

# Durrington War Graves

## World War 1



*Lest We Forget*



**29811 GUNNER**

**R. J. O'HARA**

**119TH HOWITZER BTY.**

**AUSTRALIAN FIELD ARTILLERY**

**29TH DECEMBER, 1916 Age 30**

*Commonwealth War Graves Headstone for Gunner R. J. O'Hara is located in Grave Plot # 142  
of Durrington War Graves Cemetery*

## Robert James O'HARA

Robert James O'Hara was born at Carlton, Victoria. His birth was registered in 1884 to parents John & Mary O'Hara (nee Brindley).

Robert James O'Hara married Annie Pulford in Victoria in 1912.

Robert James O'Hara, orchardist of Blackburn, was listed on the 1914 Electoral Roll for the Division of Flinders, subdivision of Dandenong, Victoria.

Robert James O'Hara was a 31 year old, married, Orchardist from Blackburn, Victoria when he enlisted on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1916 with the 119<sup>th</sup> Howitzer Battery, Australian Field Artillery of the Australian Army (A.I.F.). His service number was 29811 & his religion was Roman Catholic. His next of kin was listed as his wife – Mrs A. O'Hara of White Horse Road, Blackburn, Victoria. Robert O'Hara had previously served 4 years with Militia Artillery.

Gunner Robert James O'Hara embarked from Melbourne on HMAT *Aeneas (A60)* on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1916 & disembarked at Plymouth, England on 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1916.

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.

Gunner Robert James O'Hara was admitted to Fargo Military Hospital, Wiltshire on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1916.

Gunner Robert James O'Hara died at 1.40 p.m. on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1916 at Fargo Military Hospital, Wiltshire from Spinal Meningitis (Originally reported as Cerebro Spinal Meningitis).

A death for Robert J. O'Hara, aged 31, was registered in the December quarter, 1916 in the district of Amesbury, Wiltshire.

The Red Cross Wounded & Missing File for Gunner Robert James O'Hara contains a request from the Red Cross, on behalf of his family, to Fargo Military Hospital asking for further particulars on Gunner O'Hara's death & burial. A reply was written on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1917 by The Sister, for The Matron, Fargo Military Hospital which reads: *"He was admitted to this hospital desperately ill on the 28.12.16 and died the following day. There was practically no hope when he was brought in. The Australians have suffered terribly from the extreme cold this last winter. He was buried on the 1.2.17 in the Durrington Cemetery gave no 142 on the right hand side of the path. I am very sorry not to be able to give more particulars he was too ill to speak much – or to realize how ill he was. The cause of death was Bronchial Pneumonia." (Note: underlined are incorrect)*

Gunner Robert James O'Hara was buried on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1917 at Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire – Plot number 142 and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

Gunner Robert James O'Hara 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 Pte O'Hara's widow – Mrs Annie O'Hara (sent November, 1921 & June, 1923)

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Gunner Robert James O'Hara – service number 29811 as being 30 years old & served with 119th Howitzer Bty., Australian Field Artillery. No family details are listed.

A War Pension was granted to Annie O'Hara, widow of late Gunner Robert James O'Hara, in the sum of £2 per fortnight from 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1917. A War Pension was also granted to late Pte O'Hara's daughter – Doris May O'Hara, in the sum of 20/- per fortnight from 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1917. (Doris May O'Hara was born in 1914).

Gunner R. J. O'Hara is commemorated in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 15.

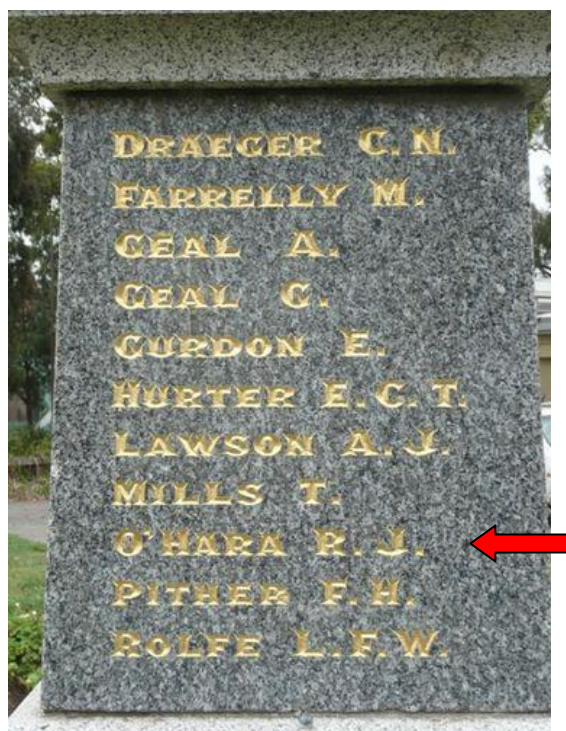


(Photos by Cathy Sedgwick)



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

R. J. O'Hara is also remembered on the Blackburn War Memorial, Victoria. It originally stood on the corner of Whitehorse & Railway Roads but was moved to Morton Park on 20 April, 1969.



**Blackburn War Memorial** (Photos from Monument Australia – Graeme Saunders)

(39 pages of Gunner Robert James O'Hara'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 Reports**

### **FOR KING AND COUNTRY.**

Gunner R. J. O'Hara.

Mr Thos. Griffin, of East Kyneton, has learned that his cousin, Gunner Robert James O'Hara died in England from meningitis. The young soldier, who before enlisting for active service, was a member of the Royal Australian Artillery, and the only son of Mr and Mrs John O'Hara, and brother of Miss K. O'Hara of Canterbury. His kindly nature made him very popular. He had many friends in Kyneton, who will regret to learn of his death and who will also sympathise with his relatives.

*(Kyneton Guardian, Victoria – Tuesday 16 January, 1917)*

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### **THE 264th CASUALTY LIST**

#### **DIED OF OTHER CAUSES**

Gunner R. J. O'Hara, Blackburn

*(The Mildura Cultivator, Victoria – Wednesday 17 January, 1917)*



**Gunner Robert James O'Hara**



### 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 at Durrington War Graves Cemetery. 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)*

A letter from Base Records, dated 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1921, to Mrs A. O'Hara advises that a letter from the Defence Dept. concerning an inscription on the headstone of the late Gunner R. J. O'Hara had not been answered & non-receipt of a reply within 21 days would have to be accepted as indicating that no further action was to be taken.

Gunner R. J. O'Hara does not have a personal inscription on his headstone.



**Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire** *(Photo by Dave Healing 2013)*

Photo of Gunner R. J. O'Hara's Headstone at Durrington Cemetery, Wiltshire.



*(Photo © Ian King - with permission)*