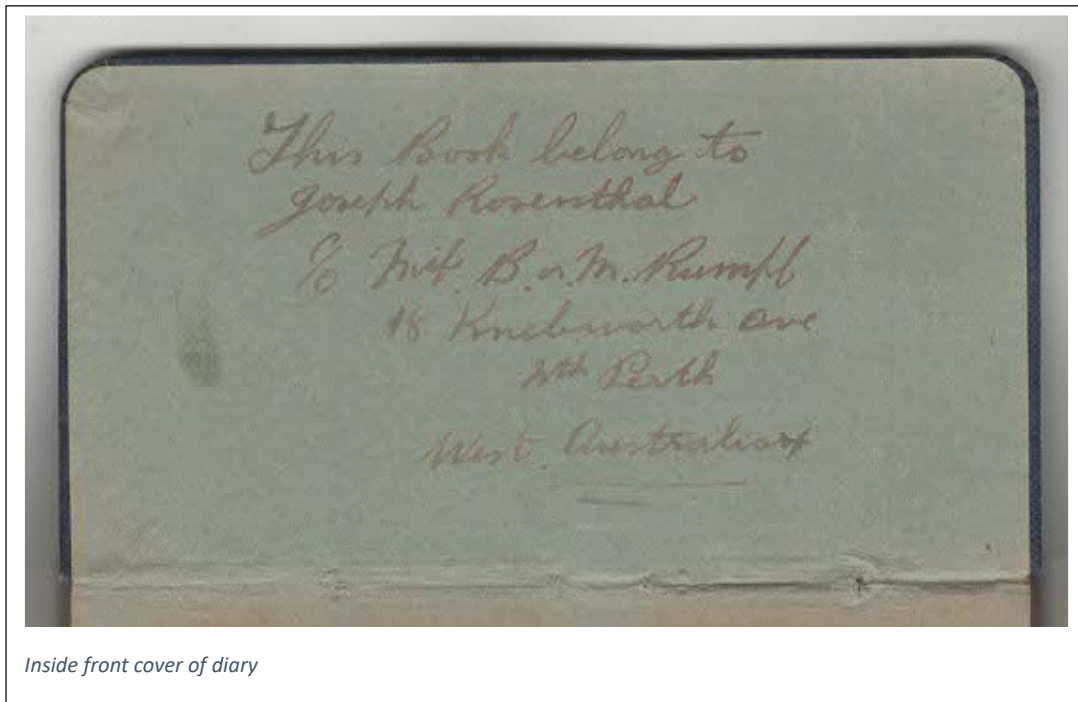


City of Vincent
Local History Awards 2023 Entry
by
Roger Elmitt

A diary of World War One experiences written between
1916 and 1919 by City of Vincent resident
Joseph Rosenthal
of 18 Knebworth Avenue, North Perth.



Joseph's Diary

Introduction

Whilst at the Jewish Historical and Genealogical Society's (JHGS) premises in Yokine in July 2023, I was shown one of their artifacts which consisted of a box containing various family heirlooms which had been donated to the Society for safe keeping. Amongst the treasures therein was a small book which, upon opening, turned out to be a diary written by Joseph Rosenthal describing his first world war experiences from the day he signed up on the 13th January 1916, "I have taken a day off work", with the voyage to Egypt, the trials and tribulations of the Western Front, leave taken in England until finally he arrives back safely at Fremantle for a "home dinner" on 8th July 1919.

What a challenge! A diary, over 100 years old, in good condition fairly difficult to read thus in need of transcription.

Joseph Rosenthal

At the back of Joseph's diary there is a double page entitled "Reference to Self". The details hereunder are a transcription of this information:

Reference to self

Another maiden name was Bertha Crown.

Bertha Crown was married at house of 111 Templar street Leeds, England 1877 January 10 to my father Samuel Rosenthal, Boot finisher. Issue Hymie (dead), Morris, Ettie(sic - Hetty(?)),

my half sisters Bertha and Margareta.

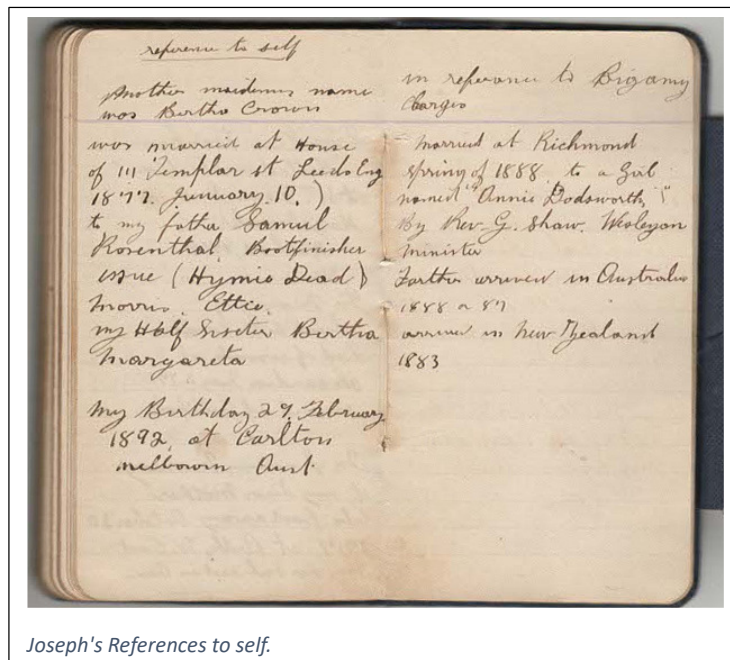
My birthday 29 February 1892 at Carlton, Melbourne.

In response to bigamy charges.

Married at Richmond spring of 1888 to a girl named "Annie Dodsworth" by Rev G Shaw, Wesleyan minister.

Father arrived in Australia in 1888 or 87. Arrived in New Zealand 1883.

Further research and, obviously not shown on this page of the diary, are the fact



Joseph's References to self.

that, after the war, at some time, he went to Melbourne and continued his occupation of

picture framer. He married Isabella MacKey in 1928 in Melbourne and, after a very eventful life, died there in 1964.

The Diary

The diary is in very good condition considering its age and what Joseph and the diary have been through – the desert dust of Egypt, the mud and shelling of the Western Front, and the locations and environment that Joseph would have had available to write the diary eg candlelight, tiredness, recalling sad and difficult times.

It is surprisingly small considering the 3½ years of entries. The diary measures 8cm wide and 13 cm tall – smaller than a smartphone – small enough to easily fit into a shirt or tunic pocket. It is dark blue in colour, faintly lined and has gold edged pages. There is a provision to slip a small diameter pencil into the holder on the right hand side of the diary.

What did he write it with considering the preservation of the script? It is not an indelible pencil as that would have smudged if it got wet. The diary has a pencil pocket on the right hand side. There are a few print-throughs the paper and also some print from one page to another which suggests he used a fountain pen. The ink is consistent throughout the 3½ years of writing. However no blots – always neat and tidy.

Sometimes Joseph would make entries on consecutive days and at other times miss out a week or more – probably depending upon circumstances and news worthiness. The longest break was between 27 November 1917, when he received notification of his mother’s death, until 19 January 1918. He merely states, “I have not been keeping my diary up to date.”

He doesn’t offer an explanation as to why he started the diary or what the ultimate purpose was. Was it so that he could relive his experiences? Doubtful. For his family to read when (if) he got home, we don’t know. Did he or they ever read it?

It is also notable that he does not describe his day to day job (that of medical orderly) in detail but does outline the circumstances under which he lives and works, his movements and modes of transport. There are over 70 instances where he mentions the shelling by “Fritz” – and the numerous near misses.

I have taken on the responsibility of transcribing it and will present it to whomever is interested in it – the City of Vincent local history library, the Australian Army Museum of West Australia or the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. I don’t know but meanwhile I will satisfy my own ego.

Transcription Methodology Used

This eight week project was quite challenging and was quite an involved process.

Experience showed that the best way of reading the diary was to scan the pages, crop them to a consistent size then catalogue each double page.

Next step was to transcribe the diary to Word. I aimed to scan and bash out a first draft of five pages of the diary per day. This was performed by displaying the scanned copy on one computer screen and the typing from the enlarged image. It was not an easy task to interpret the writing due to, (mis)spelling, grammar, use of capital letters, slang, place names and abbreviations used.

From this rough draft another pair of eyes was employed namely my wife Veronica who did a splendid job and was a tremendous help in deciphering/correcting and enhancing the original product.

By downloading the 2nd Ambulance unit War Diaries from the Australian War Memorial website for the relevant period of the diary (all relevant 35 items), it was found most illuminating and provided a solid background for Joseph's writings. It was possible to correlate Joseph's entries with the unit's movements particularly useful in obtaining the spelling of place names.

It was interesting to research where Joseph was in the history of WW1 ie Pozieres, Bullecourt, Ypres and many other WW1 hot spots. This allowed an appreciation of the circumstances and also to capture relevant photos and maps and background.

The National Archives of Australia has digitised all the army records of soldiers in WW1. By downloading Joseph's record I could relate his diary back to his army records eg sickness, leave, movements etc. which were not necessarily fully described by him in his diary.

Extensive use of Google helped to find and clarify the meaning of some of the WW1 slang words and abbreviations used.

Transcription

Transcription raises a dilemma; should the finished product be word faithful to the original and include all the spelling and grammar mistakes or should they be corrected without restructuring the original text? The latter course was taken. I did not want to highlight Joseph's writing (in)abilities but to faithfully record his thoughts and descriptions to make it pleasing to read. His quaint turns of phrase have been recorded as written!

In transcribing the diary, editorial liberty had to be taken with regard to capitalisation, abbreviation and expansion of abbreviations together with breaking down into sentences. Transcribing has been as near to the original as practicable. Obvious spelling mistakes have been corrected and possibly words added to make it more readable.

Place names written in italics are "guessed". Joseph's writing and spelling are sometimes somewhat difficult to decipher, especially place and person names. By looking at a map, the unit's diaries and his description of its whereabouts, a plausible name has been guessed but editorial rights have been exercised!

Where Joseph didn't know something he put a dash. In transcribing this diary I have put the word "blank" to indicate where Joseph had put such a dash.

Sometimes it was either not possible to determine the writing or the transcription is better showing exactly what Joseph had written. This has been reproduced as a wavy underline eg as written.

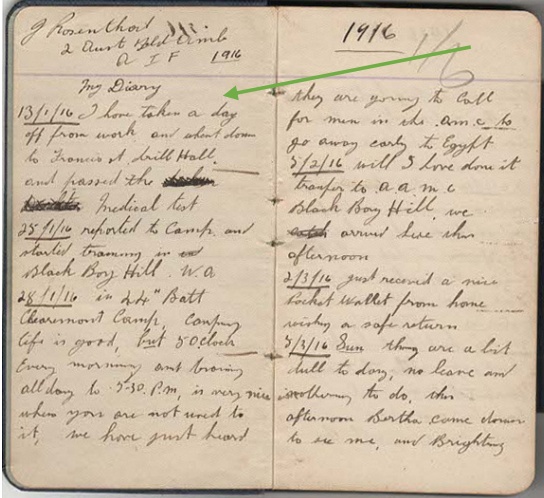
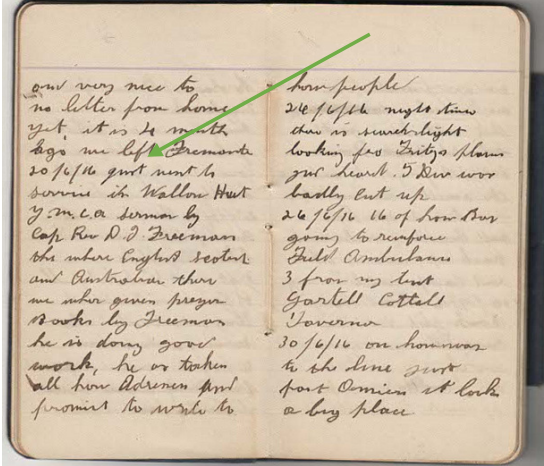
On occasions Joseph makes comments such as "nuff said". These have been reproduced as is.

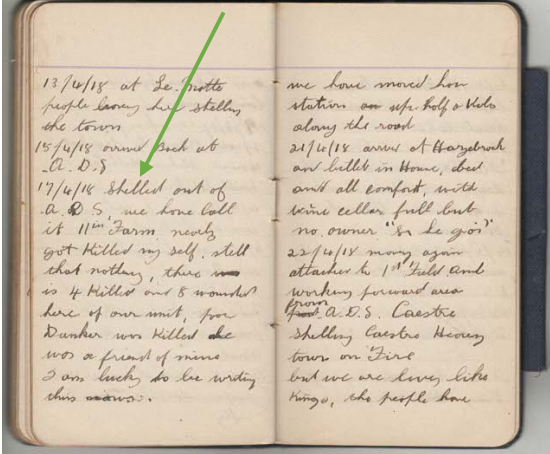
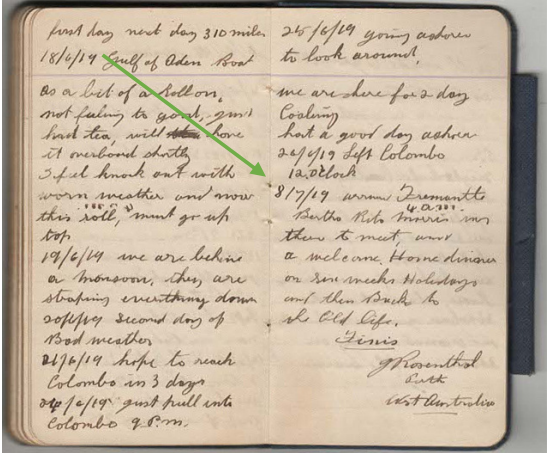
Most of the dates are of the format dd/mm/yy. Occasionally he would put say 15 June 1917 these have been changed to fit the main format dd/mm/yy.

There appears to be a great discrepancy in the months of the dates of the entries starting at 20/6/16. I believe this should appear as 20/7/16. We seem to have gone back a month. However, by 23/8/16 the dates appear to be correct again. Rather than override Joseph's dates I have reproduced his dates with the dates that I think they should be. This discrepancy occurred during the Battle of Pozières – he had other things on his mind – survival.

Examples of Entries

There are far too many pages to reproduce here so here are some extracts from the diary..

<p>The first entry</p>	
 <p><i>J Rosenthal 2 Aust Field Amb AIF 1916 1916 My Diary 13/1/16 I have taken a day off from work and went down to Frances St Drill Hall and passed the medical test. 25/1/16 reported to Camp and started training in a trench at Black Boy Hill. W.A. 28/1/16 in 24th Batt Clearmont Camp. Camp life is good, but 5 o'clock every morning and leaving all day to 5:30 P.M. is very nice when you are not used to it. We have just heard they are going to call for men in the am.c. to go away early to Egypt 2/2/16 will I love doing it tonight to a a.m.c. Black Boy Hill. we are around here this afternoon 2/3/16 just received a nice pocket watch from home wishing a safe return 2/3/16 Sun they are a bit dull to do, no leave and nothing to do, this afternoon Bertha come down to see me, and Brighting</i></p>	<p>J Rosenthal 2 Aust Field Amb AIF 1916 My Diary 13/1/16 I have taken a day off from work and went down to Frances St drill hall and passed the medical test.</p>
<p>Meeting Rabbi Freedman</p>	
 <p><i>and very nice to see letters from home yet. it is 4 months ago we left Clearmont. 20/7/16 just went to service in Wallon Hut Y.M.C.A. sermon by Cap. Rev. D.I. Freeman the whole English section and Australian there we were given prayer books by Freeman he is doing good work. he is taken all his address and promise to write to how people 20/7/16 night time this is much light looking for Bertha's plane just heard. 5. Dore was badly cut up 26/7/16 16 of how they going to reinforce Field Ambulance 3 from my last Gortell Cottell Governor 30/7/16 on tomorrow to the done just post Bertha at look a day place</i></p>	<p>20/7/16 Just went to service in Wallon Hut YMCA. Sermon by Captain Rev. DI Freeman (sic). There were English, Scottish and Australians there. We were given prayer books by Freeman (sic). He is doing good work. He has taken all our addresses and promises to write to our people. <i>This presumably is Rabbi David Isaac Freedman OBE BA VD JP (1874-1939) who, between 1915 and 1918 served with the AIF as Chaplain-Major at Gallipoli, France, Belgium, Egypt and Palestine – aka “The Anzac Rabbi”. He was the Rabbi at the Brisbane Street synagogue. Freedman street in Menora is named after him.</i></p>

<p>Death of Eric Danker</p>	
	<p>17/4/18 Shelled out of ADS*. We have call it 11th farm. Nearly got killed myself. Still that nothing. There are 4 killed and 8 wounded here of our unit. Poor Danker was killed. He was a friend of mine. I am lucky to be writing this news.</p> <p><i>Eric Danker was a 25 year old Staff Sergeant of B section 2nd Field Ambulance. He was the only son of Mr and Mrs FW Danker of 138 Walcott Street, Mt Lawley and a well-known chemist.</i></p> <p><i>Danker Lane between Chelmsford and Grosvenor streets is named after him.</i></p> <p><i>*Advanced Dressing Station</i></p>
<p>Arrival home</p>	
	<p>8/7/19 Arrive Fremantle. Bertha, Rita, Morris are there to meet. What a welcome. Home dinner. On six weeks holidays and then back to the Old life.</p> <p>Finis</p> <p>J Rosenthal</p> <p>Perth, West Australia</p>

Submission

The full transcription runs to 30+ pages and 12,000+ words – way outside the scope of the parameters of these Awards. It is thus submitted as an attachment to this entry together with the 10MB and over 60 jpgs scans of the individual pages of the diary. The 2nd Ambulance Unit War Diaries have not been included as they can be referenced directly from the Australian War Memorial at:

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1338699>

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Conclusion

This has been a most interesting and challenging exercise however somewhat depressing work with the graphic descriptions and moving experiences of war - all that slaughter, suffering, destruction etc.

On the other hand it has been a great challenge and I feel that we owe it to Joseph Rosenthal and his comrades for the sacrifice they made and the time and effort that he devoted to writing this diary. It is part of our Australian heritage.

Roger Elmitt

September 2023

