

# 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 201

## **JOHN EDWARD SELVES PLUMRIDGE 1869–1955**



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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.

***Cover Illustration: Jack Plumridge in his CMF uniform. (Photo courtesy of the family)***

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Brisbane QLD 4000  
2017

## **John Edward Selves Plumridge**

John ('Jack') Edward Selves Plumridge was a successful businessman and confectionery manufacturer, a former Councillor and Mayor of Sandgate, and a Lieutenant in the Citizen Military Forces when at the age of 48 he signed on as a labourer under the Australian War Workers Scheme in 1917. His abilities and experience quickly became evident and seem to have been well utilised - in the UK he was deployed to senior management roles, including in aircraft production and salvage.

After returning to Queensland in early 1920, Jack resumed his business activities and industry involvements, and was a well-known and frequent spokesman for, and commentator about, business in Queensland. He and his wife Annie (until her untimely death in 1930) were communicant members of Saint Andrew's Church in the Brisbane CBD, and both were energetically part of many community and charitable activities.

### **Early life**

Jack was born in 1869 in Greenwich, England, the eldest of two sons of Edward, a 'Fancy Draper and Milliner' and Ann née Selves (daughter of John Selves, a builder and Ann née Wyllie). His younger brother Charles Wyllie was also born in Greenwich, in 1872. The family arrived in Australia in June 1875, but Ann died in Queensland two years later and Edward re-married in 1878. When Jack married in 1896 Edward's occupation was recorded as clerk.

Jack was educated at the Normal School in Brisbane and enjoyed various sports including rugby union, tennis and sailing (a life-long passion). After finishing at school he first worked for the Stock and Station Agents Kellett and Co., before joining the confectionery and biscuits firm Rankin and Morrow in about 1887, travelling throughout Queensland on the firm's behalf.

His brother Charles had to leave school early (although he retained a love of reading throughout his life), and after working for Gordon and Gotch, Charles joined Jack at Rankin and Morrow, also working as a commercial traveller.

### **Marriage and family**

On 17 January 1896 Jack married Mary Anne Clarke Ewing, known as Annie, the youngest of five children of Samuel Ewing and Sarah Jane née Caldwell. Samuel and Sarah had arrived in Australia in 1866 and were the first head teachers in the North Ipswich Primary School - Annie was born in 1872 in the school house. Sadly, both her parents died when relatively young leaving their five children as orphans. Annie's young experiences may well have been a catalyst for her later work in helping children and mothers.

Annie attended Brisbane Girls Grammar School for three years (1886 -88) and seems to have been trained as a milliner and dressmaker by the Caldwell Aunt who largely raised her after her parents died.

Jack and Annie initially lived in Musgrave Street, Indooroopilly, and their son John Eric Ewing was born there in November 1896. When Eric was a toddler the family moved to Swan Street, Sandgate (now Shorncliffe), where in 1904 Heathercot was built as their residence – the house with sympathetic extensions is still there today.



*Jack, Eric and Annie*  
(Photo courtesy of the family)

Annie was a foundation member of the Queensland Women's Electoral League (QWEL) in 1903, and President and later a Vice-President of the Sandgate Branch of QWEL up to the time of her death in 1930. QWEL was one of the organisations that campaigned for women to have the vote – with this objective achieved in 1905 – and as summarised by Patricia Fallon in a 2003 thesis, the organisation continued to work to 'promote political knowledge among women, to elevate women's position and to guard the interests of children. The League was extremely active in arranging the selection of suitable non-labour candidates for elections'.

## **Sandgate**

Annie and Jack were active in the community life of Sandgate. Jack was a councillor on the Sandgate Municipal Council for nine years, including as Mayor 1906, and was a Freemason in the Norman Lodge in Sandgate, which became part of the United Grand Lodge in 1920 when the various Lodges in Queensland amalgamated - for a period Jack was President of the Board of Benevolence in the Grand Lodge.

Annie was, among other things, a noted supporter of the Sandgate School of Arts and took a keen interest in the Lady Musgrave Sanatorium for Children at Sandgate (an extension of the Children's Hospital in Brisbane, of which Annie was a committee member).

The family relished time on the water and when the Sandgate Yacht Club was formed in 1912 Jack was a foundation member, chairing the inaugural meeting and with four others, drafting the rules of the Club. Annie was also a keen and successful sailor, as was her sister-in-law Mary (Charles' wife), and Annie was always ready to assist the Sandgate Club in its activities. Jack and Annie's main yacht was *Taabinga* – competitively sailed but also used for entertaining visitors and dignitaries. Post-war Jack was Commodore of the Sandgate Club 1924-1934 and made a Life Member. Later he was also a member Royal Queensland Yacht Club



Taabinga



*Jack Plumridge at the helm of the yacht Taabinga.*

(Photo courtesy of the family)

### **Jack the entrepreneur**

In 1899 Jack launched into business on his own account, establishing the confectionery firm of Bouchard and Plumridge, with Josiah Bouchard of Ipswich and his brother Charles as partners. Their first premises were in Roma Street, Brisbane and in Ipswich. The partners had big plans and purchased land between Barry Parade and Agnes Street in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane on which they built a factory – great granddaughter Alex Penhaligon fondly recalls the old factory smelling of cocoa, aniseed and real peppermint oil. The building is still there, having been sensitively converted to commercial office space and bearing the name Plumridge House.

Jack was connected by his marriage to the Caldwells (the Rev Alex Caldwell was an early Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Queensland) and via that link to Thomas Morrow – in whose firm Jack had been working. That firm of Rankin and Morrow had operated from 1884, expanding to cover biscuit as well as confectionery manufacture, and in 1900 Thomas Morrow bought out his partner Robert Rankin junior (who was looking to retire and died in 1908). In 1949 Morrow's amalgamated with the NSW-based Arnott's Biscuits.

The three eldest of Rankin's five sons (Robert Alexander, George Philip and William Alfred) joined the Bouchard-Plumridge partnership in 1900, which then traded as Bouchard, Plumridge and Rankin Brothers, and this entity operated until 1908 (although George Rankin left the group in 1904).

One imagines that there was both quality and variety in the snacks on offer with a cup of tea at Saint Andrew's Church – the Plumridge, Morrow and Rankin families all attended Saint Andrew's. Indeed, George Rankin and the two youngest of the five Rankin brothers – Ronald Benjamin and Charles Hubert – served in the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF and are listed along with Jack Plumridge on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Peace Chapel in the Church. The Rankin brothers are the subjects of booklet no.93.

The Morrow family donated the large stained glass window depicting The Nativity over one of the northern doors into Saint Andrew's Church, in memory of Thomas and his eldest son, William Alexander Morrow. Both were Elders of the Church and William was the Session Clerk 1916-1921.

### **Business developments**

In December 1908 the partnership with Robert and William Rankin was dissolved, and the assets and debts of the business were taken on by Josiah Bouchard and Jack, trading again as Bouchard and Plumridge. Jack's brother Charles also bowed out of the partnership – he married Mary Crawford on 31 December 1908, and after a holiday in the UK they lived in Adelaide where a family member needed care, only returning to Brisbane in 1913 and taking up residence in Bardon.

In time Jack bought out Bouchard and became the Managing Director of Plumridge Pty Ltd, employing over 100 hands. Charles became a Director of the firm after he returned to Brisbane, and Eric later was also appointed a Director.

Jack espoused co-operation and communication between employers and employees and a 1913 report said of Plumridge's that: 'The incentives given to employees is a great factor in its success. Each received a bonus at the end of the year, according to the profits earned. Next year it is Mr Plumridge's intention to allot employees, instead of a bonus, shares in the business.' The business certainly prospered, and in time owned three buildings – in addition to Plumridge House there were Morrison House and what is now named Strathallan House.

## World War I

The early requirements for enlistment in the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF included a maximum age of 35 (although exceptions were made for experienced officers). Jack was aged 45, but was able towards the end of 1915 to join the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry (also called the Oxley Regiment) of the Citizen Military Forces (CMF). He was made a temporary Lieutenant (possibly on a full-time basis) and carried out administrative and guard duties.



Eric was already in the Oxley Regiment as a Sergeant, and having completed the necessary examinations, was promoted to Lieutenant in 1915. He wanted to join the Flying Corps but because he was subject to bouts of malaria, was ruled out of active service on medical grounds - he continued in the CMF, transferring to the Moreton Regiment as a Lieutenant in 1918, and after going on the reserve list in July 1922, retired from the CMF in June 1927.

*Jack and his son Eric in their CMF uniforms* 8  
(Photo courtesy of the family)

As for Jack's brother Charles, he was affected by a serious bout of pulmonary tuberculosis for two years during the War, and that precluded him from service in the armed forces.

For Annie, one means by which women could contribute during the War was the Red Cross Society, and she certainly 'put her shoulder to the wheel' – giving most of her time during the War to the Red Cross, particularly the Sandgate Branch of which she was the honorary secretary and treasurer. After the annual report was read in 1918, Annie was presented by the Sandgate Mayor, on behalf of the Branch members, with a silver vase in acknowledgment of her contribution. She remained a 'devoted member' of the Red Cross over the rest of her life.



*Mrs Annie Plumridge in her Red Cross uniform.* (Photo courtesy of the family)

### **Jack and the War Workers scheme**

Apparently administration and guard duties weren't active enough for Jack and he signed on for the War Worker Scheme in July 1917. Early in the War the British Government had recruited professionals in Australia such as chemical engineers and industrial chemists (see for example Jack MacGibbon in booklet no.71) and the British engineering conglomerate Vickers Ltd privately recruited nearly 1000 skilled tradesmen. However, the demand in the UK grew unrelentingly – in response to British requests the Australian Government established an Australian Munitions Workers (AMW) scheme in mid-1916 (recruiting skilled workers such as toolmakers,

fitters and turners, and shipyard workers) followed by an Australian War Workers (AWW) scheme from early 1917 (recruiting gangers and navvies). In total these two Government schemes provided over 5000 men from Australia – and another 230 men from the 1<sup>st</sup> AIF in the UK who were no longer fit for front line service - to Britain to assist with munitions and war work.

Jack signed an AWW agreement with the Commonwealth Government in July 1917 and was allocated the number 1203. He was given a farewell by the Queensland Employers' Federation at which he was presented with a gold watch as a token of 'esteem in which (he was) held by members' and in appreciation of the 'good service rendered in connection with the federation'. Jack sailed from Sydney on the HMAT *Medic A7* on 1 August 1917, together with 429 other war workers - the group arrived in Liverpool, England on 12 October 1917, starting work almost immediately.

On the ship over to Britain Jack's administrative skills were noted, and at the central Royal Naval Air Service training centre at Cranwell he was placed in charge of the Queensland and West Australian unskilled workers helping to build additional aerodrome facilities.

Jack was experienced in workplace relations – and he would have had to call on his experience and skills of persuasion as he managed a group of men of varying quality and in a few instances modest commitment to work, and whose general expectations were based on employment conditions and practices in Australia. There was also potential for friction with the groups of British workers alongside



who often had different expectations, greater trade union loyalties, were jealous of the higher rates of pay of the Australians, and who not infrequently thought Australians needed to change their approach.

## **Jack as a senior manager in Britain**

In the AMW/AWW Headquarters they found Jack's reports 'exceedingly helpful in assisting this office in its work' and in December 1917 he was moved to the Headquarters to help Robert Patten (a former member of the NSW and Federal Parliaments who sailed aboard the *Medic* in 1917 with Jack) with running the AWW scheme including inspection work.

Later in 1918 Jack moved to the Aircraft Section of the British Ministry of Munitions and was formally transferred to the AMW scheme, in which he was allocated the number 348 (Qld) - and according to his application for an Officers' Commission in World War 2, was given the rank and pay of Lieutenant.

In December 1918 Jack became the Officer-in-Charge of the Aircraft Production Depot at Cobnor near Chichester, before being transferred in early April 1919 to Acting Superintendent of the important Aircraft Salvage Depot at Hendon in North London. He performed that role until late in 1919, when he returned to Australia on the *SS Port Macquarie*, disembarking and being discharged on 26 January 1920.

## **Annie post-war**

In addition to her continuing substantial contribution in the Red Cross, Annie was a popular and active figure generally in public life. An obituary in *The Week* said of her:

Actively interested in many philanthropic matters and possessing a sunny personality the late Mrs Plumridge was a favourite with all she came in contact with. When anything was to be done of benefit to the community, she never spared herself.

The Queensland Country Women's Association (QCWA) was one of the beneficiaries of Annie's energy – as well as being keenly interested in the general work of the Association, she was one of the two people responsible for the Metropolitan body's purchasing (so

we know she was a person who could be relied upon to be careful with the cheque book); a founder and the President of the Sandgate sub-branch until her death in 1930; and a dedicated, hands-on supporter of the Association's seaside home 'Linga Longa' at Sandgate. She was referred to as the 'Guardian Angel' of the seaside home and its occupants.

The home was opened in 1925 and provided most welcome relief and relaxation for women from the country and their children. In October 1929, after the fourth year of operation, it was reported that:

During the year 194 women and 228 children had spent a happy holiday in Linga Longa. They had come from many towns in Queensland and in one or two instances from places in New South Wales. Several very sad and needy cases had been helped by the provision of holidays, and at present the association was giving a home for 12 months to a motherless boy and girl whose father was ill.

After Annie's untimely passing, a room at Linga Longa was dedicated in her memory and a photograph unveiled in the room. There was a large attendance at the ceremony and 'Many tributes were paid to the memory of Mrs Plumridge, always an enthusiastic member of the association and an ideal branch president'.

The Red Cross and the QCWA didn't exhaust Annie's energy or interests— an obituary in *The Brisbane Courier* summarised many of her other activities:

Another interest of the deceased lady for many years was the Children's Hospital, of which, until recent years, she had been a committee member. Other public bodies of which she had been a member included the Queensland Women's Electoral League, and she was an old and valued member of the Brisbane Women's Club, and also of the Town and Country Women's Club. Socially the late Mrs Plumridge was also well known, and

she was interested in all artistic matters, including music and painting.

Before her passing Annie would have had the satisfaction of seeing a female candidate strongly supported by QWEL in the 1929 election - Irene Longman in the seat of Bulimba - become the first woman elected to the Queensland State Parliament.

Annie passed away in a private hospital in Brisbane on 24 May 1930, and her remains were buried two days later in the Toowong cemetery. Her grave is near that of her sister-in-law Mary, who in one of those sad coincidences had also died young, two years earlier. Mary was survived by her husband Charles and their four children (daughters 'Topsy' Agnes Mary and 'Nancy' Ann Selves – who married Boyd Webb of Yalli, Wyandra and Horace Pearson respectively - and sons Edward Crawford and Charles Mains – Edward married Win Herdsman). Charles senior later married his sister-in-law Charlotte Crawford (in 1931), and they lived in Swann Road, St Lucia, until Charles passed away in 1958.

### **Jack post-war**

Jack Plumridge's activities post-war were also widespread. He was prominent in business circles and a frequent commentator for and about Queensland business – to attempt to list all of his speeches and public statements would make this account too lengthy – but suffice it to say that beyond the Queensland Employers' Federation and the Manufacturing Confectioners Federation, his involvements included executive roles with the Queensland Chamber of Manufacturers (Vice-President 1921-23), the Brisbane Chamber of Commerce (President 1928-30) and the Federated Chambers of Commerce of Queensland (President 1933-34). He was also the President of the Queensland Protection League - in which role he was 'an active champion of Queensland preference'.

Jack was interested in innovation, and an example of this was the Matthews Fire Alarm Company, of which he was the first managing director. This entity marketed the 'Street Alarm Mechanical Call Points system' - devised by Ernest Costin Matthews and trialled by Morrows Ltd - which would give the Fire Brigade an alert to the location of a fire when the glass was broken and a button pushed. The system proved itself when it successfully alerted the Fire Brigade to a fire in the Morrow factory in November 1921, thus preventing large financial losses. Jack had the system installed at the Plumridge Factory in 1922.

Outside of business and industry bodies – and beyond his interest in the Sandgate community and his passion for yachting - Jack performed other roles such as Councillor and President of the Queensland Justices' Association, President of the Ex-Imperial Services Association, and he was particularly committed to the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade and the St John Ambulance Brigade. He was on the executive for extended periods for both organisations, and in 1952 was admitted as a serving brother of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in Queensland. The Red Cross also had some of his time - with Jack being the chairman of the appeals committee in 1947 for the Food for Britain Fund.



In 1937 Jack was awarded the King George VI Coronation Medal for 'Community Contribution'.

Despite a valiant attempt by Jack in 1939 to shave 11 years off his age, he was not given an active Officer's Commission in World War 2, although he was placed in the Reserve of Officers 1939-41 as a Lieutenant.

Jack formally retired from the Managing Director position at Plumridge's around 1945 - but in the later years the Company had been largely run by his son Eric (thus giving Jack time to pursue his many interests).



Jack passed away on 6 September 1955 in the Nundah Private Hospital, aged 84. After a funeral at Saint Andrew's Church, his remains were cremated at Mt Thompson and rest there.

### **Eric and Jessie**

In 1920 at Saint Andrew's Eric and Jessie Muriel Campbell (a daughter of Charles William Campbell and a cousin of Frank and Douglas Campbell – see booklets 104 and 105) were married by the Rev Dr Ernest Merrington.

Jessie taught bookkeeping at the Commercial College and kept the books for Plumridge Pty Ltd. Alex Penhaligon recalls Jessie completing journal and ledger entries 'by fountain pen, in perfect script, in large leather-bound books with marbled page edges. Mr Hoge, the company auditor, never found an error in my grandmother's work'.



*Eric and Jessie in 1945*

Beyond his work in the confectionery business (In which Eric was highly regarded by business contacts for his ethical approach), Eric was very involved with Saint Andrew's Church – serving as a member of the Committee of Management, and later as one of the Elders. He conducted several fund-raising campaigns for the St Andrew's Hospital in Brisbane.

Like his parents Eric was a keen participant in yachting. He also had a lifelong enthusiasm for photography (his first job was in that field) and travel. He and Jessie lived for many years at 101 Christian Street, Clayfield

– with Jack joining them there after Annie died – and later Eric and Jessie built in Holland Park, next to daughter Jessie Elizabeth Ewing (known as 'Betty'), who married a returned 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF Army Corporal and prisoner of war, Roy Penhaligon at Saint Andrew's in 1945.



Eric passed away in 1982, and Jessie two years later in 1984 – their ashes were placed at Mt Thompson in the niche next to that holding Jack's ashes.

Some more photographs from the family albums



*Confectionery delivery vehicle, 1901.*



The Plumridge stand at the RNA



*A gas powered Plumridges' delivery vehicle in 1941*

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July 2017



*Lest we forget*