

## SCREECH

James William

Service No: 2395



**PTE. J. W. SCREAIGH.**

Wounded in France. Eldest son of Mr.  
and Mrs. Screaigh.

Courtesy National Library of Australia

## BASIC INFORMATION

Name: James William Screech

Service number: 2395

Date of enlistment: 7/5/1915

Age at Enlistment: 28 years

Civil Occupation: Farm Hand

Medals, Honours, Awards: British War Medal, Victory Medal

Height: 5 Feet 10 ½ inches

Weight: 160 Lbs.

Chest measurement: 34 inches

Complexion: Fresh

Eye Colour: Grey

Hair Colour: Brown to Grey

Father: William John Screech

Mother: Eliza Ann Watson

Siblings: John (b.1887) Eliza Ann (b.1890) George (b.1896) Ivy May (1899)  
Alice Catherine (b.1902) Edward (b.1904) Noel/Noail (b.1908)

## FAMILY HISTORY

James Screech (Screigh/Screaigh/Screagh) was born in England in 1833. A mason by trade, he was sentenced to seven years' transportation for larceny. James boarded the *Pyrenees* and known as convict number 614, arrived in the Swan River Colony in June 1851.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1852, just seven months after his arrival in the colony, James was convicted in the Police Magistrates Court of stealing a waistcoat from the store of Mr Turner in Perth. He was imprisoned for twelve months and received fifty lashes.

In 1857, James married Eliza Hayden/Heyden at York. She was sixteen and the daughter of Sergeant James Hayden, a Pensioner Guard who resided in York from 1853 until his death in 1880.

At the time of the 1859 Census, James and Eliza Screech were living at York in their own home. James' occupation was listed as miller, and the record stated that both he, and Eliza, were literate. They also had an infant son, William John, who was the first of their children to survive to adulthood.

Between 1863 and 1878, James and Eliza had a further six children: Charlotte (b.1863), Mary Ann (b.1865), Lucy (b.1869), James (b.1871), George (b.1874) and Edward (b.1878). All were born in York.

By 1878, James Screech was working for John Henry Monger, probably as a storekeeper. In July, he gave evidence at the trial of William McInnes and George Sheen when they were accused of stealing sandalwood logs from the yard of J.H. Monger.

A week after giving evidence in the trial, James was summoned to court under the Education Act for neglecting his children's education, with Eliza appearing on his behalf.

The school had made allowances to permit their daughter (most likely Lucy who was nine years old) to attend school for only three hours a day, rather than the full day, but she had not attended at all. The court didn't accept Eliza's excuses and fine of five shillings was imposed.

The fine for neglecting his child's education in July followed another fine of five shillings, plus costs of three shillings and sixpence, being imposed on James in June 1878 for using obscene and indecent language within the hearing of the public.

In December of the same year, James was charged with neglecting his service by his employer, John Henry Monger Junior, but the charge was dismissed when Monger did not show up in court to pursue his complaint.

In 1881, he was again found guilty of using obscene and profane language in public with another fine of five shillings, plus costs, being imposed.

James Screech died on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1899 in York. His obituary mentioned his many years spent working for J.H. Monger and noted that he had been the town crier and the sexton at the local cemetery in his later years.

Eliza Screech lived in York for the rest of her life. She had a prominent role in the 1931 town centenary celebrations when she was asked, as the town's oldest resident, to unlock the gate to the newly created Centenary Park and reveal the name of Dale Pathway, to honour Ensign Dale who was the first European to sight the Avon Valley and River in 1831.

There was, however, confusion as to her actual age. News reports of the centenary celebrations all claimed Eliza was ninety-five years old. At the time of her death, two years later, her age was given as ninety-nine, despite being recorded as eighteen on the 1859 Census.

William John Screech, the eldest son of James and Eliza, was born in York in 1859. He married Eliza Ann Watson in Northam in 1885. She was the daughter of Catherine McNamara and William Watson. William was a convict who had arrived on the second voyage of the *Pyrenees* in 1853, and Catherine was the daughter of James McNamara, an Enrolled Pensioner Guard. Eliza was the fourth of his eleven children.

Little is known of William and Eliza's early years together but, in 1896, William was recorded as playing cricket (with some of his wife's brothers) for the Daudabin team. Daudabin was a small farming location close to both Jennapullen and Southern Brook. This suggests he may have been working in the area in which William Watson, his father-in-law, had been established for more than a decade.

In June 1897, the family was living in the Northam or Meckering area when their son, John, won a race at a sports meet held as part of the celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The schools involved in the sports meet were Northam, Meckering and Parkerville, so John would have been attending school at either Northam or Meckering. In 1917, John tried to enlist but was rejected.

In 1903, William was listed on the electoral roll as residing in Meckering, where he was probably working as a farm manager for Joseph Garibaldi (Garry) Dempster. William continued to work for Dempster until 1906, when he announced his intention to build a home in the township. The business relationship between Dempster and William continued, as evidenced by a 1908 notice for the sale of six draught horses which advised potential buyers to contact either J.G. Dempster in Northam or W. Screech in Meckering.

William was also a keen cricketer, playing for many years with the Meckering Cricket Club in the local districts' competition. He was also involved with the Meckering Golf Club.

On January 16<sup>th</sup> 1926, Catherine Screech died suddenly at her home. She was fifty-nine. James died three months later, on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1926.

## Life Story

James William Screech was born in Northam in 1886, but little is known of his early life. Between 1906 and 1910, he was a member of the Meckering Cricket Club and, in 1907, was charged with working a horse with sore shoulders at Grass Valley. James appeared at the Northam Police Court, where he was fined eight pounds with two shillings' costs.

From 1910, James was listed on the Meckering Electoral Roll as a labourer until the time of his enlistment. However, it is likely he did this to avoid having to frequently change his address while he was moving around from farm to farm, doing contract farm labouring work. At the time of his enlistment, in May 1916, James gave his address as "Wilberforce, Woodside" via York. This would have been his actual current address, as he needed to receive any correspondence from the Army as quickly as possible.

"Wilberforce" and "Woodside" were owned by Edward Hamersley Junior who inherited them from his father, Edward Hamersley Senior, after his father's death in 1874.

James enlisted as a Private on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1916. He left Fremantle aboard the *Port Melbourne* on the 28<sup>th</sup> October and, on the 29<sup>th</sup> December, marched in to the 11<sup>th</sup> Training Battalion at Durrington in the U.K.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> February 1917, James proceeded overseas to France, where he was Taken on Strength with the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> April, James spent time at the Divisional Rest Station suffering from scabies before re-joining his unit in the Field on the 20<sup>th</sup> April.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> June, while the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was engaged in the Battle of Messines, James was Wounded in Action. He was returned to Base by barge before being transferred to England and admitted to the Devonport Military Hospital, on the 19<sup>th</sup> June, with a severe abdominal wound.

James was marched in to the No.2 Command Depot on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July before transferring to the No.1 Command Depot on the 28<sup>th</sup> in preparation for a return overseas. However, on the 9<sup>th</sup> August, he returned to hospital to receive treatment for boils.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> September, James was marched in to the Overseas Training Brigade to prepare for his return to France. Only a month later, he was admitted to the Sutton Veny Military Hospital with a sprained knee. Discharged on the 31<sup>st</sup> October, James returned to the Overseas Training Brigade at Longbridge Deverill, in Wiltshire, before proceeding overseas to France on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1917.

James re-joined his unit in the Field on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November, where he remained until he was admitted, on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1918, to the 10<sup>th</sup> Australian Field Ambulance suffering from nephritis (inflammation of the kidneys). Reported to be “dangerously ill,” James was transferred to the 4<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Camiers, in France, before being invalided back to England. He was admitted to Gravlingwell War Hospital and diagnosed with severe nephritis.

James Screech died on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1918. The cause of death was noted as suppurative nephritis and purulent pericarditis. He was buried in Chichester Cemetery with a military funeral.

According to information in James’ Service Record:

*...The coffin was draped with the Union Jack, and surmounted by two beautiful wreaths, which were sent by the Hospital patients and nursing staff. Firing party and bugler were present...Several of the Nursing Staff and a party of about 20 Australians (patients in the Graylingwell Military Hospital) followed the remains to the cemetery.*



## Acknowledgements

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## References

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