

To those who went away

Four Parishioners who served in the Great War of 1914-18

Neil Dwyer
Archivist
Lumen Christi Parish
Wollongong
ANZAC Day 2022

What should we remember on ANZAC Day? The futility of war? The aspiration for sustained peace in the world? Or the Australians killed or injured in war? The much-admired late Monsignor Frank Deignan, Cathedral Administrator and Bishop's Secretary under Bishop McCabe, would say in his homily on each All Souls' Day, "It is a holy and wholesome thing to pray for the dead." Who should we recall in prayer? Some of us may not know anyone who fought in a war – recently or in the distant past. This ANZAC Day four of our local parishioners who went away to the Great War are briefly recalled.

Frank Vincent Tuxworth was 23 years old when he enlisted in the army on 9 July 1915.¹ 'During the attack on the Beurevoir Line, north of St Quentin, on 3 October 1918, [Sergeant Tuxworth] displayed conspicuous gallantry in dealing with enemy opposition.'² He captured eight prisoners and two machine guns. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, which was sent to his mother, Mrs Ellen Tuxworth of Kembla Street Wollongong by the Defence Department for safekeeping until Frank's return to Wollongong. To this was added the Belgian Croix de Guerre in February 1918. As with other Great War servicemen, he received the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Frank Tuxworth was discharged from the Army on 8 March 1920, having returned to Australia on 19 September 1919.



Before the local men and boys - and women too – went off to the Great War, they were accorded some form of farewell. Often this was a public gathering with the presentation of a farewell gift, as was the case with Private **Frank Madden**:

On Friday evening the boys of Mt. Pleasant entertained Private Frank Madden (son of Mr. W. Madden), at a farewell and made him a presentation of a wristlet watch. The presentation ... was made by Mr. T. Ryan. Pte. Madden also received from the public of Balgownie a fountain pen.³

Frank Madden (left) was born in 1895, the son of William (the Mayor of North Wollongong) and Rose Madden.⁴ He was already serving in the military when war was declared

¹ The Record of Service Personnel can be found at honouringanzacs.net.au or the National Archives web site

² Extract of *London Gazette*, 2 December 1919 regarding Tuxworth's service for the award of the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

³ *South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus*, Friday 3 September 1915, p.7

⁴ Rosanna Mooney married William Maurice Madden on 9 October 1894 at St Francis Xavier's Church, Wollongong by Reverend Father John Byrne. Madden's Plain is named after Frank's great grandfather.

and was keen to join the fighting overseas. When the Waratah March (from Nowra to Sydney) passed through Balgownie gathering recruits, Frank joined them. Twelve months later Father Dunne performed the task dreaded by Wollongong residents, who collectively held their breath, when the priest came into their street: 'On Saturday, the Very Rev. J.P. Dunne had again to break sad news to a local family, when he conveyed to Alderman and Mrs. Madden, of Balgownie, the information that their son Frank had been killed in action.'⁵ Sergeant Francis William Madden was killed in action on 19 August 1916, two months before his twenty-first birthday, and his body buried between Pozieres and Mouquet Farm. He is commemorated at the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, France, Balgownie War Memorial and the War Memorial in Canberra.



Above: The Waratah March passing the Balgownie School of Arts in 1915

It seemed like the never-ending reporting of death. The *Mercury* account of Frank Madden's death was immediately below the report that Sergeant-Major **Alban Kirby**, the Quartermaster-Sergeant for the 1st battalion, 1st AIF, had also been killed in action, a few days short of his twenty-third birthday.

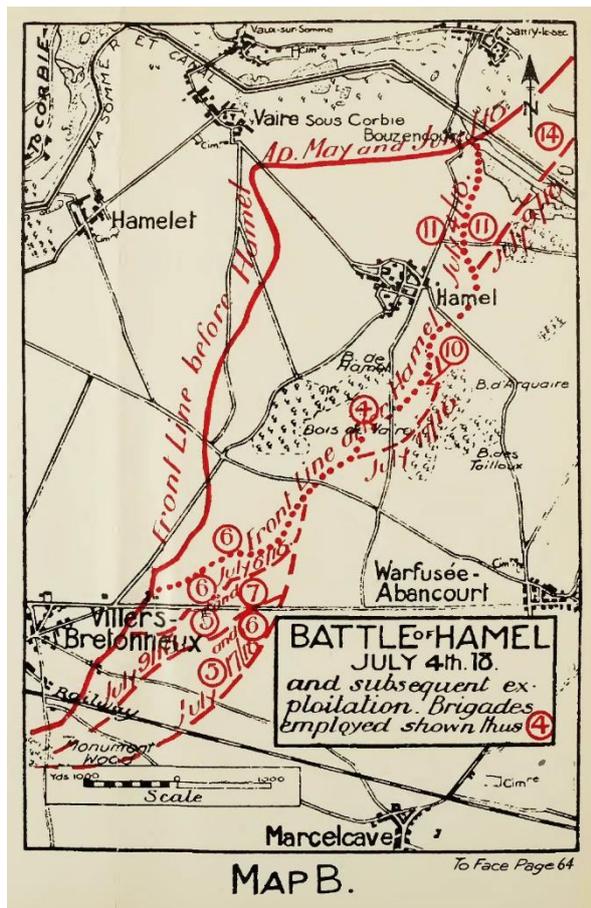
On Friday night, the Rev. J.P. Dunne received an official telegram from the Defence Department conveying the sad news that Sergeant-Major Alban Kirby had laid down his life fighting for freedom on the battlefield of France. The sad 'news was at once conveyed to Ald. Kirby, who at that time was at a meeting of Wollongong Council.⁶

Kirby had enlisted in September 1914, soon after war was declared (his service number was 508) and was in the first contingent of troops who left Australia in November 1914. He went to Egypt and then was part of the Anzac landings at Gallipoli where he served for thirteen

⁵ 'Our Heroes – Sergeant Frank Madden', *Illawarra Mercury*, Tuesday, 19 September 1916 p. 2

⁶ 'Our Heroes – Sergeant-Major Alban Kirby', *Illawarra Mercury*, Tuesday, 19 September 1916 p. 2

weeks. At Gallipoli Kirby was wounded four times before being evacuated to Egypt and then England. Alban Kirby fought on the Western Front where he died on 19 August 1916. He is buried at Courcellette British Cemetery, France, where there are 1,970 graves of which 1,180 are unidentified. Mostly the burials are of Australians from the awful battles at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm, which killed many servicemen from Wollongong during July and August 1916. In 1921, James Kirby 'received, a bronze plaque from His Majesty the King as a memorial of his son Alban, who gave his life for his country.'⁷ This plaque was commonly referred to as a 'Dead Man's Penny'.



In his homily at the nine o'clock Mass in St Francis Xavier's on Sunday morning 17 September 1916, the visiting celebrant, Father Smith, 'prefaced his remarks by prayer for the three members of the church whose death had been reported during the past week, Sergeant-Major Kirby, Sergeant Madden and Private Doherty.' Father Smith said the three words 'killed in France' had sunk deep in his heart, because behind those words were the grief of relatives and friends. The soldiers killed should be remembered he said:

Though far removed from the din of battle, and out of reach of the moans of the wounded and dying, we as Australians should not forget them in our prayers. We should not forget also the grey-haired mother and father the very heart strings of whom had been entwined round the son they had given to their country, and the widow and children who had given their all, to fight in the cause of freedom; the freedom to live without being, menaced by unjust laws, and the freedom to practice their religion as they did to-day, unhindered.⁸

When Private **Arthur Copas** was about to go off to war in 1917, he was publicly farewelled by the Mayor of Wollongong, Alderman Norm Smith. (Smith would also join the army and, at the age of 32, leave for the Western Front in February 1918). 'Appreciative reference to the departing warrior's good qualities was made by the chairman [Smith], Alderman Beatson, Kirby [father of Sergeant-Major Kirby], Vidal and others. Special reference was also made to Mrs Copas, the mother of the guest.' Twenty-nine-year-old Arthur thanked everyone 'for the kind words, but he particularly thanked the gathering for the kindly reference to his parents.'⁹ Arthur's parents were very active in the parish. His father, John, a much-respected resident of Wollongong, was elected to the St Francis Xavier's Church Committee in 1906.

⁷ *South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus*, Friday 23 December 1921. The round bronze Memorial Plaque was 120mm in diameter. It showed Britannia and a lion on the front and bore the inscription: "He died for freedom and honour". The full name of the dead soldier was engraved on the right-hand side of the plaque. No rank, unit or decorations were shown, befitting the equality of the sacrifice made by all those who died.

⁸ "Killed in France", *Illawarra Mercury*, Tuesday, 19 September 1916, p.2

⁹ *South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus*, Friday 17 August 1917, p. 10

Before the war the blue-eyed, brown haired young man had been a storekeeper. Now, Arthur was a soldier in the 13th battalion and disembarked in France on 30 December 1917. Barely seven months later he was killed in action at the Battle of Hamel. His death was publicly notified in the 420th Casualty List published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 3 August 1918 (page 11). (A numbing revelation of a war's toll: the 420th casualty listing!) Arthur was buried 1500 yards south west of Hamel and 200 yards east of Bois de Vaire (Vaire Wood). (About where the 4th Brigade is shown on the map, p.3.) His mother was identified in the *Herald* as being the next of kin but over the next twelve months it was Arthur's sister, Mollie, who would correspond on the family's behalf with the Defence Department. Mollie had received information from the Red Cross as to where Arthur was buried, but in a letter of 7 April 1919 she asked Defence's officer-in-charge at Base Records, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, "Would it be possible to get a photograph of the grave and could you find out for me what Catholic Chaplain was with his Company at that time?" She was later advised that the matter of the photograph was in hand and would be forwarded to her when available (A service provided by the Commonwealth Government for the family of service personnel buried overseas.) The military was unable to confirm that there was a chaplain at the time of Arthur's death.

The personal effects of Arthur arrived on 26 April 1919 detailing: '1 disc, 1 wallet, letters, cards, photos, Religious Trinkets.' One can reasonably suppose that what Arthur held dear within the treasury of his pockets were devotional objects of Faith and family. To the ignorant, they were 'Religious Trinkets' but as one writer has noted, 'No frontline soldier was without his amulet, and every tunic pocket became a reliquary.'¹⁰ The Scapular was the religious article often worn by Catholic servicemen, while they carried and used rosaries and wore a holy medal of personal significance, particularly of the Immaculate Virgin¹¹.

A Catholic chaplain attached to the Forces may have put Mollie Copas at ease about the provision of Sacraments to her brother or whether a priest was with Arthur when he died. Father E. Goidanich, a Catholic chaplain of 6th Brigade said in 1916 that "In a majority of cases the Catholic soldier practiced their religion, and[even] the most careless Catholics received the Sacraments."¹² In a letter to Archbishop Kelly, Army Chaplain Father T.J. King asked that the archbishop:

Assure the Catholic families of Australia whose sons have fallen that thanks to a long term of preparation ample opportunity was afforded the priests of various brigades in the A.I.F. to secure the spiritual safety of almost every Catholic man under their command.... many a careless boy came back to the Church on the very threshold of his death.¹³

It has been said that there are no atheists on the frontline.

The Great War ended 104 years ago; the Second World War concluded 67 years ago. "*The Old Force passed down the road to history. The dust of its march settled. The sound of its arms died.*"¹⁴ To every time we should as a people of Faith recall in prayer the departed who served Australia: Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord and let Perpetual Light shine upon them. May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen

¹⁰ Paul Fussell in Jenkins, P., *The Great and Holy War*, Lion Hudson, Oxford, 2014, p.123

¹¹ Pope Benedict XV placed the world under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary during the Great War.

¹² Father E. Goidanich in Johnstone, T., *The Cross of Anzac: Australian Catholic Service Chaplains*, p52

¹³ Father T.J. King to Archbishop Kelly, 8 August 1916 in Johnstone, T., *The Cross of Anzac: Australian Catholic Service Chaplains*, p.53

¹⁴ Bean, C.E.W., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, Volume VI, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1942, p. 1096