177

Lawson, James

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:	Locomotive
Designation:	Lifter

Rail employment notes: Born 13/3/1881. Joined WAGR 22/1/1917 aged 35 as Lifter, Midland Workshops (see note under Additional Information). Granted leave to join AIF 1917 (Service No.3032A). Killed in action 12/10/1917.

Military service information:

Conflict:	First World War 1914-1918
Service:	Australian Imperial Force (AIF)
Military unit:	48th Australian Infantry Battalion.
Service number:	3032A
Date of death:	12 October 1917
Place of death:	Belgium
Age:	44
Rank:	Private

Burial/memorialisation: St Julien Dressing Station Cemetery, Flanders, Belgium

James Lawson enlisted in the AIF on 8 September 1916 and underwent basic training at Blackboy Hill Camp. His Next of Kin was his wife Margaret and he had no prior military training. He was allocated the regimental number 3032 in 7th Reinforcements to 48th Battalion and departed Australia aboard A5 HMAT *Argyllshire* from Fremantle on 9 November 1916. He disembarked at Devonport on 10 January 1917 and the following day marched into 12 Training Bn where he remained until 29 May 1917 when he departed for France via Southampton to join the British Expeditionary Force. In France he joined 4 ADBD until taken on strength of 48 Bn, in the field. He was wounded in action (nature not stated) on 10 August 1917 and then passed through 4 Australian Fd Amb, 13 Aust Fd Amb and 12 Aust Fd Amb before rejoining his Unit on 6 September 1917. When he was taken on strength again it was discovered that a 3032 Pte Pearson had transferred in from 16 Bn so James' number was amended to 3032A. The Bn was engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres when he was Killed in Action. The records do not show a place name but give a military map reference. He was buried at the place of casualty.

Additional/personal information:

James Lawson was born in Dalserf or Netherburn Scotland and migrated to Australia aged about 37 years. (There are different ages recorded, which was not uncommon if men needed to beat some age rule when seeking employment or to enlist). It seems he was already married with children when he came to WA about 1910.

> LAWSON.—Killed in action, October 12, 1917, Private J. Lawson, dearly loved husband of Margaret Lawson, and loving father of Will., John, and Maisie, of York-road, Midland Junction (late of Rosebank, Lanarkshire, Scotland). Deeply mourned and sadly missed. At rest.. *The West Australian* 17/11/1917

In February 1922 the Graves Registration Unit uncovered his remains. He was identified by shoulder titles and colour patches and a wrist watch which had been engraved with his name. The watch was a farewell gift engraved "from the car barn employees". "Carbarn" is a tramway term however at that time, the government railways and tramways were operated as one department and he may have been transferred internally with out record available today – in either case, the gift was very fortunate as it helped identify his remains.

Following identification, the remains were reburied at St Julian Dressing Station Cemetery, 6 Km NE of Ieper (Ypres) town centre and the watch forwarded to his widow by the Imperial War Graves Commission. Pensions were payable to his widow, two sons and a daughter with effect from 07 January 1918. The commencing rates were 40/-,20/-,15/- and 10/- per fortnight. Pte Lawson was entitled to a Death Benefit from the WA Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees.

For his service he was entitled to receive the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and these were issued to his widow together with other service memorabilia. Mrs Lawson paid for an inscription on his tombstone which reads: "He Giveth His Beloved Sleep". Margaret Lawson died on in 1944 at the age of 70 years and was cremated at Karrakatta.

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----------