



BLOCKHOUSE BAY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
INCORPORATED

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2025. Number 124

NEXT MEETING -

The Blockhouse Bay Historical Society next meeting is on Wednesday 2nd April at 1.15 pm in the Blockhouse Bay Community Centre.

Guest Speaker - Greg Moyle. Greg retired as a Major in the NZ Army after 37 years' service. He is the Chairman of the NZ War Memorial Trust and heavily involved with NZ War Memorial Museum in Le Quesnoy, France. The Museum opened to celebrate the 100th centenary of the liberation of Le Quesnoy by NZ troops.

Like many, he has visited the fields of battle on the Western Front and seen the monuments that mark New Zealand's service during 32 months of bloody conflict in World War I.

"Given the visual evidence of numerous war cemeteries becomes in itself an emotional journey, linked with feelings of sorrow for a generation gone before their time."

Lest we forget, they gave their
tomorrow for our today.
We are forever in their debt.



Society News

Saturday opening! At long last we are able to extend our opening days at Armanasco House. Many people cannot visit during the week. The House is hired out on Saturday mornings but is available during the school holidays. So, we will be opening from 10.30-12.30 on these Saturdays:
26 April - To tie in with our ANZAC theme we will have a display at Armanasco House. Drop by and see the Bay's wartime contributions.

We already have volunteers to act as greeters/guides for 26 April. Thank you to Olwyn and Peter Over. If you can help on any of the other days please contact Mary Marshall, marymarshall55@gmail.com

5 July 12 July 27 September 4 October and 3 January 2026

We are of course still open on Tuesdays from 10 am-2pm.

Projects for 2025

- Saturday morning opening. See above.
- A History of the Kosy Theatre.
- A reorganization of the photos on walls of the House; groups, stories, subjects, or in decades of our history.

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Life Members;

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Visit our website;

www.blockhousebayhistoricalsociety.com

WW1

In 1914 the population of Blockhouse Bay (or Avondale South as it was called then) was less than 50 families. The 29 members on the Honours Board had been residents. The Catton family had 4 brothers in service, two of whom were killed in action. In all 8 were Killed in Action in WWI.



Honours Board Unveiling 2007 with veterans including Trevor Welch

Bill Armanasco: A Soldier's Journey Through War and Resilience

Bill Armanasco's story is one of courage, sacrifice, and resilience. Born in an era of global unrest, he answered the call to serve his country during World War I, enduring the hardships of battle and its lasting consequences. His experiences highlight the bravery of those who fought in one of history's most devastating conflicts.

In 1915, Bill joined the Territorials, a stepping stone toward his full enlistment in the army on July 3, 1917. Soon after, on August 23, Private William Armanasco (#64416) was assigned to overseas training at the Tauherenikau Military Camp near Featherstone. There, he prepared for the gruelling challenges ahead.

November of the same year saw him embark with the 32nd Reinforcement, setting sail toward Europe. Upon arrival in the United Kingdom, he underwent additional training before being sent to the Etaples Camp, located on the French coast near Calais. This camp, notorious for its intense regimens, prepared soldiers for the brutal realities of the Western

Front. Bill endured nine weeks of rigorous training before being deployed to the battlefield.

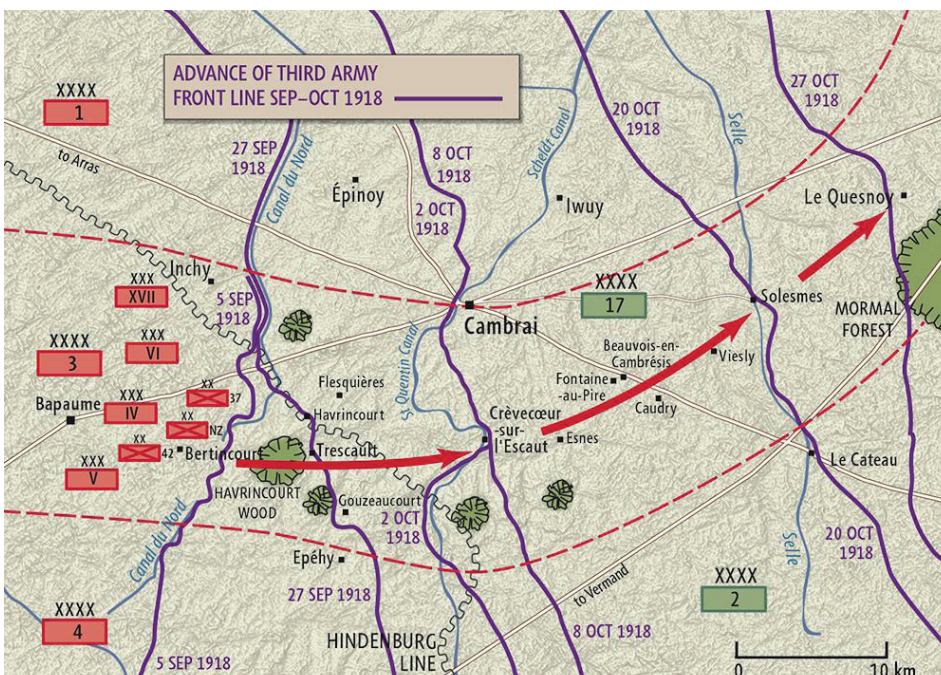
In June 1918, Bill joined the 1st Otago Battalion, actively engaging in combat. By August 24, the Third Army had paved the way for the capture of Bapaume, a key strategic town, with the New Zealand Division taking a leading role in the offensive. The ensuing battle was fierce, culminating in the liberation of three small towns and a village.

The struggle intensified on August 25, as German forces put up a tenacious defence. By August 28, Allied troops had successfully surrounded Bapaume, forcing the Germans to withdraw 2.5 kilometres eastward. However, the battle was far from over. On September 2, the Third Army collaborated with the Fourth Army for a renewed attack, reflecting the intensity of the conflict. The ferocity of these engagements was underscored by the awarding of three Victoria Crosses to New Zealand soldiers for their acts of heroism against enemy machine gun nests.

As the Germans retreated, they left behind machine gun nests and snipers to slow the Allied advance. On September 5, Bill Armanasco was struck by a sniper's bullet in his upper left arm. His injuries necessitated immediate medical attention, leading to his hospitalization in Rouen, France, before being transferred to the United Kingdom for further treatment. The effects of his wounds and the psychological toll of war would shape the rest of his life.

Returning home aboard the SS Ruahine, Bill faced a new battle—recovering from his injuries and adjusting to civilian life. Suffering from shellshock and a weakened arm and shoulder, he could no longer work as a builder, a profession he had once pursued. Instead, he turned to greenhouse farming, cultivating tomatoes for the market in his glasshouse on Heaphy Street.

Bill's story is a testament to the resilience of soldiers who, despite their injuries and traumas, found ways to adapt and contribute to their communities. His service and sacrifice remain a reminder of the extraordinary challenges faced by those who served in World War I.



Bill Armanasco 1917



POW Camp Stalag 18A.

Peter Over – top row second from right

WWII My Parents' Wartime Love Story by Peter Over

Dad

Like many Kiwi young men, my father Claude (but known as Peter) volunteered for the NZ Army in the dark days of 1940, with the extra incentive of a broken relationship behind him.

He joined the 21st Auckland Battalion and by April 1941 was involved in the Greek campaign. He was used in the rear-guard contingent holding off the Wehrmacht while troops were evacuated to Crete, with the end being surrender, if you were still alive.

Surrender came, but he was ill with bronchitis, so he ended up spending a month in hospital in Thessaloniki, before being transferred to Stalag 18A in Wolfsberg, Austria. From there, he was sent to the associated work camp 924/GW, where he was employed in civilian construction work. He learnt a new trade of carpentry and collected two pays – one from the NZ Army and one from the German Authorities! His new trade stood him in good stead for the rest of his life.

Stalag 18A was a relatively benign camp, at least for the Allied troops. There were lots of spare time activities, including sports, drama (Clive Dunn of Dad's Army fame took part) and study. There is an active association of family members who meet regularly around the world, including at Wolfsberg, where the 'red carpet' is rolled out by the civic authorities. The website www.stalag18a.org is a rich resource for those who wish to gain further insight into this period of history.

Mum

Mum, Elsie, was a real 'Eastender' from Bromley-by-Bow. She grew up in a family with an elder sister and younger brother, living in an 1850s terrace house. Her job was a specialist machinist making coffin linings. The Second World War became very real to Mum in the East End, as her suburb became the object of Luftwaffe bombing. This did not deter her family, who remained there throughout the war, their

home surviving while others around them were destroyed. In the 1970s I was sitting on the banks of the river Neckar when two Luftwaffe jets flew overhead. I mentioned this to Mum, who commented, 'You're lucky – when they flew over me, they were dropping bombs!'

The Connection

Mum had a workmate Doris, whose husband Bill was a prisoner in Stalag 18A. I mentioned that the camp was relatively benign. This resulted in many photos of activities and also barrack's photos. Bill sent Doris the photo of his barrack's mates. Doris showed my mother, with the suggestion that she should write to one of the single men. She picked the man second from the right, top row, who was also a friend of Bill's – 'I like the look of him'. There followed a frequent exchange of letters until the end of the war.

Dad arrived in London after his release and went straight to Mum's home. Her sister-in-law told me that when he came to the door, Mum went and hid upstairs and had to be coaxed into coming down. The letters had turned into a real man! After a few weeks of getting to know one another, Mum and Dad were married in the Poplar Registry Office. They saved their big bundle of letters which were around the house when I was small, but disappeared, never to be seen again.

Dad made the decision to return to NZ to look after the welfare of his mother – he was the son of an Englishman, so could have stayed in the UK. In the aftermath of WWII, you were directed when you could travel and the same applied to Mum and Dad. They came back separately – Dad first. Mum had the difficult situation of her mother being ill and dying, but she had to leave the UK when told and faced the heartbreak of learning her mother had died when Mum was two days out of Southampton.

Mum was one 12 war brides on the NZ bound Dominion Monarch, long with 2000 odd Kiwi troops. Some years ago, I was showing my wife's parents the voyage magazine, when my father-in-law produced the exact same magazine from his files – with both their names in it. He was one of the Kiwi troops on my mother's voyage!

Mum and Dad settled in Mount Eden, bought a house and had one son. Dad died in 1975 – early, no doubt because of his wartime service – while Mum died in 1983.

I met Dad's POW mate Bill and shared with him, while my wife and I met Doris and shared with her. Bill and Doris never left the East End. Doris commented to us, that Mum made a brave move to a new distant country, but that 'it was the best thing she could have done'.

Rationing in New Zealand During World War II

Rationing during World War II caused confusion in New Zealand, as the country was abundant in food supplies. With 33 million sheep food shortages were not a primary concern. However, rationing was necessary due to the demand for exports and limited imports of essential goods.

Petrol rationing was introduced almost as soon as the war started, with car owners receiving an allocation of 6 to 12 gallons per vehicle, depending on the car size. This restriction remained in place until May 1950.

To cope with petrol shortages, alternative fuels were adopted. Some cars were fitted with large cylinders on running boards or back bumpers, which functioned as gas burners fuelled by coke or charcoal. These systems produced gas to power vehicles.

Food rationing began in April 1942 as a response to shortages of imported goods. The first rationed item was sugar, followed later that year by clothing and tea. As overseas demand for New Zealand products increased, butter was rationed in October 1943, and meat followed in March 1944.

Clothing was among the first consumer goods to be rationed. Silk stockings were the first item restricted, followed by footwear, clothing, and material in May 1942. Each household was allocated 52 clothing coupons per year to manage purchases.

Families received ration books containing coupons to purchase restricted goods. Coupons could be pooled together to buy more expensive items such as jackets, corsets, and underwear.

New Zealanders found various ways to support the war effort beyond rationing. These included:

- Buying war bonds to fund military expenses.
- Growing vegetables to supplement food supplies.
- Knitting socks for soldiers.
- Preparing care packages for New Zealand troops stationed abroad.

Despite the challenges, rationing played a crucial role in ensuring that New Zealand could support both its own people and the war effort overseas. The sacrifices made by civilians contributed significantly to the country's wartime resistance and ultimate success.

Childhood Memories of WWII by Audrey Thomas

After the Japanese attacked Darwin, the decision was made for each school to have an air raid plan in case the unthinkable happened. The school had bush around it on three sides and so when the siren went, everyone left their classroom and followed the tracks into the bush. There was a great deal of elaeagnus hedge forming a thick ceiling between ti tree and bracken and assorted weedy bushes.

Each class went to their designated place and teachers checked the roll, then we just had to sit and not talk or move around. Apparently if we talked the enemy planes might have heard us. By hiding in the bush, we were thought to be safe as the school buildings would be bombed and not the surroundings. Each child had to wear I.D. This was carried in a little cotton bag worn round the neck. A small card with name and address, date of birth and father's place of work was carried in the bag together with ear plugs or cotton wool to lessen the noise of bombs, and a piece of rubber to bite on instead of biting your tongue.

Fortunately, we were never under threat of attack. It was extremely boring sitting still and being quiet. I used to catch small insects in the leaf mould and try to get them to race or even fight.

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