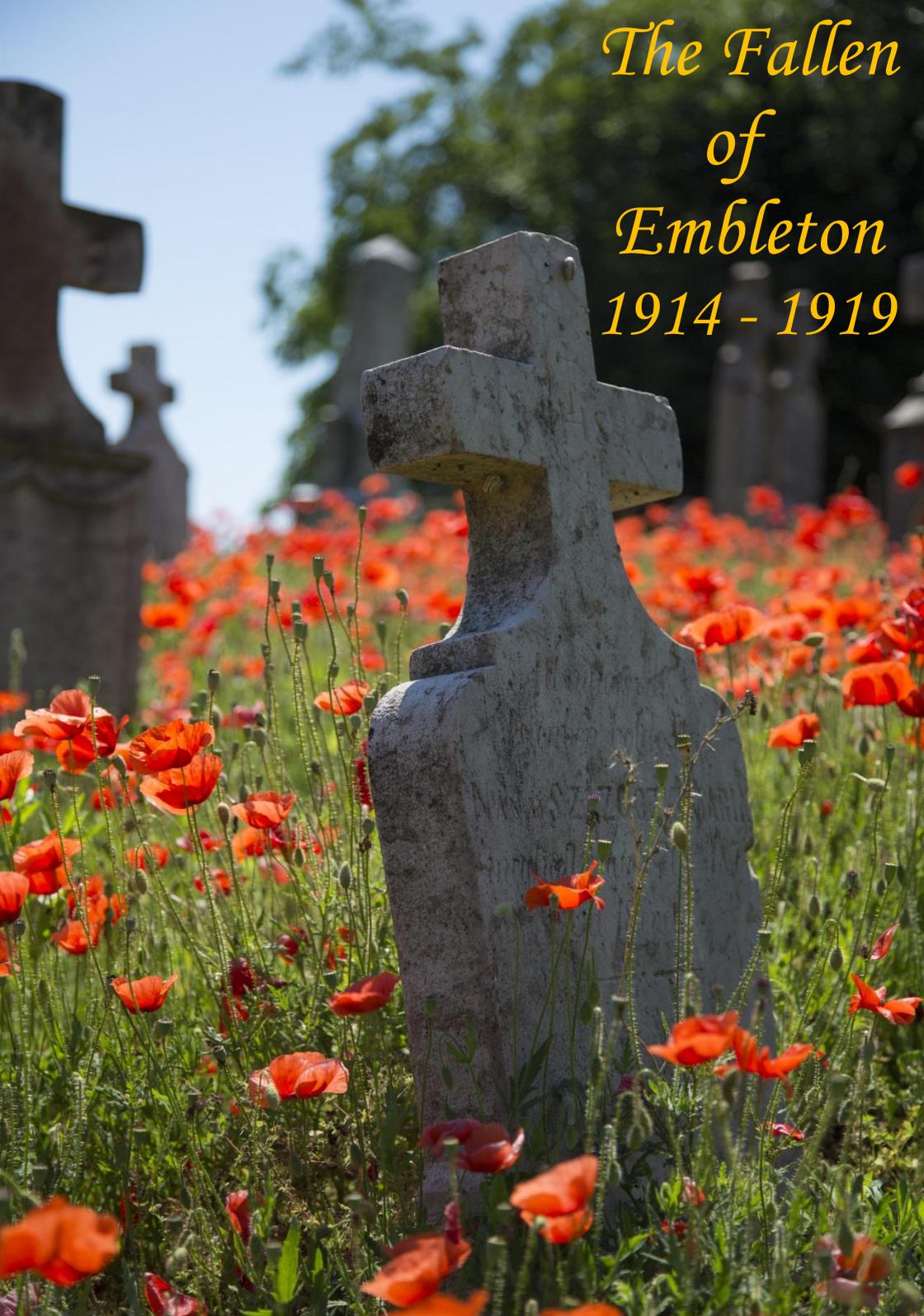


*The Fallen  
of  
Embleton  
1914 - 1919*





# *The Fallen of Embleton*

*1914 – 1919*

*A tribute to the men of Embleton*

*who fell in the Great War*

*Written and researched by*

*Terry Howells*

*Mary Kibble*

*Monica Cornall*

## Names on Memorials

NAME	COMMEMORATED	BORN	LIVED IN
Thomas Appleby	Unknown	4.10.1878 Embleton	Wolverhampton
Alfred Barrs	Spitalford War Memorial	1874 Rowley Regis Staffordshire	Embleton
David W Cowe	Spitalford War Memorial & School Board	1893 Christon Bank	Christon Bank
Oswin Creighton	Church	10.6.1883 Embleton	London
Robert Dickinson	School Board	1892 Embleton	Christon Bank
Arthur J Douglas	Spitalford War Memorial, School Board, U.R.C. Tray	3.1.1899 Christon Bank	Christon Bank
John Grey	School Board	6.9.1897 Newton Barns	Ellingham
William J.M.Humble	Spitalford War Memorial & School Board	1895 Embleton	Embleton
John Jeffery	School Board	1891 Embleton	Embleton
John Luke	Spitalford War Memorial & School Board	1894 Embleton	Embleton
Herbert Luke	Spitalford War Memorial & School Board	1890 Embleton	Christon Bank
John McDougal	Spitalford War Memorial, School Board & Amble War Memorial	24.5.1891 Dunstan Steads	Amble
Peter McDougal	Spitalford War Memorial & School Board	1894 Embleton	Embleton
Robert W. McLaren	Spitalford War Memorial & School Board	14.12.1898 Embleton	Embleton
Ralph Robinson	Spitalford War Memorial	1885 Longhoughton	Embleton
James C. Roxby	Spitalford War Memorial, School Board & St Giles Cathedral Edinburgh	1895 Embleton	Embleton
Thomas Straffen	Spitalford War Memorial & School Board	1896 Brunton	Brunton
George E.Wade	Spitalford War Memorial, School Board, U.R.C. Tray	1896 Embleton	Embleton
David Welsh	Spitalford War Memorial, School Board & Chatham Naval Memorial	20.8.1882 South Charlton	Falldon
William H.Winstanley	School Board	7.6.1889 Oystermouth Glamorganshire	Newton on the Sea
David Woodcock	School Board	27.4.1898 Craster	Embleton
William Cole/Grey	Spitalford Cemetery	1877 Durham	York

Names in blue are on Embleton church memorial board

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## Introduction

They called it The Great War, the war to end all wars – World War 1 which began on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 and was to last for five long, terrible years. Millions died in horrific conditions – gassed, blown to bits by hostile fire, sucked down by rain-sodden mud and much, much more.

Among those who perished were a few men from our own area who are commemorated on the Embleton War Memorial in Spitalford Cemetery, on the Embleton School Honours Board, on a tray which belonged to the URC church Embleton and in Holy Trinity Church Embleton.

This book seeks to describe the backgrounds and lives of these men, in as far as the authors are able, and to trace what happened to them after they enlisted, the battles they engaged in, how and where they met their end and their final resting places.

Although the major Embleton War Memorial at Spitalford is dedicated to the men of the ecclesiastical Parish of Embleton as it was after the War, it was decided to restrict this book to commemorate men who were born or lived in the local government Parish of Embleton as it is now (basically the villages of Embleton and Christon Bank) plus others closely associated with the Parish through attending the Vincent Edwards school in Embleton, or being buried in Embleton cemetery.

### **Explanatory notes on terms used in the book:-**

#### Derby (Group) Scheme

In spring 1915 enlistments had averaged 100,000 men per month, but this could not be sustained. The upper age limit was raised from 38 to 40 in May 1915 in an effort to keep the numbers up, but it became clear that voluntary recruitment was not going to provide the numbers of men required. The government passed the National Registration Act on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1915 as a step towards stimulating recruitment. All those between 15 and 65, who were not already in the military were obliged to register. This showed there

were almost 5 million males of military age who were not in the forces, although 1.6m were in highly skilled jobs and were therefore protected from enlistment. As a result the so called Derby Scheme was introduced with the aim of raising the number of enlistments. Men aged 18 to 40 were informed that under the scheme they could continue to enlist voluntarily or attest with an obligation to come if called up later on. The War Office notified the public that voluntary enlistment would soon cease and that the last day of registration would be 15<sup>th</sup> December 1915.

Men who attested under the Derby Scheme and were accepted for service were paid a day's army pay for the day they attested; were given a grey armband with a red crown as a sign that they had so volunteered; were transferred into Section B Army Reserve; and were sent back to their homes and jobs until they were called up.

Only 2.5 million men came forward under the scheme and it was dubbed a failure.



## Medals

There are three common medals that were awarded during the war. The most frequent combinations are "trios" and "pairs". Trios are made up of one or other of the 1914 or 1914-15 Stars, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. The three medals were sometimes irreverently referred to as *'Pip, Squeak & Wilfred'*. Pairs are generally for servicemen who joined the war after 1915, and are the British War Medal with the Victory Medal, colloquially known as the *'Mutt and Jeff'* pair.

The British War Medal was approved in 1919, for issue to officers and men of British and Imperial forces who had rendered service between 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914 and 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918.

The Victory Medal was awarded to anyone mobilised in any service and entering a theatre of war between 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914 and 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918. The medal was issued to all those who received the 1914 Star or the 1914-1915 Star, and to most of those who were awarded the British War Medal - it was never awarded singly.

The 1914 Star (colloquially known as the Mons Star) was approved in 1917, for issue to officers and men of British forces who served in France or Belgium between 5<sup>th</sup> August and midnight 22<sup>nd</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1914.

The 1914 – 1915 Star was approved in 1918, for issue to officers and men of British and Imperial forces who served in any theatre of the War between 5<sup>th</sup> August 1914 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 1915.

All the 'Embleton' men received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Some received the 1914 – 1915 Star as noted in the book.

## Salient

A salient is a battlefield feature that projects into enemy territory. The salient is surrounded by the enemy on three sides, making the troops occupying the salient vulnerable.

## Service Records

Whilst all the men who took part in the war had a service record which included both physical and service details, over 60% of

these were destroyed by a bomb during the Second World War. In the case of the men included in this book, only the service record of William Winstanley survives

### War Diaries

British Army War Diaries were handwritten or typed documents providing a daily account of the activities of a British, Dominion, Indian or Colonial Army unit on active service. It was the responsibility of the commander of every military unit – from the level of a battalion to a division – to ensure that the War Diary was kept up to date. It was to be written up each evening by a specific junior officer and signed off by a senior officer. The diaries were often written under very difficult circumstances by exhausted men, and so the quality and quantity of information included varies considerably.

A summary of the War Diary was compiled by month for every month that the unit was on active service.

### Wills

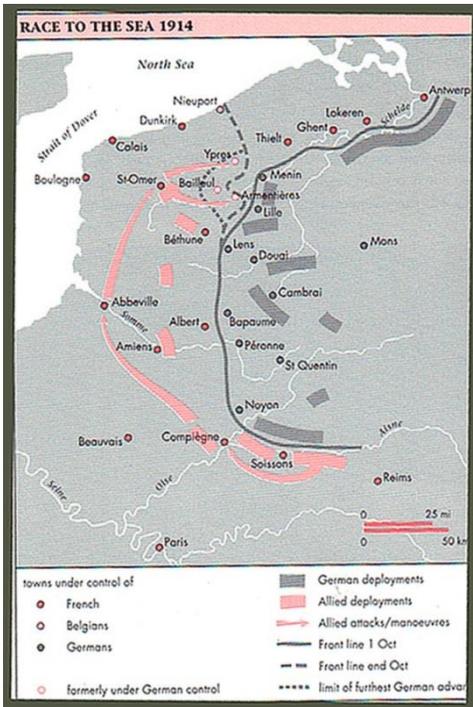
The four Wills mentioned in this book are really messages from the grave because they were never received by those for whom they were intended. Recently Wills made by servicemen who died in the First World War have been released after being retained by officialdom and stored away for nearly 100 years. The Wills, made in haste as troops went to the front, show that no legal niceties were observed and no witness was required to the signing.



## Chapter 1

## 1914

The war started as a result of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria by a Serb nationalist in Sarajevo on June 28<sup>th</sup>. On July 23<sup>rd</sup> Austria responded to this perceived challenge to the rule of Austria over Serbia by issuing an ultimatum. This was ignored due to its unreasonable demands, leading to Austria declaring war on Serbia on July 28<sup>th</sup>. On July 30<sup>th</sup> Russia mobilized in support of Serbia and two days later Germany declared war on Russia in support of Austria. On August 2<sup>nd</sup> Germany issued an ultimatum to Belgium demanding passage for its troops to attack France which had an alliance with Russia. This passage was refused and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August Germany invaded Belgium, Luxemburg and France. On the 4<sup>th</sup> August Britain declared war on Germany in response to its failure to withdraw from Belgium.



The German Schlieffen Plan was launched on August 3<sup>rd</sup> when five armies attacked the small Belgian army. By August 16<sup>th</sup> Liege had fallen and 1.2 million German troops were in Belgium pushing the defenders towards Antwerp and Brussels which fell on August 20<sup>th</sup>. The Germans were now faced by a single French army which included the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) at its western end near Mons. The BEF consisting of only regular troops amounted to a mere 150,000 men. On August 23<sup>rd</sup> the German army was checked by the BEF at Mons and then again at Le Cateau three days later.

By early September the Allies had formed a new front line east of Paris just south of the river Marne. From here the Allies, including the BEF, attacked a German army that was exhausted and over-extended and drove them back to the high ground above the river Aisne.

Deadlock had now set in from south of the Aisne river to the Swiss border. This resulted in 'The race for the sea' in which both the Allies and the Germans mounted a series of outflanking manoeuvres with the aim of getting into the enemy's rear area to cut its lines of communication. Both sides suffered from exhaustion and lack of equipment, and the strength of the defences meant that all these manoeuvres failed and by October the line of trenches had spread north to reach the coast at Nieuport in Belgium. The front was now bogged down in trench warfare from the Channel to the Swiss border.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> October the Germans attacked around Ypres in Belgium attempting to reach the Channel at Calais and Dunkirk but, despite being outgunned and outmanned and suffering heavy casualties, the BEF repulsed the attack. In the east the French attacked in Champagne and the Vosges but this too failed. Despite the famous Christmas truce of 1914, which occurred in some sectors, fighting continued elsewhere in appalling weather conditions but the stalemate was not broken.

The war on land quickly spread to the sea, with the first major battle on the water occurring on August 28, 1914, in a corner of the North Sea known as Heligoland Bight. The Bight, a partly enclosed patch of water on the north coast of Germany, sheltered several German naval bases and offered a good position from which Germany could strike out at Britain. However, the cautious German High Seas Fleet rarely sailed far from port. Eager for a fight, the British conceived a plan to bait the Germans into the open sea, where they would be vulnerable. Under the plan, a small group of British ships would venture into the bight until spotted by German patrols and would then turn and flee out to sea, where a larger British force would be waiting. For the first couple of hours, German ships slipped in and out of a thick fog bank to fire on the British

ships. In time, however, the Germans were lured into open water. After a battle that lasted nearly eight hours, Germany lost three cruisers and 1,200 men, while Britain lost only thirty-five sailors and not a single ship.

In September there occurred another sea battle but this time Germany was victorious and amongst those to die was David Welsh who had attended Embleton School.

## DAVID FERGUSON WELSH



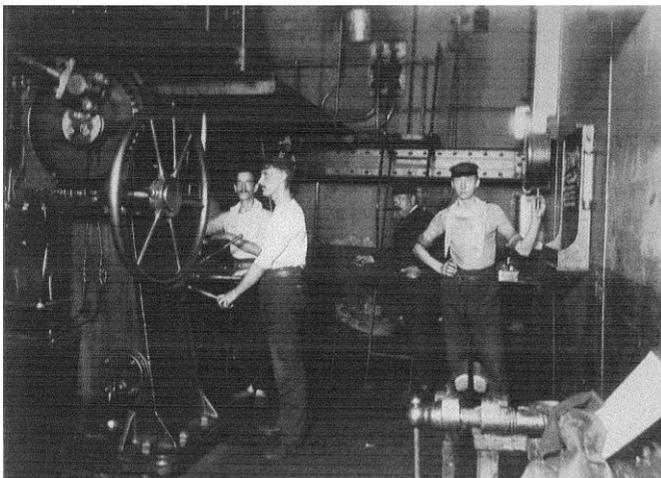
David Ferguson Welsh was born in South Charlton on the 20th August 1882. His father Andrew Scott Welsh was born in Rennington and worked as the Relieving Officer and Registrar of Births and Deaths. His mother Margaret (nee Fairbairn) was born in Embleton. They married in Embleton in 1875. David had three brothers Thomas (b

1878), Robert (b 1880) and Andrew (b 1881). At the 1901 census David (aged 18) was lodging at 93 Redheugh Road, Gateshead and was employed as an engine fitter apprentice. The family home was at Fallodon Mill, certainly until 1915, and the above photograph of David, his brothers and parents was taken outside the front door. David is second from the left. In 1914 David was living at 8 William Street West, North Shields and was well known in the town. He was a member of the St. Oswin Lodge of the Freemasons and was a marine engineer holding an extra first-class certificate.

He was called up to join the Navy (R.N.R. - 1198EA) and enrolled on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1914, joining H.M.S. Aboukir on September 5<sup>th</sup> as an engine room artificer. He was described as five feet nine and three quarters inches tall with dark eyes and a fresh complexion.

H.M.S. Aboukir was torpedoed and sunk by German submarines in the North Sea off Holland during one of the most disastrous naval actions of the war.

During the early months of the war the Navy maintained a patrol of old Cressy-class armoured cruisers in the North Sea. There was opposition to this from many senior officers on the grounds that the ships were very vulnerable to a raid by modern German surface ships and the patrol was nick-named the "live bait squadron". The Admiralty maintained the patrol on the grounds that destroyers were not able to operate in the frequent bad weather and that there were insufficient modern light cruisers available.



**David (in profile) in an engine room.**

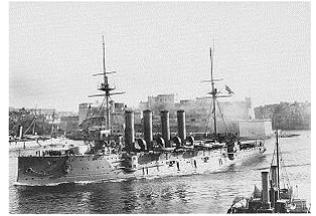
In the early hours of September 20<sup>th</sup> 1914 the cruisers H.M.S. Euryalus, H.M.S. Aboukir, H.M.S. Hogue and H.M.S. Cressy were preparing to go on patrol from Harwich under Rear Admiral Christian in Euryalus. Normally the patrol was under command

of Rear Admiral Campbell in H.M.S. Bacchantes but he was absent so Christian helped fill the gap, although he had other duties. The weather was too bad for destroyers to be at sea and unfortunately Euryalus had to drop out due to lack of coal and weather damage to her wireless. Rear Admiral Christian had to remain with his ship rather than transfer to another ship as the weather was too bad to transfer. He delegated command to Captain Drummond in Aboukir although he did not make it clear that Drummond had the authority to order the destroyers to sea if the weather improved, which it did towards the end of September 21<sup>st</sup>.

Early on September 22<sup>nd</sup> the German submarine U9 sighted the Cressy, Aboukir and Hogue steaming at 10 knots without zig-zagging. Although the patrols were supposed to maintain 12-13 knots and zig-zag, the old cruisers were unable to maintain that speed and the zig-zagging order was widely ignored as there had been no submarines sighted in the area during the war.

U9 manoeuvred to attack and at about 6.25 a.m fired a single torpedo at Aboukir, which stuck her on her port side. Aboukir rapidly suffered heavy flooding and developed a 20 degree list and lost engine power. It was soon clear that she was a lost cause and Captain Drummond ordered her to be abandoned, although only one lifeboat had survived the attack so most crew had to jump into the sea. At first Drummond thought that Aboukir had been mined and signalled the other two cruisers to close and assist but he soon realised that it was a torpedo attack and ordered the other cruisers away, but too late.

As Aboukir (right) rolled over and sank, half an hour after being attacked, U9 fired two torpedoes at H.M.S. Hogue that hit her amidships and rapidly flooded her engine room. Captain Nicholson of Hogue had stopped the ship to lower boats to rescue the crew of Aboukir, thinking that as he was the other side of Aboukir from U9 he would be safe. Unfortunately U9

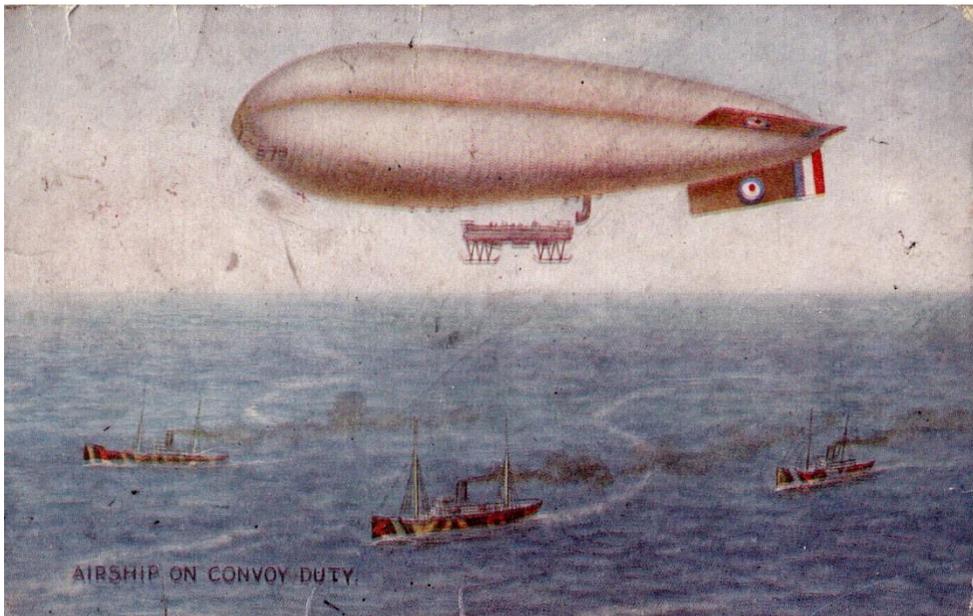


had maneuvered around Aboukir and attacked Hogue from a range of only 300 yards (274 meters). It only took Hogue ten minutes to sink as U9 headed for H.M.S. Cressy which had also stopped to lower boats, but got underway on sighting a periscope. At about 7.20 a.m. however U9 fired two torpedoes, one of which just missed but the other hit Cressy on her starboard side.

The damage to Cressy was not fatal but U9 turned round and fired her last torpedo which hit Cressy, sinking her within a quarter of an hour. Survivors were picked up by several nearby merchant ships and trawlers before the Harwich force of light cruisers and destroyers arrived. In all 837 men were rescued but 1459 died, many of whom were reservists or cadets.

A court of inquiry was set up and found that some blame was attributable to all of the senior officers involved - Captain Drummond for not zig-zagging and for not calling for destroyers, Rear Admiral Christian was criticised for not making it clear to Drummond that he could summon the destroyers and Rear Admiral Campbell for not being present and for a very poor performance at the inquiry, at which he stated that he did not know what the purpose of his command was. The bulk of the blame was directed at the Admiralty for persisting with a patrol that was dangerous and of limited value against the advice of senior sea-going officers.

David's body was not recovered and he is commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial. He was awarded the 1914-15 Star.



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## Chapter 2

## 1915

The failure of all the offensive plans during 1914 meant that strategies had to be revised. The war was now being fought in circumstances that had not been foreseen and the difficulties in obtaining a decisive victory or even creating mobility at the front had become apparent.

The Germans were prepared to stay on the defensive in the west until they had beaten the Russians in the east. This meant that 1915 was a year of unrelenting Allied attacks except for a small German offensive in April. The BEF attacked at Neuve Chapelle on March 10<sup>th</sup> and the battle lasted until March 13<sup>th</sup> with 12,000 British casualties but the main objective, the Aubers Ridge, was not taken. On May 9<sup>th</sup> the French attacked Vimy Ridge in a battle that staggered on until mid-June with little success but cost 100,000 French casualties. It was rapidly becoming clear to the military high command that new fighting methods were needed to cope with the conditions being encountered and that some sort of war of attrition, to soak up the enemy's human and material resources, would be required if he was to be defeated.

Consequently the Allied attacks in September, whilst seeking to break through the German lines, were viewed as part of the on-going development of fighting methods and of 'using up' German resources. The French attacked, and briefly took, Vimy Ridge but were halted and driven back by strong enemy defensive positions. The BEF were initially successful and occupied the German front line over a 4 mile stretch, including the village of Loos, but the dreadful decision of Sir John French to keep his reserves 16 miles behind the attack meant that, by the time they reached the front, the British had missed their opportunity. Two more days of ill-prepared attacks merely added to the British casualty list which by the end amounted to over 60,000 men. The overall casualty list, 250,000 French, 140,000 Germans plus the British 60,000 showed the Allies that while they had been educating themselves in the art

of attack, the enemy had been working to perfect the art of defence. It was now clear to everybody that it was going to take a considerable time to break the trench deadlock.

During all this time men were constantly being trained and shipped from Britain to the Continent as replacements and reinforcements. In August, whilst the Embleton Parish Council were convening a public meeting to *express the determination of the British Nation together with our allies for the persecution of the war to a successful and victorious conclusion*, the second 'Embleton' man died.

## JOHN ANDERSON McDUGAL



John McDougal was born in Dunstan Steads in 1891 and christened in Embleton village church on the 25<sup>th</sup> May of that year. He was the son of John Anderson McDougal, a carpenter/joiner born in North Sunderland and his wife Mary (nee Mather) who was born in Embleton. John and Mary were married in the second quarter of 1891 in Alnwick District (probably Embleton).

In 1901, when the young John was 9, he was living with his mother, father, younger brother Peter (7) and four year old sister Effie Mary in Blue Row Embleton. Blue Row is now known as Sunny Brae. The 1911 Census shows that the family had by now moved to live in two rooms at Embleton South Farm. John, the father now 60, was working as a joiner but the two brothers were stone breakers in Embleton Quarry. Effie was still a pupil at school.

John attended the Vincent Edwards Church School in Embleton, certainly until he was 12 but more probably until 14, which was the normal leaving age. He appears to have been reasonably well behaved, his worst misdemeanour being 'going off to shipwreck without permission' in January 1903. For this he received 4 'cuts' with the cane. He was in good company because nineteen other boys went with him and were similarly punished.

It is known that John joined the 23<sup>rd</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers enlisting in Alnwick. The 23<sup>rd</sup> battalion was to be known as the 4<sup>th</sup> Tyneside Scottish. This 4<sup>th</sup> battalion was officially authorised by the War Office on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1914 but recruiting had continued after the completion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion on the 11th November, so as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> November 400 men had already been carried over and by the 17<sup>th</sup> November it was announced the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion and therefore the Tyneside Scottish Brigade was complete. John's service number 23/100 shows he was one of those carried over into the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion when the 3<sup>rd</sup> was complete.

In mid-1915 the Tyneside Scottish 4<sup>th</sup> battalion (but not John), which had been training in Alnwick, moved to Ripon to join the other three Tyneside Scottish Battalions as part of the 34<sup>th</sup> Division which was to ship to France in January 1916. It has been established that in July 1915 John transferred to the 29<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) battalion which was formed in Alnwick from depot companies of Tyneside Scottish battalions. Basically it was made up of soldiers considered unfit for operations on the Western Front. The 29<sup>th</sup> battalion remained in Alnwick throughout 1915, carrying out a training programme for new recruits. Once again it is impossible to define John's movements because the next that is known of him is that he is in the City Sanatorium on Hedon Road, Hull. This was an Infectious Diseases Sanatorium built to cope with an outbreak of Scarlet Fever in 1884.



John died on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1915 from Scarlet Fever. How or why he arrived in Hull is unknown. The Hull Daily Mail of September 1<sup>st</sup> 1915 notes 'Military honours were accorded yesterday to the remains of Private John Anderson McDougal (22) (sic) of the 29<sup>th</sup> Reserve Northumberland Fusiliers (Tyneside Scottish) who died at the Sanatorium. The internment

took place at the Hedon Road Cemetery. A detachment of the military was present and at the graveside a firing party fired volleys and the Last Post sounded'.

John's next of kin were recorded as living at 31 Scott Street, Amble and he is also commemorated on Amble War Memorial.



## Chapter 3

## 1916

This was the year when the war of attrition began to bite deep. The long battles resulted in huge numbers of casualties in return for relatively little gain of ground. The massive battles of Verdun and the Somme are now considered to have been completely futile.

In December 1915 representatives of the Allies (France, Britain, Russia and Italy) met to discuss their strategy for the coming year. It was agreed to co-ordinate their offensives in that a Franco/British attack on the Somme was to be supported by an Italian push on the Isonzo and a major Russian attack into East Prussia. Time was needed by all the armies to train and move troops and to build up supplies of munitions etc. and thus it was decided to commence the offensive in the middle of 1916. Unfortunately, before this plan could be implemented the Germans, being convinced that the Russians posed little threat to them in the east, felt free to attack in the west.

They chose to attack Verdun on February 21st, not because of its military significance, but because they believed the French would fight to protect it to the bitter end. This served their plan for an attritional battle aimed at 'bleeding the French white'. Although the Germans achieved initial success, the French fought much harder than had been expected, slowed down and then stopped the advance short of Verdun. By June it was clear to the Germans that things had gone wrong and they were losing as many men as the French. With the impending attack on the Somme (of which they were aware) the Germans were forced to scale down efforts around Verdun, having lost over 430,000 men against the French losses of 540,000.

Whilst the battle for Verdun was unfolding, smaller engagements involving British troops were taking place further to the west. In one such battle Ralph Robinson was the third 'Embleton' man to die.

## RALPH ROBINSON

Ralph was born in late 1885 in Longhoughton. His father was John Robinson who was born in Rennington and worked as a carter at the whinstone quarry in Embleton. His mother, Margaret Ann (nee Oliver), was born in Middleton, Wooler. The couple were married in Alnwick District (possibly in Embleton) in the last quarter of 1871. Ralph had four brothers, Henry E. (b 1875), James Oliver (b 1882), John Andrew (b 1887) and Leonard Edmunson (b 1889), and three sisters, Jane (b 1872 at Stamford), Sarah (b 1877 Longhoughton) and Elizabeth (b 1892 Rennington). The family lived in the Kiln Houses at Little Houghton in 1891, at Golden Moor Denwick in 1901, at Embleton South Farm (in three rooms) from sometime before 1911 until 1915 and at Jubilee Cottage in Embleton in 1916. In 1911 Ralph was working as a quarryman in Embleton.

Ralph enlisted in Alnwick on July 20<sup>th</sup> 1915 and joined the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers (No. 23198). The 1<sup>st</sup> battalion landed in France at Le Havre on the 14<sup>th</sup> August 1914 and became part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. As Ralph was not entitled to receive the 1914-15 Star he didn't arrive in France until after January 1<sup>st</sup> 1916. It is likely that his first action was the battle of St Eloi, a village about five kilometres south of the town of Ypres situated on the corner of a salient, which expanded from a base of 600 yards wide and penetrated 100 yards northward into the British lines. The sector had been the scene of vicious fighting throughout the war due to the slightly elevated land called the "Mound", which commanded a view of the entire area.

By the end of 1915 mine warfare had reached a stage where it was regarded by both sides as an important factor in the trench warfare which now characterized hostilities on the Western Front. Whole sections of the line between Givenchy and Ypres had become the scene of extensive mining operations. To offset the enemy's aggressive activity near the surface, British miners had, in August 1915, begun sinking three shafts 50 to 60 feet deep, running galleries forward well below the sand. The tunnelling was carried out very quietly and the spoil from the tunnels was disposed of so carefully that the enemy's suspicions were not aroused. Early in March 1916 they were under the German positions. On a front of 600 yards, six mines (numbered consecutively from west to east), with charges ranging from 600 to 31,000 pounds of ammonal, were in readiness to initiate the British attack by blowing up The Mound and the enemy's front-line trenches. Staff were confident that the outcome of the

mining would ensure the success of the operation, even if the approaching spring weather should fail to improve the deplorable conditions of sticky mud and water-filled shell holes and craters through which the infantry must assault. Capture of the objectives would reverse the salient by securing a new line which would thrust south into the German position to as much as 300 yards from the existing British trenches.

Promptly at 4:15 a.m. on the 27<sup>th</sup> March an opening salvo from 41 guns and howitzers up to 9.2 inches in calibre rained down on the enemy, and the six mines were blown at intervals of a few seconds. The terrific explosions shook the earth "like the sudden outburst of a volcano" and the colossal shower of yellow smoke and debris that leapt into the heavens could be seen from miles away and the explosions heard in Folkstone. The eruption blotted out old landmarks and collapsed trenches on both sides like packs of cards. Two front line companies of the 18<sup>th</sup> Reserve Jager Battalion were annihilated by the explosion of Mines 2, 3, 4 and 5 (Mine 3 turning what was left of The Mound into a gaping hole). Mines 1 and 6, being short of the German positions, formed craters in no man's land, which were later to serve as strong points of defence on either flank. While the last clods of earth were falling, the British 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade (including the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers), whose troops had spent much of the night lying prone in the chilling mud, assaulted with two battalions. In less than half an hour the right-hand unit had captured the first three craters, and 200 yards beyond had carried its objective, the German third line. Although the Northumberland



Fusiliers' initial advance went well, the general attack eventually became bogged down in the waterlogged landscape. One of these 1916 craters (No. 6) can be seen today, although it is on private land (left).

Ralph was killed in action during 27<sup>th</sup> March 1916. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Ypres Menin Gate Panels 8 and 12. He left a battlefield Will leaving all

his property to his mother.

The abridged War Diary for the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers for this attack reports:-

**March 26<sup>th</sup>**

*Battalion left Reninghelst at 7 p.m. by motor bus to R.E. Depot, marched from there to Voornezeele where Lewis guns which*

had been sent on were picked up by companies W, X and Z. Companies proceeded to the rendezvous. The battalion was drawn up in 4 lines close behind each other. All bombing squads, Lewis gunners, carrying parties etc. were paraded with the line which was to occupy that part of the enemy's line, which was their objective. The several lines were allocated their objectives with No. 3 Line, 'X' Company to clear all communications trenches and dug-outs in them and reinforce the front line with half a company. The other one and a half companies in front of the craters.

**27<sup>th</sup> 4.15 a.m.** Stores were drawn, wire cut & the battalion was ready to advance at 3.55 a.m. The mines were exploded at 4.15 a.m. and the battalion, without waiting the half minute indicated in orders, advanced in quick time. The parapet was crossed by the ladder, as arranged, successfully and without checking the advance. The first obstacle met was the enemy's wire, which was untouched by the mine explosions and our artillery fire. It was strong barbed concertina and plain concertina mixed. However nothing could stop the impetus of the advance and the men were over before the enemy's artillery had cropped onto this point. The enemy heavily barraged our front parapet 40 seconds after the battalion had passed over.

Immediately the mines were fired the enemy put up a red light from his second line. Up to this point no opposition had been met, but then an enemy machine gun opened fire, firing wildly and to our left. The battalion was at this time crossing the wire. Lt. Holmes and one man with great promptitude rushed out and put the gun out of action. Crossing the hostile wire caused the various lines to become mixed. However men who had lost their places were sorted out by the Commander and sent towards their objectives. The advance was carried out with great rapidity and the objective was gained by 4.45 a.m.

**4.45 a.m.** The rapidity of the movement entirely upset the enemy and little resistance was offered. The enemy, surrounded on all sides, surrendered in small parties.

**6 a.m.** All prisoners were evacuated by 6 a.m.

**8 a.m.** At 8 a.m. a party of the Royal Fusiliers reported their battalion in touch and in line with ours. This however was not the

*case and the receipt of the report checked our advance further towards our objective on the east.*

**8.15 a.m.** *At 8.15 a.m. the enemy launched a counter attack by 2 bombing squads from the trenches on the west. These were unsuccessful and another 30 prisoners surrendered, the enemy also suffering heavy casualties from our bombs. The consolidation of the position proceeded under medium shell fire.*

*During the morning a patrol of officers and men advanced to the south and reached the line 98, 09 point 33. Several of the enemy were found in the dug-outs but no part of the line was held by the enemy. We established an advanced post. This was withdrawn in the evening.*

**1 p.m.** *At 1 p.m. the enemy commenced a heavy bombardment which continued throughout the night. Our guns replied heavily and no counter-attack took place.*

**28<sup>th</sup> 4.30 a.m.** *Nothing further of note happened and the battalion was relieved at 4.30 a.m. 28<sup>th</sup> March by the King's Regiment. Marched to Dickebusch where buses were waiting. Casualties during operation - officers killed 2, other ranks 29; officers wounded 4, other ranks 124; missing other ranks 21.*

*General Observations:- The mine had a great moral effect on the enemy who was seen quitting the trenches.*

An attack on the Somme was now desperately needed by the French to draw the German forces away from Verdun, but this would now be a British offensive rather than Anglo/French. The plan was audacious – an advance of 1.5 miles on a 14 mile wide front after a massive 'softening up' artillery barrage, followed by the Reserve Army passing through the gap opened up to capture Bapaume and then Arras.

The preliminary bombardment commenced on June 24<sup>th</sup> and continued until 7.30 on July 1<sup>st</sup>. This barrage of 1.7 million shells was intended to cut the German defensive barbed wire, destroy the German trenches and put the enemy artillery out of action. Unfortunately it only partly achieved these, so that when the 66,000 British troops emerged from their trenches they found uncut wire, German strongpoints intact and the well-hidden artillery pouring

down a wall of shells. Into this went Herbert Luke who became the fourth 'Embleton' man to die.

## HERBERT LUKE



Herbert Luke was born in July 1890 in Embleton and was baptised on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1890. It is not known who Herbert's father was, but his mother was Elizabeth Luke, born 1870 in Preston, Northumberland and, at the time of Herbert's birth, was a single woman living with her parents in Embleton. The 1901 census shows Herbert living with his mother and grandparents at Front Street, Embleton but the 1911 census shows his grandmother, also Elizabeth, is widowed, and she, her daughter Elizabeth, and three grandsons, Herbert, John and Arthur are living in two rooms in Christon Bank. Herbert's mother was the younger sister of John Luke Senior, born 1865, the father of John Luke who was Herbert's cousin (see page 22).

Herbert's mother Elizabeth went on to have another illegitimate son, Oscar, who was born in 1892 but who died in 1903 aged 11. The cause of his death is unknown.

Herbert attended the Vincent Edwards Church School in Embleton where he was recorded at the ages of 11 and 12 as committing several punishable offences, notably gross carelessness after repeated warnings; deceit; throwing snowballs after being cautioned and going off to see a shipwreck without permission. This last misdemeanour was in the company of about nineteen other boys for which they all received four 'cuts' of the cane. On leaving school Herbert worked in the whinstone quarry in Embleton.

He enlisted at Newcastle in the Northumberland Fusiliers 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion which was comprised of Tyneside Scottish and Tyneside Irish sections. Attempts at raising a battalion of local Scotsmen had begun in September 1914, although it was not officially authorised by the War Office until 14<sup>th</sup> October 1914. Recruiting offices were opened all over the north east and recruiting was so brisk that by 25<sup>th</sup> October a battalion of 1,200 men had enlisted. So many men responded to the call to arms that a second battalion was completed by 5<sup>th</sup>

November, a third by the 11<sup>th</sup> and a fourth by 17<sup>th</sup>. Herbert was recruited to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Tyneside Scottish.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion was the last to arrive for training at Alnwick castle in May 1915, at which time the brigade was complete and all housed in the same place. Rigorous training took place, including route marches and physical exercise and many men were rejected. In August 1915 the battalion moved to Salisbury Plain and from there was sent to France in January 1916 to serve in the 102nd Infantry Brigade in the 34<sup>th</sup> Division.

By the end of June 1916 the battalion found itself near the town of Albert, north of a village called La Boisselle. This was the place where the Battle of the Somme commenced at 7.28 a.m. on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916.



**Commemorative shield and the home-made identity bracelet worn by Herbert**

The abridged War Diary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion for the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 records:-

### ***Assembly Trenches***

***1<sup>st</sup> July 7.30 a.m.*** *The battalion, together with the 21<sup>st</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers forming the 102<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Right-assaulting column, moved forward to the attack on the enemy trenches South of La Boisselle. Heavy enemy fire was experienced but the Battalion, less heavy casualties suffered, reached enemy 2<sup>nd</sup> line.*

*A small party proceeded towards the enemy 3<sup>rd</sup> line, but had to retire owing to heavy enemy fire. Several casualties were suffered. Major Acklon had by this time taken command owing to Lt. Col. Elphinstone having become a casualty.*

### ***South of La Boisselle***

***8.00 a.m.*** *Right Flank of position held in enemy 2<sup>nd</sup> line extended to small party of Lincolns - trenches strengthened. Six separate attempts to rush our flanks were made by the enemy without avail.*

**12.45 p.m.** *Strength 7 officers and 200 other ranks, a mixture of remnants of 22<sup>nd</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> NF, all battalions of which Major Acklon had taken command.*

**10.15 p.m.** *A patrol got in touch with other troops in the new crater caused by our mine, 100 yds beyond our right flank.*

**July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1.00 a.m.** *All ranks greatly in need of water and very much fatigued. Consolidation of position continued slowly.*

At some time on 1<sup>st</sup> July Herbert Luke Service No. 22/739, aged 26, was killed in action. The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion reported 160 dead on July 1st 1916.

On that day the 34th Division as a whole was engaged in the Battle of Albert, including the capture of Scots and Sausage Redoubts, and was thus part of the now infamous 1st Battle of the Somme.

Herbert has no marked grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing of the Somme on Pier & Face 10B, 11B and 12B.

At the end of the first day the British had lost approximately 20,000 killed, whilst the German losses were nearer 2,000 men.

The Somme battle continued throughout the summer and into autumn with only small gains but large losses in manpower. Whilst this was taking place, a mystery was unfolding in Embleton during October where a man called William Cole, alias John Grey, died.



## WILLIAM COLE (ALIAS JOHN EDWARD GREY)



The grave of William Cole is situated in the graveyard at Spitalford, Embleton. As far as is known William Cole was not born in Embleton nor did he attend the village school or live there. The headstone was erected by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). After the Great War ended, the relevant service authorities supplied the CWGC with all their casualty information including next-of-kin etc. A 'Final Verification Form' was sent to next-of-kin to confirm the casualty's personal details, fill in any 'blanks' and, where applicable, provide a personal inscription for the headstone. Due to the sheer size of the task this took many years to complete and was still underway in the 1930's. By the end, over 1 million forms had been sent out.

In the case of William Cole it would appear that the CWGC did not manage to contact his next-of-kin and his details were provided by the military authorities who were aware of his use of John Edward Grey as an alias. Apparently the authorities were often aware of men signing up and using assumed names. They had a procedure in place to amend a man's service documents, and it was his choice as to which name he continued to be known by.

William Cole was born 1876 in Moor House, Durham. His father, Matthew was, in 1871, a foreman with the N. E. Railway Company living in Railway Terrace, York with his wife Elizabeth (nee Turnbull) but later (1881) was an engineer on steam boats and in 1891 was a grocer in York. William had one sister, Kate, who was four years older and who eventually became a dressmaker.

In 1901 William (Willie) was boarding in Stockton on Tees and working as a joiner's labourer, but later that year he married Sarah Elizabeth Wilkinson in York where they set up house. They had four children, Kathleen, William, Harold and Charles, the last being born in 1908.

By 1911 William had left Sarah (actually in 1909) and she was living with their children in York and working as a domestic laundress. Of William there is no sign in the 1911 Census.

It appears that William Cole adopted the name of John Edward Grey to avoid his wife, creditors etc. finding him. It is known that Cole/Grey enlisted in the Border Regiment in Carlisle in August 1915 when he was 38. In September 1916 the 6<sup>th</sup> Garrison battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (the regiment unofficially entitled themselves Welch, but his was not formally approved until 1920) was raised at Aintree and it must be assumed that Cole/Grey was transferred into it. Garrison battalions were formed of men who were too old or too unfit to serve at the front and they were employed in forming garrison guards, particularly to release other battalions to go to Egypt and the Middle East. The 6<sup>th</sup> battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers actually went to Egypt in January 1917, but by then Cole/Grey was dead.

In October 1916 Cole/Grey was visiting Embleton for a reason which it has been impossible to determine. After staying three nights with a Mr. William Robert, quarryman, he left at about 8.45 on the Tuesday (13<sup>th</sup>) night saying he was catching a train back to Liverpool where his battalion was stationed, as his leave was up the next day. On the following Saturday (17<sup>th</sup>) John Robertson found the body of Cole/Grey hanging beside a hay stack at Stamford Farm. By some means the police established his next-of-kin and his wife Sarah identified the body as Cole/Grey as she recognised the verses of poetry found on the body as his. An inquest was held in Embleton on the 27<sup>th</sup> October which found that he committed suicide by hanging himself. He was buried in Spitalford Cemetery.

The Alnwick and County Gazette recorded that :- "On Monday Mr. Hugh J. Percy, deputy coroner for North Northumberland, held an inquest at Embleton on the body of William Cole, otherwise John Edward Grey, a private in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who had been visiting Embleton.

Sarah Elizabeth Cole identified the body as that of her husband William Cole, who was last known to her by living at Leman Road, York. He lived there with her till seven years ago when they separated. Since then she had never heard anything of or from him. Her husband made her no allowance and she did not know whether he was alive or dead. The police had tried to trace him but all in vain. She recognised the verses of poetry found on the body as his. He was 39 years of age.

"Wm. Roberts, quarryman, Embleton, stated he was in company with the deceased on Saturday night, the 4<sup>th</sup> October, and deceased stayed with him until

the Tuesday night. They were in company together until about 8.45 p.m. Deceased had only one drink and bid them good-bye. He left them saying he was going to catch a train for Liverpool, his battalion being there stationed, and his leave was up on the Wednesday. He was in cheerful spirits. Deceased told him his age was 46 years.

"John Henry Robertson, 20 St Alban's Road, Edinburgh, retired farmer, stated that on Saturday last about 11.10 a.m. he found the body of the deceased hanging beside a hay stack on Stamford Farm. He was suspended by a rope round his neck, which was fixed to a post that had evidently been taken off the stack. The man was quite dead. There were no signs of a struggle but a little loose hay was lying about. He (witness) walked to Embleton and informed the police.

"Sergeant John C. Box of the Northern Cyclist battalion said that about 11.40 p.m (sic) the last witness informed him that the body of a man was hanging on a hay stack on Stamford Farm and was in uniform. He went there and cut the body down. It was quite rigid. He found a pass, a railway ticket and 1½d in copper in the deceased's possession.

"The jury found the deceased committed suicide by hanging himself on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 1916.

The jury impanelled were Messrs:- Joseph W. Carr (foreman), John Crozier, A. S. Welsh, F. Wade, Peter Watson, Alex Pitt, J. S. Bolton, W. Pitt, W. Bowden, Wm. Robertson, Richd. Davison and Wm. Redfern."

Meanwhile fighting continued as part of the Somme battle. It was still hoped that if the British kept up their offensive the enemy would crumble. The final push was to be the so called battle of the Ancre after weeks of attritional fighting. The bad weather had caused the ground to become a quagmire and this caused the attack to be repeatedly postponed, even though the troops were in position, which played havoc with morale.

During this period John Luke became the fifth 'Embleton' man to die.

## JOHN LUKE



John Luke was born during January 1894 in Embleton and was christened in the village church on February 4<sup>th</sup>. His father, also John Luke, was born in Preston, Northumberland and worked as a general carter's labourer. His mother, Isabella Cowens Pattison, was born in Alnwick. The couple married in the second quarter of 1893. The family was large with John having two brothers, George Johnson Luke (b 1895), Andrew Pattison Luke (b 1897) and five sisters, Violet Elizabeth Luke (b 1898), Isabella Luke (b 1900), Lillian Luke (b 1902), Margaret Luke (b 1904) and Annie Pattison Luke (b. 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 1906).

John's mother became the sub-postmistress for Embleton and the family lived in the Post Office Buildings. John attended the village school and was a good pupil, winning a County Scholarship (Junior) in 1907 which entitled him to a place at the Duke's school in Alnwick. Unfortunately John senior died in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1905, never having seen his unborn daughter Annie, and leaving John junior, as the eldest male, obliged to become the breadwinner for the family of ten. He was unable to take his scholarship up and in 1911 was employed as a whinstone quarry worker.



According to the Alnwick and County Gazette John, together with his friends H. S. Neal and T. Mulheron, enlisted in Alnwick on November 13<sup>th</sup> 1915. He was assigned to the Royal Fusiliers (No. PS 9214) which stood for the Public School battalions of the Fusiliers. These were numbered the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> battalions Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment). To confuse matters however, John was serving with the 22<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the Fusiliers when he was killed. He didn't qualify for the 1914-15 Star and therefore didn't serve overseas before January 1<sup>st</sup> 1916. The 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> battalions were sent to France in November 1915, whilst the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> were disbanded in England in April 1916 and the men

dispersed. It is therefore feasible that John had joined either the 19<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> battalion, both of which were raised in Epsom in September 1914, before he was sent to France as part of a draft of reinforcements in 1916, where he would have been posted to the 22<sup>nd</sup> battalion Royal Fusiliers. The 22<sup>nd</sup> battalion, raised at Kensington, served with the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade within the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in France from November 1915. During 1916 the 2nd division fought at the Battle of Delville wood (15<sup>th</sup> July - 3<sup>rd</sup> September), The Battle of Ancre (13<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> November) and the Operations on the Ancre.

John, who was promoted Corporal in 1916, was the only man of his battalion to be killed on November 5<sup>th</sup> 1916. The battalion had spent three days resting in billets in Maily-Maillet on the Ancre, having been relieved in the trenches by the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion Princess Charlotte of Wales's Royal Berkshire Regiment. On November 5<sup>th</sup> the two battalions exchanged places and the 22<sup>nd</sup> took over the left section of the Redan sub-sector which was half way between Serre and Beaumont-Hamel in what were known as Beaumont Trench and Serre Trench, which faced the German front line called Munich Trench.

John was probably just unlucky to be the one man killed during the relief. He was buried in the original plot of the Euston Road Cemetery at Colincamps.

John's youngest brother was a footman for the Craster family at Craster Towers. He served with the Royal Engineers and survived the war. Nothing is known about his other brother.



**1920**  
**Euston Road Cemetery**

The actual battle of Ancre took place between November 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> with some success. Both Beaucourt and Beaumont Hamel

were taken but during the battle John Grey, became the sixth 'Embleton' man to die.

## JOHN GREY



John Grey was born in September 1897 at Newton Barns near Embleton. His father was Thomas Grey who was born in Longhoughton and worked as a horse man / shepherd on farms, whilst his mother Jane (nee Dodds) was born in Kenton, Newcastle. John was christened in Embleton church in October 1897 and started school in Newton in 1903. He moved to Embleton school in May 1907 where he stayed until May 1910, when he left as the family moved from the district. John had three brothers, Mark (1893), Robert (1895) and Thomas (1900) and three sisters, Olive (1892), Annie (1894) and Jannie (1902). In 1901 the family was living in Newton Barns near Newton

Hall but by 1911 they had moved to Ellingham, Chathill. John was then working as a farm labourer.

John joined the 1/7<sup>th</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers (No. 291101). This battalion was formed in Alnwick in August 1914 and became part of the Northumberland Brigade, Northumbria Division. The battalion landed in France in April 1915. Because of his age John is unlikely to have joined up before late 1915 and after initial training would have gone to France in early 1916 to join his battalion. At some time during the following months John was promoted to Lance Corporal and by September his battalion was involved in the Battle of the Somme.

The abridged War Diary of the 1/7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Northumberland Fusiliers relating to November 1916 gives the following details :-

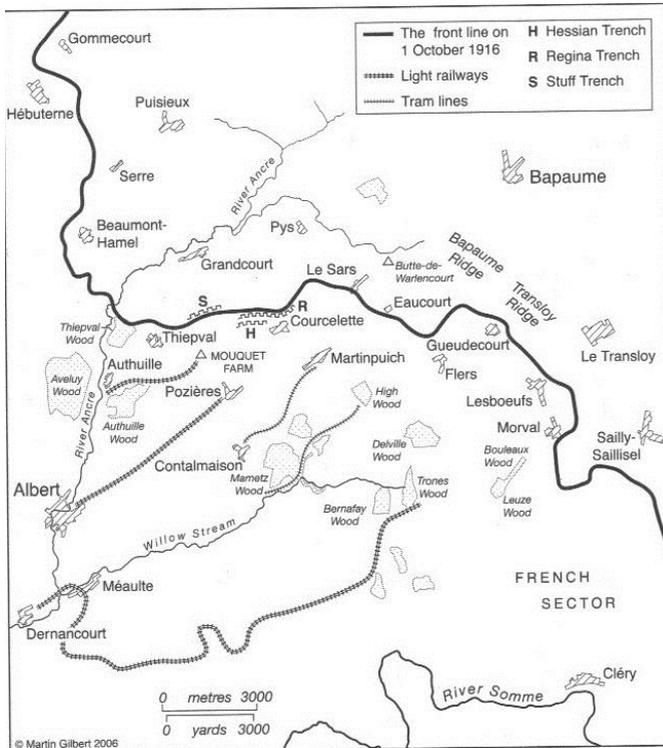
### **FLERS LINE**

**11<sup>th</sup>** *Relieved 5<sup>th</sup> Durhams in Flers and Switch Lines in the left sectors, relief was carried out by small parties during the afternoon - mist stopped all observation. Now in support. A few casualties in Switch during the night from shell fire.*

**12<sup>th</sup>** *Lt. Nixon and 2/Lt. Brown F. A. wounded on their way to reconnoitre front line. A working party of 50 per Company to dig assembly trenches - completed before dawn.*

13<sup>th</sup>

At 7 a.m. preliminary orders were received from Brigade for an attack on Grid Line & Hook. At 1.30 p.m. the Commanding officer had a meeting of Company Commanders at Battalion H.Q. and explained the scheme as far as possible. 2/Lt. Miller sent to reconnoitre 'jumping off trench'. About 7.30 p.m. operation orders were received from Brigade, the Commanding Officer held another meeting of Company Commanders at which he gave final orders. The attack was to be carried out by 'A' & 'B' Companies under 2/Lt. Lawson and 2/Lt. O'Daly. To advance in 2 waves.



18. The fighting in October, and from 1 to 11 November 1916

'C' Company was detailed as carrying party. 2 platoons to go forward with attack and 2 platoons to remain in Abbaye Trench. 'D' Company in support to occupy Snag Trench immediately the attack commenced. The object of the attack was to capture the high ground overlooking the Butte and to establish strong points on the left flank.

The Battalion moved from Flers Line at midnight and was in position by 4 a.m. the next morning. Battalion H.Q. moved up to Hexham Road, which was shared with the 5<sup>th</sup> N. F. who were attacking on our right.

## SNAG TRENCH

14<sup>th</sup>

Zero time was 6.45 a.m. 4 minutes before the zero the enemy opened an intermittent rifle fire on our right, which gave the impression that he had detected movement. Troops went forward punctually and only the 4<sup>th</sup> wave encountered enemy barrage before reaching Snag Trench. The first 3 waves met the same barrage almost immediately

after leaving Snag trench and casualties were caused. They pushed straight on and were lost in the mist.

**7.45 a.m.** Wounded began to arrive and were all satisfied that they had been successful and had got into the enemy trench.

**9 a.m.** 2/Lt. Woods holding Snag trench reports that he can see our men in Hook consolidating.

**9.30 a.m.** Sgt. Dryden returned wounded. Spoke of having crossed Hook Trench. He saw men working up Hook and saw a 'good few' men under 2/Lt. Lawson going towards the Grid Trench, but almost immediately he saw 2/Lt. Lawson fall.

**9.45 a.m.** Capt. Morris reports that a returned wounded man tells of his machine gun being in position and in Post No. 7, at the same time, 2/Lt. Woods reports he can hear it firing.

**10 a.m.** Wounded report that hand-to-hand fighting is going on on our left, presumably in Grid Trench.

**10.30 a.m.** Wounded report that they have been counter-attacked on our left and have beaten back the enemy.

**11.30 a.m.** 2/Lt. Benson, 4<sup>th</sup> N. F., reports that he is unable to continue digging to Hook owing to machine gun fire and sniping.

**2.45 p.m.** Word received from 2/Lt. Woods that machine gun in Post No. 7 had not been heard firing for some time. No further word was received and shortly afterwards G.O.C. 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade arrived.

Conclusion - That we occupied parts of Grid Trench which were counter-attacked by the enemy. This attack was repulsed. That later an attack was made on the same position from both flanks and succeeded and that Hook was then rushed and taken. That the whole of our position was then surrounded and taken, even the machine gun in Post No. 7. During the whole day it was impossible for runners to cross from Snag to Hook owing to machine gun fire & sniping. The mist also prevented observation.

**5 p.m.** Verbal orders were received from G.O.C. 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade to organise an attack for 6.30 p.m. on the original objective of the morning so as to clear up the situation. O.C. 7<sup>th</sup> N. F. at once proceeded up Pioneer Alley towards the front line but could not get up for a very heavy barrage. Written orders were sent up to 2/Lt. Woods but did not reach him until 7.15 p.m. As no information was received from the front line, both sectors of Snag trench were placed under the command of O.C. 7<sup>th</sup> N. F. The right sector was placed under charge of Major Wright, 5<sup>th</sup> N. F., and

*the left under Lt. Col. Gibson, 4<sup>th</sup> N. F., with orders to send out strong bombing patrols followed by two lines of skirmishers. These officers quickly reported that they met with very strong opposition. It was very bright moonlight and as soon as our men's heads appeared over the parapet the enemy put up S.O.S. signals and a very heavy barrage came down and heavy machine gun and rifle fire was opened, showing that the enemy was now occupying Hook Trench in force. Our first wave was recalled and the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave was not allowed to leave trench. Orders were then given to hold original line in Snag Trench.*

*On the extreme right, about 30 of our men, together with about 50 of the 5<sup>th</sup> N. F., captured about 120 yds of Grid Trench in the morning. Their news came back by a pigeon which was carried over by a man of the 7<sup>th</sup> N. F. A post was formed on the left flank and this was maintained till we were relieved by 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade, although the enemy made 2 or 3 bombing attacks.*

*At some time during the action described above, Lt. John Grey (291101 1/7<sup>th</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers) aged 19 was killed in action.*

Snag trench and Hook trench were located east of Le Sars in France. Overall during the period 13<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> November 1916 the 1/7<sup>th</sup> battalion lost 4 officers and 132 other ranks killed in action.

The Battle of the Somme was officially declared finished on November 19<sup>th</sup> 1916.

There is no known grave of John Grey and he is therefore commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial Pier and Face 10B, 11B and 12B.



Robert Grey died France & Flanders 12<sup>th</sup> August 1915. He was serving in the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers as a private (No. 18010). Robert enlisted in Berwick. He is commemorated in grave E.1 in Carnoy Military Cemetery which is about 10 km south east of Albert. Robert was one of the first people buried here as the cemetery didn't open until early August 1915. Robert did not attend Embleton school but went to Newton by the Sea school with his

brothers and sisters.  
Once he finished his education he worked as a shepherd.



**Grey family at Newton Barnes circa 1910.**  
**Front Row:- John, Jane (nee Dodds), Jane Ann, Thomas and Thomas**  
**Back Row:- Robert, Olive, Mark, Annie**

NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

---

*I am quite well.*

*I have been admitted into hospital.*  
 { sick } and am going on well.  
 { wounded } and hope to be discharged soon.

*I am being sent down to the base.*

*I have received your* { letter dated \_\_\_\_\_  
 telegram " \_\_\_\_\_  
 parcel " \_\_\_\_\_

*Letter follows at first opportunity.*

*I have received no letter from you*  
 { lately.  
 { for a long time.

**Signature** ) *Ph. Cairns G.F.*  
**only.** }

*Date* Jan. 7<sup>th</sup> Sept 1915

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

**FIELD SERVICE POST CARD**

*Ypp in Telfer*  
*Ypp from Skil*  
*Embleton N.S.O.*  
*Portsmouth land*  
*Embleton*

The address only to be written on this side. If anything else is added, the post card will be destroyed.

A.F.A. 2012.  
 114 Gen. No. 5248.

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## Chapter 4

## 1917

Despite the results, or rather the lack of results, of the 1916 fighting the Allies decided to continue with their great offensives into 1917. The Russians would attack at both ends of their front whilst the Italians would continue to campaign on the Isonzo, the French would seize the Chemin des Dames and the British would push out from the Arras area. Meanwhile the Germans looked to strengthen their positions, but had no plans to attack the Russians. In France they undertook a withdrawal to their Hindenburg Line, giving up territory they had defended fiercely during the battle of the Somme and destroying everything useful in their wake. This was a strong defensive line running from Arras to Soisson (110 miles, 180 km) featuring a series of strongly fortified positions. It lay some 15 miles to their rear and was heavily protected by artillery.

In March the Russian revolution broke out, destroying any hope of a spring offensive on the eastern front. The British were now the first to attack as part of the Allied spring offensive. Their First Army was tasked with seizing Vimy Ridge to protect the flank of the Third Army, which was to break through the Hindenburg Line. Vimy Ridge was captured on April 9<sup>th</sup>, the attack being supported by a British offensive from Arras. The Third Army advanced for over a mile across its whole front but then stalled due to logistical problems. Fighting continued around Arras until mid-May and during this time the seventh 'Embleton' man was killed.



## DAVID WILLIAM COWE

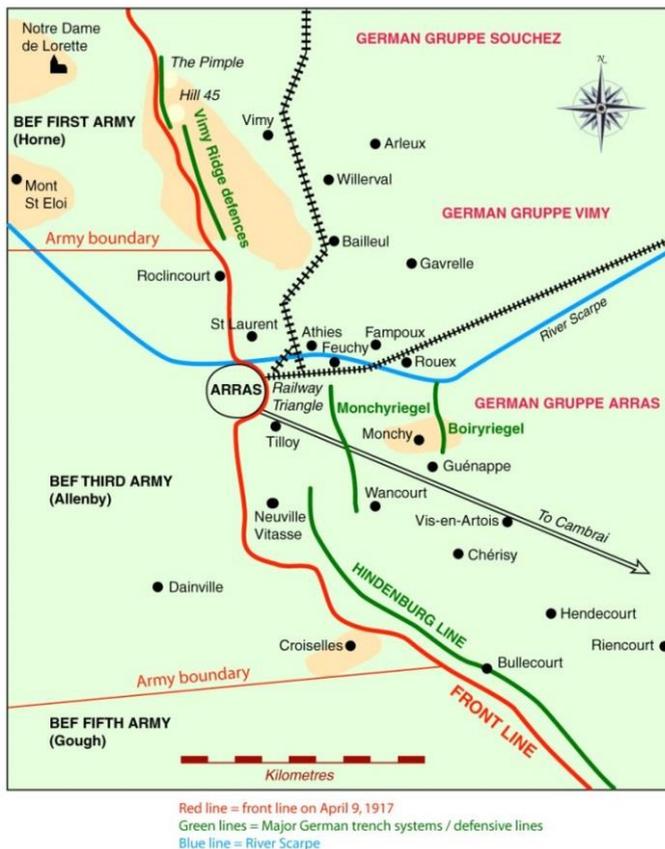


David Cowe was born in Christon Bank in June 1893 and christened in Embleton church on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1894. His father, William Turnbull Cowe, was born in Lowick and worked as a platelayer on the N. E. Railway. His mother Isabella (nee Athey) was born in 'Newham Buildings', Northumberland. David's parents married in Belford in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 1881 and he had three sisters, Eleanor (b 1884), Margaret (b 1887) and Jane (b 1890).

David attended the village school in Embleton where he received several canings including 2 'cuts' for 'running after the hounds late for school' and at another date 2 'cuts' for 'throwing stones'. The family lived in Christon Bank and in 1911 David was working as a farm labourer.

David enlisted in Alnwick on December 11<sup>th</sup> 1915 and joined the Durham Light infantry (No. 50654). At some time later he was transferred to the 25<sup>th</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers (Tyneside Irish No. 27679).

In April 1917 his battalion was stationed in the Pas de Calais region of France and took part in the second battle of Scarpe. They were charged with attacking the fortified village of Roeux (east of Arras), which formed part of the German defences behind their front line. The ground before Roeux posed many difficulties for the British, two of which were: the Arras - Douai railway line, which ran north-east to south-west in a cutting and on an embankment; and the River Scarpe with its surrounding marshland. The British commanders were using this attack simply trying to draw German troops away from the failing French attack on the Aisne river.



The abridged War Diary of the 25<sup>th</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers for April 1917 reports:-

**Fampoux** (4 miles east of Arras)

**27<sup>th</sup>** *The battalion was ordered to move forward to the front line to attack at 4.25 tomorrow morning. Moved forward at 10 p.m., relieving 27<sup>th</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers. The positions were as follows: two companies in the front line and two companies immediately behind the road.*

**28<sup>th</sup>** *The attack commenced at 4.25 a.m. Heavy machine gun and rifle fire was immediately encountered from an unregistered enemy trench 200 yds to the east of our line, and also from the Chemical Works and other buildings, holding up the 24<sup>th</sup> battalion Northumberland Fusiliers on our right, 150 yds from our front line. The 24<sup>th</sup> battalion suffered very heavily from this fire.*

*28<sup>th</sup> The battalion reached its objective on the left flank and commenced to dig in, but the fire from the enemy trench made this work very difficult.*

*A German counter-attack was made on the Brigade on our right at 11 a.m., south of the railway, by about 600 men who succeeded in passing our front line. They were however practically annihilated by machine gun and artillery fire near Mount Pleasant Wood. After dark the battalion returned to the front line as it was in danger of being cut off by parties of the enemy who were working round the flanks.*

*Our total killed was 5 officers and 72 other ranks.*

David was killed in action during this battle. He has no known grave but is commemorated on Bays 2 and 3 of the Arras Memorial.

By the summer, the failure of the French offensive, the poor performance of the Russian army and the lack of success by the Italians meant that the full weight of Allied offensives fell on the British. The result was the Third Battle of Ypres. Before the actual attack at Ypres could commence the British Command felt it necessary to take the Messines ridge because it overlooked the British lines, and from there the Germans could observe preparations for the principal offensive. The attack started on June 7<sup>th</sup> and lasted a week, by which time the objective had been taken and secured. Whilst this was good news, the bad news was that any element of surprise the main offensive might have had was now lost. Even more disastrous was the decision to delay the start of the attack until the end of July by which time the Germans had strengthened their defences. By the time the attack began the battleground had been blown up by some 4 million shells intended to destroy the enemy wire and their trenches. To make matters worse, that summer Belgium suffered torrential rains which turned the churned up ground into a quagmire. The initial objectives were a series of ridges which gave the Germans defensive advantage. During the attack on Pilckem Ridge the eighth 'Embleton' man was killed.

## JOHN JEFFREY



John Jeffrey was born in Embleton and christened in the village church on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1891. His father, George Arthur Jeffrey, who was born in Chatton, worked as a builder's stone mason. His mother Elizabeth Alexander was born in Newbiggin. They married in 1881 in the Alnwick District. The family was large; apart from John there were Robert (b 1883 stone mason), James (b 1884 quarryman), George Arthur (b 1884 quarryman), William Alexander (b 1890 quarryman), Thomas Edward (b 1896 mason), Ann (b 1886), Elizabeth (b 1894) and Mary Isabella (b 1897).

John attended the village school in Embleton and was generally well behaved, although he was one of the boys caned for going off to a ship wreck without permission in 1903. He left school aged 14 and became a builder's stone mason like his father. The family lived in Blue Row (now Sunny Brae) in 1901, but the 1911 census gives their address as Embleton Christon Bank S O. As they now had four rooms, it is assumed that they had moved to a larger property between the censuses.

John enlisted on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 1915 in Morpeth. His five digit regimental number (42492) in the Prince of Wales' Own (West Yorkshire) Regiment suggests he was trained in the U.K. and then sent to France as part of a draft of reinforcements in 1916 or 1917. John probably trained with either the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion of the Prince of Wales' Own at Whitley Bay (3<sup>rd</sup> battalion) or Redcar and West Hartlepool (4<sup>th</sup> battalion).

He was recorded as 'presumed dead' on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1917 serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Prince of Wales' Own, which was serving with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade in the 8<sup>th</sup> Division. On the date he was killed the brigade was fighting in the Battle of Pilckem Ridge. This battle, which took place from the 31<sup>st</sup> July until the 2<sup>nd</sup> August, was part of the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). The opening of the battle was preceded by weeks of tremendous and barely concealed preparations. The artillery bombardment of unprecedented scale, culminated in a stunning crescendo at the moment of assault.



killed, although it is not known exactly where he died and he has no known grave. He is commemorated on Panel 21 of the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial.



**Pilckem Ridge 1<sup>st</sup> August 1917**  
**Stretcher Bearers**  
**knee-deep in mud on the battlefield**

So little ground was taken in these attacks that the British replaced the commander for the offensive, General Gough, with General Plumer who launched a series of attacks on more limited fronts. In one of these the ninth 'Embleton' man was killed.

## **GEORGE EWART WADE**



George Wade's birth was registered in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 1896. He was born in Embleton, but there is no known christening date for him. His father was Frank Wade who was born in 1853 in Wath Upon Dearne, West Yorkshire and his mother was Annie Ewart, born on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1856 in Eyemouth, Berwickshire. Frank and Ann were married on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1877 in Eyemouth, at which time Frank's address was given as Durham and he was a schoolmaster. Ann was a schoolmistress whose occupation was given as teacher's wife in 1881. Their first child, Edwin, was born in Embleton in 1878 and they went on to have 9 more children between 1880 and 1899. The 1911 census shows that one child

died, although it has not been possible for us to establish which or when.

Frank Wade became headmaster of the Vincent Edwards school in 1877 replacing Mr T. F. Clark who, in the school log book for March 1877, wrote 'The Rev. Mr. Creighton called to give me three months' notice to leave - reason because the people of the village did not like me'. Mr. Wade's salary was £22 per annum plus the 'school pence', which was probably the money collected from pupils for their education (between 1d and 3d per child per week, depending on age, for the first three children in a family and then free for any others).

The family lived in the School Master's House free of charge. Frank served as headmaster until 1890 when once again the Church intervened. The Rev. Mr. Creighton was succeeded by the Rev. Mr. Osborn in 1884 and it appears that the new vicar and Mr Wade 'did not get on'. An entry in the school log book for August 1890 reads 'Vicar wished to take registers and Log Book out of school. Teacher objected. Result - kept in school'. It would appear that this was 'the final straw' and the vicar wished to exercise his 'right' to dismiss the schoolmaster but the remainder of the school committee would not agree, being firmly on the side of Mr. Wade. After consultation between the vicar and his solicitor, which suggested the vicar's 'right' was in doubt, Mr. Wade was dismissed by the vicar by means which, today, would warrant an appeal on the grounds of unfair dismissal. This affair was widely reported in the press and divided the village. Mr. Wade then opened the 'Private Adventure School' and some pupils transferred to this whilst others moved to Newton school. This private school didn't last long however, probably no more than two years, and in the 1901 census Mr. Wade is shown as a Grocer Shopkeeper, his address then being The Pavement, Embleton. In 1911 the family was living at Bee Hive Stores, Embleton where they occupied seven rooms and Frank was then also an Assistant Overseer and Rate Collector for the Parish Council, whilst the eldest son at home, Charles, was a Grocer assisting in the family business. George, who was then 14, was still at Vincent Edwards Church School. It is not known what work George did when he left school but he grew up as part of a famous (or infamous) local family who had a lot of support from villagers.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 he would have been 18 although he appears not to have gone abroad until 1917. An Army medal rolls index card recorded he served as a gunner, No. 123022, in the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). His six-digit number beginning 123 appears to be a wartime "general service" number typical of those allotted to men who had been in neither the pre-war RGA nor the Territorials. The numbers beginning 123 appear to have been allotted late in 1916

to both conscripts and to men who had earlier attested under the Derby Scheme for deferred enlistment.

George served with 351 Siege Battery RGA but different sources give different dates for when the Battery arrived in France: January or April 1917. It was equipped with four six-inch howitzers which fired shells weighing over 60lbs (27kg) and themselves weighed nearly five tons. Originally pulled by a team of eight horses, they were later moved by caterpillar tractors. On May 5<sup>th</sup> 1917 the Battery became part of 88 Heavy Artillery Group.

On 17<sup>th</sup> August 1917 it was strengthened by the addition of two extra guns and men from 407 Siege Battery. 351 Battery then joined 48 Artillery Brigade, RGA, on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1917.

Given that Gunner Wade had reached a Casualty Clearing Station by October 11<sup>th</sup> 1917 it is most likely he was wounded at the Battle of Poelcappelle, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1917 or possibly the Battle of Broodseinde, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1917 as part of the Campaign for the Third Battle of Ypres (31<sup>st</sup> July - 10<sup>th</sup> November 1917). When he died he had been serving with 351 Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery but it is not known if he served with any other battery beforehand.

It is recorded that George Ewart Wade "died of wounds" on October 11<sup>th</sup> 1917 and that he was buried in a named grave in plot II, row L, grave 13, at Brandhoek Military Cemetery No 3.

Throughout October the rain continued to fall, severely restricting movement and grounding aircraft which would normally have provided the artillery with target information. Despite these setbacks the battle continued with a major offensive intended to take the Passchendaele village and ridge from which the enemy could observe Ypres and the whole salient created by the offensive. In horrific conditions the British (and Canadians) gradually gained ground, but casualties were heavy and the tenth and eleventh 'Embleton' men died.

## WILLIAM JAMES McLAREN HUMBLE



William Humble was born in Embleton and christened there on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1895. His father William Humble and his mother Mary Ann (nee McLaren) were also born in Embleton and his father worked as a road contractor. They were married in Embleton in 1885 and had six children, John (b 1888), Elizabeth (b 1890), Grace (b 1892), William (b 1895), Andrew (b 1900) and Mary (b 1903).

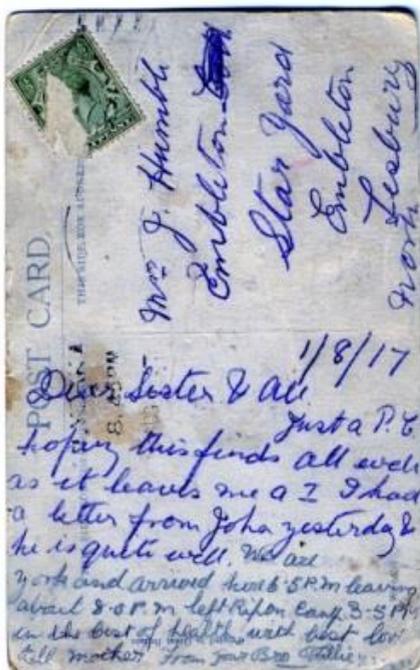
William attended Embleton school where he was obviously quite an unruly pupil, his name regularly appearing in the punishment book. At various times he was 'cut' for disobedience to his teacher, insubordination, carelessness, talking during a lesson, untidiness and interfering with Miss Welsh's hedge! He left school at 14, the normal age, and became a butcher's apprentice in Embleton. In 1901 the family were living in Pitts Yard, Embleton (this is now incorporated into the garden of Jubilee House). At some time after this the family moved into Embleton Cottage next to the Blue Bell Inn.

William enlisted in Alnwick, together with his brother John and friend William Pitt, on December 11<sup>th</sup> 1915. He was initially posted to the Northumberland Fusiliers (No. 29348) but eventually became a member of the 21<sup>st</sup> battalion Manchester Regiment (No. 51512).

It is difficult to establish when or how William died. He is officially declared as dying on October 24<sup>th</sup> 1917 but in the Berwick Advertiser it is reported that 'he has been missing since October 24<sup>th</sup>'. Evidence would suggest he actually died on October 26<sup>th</sup> 1917 as the war diary (see below) suggests there were only two slight casualties on 24<sup>th</sup> October, with the main 'push' and losses on the 26<sup>th</sup> October.

The 21<sup>st</sup> battalion Manchester Regiment took part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> battle of Passchendaele in October 1917. The official history of the 21<sup>st</sup> battalion states 'The battalion remained at Ronkloshille training until October 22<sup>nd</sup>. The next day it was at 'Little Kemmel Camp'. On the 24<sup>th</sup> it was at La Clytte and later that day at 'Lock 8'. The battalion took up assembly positions at night, preparatory to going into the line for the intended attack on 26<sup>th</sup> October. Heavy rain fell

during the night of 25/26<sup>th</sup> October, especially during the forming up, which rendered the ground exceedingly muddy and made movement a matter of great difficulty.



The abridged War Diary for the 21<sup>st</sup> battalion records:-

### ***Narrative of Operations on 24 - 27<sup>th</sup> October 1917.***

For the purpose of these operations the following personnel were attached to the battalion:- Two Guns from 91<sup>st</sup> Machine Gun Company, two Mortars from 91<sup>st</sup> Trench Mortar battery. The battalion battle strength going up on 24<sup>th</sup> October was 18 Officers, 1 Medical Officer and 512 Other Ranks.

**24<sup>th</sup>** The battalion as above moved from Little Kemmel Camp at 12.40 p.m. and marched as far as La Clytte where the battalion embossed and was conveyed as far as Lock 8 where teas were issued. The battalion left the vicinity of Lock 8 at 5.15 p.m. and proceeded to the line to take up positions of assembly.

On proceeding, the following relief took place:-

*'A' company relieved 'B' company K.R.R. and 'C' company relieved 'D' company 17<sup>th</sup> Sherwood Foresters.*

*'B' and 'D' companies relieved no-one and dug in on the high ground.*

*Relief passed off quietly and was completed by 11.00 p.m. There were two slight casualties.*

*Situation on relief was normal - though there was some shelling.*

**25<sup>th</sup>** *The day passed quietly - situation being normal throughout with desultory shelling on our forward areas - casualties.*

**26<sup>th</sup>** *At zero hour, 5.40 a.m., the barrage opened according to programme and the battalion moved forward to get as close to it as possible. The advance continued with accuracy and precision and without remarkable incident till zero plus 22.*

*At zero plus 22, 'A' company on left came under exceedingly heavy enfilading machine gun fire and were practically decimated. The left flank of 'C' company was entirely unsupported.*

*At zero plus 25, 'A' company dug in and established a post.*

*At zero plus 25, 'B' company on right came under exceedingly heavy machine gun fire.*

*At zero plus 30, 'B' company on right dug in, having suffered exceedingly heavy casualties from enemy machine guns and having been completely disorganised by the flow of 70 to 80 Gordon Highlanders, who had lost their direction, through their lines.*

*There is every reason to believe that officers and men of 'A' and 'B' companies were able by chance to continue the advance after zero plus 22 and zero plus 30 although the barrage was lost - nothing is known of their fate and no trace could subsequently be found of them although they are reported to have gone on.*

*'C' company moved off at zero and continued until zero plus 35, when they came under a very severe machine gun fire.*

*This force was now reduced to 4 men and a post was established. Later the company withdrew and met elements of 'A' company.*

*At zero plus 150, all available men from 21<sup>st</sup> Manchesters, 2<sup>nd</sup> Queens, 1<sup>st</sup> South Staffordshire, 2<sup>nd</sup> Border Regiments and the Gordon Highlanders were organised under Lieutenant Buckley and established in our old line.*

**27<sup>th</sup>** *Relief was completed by 2.15 a.m. with the battalion marching out with 8 Officers and 190 Other Ranks."*

The Berwick Advertiser carried the following on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1917: 'Mrs Humble Embleton has received word that her second son Pt. W. J. Humble Manchester Regiment is reported missing since October 24<sup>th</sup>. Previous to joining the army Pt. Humble was employed by Messrs. Pitt & Co. Butchers Embleton. It is hoped that better news may come to hand respecting Pt. Humble'.

William has no known grave and was officially declared as having died on October 24<sup>th</sup> 1917 just after his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday. He is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial Panel 120 to 124 and 162 to 162A and 163A.

## PETER WILLIAM McDOUGAL



Peter was born in Blue Row, (now Sunny Brae) Embleton in the first quarter of 1894. He was christened in the village church on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1894. His father was John Anderson McDougal who was born in North Sunderland and worked as a joiner/carpenter. His mother, Mary (nee Mather) was born in Embleton. The couple married in the second quarter of 1891 probably in Embleton. Peter had one brother, John Anderson (b 1891) and one sister, Effie May (b 1897). John also died during the war (see page 8). In 1911 the family were living in two rooms at Embleton South Farm, but by 1914 they were back in

Blue Row. Peter attended the village school in Embleton and after leaving became a stone breaker working in Embleton quarry.

Peter enlisted in the Northumberland Fusiliers on December 4<sup>th</sup> 1915 in Alnwick. He was sent to the 1/6<sup>th</sup> battalion (Territorial) and given a service number of 267211 (he appears to have had two previous numbers, 7369 and 7747).

On the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 the 1/6<sup>th</sup> was stationed at Northumberland Road, Newcastle-on-Tyne, part of the Northumberland Brigade of the Northumbrian Division, on Tyne Defences. In April 1915 it mobilised for war and landed in France where they became part of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division and engaged in various actions on the Western Front, including in 1915 The Battle of St Julien, The Battle of Frezenburg Ridge and The Battle of Bellewaarde Ridge; in 1916 The Battle of Flers-Courcelette, The Battle of Morval and The Battle of the Transloy Ridges; in 1917 The First Battle of the Scarpe, The Capture of

Wancourt Ridge, The Second Battle of the Scarpe and The Second Battle of Passchendaele.

Westvleteren was outside the front held by Commonwealth forces in Belgium during the First World War, but in July 1917, in readiness for the forthcoming offensive, groups of casualty clearing stations were placed at three positions called, jokingly, by the troops Mendinghem, Dozinghem and Bandaghem. The 4<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> Casualty Clearing Stations were posted at Dozinghem and the military cemetery was used by them until early in 1918. Its 3,174 Commonwealth burials of the First World War include 71 from the Northumberland Fusiliers.



Casualties were given first aid and assessed in the front line and were then sent back to the Casualty Clearing Station. This was a mobile field hospital situated 1 mile behind the front line where surgeons worked on emergencies. From here casualties would be moved back to base hospitals and then, in many cases, back home.

Peter died of wounds on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1917 and was buried in Dozinghem Military Cemetery, a very peaceful place set in a forest, near Ypres in grave X.A.4. Since he died in a Casualty Clearing Station at Dozinghem it is likely that he was wounded in the days just prior to this, otherwise he would have been transferred to a base hospital. If this was the case then it is likely he was wounded from say the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1917 onwards.

On 26<sup>th</sup> October the 2<sup>nd</sup> Passchendaele battle commenced. The weather was fiendish with heavy rain all the night before and all day. Misery was the *mot juste* for the 50<sup>th</sup> (Northumbrian) and 57<sup>th</sup> (West Lancashire) Divisions (Fifth Army) on this day and indicative of what was to come. They were to attempt to force a passage into the Houthulst Forest and up the Goudberg Spur. At 5.40 a.m. their advance towards Westroosebeke began with a Brigade from each Division attacking across fields north of Poelcappelle. They were faced with possibly the worst conditions of the battles to date - the ground was almost impossible to traverse. The British barrage, although far from inadequate, again drifted into the distance ahead of the troops, and the attacks gained literally a

matter of metres before the exhausted troops sank into shell holes for cover. Even a metre per minute was more than they could manage. In pillboxes and shattered woods the enemy were practically invisible. Those able to find cover or pull back were fortunate; hundreds of men stuck fast in the mud and in the open fell prey to shrapnel and snipers. Peter could have been one of these. By the evening of this day all the attacking battalions were back behind their jumping off lines!

Fighting went on into November with both sides using their artillery to wear down and disrupt their opponents. During one of these exchanges the twelfth 'Embleton' man was killed.

## DAVID ALEXANDER WOODCOCK

David is recorded as being born in the second quarter of 1898 at Craster and his school records confirm his birth date as 27<sup>th</sup> April 1898. He was baptised at Embleton on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1898.



His father was also David and his mother was Margaret, nee Thorborn. The 1911 census shows that there were seven children born to the family with four surviving, David being the eldest with Thomas b. 1900, John b. 1905 and Lily Louisa b. 1907 being his siblings. The family of six, plus David's paternal grandfather, lived in a 2 room cottage at Embleton South Farm where David senior worked as a farm labourer / spademan. David and his brother Thomas were admitted to Embleton Vincent Edwards Church School on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1907, having previously attended school at Newton-by-Sea. They appear to have been well-behaved children as their names do not appear in the school Punishment Book. David's education ended on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1912 at age 14

when he left school to start work on the farm.

David was 16 at the outbreak of the war and is recorded as having enlisted in the Army in 1916 at Alnwick. His regimental number, 39112, was a wartime service number and not a Territorial number, indicating that he would have trained in one of the training battalions before being posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers, either in the UK or at a base camp on arrival in France as part of a draft of reinforcements. The 3<sup>rd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers was

a wartime training and reserve battalion of the Territorial Force which had been raised at Bury in October 1914.

If David had been conscripted on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (plus one month) he would have been called up in May 1916. At that time the 3<sup>rd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers was centred on Colchester Essex, with units responsible for defence of the Suffolk coast. In 1917 the Division was sent to France.

By March 1917 all units had arrived via Le Havre to combine under XI Corps. From June to September they were involved in the operations on the Flanders coast called "Operation Hush" which was a failed attempt to land on the Belgian coast. The Division then fought at the Battle of Poelcappelle 1917, a phase of the third battle of Ypres between 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> October 1917. The 3<sup>rd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers fought with the 197<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade in 66 Division. This Brigade was on the right of the Second Army with the II Anzac Corps conducting the main attack. On the 9<sup>th</sup> October the Brigade advanced quickly on sandy going, but the Division ended up in the area of the Ravebeek Valley which became notorious for flooded shell holes and mud.

The attack on Passchendaele was not a success and the 66<sup>th</sup> Division was next placed at the disposal of the Canadian Corps commanded by Lieut. Gen. A. W. Currie. As it would not be possible to attempt another coastal landing until the spring of 1918 it was decided to continue the attempted advance in Flanders. The commander of the Canadian Royal Engineers, Maj. Gen. W. B. Lindsay, insisted the roads and railways were rebuilt before an advance could be made and 66 Division was put at his disposal. Currie ordered that advances should be limited to 500 yards at a time with rests in between. The assaults went in on 26<sup>th</sup> October and lasted through to the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1917. Private David Woodcock was killed in the front line on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1917, aged 19, having just relieved the 2/7<sup>th</sup> battalion a few hours earlier. He was the only member of his battalion listed as killed on that date. The War Diary for David's battalion for the previous day states '*Sentence of death passed by F.G.C.M. on Private Smith for desertion from Frezenbirg Ridge on 8<sup>th</sup> October carried out by firing party under 2/lieut Dun this morning*'. David probably knew this man.

A report in the Alnwick & County Gazette of 8<sup>th</sup> December 1917 states that "Mr & Mrs Woodstock (sic) of South Farm Embleton on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Mrs Woodstock (sic) of South Farm Embleton on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 1917 received information that their eldest son, David A Woodstock (sic), had been killed in action in France. His officer explained that he was struck and killed



instantly by a shell. The deceased, along with his parents, was employed by Mr George Robertson on the farm."

David has no known grave but is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial (left), Panels 54 - 60 and 163A.

The battle officially closed in November and was considered successful

but the very dangerous Menin Road running south east from Ypres towards the front line continued to be used by the artillery throughout December and this brought about the death of the thirteenth 'Embleton' man.

## JAMES PRATT ROXBY



James' birth was registered at the beginning of 1895. He was the son of Jonathan James Roxby, known as James, and his wife Elizabeth (nee Pratt) who had both worked in domestic service. Elizabeth and James had married in Alnwick district in 1893.

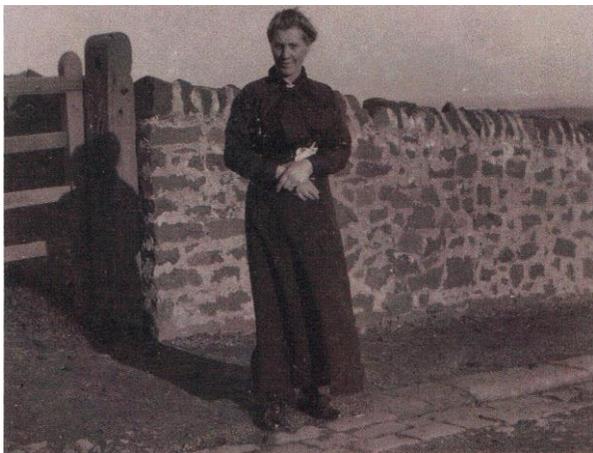
In the 1901 census James, then 6, is shown as living at Callaly Castle with his mother who was the Housekeeper in charge. His father was a valet in the service of Alexander Browne of Whalton House, Whalton. In 1904, James' father applied for the post as manager of the Anglers Hotel in Weldon Bridge. In the 1911 census the 16 year old James was recorded living with his mother as her only surviving child, another child having died in infancy. Their address at the time was 3 Dunstanboro' Terrace, Christon Bank, Embleton but by 1919 Elizabeth Roxby had moved to Pitt's House. His father was recorded as being a butler, still

for Alexander Brown, at Lorbottle Hall, Whittingham, although still married to Elizabeth.

### Mrs Roxby (James' mother) in 1918

James attended the Vincent Edwards School in Embleton where he appears to have been a fairly well behaved pupil, having only two reported misdemeanours during his time there.

James Roxby enlisted in Alnwick on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1915 but would be 'called up' later under the Derby Scheme. Men were placed in groups according to their year of birth and James would have been in Group 3, which was mobilised on 20<sup>th</sup> January



1916. As there is no surviving service record for James it is not possible to state where he trained or whether he was transferred between units. It is known however that he served with 213 Siege Battery Royal Garrison Artillery as Gunner No. 344251. This number was within a series of numbers allocated to the Forth (City of Edinburgh) Fortress Royal Garrison Artillery early in 1917. The battery was part of the pre-war Scottish coastal defences manned by the Territorial Army. 213 Siege Battery went to France in late 1916 or early 1917 and was originally equipped with 4 x 8inch (20cm) howitzers, but later this was increased to six. It is known from his obituary that James joined the battery in France in June 1917.

The medal index card was supposed to record a man's details as they were when he first went abroad. James' card recorded only a six digit number,

indicating he first served overseas after that number had been allocated, early in 1917.

213 Siege Battery RGA was allocated to the Fifth Army in the Ypres sector in 1917. The British Fifth Army was designated as such in October 1916 under the command of Sir Hubert Gough. In 1917 it fought in The Battle of Arras and the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). By December the fighting had been reduced to the routine of winter trench warfare, with frequent exchanges of artillery fire along the Menin Road, which was a notorious part of the sector.

James Pratt Roxby was killed in action on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1917. He was 22 years old. The War Diary for the 213 Siege Battery on December 19<sup>th</sup> states:- *'In evening a premature ... occurred in gun No. 432 destroying the gun and causing the following casualties:- Killed No. 34425 Gnr. Roxby J.P. Wounded Gnr. Bridle A.F., Gnr. Riler R., Gnr. Matteson A. and Gnr Thorpe J.J.'* On the 20<sup>th</sup> December the Diary records:- *No. 344251 Gnr. Roxby J.P. buried at Military Cemetery at I.qd 1.4.'*



The Alnwick and County Gazette for January 1918 included the following:- "Gunner James Roxby R.G.A., only son of Mrs E. and the late Mr. J. Roxby, Dunstanborough Terrace, Embleton, has been killed in action. The deceased was formerly employed as clerk in the office of Mr. J. H. Sanderson and at the time of joining up was a clerk in the office of the Alnwick Gas Company. He was a most popular young man and his death is deeply regretted by a wide circle of friends in Alnwick. He left for France last June."

James is buried in a marked grave in plot 3, row O, grave 2 at Menin Road South Military Cemetery in the centre of Ypres. The cemetery was used by field ambulances until the summer of 1918 and was increased after the Armistice, when burials were moved from isolated positions on the battlefields to the east and another Menin Road cemetery which had been on the opposite side of the road.

James is also commemorated on the Forth RGA war memorial at St. Giles High Kirk (cathedral), Edinburgh.

The Third battle of Ypres cost each side some 250,000 casualties and created a 5 mile salient that was subsequently lost in just three days fighting during the German offensive in 1918.



Sie schwuren dem Kaiser Sieg und Mut  
Und hielten den Eid mit ihrem Blut!

Translation:

“They vowed to the Kaiser victory and courage.  
And kept the oath with their blood.”

## Chapter 5

## 1918

Mention must be made of a battle that took place in late 1917 on the plains near Cambrai in France. Having been unsuccessful in the battle at Ypres, the British were in need of a morale boosting victory. Cambrai was chosen because the countryside there was considered to be suitable for the first battle to use massed tanks. Although the attack would be on the Hindenburg Line it was considered to be weakly defended in this area and a major breakthrough was expected. The British plan was innovative in that the enemy wire was to be destroyed by tanks, whilst the artillery barrage was to be held until zero hour to maintain surprise. The battle opened on November 20<sup>th</sup> with 300 British tanks in the field. The first day was a success with advances of over 5 miles and the Line over-run, but some 180 tanks had been lost and no major breakthrough had been achieved. The second day was much less successful in that the enemy brought up massive reinforcements and the lack of mobility of the British artillery meant that they could not support subsequent attacks. On November 27<sup>th</sup> the offensive was called off but the British now held a large salient which was being shelled from both sides and was in danger of being cut off. Whilst the British were preparing to withdraw from this dangerous position, and give up all their hard earned gains, the Germans attacked their weakest point. Again the offensive was initially successful, the Germans advancing some 8 miles to get beyond the original British positions. The day was eventually saved by British reinforcements flooding in and the British retreating to better defensive positions. By December 3<sup>rd</sup> the Germans were exhausted and stalemate returned, the year ending with no British victory to celebrate.

1918, therefore, started with the Allies having taken very hard blows on all fronts with very few successes and needing to regroup, whilst the Germans were suffering from the war of attrition. Although the USA had officially been at war since April

1917 it was clear that they wouldn't be able to make any meaningful contribution in terms of troops until early summer. Russia, in the throes of revolution, was looking for peace and no threat to Germany who could now move large numbers of men from the east to the west. The Germans were thus in a 'now or never' position and launched their own offensive before the Allies could gather their strength.

The first of what was to be a series of German offensives was launched on March 21<sup>st</sup> on the Somme (Operation Michael), where 43 divisions attacked 12 depleted British divisions spread out over 42 miles of uncompleted defences. The attack was spectacularly successful with the British being forced back some 17 miles in the first day. In the days that followed the Germans continued to advance and by April 4<sup>th</sup> were nearly 40 miles from their starting point on a 50 mile wide front. Fortunately the French were able to provide reinforcements and the Germans ran out of manpower, artillery support and supplies.

During this offensive the fourteenth 'Embleton' man was killed.

## ARTHUR JAMES DOUGLAS



Arthur Douglas was born in Christon Bank on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1899. His father, *George Douglas*, was born in Ditchburn, Northumberland and worked as a mole catcher/market gardener. His mother, *Jessie Ann (nee Murdie)*, was born at Fallodon/Cold Harbour. The couple married in the third quarter of 1891, probably in Embleton.

Arthur had two brothers, *George* (b 1894) and *Percy* (b 1901) and the family lived in Christon Bank, being listed in 1914/15 as inhabiting a 'freehold house and land'.

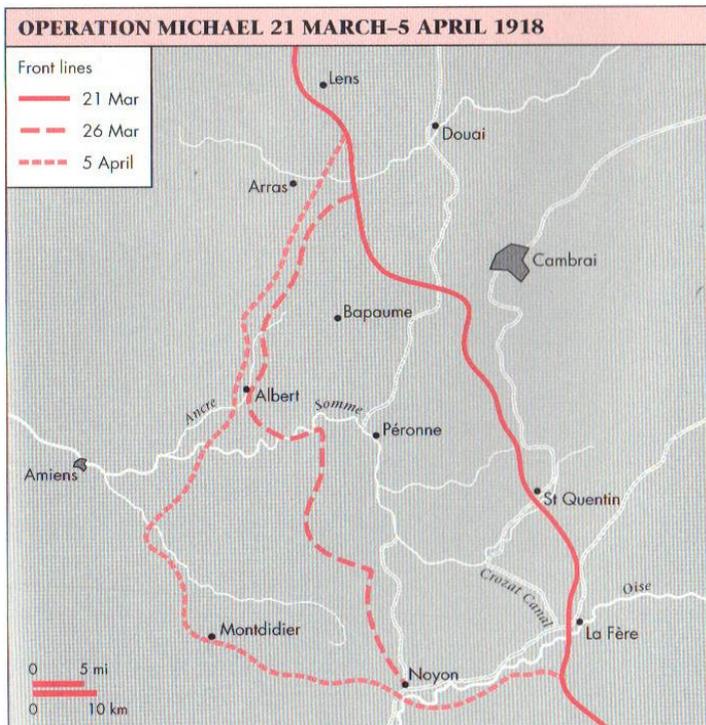
Arthur attended the village school in Embleton, starting in 1904, leaving in August 1911 when he was over 12, having won a County Scholarship (Junior) tenable at the Duke's School, Alnwick. He was one of the few pupils from Embleton school who were able to take up their scholarship and he joined the Duke's School in September 1911, leaving in July 1915 aged 16 to work in a

bank. His scholarship had entitled him to a free place at the school and half price rail travel from his home in Christon Bank to Alnwick.

Arthur is recorded as enlisting in North Shields, which may have been as a result of him working in a bank in Whitley Bay. He joined the Northumberland Fusiliers (1/4<sup>th</sup> battalion territorials) with a service number 59957. The 1/4<sup>th</sup> battalion was based in Hexham when war broke out in August 1914. After training they proceeded to France in April 1915 to join the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 50<sup>th</sup> (Northumbrian) Division. Arthur is unlikely to have joined the army before February 1917 because of his age, or to have gone overseas before mid-1917. Although men were not supposed to serve in the trenches until they were nineteen he may have been pressed into action before this.

The Alnwick and County Gazette reported in late April 1918 'Mr and Mrs George Douglas of Christon Bank received news their second son Arthur James Douglas died of gunshot wounds on March 28<sup>th</sup>. Prior to the war he worked on the staff of the London Joint Stock Bank in Whitley Bay'.

There is no way to establish when or where he was wounded. If, as likely, he died where he is buried (Rouen) then he was probably wounded up to a week before this (March 21<sup>st</sup>). If this is the case then he would have been wounded during the devastating German offensive 'Operation Michael' (March 21<sup>st</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup>



April 1918). Then, lacking manpower, artillery support and essential supplies they simply ran out of steam. Over this period both the Allies and the Germans suffered over 240,000 casualties but no ground of great strategic importance had been won or lost.

A large proportion of the casualties from the Somme battles passed through Rouen. The British scheme of

evacuation was based chiefly on this city, where there were fourteen hospitals - eight general, five stationary and one Red Cross - to which casualties were conveyed mostly by train, ambulance or lorry, but also by barges down the Somme and by char-a-bancs. Rouen, alongside Boulogne, Etaples and Trouville, acted as one of the primary Hospital Centres for the B.E.F., with some 20,000 beds by March 1918. A number of the dead from these hospitals were buried in other cemeteries, but the great majority was taken to the city cemetery of St. Sever. By September 1916 this was full and it was necessary to begin an extension which remained in use until April 1920 when the last burial took place.

Arthur is buried in the St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen (grave number P.VII.H.2A.).

The second German offensive commenced on April 9<sup>th</sup> in Flanders. 'Operation Georgette' was based on an attack from Armentieres to capture the railway junction at Hazebrouck (20 miles away) and then on to the coast (a further 40 miles on). They advanced 3 miles in the first day and by April 10<sup>th</sup> the situation had deteriorated such that Field Marshall Haig issued Orders for the Day: *'Every position must be held. There must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one must fight on to the end'*. By April 12<sup>th</sup> the Germans were only 5 miles from their first objective but, as always, logistics and exhaustion overcame them and the attack petered out. During this battle the fifteenth of the 'Embleton' men died.



## OSWIN CREIGHTON



Oswin was born on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1883 in the Vicarage at Embleton and christened a month or so later. He was the sixth child of Dr. Mandell Creighton (born 1844 in Carlisle) and Louise (nee Hume Van Glehn) who was born in Sydenham, Kent in 1850. His father was Vicar of Embleton from 1874 to 1884, when he left to become Canon of Worcester and ultimately Bishop of London. Oswin had four sisters - Beatrice (b 1872), Lucia (b 1874), Mary (b 1880) and Gemma (b 1887) and two brothers - Cuthbert (b 1876) and Walter (b 1878). In 1891 he was living with the family at College Precincts, Worcester.

In 1895 he went to Marlborough School, having until then being educated at home. His school career was not brilliant but his conduct was always rated excellent. He went to school determined to be a clergyman and never wavered from this ambition.

In 1901 his father died and in the autumn Oswin went up to Keeble College, Oxford. He was 22 when he graduated with an upper second and decided to gain experience, before going to theological college, by becoming an assistant master at an English-run boys' school in Smyrna (Greece) from September 1905 to July 1906. He was licenced as a lay reader by the Bishop of Gibraltar so he could help with services at the school and work for the Mission for Seamen.

On returning home, Oswin read for Orders at Bishops Hostel, Farnham and was ordained in St Paul's Cathedral by the Bishop of London in October 1907. He spent three years working in the slums before sailing to Canada in August 1910. He devoted his time there to working at establishing churches in rural Alberta, but returned to England in October 1914 to join the war effort, offering himself as a Chaplain to the Forces. After being appointed in November, was sent to the New Army being formed in Folkstone.

In March 1915 Oswin joined the 29<sup>th</sup> Division as Chaplain to the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which was made up of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Royal Fusiliers and 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, and sailed from Avonmouth to Gallipoli via Egypt. Arriving in April, the Division was involved in very heavy fighting and suffered huge losses. Oswin, apart from being Chaplain, worked with the Field Ambulance teams at the front and was often exposed to enemy fire. By August the campaign had failed, Oswin had diphtheria and was evacuated to Alexandria and then to the Anglo/American hospital in Cairo.

Once he had recovered he was put in charge of the Churches' work to establish recreational facilities for the wounded throughout the area, which he did with great success. Arriving back in London in January 1916 he was posted to the remount division in Ramsey and then joined 3<sup>rd</sup> Division artillery as Chaplain and travelled with them to Bus in France. He was with them throughout 1916, being involved in the battle of Serre in November. In 1917 the Division was based near Arras and Oswin served during the battle there in May. After a 72 hour leave in Paris in July he returned to the Division at Bethune, and was with them at Ypres in October during weeks of hard fighting. In December he went home to London on leave and, having money to spend, took his family out to theatres etc.

Back with his Battalions, he worked with the dead and dying during the German offensive of March 1918 and in April was based west of Bethune. On April 9<sup>th</sup> the Germans launched an attack on the line there and the Division was rushed out to meet them. During this time they were exposed to the heaviest shelling they had ever experienced. Under these conditions there was difficulty in arranging the burial of the many men killed as their bodies were spread about. Oswin volunteered to undertake the organisation of burial parties. He went up to a battery position but a shell burst near him killing him instantly, along with the three men with him.

Oswin is buried in Chocques Military Cemetery near Bethune in grave I.P.34 and was awarded the 1914 - 15 Star.

His probate, granted in London on 17<sup>th</sup> June to Louise Creighton (his mother), stated him to be 'a resident of Alix, province of Alberta Canada. Clerk temporary Chaplain of Forces 4<sup>th</sup> class. Value £463-11-4.

Whilst attention was focused on the Western Front battles were being fought and men were dying in other parts of the world.

The Turks had attacked the Suez Canal in 1915 and although this was unsuccessful, it frightened the British enough for them to

launch an offensive in early 1916 which drove the Turks back and allowed the British to establish a new defensive line 100 miles east of the canal.

It was thought that success in Palestine would increase British influence in the region after the war and to this end an unsuccessful attempt to take Gaza was made in early 1917 with high casualties. A second attack later in the year was successful and then, aided by Lawrence of Arabia's Arab forces, they captured Jerusalem in December 1917 and Damascus by mid-1918.

During these campaigns many men succumbed to illness and unfortunately these included the sixteenth Embleton man to die.

## THOMAS APPLEBY

Thomas was born in Embleton in 1878, being christened in the village church on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1878. His father was also Thomas (b. Embleton



1847), a stone merchant and proprietor of the Hare & Hounds (now Dunstanburgh Castle Hotel), whilst his mother was Margaret (nee Reekie) born in Falkirk in 1846. The couple were married at St. Giles, Edinburgh in 1876. Thomas Jnr. had a brother Alexander (b. 1881) and two sisters, Margaret (b. 1883) and Frances (b. 1886), all born in Embleton. Alexander died aged 12

and Thomas Snr. died in 1894 and both are buried in Spitalford cemetery, Embleton. At some time after her husband's death Margaret returned to Scotland to run a boarding house, taking her daughters with her.

Thomas Jnr. lived at the Hare & Hounds with his brother and sisters and attended the village school until he was fourteen although he, together with his siblings, did transfer to Newton school for six months after the 'Wade affair' in 1891. In 1901, with his mother and sisters in Scotland, Thomas was boarding in Hotspur Place, Alnwick and working as a blacksmith.

In 1909 Thomas's sister Frances married James Quigley in Derby and in 1911 they, together with their 8 month old daughter Madge, were boarding in Wolverhampton and listed as 'Kinematograph Managers and Proprietors'. They presumably owned the cinema and a 'Kinematograph Lecturer' lived in the same boarding house, who would accompany the silent films. Thomas also boarded in the same house, having presumably being offered the job as 'Kinematograph bill inspector' by his sister. At some time Margaret moved from Scotland to live with her daughter Frances in Wolverhampton, where she died in June 1918.

Early in 1914 Thomas married Sophia Agnes Taylor in Wolverhampton and over the next four years they had three children Iris (b. 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1914), Thomas (b. 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1916) and Vera (b. 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 1918).

It is not known when Thomas joined the Army but he didn't go abroad before January 1916. Virtually nothing is known for definite about his military career. Unless he volunteered then, because of his age, he was probably called up in mid-1916. He joined the Royal Field Artillery (No. 147898) and was attached to the 60<sup>th</sup> Division.

On 1st November 1916 the 60<sup>th</sup> Division received orders to reorganise, preparatory for a move to Salonika in Greece. Units entrained at Longpre, France between 14<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November and, going via Marseilles and Malta, assembled at Salonika on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1916. The Division then remained in Salonika and took part in the unsuccessful battle of Dorian against the Bulgarians.

In June 1917 the Division was once again reorganised in preparation for a move to Egypt for operations in Palestine. It embarked on 12<sup>th</sup> June and by 4<sup>th</sup> July had completed concentration at Moascar in the Southern Suez Canal Zone. The Division began to advance to Palestine and by 23<sup>rd</sup> July was at Deir el Balah (8 miles SW of Gaza). The Division then remained in Palestine and took part in many engagements, culminating in the capture of Jerusalem in December 1917 and Jericho in February 1918.

Thomas died of sickness (probably malaria) on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1918 and was buried in the Alexandria (Hadra) War Memorial Cemetery (see image on previous page) in grave F129. It is known that Alexandria remained an important hospital centre during later operations in Egypt and Palestine and the port was much used by hospital ships and troop transports bringing reinforcements and carrying the sick and wounded out of the theatres of war.

On the day of his death he was on the strength of the 60<sup>th</sup> Divisional Ammunition Column Royal Field Artillery.

Thomas prepared a field will on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1917 (see below). It is interesting to note that probate for his 'private affairs' was granted on July 29<sup>th</sup> 1918 to Audrey Appleby, spinster, in the sum of £370:8:10 and not to his wife.

### INFORMAL WILL.

W.O. No. E 581854/1

DOMICILE. English

Record No. 425/711 193/19

Name Thomas Appleby

The enclosed document dated 20<sup>th</sup> Oct 1917 and signed

Regt. No. and Rank 144898 Gunner

Thomas Appleby,

Regt. 60<sup>th</sup> Div. Ammunition Column Royal Field Artillery

appears to have been written or executed by the person named in the margin while

Died at Egypt

was "in actual military service" within the meaning of the Wills Act, 1837, and has been recognised by the War Department as constituting a valid will.

Date of Death 22 4-18

WAR OFFICE.

Date 7. 8. 18

*W. H. M. D.*  
for the Assistant Financial Secretary.

### WILL.

In the event of my Death I give the whole of my Army effects to my wife Mrs Agnes Appleby 109 Alma St. Heath Town Haverhampton My private affairs are already settled

no-144898  
Signature Thomas Appleby

Rank and Regt. Gnr R.F.A.

Date 20<sup>th</sup> Oct 1917

Meanwhile, back on the Western Front, the Germans now turned their attention back to the Somme and, by April 25<sup>th</sup>, the British were forced to withdraw from the positions on Passchendaele Ridge which they had taken in 1917 at great cost. Despite this reverse the British fought strongly and the German offensive was called off on April 30<sup>th</sup>. It is quite possible that the seventeenth 'Embleton' man received wounds that would prove fatal during these battles.

## ROBERT JOHN JOSEPH DICKINSON

Robert Dickinson was born in Embleton in 1892 and christened in the village church on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1892. His father, William Hope Dickinson, born in Newcastle, worked as an ordnance fitter. His mother, Margaret (nee Carr), was born in Christon Bank and christened in Embleton church on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1867. She worked as a dressmaker. The couple married in Newcastle in the fourth quarter of 1889. As far as is known Robert was an only child.



Robert attended the school in Embleton where it would appear he was quite unruly. He is regularly mentioned in the punishment book for offences such as 'interfering with classmates' (2

strokes), 'truant' (3 strokes), 'throwing lighted matches in playground' (1 stroke), 'disobedience and continued inattention' (1 stroke), 'stone throwing' (4 strokes), 'disobedience and insubordination' (2 strokes and a stroke or two on his behind) and 'throwing stones at night' (2 strokes). He left school at fourteen and worked as an apprentice joiner.

In 1901 he was living in Christon Bank with his mother and three boarders (laundry workers) and in 1911 he was living in four rooms in Christon Bank with his mother and grandmother. Although his mother was still detailed as 'married' there has been no mention of William for over ten years.

Robert enlisted in Newcastle and was originally posted to the Durham Light Infantry (No. 4612). At some time he was transferred to the 26<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers (3<sup>rd</sup> Tyneside Irish battalion - service number 35385)

which was a Pals battalion, originally raised in Newcastle in November 1914. The 26<sup>th</sup> battalion proceeded to France in January 1916 where they, as part of the 34<sup>th</sup> Division, were stationed at La Crosse east of St. Omer. They were in action during the Battles of the Somme, including the capture of Scots and Sausage Redoubts, the Battles of Bazentin Ridge and Pozieres Ridge and the Battle of Flers-Courcelette. In 1917 they fought in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battles of the Scarpe and the Battle of Aeiex during the Arras Offensive. In August they were involved in the fighting at Haricourt and in October took part in the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) at the Broenbeek. In early 1918 the army was reorganised and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tyneside Irish battalion was disbanded in February in France, the troops transferring to other units.

It is not known how many of these battles Robert fought but he died in the Etaples hospital complex south of Boulogne on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1918. He must have been in hospital for some time because he was still listed as being in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tyneside Irish which had been disbanded in February. His death certificate lists him as dying of 'disease' but this could be diseased wounds or pneumonia, or any of the many other diseases that affected the troops living in awful conditions. The area around Etaples was the scene of immense concentrations of reinforcement camps and hospitals. In 1917 100,000 troops were camped amongst the sand dunes and in the hospitals. There were eleven general, one stationary and four Red Cross hospitals plus a convalescent depot which all together could deal with 22,000 wounded or sick. Robert's grave (LXVIII.D.2) is in the Etaples Military Cemetery (see image on previous page).

Time was now running out for Germany, as US troops were arriving to join the Allied front line in ever growing numbers. On May 27<sup>th</sup> they launched an attack in the Chemin des Dames near Soissons to the north east of Paris. Again they quickly gained ground, 10 miles in the first day, and by the end of the third day were 40 miles from their original front line. They had now reached the Marne river and were only 56 miles from Paris but, as always, they had such extended lines that they were unable to consolidate their gains. It was in this battle that the eighteenth 'Embleton' man was killed.

## ROBERT WOOD McLAREN



Robert McLaren was born in Embleton on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 1898 and was christened on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January in the village church. His father, also Robert Wood, was born in Embleton and worked as a steel and drainage contractor owning, with John Roland McLaren, the firm McLaren & Co. Quarry Owners and Contractors at Woodstead. This partnership was dissolved in 1909. His mother, Jane Ann McLaren (nee Johnson), was also born in Embleton. Robert's parents were married in Embleton in the fourth quarter of 1897 and it would appear that Robert was an only child. Jane Ann died in 1901 when the family was living on Front Street Embleton. Following her death, Robert was brought up in the homes of his maternal and paternal grandparents and in 1911 lived in his grandfather's house at Woodstead.

Robert attended the Vincent Edwards Church School in Embleton from September 1903 until December 1912 when he reached the age of 14. He was very well behaved throughout his time at school without any entries in the punishment book against his name. He and his father emigrated to Canada in 1913, only to return home in 1915, at which point Robert went to work for Armstrong Whitworth in Scotswood, Newcastle, for a year until he was 18.

Because of his date of birth, Robert junior would have been registered in August 1915, on National Registration Day. In theory, he would then have been called-up under compulsory conscription, one month after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is therefore probable he was conscripted in Newcastle after February 1917. Since the rules stated that a man should not go abroad until he was eighteen and a half, he would have undergone training in one of the two reserve battalions of the East Yorkshire regiment based at Seaton Delaval.

He shipped out to France on Easter Monday 1918 (10<sup>th</sup> March) and joined the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion which suffered greatly in the German spring offensive 'Operation Michael' at the battle of St. Quentin on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1918. The next day they were forced to withdraw to the Longavesnes - Saulcourt Road.

The Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion were reorganised and prepared to move by train to St. Omer to join the French 6<sup>th</sup> Army. They travelled on May 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, passing through the northern outskirts of Paris to arrive at a camp at Romigny. For the next week the battalion formed working parties and went on route marches to keep fit. Finally, on May 12<sup>th</sup>, they left in incessant rain to march to Prouilly and then next day to Chalons le Vergeur (Marne). On the evening of May 22<sup>nd</sup> the battalion moved off to become a support battalion at Cauroy les Hermonville. They were in position by midnight and spent two quiet days repairing trenches overlooking the Aisne-Marne Canal. What nobody had anticipated was a renewed German advance. On May 26<sup>th</sup> the battalion noticed a great deal of enemy activity to the front of their area and were warned to expect an attack. At 1 a.m. on May 27<sup>th</sup> there was a heavy gas attack along the front and orders were given to demolish the Aisne-Marne Canal bridge. At 3 a.m. the attack commenced. Parts of the battalion were enveloped and the rest of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion made a gradual withdrawal to Hermonville. Under attack, and partly surrounded, the battalion withdrew a further 1,000 metres but then, on May 28<sup>th</sup>, the enemy advanced in force and several posts were over-run, so the 1<sup>st</sup> withdrew southwards until they met up with some French soldiers of a Mitralleirs (machine gun company) and made a stand at St. Joseph's farm. Under cover from the French, the East Yorks moved further south to Trigny village where they formed a defensive line. Unfortunately at 1.30 a.m. the French were ordered to withdraw, so the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion lost its machine gun cover and later that night they withdrew to Muizon village where they formed yet another defensive line.

The German advance was un-sustainable and this became known as the Battle of the Aisne 1918. The losses of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion between 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>



May were six other ranks killed, 55 wounded and 314 missing, presumed killed. Robert was killed in action near Homerville and is commemorated on the Soissons Memorial (left) along with almost 4,000 other officers and men who died in the battles of Aisne and Marne 1918 and who have no known grave.

Robert's father received official news that Robert was

killed in action in France on May 28<sup>th</sup>. In a battlefield will, he left all his property to his father at his last known address of 32 Fifth Avenue, Heaton, Newcastle.

## INFORMAL WILL.

W.O. No. E 582624/1.

DOMICILE. *England*

Record No. *H 29/417403*

Name *Robert Wood McLaren*

The enclosed document  
dated *April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1918.*  
and signed *Robert Wood*  
*McLaren.*

Regtl. No. *52749* *Private*  
and Rank

appears to have been written  
or executed by the person  
named in the margin while  
he was "in actual military  
service" within the meaning  
of the Wills Act, 1837, and  
has been recognised by the  
War Department as con-  
stituting a valid will.

Regt. *1<sup>st</sup> Bn. East Yorkshire*

Died at *in the field, France.*

Date of Death *28. 5. 18.*

WAR OFFICE.

Date *25<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1918*

*G. Brownford*  
for the Assistant Financial Secretary.

## WILL.

*In the event of my death  
I leave all my property  
to my father*

*Mr Robert Wood McLaren  
32 Fifth Avenue  
Heaton  
Newcastle-on-Tyne  
England*

Signature *Robert Wood McLaren*

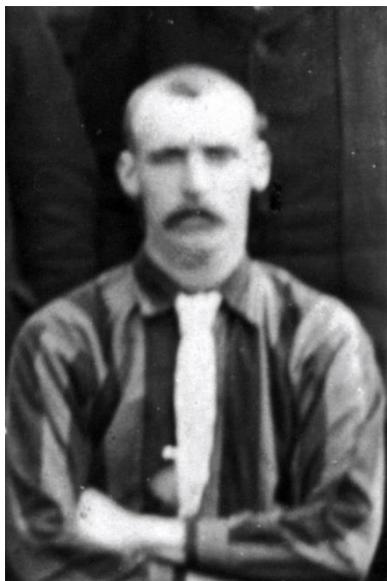
Rank and Regt. *Private 86606*

Date *April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1918.*

The Germans withdrew men from Flanders and attacked for one last time on July 15<sup>th</sup>. They did manage to cross the Marne but couldn't keep up the pressure and the Allied defences held firm. French counter-attacks drove the Germans back and, when the battle finally ceased on August 6<sup>th</sup>, Soissons had been re-taken and the Germans were back on the defensive.

The British were now receiving great numbers of guns and tanks from the home industries and American troops were arriving in large numbers, and so began the '100 days' of Allied offensives that finally led to the end of the war. The Allies attacked across almost the whole length of the western front. The British overcame the problem of crossing the Hindenberg Line plus two large canals in the St. Quentin region of the Somme in September, and by October 4<sup>th</sup> the British had broken through into open country. During this period the nineteenth 'Embleton' man died.

## ALFRED BARRS



Alfred Barrs was not an Embleton 'local'. He was born in the third quarter of 1874 in Rowley Regis Staffordshire. His father, Joseph, was an iron sett maker and his mother Mary (nee Tromans) was a nail maker. He had two sisters, Ellen born two years before him and Ann born three years after him. Alfred's mother died when he was eight and his father re-married two years later to Ellen Payne. In 1891 the family were living in Enderby, Leicestershire where Joseph was a stone sett maker and Alfred was working as a shoe hand.

Sometime in the mid 1890's Alfred moved to the north from Enderby (together with a Herbert Neal and a member of the Varnham family). Why they ended up in Embleton is not

known, but in November 1898 Alfred married Margaret Ann Appleby in Embleton. Her father, Mark Appleby, owned the quarry in Embleton and rumour has it that the marriage was not popular in the family.

Perhaps immediately after the wedding, but certainly by 1901, Alfred was living in the quarry house and working as a whinstone sett maker. Alfred and Margaret had six children, Francis Alfred (b 1901), Margaret (b 1905), Leslie (male b 1909), Joseph William (b 1910), Mary (b 1912) and Hilda (b 1915). In 1911 the family was still living in the quarry house and Alfred was still a whinstone sett maker.

In 1906 the second wife of Alfred's father died and in 1907 he married for a third time. His new wife, Jane Ord Ions, was born in Alnwick and in 1911 Joseph and Jane were living in Embleton, he working as a whinstone sett maker in the quarry and she as a dressmaker. The Barrs families were thus established in Embleton and, as late as 1915, Alfred and family were living in the quarry house. At some time before 1918 the Barrs moved to Star Yard (behind the village shop) and Mrs Barrs was still there in 1919.

As a matter of interest, the Alfie Barrs who died in 2005, and is remembered by many current Embleton residents, was the son of Francis Alfred Barrs and the grandson of this Alfred Barrs.

It is known that Alfred's hobby was pigeon keeping (racing). He raced and exhibited pigeons as 'Alf Barrs Christon Bank' of the Alnwick and District Homing Society and in 1902 received a 'very highly commended' award at the Annual Pigeon Show held at Turk's Head Inn at Bedlington for a racing cock bird. In the Alnwick and County Gazette of June 19<sup>th</sup> 1915 it was reported 'Over 2,000 homing pigeons have been placed by their owners gratuitously at the disposal of the Admiralty in connection with the war. Prizes have been awarded for efficient services rendered and amongst the successful ones is Mr Alfred Barrs of Embleton.'

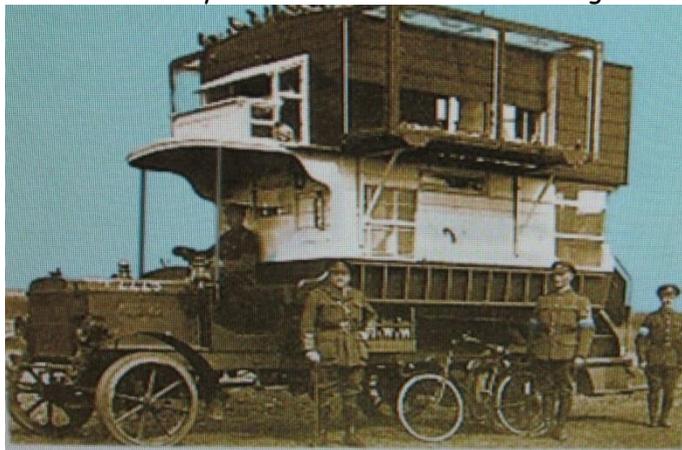
At the outbreak of war the British did not have a pigeon service and the first birds were given by the French to the British Expeditionary Force's (BEF) Intelligence Corps for carrying coded messages. By May 1915 the BEF was using pigeons to send messages to pigeon posts in the trenches during battle. The Royal Engineers were responsible for communications during the war and pigeons were an effective replacement for broken telegraph wires.

The birds were kept in reserve until telegraphic communication was destroyed by shells etc. and then released to carry coded messages. In June 1915 the Carrier Pigeon Service of the Royal Engineers was allowed to recruit 60

pigeon specialists who were men already experienced in keeping homing pigeons in civilian life. Future handlers were trained on the job in France and Flanders. The men who looked after the birds were dubbed 'pigeoneers' but by the end of the war their official title was 'Loftsmen'. As the service expanded in 1916 mobile lofts were introduced, and in 1917 artillery Forward Observation Officers and tank crews were provided with messenger pigeons.

The most common route for a bird was to carry a message on a 10 to 20 minutes flight to a pigeon loft situated next to the HQ's communications officer. Soldiers appreciated the use of birds as it reduced the need for somebody to act as a runner across a battlefield. At the end of the war there were 400 men attending 150 mobile pigeon lofts (see photo below). From a nucleus of 15 pigeons in 1914 the bird strength grew such that 12,000 birds were used at the First Battle of the Somme in 1916 and by 1918 20,000 birds were available for duty.

Alfred enlisted at Newcastle on Tyne on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1918 as a pioneer in the Royal Engineers and was sent to France on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1918. As Alfred was 43 at this time, this was probably a 'special enlistment' which was created so that men could carry out their civilian skills wearing a uniform, but not act as a trained combatant.



Alfred died at Gezaincourt (Somme, France) as a result of 'an accident sustained whilst on active service', his death certificate giving his cause of death as "died of injuries". His date of death is recorded as 18<sup>th</sup> September 1918. He was serving with 'D' Signal Company Royal Engineers (No. 305147),

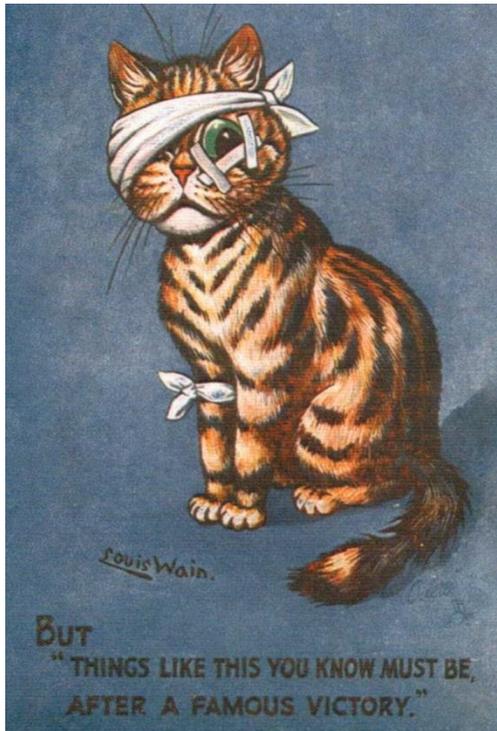
although he was employed by the Carrier Pigeon Service. He is buried at Bagneux British Cemetery, Gezaincourt.

The probate of Alfred reads 'Barrs, Alfred of Embleton Northumberland, private in H.M. Army died 17<sup>th</sup> September 1918 in France. Administration Newcastle on Tyne 27<sup>th</sup> March 1919 to Margaret Ann Barrs widow. Effects £41.19.8.'

Margaret Barrs married Alfred's friend Herbert Neal in the second quarter of 1920.

By late October the Germans were in a very difficult position. Its allies were all beaten and there was no will in the country to prolong the war into 1919. On November 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> a German delegation crossed the lines to start negotiations for peace. On November 9<sup>th</sup> a republic was declared in Germany and on November 11<sup>th</sup> an armistice was agreed in a railway carriage at Compiegne. The fighting was over.

The minutes of the December Embleton Parish Council meeting record that, in response to a Government demand, the following figures had been submitted:- number of men sent to war – 160, number of men killed – 37, number of men wounded – 25.



## Chapter 6

## 1919

And so the fighting was over and the troops were coming home but some 'Embleton' men would not survive long into the year due to their wartime experiences. The two men yet to die had both been in England for some time at the cessation of hostilities, but neither of them could be described as wounded in the conventional sense.

**THOMAS STRAFFEN**

Thomas Straffen was born in Brunton during July 1896 and christened in Embleton on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August that year. His father was John Straffen from Kirkharle, who worked as a domestic coachman and his mother was Isabella (nee Wales) who was born in Wigtown. They married in Sunderland in 1895. Thomas had one sister, Edna, who was born three years after him. He attended Embleton school, probably until 1910, then for two and a half years worked as an apprentice butcher and then became a groom. His sister also attended the school. The family home was in High Brunton, Christon Bank, Embleton where they lived in three rooms.

Thomas stated his age as '19 and two months' when he enlisted in Alnwick on September 15<sup>th</sup> 1914, the height of the September recruiting campaign. (September 1914 saw 462,901 men enlist as volunteers, from then on the numbers declined. Recruiting officers had no idea how long the war would last and had nowhere to accommodate the men). He was actually only 18 but claimed to be the minimum age (19) to serve overseas. He was told he would be in the army for a day and then would serve up to three years when called up, which he was on September 25<sup>th</sup>, ten days after being attested. Probably because he was a groom, he was posted to The King's Hussars stationed at Scarborough. He served

with the Hussars until the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1915 when he was transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion East Yorkshire Regiment (Regimental No. 18488) which was then based at Withensea (near Hull) as a training and reserve battalion.

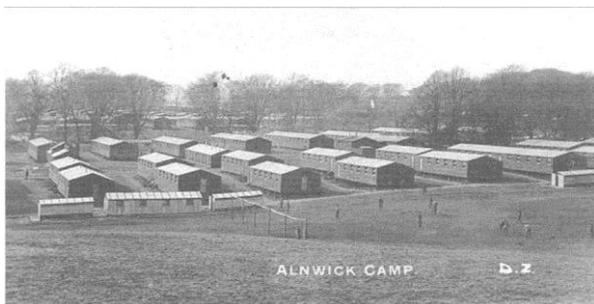
After five weeks infantry training he was posted overseas on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1915 as part of a draft of reinforcements to the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion East Yorkshire Regiment. The 1<sup>st</sup> battalion was serving in France and Flanders with the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade in the 6<sup>th</sup> Division at this time, but in November moved to the 64<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade in the 21<sup>st</sup> Division.

Thomas was wounded in the right arm in September 1916 and was returned to the U.K. on 28<sup>th</sup> September for medical treatment. The Division had been fighting on the Somme at the Battle of Flers-Courcelette (15<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1916). At some unspecified time Thomas returned to the Front to re-join the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion and was appointed paid acting corporal on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1917. He was subsequently appointed paid acting sergeant on July 31<sup>st</sup> 1917. In October 1917 he was again wounded, this time in the left arm, and returned to the U.K. as a casualty for treatment on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1917. The Division had been fighting at the Battle of Broodseinde in Flanders on October 4<sup>th</sup> and then the Second Battle of Passchendaele from October 26<sup>th</sup>, so Thomas' wound was probably received during time in the trenches at the Front between these dates.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> 1917 Thomas had recovered from his wound and was posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion East Yorkshire Regiment as a private soldier, his appointed rank of acting sergeant being valid only for the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion because it was a 'local' appointment in the grant of the Commanding Officer and not a formal promotion.

Thomas remained in the U.K. with the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion and was appointed acting lance corporal on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1918. He was admitted to the

Alnwick Military Hospital Command Depot on the Pastures where he died of valvular disease of the heart and oedema of the lungs on February 12<sup>th</sup> 1919. A Military Hospital Command Depot was a type of military convalescent camp for the rehabilitative training of soldiers too fit for a true convalescent camp but not fit enough to be returned to their unit. The Depot in Alnwick had accommodation for 40 officers and 5,000 other ranks.



Thomas was buried at Alnwick Cemetery on February 15<sup>th</sup> 1919 and a small wooden cross marked his grave until a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone was erected some years later. He qualified for the 1914-15 Star.

## WILLIAM HENRY WINSTANLEY



William Winstanley was born in Oystermouth, Glamorganshire in 1889 the son of Ralph and Mary Jane (nee Thompson) Winstanley. He had an elder sister Mary and a younger brother Thomas Jefferson. His father Ralph grew up in Rush Green, Cheshire and at the age of 16 he joined the Royal Navy as a 'boy' until his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday when his ten year service contract started. By 1871 he was a seaman on H.M.S. *Racoon*, a Pearl class corvette with a crew of close to 200 which spent most of her career on overseas stations. In the 1860's she was on the South Africa Station and in the 70's on the North American and West Indies Station. In

April 1871 she was alongside at Halifax, Nova Scotia for the Census. At the end of his service contract in 1878 Ralph signed on for a further ten years. By 1880 Ralph was married to Mary Jane and was working as a Coast Guard Officer in Bangor, Wales having transferred from the Navy.

Their first child, Mary E, was born in Bangor in 1884 followed by William Henry born at Oystermouth (the Mumbles), Glamorganshire in 1889, and finally Thomas Jefferson born in 1891 in Tenby. Mary Jane, his wife, died in late 1894 in Altringham. Six years later Ralph Winstanley married again, this time to Mary Ann Sanderson, who was born in Barrow, Lincolnshire. They had no children. In 1901 the family was living in Newton by the Sea in the Coast Guard Station and Ralph was Chief Coastguard Officer. At this time the two boys aged 12 and 10 attended Embleton school. The family was still living in Newton in 1903 but some time before 1911 Ralph, Mary Ann and Thomas Jefferson moved to Barton on Humber and by now Ralph was a Naval Pensioner.

In 1911 Thomas Jefferson was working as a railway clerk, living at home in Barton on Humber. He later served in the Durham Light Infantry and Army

Service Corps and survived the war. Mary E became an elementary school teacher and in 1911 was living in Snaith & Cowick in Yorkshire.

William Henry had always lived by the sea. No doubt having heard stories of his father's life on ships in South Africa, the Americas and West Indies he opted to join the navy in 1907 for a period of 12 years (service no. 271958) having already spent two years as a trainee/cadet at the Royal Navy ERA (Engine Room Artificer) training school called H.M.S. Indus in Devonport. H.M.S. Indus in this context was actually three ships, converted so that together they formed a school for 200 lads, 160 crew and 40 instructors. William was about 5ft 6ins tall with brown hair, grey eyes and a fair complexion and throughout his service his conduct was always rated as very good. In 1909 he was an ERA 5 and by the time he left the Navy in 1918 he was an ERA 2. Most of William's service was spent at the various shore-based training establishments in Devonport (H.M.S. Indus, H.M.S. Termaire, H.M.S. Fisgard and H.M.S. Vivid). He did serve in H.M.S. Blake, a first Class Cruiser, H.M.S. King Alfred, an armoured Cruiser and, for a very short time, in the Battleship H.M.S. Resolution.

Finally in May 1918 William was medically discharged from Devonport Naval base (H.M.S. Vivid) with tuberculosis. He returned to the family home at Cyprus Villas in Dam Road, Barton on Humber and died in February 1919. He was buried in the family grave alongside his father and step-mother. Based on his service, he qualified for the 1914 - 15 Star. His medals were posthumously issued to his brother Thomas Jefferson.



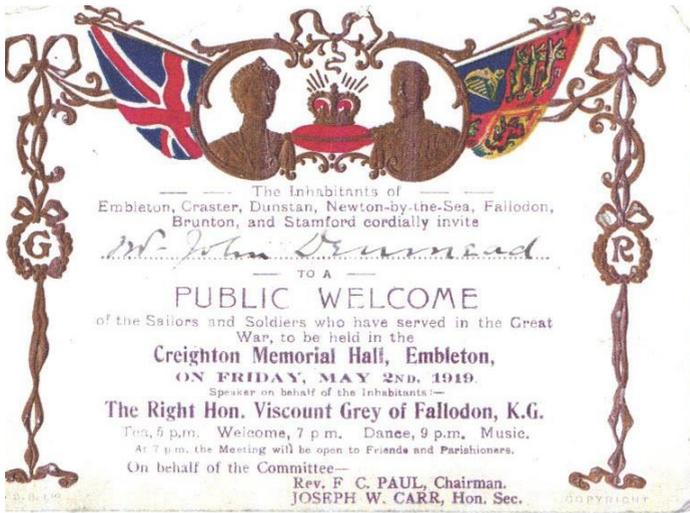
## Chapter 7

## After The War

So ends the stories of the 'Embleton' men who died in the Great War. Many others served in the Army and Navy and returned to tell the tale, but this book is dedicated to those who didn't return.

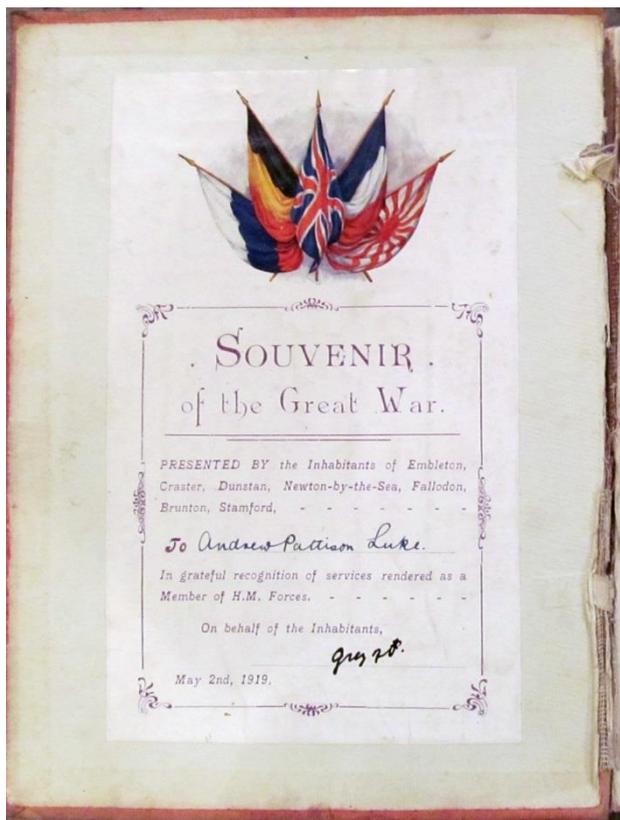
Although fighting ended on November 11th 1918 some forces had to remain in France because the war was not officially ended until a peace treaty had been signed. The formal end of the Great War came on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1919 with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

Every city, town, village and hamlet wanted to welcome their men home and plans were set in motion for celebrations. Embleton



was no different, and in March a meeting was held in the schoolroom to consider the possibility of offering a public welcome to the men back from the Forces. It was agreed that this would be arranged by a committee chaired by the Vicar

and that this committee should raise the necessary funds. Generous subscriptions brought the fund up to £150 (today's equivalent would be £4,500). The Alnwick and County Gazette reported that 'On May 2<sup>nd</sup> an enthusiastic welcome was given to the 150 men who returned safely to the Parish from the War. It opened with a tea given to the returned heroes in the Creighton Memorial Hall followed by a crowded meeting and entertainment, with an address of welcome and presentation of souvenirs by Viscount Grey of Fallodon, and



concluded with a dance. Every returning man received a copy of 'The Illustrated War Record' (see left), published at 21 shillings, and the festivities which had begun in the afternoon continued until 2 a.m.

In late June another public meeting, convened by the Parish Council, was held in the school to consider how the declaration of peace should be celebrated. It was decided that the celebrations should take the form of a festival lasting two days and that a house-to-house

collection would be taken to finance it. A tea for all would be organised, the children from the school and persons over 66 years of age to be free of charge. A concert and dance would be arranged and sports for the children and ex-members of H.M. Forces were foreseen. The festival took place in August.

The Great War lasted longer than anybody expected and the number of British men killed was very much greater than was ever foreseen. The Government was overwhelmed by the numbers of dead and refused to bring the bodies home, although it would probably have been impossible for them to do so had they had deemed it advisable. Faced with this situation some wealthy families tried to organise the return of their dead relatives via other channels, something that ordinary families couldn't consider doing. Foreseeing the upset this might cause, the Government decreed that no bodies were to be returned.

In Britain people traditionally overcame bereavement by burying their dead, but this was now denied to everybody. The erection of War Memorials was a Government-inspired initiative which offered people something to focus on. The Memorials became surrogate tombstones which people could visit and pay their respects and the unveiling ceremonies became substitute funeral services. The creation of the Memorials was organised locally, there being no Government directive or funding. The question of who was, or was not, commemorated was held to be a local decision since there were no definite 'rules'. Those who had moved away, or wanted to get on with life, or hoped their men would return, didn't offer names for inclusion; others had the name included in several places. The Memorials erected were not all outside - some were plaques in village halls, churches, libraries etc. The variety of memorials was astonishing.

By the end of 1919 most parishes had started to organise the erection of their chosen War Memorial, but Embleton was late. The Alnwick and County Gazette of May 14<sup>th</sup> 1920 reported that 'A large public meeting was held on February 6<sup>th</sup> in the schoolroom at Embleton to consider the question of erecting a memorial to those belonging to the parish who have fallen in the war. After Lord Grey had addressed the meeting on the duty of the inhabitants of the district to perpetuate the memories of those who had fallen, it was decided that a memorial for the Parish of Embleton be erected in the cemetery and that the cost be defrayed by subscription given definitely for that purpose. A committee representing the different parts of the parish was appointed to carry out the above resolution.'

The War Memorial erected to commemorate the dead of the ecclesiastical parish of Embleton is located within the graveyard at Spitalford. It takes the form of an 18ft (5.5m) tall octagonal shaft with the cross imposed upon the East and West sides and stands upon an octagonal base and steps. At the foot of the shaft on the East and West sides are two sunk and decorated panels. The East panel contains the inscription 'To the Glory of God and in grateful and lasting remembrance of the men of the ecclesiastical Parish of Embleton who fell in the Great War 1914-1919. Erected by the

Parishioners'. The West panel contains the words 'Lest we forget'. On the base are inscribed the names of the 41 Fallen from the villages of: Brunton, Craster, Christon Bank, Dunstan, Embleton, Fallodon, Newton-by-the-Sea and Stamford.

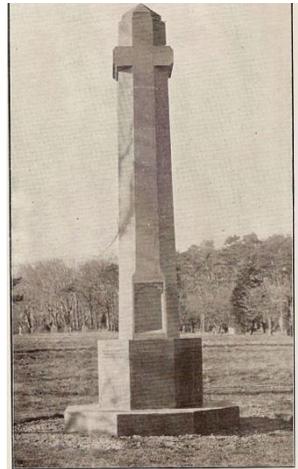


The Memorial was unveiled by the Rt. Hon. Viscount Grey of Fallodon K.G. on Sunday July 24<sup>th</sup> 1921 at 3 p.m. The Alnwick and County Gazette on Saturday July 30<sup>th</sup> reported 'There was a large

gathering of people present, and the weather was fine with a steady breeze. A combined choir consisting of the choirs from Embleton Parish Church, Embleton Presbyterian Church, Craster Church of England, Craster and Christon Bank Primitive Methodist Churches also took part and there was a large gathering of ex-service men'.

### The Memorial 1921

The Memorial was renovated in 1949 and the names of 11 men from the same eight villages who fell in the 1939 – 1945 war were added. This was unveiled on Sunday September 25<sup>th</sup> 1949 at 3 p.m. by Captain J. S. Salter D.S.O., R.N., a relation of Viscount Grey.



The fund set up to build and maintain this Memorial was finally closed in December 1996 when the sum of £113.99p was sent to the Royal Star and Garter Home by the Parochial Church Council.



The School Manual from the Vincent Edwards school, Embleton for 19<sup>th</sup> July 1921 records that ‘after a year’s discussion regarding the purchase of a ‘war memorial of a simple character’ dedicated to former pupils, the Governors agreed to buy an oak tablet at a cost of £5.10.0’. The names of 17 former pupils were inscribed on this tablet in gold paint. Originally this War Memorial hung in the school but now is mounted within the

Creighton Memorial Hall.

The U.R.C. Church of Embleton purchased its own Memorial in the form of a Communion wine tray made of oak with metal fittings. It was inscribed ‘To the glory of God and in grateful memory of (seven names) who died for us in the Great War 1914 – 1918’. The tray was donated to the Bailiffgate Museum in Alnwick after the closure of the URC church.

It is possible that other men who had some association with Embleton died in the war but are not recorded on any Memorial, having been forgotten or deliberately left off.



**Appendix****Military Formations**

To aid understanding of the organisation of the British Army, the following is a simplified description of its formations:-

**Army** – each commanded by a General and at times there were five Armies on the Western Front and others elsewhere. There were usually four *Army Corps* in an Army.

**Army Corps** – each commanded by a Lieutenant General. The Corps commander had two or more *divisions* under his command

**Divisions** – each commanded by a Major General. Each division had under its command three *infantry brigades*.

**Infantry Brigades** – each commanded by a Brigadier General. At the start of the War there were four infantry *battalions* in a brigade but in 1918 this was reduced to three.

**Battalions** – each commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel. Each battalion consisted of four *companies*. In 1914 an infantry battalion would number about 1,000 officers and other ranks, including battalion headquarters and support staff, but later could be less.

**Companies** – each commanded by a Captain and totalled about 230 officers and men.

**Illustrations**

A British Recruiting Poster on page iii and contemporary postcards, both British and German, have been inserted for general interest on pages v, vii, 6, 10, 18, 28, 29, 39, 46, 48, 52, 66.

Page 22 – Royal Fusiliers (City of London) Regiment memorial.

Page 71 – Invitation to the public welcome for returning servicemen.

Back cover - Medals of David Ferguson Welsh.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their thanks to Andy Craig (photographer) for help in preparing the front and rear covers, to Alan Greveson for providing military information, to Debbie Skalli for searching graveyards etc. and to the Bailiffgate Museum Alnwick, the Woodhorn Museum Ashington, The Northumberland Fusiliers' Museum Alnwick and the many individuals who helped in different ways.

The picture of Herbert Luke is reproduced with the permission of Northumberland Archives.

The information in this book is included in good faith and is believed to be correct at the time of publication. No responsibility is accepted by the authors for errors or any loss or injury however caused.

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Admiralty,  
London, S.W. 1.  
19th, April 1923.

Mr. J. S. Welsh, R.N. 1195 E.S.

Sir,

I am directed by my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to transmit to you the accompanying 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal which would have been conferred upon the above-named had he lived, in memory of his services with the British Forces during the Great War.

In forwarding these Decorations, I am commanded by the King to assure you of His Majesty's high appreciation of the services rendered.

I am to request that you will be so good as to acknowledge the receipt of these Decorations on the attached form.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

Mr. J. S. Welsh,

T. Murray

