

Australia Day 30 July 1915 – Rylstone Autograph Quilt auctioned for £17.10s.

One hundred years ago, Rylstone and every other rural centre was in a fever of preparation for a nationally declared 'Australia Day' to collect funds in support of the war effort and for the relief of the wounded in the Dardanelles.

H. A. Phipps, who wrote his memories of the day stated, "Australia had been pledged to support England and France in the first World War to the last man and the last shilling by Prime Minister, Billy Hughes. Hughes named 30 July 1915 Australia Day and called on every person in the Commonwealth TO DO THEIR BIT, to raise funds for the war and help our troops then fighting in Gallipoli and other places overseas."

In Rylstone, almost every man woman and child responded to the call. On the day a huge procession made its way from Rylstone Railway Station to the Horticultural Hall.



The Rylstone Australia Day Procession leaving Rylstone Railway Station 30 July 1915

The march was led out by the mounted police, followed by the Rylstone Brass Band. Motorcars were decorated to the hilt representing the Allied Countries Belgium, Italy, Britain, and Russia with drivers in costume. Members of Rylstone Rifle Club were followed by the Rylstone Druid Lodge in full dress uniform, members of the Dunn family on horseback, lorries dressed as various entities with costumed passengers, the Principal, his assistant and all the schoolchildren representing Japan, India represented by a decorated bicycle, then the Red Cross Ambulance, a comical 'Belgian Band' composed of rusty cans and old teapots, etc. and finally Sam Ferguson's truck with a huge load of wood decorated with the Australian ensign.

Commenting on the day in the Mudgee Guardian of August 5, 1915, the reporter remarked "Dr Hansard's car, representing Great Britain, was decorated from stem to stern in red, white and blue, with the national ensign supporting a British aeroplane

on the centre of the windscreen, whilst on the back of the car a splendid model of a British Dreadnought (the Queen Elizabeth) was elaborately set out with a submarine at its stern. The effort must have cost the doctor much thought and hard work, and he fully deserves the expressions of admiration that the public expressed.”



Dr Hansard's decorated car: Dr Hansard as Sir Ian Hamilton and Rev. Walker as Admiral Jellicoe.

On arrival at the Horticultural Hall, the crowd of close to 500 enjoyed a luncheon supplied by the ladies of the Red Cross, followed by speeches, auctions and entertainments. Many people came in costume, school children sang songs and performed a Maypole, the Rev. Walker gave a stirring speech, followed by Mr. McLachlan who urged “every young man to think seriously of the present situation, which was fraught with very grave peril. He appealed to them in the name of their mothers and sisters, sweethearts and wives, whom they have left behind, to go forward and fight for the honor of Freedom and Liberty.”

Fourteen young men enlisted on the day. Young people were deputised to collect donations, with many performers showered with coins. Items auctioned varied from a cauliflower to flags, fowls, pictures, livestock and the Rylstone Autograph Quilt. Mr E. H. ‘Ted’ Nash paid £17.10.0.

The creator of the quilt was Mrs Dawson, of ‘Henbury’ who had two sons at the front lines in Gallipoli, one of whom was killed on 6 August. She and her many daughters worked very hard during July to complete the quilt in time for Australia Day. Signatures and attached donations were collected by members of her family, through the Red Cross, and by Mrs. Fletcher and Mrs. Farrer. The Rylstone Autograph Quilt raised £95 in total, and total donations from Australia Day in Rylstone exceeded £700.

The Mudgee Guardian reporter concluded, "The enthusiasm of the crowd was beyond bounds; they stopped at nothing, and right throughout the day the same buoyant and patriotic feeling prevailed. Darkness closed a memorable day, never equalled, and not likely to be, in our time in Rylstone."

Rylstone and District Historical Society will be paying tribute to the more than 900 local citizens of the district who paid to have their names stitched onto the Rylstone Autograph Quilt 100 years ago. 'Stitches in Time' is an official History Week Event and will be at Rylstone Memorial Hall from the 4th to the 11th of September. The Quilt is in Canberra in safekeeping at the War Memorial and will not be on display, but EVERY signature has been photographed and these will be projected on a screen running continuously. The exhibition will be open every day from 10 am to 4 pm and a program of songs, poetry and demonstrations will make this a unique and special event. The public is invited to attend.