The Whitelaw Bros:

Whitelaw, Kenneth. Service Number 3446.

Kenneth Whitelaw was the first born to Robert and Annie Whitelaw in Briagolong Victoria in 1884. He and his seven brothers and sister Lizzie all grew up and lived in Briagolong.

Ken was a 32 year-old labourer when he enlisted in Warragul on the 10th November 1916 and was assigned to the 8th reinforcements to the 2nd Pioneer Battalion. He embarked on the HMAT A7 Medic on the 16th December 1916.

When he arrived in England, he spent four weeks in the Australian Details Camp before he proceeded to the Pioneer Training Battalion on the 24th March 1917. His records appear to have the next 12 months missing, as no further entries occurred until he was taken on service with 2nd Pioneer Battalion on the 13th March 1918.

Ken served until the 5th October 1918 when at Montbrehain on this day he was hit in the arm and chest by machine-gun bullets. The chest wound was very serious and by the 8th he was being operated on at Rouen and had the bullets removed. On the 10th of October he was in England in a serious condition. By December he was no longer in a critical condition, but he was chronically short of breath and his chest wound was constantly 'discharging.' On the 13th July 1919, he was finally discharged from the hospitals, and the army, and it was decided to repatriate him back to Australia. He was admitted to the No. 11 Australian General Hospital in Caulfield on the 3rd October 1919, still short of breath and with his chest wound still discharging.

More tragedy struck the Whitelaw family after the war, when Ken's niece, Pearl Whitelaw, ingested petrol and died on ANZAC day 1922.

Ken married Elizabeth Boyce sometime in late 1919 and Ken was continuously in and out of hospital. He died at home in Briagolong on the 17th October 1922.

As the Australian Roll of Honour only included men who died of wounds before March 1921, he was not included on this roll of honour. This is tragic as there can be no doubt that he died of wounds sustained at Montbrehain on the 5th October 1918.

Private Kenneth Whitelaw lies in the Briagolong Cemetery. His parents supplied the simple epitaph for his grave.

Son of Robert Whitelaw

&

Anne McSween

Died In Briagolong Vic. Aus.

The Whitelaw story does not end here as five of Ken's brother fought in the Great War.

Bob Whitelaw fought with the 21st Battalion at Gallipoli, was repatriated back to Australia ill, rejoined again a year later and was 'blown to bits' at Bullecourt on the 3rd May 1917.

He has no known grave.

Cecil Whitelaw served with the 12th Battalion. He was wounded three times, won a Military Medal in May 1917 at Bullecourt and was killed in action at Meteren near Armentieres on the 23rd April 1918.
He also has no known grave.

The youngest to serve was Angus Whitelaw who was only 16 when he enlisted. His mother Annie was powerless to stop him and he served with the 24th Battalion at Gallipoli and at 17 years of age was killed at Mouquet Farm on the 25th August 1916.
He also has no known grave.

Two other brothers, Lionel and Donald also served, were both wounded and both survived the war,

The youngest Clyde was not old enough for military service in the Great War.

Their mother Annie died in 1927 and her contribution to the Great War was six of her eight sons. Four of them killed. The epitaph on her grave is a quote by Arthur Conan Doyle.

Happy is she who can die with the thought that in the hour of her country's greatest need she gave her utmost.
....
Rob, Cecil and Ken Whitelaw

Written by Michael Ganey.