

## **Isabella (Isobel) Saltau**

**Maiden Name:** GRAHAM (married name SALTAU)

**Born:** 31 August 1861 in Dennington (near Woodford), Victoria<sup>i</sup>

**Married:** John SALTAU in St John's Presbyterian Church, Warrnambool on the 12 October 1887<sup>ii</sup>

**Died:** 16 October 1940, aged 79, at her daughter-in-law's residence 11 Barrow Street Brunswick<sup>iii</sup>

**Buried:** 17 October 1940. Isabel was cremated at the Fawkner Memorial Park and her ashes were scattered.<sup>iv</sup>

**Father:** Daniel McIntosh GRAHAM

**Mother:** Margaret GRAHAM (nee DAVIES)

**Spouse:** John SALTAU

**Spouse Parents:** Henry SALTAU and Ann (nee MCKENZIE)

**Religion:** Presbyterian

### **Children:**

Victor Leslie SALTAU (born 1888)

Mabel Ellen (born 1890)

Heinrich Gordon (born 1891)

Belle Vera (born 1893)

John Brian Gordon (born 1896)

Melba Irene Cecilia (born 1902)

### **Residences:**

In 1891 she was living at Timor Street, Warrnambool<sup>v</sup>

In 1906 she was living at 146 Gladstone Street, South Melbourne<sup>vi</sup>

By 1925 she was living at 7 Kendall Street, Essendon<sup>vii</sup>

### **Life Story**

Isabella was one of eleven children born to her Scottish parents who had arrived separately in Australia and settled in the Warrnambool district soon after. She was their fifth child. Her father was working as a storekeeper in Dennington when she was born. At the age of 26, Isabella married 23 year old carrier, John Saltau at St John's Presbyterian Church,

Warrnambool on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1887<sup>viii</sup> and the couple settled in Timor Street. The following year their first child was born and five others followed. During the year that her third child was born, she signed the Women's Suffrage Petition (image below).



John not only ran a furniture carrier business which was situated in Lava Street Warrnambool <sup>ix</sup> but he also sold fruit trees and various plants as a sideline at Market Square in Hamilton to support his wife and young family. <sup>x</sup>

Between 1903 and 1906 they left Warrnambool to reside in Melbourne and records indicate that life after the move was not easy.

Isobel was seriously assaulted by her neighbour, Mary Walker in 1906 and John took the assailant to court. Isabella appeared in the South Melbourne Court with her head bandaged and accounts state that she looked very weak and ill. She told the court that on October 27<sup>th</sup> she had heard an altercation in the right-of-way that divided her house from Mrs Walker's. Her children were playing there, so she had gone outside to see what was happening and discovered that Mary Walker had a jug in her hand and was speaking to the children. The jug contained dirty water and when Mary saw Isabel, she threw some of it over her and then proceeded to smash the jug over Isabella's face. Isabella was taken to the Melbourne Hospital where seven stitches were put in the wound. Isabel had bled a lot and had been very weak ever since. In defence, Mrs Walker accused Isabel of having a whip in her hand and striking her with it. Mary said that the children had been annoying her and calling offensive things to her. She had been standing on her doorstep when Isabel rushed at her with a whip and endeavoured to strike her. To protect herself from the whip, Mary had held the jug up and the jug was subsequently broken by the whip. She thought that Isabel's face was cut by the fact she had run into the jug. In response, Isabel stated that she gave Mary no provocation and did not strike at her. The whip (which was produced in court) belonged to the children and they had been playing with it. Both parties had their children testify on their behalf. The court decided that a grievous assault had been committed upon Isabel and Mary Walker was fined £5 in default of one month's imprisonment with £1/1s costs. <sup>xi</sup>

Eight years later, WW1 commenced and like many other mothers, Isabella felt the wrench when two of her sons Victor and John Brian (known as Brian) enlisted. Both never came home. Victor lost his life from injuries incurred during the Gallipoli campaign on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915<sup>xii</sup> and Brian was killed by machine gun fire near Bapaume, France on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1917.<sup>xiii</sup> She placed memorial notices in various newspapers for many years afterwards, clearly indicating that the heartache of her loss never left her.

Her sons were not the only ones to leave her life early. Eight years after Brian's death, John passed away, aged 61 in their Essendon home on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1925.<sup>xiv</sup> An autopsy was held

the following day to determine his cause of death and fortunately (and no doubt much to Isabel's relief), it was decided that a coroner's inquest was unnecessary as it was determined that he had died from a cerebral haemorrhage and kidney disease.<sup>xv</sup> John was buried on the 15<sup>th</sup> April at the New Cemetery, Melbourne (now known as Fawkner Memorial Park).<sup>xvi</sup>

Isabel never remarried and by all accounts continued to live at her Essendon address until her last days where she was obviously taken to her daughter-in-law's home in Brunswick to be cared for. She died there on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 1940, aged 79.<sup>xvii</sup> She had suffered from cerebral thrombosis (stroke) two weeks earlier and this had no doubt occurred due the arteriosclerosis which she had suffered from for many years. However, three days prior to her passing she had developed broncho-pneumonia and this was the actual cause of her death.<sup>xviii</sup> A funeral service was held for Isabella on the 17<sup>th</sup> October at the Fawkner Memorial Park and her remains were cremated and scattered.<sup>xix</sup> A brief death notice was placed in *The Age* on the day of her funeral:

*"On Oct 16, at her daughter-in-law's residence, 11 Barro Street, Brunswick, Isabella, widow of the late John Saltau, loved mother of Victor (deceased, late A.I.F), Mabel (Mrs McNeil), Henry, Vera (Mrs Sheedy), Brian (deceased, late A.I.F) and Melba (Mrs Love), aged 79 years. Peacefully sleeping."*

In the eyes of the world, Isabella was not a remarkable lady. She did not make a habit of making the headlines and was obviously content with being a housewife and caring for her family. She clearly possessed an inner strength and determination, and was a quiet achiever. A testament to these traits was her decision to sign the 1891 Women's Suffrage Petition – no noise, no fuss. Just doing what she thought to be right. She helped to give Victorian women a voice and her daughters, granddaughters and all the women to come in her future generations owe a lot to Isabella and the others of her ilk (as do all Victorian women). Unremarkable in world status she may have been, but to her family and all Victorian women she was one of the most remarkable women of her time.

Rest in peace Isabella. You quietly made your mark in the world.

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<sup>i</sup> Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Births, Reference Number: 14991/1861

<sup>ii</sup> Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Marriages, Reference Number: 6958/1887

<sup>iii</sup> Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and marriages, Reference Number: 10632/1940

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.gmct.com.au/deceased>

<sup>v</sup> Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Births, Reference Number: 38066/1891

<sup>vi</sup> 1906 'A SERIOUS ASSAULT.', *The Herald (Melbourne, Vic. : 1861 - 1954)*, 5 November, p. 3. , viewed 13 Apr 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article242567547>

and

1906 'STRUCK WITH A JUG.', *Record (Emerald Hill, Vic. : 1881 - 1954)*, 10 November, p. 4. , viewed 13 Apr 2023,

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article162257031>

<sup>vii</sup> Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Deaths, Reference Number: 5133/1925

<sup>viii</sup> Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Marriages, Reference Number: 6958/1887

<sup>ix</sup> Various newspaper advertisements but one of them is: 1898 'Advertising', *Camperdown Chronicle (Vic. : 1875 - 1954)*, 24 December, p. 3. , viewed 13 Apr 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article35714251>

<sup>x</sup> Various newspaper advertisements. One of these is: 1900 'Advertising', *Hamilton Spectator (Vic. : 1870 - 1918)*, 12 June, p. 3. , viewed 13 Apr 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article225691956>

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- <sup>xi</sup> 1906 'A SERIOUS ASSAULT.', *The Herald (Melbourne, Vic. : 1861 - 1954)*, 5 November, p. 3. , viewed 13 Apr 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article242567547>  
and 1906 'STRUCK WITH A JUG.', *Record (Emerald Hill, Vic. : 1881 - 1954)*, 10 November, p. 4. , viewed 13 Apr 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article162257031>
- <sup>xii</sup> NAA:B2455, SALTAU VICTOR LESLIE and <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/159749>
- <sup>xiii</sup> NAA: B2455, SALTAU BRIAN JOHN and <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1500933>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Deaths, Reference Number: 5133/1925
- <sup>xv</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>xvi</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>xvii</sup> Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Deaths, Reference Number: 10632/1940
- <sup>xviii</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>xix</sup> *Ibid* and <https://www.gmct.com.au/deceased>  
1940 'Family Notices', *The Age (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954)*, 17 October, p. 1. , viewed 14 Apr 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article204394825>