

finally opened in 1908 and in one year alone (1903) fifteen companies operating on the Golden Mile produced an aggregate of more than forty tonnes of gold.

Houses replaced camps and shanties, and Kalgoorlie became a great inland town of generally contented people, with their lodges and clubs, musical and dramatic groups, sports organisations and a host of other activities.

Some of the free and easy life spilled over from the pioneering days. It was easy to get a drink long after the statutory closing time of 11pm — out at the Boulder Block, the tram terminus for the miners, the pubs were seldom closed. Illegal betting shops flourished, being rostered for prosecution when complaints were made that the law was being broken.

There was, too, always the two-up school, away from shops and houses out near the area known as the Half Way. Its busiest time was immediately after the miners' fortnightly pay and during the annual racing carnival. There was no fear of police raids and anyone could blow along.

I went out once with a friend but did not have a bet. Men were gathered round a bituminised circle with bundles of notes alongside them, and in the centre the keeper concentrated on control of the game, paying no attention to the onlookers as he handed the kip from time to time to different men to toss the pennies. He was the boss, and no funny business. Men who knew said he saw that the winners gave him a reasonable share — or else . . . (which meant no more tossing of the coin).

Kalgoorlie grew up tolerant of breaches of the law which many considered were not meant for a gold town on the fringe of the desert and devoid of activities enjoyed by people who lived near oceans and rivers with fishing and boating.

In my day officialdom, through the police, often turned a blind eye to drinking hours, illegal betting, two-up, sweeps and to the town's red-light section.

Brookman Street, named to mark the pioneering work of W. G. Brookman, who helped in the pegging of some of the rich leases of the Golden Mile, became the venue of prostitutes. It was a carryover from the pioneering days when Kalgoorlie was a town of excited diggers and women were as scarce as cooling springs in the Gibson Desert. Brookman Street is a long thoroughfare running parallel with Hannan Street and containing business premises,

homes, church halls, the police station, a posh club and other evidence of normal activity, so in the course of time the southerly end — the home of the prostitutes — became Hay Street.

It was an area swept under the carpet, as it were. The police tolerated the presence of the houses with their high fences and red lights, stepping in with an occasional prosecution when some madam stepped over the traces and did not play according to the unwritten rules.

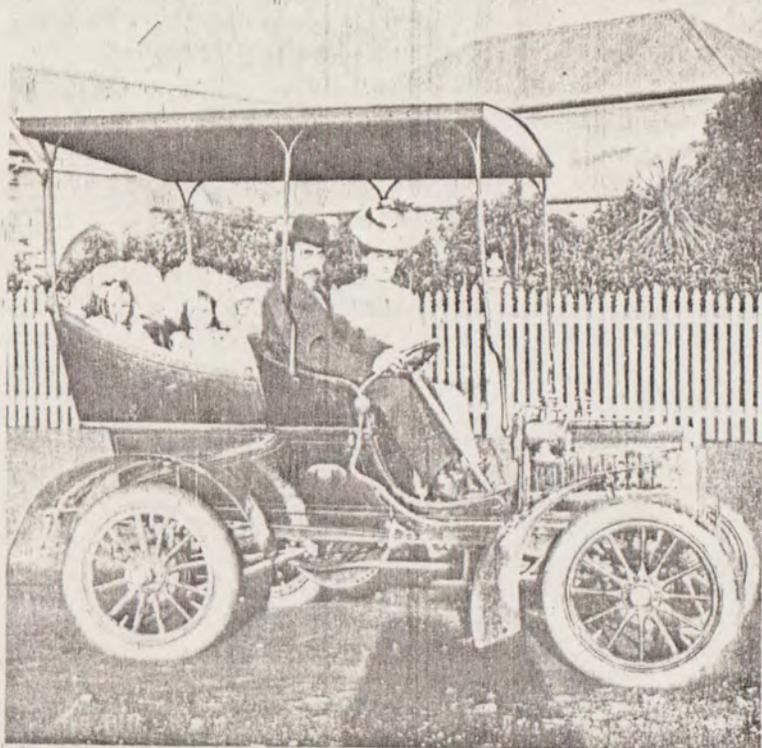
These places were excellent sources of information for detectives checking on undesirables visiting the town and on men flush with cash that could have been the proceeds of robbery. (My knowledge of the business was second-hand — from court reporting and association with detectives and other police!)

Gold stealing of course was officially frowned on, but difficult to eliminate. With thousands of men engaged in mining and the Golden Mile full of rich patches, it would have needed an army of sleuths to check the illicit flow of gold into buyers' hands. The law, however, was a tight one — in the prosecution's favour — for it was not necessary to prove that gold in a man's possession had been stolen but he had to prove that he had come into possession of it legally.

While there were a few thefts from gold store-rooms and treatment plants, most of the gold stolen by mine workers was the 'pickings' of miners trucking ore underground and drillers in rich spots. These were the small amounts they traded over bar counters or to shop keepers willing to take the risk.

Many people knew who the gold buyers were, and there were public complaints that these dealers generally escaped prosecution while the culprit charged was usually the miner intercepted on his way home with a few ounces in his pocket.

In this first decade violent crime as pictured in stories of America's Wild West had little place in Kalgoorlie's history. There were isolated instances of individuals making an amateur attempt to get a portion of a mining company's payroll or helping themselves to bars of gold in corrugated-iron 'strong-rooms', but massive quantities of the valued metal were transported with little supervision. I have seen stacks of gold bullion being taken from banks in Hannan Street to the station for transport to the Perth Mint with a minimum of escort and little fear of robbers. The aggregate value of the gold taken to the city by bullion carriages



Hannan Street draper Michael O'Reilly, who resided with his wife Annie and children in Outridge Street, Kalgoorlie, at the wheel of a new car in March 1907

attached to the Kalgoorlie-Perth express — without loss — would be an astonishing figure.

One visitor, surprised at the number of hotels along Hannan Street and clearly suspicious of the manner of some of the business transacted in a number of them, branded Kalgoorlie the wickedest town in Australia. This was a label rejected by those of us who grew up there and knew the place as an ideal family town.

NEWSPAPER LIFE

A month after leaving school I began a career in journalism that was to extend over fifty years.

John Kirwan, editor-in-chief of the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, asked me what I intended doing. I told him I thought of going to the School of Mines.

'Would you like to come and work for us?' he asked. I said I would, so began as a cadet journalist, starting at 7 o'clock every evening except Saturday and working through till around 1am.

My job included the collection of weather reports, work which earned me around the office the title of wind and water editor. I also assisted the sub-editor in the preparation of telegrams for publication and was his 'father confessor' when he wet his whistle too often on hot summer nights (mostly on a Friday, which was pay day) and he impressed on me the evils of drink and complained about his bosses and his wife. Actually he had extremely tolerant bosses and a loving and considerate wife. He would slip out of the office just before pub closing time, 11pm, return with a bottle of something and when the coast was clear of bosses would help himself to refreshments as the night wore on.

When he could no longer read the telegrams that I filled in with the necessary words I had to read them to him. As we came to 'wills and probates' he gave a chuckle, saying: 'Put this heading on, Arthur: Other People's Money.' I didn't do as he said, and after he had half emptied the bottle he did not care what I did with the telegrams.

The table I occupied was midway between those of the sub-editor and the editor, who handled his cables regardless of what went on around him.

The editor, Edward Irving, was a tall, lean, distinguished-looking figure, an Oxford M.A. who rowed and shot for his university and a grandson of Edward Irving, a celebrated preacher and friend of Thomas Carlyle. In writing *The Story of a Goldfields*



Above left: John McCleery, who was among the first to enlist in the army when war broke out in August 1914.

Right: Mr McCleery sixty-six years later, when he was aged ninety-three and living in the Perth suburb of Subiaco



T. L. (Jack) Axford, Kalgoorlie-born winner of the Victoria Cross, in his World War I uniform



15
WAR

World War I came on 4 August 1914. There was an immediate outburst of patriotic fervour by Kalgoorlie's citizens, keen to see the Kaiser's armies checked in their march across Europe and forced to make reparation for the damage they had done.

A newspaper report of the time tells of the reaction of a Tivoli Theatre audience at Kalgoorlie when a comedian broke off his fun-making to announce that a message had been received that 'the Federal Government had offered the Motherland to supply 20,000 troops in the present crisis'. A tremendous demonstration followed, with the singing of patriotic songs and the National Anthem. Many people, isolated from world affairs, believed it would not take long to show the Kaiser the error of his decision.

For a time life went along normally at Kalgoorlie, with newspaper advertisements announcing the forthcoming annual racing carnival, the Benevolent Society's yearly ball, an Irish National concert, the Athletic Club's Electric Light Carnival, an oration ('Ireland a Nation') by Hugh Mahon, MHR, and a prominent drapery firm advertising 'another pitch-out of stocks today'.

Mary Pickford continued to charm cinemagoers as Tess in *Tess of the Storm Country*. Elsa Langley was popular when the English Pierrots toured. The Mines Rovers defeated Railways in the football premiership, which was played in a blinding duststorm, and the Goldfields Football Club was congratulated by the Australasian Football Council on having sent a magnificent team to the carnival in Melbourne.

There were, however, other sorts of news in the papers, including industrial problems. An example: 'The whole of the platelayers engaged on the W.A. section of the Trans-Australia railway ceased work yesterday . . . caused by the discharge of seven men from the platelaying gang'.

Signs of change included Mayor Cutbush's sending of a telegram to Premier Scaddan asking if anything was being done for the pro-

tection of the explosives magazine situated some distance west of Kalgoorlie, where 150 tonnes of explosives were stored. Not that an explosion would cause damage in the town, but its loss would be serious for the mines, which used about half a kilogram of fractureur (gelignite) for every tonne of ore raised.

Then came the announcement of the enrolment of volunteer soldiers to fill the quota of 147 for Kalgoorlie and Boulder, under the supervision of Captain R. L. Leane. Most of those selected were young men serving in the citizen forces.

They lined up in the drill-hall grounds, some in uniform, most of them in civilian clothes. I knew many of them — some well, some casually, including Lieut.-Col. Lyon Johnston, Capt. Leane, Sgt. John McCleery, Paul McInerney, Roy Retchford, George (Mick) Maloney, Fred Stahl, Bob Hunter, Bob Hallahan and Andy Davidson. Off they marched through the main streets, preceded by the Kalgoorlie Brass Band, the Kalgoorlie Pipers' Band and the Cadet Buglers' Band, to be taken by special train to Blackboy Hill camp, with Sgt. McCleery in charge of the train.

At Blackboy Hill camp instructors had the task of turning civilians into soldiers and route marches were one of the toughening-up methods.

In his story of 11th Battalion training days, Capt. Walter Belford, who wrote that excellent book *Legs-Eleven*, tells of a weary group of soldiers resting tired feet and limbs on a roadside near Blackboy Hill camp when their C.O., Lieut.-Col. Lyon Johnston, rode past on his fine horse. In a cheer-up voice he called: 'Well, my lads. It's a long way to Tipperary, but we'll get there sometime'.

From that time, records Capt. Belford, the Colonel was known as Tipperary Johnston or more familiarly Old Tip.

They came home in September on embarkation leave, most of them in the 11th Battalion, and formed part of the Australian Expeditionary Force which went to Egypt for training.

In the months that followed hundreds more Kalgoorlie lads enlisted, many of whom I remember as school mates or family friends — Bruce Kyle, Fred Cox, Jack and Harry Axford, Percy Retchford, Roy Hunt, Burge Newman, the Coulter twins, Basil Melville, my own elder brother George Bennett, Don and Peter McLeod, Laurie Cooper, Ken and Jack McIntyre, Harold Baldock, Les Halliday, Arnold Potts, Percy Cocker, Theo Fewtrell, Clarrie

Fairley and others.

A lot of Kalgoorlie's volunteers became members of the 11th, 16th and 28th Battalions, famous units of the Australian Imperial Force.

The Gallipoli campaign tore big gaps in goldfields' units, particularly the 11th and 16th Battalions, but these, with other units, were later prominent in the bitter struggles that marked the conflict in Europe and an Allied victory in 1918.

Among those who did not return were Roy Retchford, who fought with the 11th Battalion at Gallipoli and in France, was promoted to commissioned rank, awarded a Military Cross, and was killed carrying a wounded comrade to safety.

Jack McIntyre rose to the rank of captain and was killed in action in France. Basil Melville and George Bennett both went to Gallipoli and were later killed in France, as were Fred Cox, Peter McLeod, Theo Fewtrell, Frank Lucas and Royce Woodhead.

The casualty lists of goldfields lads were long and heart-breaking. They were part of the price paid for the unsuccessful Gallipoli campaign with its 26,000 casualties, of whom 7571 were killed, and the fighting in France.

The war also brought economic changes to goldfields towns, food being more important than gold, and the war effort demanded lead, copper, zinc, tungsten and other base metals for the munition factories.

There was another disturbing element. Many of the Golden Mile's underground workers came from countries now opposed in the fighting. On the one side Austrians and on the other miners who had been born in Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia and other Balkan provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

A commission was necessary to sort things out, and I remember reporting its proceedings, with miners establishing their birthplace and the Austrians going into internment and Slavs continuing to go underground.

There was also anti-Italian tension before Italy entered the war against Germany, and a local clash triggered riots, with raids on Italian-based hotels. A German club also received attention from a hostile crowd, resulting in furnishings and bundles of cigars being thrown into the street.

Four years of world war with its appalling casualties and terrible

trail of damage finally came to an end and servicemen who had survived the conflict came home to rapturous welcomes.

I knew a dapper little chap who was able to join in the celebrations instead of being behind the barbed-wire of an internment camp. It happened this way. In pre-war years he set up a studio in an upstairs room in Cohn's building in Hannan Street to teach music and singing, using the name Herr Schmidt to impress trainees. Came the war and officialdom thought he should be interned, but he admitted his real name, Martin-Smith, born at Bath, England, and British to the core.

Jack Axford, a modest type, came home with a Victoria Cross and a Military Medal, won in France with the 16th Battalion, and Jack Carroll also was awarded a V.C., fighting with the 33rd Battalion. Later he lost a leg in a peace-time railway accident.

Captain Raymond Leane did not return to his job with the drapery firm of Pellews at Boulder. He was an officer in the Goldfields Infantry Regiment (volunteers) when he enlisted, proved to be a brilliant soldier in the Gallipoli campaign and in France, and after service with the 11th Battalion was promoted to major, going on to command of the 48th Battalion in February 1916. Before the end of the war he had become a brigadier-general, and came home with many honours.

His peacetime job was Commissioner of Police in South Australia.

Sgt. John McCleery (Mac, to his mates), one of the first to enlist at Kalgoorlie, returned home with a permanently injured shoulder. He went ashore with the 11th Battalion in the landing at Gallipoli, and ten days later was in the assault on the Turkish stronghold on Gaba Tepe, led by Capt. Leane.

'A shell from a pom-pom (a one-pounder quick-firing gun) got me in the shoulder,' he told me. 'I spent a long while in hospital, and my war days were over. I still can't lift one arm more than shoulder high.'

Mac, who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, was ninety-three when I recently met him, and he had just participated in an Anzac Day ceremony. Well over sixty years had passed since I had seen him, lined up on the parade ground at Kalgoorlie on the day of his enlistment.

Among boyhood friends who returned from the war were Laurie Cooper, who came home after extensive service (he enlisted at

seventeen); Les Halliday, who lost a leg in France; Clarrie Fairley, who won a Military Cross, but lost an eye; Frank Coulter, who returned to a store manager's job in Boulder; and Arnold Potts, who gained high military rank. Burge Newman fought with the 28th Battalion at Pozieres, Bullecourt and in other big battles, remained with his unit till the armistice and came home to an important mining career; Bruce Kyle returned after two years as a prisoner of war; Ken McIntyre survived extensive service; as did Snow Bruce, who returned with a severe leg wound.

The sacrifices of the boys who lie buried in foreign soil were expressed by Dryblower Murphy:

*Seconds of silence, heart-beats of sorrow,
Seconds that tell of our soldiers asleep;
Sleeping till God's own reveille tomorrow
Calls their brave souls from the dust and the deep.
Soldiers, civilians and mother who bore them
Keep the day sacred no rebel shall wrack,
When the maimed monsters, the white flag before them,
Bowed to the braves who had beaten them back.
Peace laurels here to their mem'ry we lay
On Armistice Day, Armistice Day!*

*Red poppies grow near the crosses above them;
Red poppies peep where they lie all unknown;
Little French lassies who knew but to love them
Whisper a pray'r in that hell-harried zone.
Softly the Angelus drifts o'er their dreaming,
Lightly the peasant folk tread where they trod,
Safe till the great Resurrectional beaming,
Shrouded by Mother Earth, guarded by God.
Heroes of Homeland, crumbling to clay,
Think you of these on your Armistice Day!*

*Lest you forget what their sacrifice saved you
Turn to their widows and orphans who pine;
Here, if the Hun and his hordes had enslaved you,
Long would you rot in the mire and the mine.
Walk you barefooted, or walk you well-booted,
Pause you and pray when the poppies are red;
Stand to attention, and stand you saluted,
Honour the wounded, the weak and the dead.
Remember your saviours who fell in the fray,
On Armistice Day —
Our Armistice Day!*

The fine six rink Bowling Green is another attraction and this is leased to the Bowling Club and subsidised by the Council, and is open to the public at all times.

There is also a recreation reserve of nine acres, containing one of the best granolithic bicycle tracks in the Commonwealth, which encloses a well-grassed football ground and cricket pitches. A fine grandstand has been erected, together with dressing rooms and training sheds, the whole enclosed with a substantial six foot close picket fence and provided with fine entrance gates, ticket boxes, etc.

The Town Hall and Theatre was completed in 1908 and consists of suites of spacious offices, a commodious Council Chamber, the best in the State, and a theatre capable of seating 1,200 persons. The stage is sufficiently large to permit of the production of the best plays and pantomimes on practically the same scale as obtains in the theatres in the Eastern States. The building was erected and furnished at a cost of about £20,000, and was paid for out of revenue.

The present area of the Municipality is about two square miles.

The annual rateable value is approximately £100,000, and the capital value variously estimated is probably rather over than under £950,000, while the revenue is about £40,000. The balance of assets over liabilities stands at £68,000.

There are 3,000 assessments in the rate book and over 2,000 names on the Municipal Voters' Roll.

An estimate of the population inside the Municipal boundaries gives the total as 8,000 to 9,000, and that for the district about 30,000.

From the foregoing brief survey it will readily be seen that the men at the head of affairs while looking keenly after the interests of the present generation have not been unmindful of posterity, and perhaps this is nowhere more evident than in their provision for the repayment of loans. The total borrowings to date have been £43,000, all of which have been repaid.

Many of those whose unstinted services were given to the town, at one period or another, throughout the past twenty-one years have also served in Parliament, both State and Commonwealth, but all have done yeoman service for Kalgoorlie.

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