

Harry Raymond Homer

Lance Corporal

3593

Australian Army Medical Corps



The Homer family of Kington had a very interesting life, full of happiness, sadness and a considerable amount of adventure. Benjamin George Homer had been born in Kington in 1864. A builder by trade, in 1887 he married Alice Price and in the early part of 1889 their first child, Sydney James was born. For Benjamin the happiness of Sydney's birth was swiftly followed by tragedy. Shortly after the birth, Alice passed away leaving Benjamin to care for his child alone. Benjamin moved in with his parents, Benjamin senior and Emma at 4 Balls Yard, Kington and most certainly Sydney's grandmother would have helped with care while Benjamin continued working as a Builder. The highs and lows of life were certainly evident in Benjamin's life when tragedy struck again in 1891, when sadly Sydney also passed away. However, Benjamin recovered from this double blow and in 1892 he remarried. Elizabeth Sarah Williams from Lyonshall was his new wife and together they were to have many adventures.

Their first child together, Lauderdale, was born in 1893. He was followed by Herbert (1894) more about Herbert later, **Harry Raymond Homer**, the focus of our piece (1895), Ernest (1897), Alfred (1899), Edith (1901), Hilda (1906) and finally Jack Benjamin in 1907. In the 1901 census the family were living in Mill Street, Kington. Benjamin was clearly an active member of Kington society, serving on Kington Urban Council for a time but a report in the 19th March 1910 edition of the Kington Times records his retirement from that position. This would prove to be the precursor to a total change of circumstances for the Homer family. Harry was educated at Lady

Hawkins' School but his education in England was cut short when in 1910 the family emigrated to Australia.



The emigration process started when Benjamin sailed, alone, from Liverpool on the 29th of April 1910 aboard the S.S. Dorset, bound for Brisbane. He clearly preceded the main party in order to make arrangements for the rest of his family who left these shores from London on the 26th of October 1910 aboard the S.S. Norseman. With 895

passengers in total it was the largest carrier of immigrants to Australia that year. On board were Elizabeth, with her children Lauderdale, Herbert, Harry, Ernest, Fred, Edna, Hilda aged 4 and Master Jack aged 2. The voyage of 13000 miles took them 56 days and was undertaken non-stop to Melbourne where 322 passengers alighted. Norseman then sailed on to Sydney and eventually arrived in Brisbane on the 21st of December 1910, where a further 249 immigrants disembarked, the Homer family among them. The ship arrived at Dalgety's Wharf, Brisbane at 7pm and for sure Benjamin would have been waiting to welcome his family. Their new home was to be in Station Road, Indooroopilly, a suburb of Brisbane, Queensland.

At the outbreak of war, dominion countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand were quick to support Great Britain. The Germans may have hoped those countries would have taken the opportunity to seek independence from their colonial masters but no, men of the dominions volunteered in their thousands to fight the common enemy. Harry took this opportunity and in Brisbane on the 9th of November 1914 he enlisted into the 2nd Light Horse Field Ambulance as Private 505 Homer. Harry was just nineteen and recorded his trade as, carpenter.



Harry took the oath of allegiance at Enoggera in Queensland on the 16th November 1914 and immediately started his basic training. On the 14th of March 1915 he was promoted to Driver and sent to No3 Transport Company 'B' Section. Shortly after, the Ambulance shipped out heading for Egypt with an ultimate destination of Gallipoli. When the unit reached Egypt Harry was transferred to No7 Field Ambulance, which coincidentally was the same unit his brother Herbert was serving in. Private 3593 Homer left Alexandria on the 4th of September 1915 bound for the island of Lemnos located at the head of the Bosphorus. Lemnos was a relatively safe staging post prior to their final

advance to the Gallipoli Peninsular. On the 12th of September, 7th Field Ambulance sailed aboard the SS Osmanieh heading for ANZAC Cove on the western side of the peninsula. They arrived the next day and immediately set about establishing themselves. The Ambulance was made up of three Sections, A, B and C, Harry was in 'A' Section and based at Waldens Point. This was a position taken from the Turks shortly after the initial ANZAC landings in the April. The location of the Field Ambulance was in a gully and thought to be in a relatively safe position, but because of the surrounding terrain, the Section were often shelled by Turkish guns on higher ground. On the 27th of October a large Howitzer shell landed directly on the hospital tent, killing one patient and injuring one attendant. 21 others in the tent were lucky to escape unscathed. Conditions on the peninsula were dire, water was in short supply, the heat was oppressive in the summer and winter months were freezing cold. It was only a matter of time before the allied troops started falling ill. Medical staffs were not immune to sickness and the 9th November 1915 Harry himself was admitted into 7th Field Ambulance suffering from the effects of jaundice. He was immediately evacuated to No16 Casualty Clearing Station on the beach at ANZAC Cove. Here his illness deteriorated and on the **12th November 1915**, Lance Corporal Harry Homer died of his illness. Harry's medical record simply states that he died of 'Acute Jaundice'. He must have been highly regarded within his unit since his death was recorded in the official War Diary. Reporting the names on Other Ranks in War Diaries was very rare. The report stated "*H R Homer of A Section died after 5 days illness from jaundice apparently commencing the majority of the mild jaundice cases common at present*". Further scrutiny of the Ambulance War Diary indicates that Harry was not the only one suffering with poor health.

In the chaos of war the news of Harry's death was slow to get back to his family in Indooroopilly. They also seem to have had further difficulties getting his personal effects returned and outstanding monies owed to him. His father Benjamin writes numerous polite letters to the authorities trying to get closure on their son's death. Letters contained in Harry's service documents would indicate that his brother Herbert was present at his death and it was he who initially informed the family of Harry's death. Harry's mother Elizabeth made a claim to the Australian authorities for a pension for her son, this was granted on the 17th of February 1916 at the rate of 10 shillings per fortnight, for how long is not specified. For his brief service to his country and the Commonwealth Harry was awarded the 1914/15



Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli

Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal. Harry's name was read out at the Kington Peace Service held on the 6th July 1919 and his name was included on the Kington Memorial. He is commemorated at the Lone Pine Memorial on the Gallipoli Peninsular, Ref 69. Lone Pine was the location of the fiercest fighting of the conflict. It commemorates the death of more than 4900 Australian and New Zealand casualties. His name is also on the Australian War Memorial at Campbell, Australia, panel 182.

Following Harry's death it appears Benjamin, his father, was galvanised into action and felt he must contribute to the struggle in some way. Before emigrating to Australia, he had been a Colour Sergeant in the old 1st Herefordshire Volunteers, this made him ideally suited to take a job as drill instructor to Australian recruits. He was very proud of his new staff position and wrote to his old friend William Price, Kington Town Surveyor, to inform him of his new found position. However the heartache of loss was not to end for Benjamin and Elizabeth with the death of their son Harry, just eighteen months later they were to lose another son Herbert.

Elizabeth, Harry's mother, died on the 25th July 1921 in Queensland. Benjamin did return to Kington in 1925 and stayed at 33 Church Street. Benjamin was accompanied by his daughter Hilda (18) and youngest son Jack (17). A departure record dated 24th February 1925 shows the three of them sailing from Liverpool aboard a ship called the Jervis Bay, bound for Brisbane. It is not clear if this was the last time the family visited Britain but Australian death records show Benjamin died on the 16th June 1946, again in Queensland, aged 82.

One small irony to this story was the fate of the S.S. Norseman. She was built in 1897 as a German merchantman at Harland and Wolfe, the Belfast ship makers and was originally called the SS Brasilia. In 1900 the ship was sold to the British Transport company The Dominion Line, who changed her name to Norseman. At the time of the Homer family's trip to Australia in 1910 she was leased to the British, Aberdeen Line shipping company. On the 22nd January 1916 she was carrying a war cargo of mules and munitions from Plymouth to Salonika. In the Bay of Salonika she was torpedoed and badly damaged by the German submarine U39. Norseman was towed to Mudros, the small island south of Gallipoli, which the allies had used the year before as a stepping stone for invasion. Here she sank and was eventually disposed of, where she foundered, in 1920. It is ironic that a ship built for the German merchant navy should be sunk by a German submarine.

To conclude the sad tale of Harry Homer it is worth recording the epitaph Harry's parents placed in their local newspaper 'The Queenslander' on 17th November 1915, it simply read '**He gave his life in a noble cause**'.



Researched and developed by Mark Wheatland