

## **Stitches In Time 100 Years 1,000 Names - Stories of the Rylstone WWI Autograph Quilt 1915**

From the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2015 Rylstone and District Historical Society will be presenting an exhibition at the Memorial Hall, Louee Street, Rylstone, celebrating the stories of soldiers and local families linked to the WWI Rylstone Autograph Quilt. This unique quilt was created 100 years ago to contribute to the fundraising campaign for the war effort and the relief of the wounded at the Dardanelles.

The exhibition will be open from 10 am to 4 pm daily and will feature biographical vignettes, photographs and artefacts from the museum collection of Rylstone and District Historical Society, rolling projections of all the signatures, uniforms and hundreds of poppies made by local school children. Service organisations will provide morning teas to raise funds for their own projects. A public program of demonstrations and performances is planned that will include:

- The Wollemi Choir signing WWI songs
- Recital of WWI Poetry daily at 2 pm
- Demonstration of the style of embroidery used on the quilt
- Demonstration of table loom weaving – used by soldiers as part of their rehabilitation
- Knitting of army socks as done during WWI

The Rylstone WWI Autograph Quilt was the result of efforts by Mrs James Dawson, supported by Mrs Fletcher, wife of the Rylstone Shire President, and Mrs J. W. Farrar. Individuals signed the quilt in pencil, and then paid to have their signatures embroidered over. It was completed for the first 'Australia Day' celebrated on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1915. Most of the funds were collected for the Australian Division of the Red Cross.

The quilt is now in safe-keeping at the War Memorial in Canberra. A Mrs Simpson in Sydney found the quilt in a collection of linen purchased at auction in Sydney in the 1970s. Recognising its significance, she sent it to the War Memorial. Rylstone and District Historical Society President, and Curator of the exhibition Helen Marsonet, explained, "When I first found out six years ago that there was a Rylstone Autograph Quilt in the collection of the War Memorial I was so excited! It has led to a massive project researching the signatures – information has been pouring in all of which will contribute substantially to the Rylstone family history archives".

There are over 900 autographs embroidered in white embroidery thread on a white sheet in stem stitch and chain stitch, with decorative motifs of grape leaves, flowers, stars, sun rays and circles.



*M. A. Lloyd and other signatures – one of the floral shapes on the quilt*

“The decorative motifs reflect the period,” says Helen. “Grape vines were probably chosen as a sign of mourning. Similarly the sun and stars dotted over the quilt may symbolise the heavens”.

Images of the rising sun featured prominently leading up to and following the Federation celebrations of 1901. With the surge of national pride, the emblem as a symbol of an emerging nation began to appear on buildings and in the brands of many commodities. The first rising sun hat badge was issued to Australian troops serving in South Africa, and was later adopted as the official emblem for all military forces within the Commonwealth of Australia – and a variant is still in use today.

The quilt contains the names of at least 75 soldiers from the Rylstone district who enlisted between August 1914 and July 1915. Two stitched circles bear the names A.C.ROBBINS, A.H.FREEMAN and J.D. SANDSTROM. All three were early Gallipoli casualties. A central circular shape bears the cipher of King George V and FOR OUR DARDANELLES AUSTRALIAN WOUNDED 1915. The exhibition will include a memorial to the recently identified soldier Athol Kirkland buried in France, given to the family by the residents of Pinnacle Swamp.



*Rupert Stanley George signature*



*Rupert Stanley George served with the Australian Infantry Forces in France*

Two circles bear the names of well known Australian commanding officers also killed on Gallipoli in the first days: General Bridges and Cols. MacLaurin, Braund and Onslow-Thompson.

Rylstone citizens donated varying amounts to have their names, or the names of loved ones, embroidered, which raised a total of £95. On completion, the quilt was auctioned. Mr E H Nash was the final purchaser of the quilt. He paid £17.10.0 for it, and the total raised was £112.10 – a substantial amount in 1915.



*Elizabeth Hastings Jones signature on quilt*

By Virginia Hollister 27 July 2015



*Nurse Elizabeth Hastings Jones (nee Taylor)*

The exhibition "Stitches in Time" and the research underpinning it has been several years in the making. Come explore the stories at this official History Week Event. All are invited.