Maurice's pass – re-discovered in Penrith City Library's special collections.

When the Research Services staff began their re-cataloguing project of Penrith Library's research collections, one of the smallest of items in the Local Files collection sparked a mass of questions. At first I passed a photocopy of it off as indecipherable, and we threw the copy in the bin as we could not see its value for the collection. However, later in the day the original was found among a group of other unrelated historical records.

So, what was this small fine piece of paper that I now found wrapped in archival paper? Along with Graham, my intrepid volunteer researcher, I set out to find out about this seemingly insignificant piece of history.

This document is a pass granted to Maurice Patterson, a Sapper in the 12th Field Company Australian Engineers to travel on 12 February 1919 from Hastiere to Namur, two towns in war-torn Belgium. How on earth did this small piece of paper survive 97 years with maybe 30-odd of these years in obscurity in Local Studies at Penrith City Library? Why did Patterson keep it, considering it had served its purpose at 9pm on 12 February 1919? Who gave us the document and what's the connection, if any, with Penrith?

The following is what I have discovered about the owner of this piece of paper.

Maurice Patterson was born to Robert and Rebecca Patterson on 6 December 1899 at Mosman, NSW. His mother sadly died on the same day giving birth to him. She is buried at St Thomas' Church cemetery, Crows Nest. It is now known as St Thomas' Rest Park. Robert and Rebecca Varian married in St Barnabas' Church of England in South Melbourne on 23 December 1890. They were both Protestant immigrants from Ireland, Robert from County Down and Rebecca from Cork. Their children identified themselves as Presbyterian. Four children Richard, Robert, Thomas and John were

born in Melbourne before the family moved to Sydney to live in Mosman. Their move could have been related to family connections in Sydney.

In December 1899, Robert was left with the care of his 5 sons aged between a newborn and 7 years. He would have struggled to cope and on 16 June 1903 he succumbed and placed his boys in the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children. Three years later on 7 July 1906, the boys were discharged back into their father's care. His address at the time was his employer in Adelaide and they possibly moved to South Australia for a time. The eldest boy, Richard had by then been discharged and was apprenticed to a tradesman in Bexley. He presumably remained in Sydney and for this reason the family were living back in Sydney on the outbreak of the war.

Four sons joined up, Thomas on 18 August and Robert on 25 August 1914. They gave their elder brother Richard as their next of kin. Richard joined on 7 March 1916 and Maurice on 8 October on 1917. All boys then gave their father as next of kin. He was living in Moore Park at the time. Both Thomas and Robert were at Gallipoli. Robert was killed by a sniper on 2 May 1915. Along with many soldiers he wrote his will on 24 April passing his estate to his mother's widowed sister, Mary Somer. His father Robert married Elsie Coppock on 25 June 1915 in Sydney.

Robert Gerald Patterson

Thomas served during the entire Gallipoli campaign and was later sent to France. He suffered the discipline of military law and was several times charged with disobeying orders, was court martialled, served a prison term and was wounded. After the war, Thomas moved to Queensland, married in 1927 and worked for the railways. In 1935 he wrote to the government asking for his discharge papers, and for a refund of the fine he paid while in France. He did state that he was 'young and foolish and the authorities failed to see that'.

Another brother, John did not serve. He died at Waterfall Sanatorium on 24 January 1919 and is buried in its cemetery. Robert, their father died in 1928 and Elsie in 1947. Elsie had also lost a brother to the war in 1917.

Maurice joined on 8 October 1917. He was a sapper in the 12th Field Company Engineers. On his enlistment, it can be seen that he started to write his correct date of birth, but overwrote it to make himself 18 years old. His father Robert and stepmother Elsie gave their consent to his enlistment, stating his age as 18 years and 2 months. They were living on Moore Park Road in Sydney at the time.

By February 1918 Maurice was in England and after a bout of influenza and hospitalization he was sent to France in August 1918. From the document held in Penrith Library, we know that he was with his Field Engineers in Belgium in February 1919. He was given permission to travel from Hastiere to Namur on 12 February 1919. In March 1919 he was on leave in England.

Maurice returned to Australia on the *Frankfurt* and arrived in August 1919. He was employed as a fireman with the NSW Fire Brigade from 1923. He married Edith Brown in 1925 and by 1930 they were living in Onslow Street Canterbury. Maurice was stationed at Newtown Fire Station until 1935 when he left this work following an indiscretion. By this time, they had 2 daughters. A son, Robert Gerald was also born to them, named no doubt after Maurice's deceased brother. Over the years Maurice worked as a fireman, labourer and cleaner. He may have worked with his elder brother Richard who was also a cleaner. Richard fell to his death from a retaining wall near the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1955.

Maurice enlisted in the Second World War and after the war he continued to work as a cleaner around the Marrickville/ Leichhardt area. It is believed that Edith died in 1957 and Maurice moved into a War Veterans Home in Yass. He died in 1978.

So, what a story, all gleaned from the basic information on that little piece of paper which was not created to be kept, but it was, and now it has a heightened value through its age, and the circumstances under which it was created. This document will remain in the custody of Penrith Library as a visual reminder of the war, lest we forget.

The document is now on view in the World War One display dome near the glass cabinets in the Library.

Sources:

National Archives of Australia
Australian War Memorial
National Library of Australia's Trove
Ancestry.com.au
Findmypast
Australian Cemetery Index
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Nepean Family History Society Library
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