

# Colenso brothers from Christchurch, NZ

Their experiences in WW1



In memory of  
Ruthie Colenso McLennan  
(1959-2008)  
*A dedicated researcher  
of the Colenso family*

24<sup>th</sup> October 2013  
Ann Collins

## Colenso brothers from Christchurch NZ: their experiences in WW1

On the 9<sup>th</sup> March 1916, at the New Zealand Army training camp at Featherston, a thirty year old trooper withdrew into his tent and cut his own throat believing that his fellow soldiers thought he was a spy<sup>1</sup>. His name was Nelson Reginald Colenso. His paranoia was attributed to alcohol withdrawal.

Recently I was sent a photograph of his gravestone and asked for information about his family. This investigation broadened into considering the WW1 experiences of his family – particularly his brothers.



Provided by Adele Pentony-Graham

### The Family

Nelson's parents James Colenso and his wife Elizabeth Jane Moyle immigrated to New Zealand in 1874, shortly after they married on the 7<sup>th</sup> February in Falmouth, Cornwall. They were passengers on the Ballochmyle which was chartered by the New Zealand Shipping Company and left London on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 1874 bound for Lyttelton. The couple probably boarded at Plymouth, leaving there on the 4<sup>th</sup> March and reaching New Zealand on the 1<sup>st</sup> June.

They were both natives of Cornwall, he was born in Helston, the son of a chandler, and she in Sithney, a miner's daughter. They had both been working at St Gluvias, near Falmouth, before they married in the Registry Office. James was a second cousin of William Colenso, the CMS printer who landed in New Zealand in 1834. James's sister Sarah Ann followed them to New Zealand on the Waitangi in 1878 with her husband Edward James Williams, a shoemaker, and their 4 daughters.



James Colenso (1849-1916)  
provided by Merrill & Barri James



Elizabeth Jane Moyle (1849-1913)  
provided by Merrill & Barri James

<sup>1</sup> Sadly troubled history: The meaning of suicide in the Modern Age, John C Weaver, MQUP 2009 page 179.

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When they married James was a general labourer, but after settling in Christchurch he became an upholsterer and mattress maker. James was described as being very religious, requiring his family to spend Sundays reading the Bible.

The couple had the first of their children on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1874. They had 11 children before 1897, 8 sons and 3 daughters, with one daughter dying as an infant.

1. John Lester (Lester) Colenso, born 9<sup>th</sup> November 1874
2. Walter Colenso, born 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1876
3. Maud Colenso, born 28<sup>th</sup> December 1877
4. Lottie Colenso, born 24<sup>th</sup> April 1879, died 1880
5. Arnold Colenso, born 21<sup>st</sup> October 1880
6. Edgar Colenso, born 8<sup>th</sup> April 1882
7. Leopold Colenso, born 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1884
8. Nelson Reginald Colenso, born 4<sup>th</sup> September 1885
9. Herbert (Bertie) Colenso, born 26<sup>th</sup> September 1886
10. Ivy Mary Colenso, born 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1890
11. Alfred James Stanley Colenso, born 24<sup>th</sup> December 1897.

There are several mentions of the family in the newspapers of the time, naturally associated with misbehaviour - otherwise they probably would not have attracted the notice of the newspapers.

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|--------------------|--|
| <b>25 Aug 1897</b> | Lester Colenso was found guilty of theft of two match-strikers, from the Oxford Hotel, in Christchurch, after being refused drink as he was drunk. He was sentenced to one month in prison. <sup>2</sup> |
| <b>14 Oct 1899</b> | James Colenso was fined 2s for neglecting to regularly send his children to school. <sup>3</sup>   |
| <b>30 Aug 1900</b> | Lester was fined 5s for drunkenness and paid for damages to the police cells while he was incarcerated. <sup>4</sup>   |
| <b>15 Jul 1907</b> | Bertie was fined for riding a bicycle at night without a light attached. <sup>5</sup>  |
| <b>11 Apr 1911</b> | Bertie appeared before the Magistrate for unpaid debts. <sup>6</sup>   |
| <b>11 Jan 1912</b> | Nelson was fined 10s for riding a bicycle without lights. <sup>7</sup>   |
| <b>21 Aug 1912</b> | Bertie and Arnold breached prohibition orders. <sup>8</sup>  |
| <b>9 Apr 1913</b>  | Bertie breached a prohibition order. <sup>9</sup>  |
| <b>13 Jul 1914</b> | Bertie appeared before the Magistrate for unpaid debts. <sup>10</sup>  |

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The incidents relating to alcohol appear to be the tip of the iceberg as the prohibition orders had been instituted in the first place. The use and abuse of alcohol was widespread in pioneering New Zealand, most visibly among the itinerant communities of men who worked the country's

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<sup>2</sup> Star, Issue 5958, 25 August 1897, page 3.

<sup>3</sup> Press, Volume LVI, Issue 10476, 14 October 1899, page 4.

<sup>4</sup> Press, Volume LVII, Issue 10748, 30 August 1900, page 2.

<sup>5</sup> Star, 15 July 1907, Magisterial.

<sup>6</sup> Press, 11 April 1911, Magistrate's Court.

<sup>7</sup> Press, Volume LXVIII, Issue 14249, 11 January 1912, page 5.

<sup>8</sup> Press, Volume XLVIII, Issue 14439, 21 August 1912, page 6.

<sup>9</sup> Press, Volume XLIX, Issue 14635, 9 April 1913, page 4.

<sup>10</sup> Press, Volume L, Issue 15018, 13 July 1914, page 3.

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agricultural, maritime and industrial frontiers. It has been said that the main causes of death in colonial New Zealand were 'drink, drowning, and drowning while drunk'.<sup>11</sup> The Temperance Movement was very strong in NZ and there was a ballot for Prohibition in 1908, where a majority of 55.8% was achieved, although not enough to be successful. The introduction of six o'clock closing of pubs was one of the unlikely impacts of the war. It was introduced as a temporary measure to stop off-duty soldiers training at Trentham, from overindulging in the evenings. It was made permanent in 1918 and maintained until 1967.

From the electoral rolls, Lester was working as a labourer, registered in St Albans in 1900, Wellington in 1905, Wanganui in 1911 and Hamilton in 1914. When he enlisted in the army he was living in Nagarawahia in the King County, working for a Mr A Sutherland, whose wife was given as his next-of-kin.

The eldest daughter Maud was married in February 1900 to Alfred Alexander Thomas George Raper, a photographer from England, and they moved to Brisbane in time for their second child to be born there in 1903.

Walter married Ida Louie Money in October 1900. They had 7 children before the end of 1910, six boys and one daughter. He was working as a labourer for a plasterer. She left him around 1911 and 5 of the children were placed in the Christchurch Receiving Home<sup>12</sup>. Walter was ordered to pay support but was in arrears and seeking a variation in December 1913<sup>13</sup>. She was not given as his next of kin when he enlisted.

Leopold died of valvular heart disease, when he was 27 on the 22nd August 1911. Earlier that year he had been involved in the prosecution of a con-man, who had taken money promising to place advertisements in a theatre program. Leopold was a house painter, as was his brother Nelson. Edgar and Arnold became bootmakers, possibly learning their trade from their uncle, Edward James Williams. The youngest son Alfred James Stanley was a sailor and Bertie was a labourer.

I have photographs of four sons, in later life, which with this photograph of the daughters, Maud & Ivy, and the descriptions from their military attestation records, gives an indication of their appearance.



**Maude & Ivy Colenso**  
provided by Merrill & Barrie James

|                             | Height | Complexion | Eyes  | Hair       |
|-----------------------------|--------|------------|-------|------------|
| <b>Bertie</b>               | 5'5"   | Fresh      | Grey  | Brown      |
| <b>Arnold</b>               | 5'5½"  | Sallow     | Grey  | Dark brown |
| <b>John Lester</b>          | 5'1½"  | Dark       | Brown | Black      |
| <b>Nelson Reginald</b>      | 5'5"   | Fresh      | Hazel | Brown      |
| <b>Alfred James Stanley</b> | 5'5½"  | Dark       | Grey  | Black      |
| <b>Edgar</b>                | 5'3"   | Fair       | Green | Dark       |

<sup>11</sup> Unattributed quotation from NZ History Online describing the beginnings of the Temperance Movement.

<sup>12</sup> Press, Volume LXVII, Issue 14153, 20 September 1911, page 3.

<sup>13</sup> Press, 24 December 1913, Magistrate's Court.

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Their mother Elizabeth died in 1913 after a cardiac arrest, aged 64. Their father James died of pleurisy in late August 1916, aged 67.

### World War 1

The government of New Zealand received the news that Britain had declared war on Germany on the 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914.<sup>14</sup> The governor, Lord Liverpool, announced the news from the steps of Parliament to a crowd of 15,000.

In August 1914 New Zealand, at the request of the British government, sent an expeditionary force of 1200 men and nurses to seize German Samoa. They successfully achieved this with no shots fired and continued to occupy the islands throughout WW1.

The New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) was quickly raised by voluntary enlistment and left on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1914, originally intended for France, but diverted to Egypt when the Ottoman Empire entered the war. With the Australians they formed the ANZACs who landed at Gallipoli, along with British and other Empire troops.

After their evacuation from Gallipoli, New Zealand troops were sent to the Western Front (France and Belgium). The Gallipoli campaign and the birth of the Anzac legend have captured the imagination of generations of Australians and New Zealanders. But it is on the killing fields of the Western Front that most New Zealanders saw action and where most of them died – 12,500 in total.

Enlistments declined during 1915 and an expansion in preparation for the NZEF's deployment on the Western Front in 1916 was not being fulfilled. A register of eligible men compiled late in 1915 revealed that 40% of these were not prepared to enlist. Consequently conscription was introduced. The first ballots began on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 1916. From their service records it doesn't appear that any of the brothers were conscripted.

|                             | <b>Enlistment Date</b> | <b>Unit</b>                       | <b>Next of Kin</b>        |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Bertie</b>               | 11 Oct 1915            | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Batt NZRB (C Coy) | James Colenso (father)    |
| <b>Nelson</b>               | 15 Dec 1915            |                                   | James Colenso (father)    |
| <b>Walter</b>               | circa Mar 1916         | Not known                         | James Colenso (father)    |
| <b>Arnold</b>               | 8 Mar 1916             | Wellington Regiment               | Mrs A Colenso (wife)      |
| <b>John Lester</b>          | 21 Aug 1916            | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Batt NZRB (D Coy) | Mrs A Sutherland (friend) |
| <b>Alfred James Stanley</b> | 25 May 1917            | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Batt NZRB (D Coy) | Miss M M Mussen (friend)  |
| <b>Edgar</b>                | 17 Sep 1917            | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Batt NZRB (D Coy) | Mrs Buggy (sister)        |

The total number of New Zealand troops and nurses to serve overseas in 1914–1918, excluding those in British and other Dominion forces, was 100,444, from a population of just over a million. Forty-two percent of men of military age served in the NZEF.

The casualties from two and a half years on the Western Front were appalling. Altogether some 13,250 New Zealanders died of wounds or sickness as a direct result of this campaign, including 50 as prisoners of war and more than 700 at home. Another 35,000 were wounded, and 414 prisoners of

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<sup>14</sup> This was probably only hours after the declaration, due to the time difference.

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war were ultimately repatriated. The total casualties approached 50,000, well over half the number of those who served in France or Belgium.

In WW1 a total of 16,697 New Zealanders were killed and 41,317 were wounded – a 58 percent casualty rate. Approximately a further thousand men died within five years of the war's end, as a result of injuries sustained, and 507 died while training in New Zealand between 1914 and 1918. New Zealand had one of the highest casualty and death rate per capita of any country involved in the war.

All the Colenso brothers serving on the Western Front were wounded. Walter returned earlier than the others, but his record is the only one unavailable so whether this related to his wounds is unknown. Arnold was discharged as unfit due to trench fever, but the others were discharged at the termination of their period of engagement – the end of the war. Most of them suffered from influenza during their period of service.

|                             | <b>Embarked</b>           | <b>Western Front</b>      | <b>Wounded</b>            | <b>Returned to NZ</b>     |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Bertie</b>               | 5 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1916  | Apr 1916                  | 17 <sup>th</sup> Sep 1917 | 10 <sup>th</sup> May 1919 |
| <b>Arnold</b>               | 26 <sup>th</sup> Jun 1916 | 28 <sup>th</sup> May 1917 | 10 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1918 | 13 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1919 |
| <b>Walter</b>               | 25 <sup>th</sup> Sep 1916 |                           | 19 <sup>th</sup> Jun 1917 | 8 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1918  |
| <b>John Lester</b>          | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Jan 1917  | 6 <sup>th</sup> Jul 1917  | 23 <sup>rd</sup> Nov 1918 | 30 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1920 |
| <b>Edgar</b>                | 1 <sup>st</sup> Feb 1918  | 21 <sup>st</sup> Sep 1918 | 25 <sup>th</sup> Oct 1918 | 24 <sup>th</sup> Apr 1919 |
| <b>Alfred James Stanley</b> | 8 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1918  | 24 <sup>th</sup> Aug 1918 | 11 <sup>th</sup> Oct 1918 | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Oct 1919  |

### Herbert (Bertie) Colenso

The first of the brothers to enlist was Bertie in October 1915. He had had some previous military service with the NZEF. This time he joined the C Company of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade. The officer confirming his posting was Captain William Colenso Drummond. This man had been named after William Colenso of Napier, Bertie's distant cousin.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion sailed with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion for Egypt in February 1916, joining the first two after their campaign against the Senussi was completed. All four battalions then sailed for France in April.

After a period of training the brigade entered the line on 13 May, east of Armentieres. It participated in the vast majority of the battles of 1916, 1917 and 1918. Notable examples include:

- The brigade's first major offensive was during the Battle of the Somme when it attacked on 15 September 1916 as part of the Battle of Flers-Courcelette.
- The Battle of Messines, in June 1917, possibly the most complete Allied victory of the war until late 1918.
- Third Ypres, in October 1917, normally described these days as Passchendaele.
- It was thrown into a gap in the line caused by the German attack, called Operation Michael, on 26 April 1918.
- Finally it fully participated in the Hundred Days Offensive that ultimately culminated inside Germany

Three of Bertie's brothers joined him in the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, but in D Company – John Lester enlisting in August 1916, Alfred James Stanley in June 1917, and Edgar in September 1917.

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Bertie went AWL in the field in March 1917 and was sentenced to 28 days detention. He went AWL again upon rejoining his unit in April 1917. This time he was sentenced to 1 year hard labour which was suspended in June 1917. Around May 1917 he came down with influenza. On the 17<sup>th</sup> September 1917, while in action, he received a shrapnel wound in the right foot. He returned to his unit in December 1917. In March 1918 he was sent to the School of Sanitation for training. After returning to his unit he was injured after some rubbish he was putting in the incinerator exploded. The right side of his face was bleeding and required treatment at a Field Ambulance. Bertie returned to New Zealand on the Kia Ora in May 1919 and was discharged. On his discharge papers his conduct was described as good despite his history of going AWL and one instance of drunkenness on duty. Bertie died in Christchurch of a sickness in December 1933, aged 55. He had not married and after 1919 he was not registered in the NZ Electoral Roll, possibly living as an itinerant labourer.

### John Lester Colenso

Lester enlisted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1916 and was described on the medical report as “short of stature but as he is of splendid physique, he should be accepted”. He was 5’1½” but was indeed accepted. He left NZ for France in January 1917 and suffered from gastrodynia on the ship. It looks like he went to France in late February 1917. In France he served as a cook in the Field on many occasions, with one charge of failing to have the food prepared for breakfast resulting in the loss of 2 days pay. He was AWL in England for 6 days in April 1919 – receiving a reprimand. Lester was discharged on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 1920. He married Charlotte Annie Giraud, a widow, in St Giles London on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1919.

Charlotte Annie was 40 when she married Lester. She had been born in Stoke Goldington, Buckinghamshire in 1879, and the daughter of Mary Herbert. Her father was probably John Charles Jepson<sup>15</sup>, who died before she was born. She was raised by her mother’s family, marrying David Crutchfield in 1897. The couple migrated to Queensland in 1900. Charlotte appears to have left him soon after this - having son William Bruce Giraud in Melbourne in 1901 and Conrad Pedro Giraud in 1909 in Sydney. She and her sons are living at Lodge Farm in Denton Northamptonshire with Pierre Marius (Maurice or Morice) Giraud<sup>16</sup>, a French-born farmer, in 1911. After marrying Lester, she sailed for New Zealand<sup>17</sup>, on the Ruapehu, on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1919 accompanied by her sons Conrad (aged 10) and Edward (aged 2). Both were recorded with Colenso as their surname. Sadly Conrad died of tuberculosis and rheumatic fever in March 1920, five weeks after arriving in NZ, and Edward is lost in the records. Her eldest son, William Bruce Giraud, sailed for NZ<sup>18</sup> in November 1921 on the Ormuz, his occupation given as a sign writer. The family settled in Glen Massey, where Lester was working as a miner when he died of alcoholic gastritis on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 1924. Charlotte married her 4<sup>th</sup> husband Henry Harrison, a Kutarere dairy farmer, in 1935 and the couple retiring to Hamilton in 1946 until her death in 1951.

### Alfred James Stanley Colenso

Alfred James Stanley Colenso first registered for active service on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1916<sup>19</sup> and was assigned to the NZ Army Service Corps, being judged to have insufficient chest measurement. He

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<sup>15</sup> From her christening record 3 August 1879 in Mortlake, Surrey.

<sup>16</sup> Claimed to have married in Singapore on Conrad’s death certificate.

<sup>17</sup> UK, Outward Passengers Lists, 1890-1960.

<sup>18</sup> UK, Outward Passengers Lists, 1890-1960.

<sup>19</sup> Press, Volume LII, Issue 15712, 4 October 1916, page 3.

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was accepted in the NZRB on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1917. While training at Trentham, in July, he was convicted of drunkenness and going AWL. In September he was again convicted of going AWL and attempting to escape. After moving to Featherston in November he was convicted of overstaying his leave. In December he was again AWL and lost his equipment – uniform and regimental necessities. He was charged with desertion, but found guilty of AWL and sentenced to 60 days detention. This was mitigated if he embarked on active service outside New Zealand. He embarked on the 8<sup>th</sup> February. After training in England he proceeded to France on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1918. He was hospitalised in Abbeville with a gunshot wound to the right thigh on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1918. After convalescence he was discharged back to the front on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1918. He had two bouts of influenza – May 1918 and March 1919. He returned to New Zealand and was discharged on the 30 October 1919.

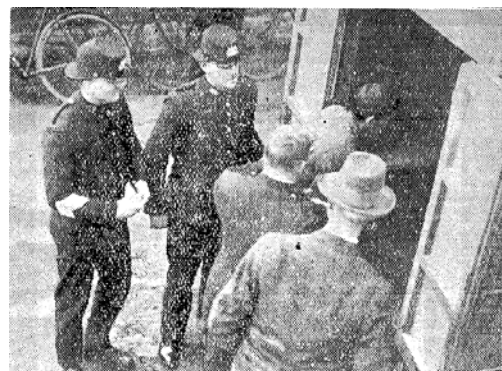


Alfred James Stanley Colenso  
provided by Merrill & Barri James

In 1928 Alfred was registered in Christchurch on the Electoral Roll, working as a labourer, but had been working on stations around the country, almost as soon as he was discharged, often in the company of Arthur Edward Craufurd Farquharson<sup>20</sup>, who was 26 years older. They had met on the road around 1920. “When I first met Colenso he was alone and he asked me if I would be his mate. I said I would look after him to the best of my ability, and I must say I found him a good and honest worker.” From then on they travelled together walking great distances and working where employment offered. “I took charge of him and he treated me like a father. He didn’t have much idea of the value of money and he always gave what he had to me to look after.” Their life was not completely nomadic as they worked on one farm for 5 years.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> June 1929 he was working at Gowan Bridge when the Murchison Earthquake (magnitude 7.8) hit. Farquharson was on the Grey River. Alfred worked his way to his surrogate father, 17 miles over country that had been damaged by landslides, many blocking rivers. Together they left the West Coast and at times were climbing on hands and knees to reach safety.

On the 2nd September 1930 they had spent the night at Acheron on a return journey to the West Coast because Albert wanted to take up some land for himself. On the next morning they were stopped in a gravel pit, near Lake Coleridge, by a Robert Cockburn, a 23 year-old ploughman. Cockburn accused them of stealing his lunch. While Farquharson opened his swag for examination, Alfred refused to do so. Cockburn became more verbally abusive and Alfred’s rifle, which had a faulty trigger, fired and fatally shot Cockburn in the chest. The pair continued on their journey, despite Farquharson advising Alfred to give himself up to the



Alfred James Stanley Colenso  
entering a police van

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<sup>20</sup> In 1928 Farquharson was registered as living at Meikleburn, Fairlie, Waimate as a farm labourer.



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police. They were arrested the next day. Alfred was charged with murder<sup>21</sup> and Farquharson with vagrancy. The result of the trial, in November, was manslaughter, taking into consideration the faulty trigger of the gun and Cockburn's intimidatory behaviour. Alfred was sentenced to 3 years "reformatory detention".

The judge advised the jury that a conviction of murder<sup>22</sup> would be unsafe. This direction was substantially due to the testimony of Farquharson. He was interviewed a few weeks after the trial about his relationship with Alfred, and also his own life<sup>23</sup>. He had been born in Dunedin, his father was a veterinary surgeon, who died in 1889. He had also enlisted in the NZRB but was sent back to NZ when his sight was considered so faulty that he was unlikely to be an effective soldier. In the interview he mentioned that he would be inheriting a substantial sum of money when he turned 60. This may have been possible as his father's father was a clergyman in Dorset, educated at Oxford and the son of a substantial landholder. However there was no further mention of Farquharson in the NZ Newspaper Archive.

In Wellington, in October 1935<sup>24</sup>, Alfred was convicted of being drunk and disorderly, and smashing a pane of glass in the door of a Government omnibus. He was placed on a prohibition order for 6 months and ordered to pay damages of 30s.

He was later a weekly boarder at the Salvation Army Home in Buckle Street Wellington until the middle of April 1937 and was not considered "addicted to drink". He was "swagging" northwards on the Upper Hutt Road, near Upper Hutt, about 6:45 pm on the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> April, when he was hit by a driver blinded by the lights of a car coming in the opposite direction. He died almost instantly of brain injuries<sup>25,26</sup>.

Arthur Farquharson was not with him, and died the following year.

### Edgar Colenso

Edgar attested in June 1917 and commenced duty in mid-September of that year. He embarked on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1918. He had one charge of AWL from Trentham, forfeiting 8 days pay and 14 days confinement to barracks. He was transferred around various companies of the NZRB within England, presumably training, until he was admitted in May to the VD Section of the NZ General Hospital at Codford. In August 1918 he was discharged to Brocton as fit, and then proceeded to France in September 1918. On the 25<sup>th</sup> October, at Fontaine, he was received a gunshot wound, with shrapnel, in the left calf. He returned to NZ on the 24 April 1919 and was



Edgar Colenso provided by  
Merrill & Barri James

<sup>21</sup> NZ Truth, Issue 1294, 25 September 1930, page 5.

<sup>22</sup> NZ Truth, Issue 1300, 13 November 1930, page 5.

<sup>23</sup> NZ Truth, Issue 1301, 20 November 1930, page 8.

<sup>24</sup> Evening Post, Volume CXX, Issue 97, 21 October 1935, page 3.

<sup>25</sup> Evening Post, Volume CXXIII, Issue 102, 1 May 1937, page 10.

<sup>26</sup> Evening Post, Volume CXXIII, Issue 117, 19 May 1937, page 12.

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discharged on the 21<sup>st</sup> May.

In 1920 Edgar married Sarah Hancock (nee Johnson), who had been divorced from her first husband in 1918. The couple had no children. Sarah died in 1941 and Edgar in 1964. Edgar lived most of his life in Christchurch, with a couple of years in Auckland around 1929. He worked mainly as a bootmaker.

The only reported dealing he had with the law was in 1916<sup>27</sup> when a woman defrauded him of 1s 3d with a block of wood, wrapped as butter. Her husband returned the money, and the case was dropped – although her lawyer recommended that she take out an alcohol prohibition order against herself.

### Nelson Reginald Colenso

Nelson enlisted in December 1915, indicating on his attestation form that he had been in jail in Lyttelton in October 1914 and had military experience with the NZ Engineers.

His time in jail was the two months hard labour resulting from assaulting a householder with a lead pipe when challenged for prowling around his premises one night. The light sentence resulted from his fear than the householder was going to hit him with a weapon<sup>28</sup>.

Despite his death in March 1916, his name was drawn in the 10<sup>th</sup> Conscription Ballot. This was reported in September 1917, giving his name as “Rational Colenso”<sup>29</sup>.

### Arnold Colenso

Arnold had married Edith Malvina Brice in January 1915, had a daughter, Elizabeth Adele, who was born on the 21st April 1915 and died the same day, and enlisted in the Wellington Regiment, attesting on the 1st March 1916, mentioning previous experience with the NZ Naval Artillery. He commenced service on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March and his brother Nelson suicided on the 9<sup>th</sup> March, while in training at Featherston. Walter<sup>30</sup> would have also enlisted about this time as he also embarked for France in September 1916.

Arnold left New Zealand on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1916. In late May he lost 3 days pay of overstaying his leave and for drunkenness. However once in England he was appointed to the Regimental Police, along with his duties in the Bugle Band. He left for France in April 1917 and was wounded in action in January 1918, being hospitalised with concussion deafness. He returned to his unit in February. He contracted influenza and was hospitalised in August, being discharged in September. This was followed by leave in the UK.

He embarked for New Zealand on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 1918 and was discharged on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 1919 as physically unfit for service due to an illness contracted on active service – trench fever. He returned to his trade as a bootmaker in Christchurch. He died on the 10<sup>th</sup> February 1933 of hypostatic congestion of the lungs, peritonitis and colitis. His wife Edith gave birth to a second daughter, Jean Lenna, on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1933.

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<sup>27</sup> Press, Volume LII, Issue 15643, 15 July 1916, page 13.

<sup>28</sup> From an undated newspaper report “Murderous Assault” describing the court proceedings.

<sup>29</sup> Press, Volume LIII, Issue 15998, 5 September 1917, page 7.

<sup>30</sup> His digitized record not available at <http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz/>.

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### Walter Colenso

Walter is reported to have been medically examined on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1916<sup>31</sup>. He embarked on the Devon in September 1916 and returned to New Zealand in July 1918. He was reported as wounded in June 1917.

He and his first wife divorced in 1920 and he remarried Mary Agnes Sophia Rooney, also a divorcee. He continued his trade as a plasterer and died in Christchurch on the 10<sup>th</sup> February 1954. The majority of the Colenso family living in NZ are descended from five of his sons, born to his first wife.



Walter Colenso provided by  
Merrill & Barri James

Ida Louie remarried in 1921 to Ernest Edward Stacey, a farmer at Rangiora, who had served in the Auckland Infantry Regiment and been awarded the Military Medal for gallantry in the Field. Walter and Ida's daughter married Lawrence Donald Hawkins under the name of Ida Eileen Frances Stacey in 1930.

### Ivy Mary Colenso

On the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1916 Samuel Buggy, a driver of 11 Radnor Street, St Albans was selected for the Samoan Force, as part of the Christchurch contingent of the 15<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements<sup>32</sup>. In September 1917 a Mrs Buggy, at the same address, was designated as Edgar Colenso's next-of kin, described as his sister.

There is no record of Ivy Mary Colenso's marriage to Samuel Buggy, but on the 1918 death record of Ivy Maud Buggy, aged 1, her parents are Samuel Buggy and Ivy Mary Buggy, nee Colenso. There is also a James Buggy, born in November 1914. On his death certificate in 1973 his father's name is Samuel Buggy but his mother's given name is not identified.

The only Samuel Buggy found at the time in NZ was living next door to James Colenso, from before 1904. Samuel married Ada Victoria Marshall, daughter of Mrs Amelia Marshall in 1901. The couple had a son William Albert Dowling Buggy in 1904 and Ada died in 1905. Samuel was born in Acton, England in 1863, the son of William Buggy and Ann Elizabeth Lovell, who had married in Paddington in 1848. Samuel died in 1925, aged 58, having lived in NZ 40 years, with one living son, aged 20. Only one marriage was shown on the death certificate and no indication that he was a returned soldier.

From the following table, Ivy Mary had a daughter fathered by Samuel. They may also have had a son in 1914. The relationship had broken by 1919, and in the mid 20s Ivy Maud had moved to Auckland, marrying William Wade in 1932. She described herself as a spinster on this marriage certificate.

When her sister Maud was widowed in 1921, Ivy offered to bring up some of the 7 surviving children. The younger three were less than 5 years old, the youngest born a month before her father's death. The offer was rejected and one of the elder daughters left school to help her mother.

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<sup>31</sup> Press, Volume LI, Issue 15312, 28 July 1915, page 5.

<sup>32</sup> Press, Volume LII, Issue 15549, 27 March 1916, page 9.

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| <b>1901</b> | James Colenso, North Street, St Albans<br>Mrs Amelia Marshall, North Street, St Albans (Samuel's mother-in-law)   |
| <b>1904</b> | Mrs Amelia Marshall, 31 North Street, St Albans<br>Samuel Buggy, 31 North Street, St Albans, cabman<br>James Colenso, 31 North Street, St Albans, upholsterer   |
| <b>1907</b> | Mrs Amelia Marshall, 31 North Street, St Albans<br>Michael Marshall, 31 North Street, St Albans, labourer<br>Samuel Bugey, 31 North Street, St Albans, cabman<br>James Colenso, 35 North Street, St Albans, upholsterer |
| <b>1910</b> | Mrs Amelia Marshall, 31 North Street, St Albans<br>Michael Marshall, 31 North Street, St Albans, labourer<br>Samuel Bugey, 31 North Street, St Albans, cabman<br>James Colenso, 37 North Street, St Albans, upholsterer |
| <b>1913</b> | Samuel Buggy, 49 Sherbourne Street, St Albans, cabman<br>James Colenso, 55 Sherbourne Street, St Albans, upholsterer  |
| <b>1914</b> | Samuel Buggy, 49 Sherbourne Street, St Albans, labourer<br>Ivy Mary Colenso, 15 Dover Street, St Albans, spinster<br>James Colenso, 59 Sherbourne Street, St Albans, mattress maker                                     |
| <b>1916</b> | Samuel Buggy, 11 Radnor Street, St Albans, labourer   |
| <b>1918</b> | Ivy Mary Buggy, 53 Springfield Road, St Albans (husband Samuel, a carter) (Ivy Maud Buggy's death certificate)  |
| <b>1919</b> | Samuel Buggy, 49 Sherbourne Street, labourer<br>Samuel Buggy, 10 Albert Street, Linwood, driver<br>Ivy Mary Colenso, 206 Fitzgerald Avenue, spinster  |
| <b>1920</b> | Samuel Buggy, 10 Albert Street, Linwood, driver   |
| <b>1925</b> | Samuel Buggy, 149 Chester Street, labourer, died aged 58  |
| <b>1928</b> | Ivy Mary Colenso, 32 Wellpark Avenue, Grey Lynn, Auckland, spinster   |

### Concluding Remarks

These men were born to parents who left Cornwall to start a new life. They raised 8 boys, some who had trade skills. The surviving sons, 7 of them, enlisted to fight for the Empire. Lester and Bertie seemed to have had an alcohol problem before the war. Nelson suicided during training - suffering the effects of alcohol withdrawal. Most of them were convicted of absence without leave and drunkenness during their war service – hardly surprising given the nature of trench warfare and the delay in returning to New Zealand after the war ended.

Four years after his return Lester died of an alcohol related condition.

Bertie appeared to be a restless man before the war and even more so after, also dying relatively young. He may have found religion before the war as he described himself as a Baptist, while all his brothers professed to be Church of England.

Alfred's story is the saddest. A sailor before the war, knocked back from enlisting because his chest measurement was not adequate, then accepted because the need for reinforcements may have reduced standards. After his return, his life was a simple one on the road with a swag, finding work on farms and with a surrogate father as a companion. To spend three years in jail after a tragic accident triggered by intimidation and a faulty gun must have been horrendous. Then, when he was free, to be walking along the road and hit by a car blinded by on-coming lights. In this day, he would

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have been diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder. Then, he was one of many men who could not settle back into “normal life”, and who were further impacted by the depression.

When compiling these sorts of stories, there is some hard evidence, but we really only get a glimpse of what life was like and people involved. These were men who answered the call of the “mother country”, and who were damaged by an appalling war.

Only Maud, Walter and Arnold had children. Walter’s wife left him, taking the children, before the war, and Arnold’s surviving daughter was born 2 months after his premature death. Maud’s children were Australian. She was widowed in 1921, after bearing 10 children in Queensland, where she died in 1971.



Edgar, Maud & Walter reunited in Christchurch,  
after Maud’s family treated her to a visit.  
Photograph provided by Merrill & Barri James

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