

Significant stitch in time



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HAVE you ever visited St Paul's Cathedral in London? If you have, I'm sure you were moved, as I was, by its splendour and the history that resonates in the building from decades of royal weddings, state funerals and thanksgiving services.

No doubt you admired a beautiful length of embroidery that will soon stretch across the front of the high altar.

Did you realise that it was created by an Australian? A bloke? A wounded soldier from the Barossa Valley?

Well, here's the story. In 1914 young George Doddridge, 19, joined the AIF. He fought at, and was evacuated from, Gallipoli.

He was then sent to France with the 10th Battalion, where he served bravely and was wounded. At some stage in 1916, George felt, as did many other men, that he needed a bit of a break from the bloodshed and madness, and took himself off for a few days (weeks).

This little holiday, to who knows where, was categorised by the army as being AWOL and he was court-martialled.



George served a period of detention but, as good men were needed desperately in the front line, he was reinstated. This time luck was not with him, and his right leg was badly smashed in shellfire.

He was evacuated to England, where his leg was amputated. We can only imagine the agony of that Channel crossing with the fairly

rudimentary care and pain relief that was standard for the time.

The AIF had taken over a school in Middlesex and set up a hospital to care for their own (No.2. Australian Auxiliary Hospital).

Its record speaks for itself. In the four months after it opened, 3991 men had been treated for serious wounds. Only two died.

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ALTARED FOR GOOD: The altar frontal at St Paul's Cathedral in London and, right, George Doddridge, of Keyneton, who was one of the 138 recuperating World War I soldiers who did the embroidery.



Africa, on creating the glorious altar frontal that now graces St Paul's.

What happened to him? He returned to Australia, lived in Keyneton, married in 1920 and raised a family. He bought a vehicle, modified it, and for years he drove a school bus.

The remarkable thing, to me, about George is that his spirit was unbroken and his sense of humour definitely intact. His party trick was to elevate his right wooden leg to his left shoulder and play it like a banjo!

How do I know all this? The story was told to me by George's son, Robert

Doddridge, who has worked at the Festival Centre for more than 40 years. When he visited London, he was greeted as a special guest by the Dean of St Paul's and plans to attend the 2018 rededication ceremony to remember those men of the "Empire" whose names are recorded in a splendid book there.

That's the moving story of a quiet, decorated hero, who never spoke about his experiences, and whose family had no idea of his wartime story until an inquiry came from the Australian War Memorial. George Ernest Doddridge.