The Fitzroy Sportsman's Memorial – Re-Dedication, 9th September 2018

Without doubt, the largest event in the history of this suburb was the Great War. Hardly a household in the suburb was unaffected by its tragedy. By comparison with many Melbourne suburbs, war memorials in Fitzroy are sparse. The most significant if the Roll of Honour in Fitzroy Town Hall. It was inaugurated by Brigadier-General H.E. 'Pompey' Elliott and he remarked that its list of names was far from complete. It list about 1200 names but it should have around 2800 – it shows 191 gave their lives: that number should be at least 439. should be 2800 191 KIA should be 439.

The Sportsman's Memorial is a unique tribute to the club players in Fitzroy. The clubs raised the money (£310) for it and placed it standing apart at the main entrance to the sports ground. 190 club members enlisted and the Memorial commemorated the 38 who died from the war. Since its inception it has been subjected to three waves of vandalism. The toilet block for the bowls club blocked one side. The electricity substation blocked another. Ordinary common vandals completed the work by defacing the wreath and steeling four of the six commemorative plaques. Today we are here to remember that the efforts of the City of Yarra have restored at least some of the lost dignity of this important memorial.

About two years ago the Fitzroy History Society (FHS) took on the challenge to identify the 38 names that were originally on the memorial. Only two of the original six plaques, with 13 of the names, still exist, so we were searching for 25 names and their links to the various sporting clubs - Cricket, Bowls, Football, Tennis.

Most were identified from newspaper reports of a century ago, plus the excellent records of the Fitzroy Cricket Club now held at the Fitzroy Library.

Several of our FHS members contributed to the task. Gil Langfield found Robert Snadden's grave and story when visiting a cemetery in London. Mike O'Brien contributed his expertise on military records held at the Australian War Memorial and the National Archives of Australia. Then Michael Moore, Peter Woods and Andy Lanskis culled a longer list to get the 38 names now on the restored memorial today.

The most difficult one to research was Alexander Salton[1] whose name was on one of the remaining plaques. He was born in 1869 and was a generation older than most of the other names. He played football for Fitzroy in 1889-90, well before the VFL was founded in 1897. He was later a football umpire and officiated when a combined Army team played the 1915 premiers, Carlton, on 25th September just before he embarked for France.

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[1] We were privileged to have members of the Salton family at the Re-dedication

99 years ago today, on 9th September 1919, Charles Dedman died of wounds at the Caulfield Military Hospital. His name was the last included on the six plaques when the memorial was first dedicated 2 months later on 16th November 1919.

The football players on the memorial include:

Lieutenant Harold Collins, Distinguished Conduct Medal, 6th Battalion. Played 6 games in 1912 and 1915. Killed in action France 10th August 1918

Lance Corporal Jack Cooper, 8th Battalion. Played 136 games 1907 - 1915. Killed in action Belgium 20th September 1917.

Captain George Elliott, Military Cross. Australian Army Medical Corps. Played 1 game 1905 University 1908-13 79 games. Killed in action Belgium 25th September 1917

Lance Corporal Arthur Harrison 22nd Battalion. Played 19 games 1913 – 14. Killed in action in France 3rd May 1917

Trooper Arthur Jones 8th Australian Light Horse. Played 7 games 1914. Killed in action on 7th August 1915 at Gallipoli

Sergeant Sydney O'Neill 8th Australian Light Horse. Played 1 game 1909. Killed in action on 7th August 1915 at Gallipoli

The Memorial was to have been opened by 'Pompey' Elliott. It would have been particularly poignant for him to open a memorial with his beloved brother - George - engraved on it. He was to ill to perform the ceremony and his friend, Brigadier General Lloyd officiated.

Lest We Forget

Michael O'Brien with Michael Moore