# Robert Davidson Shaw ANZAC

Robert Davidson Shaw is born in the small coal mining village of Blantyre Scotland. His family are all coal miners. Robert is the 3rd son and 10th of 11 children born to Andrew Shaw and Helen Wood Davidson Shaw. The family live at 45 Hunthill Road, High Blantyre.

I can find no immigration records for Robert but I find a reference to him having migrated when he’s aged 18 so that would make it about 1908/9. I find a reference to him being associated with the Young district in NSW.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This leads me to a Trove search and I find a 1915 reference to Robert being one of four workers on **Mr Billyard Leake’s** Clifford Station from the ‘old country’ who have enlisted in Australia and all have died in the War:[[2]](#footnote-2)



We know that Robert lists himself as labourer, and likely an agricultural labourer, and maybe he’s having a boy’s own adventure as a ‘jackaroo’. Life would certainly be more exciting that down the mines of Blantyre.

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| **The Billyard Leaks and ANZACS**The Billyard Leake family who own Clifford Station is interesting in itself. The money all comes from agricultural heiress Letitia Leake, who marries a NSW solicitor called Charles Billyard, and they merge their names to Billyard Leak. They own Clifford Station among other holdings, including in SA where the fortune originated. They’ve living live in England, when war breaks out. Two of their sons sign up. They soon give over their English Harefield Park Estate for wounded Australians and bring amputee specialists across from Australia etc.[[3]](#footnote-3) Up to 1000 Australians stay there during the war. It’s one of the few places in England that commemorates ANZAC Day, with more than 100 ANZACS buried at the local cemetery. The family donated the house to the govt after the war and it remains a hospital today, known for leading lung and heart transplants.[[4]](#footnote-4)  |

Robert is listed on the Young WWI memorial.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Australian War Memorial notes that his name is projected at the Hall of Memory at Lone Pine about three times a year. [[6]](#footnote-6)

I also find a NSW State Trustees record where it suggests that Robert is associated with **Peak Hill,** a mining town near Parkes in NSW.[[7]](#footnote-7) This is in 1917 several years after he has died. It note he was part of the 1st AIF – but I find in the records that mother doesn’t receive his last effects until 1917 because on his enlistment he put their address but forgot to add Scotland and so they’ve been looking for that street name in Sydney…so this listing here might be when more work was done by the public trustees and they realise this.

Robert is aged 22 and 11 months when he enlists for WWI at Liverpool, Sydney, on the 2 Dec 1914. England had declared war on Germany a few months earlier on 2 August 1914. Lists himself as unmarried and religion Presbyterian. He is assigned to the 2nd reinforcements, 2nd battalion. Robert is 22 when he signs up at Liverpool in Sydney on 2 December 2014, – with the 2nd battalion / 2nd Reinforcement, one of the first raised. <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/RCDIG1067363/large/5368429.JPG>

This is Robert’s ANZAC military file. There are 39 pages to the record – you have to scroll down to see the full page of each.

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=8081344&isAv=N>

You’ll see on page 12 of this military record he seems to have ‘come alive’ a year after he goes Missing in Action (MIA)....but he lists his battalion as the 11th not the 2nd, so maybe that’s a confusion with another Shaw...and they correct it.

On page 14 you’ll see that his mother Helen in Blantyre Scotland doesn’t receive his bible etc until 1917 – there seems to have been some confusion because people don’t realise the street address he gives when signing up is in Scotland, not Sydney…....it’s a bit eerie to see his mother’s Helen’s handwriting on that page when she signs to accept this belongings (I know it’s the same family because the street address (45 Hunthill Road, Blantyre) is the same as the address listed on his mother’s Helen’s death certificate when she dies in 1925).....how must she have felt when she was signing to receive the last effects of her son?

On page 22 they list the last effects of Robert his mother receives: a belt, a cap comforter, a brush, a bible and a silk handkerchief.

Later in the doc you’ll see that his parents Andrew and Helen claim for a pension due to his death but it’s rejected on the grounds they haven’t relied on his wage for a year before he dies (i.e. you had to be a wife I expect).

At the start of the war I can’t imagine he thought it would last long. Many immigrants sign up thinking they might kill two birds with one stone....get a free passage to Europe, and squeeze in a visit to the family while on leave or on the way home....when Robert signs up in December 2014 they really don’t think things will last that long....Britain really only joins the war because Germany announces they’re planning to take Belgium on their way to take France...few people have any idea of the hell and horror of mechanised warfare that is to come.

However, once the boys sail from Australia in February 1915, they realise they’re not sailing to England, but to Egypt for more training, and on to Gallipoli.

Robert lands at Gallipoli on 25 April and just a few weeks later on 2 May he’s reported as MIA, and a Court of Inquiry in March 2016 makes it official that he’s killed in action.

It’s likely that Robert is killed in the battle when the Turks take Lone Pine back from the ANZACS starting in May. (We call it Lone Pine; the Turks call it ‘Bloody Ridge’.) His body is never found....... these are the early days of Gallipoli; not many trenches are dug yet; they’re still just hiding out in the ridges.

Robert’s body is not found and he becomes among the 3268 Australians and 456 New Zealanders with no known grave and the 960 Australians and 252 New Zealanders buried at sea after evacuation through wounds or disease are memorialised and remembered at the Lone Pine Cemetery.

Robert is also listed on the war memorial at his home village of High Blantyre in Scotland. <https://blantyre.biz/blantyres-heroes/high-blantyre-war-memorial/>.

He’s mentioned Australian media in a list of NSW men previously reported as injured as now confirmed dead <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/45349955?searchTerm=private%20R%20shaw>

Robert’s younger brother **Alexander Davidson Shaw** has emigrated to Canada and about 7 months after Robert goes missing in action, Alexander signs up to serve with the Canadian forces. He survives the war but I find possible records of him dying in South Africa after the war (another mining location).

Contributed by Natalia Thompson (nee Cuthbertson).

Robert was my great great great uncle.

1. <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/91649> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/236961635?searchTerm=shaw> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/236960436?searchTerm=billyard%20leake> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-04-23/glencoe-heiress-who-ran-anzac-hospital-in-uk/100055656> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/content/robert-shaw> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1663465>. <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/91649> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-839922264/view?sectionId=nla.obj-840636547&partId=nla.obj-839948186#page/n11/mode/1up> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)