



ELLESMERE PORT WAR MEMORIAL PROJECT

28694 Private GEORGE ERNEST KEATES
2nd / 4th Battalion The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment
Died of Wounds (resulting from gassing) 10 June 1920 Aged 20



George Ernest Keates had a difficult short life, losing the care of his mother due to illness before he was ten, which in turn contributed to the break up of the family, together with an unsettled life with his father, moving home to follow his work at sheet metal factories in Wolverhampton, Newport and Ellesmere Port. He joined the Army under age, fought in the horror of Passchendaele and the trenches around the Somme, where was gassed. He returned home seriously ill and passed away at the age of only twenty in 1920. His name was not submitted for the Ellesmere Port war memorial by his family, and he was consequently omitted. They may have thought he would be remembered in Newport, or more fittingly the family home in Walsall. In fact, he was a forgotten young man was not recorded anywhere, and it wasn't until January 1915 before he was finally recorded on the Ellesmere Port War Memorial at the request of his family still living locally.

George Ernest Keates was born in 1900 in Walsall, the son of George Ernest Keates senior and Annie Steatham. George senior was a Sheet Iron Worker living in Darlestone Road, Walsall, the son of Samuel Keates, a boot maker. The family roots in the Bloxwich, Walsall area go back to at least the late 1700s.

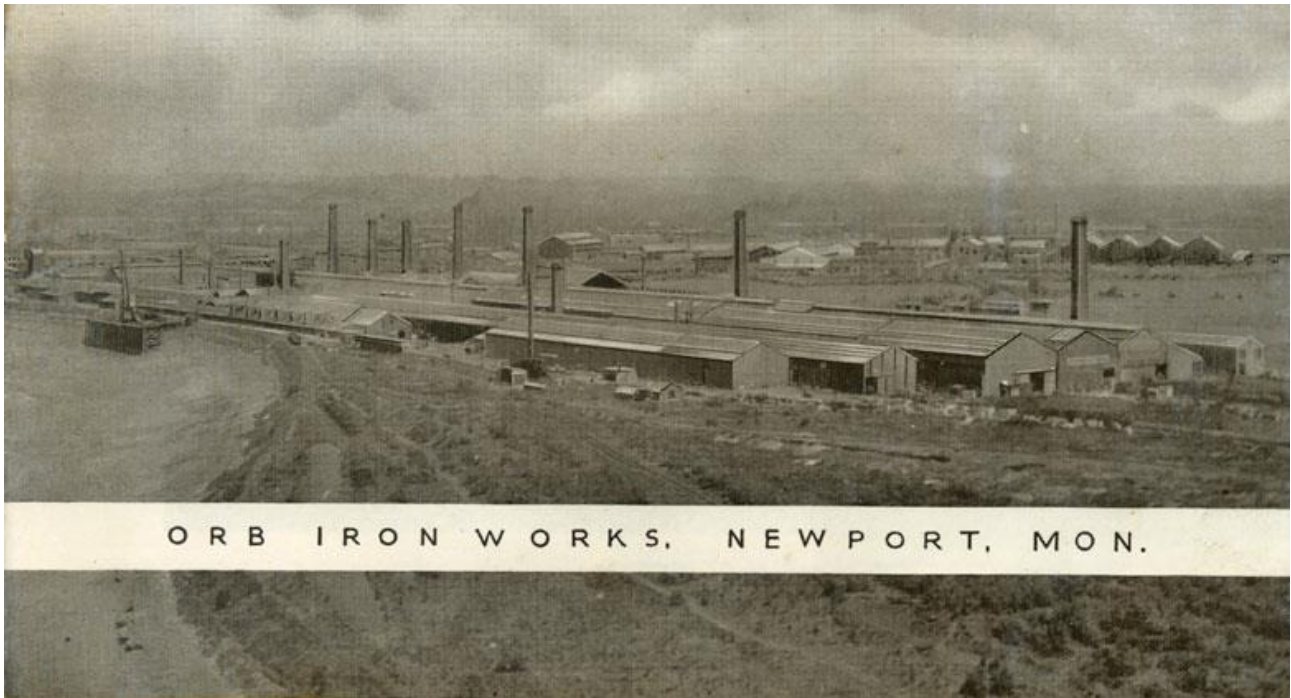
In 1895 George senior married Annie Steatham, who was working with her sister in the local iron works as nut and bolt screwers, where her father William was an iron driller. Two daughters were born, Fanny in 1896 and Annie in 1897, followed by George Ernest junior in April 1900.

Sometime between 1905 and 1911, George Keates decided to move to Newport in South Wales to find work at the local iron works. A route that many other Wolverhampton iron workers had taken already, following the move there of the John Lysaght works. George took his young son George junior with him and found lodgings at 14 Ifton Street in the home of a fellow worker who had also moved from the West Midlands, close to the foundry of John Lysaght Iron & Steel Manufacturer, Orb Works, Lliswerry, Newport. Yet this was a period of tragedy for the family. Although George had secured work in Newport, his family had been torn apart. His wife Annie had been committed to the nearby lunatic asylum in Caerleon, while his youngest daughter Annie, aged 14, was being cared for by his wife's sister Fanny, who was lodging with another sister Maria and her husband and family in Upper Dean Street, Birmingham.

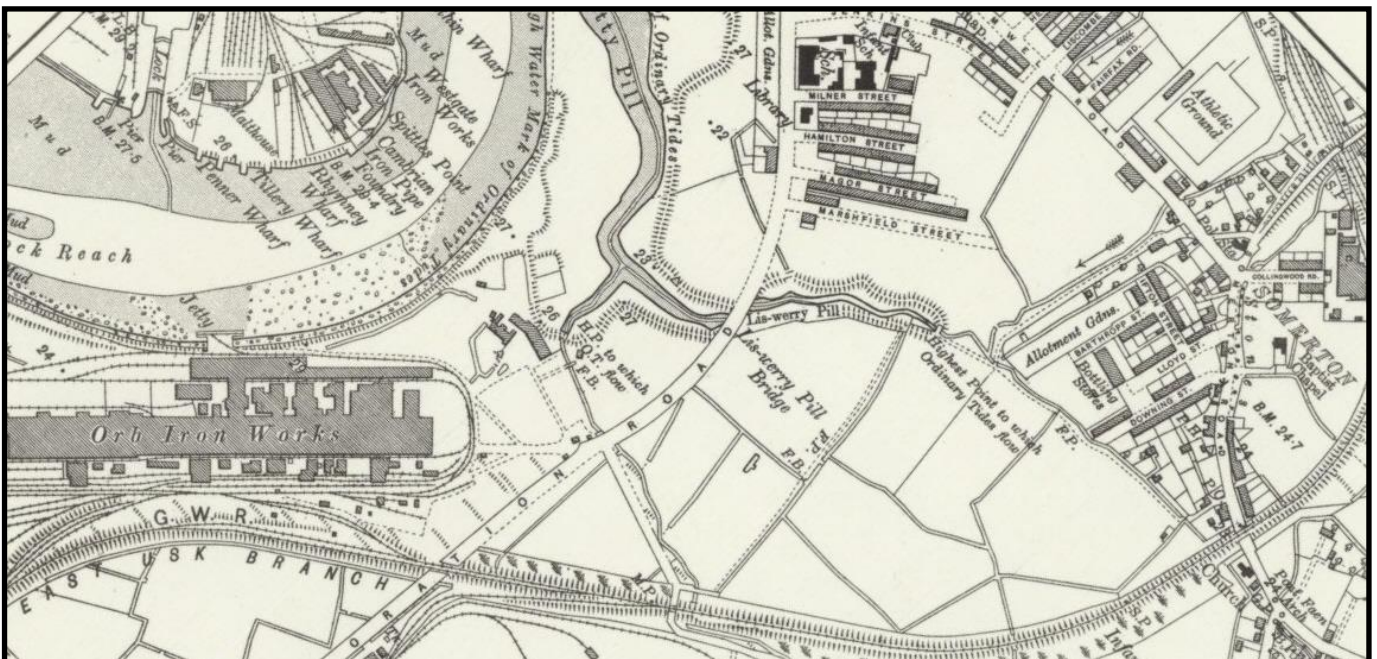


14 Ifton Street, Liswelly, Newport (white door, far right), where George Ernest Keates and son George were lodging before the war, while working at the local John Lyser 'Orb' Iron and Steel Works. Ifton Street is in the centre of the map below.





John Lysert 'Orb' Iron and Steel Works, Newport, shown on the bottom left of the map, while Ifton Street is at the centre right next to the allotments.



CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Schedule 90
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after completion)

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, or in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (last birthday) and SEX	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE		PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards		BIRTHPLACE of every Person	NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country	INFIRMITY	LANGUAGE SPOKEN	
			For Males, write "Single," "Married," "Widow," or "Divorced," or "Other Relative," "Boarder," or "Servant."	For Females, write "Single," "Married," "Widow," or "Divorced," or "Other Relative," "Boarder," or "Servant."	Personal Occupation	Industry or Service with which worker is connected					
Edward Halford	Head	34	married	15	8	6	2	Sheep-mills Lynders	Iron Works	Wolverhampton	English
Ellen Halford	wife	33	married					Wolverhampton		English	
Thomas H. Halford	son	18	single					Wolverhampton		English	
Emma Halford	daughter	8	single					Wolverhampton		English	
Barbara Halford	daughter	6	single					Wolverhampton		English	
William Halford	son	4	single					Wolverhampton		English	
Elizabeth Halford	daughter	1	single					Wolverhampton		English	
Edward Halford	son	2 months	single					Wolverhampton		English	
George Charles	lodger	37	married					Wolverhampton		English	
George Charles	son of lodger	11	single					Wolverhampton		English	

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

I certify that—
(1) All the ages in this Schedule are entered in the proper age column.
(2) I have entered the names and surnames in Columns 1 and 2 generally, and have compared them with the usual register of names.
(3) After making the necessary corrections I have compared the entries on the Schedule with the original returns, and have corrected such as appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.

Male 6 Female 4 Total 10

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

Writes below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (Kitchens, Bathrooms, or Apartments). Count the kitchen as a room, but do not count sanitary, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, or warehouse, office, shop.

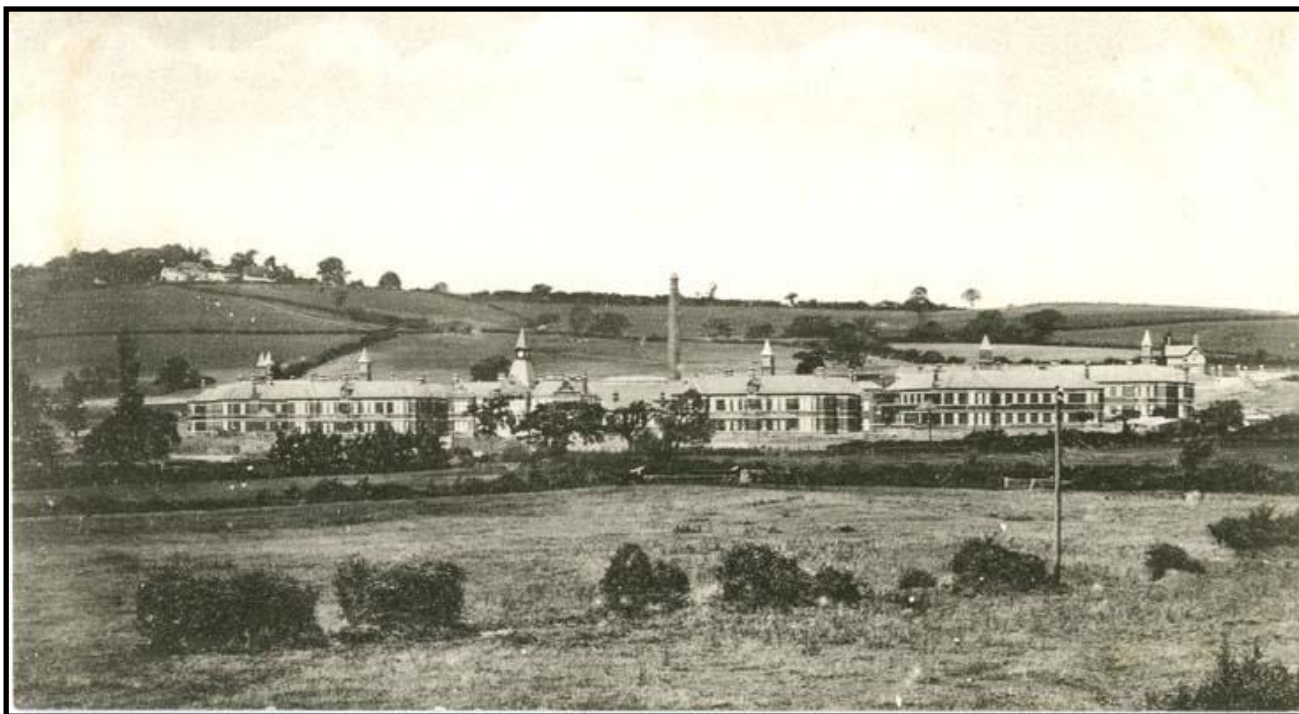
I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: Edward Halford
Postal Address: 44, Flor St. Walsley

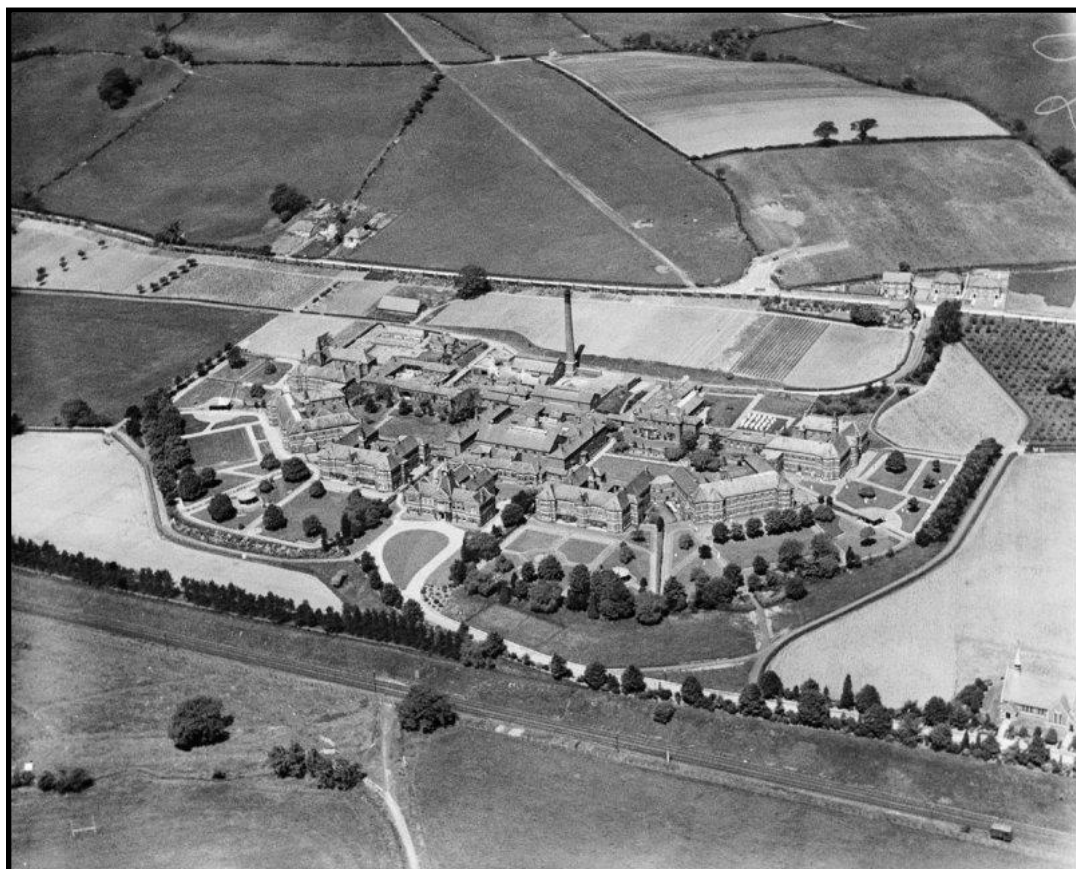
Census of 1911 showing George and son lodging with fellow iron worker who had also moved from Wolverhampton. The factory name John Lyser 'Orb' Iron and Steel Works, Newport, shown on the bottom left of the map, while Ifton Street is at the centre right next to the allotments.

Eldest daughter Fanny also moved to South Wales, but it would seem she had fallen into troubled times, as she was no longer living with her father, but had been taken in by a 'House of Mercy'. The Diocesan Deaconess House of Mercy Institution of Redlands Road, Penarth was actually a Magdalen Home. In 1897 the Bishop of Llandaff described purpose of the Deaconesses Institution at Penarth, 'for training a band of Godly women, who, after their ordination, should go forth and labour in the more populous parishes in the Diocese, and also for the recovery of fallen women, of whom there are at present 14 within its walls.' (from Francis Jones 'A Victorian Bishop', Journal of the National Library of Wales 1975). Poor Fanny Keates was one of the latter, being recorded as an 'inmate' aged 15 in 1911. Her condition and her reason for being there is unknown, but this was a home primarily for girls under 20 who had become pregnant outside of marriage. Despite the dressing up of the name and its spiritual intentions, this was a Magdalen Laundry, and the girls would be shown the errors of their ways with a heavy reliance on penitence. The role of the Penarth House of Mercy was reported to the census enumerator of 1911 to be 'For preventative training to endeavour to make them respectable and useful members of society'. Today, the campaign against the religious authorities for apology and compensation for those who resided in such institutions both in Britain and Ireland still continues.

However, it was her mother Annie Keates' illness which seem to have been the catalyst in breaking up the family. When she became ill is unknown, but the census of 1911 records 'A.K. aged 37, married, born in Birmingham' as a patient in the Newport Borough Lunatic Asylum in Caerleon. She continued there as a patient throughout the war until 1919, where she died on 23 January 1919 aged only Forty-five.

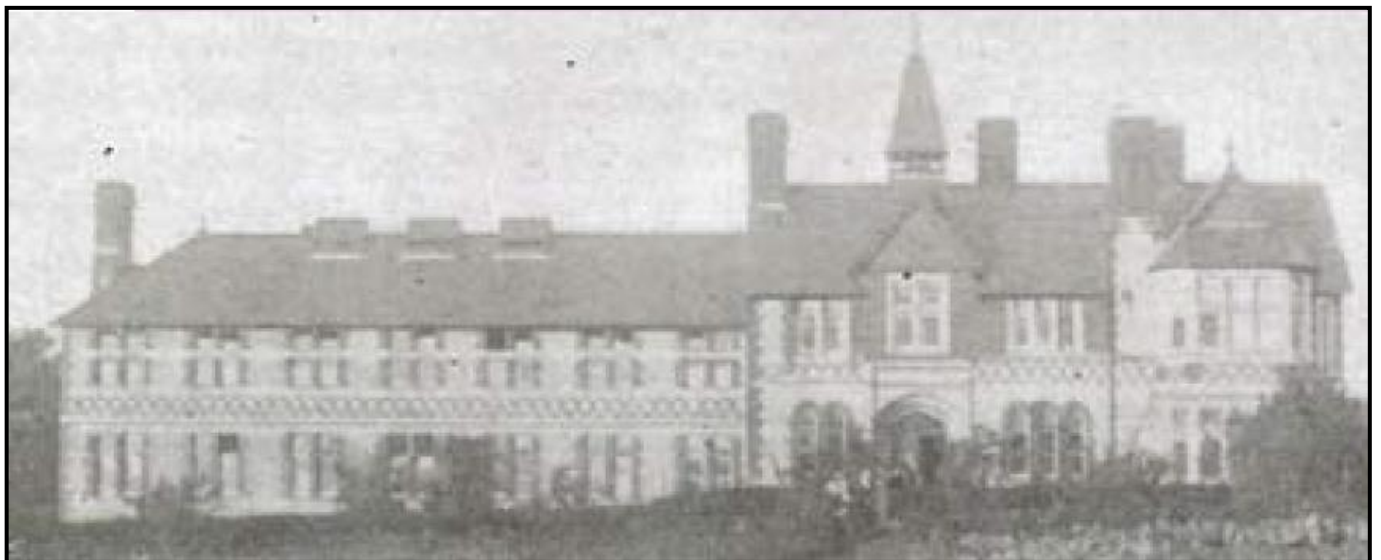


Census of 1911 records 'A.K. aged 37, married, born in Birmingham' - this was Annie, George junior's mother, sadly committed to the Newport Lunatic Asylum in Caerleon. She continued there as a patient throughout the war until 1919, where she died aged only Forty-five. (Above, and aerial view below)





The Diocesan Deaconess House of Mercy Institution of Redlands Road, Penarth (above and below). Shown far left on the map above.



After working in the Newport works, George senior made the move north to Ellesmere Port – there was work to be had in the Merseyside Iron and Steel Works, which had also relocated from Wolverhampton before the war. Lodgings were found in the Amos home in Victoria Road, a family that had also relocated from the West Midlands and were also working in the factory.

Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company

The Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company was founded in 1857 and specialised in galvanised and black flat or corrugated sheets. In 1905 the company established the Mersey Ironworks in Ellesmere Port on the banks of the Shropshire Union Canal, adjacent to the main railway line. Across the line were their main competitors, Burnell's Iron Works, founded in the late nineteenth century, and until then the main employer. Ellesmere Port may have been little more than a village based around the canal terminus and its small dock complex on the Mersey, but the Jones Brothers who owned the Wolverhampton works, chose Ellesmere Port for its commercially strategic position, with easy access to major ports, served by inland canals and railway, and because land was cheap. The major part of the company's production was exported, and barges were used to carry finished products to ships in Liverpool and Birkenhead. Almost two thousand people would be employed at the new factory, but there were insufficient workers in Ellesmere Port and this was a catalyst for its pre-war expansion as hundreds of workers began to move in. Significantly, many of the workers came from Wolverhampton, Dudley and Bilston. Census records reveal that around 300 families made this migration en masse. Some of them were so poor that they walked along the Shropshire Union Canal towpath with their possessions to get to Ellesmere Port. Well-planned housing estates were built by the factory owners for their workers. The Jones Brothers also hired trains to move others over one weekend to get their business up and running. *(Right: The Wolverhampton (Merseyside) Iron and Steel Works).*



The nearby Wolverham housing estate was built to house many of the migrant workers, hence its name - other street names reflected their origins too, such as Wolverham Road, Dudley Road, and Stafford Road. Penn Gardens (another Black Country name), was adjacent to Dudley Road.



2nd / 4th Battalion The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment



Although the family of George Keates believe he left the house in Victoria Road at the age of 14 to join up, the exact date that George junior volunteered is unknown. It is clear that he was not conscripted in 1916, as he was still too young, but nor was he in action at that stage or he would have received the 1915 Star. Precise documentary evidence in the form of his Soldier's War Record or Pension has not survived, so it is impossible to put an exact date on how old he was when he joined up. He was awarded both the British Medal and the Victory Medal, showing he was abroad sometime between 1916-1918, which would have required six months training before he left. Whatever time he went to France he was certainly under age. He could sign up at eighteen, but could not

go into action until nineteen. George was not alone. It is thought that over 250,000 underage soldiers fought in World War One.

The regiment he was enlisted in, the 2nd / 4th Battalion The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, was formed at Preston in October 1914 as a territorial second line unit. They moved to Ashford in September 1915 for training and placed under command of 170th Brigade in 57th (2nd West Lancashire) Division. In July 1916 as the Battle of the Somme raged in France, they were moved on to Aldershot, then onto nearby Blackdown in October. In early 1917 their orders came through that they were to be shipped to France, and on 8 February 1917 they landed at Le Havre.

In the Autumn of 1917, the Battalion saw serious action in the final phase of the Third Ypres offensive in the assault on the Passchendaele Ridge. Two second-line Lancashire TA divisions were committed; 66th Division, including the 2/4th and 2/5th East Lancshires, attacked at dawn on 9 October after a nightmare eleven hour approach march. Over the top, they floundered a few hundred yards into the waterlogged morass of no-mans land at the cost of almost seven hundred

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
KEATES	L. N. Lanc. R.	Pte	28694
George. E.	Lab. C.		604753
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	LC/1013232	23599	
BRITISH	do	do	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

casualties, and in appalling conditions held their gains against repeated counter-attacks. At the end of the month on 26 October, the 2/4th, 2/5th and 4/5th Loyal North Lancashires, made another concerted attack through the mud to make a bayonet attack on German machine-gun emplacements. Between them the three battalions suffered 935 casualties in this, their first major battle.

With the capture of Passchendaele the offensive ground to a halt. Casualties on both sides were appalling: 162,769 British and some 255,000 Germans. Purely in terms of attrition, Third Ypres was a British victory, won by superior artillery firepower and the infantry's endurance of the dreadful conditions, but the horror of that blood-soaked swamp has rivaled the nightmare of the Somme in the memory of those who endured it.

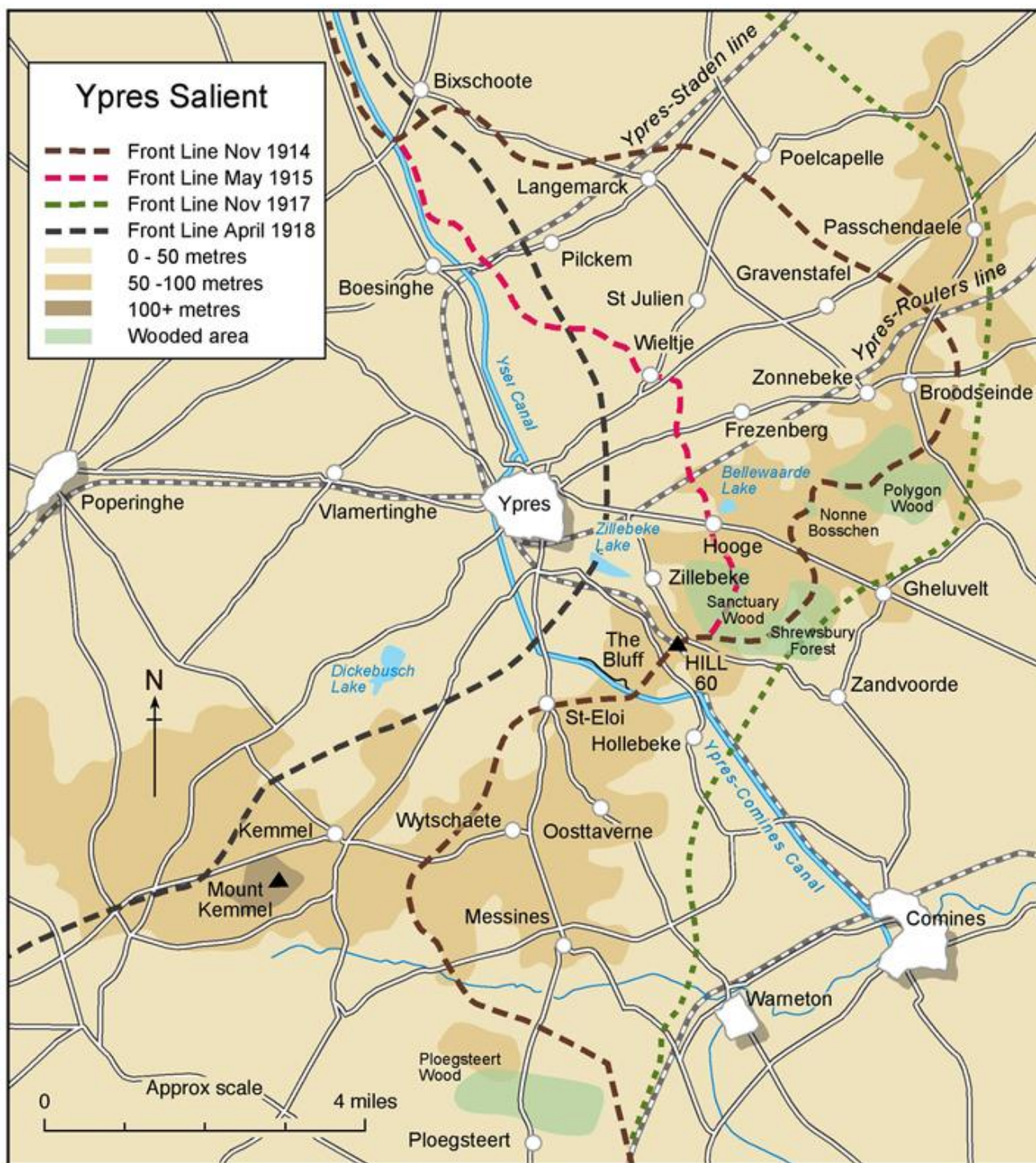
After a period of regrouping and further replacements from the training fields at home, the 2nd/4ths were again in action in March 1918 when the Germans began the last major assault, Operation Michael, on the Allied lines commencing on the 21 March. Casualties were again high and the Battalion suffered from a series of gas attacks – young George may have been a casualty in this assault, but again, without his war record his exact movements cannot be pinpointed.

On 29 Aug 1918, as part of the 57th Division, the 2nd/4th were engaged in the Battle of the Scarpe and the assault on the Drocourt-Queant Line, the northern extension of the Hindenburg Line where they fought alongside the 2nd/4th South Lancashires, the 1st/5th and 3rd/5th Loyal North Lancashires.

Towards the end of the war as action began to wind down, George Keates was posted to the Labour Corps (reg.no.604753), possibly due his being gassed while in action and to put him on duties away from the front line.



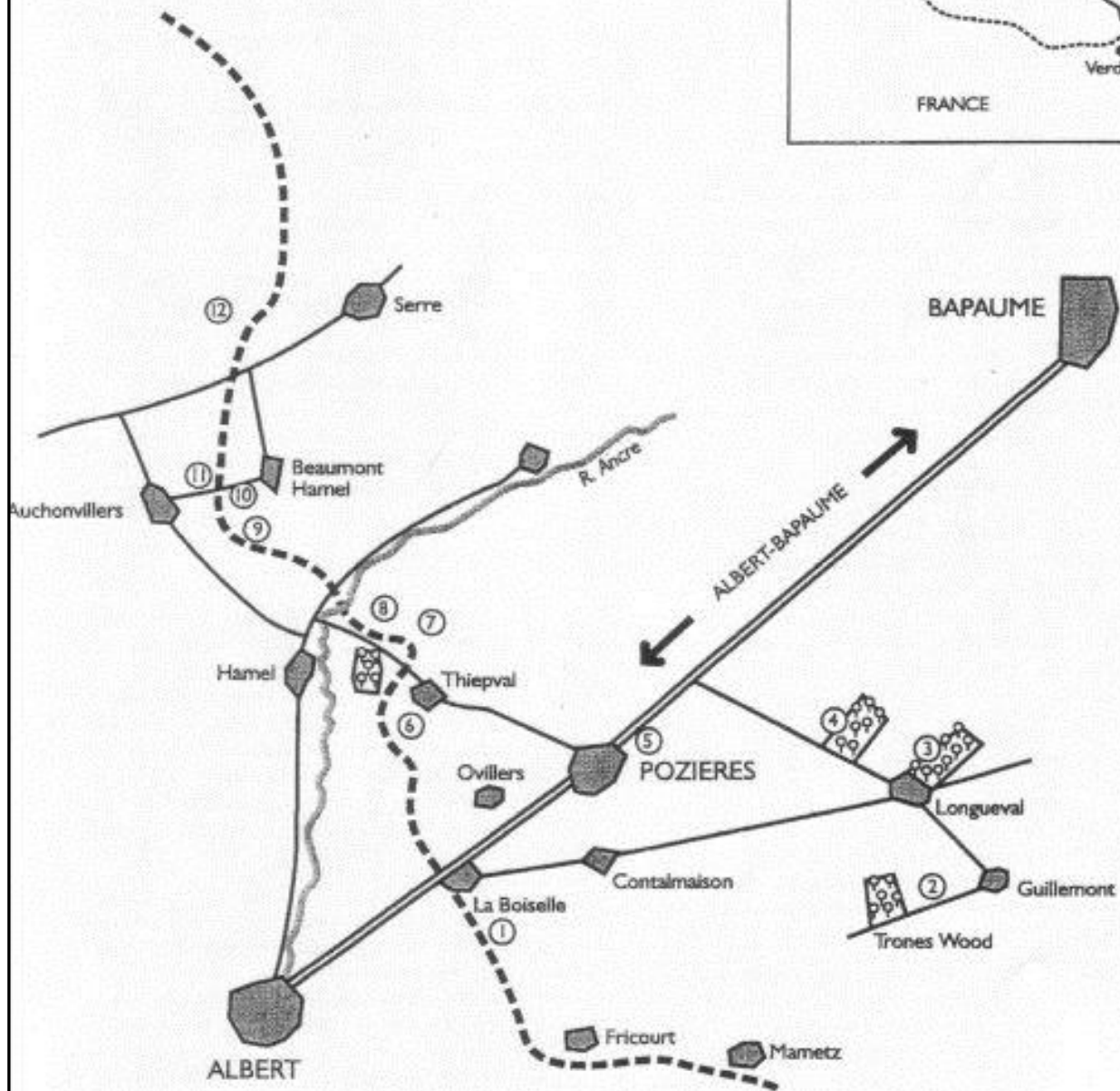
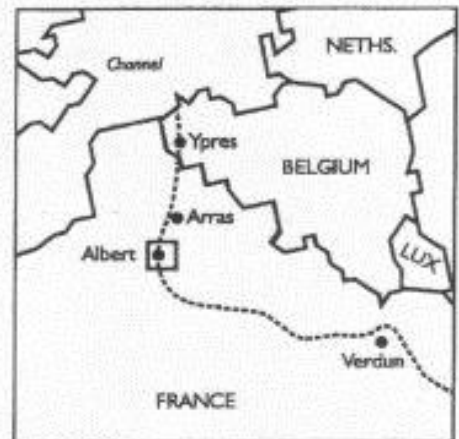
Soldiers of George's battalion, the 2nd / 4th Batallion, The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment



Soldiers of George's battalion, the 2nd / 4th Battalion, The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, with their new steel helmets in 1916.

- 1 Lochnager Crater
- 2 Raymond Asquith's Grave
- 3 Delville Wood
- 4 High Wood
- 5 Tank Corps Memorial
- 6 Thiepval Memorial

- 7 Schwaben Redoubt
- 8 Ulster Tower
- 9 Newfoundland Park
- 10 Hawthorn Redoubt Crater
- 11 White City
- 12 Sheffield Park



0 1 2 3
miles

CHRISTCHURCH CEMETERY, ELLESMERE PORT

When George came home he was seriously ill and it was in the lodgings in the Amos household in Victoria Road that George Ernest Keates passed away on 10 July 1920 aged only twenty, having succumbed to the damaging effects of the gas attacks on his lungs. He was buried in an official war grave in the cemetery of the local parish church, Christchurch, Ellesmere Port. His name was not recorded on the war memorial however. This may have been because his father did not forward his name, possibly thinking they had not been in the Port long enough (there was no fixed criteria for this).

But where did young George actually belong? In his short life he had spent his time split between Walsall, Newport and Ellesmere Port, and at least a couple of years away with the Army at home and abroad, so probably did not quite know where he could call home, especially as his family was split up. Nevertheless, his final resting place has taken precedence over his other homes, and his name was finally added to the Ellesmere Port War Memorial in 2015.

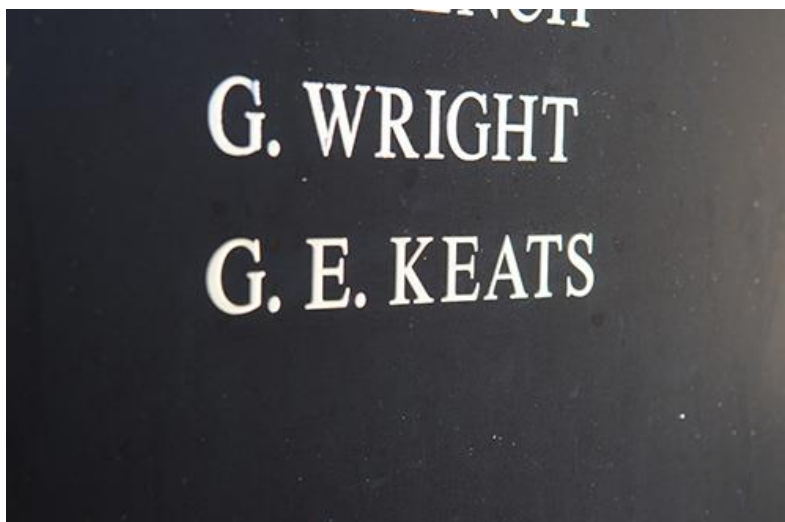


In a special ceremony led by Reverend Gordon McGuinness, with many veterans and representatives of veteran groups present, wreaths were laid by Mayor of Ellesmere Port Councillor Brian Jones, Chair of the local branch of the Royal British Legion Chris Williams, and family member Ray Wardle. Susan Wardle, an active member of the local branch of the Normandy Veterans Association, at the request of Ray Wardle, a nephew of George E Keates, contacted Councillor Brian Jones and the council agreed to add his name to the memorial.

Councillor Jones, who led the wreath laying ceremony, said: "It was with great respect that I could lay a wreath in honour of George E Keates, whose name has finally been added to the memorial.

"It was good to see so many people present at the ceremony, including members of his family. It just goes to show that we in Ellesmere Port never forget those people who have served us."





George Ernest Keates' name added to Ellesmere Port War Memorial.

***Below:* Ray Wardle and Susan Wardle with their painting of George and some of his war medals.**



A note on George's age and the spelling of his surname

It has been recorded in the local press that his age was incorrect on his headstone and that he was nineteen when he died. This is wrong. Documentary evidence is clear; he was born in early 1900 and is registered in the volume of births for April-June 1900; the census record of 31 March 1901 puts his age at 11 months and his date of death is also officially recorded as 10 July 1920. He was unquestionably twenty years old at the time he passed away. Furthermore, the recording of his name as Keats (without the second 'e') on the war memorial is also incorrect. It may have been amended by the family post-WW1, but almost every documentary record going back to the late 1700s records the name as Keates, including family members who have written the name themselves on documents such as marriage certificates, rather than it being blamed on a long series of errors by bureaucratic officials.

In Memory of

Private

George Ernest Keates

28694, 2nd/4th Bn., The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment who died on 10 July 1920 Age 20

Son of Mr. G. E. Keates and Mrs. A. Keates. Born at Walsall, Staffs.

Remembered with Honour

Ellesmere Port (Christ Church) Churchyard



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Researched and written

by

Mike Royden

www.roydenhistory.co.uk