

Reading Cemetery, Reading, Berkshire War Graves



Lest We Forget

World War 1



597 REGIMENTAL SERGEANT MAJOR

J. MacDONALD

20TH BN. AUSTRALIAN INF.

28TH JUNE, 1919 Age 35

****SERVED AS GEORGE KING – WARRANT OFFICER**

John MacDONALD

John MacDonald was born at Crown Street, Reading, Berkshire, England to parents William & Mary Ann MacDonald.

Possible Census entry for 1891 England Census:

John MacDonald was possibly listed as a 6 year old living with his widowed mother & siblings at 25 Edgehill Street, St. Giles, Berkshire, Reading. His widowed mother was listed as Mary Ann MacDonald (Laundress, aged 36, born Andover, Hampshire). John was one of five children listed on this Census, all born at Reading, Berkshire – Frederick MacDonald (Errand Boy, aged 14) then John, Mary Ann MacDonald (aged 5), Maud MacDonald (aged 4) & Henry James MacDonald (aged 2). Also living with the family was Boarder - Sarah Clark (Widowed Seamstress, aged 65) & 3 Visitors – Sarah Jane Williams (Tailoress, aged 31), Jane Rhus (Nurse, aged 45) & Elizabeth B. Rhus (aged 11).

According to information supplied for the Roll of Honour, John MacDonald served in 1st Oxford & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry & served for 7 years in India & 4 years on reserve. He was with Mercantile Marines prior to enlisting with the Australian Imperial Force.

According to information supplied for the Roll of Honour, John MacDonald came to Australia when he was about 29 years old.

John MacDonald enlisted under the name of George King. George King stated he was a 35 year old, single, Stud-groom from Warren Row, Henley-on-Thames, Buckinghamshire, England when he enlisted at Liverpool, Sydney, NSW on 1st March, 1915 with the 5th Infantry Brigade, 17th Infantry Battalion "B" Company of the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). His service number was 597 & his religion was Church of England. His next of kin was listed as his mother – Mrs Mary Ann King of Warren Row, Henley-on-Thames, Buckinghamshire, England. George King stated on his Attestation Papers that he had served with Oxford & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry for 12 years & had been discharged with time expired. George King was 5 feet 4 inches tall with Blue eyes, Brown hair & a fair complexion. He had tattoos on his arms, chest & thighs.

George King was posted as Private from 1st March, 1915 then promoted to Lance Corporal on 29th March, 1915.

Lance Corporal George King embarked from Sydney on HMAT *Themistocles* (A32) on 12th May, 1915.

Lance Corporal George King was promoted to Sergeant while posted at Heliopolis on 13th August, 1915.

Sergeant George King proceeded to join M.E.F. (Mediterranean Expeditionary Force) at Gallipoli on 16th August, 1915.

Sergeant George King was promoted to C.S.M. (Company Sergeant Major – A warrant officer) on 1st October, 1915 while at Gallipoli Peninsula.

Company Sergeant Major George King disembarked at Alexandria from Mudros on 9th January, 1916.

Company Sergeant Major George King was promoted to T/RSM (Temporary Regimental Sergeant Major) while posted at Moascar on 4th March, 1916.

Temporary Regimental Sergeant Major George King embarked from Alexandria on 17th March, 1916 to join B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force) & disembarked at Marseilles, France on 23rd March, 1916.

Temporary Regimental Sergeant Major George King was to be Regimental Sergeant Major (Warrant Officer Class 1) vice Lane evacuated on 17th August, 1916.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was mentioned in 2nd Australian Division, Routine Order dated 26th August, 1916 for good and gallant conduct in the field in connection with the fighting round Pozieres.

War Diary – 17th Battalion August, 1916:

Honours & Awards

The following were mentioned in Despatches

Lt. Col E. F. Martin

No. 597 R.S.M/ G. King

164 Sgt J. E. Bennett (Killed in Action)

2238 Pte R. L. Fry (Died of wounds)

1564 L. Cpl. H. O. McKenzie (Killed in Action)

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was placed on Supernumerary List on 27th November, 1916 while attached to 2nd Division School of Instruction. He was marched in from 2nd Divisional School to 1st Anzac Corps School in France on 1st May, 1917 & rejoined his Battalion in France on 15th May, 1917.

Miss Nellie D'Arcy of Appin, via Campbelltown, NSW wrote to Base Records on 9th February, 1917 enquiring if there were any records of No. 597 Private G. King, "B" Company, 17th Battalion being killed in action as the name of "G. King, England" had appeared in the NSW Casualty list about 3 or 4 months prior. Base Records replied on 15th February, 1917 stating that no official casualty report had been received in connection with No. 597 Regimental-Sergeant-Major George King, 17th Battalion & it was assumed he was with his Unit.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was transferred & taken on strength with Anzac Corps School, in France on 21st July, 1917.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was on leave to England on 3rd August, 1917 & returned from leave on 15th August, 1917.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was marched out to Reinforcements Camp, Caestre on 27th March, 1918.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King (John MacDonald) was taken on strength with 17th Battalion from Australian Corps School in France on 28th March, 1918.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was on leave to Paris on 22nd August, 1918 & rejoined from leave on 4th September, 1918.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King (John MacDonald) was wounded in action (Gassed) in France on 3rd October, 1918. He was admitted to 12th Casualty Clearing Station then transferred on 4th October, 1918 to No. 12 Ambulance Train. R.S.M. George King was admitted to 5th General Hospital at Rouen on 4th October, 1918 & discharged to Base Depot on 8th October, 1918. R.S.M. George King was marched in to A.I.B.D. (Australian Infantry Base Depot) at Havre, France on 9th October, 1918. He was marched out to his Unit on 13th October, 1918 & rejoined his Unit from Hospital on 14th October, 1918.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was transferred from 17th Battalion to 20th Battalion in France on 2nd December, 1918.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was listed on 17th March, 1919 to return to UK on Industrial Engineers. He embarked from France on 24th March, 1919 & disembarked at Southampton, England on 25th March, 1919. He was to then report to Parkhouse, Wiltshire.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was marched in to A.S.C. Training Depot at Parkhouse, Wiltshire on 26th March, 1919.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was marched out to Repatriation & Demobilisation Depot on 31st March, 1919.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was granted leave from 3rd April, 1919 to 9th July, 1919 with pay & subsistence. Reason – Poultry Farming. Attending – Chivers & Sons, Sedge Fen, Lakenheath, Brandon, Suffolk, England. Regimental Sergeant Major George King was taken off strength with A.I.F Headquarters, London – N.M.E. (Non Military Employment -Leave after Armistice - placement within industry) in UK.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was awarded the Medaille Militaire. A letter was sent to Mrs M. A. King of Warren Row, Henley-on-Thames, England, mother of Regimental Sergeant Major George King, which reads:

“Dear Madam,

I have much pleasure in forwarding hereunder a copy of extract from Fifth Supplement No 31454 to the London Gazette, dated 14th July, 1919, relating to the conspicuous services rendered by your son, the late No. 597 Warrant Officer G. King, 20th Battalion.

DECORATION AND MEDAL CONFERRED BY THE
PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

Medaille Militaire

No. 597 Regimental Sergeant-Major GEORGE KING

The above has been promulgated in Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, No. 119, dated 17th October, 1919.

The Médaille Militaire (Military Medal)

The Médaille militaire is a military decoration of the French Republic for other ranks for meritorious service and acts of bravery in action against an enemy force.

(Information & photo from Wikipedia)



Regimental Sergeant Major George King (John MacDonald) died on 28th June, 1919 at Lakenheath, Suffolk, England from “Heart failure due to after effect of Gas (whilst in swinging boat) at Lakenheath near The Ford.”

A death for George King, aged 35, was registered in the June quarter, 1919 in the district of Mildenhall, Suffolk, England.

Regimental Sergeant Major George King was buried on 3rd July, 1919 in Reading Cemetery, Reading, Berkshire – Screen Wall. 72. 16632. Those buried in Plot 72 & buried in other parts of the cemetery that do not have headstones marking their graves are named on the Memorial Screen Wall located near the Cross of Sacrifice. Their deaths are still acknowledged by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. From the burial report of Regimental Sergeant Major George King – *(True Baptismal name, John MacDonald) Coffin was Elm with brass fittings. The deceased soldier was accorded a Military funeral, Firing Party, and Bugler being in attendance, supplied by the Royal Berkshire Regiment, Reading. The coffin was draped with Australian Flag and surmounted by several beautiful wreaths sent from: - “Mother and Sister”, Comrades of the A.I.F., Mrs and Miss Alsop, “Aunt & Uncle Harry” and discharged soldiers from Lakenheath. The “Last Post” was sounded at the graveside, and the burial service conducted by the Chap. H. A. Smith Masters, late B.E.F., France. The grave will be turfed and an oak cross erected by the A.I.F. London, who were represented at the funeral. Names of those present at the Funeral – Mother, Sister, Mrs Fifield, Miss Fifield, Miss Norris.*

The Public Trust Office, Sydney, NSW wrote to Base Records on 17th December, 1919 requesting the death certificate of "No. 597 J. MacDonald (otherwise G. King) 20th Battalion."

Miss Nellie D'Arcy of Appin, via Campbelltown, NSW wrote to Base Records again on 2nd August, 1919 enquiring of the "W.O. George King reported died of illness in casualty list published on 30th July was No. 597 R.S.M. George King, 17th Battalion. If so I would like to have any particulars you can give me with regard to his death....." Base Records replied on 7th August, 1919 confirming the soldier referred to in Casualty List 469 was Warrant Officer George Kin, 20th Battalion (late 17th Battalion).

Miss Nellie D'Arcy of Appin, via Campbelltown, NSW wrote to Base Records again on 8th September, 1919 requesting further particulars concerning the death and burial of the late No. 597 Warrant Officer George King, 20th Battalion. Base Records replied on 12th September, 1919 stating that no further information was yet available.

Miss Nellie D'Arcy of Appin, via Campbelltown, NSW wrote to Base Records again on 7th December, 1919 requesting any "further details concerning the death and burial of the late No. 597 Warrant Officer George King, 20th Battalion (late 17th Battalion)." She stated that the late Warrant Officer King was a friend of her family but were not acquainted with his relations. Base Records replied on 15th December, 1919 stating that the late No. 597 Warrant Officer G. King had died on 28/6/19 at Lakenheath from heart failure due to after effects of gas & that he was buried in Reading Cemetery, Reading England. A description of the burial was also included in the letter.

A letter was sent from base Records, dated 7th January, 1920, to Mrs M. A. King of Warren Row, Henley-on-Thames, England – mother of late George King/John MacDonald, which reads: "Dear Madam, Advice has been received at this office to the effect that the late No. 597 Warrant-officer George King, 20th Battalion, enlisted under an assumed name – his correct name being John MacDonald. If this is so I shall be glad if you will forward to this office a Statutory Declaration embodying such fact so that his records may be amended."

Regimental Sergeant Major John MacDonald who served as George King, was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Regimental Sergeant Major John MacDonald's mother - Mrs M. A. King, in England, as the closest next-of-kin. (Scroll & Plaque both sent November, 1922).

** Note: The Memorial Plaque for Regimental Sergeant Major John MacDonald was sold on 28th February, 2015.*

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Regimental Sergeant Major John MacDonald – service number 597, aged 35, of 20th Battalion Australian Infantry. Served as KING, Medaille Militaire (France). He was the son of William and Mary Ann MacDonald of 155 Victoria Dock Rd., Tidal Basin, London. Born at Reading.

Regimental Sergeant Major J. MacDonald is commemorated on the Roll of Honour, located in the Hall of Memory Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia on Panel 91.



Roll Of Honour WW1 Australian War Memorial Canberra, Australia

(65 pages of George King's (Regimental Sergeant Major John MacDonald) Service records are available for On Line viewing at National Archives of Australia website).

Information obtained from the CWGC, Australian War Memorial (Roll of Honour, First World War Embarkation Roll) & National Archives



Newspaper Notices

TRAGIC OCCURRENCE at a FAIR

SOLDIER'S SUDDEN DEATH AT LAKENHEATH

There was a tragic scene at the fair at Lakenheath on Saturday evening about eight o'clock, when many hundreds were seeking pleasure.

One of those was Regimental-Sergt.-Major George King, 20th Battalion Australian Force, who had been gassed in the war, and was not in a good state of health. He was with others in a swing-boat and feeling unwell, requested the boat to be stopped. The man in charge brought it to a standstill, and the soldier got out. He complained of feeling tired and unwell and fainted. He remained unconscious and Inspector F. Mobbs (Brandon) and P.C. A. Broome were called to his assistance, and Dr A. J. Pickworth sent for. The doctor came quickly and examined the man, and declared that he had already passed away, the cause of death being syncope.

Two comrades, Privates Nossky and Yendall, both Australians, assisted to convey the body to the Bell Hotel, and the Coroner was communicated with by P.C. Broome on Sunday. That official decided to grant a certificate for burial without an inquest.

The deceased had been employed on the Lakenheath estate of Messrs Chivers, and was held in respect by his comrades and others who knew him. He was a single man aged 27 and had four chevrons.

(Bury Free Press, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England – 5 July, 1919)

CASUALTY LIST

NEW SOUTH WALES

DIED

W.O. GEORGE KING, England (illness)

(The Sydney Morning Herald, NSW – 30 July, 1919)

Reading Cemetery, Reading, Berkshire, England

Reading Cemetery, Reading, Berkshire contains 248 War Graves, 17 of those being from Australian Forces – World War 1.

The War Graves Plot is situated at the back of the cemetery, in the right hand corner from the entrance. A Screen Wall Memorial commemorates those buried in Plot 72 and those buried in other parts of the cemetery whose graves are not marked by headstones. There are 207 Commonwealth burials of the 1914-1918 war and 41 of the 1939-1945 war. There is also 1 Serbian burial.

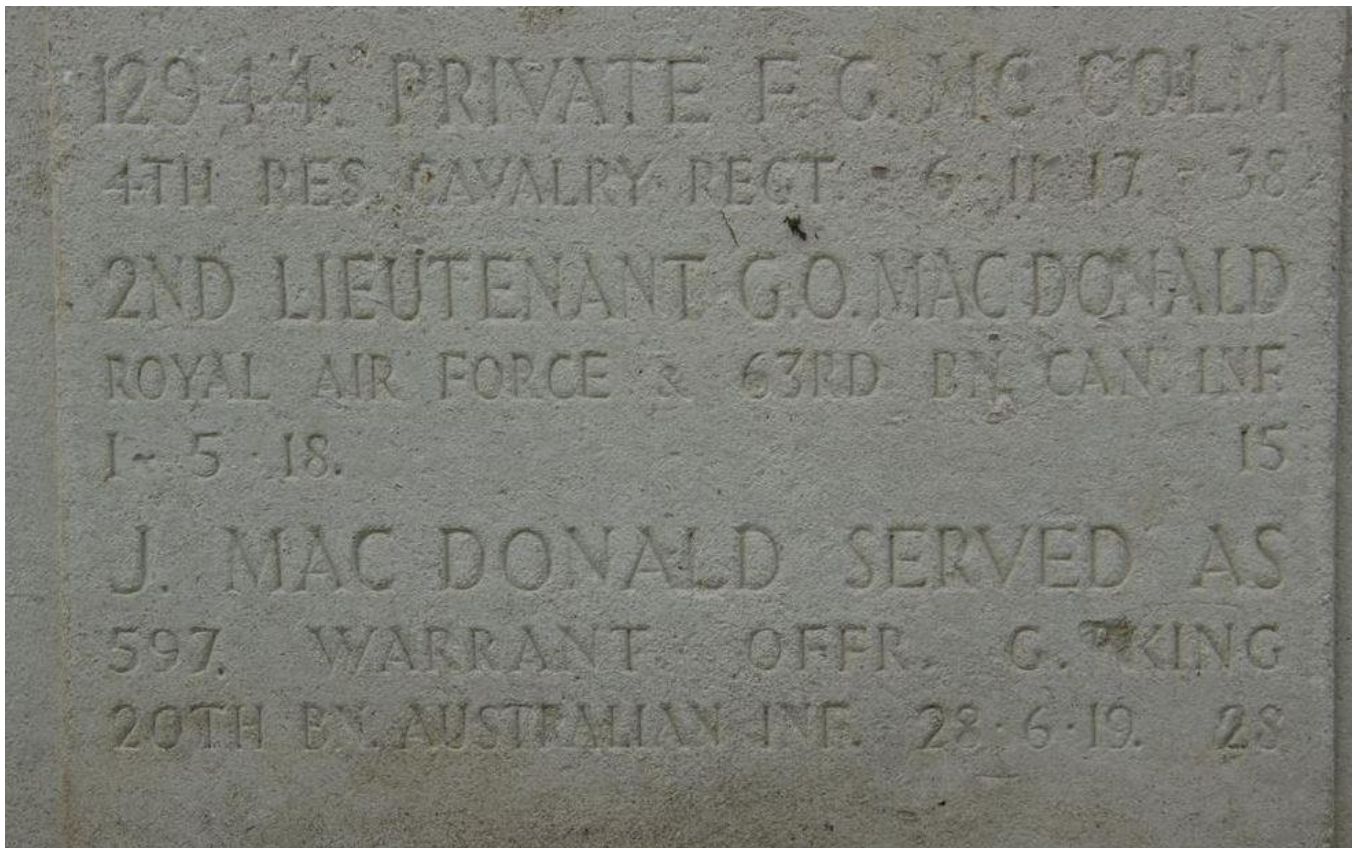
(Information & photos from CWGC)



Cross of Sacrifice & Memorial Screen Wall, Reading Cemetery, Reading, Berkshire *(Photos from CWGC)*



Photo of Regimental Sergeant Major J. MacDonald's name (served as George King) on the Screen Wall Memorial in Reading Cemetery, Reading, Berkshire, England.



(Photo courtesy of Phil Wood)