

Codford War Graves



Lest we Forget

World War I



R. I. P.

Sacred

To the Memory of

2996 Pte. MICHAEL SMITH

45TH BATTN. A.I.F.

WHO DIED DEC. 5TH 1916. AGED 38 YEARS

ERECTED BY HIS COMRADES

A COMPANY 12TH TRAINING BATTN. A.I.F.

*Commonwealth War Graves Headstone for Pte Michael Smith is located in Main Middle Row
(Right hand side) Grave Plot # 27 of Codford War Graves Cemetery (Using Map by Brian
Marshall)*

(CWGC Reference - Grave # 46)

***Service number of 2996 is incorrect – should be 2782)*

Michael Smith was born near Melbourne in 1878. He was a 38 year old, married Cook from Chippendale, NSW when he enlisted on 18th July, 1916 with the 45th Infantry Battalion, 6th Reinforcements of the Australian Army (A.I.F.). His service number was 2782 & his religion was Roman Catholic. His next of kin was listed as his wife – Mrs Lucy Smith of 22 Dick Street, Chippendale, NSW.

Pte Michael Smith embarked from Sydney on HMAT *Ceramic (A40)* on 7th October, 1916 & disembarked at Plymouth, England on 21st November, 1916.

Reinforcements were only given basic training in Australia. Training was completed in training units in England. These were located in the Salisbury Plain & surrounding areas in the county of Wiltshire.

Pte Smith was marched in to 12th Training Battalion at Codford on 21st November, 1916.

Pte Smith was admitted to Military Hospital at Sutton Veny & died at 2.35 a.m. on 5th December, 1916 of pneumonia.

A death for Michael Smith, aged 38, was registered in the December quarter, 1916 in the district of Warminster, Wiltshire.

From the burial report of Pte Michael Smith – he was buried on 6th December, 1916 at Codford Cemetery, Grave No. 46.

The Red Cross Wounded & Missing File on Pte Michael Smith contains a request for further information regarding the illness, death & burial which was sent from Secretary of Red Cross on behalf of Pte Smith's family. Sister F. M. Biggar, who nursed Pt Michael Smith wrote the following letter, dated 29th January, 1917:

Pte Michael Smith was admitted to this hospital with double pneumonia and was past all hope of recovery on admission and died within 48 hours. He was quite conscious at first and gave me his wife's address and asked me to write. I did so after he died, also to two friends in Camp in case they should take any message but they were not up in time. He died in the night. I think that is all there is to tell of him.

Pte Smith was buried on the 12th of December 1916 in the Military portion of Codford, St. Mary's Churchyard, Wilts.

Private M. Smith is commemorated in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 140.



(Photos by Cathy Sedgwick)



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

A War Pension was granted to Lucy Smith, widow of Pte Michael Smith in the sum of £2 per fortnight. Lucy Smith died on 16th January, 1918.

A Statutory Declaration is included in Pte Michael Smith's Service Record File. It was signed by William Smith of 5 Dick Street, Chippendale, dated 6th January, 1923, declaring:
That I am the eldest son of the late No. 2782 Pte M. Smith 40th Btn. That Lucy Smith my mother and the wife of the above mentioned soldier died on 16th Jan 1918.

Pte Michael Smith was entitled to British War Medal only as he had not entered a Theatre of War. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Pte Smith's son – William Smith (January, 1923)

(36 pages of Pte Michael Smith's Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

Information obtained from the Australian War Memorial (Roll of Honour, First World War Embarkation Roll, Red Cross Wounded & Missing) & National Archives

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Newspaper Reports

AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES – LISTS Nos. 252 AND 253

DIED OF ILLNESS

NEW SOUTH WALES

M. Smith, Chippendale

(*The Argus*, Melbourne, Victoria, Tuesday 19th December, 1916)

MICK SMITH

A Son of The Bush

(Written for "The Forbes Advocate" by Sergeant-Major G. W. Brownhill)

Mick Smith no doubt in his thoughts before leaving the sunny shores of Australia pictured many possibilities of his career as a soldier, but it is almost safe to say that there never crept into his mind, even a suggestion of the grand military funeral that one day in December would make its solemn way through the little English village of Codford, with the body of Mick Smith on the gun carriage, covered over with the Union Jack. And yet that was the destiny and earthly end of good old Mick. We hadn't been in England more than a few days before Mick went down to pneumonia and succumbed to it before we had properly made up our minds that he was seriously ill. I met him the morning of the day he was admitted to the hospital, and he was even then only a shadow of the Mick Smith who left Australia early in October. I had been pretty bad myself with a cold, and Mick and I had been daily exchanging commiserations on our condition. This day he said, "You haven't gone down to it yet, Sergeant-Major, but blow me if I can dodge the doctor any longer." Then, with an attempt at his former gaiety, he said, "How would a good stiff whiskey go now?" I thought it would be just the thing, and said so, and Mick's eyes lighted up for the moment, and I believe he swallowed one on the spot – strictly in his mind. After that the next news I had of poor Mick was an official announcement – "Died on such and such a date, at such and such a hospital, number so and so, Michael Smith, of such and such a company and battalion. Funeral on a certain date, at 3 p.m. in Codford Cemetery."

The whole company turned out to pay the last token of respect to Mick Smith. We were nearly 500 strong, and the procession was headed by the firing party, the gun carriage and pall-bearers, and the battalion brass band. For the best part of the way from the camp to the little cemetery we marched at the slow march to the strains of the "Dead March in Saul." At one farmhouse a great mastiff bounded out barking, as though to intimate that funerals were not in his line, and anyway Codford was not the place for them, but otherwise the solemnity of our progress was not interfered with. Soldiers saluted from the roadside, and the villagers peered from their doors and windows, and paid silent reverence to the dead. And then we reached the cemetery, and

gathered round the graveside. The burial service was read, the firing party fired three volleys over the grave, and the buglers peeled out "The Last Post," and then we all marched home again.

And old Mick Smith is in a lonely, and soon to be untended grave, 13,000 or 14,000 miles from his Australian home. A good sort, a rough diamond, and probably the makings of a dependable soldier. He was of the bushman type, and had lived a hard life. What it was to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow had been his life-long experience, and the wild ranges of Monaro had echoed many a time to the tramp of his feet. A willing worker, and a great old fellow for a yarn "while the billy boils" was he, in fact, you in Australia who knows the bush, are as familiar with his type as with anything in the big broad places where the eucalyptus is scent to the nostrils, and the note of the wild magpie music to the ear. Mick Smith will know the glorious bushland of our loved Australia no more, but he lies in an honoured soldier's grave, with the folds of the Union Jack wrapped about his coffin, and who knows but what he is better off, all said and done.

(Forbes Advocate, NSW Friday 23rd February, 1917)

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 at Codford War Graves Cemetery. 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)

Pte Michael Smith does not have a Commonwealth War Graves Headstone. His headstone was erected by "His Comrades A Company 12th Training Battn. A.I.F."

* Pte Thomas Ernest Osborne also has a similar headstone erected by "His Comrades A Company 12th Training Battn. A.I.F." Pte Smith died on 5th December, 1916, Pte Osborne on 10th December, 1916. They are buried next to each other in plots 27 & 28 (using Map by Brian Marshall).

Photo of Pte Michael Smith's Headstone at Codford War Graves Cemetery

****Note: Pte Smith's Service number was 2782. The Service number of 2996 on his headstone is incorrect & belonged to Pte Thomas E. Osborne who is buried next to Pte Smith – except his service number was 2696. Both men had their headstones erected by their Training Battalion – 12th 'A' Company.**



(Photo courtesy of Romy Wyeth)