

Great War Stories: Remembering the sacrifices of those with SC connections who served their country 100 years ago.

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Corporal Sydney Harold GIBSON No.15893

By Teresa Scott

Sydney Harold Gibson was the youngest son of Joseph and Margaret Ann (née Fox) Gibson, of Timaru. Born in Timaru on 25 May 1895, he was baptised at St Mary's Anglican Church on 11 August 1895, his mother being the sponsor. At this time his father was a hotelkeeper at Washdyke, before moving back into Timaru. He had applied for a licence for the Doncaster Hotel at Washdyke in 1894, transferring the licence in September 1895. He had previously kept well-known livery stables in Church Street and Beswick Street, and offered the services of his thoroughbred "Hollywood". In 1891 he purchased a double brake able to "carry over 20 passengers with the utmost comfort". Also in September 1895 Joseph Gibson offered for sale 32 head of racing and thoroughbred stock - geldings, fillies, mares and hacks. In December 1895 Joseph Gibson, who had also engaged in farming, put sheep and cattle up for sale. Along with his siblings Sydney attended Timaru Main School. Sydney's parents divorced in 1907. Margaret Gibson had obtained a separation order in February 1899 – Joseph was living in Sydney when a summons was served on him in 1906. Thereafter Margaret Ann Gibson worked to maintain herself and her five children. Like a number of young men of the time, Sydney incurred a fine (10 shillings) for riding a bicycle without a light. That must have occurred about the time he left Timaru for Trentham.

Sydney left Timaru on 15 December 1915 for Trentham, to join the 11th Reinforcements. Living at home (117 Church Street, Timaru) with his mother at that time, he was employed as a draper for T. & J. Thompson, Timaru. He enlisted on 5 April 1916, aged 20 years 10 months, and had previously served for two years with the Army Service Corps in Timaru. Sydney was single, of Church of England adherence, and in good health, 5 feet 10½ inches tall and 152 pounds in weight. He was initially rejected on account of a hernia, but had this operated on. He nominated his mother as his next-of-kin. His father's whereabouts were not known. The common misdemeanour was recorded against his name while at Featherston – overstaying leave, for which he forfeited 3 days pay. This followed a bout of influenza at Featherston.

Rifleman Gibson embarked with the 6th Reinforcements, NZ Rifle Brigade on 26 July 1916, destined for Devonport. On 3 October he disembarked and marched into Sling Camp and just 17 days later he proceeded overseas, where he joined his battalion at Rouen. He was penalised for another offence – this time in the field on 16 February 1917, when he paraded unshaven after being specially warned. For this he was confined to barracks for two days and deprived of one day's pay. In April 1917 he

was detached to a Working Battalion for a month. In June 1917 he was appointed lance-corporal, a month later appointed temporary corporal in place of a wounded soldier, and promoted to corporal on 28 August.

Corporal Sydney Harold Gibson, 15803, with the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, died on 18 October 1917 of wounds received in action in France, aged 22 years. He had suffered a gunshot wound to his thigh on 12 October and was admitted to the No. 1 New Zealand Field Ambulance. He died in the No. 3 Australian Casualty Clearing Station a day after his admission. His name appeared in yet another very long Casualty List, No. 706 issued on 1 November, along with those of other South Canterbury men. He was the third of Mrs Gibson's three sons to go on active service, his brothers Ernest and Herbert having embarked together, returning home by October 1917. A death notice in the *Timaru Herald* of 2 November 1917 recorded "He has done his duty". He was buried in the Nine Elms British Cemetery, Poperinge, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium, by the Rev. E. G. Muschamp on the day of his death. He is honoured on the Timaru Memorial Wall and St Mary's Church, Timaru, Memorial (S. Gibson). The plaque and scroll were sent to his mother in 1921, and his medals – British War Medal and Victory Medal – in 1923. For some years after the family continued to remember Sydney H. Gibson in brief yet touching messages – "So loved, so mourned." "To memory ever dear."

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