

**Writtle Road Cemetery,  
Chelmsford, Essex**

**War Grave**



*Lest We Forget*

**World War 1**



**1800 PRIVATE**

**H. E. WILLIAMS**

**60TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.**

**18TH AUGUST, 1916 Age 18**

*In Our Home*

*Fondly Remembered*

*Sweet Memories*

*Cling Round His Name. Mother*

## Henry Egryn WILLIAMS

Henry Egryn Williams was born at 73 Palmer Street, Collingwood, Victoria in August, 1897 to parents William & Mary Ann Victoria Williams (nee Gill)

Henry Egryn Williams attended Vere Street State School, Victoria.

From *The Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* – 27 June, 1914:

### **MILITARY FORCES OF THE COMMONWEALTH**

*3rd Military District*

*Senior Cadets-*

*.....HENRY EGRYN WILLIAMS, ... to be 2nd Lieutenants. Dated 5th June, 1914.*

Henry Egryn Williams was aged 18 years & 5 months, single and a Process Engraver in Government Printing Office, from Collingwood, Victoria when he enlisted at Broadmeadows, Victoria on 1st April, 1916 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 1800 & his religion was Methodist. His next of kin was listed as his father – Mr William Williams, of 73 Palmer Street, Collingwood, Victoria. Henry Williams stated on his Attestation Papers that he had served as 2nd Lieutenant in Senior Cadets for 18 months & had served for four years. As Henry Williams was under the age of 21, his parents were required to sign their consent for their son to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force for active service abroad. William Williams & Mary Ann Victoria Williams both signed their consent.

Private Henry Egryn Williams was posted to "A" Company, 24th Battalion at Royal Park on 24th January, 1916 for recruit training. He was transferred to 2nd Reinforcements of 57th Battalion at Broadmeadows on 31st March, 1916 & promoted to Corporal.

Corporal (listed as Private on Embarkation Roll) Henry Egryn Williams embarked from Melbourne, Victoria on HMAT *Euripides (A14)* on 4th April, 1916 with the 57th Battalion, 2nd Reinforcements & disembarked at Alexandria.

Corporal Henry Egryn Williams was taken on strength of 60th Battalion at Ferry Post on 25th May, 1916. He reverted to ranks the same day on joining the Battalion.

Private Henry Egryn Williams embarked from Alexandria on 18th June, 1916 on *Kinfauns Castle* to join B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force). He disembarked at Marseilles, France on 29th June, 1916.

Private Henry Egryn Williams was reported wounded in action in France on 19th July, 1916. He was admitted to 14th General Hospital at Wimereaux, France on 21st July, 1916 with gunshot wounds to left thigh - severe. Private Williams embarked from Boulogne, France on 21st July, 1916 for England on Hospital Ship *Jan Breydel*.

### **60th Battalion**

The 60th Battalion was raised in Egypt on 24 February 1916 as part of the "doubling" of the AIF. Half of its recruits were Gallipoli veterans from the 8th Battalion, and the other half, fresh reinforcements from Australia. The majority of both groups were Victorians. The new battalion formed part of the 15th Brigade of the 5th Australian Division.

Having only arrived in France on 28 June, the 60th became embroiled in its first major battle on the Western Front on 19 July, without the benefit of an introduction to the trenches in a "quiet" sector. The battle of Fromelles was a disaster for the battalion. In a single day, it was virtually wiped out, suffering 757 casualties. These losses meant the battalion saw little further offensive action in 1916.

*(Extract of Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)*

### War Diary – 60th Battalion

*19th July, 1916 – Trenches on Fromelles Front:*

*Coy Cmdrs and all other available officers received final instructions re assault at Batn Hdqtrs at 10 a.m.*

*Zero time 11 a.m. Head of battalion moved past Brigade Hqts at 1.30 and marched via V.C. Sap (?) to front line trenches under heavy enemy artillery bombardment. Friendly artillery very heavily bombarding enemy trenches. Battalion established in front line trench by 4.20, Lewis guns excepted, a few casualties having occurred, some serious. Battalion scaled parapet and advanced in four waves, the first wave leaving at 6.45, the last at 7. Each wave advanced under very heavy artillery, machine gun and rifle fire, suffering very heavy casualties. Advance continued to within 90 yards of enemy trenches. The attack was held up, although it is believed some few of the battalion entered enemy trenches. During the night 19/20 a few stragglers, wounded and unwounded, returned to our trenches."*

(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)

Private Henry Egryn Williams was admitted to Military Hospital, Colchester, England on 22nd July, 1916 with shrapnel wounds to thigh.

Private Henry Egryn Williams was reported to be dangerously ill with gunshot wounds to leg & haemorrhage on 16th August, 1916.

Private Henry Egryn Williams died on 18th August, 1916, a week before his 19th birthday, at Chelmsford Red Cross Hospital, Essex, England from wounds received in action in France - shrapnel wounds to left thigh (haemorrhage).

A death for Henry Williams, aged 19, was registered in the September quarter, 1916 in the district of Chelmsford, Essex, England.

Private Henry Egryn Williams was buried in Writtle Road Cemetery, Chelmsford, Essex, England – Section "C" Grave No. 194.

Administrative Headquarters, London wrote to Base Records, Melbourne in May, 1919 to advise that Pte H. E. Williams, 60th Battalion, who was buried in Chelmsford Cemetery, Chelmsford, had been exhumed from the common grave 194 C to a separate single grave No. 2116 B.

Private Henry Egryn Williams is buried in Writtle Road Cemetery, Chelmsford, Essex, England - Section B. 2116 and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

The Red Cross Wounded & Missing file for Henry Egryn Williams contains the following letter: "*Admitted to Chelmsford Red Cross Hospital 22-7-16 with gunshot wound thigh. Haemorrhage set in causing his death on the morning of 18-8-16. He was conscious almost till the last and not in great pain. He left no messages. The Sister in charge who was constantly with him was a woman of an exceptional type and far above the average. A perfectly splendid woman, so he had every care and attention. A Military funeral is being arranged for Monday 21-8-16 at the Chelmsford cemetery. His things have been sent to his Mother.*

*Telephone message from: Miss Kemble, Commandment Red Cross Hospital, Chelmsford 18-8-16.*

*On my thanking Miss Kemble for all the details she had procured for us, she assured me that they all felt nothing could be too much trouble to do for Private Williams or his people as he was such a delightful boy and loved by everyone."*

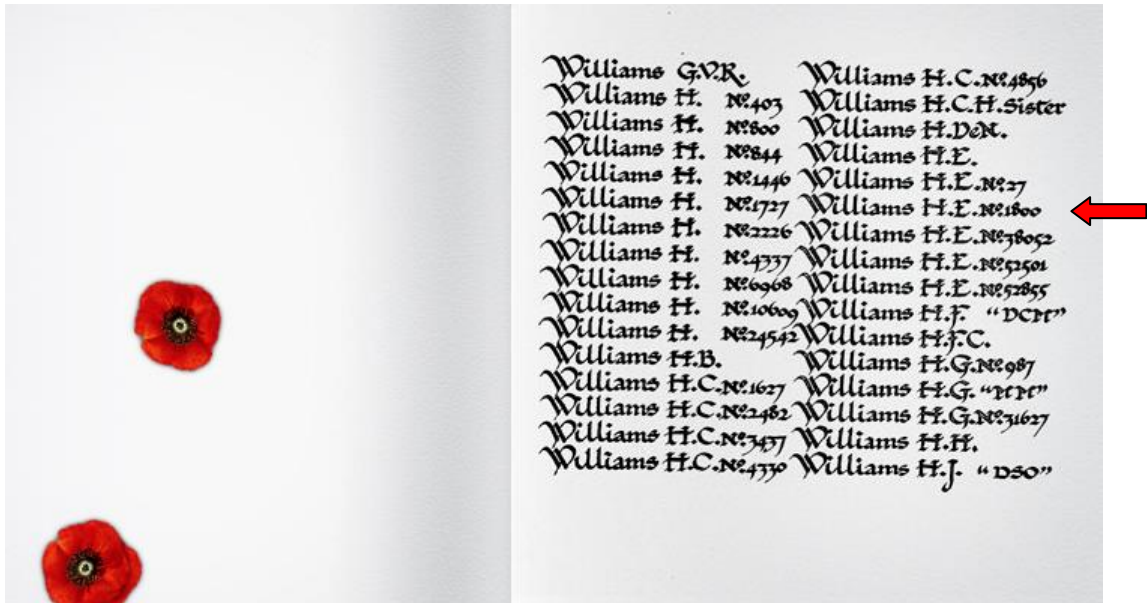
Mrs Mary Ann Victoria Williams, of 77 Palmer Street, Collingwood, Victoria, mother of the late Private Henry Egryn Williams, wrote to Base Records in November, 1921 to advise that William Williams, father of the late Private H. E. Williams, had died on 22nd February, 1919 & she wished to be noted as the next-of-kin.

Private Henry Egryn Williams was entitled to British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Pte William's widowed mother - Mrs M. A. V. Williams, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll sent January, 1922 & Plaque sent January, 1923).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private Henry Egryn Williams – service number 1800, aged 18, of 60th Battalion, Australian Infantry. He was the son of Mary Ann Victoria Williams, of 77 Palmer St., Collingwood, Victoria, Australia and the late William Williams.

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H. E. Williams is remembered in the Book of Remembrance at the Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne, Victoria.



Private H. E. Williams is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 171.



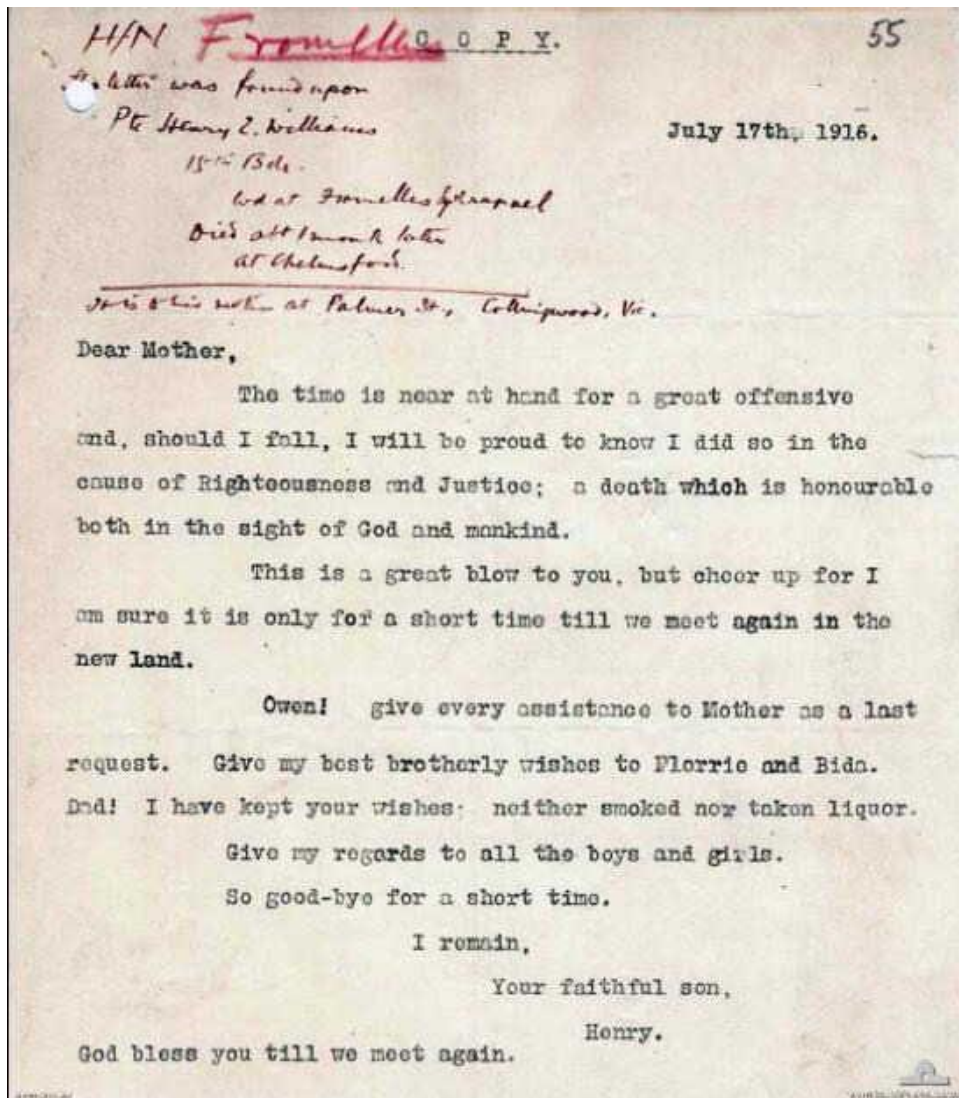
Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

(46 pages of Private Henry Egryn Williams' 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



The following is a transcript of a letter written on 17th July, 1916. It was found on Private Henry E. Williams, who was wounded at Fromelles 2 days later with shrapnel.



Dear Mother,

The time is near at hand for a great offensive and, should I fall, I will be proud to know I did so in the cause of Righteousness and Justice; a death which is honourable both in the sight of God and mankind.

This is a great blow to you, but cheer up for I am sure it is only for a short time till we meet again in the new land.

Owen! give every assistance to Mother as a last request. Give my best brotherly wishes to Florrie and Bida. Dad! I have kept your wishes; neither smoked nor taken liquor.

Give my regards to all the boys and girls.

So good-bye for a sort time.

I remain

Your faithful son,

Henry.

God bless you till we meet again.

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## **Newspaper Notices**

### **AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES**

#### **LIST No. 204**

SEVERELY WOUNDED  
VICTORIA

Pte H. E. WILLIAMS, Collingwood

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 2 September, 1916)

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#### **DIED ON SERVICE**

WILLIAMS – Died at Red Cross Hospital, Chelmsford, England, on the 18th August, of wounds received in France, Private Henry Egryn Williams, beloved youngest son of William and Annie Williams, beloved brother of Florrie and Owen, and the late John Llewellyn Williams, of 73 Palmer street, Collingwood, aged 19 years.

For King and country.

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 4 September, 1916) & (*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 9 September, 1916)

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#### **210th CASUALTY LIST**

##### **VICTORIA**

DIED FROM WOUNDS

Pte H. E. WILLIAMS, Collingwood, 18/8/16

(*Bendigo Advertiser*, Victoria – 12 September, 1916)

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#### **BEREAVEMENT CARDS**

Mr and Mrs WILLIAMS and Family desire to return sincere THANKS for telegrams, cards, and letters, and kind expressions of sympathy; also mayor and councillors of Collingwood, and staff and men of the Government Printing Offices, and the officers of the 63rd Batt., Senior Cadets; also especially the staff and nurses of the Red Cross Hospital, Chelmsford, London, for the beautiful floral tributes and extreme kindness to our dear son, the late Private H. E. Williams, and the many kind friend and relations. 73 Palmer street, Collingwood.

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 25 November, 1916)

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#### **IN MEMORIAM**

##### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of our dear son, Private Henry Egryn Williams, aged 19 years, B Co., 60th Batt., died 18th August, 1916, in Chelmsford Hospital, England; beloved brother of Mrs C. Cohen, Croxton, and Owen; also late John Lewellin Williams, late Government printing office.

Do not ask us if we miss him,

As is dawns another year;

In our loving hours of thinking,

Thoughts of Henry are always dear.

-(Inserted by their loving mother and father)

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 18 August, 1917)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of our dear son and brother, Private Llewellyn Williams, A Company, 21st Battalion, who was killed in action on 26th August, 1916, at Moquet Farm, aged 19 years; also our cousin, Private Henry Egryn Williams, who died of wounds on 18th August, 1916.

Until the day breaks and shadows flee.

-Inserted by his father and mother, sisters and brother.

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of our dear brother, Private Llewellyn Williams, who was killed in action in France on 26th August, 1916; also our dear cousin, Private Henry Egryn Williams, who died of wounds on 18th August, 1916.

Two noble heroes.

-Inserted by Albert and Evelyn.

(*The Age*, Melbourne, Victoria – 25 August, 1917) & (*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 25 August, 1917)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of our dear brother, Llewellyn, who was killed in the battle of Mouquet Farm, France, August 26, 1916; also our dear cousin, Henry Egryn Williams, who died of wounds, in England, August 18, 1916.

Two noble heroes.

-(Inserted by Albert and Evelyn.)

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 26 August, 1918)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In fond and loving memory of my dear son and brother, Private Henry Egryn Williams, died of wounds 18th August, 1916, son of the late William and Annie Williams, brother of Florrie (Mrs Cohen) and Owen, dear cousin of late Private Llewellyn Williams, died 26th August, 1916.

Do not ask us if we miss him,  
As is dawns another year;  
In our loving hours of thinking,  
Thoughts of Henry are always near.

-Inserted by his loving mother and brother, Owen.

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear brother, Henry Egryn Williams, died of wounds 18th August, 1916; also dear cousin, Llewellyn Williams, died 26th August, 1916.

Gone but not forgotten.

-Inserted by his loving sister and brother-in-law, Florence and Cecil Cohen.

WILLIAMS – A tribute to the memory of Private H. E. Williams, who died of wounds on 18th August, 1916.

-Inserted by Mrs Coxon and family, and Harold, late A.I.F.

WILLIAMS – In sad and loving memory of my true pal, Henry, died of wounds received in France 18th August, 1916.

Gone is the friend I loved so dear,  
Silent the voice I loved to hear;  
Too far away for my sight or speech,  
But not too far for my thoughts to reach.

-Inserted by his sincere pal, G. Wright.

WILLIAMS – In proud but sorrowful remembrance of my dear pal, Private Henry Egryn Williams, who died of wounds in Chelmsford Hospital, England, on the 18th August, 1916, late 60th Battalion.

To-day brings back our memory fresh,  
Of dear Henry, who is at rest.

-Inserted by his pal, Les. Ross, A.I.F. abroad.

(*The Age*, Melbourne, Victoria – 18 August, 1919)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear son, Private Henry Egryn Williams, aged 19 years, B. Co., 60th Battalion, 18th August, 1916, Chelmsford Hospital, beloved brother of Florrie, Owen and late John, and son of the late William Williams.

He gave his life, his all,  
His duty nobly done.

-(Inserted by his dear mother).

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 18 August, 1920)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of our dear brother, Llewellyn, who was killed in action at Mouquet Farm, France, on the 26th August, 1916; also our dear cousin, Henry Egryn, who died of wounds in England on the 18th August, 1916.

-Inserted by Albert and Evelyn, 37 Walker-street, Clifton Hill.

(*The Age*, Melbourne, Victoria – 26 August, 1920) & (*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 26 August, 1920)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of our dear brother, Llewellyn, who was killed in action at Moquet Farm, France, August 26, 1916; also our dear cousin, Henry Egryn, who died of wounds in England on the 18th August, 1916. (Inserted by Albert and Evelyn, 37 Walker-street, Clifton Hill.)

(*The Age*, Melbourne, Victoria – 26 August, 1920)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear son, Private Henry Egryn Williams, B Coy, 60th Btn., A.I.F., died 18th August, 1916, in Chelmsford Hospital, England, beloved brother of Mrs Chen (Croxtan) and Owen and late John, and son of the late William Williams.

Do not ask us if we miss him,  
As is dawns another year;  
In our loving hours of thinking,  
Thoughts of Henry are always dear.

-(Inserted by his dear mother.)

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear brother, Private Henry Egryn Williams, B. Coy., 60th Btn., died 18th August, 1916, in Chelmsford Hospital, England.

Loved by all.

-(Inserted by his loving sister and brother-in-law, Florrie and Cecil Cohen.)

WILLIAMS – In sad and loving memory of our dear friend, Private Henry E. Williams, who died of wounds 18/8/16, at Chelmsford Hospital, Chelmsford, England. Lest we forget.

-(Inserted by Mr and Mrs Ross and family, 280 George street, Fitzroy.)

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 18 August, 1921)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear son, Private Henry Egryn Williams, B Co., 60th Btn., A.I.F., died 18th August, 1916, in Chelmsford Hospital, England; beloved brother of Mrs Cohen (Croxtan), and Owen, and late John, and son of the late William Williams.

As is dawns another year;  
In our loving hours of thinking,  
Thoughts of Henry are always dear.

-(Inserted by his loving mother.)

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear brother, Private Henry Egryn Williams, B. Co., 60th Btn., died 18th August, 1916, in Chelmsford Hospital, Englan.

Loved by all.

-(Inserted by his loving sister and brother-in-law, Florrie and Cecil Cohen.)

WILLIAMS – In ever loving memory of Private Henry Egren Williams, who died of wounds at Chelmsford Hospital, Chelmsford, England, on the 18th August, 1916.

One of God's best.

-(Inserted by his pal, Les Ross, George street, Fitzroy.)

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 18 August, 1922)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear son and my brother, Private Henry Egryn Williams, B. Co., 60th Batt., who died of wounds at Chelmsford Hospital, England, on the 18th August, 1916.

As it dawns another year,  
In our lonely hours of thinking,  
Thoughts of Henry are always dear.

-(Inserted by his loving mother and brother)

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear brother, Private Henry Egryn Williams, B. Co., 60th Batt., who died of wounds in Chelmsford Hospital, England, August 18, 1916.

Loved by all.

-(Inserted by his loving sister and brother-in-law, Florrie and Cecil Cohen.)

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear pal, Private Henry Egryn Williams, 1800, 60th Battalion, who died of wounds in Chelmsford Hospital, England, on August 18, 1916.

Ever remembered

-(Inserted by Les Ross, 280 George street, Fitzroy.)

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 18 August, 1923)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – In sad but loving memory of my dear pal, Henry Egryn Williams, died of wounds in Chelmsford Hospital, England, on August 18, 1916.

One of the best.

-(Inserted by Les. Ross.)

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear son and my brother, Private Henry Egryn Williams, who died of wounds in Chelmsford Hospital, England, August 18, 1916.

Loved by all.

-(Inserted by his loving mother and brother)

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of my dear brother, Private Henry Egryn Williams, who died of wounds in Chelmsford Hospital, England, August 18, 1916.

Ever remembered.

-(Inserted by his loving sister and brother-in-law, Florrie and Cecil Cohen.)

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 18 August, 1925)

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **On Active Service**

WILLIAMS – A loving tribute to the memory of Private Henry Egren Williams, who died of wounds in Chelmsford Hospital, Chelmsford, England, on the 18th August, 1916.

Loved and remembered

-(Inserted by his pal, Les Ross.)

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria – 18 August, 1926)

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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 H. E. Williams does have a personal inscription on his headstone.

*In Our Home Fondly Remembered*

*Sweet Memories Cling Round His Name. Mother*

## Writtle Road Cemetery, Chelmsford, Essex, England

Chelmsford (Writtle Road) cemetery contains war graves of both world wars. There are 41 burials and commemorations of the 1914-18 war scattered throughout the cemetery. The 1939-45 war burials number 38, of which 32 form a war graves plot in the western part of the cemetery near the adjacent crematorium.

*(Information from CWGC)*



Chelmsford Cemetery & Crematorium (Photos by julia&keld)



Photo of Private H. E. Williams' Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Writtle Road Cemetery, Chelmsford, Essex, England.



*(Photo by darealjolo – Find a Grave)*



**Writtle Road Cemetery, Chelmsford** (Photo from CWGC)

## Message in bottle leads to tale of war tragedy

Malcolm Quekett, *The West Australian* – 4 January, 2014



War woe: Sharon Kent with the jar. Picture: Lincoln Baker/*The West Australian*

Gathered aboard a troop transport ship at Albany in 1916, the four young Aussie blokes were full of enthusiasm and hope, and no doubt champing at the bit to get off the ship and on with their grand adventure.

They must have had little idea about the horrors that awaited them on the bloody battlefields of World War I's Western Front.

Perhaps just to pass the time, they penned a letter, stuffed it in a jar and tossed it overboard in the hope someone, anyone, would find it.

**EMAIL US: Do you know the relatives of these soldiers?**

A little over four months later one would be dead. Just over a year later a second would fall.

Now, almost a century later, their letter has come to light, providing a remarkable insight into the minds of the soldiers and the history of the time.

It sits in a glass jar in the Attadale home of Sharon Kent, whose family has had it since her grandfather, Charles Blythe, found it, as best as anyone knows, on an Albany beach in the 1930s.

Scatched into the lid is a notation that appears to read 19/4/16. The two pages of the letter itself are yellowing and marked with deep creases and written in an elegant hand on letterhead which reads: "Melbourne YMCA on active service with the Australian Imperial Forces."

It is dated Tuesday April 11, Albany 1916.

"Dear friend," the letter begins. "Would you the finder of this message be so kind as to write and let our people know that you found (it) . . . and say that we are having a grand time and in the best of health and on our way to Egypt.

"By doing so friend we should be very grateful and only too pleased to hear from you saying you have found it also we may have the pleasure of thanking you again."

On page two each gave an initial or initials and their surname, war service number, battalion, listed their address as "Australian Intermediate Base Egypt" and then added addresses of families in Victoria.

Mrs Kent said her family was not aware of any contact having been made with the families and she had made a start on trying to track them down some time ago, but had been unsuccessful.

However, with the centenary of the war approaching, she wanted to try again.

The Weekend West, with help from the Australian War Memorial and the National Archives, set out to shed light on the men.

The first of the four letter writers gave his name as H. Coxon. Harold Coxon, number 5363, whose family lived in Abbotsford, Melbourne, was originally a reinforcement for the 8th Infantry Battalion and with his three mates had embarked on April 4, 1916 from Melbourne aboard HMAT Euripides A14.

His enlistment paper says he was a salesman and not married when he joined up on January 17, 1916 aged 20. The AWM said he joined the 5th Battalion in October 1916 and was promoted to corporal on March 6, 1917.

He spent time in hospital in May 1918 and in July 1918 he received a gunshot wound to his right hand and was evacuated to England for treatment.

He returned to Australia in January 1919.

Fate was not so kind to R. Swift, number 5458.

Reginald Norton Swift, from Northcote, was also a reinforcement for the 8th Battalion, and a farmer when he enlisted on January 22, 1916 aged 24.

He, too, was unmarried and in 1917 he found himself in a fierce battle at Lagnicourt, northern France.

According to the AWM, "the Germans launched a counter-stroke in the Lagnicourt area at dawn on 15 April, utilising 23 battalions".

Records say Swift died of wounds on April 19 and was buried at Grevillers British Cemetery, in France.

Details provided to the government after his death say he was "of a genial and kindly temperament steady and reliable and well liked by all with whom he came in contact".

Soldier three was J.V. Brown, number 5489.

James Valentine Brown, of Ballarat, was an advertising agent when he joined up on November 11, 1915 aged 26. Not married, he was also a part of the 8th Battalion and was also a member of its band.

He spent some time ill in hospital in July 1918 and came home in March 1919.

H.E. Williams, number 1800, provided a tragic end to the search.

Henry Egryn Williams, whose family lived in Collingwood, was an engraver with the Government Printing Office and not married when he enlisted in January 1916 aged just 19.

First with the 57th Battalion, he joined the 60th Battalion in May 1916.

The AWM said that on July 19, 1916 he received a gunshot wound to his left thigh and was evacuated to England for medical treatment.

The memorial's history of the 60th Battalion says it "became embroiled in its first major battle on the Western Front on 19 July, without the benefit of an introduction to the trenches in a 'quiet' sector. The battle of Fromelles was a disaster for the battalion. In a single day it was virtually wiped out".

Williams was admitted to Chelmsford Red Cross Hospital on July 22. He died on August 18, 1916.

He was, as the soldiers' letter finished, one of four mates who set off into the unknown and who would "try to do their best".

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## **Mateship lives on as families remember**

Malcolm Quekett, *The West Australian* – 30 July, 2016

*Reg Swift and William Wippell were mates.*

*They both worked on farms and did battle together on the football field for their team Kangaroo Ground, north-east of Melbourne.*

*When World War I broke out, they enlisted and on April 4, 1916, sailed from Melbourne together on the Euripides, bound for the battlefields of France and Belgium as reinforcements for the 8th Battalion.*

*Seven days later, Reg was one of four Diggers who signed a letter, folded it into a glass jar and threw it overboard while the ship was in transit in Albany.*

*Written in an elegant hand, it was on letterhead paper which read: "Melbourne YMCA on active service with the Australian Imperial Forces."*

*It was dated Tuesday April 11, Albany, 1916.*

*"Dear friend," the letter began. "Would you the finder of this message be so kind as to write and let our people know that you found (it) ... and say that we are having a grand time and in the best of health and on our way to Egypt.*



*"By doing so, friend, we should be very grateful and only too pleased to hear from you saying you have found it also we may have the pleasure of thanking you again."*

*On page two, each gave an initial or initials and their surname, war service number, battalion, listed their address as "Australian Intermediate Base Egypt" and then added addresses of families in Victoria.*

*The four writers were Harold Coxon, James Valentine Brown, Henry Egryn Williams and Reg Swift. They signed off as "four ... who will try to do their best".*

*Coxon and Brown made it home. Williams and Swift did not.*

*The Weekend West told the story in January 2014 after Sharon Kent, of Attadale, contacted the newspaper to say she wanted to track down descendants of the men.*

*She said her family had had the letter since her grandfather Charles Blythe found the jar, as best as anyone could tell, on an Albany beach in the 1930s.*

*Last week the quest took on new life.*

*Glenda Black, of Echuca-Moama on the Victoria-NSW border, a granddaughter of William Wippell, was researching his war history online when her mother Wilma Wippell suggested out of curiosity they should search for information about Reg Swift. To their surprise and delight, they found the 2014 article in The Weekend West .*

*Mrs Black said the pair had kept close together after reaching the front lines. "Reg was injured in the trench beside my grandfather," she said.*

*Not long afterwards, Reg Swift died. It was April 19, 1917.*

*"My grandfather wrote back afterwards saying it was like losing a brother, and if only he had lasted a few more days," Mrs Black said. "My grandfather was moved out of the front line on April 24."*

*"William Wippell's first son was named Reginald after Reg Swift," she said.*

*Mrs Black said the Wippell and Swift families had kept in touch for a while, and although the ties had loosened in recent times, they were able to put The West Australian in contact with Reg Swift's niece, Denise Mynott, of Merimbula, NSW.*

*Mrs Mynott, 92, said her father Vernon was Reg's twin brother. She said Vernon had tried to enlist as well but had been rejected because of a problem with his feet.*

*She did not recall her father speaking much about his brother. "I think Dad was too heart-broken, especially being his twin," she said.*

*Mrs Mynott said she was thrilled when she heard about the message in a bottle. She said her uncle Reg was just one of so many who had fallen in WWI.*

*"I just think, what a terrible waste," she said.*

*Mrs Kent was delighted that news of the letter had reached the family of one of the soldiers. She said she had given the bottle to the WA Museum, an outcome which Mrs Mynott said she was happy with.*

*Mrs Black sent The West Australian a photo of her grand-father William pictured with other Diggers.*

*Though she did not know their names, she wondered if any were among the little group who had signed a letter and tossed it overboard more than 100 years ago.*

*The answer is out there.*