

## Chronograph

January-April 2023

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## Private Matthew Knowles Thorburn (1896-1916)

During 1915 the spirit of adventure to war was dying and serious appeals began for more volunteers. The Federal Government had just offered to raise another 50,000 troops for active service at the Front. A number of organised "Snowball" recruiting marches began in late 1915. In Nowra on 30 November 1915, the Waratahs being one of these marches, set off on their long march to Sydney as the cheering crowds farewelled them along the route. The Hon. Chapman, M.H.R., said in his speech "it was their privilege to uphold the prestige of the great Empire" and "the risk was not so very great – not more than five percent would be likely killed". No doubt words of encouragement with such belief for a decisive victory. Matthew joined in the 'Waratahs' march at Meroo Meadow where they had stopped for a sumptuous meal, before continuing on. It's not known if Matthew was caught up with enthusiasm but more likely he was aroused by patriotic fervour and the manly thing of doing duty for his country.



Photograph of the Waratahs march, Berry, 30 November 1915. Matthew Thorburn being one of these men. Berry & District Historical Society Collection, Berry Museum+

Matthew Knowles Thorburn was born at Balmain to parents James and Mary Ann nee Knowles. The youngest son and seventh of eight children, he was an infant when his mother died in 1899. Matthew (known as Matt) served an apprenticeship for ten months as a carpenter to Robert Knowles. Although a city lad, he chose to work on a farm at Meroo Meadow in a small farming community with Thorburn relatives.

On 30 November 1915, Matt enlisted with the AIF in Berry, where the Waratahs were met by the town band and other contingencies. Amid scenes of great enthusiasm they were welcomed by the mayor. His attestation paper describes him as 19 years old, height 5 ft 5 in. chest 32-37, 123 pounds, brown eyes and dark complexion. The minimum height for recruits was reduced to 5 ft 2 in June 1915 and so this allowed for Matt's army acceptance.

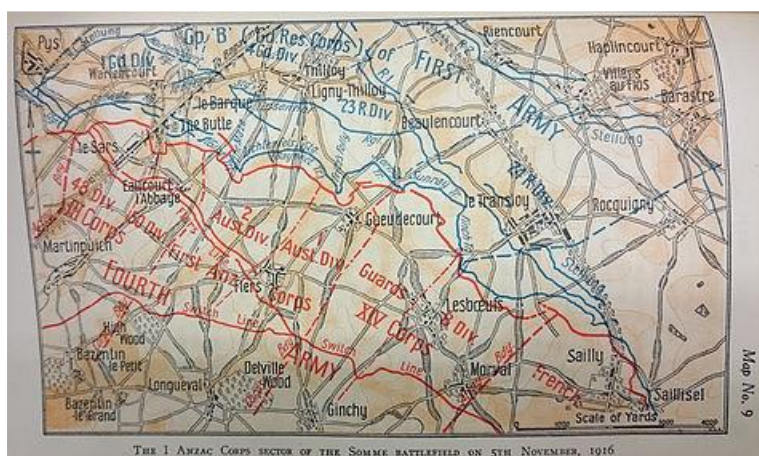
The Waratahs arrived in Sydney on 17 December. Matt was assigned to the 16th Reinforcements in the 1st Battalion while at training camp. On final leave before departing, Matt returned to Meroo Meadow where a farewell function ensued on 10 March at a local residence. He was presented with a fountain pen, a combination belt, a pocket wallet and congratulatory speeches were made from amongst the gathering.

Matt departed Sydney 1 April 1916 on *HMAT SS Makarini* with his battalion which included many Waratahs. They disembarked at Suez on 2 May and went to camp in Egypt by train, a distance of about 100 miles. After one week they left the camp at night travelling in trucks to Port Alexandria and embarked straight away on the *HMTS Caledonia* 9 May to join the British Expeditionary Force. After disembarkation at Marseilles on 17 May, they boarded a train and travelled through France for three days before reporting at the Australian Divisional Base Depot for training in Etaples on 20 May. In France he marched in and joined

1st Anzac Entrench Battalion on 25 June. One month later he proceeded to join the 1st Battalion on 27 July and was taken as strength reinforcements on 31 July.

Matt was evacuated sick from 'In the Field' and admitted to the 1st Australian Field Hospital with scabies on 6 October. He was transferred and admitted at Northumbrian Casualty Clearing Station on 8 October, discharged to duty 11 October and rejoined the 1st Battalion 12 October. The last note he wrote to his father on 7 October read "Just a line to let you know I received two letters from you yesterday. I came out of the trenches yesterday and am now in hospital sick, with some sort of a rash on my body".

At the Battle of Gueudecourt on the Somme 5 November 1916, 'the objective was a small triangular salient due to the existence of a deep sunken road in a depression 400 yards north of Gueudecourt, near the intersection of Bayonet and Hilt Trenches, known as the triangle'. The operation was due to be launched at 0030 hrs. General Paton called for a postponement as it was not intended that they attack in the wet, but it was overridden by headquarters. Matt's battalion attacked in pouring rain and heavy mud. They could not quickly cover the ground and the Germans were waiting. A 'Waratah' soldier in the same battalion wrote home "it was awful – we used to sink down past our knees and many of our fellows used to get bogged and it would take two or more to get them out". Conditions were atrocious, cold, deluged with rain and the ground was extremely heavy and slippery. The first and second attacks failed.



Anzac Corps 5th November 1916, Image, 1916. The First Battalion Attack from near Gueudecourt, Somme, France, <https://www.november5th1916-gueudecourt.com/maps>, accessed 31 August 2019.

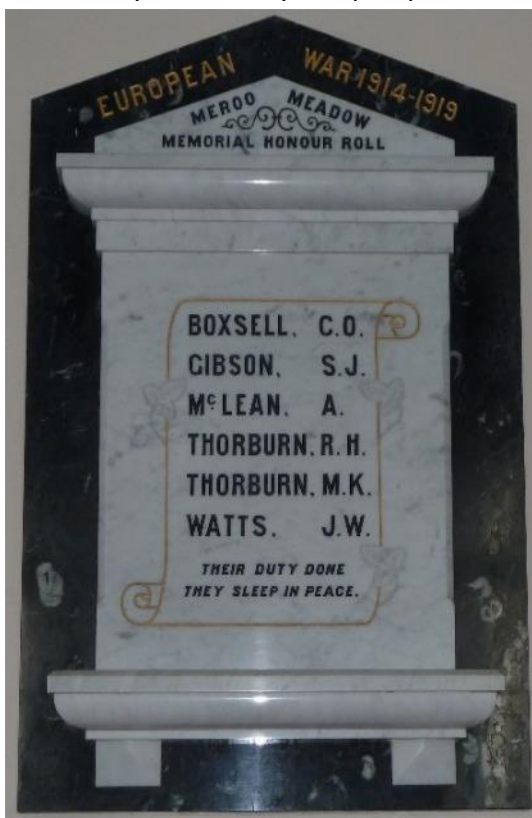
Whilst charging, Matt was wounded in the leg which was possibly broken. He fell and was being carried back to the lines out of 'No Man's Land' by Sgt Olsson. Matt was dropped and left unable to be retrieved when Olsson was badly shot in the back. Matt was reported wounded and missing in action in the field. A Court of Enquiry held on 28 November 1917 adjudged he was 'Killed in Action' on 5 November 1916. Afterwards the attacks were recognised as ill-conceived, ultimately futile and put the first strain on Australia's voluntary recruitment system which led to the first unsuccessful referendum to introduce conscription.

Regarding Matt, Private James Marr reported on 23 April 1917 that, "his body and several others were found to the left of Gueudecourt just in front of Bayonet trench on 3 March 1917. They had been killed by machine gun fire on 5 November 1916 in the Flers charge. They were buried in shell holes where they were lying. I saw them all and remember the

names. A big cross was put up with their names on it. About 50 men were found altogether. The paybooks, discs etc were taken from all the bodies and handed in to the battalion". This burial site was 450 yards NNW of Gueudecourt. As a soldier with no known grave, there is a memorial of remembrance in honour of Matt at the Australian National Memorial within Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery. There are currently 10,729 Australian servicemen officially commemorated by this memorial.

Australian Red Cross reports were sent to Matt's father James Thorburn and he duly wrote on 18 April 1918 asking for verification of Private Marr's sighting of his son's body and for the return of Matt's discs and personal effects. The letter was answered on 1 May 1918 from A.I.F Base Records confirming that through a Court of Enquiry it was adjudged that Matt was killed on 5 November 1916 but proceedings were not yet available. It was also mentioned that no advice of the despatch of personal effects had been received. Surely a sense of wanting to know more about what happened and the lack of closure would have caused unimaginable grief to the family. 'A sorrow too deep for words'. James was aged 61 when he died in February 1921 without seeing or receiving the recognition of his son's bravery awards. The British War and Victory medals, memorial scroll and memorial plaque were despatched in 1922 and eventually received by Matt's sister on 22 April 1923.

A welcome home picnic took place at Meroo Meadow on 19 June 1919 to recognise both those who had returned home after the war and also to commemorate those who had died. There was a presentation for the five returned soldiers and certificates in respect to the fallen were presented to their families. Money was raised for a local memorial honour roll to be placed in the Meroo Meadow Church to remember their fallen men. In addition to Matt, his cousin Raymond is also remembered on the same memorial for his sacrifice. 'Their duty done, they sleep in peace'.



Meroo Meadow Church Memorial Roll, photo taken 18 August 2012, Private collection.

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Land.

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*Laurelle Price*

## Heritage 101 Seminar

A number of members attended the Heritage 101 Seminar recently at the Uniting Church Hall. It was run by Andrew Conacher and Fiona Reynolds of Heritage Solutions and covered a number of topics including

- Heritage – what is it?
- The National Trust – where does it fit in to advocating for Heritage?
- The existing NSW Heritage Act and proposed changes.
- The Burra Charter – what is it?
- NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act – it's history.
- Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) – provisions for Heritage.
- Planning Provisions – what are their impact on heritage?
- How do Councils assess Development Applications?
- Objections to Development Applications – how do you write a good one?
- What can you do to a heritage listed property?
- Heritage Case Studies – Braidwood NSW, Lake Wobegon Minnesota, Napier NZ

It was an interesting day with lots of information. A delicious morning tea was provided. If any member is interested, the Museum has the slides shown on the day. Please email the Museum if you would like a copy.

If you missed out, the National Trust has arranged for Andrew and Fiona to present the Seminar again on 13 May, 9am -2 pm at the Old Court House- Ticket \$15



*Margaret Cullity*



## Digitisation

2021/2022 was an exciting time for the Museum. We were asked to be part of a digitisation project by the Shoalhaven Council which involved converting all our accessioned objects onto a new computer system.

We completed the conversion last year and have slowly been adding photographs and more details where we can. There are now 20 of our objects that can be viewed online through the website and you can access it through [ehive.com](http://ehive.com), click on Search (top left), click on Collections, then type in Berry Museum. You can then view any of the 20 objects available.

There is still a lot to do. We have been helped by a consultant photographer recently who has come to the Museum to photograph selected objects. Also, one of our members has been very busy photographing a lot of our objects as well.

A number of objects are also available for viewing on a website called Storyplace. Go to [storyplace.org.au](http://storyplace.org.au) and click on Collection. You should find Berry Museum.

If you are interested in helping us in this work, either by doing research, helping to select objects for photographing or being involved in the actual photography please contact us through [berrymuseum@bigpond.com](mailto:berrymuseum@bigpond.com). We would be grateful for any help you can give us.

*Margaret Cullity*

## What is happening at the Berry Museum April 2023 from the Secretary!

### NATIONAL TRUST

Is your property eligible for listing? If you would like to research a listed property, help update the information for your property for future listing, Contact the National Trust's advocacy team at [advocacy@nationaltrust.com.au](mailto:advocacy@nationaltrust.com.au)

If you own a house or building in NSW listed by the National Trust, you can apply for a plaque to denote your home's heritage status. Contact the National Trust's archive team at

[archives@nationaltrust.com.au](mailto:archives@nationaltrust.com.au)

### ROOF LEAKS

As you may be aware over the past 2 years with the heavy rain roof of the Museum building has suffered severe water damage from leaks in the roof. Council arranged for Fulton Hogan Construction to repair. We now need the water damaged walls and ceilings to be repaired and are following this up with Council.

## FENCE

Council has had the front fence and gates repaired and we are waiting on the painting of the same.

## GRANTS

We have prepared and lodged expressions of interest for Grants--

- to replace the lighting throughout the Museum and
- for the removal of the 1970's bathroom, formerly the Butler's Pantry, that opens off the former Dining Room, now the Military Room. The former bathroom is to be used for much needed storage of the collection.

We have made an application for a Grant for the reprinting of Gillian Shadwick's book *Family, Farms and Faith* has also been made to Council.

We are working on a Grant application for an upgrade of the kitchen to provide more power and/or hot water to make our kitchen easier for catering and also satisfy some OH&S issues.

**DIGITISATION PROGRAM** E-HIVE- volunteers are needed to assist Margaret Cullity, Julia Woinarski and Janet Fingleton with the photography. See more detail in the Chronograph.

## MEETINGS OF THE SOCIETY

The committee meets monthly, usually at 9.00am on a Wednesday in the back room of the Berry Hotel (the Hotel makes no charge for the use of the room which is most appreciated). It is not a set Wednesday and depends on availability of committee members.

From time to time, we receive feedback from members that they consider they are not kept informed of what is happening. Pre Covid the committee used to hold 2 or 3 meetings of the Society in addition to the AGM, often with a guest speaker, using the opportunity to update members. Unfortunately, there is no suitable space with acceptable social distancing at the Museum to hold these meetings. In the next financial year, we plan to again hold these meetings at the Uniting Church with a guest speaker.

If you have ideas, concerns, suggestions etc etc please do not hesitate to contact me.

*Gail Paton*

*Secretary*

## Articles for the Next Issue

If you have any interesting stories about the Berry region or its history that you would like to share, please forward them to the editor for inclusion in our next issue.

Email: [berrymuseum@bigpond.com](mailto:berrymuseum@bigpond.com)