



NAMES ON THE WALL

Ian Menzies

To mark the 100th anniversary of the conclusion of the Great War, I researched some of the names on my congregation's WWI Honour Board for a series of short pieces for our newsletter.

Thanks to the National Archives, the National War Museum and Trove, suddenly these unknown names became real-life boys and men with families and tantalising stories. Most were young, single and still living at home in disturbingly familiar streets that included and surrounded my own.

These soldiers took me to training camps, hospitals and trenches. To battlefields with notorious names and to graveyards of unimaginable poignancy and size. Some had no known grave at all.

I read archived letters that revealed

the heart-breaking anguish of families not knowing the fate of those who were Missing in Action or Prisoners of War. I uncovered tragic losses and miraculous survivals, and for some, learned of ongoing suffering from mental trauma and physical injury. None of "my" soldiers were famous. None were of particularly high rank. What touched me most was their very ordinariness, these volunteer milk carters, builders, and clerks; and the helpless but loving pride of their families left behind.

My hope was to echo the message of those families who later would plant avenues of trees, erect shrines and stained glass windows or print their boys' names in gold letters on lovingly polished wood with one determined and single-minded purpose: Lest we forget.

Reflection:

There is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.
Ecclesiastes 8:8b