## **WILLIS, David John (‘Dave’)**

David John Willis was born on 1st October 1880 at Boorowa, N.S.W. His parents were George Frederick & Deliah Willis. The family would later move to Beecroft.1

On 3rd November 1899 he and other men of “F Company” (Hornsby Junction) of the Australian Rifles, passed the medical examination, enabling them to join the contingent which left for the Cape in the S.S. *Aberdeen*. This was the first Australian contingent to South Africa to fight in the Boer War [1899-1902]. It was later said that, prior to his departure, that ‘he had been of great assistance to his father, who followed the avocation of a contractor.’2

In March 1900 it was reported: ‘When we got to Cole’s Kop, the Boers fired some shots at us, exploding well within a hundred yards of us. We got the word to trot, and some of us, myself included, were so surprised that we sat looking at the shells bursting. The captain had to roar at us to trot, and then, when we heard the guns go off the second time, we went at a gallop. Willis, of Beecroft, lost his rifle, and had to dismount and go back and find it, which he did.’3

In April 1900 it was reported: ‘During the afternoon a shell burst close to Private S. Atchison, of Carlingford. The poor fellow only lived four hours. The Church of England chaplain read the burial service, and Private Boulton had charge of a party to dig the grave. Willis, of Beecroft, was one of the party.’4

In September 1900 it was reported: ‘All well with nine of our Boys.’ [Includes D. Willis, of Beecroft, N.S.W. Infantry, formerly of the 6th Regiment.]5

On 1st October 1900 Private David John Willis was killed, on his 20th birthday.6

On Sunday 28th October a memorial service was held at the Church of England, Beecroft. About 400 people assembled to pay a last tribute of respect to his memory. As the church was far too small to accommodate so large a congregation, the service was conducted in the church grounds.7

On 29th October a public meeting at Beecroft was held for the purpose of deciding what steps should be taken to perpetuate his memory in some way. It was said that Dave Willis was a great favourite in Beecroft. It was decided to erect a memorial on the Village Green.8

In December 1900 it was ‘rumoured that Trooper Dave Willis, of Beecroft, is alive “at the front,” and not dead, as reported some weeks back. We much fear that the rumour is incorrect.’9

The Willis Memorial drinking fountain was unveiled on 24th November 1901. It was an imposing ceremony.

The inscription on the tablet reads as follows: —

“Erected

By the Residents of the District

In Memory of

DAVID JOHN WILLIS,

Killed in Battle

At

Elansskop, South Africa,

October 1st, 1900

Aged 20 Years.”10

**Bibliography**

1 N.S.W. Births, Deaths & Marriages

2 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 4 Nov 1899

3 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Wed 14 Mar 1900

4 Evening News, Wed 18 Apr 1900

5 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Wed 5 Sep 1900

6 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 3 Nov 1900

7 Australian Star (Sydney, NSW: 1887 - 1909), Tuesday 30 October 1900, page 7; Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW: 1883 - 1930), Wednesday 31 October 1900, page 7; Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW: 1883 - 1930), Wednesday 31 October 1900, page 7

8 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 20 Oct 1900; Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW: 1883 - 1930), Wednesday 31 October 1900, page 7; The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 3 Nov 1900

9 The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 1 Dec 1900

10 Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate (Parramatta, NSW: 1888 - 1950), Saturday 30 November 1901, page 10