

**Woolwich Old Cemetery,  
London, England  
War Graves**



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**3045 PRIVATE**

**J. R. FRENCH**

**48TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.**

**28TH AUGUST, 1916 Age 21**

*Only A Mother Really Knows*

*The Loss Of One So Dear*

*From Mum And Dad*

## James Robert FRENCH

James Robert French was born at 21 Godfrey Street, Woolwich, London, England. His birth was registered in March quarter, 1896 in the district of Woolwich, London, England.

(Note: a "James Robert French" was baptised on 23rd February, 1896 to parents Daniel & Elizabeth French at St John's Church, Wellington Street, Woolwich, London, England.)

The 1901 England Census recorded James R. French as a 5 year old, living with his grandmother & family at 21 Godfrey Street, Woolwich, London, England. His grandmother (Head of house) was Sarah Finn (Laundress, aged 58, widow), Sarah's daughter - Elizabeth Finn (Laundress, aged 26) & Sarah's son – Thomas Finn (aged 19).

James Robert French attended school at London County Council School – Wood St., Woolwich, England.

The 1911 England Census recorded James Robert French as a 15 year old Errand Boy (Chemist) living with his grandmother – Sarah Finn (Widow, Laundress, aged 66, born Meriott, Somersetshire) at 15 Pellpar Road, Woolwich, London, England. Also listed was Thomas Finn – son of Sarah (Greengrocer, aged 28).

According to information provided by his mother for the Roll of Honour – James came to Australia when he was 17 years old. He had been a Butcher's Assistant in Woolwich, London. A "James French", aged 17, was a passenger on *Rangatira* which departed from London, England, arriving in Sydney, New South Wales on 20th March, 1913.

James Robert French was a 20 year old, single, Labourer (in Sugar Mills) from care of P.O., Bundaberg, Queensland when he enlisted in Brisbane, Queensland on 25th August, 1915 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 3045 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his mother – Mrs Elizabeth Page, Duffin Street, Finsbury, St. Luke's London, England.

Private James Robert French was posted to 7th Reinforcements of 26th Battalion.

Private James Robert French embarked from Brisbane, Queensland on HMAT *Itonus (A50)* on 30th December, 1915 with the 7th Infantry Brigade, 26th Infantry Battalion, 7th Reinforcements.

### 26th Battalion

The 26th Battalion was raised at Enoggera, Queensland, in April 1915 from recruits enlisted in Queensland and Tasmania, and formed part of the 7th Brigade.....

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

Private James Robert French was transferred from 26th Battalion at Zeitoun on 9th August, 1916 & was taken on strength of 48th Battalion on 9th August, 1916 at Tel-el-Kebir.

Private James Robert French proceeded from Alexandria on 2nd June, 1916 to join B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force). He disembarked at Marseilles, France on 9th June, 1916.

Private James Robert French was wounded in action in France on 6th August, 1916. He was admitted to 3rd Casualty Clearing Station on 7th August, 1916 then transferred & admitted to 2nd Australian General Hospital at Wimereux, France on the same day with G.S.W. (gunshot wound/s) to Right Thigh. Private French embarked at Boulogne, France on 15th August, 1916 on Hospital Ship *Cambria* for England.

### 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. It became known as the "Joan of Arc" (the Maid of Orleans) battalion because it was "made of all Leanes" - it was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ray Leane, his brother was the adjutant, and several other relatives were scattered throughout

the battalion.

The 48th's first major battle on the Western Front was Pozieres. Here, it was tasked with defending ground captured in earlier attacks by the 2nd Division and entered the firing line on two separate occasions - 5 to 7 and 12 to 15 August. During the former period the battalion endured what was said to be heaviest artillery barrage ever experienced by Australian troops and suffered 598 casualties. A diorama at the Australian War Memorial depicts the battalion's experience at Pozieres. Before it had recovered from the trials of Pozieres, the 48th was also required to defend ground captured during the battle of Mouquet Farm.....

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

### War Diary – 48th Battalion

#### *Sausage Valley:*

*The Battalion moved from SAUSAGE VALLEY on August 5th to Take over position OG1. OG2. Pozieres. A Company moved at 4.30 pm with two minute intervals between platoons. B Company followed five minutes after A Company. We moved via SAUSAGE VALLEY, SUNKEN ROAD, PIONEER TRENCH, COPSE AVENUE to TRAMWAY TRENCH. We relieved the 27th Bn who held OG1 only from BAPAUME ROAD Inclusive to R35 C 4.8 Ref Map 1/20,000. The 27th had fallen back from OG2 early on the morning of August 5th, however I instructed my Company Commanders that OG 2 would be held, strong points to be constructed, also strong patrols to be sent out in front of OG2. This was completed by 10.30 pm. SERGT TWINING in Charge of SCOUTS I ordered to reconnoitre WINDMILL near BAPAUME ROAD and to establish a strong POINT on right of MILL. The Battalion relieved the 27th Bn under a very heavy Barrage of Enemy Artillery.*

*We suffered heavy Casualties in taking over, no trenches were constructed the place being just one mass of Craters. No communicating trenches existed attempts had been made to dig them, but they did not go beyond JUMPING OFF TRENCH in front of TRAMWAY Trench this meant about 400 yards over the open to get up RATIONS and Water. All wounded had to be carried back in the same way. Communications being kept up by Runners. My Battalion suffered very heavy Casualties during the night of 5th August and day of 6th although constant efforts were made to dig Trenches they were almost immediately blown in by Enemy Shell fire. This Barrage continued increasingly throughout 5th 6th and up to 12 noon on 7th August. At 7 pm on the 6th I relieved the two Companies holding OG1 OG2 with D Company, still keeping C Company in close support. At 2.45 pm on the 6th I sent a message to BRIGADE that I considered a counter attack probable. This happened on the morning of August 7th at just before 5.20 am. I immediately dispatched messaged by Pigeons & Runners. Also sent up S.O.S. signals for Artillery Barrage. Tow Platoons under Lt Dyke went forward to reinforce my left. The German Counter attack succeeded in penetrating the line at a far point on my left. Elsewhere they were either driven off, killed or captured.*

*2nd Lt LAW sent a party under Sergt BECK to charge some Germans who had got into a point on the left. AT the same time a party of the 14th Bn who were on my left under Lt JACKA attacked on the right. Between them the Germans were captured and the prisoners to the bunker of 54 including 2 Officers passed through my HQs for dispatch to the rear. By this time our Artillery were firing heavily and formed a barrage in front of OG2 this must have caught the Enemy who were waiting just below the Crest, their Casualties were reported as heavy. Sergt TWINING who was in position near WINDMILL informed me that he did good work with a Lewis Gun also that a German machine gun got within 300 yards of the WINDMILL and fired from a Crater, but that one of our shells knocked the Gun out. On the morning of the 6th one of my advanced patrols captured a German Patrol 200 yards in front of WINDMILL, including wounded. Our prisoners numbered during the 6th and 7th of August about 70. To my Medical Section under MAJOR WOLLARD special praise belongs, although we suffered heavy Casualties, during the time we were in the trenches we removed not only all our own, but also all those who had been left by the 7th Brigade which preceded us. Much of this work had to be done in the open and under a very heavy fire. MAJOR IMLAY who re\_\_\_\_\_ at the advanced dump did very good work in sending forward Food, Water and \_\_\_\_\_, also in collecting stragglers and returning them to the firing line. The Battalion Casualties August 5th to 7th inclusive were*

*6 Officers killed (named)*

*14 Officers Wounded (named)*

*98 Other Ranks Killed 404 Other Ranks Wounded*

*76 Other ranks Missing.....*

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

Private James Robert French was admitted to Royal Infirmary, Sunderland, England on 16th August, 1916 with G.S.W. to Right Thigh.

Private James Robert French died on 28th August, 1916 at Royal Infirmary, Sunderland, England from wounds received in action in France – G.S.W. (gunshot wound/s) to Thigh & secondary Haemorrhage.

A death for James R. French, aged 20, was registered in the September quarter, 1916 in the district of Sunderland, Northumberland, England.

Administrative Headquarters wrote to Officer Commanding, 1st Northern General Hospital, Newcastle-On-Tyne on 3rd January, 1916 regarding the late No. 3045 Private J. R. French, 48th Battalion, A.I.F. with the following: *“Information ahs been received from your Hospital, that the body of the above deceased soldier was removed to his relative’s residence at No. 15 Upper Pellipar Road, Woolwich, S.E. As the names of the relatives were omitted in your report, could this office be advised of same at your earliest convenience, please.”*

Private James Robert French was buried in Woolwich Cemetery, London, England – Grave for Heroes - Grave No. 601 Section F – now known as Woolwich Old Cemetery.

Private James Robert French’s resting place is now recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as Plot number F. 43 and he now has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

Elizabeth Page, 19M Dufferies Street, Whitecross Street, Finsbury, mother of the late Private James Robert French, applied for a War Pension but this was rejected on the grounds *“not dependent on late M.F. for 12 months prior to enlistment.”*

Private James Robert French was entitled to British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Private French’s mother – Mrs E. Page, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll & Plaque issued in England in July, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private James Robert French – service number 3045, aged 21, of 48th Battalion, Australian Infantry. He was the son of Mrs Elizabeth Page, of 19M Dufferin Street, Whitecross Street, Finsbury, London.

Private J. R. French 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

(37 pages of Private James Robert French'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*



## **Newspaper Notices**

### **THE ROLL OF HONOUR**

#### **212TH AND 213TH LISTS OF AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES**

QUEENSLAND

WOUNDED

Pte J. R. French, England

*(The Brisbane Courier, Queensland – 16 September, 1916)*

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### **Roll of Honour**

#### **Two Heavy Lists**

##### **214th LIST**

QUEENSLAND

DIED - CAUSE NOT STATED

Pte J. R. French, England, 29/8/16, prev, rep. W.

*(The Telegraph, Brisbane, Queensland – 19 September, 1916)*

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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)*

Private J. R. French has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone with the following inscription:

*Only A Mother Really Knows The Loss Of One So Dear*

*From Mum And Dad*

## Woolwich Old Cemetery, London, England

Woolwich Old Cemetery, London has 179 Commonwealth War Graves – 98 relating to World War One & 81 relating to World War Two. There are 3 Australian WW1 War Graves located in this Cemetery.



**Entrance to Woolwich Old Cemetery with Chapel in background**



**Chapel in Woolwich Old Cemetery** (Photo by Ian Yarham 2021)



War Graves in Woolwich Old Cemetery (Photos by Ian Yarham – above June, 2012; below July, 2021)



3 Australian WW1 War Graves – (left to right) French, Keelan & Clark

Photo of Private J. R. French's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Woolwich Old Cemetery, London, England.



*(Photo courtesy of Ian Yarham)*



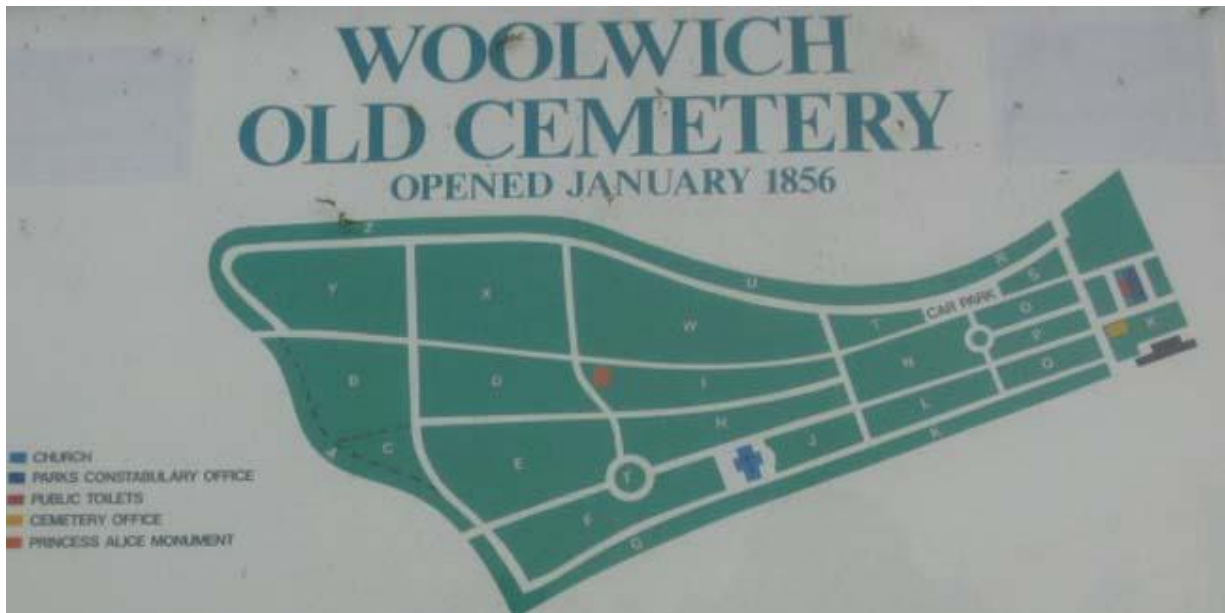


**3 Australian WW1 War Graves – (left to right) French, Keelan & Clark**  
*(Photos courtesy of Ian Yarham - August, 2022)*





**War Graves in Woolwich Old Cemetery** (Photo by Ian Yarham – July, 2021)



(Photo from Find a Grave – Iain MacFarlane)