

Private 4120 William John Pryor

Horseman of Polshea, St Tudy

Australian Imperial Force 10th/31st Battalion

Born July 1888

Killed in Action on 10th April 1918.

Born in St. Kew, William was the eldest Son of Thomas and Emily Pryor. Thomas Pryor and Emily Crahart married in 1886, and lived at Polshea. They had a family of 12 Children, William being the third child.

In 1911, William is listed as working as a Horseman on a farm in St. Mabyn.

Shortly after the census, he immigrated to Brooklet, a small village near Lismore in New South Wales, Australia, where he worked on a local farms, the last one he worked on was owned by the Johnston Family.

He seemed to fit in to his new surroundings very well, and joined the local Methodist Church, and did work for the Sunday School and Christian Endeavour Society.

William joined the Australian Imperial Force on the 19th June 1916, and signed up at Lismore, New South Wales.

On his Australian Imperial Force information, he is said to be 5ft 7 inches tall, dark complexion, grey eyes, and brown hair, and a Methodist.

He did his training at Enoggera Barracks, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

He had already lost a good friend the year before, the son of his employer, Mr. Johnston, and perhaps this is what prompted him to join up, or it may have been one of the patriotic carnivals that were held in the area.

William embarked on the "Boonah" which sailed from Brisbane, on the 21st October 1916 after four months training. After a three month voyage, he disembarked in Plymouth and was hospitalised at the Parkhouse in Plymouth, suffering from influenza and mumps, but recovered sufficiently to travel to France on the 25th April 1917.

The 10th/31st Battalion was involved in follow up operations when the German Army withdrew to the Hindenburg Line, and it was whilst they were resting in Bourgancourt Farmhouse near Varre on the 10th of April 1918 at mid-day, that three shells hit the Farmhouse, and William was killed instantly, together with about 20 others. A friend reporting on the incident said "he was a quiet man".

His death was reported in the Northern Star, New South Wales, on Monday 12th August, 1918, there was a lengthy article on the Memorial Service that was held for William. He was obviously a very trusted friend and very much part of his local community and liked and admired by all, and was held in esteem for his character and personality.

The report of the memorial service said that the reading desk was draped in mourning and the Battalion colours of the late soldier, and bowls of white flowers were on either side of the desk, also the Union Jack and Commonwealth flags. An enlarged photo of the deceased was also on a rest on the platform, and around it was the regalia of the Orangemen, to which order he belonged.

His employer, and father of his friend, Mr Johnston, said that William had many sterling qualities, his uprightness and honesty of purpose, gained him the goodwill and esteem of all that he came in contact with.

He was awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Australian Victory Medal.

He is commemorated in his Australian local area of Newrybar and Brooklet, a small village similar to St. Tudy. He is also commemorated on the Australian War Memorial at Canberra, and of course, St. Tudy.

The Memorial Service report in the Northern Star Newspaper 12 August 1918

MEMORIAL SERVICE – THE LATE PTE. W. J. PRIOR

A large congregation attended the Brooklet Protestant Hall on Sunday morning last, 4th Instant, when a memorial service was conducted in connection with the death of the late Pte. W.J. Prior, who was killed on active service in France on the 10th April, 1918. The reading desk was draped in mourning and the Battalion colours of the late soldier, (purple and aqua), and bowls of white flowers were on either side of the desk; also the Union Jack and Commonwealth flags. An enlarged photo of the deceased was also on a rest on the platform, and around it was the regalia of the Orangemen, to which order he belonged; Several members of the order were present in regalia. The late soldier was a native of Cornwall, England, and on arrival in the state some few years ago entered the service of Mr J.N. Ferguson, of Bangalow, and afterwards was employed by Mr. Blewitt, of Brooklet. The deceased, by his many sterling qualities, his uprightness and honesty of purpose gained the good will and esteem of all with he came in contact.

He was also a religious worker in connection with the Methodist Church, it's Sunday school, and Christian Endeavour Society. Letters of appreciation were read from Messrs J N Ferguson and Fred Ellis, also Reverend A F Crapp, who, was the resident minister at Brooklet during the late soldier's residence here, each of whom testified to the regard and esteem in which they held the departed appropriate.

Hymns were sung, and at the close of the service, the National Anthem and the litany used in war time were sung. Miss Boorman, organist, played the "Dead March", the congregation stood with bowed heads in silent prayer. The Rev. Ellis Thomas conducted the service and took as his text Hebrews 11:chap. 4th verse: "And by it he being dead yet speaketh".

"Death! What is it! - John Oxenham says:-

There is no death
They only truly live
Who pass into life beyond, and see
This earth is but a school preparative
For larger ministry.

We call them "dead"
But they look back and smile
At our dead living in the bond of flesh,
And do rejoice that, in so short a while,
Our souls will slip the leash.

"There is no death
To those whose hearts are set
On higher things than this life doth afford,
How shall their passing leave one least
regret,
Who go to join their Lord!"

And longfellow says:-

"There is no death!
What seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but a subub of the life elysian,
Whose portal we call earth.

Are these words merely poetic imagination or solemn truth? As I have gazed upon the casket of a soul lying still in death and have seen the placid look as of one gone asleep, I have asked myself is this the end? Is there nothing more or is this the close of chapter 1. the beginning of chapter II? And then the words of the Apostle have come to me: "Some are fallen asleep." Shall they not awake? Yes, they live! Life's mysteries have been revealed. "Faith has been lost in sight."

Some here are finding it hard to believe that Pte. W. Prior is dead. He has indeed experienced what we call death. I venture to say, however, that his voice, silenced though it is, is speaking, and will speak in days to come, to many hearts here and elsewhere.

The photograph is a remarkable invention. A speech or a song may be recorded and long after the voice which spoke or sang it silenced the speech or song is heard. So with a man's influence, his life, and character. Some present are competent to tell how W.J. Prior's words, personality or friendship speak to them, and I would like at this point to read appreciations written by Rev. Crapp, Mr F Ellis, and Mr J N Ferguson. For myself, I must be permitted to go along other lines and say that he speaks to us.

(1) of a noble 's cause: This war is the blackest page in the life of many of us. Many are asking the question: Why is it allowed to continue? What is the purpose of it all ? The longer we live, the more light is thrown upon the screen, and the more we are getting to understand it all.

A nation's lust for power, for world domination, has twisted her moral sense and made her capable of the darkest deeds. She has "lost her soul." The doctrine "the end justifies the means," has been taught and has resulted in Germany treating us as a scrap of paper a solemn treaty. Thank God our sense of right and justice has caused us to oppose that doctrine and united us as a people in the effort to save the world from the result of it.

The protection of the weak, the saving of civilisation, the making of a similar war impossible in the future, surely this is a noble cause, and W.J. Prior speaks of it to-day.

(II). Of a great sacrifice: The war has given mathematicians a great task. Computations as to the cost of war, the men engaged, etc. We are appalled by the array of figures. Wealth has been sacrificed by the million, but all of it could not redeem a single soul.

Try to realise the great sacrifice that is being made. Men and youths have sacrificed life's prospects and all that they counted dear. Bright intellects, consecrated hearts, brave souls, have all gone. And we have not yet begun to realise what it means to the nation. The strength of a nation is not in its wealth, but in the character of its citizens. And we mourn the loss of some of our noble and best.

To-day we specially mourn one who had life before him, life with all the possibilities of the 20th Century. He has sacrificed it all and laid down his life.

Let me read a copy of the letter sent by his sergeant to his parents, telling how, when and where he died. (the letter was read).

(III) Of true patriotism: We hear much of patriotism today. Much of it is not patriotism at all. So called patriotism that seeks to get something in return for what has been given is not patriotism. But when a young man offers himself to his king and country with absolutely no guarantee of ever returning, or, if he returns, that he will not be maimed, exhibits patriotism in the highest degree, and W.J. Prior speaks to us of this.

(IV) Of duty nobly done: of how many might it be said "Well done good and faithful servant." While some have enlisted for adventure the majority have heard deep down in their soul the call to fight, and in the fulfilling of their duty have faced well nigh insurmountable obstacles, never complaining, making those at home ashamed as they have read their cheery letters. The fact that W.J. Prior laid down his life at the post of duty proves that "where duty called or danger" he was not wanting there as he speaks to us of duty done, does he not remind us.

(V) of our duty : Every person has some duty to perform in connection with the war. Nelson's words still ring out, "England expects that, every man this day shall do his duty," and for some

"To be a hero" does not mean to march away
At sounding of the trumpet's call to war's array;
it does not mean a lifeless form 'neath foeman's dart
To be a hero simply means to do your part."

We must ask ourselves "What is my duty? "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," and as every issue is settled before God, let us be true to our conviction fearing neither friend or foe.

(VI) Of eternity: I would be recreant to a great trust did I fail to remind you that death is near to everyone and would that every soul realised the need for being ready to meet God. We are warned not to play with our soul with God, and the question must be asked by each one, "Where shall I spend eternity." W.J. Prior knew and knows, so do you. There is only one way of salvation faith in Jesus Christ.

Finally, W.J. Prior speaks to us of something grander, viz., "Weeping may endure for the night but joy cometh in the morning." For many it is night now, the night of bereavement and sorrow are upon us, but the morning will break the shadows flee away, and "God shall wipe away all tears." Sorrowing ones may take heart of grace, may partake of the heavenly comfort. Realise there has been forged another link binding you to eternity, and look forward with joyful anticipation to the time of reunion in the Father's house. As we hear in the days to come, the voice of Him whom we mourn to-day, let us not fail to profit, then he will not have lived in vain, neither shall we.

