

**St. Mary the Virgin Churchyard,
Harefield, Middlesex, England**

War Graves



Lest We Forget

World War 1



3393 PRIVATE

J. D. FLETCHER

57TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.

12TH SEPTEMBER, 1918 Age 42

John Duncan FLETCHER

John Duncan Fletcher was born at Port Chalmers, New Zealand on 21st September, 1878 to parents John & Isabella Fletcher (nee McGlashan).

According to information provided by his sister for the Roll of Honour – John Fletcher served with New Zealand Contingent in Boer War. He enlisted at Trentham on 5th January, 1902 with Eight Contingent for Service in South Africa. John Fletcher was a 25 year old Carter from 124 Willes Street, Wellington. His religion was listed as Presbyterian & his next of kin was listed as his father – John Duncan Fletcher, Lower Kyburn, Central Otago. John Duncan Fletcher was issued a Regimental number of 5067. The New Zealand Forces contacted Mr J. D. Fletcher, Lower Kyeburn, Otago on 25th October, 1904 requesting his son's present address so that his South African Medal and Clasps may be forwarded. Mr Fletcher (senior) advised that his son's address was General Post Office, Pretoria, South Africa. The New Zealand Defence Forces wrote to Mr J. D. Fletcher, late 8th N.Z. M. R., G.P.O., Pretoria, South Africa on 7th November, 1904 to advise him that "*Your South African and Clasps "Transvaal" and "South Africa 1902" have this day been forwarded to Major Pilcher, New Zealand Government Agent, 35 St. George's Street, Cape Town, for issue to you.*"

John Fletcher, father of John Duncan Fletcher, died on 12th February, 1912 at Kyburn, Central Otago, New Zealand.

Isabella Fletcher, mother of John Duncan Fletcher, died on 29th August, 1914 at Palmerston North, New Zealand.

The 1917 Australian Electoral Roll for the division of Ballarat, subdivision of Ballan, Victoria recorded John Duncan Fletcher, Miner from Myrning.

John Duncan Fletcher stated he was a 40 year old, single, Miner from Myrning, Victoria when he enlisted at Northcote, Victoria on 26th March, 1917 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His religion was Church of England & his next of kin was listed as his sister – Miss Isabel Fletcher, Ada Street, Palmerston, New Zealand. (According to information provided by his sister for the Roll of Honour – Her brother was aged 38 years at the time of his death.) John Fletcher listed his postal address on his "*Application to Enlist in the Australian Imperial Force*" as c/o Mr H. Lidgett, Myrning, Victoria.

Another form "*Application to Enlist in the A.I.F.*" completed on 23rd March, 1917 by John Duncan Fletcher – he stated to the question "*What is your permanent address in Australia?*" – he answered "*No fixed address.*" John Fletcher listed his next of kin as Mrs Janet Fletcher, 26 Ada Street, Palmerston, North New Zealand – parents deceased. He stated he had served with the 8th New Zealand Contingent for 1 year & 6 months Boer War 1908. John Duncan Fletcher was declared unfit for active service due to Varicose Veins in both legs.

Private John Duncan Fletcher was posted to Recruits Battalion on 27th March, 1917. He was transferred to 2nd Battalion at Broadmeadows on 16th April, 1917 then transferred on 21st June, 1917 to 9th Reinforcements of 57th Battalion.

Private John Duncan Fletcher, Service number 3393, embarked from Melbourne, Victoria on HMAT *Suevic (A29)* on 21st June, 1917 with the 57th Infantry Battalion, 9th Reinforcements. He was awarded 7 days confined to Barracks & a total forfeiture of 6 days pay for being A.W.L. (Absent without Leave) at Cape Town on 23rd July, 1917. Private Fletcher disembarked at Liverpool, England on 26th August, 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 John Duncan Fletcher was marched in to 15th Training Battalion at Hurdcott, Wiltshire on 26th August, 1917 from Australia.

Private John Duncan Fletcher was A.W.L. from 30th October, 1917 from 15th Training Battalion at Hurdcott, Wiltshire. He returned on 9th November, 1917. Private Fletcher was written up for an Offence at Wilton - A.W.L. from 24.00 hrs on 30th October, 1917 until 20.00 hrs on 9th November, 1917. He was awarded a total of 30 days pay forfeited by Lieutenant Colonel H. T. C. Layh on 13th November, 1917.

Private John Duncan Fletcher proceeded overseas to France via Southampton on 18th December, 1917 from 15th Training Battalion. He was marched in to A.I.B.D. (Australian Infantry Base Depot) at Havre, France on 19th December, 1917. Private Fletcher was marched out to his Unit from A.I.B.D. on 20th December, 1917 & was taken on strength of 57th Battalion in the Field on 25th December, 1917.

Private John Duncan Fletcher was wounded in action – Gassed on 17th April, 1918. He was admitted to 12th Casualty Clearing Station on 18th April, 1918 & transferred to Ambulance Train 37. Private Fletcher was admitted to 11th Stationary Hospital at Rouen, France on 19th April, 1918 wounded – Gas. He was reported as dangerously ill on 25th April, 1918. Private Fletcher was transferred to England on 10th May, 1918 on Hospital Ship *Guildford Castle*.

57th Battalion

The 57th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 18 February 1916 as part of the "doubling" of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 5th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. Reflecting the composition of the 5th, the 57th was predominantly composed of men from the suburbs of Melbourne. The battalion became part of the 15th Brigade of the 5th Australian Division.

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With the collapse of Russia in October 1917, a major German offensive on the Western Front was expected in early 1918. This came in late March and the 5th Division moved to defend the sector around Corbie. During this defence, the 57th Battalion participated in the now legendary counter-attack at Villers-Bretonneux on 25 April.....

(Extract of Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)

War Diary – 57th Battalion

17th April, 1918:

Fine day, a few showers.

Working parties as follows 4 Officers & 200 men to forward area on cable burying. 4 Officers & 200 men on Bn sector.

Lt Col H. T.C. Hayh D.S.O. president of FGCM at Bde Hqs. Five men of this Battalion were tried. Enemy shelling was very active during the day. A lot of gas shells were put over on our sector.

Our artillery very active harassing the enemy ___ practice barrages.

Battalion HQs changed their HQs to a position behind a steep bank near the somme Canal. Transport & QM store moved from AUBIGNY to the outskirts of DAOURS.

(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)

Base Records (Melbourne, Australia) notified Base Records Wellington, New Zealand on 6th May, 1918 with the following message: *"Inform Miss Isabel Fletcher Ada Street Palmerston Brother 3393 John Fletcher wounded Gas."*

According to information provided by his sister for the Roll of Honour he was gassed at Villers Bretonneux

Private John Duncan Fletcher was admitted to City of London Military Hospital, Clifden Road, Clapton, England on 11th May, 1918 having been Gassed (shell) & was still dangerously ill. He was transferred to 1st Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield on 29th July, 1918 with Gas Shell poisoning.

The Defence Department notified Base Records Wellington, New Zealand on 22nd May, 1918 with the following message: *"Inform next of kin 3393 Fletcher Admitted Eleventh Stationary Hospital Twentynfifth April Gas Poisoning dangerous."*

Base Records notified Miss I. Fletcher, Ada Street, Palmerston, New Zealand, on 28th May, 1918 that Private J. D. Fletcher had been transferred to the City of London Military Hospital, Clapton, England on 11th May, 1918 – gassed.

The Defence Department notified Base Records Wellington, New Zealand on 13th June, 1918 with the following message: *“Please inform next-of-kin of 3393 Fletcher pronounced out of danger.”*

Private John Duncan Fletcher died at 6.40pm on 12th September, 1918 at 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield Park, Harefield, Middlesex, England from primary – Syncope & secondary – Bronchiectasis (as listed on “Report of Death of a Soldier” (Army Form B. 2090), Casualty Form – Active Service & in Telegram to Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F. London). Some reports recorded that Private Fletcher died of Pulmonary Catarrh.

A death for John D. Fletcher, aged 45, was registered in the September quarter, 1918 in the district of Uxbridge, Middlesex, England.

Private John Duncan Fletcher was buried on 16th September, 1918 in St. Mary the Virgin Churchyard, Harefield, Middlesex, England – Grave No. 65.

From the burial report of Private John Duncan Fletcher - *Coffin was good, Polished Elm. The deceased soldier was accorded a Military Funeral, Firing Party, Bugler and Pallbearers being in attendance. The coffin was draped with the Australian Flag, and surmounted by a beautiful wreath, supplied by C. Bill-yard Leake, Esq., and flowers were also placed on the coffin by Miss Cuthbert. The “Last Post” was sounded at the graveside, and the Rev: T. Terry, conducted the burial service. Only a few of the staff attended. The grave will be turfed shortly.*

Names of Relatives & friends present at the Funeral – (Friend) Staff-Captain Annie M. Cuthbert, Congress Hall (Salvation Army), London.

Private John Duncan Fletcher’s grave position is now recorded by the CWGC as Plot number Aust. 64 and he has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

The Defence Department notified Base Records Wellington, New Zealand on 19th September, 1918: *“Inform next of kin brother 3393 John Duncan Fletcher died 12/9/18 Pulmonary Catarrh, at 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital Anglican.”*

The Red Cross Wounded & Missing file for Private John Duncan Fletcher contains a request from the Red Cross on behalf of the relatives to obtain the fullest details possible of the wounds, death & burial.

- The Staff Officer, M.R.C. British Museum wrote: *“On 29.7.18 Pte J. B. Fletcher 3393 57th Battn., A Coy, aged 45, service 18/12, was admitted to 1st Australian Aux. Hospital Harefield suffering from Pulmonary Catarrh following Gas Poison and died on 12.9.18 (No further information is given in A & D Book).”*
- Another report from A.I.F. Headquarters: *“Adm City London Hpl. Clapton 11.5.18 Gassed. Trans: No 1 Aust Aux Hpl Harefield 29.7.18. Died 1st Aust. Aux. Hpl. Harefield 12.9.18 at 6.40 pm. Cause Primary Syncope Secondary Bronchitic tassis. Buried Harefield Parish Churchyard 16.9.18 – Grave No. 65, Cons. Ground Mil. Funeral by Cap. T. Tarry att. 1st Aust. Aux. Hpl.”*

The Acting District Paymaster, 3rd Military District, wrote to Base Records in April, 1919 regarding a communication received from Mr William N. Lee, of Killingworth Station, Yea which reads: *“Re the Notice in todays “Age” Deceased Estates Act 1918. The name of John Duncan Fletcher of Myrniong is mentioned No. 3393 of the 57th Btn. It is the first I heard of his death, and as a very old friend of the deceased, (He and I were together in South Africa) I would be deeply grateful for particulars concerning his death...”*

Base Records replied to Mr W. N. Lee, Killingworth Station, Yea, Victoria on 15th April, 1919 with the following letter: *“A copy of your communication has been forwarded to this office by the Military Paymaster, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, and in reply I have to state the late No. 3393 Private J. D. Fletcher, 57th Battalion, is reported as having*

died on 12.9.18 at No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Harefield, England, of pulmonary catarrh, and was buried on the 16th idem, in Harefield Parish Churchyard."

A. G. Hall & Wilcox, Solicitors, Melbourne, Victoria, client for Miss I. Fletcher, Ada Street, Palmerston, New Zealand, wrote to Base Records on 26th August, 1919 requesting a Certificate of Death for 3393 Private John D. Fletcher, 57th Battalion.

Base Records replied to Messrs A. G. Hall & Wilcox on 29th August, 1919 enclosing a Certificate of report of Death of the late No. 3393 Private J. D. Fletcher, 57th Battalion.

Base Records contacted Mrs I. Fletcher, Ada Street, Palmerston, New Zealand, on 26th May, 1921 stating she was registered on the records of the late No. 3393 Private J. D. Fletcher, 57th Battalion as the next of kin but were enquiring if there were any nearer blood relatives than herself & specifically asked if his father and mother were still living or if he had any brothers due to the "Deceased Soldiers Estates Act 1918" which stated that the War Medals & Mementoes of a deceased soldier were to be handed in the following order of relationship – Widow, eldest surviving son, eldest surviving daughter, father, mother, eldest surviving brother, eldest surviving sister etc.

Mrs I. Fletcher, Milford Street, Palmerston North, New Zealand, replied to Base Records (no date on letter but letter was received at Base Records on 1st June, 1922) with the following reply: *"I regret that your letter has not been answered before now the reason is I changed my address and the letter got mislaid and I did not received it until now in your letter you require to know if there is a nearer blood relation than I. Mother & Father dead. I am his eldest sister, no brother perhaps the name is a bit confusing I not having changed my maiden name. Sorry if I have put you to any inconvenience."*

Private John Duncan Fletcher was entitled to British War Medal & Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Private Fletcher's sister - Miss I. Fletcher, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll sent July, 1922 & Plaque sent November, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private John Duncan Fletcher – service number 3393, aged 42, of 57th Battalion Australian Infantry. He was the son of John & Isabella Fletcher.

Private J. D. Fletcher is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 163.

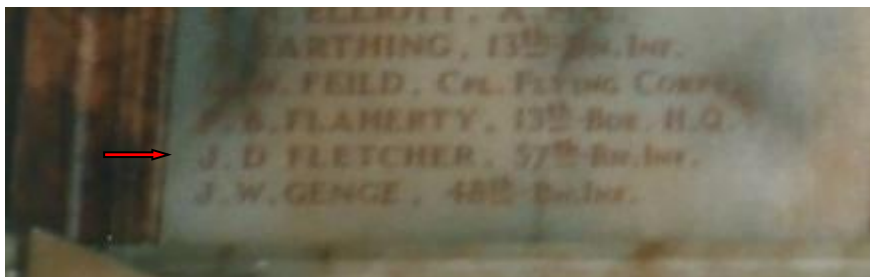


Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

J. D. Fletcher is remembered on the Australian Soldiers' Memorial in St. Mary the Virgin Church, Church Hill, Harefield, Middlesex, England.



Australian Soldiers' Memorial, Harefield (Photo from War Memorials Online – B. Wood)



(60 pages of Private John Duncan Fletcher'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

RECRUITING

A meeting of the Northcote Recruiting Committee was held on Tuesday, May 8, Hon. J. G. Membrey, M.L.A., presiding. Lieut. McMillan reported that up-to-date there have been 486 enlistments for the A.I.F. in the Bourke electorate, including 45 at Northcote and residents who have enlisted at other depots.....

The following have enlisted since last report:-.....J. D. Fletcher...

(Northcote Leader, Victoria – 12 May, 1917)

VICTORIAN CASUALTIES

List No. 482

WOUNDED

J. D. Fletcher, New Zealand

(The Argus, Melbourne, Victoria – 23 May, 1918)

CASUALTY LIST NO. 439

Died, other Causes

Pte J. D. FLETCHER, New Zealand, 12/9/18 (illness)

(The Herald, Melbourne, Victoria – 2 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 J. D. Fletcher does not have a personal inscription on his headstone.

St. Mary the Virgin Churchyard, Harefield, Middlesex, England

St. Mary the Virgin Churchyard, Harefield contains 126 Commonwealth War Graves.

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.

Harefield (St. Mary) Churchyard contains war graves from both world wars. There are 120 First World War graves, mostly those of Australians who died in No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield Park. Uniquely, their graves are marked by scroll shaped headstones, chosen by the staff and patients at the hospital. In the centre of the Australian plot stands a memorial obelisk which was erected by Sir Francis Newdegate, late Governor of Tasmania and of Western Australia, and Mr. C.A.M. Billyard-Leake, of Harefield Park. The churchyard also contains six graves of the Second World War.

(Information & photos from CWGC)

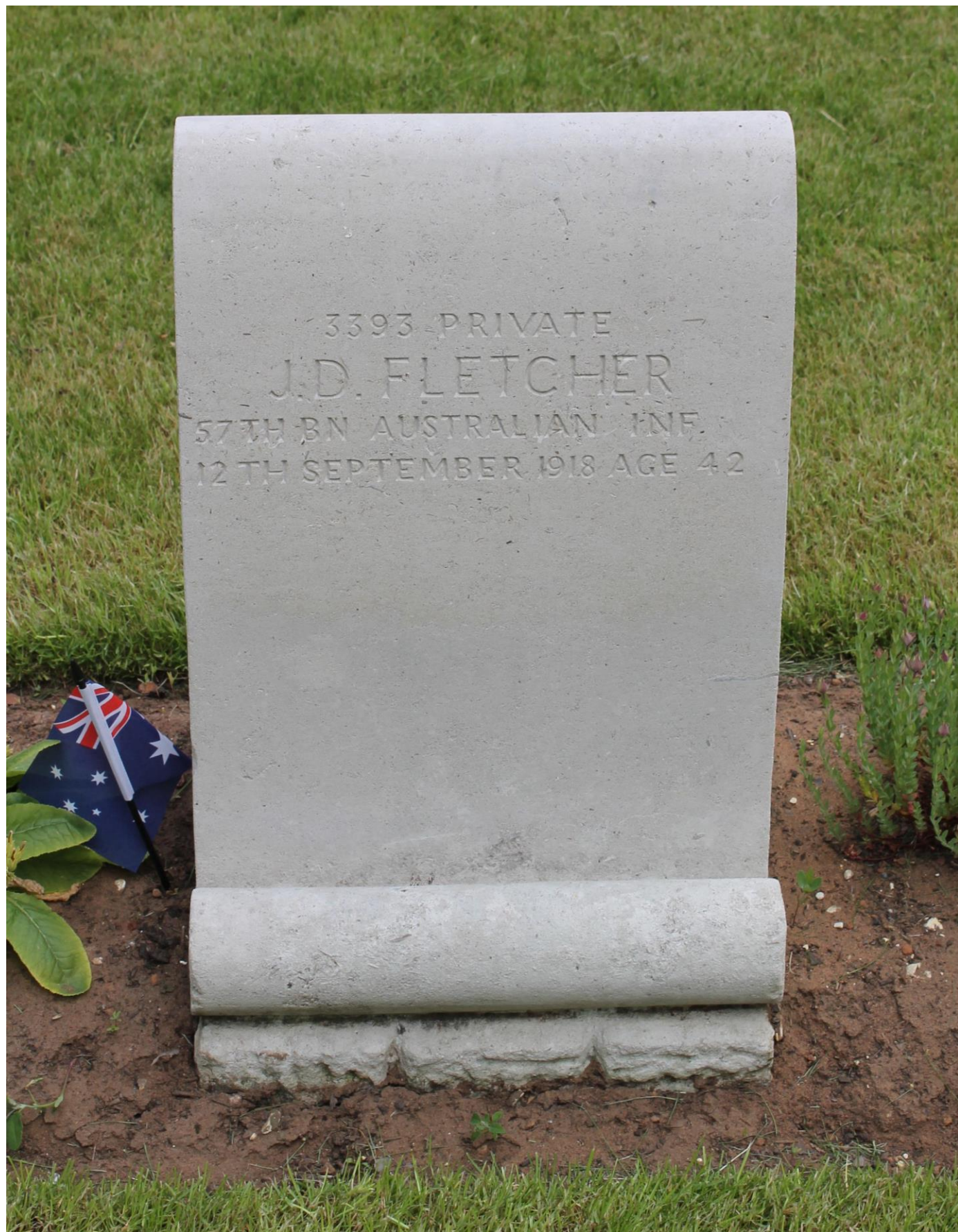




St. Mary the Virgin Churchyard, Harefield



Photo of Private J. D. Fletcher's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in St. Mary the Virgin Churchyard, Harefield, Middlesex, England.



(Photo courtesy of Peter Bennett)



St Mary the Virgin Church, Harefield (Photo courtesy of Peter Bennett)



St. Mary the Virgin Churchyard, Harefield (Photo courtesy of Peter Bennett)



St. Mary the Virgin Churchyard, Harefield (*Photos courtesy of Peter Bennett*)



