

William Wallace Wilson

# William Wallace Wilson

A personal reflection on my grandfather,

Written by Ron L. Roberts,  
c.2014

*On the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of him enlisting  
for World War 1.*

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## FOREWARD:

In 1993 Pauline and I had finished a trip to Svalbard to see our son Jason for the first time in four years. Meandering slowly home we hired a car in London with the aim of driving to Scotland and visiting the Isle of Skye, home of Pauline's maternal family, the Finlayson's.

Slowly making our way back towards London we stopped at a B&B near Kilmarnock (We remember vividly the Quiz Night in the local Pub) and perusing our map for possible routes south I came across the wee village of Maybole.

"That's the home of my ancestors on Bette's side, the Wilsons," I enthused.

Next morning as the mist was rising above the valley we entered Maybole. With a few memories but too little research beforehand, we found ourselves in the library and the cemetery. As we drove out of the village that evening, through the Scottish drizzle, there was a growing desire to know more of my forebears.

This little booklet is a result of that trip which stayed in the background until 2013.

Many years past and in 2013 we happened to have a few minutes to spare, whilst we were driving through Kyneton, and we stopped to search for his grave. Memories from when I was a child told me his grave was on the Redesdale side of the cemetery, but after thirty minutes of fruitless searching we were making our way back to the car, when we saw a small, nondescript head stone marked "W.W. Wilson". Aged and covered in moss.

Before I leave this earth we decided to have his grave refurbished. Hence this tale begins.

## **CHAPTER 1: FROM MAYBOLE ONWARDS**

One of the peculiarities of the Wilson Family was their ability to use only one given name for several generations: WILLIAM. There was William of 1836, then William of 1861 then my grandfather William of 1894 who will be referred to as William Wallace.

Our first stop at Maybole was the local library where the staff were more than willing to assist us in our search. William (1836) had been born in Maybole to John Wilson and Anne Ferguson. John is listed in the census as being a cotton weaver. William (1836) was the son who left the home land for a new life in the colonies.

On 21<sup>st</sup> October 1860 William (1836) married Mary Guthrie from Prestwick, Ayrshire. They were married in the Free Presbyterian Church (which had been demolished two years before our trip to make way for a housing estate.) Without doubting the family morality, it wasn't far into the next year when their young son William (1861) arrived and the three of them embarked on the long journey aboard the 'Clara' to Metcalfe Victoria. In the ensuing years five siblings arrived. Hugh 1868 at Taradale,

Thomas 1870, Mary Ann 1872 at Metcalfe,  
Alexander at Metcalfe in 1875 and John in 1877.



*S.S. Clara*

Our trip to the Maybole cemetery taught us several things. Firstly on a rainy day the staff would rather be in the lodge assisting two Aussies than working in the rain. Secondly there are more Wilsons in the local phone directory than Nguyen's in Ho Chi Minh City, and thirdly when seeking a grave site from the cemetery records, remember that P.P. listed beside a name refers to Pauper's Plot. Alas the Wilson forbears seemed to fill more than their share of P.P.'s.



*William (1861), William (1836) and Mary (Guthrie) Wilson*

**Family portrait taken in Scotland 1862 before they embarked on their journey.**



## **CHAPTER 2: GROWING UP and RUNNING FOR YOUR LIFE**

William (1836) being of sturdy Scottish stock it seems. settled into farming and he was employed in the district as a farm hand, working at Metcalfe and later over near Mia Mia at Spring Plains. The oldest of the offspring of William (1836) and Mary, was my great grandfather William (1861) and he had an attribute that seems to have been genetically eliminated from the family. He was a superb athlete and on October 21<sup>st</sup> 1888 was awarded a trophy for being the Champion Athlete of Australia.

William (1861) married Catherine Callaghan of Sandhurst, on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1880 at Castlemaine.



**The inscription states:**

**CHAMPION ATHLETE CUP**

**WON BY**

**W. WILSON**

**OCT 21<sup>ST</sup> 1888**

In its edition on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1888, the Kyneton Guardian reported that:

***"W. Wilson, pedestrian, of Metcalfe wins many races at Sydney, netting £130 exclusive of the half mile flat race at Botany."***

In those days £130 would have represented more than an annual salary for most manual workers, who in 1880 earned 60 pounds per annum.

William (1861) was also talented in other sports and there is a silver cake platter for shooting and several golf trophies in possession of family members.

Funds from his athletic pursuits were funnelled in to the hotel trade and he was listed as the licensee of the Redgum Bridge Hotel, Metcalfe from 1895-1908. Noting that William Wallace's birthplace in 1894 was listed as Redgum Bridge Hotel, and this was before his father owned it.

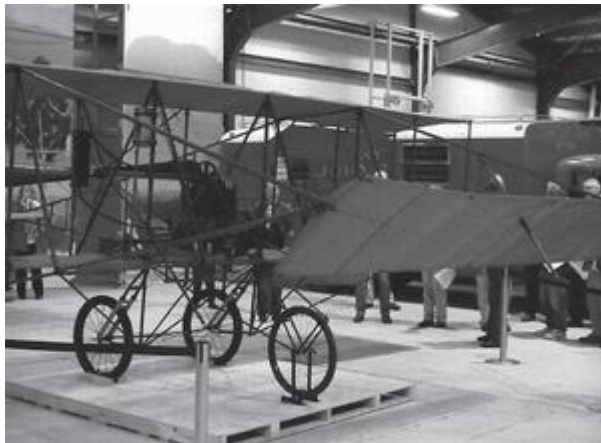
### **CHAPTER 3: WILLIAM WALLACE ARRIVES**

On 19<sup>th</sup> December 1894 at Metcalfe, William Wallace arrives. His siblings were William (1882) {who I presume died in infancy and had his name recycled in 1894,} George (1883), Ivey Agnes (1885), Sydney Allen (1887), Thomas (1889), who lived only for 14 days, Annie Adelaide (1890), Mary Ellen (1892), Lily Alena (1896) and Florence Victoria (1901). These are now but faint memories back somewhere in my cranium, although Aunty Flo and Aunty Ivey stand out with the Wilson red hair. (As a young child I thought more of the present than the past.)

Sometime during their early family days William (1861) moved from Metcalfe to Mia Mia where he had a job on the farm, 'Spring Plains' owned by the Duigan family. At least William Wallace and, I presume, other siblings, attended school at the now defunct Spring Plains State School, #1820. My grandfather was a taciturn old fellow, and never spoke much about his past, especially the War. However I did remember him telling me of the first Australian built

aeroplane to fly in Australia and his part in pushing it out of the shed.

*“On July 16, 1900 John Robertson Duigan flew an aircraft (a seven metre hop) at his family’s property, ‘Spring Plains’ at Mia Mia, near Kyneton Victoria”. This is acknowledged as the first powered, controlled flight of an all Australian designed and built aeroplane and occurred less than seven years after the Wright Brothers at Kittyhawk, USA.”*



*Model in Melbourne Museum*

I remember thinking about my grandfather and the small part he had played in Australian

aviation history on that day when I took off in 1977 in a new Jumbo 747 on my way to Oklahoma, and bemused at how far flight had come, in under seven decades.

On 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1911 William (1861) dies at Metcalfe and Catherine went to live in Simpson Street, Kyneton. His death occurred at Metcalfe and he had been observed standing on a shed roof with a hammer doing repairs. The magisterial report of 27<sup>th</sup> August stated that as a result of a fall from the roof his death was listed as 'misadventure'.

William Wallace would have been 16 years old when his father, 'the fastest man in Australia', passed away. William 1961 spent his first months in Maybole, Scotland and then life as a farm worker in the Metcalfe district. His speed over a quarter mile now faded in to the annals of history.

## CHAPTER 4: IN SERVICE OF KING AND COUNTRY.



In 1914 the Great War had broken out in Europe and most Australians thought it their duty to return for King and Country. The feeling at the time was that it would only take rugged Aussie lads a few months to win the war and return home. Little did they realize that within the next five years six million allies would die including over 60,000 Australians. Young, wiry and tough young horsemen were prized as recruits and the Kyneton Guardian on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1914 reports that the first volunteers of the Kyneton district leave for camp to the strains of the Town Band. Number 10 in the first 36 was William Wallace Wilson. They arrived at camp at Broadmeadows

and he signs on as recruit #506, on the 28<sup>th</sup> August, and starts basic training. After a full six weeks training the 4<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment embarked on the HMAT Wiltshire on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1914.

I am thankful for the words of Graeme Massey from his book, BEERSHEBA, (which is unfortunately now out of print).

*WILSON, William Wallace, Lance Corporal 506.*

*Born at Kyneton in 1895(sic) to William Wallace Wilson and Katherine O'Callaghan(sic). He worked as a farm labourer at Kyneton. . . . At his medical he was 5ft 8 inches tall, weighed 155 pounds and had reddish hair and blue eyes.. Presbyterian. Single . Next of kin was his mother Mrs William Wilson of Simpson Street, Kyneton. Left Melbourne on "Wiltshire" 20<sup>th</sup> October 1914 with C squadron.*

*He landed at Gallipoli on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1915. He reported with jaundice on 16th December and was sent to 3 AGH, Mudros (**on island of Lemnos. ed.**) He returned to Egypt with the 4<sup>th</sup> LHR on "Caledonia" 27<sup>th</sup> December 1915. He reported sick from orchitis at Abou Hammad on 26<sup>th</sup>*



*September 1916 and was admitted to 14 AGH Cairo on 6 October. He rejoined the regiment at Abou Hammad on 17 October. On 3 January 1917 he left regiment for duty with Australia Base, Moascar. He was made Lance Corporal on 20 February. He became sick from malaria on 28<sup>th</sup> June and was admitted to 14 AGH Cairo. He was discharged to Montazah convalescence depot on 17<sup>th</sup> July and returned to 4<sup>th</sup> LHR at the beach camp near Marakeb on 1st August . He became ill again with malaria at Tel-el-Fara on 27<sup>th</sup> September and was sent to rest camp at Marakeb until he returned to the regiment on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1917. He served during the Palestine campaign. He was promoted to corporal at Belah on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1918. He left the 4<sup>th</sup> LHR at Ludd on 16 September and returned to Moascar to join the cadre staff at the training camp. RTA on "Devon" 13 October 1918 for 1914 leave. Landed at Melbourne and he was discharged on 3 February, 1919.*

## The Battle of Beersheba

### **The Battle in Brief**

*The charge of the 4th Australian Light Horse at Beersheba late in the afternoon of 31 October 1917, is remembered as the last great cavalry charge. The assault on Beersheba began at dawn with the infantry*

*divisions of the British XX Corps attacking from the south and south-west. Despite artillery and air support, neither the infantry attacks from the south, nor the Anzac Mounted Division's attack from the east had succeeded in capturing Beersheba by mid-afternoon.*

*With time running out for the Australians to capture Beersheba and its wells before dark, Lieutenant General Harry Chauvel, the Australian commander of the Desert Mounted Corps, ordered Brigadier General William Grant, commanding the 4th Light Horse Brigade, to make a mounted attack directly towards the town. Chauvel knew, from aerial photographs, that the Turkish trenches in front of the town were not protected by barbed wire. However, German bombing had forced the 4th Brigade into a scattered formation and it was not until 4.50 pm that they were in position. The Brigade assembled behind rising ground 6 kilometres south-east of Beersheba with the 4th Light Horse Regiment on the right, the 12th Light Horse Regiment on the left and the 11th Light Horse Regiment in reserve.*

*The Australian Light Horse was to be used purely as cavalry for the first time. Although they were not equipped with cavalry sabres, the Turks who faced the long bayonets held by the Australians did not consider there was much difference between a charge by cavalry and a charge by mounted infantry. The Light Horse moved off at the trot, and almost at once quickened to a gallop. As they came over the top of the ridge and*

*looked down the long, gentle open slope to Beersheba, they were seen by the Turkish gunners, who opened fire with shrapnel. But the pace was too fast for the gunners. After three kilometres Turkish machine-guns opened fire from the flank, but they were detected and silenced by British artillery. The rifle fire from the Turkish trenches was wild and high as the Light Horse approached. The front trench and the main trench were jumped and some men dismounted and then attacked the Turks with rifle and bayonet from the rear. Some galloped ahead to seize the rear trenches, while other squadrons galloped straight into Beersheba.*

*Nearly all the wells of Beersheba were intact and further water was available from a storm that had filled the pools. The 4th and 12th Light Horse casualties were thirty-one killed and thirty-six wounded; they captured over 700 men. The capture of Beersheba meant that the Gaza-Beersheba line was turned. Gaza fell a week later and on 9 December 1917, the British troops entered Jerusalem.*



His return was recognised when his name was added to the Honour Board at the Presbyterian Church, Kyneton and at Mia Mia Hall however it has taken almost a century to have it added at the Kyneton Hall. That omission has been righted.

On return from the war William Wallace returned to work at 'Spring Plains'. His mother, Catherine had passed away at Kyneton in 1918 three months before his heroic ride at Beersheba. Life was to change quickly and he married Isabella Kane at Fitzroy on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1919. This was 5 weeks after his discharge.



*William Wallace Wilson and Isabella Kane 9-03-1919*

Had he met her before embarking or was he swept off his feet by this young (she was seven years older, a fact she covered up all her life) waif of Irish descent? Whilst my memories of them were from Redesdale onwards they always lived separately. Pop lived in the shed at 'Iron Bridge', Redesdale whilst Bella lived in the

house. They were always civil to each other (at least in my sight) but never seemed to show much affection.



*(Jean is on left of photo, and Betty on right. Nell Burt is the other girl)*

However in their early days the two girls were born, Gwendoline Elizabeth (always known as Betty) on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1920 at Kyneton and Jean Catherine on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1921 at Fitzroy.

## CHAPTER 5: IRON BRIDGE

My memories of Pop (William Wallace Wilson) stem from my many visits to Redesdale and a period of about 10 weeks when Mum was sick and I attended school at #2571 Redesdale. Pop Wilson had purchased the land adjacent to the Iron Bridge on 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1929.

We were so proud to be the 'owners' of the Iron Bridge and our mail was always delivered to 'Iron Bridge', Redesdale. I have never worked out whether the farm was officially named Iron Bridge or it just achieved it through geographical association.



We climbed on the bridge, through the bridge and I must admit a few times under the bridge.



Best days were when the Campaspe flooded and its swirling waters would rise as if to engulf it. It never did, but it lapped the base on several occasions.

After many conferences and bitter wrangling on behalf of the Metcalfe Shire the bridge opened on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1868. We always heard the story of how Iron Bridge had been constructed in England but whilst on its way to Melbourne to form a bridge over the Yarra in Melbourne, the ship caught fire in Hobson's Bay and the bridge sank. The bridge was salvaged, then purchased and transported to Redesdale by bullock dray. Eventually it opened and has stood solid for over 150 years, despite the number of vehicles that did not quite make the tight bend on the Redesdale side. Many a night Bella would be called on to comfort a traveller who had met the 'Iron Bridge'. Although I can never remember, in my time, a fatality at the spot. Its strange angle was due to the engineers having to fit a pre-fabricated bridge and could not make a diagonal crossing that would eliminate the sharp approach curves.

William Wallace was a hard worker, and typically country 'tough as nails'. He farmed that bit of land that seemed more suitable for rabbits and scotch thistles.



The fruit trees below the house were watered by hand with kerosene tin buckets carrying water from the river (whilst grandkids were allowed half full buckets). And figs and apricots would be transported to Kyneton to the market for a bit of cash. We would build crow traps to save the fruit and drive the rabbits down to a V-fence and tie the carcasses on a hessian overed

iron bar near the gate to be collected by the nightly rabbit truck on its way to Melbourne for the market.



*House in the 1940's*

Pop also had a firewood contract to cut trees from the North Redesdale forest and cart them, in six feet lengths, to the Redesdale Station from where they would be sent by train to Melbourne to feed its heating and cooking needs before the development of gas. He could throw those six foot logs on and off that truck as if they were air filled spaghetti.

If I was lucky he would head out for his first load and return to the station. He would then pick me up and I could be the 'jockey' for the day. These were great memories of growing up, except at lunchtime he would always stop at the pub for a few beers, and as I was the jockey I would join him in the bar. I was young and loved Raspberry cordial, however real woodcutters didn't drink sissy stuff, so I was forced to down Sarsaparilla and lemonade. Never a complaint, but I have never touched that evil drink until this day.

At one stage he decided to seek a fortune by digging for gold at North Redesdale. I don't think he found much and water stopped deeper digging.



*Photo of his mine at Nth Redesdale*

## **CHAPTER 6: FROM REDESDALE TO PENSHURST**

During 1950 he would drive through the Western District of Victoria, purchasing fresh mushrooms from the many soldier settlers who were starting to make a living on their newly settled farms after World War 2. He would buy in small towns from lunchtime onwards and head to Melbourne at about 5pm each day. The treasure would be unloaded at the Victoria Market at 10pm and sold the next day by Percy Bullen. Pop would leave early the next morning

heading west. Three and sometimes four trips a week would result in Percy advertising “the freshest mushrooms in the market”.

On one of these trips he came across a café/mixed business in Penshurst, known as the Post Office Café. It was run down and in need of some new enthusiastic management. William Wallace with his daughter Bette and her husband Les Roberts purchased the shop in 1951 and turned it into a thriving business. Old stock was pitched out in the first few days, they learnt how to make the best pies in the West and they were very fortunate to ride the wool boom of the 1950's when wool was selling at a pound for a pound. Saturday night especially, was chaos as all the settlers and family alighted on Penshurst to have a meal and watch the movies.

Hard work and that initial inspiration to purchase so far from home, paid off and we were comfortably off as a family. In 1957 we were one of the few houses in Penshurst to own a black and white television. (Even if they had to purchase a disused windmill to gain height for

the aerial so they could pick up a signal from Mt Dandenong). From memory it worked 8 nights out of ten.

William Wallace continued to live at Redesdale but moved to Penshurst when ill health was overtaking him.

During his later years he suffered a series of lung illnesses, and at Penshurst, on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1954 at the age of 59 he left this world.

The 'Iron Bridge' home and land was sold to Charlie Govey, as neither of his daughters were interested in returning to live there.

William Wallace Wilson now lies in the Kyneton cemetery, a short ride from Metcalfe, where his forebears settled after their trip from Scotland, and 28 kilometres from his home at 'Iron Bridge', Redesdale.



*William Wallace Wilson about 1950.*



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