Where is the Lieutenant Moberly plaque?

Keith Painter

On March 20th 2019 I went to Sydney to visit the State Library of NSW (SLNSW) as part of my research into the Banquet held in 1899 to open the Govetts Leap or Williams Track from Breakfast Rock to the base of Govetts Leap (waterfall) at Blackheath in the Blue Mountains.

I was wanting to see the photo of the banquet which Andy Macqueen had used in his book Back from the Brink ~ Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness (Self-published, Springwood, 1997, p145). An online search of the SLNSW catalogue for “Govetts Leap Banquet” had found one result (Royal Australian Historical Society : photographic album of views, buildings, and groups in the Blue Mountains Region, ca. 1880-1899 — PXA 1629). This was an album of 90 photographs including “Opening of the new track by Minister for Works, Mr Young, and banquet, 1899”. I was expecting to see the “Macqueen photo”, but the one I saw was slightly different and there were other photos of the event also. This proved to be a significant find as the photos were to enable the banquet site to be pinpointed. (See forthcoming History Hound: Where was the 1899 Govetts Leap banquet held?)

Four days later I reported to one of my history friends that I had found there was another album at SLNSW “which has similarities of place and time and a note that it may have belonged to the Moberly family”. (Royal Australian Historical Society : family photographic album of portraits, properties, and excursions, ca. 1865-1908, PXE 1319/Album 1.) A quick search on Trove found that a Rev. Moberly was in Blackheath around 1900.

Interest aroused

My interest in Rev. Edmund George Moberly (Figure 2) was aroused and I made further online searches of the SLNSW catalogue and found the library had a number of Moberly items. Trove searches also produced results and I commenced a list on Trove...
called “Moberly, Rev. E. G.”. I commented in the description of my list: “Two references show he was a photographer”. I think Figure 2 illustrates his eye for setting a scene with his hat on the table and the cane in his hand.

On April 8th I was making an online search of the Blue Mountains Library collection for something else when I discovered they had a collection of 15 or so Moberly photos, part of the Springwood Historical Society digitised collection.

At last after a long delay, due to me researching and writing 50 Blue Mountains Openings ~ Tracks, Lookouts, Monuments and a few surprises, I returned to the State Library on 3rd September to have a look at the Moberly album PXE 1319, and to compare it with the one I had viewed in March (PXA 1629).

**Loose photo of memorial plaque**

In the box with the album was also a folder with one loose photo. It was nicely mounted on card and was a photo of a memorial plaque to Lieutenant Francis Charles Moberly (Figure 1). Later I found that Francis was the youngest son of Rev. Edmund George Moberly and wife Julia (nee Suttor), born in 1882 at Walcha, NSW. He was a Lieutenant in the 5th Bengal Infantry. On 14 August 1904, aged 22, he was drowned in a boating accident on the Ganges River, at Dinapore (Danapur), India. English announcements of his death use the rank of 2nd Lieut. (Figure 3), but he had just recently been promoted to Lieutenant: “Second Lieutenants to be Lieutenants.— ... F. C. Moberly (since deceased), 5th Light Cavalry ...” (The Standard, 10 Dec 1904, p7 c5, www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk). See Figure 4 for one of the Australian death notices.

The wording on the plaque in the photo is:

“Sacred to the memory of Lieutenant Francis Charles Moberly 5th Light Infantry. Who was accidentally drowned whilst boating at Dinapore on 14th August 1904. Erected by his brother officers.”

My research into the Rev. Moberly and his family continued over the next few months. Further online searching of the SLNSW catalogue found another album with the name spelt “Moberley” — “Edmund G. Moberley’s album of family portraits and New England views, ca. 1859-1929, PXA 1557/Album 1”. Then I found another album with no name attached but the contents made me think it had to be a fourth Moberly album — “Album of photographs depicting scenes and people in areas of Queensland and New South Wales with a focus on clergy, churches and parsonages, HQ 2013/4635”. The description mentioned Dalby, Gladstone and Walcha, which suggested to me that there was likely to be a Moberly connection.

So in February 2020 I was back at SLNSW to look at these two albums. I was able to confirm my belief that the album “with a focus on clergy, churches and parsonages” was the work of Rev. Moberly. Some of the photos were identical to those in an already identified Moberly album and the internal evidence of photos of Dalby, Gladstone and Walcha, where Rev. E. G. had pastored churches, backed up my deduction. I submitted a report to SLNSW and the album is now attributed to Moberly in their catalogue.

On the February visit I also decided to have another look at the album in the box (PXE 1319). Again I noted the photo of the Lieutenant Moberly memorial plaque and this time I was able to take better photos of it. (On the September visit a librarian had introduced me to the folding timber stands that can be used to get better photos of items — provided of course you have the necessary permission to use your camera, etc. The roof of the Mitchell Library is one enormous skylight so there is lots of glare and reflection. Angling the item to be photographed on the stand reduces this problem.)
St Lukes Church, Danapur

Later, back home at Raglan, I wondered where the memorial plaque was located. I thought the obvious place would be Dinapore (Danapur) in India, and so I began searching on the internet.

I came across some photos of St Lukes Church (Figure 7) in Danapur — built during 1827-30 for use by English soldiers. I had a feeling that this was where the Moberly plaque would be located. St Lukes is within the grounds of the Bihar Regimental Centre and is maintained by the Indian Army. Danapur is a suburb of Patna in north-eastern India. See Figures 5 and 6.

My internet search found a photo of another memorial plaque on the wall in the church: “Sacred to the Memory of Officers of the 11th Regiment Native Infantry who died during the war in Bhootan in the year 1865 ...” followed by the names of five officers.

I now knew the church had one plaque, which meant there could be more.

Moberly plaque on wall!

Next I found a travel blog by an Indian writer (kalpriyanagari.blog-spot.com/2011/10/danapur.html) who mentioned the Moberly plaque in the church: “But when you read on the wall that Lieutenant Francis Charles Moberly of 5th Light Infantry was accidentally drowned while boating at Dinapore on August 14th 1904 ...”. But there was no accompanying photo.

My next find was a TripAdvisor report on a visit to St Lukes Church by “Peter S.”, an Australian. “St Luke’s Church is ... controlled by the Indian Army, which discourages casual visitors and photography. I was very lucky that a soldier took pity on me and called the Army Pastor, who very kindly allowed me to look around the church ... [which] contains several interesting memorials ...”

I thought this man could be an interesting lead, so I joined TripAdvisor and left a message for him.

A short time later I received a reply and was able to establish email contact with Peter Stanley, a history Professor at UNSW Canberra, military history specialist and author of numerous books. He did not have a photo of the plaque but gave me the email address of Rev. Longjam, the Indian pastor who had shown him through St Lukes Church.
Email to India

I emailed Rev. Longjam on 18th March and asked, “Could you please confirm that the Francis Charles Moberly plaque is in St Lukes Church? And perhaps you could please send me a photo of it and a photo of the church?”

Weeks went by with no response and I was wondering whether to send a follow-up message or that I had reached a deadend.

Then on the morning of 8th May 2020 I noticed a 15Mb message was coming through the email. It was a reply from Rev. Longjam in India complete with three photos of the church and the plaque (Figure 6) and further contact details!

So we now know that the plaque in the SLNSW photo is located on the wall in St Lukes Church, Danapur, India. I will pass this information on to SLNSW for their records.

Perhaps the photo which is now at SLNSW had been sent to Rev. Moberly by the officers who erected the plaque. And perhaps Lieutenant Moberly was buried in one of the three nearby cemeteries.

The Moberly albums at SLNSW contain photos of Rev. Edmund, his wife Julia, and all five daughters. But there are no photos of any of the three sons. This is a bit odd.

Sadly, all three sons died tragically.

George Alfred, born 1876 at Gympie in Queensland, enlisted for the South African War from Blackheath in early 1900. He served as a scout in the Field Intelligence Department, Soldiers of the Queen. George, age 25 and unmarried, was killed in action on 15 March 1902 at Strathrea, near Pretoria, South Africa.

Edmund William, born 1871 at Dalby, Queensland, served in the First World War. He enlisted at Rockhampton in September 1915. He was wounded in France in August 1916, awarded the Military Medal on 31 October 1917, returned to Australia in May 1918 and was discharged for medical reasons. He died of an accidental gunshot on his farm at Barmedman, NSW, on 3 July 1925. He was buried in the Barmedman cemetery.

Author’s note: I am compiling a short history of Rev. E. G. Moberly’s family which should be available later this year.