

## PRIVATE WILLIAM AWFORD GORTON

107G, 25th Battalion, Australian Infantry, Australian Imperial Force  
Died aged 40 on 14 November 1916  
Remembered with honour on *Villers-Bretonneux Memorial, France*  
Commemorated in Tewkesbury on the Grammar School Memorial



*Australian National Memorial,  
Villers-Bretonneux*



*Grammar School Memorial,  
Town Hall*



*Australian Infantry,  
A.I.F.*

**WILLIAM AWFORD GORTON** (not 'W J' as listed on the Grammar School Memorial) was born in Redditch in 1876 to William Gorton, an ironmonger from Dudley, and Alice (formerly Awford) from Stroud. The Awford family originally came from Eldersfield, which may explain why William and his younger brother, Frederick James, were boarders at the Abbey House School (precursor to the Grammar School) in Church Street. William Awford married Annie Elizabeth Fisher in Cheltenham in 1897 and they emigrated in December 1900 to Australia. They sailed on the *SS Duke of Norfolk* and landed in Brisbane, Queensland. Electoral Rolls place him there in 1905 and 1908, but in Capricornia (Central Queensland) in 1913.

William enlisted into 25th Battalion, Australian Infantry, on 7 June 1915, describing himself as a 'single man'. His 7th Brigade sailed later that month from Brisbane on *HMAT (His Majesty's Australian Transport) Aeneas*, stopping at Alexandria en route to Gallipoli, where they arrived in September to reinforce the depleted ANZAC Division. At that time the situation was relatively quiet as the last major Allied offensive had been repulsed the previous month. The battalion withdrew in December and, after further training in Egypt, sailed for France, disembarking at Marseilles on 19 March 1916 as the first AIF battalion to land there. In July the division moved to the Somme front and took part in the *Battle of Pozières* (23 July-3 September), one of the *Battles of the Somme*. In its first major battle the battalion suffered 785 casualties, after which the division was transferred to Belgium to rest and recuperate. In October it was recalled for the final stages of the offensive. The 25th Battalion took part in two attacks to the east of

Fliers in November, both ultimately floundering in the mud; the Australians captured some of their objectives, but eventually had to withdraw.

**Private William Awford Gorton** was killed in action on 14 November 1916 during that offensive. His body was never recovered nor identified, and his name is commemorated instead on the *Australian National Memorial* at Villers-Bretonneux, near Amiens, France. He was awarded the '1914-15 Star' medal.

William's story does not end with his death. Although his will mentions his wife, he nominated his brother, Frederick James, as his beneficiary. Frederick had left England in 1907 for South Africa on *SS Gaika* as an unmarried 'constable' (at one point describing himself as '*an old irregular of thirteen years in different corps in South Africa, including the Boer War*'), and during the Great War he was working in Kampala, Uganda. William's army service record reveals a complex story about his wife. Firstly it was claimed that Annie had died in 1914, hence William's enlistment as a single man. According to Annie, however, although they were living apart they were not divorced or legally separated; she claimed that William was unemployed and had moved elsewhere to look for work. Frederick wrote numerous emotional appeals to the Australian authorities, arguing that Annie was living in Melbourne in '*strained circumstances*' and was entitled to a pension. By 1920 he was a little exasperated stating that '*His brother gave his all for the Australian Contingent and that should override red tape*'; he also indicated that he would send the proceeds of William's estate to Annie. It is not known if the story ended happily for Annie, but she remained in Australia according to electoral rolls.