

**Brighton City (Bear Road) Cemetery,
East Sussex, England
War Graves**



Lest We Forget

World War 1



930 SERJEANT

G. S. WILLIAMS M.M.

3RD AUSTRALIAN PIONEERS

19TH DECEMBER, 1917

George Shannon WILLIAMS

George Shannon Williams was born at Rockhampton, Queensland around 1887 to parents Edward & Anne Williams (nee Shannon).

George Shannon Williams married Bridget Ryan on 7th February, 1912 in Queensland.

A son, John Gerald Williams, was born 2nd October, 1912 in Rockhampton, Queensland to parents George Shannon Williams & Bridget Williams (nee Ryan).

Edward Williams, father of George Shannon Williams, died 2nd February, 1913 at Rockhampton, Queensland.

George Shannon Williams was a 28 year old, married, Carpenter from Rockhampton, Queensland when he enlisted on 30th August, 1915 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 930 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his wife – Bridget Williams.

Private George Shannon Williams was posted to Field Engineers on 30th August, 1915 for recruit training. He was appointed Sergeant with Field Engineers on 12th April, 1916. Sergeant Williams was transferred to 3rd Pioneers as Private on 17th April, 1916.

Private George Shannon Williams embarked from Melbourne, Victoria on HMAT *Wandilla* (A62) on 6th June, 1916 with the 3rd Pioneer Battalion "C" Company & disembarked at Plymouth, England on 26th July, 1916. Private Williams was reported as being A.W.L. (Absent without leave) for 6 hours while docked at Capetown on 3rd July, 1916. This was admonished by Captain A. G. Stephenson & he forfeited 1 days' pay.

3rd Pioneer Battalion

The 3rd Pioneer Battalion was an Australian infantry and light engineer unit raised for service during the First World War as part of the all volunteer Australian Imperial Force (AIF). Formed in Victoria in March 1916, the battalion subsequently undertook further training in the United Kingdom before arriving in France in late 1916. It later served on the Western Front in France and Belgium until the end of the war.

The 3rd Pioneers were raised in Victoria, in March 1916, from volunteers drawn from Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia and was subsequently assigned to the 3rd Division.

Trained as infantrymen, the pioneers were tasked with light combat engineer functions in the field, with a large number of personnel possessing trades from civilian life. The concept had existed within the British Indian Army before the war, but was adopted by the Australian Army in early 1916 to meet a need for troops with construction and engineering skills to assist with digging trenches, labouring, constructing strong points and undertaking battlefield clearance. As such, they were designated as pioneer units. At the same time, they could be pressed into the line to fight alongside regular infantry where required.

A total of five pioneer battalions were raised by the AIF during the war, with one being assigned to each of the five infantry divisions that the Australians deployed to the battlefield in France and Belgium. The battalions consisted of four companies, under a headquarters company. To identify the 3rd Pioneer Battalion's personnel, they were issued with a purple and white Unit Colour Patch. The colours were in common with other Australian pioneer battalions, while the horizontal oval shape denoted that the unit was part of the 3rd Division.

The battalion's first commanding officer was Lieutenant Colonel Robert Law, and upon establishment it was decided that the unit would be an "all States" unit, meaning that personnel would not just be drawn exclusively from one particular state, but would instead draw recruits from all around Australia. The headquarters and 'A' Company were recruited from Victoria, and was established at Ascot Vale, before moving to Campbellfield in March, while 'B' Company was composed of New South Welshmen, 'C' Company came from Queensland and 'D' Company was a composite sub-unit drawn from South Australia and Western Australia. After the sub-units had formed in their home locations – Liverpool, Bathurst, Brisbane, Blackboy Hill, and Adelaide – the battalion began concentrating at Campbellfield in April 1916.

Detailed training began at Campbellfield shortly after concentration and in May the battalion marched through the streets of Melbourne, before being presented with its unit colour. They were subsequently laid up at St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne prior to embarkation. They departed Australia on the transport *Wandilla* on 6 June 1916, and

endured a seven-week voyage to the United Kingdom, sailing via Cape Town. After arriving in the United Kingdom, the battalion subsequently concentrated with the rest of the 3rd Division around Larkhill on Salisbury Plain, in Wiltshire. Between July and November 1916, the 3rd Pioneers carried out intensive training to prepare them for their arrival on the Western Front. Finally, on 25 November the battalion entrained at Amesbury bound for Southampton from where they were ferried across the English Channel to Le Havre.

(Pioneer Battalion information from Wikipedia)

Private George Shannon Williams was appointed Lance Corporal on 11th October, 1916 while posted in England.

Lance Corporal George Shannon Williams proceeded overseas to France from Southampton, England on 24th November, 1916 with 3rd Pioneer Battalion.

Lance Corporal George Shannon Williams was promoted to Sergeant on 11th March, 1917.

Sergeant George Shannon Williams was sent to Divisional Rapid Wire School on 2nd April, 1917 & rejoined 3rd Pioneer Battalion on 8th April, 1917.

Sergeant George Shannon Williams was recommended for the Military Medal on account of the following actions:

1. *Zealous work, in voluntarily working 18 to 20 hours a day in order to push some special work in Front Line Trenches.*
2. *Assisting an Officer who was partially buried by a shell explosion in Trench S.S. 88, and then rendering First Aid, and carrying him to a place of safety, although he (Sergeant WILLIAMS) was also severely shaken by the explosion of the same shell.*
3. *Assisting a wounded man at HYDE PARK CORNER, on Tuesday 17th of April 1917.*

INCIDENT:-

A motor lorry was standing at HYDE PARK CORNER on Tuesday 17th April, when it was struck by a shell and ignited. Cries of help were heard and Sergeant WILLIAMS rushed toward, and jumped into the burning lorry, where he found the Attendant badly wounded, and removed him to a place of safety.

Laudatory - 3rd Divisional Headquarters, Routine Order No. 206 sub para 1054 – 25th May, 1917:

"The Major General Commanding the Division congratulates No. 930 Sergeant George Shannon Williams 3rd Aust Div. Pioneer Battalion; upon his courageous action on two separate occasions, first, when in the trenches in giving aid to an Officer under fire, although he was himself suffering from shell shock, and secondly in assisting in the rescue of No. 206815 Driver Chris HOOTON? A.S.C. from a burning lorry, in which was ammunition on the occasion of its being struck by a shell on the 17th April 1917."

Sergeant George Shannon Williams was wounded in action on 10th June, 1917 but remained on duty. The War Diary of 3rd Pioneer Battalion recorded they were located at Ploegsteert on 10th June, 1917. Casualties – 1 O.R. Died of Wounds. 1 O.R. Killed in Action and 14 O.R. Wounded.

Sergeant George Shannon Williams was wounded in action (2nd occasion) on 12th October, 1917 but remained on duty. The War Diary of 3rd Pioneer Battalion recorded they were located at Ypres – Zonnebeke Vicinity. Casualties listed as Nil.

Sergeant George Shannon Williams was wounded in action (3rd occasion) on 24th November, 1917. He was admitted to 9th Australian Field Ambulance on 24th November, 1917 with G.S.W. (gunshot wound/s) to right hand. Sergeant Williams was transferred & admitted to 2nd Australian Casualty Clearing Station on 24th November, 1917 with G.S.W. to right side & head. He was transferred to Ambulance Train 36 on 10th December, 1917 & admitted the same day to 53rd General Hospital at Boulogne, France. Sergeant Williams was invalided to England on 14th December, 1917 on Hospital Ship *Jan Breydal* with GSW to head.

War Diary – 3rd Pioneer Battalion

24th -25th November, 1917 – Nieppe. Warneton – Frelenhien Sector:

Progress being made on all works taken in hand. 5 O.R. Wounded, on 24th.

(Extract of War Diary from the Australian War Memorial)

Sergeant George Shannon Williams was admitted to 2nd Eastern General Hospital, Brighton, Sussex, England on 15th December, 1917 with Shell wounds to head – severe.

Sergeant George Shannon Williams died on 19th December, 1917 at 2nd Eastern General Hospital, Brighton, Sussex, England from wounds received in action - shrapnel wound to head (laceration of brain.)

A death for George S. Williams, aged 30, was registered in the December quarter, 1917 in the district of Brighton, Sussex, England.

Sergeant George Shannon Williams was buried at 11 am on 21st December, 1917 in Brighton City (Bear Road) Cemetery, East Sussex, England –Plot number ZIF. 106 and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. From the burial report of Sergeant George Shannon Williams - *Coffin was good polished Elm. The deceased soldier was accorded a Military Funeral, Firing Part being supplied by Royal Field Artillery stationed at Preston Park and 6 Bearers by R.A.M.C. of the Hospital. A service was conducted at the graveside by Rev. Bevan, C. of E. Chaplain to Brighton Cemetery. The "Last Post" was sounded by a Bugler of the R.F.A. An oak cross will be erected by the A.I.F. Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F. London were represented at the funeral.*

Sergeant George Shannon Williams was awarded the Military Medal. (*Commonwealth of Australia Gazette – 27 June, 1918*) (*The London Gazette – 28 January, 1918*)

Military Medal

The Military Medal (MM) was a military decoration awarded to personnel of the British Army and other arms of the armed forces, and to personnel of other Commonwealth countries, below commissioned rank, for bravery in battle on land. The award was established in 1916, with retrospective application to 1914, and was awarded to other ranks for "acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire". (*Wikipedia*)



Military Medal (MM)

George Shannon Williams stated on 13th July, 1917 that his Will had been lodge with his son – John Gerald Williams c/o Edward Williams, Fairfield Station, Drungee via Rockhampton, Queensland. Mrs Winifred Ryan of George & Denham Street, Rockhampton, Queensland was Trustee.

A Will was completed by George Shannon Williams, of Rockhampton, Queensland on 24th May, 1916 stating that all his property both real and personal be bequeathed to his beloved son – John Gerald Williams. His mother-in-law – Winifred Ryan was appointed Guardian of his son & his brother Edward Williams as Guardian of the property for his son.

A War Pension was granted to John Gerald Williams, 138 George St, Rockhampton, Queensland, son of the late George Shannon Williams, in the sum of £1 per fortnight from 22nd February, 1918.

The Department of Repatriation, Queensland Branch wrote to Base Records in September, 1922 regarding information connected to the late Sergeant George Shannon Williams which reads:

"1. In reply to your letter of 30th August in which you enquire for the address of Master Gerald John Williams, son of the abovenamed deceased soldier, I have to advise that this boy is under the guardianship of his Grandmother, Mrs Winifred Ryan, whose address is :- "Oatley" Franklyn Street, West End, Brisbane.

2. The widow of the late Sergeant Williams has been an inmate of the Mental Hospital, Goodna, Queensland, for some considerable time."

Base Records wrote to Mr Jack Williams, c/- Mrs W. Ryan, "Oatley, Franklyn Street, West End, Brisbane, Queensland on 15th November, 1932 stating that they were forwarding *"at the request of the Imperial War Graves Commission a printed order form referring to the publication of Brighton Borough Cemetery Register containing the particulars of your Father, the late No. 930 Sergeant G. S. Williams, M.M., 3rd Pioneer Battalion. It will be noted from the proof slip entry that the letters "M.M." signifying the award of the Military Medal have been inadvertently omitted, and the discrepancy is being brought to the notice of the Commission with a view to ensuring the accuracy of the headstone inscription..."* Base Records also followed up with a letter to The Secretary, Imperial War Graves Commission, London, on the same date regarding the omission of the letters "M.M." after the late No. 930 Sergeant G. S. Williams's name in the Brighton Borough Cemetery Register & also requested *"that the necessary action be taken to ensure the accuracy of the headstone inscription in this respect."*

Imperial War Graves Commission, London replied to Base Records on 22nd December, 1932 stating that the *"entry relating to Sergeant G. S. Williams, M.M. in the Register of Brighton Borough Cemetery will be amended as requested. Action will also be taken to ensure the accuracy of the inscription on the headstone."*

Sergeant George Shannon Williams was entitled to British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Sergeant Williams' son – Master J. G. Williams, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll sent June, 1922 & Plaque sent October, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Sergeant George Shannon Williams – service number 930, of 3rd Australian Pioneers. No family details are listed. Awarded M.M.

Sergeant G. S. 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 173.



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

The Rockhampton War Memorial, located in Botanic Gardens, 100 Spencer Street, Rockhampton, does not list individual names.



Rockhampton War Memorial (Photo from AWM – Places of Pride – Penny Smith)

(42 pages of Sergeant George Shannon 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) & National Archives



Sergeant George Shannon Williams

Newspaper Notices

FIELD ENGINEERS



(*The Queenslander Pictorial*, supplement to *The Queenslander*, 8 July, 1916)

Roll of Honour

Wounded and Sick

The following were contained in the 324th casualty list....

WOUNDED

Sgt. George Shannon Williams, Rockhampton, and rem. on duty.

(The Telegraph, Brisbane, Queensland – 17 July, 1917)

LETTER FROM MRS H. G. WHEELER

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"I also received a field service card from Sergeant G. S. Williams to let me know he was getting on well. Signaller A. H. Kerlin had given him my address.

(The Capricornian, Rockhampton, Queensland – 11 August, 1917)

AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES

Lists Nos 363 AND 364

Wounded

Sergeants G. S. Williams (Rockhampton – second occasion – remained on duty)...

(Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton, Queensland – 8 December, 1917)

CASUALTIES

378TH AND 379TH LISTS

DIED OF WOUNDS

Sgt. G. S. Williams, Rockhampton, 19/12/17.

(Daily Standard, Brisbane, Queensland – 12 January, 1918)

ROLL OF HONOUR

WILLIAMS – In loving memory of our dear Brother, Sergeant George Shannon, Third Pioneer Battalion, aged 29 years, who died of wounds in Brighton Hospital, England, 19th December, 1917.

Immaculate heart of Mary,

Your prayers for him extol,

Sweet sacred heart of Jesus,

Have mercy on his soul.

R.I.P.

(Inserted by his sorrowing Sister and Brother-in-law, Annie and Jack McIntyre, Rockhampton).

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WILLIAMS – In sad and loving memory of Sergeant George Williams, died of wounds in England, December 19th, 1917.

Sacred Heart of Jesus have mercy on him.

R.I.P.

(Inserted by his loving son and Mr and Mrs Ryan and family)

(*Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, Queensland – 19 December, 1918) & (*The Capricornian*, Rockhampton, Queensland – 21 December, 1918)

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)*

Serjeant G. S. Williams does not have a personal inscription on his headstone.

Brighton City (Bear Road) Cemetery, East Sussex, England

The cemetery is on the Lewes road. It was opened in 1857, and now covers 44 acres. It climbs the hill Eastward, crossing a public road. A War Cross stands in the cemetery.

There are 275 Commonwealth burials of the 1914-1918 war and a further 102 of the 1939-1945 war commemorated in this site. The 1939-45 commemorations include 3 unidentified Merchant seamen and 1 unidentified British soldier. There are also 40 Foreign National war burials here and 4 non-war service burials.

(Information from CWGC)



(Photo by julia&keld – Find a Grave)



(Photo by julia&keld – Find a Grave)



(Photo from CWGC)

Photo of Serjeant G. S. Williams' Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Brighton City (Bear Road) Cemetery, East Sussex, England.



(Photo by Terry Denham)



(Photo from CWGC)