

**St. George's Churchyard,  
Fovant, Wiltshire  
War Graves**



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**953 PRIVATE**

**M. BIRTHISEL**

**23RD BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.**

**5TH FEBRUARY, 1919 Age 43**

## Matthew BIRTHISEL

Matthew Birthisel was born in 1877 at Fenton's Creek, near Wehla, Victoria to parents Richard John & Mary Jane Birthisel (nee Sutton).

Mary Jane Birthisel, mother of Matthew Birthisel, died on 29th March, 1906, at Kingower, Victoria.

Matthew Birthisel married Annie Ada Giri in 1909 at Toolleen, Victoria.

Births were registered for the following children born to Matthew & Annie Birthisel:

- Richard John Birthisel (born 1910)
- Alice Jean Birthisel (Born 1912)
- Elma Mavis Birthisel (born 1914)

Richard John Birthisel, father of Matthew Birthisel, died on 12th March, 1913 at Wangaratta, Victoria.

The 1909, 1912, 1913, 1915, 1916 & 1917 Australian Electoral Rolls for the division of Indi, subdivision of Chiltern, Victoria listed Matthew Birthisel, Labourer, of Chiltern. His wife Annie Ada Birthisel, Home Duties, was also listed.

Matthew Birthisel was a 37 year old, married, Sleeper Cutter from Chiltern, Victoria when he enlisted on 2nd March, 1915 with "B" Company, 23rd Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 953 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his wife – Mrs Annie Birthisel, of 66 Market Street, South Melbourne, Victoria. Matthew Birthisel had the distinctive mark of a deep indentation on right thigh as a result of an axe wound.

Private Matthew Birthisel was posted to Camp with "B" Company, 23rd Battalion on 20th April, 1915.

Private Matthew Birthisel embarked from Melbourne on HMAT *Euripides* on 8th/10th May, 1915.

Private Matthew Birthisel proceeded to join M.E.F. (Mediterranean Expeditionary Force) at Gallipoli on 30th August, 1915.

Private Matthew Birthisel was charged for the cost of replacing a ground sheet while at Anzac on 13th November, 1915.

Private Matthew Birthisel disembarked at Alexandria from *Minnewaska* from Mudros on 10th January, 1916.

Private Matthew Birthisel was taken to 5th Field Ambulance with Mumps then transferred to No. 2 Australian Casualty Clearing Station on 27th January, 1916. He was admitted to No. 4 Auxiliary Hospital at Abbassia, Cairo, Egypt with Mumps on 27th January, 1916.

Private Matthew Birthisel proceeded to rejoin his Unit from Moascar on 6th March, 1916 & was taken on strength with his Unit on 8th March, 1916.

Private Matthew Birthisel proceeded to join B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force) from Alexandria on 19th March, 1916 on *Lake Michigan* & disembarked at Marseilles, France on 26th March, 1916.

Private Matthew Birthisel was to be Baggage Guard at 2nd Australian Divisional Base Depot from 4th April, 1916. Pte Birthisel proceeded to England from France on 15th July, 1916. He was marched in to 2nd Australian Divisional Base Depot at Etaples, France on 17th August, 1916 & was marched out to join his Unit on 14th September, 1915. Pte Birthisel rejoined his Battalion in Belgium from Baggage Guard on 15th September, 1916.

Private Matthew Birthisel was admitted to 2nd Australian Field Ambulance in France on 10th November, 1916 with Trench Feet then transferred to C.R.S. the same day. He rejoined his Battalion in France from Hospital on 24th November, 1916.

Private Matthew Birthisel was on leave from 1st September, 1917 & rejoined from leave on 16th September, 1917.

Private Matthew Birthisel was reported to be with his Unit in the field on 4th July, 1918.

Private Matthew Birthisel was appointed Temporary Driver with 23rd Battalion on 23rd July, 1918 vice Payne "W". Temporary Driver Matthew Birthisel reverted to rank of Private on 11th August, 1918, on return of Payne to duty.

Private Matthew Birthisel was on leave to UK from 10th October, 1918 & rejoined his Battalion in France on 27th October, 1918.

Private Matthew Birthisel was appointed Driver with 23rd Battalion on 14th December, 1918, vice Rodriguez transferred.

Driver Matthew Birthisel was to be transferred to England for furlough to Australia on 28th December, 1918. He was marched in to A.G.B.D. (Australian Divisional Base Depot) in France on 3rd January, 1919 & disembarked at Southampton the same day.

Driver Matthew Birthisel was admitted to Military Hospital at Fovant, Wiltshire on 3rd February, 1919, dangerously & seriously ill with Broncho Pneumonia.

Private Matthew Birthisel died at 21.30 hrs on 5th February, 1919 at Military Hospital at Fovant, Wiltshire from Influenza & Broncho Pneumonia.

A death for Matthew Birthisel, aged 41, was registered in the March quarter, 1919 in the district of Wilton, Wiltshire, England.

Driver Matthew Birthisel was buried on 10th February, 1919 in St George's Churchyard, Fovant, Wiltshire, England – Plot number I. F. 5. and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. From the burial report of Driver Birthisel - *Coffin was Elm with brass mounts. Deceased was buried with full Military Honors. The coffin draped with the Australian flag being borne to the graveside on a Gun-carriage preceded by a Firing Party from No. 4 Australian Command Depot. Six of deceased's late Unit comrades supported the Pall. A number of Officers, N.C.O.'s and Men from deceased's late Depot Company followed the remains and were present at the graveside ceremony. Headquarters A.I.F. Depots in United Kingdom were represented at the funeral.*

Driver Matthew Birthisel was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Driver Birthisel's widow – Mrs A. Birthisel, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll originally sent August, 1921 & Plaque sent January, 1923). Base Records were unable to contact Mrs A. Birthisel between 1921 & 1923 as several communications sent to her had been returned unclaimed due to her moving several times. Some of the Medals & other Memorabilia had been sent to "Untraceables".

Base Records contacted Mr J. Birthisel, Burke Street, Chiltern, brother of the late Private M. Birthisel, in September, 1920 & again on October, 1922, to enquire if he knew the present address of Mrs A. Birthisel, widow of Pte Birthisel. Mr J. Birthisel contacted Base Records in November, 1922 to state that he had not heard from Mrs Annie Ada Birthisel for the past two years. He had made enquiries & even her brother had advertised for her but with no answer. Mr J. Birthisel & Mrs Birthisel's brother were apparently of the opinion that she had remarried. Mr J. Birthisel stated that if she did not claim the belongings of her late husband, Pte M. Birthisel, that he as next-of-kin & brother would like the items passed on to him.

The Memorial Scroll was eventually sent to Mrs Birthisel in July, 1923 to c/o Colac P.O. (communications previously sent to Colac P.O. were returned unclaimed).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private Matthew Birthisel – service number 953, aged 43, of 23rd Battalion Australian Infantry. No family details are listed.

M. Birthisel is remembered on the Shire of Chiltern Roll of Honour, located at Chiltern Athenaeum, 57 Conness Street, Chiltern, Victoria.



Shire of Chiltern Roll of Honour (Photos from Monument Australia –Chris McLaughlin)



M. Birthisel is remembered on the Chiltern Memorial Gates, located at Memorial Park, Chiltern-Rutherglen Road & Gleeson Street, Chiltern, Victoria.



**Chiltern Memorial Gates** (Photos from Monument Australia – Kent Watson/Graeme Saunders)



M. Birthisel is remembered on the Jacka Park Soldiers Memorial located at Jacka Park, High & Chapel Streets, Wedderburn, Victoria.



**Jacka Park Soldiers Memorial** (Photos from Monument Australia – Kent Watson/ Roger Johnson/Sandra Brown)



Private M. Birthisel is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 98.



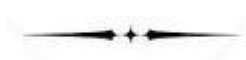
*(Photos Cathy Sedgwick)*



*Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia*

(108 pages of Pte Matthew Birthisel'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**

### **CHRISTMAS BILLIES**

### **SOLDIERS APPRECIATION**

#### **“CHEERFUL AND HAPPY”**

Miss Belle Punton, Water-street, is also in receipt of the following letter, written by Private M. Birthisel, B Company, 23rd Battalion:-"No doubt you have already read about the evacuation of Anzac. It was at ----- we boys spent, out Christmas and New Year, which I can assure you, dear girl, was spent enormously well after putting in a few months hard work in the trenches at the front. I received your billycan, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart, for the pleasure tha tlittle can brought, me. The boys had one each, and also a 'plum duff' for two, which went exceedingly well after hard biscuits and bully Beef. It was a hard old Christmas in a. way, but we were all cheerful and happy. I wonder if I shall get back out of this terrible war to meet you. Perhaps an acquaintance would be needed. Anyhow, it's not a, case of 'love at first sight.' But the handwriting catches my eye. Trusting you will answer these few lines. It's Sunday today and I would just like to accompany you for a walk over this sandy desert.

*(Bendigo Advertiser, Victoria – 21 March, 1916)*

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### **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 4th July, 1921, to Mrs A. Birthisel, of 10 Abbott Grove, Clifton Hill, Victoria advised that a letter from the Defence Dept. concerning an inscription on the headstone of her husband, the late Driver M. Birthisel, 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.

Private M. Birthisel does not have a personal inscription on his headstone.

### **St George's Churchyard, Fovant, Wiltshire, England**

There was a 600 bed hutted military hospital at Fovant during the First World War, and the concentration of Australian depots and training camps in the area is reflected in the 63 First World War burials in this churchyard. The war graves form two groups, one west of the church and the other at the east end. There is also one burial of the Second World War. There are 44 War Graves belonging to those who served with the Australian Imperial Force in World War 1.

*(Information from CWGC)*





AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

D00299

*(Photo c 1919)*





**St George's Churchyard, Fovant – War Graves at front & rear** (*Churchyard photos courtesy of Andrew Stacey*)



Photo of Private M. Birthisel's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in St George's Churchyard, Fovant, Wiltshire, England.





**Original Grave Marker of Pte M. Birthisel** *(Photo from Wayne Sneddon)*



**Cross of Sacrifice** (Photo courtesy of Andrew Stacey)