

Tower Hill Memorial, Greater London, England



Lest We Forget

World War 1



FIREMAN

J. BROWN

MERCANTILE MARINE "KYARRA" (Fremantle, W. Australia)

26TH MAY, 1918 Age 33

J. BROWN

J. Brown was born in London, England.

The crew list for *Kyarra* for 31st December, 1917 from the port of Melbourne to Sydney, New South Wales recorded a "J. Brown", Fireman, aged 21.

J. Brown was serving in S.S. *Kyarra* as a Fireman. (no other details are known as Merchant Navy records are not available before 1922)

Fireman

In the Royal Navy 'stoker' was used for all ratings in the engine room (even on oil fired ships); the merchant marine used 2 titles fireman and trimmer.

The fireman's role was primarily to tend the boilers and ensure they ran efficiently, as the fireman of a steam train would do on land.

The trimmer's role was to ensure that the fireman has adequate supplies of coal near at hand, whilst also ensuring that the trim of the ship wasn't altered unevenly: coal bunkers ran the length of the ship and on both sides so if all the coal was taken from just one at a time the ship would be unbalanced. The access points were cramped; they had to dig coal out and shovel it into wheel barrows, then wheel those along narrow tracks. All this without lighting, extractor fans for the coal dust, air conditioning in the tropics or heating in cold climes and with the ship moving or often pitching and rolling. They often ended up battered and bruised and with coal dust in any open wounds.

(Information from Great War Forum – per ardua per mare per terram)

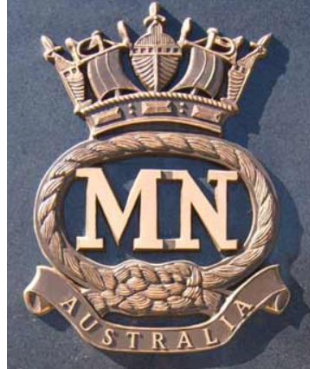


Men working in the stoke hold of a merchant ship.

Merchant Navy - Australia

During World Wars I and II, men who were professional sailors became caught up in the life-and-death struggles against Germany and her allies. Though they were not combatants, merchant mariners made a vital contribution to the outcome of both conflicts, transporting men and resources that were essential to the war effort. Merchant ships were either unarmed or lightly armed. They carried heavy, sometimes highly explosive or combustible cargoes, and were slower and less manoeuvrable than naval ships. Tens of thousands of merchant seamen lost their lives as enemy submarines, surface vessels, aircraft and mines took a heavy toll on Allied shipping.

(Information from Anzac Portal - History in Focus: Australians in the Merchant Navy)



S.S. *Kyarra*

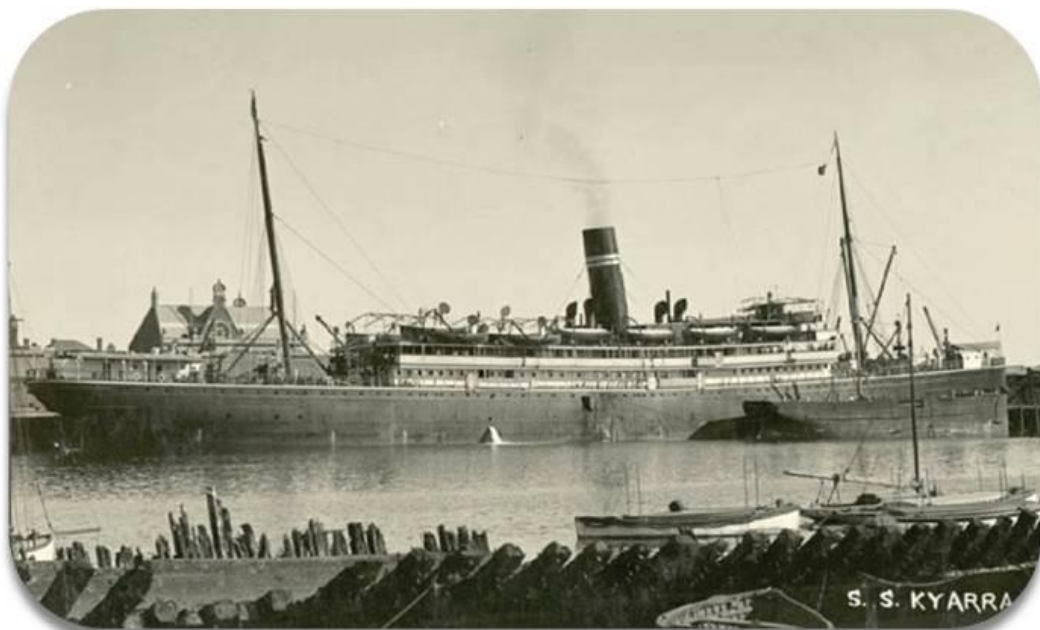
The *Kyarra* was a 6,953-ton (7,065 t) steel cargo and passenger luxury liner, built in Scotland in 1903 for the Australian United Steam Navigation Company. She was built at Dumbarton by William Denny and Brothers, and launched on 2 February 1903 on the River Clyde, Scotland. Her name was taken from the aboriginal word for a small fillet of possum fur.

For ten years *Kyarra* sailed between Fremantle, Western Australia, where she was registered, and Sydney, New South Wales carrying cargo and passengers. She sailed under the flag of the United Steam Navigation Company Limited of London.

On 6 November, 1914 she was requisitioned in Brisbane and converted into a hospital ship (HMAT A.55 *Kyarra*) for the purpose of transporting the Australian medical units to Egypt. The hull was painted white with a large red cross on the side. She carried the full staff and equipment of the Nos. 1 and 2 General Hospitals, the Nos. 1 and 2 Stationary Hospitals, and the No. 1 Clearing Hospital.

In March 1915, *Kyarra* was converted into a troop transport. Commonwealth control ended 4 January 1918.

(information from Wikipedia)



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Having at the end of December, 1917, returned to Sydney with consacks from Calcutta, the Kyarra was soon again on her way to England, this time not carrying troops, but a full cargo of foodstuffs and mail. Proceeding via New Zealand and Panama, she received orders after leaving the Canal to join a convoy at Newport News. The run across the Atlantic was uneventful; the Kyarra acted as "guide" to the fleet (twenty-seven ships, in all) until it reached the English Channel, when it broke up and each vessel proceeded independently at full speed. After the cargo had been discharged, the Kyarra was refitted at Tilbury Docks to carry invalids to Australia and was camouflaged. She left for Devonport about 10 a.m. on the 24th of May, 1918, to embark 1,000 patients. Besides her crew of 112, she was carrying 34 military details, 5 gunners, and a naval officer, who was making the journey to Devonport in order to test the recently-fitted otter gear (for sweeping up mines). Following instructions, she anchored for the night off The Nore and proceeded at day-break, clearing The Downs in the forenoon and zigzagging her way as far as St. Helen's Bay (Isle of Wight), where she dropped anchor at 9.30 p.m. At 4 a.m. she left the anchorage and steamed inside The Needles channel, slowing down for a short time at 7 o'clock so that the mine-sweeping gear could be lowered. About 9 a.m., when two miles S.S.E. from Anvil Point, the wake of a torpedo was seen; though the helm was put hard over, the Kyarra could not avoid the torpedo, which struck her in the forward stokehold on the port side. While the life-boats were being lowered, Captain Donovan vainly tried to get her into shallow water, but the main engines soon stopped, and he was unable to move the steering-gear. Attempts to close the water-tight door in the engine room had to be abandoned owing to the inrush of water, and, as the vessel was rapidly sinking, all hands were ordered to the boats.

The especial danger to the engine-room staff in this and other ships may be judged from the recorded experiences of the Second Engineer (E. F. Wharton), who, when the explosion occurred, was waiting for his breakfast in the mess-room. "For a second or two one seemed to be forced through the deck and then, as the ship heeled over, to be carried to the door. I rushed down below (a matter of seconds) and reached the middle grating; the water by this time was nearly up to it. A man was hanging on to the grating, his body being forced underneath by the rush of water coming from the stokehold . . . like a dry dock sluice. I lifted him out and placed him on the ladder to go up . . . then had a look round the back of the starboard engine, and coming back . . . waited at the foot of the ladder. You could feel the vessel sinking by this. My greaser came along; he had been cleaning out the snow chutes of the freezer in No. 3 hold. He had to crawl through the snow chute into the engine room after the torpedo hit us. . . . The water . . . was rising pretty quick and was over our boots, and I followed him up the ladder. When I reached the engine-room door the Chief came along and said, 'Do you think she is stopped?' I then got a stilson wrench with the idea of shutting the top valves from the top platform. Turning round to go down the ladder again, I got a surprise, for the Fourth Engineer and three men were coming up. The three men had been washed into the engine-room from the aft stokehold, along with the man I had pulled out. They were under water while I was down below, and had struggled out after the rush of water had eased up and begun to rise. The last I saw of the engine room, the water was close up to the main engine cylinder-tops."

The Kyarra foundered sixteen minutes after she was hit, the last boat, containing the captain, pilot, second engineer, and three men having some difficulty in getting clear. All the boats pulled into Swanage Bay and made a landing about midday. The fifth engineer, three firemen, and a trimmer were lost in the ship, and a steward's boy (a nephew of Captain Donovan), who was leaning over the rail above the spot where the torpedo exploded, was so seriously injured that he died in hospital shortly after landing.

Fireman J. Brown was killed in action on 26th May, 1918 when the *Kyarra* was torpedoed by German U-boat UB 57 (Captained by Oberleutnant Johannes Lohs) as it was passing Anvil Point on the Dorset coast. Six crew died.

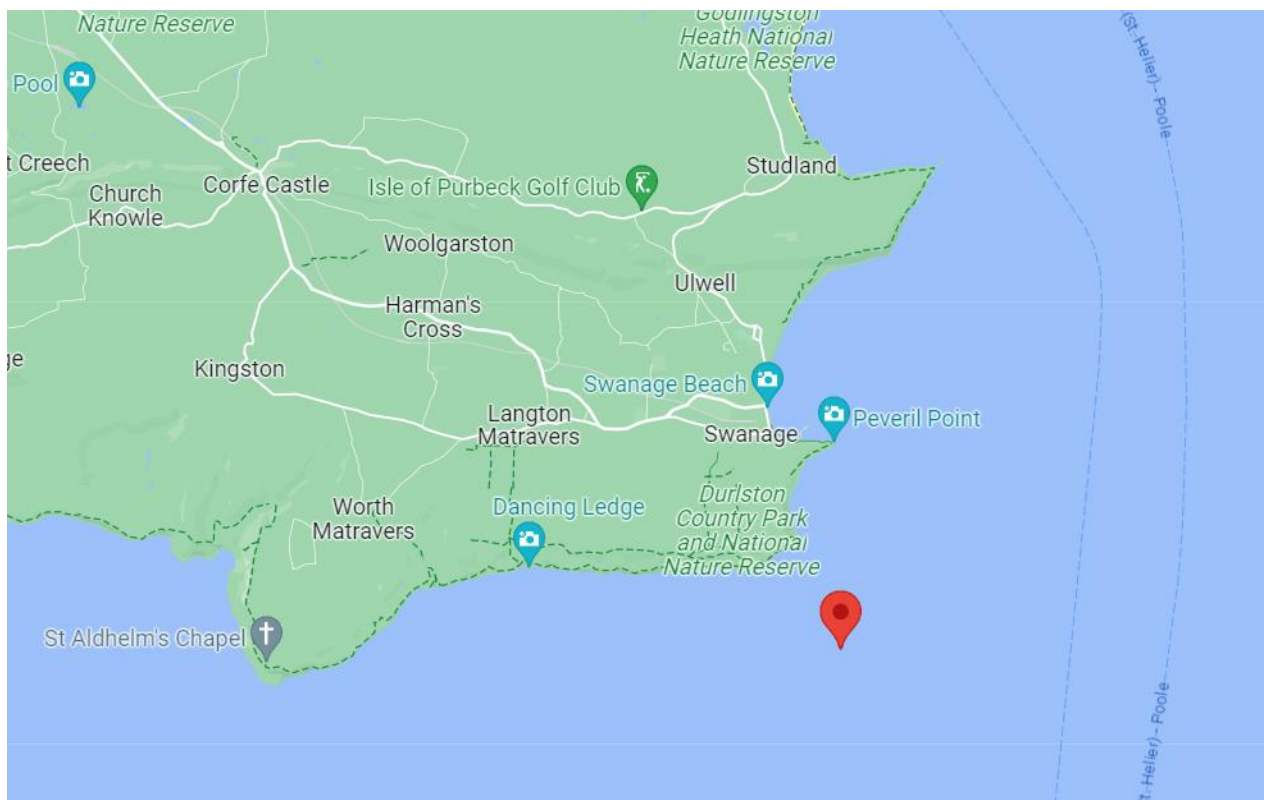
All six crew of the *Kyarra* that lost their lives are remembered on the Tower Hill Memorial, London, England as they have no grave – Fireman J. Brown, (aged 33), Fireman Duncan Mackenzie (aged 52), Steward's Boy Laurence Albert McPhun (aged 16), Trimmer Henry Garnet Warmington Morley (aged 28), Fireman James Abbott Nanles (aged 28) & Fifth Engineer Officer William Small.

Kyarra wreck

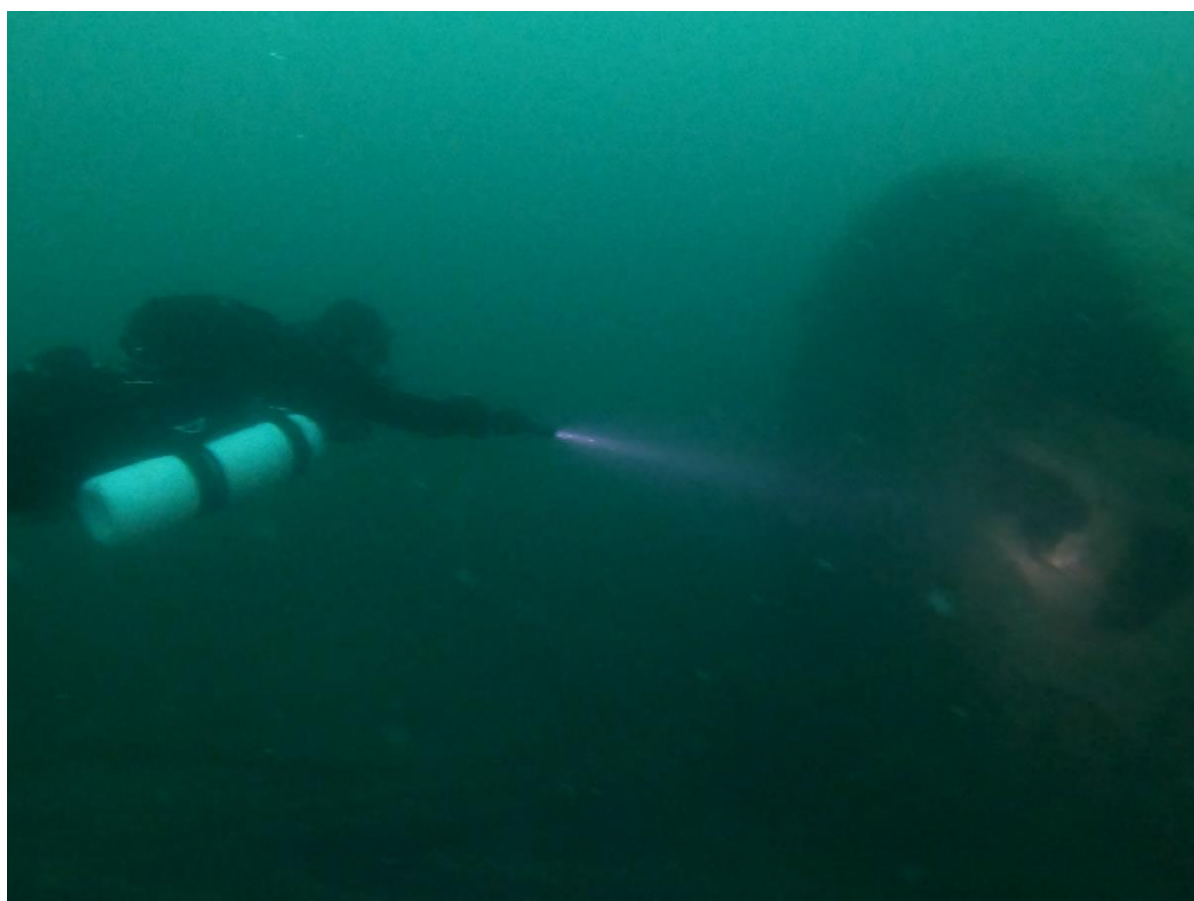
The wreck of the *Kyarra* was located in the late 1960's by a member of the Kingston & Elmbridge Sub-Aqua Club, who later bought the wreck. It can be located one mile off Anvil Point near Swanage, Dorset at coordinates 50 34.90N, 001 56.57W, in 28 metres of water & is probably one of the most popular wrecks along the Dorset Coast. The wreck lies on its starboard side at a maximum depth of 30m. At low water the top of the wreck is at 21m and it sits 9m proud of the seabed.



Location of wreck of *Kyarra*



Some photos of the wreck of *Kyarra* – still shots taken from videos by Tim Cornish.





J. Brown is remembered on the Tower Hill Memorial, Greater London, England – Panel 10 as he has no grave.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Fireman J. Brown, aged 33, of Mercantile Marine, S.S. “Kyarra” (Fremantle, W.A.).

J. Brown is remembered on the Commemorative Roll Book, located in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. The Commemorative Roll records the names of those Australians who died during or as a result of wars in which Australians served, but who were not serving in the Australian Armed Forces and therefore not eligible for inclusion on the Roll of Honour.

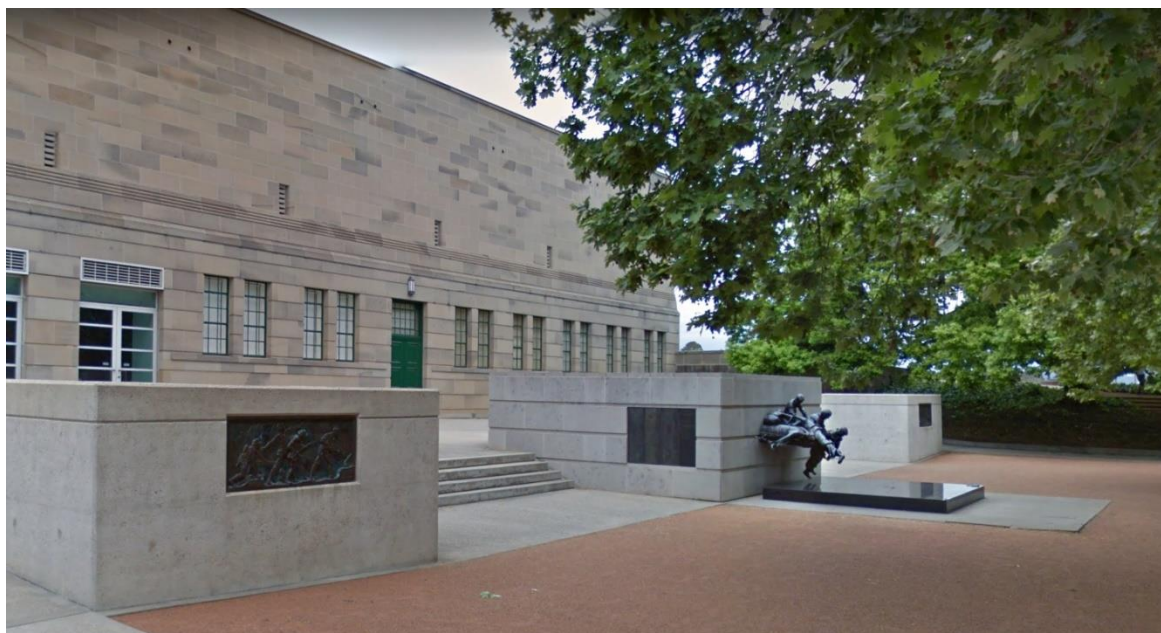
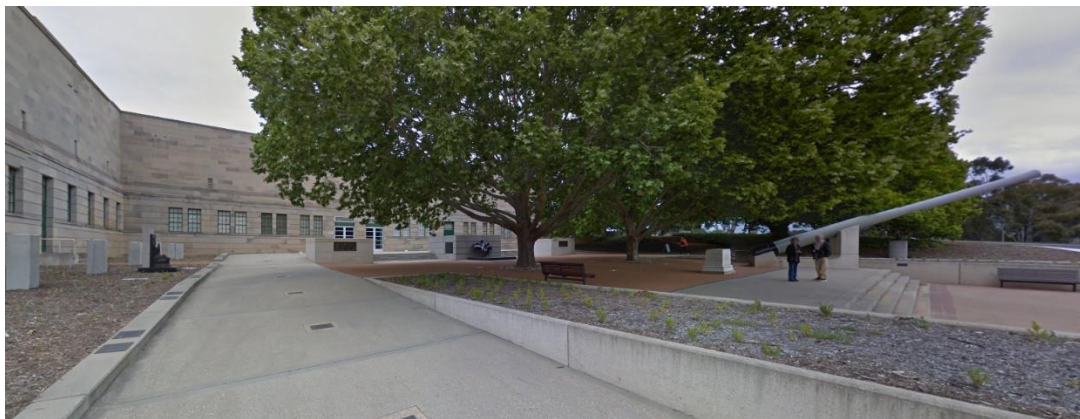
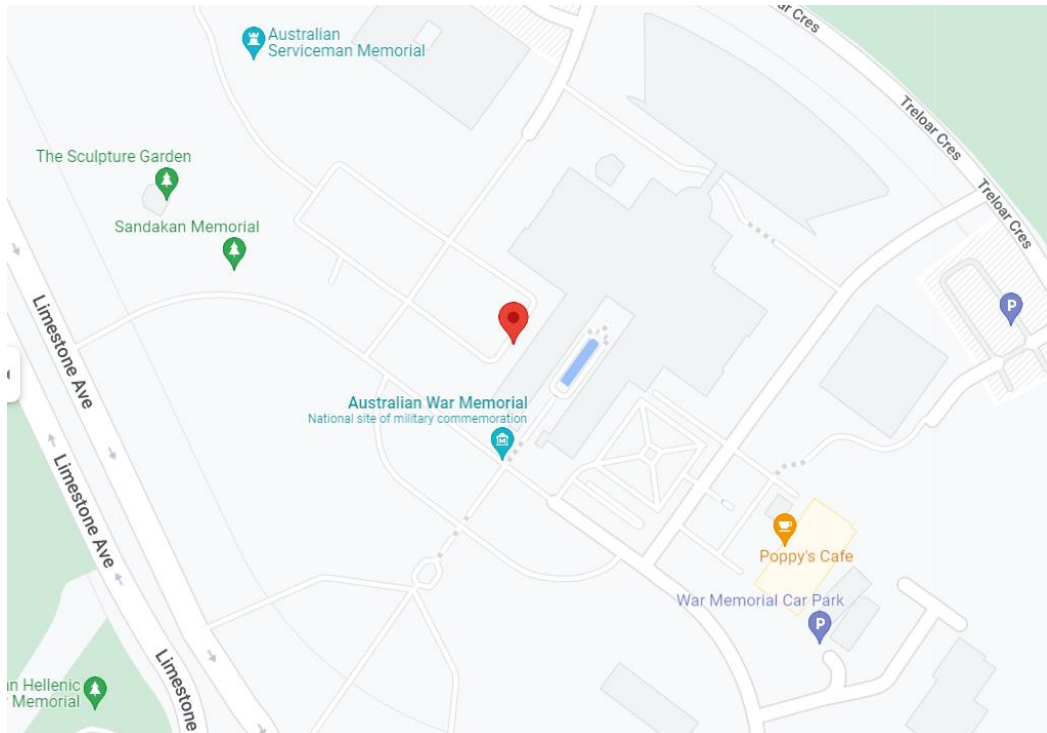


Commemorative Roll (Photo from AWM)

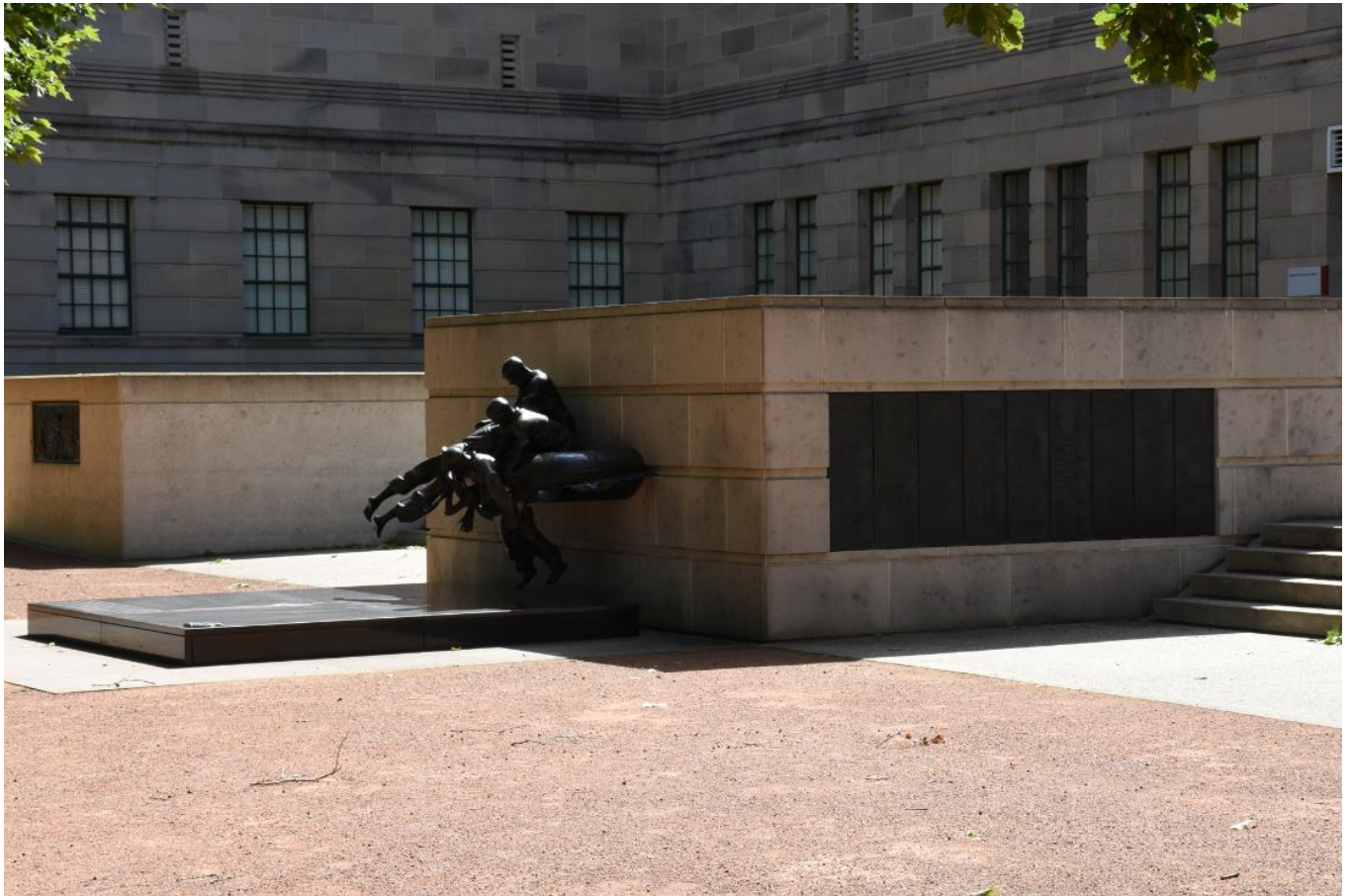


Commemorative Area of the Australian War Memorial (Capital Photographer)

J. Brown is remembered on the Australian Merchant Seaman Memorial Commemorative Plaque, located at the Australian War Memorial – Western forecourt, Treloar Crescent, Campbell, Australian Capital Territory.



Merchant Seaman Memorial Panels – WW1 Roll of Honour



(Photo from AWM Places of Pride – Henry Moulds)

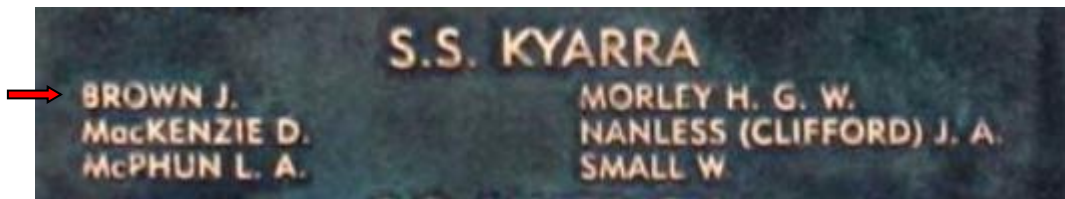


**Sculpture at Merchant Seaman's Memorial
depicting survivors in a life raft recovering other survivors from the water.**

(Photos from AWM Places of Pride – Brian Rowe)



Australian Merchant Seamen – First World War



The Australian Merchant Navy Memorial is located on Wendouree Drive, Parkes, Canberra, ACT (on northern shore of Lake Burley Griffin).





The Australian Merchant Navy Memorial (Photo by Nick-D)

J. Brown is remembered on the London WW1 Memorial 1914 – 1918 website.

THE LONDON WW1 MEMORIAL 1914 - 1918

HOME GET INVOLVED ABOUT CONTACT

SEARCH RESULTS
1 records returned

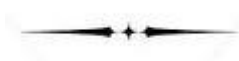
SEARCH RECORDS

First Name Rank 26-05-1918
brown Unit Lived/Born In

Last Name	First Name	Rank	Unit	Date of Death
BROWN	J	Fireman	Steam Ship Kyarra	26/05/1918

Information obtained from the CWGC, Australian War Memorial (Commemorative Roll)

(Note: The National Archives of Australia holds microfilmed employment records for Australian seamen who served on Australian merchant vessels between January 1922 and December 1990.)



Newspaper Notices

TORPEDOED

REFUGEES ARRIVE IN SYDNEY

SUNK IN HALF A MINUTE

Survivors of the Kyarra and Era arrived in Sydney yesterday by the Melbourne express. The Kyarra, which was the property of the A.U.S.N. Company, was torpedoed, and the Era, which was owned by Howard Smith, Ltd., was sunk.

The survivors arrived in Sydney in an unkempt condition. They escaped from the sinking vessels in the clothing which they wore at the time. The majority could not boast an overcoat and stepped off the train dressed in thread-bare suits, jerseys, and caps. Many had no friends to meet them.

A survivor of the Kyarra was John Dowling, a Liverpool man, who had been running to and from Australia for the past half century. "It was a Sunday morning when we 'stopped' the torpedo," he said to a "Herald" reporter. "About 9 a.m. there was hardly a ripple, and had it been peace time the actual spot where we were hit would have been crowded with smart yachts. I was admiring the scene when the breakfast signal was given and I went down to it. I must admit that the Germans gave us time for breakfast, but only just, for as soon as I had finished there was a tremendous roar and instant darkness down below. We did not need telling what had happened, and without waiting to try and rescue our clothes we ran on to the deck to find a boat. About 40 Australian soldiers were aboard, and when I reached the deck I saw one of them helping the stewardess into a life-boat. They had come aboard the Kyarra at Swanage and were known as Medical Details. Their work was to look after the cot cases on the voyage from England to Australia. Other than these 40 men and the 100 odd crew there was nobody else aboard.

HIS FIRST TRIP.

"We were on our way to Plymouth when we were hit to pick up the Australian troops who were being invalided home. Seven of the ship's boats were lowered, and these proved sufficient to accommodate the personnel aboard. We pulled to a pretty little seaside resort a few miles away, and there the ship's roll was called. It was ascertained that four members of the stoke-hold and a steward had been killed. The steward had only joined the ship a few days before, and was making his first trip, poor fellow. He was a nephew of the ship's skipper, Captain Donovan. He lived till we landed, but was too badly injured to survive. The other four killed went down with the ship. It would be less than 10 minutes before she sank. The torpedo struck her on the port side almost amidships. She toppled over, and then went down like a stone. Of course, we lost everything we had in the world, and so did the soldiers. "One of the soldiers, owing to wounds, was unable to get down the gangway quickly, so he was told to jump. He jumped into the sea; we picked him up and pulled him into a lifeboat.

"When we got into the boats I, being a seaman, took an oar and was pulling for shore, when an Australian soldier reached over my shoulder, took the oars out of my hand, and said, 'You mustn't row, dad. You won't see 50 again.' He took my place, and rowed till we got to the coast. When we landed the people were very kind. They brought us down hot tea, cake, and all sorts of things, supplied us with cigarettes and tobacco, and told us they would telephone for assistance. However, we moved off very soon afterwards, and a warm welcome awaited us at our destination. It seemed as if the whole district had turned out in our honour, and all the Australian troops as well. They came over from an Australian camp nearby, and made a fuss of us. After being transferred to London, where we stayed just over a week, we entrained for Liverpool and embarked for Australia."

SPARED TWO COLLIERS.

The Kyarra's carpenter, Jim Grant, whose home is at Auburn, saw the torpedo coming at his ship; but it was then too late to give the alarm. Between the Kyarra and the submarine, he said, two colliers had passed just before; but the U-boat commander evidently waited for the bigger prize. "The blow received was so swift and sure that the debris from the stokehole was hurled as high again as the masts of the ship. I had to force my way to my cabin on account of the debris in the doorway; but I managed to snatch my lifebelt and rush on deck before the ship went down. She had a big list to starboard, and when we lowered the lifeboat it looked every second as if the ship was going to fall on us. She rolled first to port, then to starboard, and finally sunk stern first, eight minutes after being hit. The skipper sent the survivors ashore, but he made in his boat for a drifter, which at once proceeded to the spot where the submarine appeared to have fired.

GALLANT ENGINEER.

"The skipper of the drifter lowered an instrument over the side, listened for the submarine, located her and, according to his statement, ended her career with two huge depth charges. "Among those killed by the torpedo was Mr. Small, of Balmain. He was our fifth engineer. Another killed was an Anzac, named Morley. He was a trimmer. The second engineer as soon as he heard the crash rushed to the stokehole and tried to rescue the firemen. He did good work, but could not reach three of them before they expired. The stewardess had a very narrow escape. Her cabin was smashed in, but as she had been torpedoed previously she did not get too excited to act. She broke an opening through the debris and walked onto the deck, where an Australian soldier found her and put her into a boat."

"The French officers on the destroyers stated they had never seen a ship sink so rapidly after she was struck as did the Era. "No sooner was she hit," said Smith, a seaman, "than she dived into the depths of the ocean. She remained above water less than half a minute after being hit. We had just landed a cargo from Australia and were 14 hours out on our way to England to join the Imperial service when the end came. The men down below who were killed did not have a chance to act. They went down with her and never gained the deck. I think they were killed outright, for the vessel was struck amidships.

"Mr. and Mrs. A. Kirk, of 37 Eveleigh-street, Redfern, were on the platform to meet their son, Fireman W. T. Kirk, who was a survivor of the Kyarra. Mr. Kirk has lost two brothers in torpedoed ships since war began, and the other is fighting with the Imperial Artillery in France. One brother went down in the Vacuum, the first American ship sunk after America's declaration of war, and the other in the Lakemoor, which was carrying depth bombs when torpedoed.

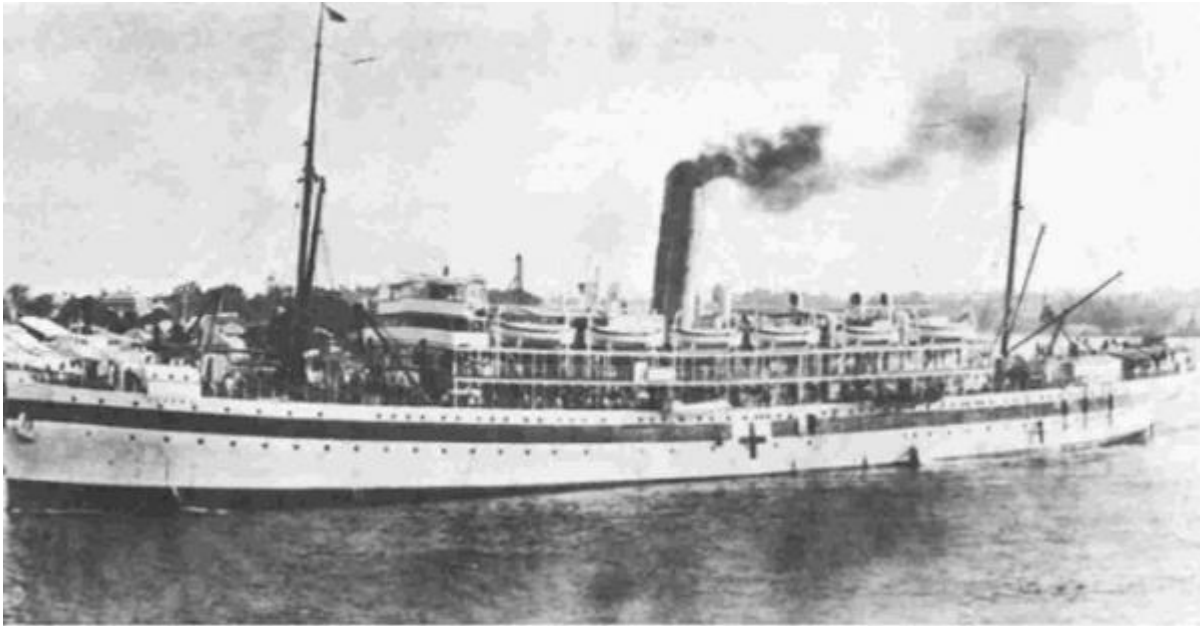
(The Sydney Morning Herald, New South Wales, Australia – 2 August, 1918)

Kyarra Survivor's Narrative

The story of the sinking of the Kyarra was told once more by Mr. Albert Thompson, of the steamer Mallina, which reached Port Adelaide a few days ago. Together with Mr. Fred Wally and Mr. Colin Bailey, he was serving on the torpedoed steamer when she was struck on Sunday, May 26. He was in the snow-room, and from there he escaped into the engine-room, which he found was rapidly filling. The water was pouring in from a large hole near the stokehold. They all escaped. When the torpedo struck the vessel the explosion caused the watertube boiler to burst, and tear the main steampipe away. The escaping steam must have fatally scolded the other men in the stokehold. The chief engineer had a narrow escape. He was in one of the lavatories, and it was only after calling for help for some time that he was rescued. The stewardess was rescued by some of the officers. Her escape was cut off owing to the torpedo exploding right underneath her room and carrying away the companion ladder which led to the main deck. The vessel sank rapidly. The soldiers were put into the boats first and then the crew embarked. The last boat to leave contained most of the officers. The vessel, which is in 18 fathoms of water, about two miles off the coast, sank about four minutes after the last boat left. The Kyarra left London on the morning she was sunk and was bound for Plymouth to pick up about 600 wounded soldiers who were to return to Australia. The vessel had about 40 Army Medical corps men on board and was travelling about 12 knots an hour. That the commander of the submarine purposely waited for the Kyarra is shown by the fact that he allowed three ordinary transports to pass without molestation. The men were landed at Swanage and then taken to Poole, whence they were sent to London. They remained there about three weeks, and were then sent to Australia.

(Western Argus, Kalgoorlie, Western Australia – 3 September, 1918)

100th anniversary of the sinking of the SS Kyarra



TODAY marks the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the SS Kyarra, which was attacked by a German submarine off the Purbeck coast.

The ship, which was requisitioned by the British Government at the outbreak of the Great War, was torpedoed by UB-57.

Five crewmen were killed during the attack, which took place when the Kyarra was being used as a casualty clearing ship.

Around 1,000 war wounded Australian soldiers had been scheduled to embark onto the Kyarra at Plymouth, to be transported back home. Had she been attacked just days later the loss of life may have been catastrophic.

Today, SS Kyarra has become one of the UK's most popular dive sites.

Nigel Bryant, retired Bournemouth University maritime archaeologist, has dived on the wreck numerous times.

He said: "Although my diving days are now over, the Kyarra has been such a big part of my life and I'm always interested to find out more about the ship."

"With the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, the ship was requisitioned by the British Government as HMAT A55 Kyarra, sailing to Egypt, landing Anzac troops in the Dardanelles then evacuating wounded soldiers from Gallipoli, before then being used as a troop ship.

"In 1917, it was again converted back into a casualty clearing ship, intended to return wounded Australian soldiers to their homeland.

Despite its humanitarian role, the Kyarra became defensively armed, with a 4.7in quick-firing gun fitted to the stern deck to deter U-boat attacks, explained Mr Bryant.

He added: "As was standard practice with other armed merchantmen, this gun was manned by a small team of six professional gunners. Although the gun was intended to deter U-boats, it proved to be of no use against the torpedo fired by UB-57's Oberleutnant Johannes Lohs, at 9.43am on May 26, 1918.

"The explosion shattered the steering gear and stopped both engines, and the Kyarra sank by the stern in less than twenty minutes.

"Thankfully, virtually everyone on board escaped by lifeboat and they were soon safely ashore at Swanage."

Firemen J Brown, aged 33; Duncan Mackenzie, 52; James Abbott Nanles, 28; Trimmer Henry Morley, 28; and Steward's Boy Laurence McPhun, 16, are commemorated at the memorial to 12,000 sailors with no known graves, at Tower Hill, London.

(Bournemouth Echo, England – 26th May, 2018)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for cemeteries and memorials in 23,000 locations, in 153 countries. In all 1.7 million men and women from the Commonwealth forces from WWI and WWII have been honoured and commemorated in perpetuity.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, as part of its mandate, is responsible for commemorating all Commonwealth war dead individually and equally. To this end, the war dead are commemorated by name on a headstone, at an identified site of a burial, or on a memorial. War dead are commemorated uniformly and equally, irrespective of military or civil rank, race or creed.

Not all service personnel have a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. In some instances the relative chose to have their own memorial/headstone placed on the deceased's grave. These private headstones are not maintained by the CWGC as they have no jurisdiction to maintain them.

Tower Hill Memorial, Greater London, England

The Tower Hill Memorial commemorates men and women of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets who died in both World Wars and who have no known grave. It stands on the south side of the garden of Trinity Square, London, close to The Tower of London. The Memorial Register may be consulted at Trinity House Corporation, Trinity Square (Cooper's Row entrance), Tower Hill, London EC3N 4DH, which will be found behind the Memorial.

In the First World War, the civilian navy's duty was to be the supply service of the Royal Navy, to transport troops and supplies to the armies, to transport raw materials to overseas munitions factories and munitions from those factories, to maintain, on a reduced scale, the ordinary import and export trade, to supply food to the home country and - in spite of greatly enlarged risks and responsibilities - to provide both personnel and ships to supplement the existing resources of the Royal Navy.

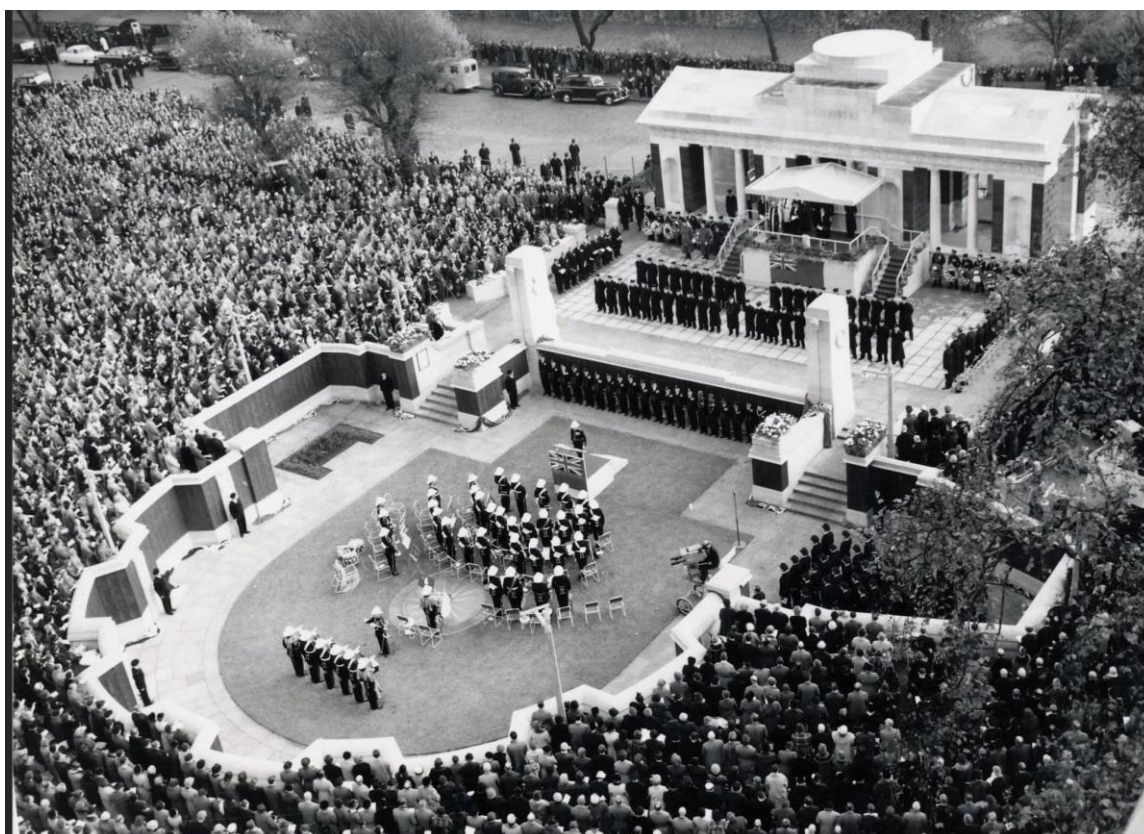
Losses of vessels were high from the outset, but had peaked in 1917 when in January the German government announced the adoption of "unrestricted submarine warfare". The subsequent preventative measures introduced by the Ministry of Shipping - including the setting up of the convoy system where warships were used to escort merchant vessels - led to a decrease in losses but by the end of the war, 3,305 merchant ships had been lost with a total of 17,000 lives.

In the Second World War, losses were again considerable in the early years, reaching a peak in 1942. The heaviest losses were suffered in the Atlantic, but convoys making their way to Russia around the North Cape, and those supplying Malta in the Mediterranean were also particularly vulnerable to attack. In all, 4,786 merchant ships were lost during the war with a total of 32,000 lives. More than one quarter of this total were lost in home waters.

The First World War section of the Tower Hill Memorial commemorates almost 12,000 Mercantile Marine casualties who have no grave but the sea. The memorial was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens with sculpture by Sir William Reid-Dick. It was unveiled by Queen Mary on 12 December 1928.

The Second World War extension, which commemorates almost 24,000 casualties, was designed by Sir Edward Maufe, with sculpture by Charles Wheeler. It was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II on 5 November 1955.

(Information from CWGC)



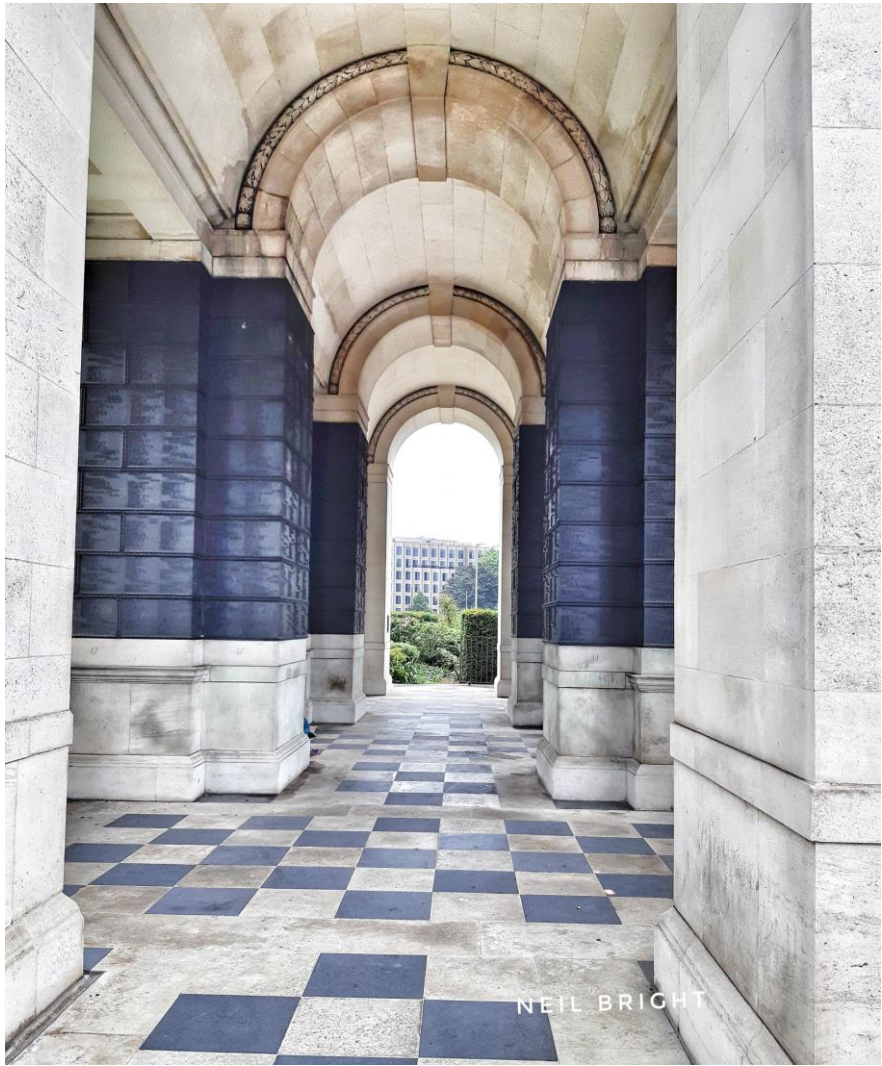
Opening of WW2 Extension of Tower Hill Memorial - 1955



(Photo by Chris Anderson)



(Photos courtesy of Neil Bright)





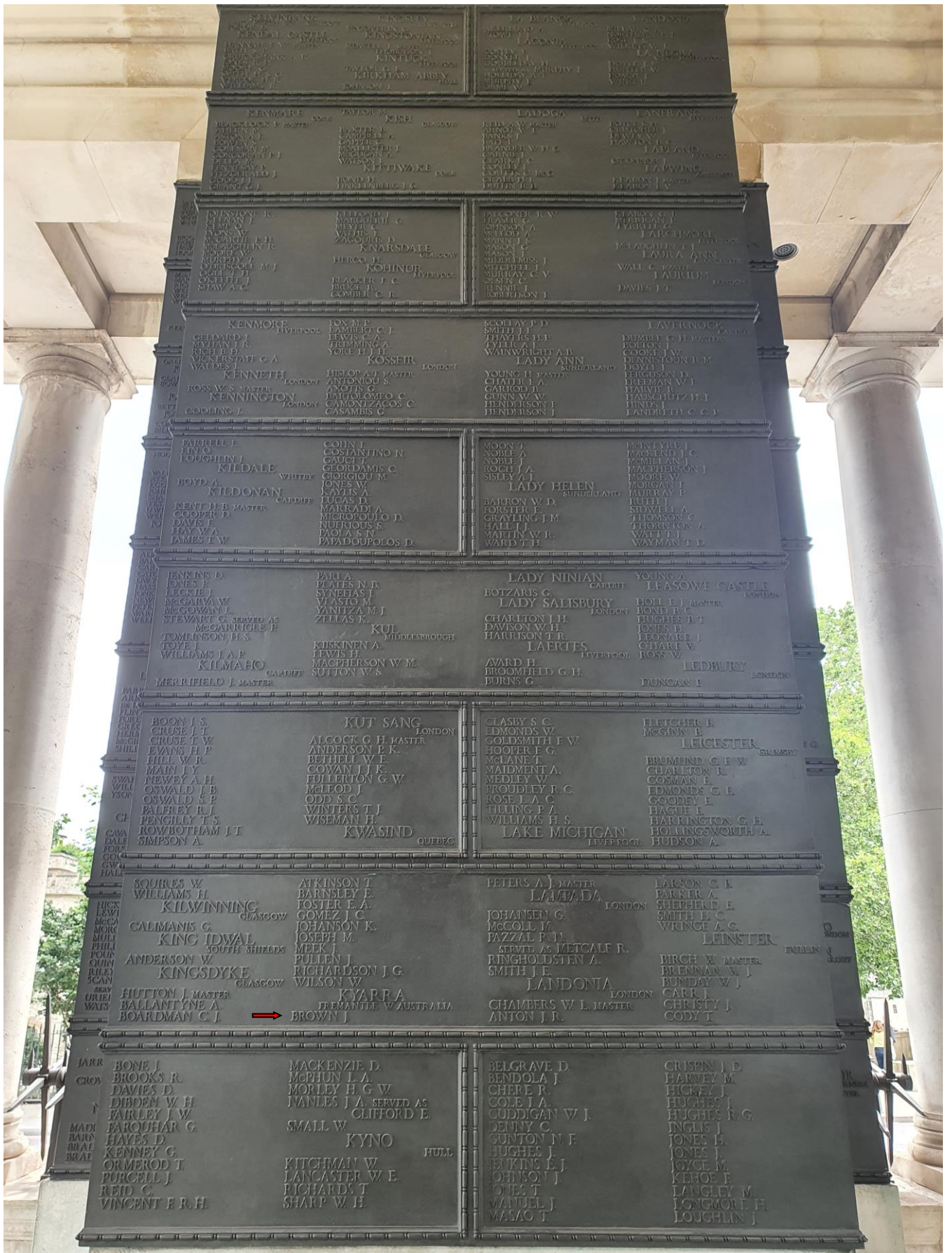
(Photo from CWGC)

Photo of J. Brown's name on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Tower Hill Memorial, Greater London, England.



(Photos courtesy of Michael Sedgwick)





Panel 10 (Photos courtesy of Michael Sedgwick)

