



December 2021

No 629

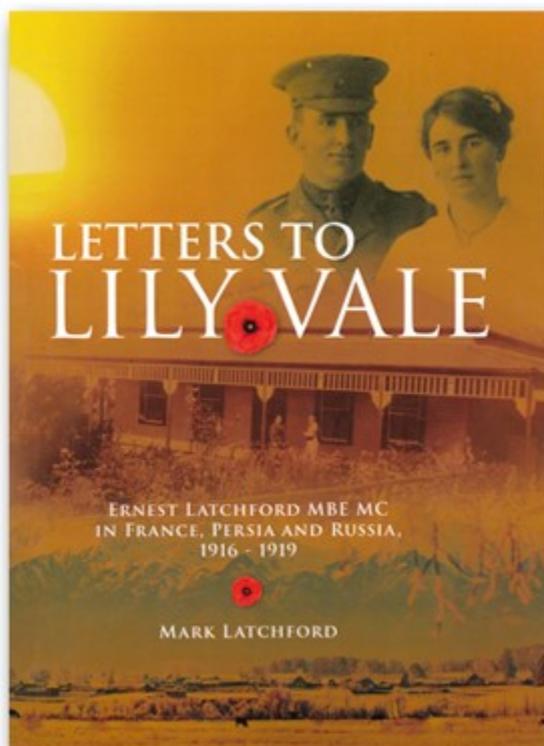
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<https://alburyhistory.org.au/>

For Your Reference A&DHS account details are:

BSB 640 000 Acc No 111097776

Registered by Australia Post PP 225170/0019 ISSN 2207-1237



The front cover of Mark Latchford's book that features his Grandfather's letters to his fiancé.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, December 08, 2021

7.30 pm, Commercial Club

Topic: Sharp postcards

Fossicking

Show & Tell

Speakers: Jan Hunter,

Connor Fedorowytsch

ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM

**Changing Gears:
Borg Warner to DSI
Until February 13**

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Protecting Local Heritage

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Vic History Award

PRESIDENT'S NOTES FOR DECEMBER

Our first meeting to be streamed on the internet worked well in November. Mark Latchford delivered his talk from Sydney via the Zoom app. Members attending the meeting were able to see Mark on the big screen and about 10 members tuned in remotely from as far away as Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Details of Mark's talk on page 2. We also heard from Hayley Lander, Digitisation Project Officer with AlburyCity, describing an exciting new facility—details on Page 6.

This month's meeting will include a talk on a Sharp family postcard collection by Jan Hunter and Connor Fedorowytsch telling us how and where he uses his metal detector with some of his more interesting finds. We then follow up with our usual December 'Show & Tell' - please consider bringing something along to contribute to what is always an interesting part of our December meeting. Our meeting will be followed by a light supper.

There are two letters accompanying this Bulletin, one from me with information on a 'memory bank' being compiled as part of commemorations of the 75th anniversary of Albury as a city. The second is from Ralph Simpfendorfer, chairperson of our Constitution Sub-committee—Ralph describes how the committee intends to address other aspects of our Society's governance now that our new constitution has been ratified by NSW Fair Trading.

This year has been difficult for our whole community. On behalf of the committee, thank you members for the solid support that we have received as we worked through some challenging issues. Best wishes for Christmas and a safe 2022 for all our members.

Mark Latchford is Ernest Latchford's grandson and his book "Letters to Lily Vale" expands on the life of his grandfather and includes many of the letters Ern sent to Linda and others from the theatres of war he served in. It can be purchased for \$30 plus postage from the author directly (mark_latchford@hotmail.com) or at <https://www.openbookhowden.com.au/product/letters-to-lily-vale/>

Colonel Ernest Latchford MBE, MC and the Albury District first crossed paths in 1910, but more significantly during the height of the Second World War, when he was the Commanding Officer of the Australian Army's Small Arms School, at Bonegilla. At the Society's meeting on the eve of Remembrance Day, Colonel Latchford's grandson, Mark, shared the story of this formidable ANZAC, whose contribution to Australia's military history is recognised by the Barrack that now carries his name on the banks of Lake Hume. The presentation was based on Mark Latchford's recently published book "Letters to Lily Vale" which focuses on his grandfather's service in the First World War.

Ern Latchford was both typical and atypical of our first ANZACs. Typical in that he was passionate and committed to serve his youthful country and was to join thousands of others heading to the carnage that was the Western Front. Atypical in that Latchford was in uniform long before war broke out. He went on to serve in theatres of conflict as diverse as the deserts of Persia and the snows of Siberia. In fact, Latchford was the only known Australian to serve in Siberia during the Russian Civil War and related foreign intervention.

Ern Latchford was born on the banks of the Goulburn Weir in 1889, into a dysfunctional and dirt-poor family. One of ten children to Richard and Ada Latchford, he was the only son to survive infancy and his father's habit of disappearing for months on end, led to Ern being raised by an uncle from the age of three. He grew up and attended school in Deniliquin before Echuca and then Launceston. Latchford developed a passion for learning, for reading and also for shooting, which unintentionally was to form the foundation of his subsequent career.

In 1906, he left home and moved to Melbourne, initially working at the famous Coles' Book Arcade. Soon after he joined the fledging Australian militia, first as a part-time reservist and then from 1910 on a full-time basis. We can probably assume he was particularly attracted to the structure and discipline of the military after growing up in such chaotic family circumstances. The Australian militia was in its very early stages of development, but its growth coincided with the advent of compulsory military training for all Australian young men and boys, legislated by the Federal Government at this time. From 1910 until the outbreak of the war, Latchford trained waves of Victorian lads on military procedure and in particular, on how to use weaponry. He attended training camps from Albury to the Mornington Peninsula, tuning his own military skills, while imparting his knowledge and expertise to others. At a party in the semi-rural Doncaster area in 1910, Latchford first met his future wife, Linda Dehnert and began an extended romance, one that often suffered from the 'tyranny of distance'.



Ern Latchford in 1907

Like most other Australians, the outbreak of war saw Latchford engulfed with passion for the pending conflict, but rather than celebrate, Ern was also filled with trepidation. In letters to Linda, he predicted accurately it would be a long and bloody conflict. Nevertheless, he was determined to contribute and wanted to be shipped immediately to Egypt and beyond. However, his expertise as a trainer meant the military hierarchy held him back throughout late 1914 and 1915, primarily to train the battalions heading to Gallipoli. This frustrated Latchford and he kept badgering his officers to allow him to serve on the front.

Finally in early 1916, he was commissioned to join the 38th Battalion, AIF, a unit being formed from recruits in and around the Bendigo area. An intense three-month preparation began before sailing from Port Melbourne on the RMS Runic. On the day he departed Australia, Latchford began a regular, very substantive correspondence to Linda, whom he proposed to before embarking. These letters, in neat writing, every Sunday evening, despite the mud of Flanders, the dust of the Middle East and the snow of Russia, nearly all survived and populate much of "Letters to Lily Vale", the name of the property Linda lived in with her family near Ballan, west of Melbourne.

The 38th was at sea for nearly six weeks, sailing via Cape Town and Cape Verde Islands before landing in England, for three months training at Larkhill Camp in Wiltshire. In November 1916, the Battalion deployed to Flanders, along the French-Belgian border. Latchford was soon promoted to Lieutenant, then Captain while in the muddy trenches. Initially, Latchford and his men were deployed to mount invasive raids against German trenches, to gather intelligence and prisoners, sometimes at heavy cost. In between deployments on the front

line, the men were billeted with French farmers and their families and Ern would often write about the difference between farmers and farms in northern France and far-away Victoria.



Latchford in France

In the summer of 1917, Latchford and the men of the 38th were involved on one of the most successful battles of the war, namely Messines and Ern wrote effusively of the organisation, discipline and courage that he saw. However, a few months later, in a wet and miserable October, Latchford again was to lead his men out of the trenches in the tragic debacle that was Passchendaele. Terrible weather, poor planning and coordination saw the 38th and many other units decimated under intense fire of the Germans and no ground was gained. Latchford earned his Military Cross for extraordinary bravery under fire in leading the remnants of the Battalion and others to safety. The tone of Ern's letters changed after the loss of so many of his men.



During the winter of 1917/1918, General Monash was asked by the British High Command for 20 of the best Australian officers he could recommend to join a special mission being formed, to be called 'Dunsterforce', after its commander, General Dunsterville. This secret mission was to be deployed to north-west Persia where Turkish forces threatened to break through toward British India, after the implosion of Russia after their revolutions. The mission was designed to protect British oil interests in the Persian Gulf and in turn, to provide protection to the hundreds of thousands of Armenian and Assyrian refugees fleeing ethnic cleansing by the Ottoman regime. Ern Latchford, alongside the other Australian and Empire volunteers, crossed France by train, then ship to Egypt and on to modern day Kuwait from where they sailed up the Tigris River to Baghdad. From there it was an arduous march across snow-capped desert mountains into Persia. Each of the officers was given different responsibilities – some to aid the remnant of Tsarists forces around

the Caspian Sea, others to rescue refugees being massacred toward the Caucasus. Recognising his experience, Latchford was missioned to train from scratch, Armenian and Assyrian male refugees into a guerrilla force to attack the Turks. Uniforms, weapons, housing and food were in extreme short supply but great progress was made before the news of the armistices arrived in November 1918.

Thousands of ANZACs celebrated the end of hostilities, irrespective of where they were. Most dreamt of getting home as soon as possible, to see loved ones and return to their pre-war occupations. However, Latchford signed on for more – he volunteered to join a British mission to Russia. Despite having a fiancé waiting patiently at home, Ern must have been concerned about what he would be able to do on returning to Australia. Unlike most of his colleagues, he had no alternative profession. Knowing the Army would be downsizing, he decided not to head south but to go north to Vladivostok, via India, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Japan. The letters home trying to explain his decision were some of the saddest and most awkward that he had written.



Repairs in the Desert

After the second Russian Revolution, the new Bolshevik government withdrew from the War in early 1918. Allied governments were concerned about the short-term impact on the other fronts as German forces were redeployed, but also on the long-term effect of a revolutionary government overthrowing a centuries old Imperial dynasty. From Tokyo to London, Paris to Washington, political leaders decided to intervene by supporting anti-Bolshevik forces around the edges of the collapsing Russian Empire. A number of Australians joined a major British intervention in Archangel in northern Russia. Others were in the Crimea and Persia in the south. The Japanese, an ally in WWI, were the first to intervene in the east, using territory secured in early wars in Korea and Manchuria. American concern about their presence triggered western Allies to also participate. Their mission was to support a ragtag of 'White Russian' groups, whose only commonality was opposition to Lenin and his Bolsheviks. Some were imperialists dreaming of restoring the decimated Romanovs; others were

social democrats; others were opportunistic warlords. Adding to the mix was a large population of former prisoners of war from Czechoslovakia, who had fought with Austrian-Hungarian Imperial forces and were released by the Russians to make their way to a newly independent homeland, via a very circular route across Siberia (and then America). They were to help and hinder the Allies during the Intervention.

On arriving in Vladivostok, Latchford enjoyed the hospitality of the lone Australian family there, the Forsyths, who ran a fur trading business, but soon had to head west, travelling in or on top of old railway box wagons traversing Manchuria into the heart of Siberia to the regional capital Irkutsk, beside massive Lake Baikal. The mission Latchford was attached to, the Knox Mission, was not deployed to fight the Bolsheviks directly, but rather train the hodgepodge of men of fighting age that had descended on Irkutsk, including independently minded Cossacks, former Imperial Army soldiers and local peasants who had only been released from serfdom a few years before. When Ern arrived in the city, it was still buried under heavy winter snow, so training was undertaken in the town square. Later, when the countryside defrosted, he built a firing range in the wilderness, loosely based on the one at Port Melbourne he had used before the war. It was here, in the summer humidity and mosquitoes, he and his English colleagues tried to apply a sense of expertise and order on a rag-tag army. In between working, he went hunting with local indigenous tribes, socialised a little with some of the old regime's elite, now refugees or the Czech soldiers making their way to the coast. Despite initial successes in pushing west, the White Russian forces were eventually pushed back along the railway by Trotsky's Bolshevik forces. Toward the end of 1919, international political will weakened and US President Wilson and UK Prime Minister Lloyd George, decided to end intervention. Latchford's mission, although far from complete, was terminated and Ern made the return trip to the coast and crossed to Japan to await transport home. Finally, nearly four years after leaving Port Melbourne, he returned home in March 1920 and into the arms of his fiancé.

Latchford felt he had no alternative but to try and maintain a career in the military, even one severely reduced in size in the 1920s. He took a demotion to Warrant Officer and was assigned to be an instructor at the School of Musketry at Randwick in Sydney. Over the next twenty years, he was based there. The unit became the Small Arms School and was missioned to train waves of officers and enlisted men on the fundamentals and advanced tactics appropriate for the Australian Army and its infantry. The men who passed through the gates of the School were to be the backbone of the Army that was asked to achieve so much in World War II. Ern rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and Commanding Officer. He was also awarded an MBE for services to the Australian military in the mid-1930s.

Meanwhile, Ern had married Linda in 1921 in Ballarat, over a decade after first meeting and five years after he left for Western France. They were to only have one child, Kevin, born 1927 – he also pursued a military career in due course, via Duntroon and with deployments to Germany and Vietnam, on the way to reaching the rank of Major-General.

With the threat of Japanese attack from the sea very real in late 1941, the decision was made to relocate the Small Arms School to Bonegilla. For the next five years, the newly constructed facility saw large groups of men from the much-expanded wartime army trained on the latest equipment before being sent to North Africa, New Guinea and South-East Asia. At this time, Latchford was heavily involved in the selection of the famous Owen machine gun as the weapon of choice for the Australian military, but was frustrated not being allowed to serve at the front. He later quipped he felt he was missioned to hunt for Japanese submarines on the upper reaches of the Murray. His family relocated to a home in Young Street Albury and Kevin completed his education at Albury High School.



Construction at Bonegilla

At the end of hostilities in 1945, the School was relocated to Seymour, to allow Bonegilla to convert to its well-known role as a migrant centre. Latchford remained Commanding Officer and Chief Instructor through to his retirement in 1949.

Rather than rest and reflect, Ern and Linda relocated to Melbourne and Latchford worked as a Supreme Court judges' associate, applying his military discipline and sense of order to this elite legal community. In 1962, he died aged 73 at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, leaving Linda, his son and four grandsons.

Postscript: In the early 1980s, the Defence Department carefully considered what to name the Barracks that was to house the newly constructed Army Apprentice School being built on the bank of Lake Hume. Recognising his contribution to the enablement of generations of Australian (and other) soldiers, it was decided to name the Barracks after Colonel Ernest Latchford MBE, MC.

STATE MEMBERS WALK

Howard Jones

Hundreds of people have viewed the State Members' Walk in East Albury. It consists of 26 plaques listing the men who represented Albury in the Legislative Assembly from 1856 to 2003.

Surprisingly, only one (Harold Mair) was born in Albury. Most early members had migrated from England or Scotland. However, James Fallon was born in Ireland and Tom Griffith in the Virgin Islands in the West Indies. George Day, a convict's son, was the first Australian-born member.

Of the 26 members, five were Labor. Several members switched parties or became "independent". Eleven lost their seats at elections. The narrowest win was by Morris Asher, who defeated Thomas Mate by three votes, but Mate later beat him. George Beeby served the shortest term (four months and 21 days). Gordon Padman served 18 years until he was almost 80, winning six elections. Vernon Goodin was the youngest elected, aged 32.

Only one (Alex Mair) became NSW Premier, but Richard Ball was the Minister who signed off massive contracts to build the Hume Dam and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, as well as several new railways. Ball was in Parliament a total 26 years but for much of that time represented Corowa.

Before railways, one member rode from Albury to Sydney in 10 days, on the same horse. Two members opposed women's suffrage, two spoke strongly against Chinese migration and one is recorded as having resisted indigenous people by force as a squatter. You'll have to "walk the walk" to find out who did what!

Not one woman has represented Albury, though a few have tried.

Member for Albury Justin Clancy inaugurated the walk on November 4 with former State member and our Society patron Greg Aplin present. President Greg Ryan and several members represented the Society.

Note: Albury was part of the Murrumbidgee seat from 1856 to 1859, then part of Hume. The Albury seat was formed in 1880 but this ceased in 1920 when Albury became part of the four-member Murray seat. It was reinstated in 1927 and has continued, though with many adjustments of boundaries over time.



Local Member Justin Clancy and his predecessor (and Society Patron) Greg Aplin at the opening of the Members' Walk

INCREASED SUPPORT FOR COUNCILS TO PROTECT LOCAL HERITAGE

Councils could have more say in protecting NSW's invaluable heritage and history under recommended changes to the State's Heritage Act.

Local Government NSW President Linda Scott said a Parliamentary report released following a review of the almost 50-year old Act included recommendations for greater powers for councils to manage local heritage and broader incentives for ownership of heritage property.

"This new report back our calls for increased funding for local heritage grant programs, the development of a State-led heritage tourism strategy and the appointment of a dedicated local government representative on the Heritage Council for the first time."

Cr Scott said the report recommended:

Enhanced enforcement powers for councils; Prioritisation of Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation; Greater inter-agency collaboration for cultural tourism using local heritage assets for improved to support economic growth; and Improved protections of heritage sites from development impacts.

Cr Scott urged the NSW Government to accept the recommendations as they considered their response to the report by April 2022.



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THE MURRAY REGION DIGITISATION HUB

The Murray Region Digitisation Hub is a custom-built facility being established at the Albury LibraryMuseum Collection Store. The Project Officer, Hayley Lander, joined us at our November meeting to present on the project. Through the Regional Cultural Fund, Create NSW granted \$233,965 toward the establishment of the facility that will service participating community museums and collecting organisations across the region. The organisations span two Council areas including Flying Fruit Fly Circus, Headlie Taylor Header Museum, Holbrook Submarine Museum, Jindera Pioneer Museum, Station House Museum, Woolpack Inn Museum, and Wymah Museum.

Specialised digitisation equipment has been purchased and professional training programs are being implemented to foster the skills of these participating organisations. The promotion of documented collection items through the web-based platform database eHive and M&G NSW website Storyplace, will enable increased access and research opportunities going forward into the future.



Photographing Albury LibraryMuseum articles in the digitisation studio

2021 VICTORIAN COMMUNITY HISTORY AWARD

Jennifer Jones, local historian and guest speaker at our February 2019 meeting, received the award for **Cultural Diversity** at the 2021 Victorian Community History Awards. She was recognised for *On Taungurung Land: Sharing history and culture* which was described as an “exemplary study of community and cultural diversity, the result of an unusual collaboration between an Indigenous male elder of the Taungurung language group and a non-Indigenous female academic historian.”

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Meetings: Second Wednesday of the month
at 7.30 pm usually at the Commercial Club
Albury.

The Committee meets on the third
Wednesday of the month at 3 pm
at the Albury LibraryMuseum.

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