

WILLIAM NAPIER



Maud Napier nee Barnes aged 16

William Napier was born just out of London about 1878 and his 1st birthday came as the family sailed to Australia. William married Maude Barnes in the Bachelors' Hall at Pyap on the River Murray in 1895 when he was just 20 years old, his bride 19. Their first child Grace, was born soon after but sadly passed away at only 6 months of age. Their family grew substantially with five children born, Sylvera (Sylv), George, Albert (Wally), Maud and Reta. Sadly the last of the children to be born, Herbert, only lived 7 months. After about five years in the city, William made his way to the fledging settlement in Berri—he asked his wife not to follow until he could make a home and life for them. One day in 1909, five months after his arrival, someone mentioned to Mr Napier “there is a lady and five children down at the wharf and she says she is your wife”.



Napier family outside their tent home, c1909 on riverfront. Maud, George 11, Sylv 13, Wal 9, seated Reta 4, Maud 7. William and Bill away.

At that time, the township was only just beginning and along with a few others, the Napier's made Berri their home. Initially their home (two tents) was on the riverfront in Berri, near today's pumping station. Tragedy struck the young family when only one year later, Mrs Napier contracted pneumonia. She was taken by buggy to Loxton, where the nearest doctor was. Unfortunately, Maud died in the Loxton Hospital and is buried close to where her family resided, in the cemetery at Pyap.

William was left to raise his five children on his own, he worked as a ganger, clearing land and excavating channels for the growing settlement. In 1911, he moved the family from the riverfront to his newly purchased Block 6 on Berri's eastern slope. William and another early Berri settler, Mr Spriggs decided a school was necessary and set up a big tent above the post office site where immediately 26 children were enrolled. The school inspector visited and complained “there is insufficient seating accommodation for the children and many had to sit on the ground to write”. In 1912 a new school house was erected on Crawford Terrace.

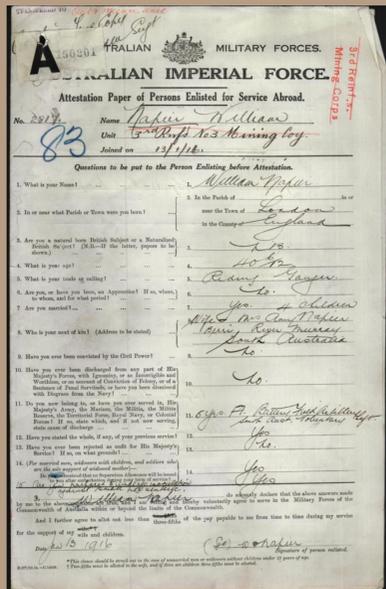
In 1913 William remarried, travelling to Adelaide to marry Miss Amy Field, he was 37 and she was 35. By 1914 William had erected a wood and iron house on his property, had 29 chain of channel, 48 chains of fencing, drying racks and a 15,000 gallon underground tank for water storage. He had apricot trees, lucerne and a wide selection of different grapes growing. There were stables with two horses and two milking cows a pig and twenty chickens on the property.

At age 40 William decided to join the war effort. Leaving his five children in the care of his new wife, he sailed for France and the trenches. It was here amongst the fighting that William one day came face to face with his son George. Dad asked “what are you doing here? You are too young to be enlisted”. George was 16 but had put his age up by two years to be able to enlist. After advising the Commanding Officer of the situation it was decided that George could stay if he was put under his father's command. And so young George continued to fight and both he and his father returned home safe at the end of the conflict after serving just over three years in the AIF. After returning from the war William was allocated a Soldier Settler Block at Block 49w, a dry block on the corner of Hoskin and Woolston Road in North Berri. He also received Government assistance to continue to run his fruit block at Block 6 along Kay Avenue, what was then the main highway through town. George, the son who had served in the war with him was also allocated Soldier Settler Block 367 at Winkie. In 1920 Amy gave birth to their first child, a son called Cyril but sadly he only lived for seven months. More tragedy was to befall the couple soon after when their second child Wilfred lived only six weeks.

William's children assisted on the fruit property for many years. When William became rather frail and felt he could not longer run the block on his own he handed over the running to his daughter Reta and her husband Bill Matthews. Reta and Bill managed the block for many years eventually handing over to their sons Bill and Fred. It was on the corner of the block that Fred and June built themselves a new home and William continued to live in the old house at the back of the property. One afternoon William said he would have a bit of a rest and headed out to the old house. Fred went out to check on him a little later and found William had passed away during his nap. He died on 13 December 1965 at 90 years of age and is buried in the Berri Cemetery.

William's Soldier Settler story is a little different to most as he was already living and owning property in Berri at his time of enlistment. Then after the war like many he was allocated a piece of land under the scheme but differently, he also received £300 toward his already owned property and was supervised in his running of the original property by the Superintendent of Soldier Settlements.

Today the property has been subdivided and a development of many streets and houses is on the hill where Block 6 once was. In 2018 Williams' grand daughters Phyl Thomas aged 94, Emily Bishop age 87 and grand daughter-in-law Hazel and June Matthews still reside in Berri.



William Napier in his fruit block top of Kay Avenue