



# *A Soldier's Story*



## **AN ALLEGORY of EMPIRE**

### **The Penruddocke Burial Ground from 1598 to 1917**

**By W.R.M.**

*Five years ago to-day, an Australian soldier, strolling from the crowded camp, at Fovant, on Salisbury Plain, came, in a quiet hour and in a quiet church, upon an allegory of Empire.*

Fovant Camp, like Hurdcott, form one of a chain stretching along the Salisbury Plain. Three roads converge at the foot of Fovant Railway Station, a short line, used almost exclusively for military purposes. One leads to Dinton, the other across a watercress bordered brook to Salisbury and the third past the A.I.F. headquarters to Compton Chamberlayne, past where the old Roman milestone, "To Sarum XI" still stands sentinel.

"After the parade was dismissed, I determined to visit the church, which teems with old-time memories. Fifteen minutes' walk along a wood track brought me to the usual well-kept road, bordered by a high wall and just visible through the trees was the church. Interrogating a sturdy little lass, with the first season's violets freshly gathered in her hand, I asked if I might enter.

"Everbuddy goes in; the lock bruk," she replied enigmatically.

Without further question the broken lock admitted me to Saint Catherine's\* Church burial ground, Compton-Chamberlayne.

At the rear of the church is the castle. Picturesquely situated, with a lake in front, the remains of a moat running round one side and the burial ground almost forming part of the ground itself, it was built in the fifteenth century, probably a century later than the church. I entered.

Replacing fresh wax candles on the altar and pulpit was a lady in deep mourning and with a warm smile of welcome she quickly dispelled any fears I might have had of intruding.

It was a gloomy Saturday afternoon and the snow was falling lightly and the appearance of the little church, with its burnished brasses and the white-haired lady in deep mourning, trimming the tapers in their brass holders, filled me with a feeling that had come only once before – in Westminster Abbey.

Obeying a welcoming smile, she led me to a tablet affixed to the wall saying, "This is a list of the Penruddocke family." Inscribed on the tablet were 32 names, the first being Edward Penruddocke, buried in August, 1598; the last on the tablet being Flora Henrietta Penruddocke, November 7, 1902. Half-way down the list of names I caught sight of "John Penruddocke, beheaded at Exeter in May, 1655 and buried here three days later." Glancing around my eye fell upon a brass tablet set apart from the rest, affixed to the opposite wall. It bore the words:-

Sacred to the Memory  
Of  
THOMAS PENRUDDOCKE (Lieut.)  
Who Lost His Life At Lake Doiran,  
SALONIKA,  
On  
April 24, 1917

"Said the soft sad voice of the lady over my shoulder, "That was my youngest son."

\* \* \*

"I tried to express the usual commonplace sympathy, recovered my hat and tip-toed out of the warmly-lighted little church into the dusk and now the fast-falling snow, past rows of thatched cottages with their cosy interiors, past the King's Elm hostelry, where the sign "sold out" was exhibited in the window and on to the cheerless hut, where some Australian soldiers from France were seated round the stove, singing a lively chorus to the accompaniment of a violin, played by a lad scarcely more than 19 years of age; and then crept into damp blankets, to dream of Edward Penruddocke, beheaded in 1598\*\* and of the sweet, sad smile of the lady in mourning who lost her youngest son at Salonika in 1917.

*(Frankston & Somerville Standard (Victoria, Australia) Wednesday 19 December, 1923)*

*Footnote:*

*\* The Church is St Michael's but the story still is correct for St Michael's.*

*\*\* It was John Penruddocke that was beheaded – in 1655*