

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



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**34 CORPORAL**

**G. BURNS**

**AUST. ARMY POSTAL CORPS**

**17TH OCTOBER, 1917 Age 26**

*In Memory Of The Dear Friend  
Of T. Scott & Agnes Cullen  
N.S.W.*

## George BURNS

George Burns was born around 1891 to mother – Mary Burns. He stated on his Attestation Papers that he was born at Darlinghurst, Sydney, NSW however, information proved by his friend for the Roll of Honour states he was born in Victoria.

George Burns attended Convent School at Campbelltown, NSW, according to information supplied for the Roll of Honour.

The 1913 Australian Electoral Roll for the division of Darling Harbour – At or Near the Town Hall, Sydney recorded George Burns, Postal Assistant, of 50 Carrington Street.

George Burns was a 24 year old, single, Postal Assistant with G.P.O. from 35 Bucknell Street, Newtown, Sydney, NSW when he enlisted at Warwick Farm, Sydney, NSW on 21st August, 1915 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 34 & his religion was Roman Catholic. His next of kin was listed as his friend – Mrs Ellen Scott of Perry Street, Campsie, NSW.

Private George Burns was posted to Camp with 11th Reinforcements of 3rd Battalion on 6th September, 1915. He was transferred to Australian Postal Unit on 28th October, 1915.

Private George Burns embarked from Melbourne on RMS *Medina* on 2nd November, 1915 with the Army Field Post Office Details – Post Corps.

Private George Burns was admitted to 2nd General Hospital, Ghezireh, Cairo on 17th January, 1916 with ear trouble. He was discharged to duty on 2nd February, 1916.

Private George Burns was promoted to Corporal on 8th March, 1916.

Corporal George Burns was admitted to 1st Australian Stationary Hospital at Ismalia on 22nd June, 1916 with Otitis Media.

Corporal George Burns was posted to A.I.F. Headquarters

Corporal George Burns was marched in to A.A.S.C. Training Depot at Parkhouse, Wiltshire from Admin. Headquarters. London on 9th January, 1917.

Corporal George Burns was admitted to 1st A.D.H. (Australian Dermatological Hospital) Bulford, Wiltshire on 9th February, 1917 with V.D. He was transferred to Parkhouse on 1st March, 1917 & discharged on 14th May, 1917.

Corporal George Burns was detached for duty with Postal Corps, Mt Pleasant from attached duty Postal with A.A.S.C. Training Depot on 18th May, 1917.

Corporal George Burns was marched in to Postal Service at Salisbury, Wiltshire from Headquarters, London on 21st May, 1917.

Corporal George Burns was marched in to No. 2 (B) Group, Rollestone, Wiltshire for duty in Field Post Office on 1st July, 1917.

Corporal George Burns died around 7 am on 17th October, 1917 at Field Post Office, Fovant, Wiltshire from a gunshot wound to roof of the mouth.

A death for George Burns, aged 25, was registered in the December quarter, 1917 in the district of Wilton, Wiltshire, England.

A Court of Enquiry was held at No. 4 Camp, Fovant, Wiltshire on 17th October, 1917 for the purpose of enquiring into and reporting upon the death of No. 34 Cpl. Burns, G. A.A.P.C.

Evidence:

1st. Witness. Capt. E. Huntley R.A.N.C. states:-

At about 7.20 a.m. on the 17th, October 1917, I went in an ambulance from Fovant Military Hospital to the Camp Post Office Fovant. On arrival there, I found in a room at the back of the P.O. a soldier whom I afterwards learned was Corporal Burns, lying dead in the room. He was lying on his right side with his head against the stove. There was a large pool of blood around his head and blood had been coming from his nose and mouth. I took the body to the mortuary at the Military Hospital Fovant, and made an examination. I found a large wound in the roof of the mouth which I should think was caused by a bullet. When I first saw the body lying in the room at the back of the Camp Post Office there was a revolver lying at his feet - to the left of them.

The Witness withdraws:

2nd. Witness. No. 412. Cpl. R.A. Bassett, A.A.P.C. states:-

At about 6.55 a.m. on 17th, October 1917, Corporal Burns of the A.A.P.C. came to the Field Post Office Fovant. He told me he had come for some belongings. He went to the registration room where he had worked prior to his transfer to No.3. Group on 16th, October 1917. Almost immediately after Cpl. Burns left me and went to the registration room I heard a shot fired and the noise of a body falling. I went to the registration room to see what had happened and found Corpl. Burns lying on his right side near a table. A service revolver such as is issued to all F.P.O.'s was lying at his feet. Blood was running freely from his mouth and nose. He appeared to be dead. I immediately sent to Fovant Military Hospital. In response to my call a M.O. arrived, examined the body and took it away. Corpl. Burns never spoke or moved after I entered the registration room. I also summoned a Sergeant of the Imperial M.P.'s who was stationed in rear of the Field Post Office. When Corpl. Burns spoke to me he appeared quite normal.

The Witness withdraws:-

3rd. Witness. No. 1118. Bombardier L.H. Tolliday, 5th. Batty. A.F.A. attached A.A.P.C. states:-

At about 7 a.m. on the 17th, October 1917, Corpl. Burns came to the room in which I slept in the Field Post Office Fovant. He wished me "good morning" he said he had come for some bundles. He appeared quite normal. Immediately after Cpl. Burns went into the registration Rooms. About a minute later I heard a report; Cpl. Bassett, who was occupying the room with me said "Good God he has shot himself" or words to that effect. Corpl. Bassett and I rushed to the door of the registration room. There I saw Cpl. Burns lying on the floor in a pool of blood. A service Webley revolver lying at his feet. I went over to Corpl. Burns but he neither spoke or moved. I then went for the ambulance and summoned Military Police. A few days ago Cpl. Burns was ordered to transfer from No.2. Group P.O. to No.3. Group P.O. Corpl. Burns did not wish to transfer



(2)

and took the order very much to heart. A few days later he was told to make the move to No.3. Group P.O. He refused to do so, when he was given a certain time to do so. In telling me of this Corpl. Burns said "I suppose this means clink for me" or words to that effect. He further said before I go to clink something will happen to me. He then gave me a piece of paper with two names and addresses written on it telling me to write to the people mentioned on the paper should anything happen to him. I never dreamt Cpl. Cpl. Burns would attempt to take his life, so I took no notice of his remarks and threw the paper he had given me in the dust bin next day. I have found that paper since the event.  
The witness withdraws.

4th. Witness. No. 1310. Pte. E.P. Benson, 7th. Battalion, A.I.F. now attached to A.A.P.C. states:-

About 7 a.m. on the 17th. October 1917, I was awakened by a noise in a room next to the one I was sleeping in. In consequence of a remark by Cpl. Bassett I jumped out of bed and went to the registration room. There I saw Cpl. Burns lying on his right side with his head against the stove and a service revolver lying at his feet. Cpl. Burns was lying in a pool of blood which was coming from his mouth and nose. About the beginning of August I was with Cpl. Burns who had recently said "Good bye" to a pal leaving from here for the front. Burns felt the separation keenly and had crying spells for about a week. One night when he appeared to be particularly upset he threatened he would blow his brains out. He said this with such earnestness that I took him to a pal with whom I left him. I then returned to the P.O. and removed the cartridges from the revolver issued to P.P.O.'s. Some time later Corpl. Burns returned and noticed the empty revolver. He wanted to know who had taken the cartridges. I told him he could not shoot himself with an empty revolver. The Cartridges were not put back until the following day when Burns appeared to have completely quietened down. Cpl. Burns was very sensitive and took every little upset very much to heart.

The Witness Withdraws.

5th. Witness. No. 6152. Sgt. W.J. Williams M.F.P. states:-

At about 7.7.a.m. on the 17th. October 1917, I was summoned by Bombardier Tolliday to come to the F.P.O. Fovant. I went to a room where I saw a soldier whom I afterwards learned was Cpl. C. Burns of the A.A.P.C. lying on the floor with his head near the stove.. There was a pool of blood near the head and blood was coming from the mouth and nose of the man, Cpl. Burns. A service revolver was lying near the mans feet. I placed my hand under the mans tunic in the region of his heart. I could detect no sign of life. I examined the revolver. It contained five live cartridges, and one exploded one. I sent for an ambulance and caused a report of the occurrence to be #4 forwarded to No.2. Group Headquarters.

Witness withdraws.

## The Finding of the Court

*The Court declare that they have examined witnesses, inspected the room wherein No. 34 Corpl. G. Burns of the A.A.P.C. met his death and have viewed the body of the said Corpl. Burns at the mortuary at Fovant Military Hospital.*

*The Court further declare that after enquiring into the circumstances surrounding the death of No. 34 Corpl. Burns G. of the A.A.P.C. that they are of opinion that the said Corpl. Burns died from the effects of a gun shot wound in the roof of the mouth, that a bullet fired from a service pattern revolver caused the said wound and that the shot causing the death of the said Cpl. G. Burns was fired by No. 34 Cpl. G. Burns of the A.A.P.C.*

Extract of Newspaper article in Corporal Burns' Service Record file from the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal and General Advertiser* – 20th October, 1917:

### **AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER'S SUICIDE**

*The suicide of an Australian soldier named George Burns, a Corpl. attached to the Postal Corps, and stationed at the Field Post Office Fovant, was the subject of an inquest held at the Fovant Military Hospital on Thursday by the Coroner for South Wilts. (Mr F. H. Trethowan). Deceased who was 25 years of age, came from New South Wales. – Bombardier L. H. Tolliday Postal Corps, A.I.F. stationed at Field Post Office Fovant said the deceased was stationed at the same Office. On Monday deceased said to him "If anything happens, or they do anything to me write to this address" and he handed him a slip of paper. Witness knew he had refused to obey an order and thought he might get into some trouble, but as he was busy he didn't take any notice. He knew the deceased was moving to another station, and deceased told him it was unfair to move him.*

*About 7 a.m. on Wednesday deceased entered the Post Office and said he had come for his brushes. He seemed quite normal. He went from the sleeping room into the Office, which was empty. Shortly afterwards he heard a sharp report. Corpl. Basset who was with him went into the room and they found the deceased lying dead near the stove, on the floor, with a revolver near his feet. Medical aid was sent for. The revolver had been supplied to the Post Office where it was kept.*

*About the end of July a great friend of deceased's went to France, and he was very upset and wept about it and seemed to feel it very much. Another friend of his went to France on Friday evening, and deceased spoke to him about it and seemed rather upset. Replying to foreman, witness said the deceased had not served overseas. He was not weakminded, but very sensitive. Pte E. P. Benson A.I.F. attached to the Postal Corps, Fovant stated that in August the deceased told him he would blow his brains out. Witness understood he was upset because a friend of his had gone to France. Witness got him out of the way and then went to the Office and took the cartridges from the office revolver and gave them to the last witness. Shortly afterwards deceased said he would blow his brains out, and witness told him he could not shoot himself with an empty revolver. Later he wanted to know who had removed the cartridges. He stormed and raved about it and witness told him he would get the cartridges in the morning. He was sober at the time. Usually deceased was cheerful, but for quite a week after his friend went away he was upset. Another friend left just before he killed himself, and he seemed upset about this. Capt. E. Huntley R.A.M.C. Fovant Military Hospital, said the deceased was brought to the Hospital about 7.40 a.m. on Wednesday. Death was due to injuries to the head caused by a revolve bullet.*

*The Jury returned a verdict of "Suicide during temporary insanity."*

Corporal George Burns was buried on 20th October, 1917 in St George's Churchyard, Fovant, Wiltshire, England – Plot number II. B. 8. and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. From the burial report of Corporal George Burns - *Coffin was polished deal and brass fittings. Buried with full Military Honours.*

Base Records contacted Mrs E. Scott, of "Allanton", Perry Street, Campsie, NSW, who was registered as the next of kin of the late Corporal Burns in June, 1921 to enquire if there were any blood relatives alive – father, mother, brothers, sisters etc Mrs Scott replied that Mary Burns, mother of the late Corporal Burns, had died in 1893 & there were no known relatives. (A death was registered in 1893 in the district of Burwood, NSW for Mary Burns – parents unknown.)



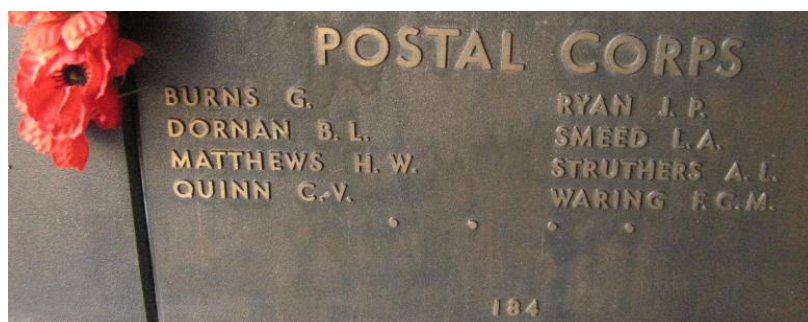
Further information provided by Mrs E. Scott states that George Burns was the illegitimate son of Mary Burns who died in April, 1893. He was placed in the care of the State & on reaching his 21st year, tried to locate any relatives but failed. At this time George Burns found out about his mother's death and that the Police had tried to find any relations at the time of her death. George Burns became friends with Mrs Scott's son when they worked at the G.P.O. George Burns was a constant visitor to her house through the boys' friendship & spent weekends & holidays with the Scott family. Mrs Scott further stated "*On leaving for the Front he said he wished me to have his personal belongings should anything happen to him. He said he knew of no one he would like and who he thought would do better as he wished. Should the Minister see fit to give me the War Medals I will be honoured also I can truthfully say I know of no one else who could claim them.*"

Base Records recommended that the War Medals be entrusted to Mrs Scott & that she would preserve with due care and produce at any time to the Department upon receipt of its demand. Mrs Ellen Scott signed a Statutory Declaration on 12th September, 1921 stating she would preserve with due care as memorials any War Medals entrusted to her on account of the service of the late Corporal George Burns & produce them to the Dept. of Defence upon receipt of its demand in writing.

Corporal George Burns was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Corporal Burns' friend - Mrs Ellen Scott (Scroll sent November, 1921 & Plaque sent September, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Corporal George Burns – service number 34, aged 26, of Australian Army Postal Corps. He was the son of the late Mrs Mary Burns. Born in Victoria, Australia.

Corporal G. Burns is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 184.



(Photos Cathy Sedgwick)

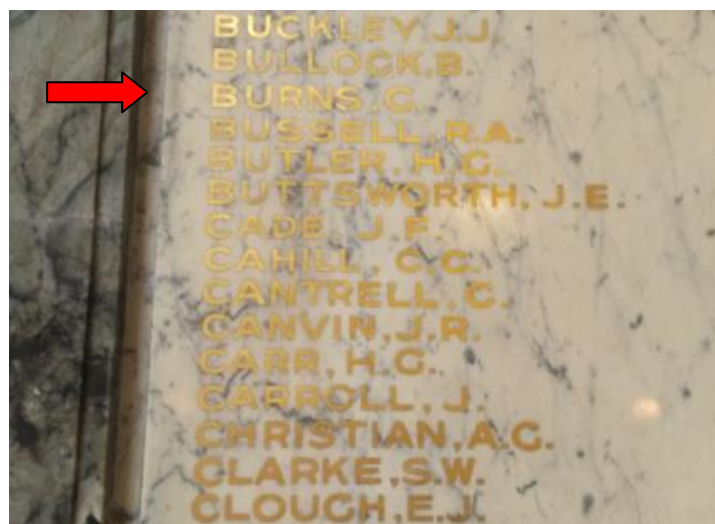


Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

G. Burns is remembered on the Postmaster General's Department in NSW Honour Roll, located at the Westin Hotel, cnr Martin Plaza and George Street (Formerly Sydney G.P.O.).



(Photos by Cathy Sedgwick)





Information provided by Ellen Scott, friend of the late Corporal Burns, for the Roll of Honour, stated that George Burns was connected with Campbelltown, NSW. G. Burns is remembered on the World War 1 plaque on the Kevin Wheatley VC Memorial Wall, located at Dredges Cottage, 303 Queen Street, Campbelltown, NSW.



(Photo by Sardaka)



(78 pages of Corporal George Burns' 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**

LATEST CASUALTIES

352nd LIST

Died (Other Causes)

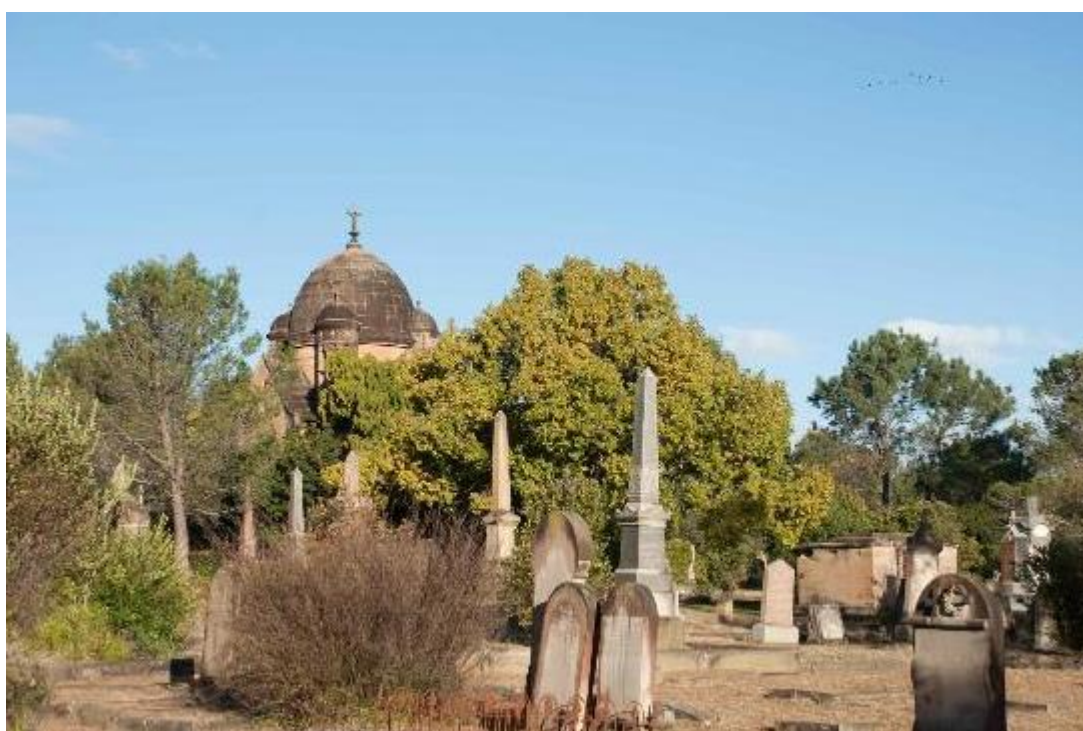
Cpl. G. Burns, Campsie

*(The Land, Sydney, NSW – 23 November, 1917)*

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George Burns is remembered on a Headstone located in Rookwood Cemetery, near Lidcombe, Sydney, NSW – Old Catholic Mortuary 1, Section 13. (Not recorded in Burial Register) The inscription reads:

*Cpl. Postal Unit, A.I.F. Who died on active service.*



***General Photo of an older section of Rookwood Cemetery (Photo from Tripadvisor)***

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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)*

Corporal G. Burns does have a personal inscription on his headstone.

*In Memory Of The Dear Friend Of T. Scott & Agnes Cullen N.S.W.*

## 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 Corporal G. Burns' Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in St George's Churchyard, Fovant, Wiltshire, England.







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