

**Stourbridge Cemetery,
Stourbridge, West Midlands, England
War Graves**



Lest We Forget

World War 1



4773 PRIVATE

W. C. DOWNEY MM.

15TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.

23RD SEPTEMBER, 1918

Faithful Unto Death

William Clarence DOWNEY

William Clarence Downey was born at Belfast, Co. Antrim, Ireland on 21st April, 1885 to Mitchell Newman (Michael) Downey & Agnes Jane Downey (nee McFall).

According to information provided by his wife for the Roll of Honour – William Clarence Downey came to Australia when he was 6 months old.

The 1913, 1915 & 1916 Australian Electoral Rolls for the division of Kennedy, subdivision of Cloncurry, Queensland recorded William Clarence Downey, Miner from McGregor Junction.

William Clarence Downey was a 30 year old, single, Miner when he enlisted at Townsville, Queensland on 23rd September, 1915 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 4773 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his father – Mr M. D. Downey, Okavaire, via Oakland, New Zealand.

Private William Clarence Downey was posted to "D" Company, 5th Depot Battalion on 23rd September, 1915 for recruit training. He was transferred to 15th Reinforcements of 15th Battalion on 18th December, 1915.

Private William Clarence Downey embarked from Brisbane, Queensland on HMAT *Commonwealth (A73)* on 28th March, 1916 with the 4th Infantry Brigade, 15th Infantry Battalion, 15th Reinforcements & disembarked at Egypt on 5th May, 1916.

Private William Clarence Downey was admitted to 2nd Australian Stationary Hospital at Tel-el-Kebir on 13th May, 1916 with Influenza. He was discharged to duty on 14th May, 1916.

Private William Clarence Downey was admitted to 2nd Australian Stationary Hospital at Tel-el-Kebir on 26th May, 1916 with Mumps (The Casualty Form – Active Service recorded he had Influenza). He was transferred to 4th Auxiliary Hospital at Heliopolis on 28th May, 1916 & discharged on 29th May, 1916.

Mr M. N. Downey, Okoraire, via Auckland, New Zealand, father of Private William Clarence Downey, was advised by Base Records on 7th June, 1916 that Private W. C. Downey had been admitted to 4th Auxiliary Hospital, Cairo on 29th May, 1916 suffering from mumps mild.

Private William Clarence Downey embarked from Alexandria on 6th August, 1916 for Overseas on *Megantic*.

Private William Clarence Downey embarked for overseas to France on 23rd September, 1916 from 4th Training Battalion in England.

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 William Clarence Downey was marched in to No. 4 A.D.B.D. (Australian Divisional Base Depot) at Etaples, France on 24th September, 1916. He proceeded from No. 4 A.D.B.D. on 8th December, 1916 to join his Battalion. Private Downey joined 15th Battalion in the Field on 12th December, 1916 from 15th Reinforcements.

Private William Clarence Downey was wounded in action on 1st February, 1917. He was admitted to No. 12 Australian Field Ambulance on 2nd February, 1917 then transferred to No. 45 Casualty Clearing Station on the same day. Private Downey was transferred from Casualty Clearing Station on 4th February, 1917 & admitted to No. 10 General Hospital at Rouen, France on 5th February, 1917. He was transferred from Rouen on 8th February, 1917 & embarked from Havre, France on 9th February, 1917 for England on Hospital Ship *Dunluce Castle*.

15th Battalion

The 15th Battalion AIF was raised from late September 1914, six weeks after the outbreak of the First World War. Three-quarters of the battalion were recruited as volunteers from Queensland, and the rest from Tasmania. With the 13th, 14th and 16th Battalions it formed the 4th Brigade, commanded by Colonel John Monash.....

In June 1916 they sailed for France and the Western Front. From then until 1918, the battalion took part in bloody trench warfare. Its first major action in France was at Pozieres in August 1916. Along with most of the 4th Brigade, the battalion suffered heavy losses at Bullecourt in April 1917 when the brigade attacked strong German positions without the promised tank support. It spent much of the remainder of 1917 in Belgium, advancing to the Hindenburg Line.

(Extract of Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)

War Diary – 15th Battalion

Front Line – 1st February, 1917:

At 7 pm a party consisting of 150 & 3 officers from A Coy, with 70 men & 3 officers from C Coy, attacked enemy position in a front of about 550 yards. The German line was entered & 50 prisoners taken. A counter attack at about 11 pm was beaten off.

(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)

Private William Clarence Downey was admitted to 3rd Southern General Hospital, Oxford, England on 10th February, 1917 with G.S.W. (gunshot wounds) to left knee & right foot. The Hospital Admissions form recorded: *“X Ray shows 2 pieces of metal behind knee. 24.3.17 Piece of bullet casing removed from ___popliteal nerve, just above head of patella. Nerve completely perforated. To be transferred to Harefield Park.”*

A cable was sent to Base Records, Wellington, New Zealand on 28th September, 1918 with the following message: *“Please inform Mr M. N. Downey Okorore via Auckland Fortyseven seventythree William Downey Fifteenth Battalion admitted Hospital February Tenth Gunshot wound right foot knee.”*

Private William Clarence Downey was transferred to 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield, Middlesex, England on 8th August, 1917 after spending 179 days in 3rd Southern General Hospital, Oxford.

Private William Clarence Downey was discharged & granted furlough from 16th August, 1917 & was then to report to No. 2 Command Depot at Weymouth on 30th August, 1917.

Private William Clarence Downey was marched in to No. 2 Command Depot at Weymouth, England on 30th August, 1917 from A.H.Q. London (Australian Headquarters & from furlough). He was transferred to No. 3 Command Depot at Hurdcott, Wiltshire on 5th October, 1917.

Private William Clarence Downey was medically classified as B1 A1 (fit for light duty) on 7th October, 1917 at No. 3 Command Depot, Hurdcott, Wiltshire. He was medically assessed on 26th October, 1917 as B1 A2 (fit for Overseas Training Camp in 3 – 4 weeks) & again on 8th November, 1917 as B1 A3 (fit for Overseas Training Camp in 2 – 3 weeks). Private Downey was medically classified as A3 (fit for Overseas Training Camp, to which transferred for hardening, prior to rejoining Unit overseas) on 13th November, 1917.

Private William Clarence Downey was marched out of No. 3 Command Depot at Hurdcott & into Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge Deverill, Wiltshire on 16th November, 1917.

Private William Clarence Downey, aged 30, married Martha Alderdice, aged 22, on 8th December, 1917 at St. Luke's Church of Ireland, Lower Falls, Belfast, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland.

Private William Clarence Downey proceeded overseas to France via Southampton on 10th January, 1918 from Overseas Training Brigade at Sandhill Camp, Longbridge Deverill. He was marched in to A.I.B.D. (Australian Infantry Base Depot) at Havre, France on 11th January, 1918. Private Downey was marched out from A.I.B.D. on 13th January, 1918 & rejoined 15th Battalion in the Field on 18th January, 1918.

The records for the next of kin for Private William Clarence Downey were changed on 24th January, 1918 to show that the new next of kin was Mrs M. Downey, Wife, 31 Third Street, Belfast, Ireland. His father was previously listed as the next of kin.

Private William Clarence Downey was recommended for the Military Medal on 11th August, 1918 by General E. G. Sinclair Maclagan, Commanding 4th Australian Division "*is recommended for his bravery and devotion to duty during the attack of CERISY on 8th August, 1918 (E. of CORBIE). Throughout the operation he showed an utter contempt for danger and carried in wounded all day under very heavy Machine Gun and artillery fire saving numerous lives.*"

War Diary – 15th Battalion

8th August, 1918:

Marched out at 1.30 am, D.A.B.C., Coys, all in forming up position No. 1 by 3 am. Zero hour 4.20 am. Very heavy mist at 5.50 am when we moved to 2nd Forming up position, which got thicker as time went on, and it was most difficult to see more than 10 yards, and to keep direction, and touch, we pushed on straight past our 2nd Forming up Position and moved to position in front of HAILLY Hospital. Got in touch with 14th Battalion and Engineer party under Lieut. Lewis, also artillery liaison officer of 110th Howitzer Battery, Australian Artillery. Up to this point we had no casualties. We crossed green line at 8.20 am sharp and reached our objective on left by 9 am. We were held up on our right from Sunken Road in Q.9.b.7.0. to Q.9.b.50.99. Enemy held this very strongly with Heavy Machine Guns. At about 2.45 pm heavies shelled CHIPILLY and during this bombardment we were able to push on to our objective capturing about 50 prisoners, 12 Heavy Machine Guns, 2 Minnenwerfers and two .77 Guns. Total prisoners captured approximately 350. Material, two .77 Guns, 2 Minnenwerfers, 15 Heavy Machine Guns and 4 Light Machine Guns. Casualties, 1 Officer and 7 other ranks killed, 27 Other ranks wounded, 6 Other ranks gassed. First Battalion relieved us at 12 midnight, and we moved to support in rear of Red Line in Q-23.0. central, just outside village of MORCOURT.

(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)

Private William Clarence Downey was wounded in action – Gassed on 24th August, 1918. He was admitted to 92nd Field Ambulance on 25th August, 1918 – Gassed Shell (classed as wounded) then transferred the same day to 53rd Casualty Clearing Station. Private Downey was transferred to 31st Ambulance Train & admitted to 5th General Hospital at Rouen, France on 26th August, 1918. He was reported to be seriously ill on 8th September, 1918 & embarked for England on Hospital Ship *Formosa* on 15th September, 1918.

15th Battalion

In March and April 1918, the battalion helped stop the German spring offensive. In July 1918, as a result of his valorous actions during the fighting near Hamel, Private Henry Dalziel was awarded the battalion's only Victoria Cross. The battalion participated in the great allied offensive of 1918, fighting near Amiens on 8 August 1918. This advance by British and empire troops was the greatest success in a single day on the Western Front, one that German General Erich Ludendorff described as "...the black day of the German Army in this war...".

(Extract of Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)

War Diary – 15th Battalion

24th August, 1918:

At 3 am the Commandant and his three Coy. Commanders and M.G. Officer of the 1st Bn. of 59th Inf. Regiment called to see us and arrange relief. This Battalion will relieve our two front line Companies, D. & C. & 2 front line Companies of 46th Bn. on our right. The Reserve Coys. A. & B. are to be relieved by the 2nd Battalion of 59th Inf. Regiment whose Commandant and Coy. Commanders called at 10.15 am and arranged matters. Guides met these Battalion sat 11 pm at (Map HARBONNIERES 1/40,000) F.3.b.2.5 and guided them as far as Crepy Woods arriving there at 12.15 am on 25-8-18.

25th August, 1918:

Whilst French were relieving us and were at a point in vicinity of Crey Wppd, the enemy opened out with a heavy barrage of Gas Shells on our front line and to a depth of 1,500 yards. This upset the relieving party and they had to take cover for a time. Shelling did not cease after half an hour so the French pushed on as best they could but made little progress and instead of relieving us by 1 am they did not finally take over until 4.45 am on 26th when it was

report to Battalion that relief was complete. Our boys files out, but did not feel the effect of the Gas beyond irritation of eyes. They proceeded to a point at W. 15.b.2.8. where buses awaited them to bring them to ALLONVILLE, the last bus arriving there at 9.30 am. The men then began to feel the effects of the Gas, and their eyes began to swell and had violent headaches. 75 per cent of A. C. and D. Coys. were affected, some very bad. It is thought that it was a new gas that Fritz used. The bombardment lasted 5 hours.

Appended hereto is the Cmdg Officer's report on the bombardment and gives casualties affected.

Report of Gas Bombardment of 15th Battalion, 24/25 August 1918.

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Evacuations yesterday and today are as under:-

	Off.	O/Ranks
A. Company (Support)	3	43
B. Company (Reserve)	-	2
C. Company (Line)	-	31
D. Company "	2	43
H.Q. (Linesmen and Sigs)	-	4
	5	123

(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)

A cable was sent to Base Records, Wellington, New Zealand (no date recorded) with the following message :
"Please inform Mr M. N. Downey, Okoroire, via Auckland son number forty seven seventy three Private W. C. Downey Wounded."

Private William Clarence Downey was admitted to 1st Southern General Hospital - Stourbridge Section, Birmingham, England on 16th September, 1918 – Gassed (severe).

Private William Clarence Downey died at 8.40 pm on 23rd September, 1918 at 1st Southern General Hospital - Stourbridge Section, Birmingham, England from wounds received in action – Gassed (shell) as a result of enemy action.

A death for William C. Downey, aged 33, was registered in the September quarter, 1918 in the district of Stourbridge, Worcestershire, England.

Private William Clarence Downey was buried on 26th September, 1918 in Stourbridge Cemetery, Stourbridge, West Midlands, England – Plot number 6 and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. From the burial report of Private Downey - Coffin was good quality. The deceased soldier was accorded a full Military funeral, Firing Party, Bugler and Pallbearers being in attendance. The coffin was draped with the Union Jack, and conveyed to the graveside where the "Last Post" was sounded, and the burial service conducted by the Rev: F. H. Simms of Stourbridge Hospital, Stourbridge. The grave will be turfed and an oak cross erected by the A.I.F. London. Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F. London were represented at the funeral.

A cable was sent to Base Records, Wellington, New Zealand on 28th September, 1918 with the following message:
"Inform next kin 4773 Downey Died 23/9/18 Effects Gas 1st Southern General Hospital – Anglican."

Private William Clarence Downey requested in his Will, dated 27th June, 1918 that all his real & personal estate be bequeathed to his wife - Mrs M. Downey, 31 Third Street, Belfast, Ireland.

Details of the death of the late Private William Clarence Downey were sent to his father – Mr M. N. Downey, Okorioro, via Auckland, New Zealand on 16th April, 1919 by Base Records. Further details regarding the funeral were sent on 13th May, 1919.

The Public Curator's Office, Brisbane, Queensland wrote to Base Records on 8th January, 1919 requesting the Certificate of Death of No. 4773 Private W. C. Downey, 15th Battalion.

Private William Clarence Downey was awarded the Military Medal posthumously. (*London Gazette* – 17 June 1919 – page 7695) & (*Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* – 10 October 1919 – page 1494).

Military Medal

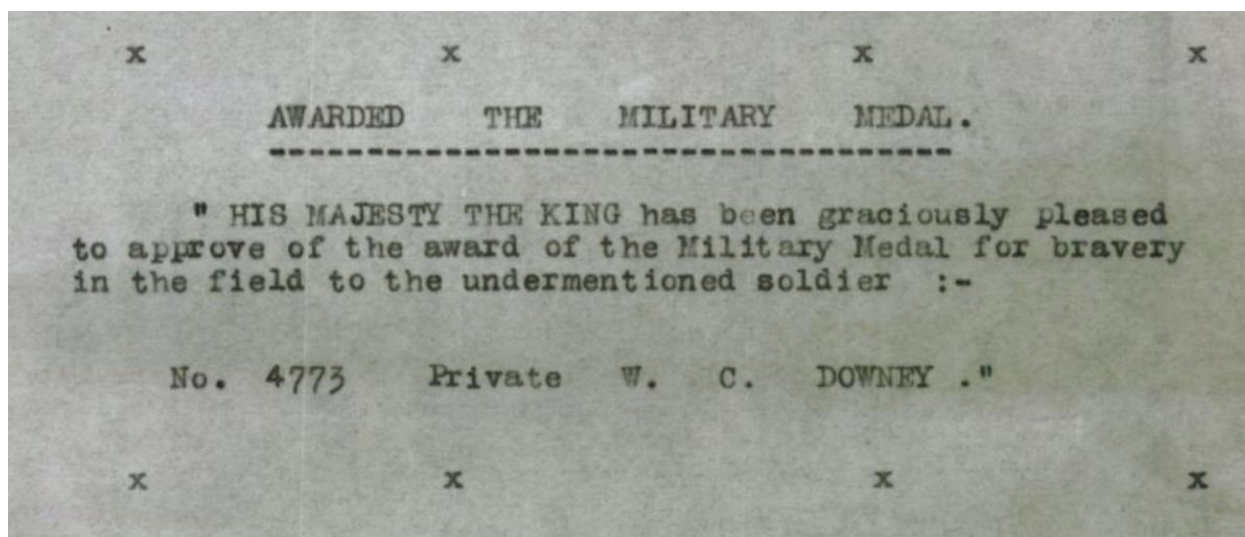
The Military Medal (MM) was a military decoration awarded to personnel of the British Army and other arms of the armed forces, and to personnel of other Commonwealth countries, below commissioned rank, for bravery in battle on land. The award was established in 1916, with retrospective application to 1914, and was awarded to other ranks for "acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire". (*Wikipedia*)



Military Medal (MM)

Base Records wrote to Mrs M. Downey, 31 Third Street, Belfast, Ireland, widow of the late Private William Clarence Downey on 17th November, 1919 advising that they were forwarding a copy of extract from Fourth Supplement to the *London Gazette*, dated 17th June, 1919, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by her husband, the late No. 4773 Private W. C. Downey, 15th Battalion.

Base Records forwarded the same to the late Private William Clarence Downey's father – Mr M. N. Downey, Okorioro, via Auckland, New Zealand on 17th November, 1919.



Private William Clarence Downey was entitled to British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Private Downey's widow – Mrs M. Downey, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll & Plaque issued in England in November, 1922).

Mrs C. M. Downey, Okoroire, via Auckland, New Zealand, mother of the late Private William Clarence Downey, wrote to Base Records on 26th July, 1919 to say many thanks for the information regarding her son's death & burial. The letter continues with *"he left a young widow in Ireland unprovided for, unless she applied for the widows pension, kindly let me know if she is receiving it, if not is there still time for her to apply. I would like to bring her to New Zealand – are widows allowed a free passage to Australia, or what reduction, if any. Kindly let me know full particulars by return mail."*

Base Records wrote to The Deputy Comptroller, Department of Repatriation, Brisbane, Queensland on 18th August, 1919 forwarding on an extract of a letter received from Mrs C. M. Downey, Okoroire, via Auckland, New Zealand, mother of the late Private William Clarence Downey, in which she wrote concerning her late son's widow in Ireland – *"I would like to bring her to New Zealand – are widows allowed a free passage to Australia, or what reduction, if any. Kindly let me know full particulars by return mail."*

Base Records wrote to Mrs M. Downey, 31 Third Street, Belfast, Ireland, widow of the late Private William Clarence Downey, on 19th June, 1924 with the following: *"I am receipt of a communication from Mr L. M. Instone, 26 Lea Rd, Wolverhampton, England (formerly a member of the Australian Imperial Force), who on Anzac Day last visited the grave of your husband, the late No. 4773 Private W. C. Downey, M.M., 15th Battalion, and other Australian soldiers buried in the Stourbridge Cemetery. No doubt this action will be much appreciated by you and it is thought you may desire to personally communicate with him."*

Mrs M. Downey, 31 Third Street, Belfast, Ireland was sent the following letter on 4th June, 1925 by Base Records: *"You will doubtless be interested to learn that in the occasion of the recent Anzac Day pilgrimage to the graves of Australian soldiers buried in the United Kingdom, the cemetery at Stourbridge, Worcestershire, wherein the remains of your husband, the late No. 4773 Private W. C. Downey, M.M., 15th Battalion, and other members of the Force are interred was again visited by Mr L. M. Instone, of "Elmdene", Woodfield Avenue, Penn. Wolverhampton, England. The thanks of the Department have been conveyed to Mr Instone for this further evidence of his continued interest in and attention to the graves of our fallen soldiers, and it is thought you may desire to personally express your appreciation of his kindness."*

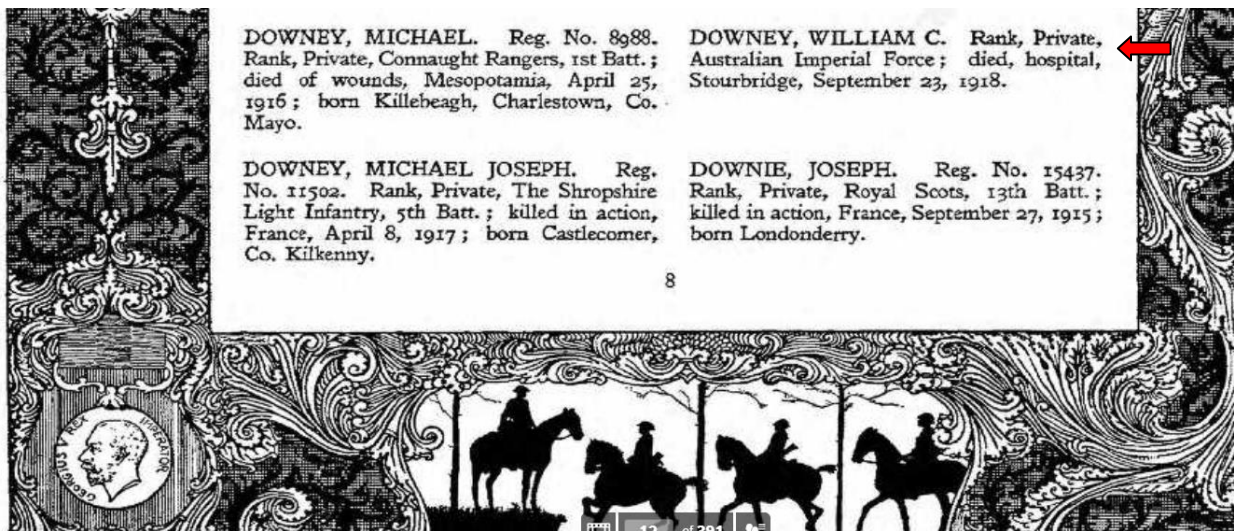
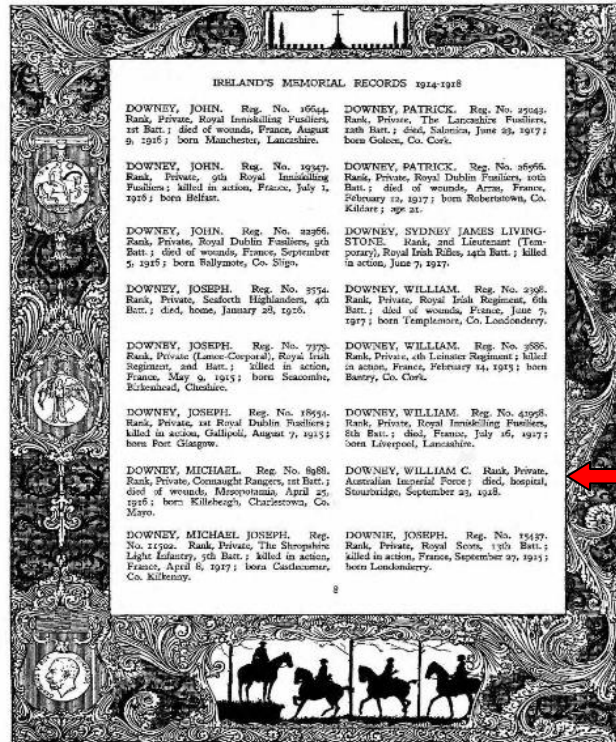
The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private William Clarence Downey – service number 4773, of 15th Battalion, Australian Infantry. He was the son of Michael and Jane Downey; husband of Martha Downey, of 31 Third St., Belfast, Ireland.

Private W. C. Downey is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 75.

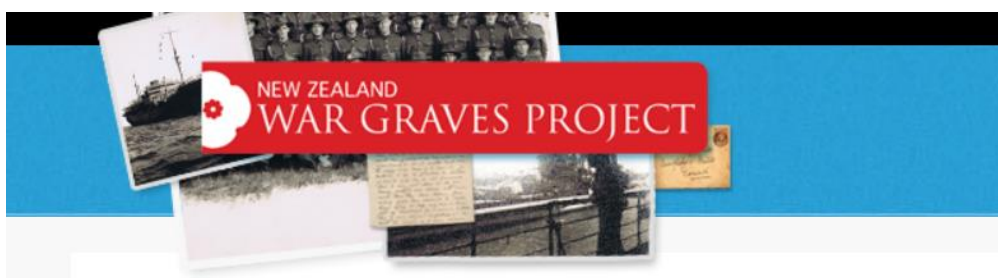


Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

William C. Downey is remembered in Ireland's Memorial Records which is an 8 volume set compiled by The Committee of the Irish National War Memorial, originally published in 1923. These volumes provide information on over 49,000 Irish men and women who died in the Great War. (Volume 3 - page 8)



Private William Clarence Downey is remembered on the New Zealand War Graves Project.



(75 pages of Private William Clarence Downey'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) & National Archives



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P09039.001

Private William Clarence Downey

Newspaper Notices

CASUALTIES

177th LIST

QUEENSLAND

ILL

Pte W. C. Downey, New Zealand

(*The Daily Standard*, Brisbane, Queensland – 17 June, 1916)

CASUALTIES

AUSTRALIAN ARMY

WOUNDED

Downey, William (M. Downey, Okoroire)

(*Sun*, Christchurch, New Zealand – 5 March, 1917)

CASUALTIES

OVERSEA FORCES

AUSTRALIAN FORCES

DIED OF WOUNDS

Downey, W. (M. Downey, Okoroire)

(*Sun*, Christchurch, New Zealand – 7 October, 1918)

Roll of Honour

Casualty List No. 438

WOUNDED

W. C. Downey, Ireland, 2nd occ., gas

(*The Telegraph*, Brisbane, Queensland – 31 October, 1918)

Roll of Honour

176 Queenslanders

Casualty list No. 441 was issued this morning.....

DIED OF WOUNDS

W. C. Downey, Ireland, 23/9/18, gas

(The Telegraph, Brisbane, Queensland – 14 November, 1918)

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)

Private W. C. Downey does have a personal inscription on his headstone.

Faithful Unto Death

Stourbridge Cemetery, Stourbridge, West Midlands, England

The cemetery contains 47 Commonwealth burials of the 1914-18 war, (including those of 13 Australian soldiers, near which a Cenotaph is placed); and a War Cross is erected on the main roadway close to the entrance. The 1st Southern General Hospital had a Section in the Stourbridge Infirmary.

Most of the First World War burials are scattered but 17 form a small plot. The cemetery also contains 20 scattered burials of the Second World War and 1 Non World War burial here. *(Information from CWGC)*



(Photo by cookie – Find a Grave)



Australian Plot (Photo courtesy of Margaret Carter)

Stourbridge Cemetery Overseas Soldiers Sarcophagus

Adjacent to the Plot where the 13 Australian WW1 War Graves are located sits a Sarcophagus Memorial (listed by CWGC above as a Cenotaph) which reads:

*“In Grateful Memory Of Our Comrades From
Overseas Who Died In The Stourbridge Military
Hospital During The Great War 1914-19.”*

The names of the 13 Australians are listed on the Plaque along with a Soldier from Canadian Contingent & 2 Soldiers from U.S.A.



(Photo courtesy of Peter Bennett)



Stourbridge Cemetery Overseas Soldiers Sarcophagus/Memorial
(Photo courtesy of Peter Bennett)



Arrow showing the Plot where Australian WW1 War Graves are located (Photo courtesy of Margaret Carter)



Stourbridge Cemetery showing Australian WW1 War Graves *(Photos courtesy of Margaret Carter)*



Photo of Private W. C. Downey's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Stourbridge Cemetery, Stourbridge, West Midlands, England.

(NOTE: No "M.M." engraved on headstone)



(Photo courtesy of Peter Bennett – Private Collection)

