

# The Teale Family and the First World War

Clarrie Neal

The Teale families of Riverstone were descendants of some of the earliest settlers on the Hawkesbury. John Teale had married Dinah Kable, daughter of Henry Kable who came to Australia with Governor Phillip and served as Chief Constable before becoming a prominent businessman.

When Dinah died in 1855 the newspaper reported “Death of the oldest white Australian”. Dinah was the wife of the late John Teale, a miller of Windsor, and the second white woman to be born in Australia and the first to live to maturity. The above information was extracted from an historical article in the *Windsor & Richmond Gazette* on the 7th Nov. 1919.

The first reference to the Teale families in Riverstone appears in the Electoral Rolls of 1893-4 with John H. and George H. registered. It is likely that they came to Riverstone to work at the meatworks.

During World War 1 the *Gazette* made several references to George and Will Teale serving in Europe from 1915 to 1918. The *Gazette* also published extracts from letters sent from the front to their parents Mr and Mrs George Teale of Riverstone. Below is a selection of these letters.

## **A.I.F. Heavyweight boxing Champion**

*Gazette* 1st September 1916

“Mr & Mrs George Teale have received a cable from their son Will who is having a spell in England after being in the trenches in France. The message reads - “Doing well and in good health”.

Pte W Teale left last October and on the way won the heavyweight boxing championship. The prize was a Gold Medal, which he sent to his parents, but they never received it. He had his 21st birthday in Egypt and is over 6 ft tall. Another son of Mr & Mrs G Teale, George left for the front on the 12th March and the two brothers met in Malta in strange circumstances, as related in a letter from Will. We will publish extracts from the letter next week and let him tell the story of the unexpected meeting.”

## **En-route to France**

*Gazette* 8th September 1916

Extracts from a letter received by Mr & Mrs G Teale from their son Will.

“I am writing this letter at sea, on our way to France. We are having a good trip as long as we don’t get hit with a ‘tin fish’ (torpedo). I am not sorry we left Egypt, and I don’t want to see another place like it. But, they put us in a worse place than Egypt - Arabia, a part of Asia Minor. The place is not fit for the niggers that were there. All you can see is just sky and desert, and that’s where we had our trenches. Flies in millions, 130 degrees F. in the shade and a pint of water a day. It was just the sort of life I wanted to experience, and I got all I wanted, too.

I wonder how George is (his brother), I suppose he is in England to finish his training. We are hard and well trained, so they will put us straight into the firing line, I suppose. I don’t want to get killed, but I can tell you this much, - I am anxious to have a go at those “square heads”. I was pretty bad when I fell sick, but have got over that little lot. I met Sid Hudson over here and every time he had a chance he came over to see me. He treated me as if I was a brother, especially when I was sick. He is one of the best pals I ever had. It will be soon 12 months since I left Sydney, and by jove, it seems like double that time. Things are going alright with me, I feel A1, but I am glad we left Egypt. A bloke would have died there this summer. As I can’t post this letter until I get to France, I will close now, and add more to it when I get there.

At sea

“I said I would finish this letter when I got to the front, but I will put some good news in it. We pulled up at Malta for a couple of days, and three other boats full of soldiers stopped in the harbour. I signalled over with flags and asked if George’s lot was there, and they answered back “Yes”. We were just half a mile apart. The thing was how to get there, I determined it was to swim. I’m not a good swimmer - but I learnt and did a lot in the Suez Canal. I swam it with plenty in hand. I pulled myself up on a rope, and when my brother saw me he nearly fell overboard. Funny place to meet him, was it not. He looks splendid. Home, I tell you flashed through my mind and we were talking for awhile. It was a great pleasure meeting one of my brothers. I was only talking to him for half an hour, and then I left and swam back to my boat. About an hour later his boat pulled out, but where he is going is more than I can tell you. Fred Hurley is with him.

We have landed in France, and are just behind the firing line. We can hear the big guns going off, so it won’t be long before we are right into it. France is a lovely place, it is worth fighting for. The women do the farming; nearly every man in France is a soldier. What a change after being in Egypt; lovely green grass to lie on. When we landed in France we did a 50 hour train journey - over a 1,000 miles. It does not get dark over here till after 11 o’clock, and the fire from the guns makes it look like day, and they make the ground shake.

BILL”

### **Other Riverstone Boys**

*Gazette 17th January 1917*

France 29/10/1916

“I have not been able to write for a while, as we have been very busy, and are still hard at it. I cannot tell you where we are, but you will see by the papers where the Australians are. We are up against it I can tell you, but that is all in the game. I got a good mail this week, but all the letters were written in May, I was pleased to get them. I received a parcel from E. Hurley a couple of weeks ago, and a letter from her yesterday. Bill and I went to see Aub Schofield and his brother and A. Mason, they all look well. C. Morris was not wounded, he was suffering shell shock, but that is just as bad. S. Alcorn was wounded, and C. Alcorn is suffering from shell shock. We are both well, but if don’t hear from us for a while, don’t worry. GEORGE”

### **Life at the Somme**

*Gazette 17th January 1917*

France 2/11/1916

“I received your letter and the photo. I don’t want you to worry about me and George, because I feel sure we will pull through alright. We are down on the Somme at present, and I tell you it is very hard. We get 3 biscuits for the 24 hours, and a drink of tea if we are lucky. I have had wet clothes on for a week, and have a cold, of course. George is the same; but I have a little bit of strength left and can see it out. I ran across Griffin cooking, and I had the feed of my life. The mud is up over our knees, and it very seldom stops raining. Mind, I’m not grumbling, I enlisted for this purpose, and am willing to see it through. I only mention it to let you know what a good time we are having. I sent you 2 cables from France. You told me you got the first, hope you got the second. Don’t worry, we are in the best of health. George and I will see this job through. We will be out for a spell shortly, and my word we need it. Tell Mrs. Griffin her husband is well, and he thanks you for visiting his wife. Shells over this way are iron factories weighing 200 lbs. F Hurley is well and wishes to be remembered to all.

BILL”

## **Shell Injury**

*Gazette 11th May 1917*

“Just received some more letters from you, and many thanks for the parcels, George also received some. I will send you a little present when we get out of this place. Where we are now we cannot buy anything. Every house for 20 miles is swept away by shell fire. There is not a house standing, it is terrible. One has to have a good nerve to stand it, but I am still hanging on like grim death. Two nights ago I was standing talking to my mate in the trench when a shell burst right near us. and a piece of shell put a hole in his back as big as my fist. I dressed his wound at once and then carried him to a Doctor, under heavy shell fire. George and Fred saw me do it. I thought my time had come, but I put plenty of heart and confidence in myself, and I pulled through alright. I have had poor fellows killed right alongside of me. George and Fred have also had some narrow shaves. I have not had a wash to speak of for 6 weeks. I think I have told you all the news, so good-bye.”

Love from BILL

Edmonton Military Hospital, Suyers Street

## **Christmas in the Trenches**

*Gazette 11th May 1917*

France 25th December 1916

“Well, Mother it is Xmas day today and we have just finished our dinner. We had some stew and a piece of plum pudding and a packet of biscuits, so we made the best of things. The pudding was not bad, only we had to get a piece of string to pull it out of our jaws, it was so sticky. I hope you enjoyed yourselves. I know there was many a sad home in Australia, but we will get over that some day. They sent Fritz over his Xmas dinner today. There was a big bombardment, so they fixed him up for Xmas dinner. The big guns never stop, they are going day after day and night after night. At times the bombardment last for weeks, and never cease. They can hear the roar in some parts of England. It is only a 24 hours run from where we are. It is very wet over here. The constant roar of the guns makes it rain. We are seeing plenty of fighting, plenty of snow, plenty of mud, and plenty of shells. Did little Arthur and Fred hang up their stocking at Xmas. I hang mine up every night full of water. I will send some silks when I get out of this place. I think I will close now, so good bye, from your loving son

GEORGE TEALE”

## **Injury and Recovery**

*Gazette 4th January 1918*

“29/10/1917, received by Mr & Mrs G. Teale from their son Pte W. Teale from the Southern General Hospital, Birmingham, England.

“Just a few lines to let you know my wounds are going splendidly. I have to go under an operation shortly to get the shrapnel out of my thigh. I shall never forget the morning I was wounded. The 2 men carrying me out got wounded, and I was wounded again. When they were wounded, I started to crawl, and crawled for half a mile through mud and shell holes. It was raining and the Germans were shelling heavily all the time. It was terrible. When I had crawled to the nearest dressing station, I was utterly worn out from loss of blood, and then fainted, the first time I ever went out to it in my life. I laughed when I came round, but was very weak from the loss of blood.

Never mind, I am in a feather bed now, listening to a nice piano being played. The nurses are very good to us here; it is quite a pleasure to be talking to an Australian girl again. Do you remember the old Warialda, the boat I left Sydney in. Well, they have made a hospital ship out of her, and I was brought from France to England in her. I met old Dick Pape’s son on her, he is an engineer on the

boat and doing well. I see where Italy is being beaten. The war won't end there, it will end on the Western front. I was wounded in Flanders, in Belgium, near Ypres."

Pte W. Teale also breaks out in poetry and sends the following and penitent effort to his family.

"A Thought Of Home"

In my dugout, somewhere in France  
I sit alone with my thoughts  
I think of the dear old home, askance  
Of the sorrow on my parents I brought

I think of the day I left behind  
The dear old Mother and Dad  
I think of my brothers and sisters so kind  
I sit alone and am sad

I picture below the white stone hearth  
A chair that is vacant for me  
In a home in Australia, the land of my birth  
In a home far across the sea

I know that the chair will be filled some day  
That place by the old fireside  
I can see my parents kneel and pray  
For this boy far over the sea

When this awful war is over  
And I return again  
I'll prize the dear old homeland for ever  
And hope never to leave again."

### **Report on Will Teale and a Poem**

*Gazette 1st March 1918*

"Mr and Mrs G. Teale have received a letter from Lieut. Alex Teale about their son Pte Will Teale who will shortly be returning to Australia, having been shot through the lungs. The letter was written from the Southern General Hospital, Birmingham and dated 29/11/1917. The paragraphs below have been extracted from the letter.

Dear Mr and Mrs G. Teale,

Just a few lines to let you know that your son Will is progressing favourably, and will, I think be winding up winning the "Recovery Stakes" in an easy canter in speedy time. His wounds were not serious, but just sufficient; I think to spend Christmas in England, instead of the land of slush and mud where death is constantly spoken. He is in hospital with me, and, rather a strange coincidence we should meet here, after not seeing one another for some years, and that was at the Hawkesbury Show.

His boxing has won him fame through out all the ranks. He is a game soldier, which is strongly appreciated by all ranks of his uniformed brothers of the Australian Forces. His self determination and intelligent spirit, with a strong devotion to duty, has won him honor and fame, amongst the bravest on earth.

I am enclosing a composed piece about Will which I have written pastime at the hospital. You can send it to the Windsor paper. I know you will be surprised when you receive this letter as neither of you know me, but Harry does. So I must ring off now with a Merry Christmas and Prosperous New Year, trusting you are both and all who are near you are enjoying life and partaking of the very best the earth can give.

Alex Teale.

2nd Battalion, Australian Imperial Infantry.

WILL TEALE

Champion Heavyweight boxer of the Australian Army, wounded at Ypres.

With feint and counter, with hook and swing  
He has brought big crowds to roar  
For battles fought around that ring  
Has come to his eyes before

But he took on more than a boxing stunt  
And a far rougher game than football  
When he came to fight for all at the front  
May he be one of the last to fall

For Will was no shirker, he took his stand  
To score a 'try' was his aim  
This play was grand - he'd a goal in hand  
Was it a German sniper, or an HE shell

For at Ypres wounded with others he fell  
In a fight where nothing was banned  
He realised then, t'was no ring fight  
As the shattering shrapnel flew

Now in spite of the lead, he kept a cool head  
As most of the Australians do  
When as man and gun, he'd forced the Hun  
With resolution high  
For he's one of Australia's fighting sons  
Who are never afraid to die.

Alex Teale"

### **Another Son Joins the War Effort**

*Gazette 10th May 1918*

"Pte Jack Teale sailed to the front this week. This makes the third of Mr and Mrs G. Teale's boys to go to the war. Two brothers are already fighting in France now."

### **Heavyweight Champion**

*Gazette 14th June 1918*

"Mr and Mrs George Teale have received a splendid photo of their son Will in his fighting costume. Will is now the Heavyweight Champion of the Australian Armed Forces and the photo was taken just after he gained that distinction.

The following paragraph is taken from one of the Army magazines.

“The fast, best and most exciting fight of the evening was the heavyweight contest between Pte W Place of South Australia and Pte W Teale of New South Wales. Each man was out to win by the short route, and a real ‘stouch up’ was the result, the decision being most uncertain until well into the last round when Teale just managed to outpoint his opponent. Teale received the decision amid applause.”

Also there is a brief description given of another bout held on 15th February with Pte Teale’s fighting weight at 13 stone 4 lbs.

### **Gassed**

*Gazette 21st June 1918*

Mr and Mrs. G. Teale have received word from the Base Records Office that their son Pte George Teale has been gassed. George was with the 5th Pioneer Battalion, and formerly with the 51st Battalion.

### **Loss of Right Eye**

*Gazette 23rd August 1918*

“Mr and Mrs G Teale have been advised their son George lost his right eye in recent fighting in France.”

### **After the War**

After the war the three brothers returned home to Riverstone and resumed their jobs at the meatworks. George continued to suffer from the terrible injuries he received during the war and in the late 1930’s he moved with his wife and family of three boys to Parramatta.

In the 1940’s when George was unable to care for his family, the boys were placed in the care of the Masonic Homes at Baulkham Hills. George passed away in 1951.

The twin boys Ken and Keith both became meat inspectors with Keith working at Riverstone for several years during the 1960’s.

Bill was a beef butcher at Riverstone, operating the beef saw that split the beef carcasses into two sides. In later years he moved with his family of three children to Bett Street at Parramatta where he built a gymnasium at the rear of his house. He continued his boxing career and taught many of the districts youth the art of boxing. Following the death of the noted boxing referee Joe Wallis, the referees job at the Sydney Stadium was shared for many years by Bill Teale and Bill Henneberry.

Bill continued to work at Riverstone until he retired around 1960 and passed away in 1975.

Compiled by Clarrie Neal from information provided by Keith Teale, Les Teale and the *Windsor & Richmond Gazette*. July 2006.