

## Walter Shaw

By Alan McKenzie

Walter was born at Papakaio in North Otago in 1877. His family moved to Timaru where his father Dugald Shaw is recorded as a commission agent and bacon curer.

Walter attended Timaru Main School then was employed in the office of James Hay a Timaru solicitor. After 15 years of learning Walter opened to practice on his own account from an office in Strathallan Street. Much of his work was as a commission agent, loaning money for the purchase of land and property, using funds invested by local citizens.

In 1910 he was engaged to Jessie Gow the daughter of retired school inspector James Gibson Gow. Their marriage took place in 1911 in Chalmers Church. The Timaru Herald recorded the names of those in attendance and they were many of the most respected leaders and business men in Timaru.

The family was complete in February 1913 when their daughter Helen Lillian was born. Outwardly it was a scene of family happiness but clouds had been gathering over Walter for some time. He had loaned out substantial funds to a local farmer and investor who then made unwise investments. As often happens things snowballed and it wasn't long before other local businessmen met with Walter in an attempt to bring some organization to his accounts. They feared that if one commission agent failed it would cause a run on withdrawals and be the ruin of many of them.

Their efforts were in vain. In April 1913 Walter was declared bankrupt, then in September he was in court to be found guilty on the charges of the theft of trust moneys and also false pretences. He was sentenced to three years imprisonment. When his daughter was christened at St Mary's Church in Timaru her father was recorded as being an "ex-solicitor". His wife and child lost their home to the creditors although they did allow Mrs Shaw to retain the household furniture and wedding presents. She and her daughter then lived with her parents in Selwyn Street.

At the conclusion of his sentence Walter is recorded working as a labourer in Wellington. He enlisted for war service and left on the troopship *Maunganui* in January 1916 and a few months later was killed in action on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1916. His place of burial is unknown with his name along with 1200 other New Zealanders listed on the memorial wall at the Caterpillar War Cemetery in France.

Daughter Helen was later to recall she never knew her father, and her mother Jessie, who thought she had married for life, was left with wedding presents, furniture and a few letters from France, and remained a widow for over 50 years. She died in Auckland in 1969, but is buried in Timaru with her parents.



Memorial Wall. Caterpillar War Cemetery