

# **Chatham Naval Memorial, Kent**



*Lest We Forget*

## **World War 1**



**SS/112681 LEADING STOKER**

**F. J. WITHERIDGE**

**H.M.S. "VANGUARD"**

**ROYAL NAVY**

**9TH JULY, 1917 Age 26**

## Frederick John WITHERIDGE

Frederick John Witheridge was born on 8th January, 1892 in Sydney, New South Wales, to parents Harry and Annie Elizabeth Witheridge (nee Kilcup).

Harry W. Witheridge, father of Frederick John Witheridge, died on 17th March, 1915 in Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, NSW.

Frederick John Witheridge joined the Royal Navy on 15th August, 1912 for a period of 5+7 years. He was 20 years old & previously employed as a "Seaman U.S." Frederick Witheridge was 5 ft 9 ½ in with black hair, blue eyes & a fresh complexion. He had clasped hands & cross flags as tattoos on his left forearm. Frederick Witheridge was given a service number of SS112681 (Chatham).

Frederick John Witheridge joined H.M.S. *Pembroke II* as Stoker 2nd Class on 15th August, 1912. He was transferred to H.M.S. *St. George* on 7th January, 1913 & rated as Stoker 1st Class on 23rd August, 1913 while still serving on H.M.S. *St. George*.

Stoker 1st Class Frederick John Witheridge was transferred back to H.M.S. *Pembroke II* on 16th October, 1913 then transferred to H.M.S. *Eclipse* on 26th February, 1914. From there he served on H.M.S. *Yarmouth* from 14th April, 1914 then was transferred back to H.M.S. *Pembroke II* on 10th July, 1915 until 20th July, 1915.

Stoker 1st Class Frederick John Witheridge rejoined H.M.S. *Pembroke II* on 11th August, 1915. He was transferred to H.M.S. *Vanguard* on 24th November, 1915 & rated as Acting Leading Stoker on 22nd February, 1917 while still serving on H.M.S. *Vanguard*.

### **H.M.S. Vanguard**

HMS Vanguard was one of three St Vincent-class dreadnought battleships built for the Royal Navy in the first decade of the 20th century. She spent her whole career assigned to the Home and Grand Fleets. Aside from participating in the Battle of Jutland in May 1916 several months later, and the inconclusive Action of 19 August, her service during the war generally consisted of routine patrols and training in the North Sea.

Vanguard was refitted in Rosyth in December, 1916. On the afternoon of 9 July 1917, the ship's crew had been exercising, practising the routine for abandoning ship. She anchored in the northern part of Scapa Flow at about 18:30. There is no record of anyone detecting anything amiss until the first explosion at 23:20. She sank almost instantly, with only three of the crew surviving, one of whom died soon afterwards. A total of 843 men were lost, including two Australian stokers from the light cruiser HMAS Sydney serving time in the battleship's brig. Another casualty was Captain Kyōsuke Eto, a military observer from the Imperial Japanese Navy, which was allied with the Royal Navy at the time through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The bodies of 17 of the 22 men recovered after the explosion, plus that of Lieutenant-Commander Alan Duke, who died after being rescued, were buried at the Royal Naval Cemetery at Lyness, not far from the site of the explosion. The others are commemorated on the Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth Naval Memorials.

A Board of Inquiry heard accounts from many witnesses on nearby ships. They accepted the consensus that there had been a small explosion with a white glare between the foremast and 'A' turret, followed after a brief interval by two much larger explosions. The board decided, on the balance of the available evidence, that the main detonations were in either 'P' magazine, 'Q' magazine, or both. A great deal of debris thrown out by the explosions landed on nearby ships; a section of plating measuring approximately six by four feet (1.8 by 1.2 m) landed on board the battleship Bellerophon. It was found to be from the No. 2 Hydraulic Room abaft 'A' barbette. It showed no signs of a blast from 'A' magazine, which reinforced the visual evidence suggesting that the explosion took place in the central part of the ship.

Although the explosion was obviously an explosion of the cordite charges in a main magazine, the reason for it was much less obvious. There were several theories. The inquiry found that some of the cordite on board, which had been temporarily offloaded in December 1916 and catalogued at that time, was past its stated safe life. The

possibility of spontaneous detonation was raised, but could not be proved. It was also noted that a number of ship's boilers were still in use, and some watertight doors, which should have been closed in wartime, were open as the ship was in port. It was suggested that this might have contributed to a dangerously high temperature in the magazines. The final conclusion of the board was that a fire started in a four-inch magazine, perhaps when a raised temperature caused spontaneous ignition of cordite, spreading to one or the other main magazines, which then exploded.

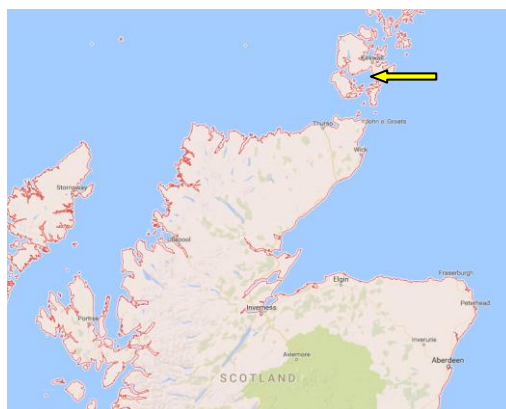
The wreck was heavily salvaged in search of non-ferrous metals before it was declared a war grave in 1984, although some of the main armament and armour plate were also removed. As might be expected, the wreck, which lies at a depth of 14.2 metres (46 ft 7 in), and its associated debris cover a large area at 58.8566°N 3.1062°W Coordinates: 58.8566°N 3.1062°W. The amidships portion of the ship is almost completely gone and 'P' and 'Q' turrets were blown some 40 metres (130 ft) away. The bow and stern areas are almost intact as has been revealed by a survey authorised by the Ministry of Defence in 2016 in preparation for the centenary commemoration planned for 2017. The wreck was designated as a controlled site in 2002 and cannot be dived upon except with permission from the Ministry of Defence.

*(Extract of information on H.M.S. Vanguard & photo from Wikipedia)*



**H.M.S. Vanguard**

Leading Stoker Frederick John Witheridge was lost at sea at Scapa Flow, North Sea after a series of internal explosions caused the sinking of H.M.S. Vanguard. His body was not recovered for burial. His mother – Mrs E. Witheridge, of “Stafford Villa, Lincoln Street, Campsie, Sydney, NSW was advised.



**Scapa Flow marked by yellow arrow**

Leading Stoker Frederick John Witheridge was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records Leading Stoker Frederick John Witheridge – service number SS/112681, aged 26, of H.M.S. “Vanguard”, Royal Navy. He was the son of the late Harry and Annie Elizabeth Witheridge; brother of Mr H. H. Witheridge, of 32 Cameron St., Balmain, New South Wales.

Leading Stoker F. J. Witheridge 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 Area of the Australian War Memorial** (*Capital Photographer*)

The Campsie Clock Tower Memorial, located in Anzac Mall, 194 Beamish Street, Campsie, NSW was originally erected to commemorate those who served in World War One. It was remodelled in 1951 and dedicated to those who served in both World Wars. No individual names are recorded.



**Campsie Clock Tower Memorial** (*Photo from Monument Australia*)

## Newspaper Notices

### SONS IN SERVICE



Private H. H. WITHERIDGE (at the front), J.F. WITHERIDGE (H.M.S. Vanguard), and H. W. WITHERIDGE (enlisted), sons of Mrs Witheridge, Lincoln Street, Campsie.

The eldest son of the family, who enlisted in Victoria has been killed.

Private VARNEY LLOYD JONES (left for the front on October 17); Private TOM JONES (wounded in France).

Private E. M. NASH (reported missing); Private R. H. ("Jack") NASH (wounded).

*(The Daily Telegraph, Sydney, NSW – 8 November, 1916)*

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### LOST ON H.M.S. VANGUARD

Word has been received by Mrs Witheridge of Campsie, that her son, Stoker J. F. Witheridge was lost on H.M.S. Vanguard, which sank as the result of an explosion on July 9.

Mrs Witheridge has two other sons, Privates H.H. and W.H. Witheridge, fighting in France. Private J. Witheridge, a fourth son, was killed at the Gallipoli landing.

*(The Daily Telegraph, Sydney, NSW – 24 July, 1917)*

## WAR CASUALTIES

### KILLED

First-stoker John Frederick Witheridge, son of Mrs A. E. Witheridge, of Stafford Villa, Lincoln-street, Campsie, who was reported to be missing after the recent disaster to H.M.S. Vanguard, is now announced to have been killed.

(*The Sydney Morning Herald*, NSW – 28 July, 1917)

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### MOTHER OF FIGHTING MEN



**Mrs A. E. Witheridge**

Of Lincoln-street, Campsie, has given four sons to the Empire. Private James Witheridge was killed at the landing of Gallipoli on April 25, 1915. Private William Henry Witheridge (aged 19) left Australia in November, 1916, and has just been reported killed in action. Another brother, Chief-Stoker John Frederick Witheridge, was lost when a battleship was destroyed. Private Harold Witheridge is still at the front.

(*The Sun*, Sydney, NSW – 16 December, 1917)

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### ON ACTIVE SERVICE

WITHERIDGE – In fond memory of Gunner James A. Witheridge, killed in landing, Gallipoli, April 25, 1915; also Frederick J. Witheridge, chief stoker, H.M.S. Vanguard, killed July 9, 1917; also Private W. H. Witheridge, killed September 20, 1917; Henry Witheridge, father of above, died March 17, 1915.

Until the day breaks and the shadows flee.

My loved ones.

Inserted by the loving wife and their mother, Mrs H. Witheridge, Private H. H. Witheridge (returned, A.I.F.) Dorothy and Albert

(*The Sydney Morning Herald*, NSW – 21 September, 1918)

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## **FURLOUGH HOUSE**

### **OFFICIAL OPENING ON SATURDAY**

"I should like the wives and mothers of soldiers and sailors to know how splendidly we are treated at Furlough House, and what a wonderful amount of good it does one to take a little rest there" Mrs A. E. Witheridge, who spoke, had four sons in the war, and three were killed – one on Gallipoli, one in France, and one on H.M.S. Vanguard.

The remark referred to Furlough House at Narrabeen, which has been established by the A.I.F. Wives and Children's Holiday Association for the purpose of providing the mothers, wives and children of soldiers and sailors with a fortnight's holiday when they require it. Furlough House is to be opened by his Excellency the Governor-General next Saturday afternoon. Mrs Witheridge, who throughout the war has been prominently connected with the Mothers and Wives' Association, the centres for mothers, and other institutions conducted in the interests of the women and children dependents of the fighting men, had just returned from a holiday at the house, and she said that the excellent food, and the comfort and recreations that she found there had greatly benefited her. Furlough House was a splendid idea, and she believed that it would be the means of rebuilding a great many women and children.

*(The Sydney Morning Herald, NSW – 19 June, 1919)*

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### **ON ACTIVE SERVICE**

WITHERIDGE – In memory of Gunner James Witheridge, killed in landing Gallipoli, April 25, 1915; Frederick J. Witheridge, chief stoker H.M.S. Vanguard, killed July 9, 1917; Private W. H. Witheridge, killed September 20, 1917; Henry Witheridge, father, died March 17, 1915. Inserted by his loving wife and mother, E. A. Witheridge, and Dorothy and Albert.

*(The Sydney Morning Herald, NSW – 10 July, 1920)*

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### **Chatham Naval Memorial, Kent, England**

Chatham Naval Memorial overlooks the town of Chatham, Kent, England. It commemorates more than 8,500 Royal Navy personnel from World War 1 & over 10,000 Navy personnel from World War 2 who were lost or buried at sea.

After the Armistice, the Naval Authorities and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission were determined to find an appropriate way to commemorate naval personnel who had no grave.

An Admiralty committee recommended that the three manning ports in Great Britain - Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth - should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, an obelisk, which would serve as a leading mark for shipping.

The Chatham Naval Memorial was unveiled by The Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII, on 26 April 1924.

*(Information & photo from CWGC)*



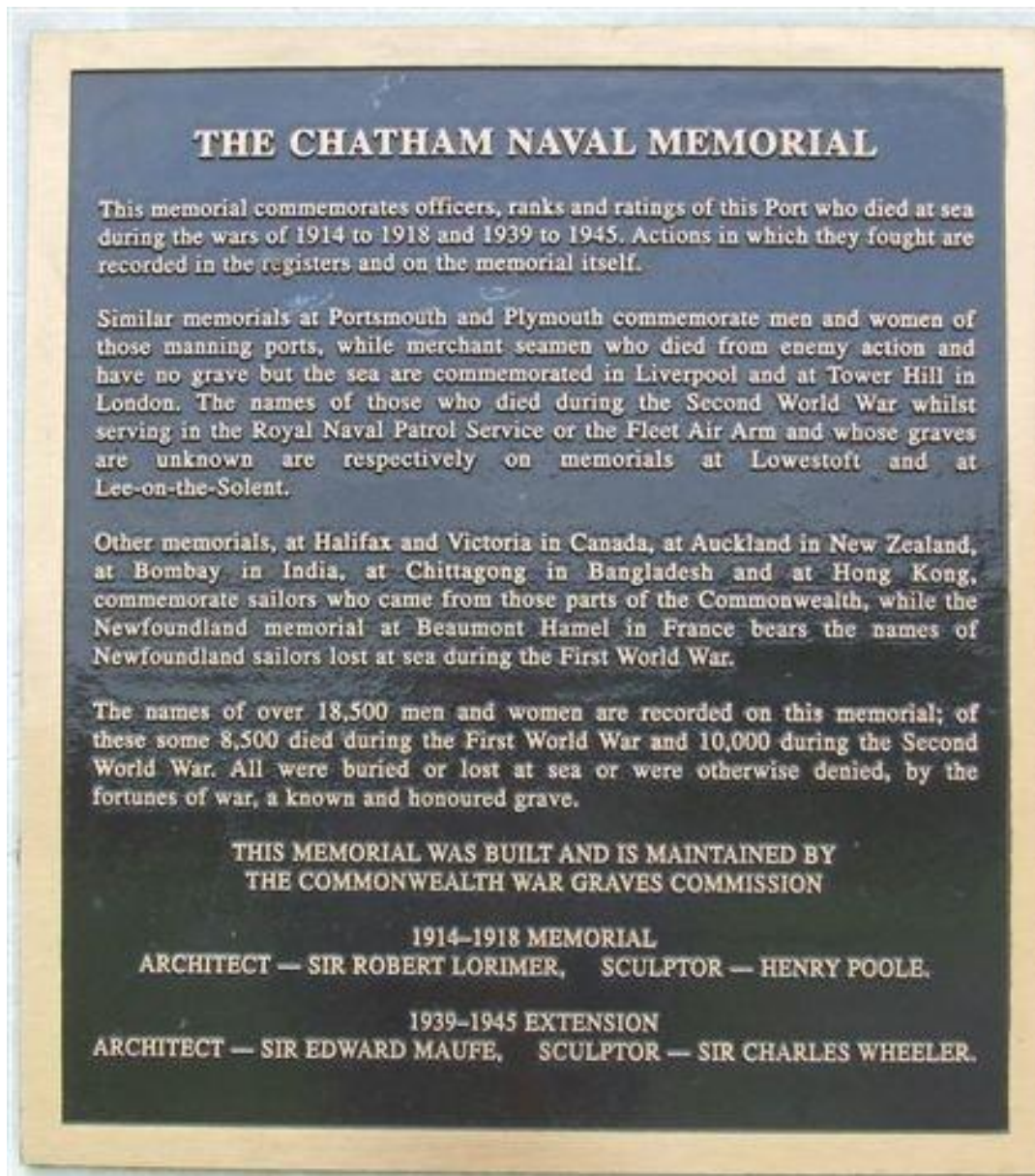


**Chatham Naval Memorial** (Photo by Clem Rutter)





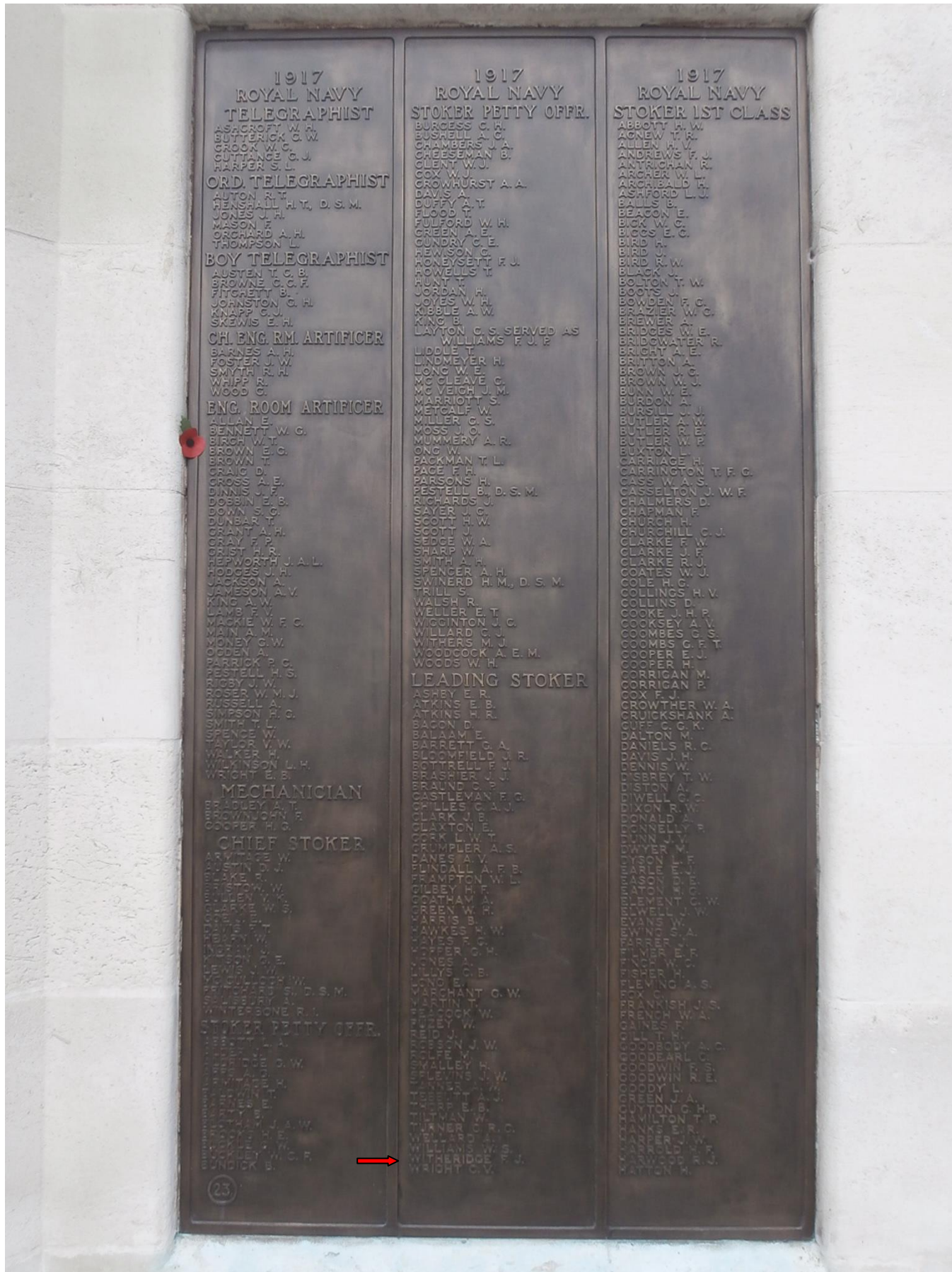
Chatham Naval Memorial (Photo from CWGC)



(Photo by Geoffrey Gillon)

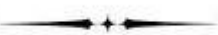
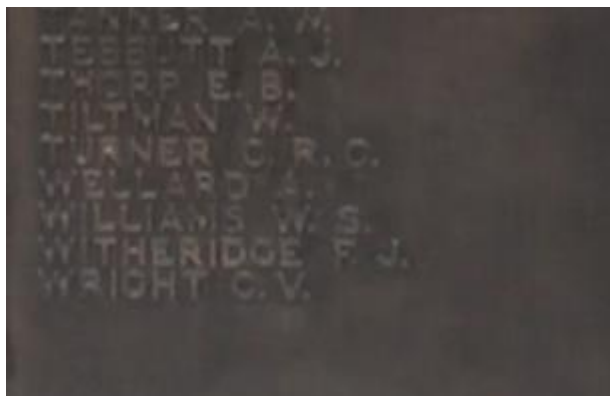


Leading Stoker F. J. Witheridge is remembered on the Chatham Naval Memorial, Kent, England as he has no known grave - Memorial reference 23.



(Photo by Brad Evans)





Research on the Australians remembered on the Chatham Naval Memorial, Kent, England was completed as part of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's "For Those In Peril" project.

*'For Those in Peril' is an initiative to encourage people to research, remember and share local stories of those who left their homes to join the war at sea, whose names are engraved on the Commission's three naval memorials at Portsmouth, Plymouth and Chatham.*

*The project has been launched to coincide with the opening of the Poppies: Wave at the CWGC Plymouth Naval Memorial, presented by 14-18 NOW: WW1 Centenary Art Commissions, to mark the centenary of the First World War.*



**Poppies: Wave By Paul Cummins, Artist and Tom Piper, Designer  
at CWGC Plymouth Naval Memorial**

**23 August - 19 November, 2017 (Photo from 1418 NOW)**

*Poppies: Wave, a sweeping arch of bright red poppy heads suspended on towering stalks, was originally seen at the Tower of London as part of the installation Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red. It can currently be seen at the CWGC Plymouth Naval Memorial.*



*(Photo from 1418 NOW)*