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War Service of Fitzroy Citizens Before the First World War

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WHILE researching the service of the citizens of Fitzroy in the Great War, I came across some information relating to those from this suburb who had served in earlier conflicts. Our impressive Honour Roll, prominently displayed in Fitzroy Town Hall, commemorates Service in the First World War, at least in part. There is no similar board for other conflicts prior to or after that war.

Even an Honour Roll has some limitations. Most, like ours, list those who served, and particularly mark those who died. The Fitzroy First World War Honour Roll is far from complete. It was put together after the war by individual application to the Town Hall and many - indeed some might reckon the majority - were left out for various reasons. Why was this so?

Who is a Fitzroy citizen, particularly when war service is considered? Should it include those born in the suburb, those who lived there prior to enlistment, those who enlisted there, those whose next-of-kin resided there during the war, those who settled there soon afterwards, those who died here or even those who played VFL for the Fitzroy team? In an ideal world, I would suggest that all these categories might be equally eligible. However, imagine some of the practical difficulties (particularly in 1919) of finding the correct details of, say, a Fitzroy-born soldier then resident in Queensland!

The purpose of this article is to list those who served from Fitzroy in conflicts before the First World War. A list like this will be incomplete and inaccurate in some of its details. For example, it is extremely difficult to verify all addresses and identities - the Joneses and Smiths are always a challenge - and the use of aliases is a further complication.

The lists are short for the Maori Wars, the Crimean War, the Soudan Contingent and the Boxer Rebellion. The greater number of Fitzroy participants in the Anglo-Boer War make it impractical to give a comprehensive list in this article, but I have deposited a listing of those I have found in the Local History collection at the Fitzroy Library.

Crimean War (1853-1856)



*Private Thomas Grady, VC,
DCM*

Quite a number of British Crimean War veterans immigrated to Australia. One, of particular distinction, was found to be destitute in Fitzroy in 1891 at the height of the depression then affecting the colony.

Private Thomas Grady, born at Cheddah in Galway, Ireland, in 1835, originally enlisted under age in the 99th Foot (2nd Battalion The Wiltshire Regiment) at Liverpool on

8th June 1853. He transferred to the 4th King's Own on 13th February 1854. Whilst serving in the trenches in front of Sebastopol during the Crimean War he was recommended for the Victoria Cross (VC) by Captain Lushington, RN:

For having, on the 18th October 1854, volunteered to repair the Embrazures of the Sailor's Battery on the left Attack, and effected the same, with the assistance of one other Volunteer, under a very heavy fire from a line of batteries.

Shortly afterwards Tom Grady received a second VC recommendation:

For gallant conduct on the 22nd November 1854, in the repulse of the Russian attack on the advanced Trench on the Left Attack, when on being severely wounded, he refused to quit the front, encouraging, by such determined bearing, the weak force engaged with the Enemy to maintain its position.

Since the warrant for the VC at that time did not allow for a second award, Grady was decorated with the Distinguished Conduct Medal. He emigrated to Australia in but he and his wife fell on hard times.

The Commandant of the Victorian Forces at the time, inspired by the poor circumstances of Grady and several other veterans, raised funds for a veteran's home. Grady died near Melbourne on 18th May 1891 and was buried in Melbourne Cemetery with military honours two days later. The veterans' home, built on the Bellarine Peninsula at Drysdale, was opened on 1st July 1891. It still stands but its original use has ceased long ago.

Thomas Grady is buried in Melbourne General Cemetery with his wife Catherine in Roman Catholic Area S Grave No. 891. His medals are at the Australian War Memorial.

Maori Wars (1845-1872)

As far as I can tell, one soldier, Joseph Hood, sometime resident of North Fitzroy was the sole local participant. His occupation was trimmer, a finisher of carriage fittings. He served between in this conflict between 14th April and 23rd July 1860 and was discharged in New Zealand. His death is recorded in Victoria in 1903.

Soudan Contingent (1885)

One participant in the Soudan Contingent returned from that conflict and died in Fitzroy. Leslie Herbert Kyngdon was born in Exeter, United Kingdom, in 1860 and his family emigrated to Australia in 1878. He was commissioned second lieutenant in the NSW Volunteer Infantry in 1880, and was a captain and commander of D Company with the NSW Sudan Contingent in 1884. Kyngdon later transferred to the NSW Permanent Artillery and saw service during the Boer War as a Special Service Officer in the (British) Royal Artillery with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Between 1902 and 1910, Kyngdon held positions with the Artillery in Queensland, Western Australia, NSW and on Thursday Island. In 1910 he was promoted to colonel and placed in command of Royal Australian Artillery (coastal defences) in Queensland, Victoria and finally NSW. He was the inspector of coastal defences until June 1919 when he became temporary chief of ordnance. As a Honorary Brigadier General, Kyngdon died of cancer on 11th April 1923 at Mount St Evins Hospital, Fitzroy. He was buried in Brighton cemetery

Boxer Rebellion (1898-1901)

At least two sailors resident in Fitzroy took part in this conflict in China.

George Robert Alexander, born 31st March 1876 at Richmond, was the son of George Ezekiel Alexander and Eliza Jane (née Gordon). He had been an Able Seaman in the Williamstown Naval Brigade He later served in the 46th Battalion AIF from 1915-1917. He was married to Edith Garrett Jones in 1899. He died on 12th August 1929 in Prahran, aged 52. Edith died 1958 in Melbourne. His address had been 24 Greeves St Fitzroy.

Able Seaman Andrew George Stephenson, born 9th Nov 1872 at Sandhurst, son of William Stephenson and Susan (née Lawson) was a saddler. He married Grace Gambetta (née McLean) in 1899. His address on enlistment in 1900 was 235 Gore St Fitzroy.

Boer War (1899-1902)



Stanley Spence Reid

At least 167 soldiers born, resident or having their next-of-kin address in Fitzroy served in this war. While most served with Victorian units, several saw action with units from other states or units formed in South Africa. The list of these men is now at the Library. One was killed in action. He was Lieutenant Stanley Spence Reid. He had played 24 VFL games for the Fitzroy team, including the first VFL Grand Final. He was a Presbyterian minister. Fourteen of these soldiers later served in the First World War, three of them being killed in action. Of these three, one officer won the Victoria Cross.

William (also known as Wilbur) Thomas Dartnell was born on 6th April 1885 in Collingwood, Melbourne, to Henry Dartnell, an English-born fruiterer, and his Australian wife Rose Ann, née Hanley. He was brought up in Melbourne and after leaving school, he became an actor. At the age of 16 he served in the Second Boer War with the 5th Victorian (Mounted Rifles) Contingent. He married Elizabeth Edith Smyth on 15 April 1907, at Queen Street, Melbourne. Soon after, they settled at Fitzroy.

He and his wife moved to South Africa, where he was living at the outbreak of the First World War. He enlisted in the Royal Fusiliers and was shipped to British East Africa. On 3rd September 1915, while his company was being evacuated, he stayed behind in an attempt to save the lives of the wounded. His VC citation reads:



William Dartnell, VC

On 3 September 1915, near Maktou, Kenya, during a mounted infantry engagement, the enemy were so close that it was impossible to get the more severely wounded away. Lieutenant Dartnell, who was himself being carried away wounded in the leg, seeing the situation, and knowing that

the enemy's black troops murdered the wounded, insisted on being left behind, in the hope of being able to save the lives of other wounded men. He gave his own life in a gallant attempt to save others.

Dartnell is buried in Voi cemetery, East Africa.

It is interesting to note that Dartnell, though once a Fitzroy resident, is not listed on our Town Hall Honour Roll. The same could be said for literally hundreds of others. There is politics in commemoration!