away to receive his medals, which had not been awarded at the time of his death. The Ginger Haired Devil was never forgotten: in 1960 his son Thomas wrote to the Government seeking the citation for his father's awards.



## Oliver and Thomas Gibbs: Branxton Brothers at War

Branxton's First World War Memorial lists 146 names of locals who served. It is believed that 90% of these men were under the age of 25 and were unmarried. There were also a number of brothers who served together. The expression 'the lost generation' is often used to describe the way huge numbers of young men were wiped out from small towns during the First World War, and Branxton provided a sad example of this.

One pair of brothers from Branxton were Oliver and Thomas Gibbs. Oliver joined up in Liverpool on the 13th of July 1915. He was 21 years old, about to turn 22. He left Sydney on the 5th of October, 1915 on the HMAT Themistocles to serve in France. On the night of the 28th of July 1918 Oliver was involved in an attack on Morlancourt in the Somme region. The German Army had spent the past months in a desperate offensive, and the Allies' ability to hold the line and then counter-attack would eventually break the German war effort. On the night in question, Oliver acted with such bravery that he was recommended for a Military Medal. In his recommendation, Brigadier J.C. Stewart wrote:

*"This NCO displayed great bravery and devotion to duty [...] The telephone line was cut many times by shell fire, but this NCO at once, utterly disregarding danger and at great personal risk, mended the breaks and was instrumental in keeping the Company in touch with the Battalion headquarters."*

Oliver's Military Medal was approved, and was formally gazetted on the 11th of December, 1918. It is however unlikely that he ever knew of it. Perhaps owing to the same disregard for danger, Oliver was killed in action at Bullecourt on the 30th of September, and buried in Tincourt New British Cemetery. His mother was informed of his award on the 24th of March, 1919, and received formal word of his death on the 4th of October that year, a full twelve months after he fell.

Thomas enlisted on the 2nd of September, 1916 at Rutherford, a month short of his 20th birthday. He departed Sydney in November, and served in France until the end of the war. He survived, and returned to Australia on the 3rd of July, 1919.



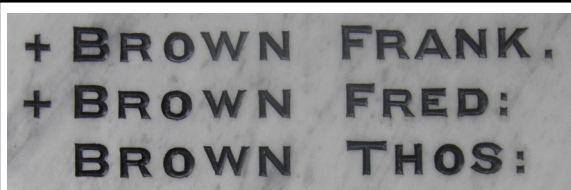
There are no known photos of Oliver, but Thomas is circled in this photo taken in England. He is pictured with other men from the 36th Battalion, many of whom were also from the Hunter region. It was common in the First World War for people from the same area to be placed together.



## The Brown Brothers - From Cessnock to Gallipoli

Three young men from the same Cessnock family found themselves in the carnage of Gallipoli. Their stories are at times tragic and grisly, but they also offer an insight into the way the communities of that era supported people who had served.

Thomas and Frank Brown enlisted together in January 1915. On the 9th of April a farewell was held for them and two other men, Cyril Knight and Thomas Rowe. The large crowd in attendance gave generously to support the men financially, so that both of them received 3 pounds 17 and sixpence for their travels.



*The three brothers' names as they appear on the Cessnock Cenotaph. The crosses next to Frank and Fred's names indicate that they gave their lives in service.*

After training in England they joined their battalion at Gallipoli on the 17th of June. Six weeks later they were thrown into the ferocity of Lone Pine, one of the most famous and brutal battles of the Gallipoli campaign. At 5.30pm on the 6th of August, the men hopped the bags and attacked the Turkish lines, amongst a hail of shells and machine gun fire. Losses were huge. For the first 24 hours wounded men were stuck in the trenches, amongst the dead, in the heat of the day.



*Lone Pine, site of the brutal battle.*

Frank was one of them. He had been shot in the hip and copped several shrapnel wounds. He was taken to hospital in Egypt and was eventually relocated to England. Tom was wounded soon after, having been shot in the right eye and having shrapnel in his arm. He also had to wait for treatment, and would later tell a gruesome story of maggots in the wound in his eye preventing infection.

Two days after Thomas and Frank arrived at Gallipoli, their brother Fred enlisted in Sydney. He left for Gallipoli on the 20th of August. One can only imagine the scene which greeted him. By that time the campaign had drifted into a stalemate, with both sides suffering in the heat of summer. By the time the Allied forces finally evacuated the peninsula in December, an estimated 8,700 men had either been killed or were missing.

## The Brown Brothers - From Cessnock to Gallipoli

After the December evacuation Fred was moved to the Western Front to take part in the struggle for Pozieres. Artillery shells were the biggest killer of the war, and it has been said that a shell fell on average every three seconds at Pozieres. On the 9th of August 1916 one of them struck Fred near Mouquet Farm, and he died instantly. He was one of the 6,800 Australians to die in the seven weeks of fighting at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm.



*The main road in Pozieres after the battle. The village was literally blown away.*

Thomas remained hospitalised because of his eye injury and eventually returned home to a hero's welcome in Cessnock in May 1916. He was carried to a car specially arranged by the Girls' Patriotic League as a large crowd cheered.

Frank arrived home a month later to an equally boisterous welcome. Again there was a large crowd at the railway station and a special car to take him home. He even had the Cessnock Band playing 'Home Sweet Home' when he arrived at the family home.

His fight was far from over though, as his injuries continued to trouble him. Over the next four years he was in and out of hospital, and underwent 30 operations. He died on the 29th of October, 1920, aged just 24. The records state that his death was 'from the effects of wounds received at Lone Pine, Gallipoli'.

The Cessnock Cenotaph has a cross next to his name, rightly reflecting that even though Frank did not die at Lone Pine, the injuries suffered during his service there undoubtedly caused his death.



*The site of the Battle of Lone Pine is now an Australian Military Cemetery, and is home to a dawn service on ANZAC Day.*

*It is considered a sacred site in Australian history.*