

Albert Abbott

.... has required extensive research to firstly find the true identity of the player and then determine what his playing history was.

There were three players by the name of Abbott who were prominent and playing high level rugby union or rugby league in the Western Suburbs district between 1906 and 1909.

The first of these players was Stanley McFarlane Abbott (b. 1887) who was the son of William Abbott, a well-known businessman from Parramatta. Stanley was a product of Fort St High School and a very good goal kicking rugby union fullback who lived at North Parramatta.

He first came to prominence playing junior rugby union with Parramatta Iona B Grade in 1905 and went on to play 2nd Grade rugby union with the Parramatta District Club in 1906, 1907 and 1908. He trialled with the Wests First Grade rugby union team in 1907 and played one game coming off the bench.

Stanley Abbott also played with the Wests 2nd Grade rugby union team in 1909. There was one recording of an A. Abbott playing for the Parramatta 2nd Grade rugby union team in 1908 but this was likely to have been a misreporting.

To confuse matters, there was a Sam Abbott of Homebush who played for a local Burwood rugby union team at the end of 1907. In this team were a number of future Wests players. The players came to prominence on this occasion due to a riot which broke out on the Parramatta Park playing field involving both players and spectators. Sam Abbott was one of a number of players that was charged and required to attend Parramatta Court.

A check of public records verified that there was no person by the name of Sam Abbott living at Homebush at that time. This again appeared to be a misreporting of Stanley Abbott. However, this person was not Stanley McFarlane Abbott from North Parramatta. It was most likely Stanley Gordon Abbott (b. 1887), a first cousin of Albert Victor Gordon Abbott. This extended Abbott family was based in the Homebush/Flemington area.

The newspaper reports from 1908 show that S. Abbott was playing rugby union with the Parramatta Club while A. Abbott was playing rugby league with the Cumberland Club. Therefore, it is evident that these were two distinct players and as such there is nothing to substantiate that Stanley Abbott was the Wests player.

The second player identified was E. Abbott who played with Homebush and then Wests First Grade Rugby Union team in 1909. Again, there are no records to suggest that E. Abbott had any connection to Wests Rugby League Club.

A. Abbott was recorded playing five First Grade games with the Cumberland Rugby League Club in 1908 as well as the very first match that Cumberland played against Eastern Suburbs, being a curtain raiser for a NSW v All Blacks match in the same year.

He was selected at fullback, wing and on one occasion in the forwards. The core of the Cumberland players came from the Homebush/Flemington suburbs with a few from the outlying areas of Burwood and Parramatta.

The "headquarters" for the Cumberland team was the Horse and Jockey Hotel at Homebush and the main employers in the locality were the Homebush Saleyards and Abattoirs.

With applicable residential rules and limited modes of transport, The Cumberland Rugby League Club, like most others at this time, primarily drew its players from local families that lived, worked, and recreated together.

Therefore, when a search was undertaken for an A. Abbott, it would most likely be a player that lived locally and was in his early twenties. The only A. Abbott found that fits this categorisation was Albert Victor Gordon Abbott, who was born at Homebush in 1885. Albert's father, John Nelson Abbott who was employed as a Drover, lived in the Homebush District from at least 1870.

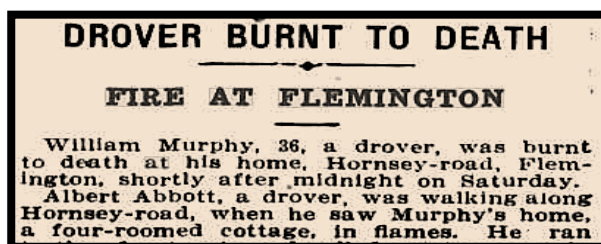
A player by the name of Abbott was first recorded playing with St Anne's Homebush rugby union B Grade team in 1905. In that team was Claude McFayden, Richard Casey, and Bert Hearne, who all went on and played First Grade football. Given the locality, ages of the players and associations, the player Abbott was most likely Albert Abbott

Albert Abbott was a Drover and later a Cattle Classer, which would suggest that he was employed at the Homebush Saleyards and Abattoirs and given his evolving employment classification was probably there for a substantial period. At least two other Cumberland players, Harold Bloomfield and Richard Casey who played for Wests in 1909, were also employed as Drovers.

Albert Abbott married in January 1909 and the marriage was registered in the neighbouring District of Canterbury. Albert's in-laws were from the Parramatta District. There are no Electoral Roll or Sands Directory recordings for Albert Abbott prior to 1920 which suggest that he may have not been a primary householder and may have been moving around from time to time.

The earliest record giving an indication of where Albert Abbott was living was when a Bench Warrant was issued by Burwood Court in March 1912, when Albert appeared to have gone to Queensland droving and had not provided financial support for his wife. Albert returned to Sydney soon after and his daughter was born in June 1913. At that time the family were living in Smith St. Summer Hill. The arrest warrant issued in 1912 was withdrawn at the Burwood Court in 1914, again placing the family in the locality.

Albert Abbott and his wife were living at his sister's residence in Tavistock St Flemington in 1915, when Albert enlisted with the AIF. This is further supported by a news article in January 1916 when Albert Abbott was reported finding a house on fire in Hornsey Rd Flemington. Hornsey Rd intersects with Tavistock St.



The Sun 24 January 1916

Albert made an appearance at Burwood Police Station in February 1916, when he was arrested for deserting the Army. The warrant was enforced by the local police which again indicates that he was living locally.

Albert Abbott enlisted with the AIF on 28 November 1915 and was posted to the Depot Battalion at Casula, NSW. Albert was in camp for only two days when he deserted from the Casula Army Camp. He was not issued any military equipment nor received any pay. A letter on his military file, dated 21

February 1916 indicates that he didn't return as his wife objected to him enlisting. However, when this letter was written, Albert Abbott had been arrested and was incarcerated at Darlinghurst Gaol the day before. It is likely that he was under some duress and was looking for a reasonable explanation to lessen the serious trouble that he was facing.

However, there is a broader perspective to Albert Abbott's desertion. In context, there was an ongoing problem with discipline and conditions at the enlistment camps during the later part of 1915. Many of the men that signed up expecting to see action were confined to the overcrowded camps in the Liverpool area awaiting transport to the Middle East.

The men were often bored doing mundane tasks and drills and the living conditions were uncomfortable. The recruits wanted more flexible leave arrangements and a canteen serving alcohol. They resented what they perceived as better conditions in the adjacent internment camp for 'enemy aliens.'

This culminated in a strike by 5,000 enlistees at the Casula Camp, who on the morning of 14 February 1916, marched on the nearby town of Liverpool. They were quickly joined by a further 10,000 enlistees from adjacent camps and together they took over the local hotels, drinking the town dry and creating damage throughout the town. The mob then went to Liverpool Station, commandeered trains which took them to Central Station where the rampage continued.

Eventually the Police were reinforced by soldiers brought in from the camp at the Sydney Showground and during the evening the rioting soldiers were gradually rounded up and moved back to Central Station for the return trip to Liverpool. Late in the evening some of the rioters, still angry, started hurling objects at the Police and Military Pickets. In the chaos, shots were fired and one enlistee was killed and seven others wounded. This quelled the situation and the authorities regained control.

Court Marshalls followed, and 279 enlistees were discharged. Another 36 were dealt with in the Civil Courts where sentences of one or more months hard labour were handed out to most, while the ring leaders received up to 5 years gaol. An unexpected outcome of the riotous behaviour and drunkenness was that, within 4 months of the riot, the NSW Government introduced 6pm closing for hotels, which remained in force until 1955.

It is not known whether Albert Abbott took part in the riot, but he was certainly caught up in the aftermath. His name appeared in the NSW Police Gazette as a deserter along with quite a number of enlistees that supposedly deserted on 7 & 8 January 1916 (Albert actually deserted in the previous November or early December, so it appears that the military was catching up on a number of the absconders sometime after the actual event). Albert was described as a Drover, born at Homebush, NSW

A warrant was issued for his arrest on 31 January 1916 and he was arrested on 19 February 1916 (5 days after the Liverpool riot). A letter on Albert's military file dated 20 February 1916 from Private J. Karistonis (Military Police) noted; "On instructions from Cpl. of the day, I proceeded to Burwood Police Station and received and escorted Pte. Abbott to Darlinghurst Gaol and handed him over to the Guard. The Civil Police arrested him as there was a warrant out for his arrest for desertion." Albert Abbott was formally discharged from the Army on 22 February 1916, with a note, "No longer required."

The military authorities were criticised for their actions. The camps in the Liverpool area had problems well before the outbreak of the Great War which were not rectified. Due to the surge in enlistments and the problems of maintaining discipline at the inner city Sydney Showground Camp, a deliberate decision was made to encamp new enlistees in the relatively remote area west and south of Liverpool,

NSW. Placing young men in such a location with a lot of time on their hands and without any real plan as to how to manage the situation, could only lead to disgruntlement.

Albert Abbott lived his life in Sydney and died at Enmore, NSW in August 1960. He was buried at Rookwood Cemetery, Anglican Section 19, Grave 3434.

Turning to the second question. Did A. Abbott actually play for Wests? The only record found of A. Abbott playing for Wests was in Round 1 of the 1909 season in a First Grade match against Newtown. The post-match reports in some newspapers describe "Abbott" putting in a strong run leading to a try by Claude Wallis and that he was one of the "best backs." These references were reported in the Sunday Times, Sydney Morning Herald and the Sydney Mail newspapers between 26 April and 28 April 1909.

However, there is an opposing account where Albert Halling is attributed to have played the match, and it was him that gave the final pass to Claude Wallis who scored a try. A post-match report also noted that Halling had; "improved a good bit on his previous Saturday's condition." Importantly it was Albert Halling that appeared in the published team lists prior to the match and not A. Abbott. Abbott appears in a team list published by the Sydney Morning Herald on the day after the match and coincides with a match report in the same edition. References to Albert Halling were found in the Evening News, the Star, the Arrow and Sydney Sportsman newspapers between 23 April and 28 April 1909.

A check of the Wests 2nd Grade team list for that day does not indicate that either player was in that team or were reserves nominated for First Grade. Therefore, it had to be either A. Abbott or Albert Halling that played on the wing for Wests First Grade against Newtown, but which one?

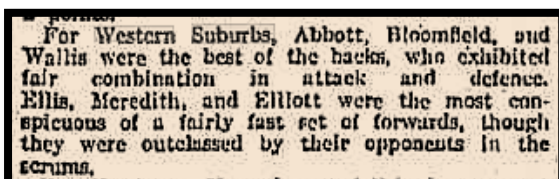
The attached news extracts below could make a case for either of these players taking the field and it cannot be conclusively confirmed that it was one or the other. However, there are some other factors to be considered which might give further insight. A. Abbott was not recorded playing for Wests at any other time during 1909. He may have played in the trial matches in April of that year, but no record exists nor was there any news commentary about him contributing to the team at that time.

On the other hand, Albert Halling was mentioned on a number of occasions in newspapers during the trial matches, both for his playing contribution and scoring. Albert Halling was not in top condition during the trials but it was evident that he was showing sufficient form to be selected for the opening competition match. Albert Halling went on to play further First Grade games with Wests in 1909.

Given all of the factors and looking at the situation objectively, it would have to be said that it was highly likely it was Albert Halling who played First Grade for Wests in Round 1 of the competition against Newtown and that Albert Abbott never played First Grade football with Wests.

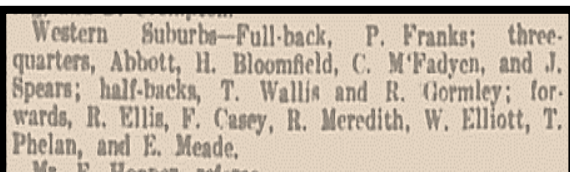
The following news extracts have been found for the Wests v Newtown game in Round 1 of 1909. As it can be seen there is a case for both Albert Halling and A. Abbott playing in that match.

Albert Abbott



For Western Suburbs, Abbott, Bloomfield, and Wallis were the best of the backs, who exhibited fair combination in attack and defence. Ellis, Meredith, and Elliott were the most conspicuous of a fairly fast set of forwards, though they were outclassed by their opponents in the scrums.

Sunday Times 25 April 1909



Western Suburbs—Full-back, P. Franks; three-quarters, Abbott, H. Bloomfield, C. M'Fadyen, and J. Spears; half-backs, T. Wallis and R. Gormley; forwards, R. Ellis, F. Casey, R. Meredith, W. Elliott, T. Phelan, and E. Meade.

SMH 26 April 1909

verted. Following up a fast run by Abbott, Wallis secured and scored a meritorious try, which Ellis converted. R. Meredith, of Western Suburbs, kicked at the ball at the same time as Newtown forward and

SMH 26 April 1909

...ing, the latter scored a try, which Ellis converted. Following up a fast run by Abbott, Wallis secured and scored a meritorious try, which Ellis converted. Newtown attacked, but failed to find a scoring opening through lack of cohesion. The game ended in a win for Western Suburbs by 10 points to 3.

The Sydney Mail 28 April 1909

Albert Halling

WESTERN SUBURBS.—Full-back, P. Franks; three-quarters, A. Halling, C. M'Fadgen, H. Bloomfield, J. Spears; halves, T. Wallis, R. Gormly; forwards, R. Ellis, W. Elliott, F. Casey, T. Phelan, R. Meredith, E. Meade. Reserves: F. Jarvis, M. Marshall.

Evening News 23 April 1909

Western Suburbs.—Full-back, P. Franks; three-quarters, A. Halling, C. M'Fadyen, H. Bloomfield, J. Spears; halves, T. Wallis, R. Gormley; forwards, R. Ellis, W. Elliott, F. Casey, T. Phelan, R. Meredith, E. Meade.

The Star 24 Apr 1909

Newtown, 3 points. By a smart, dodgy run Halling carried the ball to within 10 yards of the line, passing to Wallis, who crossed. Ellis converted. Western Suburbs, 10; Newtown, 3. A delay occurred for some 10 min.

The Star 24 Apr 1909

The following will represent Western Suburbs to-day: P. Franks, back; E. Halling, C. McFadyen, H. Bloomfield, J. Spears, three-quarters; F. Wallis and R. Gormley, halves; R. Ellis, W. Elliott, F. Casey, T. Phelan, R. Meredith, E. Meade, forwards. It is about the strongest team

The Arrow 24 April 1909

Bloomfield made his first appearance, but was short of a gallop or two.
Halling improved a good bit on his previous Saturday's condition.