032

Brown, Thomas

A West Australian railway employee
killed while on military service for their country



Memorial at Railway Workshops Midland (D.Graham/panoramio)

Rail employment information

Employer: Western Australian Government Railways & Tramways

Branch: Traffic

Designation: Assistant Station Master

Rail employment notes: Born 1/1/1884. Joined WAGR 27/11/1900 aged 16 as Junior Porter, Bunbury. Promoted to Porter, Bunbury 1/1/1904. Transferred to Picton Junction 21/6/1906, Boyanup Junction 7/3/1907, Brunswick Junction 18/4/1908, Kalgoorlie 21/10/1908 and Kurramia 3/11/1909. Promoted to Night Station Master, Woolgangie 31/5/1911 and then to Assistant Station Master, Woolgangie 1/7/1911.

Kurramia and Woolgangie were both stations on the former (narrow gauge) Eastern Goldfields railway to Kalgoorlie – the station staff were mainly needed for train safe working, with limited public dealings in either place. (When stations were busy enough to warrant more than one officer, the Station Master normally worked day shift 8am – 4pm and had overall responsibility, the Assistant Station Master worked 4pm-midnight and the Night Station master worked midninght-8am.)

Transferred to ASM, Picton Junction 17/8/1912, Robbs Jetty 18/4/1913 and Pinjarra 20/4/1914. Granted leave to join AIF 9/5/1916 (Service No.2532). Killed in action 17/10/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	43rd Battalion.
Service number:	2532
Date of death:	17 October 1917
Place of death:	Belgium
Age:	33
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: Menin Gate at Ypres (now Ieper), Belgium

Thomas Brown enlisted in the AIF on 8 June 1916 at the age of 32. At Blackboy Hill Camp after basic training he was allocated to 5th Reinforcements to 43rd Battalion with the regimental number 2532 having originally been allotted to 5th/44 Bn. He left Australia on A8 *Argyllshire* from Fremantle on 9 November 1916 and disembarked at Devonport UK on 10 Jan 1917. After a short period of illness, he marched into 11 Training Battalion on 5 February 1917. His training was interrupted by 41 days of medical problems (albuminuria) before he departed to join the British Expeditionary Force via Southampton on 13 August 1917. He spent 10 days at 3ADBD before being taken on strength of 43 Bn in the field on 26 August 1917. The Unit was then engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres and occupied a sector at Zonnebeke where he was Killed in Action on 17 October 1917. Witnesses described his injury as his head being carried off by a shell fragment. He was buried at the site, later described by the CO 43 Bn as Hill 40 Zonnebeke. After the Armistice this burial site was not located and he is remembered on the Menin Gate at Ypres (now Ieper).

Additional/personal information:

Thomas was born and schooled in Bunbury WA. He married to Elsie M Wilson in 1916 (BDM 59/1916).

> BROWN.—Killed in action in France, October 17, 1917, Private Thomas Brown, late A.S.M., Pinjarrah railways, dearly-loved husband of Elsie M. Brown, View-street, Cottesloe, and dearly-loved son of Mr. and Mrs. T. Brown, Sampson-road, Bunbury. —Inserted by his sorrowing wife, Elsie. *The West Australian* 24/11/1917p1

It was most unusual for a man with 41 days off duty with protein in his urine to be deemed fit to join the BEF. Most cases like this were returned to Australia because it indicates significant renal disease and as there was no dialysis etc then. The primary cause was streptococcal (throat) infection, the immune response antibodies then cross reacting with the kidneys to cause glomerulonephritis. (However, that knowledge was in the future).

His wife was granted a pension of 40/- per fortnight. In the post war period his wife remarried and was subsequently known as Mrs Rankin, and lived in NSW.

Further information and/or photos may be added as available. Information may also be found on the Australian War Memorial website: *https://www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search/people*

Abbreviations: WAGR= Western Australian Government Railways (& Tramways at some periods); MRWA= Midland Railway of Western Australia; BDM=Western Australian Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages website; AWM=Australian War Memorial (Canberra and website); CWGC= Commonwealth War Graves Commission (including website). DVA=Department of Veterans' Affairs (including website)

Acknowledgements: Rail employment notes from WAGR Honour Roll and WAGR records held by State Records Office, Perth, transcribed by J.Austin 2019. Military information researched by Dr G.M.Galvin. Family information and collation by G.Higham.

----------Lest we forget----------