

**THE HOLDGATE FAMILY OF TIMARU.
THEIR PARTICIPATION WITH THE NZ ARMY IN WW1.
By Guy Holdgate**

The following compilation on three Timaru Holdgate family members and four close relatives who served in the New Zealand forces during World War 1 mainly uses the standard sources for the NZ Defence Force Archive records, together with the History of the Canterbury Infantry Regiment (Captain David Ferguson), the Cenotaph Database Museum Auckland, and newspapers scanned from Papers Past including records from the Timaru Herald. As a youth the writer met only fleetingly the three main members of the family under this discussion, and none of the close relatives. In consequence little first hand memories exist. Not un-typically the main three appeared not to have narrated their war experiences to currently living family members, nor left any diaries, and may have said little to their siblings at the time. Few family stories seem to exist, for instance no-one seemed to know that Great Uncle Ernie had been on Gallipoli, or that Uncle William had been wounded at Passchendale. The writer's interest was first aroused a few years ago in Holdgates-in-WW1 when a distant Holdgate relative (Sir Martin Holdgate) in England requested information on their Great Uncle Humphrey Holdgate. Humphrey had actually served in the artillery with the Australian army in WW-1. In pursuing Humphreys story also attached here, it was decided to later follow up on the NZ Holdgates in Timaru.

EARNEST ARTHUR GEORGE HOLDGATE

The first Timaru Holdgate to serve overseas in WW1 was **Ernest Arthur George Holdgate**. He was born in Timaru in 1875, the fourth son to Edward and Betty Holdgate. Edward and Betty had emigrated from Glossop, England, to settle in Timaru in 1863 sailing on the 'Victory', one of the first ships to bring emigrants to South Canterbury. Edward Holdgate and William Priest started the well known hardware shop Priest and Holdgate located in the Royal Arcade on Stafford Street. Earnest Holdgate was educated at Timaru Main School. In time Earnest and several of his brothers worked in the family business and Earnest learnt the trades of locksmith, gunsmith and sheet metal worker. In 1893 Earnest joined the local Timaru Volunteer Rifle Company and was described as quite a marksman often winning shooting competitions. This must have served him well in the ensuing conflict, and he obtained the rank of Captain shortly after enlisting with the South Canterbury Infantry Regiment in December 1914. He duly embarked with the Canterbury Infantry Battalion to Egypt on HMNZT Willochra departing NZ on 17 April 1915. Being a keen family member and participant in affairs of the Banks Street Methodist Church he was given a large church send-off and was presented him with a fine pair of field glasses in leather case. After a short spell in Egypt he arrived on Gallipoli with the 4th Canterbury reinforcements on 8th June 1915. From Canterbury Regiment Records it appears the 4ths were then put into the trenches at the dangerous location of Quinns Post where they replaced Australian troops. On 10th July 1915 Earnest was wounded in the arm/shoulder by gun shot/shrapnel. The wound was said to be severe entailing bone damage and initially he was shipped to Malta for treatment, and then went on the hospital ship Dover Castle to England where he was admitted on 15th October to the Endsleigh Palace Hospital in London. By early March 1916 he was considered fit for light duties, and by end of March became fit for general services, embarked to Egypt on 24th March, later rejoined his old unit at Rouen in France where he was taken on strength with the Canterbury C Company 4th Rifles. He resumed his rank of Captain by 5th June 1916. According to unit records the Canterbury's participated in the Somme battles near Flers and when located possibly in the Goose Alley trench system Earnest received a second wounding – a gunshot wound to the knee on 25th September 1916. By 11th November he is recorded as

being admitted to the NZ General Hospital at Brokenhurst in England for treatment, was finally placed on the NZ ill health roll by 21st November, and was returned to NZ on the hospital ship Marama arriving in Auckland on 5th March 1917. Family stories were that during his time in England on various leave he managed to get in touch with old family connections in the Glossop-Manchester area. A photo shows him in a line-up of officers about to be presented to King George V. By 25th April 1917 he was struck off strength and by June was discharged, but continued his military duties with the Territorial Army at Burnham Camp where he was promoted to the rank of Major.

In the post-war era he worked in the family firm Priest and Holdgate until it passed into the hands of Briscoes in the 1950's. He remained interested in fishing, shooting, tennis, gardening and music and continued his association with the Banks Street Wesleyan Church where he continued his Sunday school teaching and organist duties as before the war. He remained unmarried, lived with his widowed sister Ethel in Timaru, and died at the grand old age of 89 years in 29th February, 1964. He is buried in the Timaru Cemetery.



WILLIAM EDWARD HOLDGATE

The second Timaru Holdgate to be sent overseas was **William Edward Holdgate**. He was born in Timaru in 1895, the first son to Robert and Adelaide Holdgate. Robert was the eldest son of Edward and Betty who were amongst some of the first emigrants to South Canterbury. William was educated at Timaru Main School and Timaru Boys High. After school he worked for a period with the family firm Priest and Holdgate until war came along. He joined up with the NZ forces in 25th August 1915, then following his Uncle Ernie's footsteps he embarked with the Canterbury Infantry Battalion 8th reinforcements C company, 8th Rifles to Egypt (also on HMNZT Willochra) departing NZ on 13 November 1915. He served in Egypt until posted to Rouen on 6th April 1916 where he joined the 1st Battalion Canterbury Regiment. He was temporarily attached to the NZ Infantry Brigade Headquarters possibly after being wounded on 16 September and rejoined the battalion on 14th October. He presumably took part in most of the Canterbury's battles during the 1916-1917 period including the Somme, Messines, Passchendale. He received promotion to corporal on 10th June 1916. He obtained a one weeks leave in July where he may have gone to see the old Holdgate relatives in the Manchester/Glossop area. On the 12th October the 1st Canterbury's were put into the front lines at Bellevue near Passchendale where they experienced their greatest casualties for any single day in the war. The Canterbury's were to advance to the second (blue) line objective following up on the Otago Battalion but the advance of both battalions became stalled in the Ypres mud. William received a gunshot wound to the right thigh. Family story is that he lay unattended but managed to crawl himself back to the NZ front line. His wound was quite large and in the ensuing few months became seriously infected, he was probably lucky not to have his leg amputated. He was first admitted to the General Hospital at Rouen on 14th October, then the NZ General Hospital at Brokenhurst (England). Here he underwent various operations and skin grafts but by 21st November was classified unfit by the Medical Board and placed on the NZ ill health roll. He embarked on the ship NZ Maheno on the 24th December 1917 and arrived back in NZ on 14th March 1918. He was discharged from the NZ armed services on 26th July 1918.

After the war he worked in the Public Trust Department in Auckland up until 1936 where despite his disabilities was able to play a mean round of golf at Maungakiekie Club (Titirangi Links, Auckland), became at first treasurer then president of the Auckland Lawn Tennis Club on 2 occasions. He transferred from Auckland to Masterton Public Trust Department where he continued his association with golf clubs. He may have visited his old wartime localities after the war as he was granted a passport to visit Belgium, France and the UK in 1928. Eventually he moved to Martin (South Taranaki) worked in the Public Trust and married Laura Kingsland. They had no issue. He died in 1959 in Martin aged 64 years.

William was my father's oldest brother by some 20 years. I remember Williams occasional visits to our house in Wellington where he would arrive accompanied by a huge booming voice, and would treat my father as his little brother. Everything was a huge joke with him and he was a barrel of laughs although occasionally complaining of aches in the leg from his old wound. I received his 3 service medals and service certificates after he passed.



PRIVATE WILLIAM HOLDGATE

RALPH AUBREY HOLDGATE

The third Timaru Holdgate to serve overseas in WW1 was **Ralph Aubrey Holdgate**. He was born in Timaru in 1896, the first son to John and Henrietta Holdgate. John was the second son of Edward and Betty Holdgate who were among some of the first emigrants to South

Canterbury. Ralph was educated at Timaru Main School. After school he worked for a period as a clerk with Dalgety and Co, gave his next of kin as father John Holdgate c/o John Jackson and Co (Limited) in Stafford Street Timaru. He joined up with the NZ forces in 26th September 1916 as a corporal promoted to sergeant by 16th October. Following in his cousin and uncle footsteps he embarked with the Canterbury Infantry Battalion 22nd reinforcements C company to Devonport (England) on HMNZT Navua, departing NZ on 16 February 1917. He was transferred to Rouen (France) on 26th April 1917 and joined with the 1st Battalion Canterbury Regiment A Company. He joined the regimental unit field ambulance on 20th July 1917 and later the school of instructors by August 1917. He contracted trench foot and required treatment in the Clapton Military Hospital London from August to November. He was then transferred to the Couv? Depot at Hornchurch? in early December 1917. In March 1918 he took a months leave in the UK. He was eventually discharged as being no longer physically fit for active service due to continuing foot problems, and was embarked for NZ from Liverpool on the SS Remuera on 7th September 1918. On his return to Timaru after WW1 he continued to be involved in local events, managing to play tennis, cricket, hockey and later golf up to his late 70's. He was a keen stamp collector becoming life member and patron of the Timaru Philatelic Society, president of the NZ Philatelic Society in 1957/58, and was a Timaru City Councillor. He married Merle Halliday and they had 2 sons Lyall and Bevan. Later in World War 2 he obtained the rank of Captain with the NZ military forces but did not serve overseas. His son Lyall had a lifetime career with the NZ Airforce, serving in Canada in World War 2 as a flying instructor. Ralph died on 9th July 1984 at the grand old age of 88 years.



RALPH AUBREY HOLDGATE: photo from Timaru Herald c'1975.

OTHER CLOSE HOLDGATE RELATIVES IN WW1

Several other close relatives served in WW1. These included:

PRIVATE HAROLD JOHN RADCLIFFE: oldest son of John and Elizabeth Radcliffe of Stafford Street Timaru and cousin to William Holdgate. After school he joined as a salesman his fathers furnishing company J Radcliffe at the corner of Stafford and Beswick Streets Timaru. Harold enlisted on 11th August 1914 and sailed for Egypt on the 16th October 1914 with the Canterbury Infantry Battalion. He was killed in action sometime in the first days of the landings at Gallipoli (25th-30th April 1915) and his whereabouts is unknown. He is listed as one of those killed at the landings from the Canterbury Infantry Battalion, and his name is engraved on the Lone Pine Memorial at Lone Pine Cemetery (Gallipoli).



HAROLD RADCLIFFE: photo from the Auckland Museum collection. Guy Holdgate holds his name at the Lone Pine Memorial, Gallipoli.

His younger brother **PRIVATE NORMAN RADCLIFFE** embarked from NZ to France on February 1918 with the 3rd Reinforcements Otago Infantry Regiment, D Company. He survived the war.

HUMPREY HOLDGATE:

Humphrey was born in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England on 29th June 1886. Humphrey was a third cousin once removed of Edward Holdgate (who left England to settle in Timaru in 1863). Humphrey moved from England to Australia (Melbourne) in 1914 and enlisted with the Australian Army. He previously spent 4 years with the 2nd Middlesex Royal Field Artillery and 2 years with the London Brigade Royal Field Artillery, gaining the rank of Lieutenant. He joined the Australian Imperial Forces in Melbourne and embarked to Egypt with the Australian 2nd Field Artillery Brigade with the rank of sergeant. He was involved in the first day landings at Gallipoli and went on to man one of the 4 field guns used by the Australians near Anzac beach. His gun locality known locally as 'Holgates' (misspelt), was variously placed somewhere along and off Shrapnel Gully. He was wounded in the leg on 16th July and taken to Cairo for treatment. He returned to active duty by 18th August on Gallipoli where he gained promotion to Battery Sergeant Major then 2nd Lieutenant, manning the so-called Heavy Battery (or Howitzer). He remained on Gallipoli to the very end and was one of the last off Anzac beach in December 1915. After some months in Ismailia and Tel el Kebir he was repatriated back to Australia due to ill health and delisted in 28th May 1916. He then re-enrolled with the Australian Imperial Forces on 19th October 1917 and embarked for Egypt, then England arriving early January 1918. He joined the 12th Australian Army Brigade as a Lieutenant at Rouelles and later became a casualty in July 1918 with possible wound to the head. On recovery he rejoined with the 45th Battery and served through to the end of the war. After the armistice he remained with the Australian Infantry Forces Headquarters until final demobilisation on 5th August 1919. He returned to Australia at the end of September. Humphrey was awarded the Croix de Guerre (French) on 7th November 1919. After the war he worked as an enterprising salesman until his death at the Repatriation Hospital in Sydney in 1936 at the age of 50 years, his relatively early death possibly due to complications from his war wounds. He has no known relatives in Australia, but several relatives remain in England.



HUMPHREY HOLDGATE: photo taken in November 1920, shortly after the war.

WILLIAM IRVINE TAIT:

William Tait was the son of Captain James Tait, harbour master in Timaru. William was born in 1890, educated at Timaru Boys High. When he joined up with the NZ forces his occupation was as an accountant with R. Wilson and Co. He embarked with the Medical Corps for Egypt on 16th October 1914. He was hospitalised at Zeitoun (Cairo) but returned to his unit on 3rd May. He served with the Canterbury Infantry Regiment at Gallipoli from 11th August 1915, and was badly wounded by shrapnel in the chest on 27th August 1915. He eventually was hospitalised in Warrington (Lancashire, England) by 12th September 1915, and later attached on strength to the NZ Medical Corp base at Hornchurch (north London). He was promoted to Sergeant Major on the 1st February 1916 and later Company Sergeant Major at Hornchurch by 15th September 1917. He contacted sinusitis and was hospitalised at NZ convalescent hospital Walton, later returned to Hornchurch. He appears to remain at Hornchurch until his embarkation to NZ on 12th March 1919. By 11th June he was declared no longer physically fit on account of his war illnesses and struck of strength. He later married Cara Holdgate, eldest grandchild of Edward Holdgate. Cara and William had 2 children. He died in 1956.