

YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT – 75

TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing to present interesting features from the collection and their background stories. The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing will apply.

Objects and Stories - World War One Embroidered Postcards



One of the functions of a museum is to maintain the connection between objects and their stories. Three silk embroidered postcards were recently donated to the Museum by the Hon Cheryl Davenport. They were discovered amongst her father's treasures following his death in 1970. His name was Frederick Herbert (Ted) Crockenburg, and he was the son of 7345 Private Bert Crockenburg, 11 Battalion AIF.



As part of the donation documentation, Cheryl related the family history of the postcards:

“These Post Cards were forwarded to my paternal grandmother, Caroline Crockenberg, (who subsequently became Miller) by her late husband, Bert Crockenberg, who died at Harbonnieres, France on 10 August 1918. Bert was in the 11th Battalion AIF and served on the Western Front from 1916 – 1918. Bert was wounded, sent back to England where he went AWOL, was recaptured, and returned to the Western Front where he was gassed several times prior to his death. We suspect he was the victim of a sniper bullet the day after a major battle in that region of France.”

“In WA he was a timber worker who was manpowered as an essential worker until he was laid off until mid-1916 when he volunteered and was shipped to France. The Crockenberg family lived, at Banksiadale, now a ghost town and in the catchment area of the South Dandalup Dam. Banksiadale was very close to Dwellingup – there were many Timber Mill towns in the area in those years. Bert and his father were originally from the Ferntree Gully timber mills in Victoria moving to Western Australia in the late 1800’s.”



As part of the documentation process, details of the family story were able to be confirmed. Bert was the only soldier with the name of Crockenberg to serve in the Australian Imperial Force.

An examination of his service records reveals several instances of AWOL and significant awards of Field Punishment No 2. The wounding and gassing were also confirmed.

Field punishment No. 1 consisted of heavy labouring duties, possibly being restrained in handcuffs or fetters, and being tied to a post or wheel. Field punishment No. 2 differed, in that the offender was not liable to be attached to a fixed object.

Not included in the family story was the special commendation for gallantry by the Australian Corps Commander in 1917 and the posthumous award of the Military Medal for bravery in 1918, tributes to Bert's valour and sacrifice.

Harbonnieres was part of the Battle of Amiens which was launched on 8 August 1918. Amiens was the start of the 100 Days offensive leading to the Armistice on 11 November 1918. General Ludendorff called 8 August 1918, “the black day of the German Army.”

Serving with 11 Battalion, Bert Heath was killed in action on 10 August 1918 at Harbonnieres, and is buried in Heath Cemetery alongside over 1,800 of his comrades.

Banksiadale

Banksiadale is named after the plant genus *Banksia*, as the area consists of jarrah forest with unusually thick understorey of *Banksia grandis* (Bull Banksia). For over 50 years, the area was home to this small timber milling town. The Hotham Valley railway (operated by WAGR) was opened from Pinjarra to Dwellingup in 1910 to access the jarrah and marri timber in the area. In 1911, a site to produce timber for a wide range of general railway purposes was selected 8 km north of Dwellingup and named Banksiadale. The railway was opened to it in January 1912 and the No. 2 Railway Mill began operations. By 1917, a network of railways covering 33 km of track extended from Banksiadale to the areas in which timber was being felled.



In the year of 1926 alone, the Banksiadale mill produced 185,000 sleepers, and 6,347 other loads. By 1946, the local timber had been exhausted. The Dwellingup fires in January and February 1961 devastated the countryside but the Banksiadale townsite and timber mill escaped damage. The mill only, was burnt down in 1963 and was not rebuilt as it was on land destined to be flooded when the South Dandalup Dam was constructed. Many of the mill houses were transferred to the Dwellingup townsite and private homes were sold to be demolished.

The Story of the Postcards

Embroidered silk postcards were first made in 1900 for the Paris Exposition. The popularity of silk postcards peaked during the First World War 1914 - 1918. A thriving cottage industry began around 1915 and the quality of the early silks was quite high. Postcard companies began to employ women to produce silks on a rough assembly line basis. The cards were generally hand embroidered on strips of silk mesh with as many as 25 on a strip. They were mostly embroidered by French women in their homes and then sent to the factories for cutting and mounting on postcards.

As demand increased production switched to machine assistance. A machine that could do so had been invented in 1828 by Josué Heilmann (1796-1848) in Mulhouse, France. The machine was further developed over the following decades by various engineers and companies in Britain, France, Germany, and Switzerland.

Basically, the hand-embroidery machine uses a pantograph to transfer the stitches. Each stitch is drawn out on a large-scale design and then its position is traced by an operator using a point on one arm of the pantograph. A series of needles responds to the movement of the pantograph arm. Each needle has an eye in the middle for the thread, and two sharp ends.



A hand embroidery machine in use. Textil Museum, St. Gallen, Switzerland.

The needle is passed backwards and forwards through the ground cloth using a pincer system (double-sided pincer wagons), so imitating the action and appearance of hand embroidery. Each colour in the design is individually stitched (so all the blue parts, for example, are worked, and then the machine is re-threaded with a new colour), until the design is complete. The result closely resembles and is often mistaken for hand embroidery.



Some postcards were made with little envelopes which could contain a smaller card with a sentimental message. Production continued steadily through World War I, declining substantially in 1919, until ending around 1923. An estimated 10,000,000 hand-made cards were produced from 1915 to 1919.



This type of embroidery machine is still in use in both domestic and factory settings. It is being used among others for haute couture embroidery, but also for decorating delicate handkerchiefs, shawls, tablecloths, and other embellished items. Switzerland remains an important source for these products.

LINKS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Visit the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia web site

<https://armymuseumwa.com.au/>

<https://www.aif.adfa.edu.au/showPerson?pid=67244>

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/ListingReports/ItemsListing.aspx>

<https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/62000/heath-cemetery,-harbonnieres/>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732072/Amiens_English_forweb.pdf

<http://www.ww1-propaganda-cards.com/silks.html>

<https://trc-leiden.nl/trc-digital-exhibition/index.php/silk-embroidered-postcards>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banksiadale,_Western_Australia

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/enlistment/ww1#state>

<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/where-australians-served/gallipoli/landing-anzac-cove/first-to-fall>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1339171>