

‘A PLACE IN THE HILLS’

THE SULMANS IN THE BLUE

MOUNTAINS

David Carment

2015

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Introduction

My mother's family, the Sulmans, first became associated with parts of Australia's Blue Mountains during the late nineteenth century. I explain here why that association commenced through regular long summer visits and developed after the family acquired Kihilla in Lawson as their Mountains residence before focussing on three family members: my great grandfather the architect, town planner and patron of the arts Sir John Sulman; his wife the community worker and photographer Annie, Lady Sulman; and their son, my grandfather the racing car driver Tom Sulman. All lived for long periods in the Blue Mountains. I briefly conclude by showing how the family connection continues through to the present.

A summer retreat from the city



The Sulmans, Sydney, 1900

Back row – Florence (Florrie) (1876-1965), Arthur (1882-1971)
Front row – Edith (Edie) (1878-1907), John (later Sir John Sulman) (1849-1934), Dorothy Joan (Joan) (1896-1973), Thomas Noel (Tom) (1899-1970), Annie Elizabeth (later Lady Sulman) (1864-1949), Geoffrey (1894-1917)

Not present is John Masefield (Jack) (1906-1959)
(Sulman Family Archive)

The historian Julia Horne shows how from the 1880s the Blue Mountains, which start about 50 kilometres west of Sydney, came ‘to be seen as restorative for those seeking peace and quiet from the daily grind, as well as those recuperating from a range of illnesses’. Late nineteenth century discussion ‘focused on the beneficial effects of a dry inland climate at altitudes higher than sea level’. By the end of the century the Blue Mountains were particularly valued ‘for their pure air and cool climate during summer months, a retreat from the hot and tiring life of the city’.¹

These were the principal motivations for John Sulman’s discovery of the Blue Mountains. Born in England in 1849, he was a successful architect there but migrated to Australia with his invalid first wife Sarah Clark Sulman, formerly Redgate, and young son Arthur in 1885 after receiving medical advice that Sarah’s tuberculosis was so serious that she could only survive in a warm climate. They decided to settle in Sydney, where John quite quickly became a prominent architect and began his concerns with town planning and the arts. His other two children, Florence (known as Florrie) and Edith (known as Edie), joined John, Sarah and Arthur from England in 1886.² Sarah’s condition, unfortunately, deteriorated. She died at the end of 1888. Before then, in searching for a location that would improve her health, John first encountered the Blue Mountains. In a letter of November 1885, he notes that ‘the chief objection to Sydney is the moist enervating climate of the summer months and the more or less moisture laden sea breeze which blows all year round’. It was necessary for the ‘4 hot months’ that ‘my wife must move to a place in the hills’.³ Initially they preferred the New South Wales Southern Highlands but John also went to the Blue Mountains and writes of its ‘bracing’ climate.⁴ In summer 1886 he rented a cottage at Lawson, not far from the railway station.⁵ The summer of 1887-1888 was spent in Springwood, where John and Sarah made good friends. Florrie and Edie had school lessons in nearby Falconbridge with the children of a solicitor. It was during

¹ Julia Horne, *The Pursuit of Wonder: How Australia’s Landscape was Explored, Nature Discovered and Tourism Unleashed*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2005, pp 135-136.

² Zenaida S Edwards, ‘The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman 1849-1934’, Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Technology Sydney, 2006, Vol II, Ch 1.

³ John Sulman to English friends, 12 November 1885, in Zeny Edwards (comp), ‘The Sulman Archives Held by the Family’, July 1997, p 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 60.

⁵ John Sulman, ‘Reminiscences’, 1927, p 45, Sulman Family Archive (SFA).

this period that John designed the Springwood Anglican church that I discuss later.⁶ John holidayed in Katoomba, it seems on his own, in January 1892. In a letter to Arthur then he writes of going for long walks, including to Minnehaha Falls. He describes them as ‘very little known as the track is very rough & swampy in parts & the descent at the end is rather risky...They are however very pretty’.⁷

John was married again in 1893 to the Sydney born Annie Elizabeth Masefield, who while a young child was adopted into the wealthy and prominent Walker family as a companion for Eadith (later Dame Eadith) Walker, later a well-known philanthropist. Between 1894 and 1906 John and Annie had four children: Geoffrey, Dorothy Joan (known as Joan), Thomas Noel (known as Tom) and John Masefield (known as Jack).⁸

Annie quickly became fond of the Blue Mountains so regular trips to them continued. Each summer was spent in one or other of the mountain resorts to save the children, John writes, ‘from the enervating effects of the moist heat of Sydney’⁹. One year’s summer stay was in a large cottage in Katoomba. John describes a memorable walk then with some of his children and a local doctor as involving a route by:

*the Narrow Neck to the State Mine under the Ruined Castle... and [Arthur’s] refusal to return by the same route because of its length and insistence on making the direct cut across the valley via the wire rope trollies which carried the shale to Katoomba. It looked much shorter but was far more arduous and we had to descend quite a thousand feet to the creek and then climb two thousand to reach the Katoomba lookout where fortunately I found a buggy for hire and we drove home. It almost finished the Doctor who was short and rather stout.*¹⁰

Other locations visited during the late 1890s were Jenolan Caves and Mount Solitary. It was also at this time that John and Annie began their interests in photography, in which Annie developed particular expertise.¹¹ On Christmas Day

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 45-46.

⁷ John Sulman to Arthur Sulman, 17 January 1892, in Sulman Family Papers and Pictorial Material ca. 1870-1957, Mitchell Library MSS9218, Box 2.

⁸ Edwards, ‘The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman’, Vol II, Chs 1-15.

⁹ Sulman, ‘Reminiscences’, p 60.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 60-61.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 61.

1899 their son Tom was born at The Chalet in Wentworth Falls.¹² The regular long summer stays in the Blue Mountains went on during the early twentieth century.

Kihilla



The Sulmans, Kihilla, about 1913

Back row – Joan, Jack, Tom
Front row – Geoffrey, John, Annie
(Sulman Family Archive)



Kihilla, 2015
(David Carment)

¹² Annie Sulman, diary of births, deaths and marriages, SFA.

To alleviate Geoffrey's digestive problems and Annie's rheumatism,¹³ in October 1909 the Sulmans leased Kihilla, sometimes called Kihilla Park, in Lawson with what a *Blue Mountains Echo* report describes as 'further improvements' being planned there under John's oversight.¹⁴ In February the following year he successfully applied to have a telephone service installed.¹⁵ A letter from John to Arthur in July 1910 discusses heavy snow and storm damage there.¹⁶ John purchased Kihilla with three nearby cottages in September 1913 for 4000 Pounds. While the Sulmans also had a home in Sydney, Kihilla was where the younger children mainly lived with servants and other staff for about 10 years. John and especially Annie were also quite frequently in residence.¹⁷ By this time Edie had died and Arthur, a pastoralist in North Queensland, was only an occasional visitor. The unmarried Florrie came more regularly. In 1914 she published her much read two volumed *Popular Guide to the Wildflowers of New South Wales*,¹⁸ which she later told me was inspired by her Blue Mountains experiences.

Tom writes of Kihilla as:

*an old mansion with verandahs all around it, big high ceilinged-rooms, standing in 22 acres of land a mile out of Lawson. There were stables, coach houses, and several outbuildings, a large orchard, and bushland – a kid's paradise.*¹⁹

¹³ Edwards, 'The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman', Vol II, pp 181-182.

¹⁴ *The Blue Mountains Echo*, 30 October 1909.

¹⁵ *The Blue Mountains Echo*, 26 February 1910.

¹⁶ John Sulman to Arthur Sulman, 24 July 1910, in Sulman family papers and pictorial material, Box 2.

¹⁷ Nance Cooper, Lawson, <http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/lawson>, accessed 10 February 2014; Edwards, 'The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman', Vol II, pp 181-182; Ln017 : Kihilla and Grounds | NSW Environment & Heritage, <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=1170677>, accessed 10 February 2014; Linda Windley's unpublished essay on Kihilla, 2002, held at Kihilla, Lawson.

¹⁸ Margaret Henry, 'Sulman Florence (1876-1965)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sulman-florence-871/text15251>, accessed 12 February 2014.

¹⁹ Tom Sulman, 'Autobiography – July 1969', pp 1-2, SFA.

Kihilla was built in 1883. Largely unchanged since the Sulmans' time, it is a complex of structures set in extensive landscaped grounds overlooking bushland to the north. The principal house with its former stables and a small cottage are at the site's north end. The former gardener's cottage, now under separate ownership, is close to the Great Western Highway. Kihilla's attraction to the Sulmans must have been enhanced by its proximity to Lawson, one of the Blue Mountains' most prosperous towns. It had a railway station, good shops, hotels, a post office, and, from 1918, electric power. The Sulman family owned Kihilla until 1953 but ceased using it after John's death in 1934. It was then leased out to a series of guesthouse proprietors.²⁰ Following Annie's death in 1949, it was bequeathed to her grandchildren, the oldest being my mother Diana aged only 22. They could not afford to keep the house and it was sold for what my father described as a pittance.²¹ The Church Army Australia now uses it as a retreat and conference centre.²²



A Blue Mountains picnic, about 1912
Left to right – Annie, Jack, Joan, John, Tom, Geoffrey
(Sulman Family Archive)

²⁰ Ln017: Kihilla and Grounds.

²¹ Personal knowledge.

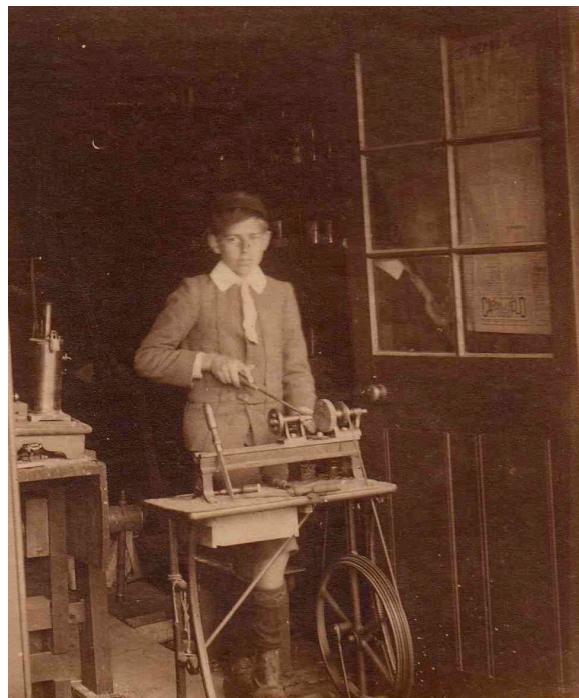
²² Kihilla Retreat & Conference Centre | Church Army Australia,
<http://www.churcharmy.com.au/hire-conference-centre/>, accessed 11 February 2014.



An outdoors Blue Mountains lunch, about 1912
Left to right – Geoffrey, Tom, Annie, Florrie, Joan
(Sulman Family Archive)



Tom and Geoffrey in the Kihilla school room, about 1912
(Sulman Family Archive)



Tom in Geoffrey's workshop, Kihilla, about 1915
(Sulman Family Archive)



A Blue Mountains outing in the family car, about 1912
(Sulman Family Archive)

Life at Kihilla was very varied. Although busy with a range of activities in Sydney, John got back as often as he could. Zeny Edwards's biography describes him as having a 'patriarchal disposition' and being 'a strict disciplinarian' but 'loving and

fair in his duties as a father'.²³ He did not provide the children with pocket money but allowed them to earn as much as possible by cutting firewood, weeding the orchard and numerous other chores. 'The more we earned', Tom recalls, 'the better pleased father was'.²⁴ There were frequent family picnics in the nearby bush. They involved large wicker baskets full of food, rugs and other utensils. Outdoor meals also sometimes occurred under a shelter. Until 1912, Geoffrey, whose poor health prevented regular school attendance, and Tom shared a tutor at Kihilla.²⁵ Tom, and later Jack, then attended Woodford Academy, about which I later say more. Geoffrey loved building model aeroplanes and steam engines in his Kihilla workshop and was fascinated by motor vehicles. On one occasion he and Tom secretly built a full-sized glider, which crashed and disintegrated with Tom as its pilot. He luckily escaped with only a few bruises.²⁶ Unable for health reasons to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force after the First World War started and unsuccessful in his attempts to work in the munitions industry, as an unmatriculated student Geoffrey attended Engineering classes at the University of Sydney but was often at Kihilla until in 1916 he went to England. There he became an officer in the Royal Flying Corps before dying in an aircraft accident the following year.²⁷ It was a tragedy from which Annie never fully recovered. Joan was dux of the Blue Mountains Girls School at Lawson in 1910.²⁸ She later married Tom's Woodford Academy friend Dr Bruce Shallard, the medical practitioner son of a well-known Glenbrook apiarist.²⁹ In 1912 John bought a family car. Tom describes it as:

a 35 h.p, seven-seater S.P.A., a 4-cylinder, 4-speed Italian car weighing about two tons. It was a beautiful job and quite fast for that period – 65 m.p.h. – and very up-to-date with electric side and tail lights and a siren, though it had no generator to keep

²³ Edwards, 'The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman', Vol II, pp 316-317.

²⁴ Sulman, 'Autobiography', p 6.

²⁵ Various photographs, SFA.

²⁶ Sulman, 'Autobiography', p 2.

²⁷ Keith Jones, 'The Sulman Letters', in *The University of Sydney Record*, no 1, 1995; National Archives (Great Britain), AIR/76/490; Students at the University of Sydney – Senate – The University of Sydney,

http://sydney.edu.au/senate/students_WWI_casualties.shtml, accessed 15 February 2014.

²⁸ *The Blue Mountains Echo*, 30 December 1910.

²⁹ *The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser*, 17 January 1928.

the battery charged. Unluckily it had loads of brass work which was my special responsibility – no shiny brass, no ride – still, we were all very proud of it.³⁰

With Geoffrey as driver, it took them all over the Mountains on many enjoyable outings. In December 1913 a fire menaced Kihilla until a combination of volunteers and rain put it out.³¹ Another fire came close to the main house in February 1926. The Katoomba Fire Brigade was called and a ‘difficult fight ensued’, *The Blue Mountains Echo* reports, ‘before it was beaten out’.³² After John’s death, the President of the Blue Mountains Shire Council, Councillor Percy Wilson, remarked that he was ‘very generous to us on the Mountains, and at Lawson especially...that fine property of his is a credit to the place’.³³ There is now a Sulman Road close to Kihilla.

John Sulman’s Blue Mountains designs

John’s most permanent contributions to the Blue Mountains were the structures he is known to have designed there, all still standing and all with recognised heritage significance.



Christ Church Springwood, about 2013
(commons.wikipedia.org)

³⁰ Sulman, ‘Autobiography’, p 5.

³¹ *Nepean Times*, 11 December 1913.

³² *The Blue Mountains Echo*, 19 February 1926.

³³ *Nepean Times*, 25 August 1934.



John's proposed design
(State Library of New South Wales)

The first was Christ Church Anglican Church in Springwood, constructed in 1888 and 1889. Now a landmark on the Great Western Highway, it is a fine sandstone building with a simple but sensitively designed interior. The sandstone is local and the roof is slate. Later extensions to the church to create the chancel, north transept and tower are in keeping with John's original design. The New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage Statement of Significance notes that the church's interior 'has an unusually peaceful atmosphere created by the use of pale sandstone and stained timber and restrained detailing'. John's original conception as seen from his drawings, though, was never finished. This included an eastern and a western transept at the church's rear and a large crowning tower between the two.³⁴

³⁴ Christ Church Anglican Church | NSW Environment & Heritage, <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5045251>, accessed 10 February 2014; Edwards, 'The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman', Vol III, p 154; The Revd Laurence T Lambert, *A History of Christ Church Springwood*, no publication details [1989], pp 1-9.



Former Holy Trinity Church, Wentworth Falls, about 2013
(pigott-gorrie.blogspot.com)

Another John Sulman church in the Blue Mountains is the former Holy Trinity Anglican Church at Wentworth Falls, also constructed in 1888 and 1889. The Office of Environment and Heritage does not acknowledge him as the architect but Zeny Edwards's carefully researched biography does. It is a well-built wooden structure with a steeply pitched corrugated galvanised steel roof. There are a side entry porch and a single bay sanctuary. The building is now used as a hall.³⁵



Khandala (also known as Kardinia Park), Katoomba, 2011
(Century 21)

³⁵ WF003 : Holy Trinity Anglican Church | NSW Environment & Heritage, <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=1170021>, accessed 10 February 2014; Edwards, 'The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman', Vol III, p 154.

Perhaps the grandest of John's Blue Mountains designs is Khandala, also known as Kardinia Park, in Katoomba, completed in 1898. A picturesque house in the Federation Queen Anne style, it is situated above a terraced garden where it has uninterrupted views over the Jamison Valley to Mount Solitary, the Ruined Castle and Narrow Neck. The house is timber framed on a brick base and clad with wide rusticated weatherboards on the ground floor. Some chimneys are topped with corbels incorporating bricks and terracotta pots. A verandah is on the house's southeast corner. To the north of the house is the original coach house, a large gabled structure. Ernest and Margaret Young engaged John to design their Katoomba retreat in 1897. By the end of 1898 the house was ready. In the original plan a drawing room, dining room and nursery were on the ground floor. Before the house was completed, the Youngs had another child with a further baby expected, so a playroom was added to the original design. More than most late nineteenth and early twentieth century retreats in the Blue Mountains, Khandala represents, according to the Office of Environment and Heritage, 'many of the attributes sought out by those who could afford to develop a summer home in the mountains'. It is also 'a particularly fine example of the Federation Queen Anne style'.³⁶



Former Holy Trinity Rectory, Wentworth Falls, no date
(pigott-gorrie.blogspot.com)

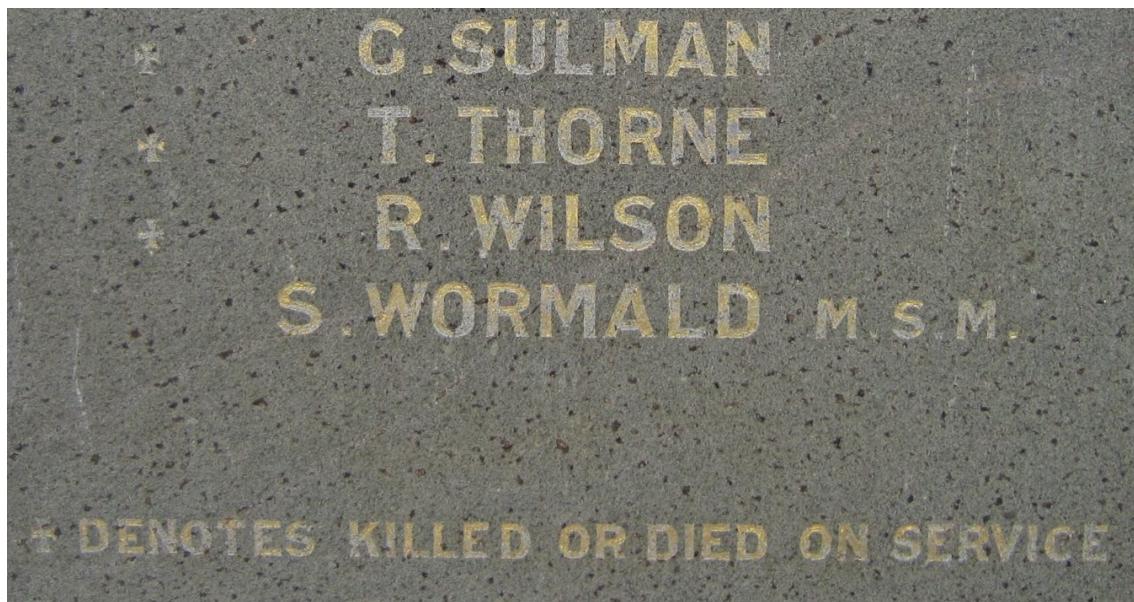
³⁶ K001 : Khandala | NSW Environment & Heritage, <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=1170734>, accessed 10 February 2014; Edwards, 'The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman', Vol III, p 172.

Very different is the smaller and far simpler former Holy Trinity Rectory in Wentworth Falls erected in 1906, still extant but no longer on its original site. Limited funds only allowed for a quite basic timber structure and there was a delay of six years between John doing the plans and the Rectory being built.³⁷



War memorial and entry to Honour Gardens, Honour Avenue, Lawson, 2014
(David Carment)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p 179.



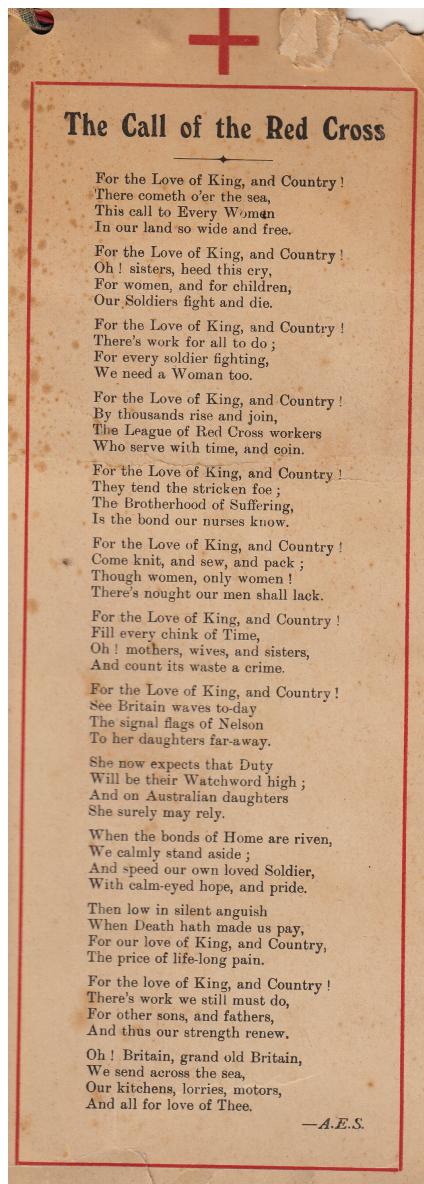
Detail on war memorial, Lawson, 2014
(David Carment)

The Honour Gardens in Lawson are the most recent of John's Blue Mountains designs. They were partly a labour of love in memory of Geoffrey. He and Annie also endowed in Geoffrey's name a memorial prize, later converted into a memorial lectureship, at The University of Sydney. From 1919 John chaired the New South Wales War Memorials Advisory Board, whose name was changed in 1921 to the Public Monuments Advisory Board. The state's Local Government Act required its approval of design and site before any monument could be erected in a public space. As the historian Ken Inglis writes, John 'put much energy into the job of influencing how other people commemorated their war dead'.³⁸ The First World War had a major impact on Lawson as it did on other Australian small towns. Many memorial gardens were planted across Australia but Lawson's are now unusual in retaining their original form. Working closely with the Blue Mountains Shire Engineer, John initially created the gardens in 1918 and 1919. The layout shows his love of order and symmetry. Permission to erect a substantial archway at the Avenue's entrance was granted in 1920. Improvements John proposed to the Shire Council, including the stonewalling on the Gardens' western side, were implemented in 1928. John supervised this work without a fee. Geoffrey's name is inscribed on the stone arch war memorial at the

³⁸ K S Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, The Miegunnyah Press, Melbourne, 1998, p 150.

gardens' entrance that was designed by Sir Charles Rosenthal and completed in 1923.³⁹

Annie Sulman: community worker and photographer



Annie's call to action as President of the Lawson Branch of the Red Cross, about 1915
(Sulman Family Archive)

³⁹ Cooper, 'Lawson'; Edwards, 'The Life and Work of Sir John Sulman', Vol III, p 187; Ln014 : Honour Gardens Conservation Area | NSW Environment & Heritage, <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=1170564>, accessed 17 February 2014; Register of War Memorials in NSW, <http://www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/content/lawson-war-memorial>, accessed 19 February 2014.

Annie's early life was tragic. The granddaughter of an Irish convict and the daughter of an insolvent Sydney schoolteacher who died in an asylum for the insane, before she was eight years old her parents and both her siblings were all dead, and the Walker family adopted her.⁴⁰ Her difficult early years combined with the Walkers' strong belief that wealthy people like them had a duty to help the less fortunate and participate in community activities, led to her active support of a range of worthy causes. She took a quite prominent part in the 1913 celebrations at Lawson to mark the centenary of the first known European crossing of the Blue Mountains. At a ceremony in Lawson on 28 May 1913, she drove a peg on the spot where an obelisk to the explorer William Lawson was to be erected.⁴¹ For many years she served as President of the Lawson Branch of the Red Cross. In April 1915 she presided at a successful Red Cross fund raising concert in Lawson, at the end of which she strongly appealed to Lawson's women to join the 40 already engaged there in Red Cross work.⁴² At about the same time, the Red Cross published her poem *The Call of the Red Cross* that revealed intense wartime patriotism but not any noticeable poetic skills. It begins:

*For the Love of King and Country!
There cometh oe'r the sea,
The call to Every Woman
In our land so wide and free*

And finishes:

*Oh! Britain, grand old Britain,
We send across the sea,
Our kitchens, lorries, motors,
And all for love of thee.⁴³*

⁴⁰ David Carment, research in progress for a biography of Annie Sulman.

⁴¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 1913.

⁴² *The Blue Mountains Echo*, 9 April 1915.

⁴³ A.E.S., *The Call of the Red Cross*, no place or date of publication.

In an address to the Lawson and District Horticultural Show in February 1922, she expressed particular concern for the returned soldiers whose nerves were shattered at the front, strongly recommending gardening as an activity that would restore their mental well being.⁴⁴ A *Sydney Morning Herald* report of March 1925 in commenting on what it called Annie's 'unfailing service' to the Red Cross in Lawson and elsewhere remarks that no one 'has done more in quiet service to invalid retired nurses'.⁴⁵



From A E Sulman, *Australian Wild Flowers*, Second Series, Angus & Robertson Ltd., Sydney, no date

Another passion was photography, a skill that she developed during the 1880s and 1890s. In addition to taking numerous photographs of relations, friends and places, she was expert in photographing Australian wildflowers, many of which were in bush near Kihilla. The major Australian publisher Angus and Robertson produced her two books of photographs *Some Familiar Wild Flowers* and *Australian Wild*

⁴⁴ *The Blue Mountains Echo*, 17 February 1922.

⁴⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 March 1925.

Flowers.⁴⁶ Both were well received and reprinted. In their prefaces she states her modest purposes. The first book's preface reads in part:

*This small collection of wild flower photographs was originally started entirely for my own use and pleasure; but finding many others similarly interested, I am making this attempt to share it with them.*⁴⁷

The second says:

*As one flower-lover to others, I offer some more photographs of our most familiar and easily-found wild flowers, hoping that among them they may find some old friends and that, in looking for those unknown to them, a fresh interest may be added to their rambles in the bush. In no sense of the word am I a botanist, hence the flowers in my book are simply arranged as fancy dictated, without regard to order or family.*⁴⁸

Tom Sulman: the beginnings of a life with motor vehicles and his education at Woodford Academy



Tom on his billy cart, Kihilla, about 1910
(Sulman Family Archive)

⁴⁶ A E Sulman, *Some Familiar Wild Flowers*, Angus & Robertson Ltd, Sydney, no date [1915]; A E Sulman, *Australian Wild Flowers*, Second Series, Angus & Robertson Ltd, Sydney, no date.

⁴⁷ Sulman, *Some Familiar Wild Flowers*, Prefatory Note.

⁴⁸ Sulman, *Australian Wild Flowers*, Preface.

From an early age Tom was obsessed with motor vehicles. The sections of his autobiography dealing with life in the Blue Mountains discuss little else. He recalls in some detail how in about 1908 he had his first ride in a motorcar, which the family hired for a journey from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves. ‘The trip’, he writes:

*was very little faster than the usual transport – a coach and four – but what a thrill!. Even though it boiled furiously and numerous stops had to be made to cool down and refill the radiator, and we had to get out and walk up Victoria Pass on the return run.*⁴⁹

When he was about 10 Tom decided to become a racing car driver. He built a billycart with pram wheels, a steering wheel cut out of the side of a butter box, and cable and bobbin steering. He then constructed a track down the slope of Kihilla’s orchard with various types of corners, a hard surface of rolled cinders and a fairly steep gradient. He practised for hours on this. At weekends Geoffrey timed him with a stopwatch and started him off with a homemade flintlock pistol. Later Tom built what he called a ‘de luxe’ model with pushbike wheels that he used to go down a steep hill on the main road. This proved his undoing. The steering failed and as there were no brakes the billycart went over a cliff and was destroyed. Tom only just managed to jump clear.⁵⁰



Desk, Woodford Academy, 2014
(David Carment)

He entered Woodford Academy as its 83rd enrolment on 2 February 1912. The school was then only five years old. Located in a former inn built during the early

⁴⁹ Sulman, ‘Autobiography’, p 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p 3.

1830s, with John McManamey as owner and Rector it offered a curriculum based on the liberal arts. Commercial subjects were also available. Rather oddly, the admissions register describes Tom as a Congregationalist⁵¹ although John had abandoned Congregationalism for Anglicanism shortly after arriving in Australia, he and Annie were married in an Anglican church, and Tom described himself as Church of England when he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in 1918.⁵² Tom's autobiography says very little about his schooling and does not even directly mention Woodford Academy. 'I am afraid', he observes,

I could never boast of my scholastic ability, the main trouble being that most of my schooldays were during the war and my ambition was to follow in Geoffrey's footsteps and enlist in the Royal Flying Corps, beyond this I could not think.⁵³

That, however, is something of an exaggeration, as Geoffrey did not join the Flying Corps until 1916. Tom's best subject was Mathematics.⁵⁴ He also performed quite well in athletics events.⁵⁵ He finished school at the end of 1917⁵⁶ but left a permanent legacy in the form of his name prominently carved into a desk.⁵⁷ By October 1918 he was studying Engineering at the University of Sydney but that may have been, like Geoffrey, as an unmatriculated student.⁵⁸ He maintained contact with the school, in 1922 being elected to the committee of the Woodford Old Boys' Union.⁵⁹

Immediately after leaving school he worked on his brother Arthur's North Queensland station.⁶⁰ On 5 November 1918, just before the First World War ended

⁵¹ Admissions register, Woodford Academy; Woodford Academy – History – Blue Mountains Australia BMPH, http://infobluemountains.net.au/history/wood_ac.htm, accessed 16 February 2014.

⁵² Sulman, 'Reminiscences', p 47; National Archives of Australia: B2455, SULMAN THOMAS NOEL, <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au>, accessed 15 February 2014.

⁵³ Sulman, 'Autobiography', pp 7-8.

⁵⁴ Display on Tom Sulman, Woodford Academy, viewed 15 February 2014.

⁵⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 November 1912; *Nepean Times*, 23 November 1912.

⁵⁶ Sulman, 'Autobiography', p 9.

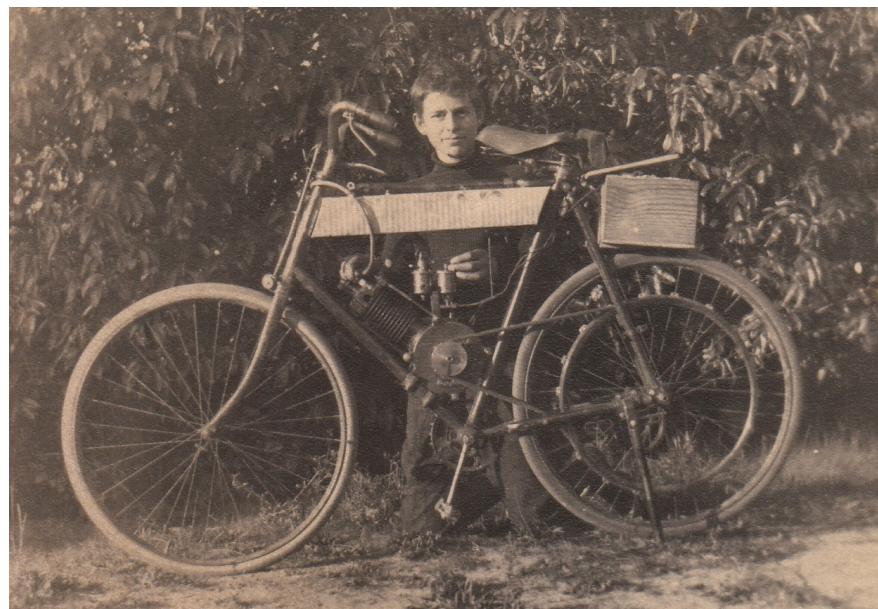
⁵⁷ Viewed 15 February 2014.

⁵⁸ Certification of enrolment, University of Sydney, 9 October 1918, SFA.

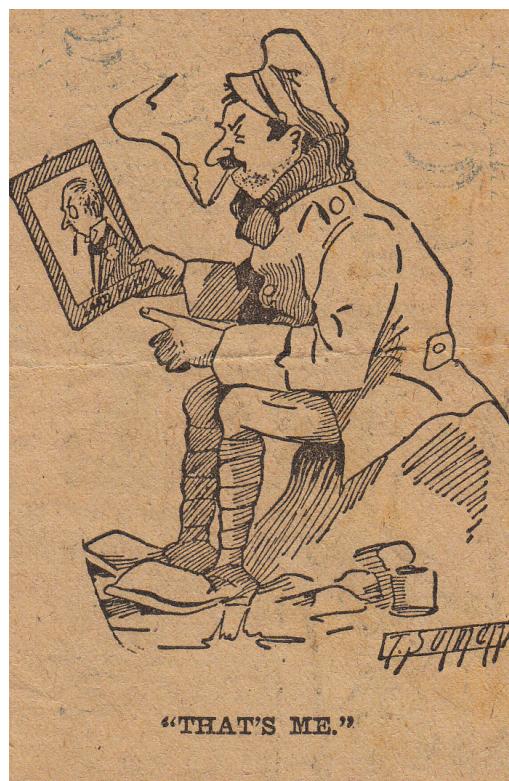
⁵⁹ *Sunday Times*, 22 January 1922.

⁶⁰ Sulman, 'Autobiography', pp 9-11.

and with his parents' reluctant agreement, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force. He was discharged in early January 1919.⁶¹



Tom with his motorcycle, Kihilla, about 1915
(Sulman Family Archive)



Tom Sulman, "That's Me", cutting from *The World's News*, no date [1917]
(Sulman Family Archive)

⁶¹ National Archives of Australia, B2455.

During the years at Woodford Academy, Tom continued to spend as much time as he could with motor vehicles. His main reading was motorcar and motorcycle magazines. At the age of 15 he resurrected Geoffrey's old two and a quarter horsepower motorcycle from the scrap heap. After fitting it with a magneto and carburettor, he took it out on surreptitious rides until he got his licence and had the motorcycle registered at the end of 1916. Because he could not afford much petrol, he ran the vehicle on kerosene taken from the household supply with a bottle of petrol in his pocket to start it up. The motorcycle broke down so frequently that Tom believed he must have pushed it further than he rode it. Eventually it fell apart, sending Tom into a ditch as it did so. This was, he writes, 'the first time I broke my nose and had concussion, not the last by any means'. With John's financial help, he then bought a six horsepower racing motorcycle that proved more reliable.⁶² An accomplished pen and ink artist, Tom covered the costs of running this vehicle by regularly publishing cartoons in the Sydney newspaper *The World's News*.⁶³

Geoffrey taught Tom to drive the family S.P.A. car around Kihilla's grounds in about 1914. Following Geoffrey's departure for England, John decided that once Tom got his licence he could take over Geoffrey's driving responsibilities. Before then, because the car had been unused for quite a long time, Tom had to do a lot of mechanical work on it. He then for about a year from the beginning of 1917 drove the family in the car every weekend. The first journey proved a disaster as the tyres were perished, resulting in five punctures.⁶⁴ One journey involved, Tom recalls:

a 1000-mile tour, quite a major undertaking in those days as all roads were un-Macadmised outside the major cities and garages few and far between. Luckily we had a practically no-trouble run, except for several punctures and a couple of broken springs which were expected with the bad roads, cart springs and no shock absorbers. My father used to tell me to 'steady down' if the speed exceeded 40 m.p.h, except when we were overtaking another car when he would cast a blind eye on the

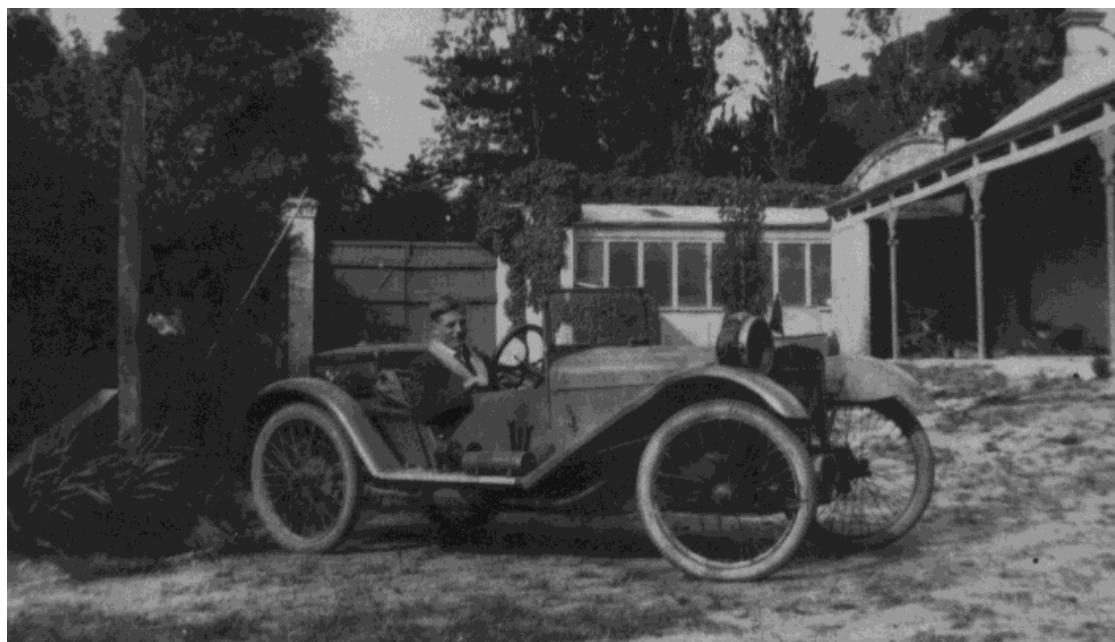
⁶² Sulman, 'Autobiography', pp 5-7.

⁶³ Tom Sulman, 'Fifty Years Racing', in *Australian Autosportsman*, January 1969, p 33.

⁶⁴ Sulman, 'Autobiography', p 8.

*speedometer until we passed, explaining to my mother that the dust was not good for her.*⁶⁵

Before Tom departed for North Queensland he taught Joan to drive the car. Because she was unable to start it, which required using a large handle, John replaced the S.P.A. with a 20 horsepower Dodge that was started more easily.⁶⁶



Tom in a Sulman Simplex, Kihilla, 1923
(Sulman Family Archive)

Although mostly based in Sydney, Tom's participation in motor vehicle races and trials between 1919 and his death while racing at Bathurst in 1970 sometimes brought him back to the Blue Mountains. He also until the late 1920s quite regularly stayed with the family at Kihilla. It was there during 1920 in Geoffrey's old workshop that he built a prototype of the Sulman Simplex cycle car that John financed. This was a two-seater, light tourer powered by a 12 horsepower, twin-cylinder, air-cooled engine. Despite a solid rear axle, it had a sporty performance. Tom found business interests prepared to provide further finance and by 1923 had in Sydney built three more of the cars that were well received. As the motoring journalist Pedr Davis tells the rest of the story:

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Orders for the light car were most impressive and Tom stood by, ready to launch a public company and enter the production field with gusto. Unfortunately, Lord Austin chose that precise moment to invade the Australian market with his diminutive “Seven”. Tom’s backers panicked and cooled off abruptly. Plans for the public company disintegrated and Tom was left with a bundle of parts and a flattened bank balance.⁶⁷

An enduring connection



Tom’s daughter Diana Inglis Carment (1927-2005) on holiday in the Blue Mountains,
1957
(Sulman Family Archive)

⁶⁷ Pedr Davis, ‘The Tom Sulman Story’, in *Sports Car World*, December 1957, p 59.

Even after the Sulmans stopped using Kihilla in 1934, various family members in addition to Tom travelled to the Blue Mountains. From the 1950s my own family went there quite frequently. In 1957, for example, we stayed in a rented house on Cliff Drive in Katoomba, enjoying walks, picnics and car trips to various beauty spots that the Sulmans first saw during the late nineteenth century. My mother Diana from time to time told stories of Kihilla, which she and her younger cousins once briefly owned. A few years ago I followed in my great grandmother Annie's footsteps by becoming involved in commemoration of the Blue Mountains' first European crossings.



The tradition continues – outdoor lunch at the Wentworth Falls home of Tom's granddaughter Annie Sulman Carment (1951-), 2013
(Vittorio Cintio)

A permanent family connection was re-established in 1987 when my sister Annie and her partner Vittorio Cintio bought a house in Wentworth Falls, the town where Tom Sulman was born. They have lived there ever since. My now deceased parents regularly went to see them. My brother Tom and his family and I have done the same. Three of Annie's five children, all educated at Korowal School in the Blue Mountains, have left home but her daughter Talulah Vane's house is very close to Woodford Academy. They often return to Wentworth Falls, particularly for the

lunches that Vittorio now organises on most Sundays where family and friends get together. As frequently as possible these are outdoors, continuing the tradition established at Kihilla so many years ago.

Between February and April 2015 my niece Talulah, an artist, arts writer and teacher, had an installation on display at Woodford Academy about her great grandfather Tom Sulman. Called 'Destination', it used what she called 'the imagined-truths and inherited identity of family legend' to inform a photographic and sculptural work.⁶⁸ It was concentrated in the former school rooms where Tom was a pupil and included hanging sculptures, a 'ghostly cup' symbolising Tom's many trophies, silken sculptures illustrating various aspects of Tom's life and a display of news clippings, trophies and other items. A reviewer of the installation commented that 'Destination' allowed for reflection on the important intersection of family history with local history.⁶⁹ I hope that this paper has done the same.



Display at 'Destination', 2015
(David Carment)

⁶⁸ Woodford Academy flyer for 'Destination', 2015.

⁶⁹ Museum Muser, Destination :: MGNSW, <http://mgnsw.org.au/articles/destination-installation-talulah-vane-woodford-academy/>, accessed 20 March 2015.

