

# Sutton Veny War Graves



*Lest we Forget*

## World War 1



**197 BOMBARDIER**

**RUSSELL G. WITTS**

**10TH A.M. T.M. BATTERY A.I.F.**

**2ND NOVEMBER, 1918 AGED 28**

*CWGC Headstone for Bdr. R. G. Witts is located in  
Grave Plot # 16. H. 2. of St. John the Evangelist Churchyard, Sutton Veny*

## Russell Gordon WITTS

Russell Gordon Witts was born at Delegate, near Albury, NSW to parents Edwin John & Rachel (Rae) Witts (nee Rankin). His birth was registered in 1890 at Bombala, NSW. Russell Gordon Witts attended Hawkesbury Agricultural College, NSW between 1908 & 1909.

Russell Gordon Witts was a 26 year old, single, Farmer from Parkes, NSW when he enlisted at Liverpool, Sydney, NSW on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1915 with the 4<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Brigade, 12<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment "A" Squadron of the Australian Army (A.I.F.). His service number was 197 & his religion was Nonconformist. His next of kin was listed as his mother – Mrs Rachel Witts of Parkes, NSW.

Private Russell Gordon Witts embarked from Sydney on HMAT *Suevic* (A29) on 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1915.

Pte Witts was absorbed into 1<sup>st</sup> L.H.R. (Light Horse Regiment) on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1915 at Gallipoli Peninsula.

Pte Witts disembarked at Alexandria on 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1915 on HT *Hororata*.

Pte Witts was absorbed into 12<sup>th</sup> L. H. Regt. at Heliopolis on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 1916.

Pte Witts was transferred to Details on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1916. He was transferred to 5<sup>th</sup> Divisional Field Artillery from Heliopolis on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1916 & taken on strength at Moascar with 5<sup>th</sup> D.A.C. (Divisional Artillery Column).

Pte Witts was promoted to the rank of Corporal (Temporary) on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1916 at Ferry Post East then promoted to Corporal the same day,

Corporal Witts was posted to No. 1 Section at Ferry Post on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1916.

Corporal Witts proceeded overseas to join B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force) from Alexandria on 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1916 on HMT *Kinfauns Castle* & disembarked at Marseilles, France on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1916.

Corporal Witts' rank reverted to Gunner at his own request on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1916.

Gunner Witts transferred to 5<sup>th</sup> Division Trench Mortar Brigade on 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1916 & taken on strength the same day.

Gunner Witts was on command at 5<sup>th</sup> D.A.C. on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1916.

Gunner Witts was on leave to England from 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1916 & rejoined from leave on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1917.

Gunner Witts was admitted to 5<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1917 with VD. His attachment to 5<sup>th</sup> D.A.C. ceased on his evacuation to Hospital on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1917. Gunner Witts was transferred to Casualty Clearing Station before being admitted to 51<sup>st</sup> General Hospital on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1917. Gunner Witts was discharged to A.G.B.D. (Australian General Base Depot) at Etaples on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1917.

Gunner Witts rejoined his Unit in France on 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1917.

Gunner Witts was sent to 15<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Ambulance on 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1917 with Scabies. He was discharged to duty on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1917. Gunner Witts rejoined his Unit from Hospital on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1917.

Gunner Witts was marched out to 5<sup>th</sup> Army TMS on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1917 & rejoined his Unit on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1917.

Gunner Witts proceeded on leave from 5<sup>th</sup> Trench Mortar Brigade on 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1917 & rejoined from leave on 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1917.

Gunner Witts was wounded in action on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1917. He was taken to 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Ambulance with gunshot wounds to right hand, left leg & abrasions to his face. He was transferred to 17<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1917 then transferred to 4<sup>th</sup> General Hospital on 19<sup>th</sup> October, 1917. Gunner Witts was invalided to England on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1917 on Hospital Ship *Ville de Lugj* & admitted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Birmingham War Hospital at Northfield on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1917 with a gunshot wound to right leg. He was discharged on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1917 & was to report to Hurdcott, Wiltshire.

Gunner Witts was marched in to No. 3 Command Depot, Hurdcott, Wiltshire on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1917. He was medically classified as B1 A2 (fit for Overseas training camp in three to four weeks) on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1917. Gunner Witts was classified as A3 (date recorded as 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1917 – possibly should be 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1918?) (fit for overseas training camp, to which transferred for hardening, prior to rejoining unit overseas).

Gunner Witts proceeded overseas from Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge Deverill, Wiltshire via Southampton on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1918.

Gunner Witts was marched in to A.G.B.D. (Australian General Base Depot) at Rouelles, France on 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1918. He was marched out to 5<sup>th</sup> Div. Artillery on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1918. He rejoined his Unit on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1918. Gunner Witts was posted to 10<sup>th</sup> Battery on 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1918 & his rank changed to Bombardier to complete Establishment on the same day.

Bombardier Witts was wounded in action (2<sup>nd</sup> occasion) on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1918. He was taken to 15<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Ambulance with a gunshot wound to left leg then transferred to 20<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1918. Bombardier Witts was transferred on Ambulance Train 38 to Rouen on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1918 & admitted to 5<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Rouen on 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1918. Bombardier Witts was invalided to England on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1918 on Hospital Ship *Carisbrook Castle*.

Bombardier Witts was admitted to Kitchener Military Hospital at Brighton on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1918 with a gunshot wound to left leg. He was transferred to 1st Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 1918.

Bombardier Witts was on furlo from 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1918 until 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1918 where he was to report to No. 4 Command Depot.

Bombardier Witts was marched in to No. 4 Command Depot on 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1918.

Bombardier Witts was marched out to Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge Deverill, Wiltshire on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1918.

Bombardier Russell Gordon Witts was sent sick to Group Clearing Hospital at Sutton Veny, Wiltshire on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1918 then transferred & admitted to the Military Hospital at Sutton Veny, Wiltshire on 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1918 with Influenza.

Bombardier Russell Gordon Witts died at 20.15 hrs on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1918 at the Military Hospital, Sutton Veny of Influenza & Pneumonia.

A death for Russell Witts, aged 26, was registered in the December quarter, 1918 in the district of Warminster, Wiltshire.

Bombardier Russell Gordon Witts was buried on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1918 in St. John the Evangelist Churchyard at Sutton Veny - Grave no. 16. From the burial report of Bdr. Witts - *Coffin was good polished Elm with Brass fittings – Deceased was buried with full Military Honours, the coffin draped with the Australian flag being borne to the graveside on a Gun Carriage preceded by a Firing Party. Six of deceased's late Unit comrades supported the Pall. The funeral was attended by One Officer and about 60 N.C.O.'s and Men of the A.I.F. Headquarters A.I.F. Depots in United Kingdom were represented at the funeral. Also in attendance at the funeral were Bombardier Russell Gordon Witts' brothers – Cadet A. E. Witts 3<sup>rd</sup> Batt. A.F.A. & Sgt. E. L. Witts 5<sup>th</sup> D.A.C. A.I.F.*

Russell Gordon Witts requested in his Will dated 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1917 that all his real & personal Estate be left to his mother – Mrs Rachel Witts of Parkes, NSW.

Bombardier Russell Gordon Witts was entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & the Victory Medal. A Memorial Scroll & Memorial Plaque were also sent to Bdr. Witts' father – Mr E. J. Witts (Scroll sent September, 1921 & Plaque sent September, 1922).



R. G. Witts is also remembered on the 1914 – 1918 Roll of Honour located in Parkes Presbyterian Church, NSW.



Roll of Honour Board in Presbyterian Church, Parkes (Photos courtesy of Daniel Greef)

Russell Gordon Witts also has a separate plaque located under the Honour Roll located in Parkes Presbyterian Church, NSW.



**Russell Gordon Witts Plaque in Presbyterian Church, Parkes**

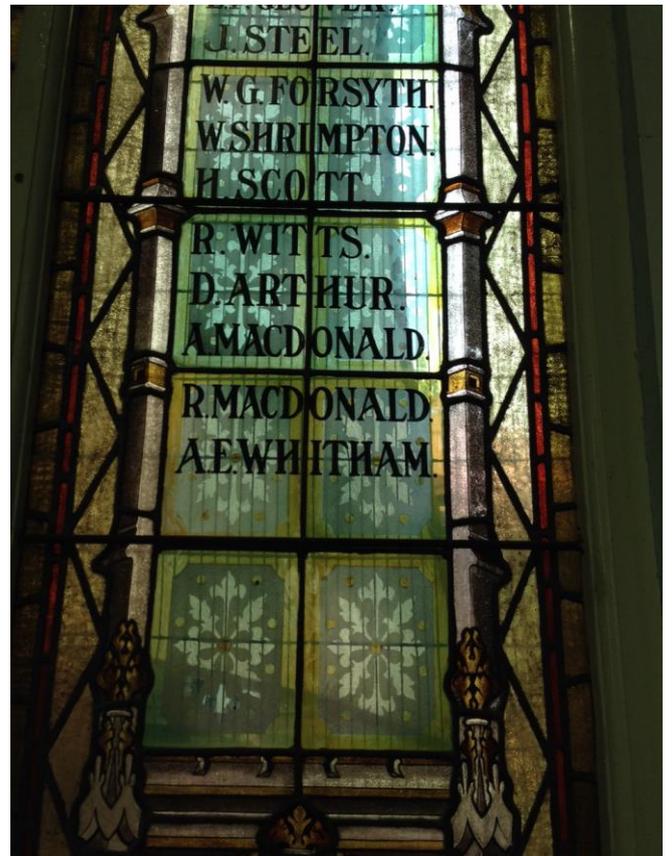
*(Photo courtesy of Daniel Greef)*

R. Witts is also remembered on the Stained Glass Window located in Presbyterian Church, Parkes which is dedicated to the Soldiers of the parish who fell in the Great War 1914-1918 & also 1939-1945.





Stained Glass Window located in Presbyterian Church, Parkes (Photos courtesy of Daniel Greef)



(77 pages of Bombardier Russell Gordon Witts' 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) & National Archives.*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

H12533

### **Bombardier Russell Gordon Witts**

#### [Connected to Bombardier Russell Gordon Witts:](#)

Younger brother – Lieutenant Edric Leigh Witts, 809, 5<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigade. Enlisted 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1915. Embarked for Gallipoli Peninsula 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1915. Wounded in action twice. Returned to Australia November, 1919. Entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & Victory Medal. Died April, 1921 at Rockhampton, Queensland.

Younger brother - Lieutenant Aubrey Elwyn Witts, enlisted 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1914. Embarked for Gallipoli Peninsula 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1915. Returned to Australia from England on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1919. Entitled to 1914/15 Star, British War Medal & Victory Medal. Served in WW2 as Flight Lieutenant with R.A.A.F. Mentioned in Despatches.

## OBITUARY

The Hawkesbury Agricultural College Journal – 1 March, 1919

### Russell G. Witts (1908-9)

It is with great regret we learn of the death from illness of Bombardier Russell G. Witts, Trench Mortar Brigade, on November 2, 1918.

He was a student at the College in 1908-9, and at the end of his course secured his Diploma in Agriculture. Subsequently he engaged in farming and grazing in the Parkes district, till his enlistment in January, 1915. Posted to the 12<sup>th</sup> A.L.H., he volunteered for service in the infantry in order to take part in the fighting in Gallipoli. After the evacuation he transferred to the artillery, and served in France with the Trench Mortars. When recovering from his second wound, he contracted influenza and pneumonia supervening, he passed away in Sutton Veny Military Hospital after two weeks illness. He was 28 years of age, and a son of Mr E. J. Witts, Licensed Surveyor, of Parkes. His two brothers served with him, and together they went almost through the entire campaign. Russell's death occurring only a few days before the signing of the armistice.

The sympathy of the Principal, staff, and Old Boys of 1908-9 goes out to his relatives in their loss.

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## Newspaper Reports

### FOR KING & COUNTRY

#### BOMBARDIER RUSSELL GORDON WITTS

On Thursday last the Rev. C. F. McAlpine received a private cable from Sergeant Edric Witts stating that his eldest brother, Russell, had passed peacefully away and expressing sympathy to their parents from Aubrey and himself. Later news gave the sad information that Bombardier Russell Gordon Witts had died in England on the 3rd November from influenza and pneumonia when he was recovering from wounds. He was 28 years of age and the eldest son of Mr and Mrs E. J. Witts, late of Jumble Plains, and now of Parkes. He enlisted in February, 1915, in the 12th Light Horse Regiment which reinforced the 1st Light Horse on Gallipoli. He served there four months, leaving at the evacuation. Bombardier Witts then joined the Field Artillery and proceeded to France and later was transferred to a Trench Mortar Battery. He was twice wounded in action. His two brothers were with him at the last, Sergeant Edric Witts being in England recovering from wounds and Private Aubrey Witts in an Officers' College. Sergeant Witts sailed with his late brother, Russell, but Aubrey enlisted in August, 1914, and sailed with the 1st. Division and has gone through all fighting without being wounded. The loss is felt even harder by the sorrowing parents from the fact that the death has occurred just at the end of the great battle which their three gallant sons had participated in almost from the outset. The knowledge that he sacrificed his young life in helping in the great cause of liberty and justice will, however, prove a silver lining to the heavy cloud of bereavement. We join Mr and Mrs Witts's wide circle of friends in extending our deep sympathy in the loss of their gallant son.

(*Western Champion*, Parkes, NSW – Thursday 14 November, 1918)

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## THE 450<sup>th</sup> CASUALTY LIST

### DIED, OTHER CAUSES

Bmbdr. R. G. Witts (Parkes)

(*The Farmer and Settler*, Sydney, NSW – Friday 27 December, 1918)

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# PRESBYTERIAN

## UNVEILING HONOR ROLL

On Sunday afternoon last a military service and church parade was held at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Returned soldiers, numbering over 50 assembled in the Square at 2.30 p.m. and headed by the Town Band, and under the command of Captain Roy Stewart, marched to the church, where seats were reserved for them. There was a very large congregation, the Church being filled before the procession arrived there. Extra seating was procured for the aisles, and though porch and vestries were filled, and the steps of the chancel crowded, still many had to stand and a large number could not gain admittance. In all it was estimated that fully 500 were present.

The service was a short and most impressive one, lasting but an hour and ten minutes in all. After the singing of a hymn, prayer and scripture reading, the minister, Rev. C. F. McAlpine, requested Captain Roy Stewart, M.C., to unveil the roll of honor given by Mr and Mrs E. J. Witts and family, in memory of their son and brother, Russell, who died while on active service. Before this was done the minister read a letter received by Mr Witts from a pal of the late Bombardier Witts, from which we take the following extracts: "Russell never thought of himself, but always of the welfare and safety of others. He worked like a Trojan, inspiring with confidence all those who were round about him. He was always at his post and never found wanting. He was never tired and his energy and self-sacrifice saved many a life. I have known him to strip off his clothes to make bandages to bind up the wounded he came across. I have never met so true a man, so real a friend and so good a chum as your son, Russell."

In unveiling the Roll of Honor, Captain Stewart said: "I count it an honor to be asked to unveil this Roll of the men and the nurses who volunteered in their country's service, and especially appreciate being asked by Mr and Mrs Witts to remove the covering of this memorial to their gallant son, Russell Gordon Witts, who after being three times wounded, died in Sutton Veney Hospital. Mr and Mrs Witts gave all their sons in their country's service. They and their sons have done their duty and made their sacrifice, and I now unveil this memorial to my comrade, Russell Gordon Witts, who died for his country."

The Honor Board is of oak with three marble tablets with golden lettering. On the top were the words "For God, King and Country," and beneath them, the emblem of the rising sun. The names inscribed were as follow: - Ashcroft H. W., .....Steel J., Nurse Tomlinson, Witts A.E., Witts R. G., Witts ,E. L., Whitmill L.

The Honor Board also bore the following inscription:-

In loving memory of Russell Gordon Witts, died in Sutton Veney Military Hospital, England, November 2nd, 1918, aged 28 years. An Anzac. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

The organist, Dr. Walker, then played, with great effect that beautiful Scottish lament "The Flowers of the Forest," the congregation standing.

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(*Western Champion*, Parkes, NSW – Thursday 29 May, 1919)

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Bombardier Russell G. Witts has a private headstone as opposed to a CWGC headstone like many others buried in churchyard at Sutton Veny.

Photo of Bombardier Russell G. Witts private headstone in St. John the Evangelist's Churchyard, Sutton Veny, Wiltshire.



*(Photo courtesy of David Milborrow)*



**War Graves at Sutton Veny** *(Photos from CWGC)*

