

**Sutton Veny,
Wiltshire, England**

War Graves

World War 1



Lest We Forget



6818 PRIVATE

F. J. COLLIS

12TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.

24TH MARCH, 1918 Age 25

*Commonwealth War Graves Headstone for Pte F. J. Collis is located in
Grave Plot # 329. D. 19. of St. John the Evangelist Churchyard, Sutton Veny*

Francis Joseph COLLIS

Francis Joseph Collis was born at Broadmarsh near Brighton, Tasmania on 11th July, 1892 to parents Nicholas Edward Robert and Mary Jane Collis (nee McShane).

Francis Joseph Collis was educated at St Mathews R.C. School, Brighton, Tasmania.

Francis Joseph Collis was a 24 year old, single, Farmer from Brighton, Tasmania when he enlisted at Claremont, Tasmania on 29th September, 1916 with the of the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 6818 & his religion was Roman Catholic. His next of kin was listed as his father – Mr N. E. R. Collis of Brighton, Tasmania.

Private Francis Joseph Collis embarked from Melbourne on HMAT *Ulysses (A38)* on 25th October, 1916, with 12th Battalion, 22nd Reinforcements, along with his younger brother – Private Albert Edward Collis, 6819. They disembarked at Plymouth, England on 28th December, 1916.

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.

Private Francis Joseph Collis was marched in to 3rd Training Battalion at Durrington Camp, Wiltshire on 29th December, 1916.

Private Francis Joseph Collis proceeded overseas to France via Folkestone on 5th April, 1917. He joined Base Depot at Etaples, France on 6th April, 1917 where he was struck off strength on 9th April, 1917 & taken on strength on 12th April, 1917.

Private Francis Joseph Collis was wounded in action on 5th May, 1917. He was admitted to 5th Field Ambulance on 7th May, 1917, with illness "*NYD Nervousness*" (NYD – not yet determined). Private Collis was transferred to 47th Casualty Clearing Station on 8th May, 1917 "*NYD Shell Shock*." Private Collis was admitted to Hospital at Doullens on 17th May, 1917 & was discharged to duty on 22nd May, 1917 in France. He rejoined his Battalion on 27th May, 1917.

Private Francis Joseph Collis reported sick on 13th August, 1917. On 17th August, 1917, Private Collis was admitted to 53rd Casualty Clearing Station with Trench Fever & transferred to 54th General Hospital with Trench Fever on 20th August, 1917. He embarked for England on board the Hospital Ship *St. Patrick* on 23rd August, 1917.

Private Francis Joseph Collis was admitted to Guildford War Hospital in England on 23rd August, 1917 & transferred to 3rd Auxiliary Hospital at Dartford on 8th October, 1917. He was discharged to Depot at Weymouth on 12th October, 1917.

Private Francis Joseph Collis was marched in from No. 2 Command Depot on 17th October, 1917 & marched out to No. 4 Command Depot at Hurdcott, Wiltshire. Private Collis was marched in to Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge Deverill, Wiltshire on 30th November, 1917.

Private Francis Joseph Collis was admitted to the Military Hospital at Sutton Veny, Wiltshire on 14th December, 1917 with Influenza.

A telegram was sent to Mr N. Collis (father of Private Collis) on 25th January, 1918 reporting that Private Francis Collis was seriously ill. Another telegram was sent on 5th February, 1918 advising that Private Francis Collis was improving.

Private Francis Joseph Collis died on 24th March, 1918 at the Military Hospital, Sutton Veny of Tuberculosis Generalised.

The Red Cross Wounded & Missing File for Private F. J. Collis contains a letter from the Assistant Matron of the Military Hospital., Sutton Veny, which reads:

“Pte Collis died in this Hospital on 24.3.18 of pneumonia. He was also I believe thought to be turbercular, He was here for several months and improved a little at one time and then gradually seemed to get a little weaker every day. He never complained much, always thought he would be better in a day or two. He had a good many people to see him (locally) who used to bring him flowers and fruit, and he had every attention. He was mercifully unconscious for some little time before he died and the priest visited him every day. The Sister of the Ward did write to his people. He is buried in Sutton Veny Churchyard.”

A death for Frank J. Collis, aged 25, was registered in the March quarter, 1918 in the district of Warminster, Wiltshire.

Private Francis Joseph Collis was buried on 27th March, 1918 in St. John the Evangelist Churchyard at Sutton Veny - Grave no. 329. From the burial report of Private Collis - *The deceased was accorded a military funeral, the coffin being oak with brass fittings and name plate. The Firing Party was composed of men of deceased's unit and the Funeral was attended by about 40 members of the 3rd Brigade.*

Private Francis Joseph Collis requested in his Will dated 4th November, 1917 that all his money & effects to be left to his mother – Mary Collis of Brighton Junction, Tasmania.

Private Francis Joseph Collis was entitled to British War Medal & the Victory Medal as he had entered a Theatre of War. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Private Collis' father – Mr N. E. R. Collis (sent December, 1921 & October, 1922).

A War Pension was granted to Mary Jane Collis, mother of late Private Francis Joseph Collis – “Granted 20/- per fortnight from 27/5/18 in addition to pension of 20/- per fortnight from 9/12/17 granted in respect of Albert E Collis.”

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private Francis Joseph Collis, 6818, of 12th Battalion, Australian Infantry, A.I.F., as the son of N. E. R. and Mary Jane Collis of Brighton Junction, Tasmania.

Private F. J. Collis is commemorated in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 65.

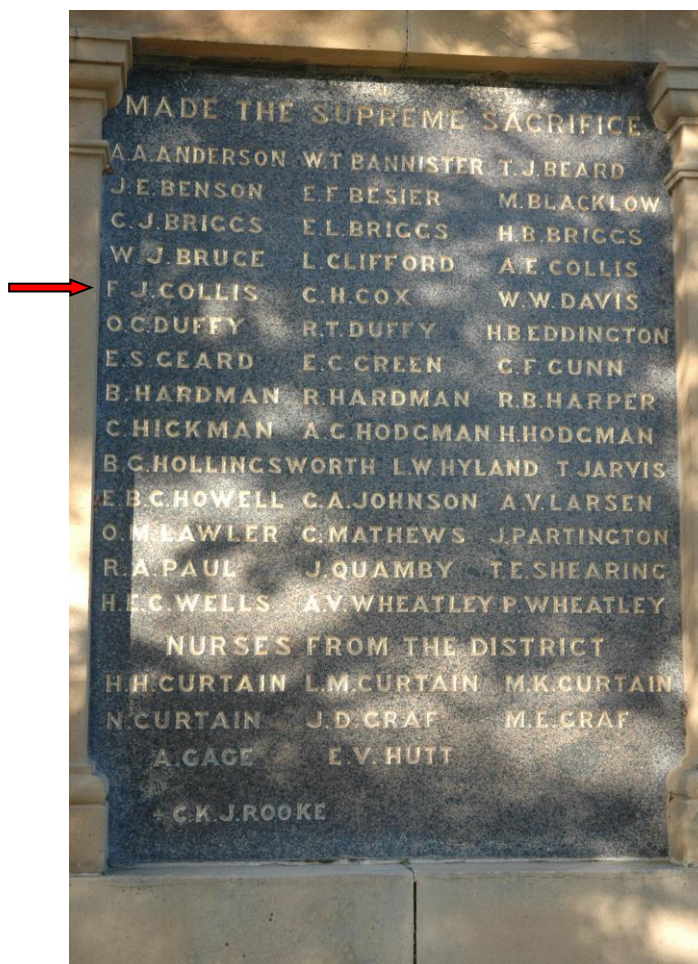


Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

F. J. Collis & his brother A. E. Collis are remembered on the Municipality of Brighton War Memoria/Cenotaph, located on Brighton Road (Midland Highway) & Ford Road, Pontville, Tasmania.



Municipality of Brighton War Memoria/Cenotaph (Photo from AWM Places of Pride - Arthur Garland)



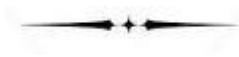
F. J. Collis & his brother A. E. Collis are both remembered on the Brighton Roll of Honour located in Brighton Council Chambers in Gagebrook, Tasmania.



Brighton Municipality Roll of Honour (Photo from *AWM Places of Pride* - Arthur Garland)

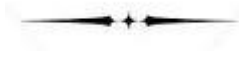
(51 pages of Private Francis Joseph Collis' Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

Information obtained from the Australian War Memorial (Roll of Honour, First World War Embarkation Roll, Red Cross Wounded & Missing) & National Archives.



[Connected to Private Francis Joseph Collis –](#)

[Private Albert Edward Collis, 6819, 12th Battalion A.I.F. Died of wounds on 21st September, 1917 & is buried in Lijssehoek Military Cemetery, Belgium.](#)





Francis Joseph Collis (*Brighton Heritage Association – with thanks to Maree Da Costa*)



F. J. Collis (middle) A. E. Collis (right) (*Photo with thanks to Maree Da Costa*)

Newspaper Reports

TASMANIAN CASUALTIES

DIED

Pte F. J. Collis, Brighton – 24/3/18

(The North Western Advocate and the Emu Bay Times, Tasmania – Wednesday 10 April, 1918)

ROLL OF HONOUR

COLLIS – On March 24, 1918, at Sutton Veny Military Hospital, England, Francis Joseph, the dearly beloved second son of Mr and Mrs Nicholas Collis, sen., of Brighton Junction, aged 25 years. R.I.P.

(The Mercury, Hobart, Tasmania – Tuesday 23 April, 1918)

TRIBUTE TO THE BRAVE

Memorial Window at Brighton

An immense congregation at St. Matthew's Church, Brighton, yesterday afternoon saw a memorial window unveiled to the brothers Albert and Francis Collis, who were killed at the war. Major E. S. Davis, Headquarters Staff, represented the Commandant, who was absent on duty. The Governor (Sir Francis Newdegate) accompanied by Miss Newdegate and Major Kerr-Pearse, was received at the church entrance by the Warden and councillors of the municipality. His Excellency offered sympathy to Mr and Mrs N. Collis, and an address of welcome was read by the Rev. A. Cullen, pastor of the district.

His Excellency replied, and referred to the part played by Catholics in the history of the British Empire.

The Warden then referred to the number of men who had gone from Brighton to fight for Australia, amongst whom Albert and Francis Collis had given their lives.

His Excellency next unveiled the stained glass window, representing the Crucifixion. Underneath are inscribed the names of Albert and Francis Collis and the dates of their death. At the moment of unveiling Mr. T. Hopkins rendered the "Last Post"

Mr. W. M'Shane moved a vote of thanks to his Excellency. This was seconded by the Rev. J. Cullen (St. Joseph's), who referred to the sacred associations and memories the church had for the Collis family. The beautiful window would ever remain as a witness to the Christian virtues of the two young Irish-Australians whose names were inscribed thereon.

After his Excellency's reply, the function concluded with the "Dead March."

(World, Hobart, Tasmania – 24 March, 1919)

PONTVILLE CHURCH

St. Matthew's Destroyed by Fire

Entire Contents Lost

Impenetrable Wall of Flame

Eve of 60th Anniversary

St. Matthew's Roman Catholic Church at Pontville was totally destroyed by fire early yesterday morning, the entire contents of the building, including the Stations of the Cross, recently erected at a cost of £200, having been lost.

The destruction of the building is the more regrettable seeing that the fire occurred on the eve of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the opening of the church. The total loss is estimated at between £3,000 and £4,000.

The diamond jubilee of the opening of the church was to have been celebrated on Sunday, and last week a new set of Stations of the Cross was installed, at a cost of £200. St. Matthew's was considered to be one of the best country churches in Tasmania, and the loss will be a big blow to the people of the Roman Catholic community of the Brighton parish, who have worked so hard in the interests of the church.

The first indication that anything was wrong was gained about 6 o'clock yesterday morning, when a resident of Pontville, Mr. J. Barrow, who, when rising preparatory to going to his work, noticed the building in flames. Senior Constable Devitt was informed, and, with Mr. Barrow, made all haste to the church, which was situate about a quarter of a mile from the township. Several residents were aroused as the two men passed by their homes, and others were awakened by the roar of the flames within the building.

FIRE IRRESISTIBLE.

The constable rushed to the main entrance door, and endeavoured to force his way into the burning building. The door was not securely fastened, and as it crashed in, he was confronted by a wall of flame which made any attempt to enter the church impossible. Knowing that valuable contents were at stake, those on the scene were encouraged to do their utmost to check the outbreak. By this time their numbers began to increase, and further attempts were made to gain entrance by means of the doors at the eastern end. Each time, however, the flames proved impenetrable, and were leaping in every direction. A lack of water made it impossible to fight the fire, and as the heat was becoming intense, those present were forced to retreat and leave the church and its contents at the mercy of the flames. Magnificent stained glass windows were broken by the heat, and soon the fire began to show through the topmost parts of the building in every direction. Then, with tragic suddenness, and to the dismay of the helpless group of onlookers, the roof crashed bodily, sending flames leaping over the topmost steeple, which had remained standing.

By 7.30 a.m. only the walls of what was a beautiful church remained. Although from the outside appearance the walls, which were erected 60 years ago, appear to be quite firm, it is extremely doubtful whether this is so.

MEMORIAL WINDOWS.

The calamity is all the more regrettable in consequence of the destruction of four valuable stained glass windows, two of which were erected a few years ago by Mr. Nicholas Collis, sen., in memory of his two sons, Frank and Albert, who gave their lives in the Great War. The window in memory of the late Rev. Father C. Corcoran, who was in charge of the Brighton parish for 16 years, was erected by the church people, while Mrs. Geo. Plesse erected the other in memory of the Stanfield family, who lived in the district for many years. In addition to the stained memorial windows and the newly-erected Stations of the Cross, a beautiful Crucifix, situated at the back of the altar, and presented by the Rev. Father A. J. Cullen, of Cygnet, together with four valuable statues on either side of the altar and an organ valued at £70, were also destroyed.

FINE BUILDING LOST.

St. Matthew's Church, to say the least, was a fine building. It was situated on the hill on the southern side of Pontville, and presented a stately appearance. It was constructed of cut freestone, with an iron roof. The stone was quarried in the district, and, it is stated, was carted by farmers of the surrounding district who were anxious to assist in the erection of the building. Mr. John Gillon, of Hobart Town, erected St. Matthew's in 1867, and there could not be

found the slightest trace of decay in any part of it. The priest in charge of the parish at that time was the Very Rev. Father W. J. Dunne, V.G., and it was mainly through his work among the people that the building was erected. From time to time the interior of the church has been improved, but never in all its history has it been fitted by such beautiful furnishings and statuary as this year.

The Sunday-school, which is within 25 yards of the church, had a narrow escape from being burnt, and although at times it was surrounded by sparks and flying embers from the burning building, it is thought that the iron roof saved it.

The church was only partly insured with the Catholic Church Insurance Company, Melbourne, but it is considered that it will take £4,000 to replace it with a suitable building and equipment.

STONES THROWN IN THE NIGHT.

Only 10 hours before the outbreak was noticed, the usual Sunday evening service was held in the church. It was followed by a meeting to arrange for the jubilee celebrations next week, and when Rev. Father Donald Shaw, who is in charge of Brighton parish, and Mr. Nicholas Collis, sen., left the building everything appeared quite safe. The kerosene lamps and candles were extinguished before they left.

Asked yesterday whether he could suggest any idea as to how the fire originated. Mr. Collis said he could not. He stated, however, that about 1.45 in the morning he was awakened by a shower of stones thrown on the roof of his house near the Brighton racecourse. "Whether the stones were thrown on the roof to let me know the church was on fire, I cannot say," he remarked, "but there certainly seems to be something funny about the whole thing, as everything was left quite safe at the church Sunday evening."

ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH, PONTVILLE



The walls and porch of building as they appeared after the fire which destroyed the whole of the contents yesterday morning. The new Stations of the Cross, recently provided at a cost of £200, and the valuable stained-glass windows, which were destroyed, renders the loss the more severe. The building on the right, which escaped the flames, is used as a Sunday school.

(The Mercury, Hobart, Tasmania – 6 September, 1927)

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 at St. John the Evangelist Churchyard at Sutton Veny. 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)

Private Francis Joseph Collis does not have a personal inscription on his headstone.

St. John the Evangelist Churchyard, Sutton Veny, Wiltshire, England

During the two world wars, the United Kingdom became an island fortress used for training troops and launching land, sea and air operations around the globe. There are more than 170,000 Commonwealth war graves in the United Kingdom, many being those of servicemen and women killed on active service, or who later succumbed to wounds. Others died in training accidents, or because of sickness or disease. The graves, many of them privately owned and marked by private memorials, will be found in more than 12,000 cemeteries and churchyards. The 26th Division was concentrated at Sutton Veny in April 1915 and No 1 Australian Command was there from the end of 1916 to October 1919. There was also a hutted military hospital of more than 1200 beds at Sutton Veny for much of the war and No 1 Australian General Hospital was stationed there after the Armistice. Sutton Veny (St John) Churchyard contains 168 First World War burials, 167 of them in a plot at the north west corner of the church. Of these, 143 are Australian. There is only one Second World War burial in the churchyard.

(Information & colour photos from CWGC)





St. John the Evangelist Churchyard, Sutton Veny, Wiltshire





AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

D00376

St. John the Evangelist Churchyard, Sutton Veny, Wiltshire



Photo of Private F. J. Collis's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in St. John the Evangelist's Churchyard, Sutton Veny, Wiltshire, England.



(Photo courtesy of David Milborrow)

