

**Colchester Cemetery,
Colchester, Essex
War Graves**



Lest We Forget

World War 1



10973 DRIVER

W. R. BENNETT

AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERS

23RD NOVEMBER, 1918

William Richard BENNETT

William Richard Bennett was born at Maffra, Victoria in 1889 to parents John & Elizabeth Bennett (nee James).

William Richard Bennett was a 25 year old, single, Horse Driver from Bennett Street, Dandenong, Victoria when he enlisted in Melbourne, Victoria on 21st February, 1916 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 10973 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his father – Mr John Bennett, Dandenong, Victoria.

William Richard Bennett was posted to Engineer Reinforcements on 21st February, 1916 for recruit training. He was transferred to 10th Field Company Engineers on 29th March, 1916.

10th Field Company Engineers

Training was carried out at Seymour.

Drivers – Driving, riding and horse management; care and cleaning of harness; musketry; semaphore signalling; field geometry; knotting, splicing and lashing.

Driver William Richard Bennett embarked from Melbourne, Victoria on HMAT *Runic (A54)* on 20th June, 1916 with the 10th Field Company Engineers, 1st Reinforcements & disembarked at Plymouth, England on 10th August, 1916. Driver Bennett had been sent to Ship's Hospital from 25th to 27th June, 1916 suffering from Influenza.

Reinforcements were only given basic training in Australia. Training was completed in training units in England. Some of these were located in the Salisbury Plain & surrounding areas in the county of Wiltshire, also Dorset & Essex counties.

Driver William Richard Bennett was taken on strength at Australian Engineers, 10th Training Company, Brightlingsea, England on 9th September, 1916. He was sent to Colchester Hospital, England on 10th September, 1916 with Scabies. (The Brightlingsea Royal Engineers' Training Depot was to be the Australian Engineers' training camp in England. The 10th and 11th Field Companies were the first Australians to be sent there.)

Driver William Richard Bennett was marched out to Christchurch on 31st October, 1916 from 10th Training Company, Larkhill. He was marched in to Australian Engineers at Perham Downs, Wiltshire on 1st November, 1916 from Larkhill, Wiltshire.

Driver William Richard Bennett was sent sick to Boscombe Military Hospital on 6th December, 1916. He was marched in to Australian Engineers at Brightlingsea on 12th January, 1917. The next entry records he was marched in from Hospital on 18th February, 1917.

Mr George Wise, Esq., M. P., Sale Victoria wrote to Base Records on 30th December, 1916 stating that Mr & Mrs John Bennett of Boisdale "*received a great shock about 10 days ago through getting a letter from Mr Kearst, M.L.A. sympathising with them on account of the death at the front of their son. They have not received any communications from your Office & are naturally, greatly concerned to know whether their son has been killed or not.*" Base Records replied on 2nd January, 1917 stating that no report of any description had been received concerning Driver W. R. Bennett.

Driver William Richard Bennett was written up for an Offence on 28th January, 1917 – Travelling by rail without a ticket. He was awarded 2 days F.P. No. 2 (Field Punishment).

Driver William Richard Bennett proceeded overseas to France via Folkestone on 26th February, 1917 on S.S. *Invicta* from Training Depot at Christchurch. He was marched in to A.G.B.D. (Australian General Base Depot) at Etaples, France on 27th February, 1917.

Driver William Richard Bennett was sent sick to Hospital at Etaples on 3rd March, 1917. He was admitted to 26th General Hospital at Etaples on 4th March, 1917 with a skin disease. He was marched out to Base Depot on 15th March, 1917 & rejoined A.G.B.D. from Hospital the same day.

Driver William Richard Bennett was transferred to 10th Field Company on 28th March, 1917 & was taken on strength of 10th Field Company in the Field on 29th March, 1917.

Driver William Richard Bennett was sent sick to Hospital on 20th April, 1917. He was admitted to 11th Australian Field Ambulance on 20th April, 1917 with Scabies then transferred to Nth Casualty Clearing Station on 23rd April, 1917. He was discharged to duty on 28th April, 1917 & rejoined his Unit on 29th April, 1917.

Driver William Richard Bennett was wounded in action on 5th June, 1917. He was evacuated to Casualty Clearing Station on 5th June, 1917 then transferred & admitted to 83rd General Hospital at Boulogne, France on 6th June, 1917 with G.S.W. (gunshot wound/s) to face. Driver Bennett was admitted to No. 1 Convalescent Depot on 8th June, 1917 then discharged to 3rd Divisional Rest Camp on 20th June, 1917.

War Diary – 10th Field Company, Australian Engineers

5th June, 1917 – Le Romarin

Working parties withdrawn from Line.

(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)

Driver William Richard Bennett was due two Blue Chevrons on 20th June, 1917.

Blue Chevron

In January 1918 the AIF also approved the wearing of the overseas service chevrons which had been adopted by the British Army. These were embroidered or woven inverted chevrons worn above the cuff on the right arm. Due to a shortage of supply, some men had chevrons privately made. For each year of war service a blue chevron was awarded and those men who had embarked in 1914 received a red chevron to indicate that years' service.

(Information from The Australian War Memorial)

Driver William Richard Bennett was marched in to A.G.B.D. (Australian General Base Depot) at Rouelles on 23rd June, 1917 from Hospital. He was marched out from A.G.B.D. on 3rd July, 1917 & rejoined his Unit in the Field on 4th July, 1917.

Mr J. Bennett, of Dandenong, Victoria, was advised by Base Records on 24th June, 1917 that Driver W. R. Bennett had been wounded.

Driver William Richard Bennett proceeded on leave to England on 18th March, 1918 & rejoined 10th Field Company Engineers from leave on 8th April, 1918.

Driver William Richard Bennett was wounded in action (2nd occasion) on 14th August, 1918. He was admitted to 53rd Field Ambulance on 14th August, 1918 then transferred to same day to Casualty Clearing Station with bullet wound to left Scapula. Driver Bennett was admitted to 5th General Hospital at Rouen, France on 16th August, 1918. He was transferred to Ambulance Train 15 on 18th August, 1918 to be invalided to England. Driver Bennett embarked for England on 19th August, 1918 on Hospital Ship *Essequibo*.

War Diary – 10th Field Company, Australian Engineers

13/14th August, 1918 – Coy resting. Telegram received on 14/8/18 to move on 15th in Brigade Groups to HARBONNIERES-CAIX area. Advance parties proceeded today,

15th August, 1918 – Coy standing to ready to move. Orders received cancelling move.

(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)

[The History of 10th Field Coy. Engineers records that Driver William Richard Bennett was wounded in action on 15th August, 1918 at Vaux Sur, Somme.]

Driver William Richard Bennett was admitted to Bath War Hospital, Bath, England on 26th August, 1918 with G.S.W. to right Scapula – severe. He was discharged from Bath War Hospital on 31st August, 1918 for furlough to 14th September, 1918 & was then to report to No. 1 Command Depot at Sutton Veny, Wiltshire.

Mr J. Bennett, of Dandenong, Victoria, was advised by Base Records on 28th August, 1918 that Driver W. R. Bennett had been wound – 2nd occasion. A follow up letter on 5th September, 1918 advised that Driver W. R. Bennett had been admitted to Bath War Hospital, Bath, England on 20th August, 1918 with a gunshot wound to right scapula – severe.

Driver William Richard Bennett was marched in to No. 1 Command Depot at Sutton Veny, Wiltshire, England on 19th September, 1918.

Driver William Richard Bennett was written up for an Offence - A.W.L. from 23.59hrs on 29th September till 6.30 hrs on 30th September, 1918. This was admonished by Major H. Clayton on 3rd October, 1918 & forfeited 1 days' pay.

Driver William Richard Bennett was marched out to Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge Deverill, Wiltshire from Sutton Veny on 16th October, 1918.

Driver William Richard Bennett was marched in to Engineers Training Depot at Brightlingsea on 1st November, 1918 from Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge Deverill.

Driver William Richard Bennett was sent sick to Colchester Hospital (no date recorded).

Driver William Richard Bennett died at 19.30 hrs on 23rd November, 1918 at General Military Hospital, Colchester, Essex, England from Influenza.

A death for William R. Bennett, aged 28, was registered in the December quarter, 1918 in the district of Colchester, Essex, England.

Driver William Richard Bennett was buried on 28th November, 1918 in Colchester Cemetery, Colchester, Essex, England – Grave number 66, Section B 10. From the burial report of Driver William Richard Bennett - *Coffin was Pine, good, brass mounts. The deceased soldier was accorded a full Military funeral, Firing Party, Bugler and Pallbearers being in attendance. The coffin was draped with the Union Jack, and surmounted by several beautiful wreaths sent by:- Hospital Staff and Residents of Colchester. The "Last Post" was sounded at the graveside, and the burial service conducted by the Rev. S. F. Cunningham C.F. of Colchester. The grave will be turfed and an oak cross erected by the A.I.F. London. Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F. London were represented at the funeral.*

Names of Relatives and Friends present at the Funeral – Capt. Potts, Adjutant, A.E.T.D, Lieut. Laurence, Capt. Chap. J. E. Nicholls and many Australian soldiers.

The 3rd Military District contacted Base Records on 5th December, 1918 in reply to their previous request to advise that the next-of-kin of the late Driver W. R. Bennett was residing at Boisdale, Victoria.

Base Records contacted Mr J. Bennett, Boisdale, Victoria, father of the late Driver W. R. Bennett, in April, 1920 to advise that information had been received that the remains of his son had "*been exhumed from the former site & re-interred in Grave No. 86 Section T. 5 in Colchester Cemetery. This work is carried out with every measure of care and reverence in the presence of a Chaplain.*"

Driver William Richard Bennett has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

Driver William Richard Bennett was entitled to British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Driver Bennett's father – Mr J. Bennett, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll sent July, 1921 & Plaque sent November, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Driver W. R. Bennett – service number 10973, of 10th Field Coy., Australian Engineers. No family details are listed.

W. Bennett is remembered on the Maffra Shire Honour Roll, located in Maffra Library, Johnson & Foster Streets, Maffra, Victoria.



Maffra Shire Honour Roll (Photos from Monument Australia)

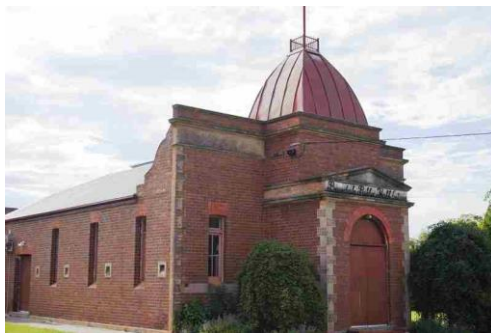


W. Bennett was also remembered with a tree planted on Maffra's Avenue of Honour. The Avenue of Honour was planted by the Maffra Soldiers Welfare League to honour the men of the district who died in service or were killed in action in World War One. 139 men from the district paid the supreme sacrifice. The trees were planted along the Maffra-Sale Road. The plaque below is now located on the Maffra Cenotaph which was originally the start of the Avenue of Honour. The avenue no longer exists.



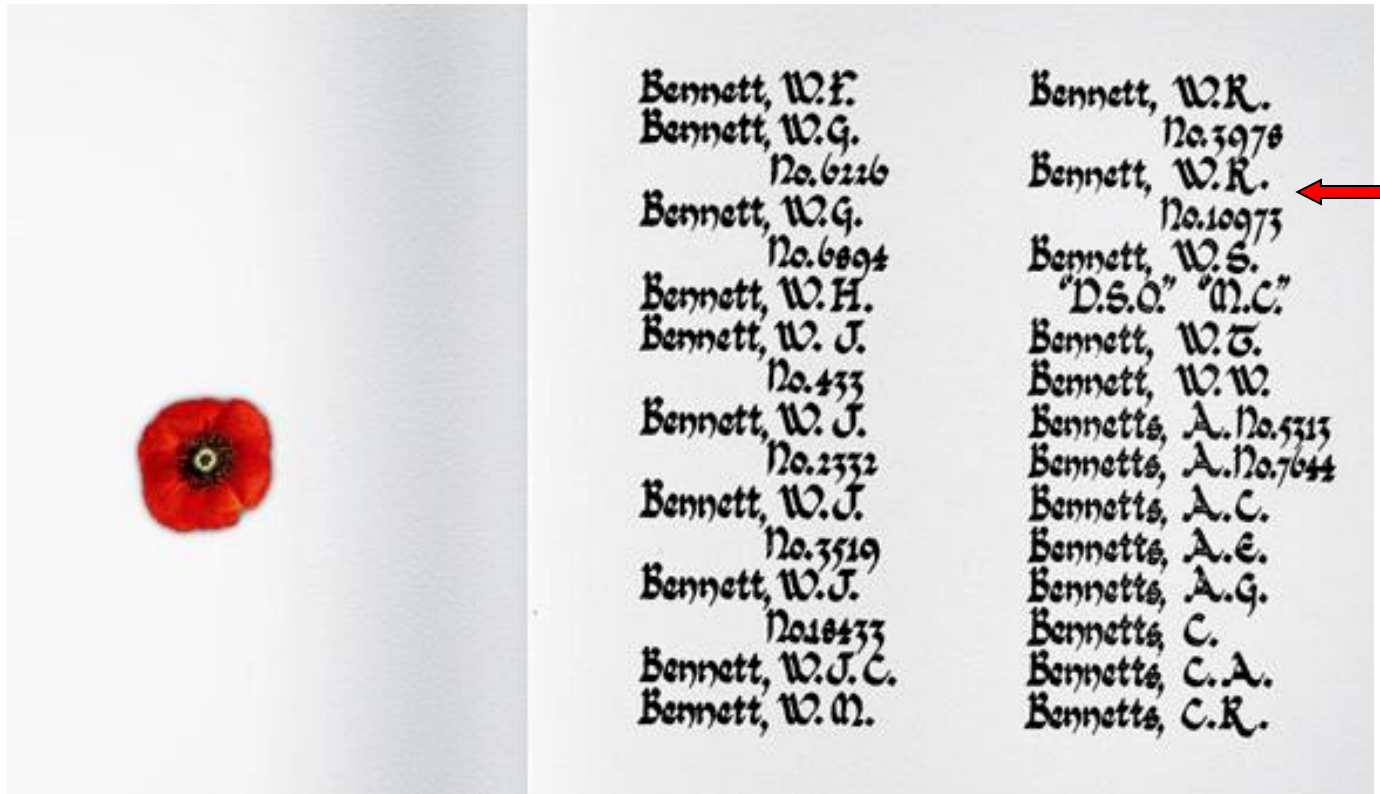
Maffra's Avenue of Honour (Photo from Monument Australia – Kent Watson)

W. R. Bennett is remembered on the Boisdale Honour Roll, located in the Boisdale Hall, Briagolong - Maffra Road, Boisdale, Victoria.



Boisdale Honour Roll (Photos from Monument Australia – Chris McLaughlin)

W. R. Bennett is remembered in the Book of Remembrance at the Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne, Victoria.



Driver W. R. Bennett is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 23.



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

(72 pages of Driver William Richard Bennett's Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

Information obtained from the CWGC, Australian War Memorial (Roll of Honour, First World War Embarkation Roll) & National Archives



Newspaper Notices

AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES

324th LIST

Wounded

Dvr. W. R. Bennett, Dandenong

(The Bendigo Independent, Victoria – 17 July, 1917)

ROLL OF HONOUR

Lce-Cpl F. Bennett has been reported gassed (second occasion), and Driver W. R. Bennett has been reported wounded (second occasion). Both are sons of Mr John Bennett, of Boisdale.

(The Maffra Spectator, Victoria – 5 September, 1918)

NEXT OF KIN

The next of kin of No. 10,973, Driver W. R. Bennett, 10th Field Co. Engineers and of No. 4235, Gunner L. J. Turner (enlisted South Australia), 5th Div. Heavy Trench Mortar Bgde., are requested to communicate with the chief clerk, 3rd Military District, Victoria Barracks, as early as possible.

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 6 December, 1918)

AUSTRALIA'S HEROES

CASUALTY LISTS No. 451 & 451A

VICTORIA

DIED, OTHER CAUSES

Dvr. W. R. Bennett, Dandenong

(*The Ballarat Star*, Victoria – 16 December, 1918)

MEMORIAL SERVICE AT COLCHESTER

GRAVES CAREFULLY TENDED

Prominent Englishmen and women were quick to spring to the defence of Australian soldiers when they were libelled recently in one of the flood of belated war books on the market. The abiding sense of gratitude felt by the English people towards the men from overseas who rallied to the defence of the Empire, is typified in the action of the members of the women's section of the British Legion at Colchester. Mrs. Florence T. Towsey, chairman of the Colchester section, has sent a message to the Australian relatives of the men of the A.I.F. who were laid to rest in the cemetery at Colchester, the quaint old Essex town, which was established in the time of the Saxons, and was once a stronghold of the Danes in the days when they ravaged the coasts of England. It was strongly fortified by the Romans, and the great Roman walls remain almost entire to this day. The countryside must have seen much fighting, and the frowning Norman keep is one of the largest in England, and there is something singularly touching in the fact that the soldiers of the younger countries rest here, amid the brotherhood of warriors of long ago.

Impressive Ceremony

Mrs. Towsey says on Anzac Day, 1929, the members of the British Legion (Women's Section), Colchester Branch, assembled at the cemetery to pay a tribute to the memory of the men of the overseas Dominions, who came to fight for the British Empire in the Great War, and who lie buried there. A simple but impressive little service was held, and then flowers were placed on each grave. It is proposed to hold this service annually. The graves are carefully tended. The following are the names of the Australians who rest in Colchester Cemetery, and the simple inscriptions on their graves: —

38 651. Gunner C. C. Willcock, Field Artillery. Dec. 25, 1918. Age 38. 'Happy in my lot.'

2 182. Corporal J. P. Byrne, 58th B.N., Australian T.N.F. Jan. 5, 1918. Age 29.

3370. Private H. M. C. D. McIntosh, 3rd B.N., Australian I.N.F. July 12, 1916. Age 18. 'My son, your memory we will cherish, until we follow you.'

1100. Driver R. C. Hendry, Australian Field Artillery. August 9, 1918. Age 25. 'Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away.'

6035. Private J. Hought, 6th Bn., Australian Infantry. Nov. 17, 1917. Age 31. 'Thy purpose, Lord, we cannot see; He gave his life that we might live.'

1384. Private W. I. Mackenzie, 51st Bn., Australian Infantry, Aug. 5, 1916. Age 27. 'Gone, but not forgotten.'

10973. Driver W. R. Bennett. Australian Engineers, Nov. 23, 1918.

1906. Private S. E. Barclay, 45th Bn., Australian Inf. April 11, 1918. Age 24.

493. Private F. R. Rankin, 21st Bn. Australian Inf., Sept. 10, 1916. Age 21 'God has saved from weary strife, In its dawn this young, fresh life.'

2413. Driver C. S. McKellar, Australian Engineers, June 18, 1918. Age 25. The dearly-loved son of Mr. and Mrs. McKellar, of Sydney, late of Glasgow.

19477. Sapper H. F. Smith, Australian Engineers, Nov. 5, 1918. Age 31.

Getting in Touch with Relatives

Mrs. Towsey asked Mrs. Florence Muriel Paxman, a member of the Colchester branch, who is visiting Sydney on a holiday trip, to try and get in touch with the Australian relatives of any of these men. In a letter to 'The Chronicle,' Mrs. Paxman says— 'I visited all the graves the day before I left England, and I shall be most happy to give any relatives any further information, or to get them photographs of any particular grave if they will write to me at my address, Winton, New South Head-road, Rose Bay, Sydney.'

Mrs. Towsey's address is Tollgate House, Shrub End, Colchester, and many Australians will remember with gratitude the hospitality that was extended to them there during the war.

(Chronicle, Adelaide, South Australia – 13 March, 1930)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstones

The Defence Department, in 1920/21, contacted the next of kin of the deceased World War 1 soldiers to see if they wanted to include a personal inscription on the permanent headstone. Space was reserved for 66 letters only (with the space between any two words to be counted as an additional letter) & the rate per letter was around 3 ½ d (subject to fluctuation).

The expense in connection for the erection of permanent headstones over the graves of fallen soldiers was borne by the Australian Government.

(Information obtained from letters sent to next of kin in 1921)

A letter from Base Records, dated 2nd July, 1921, to Mr J. Bennett, Boisdale, Victoria, advised that a letter from the Defence Dept. concerning an inscription on the headstone of his son, the late Driver W. R. Bennett, had not been answered & non-receipt of a reply within 21 days would have to be accepted as indicating that no further action was to be taken.

Driver W. R. Bennett does not have a personal inscription on his headstone.

Colchester Cemetery, Colchester, Essex, England

Colchester Cemetery was opened in 1856 and now belongs to the Corporation. It originally covered about 30 acres, but was enlarged in 1940 to 67 acres. The newer part is on the western side of the original burial ground, and behind it is the site of a Roman Way. There are 267 Commonwealth burials of the 1914-1918 war, 1 being unidentified, of which 50 are in the War Plot, while 11 Australian graves are together in a group nearby, the remainder being scattered. After the war a Cross of Sacrifice was erected on a site overlooking both the plot and the group of war graves, in honour of all the servicemen buried here. There are also 114 Commonwealth burials of the 1939-1945 war here, 1 of which is unidentified. In the early months of the 1939-1945 War, shortly after the enlargement of the cemetery, land was set aside in the newer part for service war burials. This is now the War Graves Plot. Among these casualties are men who were killed at sea after being evacuated from Dunkirk. The non-war graves are those of a man of the Merchant Navy and two ex-servicemen who were buried in the War Graves Plot although their deaths were not due to war service. There are also 7 Foreign National burials. The plot is enclosed by a hedge of cotoneaster frigida and a Cross of Sacrifice stands on the western side. The graves are set in level mown turf, with continuous flower borders along the rows of headstones in which are polyantha roses and other seasonal flowers. *(Information from CWGC)*



Colchester Cemetery Entrance *(Photo by Iain MacFarlane – Find a Grave)*



Cross of Sacrifice, Colchester Cemetery (Photo from CWGC)



Australian Plot of World War 1 War Graves, Colchester Cemetery (Photo from CWGC)

Driver W. R. Bennett's CWGC Headstone (marked with red arrow)

Photo of Driver W. R. Bennett's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Colchester Cemetery, Colchester, Essex, England



(Photo by Andrea Charlesworth)

Welcome to Colchester Cemetery

to Crematorium,
Garden of Remembrance
Office, Toilets, Pay-phone
and Car Park.



(Photo by Andrea Charlesworth – Find a Grave)