

Citation 24th May 2009 on Pensioner guards at East Perth Cemetery - given to the Royal Western Australian Historical Society

Today we are here to honour the contribution made to the Colony of Western Australia by the Pensioner Guards. Pensioner Guards are the personnel who were enrolled as pensioners from the British military through Chelsea, Chatham and several other pensioner hospitals throughout Britain including Ireland. They applied to come out to this Colony guarding the convicts on the voyage. The exception being the ship the *Naval* which brought out a contingent after the transportation of convicts ceased. There are always exceptions to the rule and this applied also to only a handful that were pensioned off in Western Australia when their regiments were moved to another Colony or overseas. They became Pensioner Guards when they were employed by the War Office as an appointment in charge of convicts at such faraway places as Breaksea Island and this included a few who came on ships such as the *Travencore*. Their pensions were paid by Britain at that time and in regulated amounts depending on their service and sometimes their injuries. Ages generally ranged from in the early 20's to the late 50's.

Those who remained in the pensioner service would have to parade weekly in full uniform and be on call by the Colony for use at any time. Others were employed on arrival in the convict system to the Chief Establishment in Fremantle, others to Ticket of Leave Depots and government departments throughout the Colony. Some were only hired for the voyage and had to seek employment on their own account or with free settlers and expired convicts on arrival. Many brought their families with them on the voyage to Western Australia, some sent for them later while others married in the Colony.

Those able were after 7 years service, to obtain or purchase the allotment of land which was normally registered as P locations. Locations ranged from Butler's Swamp, Coogee, North Fremantle, Geraldton, Guildford, Kojonup, South Perth, Toodyay, York to name a few. This land on their death was either retained by the family, or the family was displaced and the location was then given to another Pensioner Guard. Pensioners who gained or owned the title to their lot were able to sell their land and in some cases the widows of Pensioners were able to upon application keep the plot. Some Pensioners on owning the land could then sell it to others. On average the total land was around 2 acres.

When responsible government came to WA a few of them were retained in the new Enrolled Pensioner Force but many were reported as being too unfit through health, drink, or age, to continue as reported in the records, all still being Pensioner Guards receiving their pensions.

Military funerals became part of what now we would call the Pensioners job description. Today we honour two men, they are but a small sample of what is known as Pensioner Guards, the many men who served our Colony well and the red ribbons you see fluttering in the breeze with name tags are spread over what remains of the several

cemetery areas here signifying approximately 10% of pensioner gravesites. Take time to have the opportunity of visiting these sites today.

The two we are specifically honouring today are Martin O'Dea and William Thomas Wimbridge both men brought their families to Western Australia and their descendants are many.

Martin O'DEA was born in County Clare, Ireland circa 1832. He enlisted as a private of the British Army in the 41st Regiment of Foot, which by 1881 was called the 1st Battalion of the Welsh Regiment.

Jean McDonald (who is here with me) from the Enrolled Pensioner Guard Special Interest Group of the Western Australian Genealogical Society writes that he served in the Crimea becoming Lance Corporal although the War Office listings on arrival state he was a private. In 1856 in Ennis, Co Clare, Ireland, Martin married Bridget Warren. Martin and Bridget, had four children in Ireland John Martin, Mary Anne and Michael born between 1857 and 1863. No record has been found to date of Bridget and Mary Anne arriving in WA and it is assumed that they died in Ireland.

After his term of service in the military his pension was paid to Ennis his birthplace. Martin O'Dea was enrolled as a pensioner and applied to serve as a guard to the convicts on the ship *Vimiera* in December 1865. More children were born after their arrival in the Colony. Francis born 1868, Mary Rosary born 1870, Peter born 1872, and from family sources also Patrick Joseph who although unregistered was said to be born 1873. Both Francis and Peter died in 1873 aged 4 years and 8 months respectively making that 4 of their children who did not survive.

Martin and Bridget with children lived in the Barracks at the top of St George's Terrace prior to his being transferred to the Avon Valley and then to the South West. He acquired Perth Location Y145 which we now know as the Northbridge area of West Perth with this site being St Brigid's Church and buildings area.

Bridget died in 1886 aged just 46 years and Martin died on the 23rd of September 1893 aged 60 years. Martin was honoured with a Military Funeral. The photo in the possession showing an impressive number of Pensioners in full regalia is shown in *The Dismal Trader: the undertaker business in Perth 1860-1939* written by Leonie Liveris. They rest together here in the Roman Catholic Section. Michael their son became a partner in Bowra and O'Dea.

William Thomas WIMBRIDGE was born in the area of St Marylebone, Middlesex c1806. He enlisted as a private in Manchester, Lancashire, England on the 30th April 1827 at the age of 19 years with the occupation of a cotton spinner and moved through the ranks to become a Corporal of the 69th Regiment in 1840 which later became known as the 2nd Welsh Regiment. He served 19 years and 47 days and during this time his service included 7 years in the West Indies and British North America. William became a Sergeant in 1845 and held two good conduct badges. He was discharged from the Salford Barracks at Manchester at the end of 1846.

William arrived in Western Australia on the second voyage of the *Pyrenees* in 1853 and in September of 1854 was appointed to the Chief Establishment without the sanction of

his commanding officer. William brought with him his wife Eleanor Barbara but known as Ellen, Thomas aged 3 years and 3 other children. In 1857 he was employed with a pension then was granted an allotment in North Fremantle and had to pay 1/- per day for nearly a year towards his cottage. By 1878 his pension was increased to 1 shilling and 7 pence per day Commissariat Messenger. It was noted on his records that the staff office returned his old pension certificate to the War Off in the first quarter of 1880.

During his life he was a subscriber to the Florence Nightingale Fund in 1857 and in 1869 subscribed to the Pensioners Benevolent Fund of which he was a founding member. These subscriptions were seen as compulsory for Pensioner Guards.

William died 4th January 1881 being buried here in East Perth Cemetery with his 17 year old daughter Sarah who predeceased him by less than 7 ½ years and with his wife Eleanor who followed him to the grave 10 years later. The gravesite is just west of this building on the pathway around the chapel.

Today this ceremony is only possible because of the co-operation between the Royal Western Australian Historical Society and the National Trust which is now (in 2009) in charge of this resting place of many of our citizens of Western Australia but historically our Colonial settlers one and all. May they all rest in Peace. Thank you.

It is important to note:

The other Pensioners graves found at this time were:

Michael BENSON, John CADDEN, William CAMPBELL, William CARR, Patrick CLAFFERTY, James Alfred CLINTON, John CLAYTON? Michael Henry CONDRON, John Henry (Charles) DARLEY, James FALLON, William GAUNT, Daniel JENNINGS, John LILLIS / LELLIS, George McGUINNESS, David McMULLEN (McMULLIN), Malcolm McNEE, Thomas MEADE, Robert MORGAN, Joseph NAUGHTON, Richard PRATT, John ROBINSON, John SEERY, Isaac SMITH, Patrick SULLIVAN, Samuel SUTTON, Michael (George) THROSSELL. Today most location numbers have been altered from those given in original diagrams and remember in the beginning there was no Church or driveway on the site.

By Gillian O'Mara