

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 146

SIDNEY KERR SMITH 1891 - 1969



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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During World War I the Australian Imperial Force's Administrative Headquarters was located on Horseferry Road, Central London.

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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.**

Cover Illustration: *AIF headquarters, Horseferry Road, London.
Sidney was transferred to the Finance Section in AIF Headquarters in
November 1918.*

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Brisbane QLD 4000
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Sergeant Sidney Kerr Smith

Sidney Kerr Smith, a Federal civil servant, enlisted in September 1916 and trained as a machine gunner. However, in the UK he was ruled unfit for active service, and worked in the Australian Army Pay Corps and in AIF Headquarters, reaching the rank of Sergeant.

In 1920 Sidney returned to Australia and to age and invalid pensions administration, being promoted several times and remaining in that field until retirement. He died in 1969, aged 77.

Family background

Sidney's family were active members of Saint Andrew's Church in the Brisbane CBD – his father Alexander served on the Committee of Management, and his maternal grandfather James Semple Kerr was an Elder and one of the trustees when Saint Andrew's was under construction in 1904.

Both of Sidney's parents were born in Scotland – Alexander in Edinburgh and Annie née Kerr in Gourock. They married in Brisbane in December 1885. Alexander was a law clerk when Sidney was born on 26 August 1891, and later qualified and practised as a solicitor.

One of Sidney's cousins, also named James Semple Kerr, is listed on the Saint Andrew's Honour Boards and is the subject of booklet no.111.



Fryer Library

*Sidney Smith with his mother Annie and sisters,
Margaret and Isobel. c.1900.*

*Margaret Wilhemina Smith, daughter of Alexander and Annie (née Kerr) Smith was
headmistress of Rockhampton Girls' Grammar School from 1925-1948.*

Early life

Sidney attended primary schools in Rockhampton and Winton, and later the Brisbane Boys' Central School where his grandfather James Semple Kerr was the long serving and highly respected principal.

Having won a State scholarship in 1904, Sidney chose to study at the Brisbane Grammar School, doing so from 1905 to mid-1908. There his activities included the School cadets, in which he was promoted to Corporal and then Sergeant.



Sidney in a school play , 1907

In 1907 he performed well in the Junior examination and the Headmaster of BGS wrote to his father saying that 'your boy has a good chance of gaining a continuation scholarship at Christmas if he keeps on his Greek'.

However, Sidney was apparently keen to join the Federal Civil Service (and perhaps not enthusiastic about Greek), and after topping the State in the Federal Civil Service examination, was appointed to a clerkship in the Defence Department in September 1908.

Sidney later moved to a position with the Queensland branch of the Federal Treasury, in the area administering age and invalid pensions (which had been implemented at the Federal level 1909-1910). In 1914-1915 Sidney was seconded to the Treasury office in Melbourne, but apparently returned to the Brisbane office in 1916.

Enlistment

On enlistment on 29 September 1916 Sidney was tall at 183cm, weighed 63.5kg, and had a medium complexion, blue eyes and light brown hair. He had had three years in the militia as a signaller, but was placed in the 11th reinforcements for the 13th Machine Gun Company.

These reinforcements embarked in Melbourne on HMAT A11 *Ascanius* on 11 May 1917, and reached the UK in July.

Service

From 20 July 1917 Sidney underwent training at Codford and Grantham, and in December 1917 he was promoted to Corporal in the machine gun training depot at Grantham. There are no available records as to why or exactly when he was ruled unfit for general/active service.

In June 1918 Sidney reverted to the rank of Private and moved to the Australian Army Pay Corps component at the administrative headquarters in London, at Horseferry Road. It was apparently a place where 'there was much picturesque indignation and lurid argument' from diggers arriving from leave and seeking advances – which could be approved in certain circumstances – from the pay staff.

Sidney was transferred to the Finance Section in AIF Headquarters, Australia House in November 1918. It seems that this work had a pensions component to it. On 1 February 1919 he was made a temporary Sergeant and later in October promoted to Sergeant.

He finally spent a period in Internal Audit before returning to Australia in February 1920 on HT *Megantic*.

Post war

Once back in Australia Sidney wrote asking for a transfer to Treasury in Melbourne, but this wasn't approved. He was formally discharged from the Army on 30 March 1920 and after some leave, returned to Treasury's Brisbane office.

Then followed what seems on the papers to have been a disappointing if not unhappy period at work for Sidney – further applications for transfer to other organisations were unsuccessful, and there may have been a difficult relationship with a more senior officer. He was, however, promoted in 1926 to Examiner Grade 2 in the pensions area, and remained in that role for another 10 years.

On 28 March 1934 Sidney married Brisbane-born typist Ellen Elizabeth Bond, with Congregational rites. Ellen's father was John Dalton Bond, a farmer, and her mother Maud Hetty Freer.

In 1936 Sidney was promoted to Special Magistrate and examiner (the third most senior position in the Brisbane office). Following the creation of the new Department of Social Security, Sidney was among the staff transferred to the new Department along with the pensions function.

Sidney next appears in available records as having been promoted to Senior Clerk level in July 1943, and in January 1948 as occupying the Senior Clerk position in charge of the pensions and maternity allowances branch in the Department of Social Service's South Australian office. He does not appear in later permanent officer lists.

We do know that he died on 28 July 1969 in the Princess Alexandra Hospital, South Brisbane, aged 77. He left his widow Ellen and two daughters (Barbara and Winifred), and his remains were cremated at Mt Thompson with Presbyterian rites.



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Written by Ian Carnell,
Buderim, November 2016.



Lest we forget