

# Leonard Comer Wall and Blackie the War Horse

## Mike Royden

In the north-west corner of the western field fronting the Higher Road RSPCA Liverpool Animal Centre (always known locally as 'The Horse's Rest'), is an unusual and rare grave. It could be classed as a war grave – the importance of the headstone has certainly been recognised as such, as it now has Grade II Listed Building Status.

It is the final resting place of 'Blackie' – a war horse that served during the First World War. But how did he come to be here and what is his story? It begins in West Kirby, in the Wirral where a young man, soon to be his master, was born in 1896.

### Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall

"A" Battery, 275th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery (55th (West Lancashire) Division)  
Mentioned in Despatches

Leonard Comer Wall, was the only son of Charles Comer Wall (1867-1928) and Kate (nee Earle) (1874-1954). Charles was brought up in Great Homer Street in Liverpool, where his grandfather George's business was located. He was a landowner and provision merchant with a number of men and shop boys in his employ, who had moved to Liverpool by 1861 after learning the trade under his step-father back in Derbyshire. He set up the family business of George Wall and Co. Limited, mainly concerned with grocery provisions and margarine manufacturing, and was joined by his sons Charles and Percy when they were old enough. As the business prospered, the mainly moved to West Kirby, to a more substantial merchant's house befitting his status in Grange Road.

152	9	do	1.	George Wall	Head	Man	31	Provision Merchant	do	Preston
				Elizabeth	Wife	Man	35		do	do
				Percy	Son		5		do	Riverpool
				Charles C	do	Son	11		do	do
				Elizabeth	do	Daughter	11		do	do
				William Hollins	Serv	Man	25	Grocery Assistant	do	do
				John P. Foster	do	Man	21	do	do	do
				Thomas Helsby	do	Man	21	do	do	do
				Alfred Wood	do	Man	17	do	do	do
				William Turnbull	do	Man	13	do	do	do

The family of George Wall 1871 - 9 Great Howard Street, Liverpool

158	Leigh Road	1		George Wall	Head	m	50	Provision Merchant	x	Derbyshire Heath
				Elizabeth	do	wife	50			Cheshire Crewe
				Percy J	do	son	24	Provision Merchant	x	Lancashire Liverpool
				Charles C	do	son	22	do	x	do do
				Elizabeth	do	daughter	20	Living at Home		do do
				Dorothy	do	niece	20	Living here		Derbyshire Chesterfield
				Lane Roberts	relation	S	20	Tom's companion	x	do do
				Anne Halliwell	Serv	S	20	Servant (housemaid)	x	Derbyshire Highley

The family of George Wall 1891 - Grange Road, West Kirby

137	do	1		Chas. C. Wall	Head	m	24	Provision Merchant	do	Lancs Liverpool
				Kate	Wife	m	26			Canada
				Howard C. do	son	s	4			Ches. West Kirby
				Henry Earle	brother	s	21	Student		Canada
				Helen M. Wall	2nd daughter	s	2			Ches. Highley
				Sarah A. Ferguson	Servant	w	60	Ches. domestic		Stafford Sedgely
				Ada C. A. Walters	do	s	27	Nurse	do	Lancs. Pemberton
				Ellen Clarkin	do	s	22	Housemaid	do	Ireland

The family of Charles Wall 1901 - Leigh Road, West Kirby

It was in West Kirby where Charles met his future wife Kate Earle. A native of Newfoundland, like her brothers, she was sent to England for her education. At seventeen she was recorded as a boarder at Kirby Park Ladies School, run by Louisa Stowell, in the Old Village of West Kirby in 1891. It was, no doubt, shortly after this time that they met, and their courtship began. Their marriage banns were read at St Bridget's church in West Kirby (*right*) in August 1895, but they left for Kate's home to be married a month later at St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Fogo, Newfoundland on 28 September 1895.



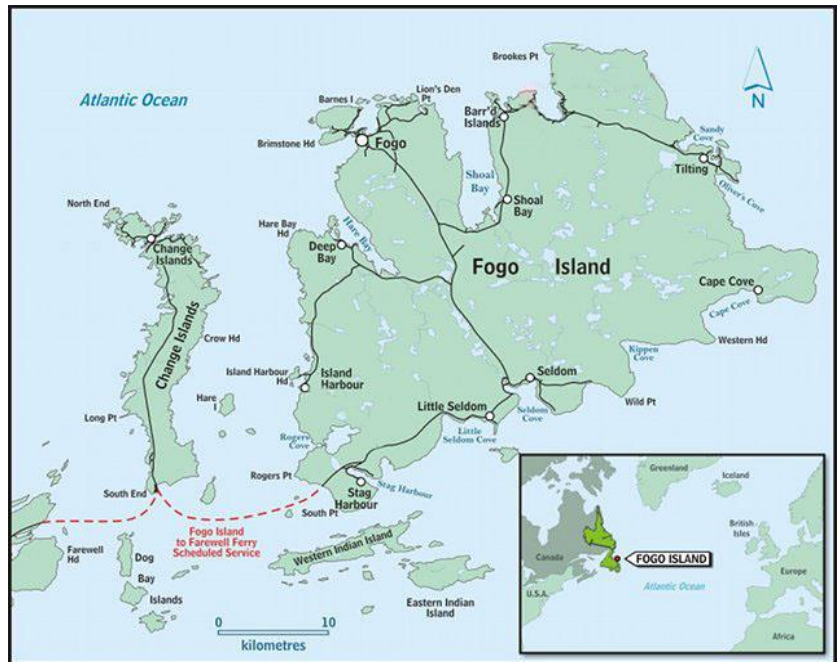
219	Kirby Park	1	Louisa Stowell	head	8	29	Principal of Ladies School	x	Isle of Man, Malton
			Louisa Stowell	pupil	8	29	scholar		Ireland & Swieris
			Charlotte Sturtevant	pupil	8	29	do		do Kingston
			Kate Earle	pupil	8	27	do		Newfoundland Fogo
			Elleanor M. Bennett	pupil	8	27	do		India India
			Margie A. Lippincott	pupil	8	28	do		Lancashire Liverpool

**Kirby Park Ladies School, run by Louisa Stowell, in 1891- Kate Earle listed on the fourth row**

5	September 28	Fogo	Charles Comer	Wall / 29	Bachelor	Merchant	do	West Kirby, Cheshire, England	do	Henry E. Brown, Henry J. Earle
			Kate	Earle / 20	Spinster	do	Fogo	do	Edwin Herbert, H. Earle, Annie Procter	

**Marriage entry, St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Fogo, Newfoundland - 28 September 1895**

Kate's grandfather, Henry Earle (1809-1883), had emigrated to St. John's from Dartmouth in the 1830s and had established himself as a merchant tailor and outfitter, marrying Catherine Nosworthy (1816-1868) on 7 October 1838 at St John's. Catherine was also from Dartmouth and there was an Earle witnessing the marriage, so they may have left their home to join family already there. They had a large family, but it was their oldest surviving child Henry John Earle (1841-1934) who headed north to live on Fogo Island as a merchant. In 1873 he married Amelia Ann Rolls (1853-1924), a daughter of a local fisherman and Kate was born the following year.



After Kate and Charles' marriage in Fogo, they left Newfoundland for England, and within the year their son, Leonard Comer Wall, was born in 1896, and baptised on 11 October in St Bridget's, West Kirby. By 1901 the family was living at Hill Top, Leigh Road, West Kirby, where Kate's brother Henry was also staying while studying at university.

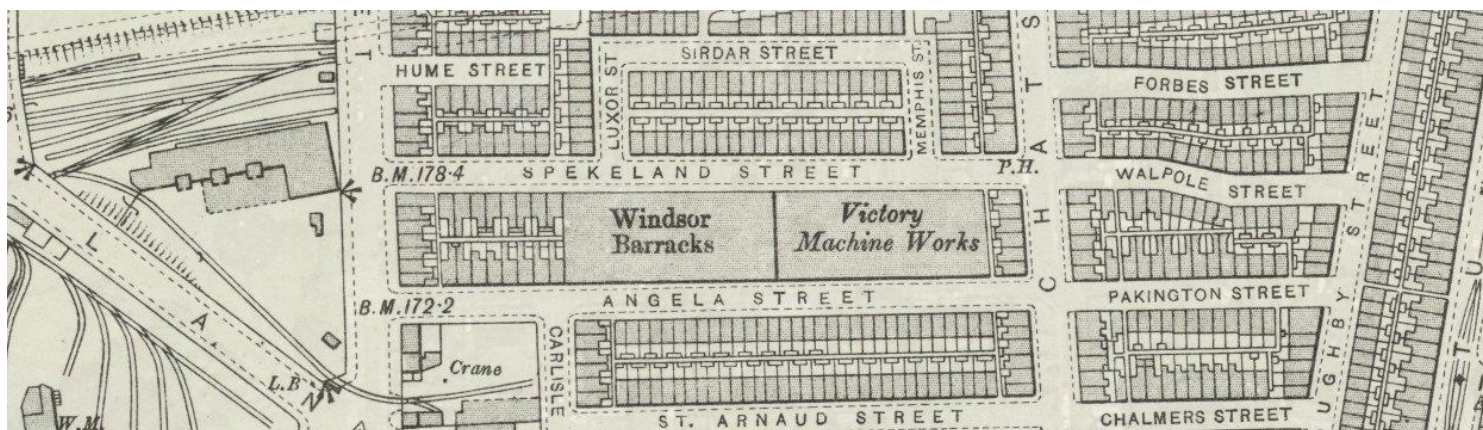
No doubt young Leonard was expected to go into the family business too, but first there was the question of his education, and he was packed off, firstly to Terra Nova School in Birkdale, Lancashire, before moving to Clifton College in Bristol. His mother, accompanied by her brother

Henry Earle, is recorded as staying at the Clifton Down hotel in Bristol in 1911, while there to see visit her son. (At the same time, his father was staying at Springfield Farm, in Scorton near Garstang, Lancashire, taking a break with three other Liverpool business men, most likely on a sporting holiday).

When the war started Leonard was still at college, but he volunteered within days and obtained a commission on 29 August 1914 as a temporary 2nd Lieutenant into the 1st West Lancashire Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. (ominously, Clifton College became notable for the very large number (582) of its former pupils who died during WW1).

*Clifton College (right)*

*This was also the former college of General Haig, commander of the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front from late 1915 until the end of the war.*



**Lieutenant. Dated 5th August, 1914.**  
**1st West Lancashire Brigade; the under-**  
**mentioned to be Second Lieutenants. Dated**  
**29th August, 1914:—**  
**Leonard Comer Wall.**  
**John Ryder Ritchie.**  
**Reginald William Bray.**  
**Charles Norman Cross.**

*Confirmation of Leonard's commission as a  
 Second Lieutenant  
 – London Gazette, 11 September 1914*



The Lancashire Batteries Royal Field Artillery were part of the Territorial Force having been formed in 1908. They were originally known as the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th West Lancashire Brigades RFA and later as 275, 276, 277 and 278 Brigades. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Lancashire Batteries along with their Ammunition Column were based in Liverpool and together formed the 1st West Lancashire Brigade, RFA which had its HQ at Windsor Barracks, Spekeland Street, in Toxteth. It was embodied when the army was mobilised on 4-5 August 1914. The brigade came under orders of the West Lancashire Division. The division was in effect broken up when most of its infantry battalions were ordered independently to France in late 1914.

The divisional artillery, including this brigade, was placed under orders of the 2nd Canadian Division, which had not been in action before and was in need of artillery support. After a period of

training, during which their old 15-pounder field guns were replaced by modern 18-pounders, they crossed for France, landing at Le Havre on 1 October 1915. Leonard, who had been overlooked for promotion, is recorded as entering the French theatre of war on 9 September 1915 according to his medal card. [His war record was among the 'burnt records' and has not survived].

The West Lancashire Division, now titled as the 55th (West Lancashire) Division, was ordered to re-form in France and the artillery re-joined it at Hallencourt between 2 and 4 January 1916. On 15 May 1916, the brigade was given the number 275 and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Lancashire Batteries became 'A', 'B' and 'C' Batteries. 2nd Lieutenant Leonard Wall was assigned to 'A' Battery.

8880 THE LONDON GAZETTE, 7 SEPTEMBER, 1915.

*West Lancashire Brigade.*

The undermentioned Second Lieutenants to be temporary Lieutenants. Dated 1st July, 1915:—

Patrick R. Playford.

Walter W. Wadsworth.

Reginald W. Bray, and to remain seconded.

Charles N. Cross.

Leonard C. Wall.

David M. Ritchie.

Lieutenant and Adjutant William G. Catlin to be temporary Captain and Adjutant. Dated 10th August, 1915.

Septimus Fawcett Hignett to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 5th September, 1915.

ROYAL GARRISON ARTILLERY.

*Lancashire.*

Private Eric Robinson Parrington, from The King's (Liverpool Regiment), to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 8th September, 1915.

*North Midland (Staffordshire).*

Reginald Mellor to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 19th August, 1915.

*Northumbrian (North Riding).*

Cadet Nathan Percy Goldberg, from the University of London Contingent, Senior Division, Officers Training Corps, to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 24th August, 1915.

*Leonard is passed over and remained a Second Lieutenant  
— London Gazette, 7 September 1915  
His promotion to Lieutenant finally came in 1917*



*Royal Field Artillery cap badge*

### **Second Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall**

*Extract from a group photo of officers of the 1<sup>st</sup> West Lancs Brigade R.F.A. taken at Canterbury in September 1915 immediately before departure for France.*

*(From the War Diary of the 1<sup>st</sup> West Lancashire Brigade published 1923. (pic. Thanks to RyanP))*

After seeing action on the Somme and around Arras, 'A' Battery was moved north to Ypres in Belgium, to prepare for the Battle of Messines Ridge

The front line around Ypres had changed relatively little since the end of the Second Battle of Ypres (22 April – 25 May 1915). The British held Ypres, while the Germans held the high ground of the Messines–Wytschaete Ridge to the south, the lower ridges to the east and the flat ground to the north. The Ypres Front was a salient bulging into the German lines but was completely vulnerable to the German artillery observers on the higher ground. The British had little ground observation of the German rear areas and valleys east of the ridges.

British operations in Flanders would relieve pressure on the French Army on the Aisne front, where demoralisation amid the failure of the Nivelle Offensive had led to mutinies, and the capture of Messines Ridge would give the British control of the tactically important ground on the southern flank of the Ypres Salient, shorten the front, and deprive the Germans of observation over British positions further north. The British would gain observation of the southern slope of Menin Ridge at the west end of the Gheluvelt plateau, ready for a larger offensive in the Ypres Salient. The Battle of Messines was a prelude to the much larger Third Battle of Ypres, the preliminary bombardment for which would begin on 11 July 1917.



This account about a young farmer, John Shaw, describes what it was like for another local battalion – the Cheshire Regiment in the assault on the Messines Ridge;

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

**JOHN SHAW, Private 50255, 'D' Company, 9th Battalion Cheshire Regiment, formerly 2202 3rd Cheshire Yeomanry, Died of Wounds 30 July 1917**

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; - road-making, 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 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.

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 3.10am 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, leapfrogged 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.

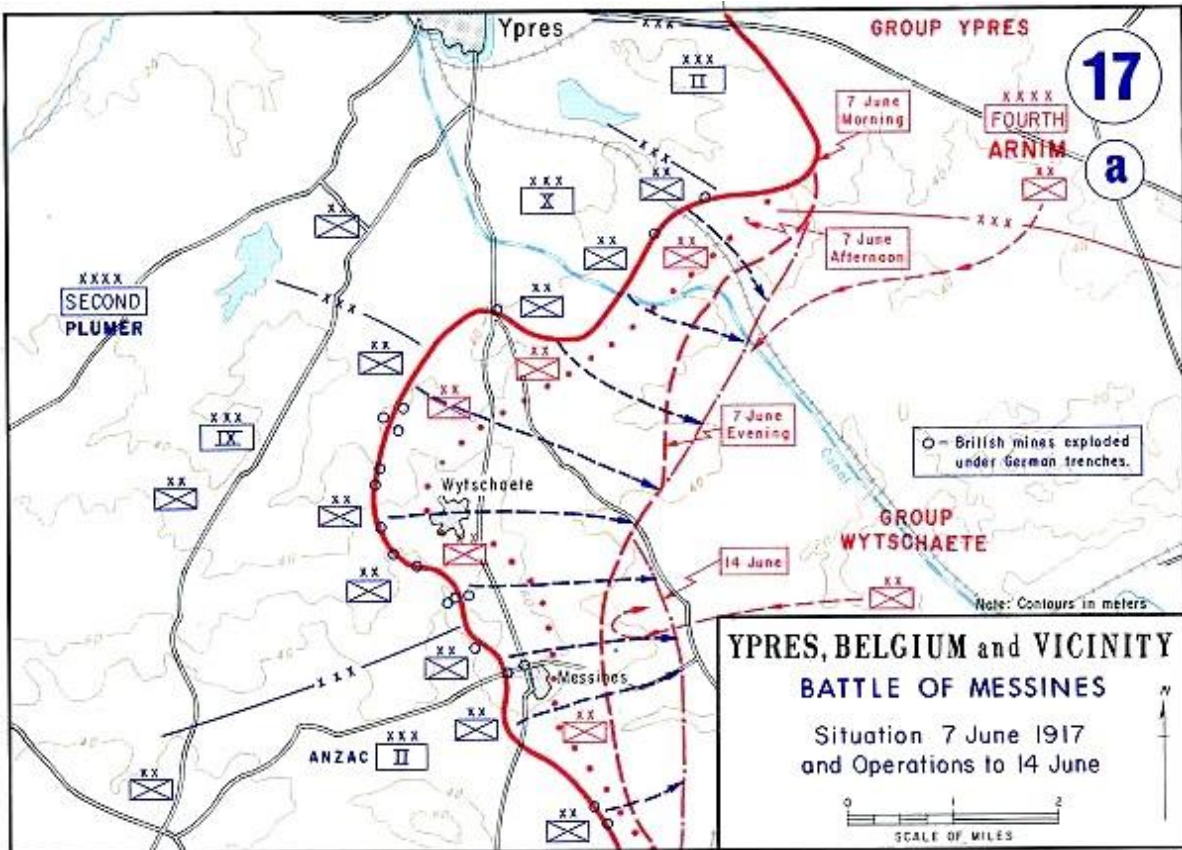
At 1.45pm, the expected counter-attack began, with about 600 Germans advancing on the Cheshires, in four waves. In less than thirty minutes it was beaten off by intense rifle and Lewis gun fire, and finally dispersed by an artillery barrage. Once clear, the 9th moved on again in the afternoon, establishing a new line at Oosterverne 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.

**Mike Royden, *Village at War – The Cheshire Village of Farndon During the First World War* (Reveille Press 2016)**

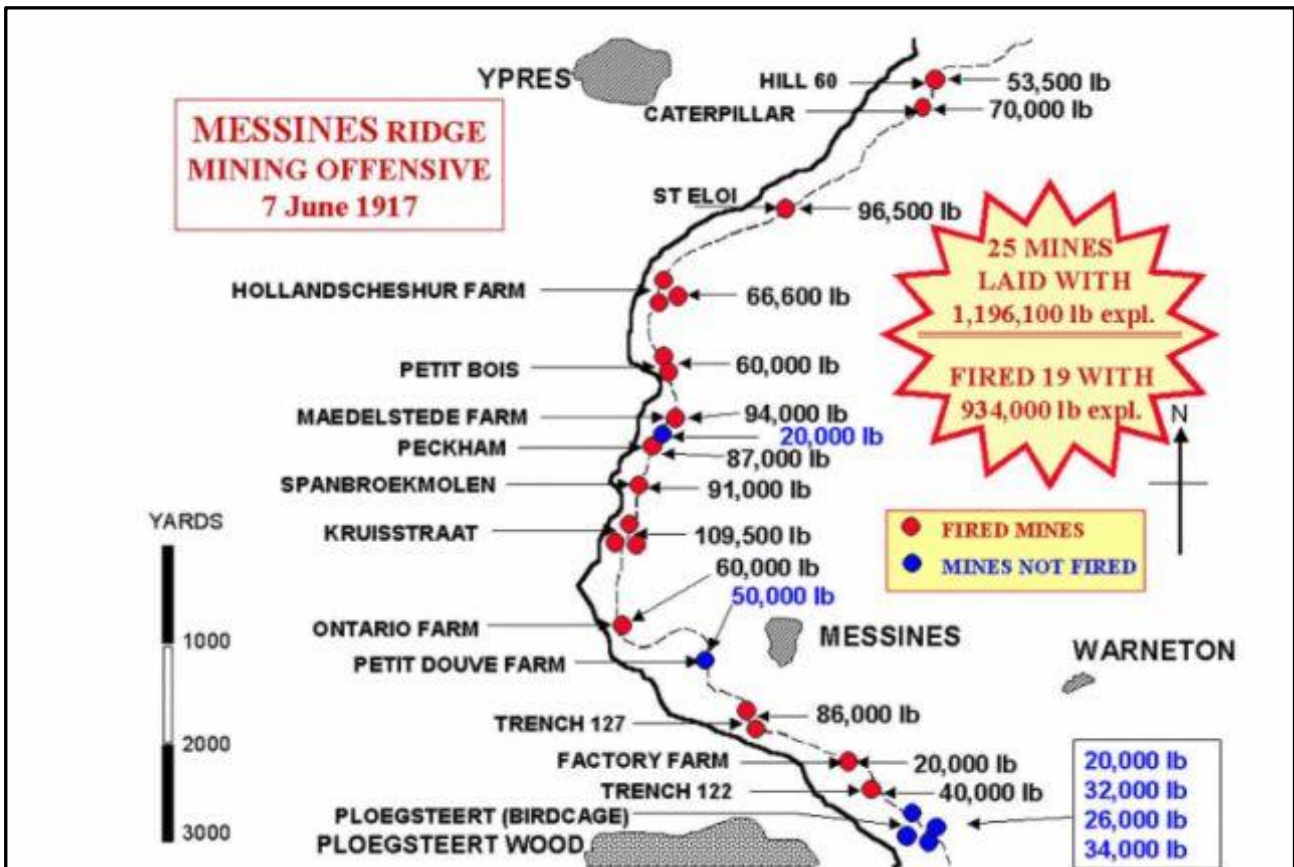


*Gun emplacement – below Messines Ridge*

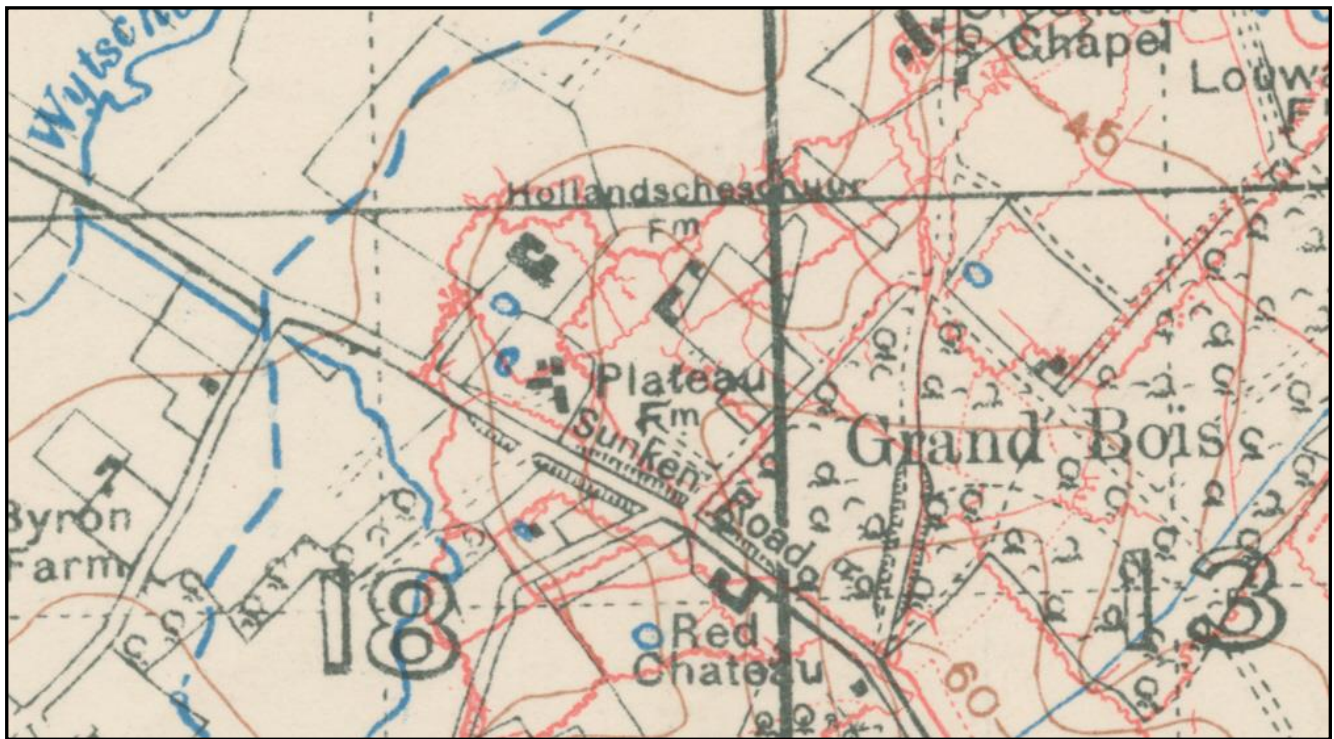
# THE BATTLE OF MESSINES



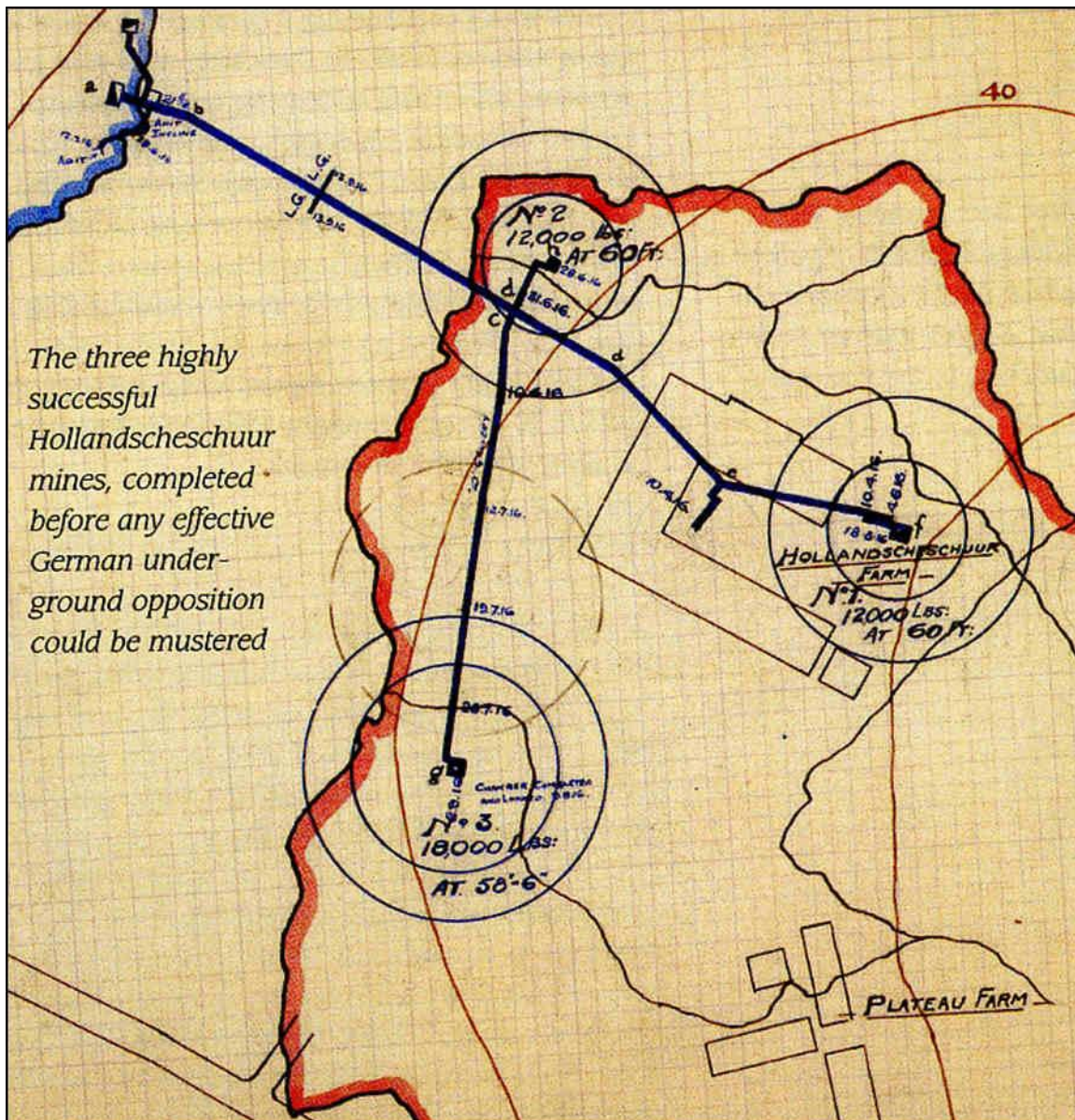
The 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Cheshire's, would be attacking from the British lines on the left through Hollandscheshuur Farm (below) and Wytshaete. The 275<sup>th</sup>s would be providing artillery support in this area.







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.**





*Above:* Walking through the ruins of Wytchaete village after the Battle of Messines

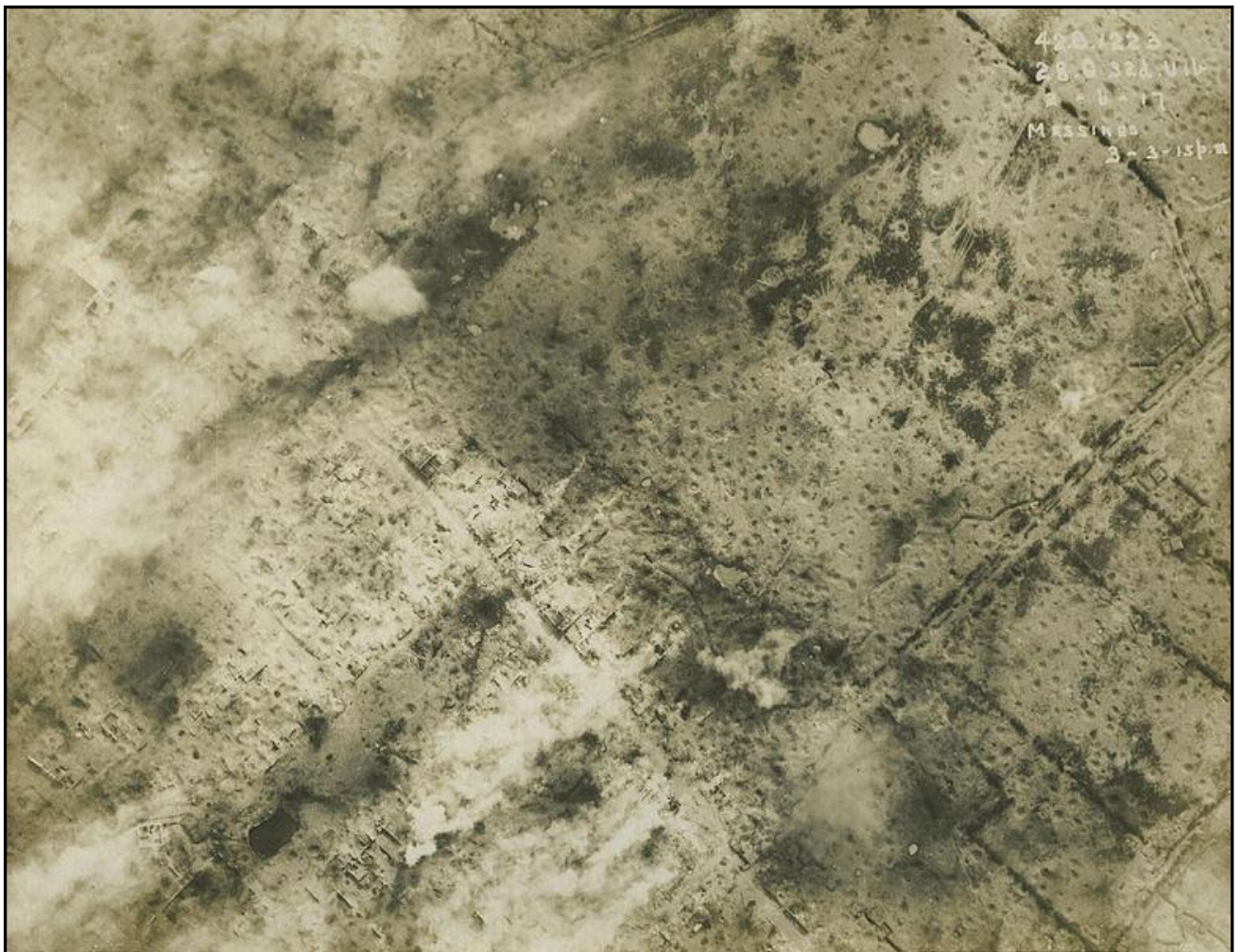
*Below:* Captured German trenches on the Messines Ridge

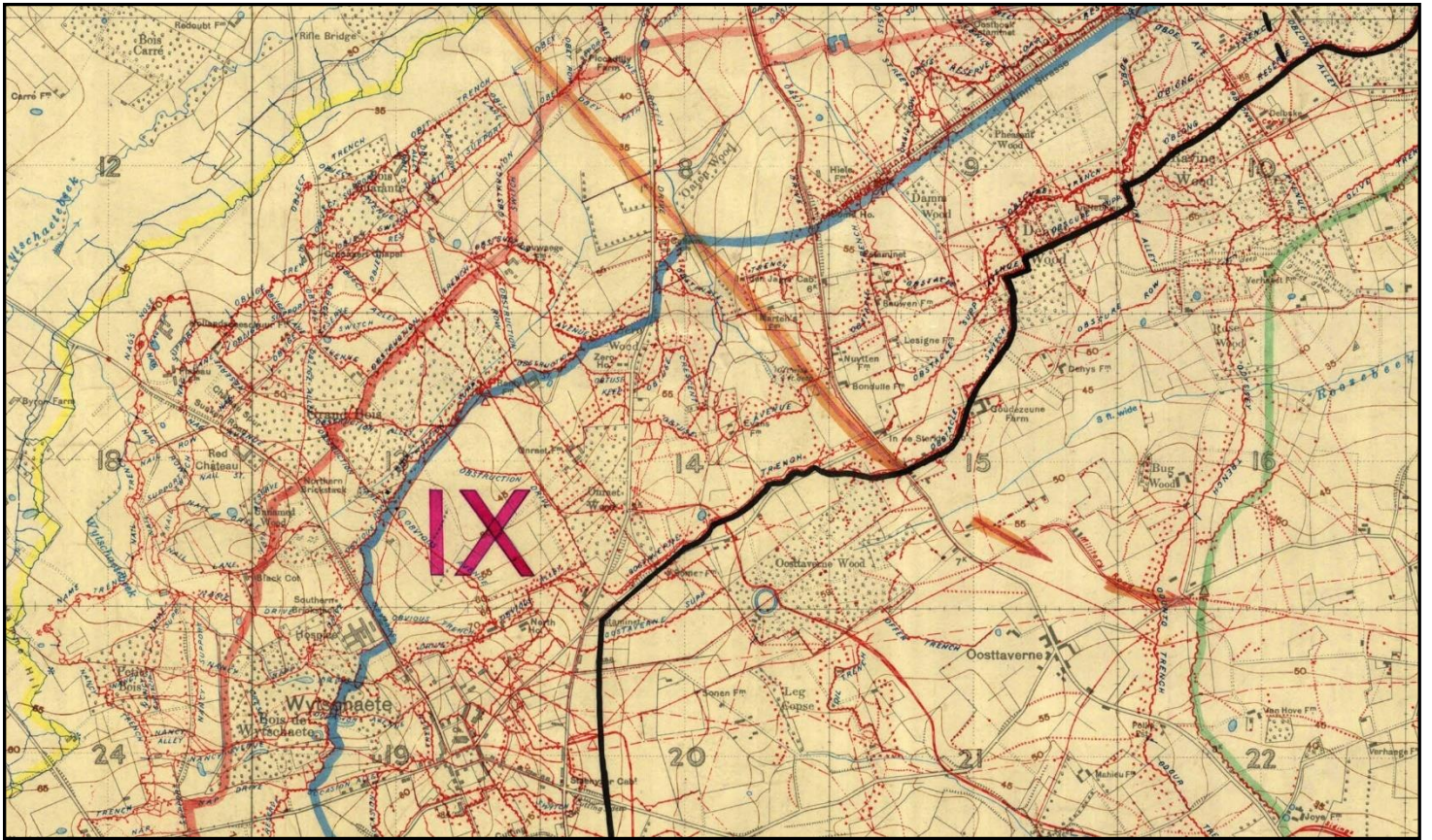




***Above:*** Captured German trenches and enemy soldiers on the Messines Ridge

***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***  
**Below:** Aerial reconnaissance of the same area after the Battle of Messines

**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*.**



On the 7 June 1917, a week after his promotion to Lieutenant, Leonard was with 'A' Battery, 275th (West Lancashire Brigade), RFA, in action near Wyttschaete to the north of the ridge, with the artillery providing support and the creeping barrage for the advancing troops. He would have witnessed the mines exploding in front of him, a terrifying sight, the largest combined explosions ever heard (until the atomic bombs of WWII). The day after, as the Germans continued their counter attacks and shelling of allied trenches, Leonard was hit by shrapnel from an exploding shell aimed at the gun emplacement, while his mount 'Blackie' was also hit by shrapnel and badly injured, but survived the blast. His groom, Driver Francis 'Frank' Wilkinson was killed by the explosion.

Lieutenant Wall and Driver Wilkinson were taken to a casualty clearing station behind the lines, but Leonard died the following day. Both men were later buried in Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery near Poperinge. He was still only twenty years old. At the time, Leonard was engaged to be married to Irene Dorothy Bryan, born in Folkestone and daughter of Reverend Edward Bryan, a vicar in Canterbury. It is likely they met when Leonard was stationed nearby in 1915. (She later found happiness, marrying William Marshall in 1934). In his will he left £180, a considerable sum for such a young man (although dwarfed by the £53,000 left by his father when he died in 1928). It is also said that his will contained instructions that his horse Blackie be cared for, and that his medals be buried with the animal when he died.

At home, his death was reported in the pages of the local press,

#### LIEUTENANT LEONARD C. WALL

Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall, Royal Field Artillery, was killed in action in France on Saturday last. The only child of Mr. C. Comer Wall, director of George Wall and Co., Limited, provision merchants, of this city, Leonard Wall obtained a commission in the West Lancashire Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, in the early days of the war. He was then fresh from his studies at Clifton College. For the last two years he had been serving in France, discharging his duties with valour, intelligence, and marked enthusiasm. He was in his twenty-first year, and was engaged to be married to a Kent lady. Much sympathy is felt with his parents, who reside at West Kirby.

*Liverpool Daily Post & Mercury, 14 June 1917*

During 1917, Leonard was Mentioned in Dispatches for bravery in action, and had also had some of his poetry published. In April 1917 his poem *Red Roses* was printed in the pages of the *Liverpool Daily Post*,

#### RED ROSES

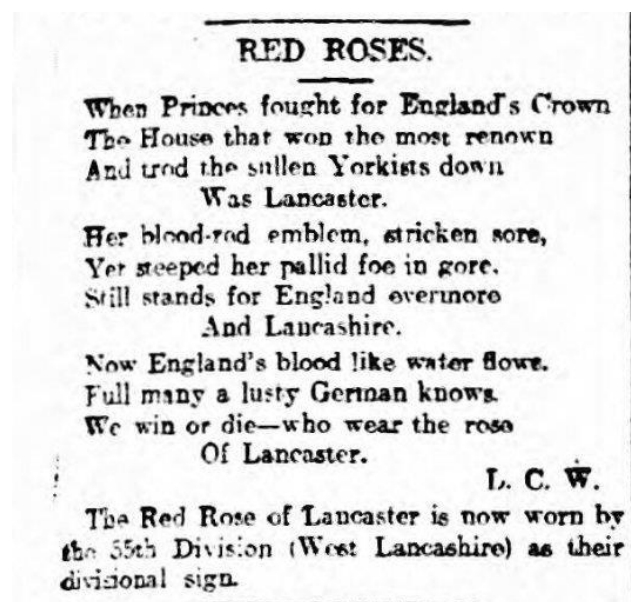
*When Princes fought for England's Crown,  
The House that won the most renown,  
And struck the sullen Yorkist down,  
Was Lancaster.*

*Her blood-red emblem stricken sore,  
Yet steeped her pallid foe in gore,  
Still stands for England evermore,  
And Lancashire.*

*Now England's blood like water flows,  
Full many a lusty German knows,  
We win or die - who wear the rose  
Of Lancaster.*

Leonard Comer Wall

*Liverpool Daily Post, 13 April 1917*



[The poem appeared again in *Sub Rosa, Being the Magazine of the 55th West Lancashire Division*, in June 1918, and was reprinted with notes about Leonard's death in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, on 5 August 1918].

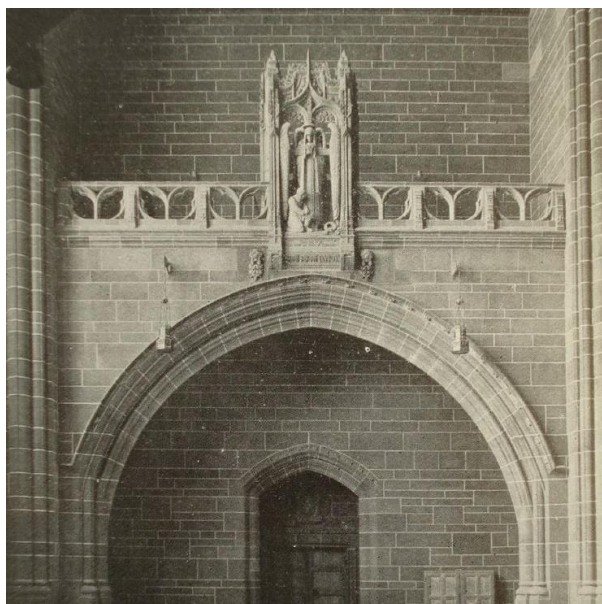
A note in the *Liverpool Scottish Regimental Gazette* explained how important the poem became to the West Lancashire Division,

About a week after his death an officer of the divisional staff saw the announcement of Lieutenant Wall's death in a newspaper and beneath it the words "We win or die who wear the Rose of Lancaster." He mentioned the quotation next day to General Jeudwine [Divisional Commander], who was so impressed by it that he gave orders forthwith that the motto should henceforward encircle the divisional sign, and his orders were at once carried out.

*The Liverpool Scottish Regimental Gazette, Vol 10 No 3, (July 1939)*

The following year, the practice of placing a small enamelled metal plaque bearing the motto, known as a *cocarde*, on the graves of the men of the 55th (West Lancashire) Division was instituted by the divisional chaplain, Canon Coop.

The motto is also carved on the monument to the 55th Division in the Anglican Cathedral Church, Liverpool.



Although, this memorial in *Liverpool Echo* on 12 July 1917 suggests an earlier use of the motto;

BRADSHAW—In affectionate remembrance of Peter Dennison, younger son of Mr. and Mrs. P. M. Bradshaw, 24, Everton-valley (2nd-lieutenant Northumberland Fusiliers), killed in action, Friday, July 14, 1916. Buried Dernancourt Communal Cemetery. (They win or die who wear the Rose of Lancaster.)

Ever remembered by his loving Wife and Child  
133, Victoria-square.  
WALL, WILKINSON—To the dear, fair memory of  
LEONARD COMER WALL, Lieut. West Lancashire  
Brigade R.F.A., who fell in action, June 8, 1917;  
also of Driver FRANK WILKINSON, his friend and  
groom, who fell at his side. ("We win or die who  
wear the Rose of Lancaster.")

*Liverpool Echo, 08 June 1918*

Sisters and Brothers.)—16, Penton-street.  
WALL—June 9, killed in action, in his 21st year  
Leonard Comer Wall (lieutenant R.F.A.), only and  
most-beloved child of Charles Comer and Kate  
Wall, Hill Top, West Kirby, and the affianced  
band of Irene Dorothy Bryan, Braxted Rectory,  
Sevenoaks, Kent. (We win or die who wears the  
rose of Lancaster.)

*Liverpool Echo, 15 June 1917*







**Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall** (*Cheshire County Memorial Project*)

Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall is commemorated on Grange Hill War Memorial, West Kirby; St Bridget & St Andrew Churches, West Kirby; the Wall family grave in Grange Cemetery, West Kirby; and Clifton College War Memorial, Bristol.



Above: St Bridget's War Memorial panel, West Kirby



Hoyleake and West Kirby War Memorial, Grange Hill, West Kirby

WILFRED E. CRONE  
REGINALD SIKISTER  
WILLIAM M. SIMPELL  
CHARLES L. SMITH  
ERNEST SMITH  
ROBERT SMITH  
SAMUEL SMITH  
WILLIAM G. SMITH  
JOHN A. SKEEDON  
HARRY SPARROW  
HERBERT SPENCER  
ARTHUR STALLARD  
WALTER STANLEY  
BASIL STOTT  
ERNEST TEANBY  
GEORGE S. THOMAS  
HENRY THOMPSON  
JOHN L. TILLOTSON  
FREDERICK TOTTY  
NICHOLAS R. VAN CRUISEN  
HARRY WALKER  
LEONARD C. WALL  
GLENCEY A. G. WALLWORTH  
ROBERT WARRICK  
WILLIAM WARRING  
RICHARD WATERS  
RICHARD B. WAYLAND  
THOMAS WEBSTER  
WILLIAM WEBSTER  
THOMAS E. WEST  
FRANK WEAVER  
SAMUEL E. WHARTON  
HERBERT J. WHELAN  
FREDERICK WILKINSON  
ALBERT D. WILLIAMS  
HORACE WILLIAMS  
HUBERT L. WILLIAMS  
NORMAN L. WILLIAMS  
ROBERT H. WILLIAMS  
JOSIAH A. O. WILLIAMSON  
MILLCENT WILSON  
WILLIAM T. WITT  
GEORGE WOODS  
WILLIAM H. WRIGHT

Leonard C Wall recorded on  
the Hoylake and West Kirby  
War Memorial, Grange, West  
Kirby

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
WALL	R.F.A. J.F.	X Lieut	
Leonard Comer			

Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY R.F.A. X	OFF/132	H35 <sup>2</sup>	} NW/5928 d/10 $\frac{4}{22}$ Kirt } Dec 29/6/17 NW/8/18390
BRITISH	L.-	- - -	
15 STAB X	OFF/132	66.	
Theatre of War first served in		France	
Date of entry therein		9.9.15	

16  $\frac{3}{22}$  NW 8/18390 K. 1380

**Correspondence**

**Address** G.C. Wall Esq. (Father)  
 Hill Top  
 West Kirby  
 Cheshire

J. Comer  
27/11

(1475) Wt. W2733/RP8342 1,000m 1221 J.F.W. E 8261

Medal Card for Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall

In Memory of

Lieutenant

# Leonard Comer Wall

Mentioned in Despatches

"A" Bty. 275th Bde., Royal Field Artillery who died on 09 June 1917 Age 20

Son of Charles Comer Wall and Kate Wall, of Hill Top, West Kirby, Cheshire.

Remembered with Honour

Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

In Memory of

Driver

## Francis (Frank) Wilkinson

675411, "A" Bty. 275th Bde., Royal Field Artillery who died on 08 June 1917 Age 23

Son of Thomas and Elizabeth Wilkinson; husband of Catherine E. Wilkinson, of Mitford Hill House,  
Netherfield Rd., Everton, Liverpool.

Remembered with Honour  
Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

**Driver Francis 'Frank' Wilkinson**  
**675411 (formerly 1345) 'A' Battery, 275th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery**

Frank Wilkinson was the son of Thomas and Elizabeth Wilkinson and husband of Catherine E. Wilkinson, of Mitford House, Netherfield Road, Everton. He too volunteered for the West Lancs and was also posted to 'A' Battery, entering the French theatre of war on 29 September 1915. At the time of his death (Killed in Action aged 23 on 8 June 1917) he was alongside Lieutenant Wall serving as Blackie's groom.



Name	Corps	Rank	Regt. No.
WILKINSON	R. F. A.	DRIVER	1345
	— —	— —	675411
F. rank			
Medal	Roll	Page	Remarks
VICTORY	(HF) RFA/111 B	2208	8. 6. 17.
BRITISH	— —	— —	
15 STAR	(T) RFA/28 A-B	3658	
Theatre of War first served in (1) France			
Date of entry therein 29. 9. 15			

## Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, near Poperinge



During the First World War, the village of Lijssenthoek was situated on the main communication line between the Allied military bases in the rear and the Ypres battlefields. Close to the Front, but out of the extreme range of most German field artillery, it became a natural place to establish casualty clearing stations.

The cemetery was first used by the French 15th Hopital D'Evacuation and in June 1915, it began to be used by casualty clearing stations of the Commonwealth forces.

From April to August 1918, the casualty clearing stations fell back before the German advance and field ambulances (including a French ambulance) took their places.

Lijssenthoek was one of the cemeteries visited by King George V in May 1922. The King, who lost members of his own family in the war, embarked on a tour of a number of cemeteries while they were being formally established by the Commission.

The cemetery contains 9,901 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, 24 being unidentified. There are 883 war graves of other nationalities, mostly French and German, 11 of these are unidentified. There is also a section with 35 graves for workers of the Chinese Labour Corps who died in the area of Ypres and Poperinge during and just after the First World War.

The cemetery was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and Captain Arthur James Scott Hutton.



## Grave Locations

**Driver Francis 'Frank' Wilkinson**

**Grave Reference: XV. H. 7.**



**Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall**

**Grave Reference: XIII. B. 10.**









**Pilgrims visiting and attending a Service**





## Blackie the War Horse

Blackie was the name given to the horse that served with the 275th Brigade Royal Field Artillery 'A' Battery - 55th West Lancashire Division during the First World War, alongside his master Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall. Blackie is believed to have been born around 1905, but other details of his early life and how he came to serve with the R.F.A are unknown, although he is likely to have been part of the rounding up and purchasing of horses from local farms and businesses at the beginning of the war. He may even have belonged to the Wall's family business.

He would have been stabled and trained at the West Lancs Barracks in Spekeland Street, in Liverpool, before moving to France with the Division in September 1915. Their movements from then on are detailed above. Blackie was badly wounded by flying shrapnel that killed his master and groom, but after a period of recovery, he returned to serve the 275ths until the end of the war, being involved in the battles of Arras, Somme, Ypres and Cambrai.

By then, the terms of Lieutenant Wall's will had become known, in which he requested that if he did not survive the war that his faithful horse be cared for, and when Blackie died to be buried with his service medals.

On realising what Blackie meant to her departed son, Kate Wall purchased Blackie, while allowing him to continue to be looked after by the West Lancs at Spekeland Road barracks, where he would be used by the Territorial Riding School in Liverpool.

It is believed that Blackie, adorned with his master's medals, along with another war-horse known as 'Billie,' used to lead Liverpool's annual May Day Horse Parade, when Liverpool carters would decorate their horses and parade through the city.



*Liverpool carter Albert Hilton in a Liverpool May Day Parade leading two of his favourite horses Gilbert and Prince along Lime Street.*



***May Day Parade, William Brown Street, May 1930 [www.scottiepress.org]***

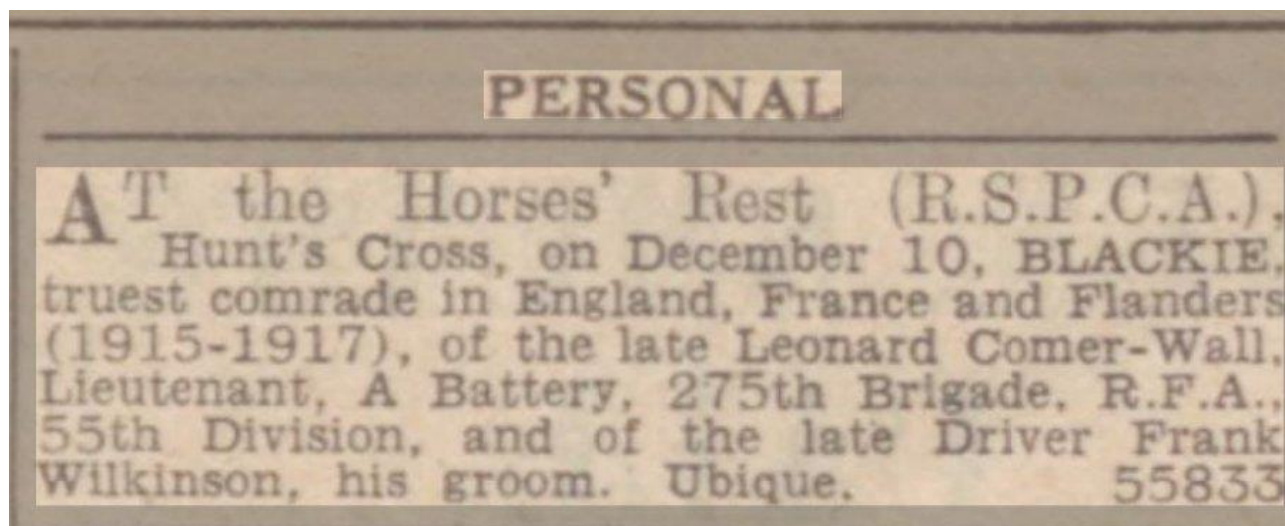
When it came time for him to retire, he was pensioned off in 1930 to the 'Horses' Rest' on Higher Road in Halewood (the RSPCA), where he remained until his death at the age of 37 in December 1942. The marks of his shrapnel wounds were clearly visible until his death.



**The 'Horses' Rest' on Higher Road in Halewood (the RSPCA)**

**[The tall trees to the right mark the boundary of their close neighbour – Everton Football Club and their Finch Farm Training Academy]**

Blackie's death received press coverage across the country, from the local *Liverpool Daily Post* to the *Gloucester Citizen*, *Portsmouth Evening News*, and *Dundee Evening Telegraph*.



Death notice *Liverpool Daily Post*, 12 December 1942

### Warhorse Buried With Honours

"Blackie," one of the heroes of the last war, has died at the R.S.P.C.A. Horses' Rest Hunts Cross, Liverpool. He has been buried with the medals of his master, Lt. Leonard Comer-Wall, A Battery, 275th Brigade, R.A. who while riding him was killed in France.

"Blackie," who was 35 years of age, carried the marks of the shrapnel he received in the action to his death.

After the last war he was bought from the Army by his master's mother, Mrs K. Comer-Wall of West Kirby, and lent to the Territorial Riding School at Liverpool.

He was "pensioned off" 12 years ago.

A stone is to be erected over his grave in Hale Wood, Hunts Cross.

### Horse Buried With Master's Medals

"Blackie," one of the heroes of the last war, has died at the R.S.P.C.A. Horses' Rest, Hunts Cross, Liverpool, and been buried with the medals of his master, Lieut. Leonard Comer-Wall, A. Battery, 275th Brigade, R.A., who, while riding "Blackie," was killed in France.

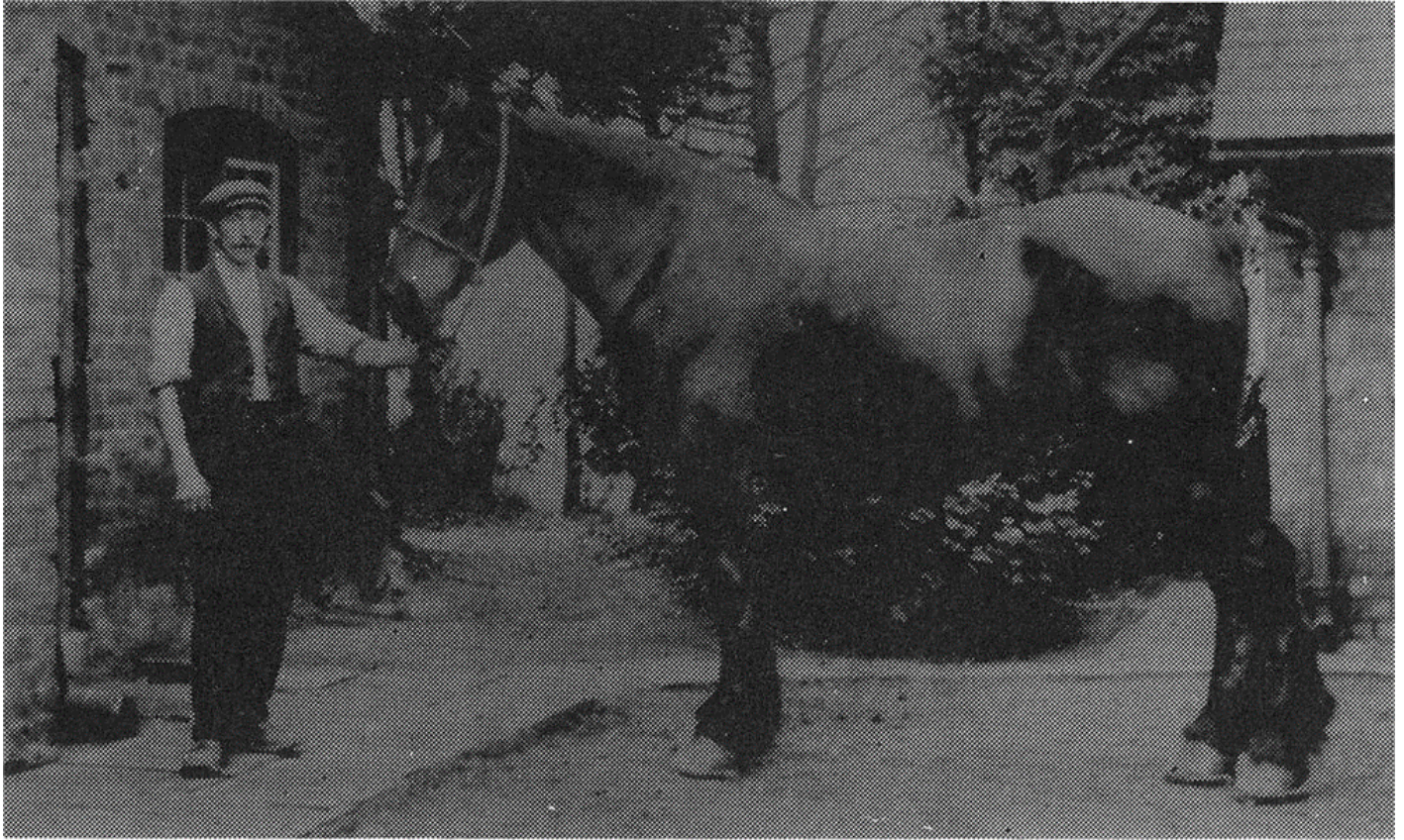
Blackie, who was 35 years of age, carried the marks of the shrapnel he received in the action to his death.

### War Horse Buried With Master's Medals

"Blackie" one of the heroes of the last war has died at the R.S.P.C.A. Horses Rest, Hunts Cross, Liverpool, and been buried with the medals of his master, Lieut. Leonard Comer Wall, A. Battery, 275th Brigade, R.A.F., who while riding "Blackie" was killed in France.

"Blackie" was 35 years of age and carried the marks of the shrapnel he received in the action to his death.





*Blackie with his groom at the Horses' Rest*

He was buried in the north-west corner of the western field fronting Higher Road with his master's medals and a gravestone was erected. The gravestone has been cleaned in recent years making the inscription legible again. The grave is accessed via a grassy walkway alongside the northern edge of the field boundary.

The inscription on the sandstone headstone reads:

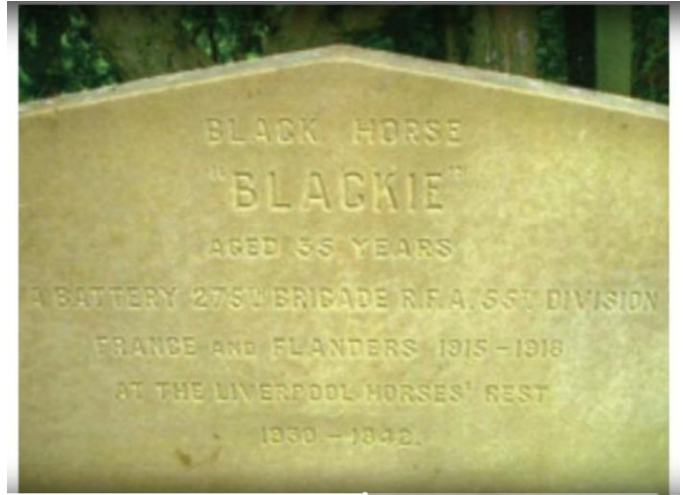
**BLACK HORSE  
"BLACKIE"  
AGED 35 YEARS  
'A' BATTERY 275TH BRIGADE R.F.A. 55TH DIVISION  
FRANCE AND FLANDERS 1915-1918  
AT THE LIVERPOOL HORSES' REST  
1930-1942**

The grave has been covered by modern artificial turf and is surrounded by a modern low ornamental white picket fence.



## LISTED STATUS

In December 2017, Historic England announced that the grave and headstone had been given **Grade II Listed status**. It is the first war horse grave to be granted such protection, and came about when Historic England were contacted by members of the public concerned that it was threatened by proposed building work. They were advised to apply for listing and their application was successful.



A total of 1,041 historic sites have been given listed status in 2017, in a year when Historic England celebrated 70 years since listing was introduced in the Town and County Planning Act in 1947 to protect important properties from over-zealous post-war builders. It is estimated that the National Heritage List for England includes about 500,000 buildings, 1,600 parks and recreational grounds and 20,000 monuments.

Historic England have listed the gravestone of Blackie the war horse at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

**Historic interest:** Blackie's close association with his master, the wartime poet Leonard Comer Wall, and the fact that Blackie is buried with his master's medals, reflects the strong bonds shared between thousands of soldiers and their horses on the western front.

It has **strong cultural and historic significance** in representing the key role animals played, and the sacrifices they made, in the First World War;

It is a **rare memorial** commemorating an individual animal that served in, and survived, the major battles of the First World War;

**Architectural interest:** Its modest yet elegant design bears similarities to those in military cemeteries, whilst the inscription recording Blackie's name, regiment, and place and date of death reads like those ascribed to human soldiers.

A similar set of war service medals to those pictured here belonging to Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall were buried with Blackie.

**1915 Star**

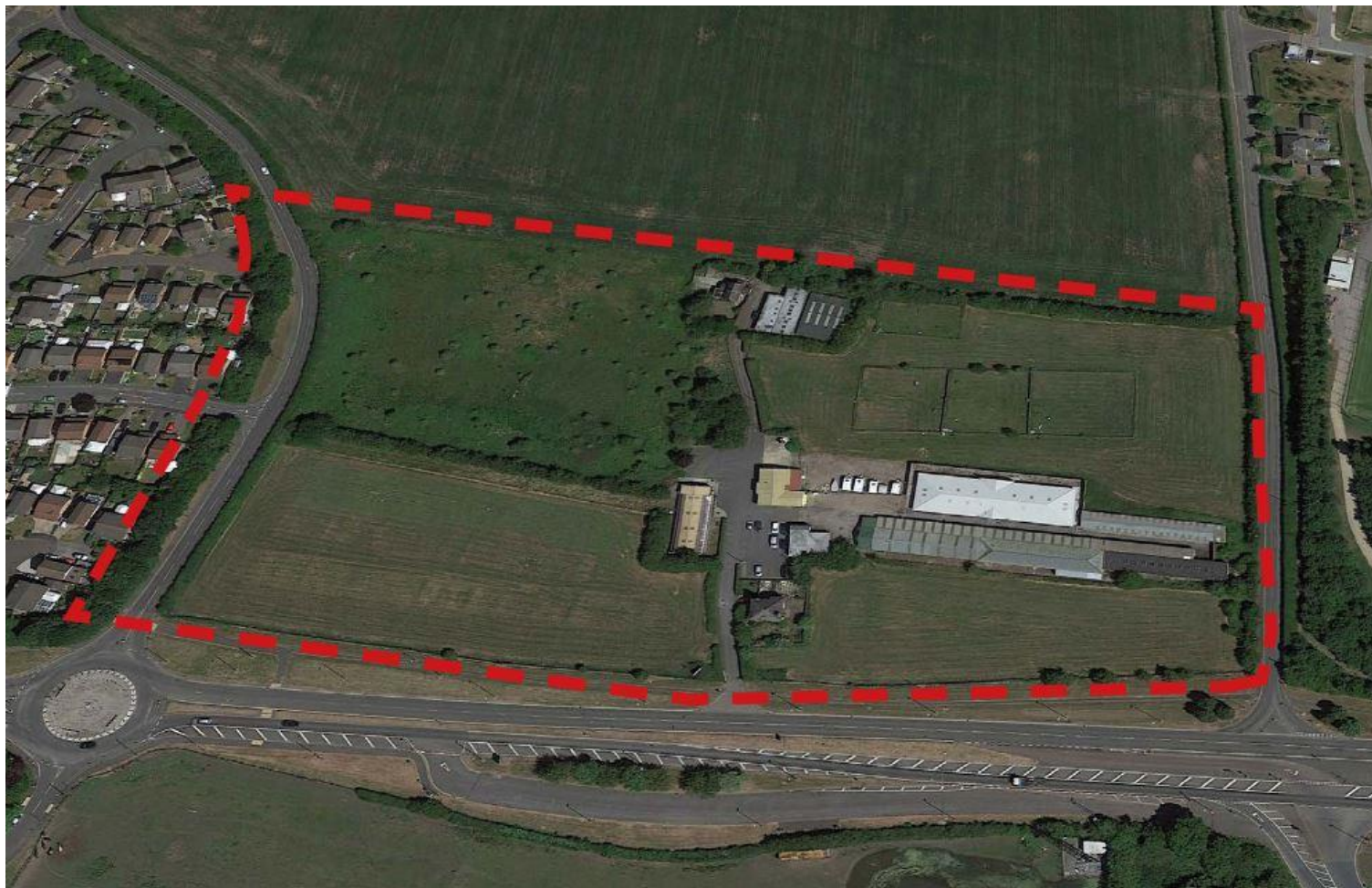
**British Medal**

**Victory Medal**



## The Preservation of the War Horse Grave

In 2021, the sale of the RSPCA 'Horses Rest' and surrounding land finally went through, the purchaser being Miller Homes, who revealed that the site acquisition came after several years of working with Knowsley Council on the wider East of Halewood Sustainable Urban Development. Their final planning application was for a 162-unit housing development to be known as Wilbury Park.



Of concern to many of course, was the fate of Blackie's grave, by now protected by grade II listed status. Rather worrying, the planning application, supported by Knowsley Council planning department, allowed the temporary removal of the gravestone. However, this was granted in order to reposition it at the same plot - the re-setting of the gravestone involving a change below ground, while avoiding physically altering the gravestone itself, according to the Council planning officers.

The report stated: 'The shallow 200mm depth of the slab, and position near tree and hedge roots has caused movement previously,' but that its new base should 'ensure the future structural integrity of the gravestone by raising the level of the land on which it sits by 0.3m.' The work was allowed to go ahead on condition that physical markers be placed on the site to mark the precise position of the gravestone, so as to ensure it is returned to the same spot; and that the gravestone be returned to the site within six months of its removal.



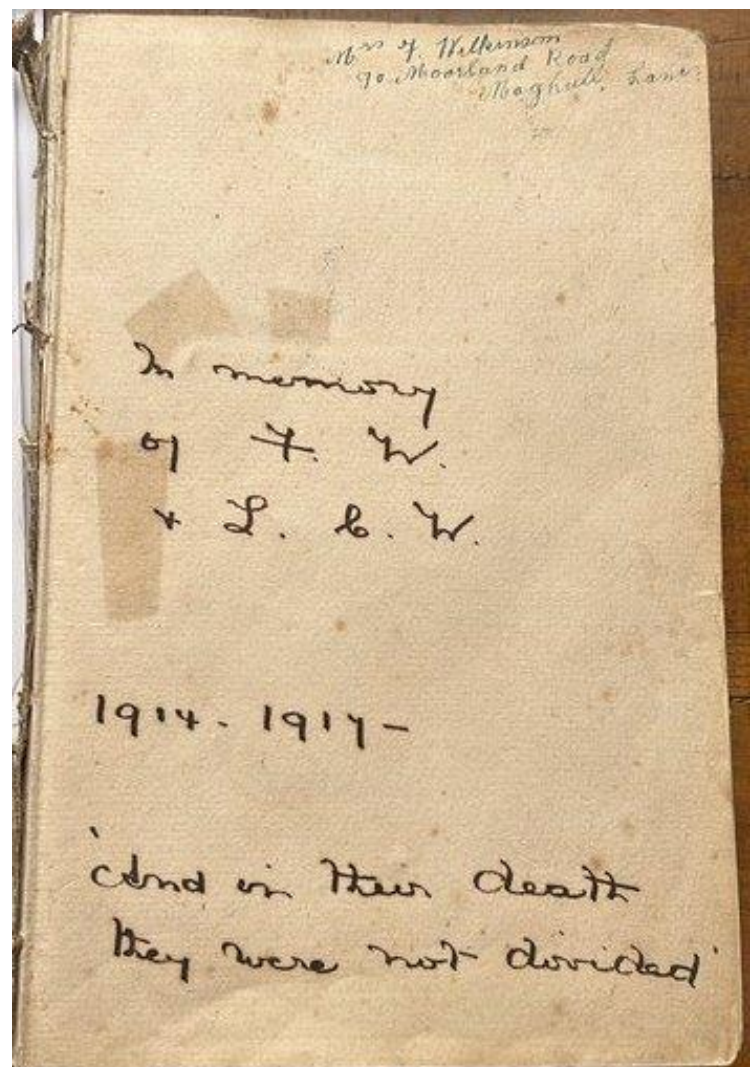
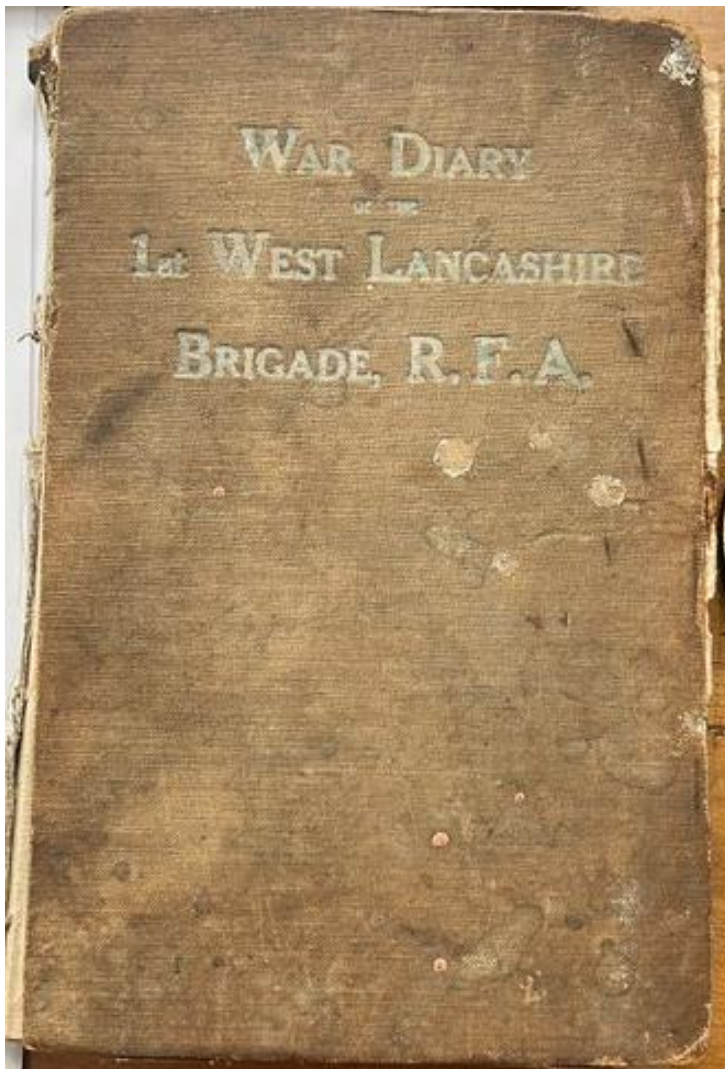
Miller Homes stated they were keen to protect the memory of Blackie the war horse, and their planning layout for the residential development incorporated the grave into the landscape design as shown above. This included a pathway to Blackie’s grave, which would be surrounded by wildflower meadows and native shrubs and trees. This would allow continued access to the gravestone by the general public, enhancing its setting and significance. Ian Smith, Managing Director of Miller Homes North West said, “The grave has strong cultural and historic significance in representing the key role animals played, and the sacrifices they made in the First World War. It was incredibly important, therefore, that we restore and preserve this heritage site and allow it to be enjoyed by the Halewood community for many years to come.”

**The War Diary of the 1st West  
Lancashire Brigade, R.F.A. - Compiled by  
Capt. W.W. Wadsworth (Liverpool 1923)**

In August 2023, I was contacted by David Luck, a military and Great War history enthusiast from Wiltshire. Only the previous day he had acquired a copy of the above war diary – but this was much more than the diary of the West Lancs RFA, as it had previously belonged to the widow of Driver Frank Wilkinson.

On opening the diary, David was astonished to discover it still contained photographs of Frank and the two horses under his charge, as well as a photo of Lieutenant Wall's original grave cross. The acquisition also included Frank's 'memorial penny.'

I am very grateful to David for sharing this information with me, and for his permission to reproduce the diary photographs here.





**Driver Francis 'Frank' Wilkinson with his charges, 'Kitty' and 'Blackie'**

KITTY Killed in Action also.  
TOGETHER WITH LIEUT. LEONARD WALL.  
AND DRIVER AND FRIEND FRANCIS WILKINSON  
BLACKIE BOUGHT OUT ARMY.  
LED. PROCESSION EACH YEAR OF REMEMBRANCE.  
UNTILL DEATH IN ANIMAL  
REST HOME.

with  
divided





**Researched and Written**

**by**

**Mike Royden**

**[www.roydenhistory.co.uk](http://www.roydenhistory.co.uk)**