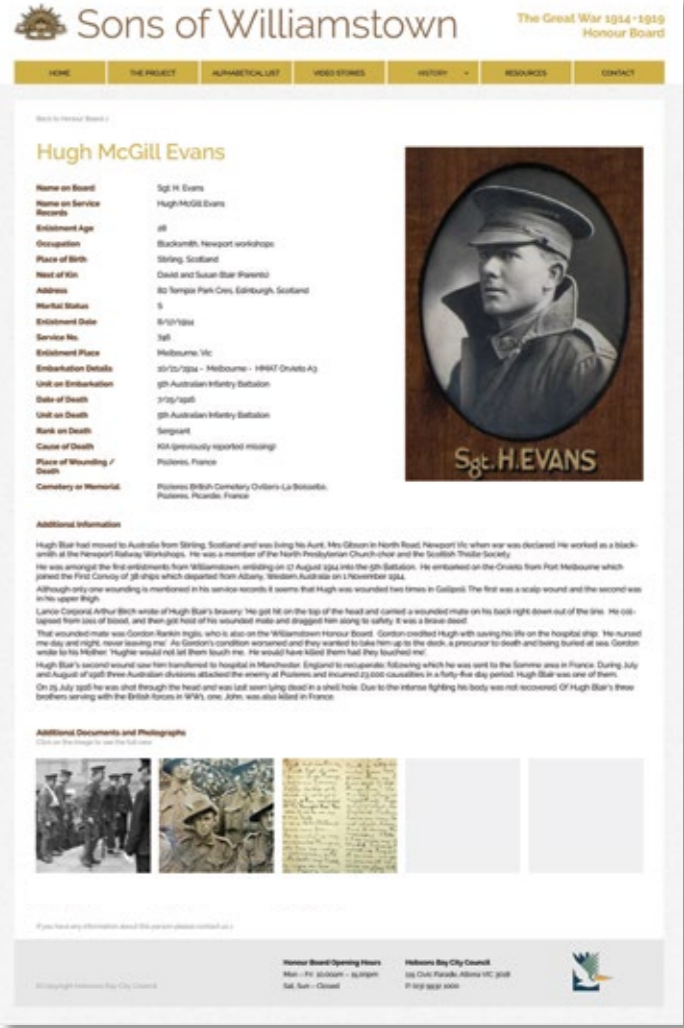




Sons of Williamstown - A Labour of Love website

Sons of Williamstown - A Labour of Love website, tells the stories behind the faces on our Williamstown Town Hall Honour Board. To see those stories, visit www.sonsofwilliamstown.com.au



The Project

Sons of Williamstown - A Labour of Love set out to conserve, research, document and share the many stories behind the faces on the Williamstown Town Hall Honour Board.

Due to its age, the plywood panels framing the photographs on this extraordinary memorial were buckling and pressing the gilded lettering to the glass. The names of our local servicemen were all slowly disappearing. Nearly 100 years after it was created, it was time to preserve the names of those who gave their lives in the Great War and tell their stories.

Expert conservator, Jude Schahinger, conserved the board by cleaning, repairing and regilding damaged lettering and installing spacers to prevent the plywood and lettering coming into contact with the glass.

Using digitised records, resources from across the world, information from local communities and artefacts from families we established and confirmed identities of the men on the board, their connections to Williamstown, their service histories and their stories.

Through a series of talks, social media posts and the creation of the Sons of Williamstown website, the stories behind the faces on the Williamstown Town Hall Honour Board are being told. To see those stories go to www.sonsofwilliamstown.com.au or visit the board in person at the Williamstown Town Hall.

The Honour Board

Of the 1,800 Williamstown men who enlisted during WWI, 265 would not return. In 1917, at the request of local families, Councillor William Henderson, a Williamstown councillor from 1916-1928 and Mayor from 1919-1920, collected the names and portraits of each of those men who gave their lives.

In May 1919 Governor Sir Arthur L. Stanley proclaimed Williamstown a city, opened the new Council Chambers in Ferguson Street and unveiled an '8 feet by 4 feet handsomely framed and glazed collective photograph' of 248 individual photos plus the names of six other local servicemen who died in the Great War. The 1919 collective photograph is believed to be the first manifestation of the present honour board which hangs in the Williamstown Town Hall today.

By 1924 Cr Henderson had collected 265 portraits. To display them, the council contracted the well-known Melbourne firm, H Goldman Manufacturing Co., to build a blackwood cabinet with doors designed to protect the photos.

For Cr Henderson this work was his labour of love but it was no easy task. "I have seen more of the domestic side of grief than ever before", he wrote. Describing his experiences in gathering the photos, an emotional Cr Henderson said he had "learned the private histories of those boys so truly loved".

Sons of Williamstown

— "A Labour of Love" —



War

Australia initially embraced the declaration of war on 4 August 1914. The government's promise of 20,000 servicemen was soon met. By the end of 1914 more than 50,000 men had enlisted and thousands more were rejected for not meeting the medical and physical requirements.

By the time the war ended in 1918, from a population of fewer than 5 million, more than 400,000 Australians had enlisted.

They came from all walks of life. They were butchers and bakers, sailmakers, plumbers, miners, grocers, lawyers, architects and even a piano maker.

Many brothers and cousins enlisted and fought together. Some saw their relatives and mates killed, some searched for the missing. None of the men on the Williamstown Town Hall Honour Board returned.

Memorials

Those who died in World War 1 were not returned to Australia. They remained in marked and unmarked graves in the countries where they fell. Cost and distance prevented most families visiting Australian war graves overseas.

In the absence of graves to visit, the listing of names on memorials and honour boards became, for families and friends, the physical presence of lost loved ones. Memorials big and small were built and dedicated all over Australia. They served to confirm and validate a community's contribution to the war and helped people to make sense of their loss. Families and friends wanting to keep the memory of their loved ones closer to home often created personal memorials in local cemeteries with plaques dedicated to those lost.

Heartfelt 'In Memoriams' appeared in local papers for many years after the war and for the people of Williamstown, Newport and Spotswood the Town Hall Honour Board was an important place of remembrance.

Photography

In part, the Williamstown Town Hall Honour Board owes its existence to the popularity of photography at the time. It was common practice for service men to have a formal studio photograph taken in uniform. Melbourne commercial photographers, such as Algernon Darge had concessions to take photos at Broadmeadows and Seymour Camps. Darge's immense catalogue of glass negatives and notes were bought by the Australian War Memorial in the late 1930s.

It is mainly thanks to Darge and precious images kept by families that Cr Henderson was able to collect photos for the Honour Board at Williamstown Town Hall.

Acknowledgements

In identifying the full names and locating the service records of every man on the Williamstown Town Hall Honour Board, Sons of Williamstown - A Labour of Love has been researched, compiled and cross referenced from publicly available sources, such as the National Archives of Australia and the Australian War Memorial, as well as through the generous assistance of the local community, including direct family relatives to whom we extend our sincerest thanks.

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