Whittingham Family:

Henry Douglas Whittingham, John Cecil Whittingham, Leslie Ernest Whittingham and Eric Walter Whittingham

The Whittingham boys: Four went to War but only three returned

Sons of Walter Stanley and Elsie (called Lily) Whittingham.

To have one son serving King and Country in the Great War (1914-1918) was considered to be patriotic. To have two sons serving was called committed, and to have three sons in the armed forces was thought to be commendable, however to have four sons in uniform and overseas was admirable, and that was the situation in the Whittingham family during World War One (WW I).

The Whittingham family were a typical rural family, who had moved from Alice Downs Queensland and had settled in the Greensborough area. They took up a holding, were a hard working and respected family in the district. However because of the pressure of the day for the young men to ‘go to war and fight for the Empire’, one cannot imagine the feelings of the parents when they signed the enlistment papers. Were they sad or glad, and would they ever see their sons again?

WW I did change the Whittingham family. One son did not return and one son brought home an English bride.

All four Whittingham boys were born in Blackall Queensland, but they enlisted from Greensborough, and always considered themselves to be Burra Boys.

Two Whittingham sons (Henry Douglas and John Cecil) enlisted on the same day August 20 1914.

**Henry Douglas Whittingham**

Serial No. 1592

Rank: Private and gunner

Unit: 6th Battalion and 2nd Field Artillery Brigade

Henry Douglas Whittingham gave his age at 19 1/2 years and his occupation as a farmer with three months training as a cadet.

Henry Douglas Whittingham became a gunner in the 4th Battery Field Artillery Brigade and sailed for Overseas Service from Melbourne on October 19 1914 on HMAT Hororata A20. His father, W.S. Whittingham, signed his enlistment papers.

Unfortunately Gunner H.D. Whittingham was killed in action on April 15 1917 aged 21 and 5 months in Lagnicourt. France. His body lays in Queant Road Cemetery, Buissy, Pas de Calais France and his name can be located at panel 12 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial.

H.D Whittingham was well known in the Greensborough district as a fine athlete excelling in foot running and he was also known to have had a brilliant brain. The memoriam notices in the Melbourne Argus (1848-1957) Monday April 15 1918 show to what extent the family felt the loss of a son, brother and uncle and friend. Greensborough people remember his sacrifice with his name on the Fallen Soldier’s Memorial in War Memorial Park Greensborough. Along with his brothers he is also commemorated on the Greensborough Primary School Honour Board and the Greensborough and District Honour Board at the RSL.

**John Cecil Whittingham**

Serial No. 2921

Rank: Driver, then Sergeant

Unit: No 3 Section, Divisional Ammunition Column

John Cecil Whittingham also enlisted on August 20 1914 giving his age as 19, 10/12 years and occupation as farmer. The enlistment form states that he had no military training and his Service Number was 2921, with the rank of Driver with Divisional Ammunition Column (September- October 1914). Driver J.C Whittingham embarked from Melbourne for overseas service on HMAT Shropshire A9 on October 20 1914. He rose to the rank of Sergeant. Mother Lily Whittingham signed his enlistment papers. However John Cecil Whittingham brought a surprise back to his parents and friends in the form of an English bride. On leave in England John Whittingham met and married Agnes Baker aged 21 years at the Wesleyan Methodist Church Portland Road Hove England on November 5 1918.

**Leslie Ernest Whittingham**

Serial No. 3159

Rank: Private and Gunner

Unit: 8th Battalion

Leslie Ernest (who signed his name as Ernest Leslie) Whittingham enlisted at the age at 18 one month on August 20 1915 giving his occupation as a farmer. His enrolment paper states that he had 6 months training with the Citizen Forces, service number 3159 with the 8th Infantry Battalion- 10 to 12 Reinforcements (September-November 1915). Father W.S Whittingham signed his enlistment paper. Private L.E.Whittingham embarked from Adelaide on RMS Osterley on September 29 1915. He rose to the rank of Lieutenant by the cessation of the war.

However young Leslie Ernest had already hit the headlines even before the war started, when he helped with a house fire at the age of 13 years.

The Mercury (Hobart 1860-1954) Tuesday August 30 1910 p3 tells the story: “A five-roomed cottage, owned by Mr J. Laidley, and occupied by Mr. Whittingham, was partly destroyed by fire in Greensborough. The family were out of doors when the fire was first seen by them, but hurrying to the house, they managed to save furniture and two rooms. The house was insured... In his anxiety to enter the house, Leslie Whittingham, aged 13 years, broke through one of the windows and severed some of the sinews in his hand. He was taken to the hospital for treatment.”

**Eric Walter Whittingham**

Serial No. 727

Rank: Private

Unit: 14th Machine Gun Coy

Eric Walter Whittingham was the last of the brothers to enlist. His enlistment papers signed by Lily Whittingham on February 10 1917 gave his occupation as a labourer of 24 years 4 months with no military training. Private Eric Whittingham embarked in Melbourne on HMAT Suevic A29 for overseas service in France. On his return from war service Eric Walter Whittingham married Elsie Laidlay.

Eric and Elsie Whittingham went on to have five children. Four girls and one boy. Ethel, Eric, Doris, Trieandra (called Trinnie) and Elvie, all of whom made their home in the Greensborough area.

Eric Walter Whittingham junior carried on the tradition of going to war, but he broke with tradition by joining the Royal Australian Air Force in World War II.

***Greensborough Historical Society World War I Project thanks Rosalie Bray for her story on the Whittingham family.***

****