

## FARNDON DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Remembering the Men of Farndon

## **Private JOHN SHAW**

50255 'D' Company, 9th Battalion Cheshire Regiment Formerly 2202 3<sup>rd</sup> Cheshire Yeomanry Died of Wounds 30 July 1917

John Shaw was the son of Walter and Elizabeth Ann Shaw of Crewe Hall, a large farm in Crewe-by-Farndon, a hamlet just to the south of Farndon village in Cheshire. His father and grandfather, John Francis (from Puddington), had originally farmed in Tattenhall, where Walter was born, but they moved to Crewe Hall in the 1870s. Although Walter had older sisters, as the oldest son, he took over the running of Crewe Hall in the 1890s when his father retired when well into his seventies (he died in 1911 aged 90). Walter and his wife Elizabeth soon started a family, and as eldest son with six brothers and sisters, John would, no doubt, have taken over the farm from his father, had the war not interrupted domestic life. On Sundays, the family attended the nearby Crewe-by-Farndon Primitive Methodist Chapel, which had been built in 1858, and still serves the community today.

When the war came, John continued his work looking after the dairy herd on the farm, but when conscription was introduced in January 1916, he set off for Chester to enlist, where he signed up on 29 February 1916. He was posted as Private 2202 into the 3rd Cheshire Yeomanry, but was not mobilised until 19 June, after which he was put through the usual period of intense training. In November, he was transferred to the 4th Reserve Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment, which was making preparations to leave for France and to bolster depleted Cheshire battalions. Embarkation was at Southampton on 7 December 1916, arriving at Rouen the following day. By 21 December 1916 John had been posted to the 9th Cheshires, which had been in various actions from mid-1915, including several months on the Somme, and losing a great many men in the process. The battalion had been involved early on in the battle, suffering over 300 casualties in 4 days, initially attacking at night near La Boiselle without reconnaissance, where every shell hole held a dead or wounded man.

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## Census 1881

The family of John Francis Shaw – grandfather of Private John Shaw. John's father Walter is shown aged 16.

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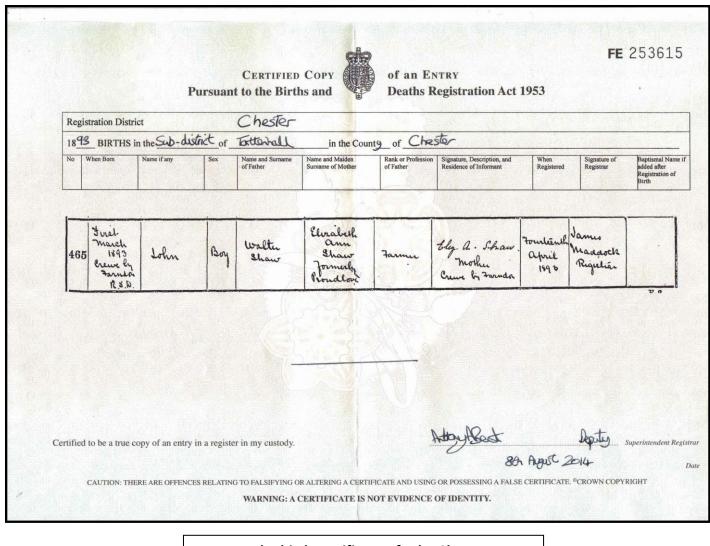
#### **Census 1891** The family of John Francis Shaw – still farming at 70.

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### Census 1901 The family of Walter Shaw – John is aged 8.

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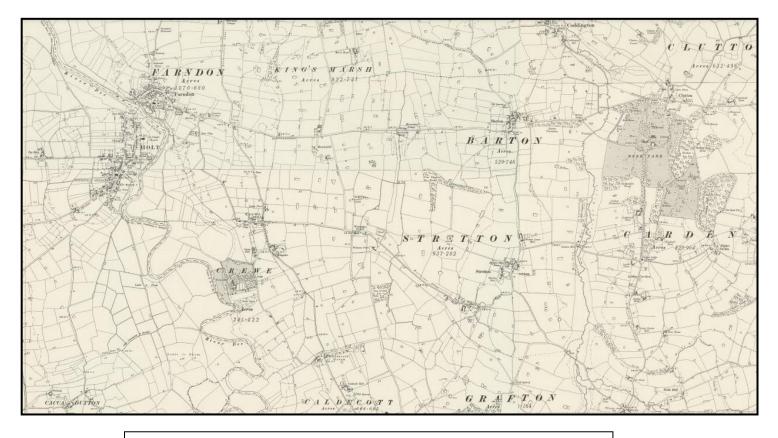
Census 1911 The family of Walter Shaw – John is aged 18.



### The birth certificate of John Shaw



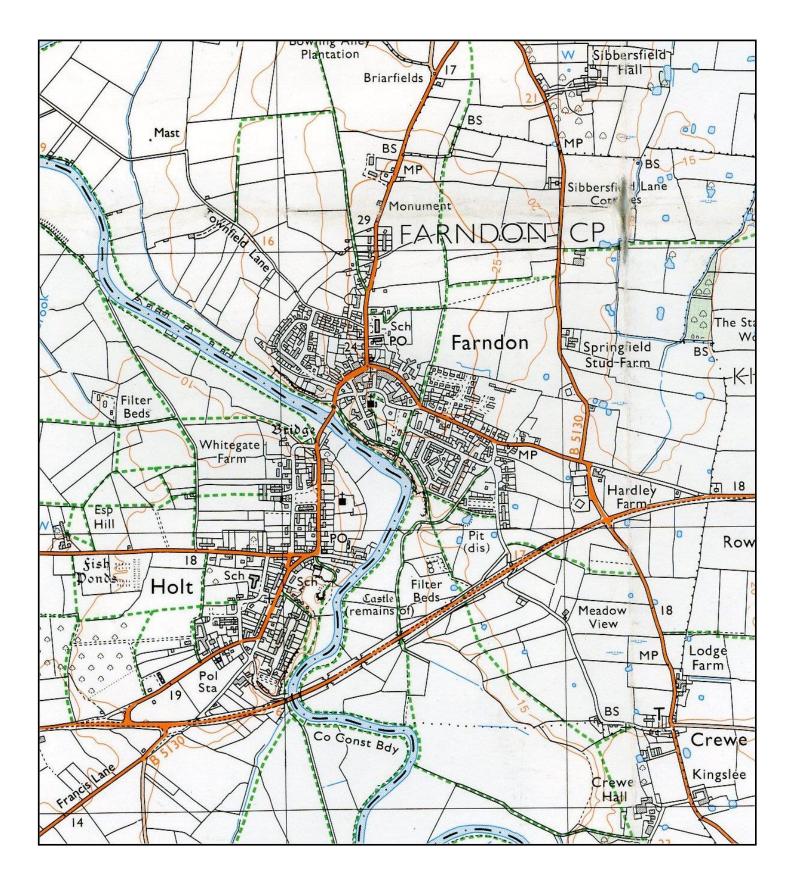
#### Modern view of Crewe Hall Farm



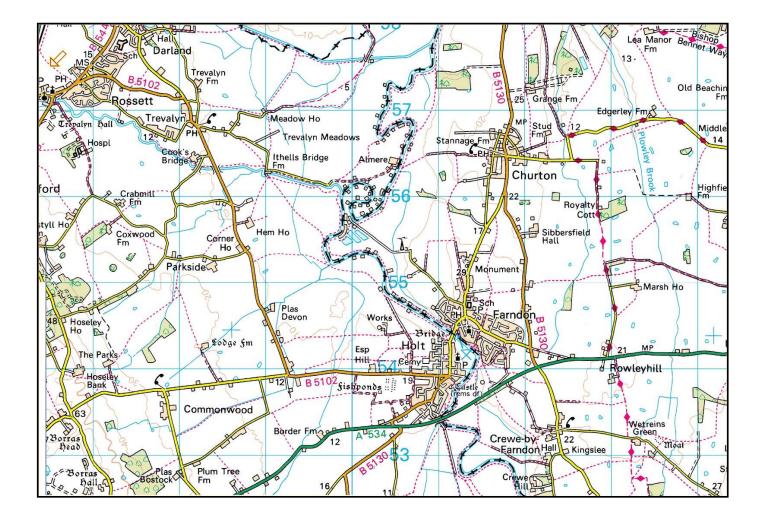
Map of Farndon Parish and the hamlet of Crewe-by-Farndon c.1895



Map of Farndon Parish and the hamlet of Crewe-by-Farndon c.1895 Close-up of Crewe Hall Farm. The Methodist Chapel is marked 'Meth.Chap.' in Crewe (*centre top*).



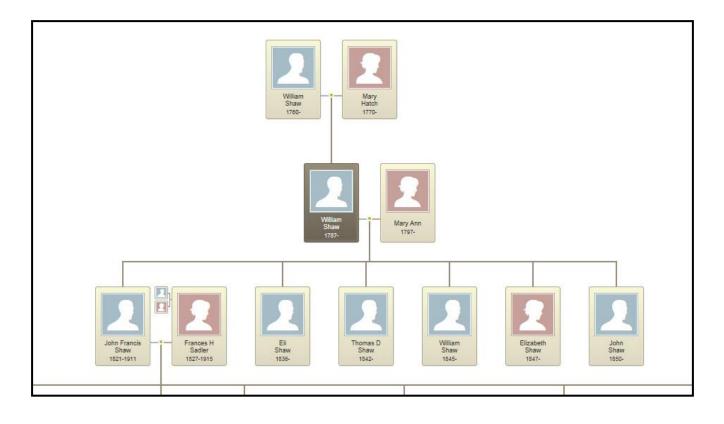
Modern map of Farndon with the hamlet of Crewe-by-Farndon bottom right. The farm is marked 'Crewe Hall'.



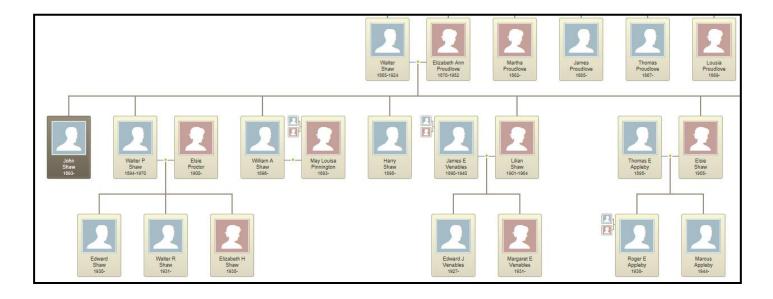
Modern map of Farndon with the hamlet of Crewe-by-Farndon bottom right. The farm is marked 'Hall' to the left of Kingslee.



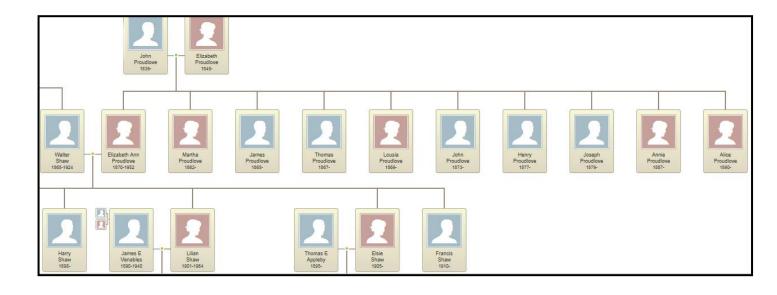
Crewe-by-Farndon Methodist Chapel today



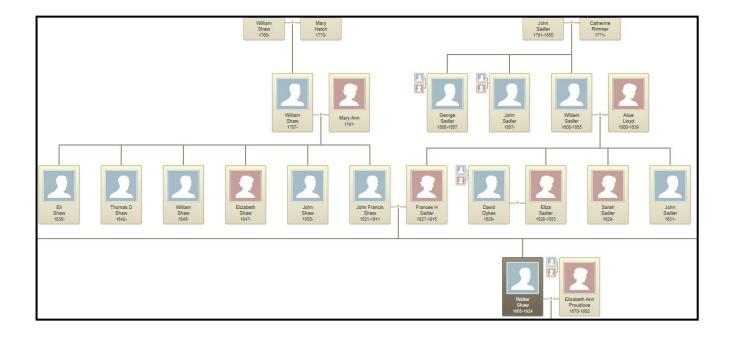
Shaw ancestry beginning with John's grandfather, John Francis Shaw, bottom left



Shaw ancestry, showing John Shaw, centre left



The family of John Shaw's mother, Elizabeth Proudlove, centre left



Brief ancestry tree of Walter Shaw, bottom right , John's father

CHES. ER. Army Form B. 2512. SHORT SERVICE. Card No. (For the Duration of the War, with the Colours and in the Army Reserve) ATTESTATION OF BENERAL SE No. 2202 Name Corps. Questions to be put to the Recruit, before Enlistment. 1.1. 199 1. What is your Name ... 1. ..... ... ... ... What is your full Address? 2 ... 3. Are you a 4. What is y 23 Years. 4 Months. 5. What is your Trade or Calling? 5 bouma ... ... ... 6. Are you Married ? ... .... ... ... no Have you ever served in any branch of His Majesty's ) 7. 7. 20 Forces, naval or military, if so\*, which ? yes Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated ? ... 8. 9. Are you willing to be enlisted for General Service? ... Zeza Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you? 10. ( Name ..... 10. ..... ) Corps ..... 11. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long v require your services ? For the duration of the War, at the end of which you will be discharged with all convenient speed. You will be required to serve for one day with the Colours and the remainder of the period in the Army Reserve, in accordance with the provisions of the Royal Warrant dated 20th Oct., 1915, until such time as you may be called up by order of the Army Council. If employed with Hospitals, depots of Mounted Units, or as a Clerk, etc., you may be retained after the termination of hostilities until your services can be spared, but such retention shall in no case accord size months. yes 11. ..... shall in no case exceed six months. form I hu I., do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made. SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT. Signature of Witness. TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION. OATH thur. ohn swear by Almighty God, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God. CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER. The Recruit above named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act. The above questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been dury entered as replied to, and the said Recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at. on this 29 day of \_19/6 10N 1910 Signature of the Justice\_ † Certificate of Approving Officer. I certify that this Attestation of the above-named Recruit is correct, and properly filled up, and that the required forms appear to have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to the # 37 Cleanse generation of the second secon If enlisted by special authority, Army Form B. 203 (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to the original attestation. derson Date Approving Officer. 1 Lintes. Inname Place t The signature of the Approving Officer is to be affixed in the presence of the Recruit. I Here insert the "Corps" for which the Recruit has been enlisted. • If so, the Recruit is to be asked the particulars of his former about be returned to him conspicuously endorsed in red service, and to produce, ink, as follows, viz -(Na If possible, his Certificate of Discharge and Certificate of Character, (Regimer) (Date)

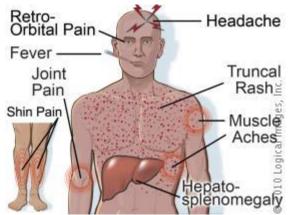
John Shaw's Attestation Form from his Soldier's Record

But now the 9ths had been pulled out, and were now on their way north, to the Ypres Salient in Belgium. Only weeks after arrival early in 1917, John had a few bouts of illness commencing with being laid low with severe influenza on 18 March, which him being moved behind the lines via the High Casualty Clearing Station to No. 11 General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers. On 8 April, he was then

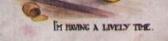
diagnosed with having 'Trench Fever', a moderately serious disease transmitted by body lice. This illness infected armies in Flanders, France, Poland, Galicia, Italy, Salonika, Macedonia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt in during the First World War (three noted sufferers being the authors J.R.R. Tolkien, A. A. Milne, and C.S. Lewis).

From 1915 to 1918, between one-fifth and one-third of all British troops reported ill had trench fever while about onefifth of ill German and Austrian troops also had the disease. Until the final year of the war it baffled doctors and

researchers. Chief symptoms of the disease were headaches, skin rashes, inflamed eyes and leg pains. As the symptoms resembled typhoid and influenza, it may have been Trench Fever John was suffering from all along and not the latter. Patients tended to recover after some five or six days, although as in John's case, prolonged hospitalisation amounting to several weeks was common, as were relapses after intervals of several days. But of course, this was a serious illness with respect to its effect on military capability, and the authorities were therefore very keen to determine the root of the problem. In 1918, it was identified as excretions from lice, affecting all trenches: *Rickettsia quintana*. The disease was transmitted via the bites of body lice and was chiefly prevalent on the warmer Western and Italian Fronts. Medical staff believed John's recovery would take longer and moved him to the base hospital in Rouen via Havre, where he arrived on 14 April. John stayed there, slowly recovering, until he was posted back to his unit in the field on 9 May. He was now thrown back into the intense











So well-known was the problem, that the issue was even made fun of in numerous postcards

preparations for what would be the Battle of Messines on the Ypres Salient in Belgium.

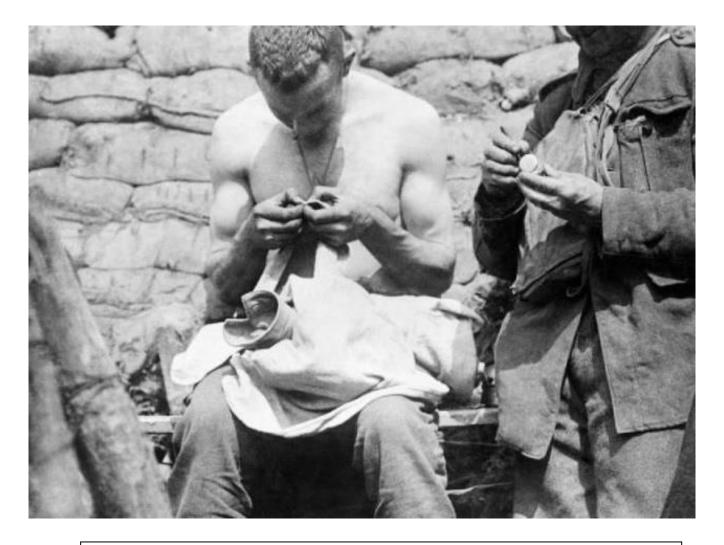
# "THE SOLDIER'S TRENCH POWDER" Specially prepared for the Destruction

Specially prepared for the Destruction of all Body Parasites.

DIRECTIONS FOR USE.—Thoroughly apply to the infasted area. As a preventive the powder should be gently dusted on the underclothing.

> A. B. SHERREN Pharmacist HERSHAM, SURREY

FOR EXTERNAL USE ONLY



Picking out the lice from under shirt seams

Also known as " Lice ", " Gray Backs ", " Seam Squirrels ", " Boches ", and ... (deleted by the Censor)



#### ONE OF THEM

They are gray. They are bloodsuckers. They live in blankets and clothes. They breed and lay eggs or "nits" in seams of clothing, especially the trousers, and on the pubic hairs like crab lice.

## RESULTS

If you do not get rid of em they will cause sores and boils; and you will be an **UNPOPULAR** candidate for a hospital.

# THE CURE

While taking a bath your entire kit of clothing will be sterilized.

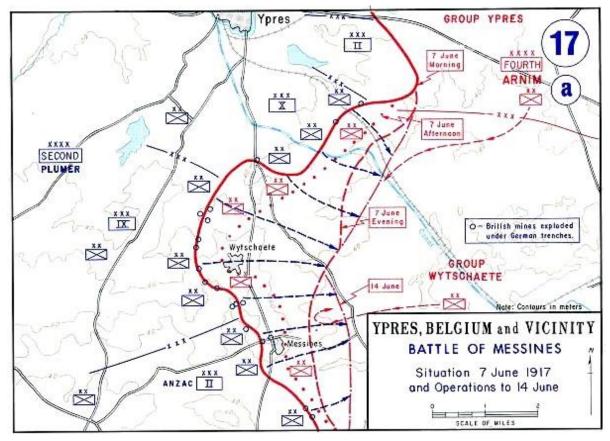
Get a new identity tag cord.

Bathing and Delousing Station at

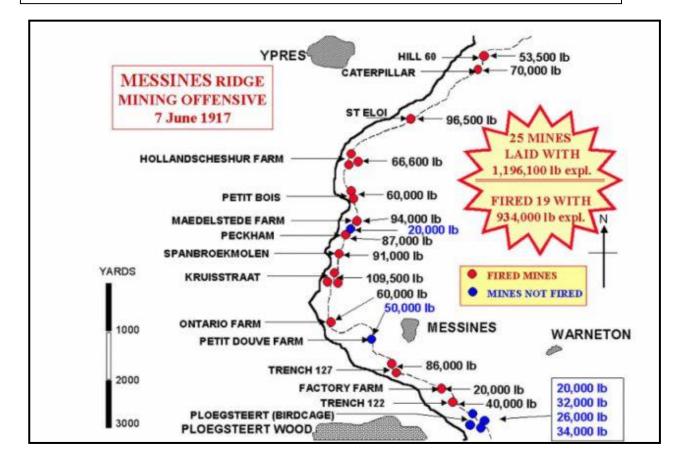
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## THE BATTLE OF MESSINES



The 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Cheshire's, would be attacking from the British lines on the left through Hollandscheshuur Farm (below) and Wytschaete



## Battles of Messines Ridge, 7 June–14 June 1917

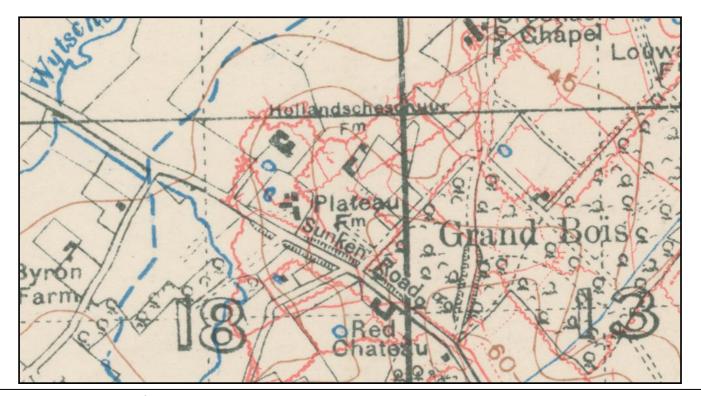
In fact, preparations had been going on for some time: for the previous 18 months, soldiers had worked to place nearly 1 million pounds of explosives in tunnels under the German positions. The tunnels extended to some 2,000 feet in length, and some were as much as 100 feet below the surface of the ridge, where the Germans had long since been entrenched. This was to be a major Allied offensive, designed to break the grinding stalemate on the Western Front in World War I, and it was intended to occupy the high ridgeway running from Armentieres to Dixmude, from which the German Army overlooked the Allied positions in the Ypres Salient. There had been months of work - roadmaking, improved water supply, installing dressing stations, aid posts, telephone exchanges, machine gun emplacements, together with miles of communication and assembly trenches. Cheshire battalions, including the 10ths, 11ths, 13ths and the 9ths - John's battalion - had all been involved in aspects of the work.

At 3:10 a.m. on June 7, 1917, a series of simultaneous explosions rocked the area; with some witnesses saying the blast was heard as far away as London. A German observer wrote later, 'nineteen gigantic roses with carmine petals, or enormous mushrooms, rose up slowly and majestically out of the ground and then split into pieces with a mighty roar, sending up multi-coloured columns of flame mixed with a mass of earth and splinters high in the sky.'

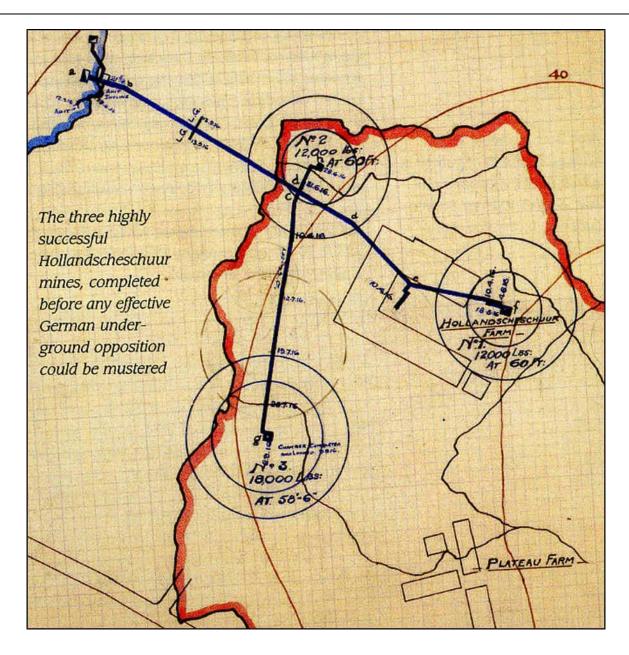
More than 10,000 Germans lost their lives in the explosions, and 7,000 more were taken prisoner - too stunned and disoriented to fight off the assault. In all, nineteen huge underground mines, containing over a million pounds (almost 500 tonnes) of explosives were detonated under the Messines Ridge and the German lines. This was immediately followed up by an infantry attack behind a creeping barrage, with tanks and gas to capture the enemy lines on the ridge. In fact, they successfully reached their objective – the second line of German trenches, which they captured and dug in to consolidate the new British front line.

Several Cheshire battalions had taken part in the attack. The 10ths had jumped off from Martin Trench at 3.15am after their issue of tea and rum. The leading left-hand company captured Hell Farm, but behind them, the next company wave was counter-attacked from Hell Wood, which was described in the Cheshire Regimental History as 'A grim struggle, in which our men gradually gained the upper hand, and killed or captured all the German defenders of the wood and farm.' Little opposition was encountered as they captured the other objectives - Occur Trench, Occur Support Trench, Nathan Drive and Styx Farm, taking fourteen machine guns and nearly 120 prisoners.

After leaving the safety of their trench , the 13th Cheshires joined the leaving waves of attacking troops, but lost some direction due to the increasing cloud of dust and smoke that hung over the battlefield. Despite this, the leading companies swept over the German front line and pressed on to also take the second line trenches by 3.17am, capturing two machine guns along the way. The 11th Cheshires were waiting nervously in Durham Trench from 1am, which intensified as they heard the other battalions going over the top and heading off towards the ridge. It was not until 6.50am before they were called out to support the next wave. In the meantime, they had undergone shelling with several casualties. As they joined the attack, and reaching the until top of the Messines Ridge, they came under machine gun fire from the left and from German positions at Lumm Farm, but bravely they pushed on towards the second line objective which they secured by 9am. They took many prisoners, four field guns and a machine gun, while some of their company pushed on to attack Despagne Farm. In the confusion of the battle, they had miscalculated and had gone ahead of their own artillery barrage, and were quickly ordered to take cover into the nearest shell hole. Most of the men survived, the position around the Farm had been consolidated.



The route of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cheshire's, diagonally from the British lines top left to the German lines marked in red bottom right. Three mines had been detonated right in front of them at Hollandcheshuur Farm, enlarged below.





Above: Modern aerial view of the previous trench map showing the route of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cheshire's. The three mine craters are clearly visible around Hollandcheshuur Farm, now filled with water. Red Chateau, later rebuilt, is bottom right. Below: Close up of Hollandcheshuur Farm



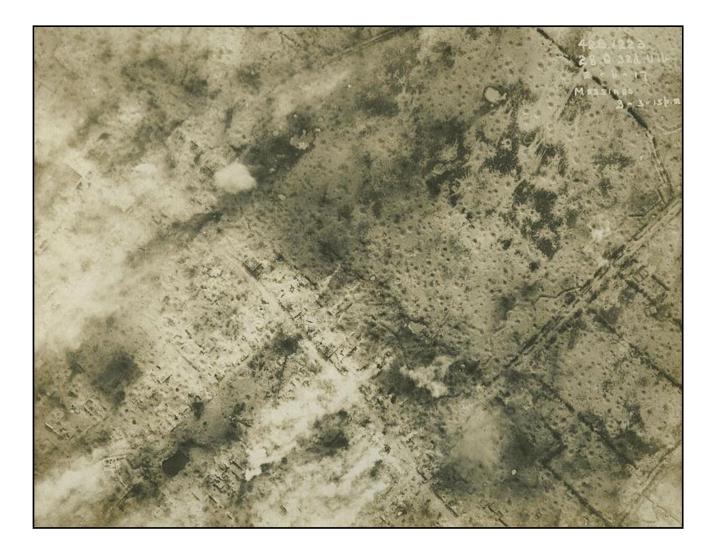


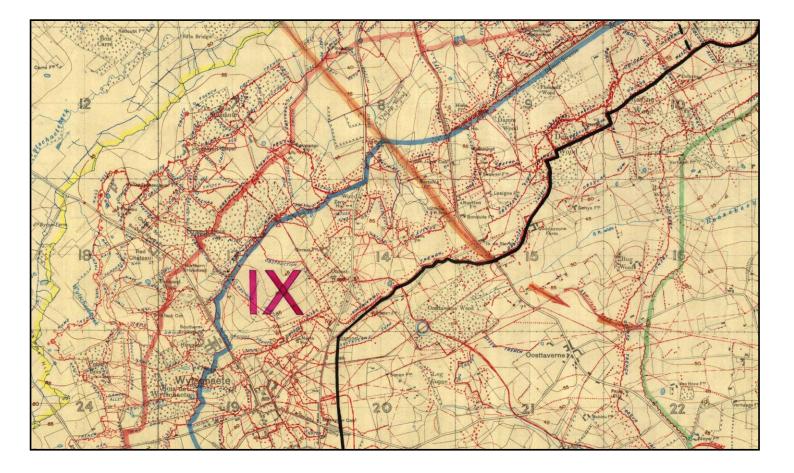
*Above:* Walking through the ruins of Wytschaete village after the Battle of Messines *Below:* Captured German trenches on the Messines Ridge





Above: Captured German trenches and enemy soldiers on the Messines Ridge Below: Aerial reconnaissance of the same area after the Battle of Messines





*Above:* Trench map of the area attacked by the Cheshires. Hollandcheshuur Farm is *centre left* and the Oosttaverne farms *bottom right* 



Modern map of the area south of the Somme (top right – Beaumont Hamel-Peronne), showing location of Rouen (Base Hospital No.2 and St Sever Cemetery) bottom left.

Meanwhile the 9th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment, including John Shaw, were nearby, serving with the 19th Division near the Hollandscheschurr Farm mines. By 12.45am they were ready to jump off, and as the War Diary noted, 'The men were very crowded in the trenches but silence was well maintained.' For almost three hours they waited, taking on a last drop of rum to fire them up for the impending assault. The mines exploded at 3.10 and still they waited as the first wave went over. They were now being hit by enemy shelling and fifteen men were killed before they were out of their trenches. Then the whistles blew at 3.30 am and they were into No-Man's Land, 'A' and 'B' Companies taking the lead, but again in the confusion, some sections lost direction. The gaps were filled by the second wave moving up, who on reaching the ridge, leap-frogged the troops holding German front line, taking the second line objective by 4.50am, where many Germans were killed or captured in the process. They rested up before reorganising and digging in a new front line trench in their captured section. This done, they moved forward again under cover of the artillery 'creeping barrage', heading for their final objective at Onreat Wood. This secured and consolidated, food and water rations were brought up to the men by mule train. At 1.45pm, the expected counter-attack began, with about 600 Germans advancing on the Cheshires, in four waves. In less than thirty minutes it was beaten off by intense rifle and Lewis gun fire, and finally dispersed by an artillery barrage. Once clear, the 9ths moved on again in the afternoon, establishing a new line at Ooosterverne which they held for two days.

The attack had been a complete success. Although Messines Ridge itself was a relatively limited victory, it had a considerable effect. The Germans were forced to retreat to the east, a setback that began their gradual but continuous loss of territory on the Western Front. It also secured the right flank of the British advance towards control of the much-contested Ypres Salient, which, in fact, was the overall object of the offensive from 1917 onwards. This continued over the coming months into the horror of Passchendaele, launched on 31 July as the Third Battle of Ypres.

The Cheshire Battalions, 9th , 10th, 11th and 13th, had between them suffered a total of 86 fatalities, but Private John Shaw had come through and survived the biggest battle of his life.

[It was later in the battle of Ypres that 2nd Lieutenant Hugh Colvin of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Cheshire Regiment, was to win a Victoria Cross. On 20 September 1917 east of Ypres, Belgium, when all the other officers of his company and all but one in the leading company had become casualties, Second Lieutenant Colvin took command of both companies and led them forward under heavy fire with great success. He went with only two men to a dug-out, when he left the men on top, entered it alone and brought out 14 prisoners. He then proceeded to clear other dug-outs, alone or with only one man, capturing machine-guns, killing some of the enemy and taking a large number of prisoners. His citation read "For conspicuous bravery in attack. When all other officers of his company and all but one of the leading company had become casualties, he assumed command of both companies, and led them with great dash and success. During the same attack he attacked several dug-outs, one of which contained a machine gun. This he captured, and in all took about fifty prisoners single handed". His Victoria Cross is displayed at The Cheshire Regiment Museum in Chester. ]

In the days following the battle, and as further consolidation was made, the battalions were given a break behind the lines. However, respite was to be short, and the Cheshires, including the 9ths with John Shaw, were back in the front line at Onraet Wood on 17 July. Now in the ascendency and taking the initiative to the enemy, 'C' Company was ordered to capture positions known as Junction Buildings, about halfway between the Belgian villages of Hollebeke and Ooostaverne. War Diary entries note the operation was very successful, with only two or three casualties, in spite of the Cheshire's front line taking a pounding from German artillery.

The following day on the 18th, it was the turn of 'D' Company - John Shaw's unit - who took over the captured position. But this was still contested ground, and they were under bombardment all day, finally enduring the enemy attack at 9.40pm, resulting in the withdrawal of the 9ths. Three men

were missing, left behind in the mud, but this was going to be a long night. The Cheshire's regrouped and attempted a counter-attack but this failed. Into the early hours of the following morning, there was no let-up, and the 9th Battalion of the Welch Regiment made a successful counter -attack, but by 6.30am, this was lost again and the British troops pulled back. It is thought that the Welch were supported by two platoons of the 9th Cheshires in this last action, with the loss of 15 soldiers, but the battalion War Diary is not clear on this.

Several of the 9ths who were wounded, were also captured by the Germans, some dying in captivity and being buried behind German lines. John Shaw had avoided capture, but he had received gunshot wounds to his right hip and leg in the action on the 18 July, and was recovered to safety behind the British lines.

Nevertheless, he had been badly wounded, and was shipped out via the casualty clearing stations, ending up in the Base Hospital miles away in Rouen, France. But, despite hanging on for twelve days in his final desperate fight, he died in his hospital bed on 30 July 1917.

Like thousands of other men who came to be treated in Rouen but were too badly injured, he was buried in the nearby cemetery of St Sever Cemetery. Sergeant Joseph Jones of Farndon, was also laid to rest in this cemetery.

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John Shaw's Casualty Form from his Soldier's Record

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John Shaw's Soldier's Record showing the entry regarding his fatal wounds

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John Shaw's Soldier's Record showing his movements and final entry

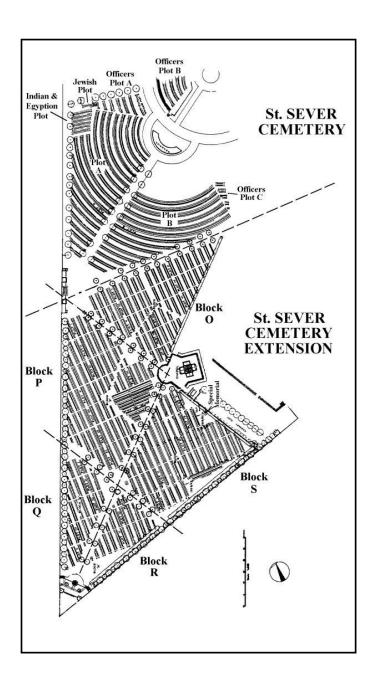
## ST. SEVER CEMETERY EXTENSION, ROUEN

During the First World War, Commonwealth camps and hospitals were stationed on the southern outskirts of Rouen. A base supply depot and the 3rd Echelon of General Headquarters were also established in the city. Almost all of the hospitals at Rouen remained there for practically the whole of the war. They included eight general, five stationary, one British Red Cross and one labour hospital, and No. 2 Convalescent Depot. A number of the dead from these hospitals were buried in other cemeteries, but the great majority were taken to the city cemetery of St. Sever. In September 1916, it was found necessary to begin an extension, where the last burial took place in April 1920. During the Second World War, Rouen was again a hospital centre and the extension was used once more for the burial of Commonwealth servicemen, many of whom died as prisoners of war during the German occupation. The cemetery extension contains 8,346 Commonwealth burials of the First World War (ten of them unidentified) and 328 from the Second World War (18 of them unidentified). There are also 8 Foreign National burials here. The extension was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield.

John Shaw's Memorial Reference: P. II. E. 12B

*Right:* Plan of St Sever Cemetery and St. Sever Cemetery Extension

St Sever Cemetery and St. Sever Cemetery Extension are located within a large communal cemetery situated on the eastern edge of the southern Rouen suburbs of Le Grand Quevilly and Le Petit Quevilly.





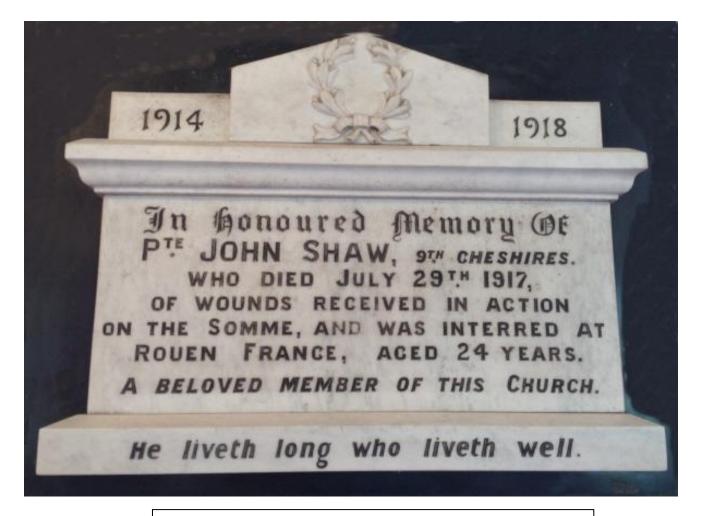
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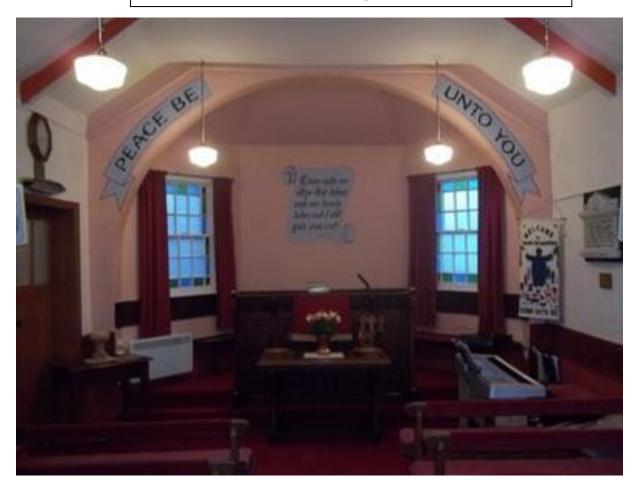


St Sever Cemetery and St. Sever Cemetery Extension

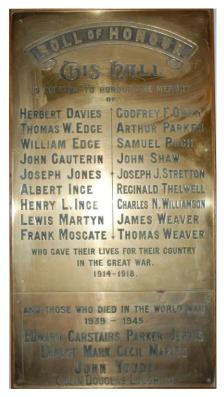




Memorial Plaque to John Shaw Crewe-by-Farndon Methodist Chapel (location shown on the right hand wall below)









**Farndon War Memorial** *Left:* the memorial plaque located in the entrance hall in the adjacent Memorial Hall (*top left*).



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### Above: Medal Card Below: Service Medals (Victory Medal, and British Medal) Memorial Plaque and Scrolls



In Memory of Private J Shaw

50255, 9th Bn., Cheshire Regiment who died on 30 July 1917

## Remembered with Honour St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen





Commemorated in perpetuity by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

# **Researched and written**

by

## **Mike Royden**

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Janet Bryan (nee Shaw) of Ludlow (niece of John Shaw) for sharing information about her family and for the copy of his birth certificate.

www.roydenhistory.co.uk