

Second Lieutenant Malcolm Keys

Malcolm's great grandfather and grandfather both served in the British army. His grandfather went on to become a much esteemed councillor in West Bromwich and his uncle chairman of West Bromwich Football Club. When war was declared Malcolm was resident in Australia. He considered joining the Australian Expeditionary Force but instead chose to return to England to serve King and Country. He was just twenty years old when he was killed in the Battle of the Somme on 31st August 1916.



Figure 1: The Battle of Waterloo, in which Malcolm's great-grandfather fought

The family origins can be traced back to William Keys, who fought in the Battle of Waterloo.ⁱ A son, Samuel, was born c 1818, to William and his wife Isabel in Rothbury, Northumberland.ⁱⁱ At the age 17 years and 6 months, Samuel enlisted in Derby on 17th November 1835, joining the Royal Sussex Regiment, 35th of Foot. During his seventeen years in the army he served for 2 years and 145 days in Mauritius, and attained the rank of corporal. Samuel's service with the regiment eventually took its toll on his health and on 28th December 1852, he was discharged as 'unfit for further service' due to 'phthisis pulmonalis', better known today as tuberculosis, causing Samuel to have 'difficulty in breathing and increased action of the heart'.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1854, Samuel married Francis Charlotte Graham at St Alkmund's Church, Derby on 18th April.^{iv} After his marriage and with a family to support, Samuel supplemented his Army Pension, by becoming a hop merchant.^v He was a 'remarkably shrewd and clever man of business'^{vi} and set up a company with his brother, John, in Derby producing isinglass and other chemical products for the brewing industry.^{vii} Although the brothers fell out, they both continued to prosper independently until Samuel, who had moved away to West Bromwich,

started to poach on his brother's preserve which resulted in litigation.^{viii} At the age of 88 years, Samuel fell on hard times and appealed to the army to have his pension increased on account of his business failing and having no income. He was given a 3p a day rise to 12p.^{ix} When he died in 1908, Samuel was described in his obituary as 'the grand old man of West Bromwich', a member of the Corporation with a deep interest in local affairs. He was a lifelong supporter of West Bromwich Football Club, his eldest son, Harry, being its chairman and member of the management committee.^x

Samuel's son Clement Keys, born in 1865 took a very different career path entering the world of chartered accountancy at the age of sixteen. Clement married Ada Morris in West Bromwich in early 1889.^{xi} Malcolm was born on March 21st 1895, brother to Marjorie, Clement Geoffrey and Leila Margaret born in 1889, 1892 and 1898 respectively.^{xii} In 1901 the family were still living in West Bromwich.

By 1911, Clement and his family had moved to 48 Chantry Road, Moseley. They employed the services of a cook and a domestic servant to assist Ada in the running of the household.

Malcolm's first school was St Oswald's College, Ellesmere in Shropshire where he stayed for a year and two terms, from September 1904 to April 1906.^{xiii}

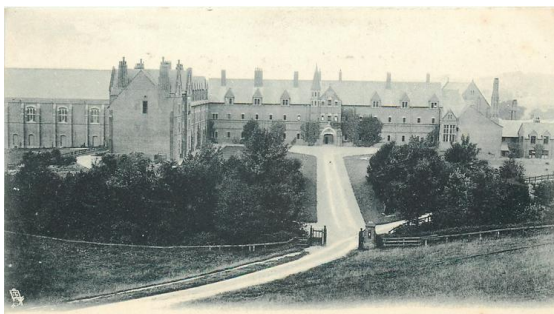


Figure 2: St Oswald's College, Ellesmere



Figure 3: Rifle Range at St Oswald's College



Figure 4: King Edward VI Grammar School, Stourbridge

He then spent two years at Miss Silvester's Preparatory School in West Bromwich, before attending King Edward VI Grammar School, Stourbridge. He left there in form VI on 24th July 1911 to continue his education at King Edward's High School, in New Street, Birmingham, leaving in 1912.^{xiv}



Figure 5: SS Orvieta

On 20th December 1912, having left school, Malcolm sailed to Australia on the *SS Orvieta*, aged just sixteen years old, to pursue his dream of an outdoor life and to learn the principles of farming.^{xv} He entered the Hawkesbury Agricultural College, Richmond, near Sydney in February 1913. He undertook and completed courses on, Piggery and Dairy Farming including the production of milk and cream, together with butter and cheese making, receiving Certificates of Proficiency in them all by 1914.^{xvi}



Figure 6: Hawkesbury Agricultural College

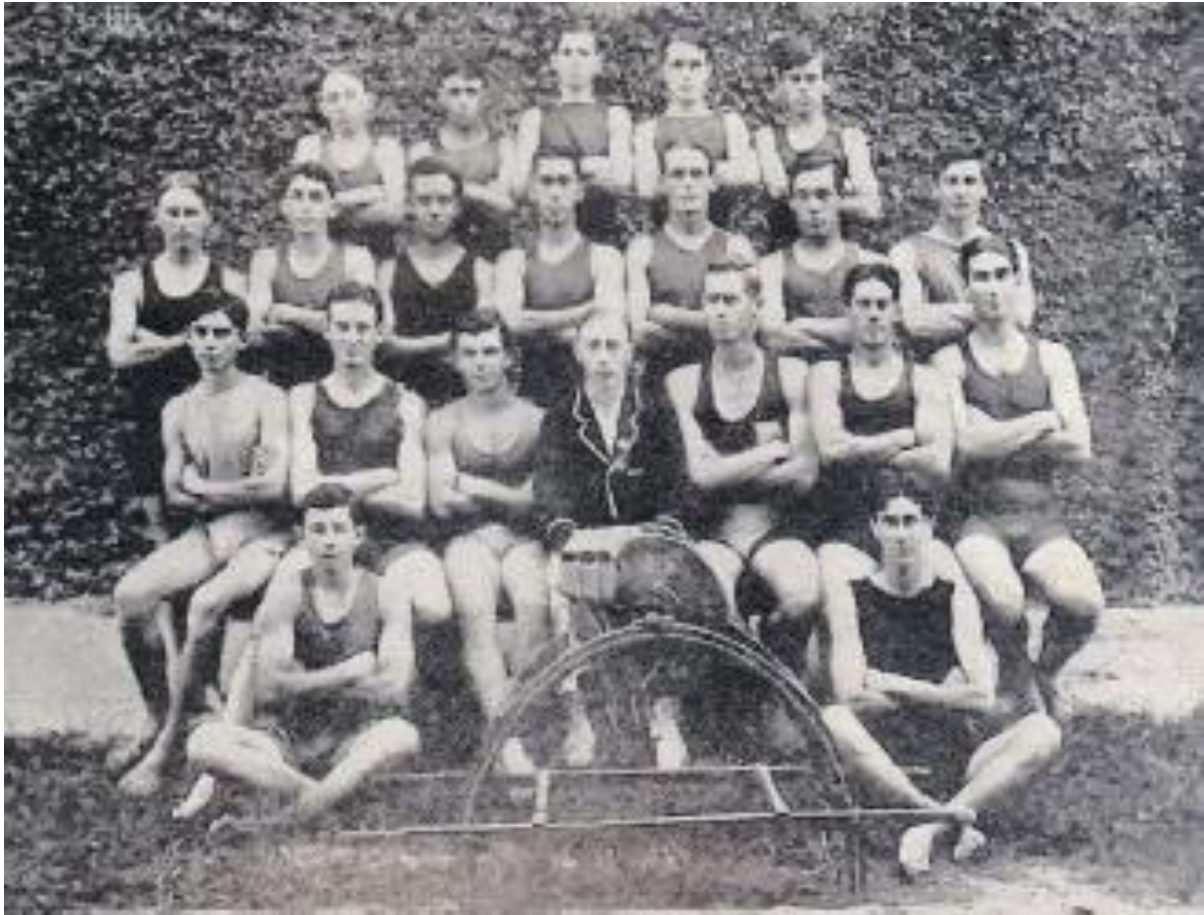


Figure 7: Hawkesbury Swimming and Life Saving Class 1914. Malcolm is the first boy on the left of the second row from the front



Figure 8: Second Lieutenant Malcolm Keys

When war was declared on 3rd August 1914, Malcolm considered joining the Australian Expeditionary Force, having been a cadet for one year (1913-14) and in the militia for six months (1914-15). It was his intention to join the Australian Forces, but hearing that his brother had already enlisted in England, he returned to take his brother's place and became articled to his father in his profession as a chartered accountant. Six months later he applied to the War Office. Malcolm was passed as 'fit' on 26th October 1915 at the First Sutton General Hospital and was granted a commission on 10th November 1915 as a Second Lieutenant in the 10th Battalion Border Regiment. ^{xvii}

After a period of training and then sick leave due to a hernia operation, which left him out of action from 9th March to 8th May 1916, Malcolm proceeded to Ireland at the outbreak of the rebellion and from there he crossed to France on 18th July 1916, and was attached to the 8th Battalion Border Regiment.^{xviii}



Figure 9: Map showing the River Ancre (running bottom to top on the right of the first column), Thiépvall, Aveluy Woods and Black Water Bridge

In early July the battalion saw action near Martinsart and again in mid July in the Ovillers area. Between the 23rd of July and 10th of August 1916, the Battalion, part of the 25th Division, held a sector of the line north of the River Ancre, near Thiépvall.^{xix}

In August, from 19th to 21st August, the battalion was busy constructing new front line trenches in Aveluy Wood. After a five day period of rest they returned to the front line. During this time the whole line was heavily shelled day and night. The Battalion war diary records that, on 30th August, 2nd Lt Keys was wounded by shrapnel and that there were many casualties in the Black Horse Bridge area where the battalion was entrenched. Malcolm was taken to Warloy Hospital where he died the next day.^{xx} He was just twenty years old.

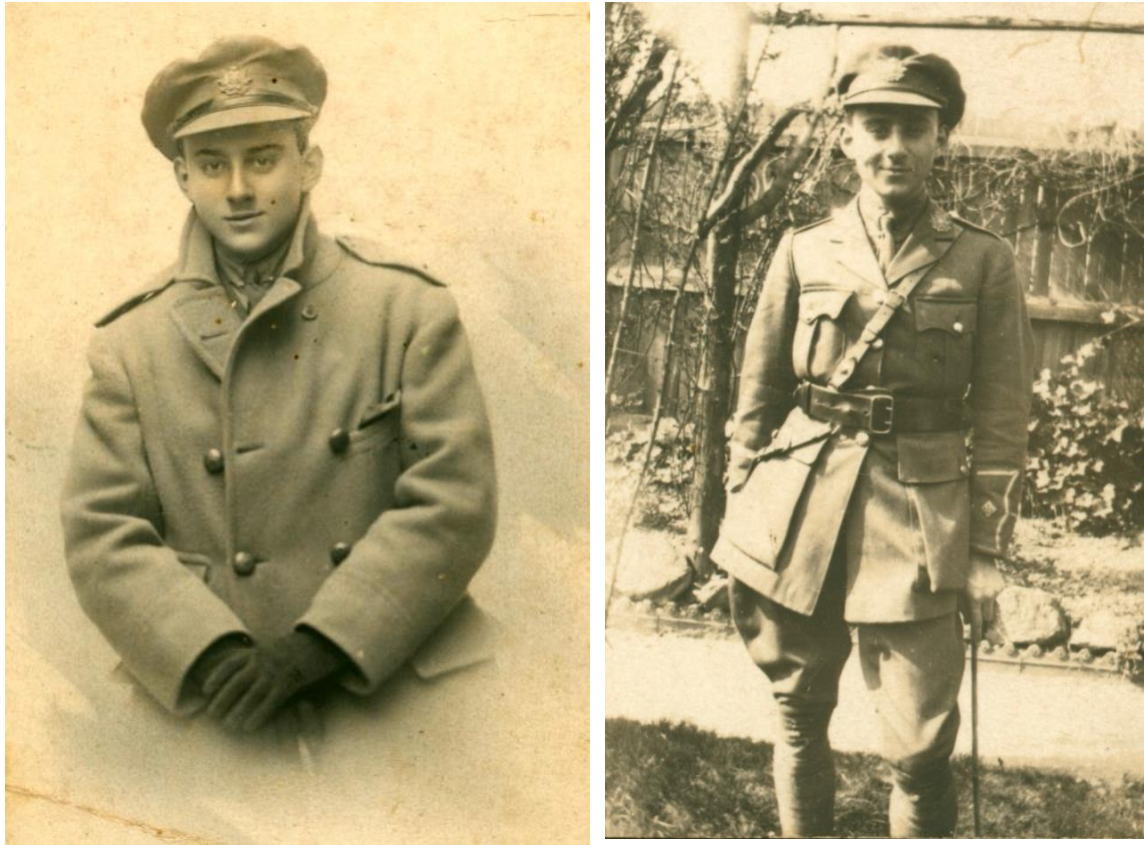


Figure 10: Photographs of Second Lieutenant Malcolm Keys held at the archives of Western Sydney University

Malcolm's Commanding Officer wrote of him:

His courage and manliness in most trying circumstances proved him more man than boy. He endeared himself to all and took such an interest in his platoon, that it was easily the most efficient in the company. The men were greatly distressed and asked eagerly after him. I have lost a most promising officer and cherished comrade and friend. In all circumstances his very presence was an inspiration to me.^{xxi}



Malcolm is buried in Warloy-Baillon Community Cemetery, 21 kms NE of Amiens, France.^{xxii}



Figure 11

(Far left) Malcolm's headstone at Warloy-Baillon Community Cemetery, France pictured left

He is also commemorated at King Edward VI Grammar School, Stourbridge, KES, Edgbaston and St Mary's Church, Moseley.



Figure 12: King Edward VI Grammar School, Stourbridge WW1 memorial



Figure 13: St Mary's Church, Moseley, WW1 memorial

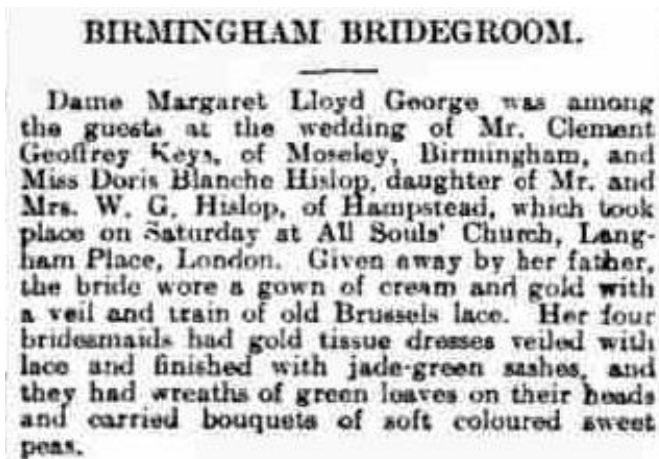


Figure 14: Newspaper cutting for the marriage of Malcolm's elder brother Lieutenant Clement Geoffrey Keys in 1923

Malcolm's elder brother, Lieutenant Clement Geoffrey Keys, served with the Northamptonshire Regiment but was honourably discharged on 18th April 1918, no longer physically fit for further war service.^{xxiii} He married Doris Blanche Hislop at All Souls Church, Langham Place, London on 2nd June 1923. Clement died on 16th November 1960.

Written and researched by Edwina Rees, with thanks to Jim Hone for his census contribution and Cathie Lester, archivist, at Western Sydney University.
Moseley Society History Group

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Endnotes

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- i *Birmingham News*, 9th September 1916
England marriages 1538-1973. (William Keys recorded as father of Samuel Keys)
 - ii Northumberland and Durham Baptisms
 - iii British Army Service Records 1760-1915
1861 census record Rothbury as place of birth
 - iv Derbyshire Marriage Index
 - v 1871 census
 - vi *The Derby Daily Telegraph*, 22nd August 1906
 - vii *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17th September 1886
1881 census
 - viii See vi
The Daily News, 29th April 1907
 - ix See iii
 - x England & Wales deaths 1827-2007, 1908, Kidderminster, 3rd quarter, 6C, 85
The Derby Daily Telegraph, 23rd August 1929
 - xi England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, West Bromwich, 1st quarter, 1889, 6B, 855
 - xii National Archives, British Officers after 1913, Ref WO339/47675
 - xiii Ellesmere School records
Stourbridge Grammar School WW1 Roll of Honour

<http://www.rememberthefallen.co.uk/casualty/keys-malcolm/>

- xiv See xiii
Service Record of King Edwards School 1914 1919
- xv Passenger Lists leaving UK 1890-1960
- xvi Western Sydney University Archives Collection. Ref A1-50022 with permission to use dated 28th August 2017 (Ref 07/013778)
- xvii De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour 1914-1919, 193
See xii
Western Sydney University Archives Collection. Ref A1-50022 with permission to use dated 28th August 2017 (Ref 07/013778)
- xviii See xii
War Diaries, 8th Border Regiment, Ref WO 225/3, pp 69-73
- xix Border Regiment, 8th Battalion
<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/battalion.php?pid=472>
See xvii, War Diaries
- xx War diary, 8th Battalion Border Regiment, National Archives, Ref WO 95/2251/3, pp 69-73
- xxi De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour 1914-1919, p 193
- xxii Commonwealth War Graves Commission
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<https://tuckdb.org/postcards/102550>
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- Figure 4 King Edward VI Grammar School, Stourbridge
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- Figure 5 SS Orvieto
<http://www.akpool.co.uk/postcards/24293537-postcard-dampfer-ss-orvieto-orient-line-orient-steam-navigation-company>

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Commonwealth War Graves Commission
- Figure 12 King Edward VI, Stourbridge WW1 memorial
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