

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



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**2182 CORPORAL**

**J. F. BYRNE**

**58TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.**

**5TH JANUARY, 1918 Age 29**

## John Francis BYRNE

John Francis Byrne was born at Bally Valley, Killaloe, Co. Clare, Ireland around 1889 to parents Patrick and Alicia Byrne. (John Byrne stated on his Attestation Papers that he was born at Dublin, Ireland).

John Francis Byrne attended National School at Killaloe, Ireland.

According to information supplied by his mother for the Roll of Honour – John Francis Byrne came to Australia when he was 27 years old.

John Francis Byrne was a 25 year old, single, Labourer when he enlisted at Box Hill, Victoria on 14th September, 1914 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 1119 & his religion was Roman Catholic. His next of kin was listed as his mother – Mrs Elica Byrne, 54 James Street, Dublin, Ireland.

Private John Francis Byrne embarked from Melbourne, Victoria on HMAT *Themistocles* (A32) on 22nd December, 1914 with the 6th Infantry Battalion, 1st Reinforcements.

Private John Francis Byrne embarked to join M.E.F. (Gallipoli Campaign) from Alexandria on 5th April, 1915.

Private John Francis Byrne was wounded at Anzac Gallipoli on 26th July, 1915 (date as stated on Casualty Form – Active Service). He was admitted to 1st Australia Casualty Station on 25th July, 1915 with shrapnel wounds to left side. (date as stated on Casualty Form – Active Service).

### War Diary - 6th Battalion

*The total casualties during the month [July] were:-*

*Killed – Officers 1 Other Ranks 19*

*Wounded – Officers 4 Other Ranks 60*

(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)

### **6th Battalion**

The 6th Battalion was among the first infantry units raised for the AIF during the First World War. Like the 5th, 7th and 8th Battalions, it was recruited from Victoria and, together with these battalions, formed the 2nd Brigade.

The battalion was raised within a fortnight of the declaration of war in August 1914 and embarked just two months later. After a brief stop in Albany, Western Australia, the battalion proceeded to Egypt, arriving on 2 December. It later took part in the ANZAC landing on 25 April 1915, as part of the second wave. Ten days after the landing, the 2nd Brigade was transferred from ANZAC to Cape Helles to help in the attack on the village of Krithia. The attack captured little ground but cost the brigade almost a third of its strength. The Victorian battalions returned to ANZAC to help defend the beachhead, and in August the 2nd Brigade fought at the battle of Lone Pine. The battalion served at ANZAC until the evacuation in December.

(Extract of Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)

Private John Francis Byrne was admitted to Hospital at Malta on 31st July, 1915 from *Somali* with broken ribs. He was later admitted to Military Hospital at Cottonera, Malta – in a serious condition. Private Byrne embarked for England on Hospital Ship *Asturias* on 18th August, 1915.

Private John Francis Byrne was admitted to Military Hospital, Lewisham, London, England on 26th August, 1915. He was discharged from 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield to furlough as "Fit" on 8th September, 1915.

Private John Francis Byrne joined 15th Draft at A. & N.Z. Base at Weymouth, Dorset, England on 29th December, 1915 to rejoin M.E.F. (Mediterranean Expeditionary Force).

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

Private John Francis Byrne disembarked from *Oriana* at Alexandria on 13th January, 1916. He rejoined his Battalion at Tel-el-Kebir on 15th January, 1916.

Private John Francis Byrne was transferred to 58th Battalion from 6th Battalion on 17th February, 1916 & was taken on strength of 58th Battalion at Serapeum the same day.

Private John Francis Byrne embarked from Alexandria on 17th June, 1916 on *Transylvania* to join B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force). He disembarked at Marseilles, France on 23rd June, 1916.

Private John Francis Byrne proceeded to England on furlough from 18th January, 1917 & rejoined 58th Battalion from leave on 9th February, 1917.

Private John Francis Byrne was promoted to temporary Corporal from 20th June, 1917 – vice 2779 Barter sick.

Miss A. M. Callahan of Blackburn Street, Surry Hills, Victoria, wrote to Base Records in July, 1917 asking for a contact address for Private J. F. Byrne, "C" Company, 6th Battalion. She had heard from him regularly until "5 months ago and since then my letters have been returned marked "unable to trace". I have heard through another soldier abroad that he is still in the trenches in France but had not received any letters from us for some months, although we have written regularly." Base Records replied that the postal address was: "Private J. F. Byrne No. 2182/119, 58th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, ABROAD."

Temporary Corporal John Francis Byrne was promoted to Corporal on 1st August, 1917.

Corporal John Francis Byrne was sent sick to Hospital on 11th August, 1917. He was admitted to 15th Australian Field Ambulance on 11th August, 1917 – P.U.O. (Pyrexia (fever) of unknown origin). He rejoined his Battalion on 16th August, 1917.

Corporal John Francis Byrne was sent sick to Hospital on 16th October, 1917. He was admitted to 8th Australian Field Ambulance on 17th October, 1917 – P.U.O. then transferred the same day to 5th Divisional Rest Station. Corporal Byrne was transferred to CCS on 18th October, 1917 with empyaema. He was transferred & admitted to 54th General Hospital on 19th October, 1917 with pleurisy. Corporal Byrne was transferred to England on Hospital Ship *St. Andrew* on 21st October, 1917 with pleurisy.

## **58th Battalion**

The 58th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 17 February 1916 as part of the expansion of the AIF. Roughly half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 6th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 6th, the 58th was predominantly composed of men from Victoria. The battalion became part of the 15th Brigade of the 5th Australian Division.

Having only arrived in France on 23 June, the 58th became embroiled in its first major battle on the Western Front at Fromelles on 19 July. The battle was a disaster. The 58th had the dual role of providing carrying parties and a reserve force. The reserve force (approximately half of the battalion) was ordered to attack late in the battle and was virtually annihilated by machine-gun fire; as a whole, the 58th suffered casualties equal to almost a third of its strength. Despite the grievous losses in its battalions, the 5th Division continued to man the front in the Fromelles sector for a further two months.

Early in 1917 the 58th battalion participated in the advance that followed the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, but it was spared from the assault. It did, however, defend gains made during the second battle of Bullecourt, between 9 and 12 May. Later in the year, the AIF's focus of operations switched to the Ypres sector in Belgium. The 58th's major battle here was at Polygon Wood on 26 September.

*(Extract of Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)*

Corporal John Francis Byrne was admitted to General Military Hospital, Colchester, Essex, England on 22nd October, 1917 with Pleurisy.

The Red Cross Wounded & Missing file for Corporal John Francis Byrne contains an update on Corporal John Francis Byrne's condition on 31st December, 1917 which reads:

*"Adm. Colchester Gen. M. Hpl 22-10-17 – Pleurisy.*

*Suff: from Pleural effusion, ? Tubercular. The disease appears to be progressing slowly, necessitating periodic drawing off of the fluid. His condition to-day is not at all satisfactory & is giving rise to anxiety."*

An update of the 3rd January, 1918 reads:

*"Regret is sinking and can hold no hope of his recover. Suspect Tubercle unfortunately verified."*

Corporal John Francis Byrne died at 7.45 am on 5th January, 1918 at General Military Hospital, Colchester, Essex, England from Pleurisy & Effusion.

A death for John F. Byrne, aged 28, was registered in the March quarter, 1918 in the district of Colchester, Essex, England.

Corporal John Francis Byrne was buried at 2 pm on 9th January, 1918 in Colchester Cemetery, Colchester, Essex, England – Grave 11, Section P, Division 7. From the burial report of Corporal John Francis Byrne - *Coffin was good, Elm with brass fittings. The deceased soldier was accorded a full Military Funeral. The coffin was draped with the Union Jack Flag and surmounted by a beautiful wreath. Gun Carriage, Firing Party, Bugler and Pallbearers were supplied by the 30th London Regiment stationed at Colchester. No relatives were present at the funeral. The grave will be turfed and an oak cross will be erected by the A.I.F. London. Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F. London were represented at the funeral.*

[Note – Other Australian Soldiers buried in Colchester Cemetery have a letter in their Service Record file that was sent to the next-of-kin advising that the remains had been exhumed & re-interred. There is no such letter in the Record file for the late Corporal John Francis Byrne, however his remains would have been re-interred as the current information of the grave of Corporal Byrne by the CWGC is T. 5. 62.]

Corporal John Francis Byrne has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

The Red Cross Wounded & Missing file for Corporal John Francis Byrne contains a letter from Red Cross Visitor, Ashbourne House, Colchester, which reads: *"I deeply regret to inform you he passed away last night. I wrote in my last report he was not expected to live many hours and previously to that how seriously ill he was. He took a sudden turn for the worse. Before that we thought he was going to get well. He was well taken care of and had everything done that could be done, but he was tubercular unfortunately. He was such a nice man, and one is so sorry. The sister is a splendid one and so kind and let me see him every day. I saw him yesterday afternoon. If it is possible I hope to go to the funeral. P.S. I am writing to Mrs Byrnes (Cpl. Byrne's Mother) and also to a lady he knew and to whom his last letter was addressed."*

Miss A. M. Callahan of Blackburn Street, Surry Hills, Victoria, wrote to Base Records in January, 1918 stating she had been notified by The Red Cross of the death of her friend "Corporal J. F. Byrne, No. 1119/2182, 58th Battalion "Ireland" in Colchester Hospital. She was enquiring as to who was named as the next-of-kin as she could have a photo of his grave sent to his people if she could obtain their address or failing that she may be able to get on herself as she was his nearest friend in Australia. Base Records advised Miss Callahan that the next-of-kin of the late Corporal J F. Byrne was his mother – Mrs E. Byrne, 54 James Street, Dublin, Ireland.

(Note – communications to Mrs E. Byrne, 54 James Street, Dublin, Ireland. from Base Records in June & July, 1918 were returned as "not known".

Rev. G. Byrne, of Lilydale, Victoria, wrote to Base Hospital, St. Kilda, Victoria who then forwarded the letter to Base Records in June, 1918 enquiring about Pte John Francis Byrne, "D" Company, 6th Battalion, A.I.F. with the following: *"1. If dead when & where. 2. Who did he mention as next of kin. 3. To whom is his back pay to be sent."* Base Records replied to Rev. G. Byrne in June, 1918 with the relevant details.

Corporal John Francis Byrne was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Corporal Byrne's father – Mr P. Byrne, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll & Plaque issued through England in October, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Corporal John Francis Byrne – service number 2182, aged 29, of 58th Battalion, Australian Infantry. He was the son of Patrick and Alicia Byrne, of Bally Valley, Killaloe, Co. Clare, Ireland.

Corporal J. F. Byrne is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 165.



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

John Francis Byrne is remembered in Ireland's National Roll of Honour 1914-1921.

(70 pages of Corporal John Francis Byrne'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, Red Cross Wounded & Missing) & National Archives*



## **Newspaper Notices**

### **THE SIXTY-EIGHTH CASUALTY LIST**

#### **WOUNDED**

Victoria

Pte J. F. Byrne, Ireland.

(*The Mildura Cultivator*, Victoria – 25 August, 1915)

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### **ROLL OF HONOUR**

#### **VICTORIAN LIST**

#### **DIED OF ILLNESS**

Cpl. J. F. BYRNE, Ireland, 5/1/18

(*Weekly Times*, Melbourne, Victoria – 26 January, 1918)

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### **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)*

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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 J. F. Byrne 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)

**Corporal J. F. Byrne's CWGC Headstone (marked with red arrow)**



Photo of Corporal J. F. Byrne'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)