

...and then the War came

During some recent research into local sport at the turn of the nineteenth century (yep, its amazing what some people get up to during isolation) we discovered that James W. Wyles was captain of the first Olinda team in 1908.

In that year Olinda played challenge games against Ferny Creek, Monbulk and The Basin. The Ferny Creek boys had been playing games since 1902 when the One Tree Hill club formed.

Olinda, Ferny Creek and Monbulk were joined by Belgrave in 1912 and former the Mountain District Football Association (which eventually became MDFL then YVMDFL and now AFL Outer East).

So while following up "James Wyles/Olinda" we learned that the family had been in the area since the 1890s and there was a James Wyles senior and a James W (Walker) Wyles (son).

The family took up blocks of land near the top of Upper Coonara Road. Sadly James senior died in 1916 . His wife Janet passed the previous year.

Like so many of the local young men James W. Wyles enlisted in the AIF and was most probably overseas when he lost his parents.

He was in the 23rd Battalion on the Western Front and people who have seen the film "1917" will be reasonably familiar with how this played out.

In early 1917 the Germans withdrew to the heavily fortified Hindenburg Line. The withdrawal prompted many Allied units to go on the attack and the 23rd Battalion was among them.

In early May they captured the town of Bullecourt after very fierce fighting. However the Germans then launched a major counter offensive and inflicted heavy casualties.

On May 3 1917 James Walker Wyles was killed in action. The remains of Olinda's first captain are interred at the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial.

We will try to learn more about James Walker Wyles service record



This Olinda team photo was taken in 1912 (not 1910, a premiership year. as we previously thought). We are not sure if James Wyles is in the pic but if he was still captain perhaps that's him with the ball? We also wonder if 1913 best player Peter Johnston is in the picture. However he was described at the time as small with snowy hair (see below). Within a few years Peter would also be dead, he was fatally wounded at Gallipoli.

DIED ON SERVICE.

WYLES.—Killed in action on 3rd May, 1917 (previously reported missing). Private James W. Wyles, brother of Mrs. W. French (late of Footscray) and A. Wyles, of Olinda, and Robert J. Wyles, of Armadale.

He died doing his duty.

OLINDA NOTES.

Mingled pride and sorrow rose in the breasts of all Olinda people when the news reached here that one of the local boys had fallen during the recent fierce fighting at Gallipoli. Peter Johnston was one of the cheeriest and most good natured lads, and his face will be missed by all. He had lived in Olinda for seven years past, and had gone about his daily work in a quiet unobtrusive way that little betokened he would die a soldier's death in action. He will be missed in the football field, for he was a good little player, and his fair head was often conspicuous in hard contests. In 1910 he won the club's medal for good play. Sympathy goes out to his sorrowing parents and relatives, and to those near and dear friends who were more closely associated with him before he left for the front.

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