

**Plumstead Cemetery,  
Plumstead, Greater London, England**

**War Graves**



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**L. THOMPSON**

**AUSTRALIAN MUNITION WORKER**

**17TH FEBRUARY, 1919 Age 42**

*Rest in Peace*

## Lawson THOMPSON

Lawson Thompson was born on 29th February, 1876 to parents John William & Catherine (Kate) Thompson. His birth was registered in June quarter, 1876 in the district of Woolwich, London, England. Lawson Thompson was baptised on 27th July, 1879 at St. Mary Magdalene Church, Woolwich, London, England. The family were living at 3 Orchard Street & John William Thompson was a Metal Turner.

Lawson Thompson attended Earl Street School, Greenwich, England from 12th February, 1883. His father was listed as John William Thompson & the family lived at 36 Station Road. Lawson Thompson left the school on 8th September, 1883.

Lawson Thompson joined Charlton Nation School, Greenwich, England on 12th October, 1885. His father was listed as an Engineer & the family lived at 11 Leytenberg (?) St. Lawson Thompson had previously attended Vicarage Road Boys School.

The 1891 England Census recorded Lawson Thompson as a 15 year old Labourer, living with his family at 4 Thames View Terrace, Plumstead East, London, England. His parents were listed as John W. Thompson (Engineer – Turner, aged 37, born New Cross, London) & Catherine Thompson (aged 36, born Sheffield, Yorks). Lawson was the eldest of five children listed on this Census – Lawson (born Plumstead, Kent) then Charles Thompson (Scholar, aged 13, born Woolwich, Kent), George Thompson (Scholar, aged 5, born Plumstead, Kent). Robert Thompson (Scholar, aged 4, born Plumstead, Kent) & Ada Thompson (aged 2, born Plumstead, Kent).

Lawson Thompson, Metal Turner, aged 18 years & 10 months, enlisted in the British Army on 22nd December, 1894. He stated on his Attestation Papers that he was with 4th Middlesex Regiment & was willing to enlist with Yorkshire Regiment. His next-of-kin was listed as his father – John William Thompson, 4 Thames View Terrace, Brewery Road, Plumstead, Kent.

Private Lawson Thompson was posted to Yorkshire Regiment with a Service number of 4765. He was on Home Service from 22nd December, 1894 then posted to India from 26th November, 1896 & was with Terah Expeditionary Force in 1897 & 1898. He returned for Home Service from 14th March, 1903.

Lawson Thompson married Rose Rebecca Cullum in 1904. Their marriage was registered in December quarter, 1904 in the district of Woolwich, London, England.

Private Lawson Thompson was discharged from Yorkshire Regiment on 21st December, 1906 having terminated his period of engagement – having served for 12 years.

The 1911 England Census recorded Lawson Thompson as a 32 year old, married, General Labourer with Royal Arsenal living with his wife – Rose Thompson (Ironer at her sister's Laundry, aged 34, born Plumstead, Kent) living at 119 Griffin Rd, Plumstead, London, England in a 2 roomed dwelling. Lawson & Rose Thompson had been married for 6 years & had no children.

Lawson Thompson, Engineer, aged 32, & his wife – Rose Thompson, aged 31, were passengers on *Zieten* which had departed from Antwerp, Belgium & arrived in Sydney, Australia on 16th October, 1911.

Lawson Thompson stated he was a 34 year old, married, Ammunition Worker when he enlisted on 7th March, 1916 in Melbourne, Victoria with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 26462 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his wife – Rose Rebecca Thompson. 102 Roseberry Street, Ascot Vale, Victoria. Lawson Thompson stated on his Attestation Papers that he had served for 8 years & 104 days with 19th Yorkshire Regiment in England & had been discharged for Time expired.

Private Lawson Thompson was posted to "B" Company, 23rd (Depot) Battalion at Royal Park, Victoria on 9th March, 1916 for recruit training. He was transferred to "E" Company, 24th (Depot) Battalion at Royal Park on 14th July, 1916.

A Medical Report was completed on Private Thompson on 1st August, 1916 at Royal Park where Private Thompson was in the Band. His disability was listed as Rheumatism which had originated 7 years ago in India. "*7 years ago in India got pain (no swelling) in right knee. Was free for 4 years and then came on again and since then gets the trouble off and on especially in wet weather.*" The Medical Officer in charge of the Case recommended that Private Lawson Thompson was permanently unfit for Service. The Medical Board agreed but stated "*that he be retained for Home Service.*"

Private Lawson Thompson was transferred on 2nd August, 1916 to "F" Company, 24th Battalion at Royal Park.

Private Lawson Thompson was discharged from the Australian Imperial Force on 7th August, 1916 as medically unfit (Rheumatism).

Mr W. B. Mann, 42 Albatross St., Plumstead, London, England, wrote to Base Records on 2nd March, 1917 with the following letter: "*Will you please pardon my troubling you with my enquiries. I am writing for my aunt, who is greatly troubled over the lack of news of her husband, y name Mr Lawson Thompson, who left England some five years ago, & prior to the war, in fact, up to two years ago, worked in a Cordite factory at a place called Marilebong, or a name like that – near Melbourne I think. When I wrote them, they informed my he had joined up, & that his address then was:- Bandsman Lawson Thompson, Royal Park Band, Military Camp, Royal Park, Melbourne, Australia.*

*I wrote to Weymouth & London on hearing that he was thought to be in France, but they have no knowledge of him, & have referred me to you. Will you be as kind as to let me know if you have any knowledge at all of him. Any little bit of news will do, that will help me trace him. By doing as you will render favour both to myself & his anxious wife. Apologising again for the trouble I may be giving you.*

*P.S. Mr L. Thomson is a drummer.*"

Base Records replied to Mr W. B. Mann on 12th May, 1917 advising "*...the nearest approach to the soldier referred to is shown on the records held in this office as Private Lawson Thompson, 24th Depot Battalion, who enlisted at Melbourne, Victoria, on 7/3/1916; but was discharged as Medically unfit – Rheumatism – on 7/8/1916; his present whereabouts being unknown here.*"

Lawson Thompson would have applied for enrolment as a Volunteer for Manufacture of Munitions in Great Britain. He was issued a Munition Worker number of 2590.

[Unfortunately, the Munitions file for Worker Lawson Thompson had not been opened at the time of researching (October, 2022) so there is very little information known at his role as a Munitions Worker in England]

Australian Munitions Worker Lawson Thompson died on 17th February, 1919.

A death for Lawson Thompson, aged 42, was registered in the March quarter, 1919 in the district of Woolwich, London, England.

Australian Munitions Worker Lawson Thompson was buried on 24th February, 1919 in Plumstead Cemetery, Greater London, England – Plot number K. 670 & now has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Worker Lawson Thompson – service number 2590, aged 42, Australian Munition Worker. He was the son of William & Kate Thompson, of 119 Griffin Rd, Plumstead; husband of Rose R. Thompson, 119 Griffin Rd, Plumstead.

Australian Munitions Worker Lawson Thompson is remembered on the Commemorative Roll Book, located in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. The Commemorative Roll records the names of those Australians who died during or as a result of wars in which Australians served, but who were not serving in the Australian Armed Forces and therefore not eligible for inclusion on the Roll of Honour.



**Commemorative Roll** (Photo from AWM)



**Commemorative Area of the Australian War Memorial** (Capital Photographer)

## Australian Munitions Workers

Men enlisted under a joint Australian Commonwealth - Imperial Government scheme for providing skilled Australian workers to British war industries during the First World War. Under this scheme the volunteers would receive free passage to Great Britain, an allowance for travel time, a special allowance for the duration of service, and eventual repatriation to Australia. Married men also received a separation allowance, but were required to allot a portion of all their earnings to dependants. The men were expected to work in whatever industries they were directed to by the British Board of Trade, and under the prevailing conditions and wages for the duration of hostilities.

Government newspaper adverts appeared in August, 1916, and the first party of 76 workers departed Australia in September. Groups continued to be recruited and sent at intervals, with the eventual number of workers under the scheme totalling just over 5,000. Almost 1,000 of these had already been working in Britain under private agreements with large firms such as Vickers, and were brought under the conditions of the scheme. An additional 200 former AIF soldiers were also recruited in Britain. Initially only skilled workers were sought, however at the request of the British Government later groups included large numbers of navvies for general labouring.

These men were not members of the Australian Imperial Forces and did not serve in combat units, but were recruited to meet the shortfall in skilled labour that threatened many of Britain's key wartime industries including munitions. *(Source: Australian War Memorial)*



**\*\* Note – The Service Record file for Lawson Thompson, Australian Muniton Worker No.2590, had not been purchased at the time of researching from National Archives, Australia. Once the file is purchased it is then open for all to view on-line.**

*29 pages of Lawson Thompson's A.I.F. Service Record file is available for on-line viewing at National Archives of Australia.*

*Information obtained from the CWGC, Australian War Memorial & National Archives Australia.*



## **Newspaper Notices**

*The newspapers at the time were encouraged not to report munition explosions or deaths through TNT poisoning as it would affect the morale of the civilian population and so reports in newspapers are virtually non-existent. When the war ended the Australians returned home and life moved on.*

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### **MUNITION WORKERS**

#### **AUSTRALIANS IN GREAT BRITAIN**

Melbourne, Thursday.

The Minister for Defence (Senator Pearce) announces that during the period from the inception of the schemes for the despatch of munition workers and navvies to Great Britain up to June 30 last, 2662 munition workers had been disembarked in England for employment on munition and war work. There had also been enrolled under the munition workers' scheme 124 men who had been discharged from the A.I.F. in England for that purpose, and two discharged A.I.F. men had enrolled under the navvies' agreement, making the total number of men engaged in work in Great Britain under both these schemes 4,998. Of this number 384 men had returned to Australia – the majority on account of ill-health. There had been 23 deaths. The agreement of 38 men had been cancelled for disciplinary and other reasons. Six of the men had enlisted in the A.I.F., in England, five men had enlisted in the Royal Navy, and nine men had enlisted in the British Army, leaving the total number of men still in England under the Commonwealth agreement as 4,533. In addition these men were registered on the index held in Australia House 674 Australian munition workers who proceeded to Great Britain under private contract prior to the inauguration of the Commonwealth scheme. Of the men still in England on June 30, 1918, 87 were waiting return up to that date, 152 men had proceeded to France to engage in special work, and 107 of them had returned again to England. Australian munition workers were employed at 409 different firms or centres, and navvies at 192, and the value of the output produced by the labour of these men was estimated at £6,000,000.

Provision for the payment of munition workers and navvies who proceeded to Great Britain on war work under the agreement with the Commonwealth Government is made in an amendment to the war financial regulations issued today. Munition workers and navvies are to be provided with a free passage from Australia to Great Britain and back. In the case of munition workers a dependants' allowance of 25s a week, with allowances for children, will be made for the first eight weeks after embarkation. Subsequently the allowance will be 20s. Separation allowances equal to that paid in the case of a private in the A.I.F. will be paid to dependants.

*(Examiner, Launceston, Tasmania – 30 August, 1918)*

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## Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstones

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) honours the 1,700,000 men and women of the forces of the Commonwealth who died in the two world wars and ensures that their memory is never forgotten. The applicable periods of consideration are 4 August 1914 to 31 August 1921 for the First World War and 3 September 1939 to 31 December 1947 for the Second World War.

The Commission's principles:

- Each of the dead should be commemorated by name on the headstone or memorial
- Headstones and memorials should be permanent
- Headstones should be uniform
- There should be no distinction made on account of military or civil rank, race or creed

During both WW1 (& WW2) a number of Commonwealth civilian organisations were accepted by the military as qualifying for war grave status.

Members of the Recognised Civilian Organisations had to meet two additional criteria not required by military casualties.

1. Their death had to be caused by war actions or the increased threat caused by war and
2. They had to be on duty at the time of their death - being posted overseas counted as 'being on duty'.

The Australian government deemed that their War and Munitions Workers (men and women) qualified for war grave treatment as they were recruited as a body and were posted overseas for the war effort. Some of their CWGC entries show a 'service number' indicating that they were an organised body.

## Plumstead Cemetery, Greater London, England

Plumstead Cemetery contains 187 Commonwealth War Graves – 106 relating to World War 1 & 81 relating to World War 2.



**Plumstead Cemetery Entrance**



**Chapel in Plumstead Cemetery** *(Photo courtesy of Ian Yarham – 2020)*





**Cross of Sacrifice** (Photo courtesy of Ian Yarham – 2021)



(Photo courtesy of Ian Yarham – 2020)

Photo of Australian Munition Worker L. Thompson's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Plumstead Cemetery, Greater London, England.



*(Photo courtesy of Neil Bright 2020)*



*(Photos courtesy of Ian Yarham – September 2022)*

