

# 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

Booklet Number 135

# **VICTOR GRANVILLE MATHAMS 1893 - 1989**



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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.

**Cover Illustration:** *Victor sent this photograph of himself to Mrs Gertrude Keys of Wondai for whom he had worked before enlistment. He was thanking her for a parcel she had sent. The photo was taken in 1917 by Victor's uncle in Somerset while Victor was recuperating from wounds received at the Front. This well preserved photograph is still in the care of Mr and Mrs Keys' grandson, Ed Wilson.*

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets  
Brisbane QLD 4000  
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## Private Victor Granville Mathams

Victor Granville Mathams was born in Brisbane on 26 May 1893, second son and fifth child of Gregory Alfred Mathams, (1854 – 1937) a carpenter, and Annie Louisa née Balls (1860 – 1950). An older brother Gregory Henry and two sisters Eva Annie and Alice Rose had been born in Sittingbourne, Kent, England and travelled with their parents to Australia on the ship *Duke of Sutherland* in 1886. A third daughter was born in Brisbane the following year but died in infancy. The family lived at Latrobe Terrace, Paddington where they kept a grocery store though Gregory also obtained employment as a carpenter. Mr G A Mathams, Mrs Mathams and Miss Alice Mathams were members of Wharf Street Congregational Church and the family was also closely involved in the life of the Latrobe Terrace Primitive Methodist Church and Sunday School and the temperance organisation known as the Independent Order of Rechabites.

Victor's schooling was brief. It amounted to five and a half years while he attended Ithaca State School. He tried various jobs to earn a living – message boy for a dentist; learning a trade in a factory where fumes affected his lungs; his parents' grocery shop; postman at Brisbane General Post Office and Newcastle in New South Wales; switchboard operator at Waratah Post Office, New South Wales; working on farms. He was a farmhand and employee of William J Keys and his wife Gertrude on their property named Butterfields at North Mondure, via Wondai.



*Victor's parents Gregory and Annie Mathams*

Victor was much younger than his siblings. His brother Henry who was twelve years older than Victor married Grace Campbell Fordyce in January 1913 at the Milton Congregational Church. Henry and Grace Mathams later linked with Ithaca Presbyterian Church. Miss Eva and Miss Alice Mathams never married.

The electoral roll for the year 1915 lists the whole family residing at Latrobe Terrace, Paddington: Mr Gregory A Mathams (grocer) and his wife Mrs Annie Mathams, Mr Henry Mathams (clerk) and his wife Mrs Grace Mathams, Miss Eva Mathams (home duties), Miss Alice Mathams (clerk) and Victor Mathams with no occupation. They were a close family.

On 28 December 1915 Victor Mathams aged 22 years and seven months, enlisted in Brisbane to serve overseas in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). He was given regimental number 1950 and allotted to reinforcements for the 49<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Though he was listed on one of the Wharf Street Congregational honour boards now in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel, Private Mathams gave his religious denomination as Presbyterian.

Mrs Annie Mathams, his mother at the Imperial Store, Latrobe Terrace, Paddington was named next-of-kin. His unit embarked from Brisbane on HMAT<sup>1</sup> *Clan McGillivray* on 1 May 1916.



1. His Majesty's Australian Transport



*In this photo of the Mathams family , Mrs Mathams holds a photo of her son Victor who is working away from home.*

On the voyage sixteen young Queenslanders wrote their names on a message which they placed in a bottle and threw overboard. It was picked up by Mr H Gale, a lighthouse keeper at Ras Gharib in the Gulf of Suez. The message said, "Thrown overboard by men of – on 12/6/16 on her way to the Front" and requested that the list of names be sent to Rev James Gibson, minister of Ithaca Presbyterian Church in Brisbane. (The young soldiers had not named their vessel for security reasons.) Rev Gibson reported the story to the *Brisbane Courier* and the message was published in the newspaper on 19 August 1916 along with a photograph supplied by Mrs Mathams of Paddington of twelve of the signatories, her son Victor's amongst them.

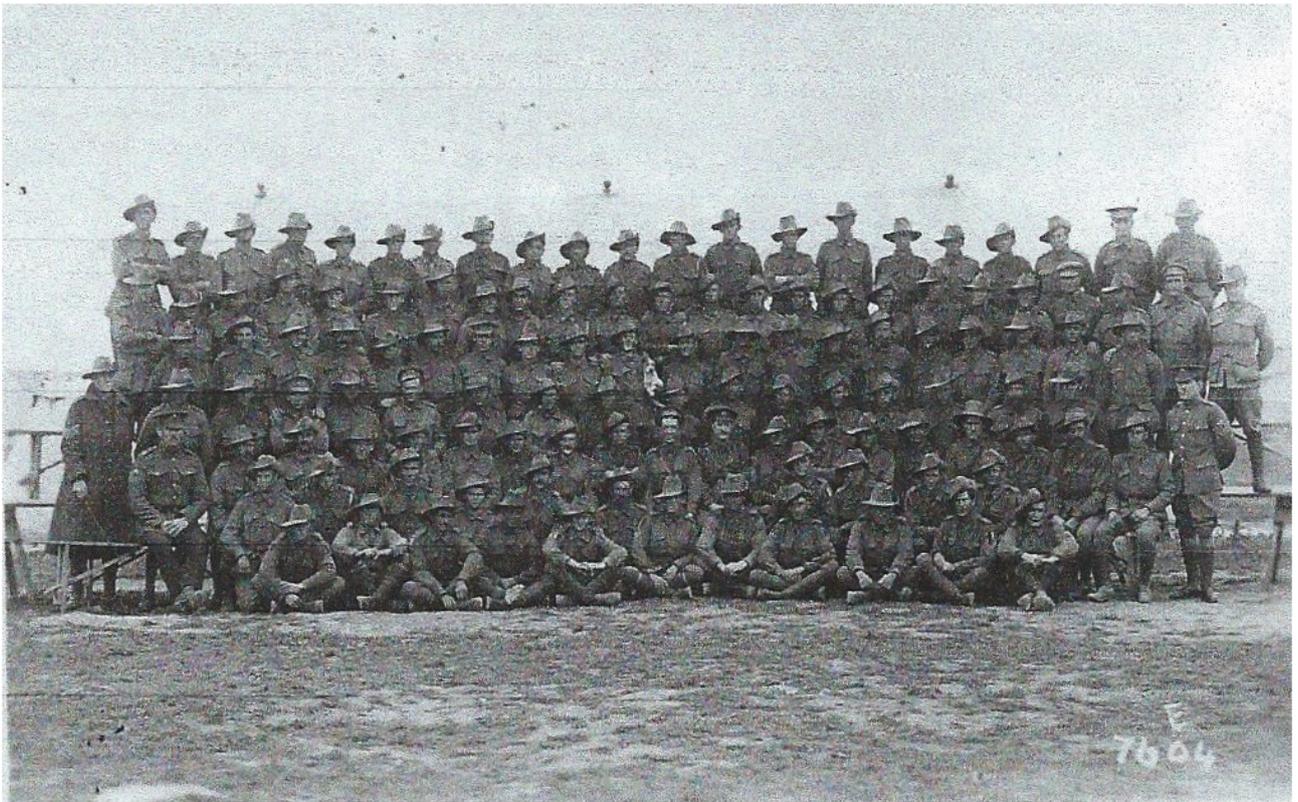
On reaching Egypt on 13 June, the troops trained there for some weeks before leaving Alexandria to join the British Expeditionary Force on board *Megantic* to Southampton. Further training took place in southern England before Private Mathams crossed the channel to serve in the front line in France with the 41<sup>st</sup> Battalion to which he had been transferred on 25 September.

The winter of 1916-17 was bleak. For a short time at the beginning of 1917 Private Mathams worked with the Australian Tunnelling Company. The 41<sup>st</sup> participated in the battles of Belgium in 1917 and Private Mathams was wounded in action on 4 June.

The usual telegram no doubt causing grief and anxiety was sent to Mrs Mathams, "REPORTED PRIVATE VICTOR MATHAMS WOUNDED WILL ADVISE ANYTHING FURTHER RECEIVED. BASE RECORDS."

He had recovered by the end of June and had rejoined his unit in the field but was again in hospital due to gas inhalation at the beginning of July and with epilepsy on 21 July. Private Victor Mathams was back in the field on 5 August but by 20 September his health had again declined. His medical condition was classified PB meaning he would be appointed to a permanent base during rehabilitation. He was attached to Command Depot No. 2 at Monte Video House in Weymouth and later Command Depot No. 4 at Codford. He was then assigned to the Overseas Training Brigade, Longbridge Deverill before returning to his battalion in France on 27 December 1917.

The front and back of a postcard Victor Mathams sent from England



**POST CARD**

*3/49<sup>th</sup>* before being broken up into the  
 This space for communication. The Address to be written here

*2<sup>nd</sup> from end (left)*  
*3<sup>rd</sup> Row down*  
 Centre. Our Late. OC  
 Lt. Heron. & Flowers.  
 Sergeant (Major) sitting left.  
 1 Right Standing are  
 2. Platoon Instructors.  
 we have had attached to us  
 for drill purposes.

*the Sergeant standing on the left is dead.*

*Gr. No. of A Coy 13<sup>th</sup> B. Co.*

*taken out - Polesden Camp*  
*Bulsbury Place*  
*England*  
*taken 22/10/16.*  
*Love from your loving son*

STAMP

\*

HERE

Except for a few days in hospital with debility in March 1918, Private Mathams was able to carry out his duties with the 41<sup>st</sup> Battalion for the remaining months of the war. He was transferred to the Postal Corps of the Australian Army Base in London from 5 November 1918 till 14 February 1919 and served in the War Records Section of AIF Headquarters in London till his return to Australia. While on leave before he left he appeared at Tower Bridge Police Court, charged with travelling on the train without paying his fare. He was fined £2/10/- which he was unable to pay. He was paraded before the Officer-in-Command Troops and released. Private VG Mathams sailed home on the troopship *Pakeha* and was discharged on 9 February 1920.

When Victor Mathams enrolled in the AIF he gave his occupation or trade as farmer and he took up farming again on his return to civilian life. He paid £5 an acre for a 120 acre property at Mono View on Mondure Estate near Wondai. He married May Drummond on 5 April 1921 at Wondai and their son Alfred was born there. For the good of his health Victor was advised to move to a place with a cooler climate.

In January 1923 they went to Tasmania where their daughter Agnes was born. Victor obtained work as a postman though he was experiencing financial difficulties. In the same year Victor's parents and sisters moved from their home in Paddington to live at Stanthorpe. Victor and his young family returned to Queensland in 1927 and joined his family at Stanthorpe where he gained casual employment as a labourer mainly on stations. In 1929, Victor's elder sister, Eva who suffered from an asthmatic condition died at the age of 47 years following a severe electric storm .

The Great Depression (1929–32) was a time of extreme hardship for people in Australia. For Victor Mathams the going was tough. In addition to his difficulties finding work Victor petitioned on 26 March 1930 in the Supreme Court in matrimonial jurisdiction for a dissolution of his marriage with May Drummond on the ground of her misconduct with another man. May Mathams was charged with bigamy and the Chief Justice, Sir James Blair, granted a decree nisi for the dissolution of the marriage returnable in three months. Victor's son Alfred was sent to Marsden Home for Boys at Kallangur while Agnes, his daughter, lived at the Salvation Army Girls' Home at Yeronga. Alf and Agnes looked forward year by year to spending the Easter season with their uncle Henry and family in Bardonia and the six weeks at Christmas time with their grandma at Stanthorpe. Alf remembers with gratitude the love and care his grandma gave during his childhood years.

The year 1937 was to see the death of Victor's father at the age of 83 and Victor's marriage to Nellie Maud Wiles (1892 – 1971)<sup>1</sup>, the widowed mother of three children whose husband had died during World War 1 service in the British army.

At that time Victor Mathams was employed as a debt collector in Stanthorpe and later he set up a tourist and travel centre in Stanthorpe. In about 1940, Victor and Nellie Mathams moved to Aberdeen Road in the suburb of Prahan in Melbourne where Victor Mathams worked as a waiter in a club restaurant. While they lived in Springvale during the 1960s, Victor was regularly employed as a cleaner in the premises of the weather bureau.

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1. Mrs Nellie Wiles and her three children (Doris, Eva and Arthur) from her previous marriage to Arthur Henry Pittam came to Australia on the ship *Demosthenes* in 1921. Private Pittam was killed in action during the Great War on 18 October 1917. His grave is located at Tyne Cot Cemetery. Nellie Pittam married Arthur Wiles in 1918.

After his wife Nellie's death in 1972, Victor moved to Colonsay Road in Springvale. He married a long time friend, Florence (Flo) Alice Duke whose former husband George Duke had passed away. When Flo died in December 1979, Victor moved to Excelsior Street, Lisarow in New South Wales where his son Alfred and daughter-in-law Evelyn lived. They cared for him during his old age. He kept active however and was still able to chop the wood and kindling and arrange it in tidy piles till quite late in his life.



*Victor, aged 93, was living with his son Alf and his daughter-in-law Evelyn at Lisarow, New South Wales when this photograph was taken in 1986.*

Victor spent the final months of his long life in the Brisbane Water Legacy Nursing Home at Wyoming where he died at the age of 96 years on 6 September 1989. He is buried in the Palmdale Lawn Cemetery and Memorial Park in New South Wales.



*The reverse sides of Victory Medal (left) and British War Medal awarded to Private Victor Mathams*

(Photo taken by Ev Mathams, 2016)

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### **Acknowledgement**

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Compiled by Noel E Adsett,  
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*Lest we forget*