



FARNDON DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Remembering the Men of Farndon

Private CHARLES NORMAN WILLIAMSON

Cheshire Yeomanry

31547 2nd Battalion South Lancashire Regiment

Died 21 October 1916 Aged 21

*'tis hard to part
from one so dear
without a last farewell'*

Charles Williamson came from Churton village, just to the north of Farndon. He was the son of local publican Samuel Holland Williamson who was married to Mary Williams. Samuel's family resided at The Red Lion Inn on the main road through the village, which had also been run by his father before him, Richard Williamson, during the later 19th century.

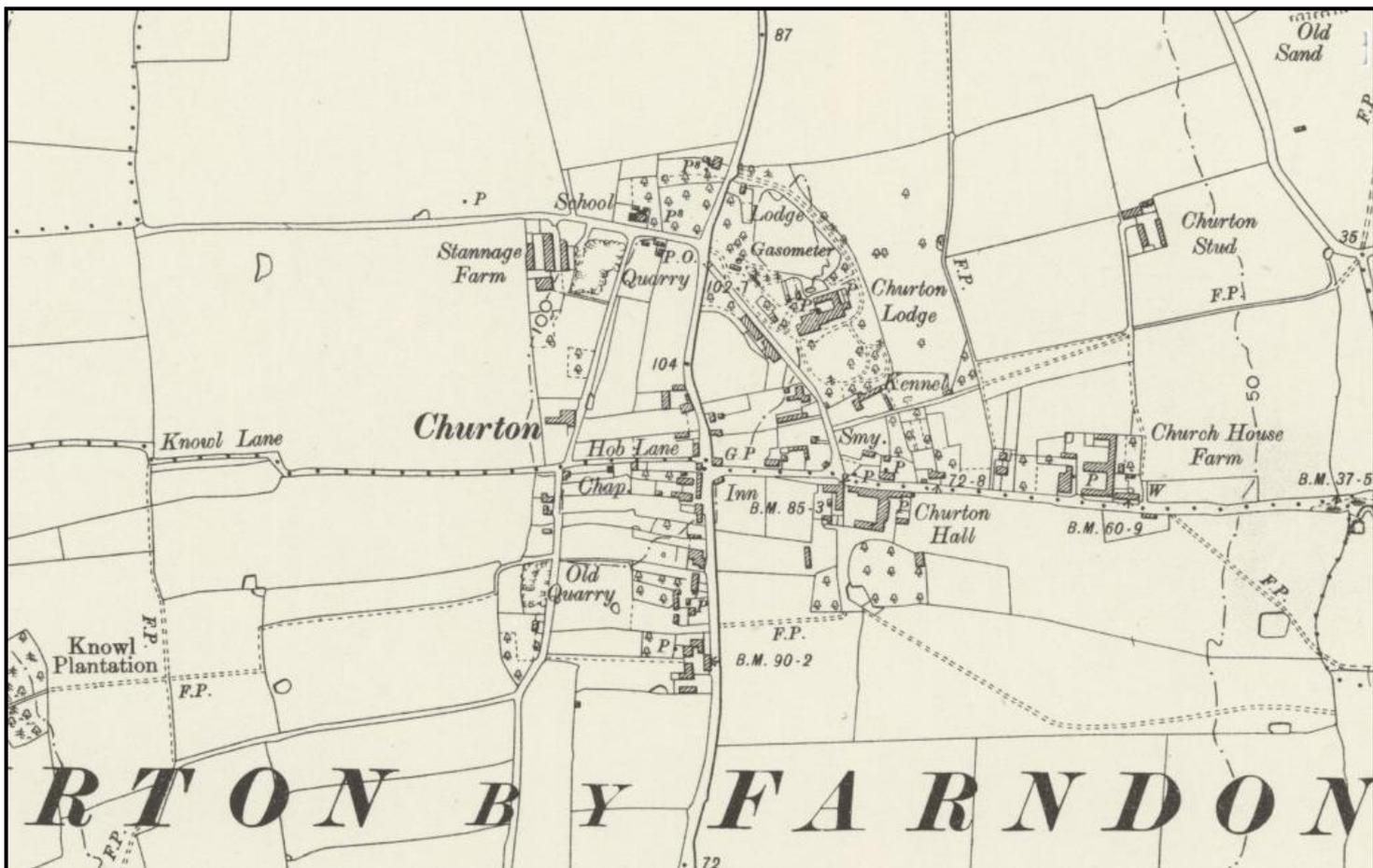
When Charlie left school in his early teens, like many other local lads of his age, moved out of the family home to live on a nearby farm and begin work as an agricultural labourer. They were quickly introduced to looking after the horses, often assisting the teamsman, until they were adept enough to take the reins themselves. When the war came a great many of these young farm hands from right across the parish were assigned to similar roles as drivers in their battalions becoming responsible for the teams of horses, essential for the movement of troops, gun carriages and limbers and other equipment.

Charlie was now working in Holt, across the Dee bridge, on the farm of his aunt and uncle, John and Clara Thomas. Clara was the sister of Charlie's father, and her first husband, Frances Harrison, had died in 1904 and although her grown up daughters from her first marriage were working on the farm, an extra pair of hands to take on traditional male labour was essential and not just a favour for the family.

Charlie was an early volunteer when the war started, although as a close friend of John Gauterin of Farndon village (see separate article) and Bob Tilston of Holt, they probably encouraged each other to sign on together. In fact John's brother Arthur was already in the Cheshire Yeomanry and had left for training camp in Thetford, Norfolk, and John wanted to follow in his footsteps. He attested on 15 October 1914 at Chester and Charlie a few days later on 20th. Charlie and his two pals, John and Bob, were kept together and all three were posted to the 2nd Line Cheshire Yeomanry, stationed in Northumberland as part of the Home Defences. German warships had bombarded the east coast early in the war, and it was thought that a threat could come in that area.

All three men were very experienced in the handling and management of horses – Charlie and Bob through their farm work, and John working for the Gauterin family carrier business in Farndon.





Churton village c 1895.
 The Red Lion is the building across the road to the left of the word *Inn* in the centre of the village.
 Below: Churton c1905. The Red Lion is on the right, immediately after the timber framed building.





The Red Lion, Churton c.1900

The lion pub sign and publican's name Samuel Williamson are clearly visible on the front of the building. Samuel is standing in the doorway, possibly with his sons, including Charles.

Below: The shop next door to the Red Lion Inn



Administrative County <u>Cheshire</u>										The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the							Page 28
Civil Parish <u>of Chetton by Jarrow</u>		Ecclesiastical Parish <u>of Jarrowdon (part)</u>					County Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District <u>of</u>		Ward of Municipal Borough or of Urban District <u>of</u>		Rural District <u>of Jarrow (part)</u>		Parliamentary Borough or Division <u>of Sedburgh, Cheshire</u>		Town or Village or Hamlet <u>of Chetton by Jarrow</u>		
No. of House	ROAD, STREET, No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES				Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Age last Birthday of	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION		Employer, Worker, or Own account	If Working at Home	WHERE BORN		(1) Deaf and Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lame (4) Imbecile, feeble-minded		
		Uninhabited	Inhabited	Occupied by one person	Occupied by two or more persons				Male	Female			Male	Female			
171	Chetton Rd	1				John White	Head	M	72	Gardener	Worker		Cheshire	Chetton			
						Jane Do	Wife	M	60				Do	Do			
						Thomas Do	Grandson	M	3				Do	Do			
172	Do	1				Albert Williamson	Head	M	38	Market Gardener	Worker		Derbyshire	Holt			
						Rosanna Do	Wife	M	25				Do	Do			
173	Do	1				William Hughes	Head	M	61	Agriculture	Worker		Cheshire	Jarrowdon			
						Lydian S. Do	Wife	M	53				Do	Chetton			
174	Do	1				Edward Rowland	Head	M	38	Agriculture	Worker		Derbyshire	Rowland			
						Jane Do	Wife	M	22				Cheshire	Chetton			
						Thomas Do	Son	M	1				Do	Do			
						John Do	Son	M	11				Do	Do			
175	Do	1				George Challenger	Head	M	35	Farmer	Worker		Derbyshire	Holt			
						Mattha Do	Wife	M	35				Do	Do			
						Mattha Do	Son	M	6				Do	Do			
176	Do	1				Samuel S. Pordell	Head	M	62	Living of own means			Cheshire	Tadlington			
						Matilda Do	Wife	M	66				Do	Jarrowdon			
177	Do	1				George Rogers	Head	M	23	Bricklayer	Worker		Cheshire	Jarrowdon			
						Margaret Do	Wife	M	22				Do	H. Hill			
						William Do	Son	M	1				Do	Alford			
178	Do	1				William Tilton	Head	M	27	Bricklayer	Worker		Derbyshire	Rowland			
						Emily Do	Wife	M	25				Do	Rowland			
						William Do	Son	M	6				Cheshire	Alford			
179	Do	1				Mary Pearson	Head	M	30	Gardener	Worker		Do	Jarrowdon			
						Alvin Do	Wife	M	31				Do	Jarrowdon			
						Emmaline Do	Son	M	7				Do	Halton			
						William Do	Son	M	5				Do	Chetton			
						Arthur Do	Son	M	2				Do	Do			
180	Do	1				James Williamson	Head	M	42	Innkeeper Pub.	Employer		Do	Alford			
						Mary E. Do	Wife	M	33				Do	Do			
101	Total of Schedules of Houses and of Tenements with less than Five Rooms	10	1		5	Total of Males and of Females...			161/131								

NOTE—Draw your pen through such words of the headings as are inapplicable.

Administrative County <u>Cheshire</u>										The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the							Page 29
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		Uninhabited	Inhabited	Occupied by one person	Occupied by two or more persons				Male	Female			Male	Female			
181	Chetton Rd	1				Frank Williamson	Son	M	10				Cheshire	Chetton by Jarrow			
						Arthur Do	Son	M	9				Do	Do			
						John Do	Son	M	8				Do	Do			
						Charles H. Do	Son	M	6				Do	Do			
						Thomas Do	Son	M	3				Do	Do			
						Kate Do	Son	M	1				Do	Do			
						Samuel H. Do	Son	M	5				Do	Do			
182	Do	1				George Challenger	Head	M	53	Farmer	Worker		Do	Do			
						Anna Do	Wife	M	53				Do	Do			
						Mary Do	Son	M	23	Domestic Servant			Do	Do			
						Isa Do	Son	M	18				Do	Do			
						George Do	Son	M	16				Do	Do			
						Eglah Do	Son	M	13				Do	Do			
						John Do	Son	M	11				Do	Do			
183	Do	1				Joseph B. Edwards	Head	M	40	Farmer	Employer		Do	Alford			
						Mary E. Do	Wife	M	23				Do	Do			
						George J. Do	Son	M	8				Do	Chetton			
						Emily Do	Son	M	7				Do	Do			
						Joseph B. Do	Son	M	6				Do	Do			
						Joseph B. Do	Son	M	1				Do	Do			
184	Do	1				John	Son	M	24	Farmer	Worker		Do	Alford			
						John Madocks	Head	M	77				Do	Chetton by Jarrow			
						Betsy Do	Son	M	21	Domestic Servant	Employer		Do	Do			
185	The Hall	1				John Ballin	Head	M	41	Farmer	Employer		Derbyshire	Holt			
						Ann Do	Wife	M	39				Do	Rowland			
						John C. Do	Son	M	21	Farmer	Worker		Do	Holt			
						Elizabeth R. Do	Son	M	18				Do	Do			
						Mary A. Do	Son	M	16				Do	Do			
						Over R. Do	Son	M	12				Do	Do			
						Edwin K. Do	Son	M	10				Do	Do			
142	Total of Schedules of Houses and of Tenements with less than Five Rooms	44				Total of Males and of Females...			28/10								

NOTE—Draw your pen through such words of the headings as are inapplicable.

1901 Census covering the Williamson family in the Red Lion Inn

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Schedule 39
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection.)

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, as 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 (Date Birth day and M.O.)	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.
			State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of—	Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no Children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)	Completed years the present Marriage has lasted. If less than one year, write "under one year."	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have Died.	Personal Occupation.	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.	Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account.				
1 John Thomas	Head	44	Married				Farmer	100		Employer	Holt, Holt, Lincolnshire	British subject by parentage.		English	
2 Clara Thomas	Wife	46	Married	6						Worker	Holt, Holt, Lincolnshire	British subject by parentage.		English	
3 Barbara Harrison	Sister	24	Single				Dairy Work	110		Worker	Holt, Holt, Lincolnshire	British subject by parentage.		English	
4 Clara Harrison	Sister	18	Single				Dairy Work	1		Worker	Holt, Holt, Lincolnshire	British subject by parentage.		English	
5 Charles Williamson	Nephew	16	Single				Assistant on Farm	10		Worker	Holt, Holt, Lincolnshire	British subject by parentage.		English	
6															
7															
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15															

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

I certify that—

- All the names on this Schedule are entered in the proper and columns.
- I have examined the copies and bundles in Columns 3 and 4 separately, and have compared their sum with the total number of persons.
- After making the necessary corrections I have completed all entries on this Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.

Initials of Enumerator: *J.S.*

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

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (House, Tenement or Apartment). Count the Kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, nor wardrobe, office, shop.

10

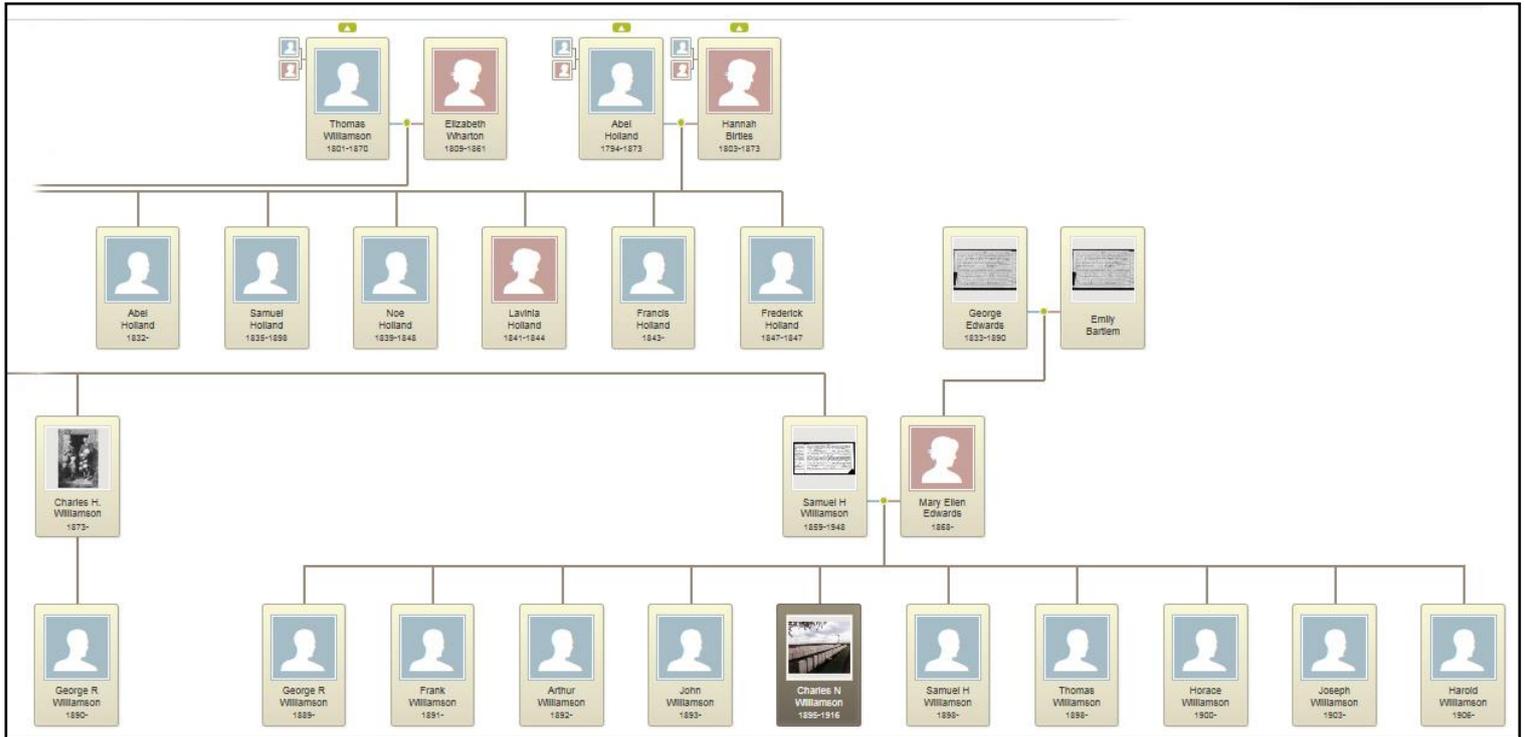
I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: *John Thomas*

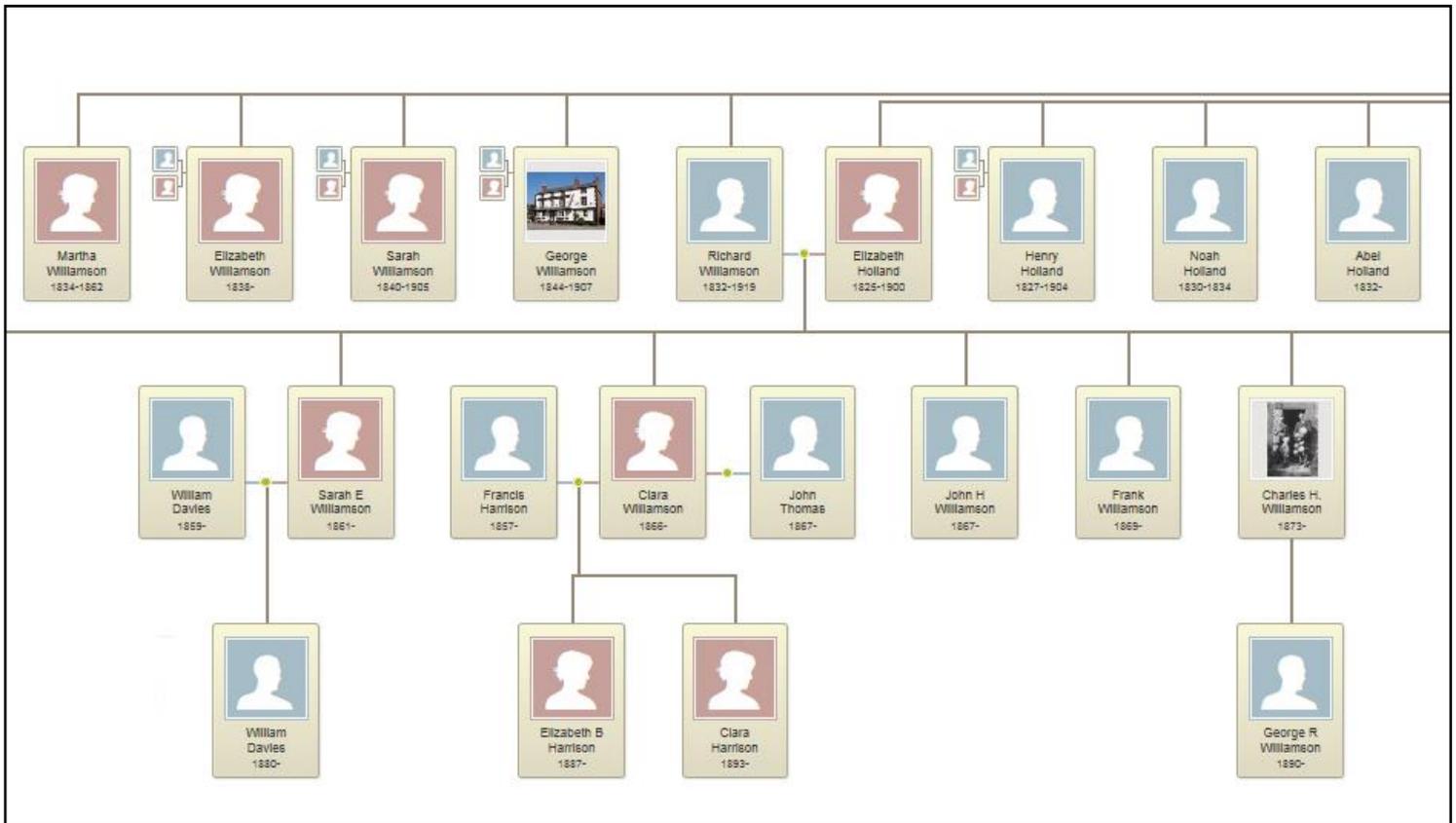
Postal Address: *Fleet St. Holt*

1911 Census
showing Charles Williamson living and working on his Aunt Clara's farm in Holt.
Below: The Red Lion Inn





Brief extract from the Williamson family tree.
The chart below is an extension to the left side of the chart above.
Research by pete1473, Crewe, Cheshire



Farndon resident Peter Gauterin, Grand-nephew of John Gauterin was privileged to be able to talk at length with Bob Tilston in the late 1980's; he was the only one of the three friends to survive the war, and he was able to describe the period quite graphically. What follows has been gleaned from some of those fascinating conversations.

The 2nd Line was split up in Northumberland - B Squadron was stationed in Morpeth with the Headquarters troop; A Squadron was billeted in Plessey Farm near Stannington; and C Squadron were in the farm buildings of Longhirst Hall, also near Morpeth (now a prestigious golf club). John was with A Squadron at Plessey. They were part of the 17th Mounted Brigade, 63rd (2nd) Northumberland Division. The 2nd Lines responsibilities were for a sector of the coastal defence along with the 1st Line of the Northern Cyclists who were later added to the force in December 1915. Bob Tilston reflected many years later that the horses they had were from Canada and semi wild, and it took many hours of training to break them into cavalry mounts, so it must have grieved him and the Yeomanry greatly when they were dismounted and turned into a cyclist unit as part of the 6th Cyclist Brigade in May 1916.

In the meantime, they were engaged on training and patrolling the area. Bob and his close friend Charlie Williamson, looked similar physically, and the rest of the squadron called them 'the twins', as they were always "chasing the girls and getting into trouble" (Bobs words!). Sergeant Major Roberts had taken a dislike to both of them - which was reciprocated. Bob recounted one escapade which still amused him many years later; the food given to the troops was very poor quality, however, the senior NCO's had ensconced themselves in an outbuilding of Plessey Farm and were, generally speaking, unstinting in serving themselves generous portions when it came to 'grub'. One day Bob said to Charlie and John "do you fancy a good feed?" - naturally the answer was a resounding "yes", so that evening they went around the back of the building and Bob climbed on Charlie's back, and got in through a broken window, pinched the food just prepared for the senior NCO's, they had their 'good feed' then broke up the plates and buried the pieces in the midden!

Well, said Bob, the wrath that fell upon the troops can be imagined, the sergeant major had them on parade and grilled every one individually. Meanwhile, the 'twins' adopted an angelic countenance and professed to having been writing letters home at the time of the said offence. Several more parades followed, along with dire threats, but the culprits were never discovered. It was only the day before Bob was posted to France some time later that he approached Sgt Major Roberts and told him who had done the deed. 'It was too late for him to do anything by then, but the look on his face was priceless', Bob chortled all those years later. [Charlie's War Record states he was fined 14 day's pay field punishment for insubordination to an N.C.O. on 20 May 1915 - this may have been the incident that led to his offence.]

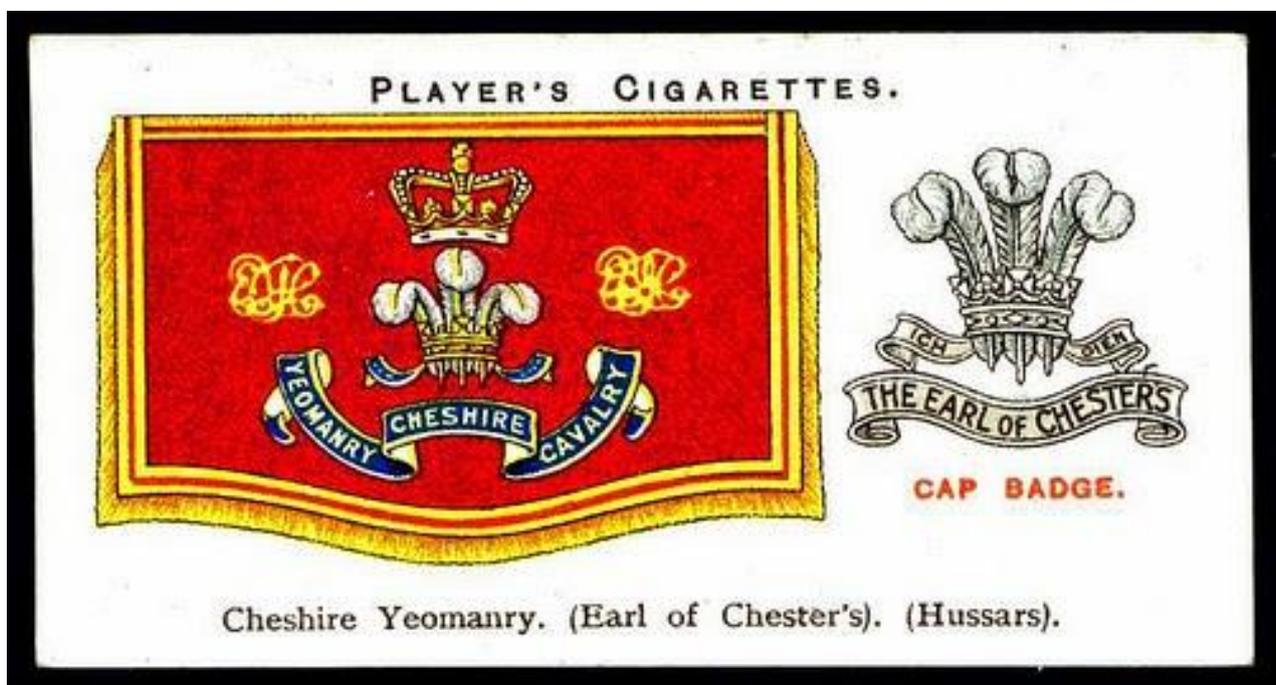
One event stood out for Bob during this time; Zeppelins had been conducting random bombing raids over the north east (and elsewhere) at this time and on the evening of 14 April 1915, at around 8.30pm, one was heard overhead. It is thought that this was Zeppelin L9, under the command of Kapitanleutnant Heinrich Mathy, which had taken off from Emden (on its first mission) to bomb Newcastle, but had meandered over Wallsend, before progressing north over Dudley, Cramlington and Bedlington, and finally heading back over the North Sea via Blyth. As it progressed, dropping random bombs to no great effect along the way, one of these bombs landed near Plessey, the blast causing damage to windows. Troops on the ground had attempted to bring it down by rifle fire without effect, but there was a nearby flight of fighter aircraft kept on readiness for such an incursion. However, when one of the fighters took off it was too low and clipped telegraph wires in its path, flipping it into a barn where it exploded into flames. The Yeomanry were called to clear the area, but there was obviously nothing that could be done for the pilot. The farmer and his family had



miraculously managed to escape, but no approach could be made until the ruins had cooled down. The following day, Bob was detailed to accompany the medical officer to retrieve the pilot's body. He was burnt to a cinder, and Bob had to hold a lantern whilst the doctor examined the body. The doctor retrieved a locket from around the pilot's neck which had survived the flames, and inside was a picture of a wife or girlfriend. Bob was beginning to pale by now but the doctor said to him as they removed the pilot, 'You know young man, this fellow never felt a thing'. 'That's a lark', Bob gulped, surveying the charred body. 'No, look, his neck was broken by the impact, he died instantly'. Sure enough the broken vertebrae was clear through the burnt flesh.

Kapitanleutnant Mathy and his Zeppelin L31 were eventually shot down by 2nd Lieutenant W. Tempest over Potters Bar near London, on 1 October 1916, and he was killed along with his crew. He had jumped rather than burn, and was found 'embedded' in the corner of a field. Zeppelin L9 caught fire and was destroyed in its shed in Fuhlsbuttel on 19 September 1916.

As May 1916 arrived, the Yeomanry lost their horses as they went through the process of dismounting the regiment - what a traumatic affair that must have been; cavalrymen being dismounted! Bob said goodbye to his horse Joe, never to see him again, and bicycles were issued. That might not have been too bad, but half of the boys had never ridden a bike and had to be taught - chaos! Even more so, as there was an inspection by the Duke of Connaught of the Tyne Garrison troops, and the Yeomanry were chosen to represent the Cyclist Units and as no ceremonial drill had been drawn up for bicycles they had to make it up and hope for the best!





Above: 'A' Squadron 2/1st Cheshire Yeomanry at Plessey Farm 1915. Bob Tilston is very recognisable, being in the middle row, eleven from the left, Charlie Williamson just behind him. John Gauterin is also in the photograph, but Bob Tilston could not pick him out.

Below: Troop posing in front of the farm building where the windows were blown out by the Zeppelin bomb. Bob Tilston is 8th from the left, with Charlie Williamson to his right.





Close up of previous photograph of the Troop posing in front of the farm building where the windows were blown out by the Zeppelin bomb. Charlie Williamson is on the left and Bob Tilston on the right.

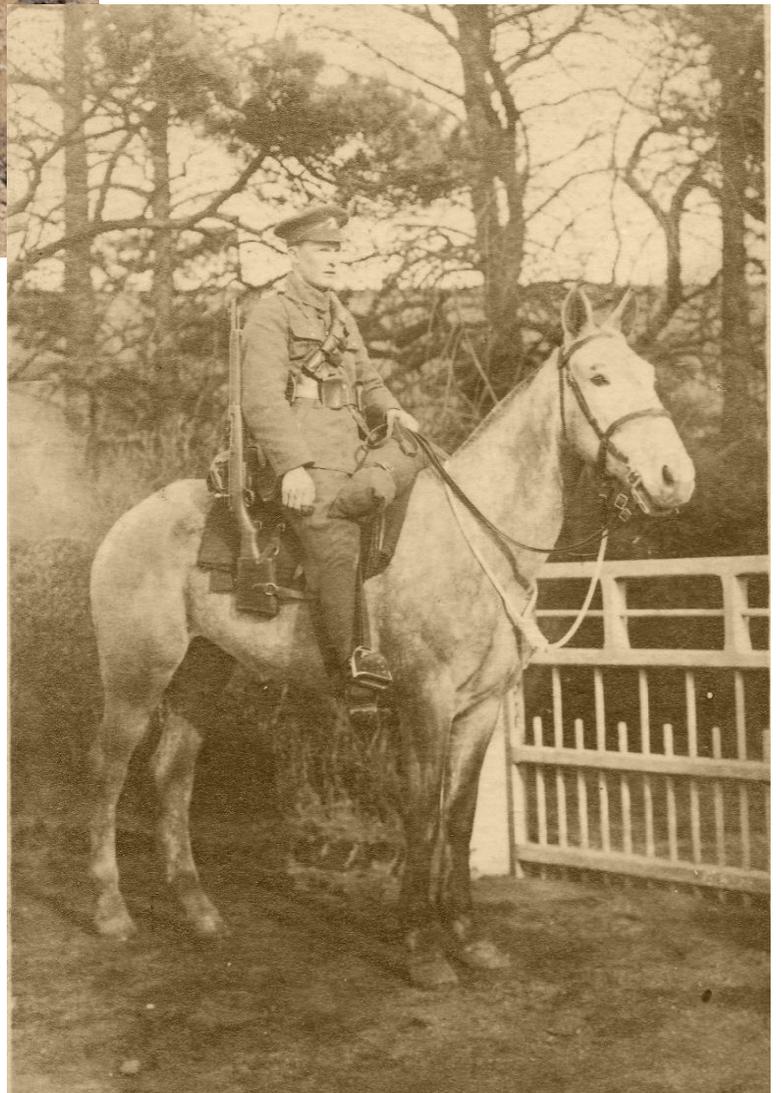


Left to right: Bob Tilston, John Gauterin (sitting), Charlie Williamson



Above: Charlie Williamson

Right: Bob Tilston





Left: Bob Tilston later in the war. He served with the South Lancs in the Battle of Messines in June 1917, and was wounded in the stomach in the vicinity of Ploegsteert Wood.

After his wounds had healed he was transferred to the Labour Corps, presumably due to the debilitating effects of his wound. His wound stripe is visible on his left sleeve (together with a good conduct stripe).

Below: Army cyclists on the Somme



France and the Somme

Although the conflict on the Somme began in July 1916, it would be some weeks before the three pals would be in France. Meanwhile, the Battle of the Somme commenced with a seven day bombardment of the German lines, followed by a massed infantry assault on 1 July 1916. This was the greatest disaster in British Army history, with almost 60,000 men becoming casualties on that first day, of which 20,000 were fatalities.

When the Cheshire Yeomanry (including John and his two pals) arrived in Rouen, France, on 21 September 1916, they were posted to the military base at Etaples. There they underwent a short period of intense training, and within days they were transferred to the 2nd Battalion South Lancashire Regiment. This was a regular battalion that had been part of the original 1914 BEF, and had suffered grievously since then. They were destined to suffer a lot more in the subsequent weeks and months of the Somme battle; on 3 July they lost 14 officers and 300 men, on 12 July a further 4 officers and 75 men, and on 15 July another 4 officers and 100 men were casualties. The 8th Battalion had suffered similarly. So much so, that the gaps in the ranks could not be bolstered with available reinforcements, rendering it ineffective as a fighting force. Consequently, the battalion was pulled out of the line to the Auchonvillers area, to refit and rest before relieving the 8th Battalion on 5 August. Further action took place in the Aveluy Wood area, during which a further 40 men were lost, mainly to shellfire. On 3 September, a further attack on the Thiepval spur cost another 7 officers and 123 men.

After moving back to Bouzincourt and Amplier, they were then moved back into the trenches in the vicinity of Mouquet Farm (the battle for which had already been savage and costly for the Australians, Canadians and British), where they suffered heavy shelling.

By this time, the military hierarchy had decided that the likelihood of a German invasion of the north east coast of Britain had receded, and to keep trained soldiers in that area when reinforcements were desperately needed in France was foolish. Consequently, three officers and 200 men from the 2/1st Cheshire Yeomanry were detailed for the infantry, and they embarked for France at Southampton on 20 September 1916. After their training and transfer to the 2nd Battalion South Lancashires, 110 men were despatched to join the main battalion at the Front on 30 September.

Their thoughts could be summed up by Private 1035 Reg Lloyd of the Cheshire Yeomanry attached to the 8th Battalion :

'We went up to relieve the Canadians, we'd never seen anything like it going up through this area it was just as if an earthquake had occurred it was all mud and I was frightened to death. Eventually we came to a noticeboard in amongst the rubble and it just said 'Pozières' - that's all there was, just a noticeboard that said 'Pozières' to tell us where we were'

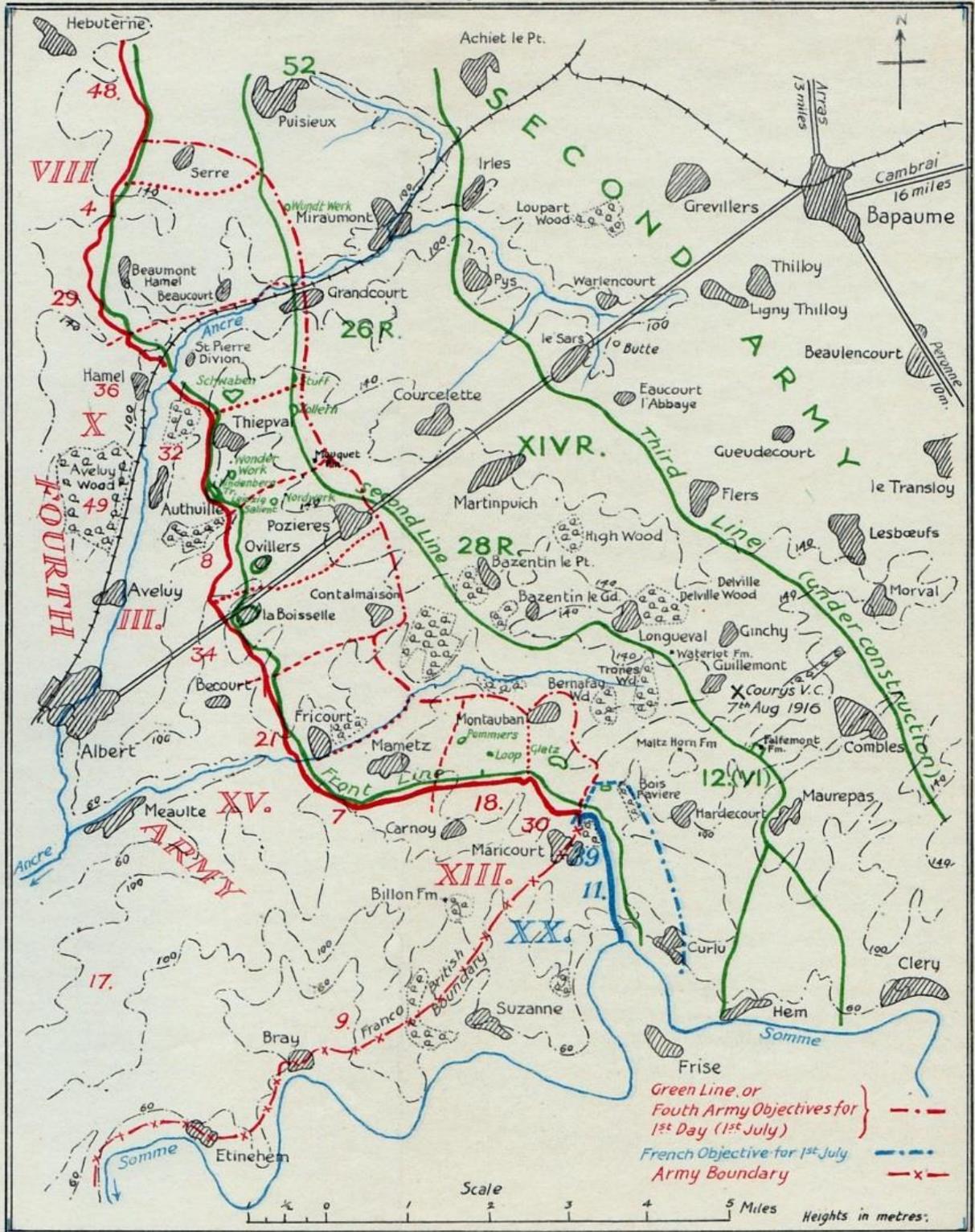
from Lynn MacDonald, *Somme* (1983)

The war diaries at this time stated that it was taking 24 hours to get rations to the front line due to the shelling and state of the landscape. It was into this hell that came three country boys from Farndon, Holt and Churton!

Stuff Redoubt (*Feste Staufen*) was a strong point in the German Somme fortifications, sitting due east from the massive Schwaben Redoubt, which formed the German front line on 1 July 1916. It was an artillery observation post on that first day of the battle, but was a clear objective for the troops attacking in that sector. This was attacked mainly by the 36th Ulster Division - those amazing men had overrun the German positions, suffering severe casualties in doing so. So many officers had

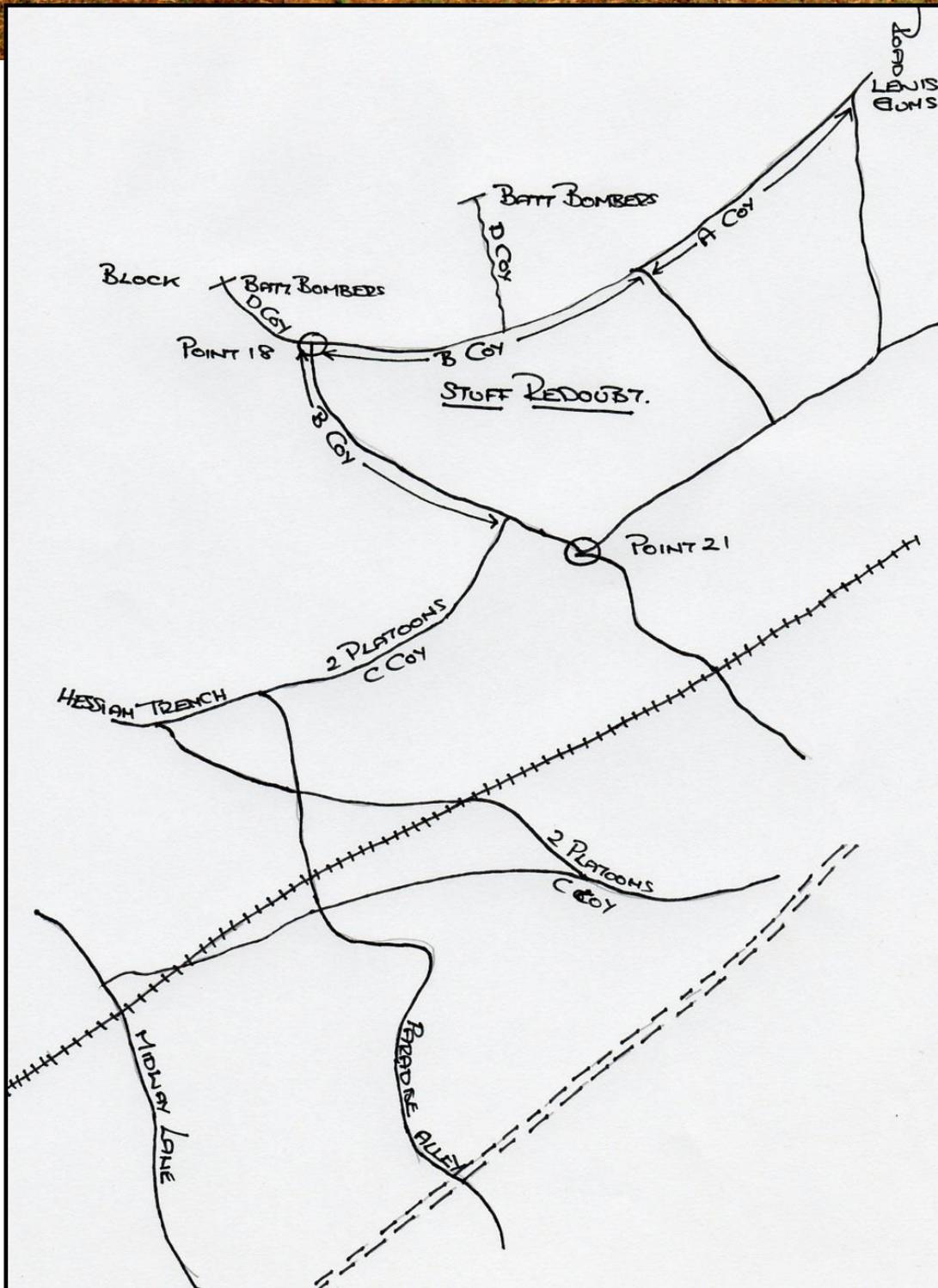
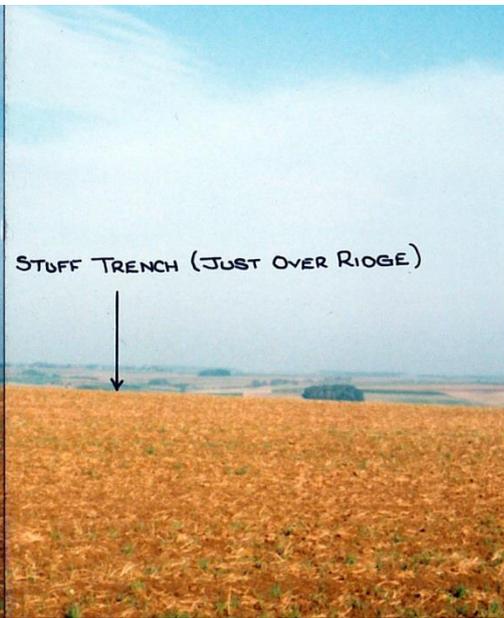
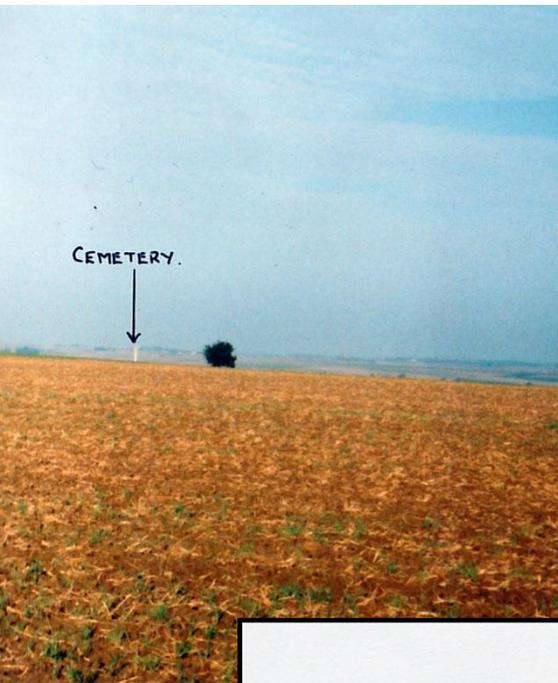
THE SOMME, 1916.

The Battle of Albert 1st July The Fourth Army Objectives.



P.W.V. History.

Reproduced from *The Official History of the War, France & Belgium*, by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.



been lost that the command structure was seriously weakened. An opportunity to flank the German defences in Thiepval was lost, but that would have required an alteration to the rehearsed attack on the German second line. It would be another three months before Thiepval eventually fell, however, the gallant Ulstermen pressed on as ordered, with so very few left standing. The Germans in Stuff Redoubt were amazed when they realised that the Tommies were to the front of their position - just a handful of artillerymen and few, if any, German troops for half a kilometre in either direction. One problem faced them; the wire had not been cut. The Ulstermen had reached the objective before the artillery bombardment had cut it. The handful of men did their best, but could not find a way through, and they now came under heavy shell and machine gun fire, plus the Germans were gathering for a counter attack. They had no choice but to retire. It was the high water mark of that first days' attack on the Somme.

As the weeks and months passed on that dreadful Somme slog, the direction of the British attack shifted; Pozieres fell in mid-August; Thiepval in late September; and it was possible to now start attacking northwards, to take out the strong points of Mouquet Farm, Zollern and Stuff Redoubts - not an easy task, as all were part of an interconnected defensive system.

Stuff Redoubt had, at last, been captured on 9 October after weeks of fighting, and following on from the taking of Mouquet Farm and Zollern Redoubt, the South Lancs had moved into position for the next attack, which would be on Regina Trench (a strong deep construction running from Stuff trench towards Le Sars). It was an important German switch-trench, allowing troops and material to be moved around the Front in some shelter (especially as the Canadians were a close threat on their right flank). The trenches were smashed with dead British and German troops lying everywhere, the mud stank of gas, and detritus lay everywhere. However, the attack was postponed on 6 October, and the battalion was relieved by the 13th Cheshires and moved back to Bouzincourt to rest. On 15 October, the battalion moved back up to the front line to what remained of Stuff Redoubt. 'A' Company left camp at 6am, followed by D, B, C and HQ, at intervals of 400 yards between platoons, and moved to the right sub sector of the position soon to be occupied by 75 Infantry Brigade, relieving the 8th Loyal North Lancs, and being directed into position by company guides.

The companies were taking over positions 'recce'd' by their company commanders the previous day. The situation was reported quiet with no gas, while the units on their right were the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers, and the 8th Border Regiment, with the 8th South Lancs in support. The 11th Cheshire Regiment were in reserve, further right were the Canadians, who would take on the formidable Regina Trench, and to their left were the 39th Division, which including the poet Edmund Blunden among the ranks of the 11th Royal Sussex. The whole frontage for the attack covered 5000 metres.

The battalion transport was in the rear, along with the cadre who would form the basis of a new battalion (should the situation demand it), under the command of Major W.J.Hasketh Smith, aided by 2nd Lieutenants H.W.Mirehouse, S.W.Boast, H.E.House, L.G.Mathews and C.L Lomas, plus one senior NCO from each company plus 10% of Ordinary Ranks.

On the night of 15 October, as the battalion huddled in the remains of Stuff Redoubt in the rain, an artillery barrage was endured from 8-11pm. It was particularly heavy from 9-10pm, and an SOS signal was sent up. The Allied artillery answered, and put up a heavy barrage in no man's land in front of Stuff Redoubt. Unfortunately, several of the British shells were pitching short about 100 yards behind Point 18. It is likely this was being fired from a gun with a worn out barrel after excessive use in the previous weeks and months. Consequently, frantic efforts were made to try and get HQ to communicate with the batteries involved and get them to 'lift' - all to no avail, and a shell pitched

into the trench occupied by B Company, killing three men and wounding nine. One of those killed was Peter's great-uncle, **John Gauterin**.

Bob recalled that they got to him quickly, but that he had suffered a severe shrapnel wound which had blown half his face off. They comforted him as best they could, he tried to say something but slipped away. He was wrapped in a blanket and given a quick burial behind the trench. The grave was marked, with a view to interring him more fittingly when they could, but with the amount of dead British and German soldiers lying about, the state of the trenches and surrounding landscape, together with the constant shelling, it was always going to be a forlorn hope. The grave was lost, and today John is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme battlefields, along with 72,194 others who similarly have no known grave. The distressing circumstances regarding John's death and burial go some way to explain why so many names are on the memorial and why remains are still being uncovered today by those who work the land.



Thiepval Memorial to the Missing



After midnight, the Front quietened and patrols were sent out to recce the state of the barbed wire facing the Stuff and Regina Trenches. All companies were employed repairing and improving the trenches. Bob recalled there were many dead Germans lying about wearing gas masks.

It was decided to postpone the attack, and the battalion was relieved by the 8th Border Regiment, while temporarily withdrawing to the old support line. On 19 October, they once more occupied the front line in attack readiness - this time there would be no postponement. Rain was forecast, onto a landscape that was already a quagmire.

Saturday, 21 October dawned, a fine day with a cold wind. By this time the British Army had learned harsh lessons regarding the assault of enemy positions. Too many battalion commanders and senior officers had died leading from the front, too many men had died walking in straight lines towards the enemy machine guns, and this after a preliminary bombardment had warned the enemy of the attack. The standard timing of attacks had been at dawn, just when the enemy was deemed to be at its lowest ebb, the trouble was, both sides now 'stood -to' at dawn just because of this thinking. The timing of attacks were now becoming more varied, and bombardments were being refined - which now provided a creeping barrage for the infantry to follow. Rank and file were increasingly being led by lieutenants and second lieutenants, due to the mortality rate of captains and majors. It was not perfect, but it was getting better.

Later that October day at 12.06pm, the artillery opened up on the German lines with the enemy replying six minutes later. The battalion went over the top following the British barrage in the following order:

A Company on the right under 2nd Lieutenant McMahon

B Company in support under 2nd Lieutenant Neville

D Company on the left under 2nd Lieutenant Snowden

C Company in support under 2nd Lieutenant Harrison

According to Bob Tilston, just before they went 'over the bags', Charlie (still only twenty-one) was very nervous. He reassured his friend as best he could, "just stick with me and you'll be fine", said Bob. The units moved forward in waves of half companies, the frontage of A and B being Stump Road on the right to Cable Trench. D and C covered from Cable Trench to the communication trench running north west from point 38. The whole frontage covered a distance of about 400 yards.

The battalion war diary relates that when the line moved forward the spirit of all ranks was 'wonderful', although I'm sure Charlie didn't feel too wonderful at the time. The men went over the parapet in fine style, arriving in the enemy trench at about 12.15pm. The objective was easily gained, although some trouble was caused by the enemy bombing parties. Casualties during the actual advance were slight, although some men were caught by the British barrage, having got under it in their haste. On entering the German trenches, few Germans were found still in occupation. Many emerged from dugouts, and some put up a fight - these were easily dealt with, with about 50 killed. The remainder were driven to communication trenches on the flanks, where they surrendered.

Bob Tilston still reserved feelings of absolute contempt for one of his own comrades, a man who was actually from his own village. Refusing to name him, he recalled how when the Germans were surrendering and being shepherded towards the rear, his comrade shot a very young soldier in the back as he went past with his hands in the air.

Meanwhile, the company bombers and Lewis gunners had carried out brave work along Cable Trench in the centre, Stump Road on the right, and a communication trench on the left. A machine gun had been captured and several others destroyed.

At this point the Germans in Grandcourt, recognising that the position was lost, opened fire with shellfire, machine guns and sniper fire. The British officer commanding the section under fire (most likely Second Lieutenant Neville) gave young **Charlie Williamson** a message to take to the other flank, but as he started off Charlie was hit by bullet in the chest and killed instantly .

On 22 October the battalion was relieved by the 8th North Staffs and went in reserve, leaving behind their dead. When the battlefield was cleared, a cemetery was laid out roughly on the line of Stuff Trench. This is now **Grandcourt Road CWGC Cemetery** with 283 British dead within, including 108 unidentified. Charles Williamson was laid in this cemetery.

The 2nd Battalion received orders to move north but not before they received an inspection and congratulations from none other than Sir Douglas Haig while behind the lines at Gezaincourt near Doullens on 26 October. Following this they were posted to Belgium to a quieter area near Ploegsteert in Belgium after being withdrawn from the Somme. They stayed there for the remainder of 1916.

Several weeks later Bob was granted leave and cycled over to the Red Lion in Churton to visit Charlie's parents. As he went under the stone arch into the back yard, Charlie's mother was walking across the cobbles with a bucket of water, she looked up, screamed and fainted. Much later when she had recovered, she explained that because Bob and Charlie were so similar ('the twins') she thought it was Charlie returning from the grave.

Bob returned to the Front to serve with the South Lancs in the Battle of Messines in June 1917 before being wounded in the stomach in the vicinity of Ploegsteert Wood (he distinctly remembered the dead German snipers in what was left of the trees, strapped in place by their belts). After his wounds had healed, he was transferred to the Labour Corps, presumably due to the debilitating effects of his wound. He was discharged in 1919 and lived to the ripe old age of 94, passing away in September 1990.

On Charlie's gravestone his parents had the following words inscribed;

*'tis hard to part
from one so dear
without a last farewell'*

while Peter Gauterin inherited a bible from John's brother Charles Gauterin, in which he discovered a piece of paper in Psalms with 'John Gauterin 103' written on it. Psalm 103 includes the words

*'As for man his days are as grass
as a flower of the field so he flourished,
For as the wind passeth over it and it is gone
and the place thereof shall know it no more'*

Words that fittingly sum up the sad loss of Bob's young friends, the deaths of whom he tragically witnessed.



Bob Tilston (wearing his silver war badge)

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
WILLIAMSON	S. LAN. R.	Plt.	31547
Charles. H.			
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	J/1/103 B8	1512	
BRITISH	do	do	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

K. 1380



Charles' Medal card showing he was awarded the British Medal and Victory Medal

TELEPHONE
No. 22 CHESTER.

No. 240/21
In reply please quote above
Reference and address to
THE CHIEF CONSTABLE
OF CHESHIRE,
CHESTER.

CHIEF CONSTABLE'S OFFICE,
CHESHIRE CONSTABULARY,
CHESTER.

18 FEB 1921
FULY
P

16th February 1921.

Sir,

No 31547 Pte Charles Norman Williamson,
South Lance Regiment.

In reply to your letter dated 11th Instant, No
P and B/30/503 S. Lance, I beg to inform you that the local
Police have made enquiries and report that the father of the
above named deceased soldier is Mr Samuel H. Williamson, Red
Lion, Churton, near Chester.

When interviewed by the Sergeant of Police, Mr
Williamson stated that he hoped that the Military Authorities
would not send the plaque and scroll relating to his son, as
it would only upset his wife who has not been in good health
for some time.

*scroll not
sent*

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

P. M. Williams
Chief Constable of Cheshire.

The Officer i/c Infantry Records,
Fulwood Barracks,
PRESTON.

A letter extracted from Charles' War Service Record, revealing the fragile condition of Charles' mother, clearly affected by the loss of her son, and wishing for no further communication from the military authorities.

Casualty Form - Active Service.

Regiment or Corps _____
 Regimental No. 1286 Rank Private Name Charles Thomas
 Enlisted (a) 20-10-14 Terms of Service (a) Period of 1 year Service reckons from (a) 20-10-14
 Date of promotion to present rank _____ Date of appointment to present rank _____ Numerical position on roll of N.C.Os _____
 Extended _____ Re-engaged _____ Qualification (b) _____

Report Date	From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents.
		Embarked	Southampton.	20-9-16.	
		Disembarked	Rouen.	21-9-16.	
		Joined No. 1. Terr. Base Dep.	Rouen.	21-9-16.	
		Trans. to 4th Inf. Base Dep.	Rouen.	20-9-16.	
		Compulsorily trans. to 4th T.E. Res.	South Lanes.	and Posted to	
		End South Lanes. under A.O. 206 & A.O. 1.1492 of 1916.		from. 20-9-16.	New No 31547.

1/10/16. O.C. 2nd BN. Joined 2nd Bn. S. Lan. R. Officer 1/10/16. Roll.
 - do - Killed in action 21-10-16. Roll.
 O.K. Regularly Sub No

Casualty form extracted from Charles' War Service Record, listing his movements and confirming his date of death.

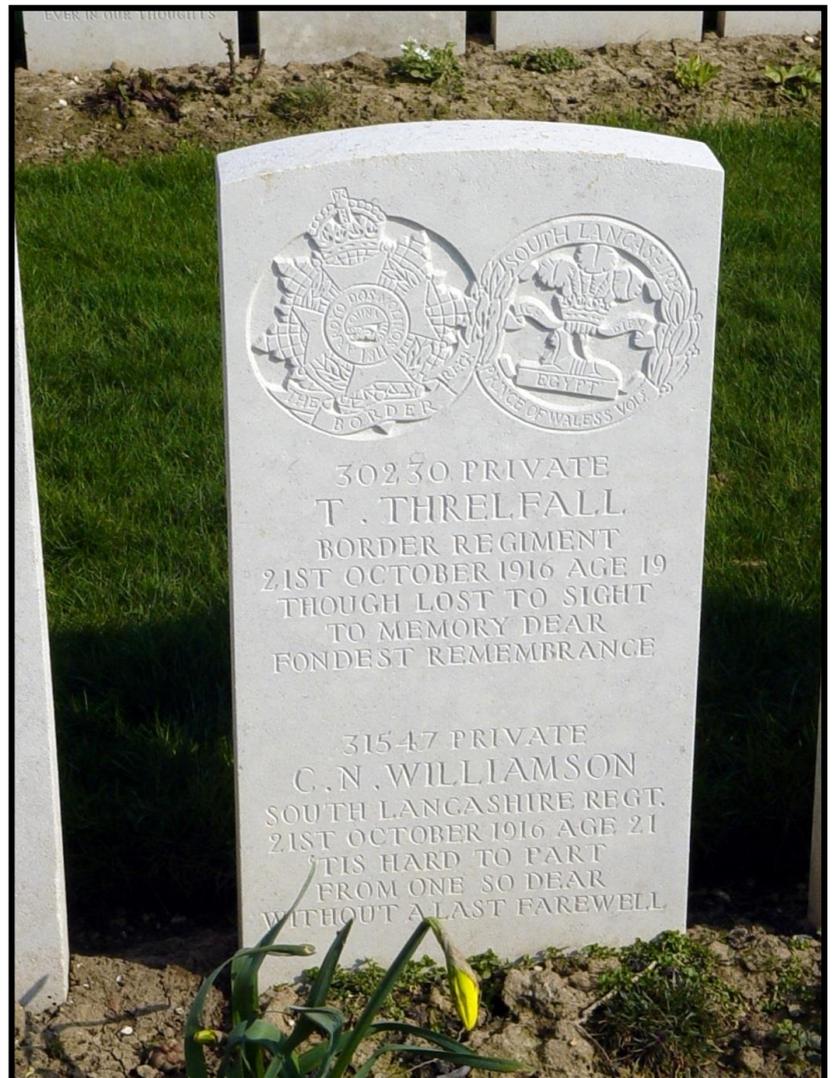
RETURN TO THE BATTLEFIELDS

Visiting the resting place of Charlie Williamson

Grandcourt Road Cemetery is in a rather isolated position lying amongst ploughed fields on the Somme. It may be remote, but the grave of Charles Williamson has been visited by Farndon villagers on three recent occasions, including author of this article Peter Gauterin; parish councillors Ken Wakefield, and Neil Jones of Kings Marsh Farm, with Colin Capewell; and historian and web author Mike Royden. Charlie Williamson has not been forgotten.



Photos taken by **Peter Gauterin** on his visit to Grandcourt Road Cemetery, Somme



The visit made by Ken Wakefield, Neil Lewis and Colin Capewell, July 2009

Grandcourt Road Cemetery where Charles lies, was made in the spring of 1917 when the Ancre battlefield was cleared. The cemetery now contains 391 burials and commemorations of the First World War. 108 of the burials are unidentified but there is a special memorial to one casualty known to be buried among them. The cemetery was designed by Sir Herbert Baker.

Today it is not easy to reach, given that it lies in the middle of cultivated fields well away from main roads. The approach is along a single lane leading up from Grandcourt village. This lane become more of a farm track as it reaches the top of the hill. Parking tight against the roadside out of the way of passing tractors, the approach is initially up a few concrete steps then along a perfectly mown turf path through two cultivated fields.

In July 2009 Farndon residents Ken Wakefield, Neil Lewis (Kings Marsh) and Colin Capewell, made a visit to the Battlefields (a more detailed account and illustrations can be found on the **'Return to the Battlefields'** menu link) and made a special journey to Grandcourt to visit Charlie Williamson's grave.

Ken later wrote,

Charles N Williamson of the Old Red Lion at Churton was killed during the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and is buried in Grandcourt cemetery. On a recent visit to the WW1 battlefields of Flanders and France, we set out to find his final resting place. After local museum visits in the morning we set off to find Grandcourt. All sites are well signposted and our sign led us down a narrow road just wide enough for one car with a six foot high bank on each side. Driving on we came to well kept steps leading up the bank to the right. We parked in a field a walked back.

Our guide book said that we needed to cross two fields so we climbed the steps. A stubble field lay ahead but across the centre was a perfectly maintained lawned carpet and this was our path. This led to a cornfield with once again a clear path through it to the cemetery. It is one of the smallest but there lies Mr Williamson and below is a photo of his gravestone. A visitors book at the entrance showed that many others had made the journey to this still and tranquil place. The neatness and pristine condition of this and all other sites we saw is a testimony to the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission who maintain them.

Ken Wakefield





Left: Walking along the lawned CWGC access path through the arable fields on the Somme

Right: Continuing to walk the long lawned CWGC access path, now passing through the tall crop in the next field

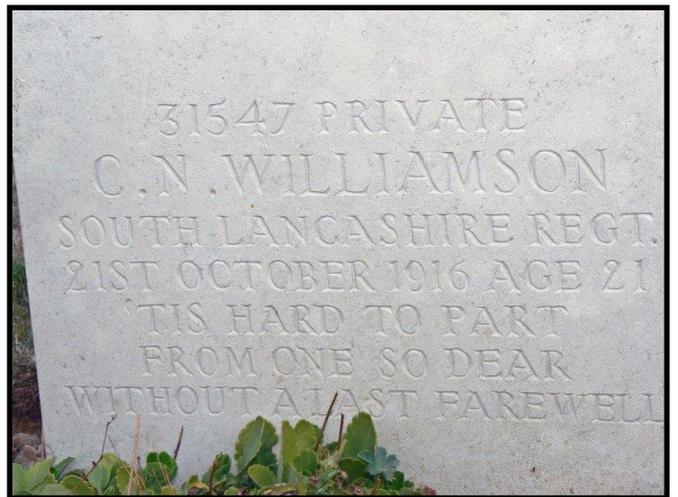


Left: Reaching Grandcourt Road Cemetery, as it emerged hidden away, isolated in the middle of arable land on the Somme



**Left to right:
Neil Lewis, Ken Wakefield,
Colin Capewell**





The visit made by Mike Royden, August 2007



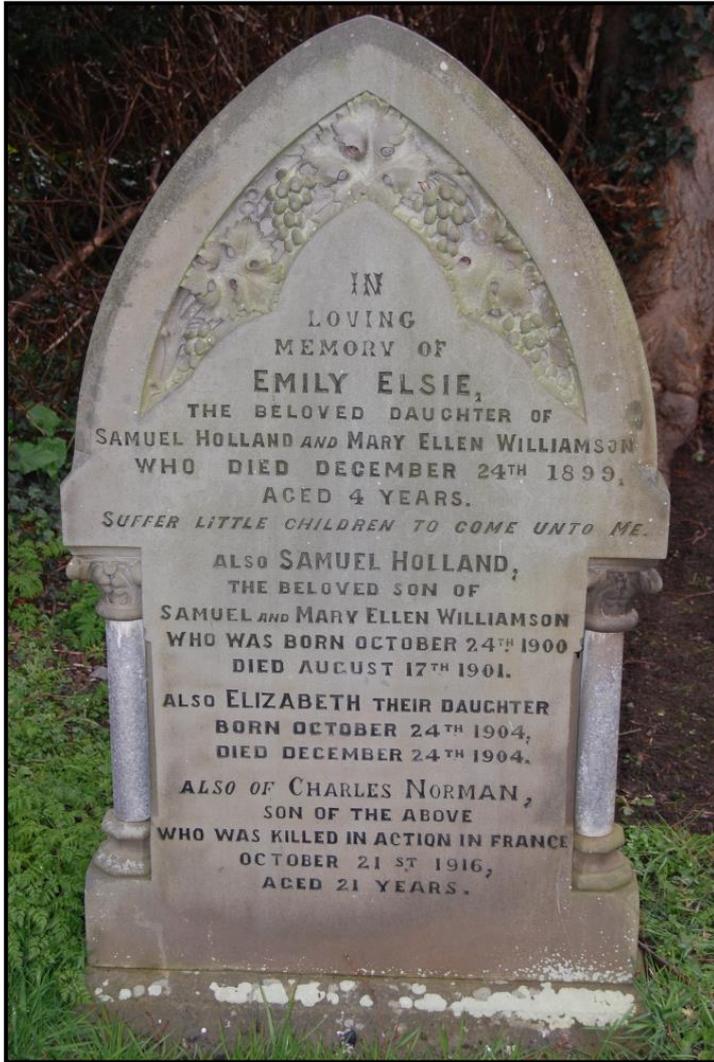
Left: Accessing Grandcourt Road Cemetery, across the lawned CWGC path through the arable fields on the Somme





Top: The view from Grandcourt Road Cemetery, across the Somme fields towards the Ancre Valley.
Below: Looking up towards the Thiepval ridge across the former Somme battlefields

FARNDON CHURCHYARD



**Williamson family grave,
St. Chard's Churchyard,
Farndon**

**With a memorial to
Charles Norman Williamson
Killed in Action
on the Somme
21 October 1916 aged 21**



In Memory of

Private

Charles Norman Williamson

31547, 2nd Bn., South Lancashire Regiment who died on 21 October 1916 Age 21

Son of Samuel Holland Williamson and Mary Ellen Williams, of "The Red Lion" Inn, Churton, Chester.

Remembered with Honour

Grandcourt Road Cemetery, Grandcourt



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Researched and written

by

Mike Royden

***With the account of Bob Tilston's reminisces and the
action on the Somme researched and written
by***

Peter Gauterin

www.roydenhistory.co.uk