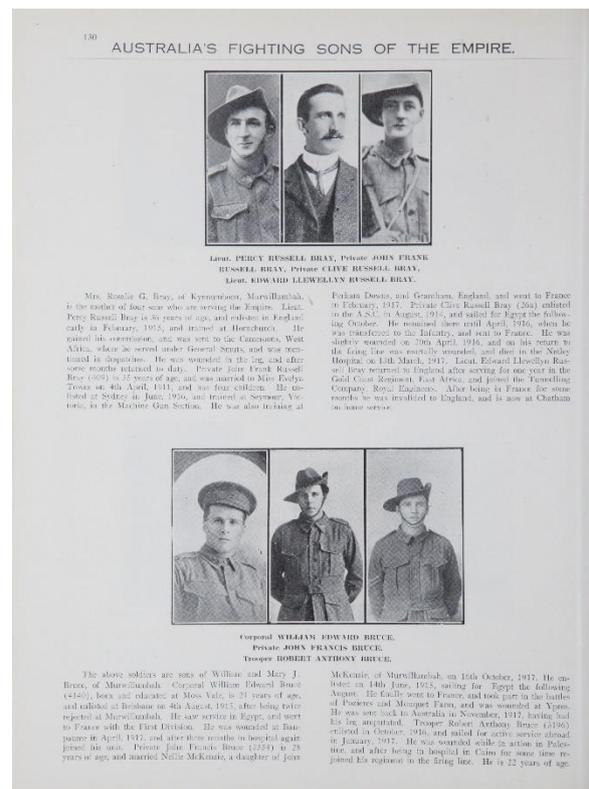
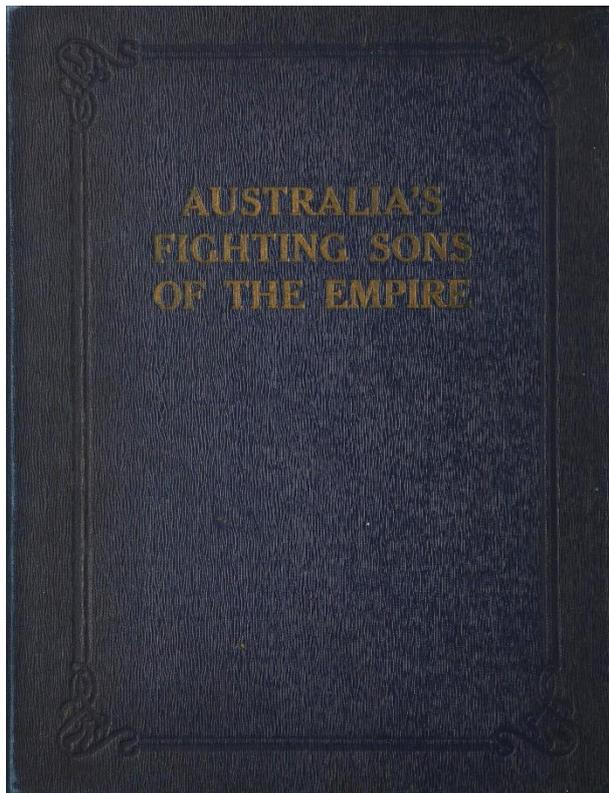


Australia's Fighting Sons

Australia's Fighting Sons of the Empire: Portraits and Biographies of Australians in the Great War is an extremely valuable resource for local soldier research. Published circa 1919, it is a compilation of the portraits and biographies of Australian soldiers from New South Wales and Queensland who fought in World War I. The book is free and accessible online via Trove: <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-35909257/view>.

'Incomplete though the work must be, the publication of this volume may still afford an opportunity to the friends and relatives of every soldier to hold, and to hand down to children and grand-children, a memorial of the great deeds which the Anzacs performed, with the enduring printed record of the names which each household cherishes.'

— Preface, *Australia's Fighting Sons of the Empire*



Royal Australian Historical Society volunteer Trudy Holdsworth has devoted much time to researching the stories of the men included in the publication. Using a variety of databases, including Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM), the National Archives of Australia (NAA), the Australian War Memorial (AWM), Trove, and the AIF Project, Trudy tracked down the records of almost 1,800 soldiers.

Some lives were easier to trace than others.

'... some of the men, mostly from the country areas, had not been registered at birth. Then I noticed that a lot of the men were not married, so there was no record in BDM, and then some of them were killed in action. There was a record with the AWM, the NAA have in the enlistment papers that they were either killed in action or died of wounds, but there was no [death] record in BDM.

Some of the men changed their names, some gave the wrong age, therefore the search made in BDM had to be wide enough to pick up those that changed details ... there is a huge hole in our Social History of men who were born in Australia, but with no record of that person even existing. No birth listing, no marriage listing and no death listing. These men were encouraged to join the AIF and wore the AIF uniform, they were representing Australia overseas ...'

Records varied state by state. Queensland BDM included soldiers who died whilst on service overseas, but no other states did. The AWM sometimes did not include soldiers who returned from overseas wounded or sick and died soon afterwards. Unfortunately, these are the kinds of difficulties one can face when researching local soldiers across a number of locations and databases.

Trudy also faced challenges researching exemptions for service in the Great War. Even though the First Australian Imperial Force was an entirely volunteer force, exemptions were still issued to men in certain circumstances, such as those in certain professions (engineers and dairy farmers among them). Locating these exemption certificates and letters is difficult as there is no dedicated database. Trudy found the easiest way to research them was through court hearings published in newspapers on Trove:

'I stumbled across exemptions because I had been looking for a particular person in NAA and could not find any enlistment papers ... but when his name was put into Trove I found the list of names of men who had been given exemption at a hearing, including the person I had been looking for.

This brings up another issue. A family had been certain that their relative had served in WWI because they had a photograph of him in uniform. So finding that he had been given an absolute exemption was something of a shock to them ...

The very murky subject of exemptions should be brought to light. It was thought that if you were a man [still] in Australia during war time you were a coward, but that is not necessarily the case.'

Trudy's diligent research reveals the difficulties all of us face when trying to find out about our local soldiers. It highlights some of the lesser known records and facts of the war, that perhaps you might not think of at first glance. The book *Australia's Fighting Sons* is an excellent resource, but there is so much more to uncover about the men than what is included between the book's covers.

Trudy has helped to compile a database on the soldiers mentioned in *Australia's Fighting Sons* for the RAHS. If you would like to access a copy of the Excel spreadsheet, please email our librarian Donna Newton at library@rahs.org.au.