Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

JAMES SEMPLE
KERR
1888 - 1979

This booklet remains the property of Saint Andrew’s Uniting Church. Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.
**Cover Illustration:** Private James Semple Kerr’s unit embarked from Brisbane on board HMAT Itonus on 8 August, 1916.

Itonus weighed 5,340 tons with an average cruise speed of 12 knots or 22.22 kmph. It was owned by the British India SN Co Ltd, London. *The Itonus was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean, 20 December 1916.*
Private James Semple Kerr

James Semple Kerr was born at Yangan near Warwick in Queensland on 17 June 1888, the only child of James Kerr (1862 – 1889) and Christina née Tait (1863 – 1948). His parents and grandparents were closely associated with Saint Andrew’s Presbyterian Church. His grandfather, James Semple Kerr (senior) was the headmaster of the Normal School, an elder at Saint Andrew’s Church and one of the trustees when Saint Andrew’s was under construction in 1904. On his mother’s side, his grandparents were David and Christina Tait to whom the stained glass window, *David and Jonathon* was dedicated in 1923.

When James Semple Kerr was only one year old, his father James who was the teacher at the rural school at Yangan, died suddenly. Mrs Christina Tait moved back to Brisbane with her infant son and lived at her parents’ home named Luggie Bank at Tribune Street, South Brisbane. When he became old enough to earn a living, James Semple Kerr began as a warehouseman in Brisbane and later moved to the country and worked as a jackaroo.

On 14 March 1916 J S Kerr enlisted to serve in the AIF with reinforcements for the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion training at Bell’s Paddock, Enoggera Camp. His unit embarked from Brisbane on board HMAT<sup>1</sup> *Itonus* on 8 August. The troops disembarked at Plymouth and undertook further training in southern England till December. J S Kerr held the rank of provost corporal in the second half of 1916 but on transferring to the Australian depot in France in early 1917, he reverted to private.

1. His Majesty’s Australian Transport
The 25th Battalion was not involved in any major offensive role at this time. Private Kerr transferred to the 2nd Australian Ammunition Sub Park on 2 June 1917. In line with a move in 1918 to replace supply columns and sub parks with mechanical transport companies, he was appointed a motor transport driver in April 1918. In the same year he was also granted two periods of leave in the United Kingdom. After the armistice, Private Kerr was engaged in non-military employment at the Galeshiels Woolworks Technical College in Scotland before returning to Australia per HMAT *Euripides* in October 1919.

On his return from the war James Semple Kerr took up a selection at Hampden Downs, a property near Kynuna, a town on the Landsborough Highway between Winton and Cloncurry. He married the only daughter of Mr and Mrs W H Rudd of The Range, Rockhampton, Miss Iris Lorna Rudd, at St Paul’s Cathedral, Rockhampton on 7 June 1921. Mr Rudd was managing director of the Rockhampton firm, Walter Reid and Company.

Iris Lorna Kerr (1893 – 1961) became an industrial artist and product designer, an artist/photographer, craftworker and painter. Describing the years with her family on Hampden Downs prior to her successful career, her biographer wrote, “Her life during the 1920s and 1930s was the common lot of most western women: home-making, rearing children, nursing them in sickness and death, surviving through drought and depression, and always offering visitors that hospitality for which the west was famous. Artistic activities were subsumed in making clothes and furnishings, but she continued to fill the ubiquitous autograph books with lively beings inspired by Norman Lindsay’s bears, Louis Wain’s cats, and Aboriginal corroboree groups in the manner of Tommy McRae.”

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Their first child died in infancy but their family later consisted of two daughters and a son.

The son was Jim Kerr AM, born William James Semple Kerr (1932 – 2014), a pioneering heritage administrator, architectural historian and heritage practitioner. He influenced cultural heritage management practice in Australia over a long period. The Conservation Plan for Saint Andrew’s Uniting Church\(^1\) is based on the guidelines drafted by Jim Kerr in his famous work titled *The Conservation Plan*\(^2\) and the *Burra Charter*.\(^3\) It is noteworthy that Saint Andrew’s, constructed in 1904 under the watchful eye of a building committee of which James Semple Kerr (1836-1915) was an active member and now regarded as the finest example of neo-Romanesque architecture in the Southern Hemisphere, should now be protected by national principles devised and promoted by J S Kerr’s great grandson.

During the 1940s J S Kerr and Iris moved to a property named Kunda in the Landsborough area. They later moved to Surfers Paradise then St Lucia. Iris Kerr died on 31 January 1961. For a short time James Semple Kerr lived at Brookfield before occupying a unit at Hawken Drive St Lucia. Aged 90 years, he died on 24 March 1979. He was buried in a family grave at Toowong Cemetery.

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1. A current document approved by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
2. *The Conservation Plan* was first published by the NSW National Trust in 1982 and quickly became a standard reference.
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Compiled by Noel E Adsett
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The “Conservation Plan for Saint Andrew’s Uniting Church” is based on the guidelines drafted by Jim Kerr (1932-2014) in his famous work titled The Conservation Plan. Jim Kerr was the only son of Private James Semple Kerr. (1888-1979)
Lest we forget