

**St. John's Churchyard,
Read, Lancashire, England**

War Grave



Lest We Forget

World War 1



5169 PRIVATE

J. DURKIN

ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

4TH MAY, 1918 Age 26

John DURKIN

John Durkin was born at Burnley, Lancashire, England in 1891 to parents Thomas & Mary Durkin.

The 1901 England Census recorded John Durkin as a 9 year old, living with his family at 1 Park Street, Burnley, Lancashire, England. His parents were listed as Thomas Durkin (Stone Waller Mason, aged 40, born Ireland) & Mary Durkin (aged 38, born Burnley, Lancashire). John was the eldest of three sons listed on this Census (all born Burnley, Lancashire) – John then Martin Durkin (aged 4) & Patrick Durkin (aged 2). Also listed were three Boarders – Patrick Welsh (Garden worker, aged 40, born Ireland), John Gauchan (?) (Cotton Grinder, aged 40, born Ireland) & Robert Smith (Cotton Mulehand, aged 26, born Preston, Lancashire).

John Durkin enlisted in the British Army on 18th October, 1910 at Burnley, Lancashire, England. He was a 19 year old Collier & his religion was Roman Catholic.

Private John Durkin was posted to Royal Army Medical Corps (as nominated) with a Service number of 5169. He joined at Aldershot on 21st October, 1910. Private Durkin attended School of Instruction, R.A.M.C., Aldershot from 13th March, 1911.

The 1911 England Census recorded John Durkin as a 19 year old, single, Private in Royal Army Medical Corps, located at Infantry Barracks, Fulford Road, York, England.

Private John Durkin was transferred to Army Reserve on 17th October, 1913 at the expiration of his period of Army Service.

Private John Durkin was mobilized at Edinburgh on 6th August, 1914 & was posted to 19th Field Ambulance on the same day.

Field Ambulance

The Field Ambulance was a mobile front line medical unit (it was not a vehicle), manned by troops of the Royal Army Medical Corps. Most Field Ambulances came under command of a Division, and each had special responsibility for the care of casualties of one of the Brigades of the Division. The theoretical capacity of the Field Ambulance was 150 casualties, but in battle many would need to deal with very much greater numbers. The Field Ambulance was responsible for establishing and operating a number of points along the casualty evacuation chain, from the Bearer Relay Posts which were up to 600 yards behind the Regimental Aid Posts in the front line, taking casualties rearwards through an Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) to the Main Dressing Station (MDS). It also provided a Walking Wounded Collecting Station, as well as various rest areas and local sick rooms. The Field Ambulances would usually establish 1 ADS per Brigade, and 1 MDS for the Division.

When it was at full strength a Field Ambulance was composed of 10 officers and 224 men. It was divided into three Sections. In turn, those Sections had Stretcher Bearer and Tented subsections. RAMC officers and men did not carry weapons or ammunition.

(Information from The Long, Long Trail)

Private John Durkin was taken Prisoner of War at the Retreat from Mons on 26th August, 1914. He was admitted to Sennelager Camp, Germany. (Information from Medical Report below)

Newspaper article – *Burnley Express*, Lancashire, England – 7 July, 1915:

HOSPITAL NOT FIT FOR ANIMALS.

Private John Durkin, the other Burnley prisoner, who lives at Edward Street, was captured in a hospital on August 26th after an engagement at Landrecies. He and some others were taken to the compound in cattle trucks, "packed like herrings". On arrival they were turned into an open field, where they slept on straw, with one blanket to three persons, during a very heavy thunderstorm. Their first ration the next day was a loaf of hard and mildewed black

bread. In summer time they had to rise at four o' clock in the morning, when they were given some very poor black coffee, with no food to accompany it. After several hours "fatigue" duty they were given soup made with horse flesh for dinner, and coffee and black bread for tea. "If we did not turn out with a 'good will' each morning," said Pte. Durkin, "we were whipped out, and the smallest punishment inflicted for 'Insolence' was to be tied for six hours to a tree. After the first few day's we were accommodated in huts, the floors of which were covered with straw, and each man was given two blankets.

"When I had been there some time I contracted diabetes, and, in my opinion, it was due to the bad food and treatment. I persevered for three months because I had heard it was worse in hospital than in camp. One morning however I reported sick, and was taken to hospital where I was fed for the next 24 hours on nothing but rice water. The next morning, therefore, I asked to be discharged, and the British medical officer agreed with my opinion, and said the hospital was not a fit place for animals. Some time later I was again carried into hospital on a stretcher, but cleanliness was the only noticeable improvement in the food.

"The Germans were so afraid of our escaping that wires charged with electricity ran all the way round the camp. The current was switched on night and day, and it was no uncommon sight to see the paws of dogs drop off as they touched the wire. On one occasion a German civilian workman was similarly electrocuted.

Private John Durkin was admitted to Queen Mary's Military Hospital, Whalley, Lancashire, England on 22nd July, 1915 with Diabetes.

A Medical Report was completed on Private John Durkin on 8th July, 1916 at Queen Mary's Military Hospital, Whalley, Lancashire. He was aged 25 & his former occupation was listed as Coal Miner. His disability was listed as Diabetes which had originated January – February 1915 at Sennelager – Prisoner of War Camp, Germany. "Was taken prisoner of war during the Retreat from Mons, on August 26 1914. Sent to Sennelager Camp and while there underwent severe privations and exposure. Amount of food and quality of same not enough to "keep body & soul together." – Became extremely weak and debilitated and complained to British Medical Officer-also a prisoner – after two months was carried on a stretcher to Hospital – where he was found to be suffering from Glycosmia – remained in Hospital until "exchanged" – arrived in England June 30th 1915 and admitted to King George's Hospital – sent from there to Aldershot and after three days was granted "leave." At home 13 days – reported sick at this Hospital and admitted July 22nd 1915." The Officer in charge of the Case stated that the cause of Private Durkin's disease was "starvation, while a prisoner of war on active service." His weight on admission was 6st 7 lbs – normally 11st 7 lbs. The Medical Board decided that Private John Durkin was physically unfit – Total disablement. It was recommended that he be discharged as permanently unfit.

The Medical Board found on 15th July, 1916 that Private John Durkin was no longer fit for Service- discharged as permanently unfit. He was discharged from Queen Mary's Military Hospital, Whalley, Lancashire on 18th July, 1916.

Private John Durkin was discharged from Royal Army Medical Corps on 1st August, 1916 "No longer physically for War Service." He had served for 5 years & 288 days.

Ex-Private John Durkin, R.A.M.C. Depot, (Chelsea Number 26943) was awarded a weekly Pension of 25/- for 6 months conditional (date illegible).

Details from the Pension Records:

- Next of kin: Father – Thomas; mother – Mary; younger brother – Martin & younger brother – Patrick. The family lived at 4 Edward St, Burnley. Private Durkin had served in the British Expeditionary Force 1914 – 1915.
- Service Home & Abroad: Home Service – 18.10.10 to 18.8.14 (3 years 305 days)
Egypt ____ ____ France - 19.8.14 to 29.6.15 (315 days)
Home Service – 30.6.15 to 1.8.16 (33 days)

John Durkin married Margaret Jane Sutcliffe in 1916. Their marriage was registered in the district of Burnley, Lancashire, England on September quarter, 1916.

Ex-Private John Durkin was awarded the Silver War Badge as was no longer physically for War Service. He was issued Badge No. 80846 on 16th November, 1916. John Durkin signed, as receipt for, the Silver War Badge on 18th November, 1916. His address was No. 2 Lower Water St., Lowerhouse, Burnley, Lancashire.

Silver War Badge

The Silver War Badge was issued in the United Kingdom and the British Empire to service personnel who had been honourably discharged due to wounds or sickness from military service in World War I. The badge, sometimes known as the "Discharge Badge", the "Wound Badge" or "Services Rendered Badge", was first issued in September 1916, along with an official certificate of entitlement.

The large sterling silver lapel badge was intended to be worn on civilian clothes. The decoration was introduced as an award of "King's silver" for having received wounds or injury during loyal war service to the Crown's authority. A secondary causation for its introduction was that a practice had developed in the early years of the war in the United Kingdom where some women took it upon themselves to confront and publicly embarrass men of fighting age they saw in public places who were not in military uniform, by ostentatiously presenting them with white feathers, as a suggestion of cowardice. As the war had developed substantial numbers of servicemen who had been discharged from His Majesty's Forces with wounds that rendered them unfit for war service, but which were not obvious from their outward appearance, found themselves being harassed in such a manner and the badge, to be worn on the right breast while in civilian dress, was a means of discouraging such incidents being directed at ex-forces' personnel. It was forbidden to wear the badge on a military uniform.

(Information from Wikipedia)



Silver War Badge

A report was completed by Medical Board on 15th December, 1916 on ex-Private John Durkin's condition. His address was listed as Dudley Hill Cottages, Read, Blackburn. The Medical Board reported "*Total incapacity for 12*" months. Pension granted 25/-. Expires 1.8.17.

A report was completed by Medical Board on 2nd July, 1917. "Total incapacity." Pension granted 27/6. Expires 1.1.18.

A report was completed by Medical Board on 31st October, 1917. "Prev ___ 100%". Pension granted 27/6. Expires 28.1.19.

A daughter – Ivy Durkin was born on 26th February, 1918 at Burnley, Lancashire to parents John & Margaret Durkin.

Private John Durkin died on 4th May, 1918 at Dudley Hill Cottages, Read, Lancashire, England.

A death for John Durkin, aged 26, was registered in June quarter, 1918 in the district of Burnley, Lancashire, England.

Private John Durkin was buried in St. John's Churchyard, Read, Lancashire, England – Plot number 38 and now has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone.

Private John Durkin was entitled to 1914 Star & Clasp, British War Medal & the Victory Medal.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Private J. Durkin – service number 5169, aged 26, of Royal Army Medical Corps. He was the son of Martin* & Mary Durkin, of Burnley; husband of Margaret Jane Thorpe (formerly Durkin), of Scottsdale, Tasmania. (Note: His father was Thomas Durkin; Martin was his brother).

Private John Durkin, Royal Army Medical Corps, 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.

(Note: It appears that Private John Durkin's name on the Commemorative Roll may be in error as it was based on the information that his next-of-kin's address was listed as Australia & therefore the soldier concerned, it was assumed, would be Australian.)

[Margaret Jane Durkin, aged 32, & her daughter Ivy Durkin, aged 3, were passengers on Ballarat which had departed from London, England on 26th January, 1922 & arrived in Melbourne, Australia on 13th March, 1922.

**Margaret Jane Durkin married Gordon William Thorpe]*



Commemorative Roll (Photo from AWM)



Commemorative Area of the Australian War Memorial (*Capital Photographer*)

(15 pages of Private John Durkin's Service Record file & 16 pages of Private John Durkin's Pension records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives UK).

Information obtained from the CWGC, Australian War Memorial (Commemorative Roll) & National Archives UK



(*Burnley Express* – 1918)



Newspaper Notices

HAPPY RELEASES

BURNLEY MEN BACK FROM GERMANY

STORY OF PRIVATION AND ILL-TREATMENT

One of the British soldiers fortunate enough to be liberated from a German prisoners' camp through the exchange of prisoners is Pte Thomas Bray, of the R.A.M.C., who returned to his home at 174, Accrington road, Burnley, on Saturday, for a fourteen days' furlough.....

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Continuing, Pte Bray said the German authorities told them on June 26th that they were being exchanged, but, he added "we couldn't believe it: it was the same as a very rare luxury to us." Eventually 301 R.A.M.C. men and about 200 disabled soldiers were sent off to be exchanged. The German people acted towards them very much the same as on the previous journey, but no stones were thrown..... We went to Flushing and embarked for England, and landed at Tilbury on Tuesday of last week. We had a great reception, between 3,000 and 4,000 people seeing us come in. But the people cried to see some of the men. We trained from Tilbury to St. Pancras, where we had another great reception, and got into taxi-cabs – three men in each – and went to the King George's Hospital. On Wednesday we left the hospital for Aldershot, where we had baths, change of clothing, and medical inspection."

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Two other Burnley men, also in the R.A.M.C., are among those liberated, these being Pte G. Bannister and Pte Durkin.

(Express and Advertiser, Burnley, Lancashire, England – 7 July, 1915)

DEATHS

May 4 – John Durkin, Hospital, 26

(The Burnley News, Lancashire, England – 18 May, 1918)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for cemeteries and memorials in 23,000 locations, in 153 countries. In all 1.7 million men and women from the Commonwealth forces from WWI and WWII have been honoured and commemorated in perpetuity.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, as part of its mandate, is responsible for commemorating all Commonwealth war dead individually and equally. To this end, the war dead are commemorated by name on a headstone, at an identified site of a burial, or on a memorial. War dead are commemorated uniformly and equally, irrespective of military or civil rank, race or creed.

Not all service personnel have a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone. In some instances the relative chose to have their own memorial/headstone placed on the deceased's grave. These private headstones are not maintained by the CWGC as they have no jurisdiction to maintain them.

Private J. Durkin has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone but no inscription.

St. John's Churchyard, Read, Lancashire, England

St. John's Churchyard, Read contains 7 Commonwealth War Graves – 5 relating to World War 1 & 2 from World War 2.





(Photo by Robert Wade)

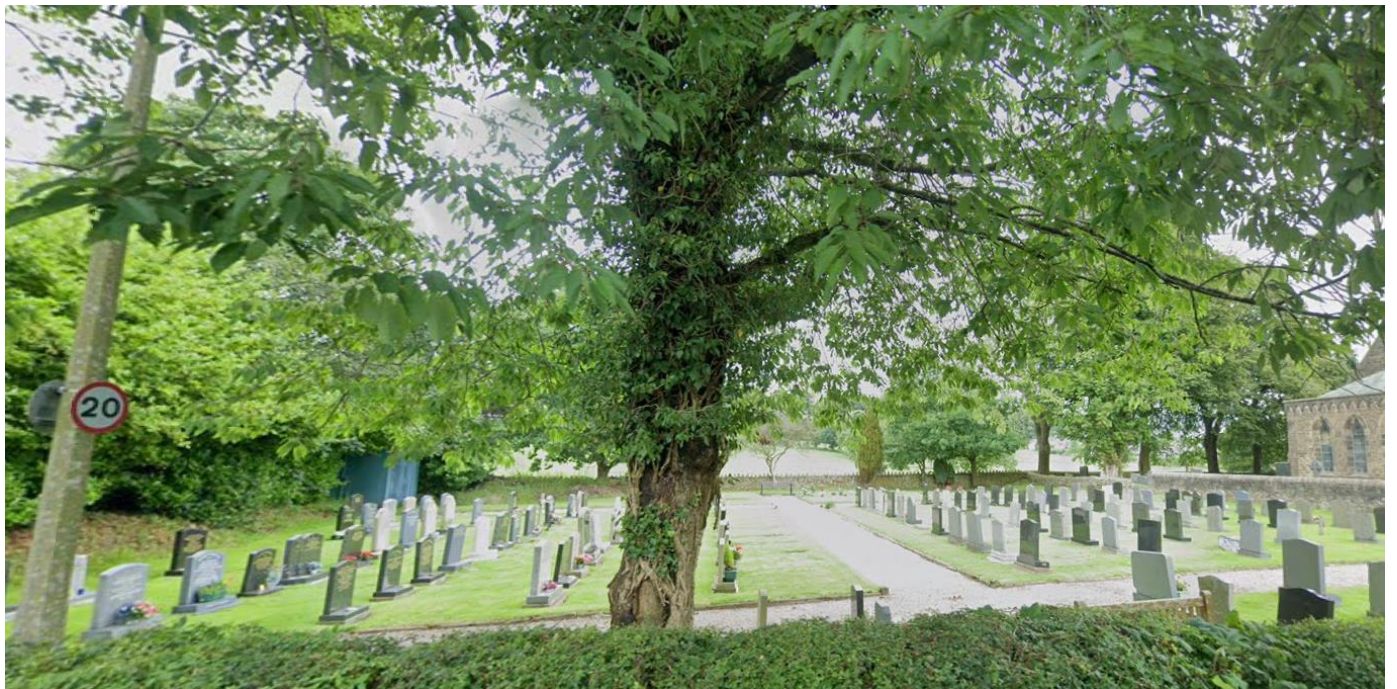
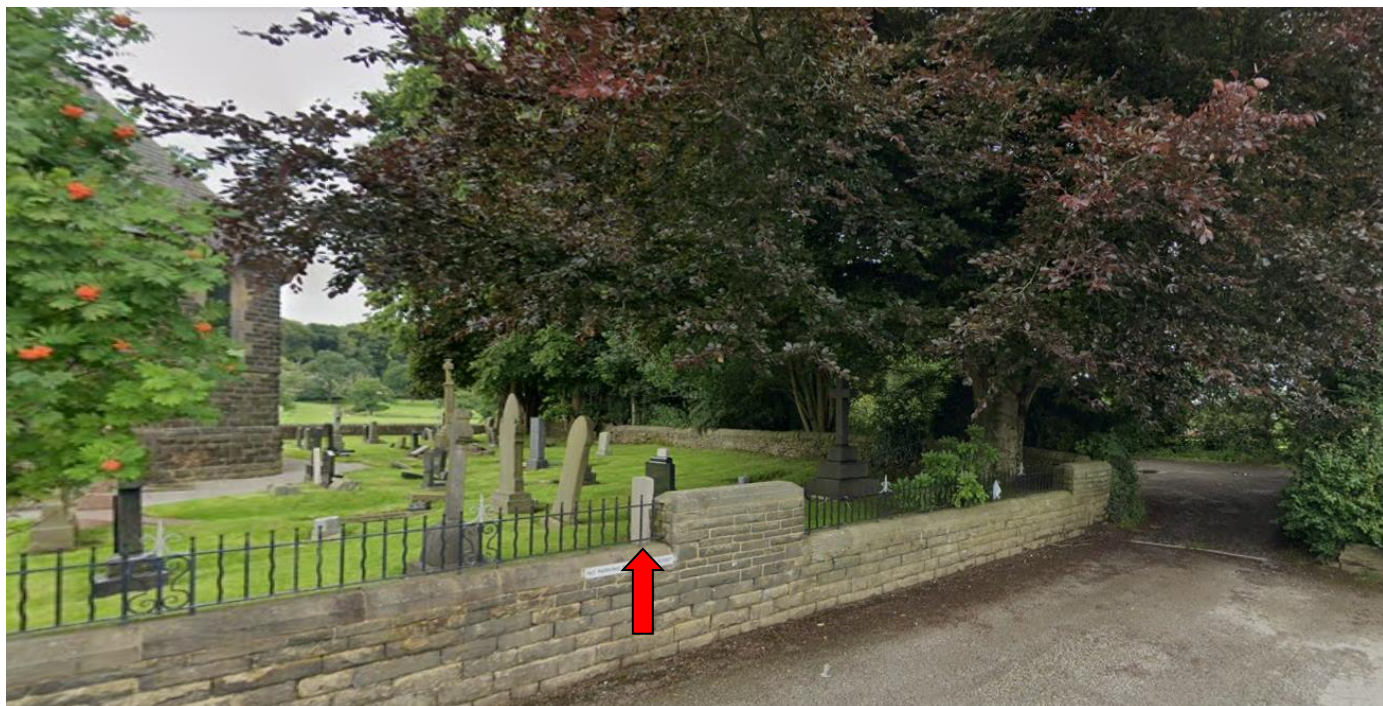


Photo of Private J. Durkin's Commonwealth War Graves Commission Headstone in St. John's Churchyard, Read, Lancashire, England.



(Photo from Find a Grave – Bob the Greenacre Cat)



Private Durkin's headstone