

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



Lest We Forget

World War 1



773 TROOPER

W. KEELAN

5TH AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE

27TH NOVEMBER, 1915 Age 32

William KEELAN

William Keelan was born on 18th June, 1881 at Gatehouse - of - Fleet, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland to parents Robert & Annie Keelan (nee Griffin). (Note: date of birth of 18th June, 1881 was listed on Royal Navy records; however the Report of Death of a Soldier in the Service Record file recorded the date of birth as 18th June, 1882)

William Keelan attended Castle Public School, Kirkcudbright, Scotland.

The 1891 Scotland Census recorded a "William Keelan", Scholar, aged 9, as a border along with Agnes Keelan (aged 11) living at Mid Boreland (Cottage), Kirkcudbright, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland. The head of the house was listed as Cunningham Stevenson (Joiner, aged 72); his wife Jane Stevenson (aged 72); their daughter Agnes Stevenson (aged 29) & their grandson David S. Bentley (aged 8).

William Keelan, born 18th June, 1881, joined the Royal Navy. He was issued a Service number of 196888 & first served in *Caledonia* as Boy 2nd Class from 9th December, 1897. He was transferred to *Minstand* on 16th September, 1898 then promoted to Boy 1st Class on 19th October, 1898. Boy 1st Class Keelan was transferred to *Caledonia* from 1st November, 1898 then promoted to Ordinary Seaman on 18th June, 1899. Ordinary Seaman Keelan was transferred to *Pembroke I* from 21st June, 1899 until 7th July, 1899 when he was invalided out.

According to information provided by his widow for the Roll of Honour – William Keelan came to Australia when he was 24. She also believed he was in the Navy as a boy.

The 1913 Australian Electoral Roll for the division of Darling Downs, subdivision of Clifton, Queensland recorded William Keelan, Labourer from Clifton.

William Keelan was a 32 year old, single, Farmer from Clifton, Queensland when he enlisted in Brisbane, Queensland on 30th December, 1914 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 773 & his religion was Presbyterian. His next of kin was listed as his aunt – Agnes McQueen, Gladstone Place, Kirkcudbright, Scotland. William Keelan stated on his Attestation Papers that he had served with Territorials (K.O.S.B.) for 2 years & with the Royal Navy for 2 ½ years.

Private William Keelan was posted to 3rd Reinforcements of 5th Light Horse Regiment.

Private William Keelan embarked from Brisbane, Queensland on HMAT *Itria* (A53) on 9th February, 1915 with the 2nd Light Horse Brigade, 5th Light Horse Regiment, 3rd Reinforcements.

Private William Keelan was taken on Service with 5th Light Horse Regiment at Gallipoli on 29th July, 1915.

5th Light Horse Regiment

The 5th Light Horse Regiment was raised in Brisbane in September 1914, entirely from men who had enlisted in Queensland, and became part of the 2nd Light Horse Brigade. Sailing from Sydney on 21 December 1914, the regiment disembarked in Egypt on 1 February 1915.

The light horse were considered unsuitable for the initial operations at Gallipoli, but were subsequently deployed without their horses to reinforce the infantry. The 2nd Light Horse Brigade landed in late May 1915 and was attached to the 1st Australian Division. The 5th Light Horse played a defensive role for most of the campaign but was involved in several minor attacks. It left the peninsula on 20 December 1915.

(Extract of Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)

[Note: According to newspaper reports reporting on Private Keelan's death – it is mentioned that he was wounded at Gallipoli/Dardanelles. There are no entries on his Casualty Form – Active Service recording he was wounded at Gallipoli.]

Private William Keelan embarked for England on Hospital Ship *Esmeralda* on 28th August, 1915 with Dysentery & disembarked at Devonport on 17th September, 1915

Private William Keelan was admitted to Reading War Hospital on 17th September, 1915 cause N.Y.D. (not yet determined) but was later diagnosed with Dysentery (Gallipoli). He was discharged on 30th September, 1915.

William Keelan married Elizabeth Couplin McCoskry on 12th October, 1915 at The Manse, Kirkcudbright, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland.

Trooper William Keelan died around 8.15 pm on 27th November, 1915 at Woolwich, London, England (main road – as listed on Report of Death of a Soldier in the Service Record file) as a result of a motor accident.

Newspaper item – *Portsmouth Evening News*, Hampshire, England - 30 November, 1915:

ANZAC HERO KILLED BY MOTOR CAR

An inquest was held at Woolwich yesterday on Trooper William Keelan, 32, of the 5th Australian Light Horse, who was killed by a motor-car at Bostall Heath, Plumstead, on Saturday night.

It was stated that Keelan was a native of Queensland and had been invalided home from Gallipoli. The evidence showed that he was crossing the road, which was very dark at that point, when a car, owned and driven by Mr Cyril Garrett, of Belvedere, struck him and passed over him, causing compound fracture of the skull and the hip and other injuries.

Other Australian soldiers and a police constable who witnessed the accident agreed that the car was being driven slowly and carefully, and that in the darkness the driver could not have seen Keelan until it was too late to avoid him.

In returning a verdict of "Accidental death" the jury exonerated Mr Garrett from blame, and expressed their sympathy with the relatives and comrades in the Australian Field Force.

Report on proceedings of Inquest into death of No. 773 Private William Keelan, 5th Australian Light Horse Regiment by M. L. Moss on 30th November, 1915 to Colonel the Hon. Sir Newton J. Moore, K.C.M.G., Savoy House, Strand, W.C.:

"In accordance with your request, I attended Woolwich yesterday and watched the proceedings at the Inquest which was held on the body of No. 773 Private Keelan, 5th A.L.H., A.I.F.

The deceased was killed on the 27th inst. about 8 pm through collision with a Motor Car driven by one Cyril W. Garrett, Car License No. 86346, Driver's License 165707.

The jury found a verdict of Accidental Death, and exonerated the driver from all blame. The verdict is a perfectly proper one, and there is no doubt whatever that the darkness of the road, necessitated in consequence of the War, was mainly responsible for the unfortunate occurrence.

The deceased was promptly attended to by a Medical man, but it was a hopeless case, and nothing could be done for him. The injuries consisted if a compound fracture of the right side of the skull, and the Doctor found the Brain matter protruding. There was also a compound fracture of the left hip, in addition to other minor injuries.

The cause of death was syncope and shock due to the injuries above mentioned.

The deceased's wife is at present in the United Kingdom, her address being as follows:- Mrs Elizabeth Keelan, Grobdale, Mossdale, Lauriston, via Castle Douglas, Scotland. She has been informed by telegraph of the death of her husband, and I understand from Assistant Adjutant, Lieut. Scanlan, that she is now on her way to Woolwich. I have asked him to request her to call at your Office.

A certified copy of the Coroner's Notes of the Evidence could be procured at a small cost, and this might be useful to the Commonwealth Military Authorities.

Shall I procure a set of the depositions?"

Depositions of Witnesses at Inquest:

COPY.

D E P O S I T I O N S ,

of witnesses taken and acknowledged on behalf of our Sovereign Lord the King touching the death of WILLIAM KEELAN at the Coroner's Court Co-operative Institute in the Parish of Woolwich in the County of London aforesaid on Monday the 29th day of November One thousand nine hundred and fifteen before H.R. Oswald Esquire, one of His Majesty's Coroners for the said County, on view of the body of the said Person then and there lying dead.

London
to wit.)

WILLIAM KING having been sworn upon the day and year and at the place about mentioned deposed as follows:- I reside at the Camp, Bostall Hill. I am a Private, 3rd Battalion, Australian Imperial Forces. I identify the body of the deceased man as that of William Keelan, aged 32 years, a Trooper 5th Australian Light Horse. He came from Queensland. On last Saturday I was in Bostall Hill about 8 p.m. the 27th November 1915. The road was very dark. I saw deceased man coming from a pathway facing the entrance to our Camp. He walked along the footway in the main road towards Plumstead. He then was crossing the road towards some Soldiers' Huts on the other side. Just then I saw a motor car coming towards me, also going in the direction of Plumstead. I heard its hooter sounded some four times. Its two head lights were burning. The motor car was travelling on its near side. I was 15 to 20 yards from deceased. Suddenly I heard a noise like brakes being put on a car and a bump. I afterwards saw Keelan lying in the roadway. He was unconscious, in the centre of the

road but a little to the left of the middle line going towards Plumstead. He was removed to a shed. His hat and a parcel were lying in the road. A doctor was summoned to see him. He died on Bostall Heath. I saw the motor car on the top of the hill. It was not going very fast. I am not a judge of speed. The road was almost level where the accident happened. There is a lamp outside the gates of the Camp on opposite side. The Deceased had passed it, and so did the car. When the car stopped the Deceased was close behind it - 5 to 10 yards. Deceased was invalided home from Gallipoli.

WILLIAM WILSON CLARK, deposed:-

I am a private of 18th Battalion, Australian Imperial Forces, at Bostall Heath. I was in Bostall Hill, Saturday 27th instant. I saw a motor car coming down Bostall Hill a quarter of a mile away. I was on sentry go. I heard its hooter sounded repeatedly. It seemed to be going half normal speed. It was not going at an excessive rate. The accident occurred 25 yards before the car reached me. I saw the deceased man crossing the road. The Deceased was crossing as though lost in thought and his head down. The car struck Deceased and ran over him. A Constable with me went forward. He was bleeding a good deal when picked up.

WALTER MORRIS deposed:-

I am a Police Constable 573 R.Division. At 7.55 p.m. 27th November 1915 I was with last witness and saw a motor car coming from Belvedere direction. It was hooting. When it was about 30 yards from me I turned in the opposite direction. I heard brakes applied and turned again. Then I saw Deceased lying in the road behind the motor car, about 15 yards from me. He was ten yards behind the car when it stopped. The Guard was turned out and assistance obtained. Deceased was moved on a stretcher to the verandah of the Orderly Room of the Camp. It was a light motor car driven by Cyril Walter Garrett, a Motor Engineer. He said "I saw him as the car hit him. I immediately sounded the horn again and pulled up as soon as possible, but the car had run over him. I was travelling about 8 miles an hour."

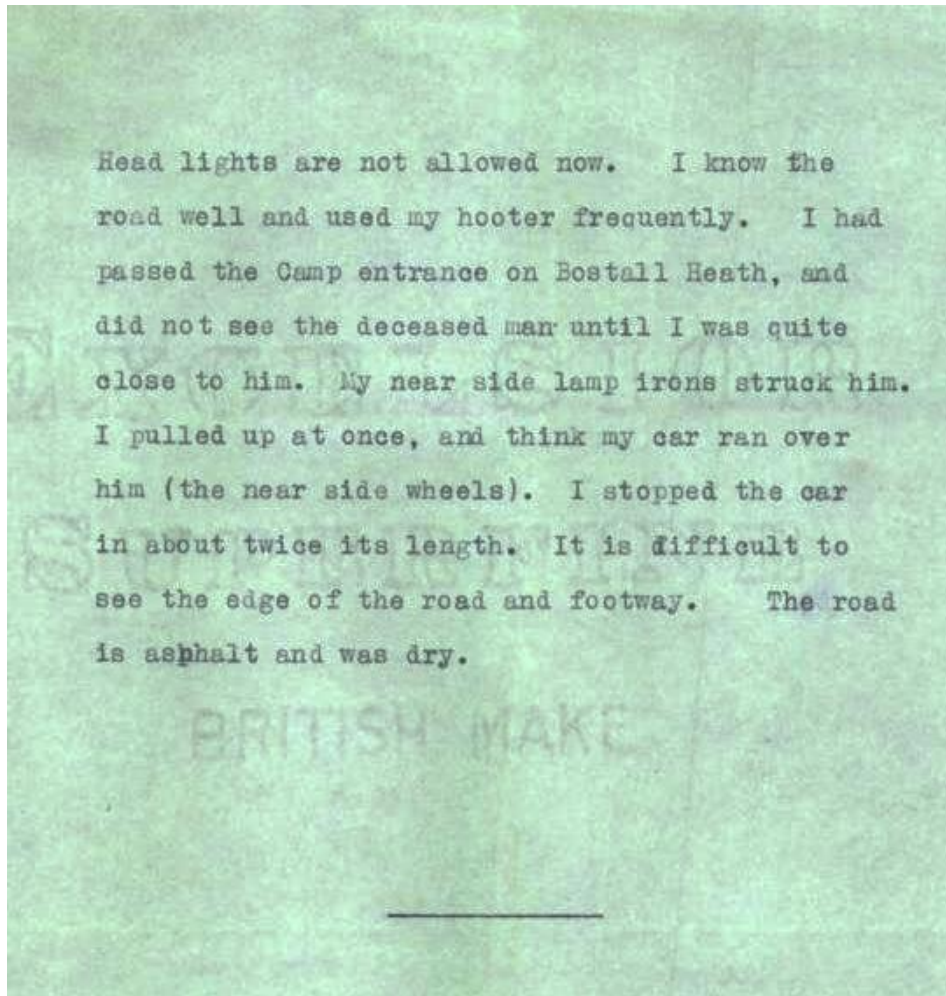
I sent for a doctor who came and pronounced life extinct. I took the body to Sun Street Mortuary and searched the body. Found, $\frac{1}{2}$ d bronze, 2 penny stamps, a bank receipt, and a number of articles of no special value. The road is very dark. There is a lamp 40 yards from where the collision occurred. The driver's license was in order, and he was sober.

CHARLES MELVILLE GREENAWAY, deposed:-

I am a Registered Medical Practitioner of 291 High Street, Plumstead. I saw Deceased about 8.30 p.m. Saturday 27th November 1915 at the Camp on Bostall Heath. He was dead. Body warm. His skull was fractured, brain matter protruding. There was a compound comminuted fracture of left hip (femur). There were cuts about head, and the face was bloody. The injuries were capable of being caused by being run over by a motor car. Cause of death, Shock from compound fracture of the skull and femur.

CYRIL WALTER GARRETT deposed:-

I am a Motor Engineer of Picardy House, Halt Robin Road, Belvedere, Kent. I have driven motor cars since last April and have had a good deal of experience on private tracks. I was going towards Plumstead on 27th instant about 8 p.m. in Bostall Hill. I was not in a hurry. I was going about 8 miles an hour on my near side. It was a 26 horse power landaulette. The car was in good order, the brakes acting all right. The side lights (two) were lit.



A death for William Keelan, aged 32, was registered in the December quarter, 1915 in the district of Woolwich, London, England.

Trooper William Keelan was buried on 30th November, 1915 in Woolwich Cemetery, London, England – Grave No. 1096 Section 11 - now known as Woolwich Old Cemetery.

This is now recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as Plot number F. 42 and he now has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

Newspaper item – London Evening Standard, England – 2 December, 1915:

NEWS IN BRIEF

...

Private Keelan, of the 5th Australian Light Horse, was accidentally killed as the result of a motor car collision on Sunday night near Abbey Wood, where an intermediate depot has been established for Australasian soldiers. Over a thousand of the deceased man's comrades attended the funeral. Colonel the Hon. Sir Newton Moore, commanding the Australian and New Zealand base at Weymouth, and Lady Moore, were also present.

Private William Keelan wrote the following letter on 5th August, 1915: "Owing to the death of my next-of-kin named in my attestation paper namely Aunt Agnes McQueen, Gladstone Place, Kirkcubright, Scotland, I beg that the following alteration be made, and that it now reads Friend, Elizabeth Coskry, c/o Mrs John Coskry, 71 William Street, Delbeattie, Kirkcubrightshire, Scotland."

A War Pension was granted to Mrs Elizabeth Couplin Keelan, "Anchorlee", Kirkcudbright, Scotland, widow of the late Trooper William Keelan on the sum of £52 per annum & granted from 27th January, 1916.

The Public Curator, Brisbane, Queensland, wrote to Base Records on 23rd October, 1917 requesting a Certificate of Death for No. 773 Trooper William Keelan.

Base Records replied to The Public Curator on 2nd November, 1917, enclosing a certificate of report of death of the late No. 773 Private W. Keelan, 5th Light Horse Regiment.

Trooper William Keelan was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Private Keelan's widow – Mrs E. Coskry, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll & Plaque issued in England August, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Trooper William Keelan – service number 773, aged 32, of 5th Australian Light Horse. He was the son of Robert Keelan; husband of Elizabeth Couplin Keelan, of Bow House, Palnackie, Dalbeattie, Kirkcudbrightshire.

Trooper W. Keelan is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 4.



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

William Keelan is not remembered on the Clifton War Memorial, located at King & Edward Streets, Clifton, Queensland.

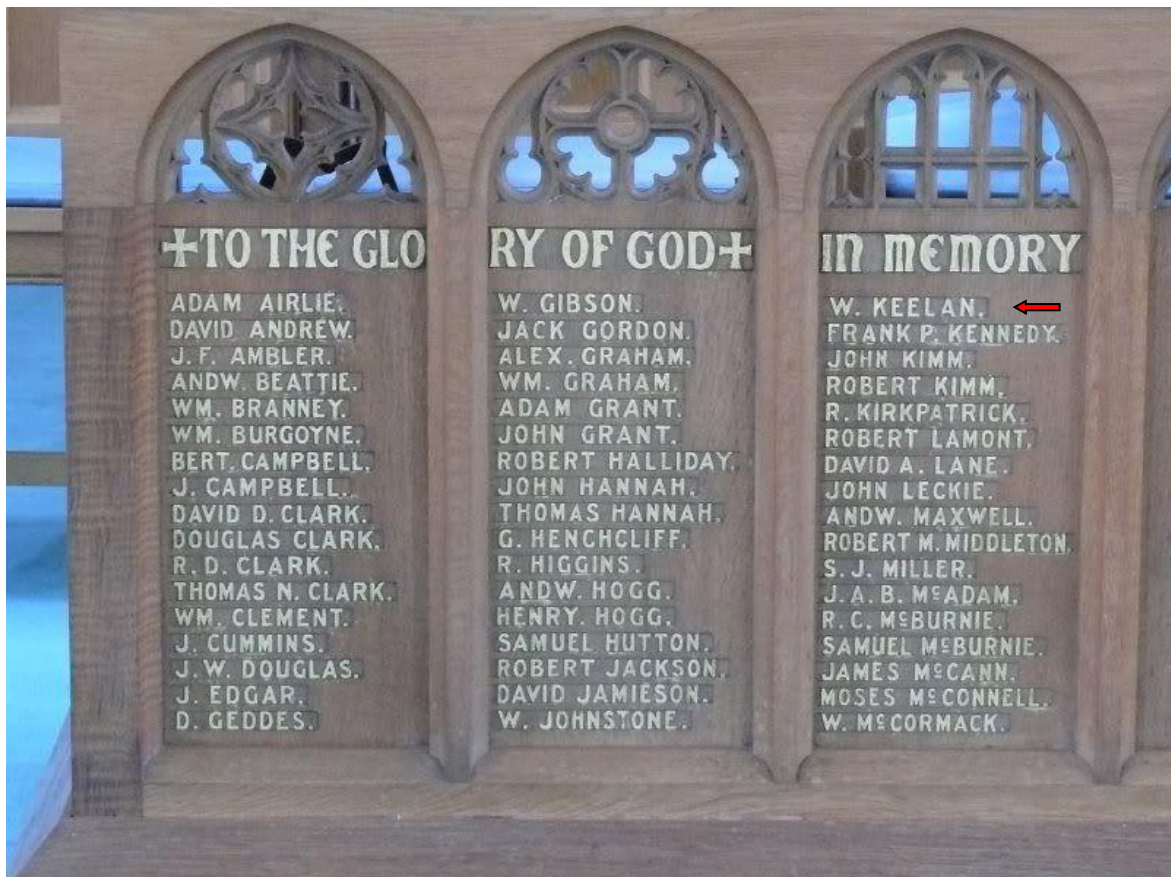


Clifton War Memorial (Photo from Monument Australia)

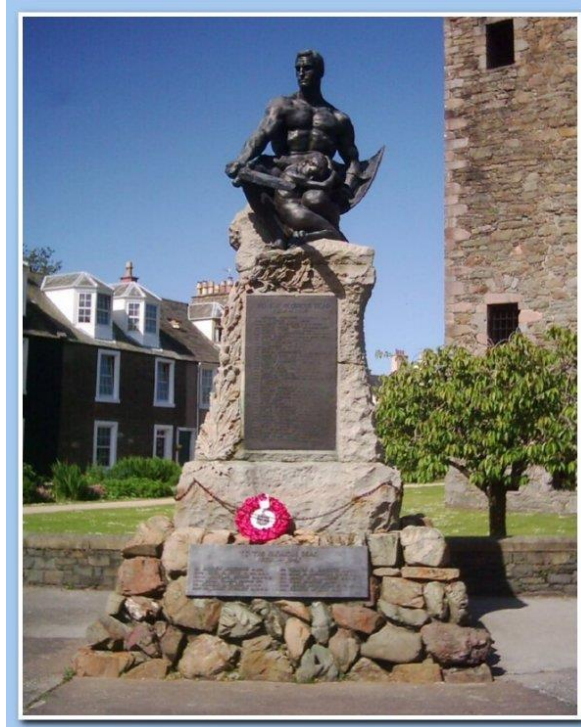
W. Keelan is remembered on the St. Cuthbert's Parish Church Roll of Honour, located in St. Cuthbert's Church, St. Mary Street, Kirkcudbright, Scotland.



St. Cuthbert's Church Roll of Honour, Kirkcudbright (Photos from War Memorials Online – Paul Goodwin)



Trooper W. Keelan is remembered on the Kirkcudbright War Memorial, located in front of Maclellan's Castle, Castle Street, Kirkcudbright, Scotland.



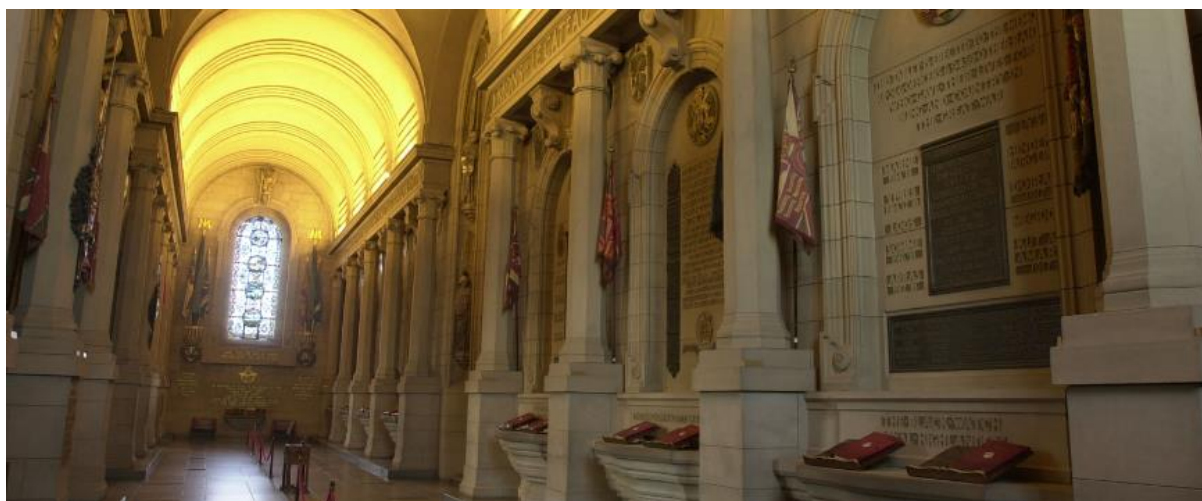
Kirkcudbright War Memorial (Photos from War Memorials Online – Paul Goodwin)



William Keelan is remembered in the Roll of Honour books held in the Hall of Honour inside The Scottish National War Memorial. The north side of the Hall of Honour is divided by columns into bays, each dedicated to a different regiment and enhanced with battle honours and consecrated colours. On the broad shelf in front of each of the bays, the names of the dead are listed in leather-bound books.

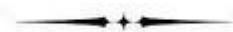


The Scottish National War Memorial & the Hall of Honour & the Roll of Honour books.
(Photos from The Scottish National War Memorial)



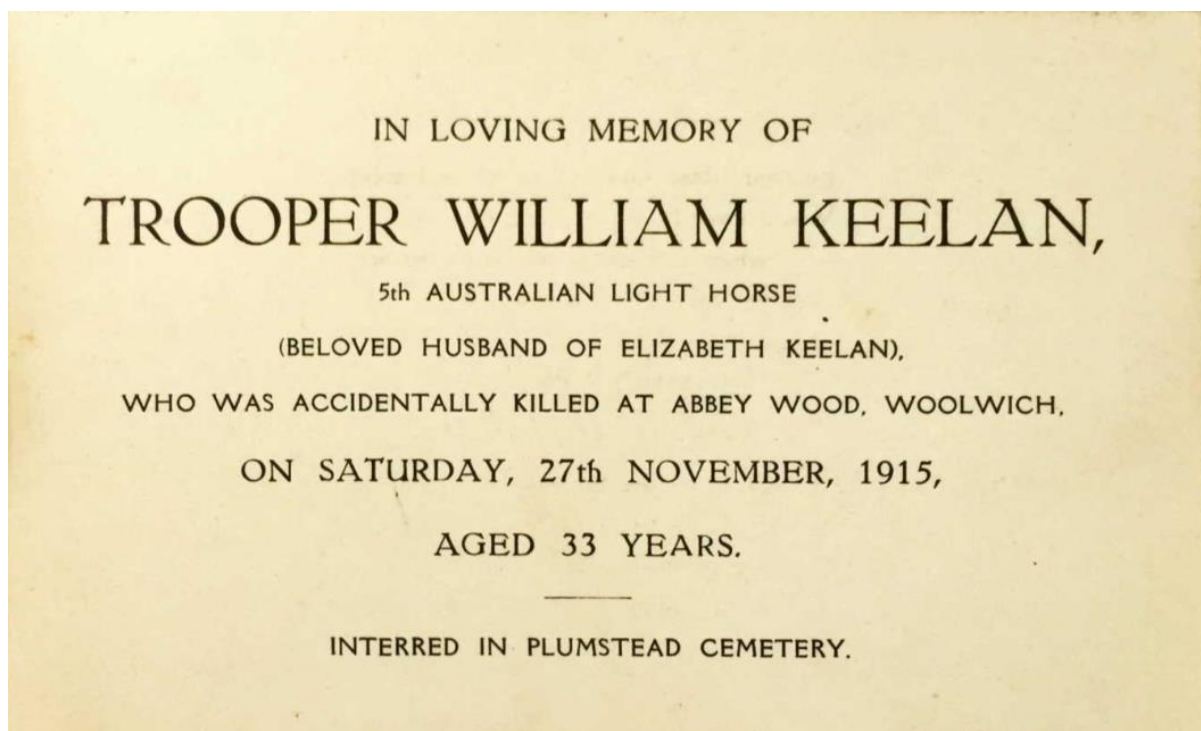
(50 pages of Trooper William Keelan's Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

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





Private W. Keelan (The Queenslander, Brisbane – 20 March, 1915)





Trooper W. KEELAN,
Kirkeudbright.
(Killed).



Private William Keelan *(back right)*



Newspaper Notices

ROLL OF HONOUR

Australian Casualties

The 95th and 96th Australian casualty lists were released by the censor last evening....

QUEENSLAND

773 Pte W. Keelan, 5th L.H., 3rd rfts, Scotland, ill in hosp., London

(The Telegraph, Brisbane, Queensland – 21 October, 1915)

SOLDIER KILLED IN LONDON

A telephone message was received from London by the Kirkcudbright police on Sunday night that Private William Keelan, 5th Australian Light Infantry, had been knocked down by a motor car in London on Saturday and had since died. Private Keelan was a Kirkcudbright man, and was brought up at Mid-Borland, where he was employed as a farm worker. He went to Australia about eight years ago, and on the outbreak of war joined the Australian contingent, and was sent to the Dardanelles where he was wounded and sent home to hospital in England. About six weeks ago he returned to Kirkcudbright on furlough and married Miss Elizabeth Copland Coskrie, domestic servant, at Anchorlee.

(Dumfries and Galloway Standard, Scotland – 1 December, 1915)

SOLDIER'S PATHETIC FATE

Pathetic circumstances surround the death of Trooper William Keelan, of the 5th Australian Light Horse, who was killed in a motor accident at Woolwich on Saturday.

Trooper Keelan, who was about 35 years of age, emigrated to Australia eight years ago, and at the outbreak of war joined the Australian Expeditionary Force. He served at the Dardanelles, and was sent to an English hospital to recover from a wound.

Seven weeks ago he was married at Kirkcudbright, and yesterday his young wife attended his funeral at Woolwich.

(Daily Record, Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland – 1 December, 1915)

ACCIDENTAL DEATH

London, Tuesday

A verdict of accidental death has been recorded in the inquest on Trooper William Keelan, a Queensland, who was knocked down on Saturday by a motor at Plumstead.

(Daily Mercury, Mackay, Queensland, Australia – 2 December, 1915)

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)

Trooper W. Keelan has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone but no inscription.

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



Private William Keelan's Original Cross Marker

Photo of Trooper W. Keelan's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Woolwich Old Cemetery, London, England.



(Photo courtesy of Ian Yarham)

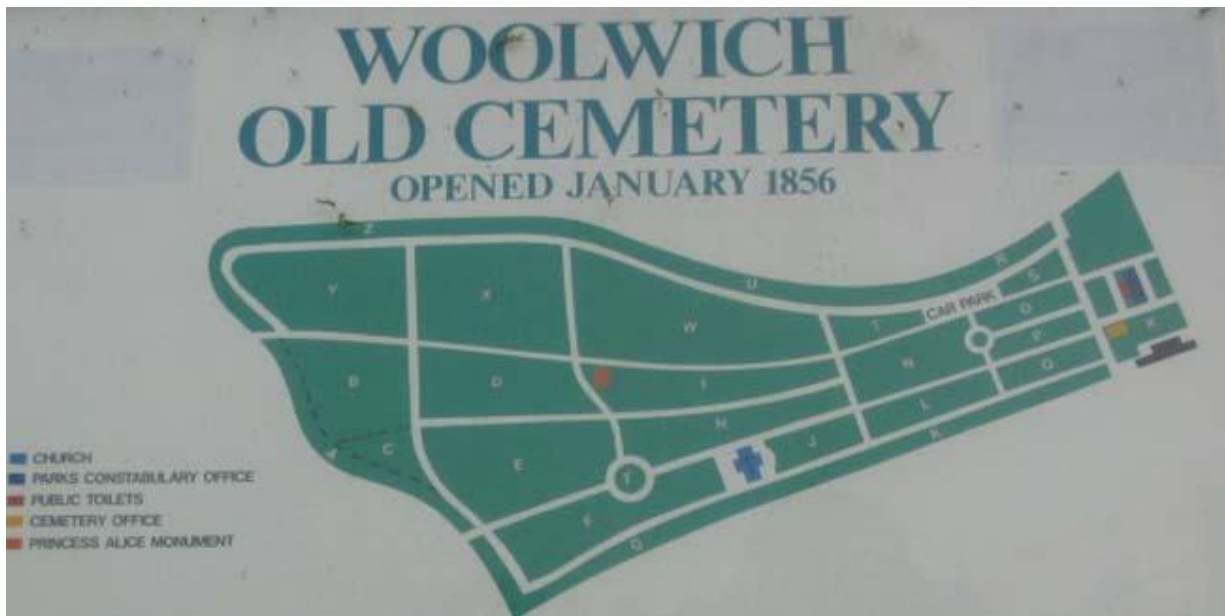


3 Australian WW1 War Graves – (left to right) French, Keelan & Clark
(Photos courtesy of Ian Yarham - August, 2022)





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



(Photo from Find a Grave – Iain MacFarlane)