Joe Mercer and the Football Battalion

by

Mike Royden

(Everton F.C. Heritage Society)

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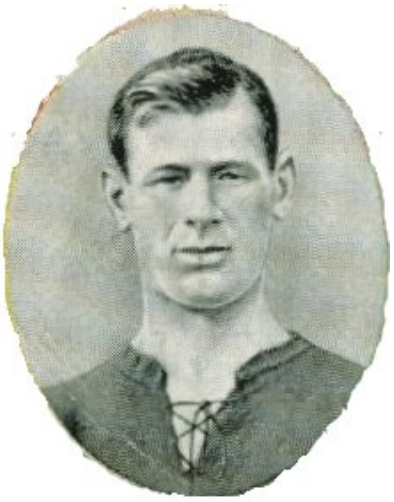
Some years ago, I was working on an extensive project to research and document the history of Ellesmere Port during the First World War, which covered life on the home front, those that served in the forces, and those who sadly did not return. I created a website to share the research and stories, which also covered the recording of the biographies of the servicemen listed on the town's war memorials.

One name sprang out while scouring the newspapers of the time – that of Joe Mercer. It was an interview he gave to a local journalist, in which he described his experiences as a prisoner of war. Of course, as an Evertonian, I was well aware of the career of Joe Mercer, and although too young to have seen him play, I was still old enough to have witnessed his successful managerial career, especially that great Manchester City side of the late sixties. But surely he was too young to have fought in the First World War? Yet, here was Joe Mercer – a professional footballer – coming home after the war to Ellesmere Port, the home town of the Everton icon.

Well of course, the answer was obvious, and after a quick check of the records, it was confirmed that this was Joseph Mercer senior, the father of Joe of that great 1930s Everton side. I had no idea that he too had been a footballer, which initially had me confused. So here is his story, featuring his footballing career, and his horrendous experience of war.

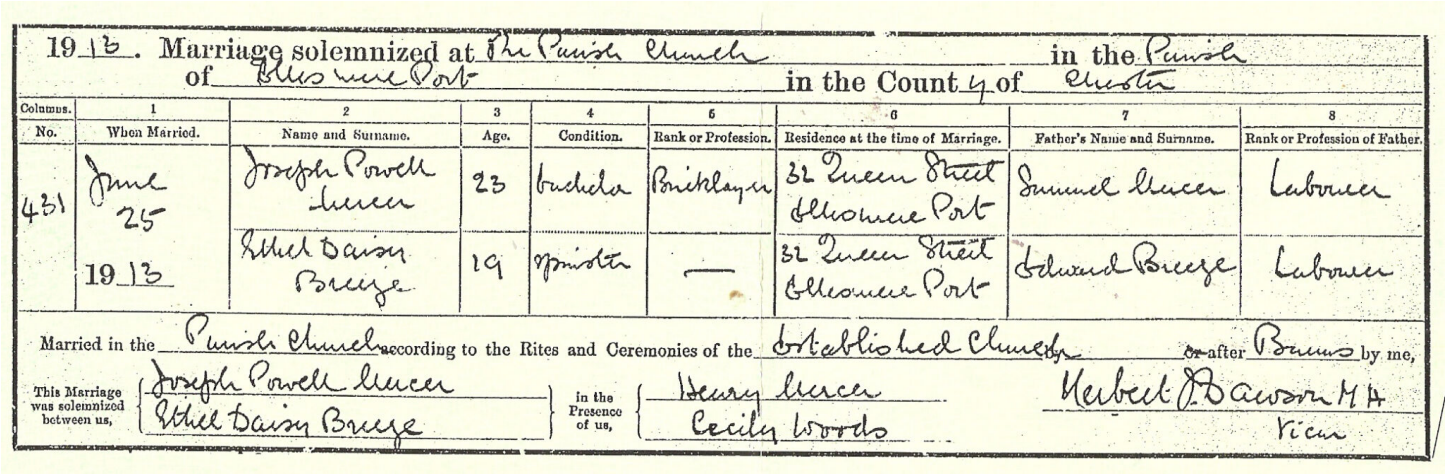
Joseph Mercer senior – Footballer and Soldier of the First World War

Joseph Powell Mercer was born in Higher Bebington on 21 July 1889. As a young teenager, he joined the local New Ferry Bible Class, and regularly played for their football team, before moving up a level to turn out for Bebington Vics. Then, from there to a team in Bolton; returning back home again to play two seasons in a soldier's side based at Chester Castle; followed by a short, uneventful spell at Tranmere. His position was centre-forward, with an impressive scoring record. By this time in his late teens, he was also an apprentice bricklayer, while his football skills had come to the attention of the local Burnell's Ironworks football team – Ellesmere Port F.C. – who were to turn him into a centre-half. Scouts soon became aware of his qualities and came calling, and on 14 December 1910, twenty-one year old Joe was snapped up by Nottingham Forest, then in the top flight, immediately making his debut for the reserves on 17 December. His friend and team mate in the Burnell's side, Sam Chedgzoy, had signed for Everton just a few days earlier.



While in Nottingham he lived in digs, returning home during the summer break, where he carried on working in his 'proper job' on the local building sites. In June 1913, while back in the Port during the close season, he married Ethel Breeze in the local parish church of Christchurch. Joe still looked upon himself as a bricklayer, his true occupation – how times have changed for footballers;

despite being in the first team in one of the most famous clubs, he still put down his occupation as bricklayer on the census form of 1911, and on his marriage certificate of 1913 – no mention of ‘footballer.’ He would go on to play a total of 158 regular first team games for Forest between 1910-1914, scoring six goals.



19 13. Marriage solemnized at The Parish Church in the Parish of Ellesmere Port in the County of Chester

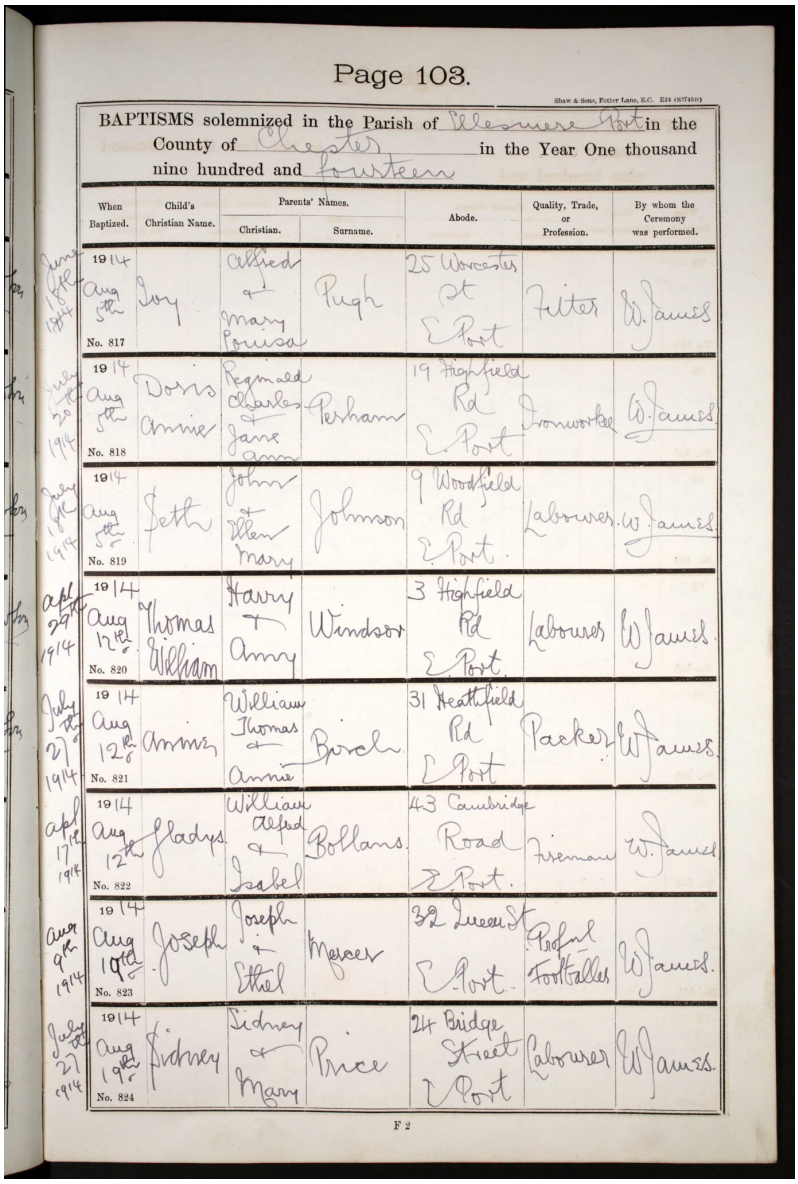
Columns. No.	1 When Married.	2 Name and Surname.	3 Age.	4 Condition.	5 Rank or Profession.	6 Residence at the time of Marriage.	7 Father's Name and Surname.	8 Rank or Profession of Father.
431	June 25 1913	Joseph Powell Mercer	23	Bachelor	Bricklayer	32 Queen Street Ellesmere Port	Samuel Mercer	Labourer
		Ethel Daisy Breeze	19	Spinster	—	32 Queen Street Ellesmere Port	Edward Breeze	Labourer

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church ~~or~~ after Banns by me, Herbert P. Dawson M.A. Vicar

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Joseph Powell Mercer, Ethel Daisy Breeze

in the Presence of us, Henry Mercer, Cecily Woods

Joe married Ethel Breeze on 25 June 1913.
The birth of their son, Joseph Mercer junior, came the following year *(below)*.



Page 103.

Shaw & Sons, Fetter Lane, E.C. E24 (8374510)

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of Ellesmere Port in the County of Chester in the Year One thousand nine hundred and fourteen

When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents' Names. Christian.	Parents' Names. Surname.	Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
1914 Aug 5th No. 817	Ivy	Alfred & Mary Louisa	Pugh	25 Worcester St E Port	Fitter	W. James
1914 Aug 5th No. 818	Doris Annie	Reginald Charles & Jane Ann	Perham	19 Highfield Rd E Port	Ironworker	W. James
1914 Aug 5th No. 819	Seth	John & Ellen Mary	Johnson	9 Woodfield Rd E Port	Labourer	W. James
1914 Aug 12th No. 820	Thomas William	Harry & Amy	Windsor	3 Highfield Rd E Port	Labourer	W. James
1914 Aug 12th No. 821	Annie	William Thomas & Annie	Birch	31 Heathfield Rd E Port	Packer	W. James
1914 Aug 12th No. 822	Gladys	William Alfred & Isabel	Bollans	43 Cambridge Road E Port	Fireman	W. James
1914 Aug 19th No. 823	Joseph	Joseph & Ethel	Mercer	32 Queen St E Port	Professional Footballer	W. James
1914 Aug 19th No. 824	Sidney	Sidney & Mary	Price	24 Bridge Street E Port	Labourer	W. James

F 2

Administrative County of Chester — The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the — Page 9

Civil Parish: Christ Church — Municipal Borough: — Municipal Ward: — Urban Sanitary District: Higher Bebington — Town or Village or Hamlet: — Rural Sanitary District: — Parliamentary Borough or Division: Wirral — Ecclesiastical Parish or District: Bebington

Cols. 1 No. of Schedule	2 ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	3 Houses Inhabited	4 Houses Uninhabited (U.) or Building (B.)	5 Number of rooms occupied if less than five	6 NAME and Surname of each Person	7 RELATION to Head of Family	8 CONDITION as to Marriage	9 Age last Birthday of Males	10 Age last Birthday of Females	11 PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	12 Employer	13 Employed	14 Neither Employer nor Employed	15 WHERE BORN	16 If (1) Deaf-and-Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lunatic, Imbecile or Idiot
					Chas. Lee	Son		5		Scholar				Cheshire Higher Bebington	
					Alfred Lee	"		2							
		1			Jane Davies	Nurse	Widow Single		22	Dom. Nurse, Help				" "	
52	Ringo Brow	1		4	Saml. Lee	Head	Single	27		Builder & Contractor	X			" "	
53	Ringo Brow	1		3	Joseph Duttenston	Head	M	56		Market Gardener	X			" Eastham	
					Mary "	Wife	M		56					" Birkenhead	
54	Ringo Brow	1		2	Chas. Jones	Head	M	32		Porter Warehouse		X		" Higher Bebington	
					Sarah "	Wife	M		36					Lancashire Liverpool	
					William "	Son		13		Scholar				Cheshire Higher Bebington	
					Chas. "	"		10						" "	
					Sarah Ann "	Daughter			8	"				" "	
					Thomas "	Son		7						" "	
					Joseph "	"		0	9 mo					" "	
55	Ringo Brow	1		3	William Wright	Head	Single	44		Agricultural Labourer		X		" "	
56	"	1		4	John Jones	"	Widower	83		Retired Blacksmith				Flintshire Mold	
					Ann Prince "	Daughter	Single		52	Laundress				Lancashire Prescot	
					Jane Cross	Boarder			73					" Wirral	
57	Ringo Brow	1		3	Thos. Spencer	Head	Married	36		Cotton Porter		X		" Higher Bebington	
					Mary Ann "	Wife	"		32	Laundress				" "	
					William "	Son		8						" "	
					Albert Waring	Visitor			11	Scholar				Lancashire Bootle-cum-Linacre	
58	Ringo Brow	1			John Gearsley	V —	away from home on Sunday				Church Day				
59	"	1			Henry Mercer	Head	Married	60		Stokers		X		Cheshire Bebington	
					Martha "	Wife	"		57					" "	
					Mary "	Daughter	Single		27	Florist		X		" "	
					Samuel "	Son		25		Pipe Cider		X		" "	
					Eliz. "	Daughter			18					" "	
					James "	Son		16						" "	
					Jane "	Daughter			12					" "	
60	Ringo Brow	1		4	John Lidsone	Head	M	62		Joiner		X		" "	
					Nursery & Fruiterer										
7	Total of Houses and of Tenements with less than Five Rooms	7		7		Total of Males and Females...		17	12						

NOTE.—Draw the pen through such of the words of the headings as are inappropriate. Eng.—Sheet E.

1891 Census – Higher Bebington
Joseph senior's father Samuel and grandfather Henry (item 59)

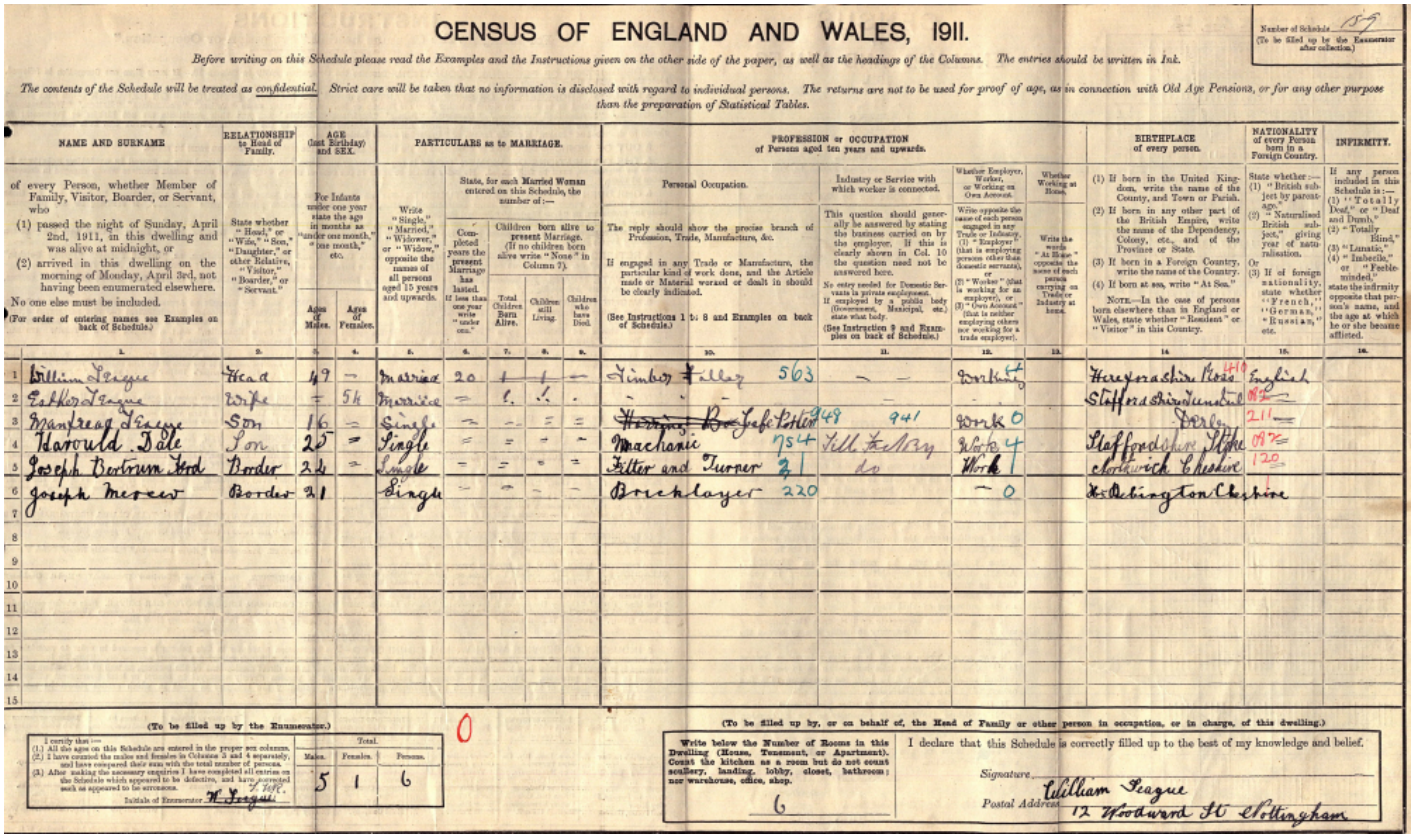
Administrative County Cheshire — The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the — Page 31

Civil Parish: of Higher Bebington — Ecclesiastical Parish: of Christ Church — County Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District: of Higher Bebington — Ward of Municipal Borough or of Urban District: of Higher Bebington — Rural District: of Higher Bebington — Parliamentary Borough or Division: of Wirral — Town or Village or Hamlet: of Higher Bebington

Cols. 1 No. of Schedule	2 ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	3 Houses Inhabited	4 Houses Uninhabited: Inhabitable	5 Houses Uninhabited: Not inhabitable	6 Houses Building	7 Number of rooms occupied if less than five	8 Name and Surname of each Person	9 RELATION to Head of Family	10 Condition as to Marriage	11 Age last Birthday of Males	12 Age last Birthday of Females	13 PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	14 Employer, Worker, or Own account	15 If Working at Home	16 WHERE BORN	17 (1) Deaf and Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lunatic (4) Imbecile, feeble-minded
188	5 Falkenus dgs	1				4	Samuel Mercer	Head	M	32		Labour Soap Works	Working		Hy-Bebington Cheshire	
							Sarah Do	Wife	M		27	Laundress Wash	Working		Prod Lancashire	
							Joseph Powell Do	Son	S	11					Hy-Bebington Cheshire	
							Henry Do	Son	S	8					Do Do	
							Samuel Do	Son	S	7					Do Do	
							Ida Do	Daur	S		4				Do Do	
							Christina Mary Do	Daur	S		1				Do Do	
189	2 Falkenus dgs	1				4	William Robinson	Head	M	23		Farm Labourer	Working		Brimstage Cheshire	
							Elizabeth Do	Wife	M		20				Leacombe Do	
							John William Do	Son	S	1	9 mo				Egremont Do	
190	4 Falkenus dgs	1				4	Robert Beverly	Head	M	24		Brick Kiln Labourer	Working		Bebington Cheshire	
							Minnie Do	Wife	M		25				Wirral Do	
							Peggie Do	Daur	S		3				Bebington Cheshire	
							Herbert Dumagne	Boarder	S	25		Engine Driver	Working		New Port Monmouth	
							Bert Hopings	Boarder	S	24		Engine Stoker	Working		Leicester	
191	6 Falkenus dgs	1				4	Charles Shakeshaft	Head	M	61		Gardener Domestic	Working		Neston Cheshire	
							Catherine Do	Wife	M		62				Do Do	
							Thos. Do	Son	S	32		Gardener Domestic	Works		Thornton Do	
192	52 Brotton Lane	1				1	Elizabeth Jackson	Head	Wid		82		Own account			
193	24 Mill Brow	1				4	Samuel Webster	Head	Widr	55		Stone Quarryman			Hy-Bebington Cheshire	
							Lydia Do	Daur	S		16	Soap factory			Poxton Do	
194	26 Mill Brow	1				4	Peter Evans	Head	M	35		General Labourer	Working		Woodchurch Cheshire	
							Martha Ann Do	Wife	M		30	Laundress Wash	Own account		Birkenhead Do	
							Mary Do	Daur	S		17	Do	Working		Hy-Bebington Do	
							Martha Do	Daur	S		11				Do Do	
							Edith Do	Daur	S		7				Do Do	
							John Do	Son	S	5					Do Do	
							Annie Do	Daur	S		3				Do Do	
							William	Son	S	2 months					Do Do	
7	Total of Schedules of Houses and of Tenements with less than Five Rooms	7				7	Total of Males and of Females...			15	14					

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

Census 1901 – Higher Bebington
Top entry under Samuel Mercer, Joe Mercer aged 11.



CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

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 of every Person, whether Member of Family, Visitor, Boarder, or Servant, who (1) passed the night of Sunday, April 2nd, 1911, in this dwelling and was alive at midnight, or (2) arrived in this dwelling on the morning of Monday, April 3rd, not having been enumerated elsewhere. No one else must be included. (For order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family. State whether "Head," or "Wife," "Son," "Daughter," or other Relative, "Visitor," "Boarder," or "Servant."	AGE (last Birthday) and SEX. Ages of Males.	Ages of Females.	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE. Write "Single," "Married," "Widower," or "Widow," opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards.	State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of:— Completed years the present Marriage has lasted. If less than one year write "under one."	Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7). Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have Died.	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards. Personal Occupation. The reply should show the precise branch of Profession, Trade, Manufacture, &c. If engaged in any Trade or Manufacture, the particular kind of work done, and the Article made or Material worked or dealt in should be clearly indicated. (See Instructions 1 to 8 and Examples on back of Schedule.)	Industry or Service with which worker is connected. This question should generally be answered by stating the business carried on by the employer. If this is clearly shown in Col. 10 the question need not be answered here. No entry needed for Domestic Servants in private employment. If employed by a public body (Government, Municipal, etc.) state what body. (See Instruction 9 and Examples on back of Schedule.)	Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account. Write opposite the name of each person engaged in any Trade or Industry. (1) "Employer" (that is employing persons other than domestic servants), or (2) "Worker" (that is working for an employer), or (3) "Own Account" (that is neither employing others nor working for a trade employer).	Whether Working at Home. Write the words "At Home" opposite the names of such persons carrying on Trade or Industry at home.	BIRTHPLACE of every person. (1) If born in the United Kingdom, write the name of the County, and Town or Parish. (2) If born in any other part of the British Empire, write the name of the Dependency, Colony, etc., and of the Province or State. (3) If born in a Foreign Country, write the name of the Country. (4) If born at sea, write "At Sea." NOTE.—In the case of persons born elsewhere than in England or Wales, state whether "Resident" or "Visitor" in this Country.	NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country. State whether:— (1) "British subject by parentage," (2) "Naturalised British subject," giving year of naturalisation, (3) If of foreign nationality, state whether "French," "German," "Russian," etc.	INFIRMITY. If any person included in this Schedule is:— (1) "Totally Deaf," or "Deaf and Dumb," (2) "Totally Blind," (3) "Lunatic," (4) "Imbecile," or "Feeble-minded," state the infirmity opposite that person's name, and the age at which he or she became afflicted.
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.
1	William League	Head	49	—	Married	20	1	1	—	Timber Fellow 563	— —	Work 4		Herefordshire Ross 410	English	
2	Esther League	Wife	—	54	Married	—	1.	1.	.	—	—			Staffordshire Lunelton 1892	—	
3	Manfred League	Son	16	—	Single	—	—	—	—	~~Horse Boy~~ Jobber Fitter 948	941	Work 0		Derby	211 —	
4	Harould Dale	Son	25	—	Single	—	—	—	—	Machanic 754	Gill Factory	Work 4		Staffordshire Stoke	1897	
5	Joseph Bertrum Ford	Border	22	—	Single	—	—	—	—	Fitter and Turner 31	do	Work 1		Cholwich Cheshire	120	
6	Joseph Mercer	Border	21		Single	—	—	—	—	Bricklayer 220		— 0		Ashington Cheshire		
7																
8																
9																
10																
11																
12																
13																
14																
15																

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

I certify that:—
(1.) All the ages on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex columns.
(2.) I have counted the males and females in Columns 3 and 4 separately, and have compared their sum with the total number of persons.
(3.) After making the necessary enquiries I have completed all entries on the Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.

Initials of Enumerator W. Fergus

Total. Males.	Females.	Persons.
5	1	6

0

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, 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 warehouse, office, shop.

6

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

Signature William League

Postal Address 12 Woodward St Nottingham

1911 Census
Joseph in his Nottingham lodgings while playing for Forest – still recorded as a 'Bricklayer'

His footballing career did pay well however. The maximum wage was £4 per week, but even if he was earning less than this, he was still far better off than the skilled and semi-skilled who were averaging £97 and £63 per year respectively, and many of his contemporaries were unskilled labourers on much less than that.

On 23 November 1912, Joe was featured in a player profile in the ***Nottingham Football News,***

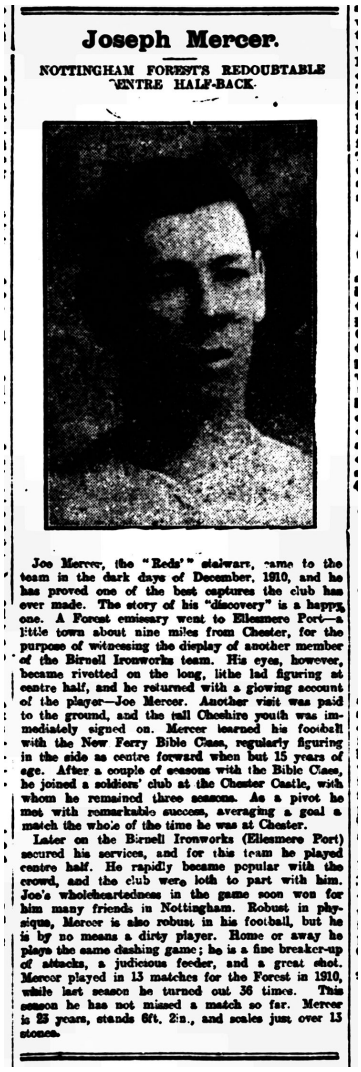
Joseph Mercer

Nottingham Forest's redoubtable centre half-back

Joe Mercer, the 'Reds' stalwart, came to the team in the dark days of December 1910, and he has proved one of the best captures the club has ever made. The story of his 'discovery' is a happy one. A Forest emissary went to Ellesmere Port – a little town about 9 miles from Chester, for the purpose of witnessing the display of another member of the Burnell Ironworks team. His eyes, however, became riveted on the long lithe lad figuring at centre half, and he returned with a glowing account of the player – Joe Mercer.

Another visit was paid to the ground, and the tall Cheshire youth was immediately signed on. Mercer learned his football with the New Ferry Bible Class, regularly figuring in the side as centre forward when but 15 years of age. After a couple of seasons with the Bible Class, he joined a soldiers' club at the Chester Castle, with whom he remained three seasons. As a pivot he met with remarkable success, averaging a goal a match the whole of the time he was at Chester.

Later on the Burnell Ironworks (Ellesmere Port) secured his services, and for this team he played centre half. He rapidly became popular with the crowd, and the club were loath to part with him. Joe's wholeheartedness in the game soon



Joseph Mercer.

NOTTINGHAM FOREST'S REDOUBTABLE CENTRE HALF-BACK.

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Later on the Birnell Ironworks (Ellesmere Port) secured his services, and for this team he played centre half. He rapidly became popular with the crowd, and the club were loth to part with him. Joe's wholeheartedness in the game soon won for him many friends in Nottingham. Robust in physique, Mercer is also robust in his football, but he is by no means a dirty player. Home or away he plays the same dashing game; he is a fine breaker-up of attacks, a judicious feeder, and a great shot. Mercer played in 13 matches for the Forest in 1910, while last season he turned out 36 times. This season he has not missed a match so far. Mercer is 25 years, stands 6ft. 2in., and scales just over 13 stones.

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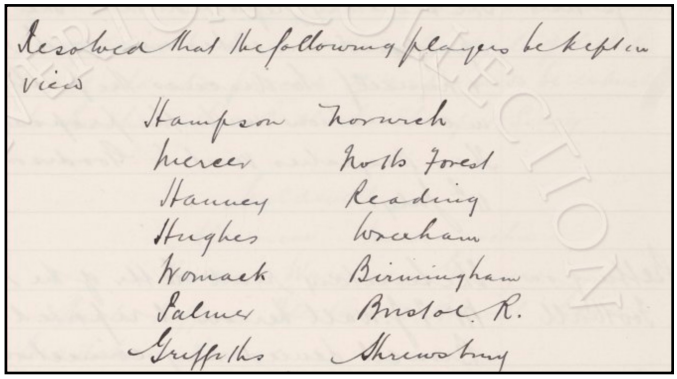
***Nottingham Football News,* 23 November 1912**

Nottingham Forest 1912
with the unmistakable figure of Joe Mercer in the centre of the back row

His reputation as a hard, tough-tackling centre-half began to grow, especially after a clash with former Everton star Harry Mountford, in a game against Burnley at Turf Moor in October 1911, which effectively curtailed the top flight career of the Claret's forward. Everton were reported to have been interested in signing Joe, but Will Cuff thought him a little too rough around the edges for the Blues, commenting 'He'll get us thrown out of the league!'



Resolved that the following players be kept in view

Hampson	Norwich
Mercer	Notts Forest
Hanney	Reading
Hughes	Wrexham
Womack	Birmingham
Palmer	Bristol R.
Griffiths	Shrewsbury

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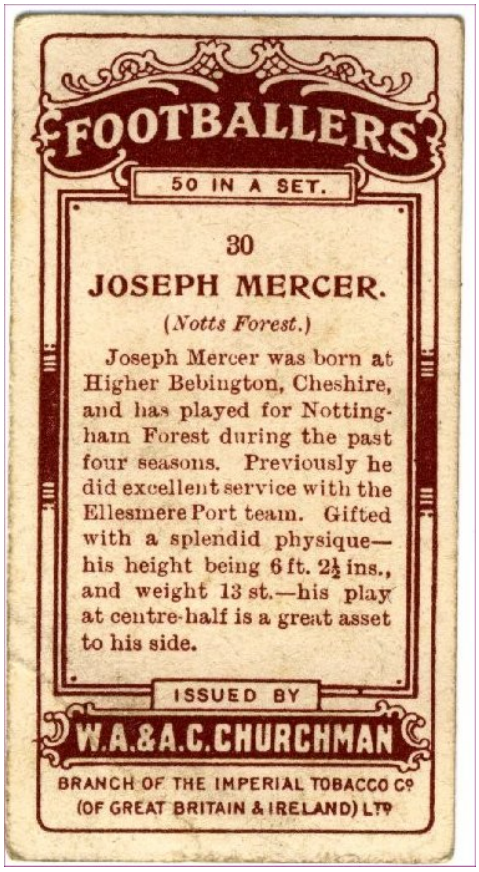
Griffiths	Shrewsbury

Mercer was certainly on Everton's radar, as this extract from the *Everton Board Minute Book* (29 Nov 1912-4 May 1914 volume) of 25 Feb 1913 bears witness.

During the 1913-14 season, Joe was regularly putting in impressive performances, and the local Nottingham journalist with the inspired pen-name of *'Robin Hood,'* stated in his weekly column,



> Joe Mercer met with a painful injury to his face in heading the ball, but he stuck to his guns and played capital football. The big centre-half has touched great form in the last three matches, and if he studies his small faults, with age and physique in his favour, there is no reason why he should not one day be England's pivot. I wish him luck.
>
> ***Nottingham Football News*, 21 March 1914**

But at the peak of his playing career, the outbreak of hostilities put paid to any further aspirations on the footballing front. It must have been a week of tortured emotions for him, given that his young son, Joseph junior, the first of four children, was born just five days after war was declared on 9 August 1914, at their home in 32 Queen Street, Ellesmere Port (in those days there was a true close season, from the end of April until the beginning of September, and the Mercers had retained their family home). His infant son would also become a footballer, destined to one day manage the England football team.

(***The reverse side of the above football card)***

Queen Street, Ellesmere Port

Burnell's Ironworks (far left) and the Mersey Ironworks sitting either side of the railway in Ellesmere Port

HAT TRICK AND A LOST BALL.

Little Sutton and Church Institute, Ellesmere Port, met on the former club's pitch on Saturday, and resulted in the Portites securing a most creditable win. The homesters took first knock, recording a score of 53. The Brothers Perrin and Joe Mercer (Notts Forest F.C.) were entrusted with the bowling, Jack Perrin being the most successful by claiming 5 wickets for 22 runs, his performance including the "hat trick." The Institute opened their innings in promising fashion, runs coming freely. J. Mercer scored thirty-three out of a total of 71 for 4 wickets, when Jim Perrin put a stop to the game with a hit that placed the ball beyond recovery.

As the storm clouds were approaching, Joe had the opportunity to turn out for the Ellesmere Port Church Institute cricket team against local rivals Little Sutton. Another sport he clearly excelled in. The Church Institute was at the end of Queen's Street pictured above.

***Cheshire Observer*, 11 July 1914**

Of course, with the general misapprehension across the country that the war would be all over by Christmas, most footballers probably felt they should carry on playing, until the authorities – be it the F.A. or the government – told them otherwise. Inevitably, the focus of discussion on who ought to be serving soon turned to sportsmen. Pressure came, for example, from the author Arthur Conan Doyle, who appealed on 6 September 1914 for footballers to join the armed forces:

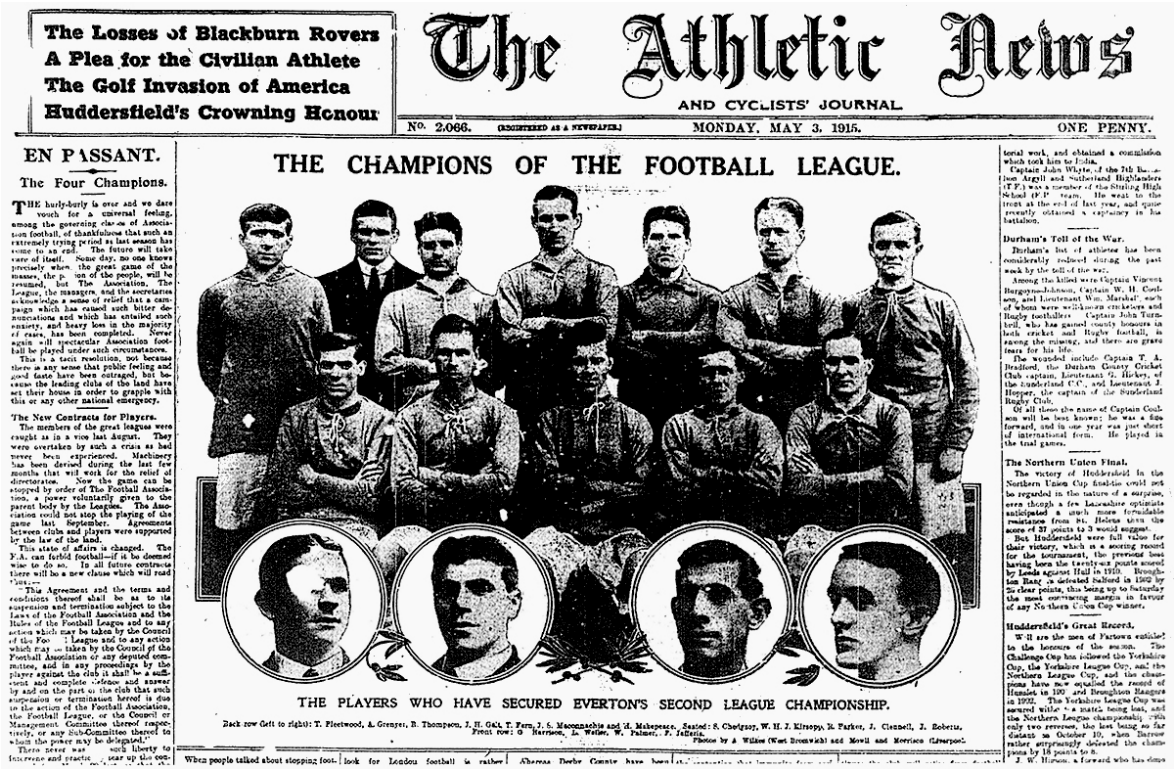
> 'There was a time for all things in the world. There was a time for games, there was a time for business, and there was a time for domestic life. There was a time for everything, but there is only time for one thing now, and that thing is war. If the cricketer had a straight eye, let him look along the barrel of a rifle. If a footballer had strength of limb, let them serve and march in the field of battle.'
>
> **[On 28 October 1918 his son, Kingsley Doyle, died from pneumonia, which he contracted during his convalescence after being seriously wounded during the 1916 Battle of the Somme].**

Others even verbally attacked the West Ham United players, calling them 'effeminate' and 'cowardly' for getting paid for playing football, while others were fighting on the Western Front. C.B.Fry, the well-known amateur footballer and cricketer, called for football to be abolished; all professional contracts be annulled; and furthermore, that no one below forty years of age be allowed to attend matches.

Eventually, the F.A. – after considerable pressure – called for clubs to release professional footballers who were not married, to allow them to join up, while the War Office worked with the F.A. to organise recruitment drives at games that were still being played. Sections of the press though saw this as an attempt by the ruling classes to stop the one single recreation enjoyed by the masses, on just one day in the week. The *Athletic News* angrily declared,

> 'What do they care for the poor man's sport? The poor are giving their lives for this country in thousands. In many cases they have nothing else… These should, according to a small clique of virulent snobs, be deprived of the one distraction that they have had for over thirty years.'

And so, the opinion of *The Athletic* uneasily prevailed, at least for now. League fixtures would continue until the end of the 1914/15 season, which saw Everton crowned champions, after which the competition was suspended until the end of the war. (Joe's former team mate Sam Chedgzoy, was part of the championship winning side).



The Losses of Blackburn Rovers
A Plea for the Civilian Athlete
The Golf Invasion of America
Huddersfield's Crowning Honour

The Athletic News
AND CYCLISTS' JOURNAL.

No. 2,066. (REGISTERED AS A NEWSPAPER.) MONDAY, MAY 3, 1915. ONE PENNY.

EN PASSANT.

The Four Champions.

THE hurly-burly is over and we dare vouch for a universal feeling among the governing classes of Association football, of thankfulness that such an extremely trying period as last season has come to an end. The future will take care of itself. Some day, no one knows precisely when, the great game of the masses, the passion of the people, will be resumed, but The Association, The League, the managers, and the secretaries acknowledge a sense of relief that a campaign which has caused such bitter denunciations and which has entailed such anxiety, and heavy loss in the majority of cases, has been completed. Never again will spectacular Association football be played under such circumstances.

This is a tacit resolution, not because there is any sense that public feeling and good taste have been outraged, but because the leading clubs of the land have set their house in order to grapple with this or any other national emergency.

The New Contracts for Players.

The members of the great leagues were caught as in a vice last August. They were overtaken by such a crisis as had never been experienced. Machinery has been devised during the last few months that will work for the relief of directorates. Now the game can be stopped by order of The Football Association, a power voluntarily given to the parent body by the Leagues. The Association could not stop the playing of the game last September. Agreements between clubs and players were supported by the law of the land.

This state of affairs is changed. The F.A. can forbid football—if it be deemed wise to do so. In all future contracts there will be a new clause which will read thus:—

"The Agreement and the terms and conditions thereof shall be as to the suspension and termination subject to the laws of the Football Association and the Rules of the Football League and to any action which may be taken by the Council of the Football League and to any action which may be taken by the Council of the Football Association or any deputed committee, and in any proceedings by the player against the club it shall be a sufficient and complete defence and answer by and on the part of the club that such suspension or termination hereof is due to the action of the Football Association, the Football League, or the Council or Management Committee thereof respectively, or any Sub-Committee thereof to whom the power may be delegated."

There never was such liberty to intervene and practically tear up the con-

THE CHAMPIONS OF THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE.

THE PLAYERS WHO HAVE SECURED EVERTON'S SECOND LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP.

Back row (left to right): T. Fleetwood, A. Grenyer, B. Thompson, J. H. Galt, T. Fern, J. S. Maconnachie and H. Makepeace. Seated: S. Chedgzoy, W. H. J. Kirsopp, R. Parker, J. Clennell, J. Roberts. Front row: G. Harrison, L. Weller, W. Palmer, F. Jefferis.

Photos by A. Wilson (West Bromwich) and Movil and Morrison (Liverpool).

When people talked about stopping foot-

look for London football is rather

Whereas Derby County have been

total work, and obtained a consolation which took him to India.

Captain John Whyte, of the 7th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (T.F.) was a member of the Stirling High School (F.P.) team. He went to the front at the end of last year, and quite recently obtained a captaincy in his battalion.

Durham's Toll of the War.

Durham's list of athletes has been considerably reduced during the past week by the toll of the war.

Among the killed were Captain Vincent Burgoyne-Johnson, Captain W. H. Coulson, and Lieutenant Wm. Marshall, each of whom were well-known cricketers and Rugby footballers. Captain John Turnbull, who has gained county honours in both cricket and Rugby football, is among the missing, and there are grave fears for his life.

The wounded include Captain T. A. Bradford, the Durham County Cricket Club captain, Lieutenant G. Hickey, of the Sunderland C.C., and Lieutenant J. Hopper, the captain of the Sunderland Rugby Club.

Of all those the name of Captain Coulson will be best known; he was a fine forward, and in one year was just short of international form. He played in the final games.

The Northern Union Final.

The victory of Huddersfield in the Northern Union Cup finals could not be regarded in the nature of a surprise, even though a few Lancashire optimists anticipated a much more formidable resistance from St. Helens than the score of 37 points to 3 would suggest.

But Huddersfield were full value for their victory, which is a scoring record for the tournament, the previous best having been the twenty-six points scored by Leeds against Hull in 1910. Broughton Rangers is defeated Salford in 1902 by 26 clear points, this being up to Saturday the most overwhelming margin in favour of any Northern Union Cup winner.

Huddersfield's Great Record.

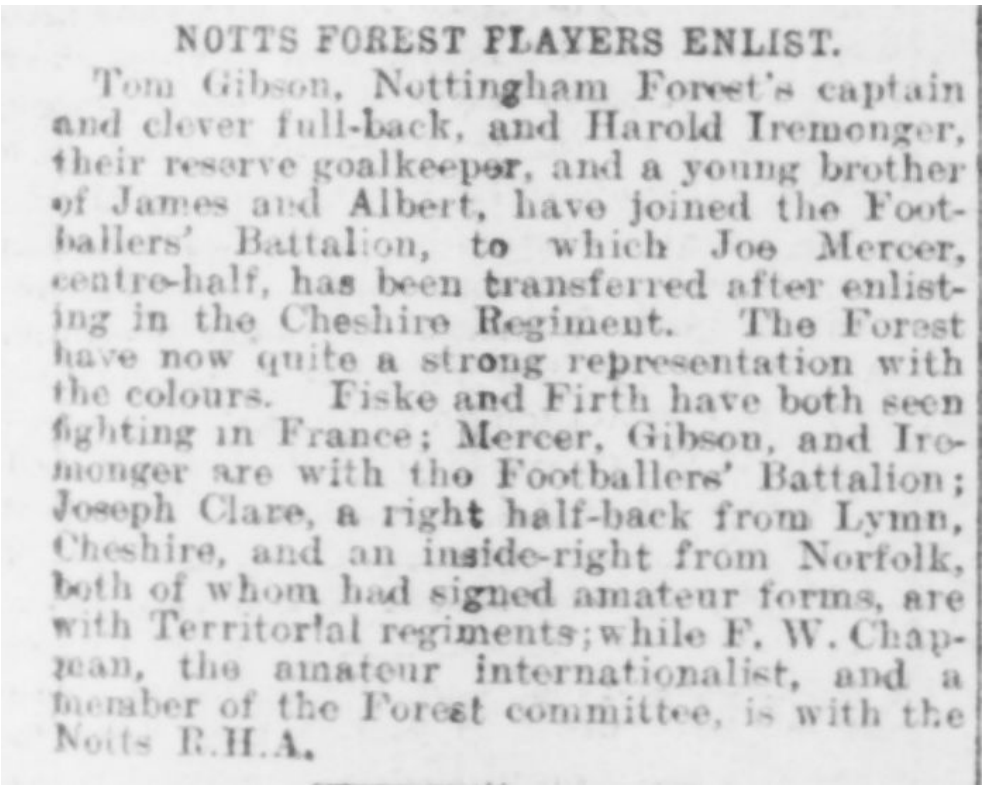
WHO are the men of Fartown entitled to the honours of the season. The Challenge Cup has followed the Yorkshire Cup, the Yorkshire League Cup, and the Northern League Cup, and the champions have now equalled the record of Hunslet in 190 and Broughton Rangers in 1902. The Yorkshire League Cup was secured while a match being lost, and the Northern League championship (with only two reverses, the last being so far distant as October 10, when Barrow rather surprisingly defeated the champions by 16 points to 8.

J. W. Hirson, a forward who has done

Everton in 1914-15, champions of the Football League. Back row (left to right): Tom Fleetwood, Alan Grenyer, Thompson, Jimmy Galt, Tom Fern, John Maconnachie, Harry Makepeace. Front row: Sam Chedgzoy, Billy Kersopp, Bobby Parker, Joe Clennell, James Roberts.

Many footballers did not wait for Christmas, and heeded the call by early December 1914, when the 17th Service (Football) Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment was established. Within a few weeks, the 17th Battalion had its full complement of 600 men. Not all were footballers however, as many recruits were local men who wanted to be in the same battalion as their football heroes. Nevertheless, by March 1915, it was reported that 122 professional footballers had joined the battalion. This was much lower than expected, and sportsmen, not just footballers, continued to come under pressure to enlist, not least for the example they would set to the masses – in the view of the recruiting organisers.

Joe Mercer presented himself at the Nottingham recruitment office on the morning of the 16 December 1914, and enlisted into the Cheshire Regiment. Most new recruits were posted to their local home regiment, or one with family links, especially if a relative had served in the Regulars or Territorials before the war. By December, many were were signing on for their local regimental 'Pals' battalions, a system of recruitment introduced to boost the numbers of volunteers who were encouraged to sign up with their friends or work colleagues. Faced with this option, Joe transferred to the Footballer's Battalion the following day.



NOTTS FOREST PLAYERS ENLIST.

Tom Gibson, Nottingham Forest's captain and clever full-back, and Harold Iremonger, their reserve goalkeeper, and a young brother of James and Albert, have joined the Footballers' Battalion, to which Joe Mercer, centre-half, has been transferred after enlisting in the Cheshire Regiment. The Forest have now quite a strong representation with the colours. Fiske and Firth have both seen fighting in France; Mercer, Gibson, and Iremonger are with the Footballers' Battalion; Joseph Clare, a right half-back from Lynn, Cheshire, and an inside-right from Norfolk, both of whom had signed amateur forms, are with Territorial regiments; while F. W. Chapman, the amateur internationalist, and a member of the Forest committee, is with the Notts R.H.A.

***Northern Daily Telegraph*, 31 December 1914**

After months of training, Joe was posted to France, arriving on 17 November 1915, where the the battalion first experienced life in the trenches around Loos. Meanwhile, out of the front line, they played as much football as possible, including specially organised tournaments. Joe played in several games, home and abroad, including one representative match at Reading in front of a crowd of 3,000. While still at home during his basic training, Joe was also a guest player for the Liverpool Pals battalion;

FOOTBALL.

PORT ST. MARY'S v. LIVERPOOL "PALS."

This match was not a success, the "Pals" failing to produce a representative team. The Saints included a number of old faces, Dick Jones and Sam Jones being among the number, while Joe Mercer (Notts Forest) appeared for the "Pals." The game throughout was one-sided, the home team doing almost as they liked. The Saints took the game in hand from the start. Roberts should have scored for the recruits early on, but the danger was averted. Mercer took matters somewhat easy, but gave a glimpse of his true form, but all his efforts were upset by his comrades. Dick Jones also was prominent for the Saints, who had a three goals' lead at the interval. The second portion was noticeable for some amusing antics by a number of the "Pals," who kept the crowd pleased. The Saints ran out winners by 5—0.

***Cheshire Observer,* 6 February 1915**

During February 1915, there was a concerted drive on the Isle of Man to form a 'Manx Pals' battalion. It is quite possible that this match was arranged as part of that drive, and there was no better battalion to play against, and to publicise the cause, than the Liverpool Pals, the first such unit to be formed in the country. To line up against a star professional like Joe Mercer would certainly benefit the cause. There were new Manx recruits already based in Hoylake, soon to be joined by their new battalion, and it is likely that they supplied the team for this fixture.

The following advert appeared the same day back home in the Manx press.
Within days, a thousand Manxmen had signed up.

Wanted at Once!

500 MANXMEN

TO COMPLETE

A Manx Battalion

OF THE

ROYAL SCOTS

The 14th Battalion of this famous Regiment is now Recruiting in the Isle of Man.

A number of Manxmen have already joined this Battalion.

Conditions – Age 19 to 38. Height: a minimum of 5ft. 3ins. Enlistment for duration of war for general service.

It has been arranged that friends shall be associated together in the service.

Application should be made at once to Major Hamilton, R.O., at the Recruiting Office, Prospect Hill, Douglas.

L. RADCLIFFE, Lieut.,
Adjutant, 14th the Royal Scots.

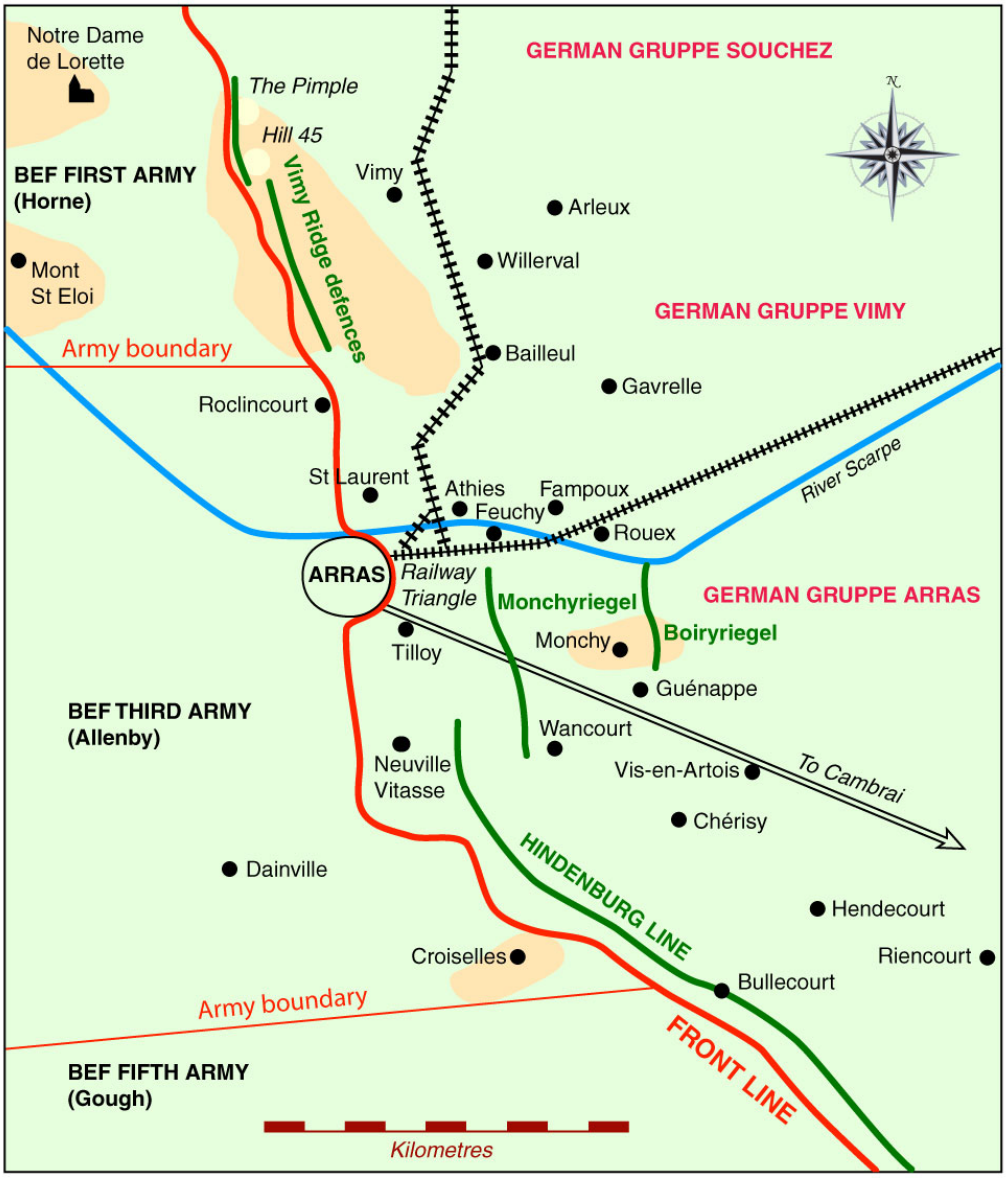
***Isle of Man Examiner and General Advertiser,* 6 February 1915**

The 1st Manx Service Company was formed just three weeks later on 1 March 1915. On 9 March, they sailed out of Douglas harbour to join the 16th Battalion, King's Liverpool Regiment (Liverpool Pals), to begin basic training on Merseyside and North Wales, before being shipped out to Salonika in January 1916.

The 17th Service (Football) Battalion, Middlesex Regiment on the The Western Front

In late April/May of 1916, the Football Battalion moved south towards Vimy Ridge, where they took part in their first offensive action near Souchez. By July 1916, they had moved south again. The Battle of the Somme had commenced on 1 July, and the 17ths were moved to the British line east of Albert, where they were involved in heavy fighting at Delville Wood (27–29 July) and Guillemont (8 August). British casualties were very high across the front, and these actions devastated the 17th Middlesex to the extent that a draft of 716 men was needed to bring it back up to strength. At Delville Wood they lost 300 men in 1½ hours. Several footballers had been killed in

action, while many others were among the wounded. Sergeant Mercer was wounded in the head by shrapnel in August 1916.



Red line = front line on April 9, 1917
Green lines = Major German trench systems / defensive lines
Blue line = River Scarpe

Oppy Wood lies slightly to the north of Gavrelle in the centre of the map

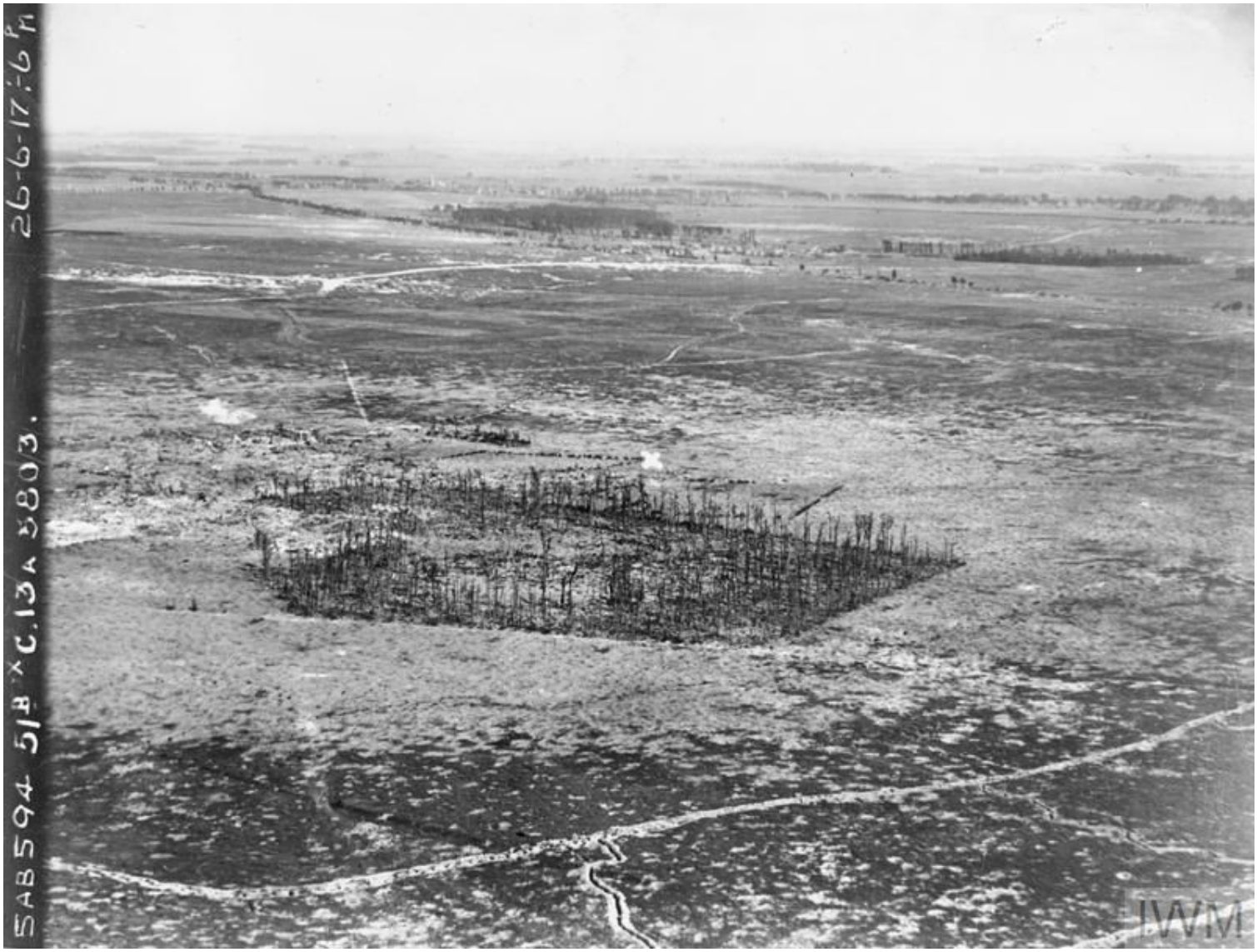
As the weather worsened and the Battle of the Somme was drawing to a close, the 17th Middlesex attacked the Redan Ridge on 13 November 1916, near Serre in the Battle of the Ancre. After weeks of heavy rain, some men sank up to their waists in the mud, and a heavy fog hung over the battlefield, limiting visibility to thirty yards.

Showing remarkable composure in the face of what was to come, two companies (B and D) of the 17th Middlesex went over the top playing mouth organs. According to the war diary containing the record of that day's fighting, three officers were killed, two were wounded, with eight missing; fifteen other ranks were killed, plus 145 wounded and 133 missing.

Yet worse was to come. Moving to the north into the Arras sector once more, the 17ths were in the thick of the action in the Battle of Arras in April 1917. They fought through Oppy Wood on 28 April, into the small village of Oppy itself, only to find they were cut off and surrounded. The fight was desperate, and the battalion suffered its heaviest casualties in a single day, more than at any other stage in the war; eleven officers and 451 ranks were among the killed. They had lost over a thousand men overall in the Battle of Arras. Most of those who had survived, were either wounded or taken as prisoners of war.

Lying in a shell hole for several hours during the barrage, and badly wounded in several places, Sergeant Mercer was captured by the enemy while attempting to return to the British lines.

Oppy under shell-fire



Oppy Wood and the devastated landscape by June of 1917

"I knew nothing of Professional Footballers when I took over this Battalion. But I have learned to value them. I would go anywhere with such men. Their 'esprit de corps' was amazing. This feeling was mainly due to Football – the link of fellowship which bound them together. Football has a wonderful grip on these men and on The Army generally."

Colonel H. T. Fenwick, Commanding Officer, 17th Middlesex Regiment (1915 - 1917).

Prisoner of War

Joe Mercer, the Nottingham Forest centre half-back, who was in the Middlesex Regiment, is reported missing. It was an injury received in contact with Mercer at Turf Moor, on October 7th, 1911, which practically ended the career of Harry Mountford as a first-class player.

***Burnley News,* 13 June 1917**
If there was ever an inappropriate time to bring up a reference to an old score, this was surely it.

Meanwhile, behind the lines, following the annihilation of the Footballer's Battalion at Oppy, Sergeant Mercer was posted as 'missing' – but of course, so were the majority of those lying dead on the battlefield, until they could be recovered and positively identified. It would be several weeks before anything was heard of his whereabouts – if he had survived at all.

To the relief of his family and friends, Ethel received a postcard with the briefest of messages, informing her that Joe was now a German prisoner of war.

JOE MERCER A PRISONER.

FOREST FOOTBALLER REPORTED IN THE HANDS OF THE GERMANS.

Sergeant Joseph Mercer, who for several seasons played centre-half for Nottingham Forest, and was very popular with the local football crowd, is slightly wounded and a prisoner in the hands of the Germans.

Mercer enlisted in 1914, the day following the bombardment of Scarborough, in the Footballers' Battalion, and has been on active service ever since. He was missing a little while ago, and considerable anxiety has been occasioned among his friends, but a postcard giving the information that he is in a prisoners' camp in Germany has just reached his wife, who resides in Cheshire.

The news was sent to Nottingham by C.S.M. T. Gibson to Mr. R. J. Marsters, secretary of Nottingham Forest F.C.

***Nottingham Evening Post,* 12 June 1917**

Joe Mercer Alive.

Sergeant Joe Mercer (17th Middlesex), formerly of Burnell's Ironworks and Notts Forest, is a prisoner of war in Germany. He is wounded but not seriously. No news of him had been received for about two months. "Tim" Coleman recently told "Echo" readers that he feared Mercer was killed.

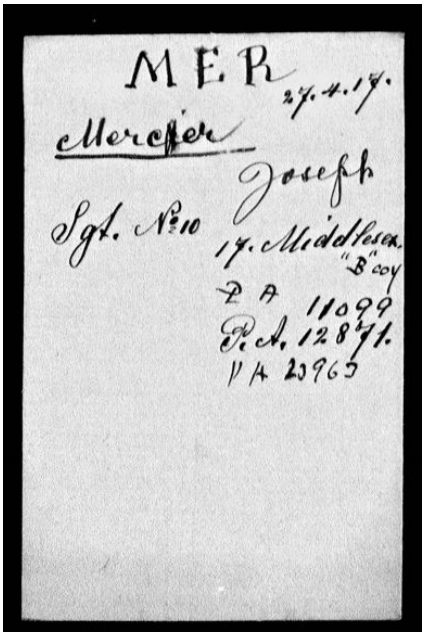
***Liverpool Echo,* 4 June 1917**

JOE MERCER IN GERMANY.

Mr. R. Norris, the Nottingham Forest F.C. trainer, has received a post card from Sergt. Joe Mercer, who formerly played centre-half for the "Reds" and is now a prisoner at Giessen, Germany, having been captured while out with a sniping party. Joe stated that he was wounded in eight places, and was only just out of hospital, but was going on favourably.

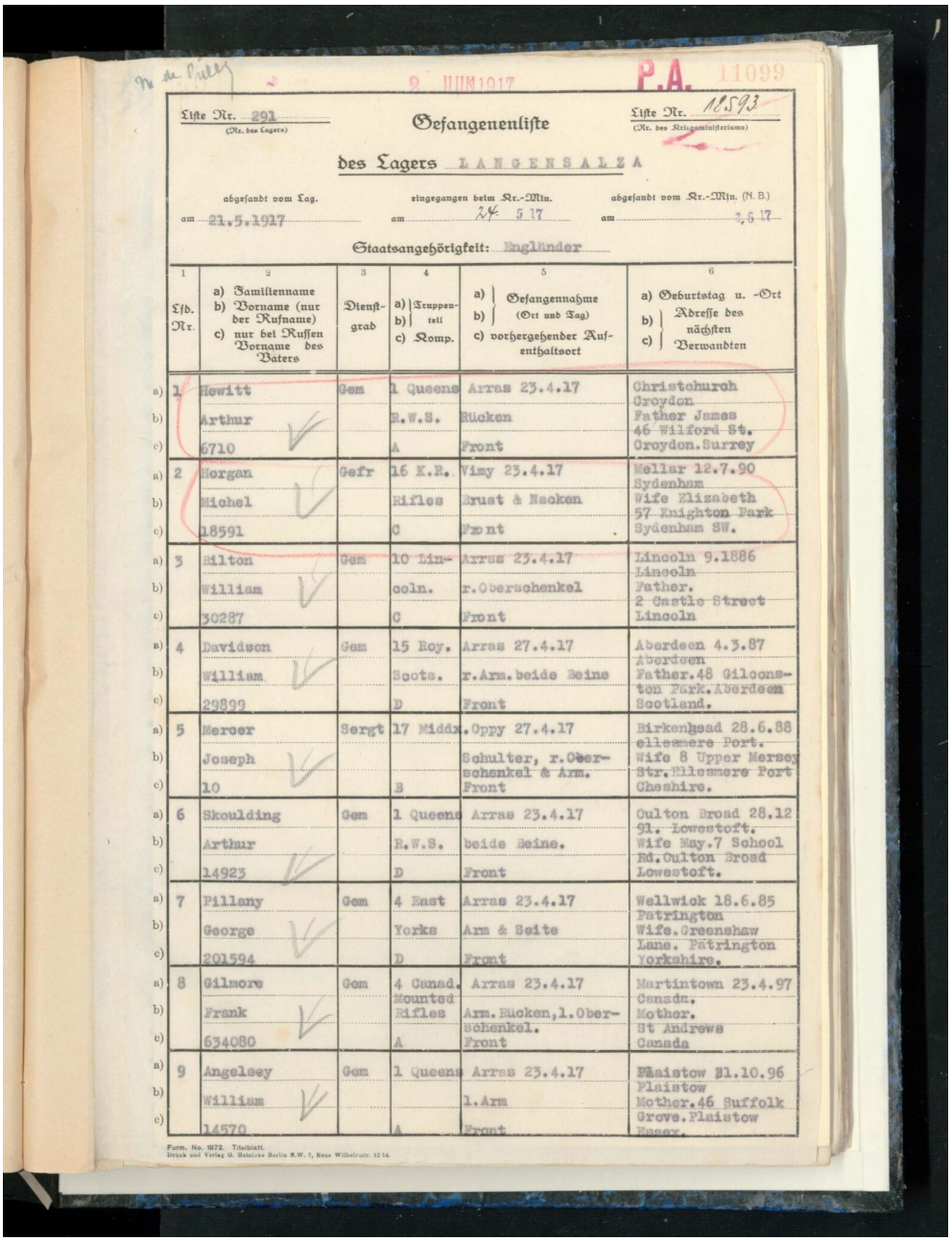
***Nottingham Evening Post,* 27 October 1917**

His first experience as a PoW, was to be taken by ambulance behind the lines to Douai to have his wounds treated, following which, he travelled for three days by train to reach Langensalza prison camp in Thuringia, where he spent more time recovering in the camp hospital. Once discharged, he was on the move again, this time to Giessen, where he stayed until 17 March 1918. From there he was transferred to Meschede in North Rhine-Westphalia, regarded by those who had experienced it, as one of harshest of the German camps. Meschede had a notorious reputation due to guards coming from the bottom echelons of the German Army, and their brutal treatment and exploitation of the Allied PoWs. It was here that Sergeant Mercer saw out the war. Once Armistice was declared, it would still be several weeks before he was discharged and despatched for home.



International Committee of the Red Cross, Historical Archives
1914-1918: Prisoners of the First World War

The discovery of Sergeant Joseph Mercer's PoW index card *(left)* in the above archive listing the key reference numbers, led to the retrieval of his PoW records shown below.



9 JUN 1917 P.A. 11099

Liste Nr. 291 (Nr. des Lagers) — Gefangenenliste — Liste Nr. 10593 (Nr. des Kriegsministeriums)

des Lagers LANGENSALZA

abgesandt vom Lag. am 21.5.1917 — eingegangen beim Kr.-Min. am 24 5 17 — abgesandt vom Kr.-Min. (N. B.) am 2.6.17

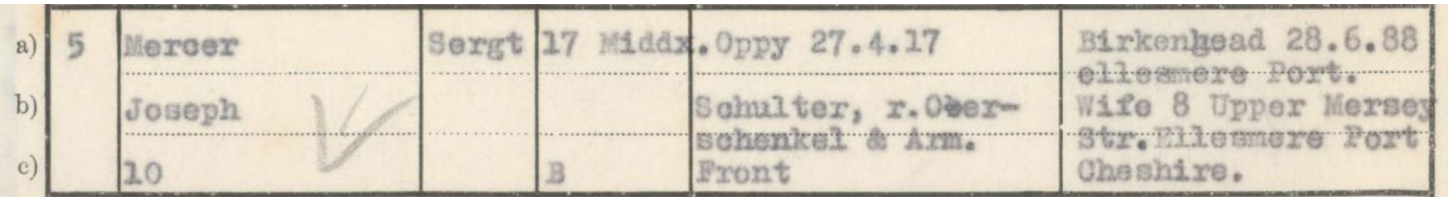
Staatsangehörigkeit: Engländer

	1 Lfd. Nr.	2 a) Familienname b) Vorname (nur der Rufname) c) nur bei Russen Vorname des Vaters	3 Dienstgrad	4 a) Truppenteil b) c) Komp.	5 a) b) Gefangennahme (Ort und Tag) c) vorhergehender Aufenthaltsort	6 a) Geburtstag u. -Ort b) c) Adresse des nächsten Verwandten
a)	1	Hewitt	Gem	1 Queens	Arras 23.4.17	Christchurch Croydon
b)		Arthur		R.W.S.	Rücken	Father James 46 Wilford St.
c)		6710		A	Front	Croydon.Surrey
a)	2	Morgan	Gefr	16 K.R.	Vimy 23.4.17	Mellar 12.7.90 Sydenham
b)		Michel		Rifles	Brust & Nacken	Wife Elizabeth 57 Knighton Park
c)		18591		C	Front	Sydenham SW.
a)	3	Milton	Gem	10 Lin-	Arras 23.4.17	Lincoln 9.1886 Lincoln
b)		William		coln.	r.Oberschenkel	Father. 2 Castle Street
c)		30287		C	Front	Lincoln
a)	4	Davidson	Gem	15 Roy.	Arras 27.4.17	Aberdeen 4.3.87 Aberdeen
b)		William		Scots.	r.Arm.beide Beine	Father.48 Gilcons- ton Park.Aberdeen
c)		29899		D	Front	Scotland.
a)	5	Mercer	Sergt	17 Middx.	Oppy 27.4.17	Birkenhead 28.6.88 ellesmere Port.
b)		Joseph			Schulter, r.Ober-	Wife 8 Upper Mersey
c)		10		B	schenkel & Arm. Front	Str.Ellesmere Port Cheshire.
a)	6	Skoulding	Gem	1 Queens	Arras 23.4.17	Oulton Broad 28.12 91. Lowestoft.
b)		Arthur		R.W.S.	beide Beine.	Wife May.7 School Rd.Oulton Broad
c)		14923		D	Front	Lowestoft.
a)	7	Pillany	Gem	4 East	Arras 23.4.17	Wellwick 18.6.85 Patrington
b)		George		Yorks	Arm & Seite	Wife.Greenshaw Lane. Patrington
c)		201594		D	Front	Yorkshire.
a)	8	Gilmore	Gem	4 Canad.	Arras 23.4.17	Martintown 23.4.97 Canada.
b)		Frank		Mounted Rifles	Arm.Rücken,l.Ober-	Mother.
c)		634080		A	schenkel. Front	St Andrews Canada
a)	9	Angelsey	Gem	1 Queens	Arras 23.4.17	Plaistow 31.10.96 Plaistow
b)		William			l.Arm	Mother.46 Suffolk
c)		14570		A	Front	Grove.Plaistow Essex.

Form. No. 1072. Titelblatt. Druck und Verlag G. Reimicke Berlin N.W. 7, Neue Wilhelmstr. 12-14.

International Committee of the Red Cross, Historical Archives 1914-1918: Prisoners of the First World War

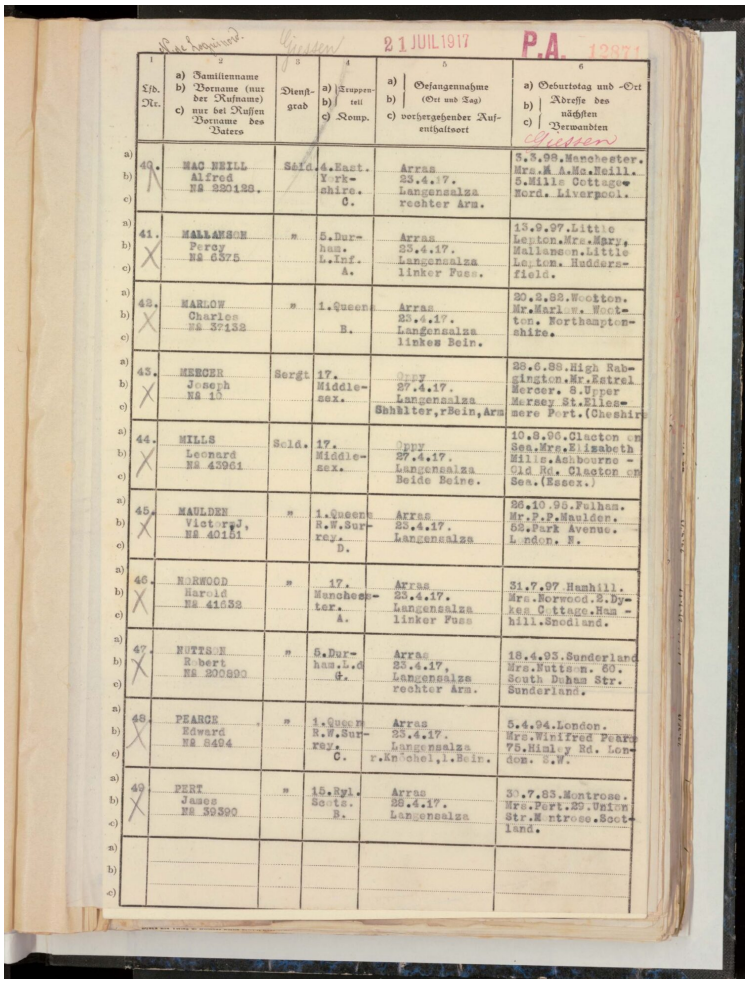
Joe Mercer recorded at Langensalza PoW camp on arrival 24 May 1917.
His date of capture and injuries – shoulder, thigh and arm – were also recorded.



a)	5	Mercer	Sergt	17 Middx.	Oppy 27.4.17	Birkenhead 28.6.88 ellesmere Port.
b)		Joseph			Schulter, r.Ober-	Wife 8 Upper Mersey
c)		10		B	schenkel & Arm. Front	Str.Ellesmere Port Cheshire.

As above, enlarged

Langensalza PoW camp



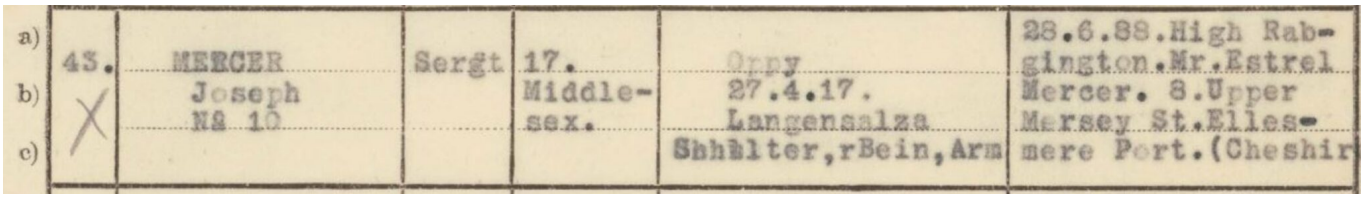
21 JUIL 1917 P.A. 12871

Lfd. Nr.	a) Familienname b) Vorname (nur der Rufname) c) nur bei Russen Vorname des Vaters	Dienstgrad	a) Truppenteil b) c) Komp.	a) Gefangennahme b) (Ort und Tag) c) vorhergehender Aufenthaltsort	a) Geburtstag und -Ort b) Adresse des nächsten c) Verwandten
40.	MAC NEILL Alfred NS 320128.	Sold.	4.East. Yorkshire. C.	Arras 23.4.17. Langensalza rechter Arm.	3.3.98.Manchester. Mrs.M A.Mc.Neill. 5.Mills Cottage Nord. Liverpool.
41.	MALLANSON Percy NS 6375	"	5.Durham. L.Inf. A.	Arras 23.4.17. Langensalza linker Fuss.	13.9.97.Little Lepton.Mrs.Mary, Mallanson.Little Lepton. Huddersfield.
42.	MARLOW Charles NS 37132	"	1.Queens B.	Arras 23.4.17. Langensalza linkes Bein.	20.2.88.Wootton. Mr.Marlow. Wootton. Northamptonshire.
43.	MERCER Joseph NS 10	Sergt	17. Middlesex.	Oppy 27.4.17. Langensalza Schälter,rBein,Arm	28.6.88.High Rabgington.Mr.Estrel Mercer. 8.Upper Mersey St.Ellesmere Port.(Cheshir
44.	MILLS Leonard NS 43961	Sold.	17. Middlesex.	Oppy 27.4.17. Langensalza Beide Beine.	10.8.96.Clacton on Sea.Mrs.Elizabeth Mills.Ashbourne - Old Rd. Clacton on Sea.(Essex.)
45.	MAULDEN Victor J. NS 40151	"	1.Queens R.W.Surrey. D.	Arras 23.4.17. Langensalza	26.10.95.Fulham. Mr.P.P.Maulden. 52.Park Avenue. London. N.
46.	NORWOOD Harold NS 41638	"	17. Manchester. A.	Arras 23.4.17. Langensalza linker Fuss	31.7.97.Hunhill. Mrs.Norwood.2.Dyken Cottage.Hunhill.Snodland.
47.	NUTTSON Robert NS 200890	"	5.Durham.L.I. G.	Arras 23.4.17. Langensalza rechter Arm.	18.4.93.Sunderland Mrs.Nuttson. 60. South Durham Str. Sunderland.
48.	PEARCE Edward NS 8494	"	1.Queens R.W.Surrey. C.	Arras 23.4.17. Langensalza r.Knöchel,l.Bein.	5.4.94.London. Mrs.Winifred Pearce 75.Hinley Rd. London. S.W.
49.	PERT James NS 39390	"	15.Rgl. Scots. B.	Arras 23.4.17. Langensalza	30.7.83.Montrose. Mrs.Pert.29.Union Str.Montrose.Scotland.

International Committee of the Red Cross, Historical Archives 1914-1918: Prisoners of the First World War

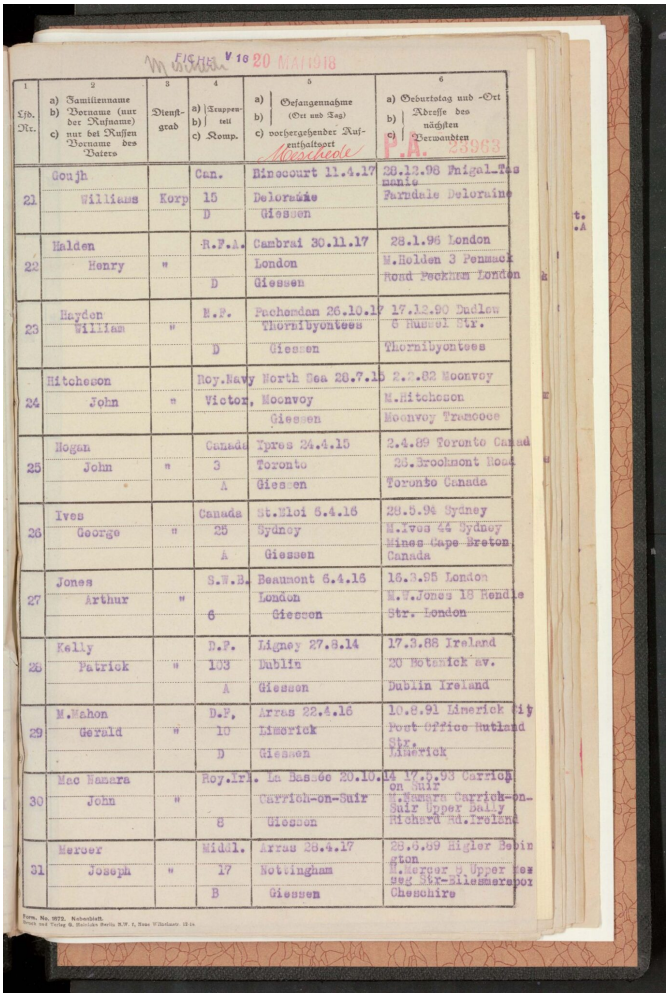
Joe Mercer recorded on arrival at Giessen PoW Camp, 21 July 1917

Below, Joe Mercer's record shown left enlarged



a) b) c)	43. X	MERCER Joseph NS 10	Sergt	17. Middlesex.	Oppy 27.4.17. Langensalza Schälter,rBein,Arm	28.6.88.High Rabgington.Mr.Estrel Mercer. 8.Upper Mersey St.Ellesmere Port.(Cheshir

Gießen: Lazarettbaracke



1 Lfd. Nr.	2 a) Familienname b) Vorname (nur der Rufname) c) nur bei Russen Vorname des Vaters	3 Dienstgrad	4 a) Truppenteil b) c) Komp.	5 a) Gefangennahme (Ort und Tag) b) c) vorhergehender Aufenthaltsort	6 a) Geburtstag und -Ort b) Adresse des nächsten c) Verwandten
21	Gough Williams	Korp	Can. 15 D	Bincourt 11.4.17 Delorraine Giessen	28.12.98 Frigal Tasmanie Farndale Delorraine
22	Halden Henry	"	R.F.A. D	Cambrai 30.11.17 London Giessen	28.1.96 London M.Holden 3 Penmaen Road Peckham London
23	Hayden William	"	N.F. D	Pachendan 26.10.17 Thornibyontees Giessen	17.12.90 Dudlow 6 Russel Str. Thornibyontees
24	Hitchcson John	"	Roy.Navy Victor,	North Sea 20.7.15 Moonvoy Giessen	2.2.82 Moonvoy M.Hitchcson Moonvoy Trencoce
25	Hogan John	"	Canada 3 A	Ypres 24.4.15 Toronto Giessen	2.4.89 Toronto Canad 23.Brookmont Road Toronto Canada
26	Ives George	"	Canada 25 A	St.Eloi 5.4.16 Sydney Giessen	28.5.94 Sydney M.Ives 44 Sydney ~~Mines Cape Breton~~ Canada
27	Jones Arthur	"	S.W.B. 6	Beaumont 5.4.16 London Giessen	16.3.95 London M.W.Jones 18 Rendle Str. London
28	Kelly Patrick	"	D.F. 103 A	Ligney 27.8.14 Dublin Giessen	17.3.88 Ireland 20 Rotenick Av. Dublin Ireland
29	M.Mahon Gerald	"	D.F. 10 D	Arras 22.4.16 Limerick Giessen	10.8.91 Limerick City ~~Post Office Rutland~~ Str. Limerick
30	Mac Namara John	"	Roy.Irl. 8	La Bassee 20.10.14 Carrick-on-Suir Giessen	17.5.93 Carrick on Suir M.Namara Carrick-on-Suir Upper Sally Richard Rd.Ireland
31	Mercer Joseph	"	Middl. 17 B	Arras 28.4.17 Nottingham Giessen	28.6.89 Higler Bebington M.Mercer 5 Upper Mersegg Str-Ellesmereport Cheschire

Meschede V 16 20 MAI 1918

P.A. 25963

Hospital Ward at Giessen 1916

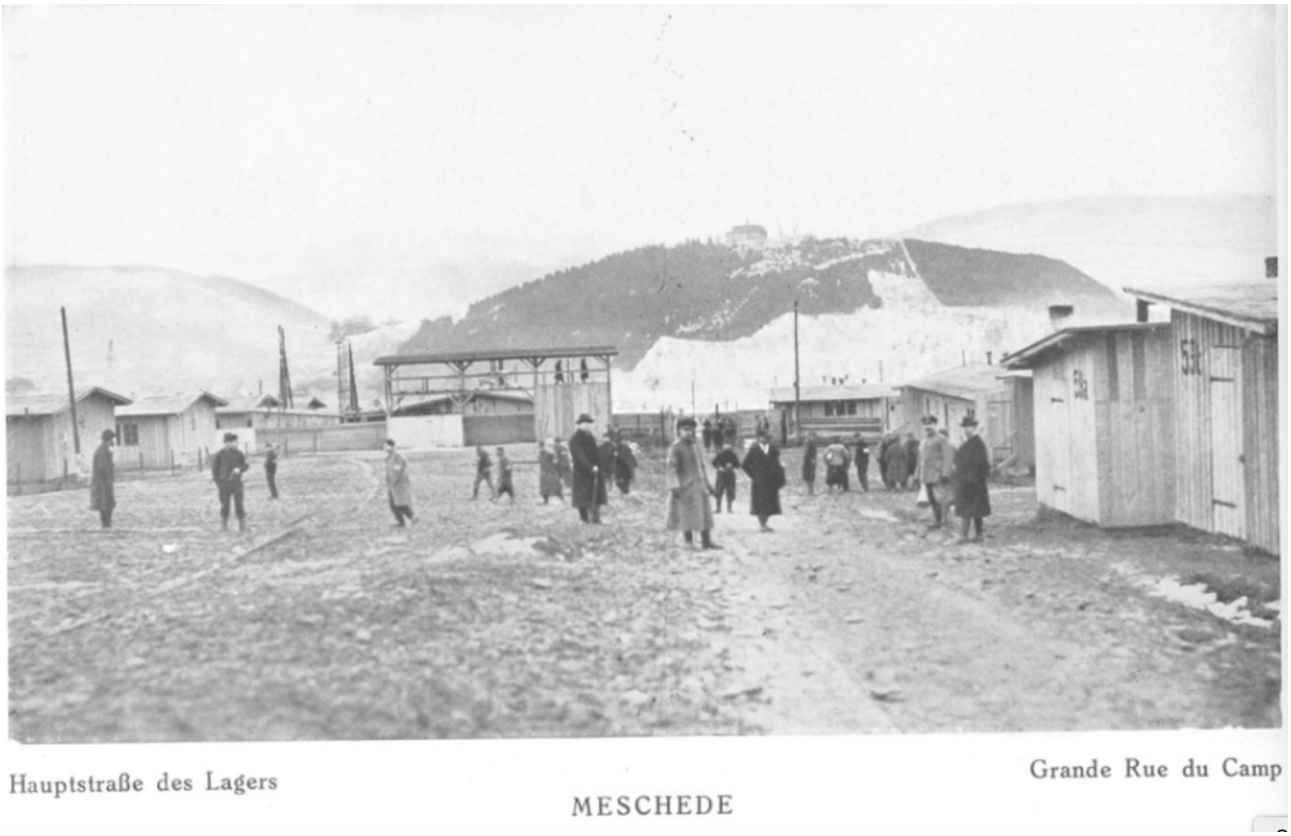
French orderlies provide care for the sick and wounded Allied prisoners in a hospital ward at Giessen. The beds are full of recovering soldiers and the ward is well heated by the large stoves in the centre aisle of the building.

International Committee of the Red Cross, Historical Archives 1914-1918: Prisoners of the First World War

Joe Mercer recorded on arrival at Meschede PoW Camp, 20 March 1918

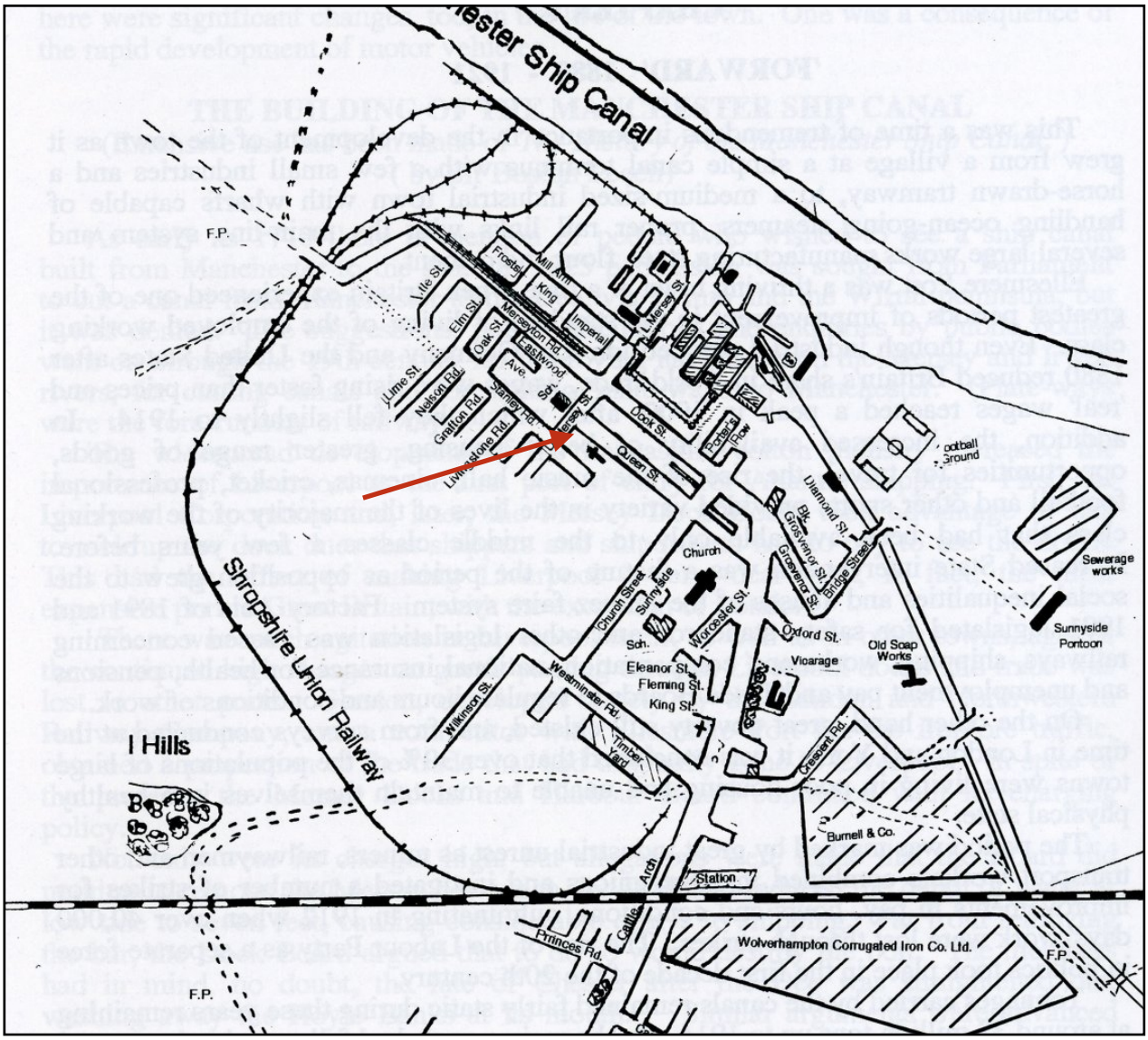
Below, Joe Mercer's record shown left enlarged

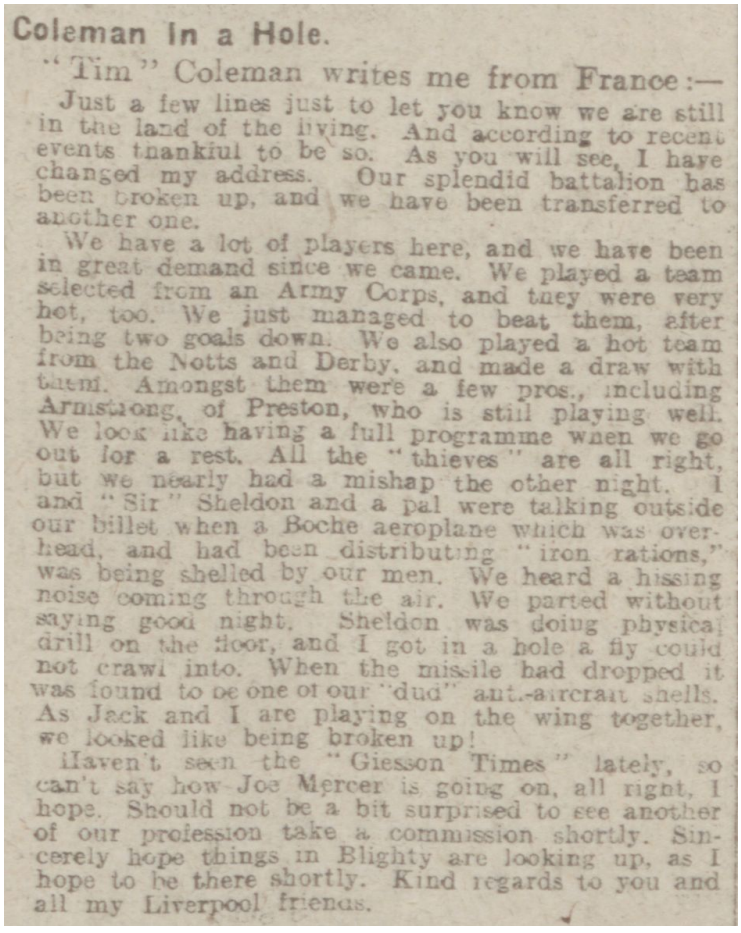
31	Mercer Joseph	"	Middl. 17 B	Arras 28.4.17 Nottingham Giessen	28.6.89 Higler Bebington M.Mercer 5 Upper Mersegg Str-Ellesmereport Cheschire



Meschede PoW Camp, Main Street
Probably taken in the Winter of 1914-1915. It provides a good view of the barracks lining the square and the hills surrounding the camp. German guards observe the activities from a bridge over a gate. There are German officers and a number of civilians, who may be Red Cross or neutral embassy inspectors.

During his time in captivity, Joe's wife Ethel and infant children Joe junior and Betty, moved the short distance to 8 Upper Mersey Street.





Coleman In a Hole.

"Tim" Coleman writes me from France:—

Just a few lines just to let you know we are still in the land of the living. And according to recent events thankful to be so. As you will see, I have changed my address. Our splendid battalion has been broken up, and we have been transferred to another one.

We have a lot of players here, and we have been in great demand since we came. We played a team selected from an Army Corps, and they were very hot, too. We just managed to beat them, after being two goals down. We also played a hot team from the Notts and Derby, and made a draw with them. Amongst them were a few pros., including Armstrong, of Preston, who is still playing well. We look like having a full programme when we go out for a rest. All the "thieves" are all right, but we nearly had a mishap the other night. I and "Sir" Sheldon and a pal were talking outside our billet when a Boche aeroplane which was overhead, and had been distributing "iron rations," was being shelled by our men. We heard a hissing noise coming through the air. We parted without saying good night. Sheldon was doing physical drill on the floor, and I got in a hole a fly could not crawl into. When the missile had dropped it was found to be one of our "dud" anti-aircraft shells. As Jack and I are playing on the wing together, we looked like being broken up!

Haven't seen the "Giesson Times" lately, so can't say how Joe Mercer is going on, all right, I hope. Should not be a bit surprised to see another of our profession take a commission shortly. Sincerely hope things in Blighty are looking up, as I hope to be there shortly. Kind regards to you and all my Liverpool friends.

Upper Mersey Street, located in the centre of the map, lies at the junction of Queen's Street where the Mercers had lived previously. Their later home in Flatt Lane would be built off Princes Road, bottom left. Burnell's lies alongside the railway, while their football ground, where both father and son were scouted, can be seen next to the Ship Canal – today the site of the Boat Museum car park.

…….

***Liverpool Echo,* 19 March 1918**

John 'Tim' Coleman MM (1881-1940) was an England international who made 71 appearances for Everton between 1908 and 1910, scoring 30 goals. He later became a team mate of Joe Mercer at Nottingham Forest, and also signed up in

the Footballer's Battalion. He was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in October 1918. He continued to correspond with *'Bee'*, (journalist of the *Liverpool Echo* football pages), throughout the war.

By the time his letter appeared in the *Echo*, Mercer was already on his way to Meschede. Coleman's reference to the battalion break-up, was in regard to the 1st Football Battalion, 17th Middlesex, being disbanded in February 1918 due to manpower shortages in the British army. The remaining officers and men were transferred to other units.

[An excellent account of the life of Tim Colman by Rob Sawyer, entitled *'Tim Coleman: A Rebel, a Soldier and an Entertainer*,' can found on ToffeeWeb. www.toffeeweb.com/season/21-22/comment/history/41764.html]

Any hopes that the majority of Ellesmere Port soldiers held in captivity would be home by Christmas were soon dashed, and the planned civic reception was put back to 22 January 1919, in the hope that all would have arrived by then.

In fact, such was the operation to get all the PoW's home so huge, that a great many prisoners from all nations spent another Christmas in the camps. Some of their guards had upped and left as soon as the armistice was declared, while in other camps German officials tried to use the prisoners as bargaining chips for their own safe passage. By the end of November, only around ten per cent of British men had made it home, while only half had made it to allied lines by the end of the year. Nevertheless, Joe had survived his injuries, and although he was not officially discharged until 14 April 1919, he was home (either permanently or on leave) by early January. He also took the opportunity to speak in more detail about his experiences to the Ellesmere Port local press on 4 January 1919,

Prominent Footballer's Experiences

Ellesmere Port people are always interested in the career of Sergeant Joseph Mercer, the Nottingham Forest half-back, who at one time played for Burnell's Ironworks. He is now one of Ellesmere Port's repatriated prisoners of war, and thanks to his fine physique he has come through the ordeal well. He enlisted in the Footballer's Battalion on 16 December 1914, and we may say at the outset, that he considers this battalion one of the finest for good comradeship that ever crossed to France.

He went over to France on 17 October 1915 [the medal card states it was 17 November] and after 20 months fighting in the line, was taken prisoner on 28 April 1917. The battalion was in some heavy fighting including Delville Wood, where they lost 300 men in 1½ hours. Sergeant Mercer was wounded in the head by shrapnel in August 1916. He was taken prisoner near Arras. His company went right through a village, but the right and left were held up and he heard afterwards that only two of the company got back. He was hit in the leg, and shot in the shoulder by a bullet. He lay in a shell hole for several hours and was under a British barrage for two hours being very thankful when it finished. Sergeant Mercer tried to get back to British lines, but ran into a German machine gun party, which settled matters.

He was taken to Douai in a motor ambulance, and then to Langensalza, a three days' journey by train. The food was such that no wounded man could tackle it at all. He was pleased to see Britishers helping in the hospital and later got in touch with Jim McCormick, Plymouth Argyle's right half-back who was a great help. The food at Langensalza was terrible, and often included raw fish and black bread and coffee twice a day. Only the Russians could eat it, and they were from behind the line, almost at

starvation point. Sergeant Mercer states it reminded him more than anything of Woodward's sea lions.
He afterwards was sent to Giessen, and here the other prisoners shared their parcels until those for the newcomers arrived from home. At this camp five-a-side football contests were arranged. The prisoners subscribed half a mark each towards the prizes, and the sides were picked in fives as the names came out of a bag. They had to buy wood from the Germans to make goalposts, and nets were made from string taken from parcels received from England. An amusing feature of the contests was that the Germans would not allow the referee to use his whistle because it excited the guard. He had to use a little bell and even at times a mouth organ. To enable the British to have their usual 'flutter', a book was made on the matches. The prizes for the contests were all given in cash.

The commandant at Giessen was usually very fair and held the British up as a pattern to other nationalities in the camp for their cleanliness, not that he loved the British any more for it. The commandant at Meschede once met a prisoner coming from the stores carrying two tins of food. The man was too loaded to salute – the commandant led him to a drain and made him pour the contents of the tins down the drain. Later, he had to do fourteen days 'strafe'.

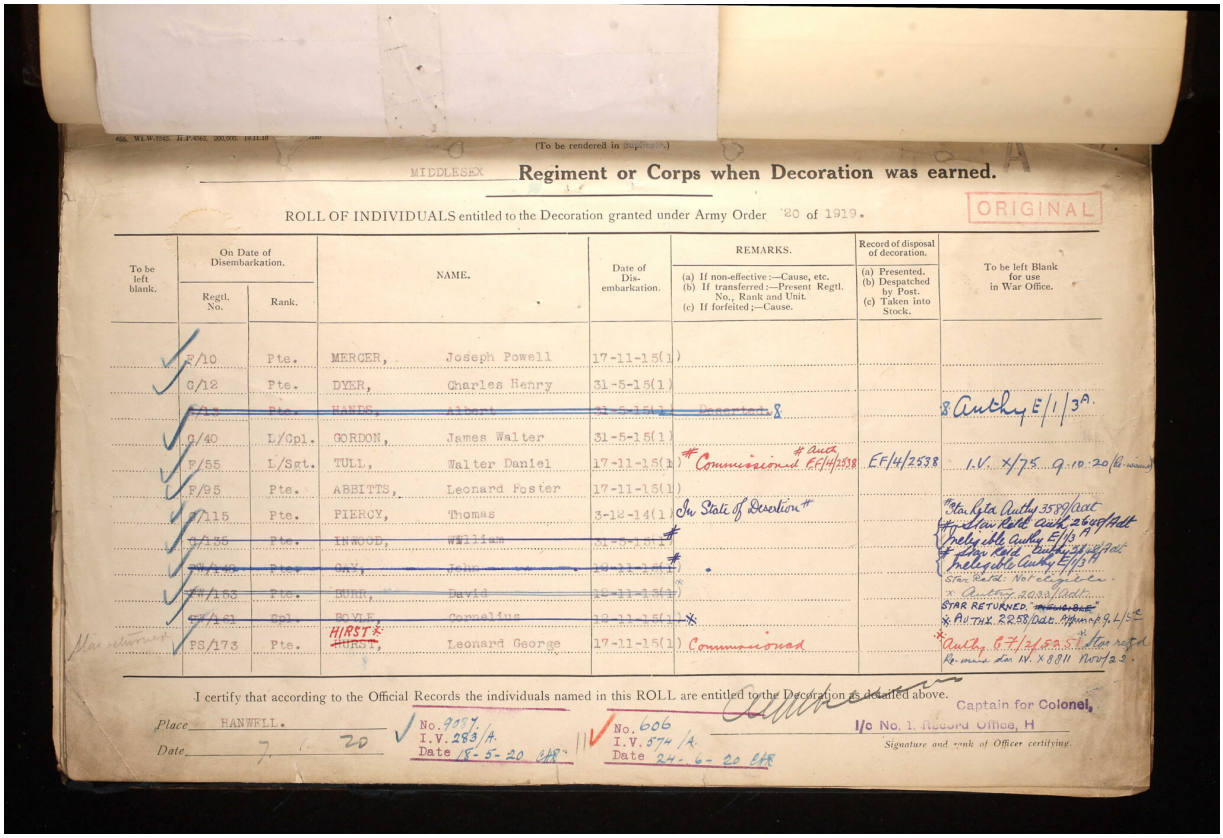
Sergeant Mercer left Giessen for Meschede on 17 March 1918, and his new camp was known to be one of the worst in Germany. The prisoners were non-commissioned officers, men who were no good to the Germans for work, which meant a great deal. The distributions methods were such that they stood very little chance of getting their parcels. One portion of the camp was set aside to receive men of all nationalities who had been working behind the lines. Those who lived through this ordeal were in a terrible state, but quite 25 per cent died, and as many as five Britishers were carried from the train dead on arrival at the camp. No one had been allowed to take them any food, the prevention of disease being the excuse made by the Germans, and special guards were provided carrying switches of barbed wire with which they used to strike at any prisoners trying to take food over the fence. One day, one or two N.C.O.s were allowed in to take in the names of newly arrived prisoners. A man brought in a bath of so-called soup, and the starving prisoners absolutely mobbed him. There was such a rush that as soon as one man got a bowl full it was upset in the crush and all the soup was wasted.

Efforts were made to start a British Help Committee at this camp, and despite all German efforts to stop it, it was eventually carried through, mainly by the efforts of Petty Officer Brooks of the R.N.A.S., a neutral named Rogeburg of the North American Y.M.C.A., and Sergeant Mercer. It took about four months to get going, but was of great benefit afterwards, bulk supplies of parcels being obtained, which kept the men going until the parcels came from home. The camp accommodation was ten thousand and when the Armistice was signed this number had increased to 22,000 by men coming into the camp from working parties. Men were walking about all night and things were very bad.

The camp authorities asked the prisoners to appoint delegates to visit Army Headquarters, but the British refused to do this, saying it was against their discipline. The German idea was to get the Armistice terms moderated. En route to the frontier, it was pitiful to see the German women and children without food and the prisoners gave a good deal away, even of the little they had. While at Meschede, the Germans pillaged the prisoners' supply of medicine, in fact, the Help Committee wrote home to ask the Depot at Hove not to send further supplies. A tunnel was made at Meschede with a view to escape, but it was discovered by the Germans, and the prisoners from the whole barrack, about 250, had to do 21 days "dark cells" in batches of thirty.

Sergeant Mercer was not ill-treated himself, and says that the Germans never tackled anyone strong – it was always the poor chaps from behind the lines who had no strength. He adds that it was fine the way the Britishers stuck together under all circumstances, and if a man is a prisoner of war it soon brings out the bad or good in him.
Except for the stiffness in his arm, Sergeant Mercer is sound in wind and limb, and soon hopes to be able to take up football in real earnest'.

***Chester Observer,* 4 January 1919**



(To be rendered in duplicate.)

MIDDLESEX Regiment or Corps when Decoration was earned.

ROLL OF INDIVIDUALS entitled to the Decoration granted under Army Order 20 of 1919.

ORIGINAL

To be left blank.	On Date of Disembarkation. Regtl. No.	Rank.	NAME.		Date of Dis-embarkation.	REMARKS. (a) If non-effective:—Cause, etc. (b) If transferred:—Present Regtl. No., Rank and Unit. (c) If forfeited;—Cause.	Record of disposal of decoration. (a) Presented. (b) Despatched by Post. (c) Taken into Stock.	To be left Blank for use in War Office.
	F/10	Pte.	MERCER,	Joseph Powell	17-11-15(1)			
	G/12	Pte.	DYER,	Charles Henry	31-5-15(1)			
	~~F/12~~	~~Pte.~~	~~HANES,~~	~~Albert~~	~~31-5-15(1)~~	~~Deserted~~ 8		8 Authy E/1/3A.
	G/40	L/Cpl.	GORDON,	James Walter	31-5-15(1)			
	F/55	L/Sgt.	TULL,	Walter Daniel	17-11-15(1)	# Commissioned # Auth. EF/4/2538	EF/4/2538	I.V. X/75 9.10.20 (6 issued)
	F/95	Pte.	ABBITTS,	Leonard Foster	17-11-15(1)			
	~~F/115~~	~~Pte.~~	PIERCY,	Thomas	3-12-14(1)	In State of Desertion #		*Star Rtd Authy 3589/Add # Star Rtd Authy 2640/Add Inelig ible Authy E/1/3A # Inelig ible Authy 22/Add Inelig ible Authy E/1/5A Star Rtd. Not eligible.
	~~G/135~~	~~Pte.~~	~~INWOOD,~~	~~William~~	~~31-5-15(1)~~	#		
	~~F/148~~	~~Pte.~~	~~GAY,~~	~~John~~	~~19-11-15(1)~~	#		
	~~F/153~~	~~Pte.~~	~~BURR,~~	~~David~~	~~15-11-15(1)~~	*		x Authy 2033/Add. STAR RETURNED. ~~WAR DEC~~ * AUTHY. 2258/Date. 8/Jun/19 L/Cpl
	~~G/161~~	~~Cpl.~~	~~BOYLE,~~	~~Cornelius~~	~~12-11-15(1)~~	*		
Star returned	FS/173	Pte.	~~HURST,~~ HIRST *	Leonard George	17-11-15(1)	Commissioned		* Authy 67/2/5257 Star rec'd Re-issue Star IV. X 8911 Nov/23.

I certify that according to the Official Records the individuals named in this ROLL are entitled to the Decoration as detailed above.

Place HANWELL.

Date 7. 6. 20

No. 9957. I.V. 283/A. Date 18-5-20 EAR

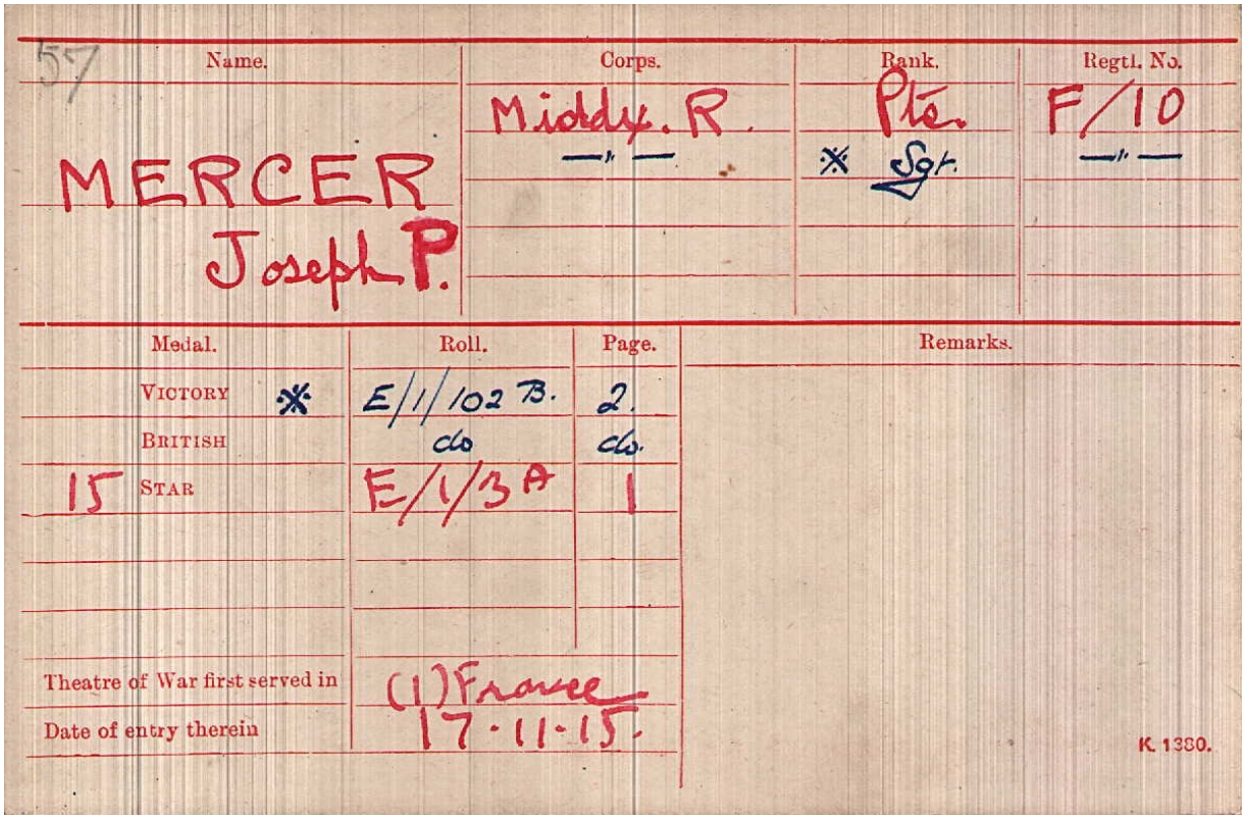
No. 606 I.V. 574/A. Date 24-6-20 EAR

Captain for Colonel,

I/c No. 1. Record Office, H

Signature and rank of Officer certifying.

The Middlesex Regiment medal rolls, recording (Private – before promotion) Joseph Powell Mercer



57

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
MERCER Joseph P.	Middx. R.	Pte.	F/10
	—"—	* Sgt.	—"—

Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY *	E/1/102 B.	2.	
BRITISH	do	do.	
15 STAR	E/1/3A	1	
Theatre of War first served in	(1) France		
Date of entry therein	17.11.15.		

K 1330.

Medal Card for Sergeant J.P. Mercer
Confirmation that he was to be issued with the service medals pictured below.

WW1 Service Medals

According to the Medal Card for Sergeant J.P. Mercer, he was awarded *(left to right)* the 1915 Star, the British Medal and the Victory Medal

The Footballers' Battalion Memorial

Unveiled in Longueval, France on 21 October 2010.

The memorial honours the soldiers who fought in the 17th and 23rd (Service) Battalions of the Middlesex Regiment during World War I.

TRANSFERRED TO—

REGION.

NEW REGIONAL No.

OTHER ACTION.

Form No. S.B 36.

Surname (in block letters) MERCER

Christian Names Joseph Powell

Regional No. 3/M M/ Nº 3484

Unit and Regiment or Corps M/Dx.

Regtl. No. F/9 Sgt. Rank

Date of Discharge 14.4.19

Year of Birth 1890

Marital Status S. = Single, W. = Widower, M. = Married: M

Address 9 Upper Mersey St. Ellesmere Port

Date of commencement of Pension 15.4.19

Disabilities:—

1. Bullet Wound L. Shoulder 3.

2. 4.

State whether attributable to or aggravated by Service or non-attributable:—

1. Due to 30%

2. 3. 4.

Particulars of Awards for previous Service (if any)

POST-AWARD CORRESPONDENCE.

Date of Letter	ACTION TAKEN. NOTE:—In this column are to be entered particulars of action taken before a definite reply can be given, e.g., date of acknowledgment, date of reference to Local Committee or to Records, and date of their reply.	Date of final Disposal	REMARKS
	OK 28 JUL 1925		

Wt 17685/2787 3570 bks 8/19 J. H. & S. E5332 CS7612 SB36

P.T.O.

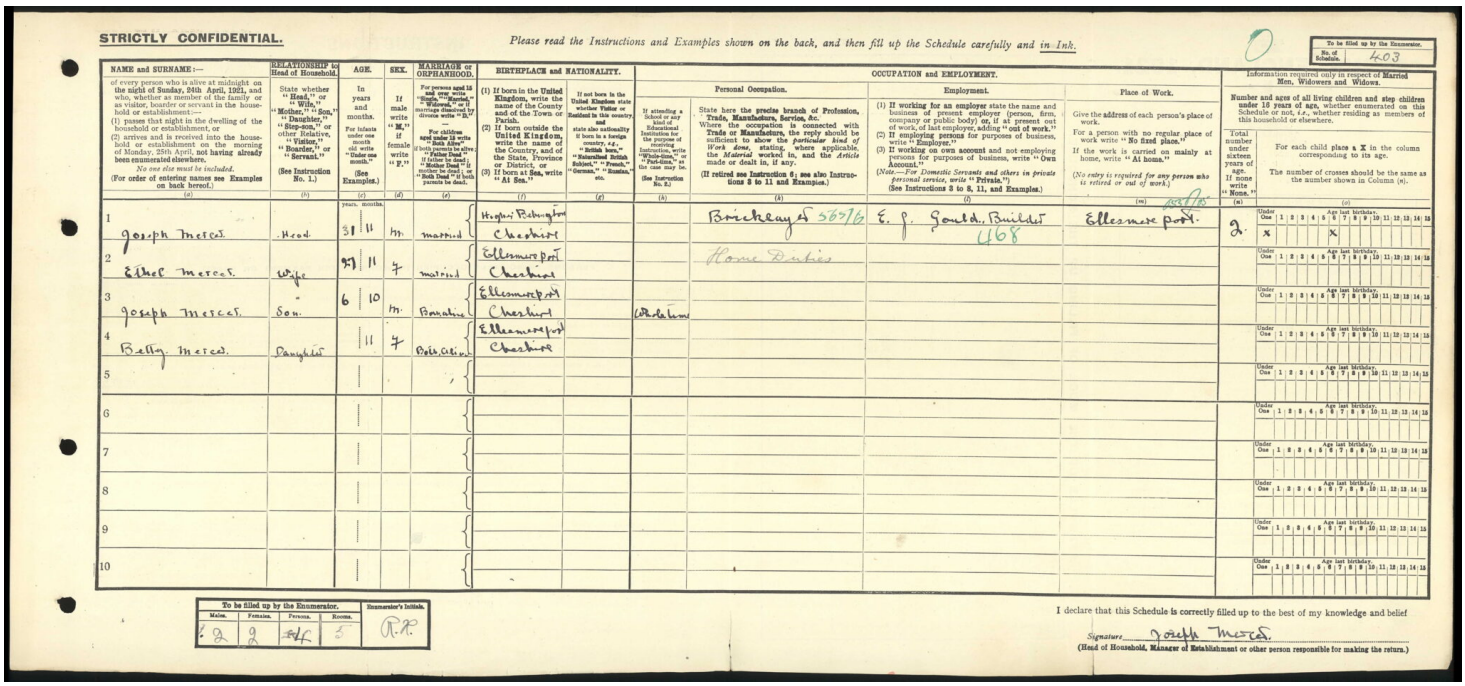
Disability War Pension

From the day Sergeant Mercer was officially discharged, he was awarded a disability war pension due to the injuries he had suffered, but in particular, the bullet wound to his shoulder, which continued to give him problems for the rest of his life.

AWARDS OF PENSION, GRATUITY OR WEEKLY ALLOWANCE.

Date of Award or other Action	Degree of Disablement	Nature of Award: Art. under which granted (and Warrant if necessary)	Whether Pension, Gratuity or Weekly Allowance	Whether Permanent, Conditional or Final	Weekly Rate: Man	Wife	Child	No. of Children under 16	Period of Award: From	To	REMARKS: Note—This column is to be used for explanatory remarks where necessary, e.g., that an award is made or revised under Article 9, or as the result of an appeal to the Tribunal, or for increase of Pension
5.5.20.	30%.	art. 11(1).	P	C.	18/8	9/-	4	1.	14/4/20	12/4/21.	
						3/-	–	–	3/9/19	13/4/20.	

The payment was gradually reduced, possibly once the authorities became aware of him returning to building work, and professional football



STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

Please read the Instructions and Examples shown on the back, and then fill up the Schedule carefully and in Ink.

To be filled up by the Enumerator. No. of Schedule. 403

NAME and SURNAME:— of every person who is alive at midnight on the night of Sunday, 24th April, 1921, and who, whether as member of the family or as visitor, boarder or servant in the household or establishment:— (1) passes that night in the dwelling of the household or establishment, or (2) arrives and is received into the household or establishment on the morning of Monday, 25th April, not having already been enumerated elsewhere. *No one else must be included.* (For order of entering names see Examples on back hereof.) (a)	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Household. State whether "Head," or "Wife," "Mother," "Son," "Daughter," "Step-son," or other Relative, "Visitor," "Boarder," or "Servant." (See Instruction No. 1.) (b)	AGE. In years and months. For infants under one month "Under one month." (See Examples.) (c)	SEX. If male write "M." If female write "F." (d)	MARRIAGE or ORPHANHOOD. For persons aged 15 and over write "Single," "Married," "Widowed," or if marriage annulled or divorced, write "D." For children aged 15 and under write "Both Alive" if both parents in alive, "Father Dead" if father is dead, "Mother Dead" if mother is dead, or "Both Dead" if both parents is dead. (e)	BIRTHPLACE and NATIONALITY. (1) If born in the United Kingdom, write the name of the County and of the Town or Parish. (2) If born outside the United Kingdom, write the name of the Country, and of the State, Province or District, or (3) If born at Sea, write "At Sea." (f)	If not born in the United Kingdom state whether Visitor or Resident in this country, and state also nationality if born in a foreign country, e.g., "British born," "Naturalized British Subject," "French," "German," "Russian," etc. (g)	OCCUPATION and EMPLOYMENT. Personal Occupation. If attending a School or any kind of Educational Institution for the purpose of Full-time Instruction, write "Whole-time," or "Part-time," as the case may be. (See Instruction No. 5.) (h)	Personal Occupation. State here the precise branch of Profession, Trade, Manufacture, Service, &c. Where the occupation is connected with Trade or Manufacture, the reply should be sufficient to show the *particular kind of Work done*, stating, where applicable, the *Material* worked in, and the *Article* made or dealt in, if any. (If retired see Instruction 6; see also Instructions 3 to 11 and Examples.) (i)	Employment. (1) If working for an employer state the name and business of present employer (person, firm, company or public body) or, if at present out of work, of last employer, adding "out of work." (2) If employing persons for purposes of business, write "Employer." (3) If working on own account and not employing persons for purpose of business, write "Own Account." (Note.—*For Domestic Servants and others in private personal service, write "Private."*) (See Instructions 3 to 8, 11, and Examples.) (j)	Place of Work. Give the address of each person's place of work. For a person with no regular place of work write "No fixed place." If the work is carried on mainly at home, write "At home." (*No entry is required for any person who is retired or out of work.*) (m)	Information required only in respect of Married Men, Widowers and Widows. Number and ages of all living children and step children under 15 years of age, whether enumerated on this Schedule or not, *i.e.*, whether residing as members of this household or elsewhere. Total number under sixteen years of age. If none write "None." For each child place a X in the column corresponding to its age. The number of crosses should be the same as the number shown in Column (c). (n) (o)
1 Joseph Mercer	Head	31 years 11 months	M.	Married	Hoylake Birkenhead Cheshire			Bricklayer	E. J. Gould, Builder 468	Ellesmere port.	2.	Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday: X X
2 Ethel Mercer	Wife	27 11	F	Married	Ellesmere Port Cheshire			Home Duties				Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday:
3 Joseph Mercer	Son	6 10	M.	Born at	Ellesmere Port Cheshire		Whole-time					Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday:
4 Betty Mercer	Daughter	11	F	Born at	Ellesmere port Cheshire							Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday:
5												Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday:
6												Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday:
7												Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday:
8												Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday:
9												Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday:
10												Under One 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 Age last birthday:

To be filled up by the Enumerator. Males.	Females.	Persons.	Rooms.	Enumerator's Initials.
2	2	4	5	A.P.

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

Signature Joseph Mercer.

(Head of Household, Manager of Establishment or other person responsible for making the return.)

1921 Census

Joe Mercer and family are recorded living in 1 Flatt Lane in Ellesmere Port. Joe has returned to his pre-war occupation as a bricklayer, working for local builder E.J. Gould, while playing football for Tranmere Rovers

Tranmere Rovers 1921-22 squad

Joseph Mercer is fifth from the right, back row

After the war, Mercer attempted to resume his career with Nottingham Forest, but after five years away he knew he would have to drop to a lower league, and he returned to his Wirral home to sign for Tranmere Rovers in 1920, in time for the start of the 1920/21 season. During that period, the Tranmere first team were playing in the Central League, and Joe was appointed club captain. However, his injury wracked body was to suffer yet again, when in the first Central League game of the season against Aston Villa, he had to be taken from the pitch to hospital by ambulance after fracturing his jaw.

Joe Mercer
(Tranmere Rovers 1921/22)

The next season – 1921/22 – was the first season of league football played by Tranmere Rovers. They now competed in the newly instituted Football League Division North (known as the Third Division (North)), winning their first fixture against Crewe Alexandra 4-1 at Prenton Park on 27 August 1921. Joe made 18 appearances in total, scoring once in a 4-0 defeat of Lincoln on 25 February 1922.

Sadly, the injuries to his body were taking their toll, and prevented him continuing further, and he was forced to retire from the game. By 1927, he was hospitalised and in decline. By April, he was in a sanatorium and given just weeks to live. Considering he had taken a bullet to the shoulder, shrapnel in the head, wounds to the leg, then resumed a physically demanding career, it is a shock to find that his premature death aged just 37 in May 1927 was caused by the long-term effects from a gas attack in the trenches ten years earlier. To have coped with such handicaps in his post-war career is remarkable. Something to consider next time the latest overpaid prima donna dives like a swan and rolls over half a dozen times, after a passing defender just happened to cause a heavy draft of air turbulence. When Mercer went down, he really had been shot.

He was far from forgotten on Merseyside, and news of his passing was featured on the front page of several newspapers, including the *Liverpool Evening News* on 23 May 1927 *(left)*. Joe was interred in the Ellesmere Port Overpool Cemetery, while his wife Ethel and four young children mourned his passing.

JOE MERCER DEAD.

Former Ellesmere Port and Tranmere Footballer.

Evening Express Correspondent.

Ellesmere Port, Monday.

Joe Mercer, until recently a prominent professional footballer, has died at his home at Ellesmere Port.

He was a native of Higher Bebington, and played for his village before going to Chester Castle and then to Burnells, the latter now Ellesmere Port Town Club.

Here he caught the eye of a Nottingham Forest official, and played centre-half for the famous Midland club for five seasons, during one of which he was captain. He enlisted for the war, and his death is attributed to the privations that he went through as a prisoner.

He was only 37. He ended his career with Tranmere Rovers about three or four seasons ago, and his two brothers, Sam and Harry, have both until recently been prominent football players in West Cheshire circles.

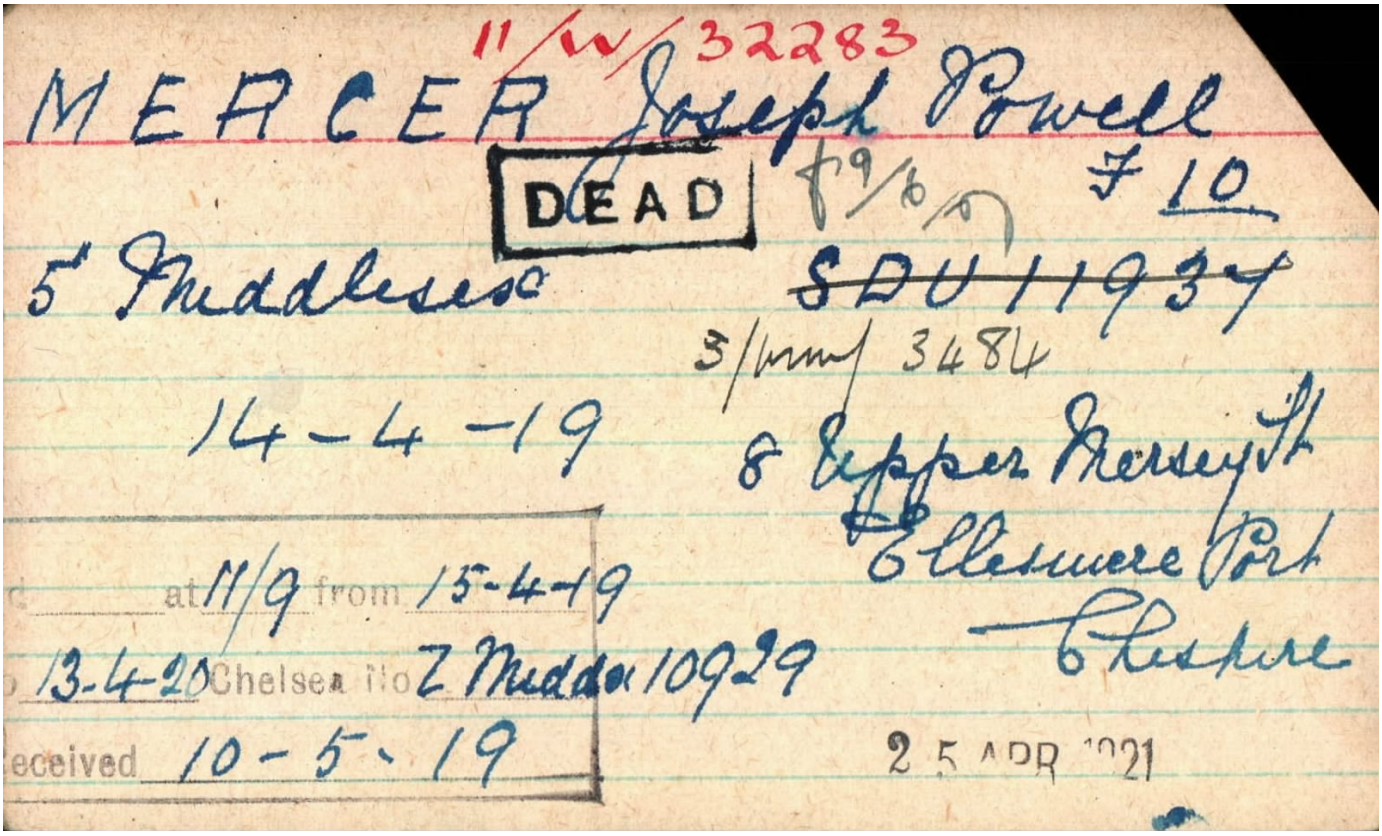
***Liverpool Evening News*, 23 May 1927**

LOCAL DEATH

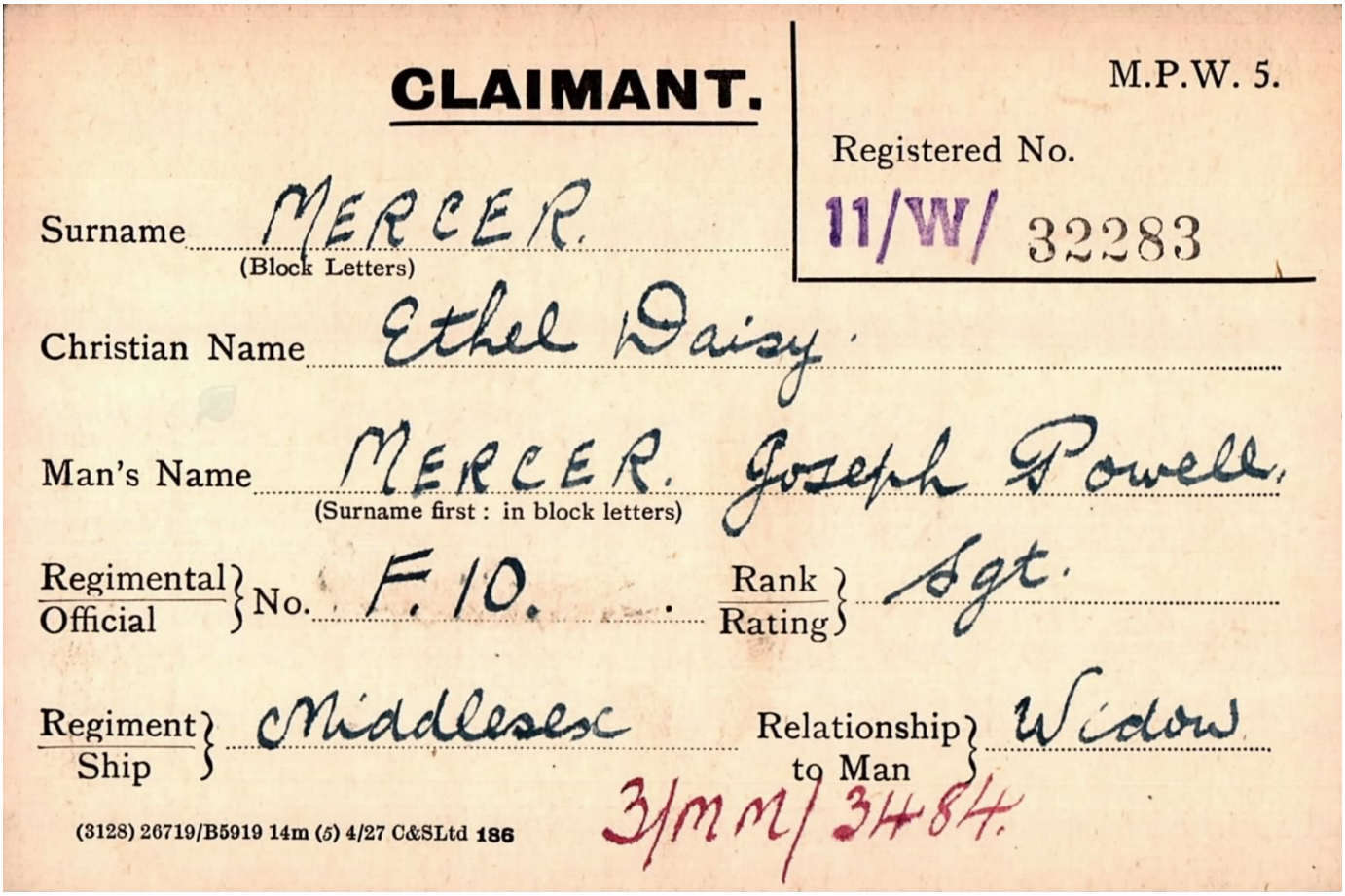
Mr. "Joe" Mercer.

The death took place in the early hours of Saturday morning of Mr. Joe Mercer, of Stanley Road, at the early age of 35 years. Mr. Mercer's death was not altogether unexpected as he returned from a sanitorium incurable two weeks previous to his death. Joe's malady was a legacy left to him from the great war. As he experienced great suffering, not only in the line, but as a prisoner of war in Germany. A native of Bebington, Joe first came to Ellesmere Port when he was playing for Chester Castle, and his outstanding abilities as a centre half-back attracted the attention of Burnells, and soon Joe was playing in the Port. Joe and Sam Chedzoy played together in the old Burnell's team, and we have an idea that Joe was the attraction that brought the touts from the big clubs to Ellesmere Port to watch the boys play. Ultimately Joe was snapped up by Nots Farest, with whom he played excellent football until the outbreak of war, when in common with thousands of other footballers he joined the footballers' battalion, then a popular feature of recruitment at the time, and soon being drafted to France where he suffered the hardships of a front line soldier, being severely wounded and made prisoner of war, in Germany where he was incarcerated for over two years before the Armistice brought him release. On his return to civil life, Joe threw in his lot with Tranmere Rovers for whom he did good service, first in the Lancashire Combination, then in the Central League, then in the Third Division, and finally with the Cheshire County side, and it has been said that it was through the agency of Joe's inspiration and judicious leadership that won his side (Tranmere Rovers) sucn speedy promotion. Mr. Mercer leaves behind him a wife and four small children to mourn his loss. The funeral which took place on Tuesday, at Overpool Cemetery, was followed by a large number of mourners and the general pubic, and the large number of wreaths and floral tributes received testified to the respect that the deceased was held, not only in Ellesmere Port, but also in his native town of Bebington.

Ellesmere Port Pioneer, 27 May 1927


11/W/32283
MERCER Joseph Powell
DEAD
F 10
5 Middlesex
~~SDU 11937~~
3/mm/3484
14-4-19
8 Upper Mersey St
Ellesmere Port
Cheshire
at 11/9 from 15-4-19
13-4-20 Chelsea No Z Middx 10929
Received 10-5-19
25 APR 1921

Sergeant Joseph Powell Mercer – War Pension Card


CLAIMANT.

M.P.W. 5.

Registered No. 11/W/ 32283

Surname MERCER. (Block Letters)

Christian Name Ethel Daisy.

Man's Name MERCER. Joseph Powell. (Surname first : in block letters)

Regimental/Official No. F. 10.

Rank/Rating Sgt.

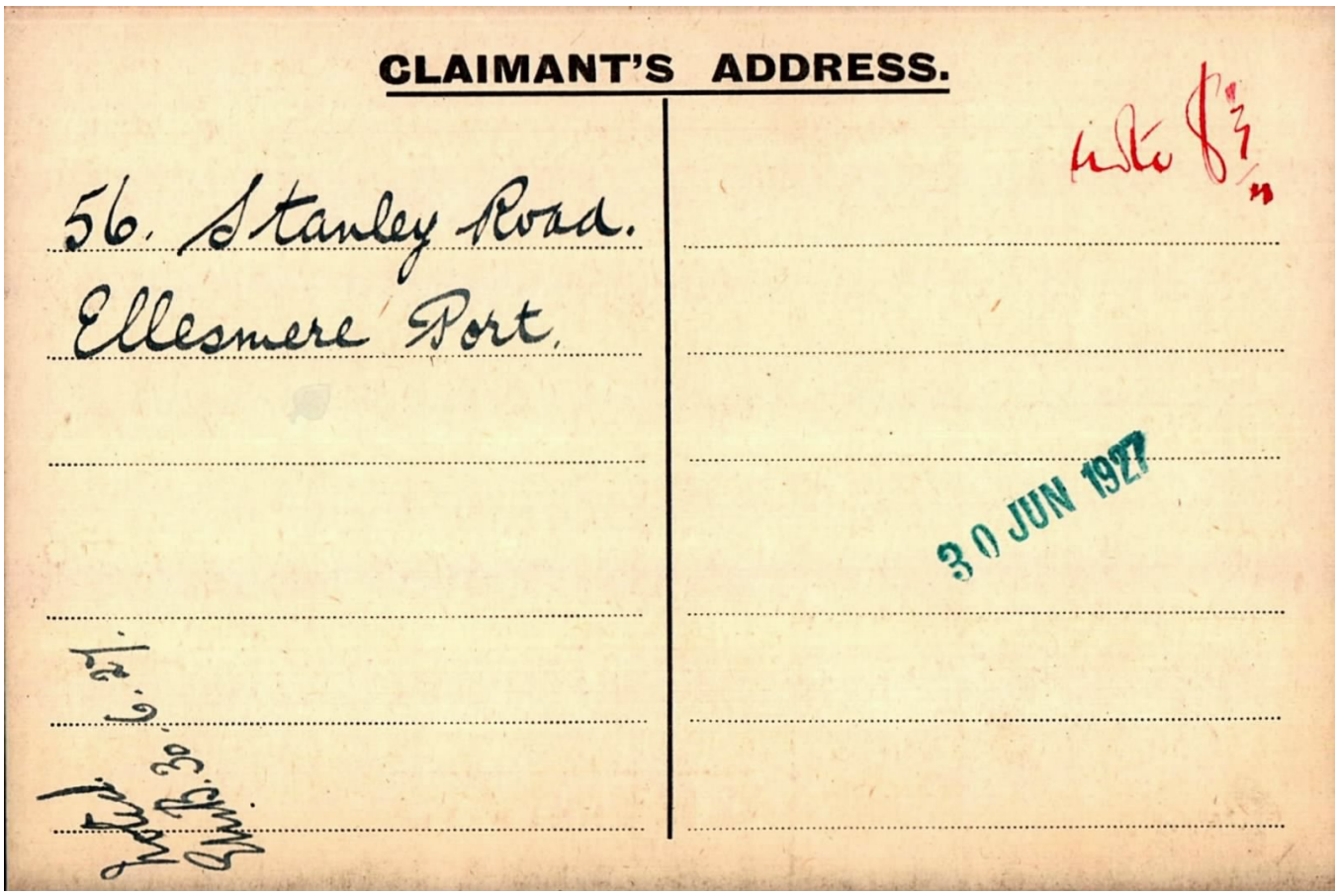
Regiment/Ship Middlesex

Relationship to Man Widow

3/mm/3484.

(3128) 26719/B5919 14m (5) 4/27 C&SLtd 186

On the death of Joseph, Ethel was entitled to claim a widow's war pension


CLAIMANT'S ADDRESS.

56. Stanley Road.
Ellesmere Port.

30 JUN 1927

At the time of Joe's passing, the family had relocated once more, to 56 Stanley Road, Ellesmere Port. In the 1930s, Ethel moved away from the town with her younger teenage children to 1284 New Chester Road, to be closer to her former home in Bebington.

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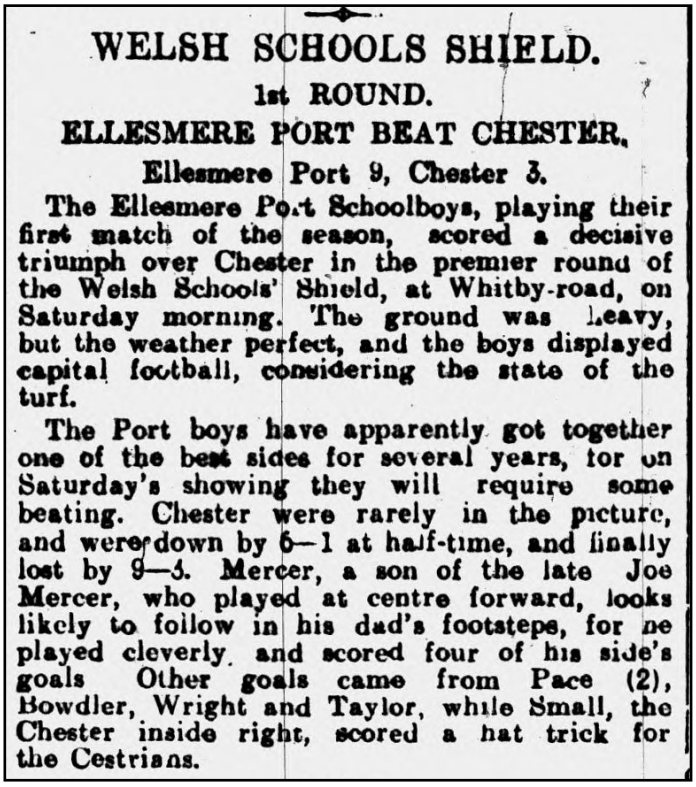
Joseph Mercer OBE (9 August 1914 – 9 August 1990)

Joseph Mercer junior was only twelve when his father died. He regularly watched his father play for Tranmere, although by then he was well past his best. By thirteen, young Joe had already started to shine, originally playing as a striker like his father.


WELSH SCHOOLS SHIELD.

1st ROUND.

ELLESMERE PORT BEAT CHESTER.

Ellesmere Port 9, Chester 3.

The Ellesmere Port Schoolboys, playing their first match of the season, scored a decisive triumph over Chester in the premier round of the Welsh Schools' Shield, at Whitby-road, on Saturday morning. The ground was heavy, but the weather perfect, and the boys displayed capital football, considering the state of the turf.

The Port boys have apparently got together one of the best sides for several years, for on Saturday's showing they will require some beating. Chester were rarely in the picture, and were down by 6—1 at half-time, and finally lost by 9—3. Mercer, a son of the late Joe Mercer, who played at centre forward, looks likely to follow in his dad's footsteps, for he played cleverly and scored four of his side's goals Other goals came from Pace (2), Bowdler, Wright and Taylor, while Small, the Chester inside right, scored a hat trick for the Cestrians.

The promise of what was to come
***Chester Chronicle,* 3 December 1927**

Joe Mercer, of the Ellesmere Port Schoolboys team, has been selected to lead the Cheshire Schoolboys' attack against the Lancashire Schoolboys at Blackpool F.C. ground on Easter Monday. He is the son of the late Joe Mercer, formerly of Notts Forest and Tranmere Rovers.

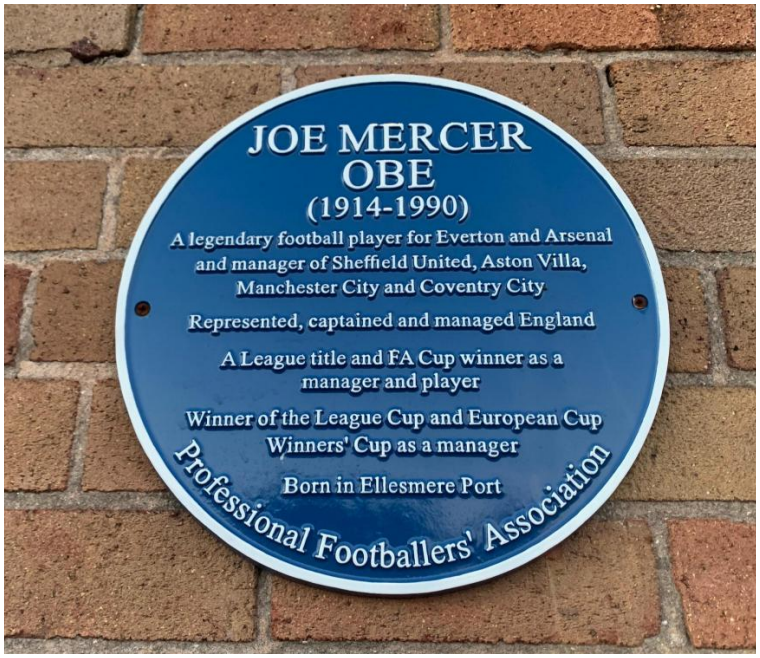
By 1928, still only thirteen, he was selected for his county.
***Staffordshire Sentinel,* 7 April 1928**

It wasn't long before Burnell's (Ellesmere Port Town) came knocking once more on the door of the Mercer household, and, following in his father's footsteps, Joe signed up.

Word soon reached the scouts at Everton, and in 1932, at the age of eighteen, he signed for the Blues, where he spent fifteen years, winning a championship medal and captained the side, before having his own career interrupted by war like his father.

After serving in the war as a PT instructor at Aldershot, Joe moved to Arsenal where he spent nine years captaining them to two FA Cup finals, and two league championships. He played twenty-seven times for England, and also captained his country. After a serious leg injury finished his playing days, he had a successful career in management, culminating in a caretaker manager role of England in the 1970s. After suffering from Alzheimer's in his latter years, Joe passed away peacefully at home on his seventy-sixth birthday in 1990.

On 18 November 2021, a civic tribute took place in Ellesmere Port, when Joe Mercer junior was remembered by his home town with a reception and the unveiling of a blue plaque. Family members, plus former players from the clubs he was associated with were also present, including Mike Summerbee, Peter Reid, Graeme Sharp, and Graham Taylor of the PFA.



'Supporters from across the football spectrum, including members of Everton FC Heritage Society, came together in Ellesmere Port last Thursday, 18 November, to celebrate the life of Joe Mercer — one of the town's greatest sons. A plaque commissioned by football historian Mark Metcalf, with the support of the PFA, was unveiled at the Civic Hall.'
by Rob Sawyer – see ToffeeWeb article here;
www.toffeeweb.com/season/21-22/comment/history/41465.html

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Newspapers;

Various newspapers, including;
Chester/Cheshire Observer
Chester Chronicle
Ellesmere Port Pioneer
Birkenhead News
Liverpool Echo
Athletic News
Nottingham Evening Post

By Mike Royden

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Mike Royden, with former EFCHS member **Peter Jones,** has compiled the '*Fallen of Everton Football Club*' booklet, and has produced films on Remembrance at Everton FC. More details and a free copy of the booklet here; **efcheritagesociety.com/rest-in-peace/the-fallen-of-wwi-and-wwii/**

He is also working on a current project with **Lewis Royden, Tony Wainwright** and **Peter Jones**, to film short biographies of the Fallen of Everton FC. The first to be completed is about Private Don Sloan and can be found at **efcheritagesociety.com/the-fallen-of-everton-private-don-sloan/**

EST 2008
EFC HERITAGE SOCIETY

A lovely response from The Forest Preservation Society @ForestPresSoc on Twitter.

Much appreciated!

The Forest Preservation Society @F... · 1d

A really fascinating piece, thanks Mike.

In 2019 we at Forest paid tribute to Joe Mercer and others who fought in the world wars on a special Armistice Day fan display in the Trent End. Joe is furthest on the left.

So it was great to hear about his wider story in your article.