

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 64

JOHN THOMSON

1864 – 1935



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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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Gunner John Thomson

John Thomson was born in Liverpool, England on 5 November 1864, the son of William Thomson, a bookseller, and Jane (née Rae). He was baptised on 4 December 1864 at Oldham Street Presbyterian Church. When John was 10 years old, he with his family migrated to Australia and lived in Melbourne for twenty years. When he came to Brisbane he entered the firm of Watson, Ferguson and Co Ltd. He also worked in the composing room of *The Telegraph* newspaper for three years before establishing a bookselling business at 270 George Street in partnership with his brother Richard.

Meanwhile, John married Janet Adamson Wallace in Perth, Western Australia. The wedding took place in Christ Church, Claremont on 6 October 1897. Miss Wallace was the eldest daughter of Walter and Henrietta Wallace of Daar Lodge, Kirendbright, Scotland and had arrived in Australia by steamer only days before, under the fatherly care of her uncle, Captain Thomas Young of the steamer *Cornwall* who gave her away. The groom was attended by his brother Jensen Thomson of Coolgardie. A newspaper reported, “The newly-married couple will leave, in this afternoon’s southern district’s train, on their way to Albany, whence they will proceed to Brisbane – their future home.”¹

John and Janet Thomson lived at first in the Brisbane suburb of Oxley and later moved to Daar Lodge in Highgate Hill. They had one daughter and five sons, one of whom died in infancy.

¹ *The Daily News*, Perth, 6 October 1897, page 2

The family attended Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church where John served on the Committee of Management and fulfilled the role of "Seat-Letting Secretary". Mrs Janet Thomson worked tirelessly in Women's Guild activities as its Secretary. Thomson's Bookshop gained a good reputation in the city.

Remarkably, John Thomson enlisted at the age of 52 years and 1 month in the Australian Imperial Force on 15 December 1916. His attestation paper recorded his wife, Mrs Janet Thomson as next-of-kin and noted three dependent children then living at their home at Dornoch Terrace, Highgate Hill. Private John Thomson, regimental number 37341, embarked from Sydney on HMAT *Port Sydney* on 5 November 1917 and arrived in Southampton in January 1918.

Assigned to Reserve Brigade Australian Artillery at Heytesbury, Gunner Thomson prepared for field duties on the Western Front with 4th Division Artillery based at Rouelles, France from early May 1918. He spent a short period in hospital during October and rejoined his unit, the 11th Field Artillery Brigade. Just before the war ended on the Western Front however, Private John Thomson was wounded in action on 9 November 1918, with severe gunshot wounds to his thigh and legs. He was transported to England for treatment at the War Hospital at Exeter and making favourable progress remained in the Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield, London till 19 April 1919. He returned to Australia on SS *Ormonde*, and was discharged on 24 August 1919.

In civilian life, John Thomson resumed his bookselling career, moving Thomson's Bookshop to Queen Street near the GPO. He joined the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty as a member of its executive, was ordained as an Elder in Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church and for recreation became a member of the South Brisbane Bowling Club.



*Thomson's Bookstore,
Queen Street, Brisbane*



Committee of Management, Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church, 1912.

*John Thomson: Front row, right hand end.
Rev Dr Ernest Merrington: Front row, centre.*

He died in hospital after a short illness on 20 September 1935, aged 71 years.

John Thomson was highly regarded at Saint Andrew's Church as the following statement verifies, "On September 20th the congregation lost a member and the Session a brother greatly beloved, in the passing of Mr John Thomson. For 35 years he had served this church as Member, Manager and Elder. It will be difficult to think of the church without him. A more loyal hearted man we have not known. He was the very soul of honour. His disposition combined frankness and friendship, candour and courtesy, in a measure almost unique. He thought of himself always last. No matter how humble or arduous the service he was glad to render it. His labours on Anzac Day will be long missed and long remembered. He was a patriot through and through and utterly fearless in allegiance to his convictions. Perhaps his most characteristic act was his enlisting in the ranks of the AIF at the age of 53. He was severely wounded just prior to the Armistice, but was never heard talk about it. Where bravery was the order of the day one returned man told the writer that in his front line experience he had never seen a braver man than John Thomson. He was a good companion in war and in peace and Thomson's Bookshop had an attraction for many who esteemed the genial and informative talk of the proprietor more than the printed word. It is abundantly true of our friend that he being dead yet speaketh and his works do follow him. Though past three score years and ten when called to the King's Country, his heart was still gallant and young. We pray God's comfort and peace upon all his dear ones."²

² *Annual Report 1935, Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church, page 9*

In 1952 Mrs Janet Thomson presented fourteen Elders' Chairs to Saint Andrew's Church in memory of her late husband, John Thomson. This generous gift is still treasured. The chairs are in constant use. They are beautifully carved and their appearance enriches the interior of the sanctuary. Each chair bears the inscription, "These chairs presented by Mrs Thomson in loving memory of her husband John Thomson, a faithful and honoured Elder of this church 1919 – 1935".



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Lest we forget