

**Melcombe Regis Cemetery,
Weymouth, Dorset, England**

War Graves



Lest We Forget

World War 1



130 PRIVATE

R. E. MITCHELL

34TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.

30TH DECEMBER, 1916 Age 22

After Life's Fitful Fever

He Sleeps Well

Ralph Eric MITCHELL

Ralph Eric Mitchell was born at Clapham, London, England on 2nd May, 1893 to parents Brick (Herbert Leigh Mitchell) and Marion Alice Mitchell (nee Poulton). His birth was registered in June quarter, 1893 in the district of Wandsworth, London, England.

The 1901 England Census recorded Ralph E. Mitchell as a 7 year old living at Wellington Rd, St Mary in the Castle, Hastings, Sussex, England. Listed in the household - his mother Marion A. Mitchel (aged 28); sister Margaret R. Mitchell (aged 6) & brother Denis S. Mitchell (aged 3). Also listed were 2 visitors – Edith A. Austin (aged 22) & Ethel Liddle (age 21).

The 1911 England Census recorded Eric Ralph Leigh Mitchell, aged 18, attending University School, Hastings, Sussex, England.

According to information provided by his mother (Marion Alice Mitchell) for the Roll of Honour Ralph attended University School Hastings, England. He matriculated at the London University in January, 1911. He had served with Cadet Corps & gained a Commission in Citizen Forces, NSW. He was a “*Scholastic Coach for Literature & Mathematics.*”

Ralph Eric Mitchell was a 26 year old, single, School Teacher when he enlisted on 9th November, 1915 at Walgett, New South Wales (As per Attestation Papers, however his Medical History form recorded he enlisted on 9th November, 1915 at Newcastle) with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His religion was Church of England & his next of kin was listed as his mother – Mrs Leigh Mitchel, 17 St Saviour’s Road, St Leonard’s Sussex, England.

The Preliminary Medical Examination on 9th November, 1915 at Angledool reported: “*Has small inguinal hernia on rt side. This has been present for many years & he was accepted for military service in England. Is prepared to undergo operation if necessary.*”

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell was posted to 34th Battalion on 9th November, 1915. He was posted to “A” Company, 34th Battalion on 1st April, 1916 at West Maitland, NSW. A “*Record of Members of the A.I.F. in Australia*” card for Private Ralph Eric Mitchell, 130, 34th Battalion has recorded he enlisted at Narrabri on 30th November, 1915. His postal address was Eurungie, New Angledool, N.S. Wales. His next of kin was recorded as Mrs Leigh Mitchell, 5 St. Helens Park Road, Hastings, Sussex, England. “Posted to following Camp” – West Maitland on 19th January, 1916.

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell, Service number 130, embarked from Sydney, New South Wales on HMAT *Hororata* (A20) on 2nd May, 1916 with the 9th Infantry Brigade, 34th Infantry Battalion “A” Company & disembarked at Plymouth, England on 23rd June, 1916.

34th Battalion

The 34th Battalion was formed in January 1916 at a camp established at the Maitland showground in New South Wales. It was planned that the bulk of the battalion’s recruits would be drawn from the Maitland area and thus it was dubbed “Maitland’s Own”. The first recruits for the 34th, however, hailed from the far north-west of the state and arrived at Maitland after joining a recruiting march that began at Walgett. These men were known as the “Wallabies”.

The 34th became part of the 9th Brigade of the 3rd Australian Division. It left Sydney, bound for the United Kingdom in May 1916. Arriving there in late June, the battalion spent the next five months training. It crossed to France on 22 November, and moved into the trenches of the Western Front for the first time on 27 November, just in time for the onset of the terrible winter of 1916-17.....

(Extract of Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)

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.

A Medical Report was completed on Private Ralph Eric Mitchell on 1st September, 1916 while at Lark Hill, Wiltshire, England. His disability was listed as Asthma which had originated “*years before enlisting, from childhood.*” “*Has had difficulty & shortness of Breathing – increased on exertion, for a good many years. Also has an inguinal Hernia.*” The

Officer in charge of the medical case recommended that Private Mitchell be discharged as permanently unfit. The Medical Board found that Private Mitchel was permanently unfit for general service but fit for home service

A Handwritten note in Service Record file for Private Ralph Eric Mitchell, stamped Central Register, Imperial Force Headquarters, reads: "*Pte Mitchell, R. E. of 34 Battn was paraded before a Medical Board on September 4th 1916. The Board recommended him for Home Service as he was unfit for Active Service.*"

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell was admitted to Military Hospital Fargo, Wiltshire on 5th October, 1916 with Asthma & was discharged on 18th October, 1916.

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell was marched in to No. 2 Command Depot, Weymouth, Dorset from Fargo on 18th October, 1916.

A Medical Report was completed on Private Ralph Eric Mitchell on 21st October, 1916 at No. 2 Command Depot, Weymouth. His disability was listed as Asthma which had originated in England, prior to enlistment. "*Went to Australia five years ago on account of Asthma. Was quite free from it while in Australia but as soon as he returned to England Asthma started again.*" The Officer in charge of the medical case recommended that Private Mitchell be discharged as permanently unfit & he have a change to Australia. The Medical Board found that Private Mitchel was permanently unfit for general service but fit for home service in Australia.

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell was transferred to Weymouth on 22nd October, 1916.

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell was admitted to Hut 80 Hospital on 27th October, 1916 until 1st November, 1916 then again from 22nd November, 1916 until 2nd December, 1916.

A Telegram was sent from No. 2 Command Depot, Weymouth to Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F., London on 29th December, 1916: "*AAA To report that 130 Pte R. E. Mitchell 34th Battalion is lying in Camp Hospital seriously ill with Asthma and Bronchitis AAA Please advise next of Kin Mother Mrs M. L. Mithell 17, St. Saviours Road, St. Leonard's-on-Sea Sussex AAA Progress report will be wired you tomorrow morning...*"

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell died at 12.57 am on 30th December, 1916 at Camp Hospital, No. 2 Australian Command Depot, Weymouth, Dorset, England from Asthma & Bronchitis. (Statement of Service form recorded he died at Hut Hospital, Monte Video which was part of No. 2 Australian Command Depot. The "*Morning State of Sick*" form (Army form A27) recorded he died of Acute Asthma, Bronchitis & Broncho Pneumonia at Hut 80 Monte Video.)

A death for Ralph E. Mitchell, aged 25, was registered in the March quarter, 1917 in the district of Weymouth, Dorset, England.

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell was buried on 8th January, 1917 in Melcombe Regis Cemetery, Weymouth, Dorset, England – Section C Grave No. 268.

This is now recorded by CWGC as Plot number III. C. 2681 and he now has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell requested in his Will, dated 17th July, 1916: "*In the event of my death I give the whole of my property and effects to my mother & father Marion Alice Mitchell and Herbert Leigh Mitchell of 17 St. Saviour's Rd, St. Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex, England, with the exception of my papers relating to the theatre, my dramatic criticisms and plays which I give to Mrs H. Selden, c/o Mrs Ascher 45 – 47 MacLeay St., Pott's Point, Sydney, NSW.*"

Private Ralph Eric Mitchell was entitled to British War Medal only as he had not entered a Theatre of War. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Private Mitchell's mother - Mrs L. Mitchell, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll & Plaque issued in England in July, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private Ralph Eric Mitchell – service number 130, aged 22, of 34th Battalion, Australian Infantry. He was the son of Brick & Marion Alice Mitchell, of 9, Colville Gardens, Notting Hill Gate, London, England.

Private R. E. Mitchell is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 124.



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

(73 pages of Private Ralph Eric Mitchell'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



Ralph Eric Mitchell.

(De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour 1914 – 1918)

MITCHELL, RALPH ERIC, Private, No. 130, 34th Battn. Australian Infantry,



Ralph Eric Mitchell.

Australian Imperial Force, eldest s. of L. Corpl. Brick Mitchell, No. 745, 18th Battn. Australian Infantry, by his wife, Marion Alice (—) (17, St. Saviour's Road, West St. Leonards, co. Sussex); and brother to Private Denis Stuart Mitchell (*q.v.*); *b.* Clapham, London, S.W., 2 May, 1893; educ. Foyle College, Londonderry, and University School, Hastings, co. Sussex; went to Australia in 1912, and settled in Sydney as an Accountant, but owing to chest trouble was obliged to seek a change of climate, and proceeded 400 miles inland to the borders of New South Wales and Queensland; made many attempts to enlist, but failed to pass the medical examination; eventually was accepted as one of the first 150 of the "Wallabies," and took part in their famous recruiting march; served 12 months, and died at Monte Video Camp, Weymouth, 30 Dec. 1916, from acute asthma and bronchitis, which had been aggravated by military

service. Buried in the Melcombe Regis Cemetery, Weymouth, co. Dorset. Private Mitchell was a keen sportsman, and took part in golf, cricket and fishing, and was an excellent chess player; *unm.*

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Newspaper Notices

COMMONWEALTH MILITARY CADET CORPS

2ND MILITARY DISTRICT

Senior Cadets

Appointments

.....RALPH ERIC MITCHELL.... To be Lieutenants (provisionally)

(Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, Australia – 31 October, 1914)

THE WAR

PRIVATE R. E. MITCHELL

We regret to record in our obituary column the death of Private R. E. (Eric) Mitchell, elder son of Mrs Leigh Mitchell, of 17, St. Saviours'-road, Qwest St. Leonards.

The deceased, who was in his 24th year, was educated at Foyle College, Londonderry, and University School, Hastings. Whilst there he studied for and passed the London Matriculation Examination. Indifferent health decided him to try the climate of Australia. Arriving in Sydney in 1912, he adopted accountancy as a profession, and served for a year with Yarwood, Vane and Company, but he was again compelled to seek a change of climate and proceeded 400 miles inland to the borders of New South Wales and Queensland.

When war was declared he returned to Sydney and made every effort to join the first Expeditionary Force, but was unsuccessful. He, however, would not be denied, and eventually enlisted at Collarenebri as one of the first 150 of the "Wallabies" taking part in their famous recruiting march. Asthma and bronchitis troubled him right through, and from these complaints he succumbed at Monte Video Camp, Weymouth, on December 30th.

The deceased took an active part in all sports, especially golf, cricket, and fishing, and was also more than an average good chess player. His only brother, Denis, was killed in France last June. His father was through Gallipoli and is still serving with the Australian Imperial Force.

(Hastings and St. Leonards Observer, Sussex, England – 13 January, 1917)

Australian Casualties

Lists Nos. 262 to 264

New South Wales

Died of Illness

Pte R. E. MITCHELL (England), 30/2/16

(Australian Town and Country Journal, Sydney, NSW – 17 January, 1917)

ROLL OF HONOR

MITCHELL – On June 11th, in France, from wounds, Denis Stuart Mitchell, B.E.F., younger son of Brick Mitchell, A.I.F., of David Jones, Limited, Sydney, and Marion Leigh Mitchell, of St. Leonards-on-Sea, England, aged 18 years.

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(The Daily Telegraph, Sydney, NSW – 31 March, 1917)

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(The Sydney Morning Herald, NSW – 31 March, 1917)

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 R. E. Mitchell does have a personal inscription on his headstone.

After Life's Fitful Fever

He Sleeps Well

Melcombe Regis Cemetery, Weymouth, Dorset, England

Weymouth became a depot for Australian forces in 1916 and 83 of the 147 First World War burials in Melcombe Regis Cemetery are of Australian servicemen; most of these graves are scattered in the old part. The 36 Second World War burials are in the extension. The cemetery also contains seven war graves of other nationalities and one non-war burial.

(Information from CWGC)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

D00333

Australian graves in the cemetery at Melcombe Regis. March 1919

Identified, front row, left to right: unidentified; Butler; 5917 Private Edgar Allan Thornell, 22nd Battalion (Bn), died 9 August 1918; 1207 Corporal Jesse Adams Davis, 12th Bn, died 15 November 1918.

Back row: 5329 Private Frederick Albert Archer, Anzac Provost Company, died 6 November 1918; 5990 Private Albert Robert Blackmore, 12th Bn, died 2 November 1918; 11099 Driver Matthew Charles Percival Nettle, 6th Australian Field Artillery Brigade, died 22 October 1918; 3942 Private Walter Alick Weckman, 51st Bn, died 9 November 1918.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

D00332

Some of the Australian graves in the cemetery at Melcombe Regis. March 1919

Identified, left to right: Captain Francis Arthur Deravin, Australian Army Medical Corps, died 8 July 1917 aged 41 years (large headstone); 138 Private Louis Nelson Matthews, 27th Battalion, 4 July 1917; 5082 Private Victor George Smith, 21st Battalion, died 13 November 1918.



(Photo courtesy of Steve Stewart)



(Photos courtesy of Steve Stewart)





(Photos courtesy of Steve Stewart)

Australians in Weymouth

What was life like for the Australians?

The Camp

Within the camp, there were educational facilities as well as medical rooms which helped to recover and re-educate the soldiers. There was help provided for soldiers suffering with physical or emotional impairments, such as massage rooms, psychotherapy training rooms and a remedial gymnasium. This strengthened the men to help them recover from their injuries. The educational aspects were diverse, allowing soldiers to pick a completely different profession for when they went back home. This included architecture, motor engineering, electrical and carpentry classes. Another option allowed the soldiers to be retrained in their previous professions which may have become more difficult, due to loss of limbs or new techniques that may have been created whilst they were at war.

The Town

Weymouth benefited hugely from the influx of Australian and New Zealand soldiers. One shop that still exists today is the Acutt's clothing store, which used to sell everything a soldier could possibly need for his uniform, from the whole jacket to just the buttons and epaulettes. As well as Acutt's, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia also opened up their own branch in Weymouth, for the soldiers to use during their time over here, which highlighted the permanence of their stay. There was also a monthly newsletter that circulated amongst the men, which was produced by local company Sherrens, which still operates on the Granby Industrial estate.

Special Events

The Australian recovery camps took special occasions very seriously, such as Christmas and Easter, to try and reduce the ache of home sickness and being away from their family and friends. Most camps tried to make their soldiers feel at home, with large celebrations with Christmas dinners and special guest performances at Easter. However, there were also other special events that gained press attention, such as the opening of the YMCA building, which used to be on Abbotshay Road. This provided help and welfare to the Australian soldiers, such as free food and blankets. There were fundraising days for the prisoner-of-war soldiers that had been captured during the fall of the Kut, who were mainly Dorset soldiers. From these fundraising days in Weymouth, Dorchester and Biddport, the towns managed to raise £3,600 to help comfort the prisoners.

Entertainment

Entertainment was a highly important aspect of the soldiers' lives whilst they were in Weymouth. It kept the soldiers motivated and in high spirits whilst they were ill or injured, in hopes of helping to speed up their recovery. Throughout the camps in Weymouth, there was always something to watch or listen to, whether it was singing and acting companies who toured round the camps or at the Pavilion Theatre on the Esplanade. Sometimes, the soldiers even made their own entertainment, with marching bands and choirs being set up by the YMCA building in Westham. There were also balls and dances at the camps themselves and even a small trip to the Alexandra Garden along the Esplanade. Dating also became a significant part of the soldiers' lives, with many Weymouth women losing husbands and boyfriends at war. Finding comfort with the new soldiers at the camp, this led to many marriages between the two groups, and some migrating back to Australia with their new families, or staying here and leaving their families.

3

THESE BOYS BEARING ACUTT BROTHERS

AMERICAN OFFICERS UNIFORMS.

THE JUBILEE HALL

ROYAL PALM COURT

#weyforward

The National Lottery

Images courtesy of Australian War Memorial, Newsletter originals published by Sherrens, Ltd. Weymouth



(Photos courtesy of Steve Stewart)

Australians in Weymouth

From Weymouth to Auswey - A Soldier's Récovery



During the First World War between 1914 and 1918, many injured soldiers who were mostly from Australia and New Zealand, were brought to Weymouth. They were known as ANZACS (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps). They were placed in Repatriation and Recuperation camps in Westham, Littlehampton, Chichester and Portland. This was in the hope of sending them back to the line of action in France or back home to Australia due to lack of fitness. Weymouth was picked as the place to set up camp, as it was seen as a relaxing seaside location. This would help to heal the sick and injured Australians who had been fighting in major battles of the war or on the Western Front between France and Belgium.



Although thousands of ANZACS passed through Weymouth during the First World War, there are some soldiers who unfortunately did not make it home. These soldiers are proudly buried in the Melcombe Regis cemetery. This is only 100 metres away from one of the major camps in Westham, with 142 soldiers buried in the cemetery, 83 from Australia and 59 from New Zealand. These graves are similar to some of the war memorials and graves placed around Europe, much like the Somme in France. Unfortunately, there are too many grave names to be displayed on this board, but they can be found on the website link at the bottom of this board.



Past and Present Westham

As you can see on the map of the Westham camp, many of the street names have an Australian connection, highlighting the history of the area. Residents of the housing estates, which are now built where the camp once stood, are still digging up remains of the camp, such as bullets or cooking equipment.



Modern Day Street Names	Westham Camp - December 1916
Cheset Close	Soldiers Huts
Swine Road	Company Officers
Queensland Road	Regimental Institute
Kitchener Road	Minutemen Rifle Range
Corporation Road	Officers' Mess
Shark Road	Shower Block
Longcroft Road	Vehicle Shed, Mob Store
Wessex Road	Home Shelter
Parth Street	Cool Yard
Melbourne Street	Cook House
Adelaide Crescent	YMCA
Abbotsbury Road	Dung Pit
Sydney Street	Fire Hydrant
Shirecroft Road	



www.westhamcommunitygroup.co.uk



Images courtesy of Australian War Memorial



Photo of Private R. E. Mitchell's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Melcombe Regis Cemetery, Weymouth, Dorset, England.



(Photos courtesy of Allan Wood)

