

**Balmoral Cemetery,  
Belfast, Northern Ireland**

**War Grave**



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**3139 PRIVATE**

**J. COWAN**

**48TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.**

**24TH NOVEMBER, 1917 Age 30**

*Weighed In The Balance*

*And Not Found Wanting*

## James (Barney) COWAN

James Cowan was born at Albert Park, South Melbourne, Victoria in 1887 to parents John Cowan and Sarah Apsley Cowan (nee Craig).

James Cowan attended Fremantle Grammar School, Western Australia.

The 1909, 1910 & 1912 Australian Electoral Rolls for the division of Fremantle, subdivision of South Fremantle, Western Australia recorded James Cowan, Clerk from 56 Attfield Street.

The 1915, 1916 & 1917 Australian Electoral Rolls for the division of Fremantle, subdivision of Fremantle, Western Australia recorded James Cowan, Clerk from cnr High and Stirling Streets.

John Cowan, father of James Cowan died on 14th March, 1916 in Fremantle, Western Australia.

A letter from D. & J. Fowler, Fremantle, dated 11th October, 1916, to the Commanding Officer, Military Camp, Blackboy Hill reads: "*The bearer – Mr James Cowan is a member of our staff, for whom we ask one month's exemption. He fills a responsible position in our Office, which has already been depleted by ten enlistments, and owing to our half yearly Balance, the present is a most inopportune time to lose his services. We trust that you will give this application your best consideration, and we in turn, will endeavour to release him at the earliest possible moment.*"

James Cowan was a 29 year old, Clerk when he enlisted on 13th November, 1916 at Blackboy Hill, Western Australia with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 3139 & his religion was Presbyterian. His next of kin was listed as his James Cowan stated he had previously served in His Majesty's Army for 23 days at A.I.F. Blackboy (Western Australia) but withdrew on account of his father's death.

Private James Cowan was posted to 93 Depot on 13th November, 1916 for recruit training. He was transferred to 91 Depot on 16th November, 1916

Private James Cowan embarked from Fremantle, Western Australia on HMAT *Berrima* (A35) on 23rd December, 1916 with the 8th Reinforcements of 48th Battalion & disembarked at Devonport, England on 16th February, 1917.

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 James Cowan was marched out from Camp Details at Sutton Mandeville, Wiltshire to 12th Training Battalion at Codford, Wiltshire from Australia on 6th March, 1917.

Private James Cowan was sent sick to Hospital on 11th March, 1917 & admitted with Influenza on 12th March, 1917. He returned to 12th Training Battalion at Codford on 16th March, 1917 with 3 days light duty.

Private James Cowan was sent sick to Group Clearing Hospital at Codford on 5th May, 1917 with Influenza & was discharged on 12th May, 1917.

Private James Cowan proceeded overseas to France via Southampton on 14th June, 1917 from 12th Training Battalion.

Private James Cowan was marched in to 4th A.D.B.D. (Australian Divisional Base Depot) at Havre, France on 15th June, 1917. He was marched out to his Unit on 3rd July, 1917 & was taken on strength of 48th Battalion from 8th Reinforcements in the Field on 4th July, 1917.

Private James Cowan was wounded in action on 11th October, 1917. He was admitted to 3rd Australian Field Ambulance on 12th October, 1917 then transferred & admitted to 24th General Hospital at Etaples, France the same day with G.S.W. (gunshot wound/s) to knee & back. Pte Cowan embarked for England on Hospital Ship *Brighton* on 22nd November, 1917.

## 48th Battalion

The 48th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 16 March 1916 as part of the "doubling" of the AIF. Roughly half of its new recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 16th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 16th, the men of the new battalion hailed mainly from regional South Australia and Western Australia. The new battalion formed part of the 12th Brigade of the 4th Australian Division.

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1917 was also a trying year for the 48th Battalion. In two of the major battles in which it fought - the first battle of Bullecourt, in France, and the battle of Passchendaele, in Belgium - it was forced to withdraw with heavy casualties as result of poor planning and inadequate support. On neither occasion did the battalion fail for want of courage or skill amongst its own troops.

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

### War Diary – 48th Battalion

*WESTHOEK RIDGE - 11th October, 1917:*

*Orders were received from Brigade that the Battalion in conjunction with 47th Bn would attack a section of the enemy defences between Zonnebeke & Passchendaele Ridge with the 3rd Aust. Division on our left flank & the 13th A.F.B. on the right in accordance with attached Operation Order by Lt. Col. R. L. Leane D.S.O., M.C.*

*(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)*

Mrs S. Cowan, High & Stirling Streets, Fremantle, Western Australia, mother of Private James Cowan, was advised by Base Records that he had been wounded. A follow up letter on 29th October, 1917 advised that Private James Cowan had been admitted to 24th General Hospital at Etaples, France on 16th October with Gunshot wound to back & right knee – severe.

Private James Cowan was admitted to 1st Southern General Hospital in Birmingham, Warwickshire, England on 22nd November, 1917 with G.S.W. to right knee – severe. The Hospital Admissions form records on 16th October, 1917 “*Gas gangrene amputated above knee*”.

Private James Cowan died on 24th November, 1917 at Civil General Hospital, Birmingham, Warwickshire, England from wounds received in action – G.S.W. right knee.

A death for James Cowan, aged 30, was registered in the December quarter, 1917 in the district of Birmingham, Warwickshire, England.

### Newspaper Notice – *Northern Whig*, Belfast, Northern Ireland – 28 November, 1917:

*Private James Cowan, Australian Imperial Force, who died on November 25th at the General Hospital, Birmingham from wounds received in action, was the second son of the late John Cowan, Fremantle, and grandson of the late Hugh Craig, Belfast. The funeral will leave Fleetwood boat at 10.30 today (Wednesday) for Balmoral Cemetery.*

A request was made to Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F. on behalf of the uncle of the late Private James Cowan for the remains to be buried in Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast. His uncle was Mr E. Craig, 6 Royal Avenue, Belfast. Private James Cowan was buried on 28th November, 1917 in Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast, Northern Ireland – Family Grave - Plot number A.17.5 (near north boundary) and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. From the burial report of Private James Cowan – *The funeral arrangements were carried out by relatives of the deceased soldier, and a representative from these Headquarters was not present on this occasion.*

### Newspaper Notice – *Belfast Telegraph*, Belfast, Northern Ireland – 28 November, 1917:

#### **MILITARY FUNERAL IN BELFAST**

*The funeral took place to-day with full military honours of Pte James Cowan, of the Australian Forces, who death occurred at the General Hospital, Birmingham, on Sunday, from wounds received in action. Deceased was the second son of the late Mr John Cowan, Fremantle, West Australia and grandson of the late Mr Hugh Craig, Belfast.*

*The remains arrived from England this morning by the Fleetwood boat, whence they were removed for interment in Balmoral Cemetery.*

*A firing party from the Northumberland Fusiliers was present, and en route to the place of burial solemn airs were discoursed by a band from the same regiment. There was a large attendance of friends, the chief mourners including – Mr James Craig, Mr J. C. Craig, Rev. D. H. Craig, and Mr A. Craig (uncles) and Rev. Jas. Meek, Mr Alex. Moore, Mr Jas. Tate and Mr J. McDowell (uncles-in-law).*

*A brief service was conducted at the graveside by Revs. R. Barron, D.D., and W. A. Watson, M.A. The usual volleys were fired and the “Last Post” sounded on the bugle.*

*Messrs Melville & Co. Ltd., had charge of the funeral arrangements, which were carried out satisfactorily.*

*The Red Cross Wounded & Missing file for Private James Cowan contains a letter from The Matron, The General Hospital, Birmingham which reads: “He was admitted to this hospital on Thursday evening, Nov. 22nd last, he was very ill, but seemed to improve a little next day. He had had his right leg amputated above the knee, in France and the limb was in a very bad condition, complicated by “gas gangrene”. We were from the first, afraid of secondary haemorrhage and watched him very carefully. It occurred during Saturday evening and he was at once taken to the Operating Theatre and the bleeding was stopped. He stood this very well and came round from the anaesthetic, which was only a short one, but later on he sank and died very quietly just before midnight. He had given his relations’ address as being in Australia, and it was not until Saturday afternoon that I discovered that he had an Uncle & Aunt living in London. We immediately telegraphed to them, asking them to come. A reply was received saying they would come Monday, unless it was necessary for them to come on Sunday, upon which another wire was sent asking them to come as soon as possible, as it was then evident that he might not live to the Monday, The Uncle arrived on Sunday, but in the meantime the patient had died, The Uncle arranged for the funeral to take place at Belfast where he had relations, otherwise he would, have had a Military funeral here. I had a very-nice letter from the Uncle afterwards, saying that he was sending me a Belfast paper, with an account of the funeral, but that did not arrive. Unfortunately I did not keep the letter, or I would have sent it to the parents. No doubt the Uncle would have sent them a Belfast paper also. I cannot recollect the name of the Uncle, but have written to the Staff Nurse, who was in the ward at the time, to ask her if she remembers it. Unfortunately, both she and the sister have left the hospital since November, so I cannot ask them. The address is - 19 Cecile Park, Crouch end, London. His letter was just to ask me to thank the Nurses for their attention to his nephew. I spoke to Pte, Cowan myself during the afternoon of Saturday and asked if there was not anything he would fancy, as he would take so very little, but he said that Nurse had just given him a drink of coffee and that all they had offered him was very nice, but that he had, absolutely no appetite. He appeared to be very ill, and I sent my Assistant up to see him a little later on, to see if she could write a letter for him or do anything else. He thanked her, however and said he had no letters he wished to write, that Nurse had already offered to do so. I think he was so thoroughly poisoned through, being in such a septic state, that his mind was a little dulled. He appeared to be apathetic. At the end he sank so quickly and quietly, there was not time to write, even had he seemed to want to do so. He sent no sort of message to anyone. He was very patient and uncomplaining but evidently felt very ill. He was, of course, only with us for a little over 48 hours. We do not know whether he had written to his people while he was in Hospital in France.”*

Mr J. A. Cowan, 116 East Street, East Fremantle, Western Australia, brother of the late Private James Cowan, wrote to Base Records on 4th December, 1917 requesting details of his brother’s death & “if there was any specific reason for receiving no progress report, as over 5 weeks elapsed between the date of his being wounded and the time of his death, and we did not even know that he had been transferred from the Etaples Hospital, France. Had we been advised of the transfer arrangements could have been made for relatives to visit him....” Base Records replied on 18th December, 1917 stating they had received 2 cable messages – “G.S.W. back and right knee, severe, admitted 16/10/17, 24th General Hospital” & “Died 24/11/17 wounds, Civil General Hospital, Birmingham.” “No previous advice of the soldier’s transfer to the Civil General Hospital, Birmingham, was received and as this Department is entirely dependent upon the Authorities Overseas for such reports, you will understand why next-of-kin was not notified....”

A War Pension was granted to Sarah Apsley Cowan, of Fremantle, mother of the late Private James Cowan, in the sum of 40/- per fortnight from 30th January, 1918.

Private James Cowan was entitled to British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Private Cowan's mother - Mrs S. A. Cowan, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll sent October, 1922 & Plaque returned September, 1924 & resent in October, 1924).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private James Cowan – service number 3139, aged 30, of 48th Battalion, Australian Infantry. He was the son of John Cowan and Sarah Apsley Cowan, of High & Stirling Sts., Fremantle, Western Australia.

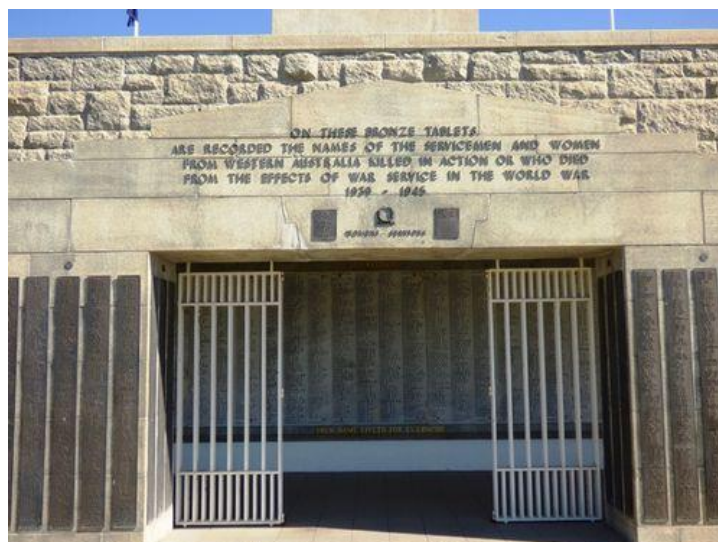
J. Cowan is remembered on the Western Australia State War Memorial which is located at the top of Kings Park and Botanic Garden escarpment, ANZAC Bluff, Fraser Avenue, Perth, Western Australia. The memorial was developed around an 18 metre tall obelisk as the principal feature, which is almost a replica of the Australian Imperial Force Memorials erected in France and Belgium.

The heavy concrete foundations are supplemented by heavy brick walls which enclose an inner chamber or crypt. The walls surrounding the crypt are covered with The Roll of Honour; marble tablets which list under their units the names of more than 7,000 members of the services killed in action or as a result of World War One.



**Western Australia State War Memorial Cenotaph, Kings Park (above)  
& (below) The Crypt with the Roll of Honour names**

*(Photos from Monument Australia – Kent Watson/Sandra Tattersall/Graeme Saunders)*

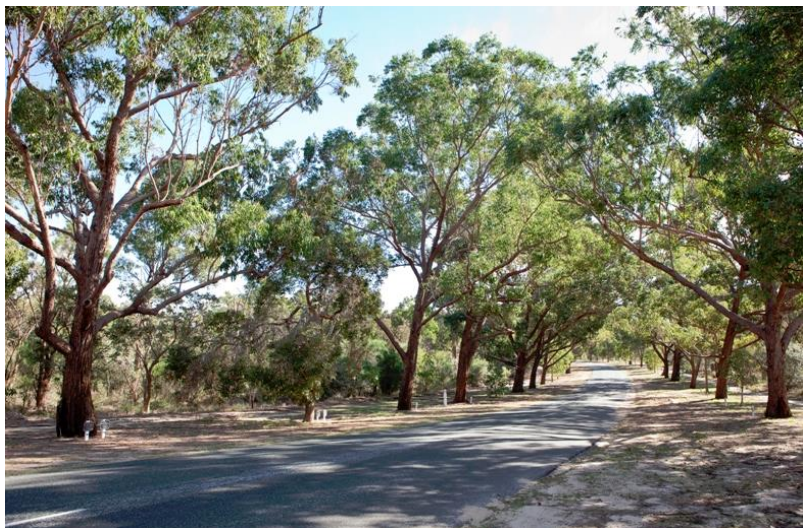






48th Battalion Panel (Photo courtesy of Gordon Stuart)

Pte James Cowan is remembered with a Memorial Plaque (M69) on the Kings Park Honour Avenue. At the base of each commemorative tree is a plaque inscribed with details of the deceased: name, age, unit in which they served, nature of death, place of death, and who dedicated the plaque. Honour Avenue memorials commemorate service personnel who are listed at the State War Memorial, Kings Park. These soldiers enlisted in Western Australia, died overseas on active service, and were either buried overseas or have no known graves. The plaque was dedicated by his friend on 3rd August, 1919.



(Photos from Kings Park Botanic Gardens & Parks Authority)

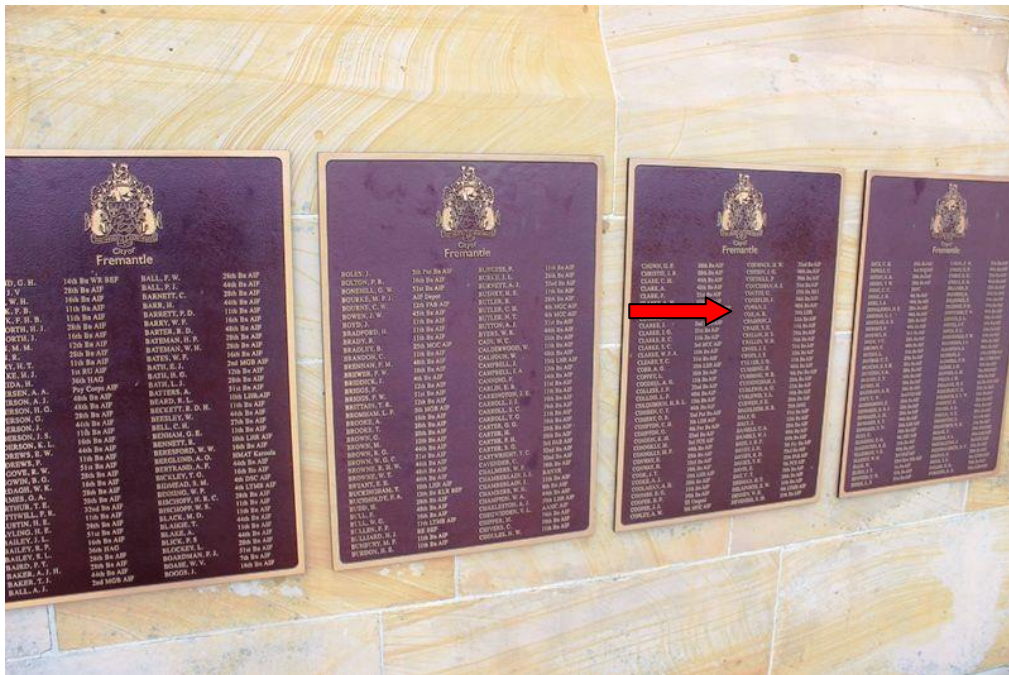


J. Cowan is remembered on Fremantle's 849, located at War Memorial, Monument Hill Memorial Reserve, High & Swanbourne Streets, Fremantle, Western Australia. Twelve plaques contain all 849 names of the Fremantle servicemen who died in service or were killed in action during World War One. The plaques were created as part of the Centenary of Anzac commemorations.



**Fallen Sailors & Soldiers Memorial**





Fremantle's 849 (Photo from Monument Australia – Harry Frotcher)

J. Cowan is remembered on the D. & J. Fowler Ltd Roll of Honour which is located in Army Museum, 2 Burt Street, Fremantle, Western Australia.



D. & J. Fowler Ltd Roll of Honour (Photo from Monument Australia – Father Ted Doncaster)



Private J. Cowan is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 145.



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

(72 pages of Private James Cowan'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*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P08210.006

*(Photo from 1908)*

*Studio portrait of the soccer club the Fremantle Rangers. Front row, right, is James (Barney) Cowan, of Fremantle, WA. 3139 Private James Cowan, enlisted in November 1916. He died in Birmingham, England, on 24 November 1917 of wounds received in action at Passchendaele, Belgium. He was 30 years of age. This is one of a collection of eight photographs relating to the Caledonian Soccer Club, Fremantle, WA.*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P08210.002

**Private James Cowan**



## **Newspaper Notices**

### **KILLED IN ACTION**

COWAN – In memory of James (Barney) Cowan, who died of wounds received in France, November 24, 1917.

-Inserted by J. S. and E. Remilton, Mrs O. Acves, Tasmania.

*(Western Mail, Perth, Western Australia – 14 December, 1917)*

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### **W.A. Casualties**

#### **At The Fighting Fronts**

#### **375th OFFICAL LIST**

#### **DIED OF WOUNDS**

Cowan, Jas., Fremantle

*(The Daily News, Perth, Western Australia – 26 December, 1917)*

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### **IN MEMORIAM**

#### **Anzac Heroes**

COWAN – In fond and loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, 48th Battalion, who died of wounds on November 24, 1917, at the Civil General Hospital, Birmingham. Interred at the Balmoral Cemetery, Ireland.

Inserted by his brother and sister-in-law, A. D. and Ethel Cowan, and nephews, Les and Jack.

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, who died of wounds in the General Hospital, Birmingham, on November 24, 1917, at the. Interred in the Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast, Ireland. Greater love hath ni man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

*(The West Australian, Perth, Western Australia – 23 November, 1918)*

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### **IN MEMORIAM**

#### **Anzac Heroes**

COWAN – In loving memory of my dear friend, Private James (Barney) Cowan, of the 48th Battalion, who died of wounds on November 24, 1917, at Birmingham, England. A noble life not given in vain.

Inserted by his sorrowing friend E. Bishop.

COWAN – In sad but proud memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, 48th Battalion, who died of wounds on November 24, 1917, received while fighting at Passchendaele Ridge on October 12, 1917. May we prove worthy of his noble sacrifices.

Inserted by Mrs Bishop and daughters, 28 Amherst-street, Beaconsfield.

COWAN – A tribute to the memory of James Cowan (Barney), who died of wounds received in France November 24, 1914; also Private S. V. Selby, who was killed in action on October 12, 1917.

Inserted by Private Ernest Berg (Joe), on active service).

COWAN – In memory of our true friend and comrade, Private James Cowan (Barney), 48th Battalion, died of wounds received in France at the Birmingham General Hospital on November 24, 1917.

Inserted by his workmates, D.H., F.A., H. O. H., J. Mel.,

*(The West Australian, Perth, Western Australia – 25 November, 1918)*

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **Anzac Heroes**

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, who died at the Civil Hospital, Birmingham, on November 24, 1917, from wounds received in action.

Inserted by his brother and sister-in-law, A. D. and E. Cowan, and nephews, Les and Jack.

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, 48th Battalion who died of wounds at the General Hospital, Birmingham, November 24, 1917. Interred Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast, Ireland.

Called to a higher service.

COWAN – In loving memory of my dear friend, James (Barney) Cowan, late of the 48th Battalion, who die of wounds on November 24, 1917, at Birmingham, England.

Inserted by E. Bishop.

*(The West Australian, Perth, Western Australia – 24 November, 1919)*

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **Anzac Heroes**

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, 48th Battalion, A.I.F., who died of wounds on November 24, 1917.

Inserted by his brother and sister-in-law, A. D. and E. Cowan, and nephews, Les and Jack.

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, of the 48th Battalion, who died of wounds on November 24, 1917 at Birmingham, England.

Inserted by E. Bishop.

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, 48th Battalion, who died of wounds received in France at the General Hospital, Birmingham, November 24, 1917.

*(The West Australian, Perth, Western Australia – 24 November, 1920)*

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **Anzac Heroes**

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, who died of wounds at the Civil General Hospital, Birmingham, on November 24, 1917.

Inserted by his brother and sister-in-law, and nephews, Les and Jack.

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James Cowan (Barney), 48th Battalion, who died of wounds at the General Hospital, Birmingham, November 24, 1917.

COWAN – In loving memory of my friend, James (Barney) Cowan, late of the 48th Battalion, who died of wounds in England on November 24, 1917.

Inserted by E. Bishop.

*(The West Australian, Perth, Western Australia – 24 November, 1921)*

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **Anzac Heroes**

COWAN – In fond memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, who died of wounds at Civil General Hospital, Birmingham, November 24, 1917.

Inserted by his brother, sister-in-law, and nephews, Les and Jack.

COWAN – In loving memory of my friend, James (Barney) Cowan, late of the 48th Battalion, who died of wounds on November 24, 1917.

Inserted by E. Bishop.

*(The West Australian, Perth, Western Australia – 24 November, 1922)*

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **Anzac Heroes**

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, who died of wounds on November 24, 1917.

Inserted by his brother and sister-in-law, and nephews, Les and Jack.

COWAN – In loving memory of my friend, Private James (Barney) Cowan, of the 48th Battalion, who died of wounds on November 24, 1917.

Inserted by E. Bishop.

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James (Barney) Cowan, 48th Battalion, who died of wounds at the General Hospital, Birmingham, November 24, 1917.

*(The West Australian, Perth, Western Australia – 24 November, 1923)*

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **Anzac Heroes**

COWAN – In loving memory of Private James Cowan (Barney) who died of wounds, Birmingham Hospital, on November 24, 1917.

Inserted by his sister and brother.

*(The West Australian, Perth, Western Australia – 26 November, 1923)*

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James Cowan is remembered on the Cowan Family Headstone in Fremantle Cemetery, Western Australia.







**Cowan Family Headstone**



### 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 7th July, 1921, to Mrs S. A. Cowan, cnr High & Stirling Streets, Fremantle, Western Australia, advised that a letter from the Defence Dept. concerning an inscription on the headstone of her son, the late Private J. Cowan, 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 J. Cowan does have a personal inscription on his headstone.

*Weighed In The Balance And Not Found Wanting*



## Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast, Northern Ireland

Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast contains 3 Commonwealth War Graves – all from World War 1.



**Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast** (Photos by Belfast City Council)





Photo of Private J. Cowan's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast, Northern Ireland.



*(Photo by Peter Bennett)*



Private J. Cowan's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone next to Craig Family (his mother's side) Headstone in Balmoral Cemetery, Belfast, Northern Ireland.



*(Photo by Rossograph – Geograph.org)*



(Photo by Rossograph – Geograph.org)