

**Athelstan (Athel) William Shoobridge**



By Molly Woolcock

## **Athelstan William Shoobridge**

**Regimental number:** 7686

**Rank:** Private

**Place of birth:** New Norfolk, Tasmania

**Occupation:** Orchardist

**Age at embarkation:** 33

**Next of kin:** father, R W G Shoobridge,

**Unit:** 12<sup>th</sup> battalion, 26<sup>th</sup> Reinforcement

**Fate:** Killed in Action 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1918

**Burial:** Le Peuplier Military Cemetery (Row A, Grave No. 2), Caestre, France

Athelstan William Shoobridge was born on the 7 September 1883 in New Norfolk, Tasmania to parents Annie (1849 – 1888, nee Crouch) and Robert Wilkins Giblin Shoobridge (1847 – 1936). To his close family and friends he was known by ‘Athel’. He was raised on the Valleyfield farm with his eight siblings; Thomas, Ebenezer, Kate, Winifred, Charlotte, Annie, Muriel and Marjorie.

1. Thomas Robert Giblin Shoobridge *1872-1903*
2. Ebenezer Crouch Shoobridge *1874-1877*
3. Kate Sarah Shoobridge *1875-1950*
4. Winifred Mary Shoobridge *1877-*
5. Annie Dorothea Shoobridge *1879-1953*
6. Charlotte Mabel Shoobridge *1881-1959*
7. Olive Marjorie Shoobridge *1885-1957*
8. Muriel Constance Shoobridge *1888-1889*, and
9. Nancy Hope Shoobridge (1890- 1897), daughter of Robert and his second wife Selina Corumbene Alexander (1854-1924) – Athel’s half-sister. Selina was a nurse who emigrated from England with a reference signed by Florence Nightingale.

**Thomas:** Thomas was the eldest son born in 1872. He was studious and became dux of his year at Horton College in Ross. Thomas married Mattie Moore but had no children. Thomas passed away in 1903 after suffering from tubercular trouble.

**Ebenezer:** Ebenezer was the second son of Robert and Annie. He died when he was only three years old from scarlet fever.

**Kate:** Kate was the eldest daughter, she was born in 1875. She became a teacher and ran a school in Devonport for a while with her sister Winifred.

**Winifred:** The second daughter was born in 1877. She also became a teacher, teaching at the Collegiate School before joining her sister to teach in Devonport. Winifred made a trip to England for the coronation of George V in 1911. She was ordained as a Deacon by the Archbishop at St Andrews Cathedral in 1918. She passed away in 1945 in Queensland while living with her sister Marjorie.

**Charlotte:** Charlotte known as Mabel trained as a nurse and served in France during WW1. When she returned she was a sister at the Prince Alfred Hospital.

**Dora:** Dora known as Annie kept the house for her father after the death of her Mother. She remained with him until he passed away. She then moved to Sydney.

**Muriel:** Muriel was born in 1888 and died in 1889.

**Marjorie:** Marjorie was a nurse. She married Hendrick Archer in 1926 and had a son Robert William. Robert William was the only grandchild in the family. Hendrick died and Marjorie re-married to Arthur Keeler in 1930. They lived in Queensland for a while and Winifred lived with them for some time. Marjorie died in 1957.



Above: Valley Field

When Athel was five years old his mother Annie passed away, aged 39 years, leaving his father to raise the young children. Annie's last baby Constance, born February of that year also died in January 1889. Robert married again. His wife was Selina and their daughter Nancy was born in 1890, when Athel was aged seven years. In 1890, Nancy and her mother departed for England aboard the 'Ormuz' in order for Nancy to visit her grandparents. However, Nancy died of Scarlet Fever during the voyage on 6 April 1898. Her body was committed to the sea off the coast of Columbia. Her heartbroken parents commissioned a stained glass window in her memory to be erected in St Matthew's Church in New Norfolk.

Athel gained a scholarship that allowed him to attend the Hutchins School for his education in Hobart as a boarder. When Athel left the Hutchins school he went back to Valleyfield and managed the property from 1906. Athel was foundation member of the New Norfolk Masonic

Lodge and became Worshipful Master. He was a member of the Grand Lodge. In 1909 Athel went into partnership with Hugh Warner. They took over the Valleyfield estate which comprises one of the largest orchards in Tasmania and a hop ground.



### **William Ebenezer Shoobridge - Athel's great grandfather**

Hops are significantly important to the Shoobridge family; they are the reason why the Shoobridge's came to Tasmania. William Shoobridge, Athel's great grandfather was an immigrant from Kent, England. His family were well established hop farmers and saw potential in the little island known as Van Diemen's Land. When William arrived in 1882 he introduced a new variety of hops. He was one of the first people to start the Tasmanian hops crops that still thrive today.

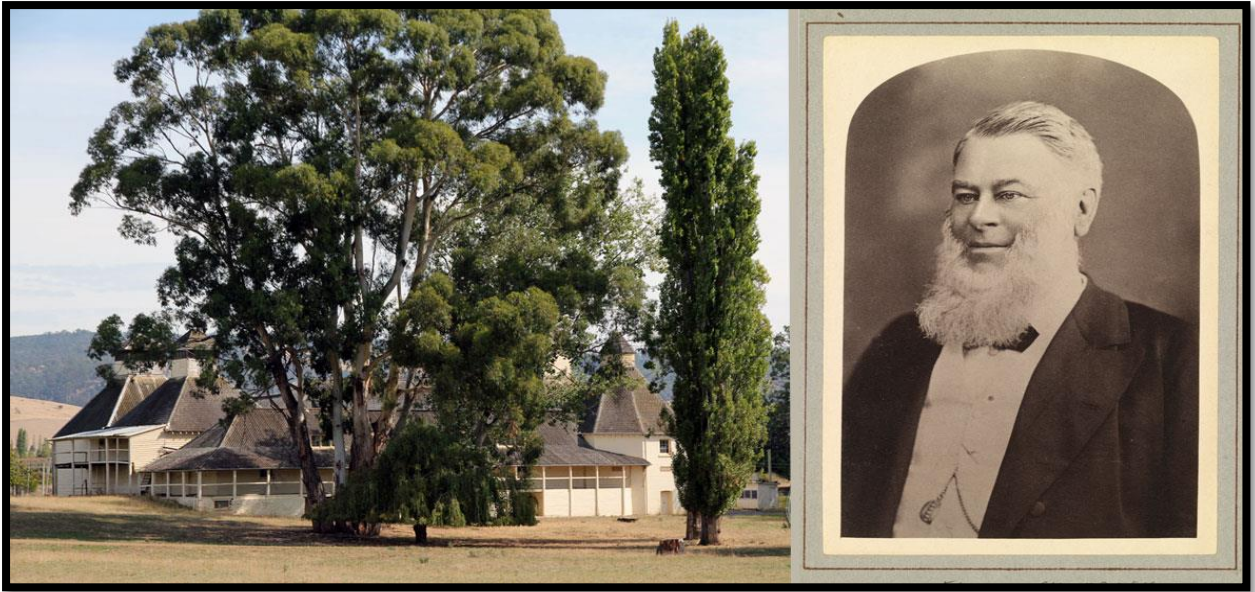
In 1867 William Ebenezer Shoobridge (1846-1940) came to the Styx valley and began growing and processing hops. He was the first to plant hops at Bushy Park in 1864. His three hectares of planting are now known as the Farm.

In 1867 he built the Text Kiln to dry the hops, and as Ebenezer was a religious man, the kiln served as a place for prayer. On the walls of the Text Kiln are quotations from the Bible, such as *'And these words that I command thee this day shall be in thine heart and thou shall write them on the posts of thine house and on thine gate'*. Appropriately in the middle of the building is the sign *'God is Love'* and on the far side is *'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life'*.

### **Ebenezer Shoobridge - Athel's grandfather, William's second son**



Ebenezer Shoobridge was Athel's grandfather. He was a respected man of his times. He was responsible for a highly successful crop of hops and vastly improved the farming that his father William had established on their property. Ebenezer was also a politician. He represented the Electoral district of New Norfolk in the Tasmanian House of Assembly from the 1882 election until he was defeated at the 1886 election.



In 1916 Athel resigned the Lieutenancy that he first signed in 1908 in the Derwent Regiment. He joined the Signal Corps, but because of poor eye sight, he transferred to the infantry as a private, rising to Sergeant of F Company. He went to Duntroon but failed to pass the course.

He returned to Claremont and enlisted on the twenty first of November 1916. He left for war in the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 26<sup>th</sup> Reinforcement on the HMAT A32 *Themistocles* on 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1917.

**AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.**

Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad

No. **1050** **686** Name (Surname) **SHOBRIDGE** CLAREMONT NOV 23 1916 CAMP  
 in full (Christian Name) **Athelstan Williams**  
 Unit **12th BATTAL**  
 Joined on **21. 11. 16**

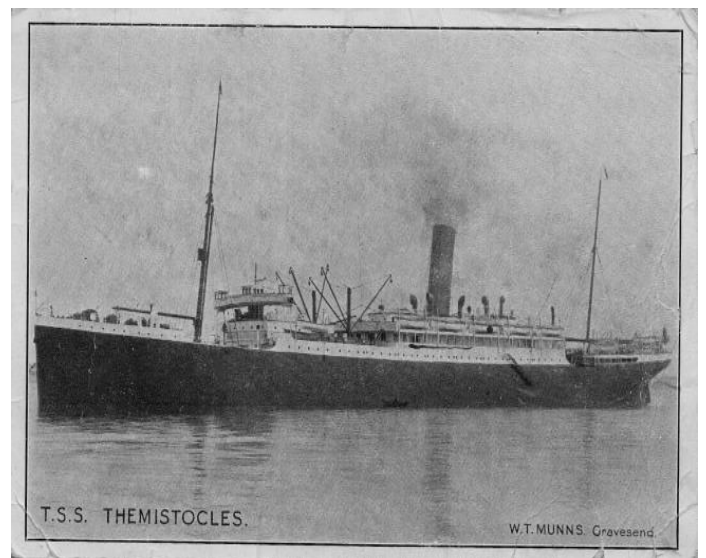
Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.

1. What is your Name? **44 Athelstan Williams Shobridge**
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born? **New Norfolk, Tas**
3. Are you a natural born British Subject or a Naturalized British Subject? (N.B.—If the latter, papers to be shown.) **Yes Natural Born**
4. What is your Age? **33 1/2**
5. What is your Trade or Calling? **Hop grower Orchardist.**
6. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? If so, where, to whom, and for what period? **no**
7. Are you married? **no**
8. Who is your next of kin? (Address and relationship to be stated) **Wife R. W. G. Shobridge New Norfolk, Tas.**  
**NEW TASMANIA**  
**WASMANIA Valley Field New Norfolk, Tas.**
9. What is your permanent address in Australia? **NEW TASMANIA Valley Field New Norfolk, Tas.**
10. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in, His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy, or Colonial Forces? If so, state which, and if not now serving, state name of discharge. **Yes 93rd Inf. Period 3 yrs. Officer 10 yrs.**
11. Have you stated the whole, if any, of your previous service? **Yes**
12. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for His Majesty's Service? If so, on what grounds? **no**
13. (For married men, widowers with children, and widows who are the sole support of dependent children.—Do you understand that no suspension allowance will be issued in respect of your service beyond an amount which together with pay would reach eight shillings per day?) **no**
14. Are you prepared to undergo inoculation against smallpox and enteric fever? **Yes**

I, **Athelstan Williams Shobridge**, do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and I am willing and lawfully voluntarily agree to serve in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the Commonwealth.

And I further agree to enlist not less than **12 months** of the term of my service, and to continue my service for the support of **myself and family** with such assistance as may be granted by the Government.

Date **20. 11. 16** **Athelstan Williams Shobridge** **W. G. Shobridge**  
 Signature of applicant. Signature of sponsor related.



Above:  
 Ebenezer Shobridge and Valleyfield  
 Athel's enlistment papers  
 HMAT *Themistocles*

Athel spent six months in England before being sent to France. When he was in England because he was a member of the Grand Lodge he was invited with other AIF Masons to the Lodge at Warminster, a town in England. Athel managed to gather enough office-bearers to hold a full Lodge meeting.

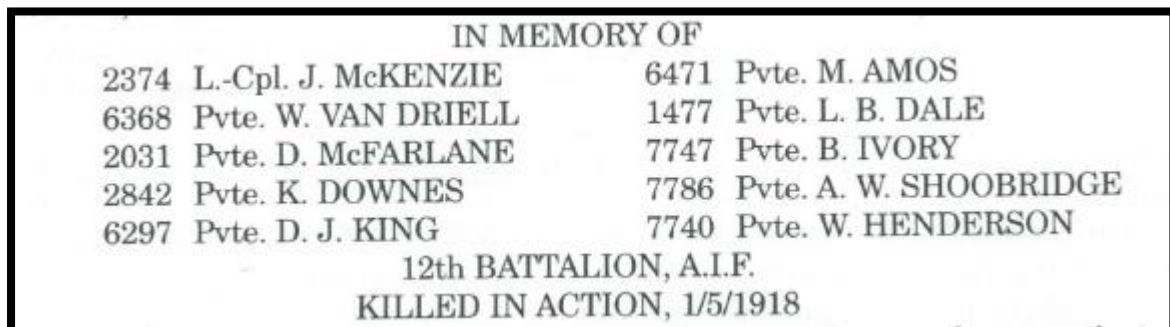


Above: Masonic Lodge at Warminster

He was in the trenches just two weeks before being killed at La Caestre, Belgium. The 12th was staying at a camp at Borre Siding. It was described as very comfortable, being made up of well-built huts that were previously occupied by Ordnance Corps. These huts were quite close to the Hazebrouk-Poperinghe railway line which was surrounded by batteries of guns and were less than three miles from the front line. Being so close to the front line was dangerous. Shells from the enemy were frequently fired in an effort to locate the guns in the vicinity. Most of them passed over the camp with a clearance of 150 to 200 yards.

On 1 May 1918 at 9:30pm as the sky grew dark, a stray shell landed in the middle of the camp and exploded on the ridge-pole of one of the huts; the hut where Athel was staying in. It had an instantaneous fuse, and consequently the occupants received the full effect of the explosion. The shell killed 10 instantly and wounded 14, four of the wounded later passed away as a result of the inflicted injuries. The scene of the hut was described as pitifully tragic, for when the shell exploded many of the men were asleep in bed, while others were reading and chatting before calling it a night. Four other men had been playing a game of cards. One man was found with a writing pad and a half-written letter in front of him.

All the men who were killed immediately when the shell exploded were all buried in the one grave at Le Peuplier farm in a little grave yard. A cross was erected that read-



Athel, together with Leslie Dale, (25 years) from Middleton, Bert Ivory (19) from Devonport and William Henderson (21) from Queenstown, Tasmania, had all been part of the 12th Battalion, 26th Reinforcements who travelled together to Europe aboard the Themistocles. David King (21) had lived in the same street in Ulverstone as Frank MacDonald, Malcolm Amos (25) had lived in Irishtown and John McKenzie was a butcher from Queensland.

Robert Shoobridge, Athel's father received word of his death by cable. He must have been devastated by the death of Athel. He had lost his the last of his three sons. Much sympathy was expressed in the district for Robert.

A memorial service was held for Athel at St Matthews Anglican Church, New Norfolk where Athel was previously a Lay Reader.

At the memorial the Bishop of Tasmania unveiled a memorial window which had been specially made in Melbourne to commemorate Athel.

It represents St George in full armour, with spear in hand, shield on arms and the dragon at his feet. Masonic emblems are above and Athel's regimental colours below with the words "Australian Military Forces" and "To the glory of God and in memory of Athelstan William Shoobridge, killed on active service in France. 1st May, 1918. Aged 34 years. He laid down his life for his country."







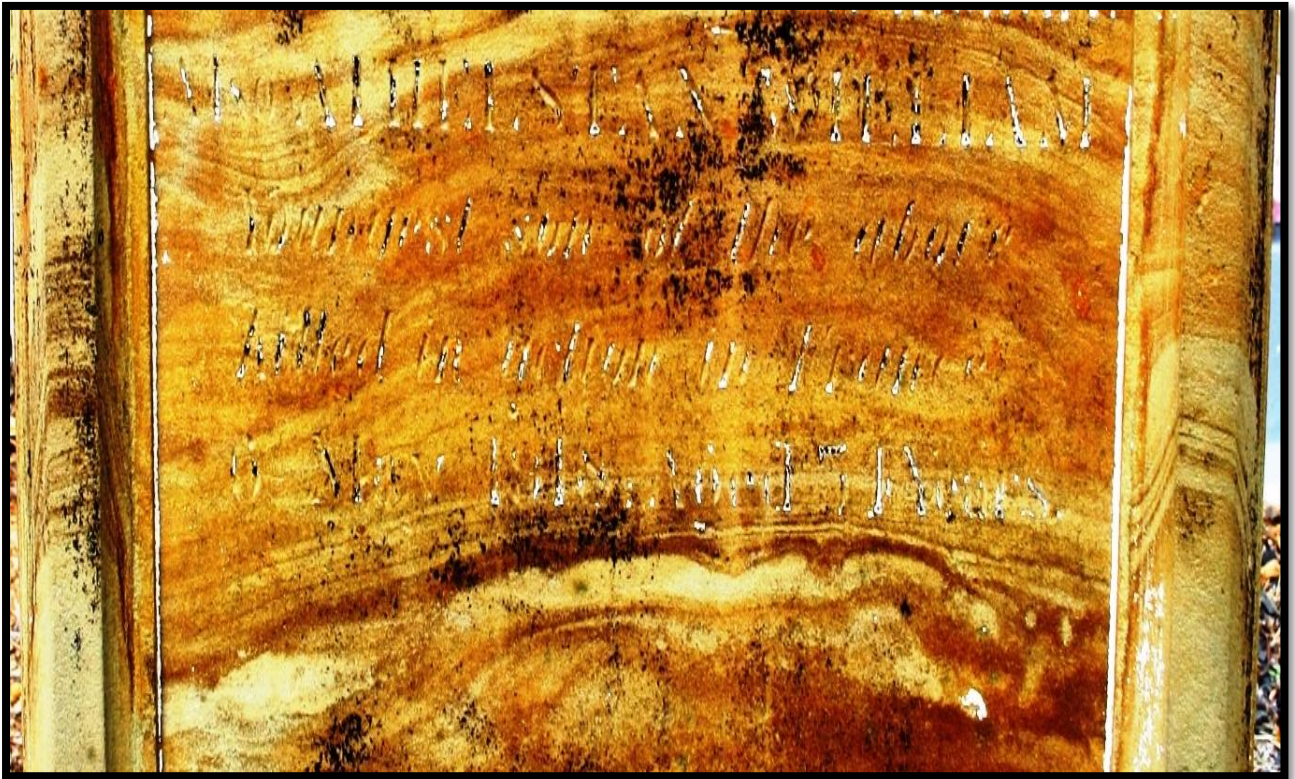
An additional window in the church depicts Athel's half-sister, Nancy Shoobridge. Her parents had the artist reproduce a picture of their child in the window. She can be seen in the background of the Nativity scene.



Above:  
Nancy Hope Shoobridge pictured in a stained glass window of the nativity at St Matthews Church  
St Matthews Anglican Church, New Norfolk

At his service it was reported that there was not one empty pew in the church.

Athel's name was also added to an inscription on the family headstone at Red Hills Cemetery at Bushy Park in Tasmania (see below).



In 1920, Robert Wilkins Giblin Shoobridge, Athel's father travelled to France see his son's grave at Le Caestre. Robert died in Hobart on 13 May 1936, predeceased by his wife Annie Rebecca, née Crouch, whom he had married in Hobart Town on 7 December 1871, and with all five of their daughters surviving him.

## **A Tribute to Athelstan William Shoobridge:**

*Words cannot bring you back. Words do not have the power to change the past. But through words gratitude, respect and admiration can be shown. This a tribute to you Athelstan William Shoobridge. A man who payed ultimate sacrifice.*

*I have had the honour of researching you for the last few months Athelstan. It is quite strange how I have come know so much about you but you have no idea of my existence nor will you ever. I have obtained the knowledge of the basics facts. I roughly know the timeline of your life. I know where you lived, who your family was, what you did. What I wasn't able to find was an emotional insight. Anything that wasn't made into words I don't know for sure. Your life is like a puzzle to me and unfortunately pieces have been lost, but I can use what I have discovered to recreate what the missing pieces might look like.*

*Love, is arguably the most powerful emotion there is, is missing from your records. You were loved Athelstan. You were loved by many. The people I know that loved you the most were your parents. Annie and Robert Shoobridge. I can't even begin to comprehend the indescribable pain that your father Robert and mother Annie would have experienced when they received the word that you had been killed. Their last son had passed away. This would have caused a degree of suffering that is simply impossible for me to grasp. The pain of lost child stays with the parents until the day they are reunited. They made sure you were not forgotten. In honour of your memory they bought a memorial window in New Norfolk. It is a beautiful representation of St. George in full armour. It is accompanied by the words "To the glory of God and in memory of Athelstan William Shoobridge, killed on active service in France 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1918 aged 34 years. He laid down his life for his country. "It was evident how loved you were Athelstan. At your memorial service there was not one empty pew in the church.*

*I am sure you remember the very last time you left home Athelstan. The swirl of emotions inside you as you started the next chapter of your life. The last chapter of your life. The beautiful feeling of coming home was something you would never feel again. I have bought a piece of home to you today. To ease the homesickness that must eat at you every day. Homesick not just for the place where you belong but for the people who were your home. I have bought a little print of a hops. I know it has great significants to you. I hope it reminds you of your family and where you came from. I hope it brings comfort to you.*

*Comfort, one of the rarest things in WWI. The huts you were staying at on the first of May 1918 were described as well built, and above all very comfortable. I can't be sure what you were doing when the clock rolled to 9:30pm. Playing cards with mates, writing a letter to home, or asleep oblivious to what was about to happen. One stray shell landed right on the ridge pole of your hut. In an instant you were gone.*

*You may be gone Athelstan but your story lives on. You have not been forgotten. Lest, we forget*





Above: Molly at Athelstan Shoobridge's grave