

Queen Mary's Hospital Military Cemetery, Whalley, Lancashire

War Graves



Lest We Forget

World War 1



2766 PRIVATE

G. J. WILLIS

54TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.

8TH NOVEMBER, 1917 Age 27

George Joseph WILLIS

George Joseph Willis was born at Lithgow, NSW in 1890 to parents James and Lucy Matilda Willis.

George Joseph Willis attended Lithgow Public School, NSW.

George Joseph Willis was a 26 year old, single Coke-worker from King Street, Lithgow, NSW when he enlisted at Bathurst, NSW on 16th May, 1916 with the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 2766 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his father – Mr James Willis, King Street, Lithgow, NSW.

Private George Joseph Willis was posted to 54th Depot Battalion on 16th May, 1916 for recruit training. He was transferred to "A" Company, 6th Reinforcements of 54th Battalion on 17th July, 1916.

Private George Joseph Willis embarked from Sydney, NSW on HMAT *Ceramic (A40)* on 7th October, 1916 with the 54th Infantry Battalion, 6th Reinforcements & disembarked at Plymouth, England on 21st 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.

Private George Joseph Willis proceeded overseas to France on *Princess Victoria* from Folkestone on 21st December, 1916 from 14th Training Battalion.

Private George Joseph Willis was marched in to 5th A.D.B.D. (Australian Divisional Base Depot) at Etaples, France on 22nd December, 1916. He was marched out to his Unit on 6th February, 1917 & was taken on strength of 54th Battalion from 6th Reinforcements on 8th February, 1917.

Private George Joseph Willis was wounded in action in France on 17th October, 1917. He was admitted to 3rd Australian Field Ambulance on 18th October, 1917 with shrapnel wounds to leg knee. Pte Willis was transferred to 2nd Canadian Casualty Clearing Station then transferred again & admitted to 54th General Hospital on 19th October, 1917. He embarked for England on 28th October, 1917

54th Battalion

After a freezing winter manning trenches in the Somme Valley, in early 1917 the 54th Battalion participated in the advance that followed the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line. It was spared the assault but did, however, defend gains made during the second battle of Bullecourt. Later in the year, the AIF's focus of operations switched to the Ypres sector in Belgium. The 54th's major battle here was at Polygon Wood on 26 September.

(Extract of Battalion information from the Australian War Memorial)

War Diary – 54th Battalion

17th October, 1917 – Westhoek Ridge

With the exception of parties permanently employed no details were requisitioned from the Battalion for work today, and final arrangements were made for the relief of the 59th Battalion in the front line during the evening. In consequence of yesterday's losses and in consideration of the weakness of the Companies instructions were forwarded to rear Battalion Headquarters for Lieut. Green and the 25 O/Ranks who had volunteered to act as stretcher bearers during the operations 5th – 12th October – and whom we believed to be at the Transport Lines.

The day passed off very quietly, Enemy Artillery activity being not at all heavy and spasmodic. In accordance with Battalion Order. Adj. 27, Companies moved off from their positions in WESTHOEK RIDGE at 5pm. As this Battalion moved out the 29th Battalion (8th Australian Infantry Brigade) moved in. Notwithstanding the fact that the duck-board tracks leading to the front line had been constantly shelled during the last three days our relief of the 59th Battalion was completed without casualties by 7-5pm. "D" Company on the right and "A" Coy., on the left occupied the front line. "C" Company occupied the support line and "B" Company remained in reserve. Battalion Headquarters was situated in a pill box at J.4.b.7.6. About 10 pm the front line was very heavily barraged by the enemy. Our casualties for the day were:- 4 O/Ranks Killed, Lt. Carrick and 40 O/Ranks wounded, 31 O/Ranks gassed. A great number of these casualties were the result of the heavy enemy shelling mentioned in the diary of the 16th inst., but which were not evacuated until today. In accordance with instructions received from Brigade, Major Hansen (Bn.

S.I.C.) reported to B.H.Q., at 5 pm and is to remain during out tour in the line. (Extract of War Diary information from the Australian War Memorial)

Private George Joseph Willis was admitted to Queen Mary's Military Hospital, Whalley, Lancashire, England on 29th October, 1917 with gunshot wounds to left hip (severe).

Private George Joseph Willis died at 2.40 pm on 8th November, 1917 (four hours after operation) at Queen Mary's Military Hospital, Whalley, Lancashire, England from wounds received in action – gunshot wounds to left knee, toxaemia and shell shock.



Queen Mary's Military Hospital, Whalley

A death for George J. Willis, aged 26, was registered in the December quarter, 1917 in the district of Clitheroe, Lancashire, England.

Private George Joseph Willis was buried at 3 pm on 13th November, 1917 in Queen Mary's Hospital Military Cemetery, Whalley, Lancashire, England – Plot number 307 and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. From the burial report of Pte George Joseph Willis - *Coffin was good polished Elm. The deceased soldier was accorded a Military funeral. The Firing Party was supplied by Preston Depot and Bearers by R.A.M.C. of Whalley Hospital. A service was conducted in the Hospital Chapel and at the graveside by Chaplain Rev. Tuke, C. of E., Chaplain to the Hospital. The "Last Post" was sounded by a Bugler from Preston Depot. Mrs L. Stone (Aunt) and Mrs Polker, 98 Belgrave Road, Stoke Newington were present at the funeral. Administrative Headquarters, A.I.F. London were represented at the funeral. An oak cross will be erected by the A.I.F.*

Mr James Willis, father of the late Private George Joseph Willis, applied for a War Pension but was rejected as he was not dependent upon his son.

Private George Joseph Willis requested in his Will, dated 4th June, 1917, that all his personal estate be bequeathed to his father – Mr James Willis, King Street, Lithgow, New South Wales.

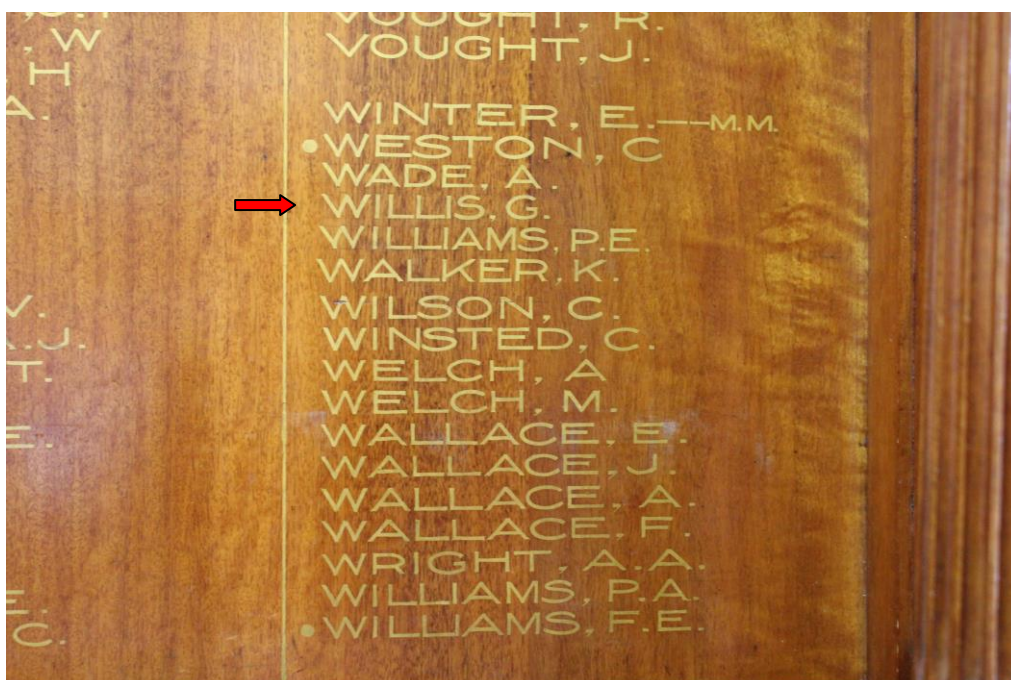
Private George Joseph Willis was entitled to British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Pte Willis' father – Mr J. Willis, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll sent December, 1921 & Plaque sent October, 1922).

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private George Joseph Willis – service number 2766, aged 27, of 54th Battalion, Australian Infantry. He was the son of James and Lucy Matilda Willis. Born at Lithgow, New South Wales.

G. Willis is also remembered on the Lithgow Public School Honour Roll, located inside Lithgow Public School, Eskbank and Mort Streets, Lithgow, NSW.



Lithgow Public School Honour Roll (Photos courtesy Judy Riley – Lithgow School Administrative Manager)



Pte G. Willis is remembered on the Lithgow War Memorial, located in Queen Elizabeth Park, Main Street, Lithgow, NSW.



Lithgow War Memorial (Photos from Monument Australia)



Lithgow War Memorial (Photos from Monument Australia)

Private G. J. Willis is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 160.



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

(43 pages of Pte George Joseph Willis' 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

MILITARY CAMP

Ten persons enlisted yesterday and they were all accepted for active service. They were:G. J. Willis, coke-worker, Lithgow; E. H. Willis, labourer, Rylstone; J. A. Willis, shearer, Rylstone.

All the above-mentioned entered camp.....

(The Bathurst Times, NSW – 17 May, 1916)

DIED OF WOUNDS

PTE G. J. WILLIS

Rev. D. H. Dillon this morning received a telegram from Colonel Sandford, of Victoria Barracks, asking him to convey to Mr and Mrs James Willis, of King-street, Lithgow, the sad intelligence that their son, Pte G. J. Willis, of the 54th battalion, had died of wounds in France on the 8th of this month. Pte Willis was well known in Lithgow, where his now aged and respected parents have resided for very many years. They will have the sympathy of a great number of friends in their bereavement. Prior to enlisting the deceased soldier, who was a native of Lithgow and 28 years of age, was employed at Messrs. Hoskins' coke-works. He had been in the trenches about 13 months.

(Lithgow Mercury, NSW – 16 November, 1917)

WESTERN CASUALTIES

Wounded

Pte G. J. Willis, Lithgow

(Mudgee Guardian and North-Western Representative, NSW – 6 December, 1917)

WAR CASUALTIES

DIED OF WOUNDS

Mr and Mrs James Willis, of King-street, Lithgow, have received intelligence that their son, Private G. J. Willis, has died of wounds in France. He was 28 years of age, and was employed at Messrs Hoskins's coke works.

(The Sydney Morning Herald, NSW – 1 January, 1918)

ROLL OF HONOUR

WILLIS – Died of wounds in Walley Hospital, Lancashire, England, on November 8, 1917, George Joseph Willis, of the 54th Battalion, A.I.F.

Inserted by J. and L. Willis and family, king-street, Lithgow.

(Lithgow Mercury, NSW – 8 November, 1918)

ROLL OF HONOUR

WILLIS – In loving memory of Private George Joseph Willis, who died of wounds at Whalley Hospital, Lancashire, England, November 8th, 1917. Inserted by his loving brother and sister-in-law, A. and M. Willis, Clifton, South Coast.

(The Daily Telegraph, Sydney, NSW – 8 November, 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)

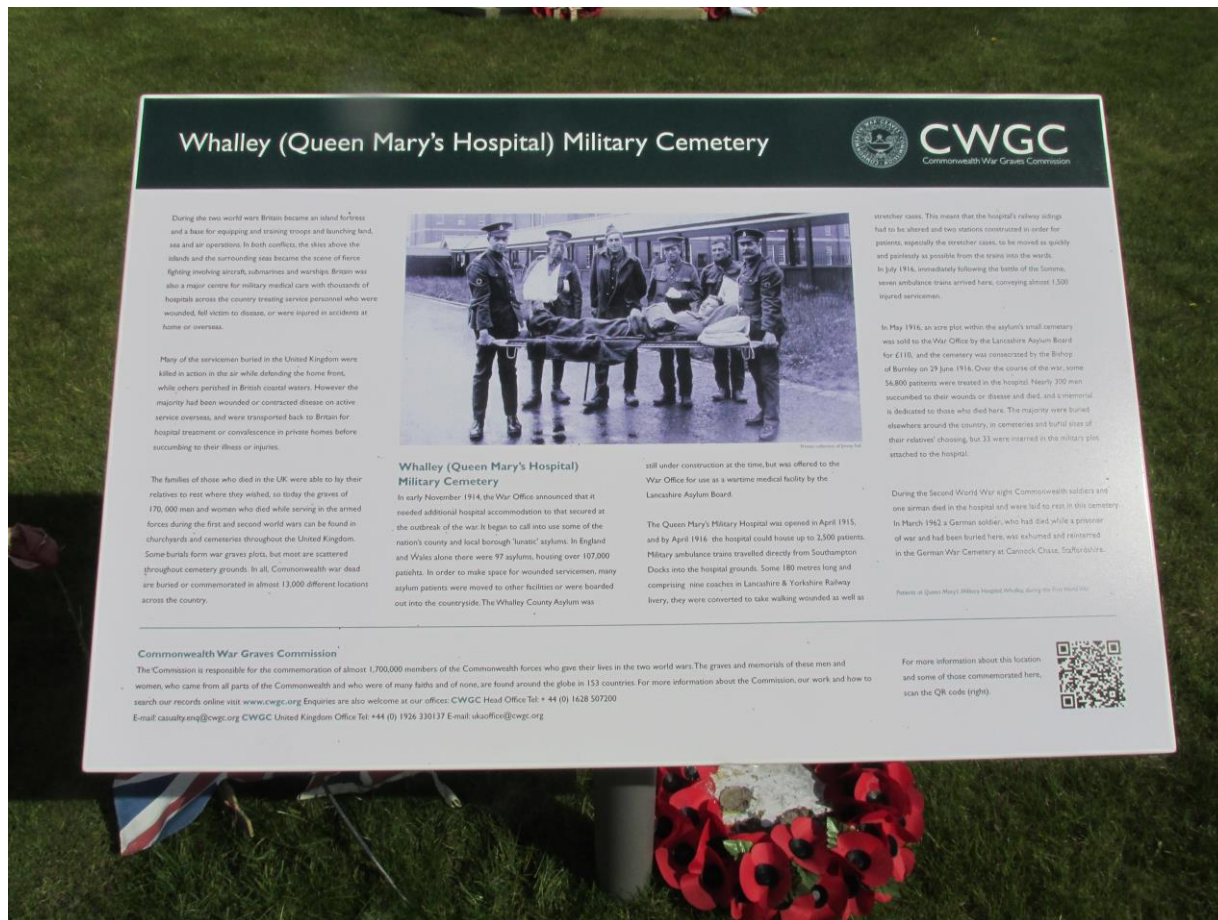
A letter from Base Records, dated 28th July, 1921, to Mr J. Willis, King Street, Lithgow, advised that a letter from the Defence Dept. concerning an inscription on the headstone of his son, the late Pte G. J. Willis, had not been answered & non-receipt of a reply within 21 days would have to be accepted as indicating that no further action was to be taken.

Private G. J. Willis does not have a personal inscription on his headstone.

Queen Mary's Hospital Military Cemetery, Whalley, Lancashire, England

During the First World War, the 2,000 bed Queen Mary's Military Hospital was housed in the County Asylum at Whalley, remaining there until June 1920. The Military Cemetery associated with the hospital is at the eastern end of the Mental Hospital Cemetery and was handed over to the War Department in February 1916. The cemetery has a Cross of Sacrifice and there is also a memorial to all the servicemen, nearly 300 of them, who died in the Hospital. The Military Cemetery contains 34 First World War burials and 9 from the Second World War.

(Information from CWGC)



Queen Mary's Hospital Military Cemetery, Whalley (Photos by sefton – Find a Grave)





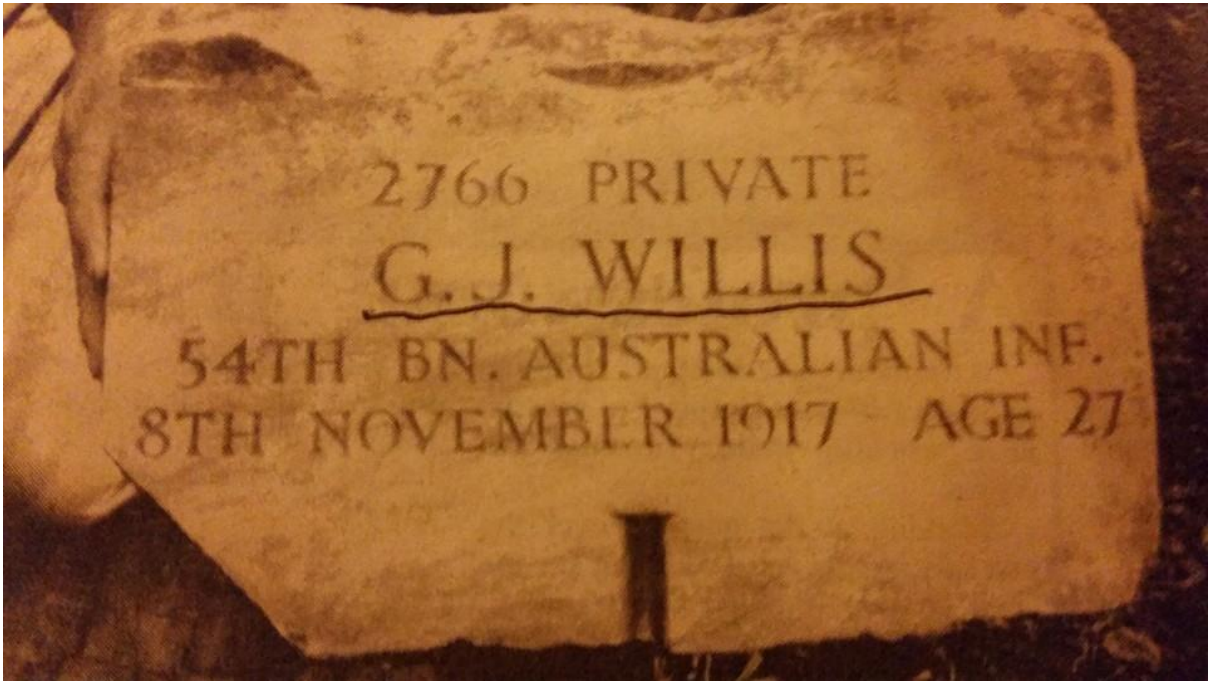
Queen Mary's Hospital Military Cemetery, Whalley (Photos by sefton – Find a Grave)



Photo of Private G. J. Willis' Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in Queen Mary's Hospital Military Cemetery, Whalley, Lancashire, England.



(Photo by courtesy of Andrew Mackay)



(Photo from DaveE – Find a Grave)

