Gregson, William Hilder
ASC 1895

1915

Cemetery or memorial details: France 385 Warlencourt British Cemetery. War Grave Register notes: Gregson, Sgt. William Hilder, 2608. 7th Field Coy. Australian Engineers. Killed in action 14th Nov. 1916. Age 39. Son of Jesse and Catherine Maclean Gregson; husband of Grace of Maiala, 57 Spofforth St., Cremorne,

The Junior Exams

THE BATHURST PASSES.

William Hilder Gregson

SMH 24/11/1892 p.2

SYDNEY UNIVERSITY.

RESULTS OF SENIOR EXAMINATIONS. Below will be found the results of the senior examinations held some time since in connection with the Sydney University. An analysis of the returns shows that, when compared with the returns for 1893, there was this year a diminution in the number of senior candidates presented for examination, while the passes yield an increase of five per cent, over the returns for the previous year.

“William Hilder Gregson, All Saints' College, Bathurst, History of Europe C, French A, Latin B.

SMH11/11/94 P.3
GREGSON, WILLIAM HILDER.


Enlisting in July, 1915, and sailing in November, served three months on Suez Canal and, crossing to France in March, 1916, fought at Pozières, where wounded 5th August, and in Somme sector till death. Promoted corporal, 8th March, 1916, and sergeant, 16th July.

Killed in Action, Flers, 14th November, 1916—at first reported Wounded and Missing—and buried in Warlencourt British Cemetery.

Early education at All Saints' College, Bathurst. Later at St. Paul's.

NSW. Native of Waratah, NSW.

Of the two Gregsons we only hear of their steady plodding at the work they have chosen, viz., Mining and Electrical Engineering. Neither of them has, as yet, found his Bullfitch W. H., or "Daz," as he was generally known, was for some time working at Cobalt, in Ontario, one of the richest silver fields in the world, and, subsequently, at Bruce Mines, on L. Huron; then he went to Royal View (coal-mining) near Lethbridge in Alberta, and, subsequently, took a "summer's job" of surveying in the mountains of Idaho, U.S.A., whence he is now on his way back to Australia. His experiences have been varied and valuable. He has found, amongst other things, that the winter climate of North America is not the serious objection which many people in Australia think it to be, and that Australia does not possess all the insect pests in the
Informal portrait of 2608 Lance Corporal William (Jessie) Hilder Gregson, 7th Field Company Engineers, of Sydney, NSW. A surveyor for three years before enlisting in August 1915, L/Cpl Gregson left Australia for Egypt in December 1915. On arrival in Alexandria, he was sent to France for service on the Western Front. Two weeks after he was promoted to Sergeant in June 1916, Gregson was hospitalised for chest injuries sustained by a German shell, and rejoined his unit in Belgium in September 1916. Sgt Gregson took part in an attack on German positions at Flers on 14 November 1916. When he and another man were wounded by German machine gun fire. The two men were placed in a shell-hole by a party of engineers who notified nearby stretcher-bearers and continued on with the attack. Although the other man was taken to a dressing-station, Sgt Gregson could not be found. Exhaustive attempts were made by the Red Cross and Gregson's family to determine his whereabouts, but it was thought that the shell hole was later swept by enemy artillery. Sgt Gregson was later listed as killed in action, age 39.

OFFICIAL CASUALTIES.
The 333rd list of casualties sustained by members of the Australian Imperial Force was made available yesterday.

Details are as follow:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Killed in action</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Died of wounds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Died- other causes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidentally killed.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wounded.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoners of war</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total casualties</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned to duty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sgt. WM. HILDER GREGSON, England,

(Prev. reported wounded and missing). SMH 28/8/17

Register of war memorials also lists above details at Mt Wilson memorial.

Biographical details from Gregson Family Papers State Library of NSW.

Gregson (1837-1919) was born at Kent, England, son of William and Caroline Gregson. He arrived at Sydney in 1856 travelling to Cassilis to stay with the Busby family at 'Llangollen', and then to work at 'Collaroy' station. Gregson and Alexander Busby travelled overland to an area near Springsure in Queensland to establish a new pastoral property, 'Rainsworth'. In 1874 Gregson was appointed superintendent of the Australian Agricultural Company and held the position until 1905. In 1880 Gregson built a home at Mt Wilson where he pursued his interest in botany. His botanical specimens are preserved in the National Herbarium of NSW. [Ref: ADB 4]

William Hilder Gregson (1877-1916) was the son of Jesse Gregson and his wife Catherine, nee Woore. He was educated at All Saints College, Bathurst, and the University of Sydney where he graduated Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Engineering. Gregson worked at Broken Hill from 1901 to 1905 and then travelled to America where he worked in Canada for some years. In 1912 he married Grace Busby, nee Ranken and widow of George Busby, by whom he had one daughter Catherine Grace. In 1915 Gregson enlisted in the AIF embarking for Egypt in 1915 and then to France in 1916. He was killed in northern France in 1916. --------

Papers of William Hilder Gregson, including letters sent to his mother Catherine Gregson from his school at Bathurst; copies of testimonials and references; genealogical notes; photograph of William Hilder Gregson, his wife Grace and baby daughter Catherine Grace Gregson, together with Jesse Gregson probably at Mt. Wilson, ca.1914 (Call No.: MLMSS 7463/1)
1901-1904; 'Willie's letters from Broken Hill, being 6 vols. of ms. letters sent by William Hilder Gregson to relatives while he was working for BHP at Broken Hill (Call No.: MLMSS 7463/1)

1905; Passport issued to William Hilder Gregson 13 Apr. 1905 (Call No. MLMSS 7463/2)

1905-1910; 'Willie's letters from America', being 5 vols. of ms. letters sent by William while travelling and working in America and Canada (Call No.: MLMSS 7463/2)

1915-1920; Letters sent by William from Egypt and France, 1915-1916; news cuttings, 1917; programme of the Unveiling of Roll of Honour of University Soldiers who have Fallen, 11 October 1919; letter to Mrs G. Gregson from Major G.L. Phillips, officer in charge of Australian Graves Services enclosing a photograph [not with these papers] of the grave of Sergeant W.H. Gregson, 7th Field Company Engineers, 1920 (Call No.: MLMSS 7463/2)

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Gregson, top row 2nd left. From Gregson Papers Mitchell Library
7th F. Co. Engrs. A.I.F.,

"Wounded 14/11/16"

Your memo of 15th inst, addressed to Sapper Grice of this unit has been forwarded to me with a request that I will answer it. Therefore I have to forward the following particulars regarding 2608 Sgt. W.H. Gregson and 2616 2nd Cpl. C.B. Wailes. These N.C.O’s formed portion of a party of Engineers accompanying attacking infantry in an attack on the enemy position on the 14th November 1916. Sgt. Gregson was hit when some distance out in No Man's Land and his left thigh was badly injured by the shell burst. He was however brought back to position in front of our old front line near where another branch of the service were working. They were on the party returning from the attack, looked for but no trace could be found of them, it was naturally assumed that they had been taken in by stretcher bearers. I have had exhaustive enquiries made and the Base Records office has been communicated with on the matter of the non-appearance of any record of their whereabouts. I have not as yet received any definite answer from Records, but I regret to state that I fear that they will be both posted as Wounded and Missing. Please convey to the relatives enquiring, the sincere sympathy of all ranks of the 7th Field Company Engineers.

Cert. by letter from The Officer Commanding,
7th Field Company Engineers,
London 14, 3, 17.

Sgt. W.H Gregson 4648
2/Cpl C.B. Wailes 4646

London France 27, 2, 17.
2608 Sgt. W.H. Gregson, 7th. Field Company Engrs. A.I.F., who was wounded on the 19th. November, 1916 at Yank Lane near Fleurie. Sapper Robertson picked him up and put him into a shell hole as there was heavy machine gun fire. He went to get a stretcher-bearer and seems to be the last seen of him. Some hours later the Germans retook the position.

Cert by Letter from Grace Gregson,
28A Elsham Road,
Holland Road,
Kensington, W.
20.11.16.

A.I.F.,
7th. Field Co. Engrs.
Sgt. W.H. 2608.

Wounded & Missing, 16.11.16.

Sgt.

All I know of the above two men is as follows:—
When we went over to mark out the ground for the communication trench etc, with Sgt. Gregson, he was unfortunately hit by a bullet about six inches above the knee, he told us to carry on and that was the last I saw of Sgt. Gregson.
Cpl. Wailes and two other men stopped behind to attend to Sgt. Gregson. After finishing our work and returning back we came across Cpl. Wailes wounded just above the knee. After rendering him first aid and making a stretcher, we tried to carry him, but he complained of too much pain and asked us to send stretcher bearers which we did. Unfortunately this is all I can tell you, these two men, in my opinion they were not so severely wounded to die of their wounds, hoping you will find out their whereabouts.

Cert by Letter from
1936 Spr. H.H. Hewton
Alexandra Hospital,
Goshen,
Hants.

London.
25.4.17.
Informant said both these men belonged to Section No.3 and gave Corpl. Wailes' name before it was read to him. In Nov., some of the Coy. were digging a sap from our front line and both Gregson and Wailes were wounded and were put in a shell hole by Sappers Hamilton and Fenton of No.7 Coy. 2 tapes cut i.e. about 100 yards. Hamilton and Fenton then left them to go to construct a bombing post, but the shell hole in which the men were left was one through which the sap was to run, so it was assumed No.5 Section would find Gregson and Wailes and bring them down. Informant does not know what happened after but adds that the Dressing Station was blown up about this date.

Reference: Corpl. Will, 2705,
No. 11 Stationary, Rouen, 15.3.17

Gregson was wrongly listed. He was Capt. of No.3 section. 7th Fld Co. Wailes was his Op., in the same section. They were wounded by a shell which came over while a party was putting in a sap from our front line across Rem瑑land. Wailes was very badly wounded. They were "two tapes" out when the casualty occurred. A stretcher was improvised from rifles, and Wailes was put on it, and placed in a shell hole. Gregson was put in the same shell hole. The men who placed them in the shell hole went on with their job, a lateron went along to the shell hole to carry them in. When they got to the hole, both men were missing. They came back to the front line and were told that the wounded man had been carried in. Sappers Hamilton and F. Hamilton, both of 3rd Section, were amongst the men who attended the casualties, and told me about the affair themselves. Their own belief is that the wounded man were not brought in, but were blown up while in the shell hole. They have made many enquiries, but can find no trace of the missing man. Gregson & Wailes were both Sydney men: I knew them very well.

Reference: Capt. M.J. Hall, 2706, H.Q. 7 Fld Co
2608 Sgt. W.H. Gregson, 7th. Flt. Company Engrs. A.I.F., who was wounded on the 12th. November, 1916 at Flare Lane near Flares. Sapper Robertson picked him up and put him into a shell hole as there was heavy machine gun fire. He went to get a stretcher bearer and seems to be the last seen of him. Some hours later the Germans retook the position.

Cert by letter from Grace Gregson, (wife) 28A Elsham Road, Holland Road, Kensington, W. 2o.4.17.

London.
28.7.16.
(W. Nov: 14/16.)

On Nov: 14/16 at Flare Gregson was wounded in No Man's Land, whilst the advance was on. He was wounded through the thigh by a bullet wound. Cpl Wailes dressed the wound for him. Sapper Grice and Tomkins carried him to a shell hole. They tried to get a stretcher but were unable to do so they reported to the stretcher bearers where to find him. The next morning they inquired at the dressing station whether Gregson (and Wailes had gone through, and were told that a Lt. and Sgt. had passed through, but no names were reported."

Eye witness: No. Was told by Sapper Grice.

Description:-- Fairly tall, fair man, frail looking.

Informant:-- Sapper, R.G. Smith. 7th Field Coy. Aust Engrs.
3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth.

Feb: 8th
Perrin.

Home address:-- Horseferry Rd., S.W.

With Spa Gues 15.2.17
Be your letter of 23rd inst., enquiring for particulars of Sgt. Gregson W.H. of my unit. I am not in the same section as the Sgt. was and was not in the fighting on the day that he was wounded, but I know him well and have often heard discussions by men of his own section (who were with him, at the time of his being wounded) as to what really happened. What the idea was is that Sgt. Gregson was badly and painfully wounded somewhere between our own front line and the line they were trying to take. He was seen to be badly hurt and a few of the boys were carrying him back as well as they could manage. This was causing the wounded man great pain and on arriving at a partly-dug trench they placed him down in a position offering most cover. This trench would be in No Man’s Land after the fighting was over but what became of the Sgt. is doubtful. It is certain that he was last seen (by his own request on account of his pain) but as the nights were terribly cold at this time, and as the trench was midway between our own and the Hun’s front line and patrolled doubtlessly by both it is a hard matter to say what really happened. What I have told you is the story obtained from the boys who were with him at the time.

London 3rd Inst. by letter from 7369 Sepoy D. McKinlay
7th Flt. Coy Aug 33. 7th Flt. Coay Aug 33. P.I
Dartford, 26.4.17

AUST. OFFICER 7 Flt. Co.

Sgt. E. H. GREGSON 2609 L.Q
Cpl. C. E. Wailes 2616

J & M 14.11.16.

Sgt. Gregson and Cpl. Wailes were both wounded at Flers on Nov. 14th while running the tape for a map. Some of the party went back to fetch stretchers, and on returning they could find no trace of them. They had evidently been blown up by a shell. I have seen their names on a memorial to the killed in No.7 Flt. Co. The memorial is erected at Terra Hill just outside Albert between La Boisselle and Albert on the main Beaumetz Road.

Reference: Dvr. L. Fernie, 8661.
No.5 General, Romon 14.6.17.

Lieutenant E. J. Gregson, who joined the Canadian forces, is now on his way back to Australia. His elder brother, W. H. Gregson, enlisted in the Field Engineers, and was reported killed in action on 14th November. 1918.
William Hilder Gregson [born 16th April 1877, at Waratah, N.S.W.]

He entered All Saints College, Bathurst July 1898; matriculated at Sydney University in 1895, residing at St. Paul's College; graduated B.A. in 1898, and B.E. in 1901. In the same year he went to the British Proprietary Co. at Broken Hill, where he became Assistant Underground Manager. He left Broken Hill in 1905 to tour the mining districts of North America, going on to England; after spending a few months there, in 1906 he returned to East Canada, first finding occupation as a Draughtsman for a large Manufacturing firm, and later working as a practical miner for the Coriagan Silver Mining Co., Cobalt. In 1909 he came west, Coal mining at Lethbridge, Alta., and later joined a Land Surveying firm at Salmon, Idaho. In 1910 he returned to Australia, and qualified as a Licensed Land Surveyor. He married in 1912. In 1915 he enlisted in the A.E.F. joining the 7th Field Coy Engineers, and left Sydney with them as a Corporal in November 1915. He saw three months service on the Suez Canal, where he was promoted to Sergeant, going on to France with the 2nd Australian Division in March 1916. He was reported "Wounded 25th May" on 14th November 1916, (in an attack near Bapaume on the Somme) and subsequently "Killed in Action" - his grave having been re-erected in 1922, at the local War Memorial twelve months later.
Total number of veteran’s names recorded on this memorial: 957

Gregson W.H. World War 1 KIA

Register of war memorials also lists above details at Mt Wilson memorial.

Historical Society
Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine
Newsletter No 19
August 2008

WILLIAM HILDER GREGSON

I’d like to begin by reading from the Roll of Honour, in the Australian War Memorial, Canberra: Gregson, Sgt William Hilder, 7th Field Coy, Australian Engineers. Killed in action, 14th November 1916, aged 39. Son of Jesse and Catherine Maclean Gregson, husband of Grace Gregson, native of Waratah NSW.

In the library of the Historical Society there is a Gregson family diary of some 150 pages, written by hand, from which we learn that William was born in Newcastle, that his father Jesse had come to New South Wales from England to seek his fortune. Here, among other things he discovered Mt Wilson, through his friends the Merewethers of Dennarque in Church Lane. Jesse Gregson bought a property and developed both house and garden here and from 1880 onwards never missed spending a summer at Yengo, his mountain retreat Yengo, he said, ‘was to me and to all the children a place we were always glad to come to and always sorry to leave.’ He generally came to Yengo with his wife and children early in December each year and remained till early April. In 1870 he had married Katie Maclean. The diary says that the two boys of the family, Willie and Edward, ‘tracks to favourite places’. The boys were sent to school at All Saints College at Bathurst. The mother’s diary notes that both my boys owe almost everything of their reverence for all that is good to the teaching they received and the example they saw at All Saints’. Both in turn served as head boys at this school and went on to Sydney University and in due course graduated. Willie, Bachelor of Arts in 1898, Bachelor of Engineering in 1901 and, Edward, Bachelor of Arts in 1903. Over the years the family travelled quite extensively around the world. While they were in America, Willie went off to find work in Canada as a draughtsman. He and his brother continued to travel widely—Italy, Switzerland, the Rhine area, France and eventually England. In 1912 Willie married, and a daughter was born in June 1914. Meanwhile he had gained
Professional qualifications as a licensed surveyor, working mainly with mining companies. At the outbreak of war he joined a rifle club and before long enlisted for military service, serving in the 7th Field Engineering Company. Three months later he had gained two stripes as a Corporal, and his unit sailed from Sydney for the Great War beyond. The 7th Engineers took up foreign duties first at the Suez Canal and from there in March 1916 to France. The Unit was soon directly engaged in the great, long and terrible Battle of the Somme. In all the literature of war that name strikes dread—for all the carnage, ineptitude and sheer waste of life. (In which for the British Army alone, there were 150,000 men killed. The very first day of this battle, 1st July 1916, saw the death of 20,000 British soldiers.)

Siegfried Sassoon

The General

“GOOD MORNING; good morning!” the General said
When we met him last week on our way to the Line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of ‘em dead,
And we’re cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
“He’s a cheery old card,” grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack
. . . . . . . .
But he did for them both by his plan of attack.

From this point Willie’s military record becomes sparse and uncertain. It is clear that he was wounded in action in November 1916, but his casualty report is filled with uncertainties:

27th February, 1917: Now reported wounded and MISSING.
3rd August, 1917: Previously reported wounded and missing, and now reported killed in action.

That’s the official record, but the family diary gives more detail. On the Somme, six months passed over, but on 14th November 1916 he was reported—wounded Sars— from that time he was lost sight of, and though every possible enquiry and search was made for him, both from here and by relatives in England, nothing more was ever heard of his state. A year later his grave was found and reported by the military authorities and his identity discs returned to his widow.

This is the direct account from the family diary, but their undoubted grief is not expressed or mentioned. Not a word on the hopeless difficulty of realising what had happened, of achieving some sort of acceptance of the bare announcement of his death. No closure. That’s a rather fashionable word for an old idea meaning some final acceptance of a long felt loss. But the diary contains no expression of the family’s grief that Willie is gone. It’s beyond words. What I find most touching about this story is that Willie’s decision to enlist must have been so hard to reach. It is not like the stories of young fellas, enlisting for the adventure of it, or getting away from the hum drum of life in an office or on the farm. We hear such stories, but here was William in his mid-thirties, married, with a young daughter, doing useful work, yet volunteering for army service, doing his duty for his country. And then missing and dead at age 39, and his widow left with his identity discs; facing post-war life in a country impoverished by the war, and with his name now on our war memorial.

Only a small photograph of Willie could be located (previous page), but Meg Fromel (Gregson) did find some notes and sketches tucked inside one of her father’s diaries. Her father, Edward Jesse Gregson, had also served in the First World War and, at some later time, found his son Willie’s grave and his name on a memorial in France and drew a sketch of the memorial and a map of the location. His notes say:

Memorial to our fallen comrades, erected at Tara Hill, between Pozieres and Albert, Somme. The cross and base is made from oak and stone taken from the ruins of a church at Martinpuich & inserted in base are four wooden tablets on one of which your brother’s name is inscribed. The design is by Lieut. Cartwright MC, 7th Coy. & was erected by the boys of the Coy. The memorial stands about 12 ft high and is a very solid bit of work. Britannia standing with trident in her right hand holding out a laurel wreath over Willie’s name. The British Lion at her feet.