

**St. George's Churchyard,  
Fovant, Wiltshire  
War Graves**



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**2667 PRIVATE**

**R. SIMPSON**

**4TH AUSTRALIAN PIONEERS**

**16TH MAY, 1917 Age 41**

*He Died*

*For Truth And Freedom*

## Robert SIMPSON

Robert Simpson was born at Ferryhill, Durham, England in 1875 to parents Alexander and Mary Jane Simpson (nee Robinson). His birth was registered in March quarter, 1876.

The 1881 England Census recorded Robert H. Simpson as a 5 year old Scholar, living with his family at Hett Moor, Ferryhill, Durham, England. His parents were listed as Alexander Simpson (Farmer of 66 acres, aged 41, born Scotland) & Mary Jane Simpson (aged 44, born Heseldon, Durham). Also listed was Robert's younger sister – Alice Mary Simpson (aged 3, born Ferryhill, Durham) & a Domestic servant – Robina Stewart (aged 17, born Scotland).

The 1891 England Census recorded Robert Simpson as a 15 year old Farmer's son, living with his family at Tudhoe Village – Tudhoe Hall Farm. His parents were listed as Alexander Simpson (Farmer, aged 45) & Mary J. Simpson (aged 45). Robert was the eldest of 3 children listed on this Census – Robert then Alice Simpson (aged 13) & Alexander Simpson (Scholar, aged 10, born Ferryhill, Durham). Also listed was a Farm Servant – Henry Allison (aged 18, born Darlington, Durham).

The 1901 England Census recorded Robert H. Simpson as a 25 year old Farmer's son, living with his family at Tudhoe Village, Durham. His parents were listed as Alexander Simpson (Farmer, aged 60) & Mary Jane Simpson (aged 63). Also listed was Robert's younger sister – Alice M. Simpson (aged 23) & a Domestic Servant – Ellen Wright (aged 18, born Crook, Durham).

Robert Simpson stated he was a 33 year old, single, Farm Hand from G.P.O., Perth, Western Australia when he enlisted at Beverley, Western Australia on 25th March, 1915 with the 6th Reinforcements of 11th Infantry Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 2211 & his religion was Presbyterian. His next of kin was listed as his father – Mr A. Simpson of Mount Hurley, Ferry Hill, Durham, England.

Private Robert Simpson was posted to No. 14 Depot on 25th March, 1915 for recruit training.

Private Robert Simpson was written up at Blackboy Hill Camp, Western Australia on 5th June, 1915 – “Absent from Tattoo whilst under orders to embark for active service till reporting himself in Camp at about 5 pm on 8th June, 1915 – 3 days.” He was given 10 days No. 2 Field Punishment & forfeited 10 days' pay.

Private Robert Simpson was written up at Blackboy Hill Camp, Western Australia on 23rd July, 1915 – “absent without leave till reporting himself at 5.30 pm on 29th July, 1915.” He forfeited 6 days' pay & was fined 10/-.

Private Robert Simpson was written up at Blackboy Hill Camp, Western Australia on 17th August, 1915 for being absent without leave from Reveille till 4pm on 26th August, 1915 – 10 days. He was given 168 hours detention & forfeited 10 days' pay.

Private Robert Simpson was transferred to 11th Infantry Battalion, 8th Reinforcements on 2nd September, 1915 & his new service number was 2667.

New Attestation Papers were completed for Private Robert Simpson in August, 1915 at Blackboy Hill, Western Australia. His aged was stated as 39 years & 6 months & his religion was recorded as Church of England. His service number was recorded as 2667. All other details remained the same.

Private Robert Simpson embarked from Fremantle, Western Australia on HMAT *Anchises (A68)* on 2nd September, 1915.

Private Robert Simpson was en route to join M.E.F. (Mediterranean Expeditionary Force) from Zeitoun on 21st October, 1915.

Private Robert Simpson was taken on strength from 8th Reinforcements at Sarpi Camp, Lemnos on 12th December, 1915.

Private Robert Simpson disembarked at Alexandria from *Lake Michigan* on 6th January, 1916.

Private Robert Simpson was transferred to 51st Battalion from 11th Battalion on 1st March, 1916 at Serapeum.

Private Robert Simpson was transferred & taken on strength of 4th Pioneer Battalion on 16th March, 1916 at Tel-el-Kebir.

Private Robert Simpson proceeded to join B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force) from Alexandria on Troop ship *Scotian* on 4th June, 1916. He disembarked at Marseilles, France on 11th June, 1916.

Private Robert Simpson was wounded in action in France on 2nd September, 1916. He was admitted to 44th Casualty Clearing Station with gunshot wounds to left leg. Pte Simpson was transferred by Ambulance Train & admitted to 32nd Stationary Hospital on 3rd September, 1916 with shrapnel wounds to left leg. He embarked for England from Boulogne on Hospital Ship *Jan Breydel* on 6th September, 1916 with gunshot wounds to left leg.

Private Robert Simpson was admitted to Military Hospital at Frensham Hill, England on 7th September, 1916. He was transferred to Norfolk War Hospital & was granted furlough & was then to report to Perham Downs.

Private Robert Simpson was marched in to No. 1 Command Depot at Perham Downs, Wiltshire from furlough on 10th November, 1916. He was medically classified as B1 A.

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 Robert Simpson was marched out to Wareham from No. 1 Command Depot on 13th November, 1916.

Private Robert Simpson was written up for a Crime on 2nd January, 1917 while at Wareham – Absent without leave from Muster Parade. He was awarded 24 hours detention.

Private Robert Simpson was marched into Pioneer Training Battalion at Larkhill, Wiltshire on 25th January, 1917 from No. 2 Command Depot at Weymouth.

Private Robert Simpson was marched out from No. 4 Company to No. 6 Company (Home Service) at Larkhill on 22nd February, 1917.

Private Robert Simpson died on 16th May, 1917 at No. 4 Camp, Fovant, Wiltshire, England from Heart failure.

A death for Robert Simpson, aged 40, was registered in the June quarter, 1917 in the district of Wilton, Wiltshire, England.

Private Robert Simpson was buried on 20th May, 1917 in St George's Churchyard, Fovant, Wiltshire, England, – Plot number II. B. 3 and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. From the burial report of Pte R. Simpson - *Coffin was Ash with brass mountings. The deceased soldier was recently Medically examined and found to be in good health, and appeared to be so right up to the time of his death. He died quite suddenly in the presence of the Sergeant Major of the Company. He was buried in the Fovant Church Yard beside his mate the late Private N. Chappell. The men of the 4th Company Pioneers have placed permanent wreaths on both graves.*

#### **4th Pioneer Battalion**

The 4th Pioneers were established on 10 March 1916, at Tel-el-Kebir in Egypt, and were subsequently assigned to the 4th Division. Trained as infantrymen, they were also tasked with some engineer functions, with a large number of personnel possessing trade qualifications from civilian life. As such, they were designated as pioneer units. In early 1916, the Australian Army was reorganised ahead of its transfer to the Western Front in Europe. A total of five pioneer battalions were raised by the AIF at this time, with one being assigned to each of the five infantry divisions that the Australians deployed to the battlefield in France and Belgium. Tasked with digging trenches, labouring, constructing strong points and light railways, and undertaking battlefield clearance, the troops assigned to the pioneers required construction and engineering experience in addition to basic soldiering skills.

*(Pioneer Battalion information from Wikipedia)*

Private Robert Simpson was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Pte Simpson's father in England – Mr A. Simpson, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll & Plaque sent December, 1921).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private Robert Simpson - service number 2667, aged 41, of 4th Australian Pioneers. He was the son of Alexander and Mary Jane Simpson, of Mount Hully, Ferryhill, Co. Durham, England. Born at Ferryhill.

Private R. Simpson is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 174.



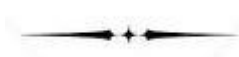
*(Photos by Cathy Sedgwick)*



*Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia*

(46 pages of Pte Robert Simpson'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 TOLL OF WAR**

### **AND ROLL OF HONOUR**

#### RETURNED TO DUTY

Pte R. Simpson, England, previously reported wounded

*(The Sun, Kalgoorlie, Western Australia – 7 January, 1917)*

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### **W.A. CASUALTIES**

#### **307th Official List**

DIED, CAUSE NOT STATED

PRIVATE ROBERT SIMPSON, England

*(The Daily News, Perth, Western Australia – 4 June, 1917)*

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### **DEATHS**

SIMPSON – Died on May 16th, 1917, at Fovant Camp, Salisbury, Wiltshire, Private Robert Simpson, 4th Pioneer Battalion, Australian Imperial Forces, son of Alexander and the late Mary Jane Simpson, formerly of Tudhoe Hall Farm, Spennymoor, Interred at Fovant Churchyard on May 20th, 1917.

*(Newcastle Journal, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear, England – 23 May, 1917)*

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### **W.A. Casualties**

#### **333rd OFFICIAL LIST**

DEATHS

Robert Simpson, England, now reported died of illness, previously reported died, cause not stated.

*(The Daily News, Perth, Western Australia – 27 August, 1917)*

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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 R. Simpson does have a personal inscription on his headstone.

*He Died For Truth And Freedom*



## St George's Churchyard, Fovant, Wiltshire, England

There was a 600 bed hutted military hospital at Fovant during the First World War, and the concentration of Australian depots and training camps in the area is reflected in the 63 First World War burials in this churchyard. The war graves form two groups, one west of the church and the other at the east end. There is also one burial of the Second World War. There are 44 War Graves belonging to those who served with the Australian Imperial Force in World War 1.  
*(Information from CWGC)*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

D00 299

*(Photo c 1919)*







**St George's Churchyard, Fovant – War Graves at front & rear** (*Churchyard photos courtesy of Andrew Stacey*)





Photo of Private R. Simpson's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in St George's Churchyard, Fovant, Wiltshire, England.







**Cross of Sacrifice** (Photo courtesy of Andrew Stacey)