

The Rylstone WWI Autograph Quilt 1915

In September during History Week Rylstone and District Historical Society will be presenting an exhibition at the Rylstone Memorial Hall celebrating the stories of soldiers and local families linked to the Rylstone Autograph Quilt.

The Rylstone WWI Autograph Quilt was the result of efforts by Mrs James Dawson, supported by Mrs Fletcher, wife of the Rylstone Shire President, and Mrs J. W. Farrar one hundred years ago. Individuals signed the quilt in pencil, and then paid to have their signatures embroidered over. It was completed for the 30th of July 1915, called "Australia Day", a special day where the Australian community raised money to support the war effort. Most of these funds were collected for the Australian Division of the Red Cross.

This quilt is now in safe-keeping at the War Memorial in Canberra. Its preservation has been a miracle. A Mrs Simpson in Sydney found the quilt in a collection of linen purchased at auction in Sydney in the 1970s. Recognising its significance, she sent it to the War Memorial. Its makers and all those who signed it would probably be surprised that it still exists 100 years later!

Rylstone and District Historical Society President, and Curator of the exhibition Helen Marsonet, explained, "When I first found out six years ago that there was a Rylstone autograph quilt in the collection of the War Memorial I was so excited! It has led to a massive project researching the signatures – information has been pouring in all of which will contribute substantially to the Rylstone family history archives".

There are over 900 autographs embroidered in white embroidery thread on a white sheet in stem stitch and chain stitch, with decorative motifs of grape leaves, flowers, stars, sun rays and circles.

"The decorative motifs reflect the period," says Helen. "Grape vines were probably chosen as a sign of mourning. Similarly the sun and stars dotted over the quilt may symbolise the heavens".

Images of the rising sun featured prominently leading up to and following the Federation celebrations of 1901. With the surge of national pride, the emblem as a symbol of an emerging nation began to appear on buildings and in the brands of many commodities. The first rising sun hat badge was

issued to Australian troops serving in South Africa, and was later adopted as the official emblem for all military forces within the Commonwealth of Australia – and a variant is still in use today.

The quilt contains the names of at least 75 soldiers from the Rylstone district who enlisted between August 1914 and July 1915. Two stitched circles bear the names A.C.ROBBINS, A.H.FREEMAN and J.D. SANDSTROM. All three were early Gallipoli casualties. A central circular shape bears the cipher of King George V and FOR OUR DARDANELLES AUSTRALIAN WOUNDED 1915.

Two circles bear the names of well known Australian commanding officers also killed on Gallipoli in the first days: General Bridges and Cols. MacLaurin, Braund and Onslow-Thompson.

Rylstone citizens donated varying amounts to have their names, or the names of loved ones, embroidered, which raised a total of £95. On completion, the quilt was auctioned. Mr E H Nash was the final purchaser of the quilt. He paid £17.10 for it, so the total raised was £112.10 – a substantial amount in 1915.

The “Stitches in Time” exhibition in Rylstone celebrating 100 years since the quilt was created will feature the signatures from the quilt in the form of large projections. There will be stories and photographs, a memorial to the recently identified soldier Athol Kirkland given to the family by the residents of Pinnacle Swamp, WWI objects, uniforms, and other attractions. During the exhibition embroidery in the style of the quilt and sock knitting will be demonstrated. The exhibition will be open daily from 10 am to 4 pm from the 4th to the 11th of September.

Anyone curious to know if the signatures of their forebears are on the quilt, or who can provide further family history information, are urged to contact Helen Marsonet at Rylstone and District Historical Society at rylstonehistory@westnet.com.au or PO Box 66 Rylstone 2849.



Rylstone Autograph Quilt (detail)



Rylstone and Grape Vines (detail)



M. A. Lloyd and other signatures – one of the floral shapes on the quilt

A close-up photograph of a signature written in gold thread on a textured, light brown fabric. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style and reads "Rupert Stanley George".

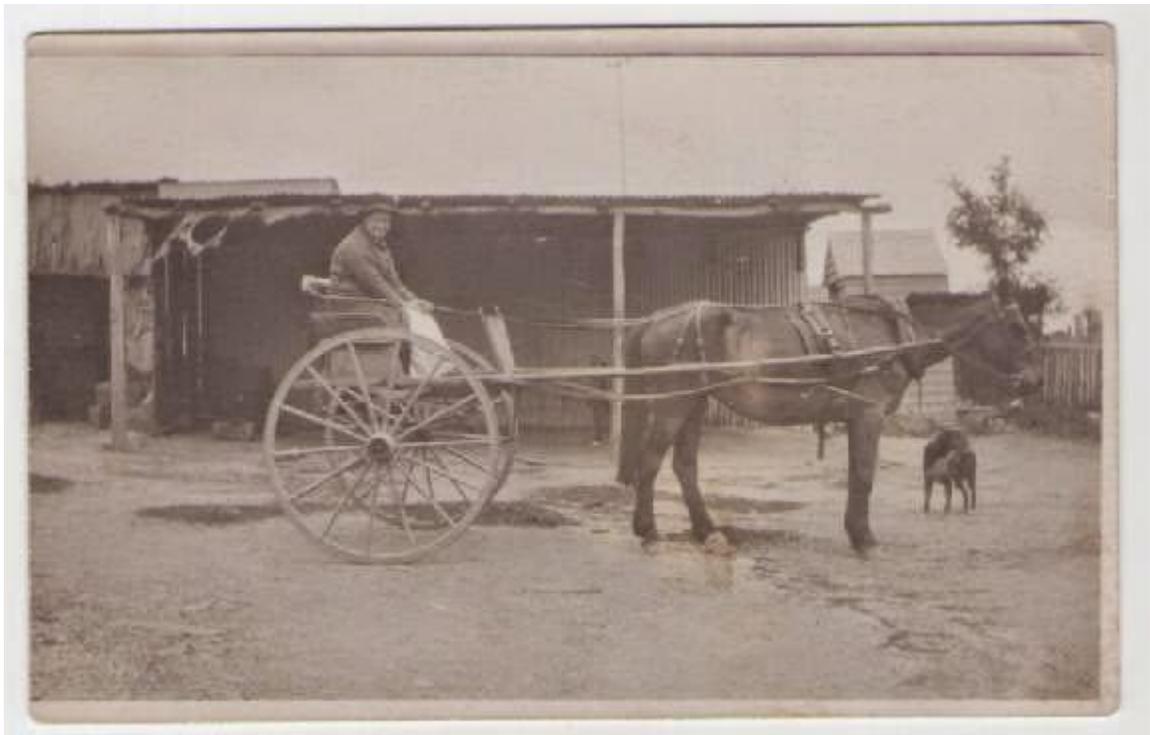
Rupert Stanley George signature



Rupert Stanley George served with the Australian Infantry Forces in France



Blanch Bayliss signature on quilt



Blanch Bayliss



Ada Ferguson signature on quilt



Ada Ferguson (nee Farrar)



Elizabeth Hastings Jones signature on quilt



Nurse Elizabeth Hastings Jones (nee Taylor)