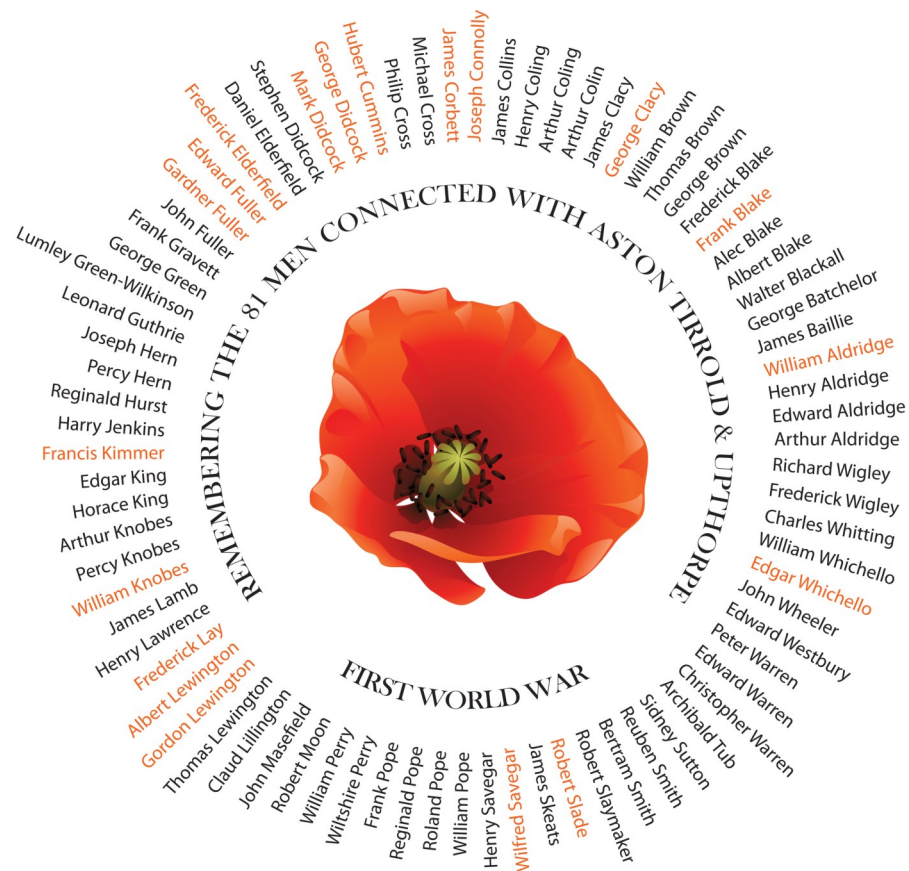


WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

Remembering the Astons during the First World War



“WEE JOE”

From Galloway to Flanders Fields



JOSEPH CONNELLY

16th January 1900 to 13th September 1918

Astons History Group

This booklet is one of a series of publications resulting from the Astons' *We Will Remember Them* project:

- ◇ Wee Joe: From Galloway to Flanders Fields
- ◇ Astons fallen soldiers
- ◇ The Home Front: the role of women during WW1.
- ◇ "We will remember them" : extracts from the exhibition . (Jan.2019).

See also: <https://www.theastons.net/history/the-astons-at-war>

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Contact: astonshistory94@gmail.com



Above: Joe far right, with possibly his younger brother James (sitting) and another unknown male, circa 1916/1918.

Front cover: Joe with his Jack Russell dog – probably taken around 1916/1917.



Esquelbecq Chateaux today



Esquelbecq Cemetery's dedication, as "the free gift of the French people for the perpetual resting place for those of the Allied armies who fell in the war of 1914-1918".

Appendix 3: Esquelbecq Cemetery.



This is not Esquelbecq, but during and immediately after the war this is how most graveyards would have looked. Wooden crosses were later replaced with stone. *Below:* Esquelbecq Cemetery today.



Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe are spring line villages on the northern edge of the Berkshire Downs (now part of the North Wessex Downs) – five miles to the south-west of Wallingford and five miles to the south-east of Didcot. In 1914 they were in the county of Berkshire but now lie within Oxfordshire.

In 2014 the Astons became part of the English National Heritage nationwide project to commemorate the centenary of the beginning of the First World War: “We will remember them”.

With an ambitious programme of research and with the involvement of many current and past residents of the villages, the project culminated in a fascinating weekend long exhibition.

In 2018 a second exhibition was held to commemorate the ending of the war bringing together the initial research and much new information that had emerged since the first exhibition.

Joe Connelly was one of the 16 Astons casualties from those four years of war, and this booklet is based on research carried out for the initial 2014 exhibition, and subsequent conversations with Joe’s family.



An OS map from 1914 showing the Astons as they were at the time of the First World War.



Note the open spaces reflecting the agricultural use of many paddocks and fields within the village.

1.

2/4th THE QUEEN'S REGT.

1918

Appendix

September

Narrative of Operations attached.

Strength

During the past month the strength of the Battalion has been increased by 6 officers - 103 O.R. and decreased by 5 officers - 268 O.R.

Casualties

The unmentioned casualties have been sustained by this Battalion during September.

Killed: Captain. E.A. ROE M.C.
East Surrey Regt attd.
2/4 Queen's
2/Lieut H.G. SWEET. 2/4th
Queens. & 14 O.R.

D.of W. 1 O.R.

Wounded: Lt.V.R. GALBRAITH. 2/4
Queen's. 2/Lt C.U.V. JENNINGS 2/4
Queen's. 2/Lt J.L. ROGER.
2/4 Queens. 2/Lt.D.C. BRAHAM
2/4 Queens. & 83 O.R.

Health

The health of the Bn has been fair, average sickness 6%
Prevalent complaints, diarrhoea
and colds.

Weather

Changeable, principally cold and wet with fine spells towards the end of the month.

October 7th. 1918

Major
Cmdg. 2/4 Queen's.

2/4th The Queen's Regt.

Confidential

September 1918

7th - 13th September 1918'

Sept.4.1918.	and 2 in support about N.27.c. The same line was held during the 4th and in the evening Bn.H.Q. moved forward to N.26.b.3.1.
Sept.5.1918.	On the night of September 5th/6th The Brigade relieved troops of the 102 Bde. in the line. This Battalion remained in reserve in the KEMMEL system.
Sept 6th 1918.	This line was held without incident during the 6th and 7th.
Sept.7th.1918.	The enemy shelled the line and Bn H.Q. regularly during this period. On the night of Sept.7/8th the Battalion readjusted its position in the KEMMEL system holding from PARRET FM. (N.16.b) to LINDENHOCK Cross roads (N.27 control) with 4 companies in the line.
Sept.8th.1918.	This line was held during the 8th,9th,
Sept.9th.1918.	and 10th. The usual enemy shelling was experienced, but no action developed. On the night of September 10th/11th the Battalion relieved the 4th R.Sussex Regt in the right sector of the Divisional area. 3 companies were in the line between BEAVER HAT (N.23.c) and N.35.b.3.9., and 1 company in support about N.29.c. Bn.H.Q. were at ROBERT ST. dugouts in N.29.c.
Sept.10th 1918.	The Battalion held this line during the 11th, 12th, and 13th without incident. The weather was continuously wet rendering work difficult, and visibility poor. However, the trenches were improved and the line locally adjusted to form a better defensive position. The enemy was generally quiet confining his activities to M.G. fire, occasional bursts of artillery fire, sniping and very little use of trench mortars. On the night of the 13th/14th the Battalion was relieved in the line by the 4th Sussex Regt. and withdrew to the KEMMEL system, readopting the dispositions previously held with the exception that Bn.H.Q. were established at SIBBE FARM (N.16c.3.8.) This line was held until Sept.19th.
Sept.11th 1918.	
Sept.12th 1918.	
Sept.13th 1918.	
Sept.14th 1918.	On the night of September 15th/16th The 101 Inf Bde was relieved in the line by the 102 Inf.Bde. This Battalion, however, retained its positions in the KEMMEL system, and came under the orders of the G.O.C. 102. Bde.
Sept.15th 1918	
	3.
Sept.16th 1918	Large working parties were formed daily for constructing and improving trench shelters and dugouts and establishment of dumps for pending operations. The enemy continued harrassing artillery fire on this area throughout the period it was occupied.
Sept.17th 1918	
Sept.18th 1918	
Sept.19th 1918	On the night of Sept.19th/20th the Bn. was relieved in the KEMMEL system of the 1/7
Sept.20th 1918	Cheshire Regt. and withdrew to the Area about N.18.a. SCHERFENBERG. The Bn. was responsible for manning the original SCHERFENBERG
Sept.21. 1918	DIKERSBUSCH line between MARJORIE POST (N.18.c) and SHOE WOOD (N.18.b.), both inclusive, in the case of emergency. This Area was occupied until the night of Sept 22/23rd when the Bn
Sept.22 1918	relieved the 1/1 Herefordshire Regt. in the
Sept 23. 1918.	KEMMEL system. Before taking over this line 2 patrols of 30 men, each under an officer, were left in the reserve area to train, with a view

Acknowledgements:

My thanks must go firstly to my daughter Anna Dillon, without whose enthusiasm and dedication to discovering more about the 16 names of the fallen on the Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe village war memorial, this project would never have got off the ground.

Also, my profound thanks in huge amounts must go to Joseph Connelly's great niece Deborah Solley in Scotland and to her immediate family, who were able to add so much more to this story which had been told to them by their grandmother Muriel Solley (nee Connelly) younger sister to Joseph (Joe) Connelly.

The Solley family also had a handful of much treasured photos of Joe as a young lad, which we have been given permission to use here.

My thanks also to Stuart Wilson of the "Sons of Galloway" website for pointing me towards the Kirkcudbrightshire Stewartry Roll, and who also found the incredibly useful entry of Joe's death published in the Kirkcudbrightshire Advertiser dated 27th September 1918, which pinpointed Joe's exact date of death.

Also to Ken Morrison via his Balmaghie WW1 on-line discussion forum, who put me in touch with Stuart Wilson, and who also helped me understand and correct my misunderstanding on the formation of WW1 territorial battalions.

Finally, to my invaluable proof readers who helped me prepare this booklet for publication.

Judy Barradell-Smith. October 2018.

1. The story begins...

A plain stone cross stands on land opposite The Chequers public house, where the crossroads mark the meeting point of the two villages. It lists the names of sixteen village men who lost their lives in the First World War, together with the names of ten village men who died in the Second World War.

Many people pass it every day with never another thought. It is one of thousands of such war memorials up and down the country.

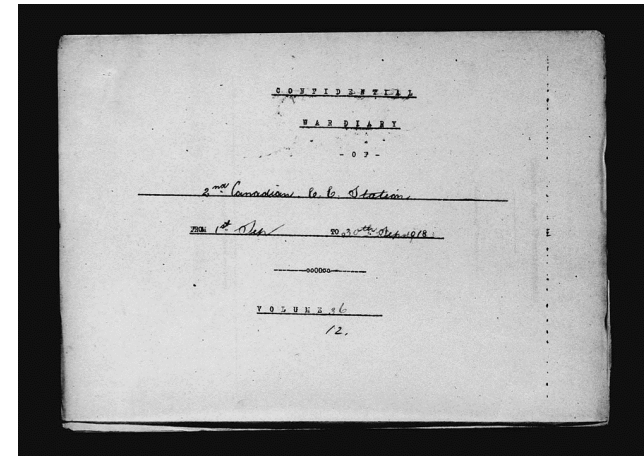
It is difficult now to understand the profound affect that WW1 had on the population of the UK, and especially on small rural communities. Estimates of the numbers of allied troops killed and missing in action in WW1 vary from around 750,000 to 994,000 - numbers which include troops from Ireland and the Commonwealth.

- The population of the UK in 1914 was estimated as 46 million
- The numbers killed in action represented around 2% of that population
- Those who went off to war in WW1 stood roughly a 10% chance of being killed, and a 30% chance of being injured
- There was therefore about a 60% chance of returning home unscathed
- If you took part in the first 10 days of the Battle of the Somme - you stood a 35% chance of being killed
- On average a soldier's life expectancy during WW1 was 6 weeks

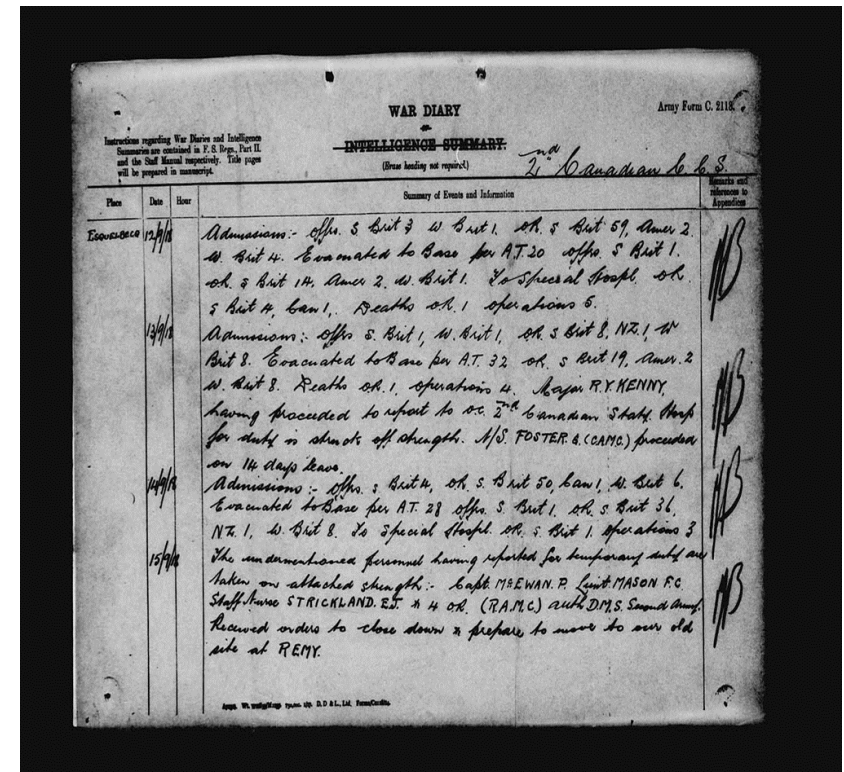
At the time of the 1911 census the combined population of Aston Tirrold and Upthorpe was 415. Both villages lost eight men - 4% of their population - so that means twice as many men lost their lives from these two villages than was the national average.

Today the population of the UK is around 67 million. If 2% of the UK population were to be killed today, that would amount to 1,340,000 deaths.

It is natural to think that those sixteen men listed on our memorial lived in these villages and had links going back many years. For most of them that was true, but not for all. It turned out that not all the men's stories



Picture of the front cover of the daily diary of the 2nd Canadian Clearing Station which covers the date of Joe's death on 13th September 1918



Copy of the page for 13th September 1918.

Appendix Two: Regimental War Diaries 7th - 13th September 1918'. 2nd /4th Battalion, Queen's Royal West Surrey.

NOTE: the dates were inserted to the left of the script but the writing on the page was continuous (see copy of actual diary in Appendix Three). Spelling has been shown as in original and capitals used as in original. The Capital letters and numbers used (often in brackets) denote grid references on trench maps.

Sept 7th 1918

The enemy shelled the line and Bn H.Q regularly during this period. On the night of Sept 7/8th, the Battalion readjusted its position in the KEMMEL system holding from PARRET Fm (N.16.b) to LINDENHOEK Cross Roads (N.27 central) with 4 companies in line

Sept 8th1918, Sept 9th1918, Sept 10th 1918.

This line was held during the 8th,9th and 10th. The usual enemy shelling was experienced, but no action developed. On the night of September 10th/11th, the Battalion relieved the 4th R. Sussex Regt in the right sector of the divisional area. 3 companies were in the line between BEAVER HAT (N.23.c) and N.35.b.8.9 and 1 company in support about N.29.c. Bn H.Q were at REGENT STREET. Dugouts in N.29.c.

September 11th 1918

The Battalion held this line during the 11th, 12th and 13th without incident. The weather was continuously wet rendering work difficult and visibility poor.

September 12th 1918

However the trenches were improved and the line locally adjusted to form a better defensive position.

September 13th 1918

The enemy was generally quiet confining his activities to M.G fire, (Machine Gun) occasional bursts of artillery fire, sniping and very little use of trench mortar. On the night of the 13th/14th, the Battalion was relieved in the line by the 4th Sussex Regt. And withdrew to the KEMMEL system, readopting the dispositions previously held with the exception that Bn. H.Q. were established at SIEGE FARM (N.16c.3.8.) This line was held until Sept 19th.

were that simple, and that the journey of discovery would be a long and fascinating one.

This is the story of one of those men: Joseph Connelly.



Names of those who lost their lives in WW1, before the 2014 re-carving: showing Joseph Connelly with incorrect spelling.

Our researches discovered that Joe's surname was spelt differently in different sources. To avoid confusion the correct spelling - of Connelly - will be used throughout the text, but the variations will be detailed under the photos of the different inscriptions.

2. Identifying Wee Joe:

Of the 16 men listed on the village war memorial 15 could be seen from the 1901 and 1911 censuses to be either born in the village, living in or close to the village, or to have a parent still living in the village. So these fifteen were all village men and lads – but not so Joe. I tried hard to find records of why he was in the Astons, but there was nothing - if they ever did exist they are no longer available.

If Joe was not from the village I needed to identify him before I could research his story - but identifying soldiers with similar names is not straightforward, as seen by the different spellings found even within village records.

A visit to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) website shows that there were five possible candidates for Wee Joe:

- 2 x Joseph CONNOLLY killed in 1918.
- 1 x Joseph CONNELLY killed in 1918.
- 1 x Joe CONNELLY killed in 1918
- 1 x J. CONNELLY (initial only given) killed in 1918.
- No one called Joseph CONOLLY (the spelling from the URC list)

This narrowed my search down to five men.

Using various on-line sources and army service records, and using their service numbers as given on the CWGC site and their names - including their rank and any other details such as parents' names or addresses - I searched through these five men's records. I was able to eliminate the J CONNELLY as his first name turned out to be John, and Joseph CONNOLLY as he was a Canadian Air Force pilot. That left three men – 2 x Joseph CONNELLY and 1 x Joe CONNELLY.

I then looked for evidence that any of these three remaining men had either lived in or near our villages or had enlisted in or near Aston Tirrold or Aston Upthorpe (into the Royal Berkshire Regiment for example).

By using the national 1911 census records I could track down their place of abode and the names of their family or their profession, and in all three cases there was no correlation at all with Berkshire records.

After a long search, I concluded that there was one CWGC record which seemed to be an almost perfect match. It listed a Private Joe CONNELLY (full name Joseph CONNELLY) from Kirkcudbrightshire in Scotland, who in March 1918 had enlisted with the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Regiment (2nd /4th) Royal Berkshire Infantry. His address on enlistment was given as Wallingford, Berkshire which in 1918 was the postal address for Aston Tirrold and Aston

casualties to base hospitals, or directly to a port of embarkation if the man had been identified as a "Blighty" case and needed to be returned to the UK.

There was a vast network of narrow gauge railways in the areas behind the front lines. These were used to bring up supplies, food and ammunition as well as to evacuate the wounded. This network of miles of narrow-gauge railway had been laid to connect up with broad-gauge railway further to the rear.



First aid posts were often located in a bunker or in a dug out where it afforded some protection from shelling.

Esquelbecq had a railway line running through it which was one of the chief requirements for choosing the placement of a CCS, so that the badly wounded could be evacuated back to base hospital and for the delivery of supplies and staff into the CCS.

Generally there was one CCS provided for each military division. Prior to a division moving into the front line, the senior medical officer within that division would gather his senior medical officers from the various brigades of the division and work out what their casualty evacuation routings would be. There would be routes and dressing stations for general injuries and also for injuries requiring specialist help, such as in Joe's case.

After the CCS the next stage would be the Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) - usually about a mile to a mile and a half from the front. This is the furthest point forward that you see surgeons operating. Their primary role was to patch up minor wounds and to stabilise those more seriously wounded for further evacuation to the rear, but they were equipped to carry out urgent life-saving operations if required.

Part 7 of the 34th Division ADMS war diary deals with medical services up to the end of September 1918. It clearly shows that both Remy Sidings and No 2 (Canadian) CCS at Esquelbecq were being used by the divisional medical authorities for the evacuation of casualties. (It is interesting to note that for some time the HQ of the 34th Division ADMS was in Esquelbecq too).

Following the German territorial gains of April 1918 the CCS at Remy sidings had been downgraded to a Main Dressing Station (MDS) and from there casualties would have been sent out to the CCSs.

Appendix One: Casualties of war.

With such vast numbers of wounded needing to be processed, every division had a well set evacuation plan for how its wounded were to be taken off the battlefields, and within each division there would be a senior medical officer, known as the ADMS (Assistant Director of Medical Services), who kept an official war diary of medical information and of some specific cases.

(The ADMS war diary for the 34th Division is held at The National Archives: reference WO95/ 2443/ 7). The Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) was for front line treatment and Joe would have received some basic first aid here before being moved further away from the area of conflict.



The Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) would then have been the first large, well-equipped and static medical facility that the wounded man would visit. These were the first places that you see surgeons with proper facilities operating. Their primary role was to patch up minor wounds and to stabilise those more seriously wounded for further evacuation to the rear, but they were equipped to carry out urgent life-saving operations if required. It would retain all serious cases that were unfit for further travel, treat and return slight cases to their unit, and evacuate all others to base hospitals. It was often a tented camp, although when possible the accommodation would be in huts. CCSs were often grouped into clusters of two or three in a small area, usually a few miles behind the lines and preferably on a railway line. A typical CCS could hold 1,000 casualties at any time, and each would admit 15-300 cases, in rotation, but at peak times of battle even the CCSs were overflowing. Serious operations such as limb amputations were carried out here. (CCSs also catered for sick men. Generally, considering the conditions, the troops were kept in good health).



At times, various CCSs grouped together and specialised - for nervous disorders, skin diseases, infectious diseases, or for certain types of wounds - such as at Esquelbecq for head injuries.

CCSs did not move location very often and the transport infrastructure of railways usually dictated their location. Most evacuated casualties came away from the CCS by rail, although motor ambulances and canal barges also carried

Upton. The record ended with his death in 1918, at which time he was serving with the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment.

Once I was convinced we had correctly identified our man, my next task was to find an on-line listing of this Joe Connelly. I struck lucky in tracking down Joe's great niece Deborah Solley on Ancestry.co.uk, who confirmed two things from her family's oral memories which I felt clinched this as being the right man:

- Joe had been working "down south" (actual place unknown) and probably as a jockey when he enrolled into the army.
- They thought he may have falsified his age when he joined up.

The official age for a soldier to enlist in WW1 was 18, and age 19 to be sent to fight overseas. Joe was only 18 years and 9 months when he died. During WW1 it is estimated that 250,000 under age boys joined up. They falsified their ages and there was little if any attempt to require a volunteer to "prove" their age.

The youngest ever known person to enlist in WW1 was a boy aged 12.

Recruiting officers often turned a blind eye to under age recruits in the early years, and especially so after the Somme battles of 1916 when there was an urgent need to replace the thousands slaughtered that year. After compulsory conscription was brought in later that year the numbers of under-age recruits diminished but never vanished completely. Headmasters, vicars and employers all conspired to encourage under age recruits to join up and do their patriotic duty.

Having enlisted at Wallingford we can assume Joe underwent his initial training with the Royal Berkshire Regiment in Reading and surrounding area, and it is likely he was sent overseas as part of that regiment.

Joe served first with the 2nd /4th Royal Berkshire Infantry Regiment, then the 2nd /1st Hertford Yeomanry and finally the 2nd /4th The Queens, Royal West Surrey Regiment. Men were often moved to different battalions or regiments, either due to loss of men in battle, or as part of strategic combination of troops, or because of a particular man's job or skill.

We do not have full details of when he was moved between battalions as unfortunately his full service record was destroyed during WW2. (An incendiary device hit the building in London where the records were stored and over 80% of WW1 records were incinerated).

3. Joe's early life:

Once Joe's origins were known I could begin researching Scottish census records, and there we find Joe's birth very precisely recorded as 3.55am on January 16th 1900 at Greenhall, where the family was living, at the Bridge of Dee in the parish of Balmaghie, in Kirkcudbrightshire (a historic county area now part of Galloway).

The 1901 census shows the father as William Connelly, listed as a horse dealer, together with Joseph aged 1. By the time of the 1911 census the family were still living at Greenhall, with William shown as a "dealer." Joe, aged 11, is now shown as one of four children and at school.

This early photo dated probably around 1906 shows Joe Connelly – the young boy in the middle (so aged around 6). His elder sister Mary Austin Connelly, born 1899, is seated. To the left standing with the dark hat, is his grandmother, and to the right with the light hat, his mother Jane Foster Connelly (nee Austin). This is the only known picture of Joe as a young boy.



The next part of this story may be conjecture, but conjecture with a degree of probability, as it is based around the information that Joe's family have supplied about his early life and that of his parents and siblings.

We know that William Connelly was a horse breeder and dealer (various census results show him as pig breeder, horse breeder, dealer). I found a record for 1897 in the Clydesdale Stud book, Volume XIX, listing William Connelly of Castle Douglas as breeder of Clydesdale Horses.

We also know from family stories and pictures that the family kept horses and that the children rode their ponies to school in Balmaghie each day. William was in all likelihood an amateur jockey in his own right. This family picture opposite shows someone named as Mr Connelly, clearly an older man in a suit, racing a horse in what looks like a point to point or local horse race of some kind. There are no other clues on the picture.

Joe and his younger brother James (six years younger than Joe and known in the family as Jack) would naturally have followed their father into the racing world and both were known to be jockeys - although whether as amateur or professional is unknown. The story goes that Jack was also going to head south



Joe's headstone in Esquelbecq Cemetery, France.

Anna (left) and myself at Joe's grave.

9. Epitaph

Our soldiers' names have been honoured at the village war memorial every November since 1921, but the connections with their families had been lost. The approach of the WW1 centenary however, stirred many people to revisit those times, and created a desire to remember and to commemorate the fallen.

The Astons were one of many rural communities who set out to find out more about the individuals from their village who had died. It has been a fascinating journey, and one that has created new links around the country, with several families visiting the Astons, some for the first time, and telling us their stories.

Between 2014 and 2018 members of the Astons' WW1 committee visited all our Astons' war graves, including Joe's at Esquelbecq. We prepared a laminated plaque for each grave with information about the fallen soldier and left it beside the grave. We respectfully commemorated our visit with a short dedication for the fallen, and took pictures, copies of which were passed to families who had been such a major support in our researches.

Joe Connelly, a young man at the start of his life, left the green fields of Berkshire - far away from his native Scotland - and went off to face the horrors of the war in Flanders.

He now lies peacefully in France, surrounded by far too many other young men who like him ended their lives in that awful, wasteful conflict.

In September 2018 several of the Solley family attended his graveside to mark 100 years to the day of his death. It must have been a very moving experience for them all, and we are proud to have helped Joe's family discover more about "Wee Joe".

Joe's name on our memorial started out as a mystery – but his story has been one of the most interesting.

JOE CONNELLY "WEE JOE"

To Memory Dear.

R.I.P.

to be a jockey but nothing came of it.

The training of a jockey started quite young, probably around age 14. Initially mucking out, grooming and stable work, then gradually moving on to riding the horses, and then hopefully the trainer would let you ride in a race on behalf of an owner. You would start riding young or untested horses who had no 'form', then if you were successful work would come your way and you could become a professional jockey riding famous horses for well-known owners.

The "Sport of Kings" (horse racing) was much loved by all classes in those pre WW1 days, certainly by country folk, including agricultural workers. Not all races were "posh" and taking place at big race courses, many were held on amateur circuits or at point to points - where up and coming jockeys, amateur riders and owners could make a fair bit of money - bets could be placed and money won or lost.



Greenhall: The house where Joe was born and brought up, on the banks of the River Dee. Note the L shape of the loose boxes where his father kept and trained horses



Joe's father William Connelly racing at an amateur event before WW1

4. Joe's move to the Astons:

I had learned from Deborah Solley that Joe was working "down south" at the time of his enlistment, and before the war he was probably either a jockey or a stable hand when he joined up. If that was so we can look at what employment he might have taken in the Astons, and why.

We do not know for sure the reason for Joe's move south, or indeed whether he came by himself or with his father. As a known horse dealer, William may have been buying up horses and selling them on for the war effort. Whatever the circumstances, given Joe's experience with horses up to that time, the Berkshire area round the Astons would have provided many options. It was a major area for racing stables and breeding studs. Any young lad wanting to further his career in this field would get more opportunities in this area of Berkshire - or around other well-known racing venues such as Newmarket, Kempton, or Cheltenham - than he would in Scotland.

Whilst most sporting programmes were halted during WW1, racing was less disrupted and took place on several courses. Much of the normal racing calendar continued - the Derby, the Grand National and the Oaks were all held during the war years. One main reason for that was that racing had been big business in the years leading up to the war and continued to be a popular entertainment during the war - but there was also the recognition that the breeding of horses had to continue through the war years to provide the masses of horses needed for the war effort.

Once the war started however, racing did face some difficulties, with many stable hands and jockeys enlisting and going off to war, so local breeders and trainers had to look further afield to attract the jockeys or stable hands they needed. Maybe there had been an advert placed in the sporting papers which Joe or his father had seen?

Joe is listed in three out of the four memorials in our village, so as a non-villager this meant he was either living or working in one of the villages before he enlisted.

There are some good records of the Aston Upthorpe racing stables and staff after Frank Cundell took them over in the 1920s (buying them from Major John Morris) but nothing exists from the days when Major John Morris owned them.

Joe does not appear in any post office directory - which give surprisingly detailed lists of village personnel - or voters' lists of the time (he was under 21) and I suspect he only lived in Aston Upthorpe for quite a short time. I am going to guess he was employed in Aston Upthorpe by Major John Morris from sometime in 1917 until he enlisted in March 1918.



Joe's sister Muriel Kennedy Connelly (sitting on the horse) aged about 15 and a friend. Picture circa 1919, about a year after Joe was killed.



Joe's sister Muriel in later life.

Here is a quick resume of what happened to Joe's siblings:

Mary Austin Connelly, Joe's elder sister was born in 1899. She married William Munro, a gamekeeper from Aberdeen. He was initially a gamekeeper for Auchencairn House, Near Castle Douglas. The family moved south to England and William Munro took a job working as a gamekeeper in Windsor Great Park for King George V. They had just one child, James Munro who remembers his mother Mary Munro (nee Connelly) having an old family photo album, including picture postcards with embroidery on them, sent back to Scotland from France by Joe Connelly.

But regrettably, it seems that the album disappeared around the time his mother Mary died.

Muriel Kennedy Connelly, Joe's younger sister, was born in 1903. She married James Solley and had 4 children - Jean, Samuel, James and Muriel. It is this branch of the Connelly family who have thankfully retained some of the pictures and a lot of the memories of Wee Joe. Deborah Solley, daughter of son James Solley and granddaughter of Muriel Kennedy Solley (nee Connelly), has many fond memories of her Granny Muriel Solley (nee Connelly).

From Muriel we get most of the stories about the family and of the early years growing up at Greenhall. Clearly Joe's name was kept very much alive by his sister Muriel, and increasingly by the rest of the family too - especially during this 100 year anniversary of WW1.

James "Jack" Connelly, Joe's younger brother was born in 1905. He married a lady called Margaret and they had somewhere between 10 and 13 children, but the marriage did not survive and the Connelly family lost touch with them in later years.



The Connelly home at Greenhall, on the banks of the River Dee.

Major John Morris was a retired Indian Army officer, born in Lahore Pakistan in 1857, who had bought land from the Slade family of Thorpe Farm in Aston Upthorpe in around 1906, and built stables off Thorpe Street (later known as Frimley Stables). He also owned large tracts of land around Aston Upthorpe - including many of the fields between Blewburton Hill and South Moreton, and land up on the Upthorpe Downs, where he laid out the horse gallops which are there to this day.



A view of Major Morris' stables from Thorpe Street.

The villages' racing connections continued after the war, and by the end of the 1930s there were four known racing establishments in the village – the best known of them, Frank Cundell's, having moved to the Astons after their Chilton lands were compulsorily purchased for a RAF airfield in the lead up to WW2. Frimley Stables was the last of the racing stables to close, in the late 1990s, but there is still a well-known horse breeding farm - Aston Upthorpe Stud.

Major Morris ran his horse breeding and training business from what is now Blewburton Hall, running both flat and steeple chase runners during the period 1909 – 1926. The breeding stables - now Upthorpe Stud - were at the back of Orchard House on Thorpe Street, which had been built in 1910 by Major Morris's brother Alexander Henry Morris (born in Fife 1851) a retired policeman who had served in India.

The 1911 census lists the occupations of Major Morris's employees as game keepers, farm labourers, gardeners and other domestic workers. He had a number of tied farm cottages suitable for his married employees and their families but needed somewhere for his single men and stable hands, who were living as lodgers in the homes of other employees - not an ideal set up. So in 1912 he built two semi-detached cottages on the junction of Hagbourne

Road and Thorpe Street for these single employees (marked clearly with his initials JM beneath one of the gable-ends). Known in the village as The Jockey Houses, they continued to house young stable hands and jockeys until the late 1990s when Frimley Stables closed.

Of the 16 men and boys from the Astons who lost their lives in WW1, Major John Morris employed 6 of them. They had all lived in his tied cottages on Hagbourne Road. These are their names, and their ages when they died:

- George CLACY (aged 19)
- Joe CONNELLY (aged 18)
- James CORBETT (aged 33, married with children)
- William KNOBES (aged 24)
- Frederick LAY (aged 27, married with children)
- Claude LILLINGTON (aged 22)

All were killed in action, or died of wounds.



Major Morris's 1912
"Jockey Houses" on
Thorpe Street.



8. After the war:

The Connelly family, like thousands up and down the country, had to learn to cope with the loss of a much-loved son. They were left to grieve for their lost son with their personal memories and with the few precious photos that they had of him - which have been handed down the generations.

In 1919, after Joe had died and after the end of the war, it appears the Army sent to the next of kin (in this case Joe's mother Mrs Jane Connelly), outstanding pay or savings – which in Joe's case amounted to £4-7 shillings and 8 pence, plus what appears to be a one off "death in service" grant of £3-0-0. Whether any of his personal possessions were also sent home is not known. These accounts are contained in the army records "Register of Soldiers Effects 1901 – 1929" (see copy below). The first payment of £4-7-8 was given out on 5th April 1919 and the second amount of £3-0-0 on 5th December 1919.

NAME	REGIMENT	DATE	AMOUNT	REMARKS
✓ 661458	CONNELL Joseph	12-9-18 16/10/19	4 7 8	5-11-19 Mchelle Leg 25 June 21
1	CONNELL Joseph	12-9-18 16/10/19	3 0 0	5-12-19 Mchelle Leg 25 June 21
661457	BRANBROUGH Tom	12-9-18 16/10/19	12 6	16-7-19 Mchelle Leg 25 June 21

"Register of Soldiers' Effects 1901 – 1929."

At the time of Joe's death Mary, the eldest child, was 20, Muriel aged 14, and James "Jack" aged 12. The family continued to live at Greenhall on the banks of the River Dee and we assume that Joe's father William carried on in his business.

William Connelly died in 1926 as a result of a road traffic accident. He was walking along a road not far from Castle Douglas when he was killed by a motorcyclist.

His wife Jane (or Jean as she was often called) died in 1933 aged 55.

In addition to these physical memorials, in 1927 the owner of the Kirkcudbrightshire Advertiser, J.H. Maxwell of Castle Douglas, published the Stewartry Roll of Honour in the Great War 1914-1918 in recognition of the "natives of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, and residents living in the County at the time of enlistment" who served their country in WW1.

Much of the information that we have on Joe, including where he served, comes from information compiled in that publication.

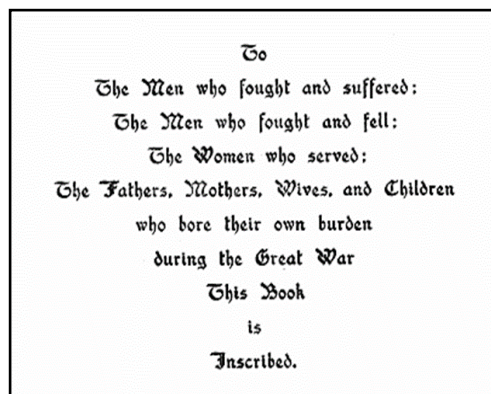
The newspaper sent out forms to every parish within Kirkcudbrightshire and details were "furnished by the parties themselves or by near relatives". However some people could not be traced or simply did not return their forms and so are listed by name and place of birth or residence only.

Over 6,000 men and women are named, with brief details of service given in approximately 4,000 cases. The publisher's original intention was to include a photo of all those who died in service or were recipients of gallantry/meritorious service awards, but costs proved to be prohibitive.

The Roll was set out in alphabetical order and then subdivided into officers, NCOs, privates, and women. For individuals where no details were returned, a list of names and their town/area of residence was appended at the end of each alphabetical section. The entry for Joe reads as following:

Connelly, Private. Joseph, Bridge of Dee. Enlisted March, 1918, 2/4 Royal Berks Infantry. Transferred to 2/1 Hertford Yeomanry, and 2/4 Royal West Surreys. Served on Western Front. Wounded at Ypres. Died in 2nd Canadian Clearing Station on 13th Sept, 1918. Buried near Popperhinge.

This therefore ties up precisely with his on-line Army record showing his enlistment date as March 1918 in Wallingford.



The Stewartry Roll of Honour

5. The role of horses in WW1:

When war began in 1914 the British Army possessed a mere 25,000 horses. The War Office was given the urgent task of sourcing half a million more to go into battle. They were essential to pull heavy guns, to transport weapons and supplies, to carry the wounded to hospital and to mount cavalry charges. Motor driven transport was in its infancy.



In the first year of war, the countryside was emptied of surplus shire horses not needed to till the land, plus riding ponies, hunters and hacks as well as donkeys and mules. This was a heartbreaking prospect for farming families who saw their finest and most beloved horses requisitioned by the government.

For the families who lost their horses, and the grooms, infantrymen and cavalrymen who took charge of them and helped train them up it was traumatic, as the film of Michael Morpurgo's book 'War Horse' so graphically shows.

The war machinery that supported the horses consisted of a huge number of grooms, farriers, harness and saddle makers, teams of men to transport fodder and water, and veterinary surgeons to look after the horses.

Transported to the ports, these horses were hoisted onto ships crossing the Channel before being initiated into the horrors of the front line, either as beasts of burden or as cavalry horses. There was little anyone could do to prevent the appallingly high death rate of these horses due to injury from gun fire, shelling, shrapnel injury and exhaustion in the appalling conditions and mud of the battlefield.



5. Joe's war:

Joe would have been aware of earlier enlisting by village lads - was he eagerly waiting until he was old enough to join up? He would have been called up shortly after his 18th birthday, on January 16th 1918.

Having enlisted at Wallingford, and having received his initial training at the regimental headquarters in Reading, he would have been given a short amount of leave before being sent to fight in France or Belgium in 1918. I really hope he did get back to Scotland one last time before setting off for war.

His battalion, part of the 2nd /4th Queens Regiment, was serving in the Kemmel System and was engaged in the week 6th – 13th September 1918 on an assault of Kemmel Wood, part of the Kemmel System.

The Kemmel System near the village of Bayernwald was a series of German defensive trenches dug by the Germans in 1914 and 1915. It lay about 6 miles west of Ypres and north of the village of Wijtschaete - known by the British Tommies as Whitesheet. Wijtschaete and the Kemmel Trenches were in German hands from early November 1914 until the battle of Messines in June 1917. It changed hands again in April 1918 before being retaken by the Allies in September 1918. So at the time Joe was fighting there, serving at the rank of Private, the British were once again defending the trenches from German attack.

The specific area he was helping to defend was between Parret Farm and Lindenhoek Cross Roads; the line where most of the activity took place is described as between Beaver Hat and Regent Street. All the allied trenches were given these English names.

The Regimental war diary (see Appendix 2) indicates sniper activity on September 13th which ties up with what the Solley family had told me, "Joe was employed as a dispatch or messenger rider on a motor bike and was shot by a sniper when taking a message" probably between the front line and the Battalion HQ positioned at Regent Street.

Front lines were close together and would have been well known places for snipers to pick off anything that moved within their sight – so dispatch riders would have been a likely target.



Joe in his army uniform - possibly taken in Scotland.

John Francis Kynaston Cross (owner of the Aston Tirrold estate), the Reverend Lumley Green-Wilkinson, Rector of St Michael's, the Reverend Thomas Curry, Presbyterian minister of what is now the United Reformed Church, and the village school master of the time Mr Robert Evans.

It will remain an unanswered question as to why his name is incorrectly spelt on the memorial. Joe may simply have been hired as a stable hand and paid a weekly wage in cash. His employer may never have had any written record of his name, and of course Joe also had no local family to advise on the correct spelling after his death.

Kirkcudbrightshire memorials:

We have seen earlier that Joe came from Kirkcudbrightshire in Scotland. A search on Joe's name and the location of Bridge of Dee, Scotland shows that his name as a casualty of WW1 is commemorated in several places.

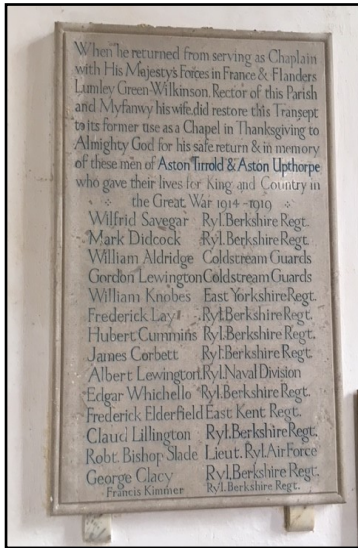
- 1) A rectangular stone memorial on the external wall of Balmaghie Parish Church which, although not in the usual style, is in fact the parish war memorial.
- 2) A muster roll inside Balmaghie Church showing those who served in the Great War from the parish of Balmaghie and giving the death dates of those from the parish who died. The date given for Joe's death on this roll for Joe Connelly as 11th April 1918 is incorrect
- 3) A roll of honour inside Rhonehouse Public School Roll, the school which Joe and his siblings attended.
- 4) A family gravestone in Castle Douglas Graveyard outside the church.

These four Scottish commemorations, together with the three Astons memorials, mean that Joseph Connelly is commemorated in seven separate places.



Balmaghie Church memorial





St. Michael's Roll of Honour

3) In the United Reformed Church in Spring Lane (in 1918 a Presbyterian chapel) there is a stone wall plaque. Joseph Connolly's year of death is given here - 1918. His inclusion in this record indicates he was likely to have been a worshipper there.



4) Astons' War Memorial is at the junction of Baker Street and Spring Lane, and was unveiled on October 29th 1921 in a ceremony attended by most of the village.

As a recent and probably short term resident of the Astons, I believe that Joe's entry onto the Muster Roll, the Presbyterian Roll and the War Memorial was probably due to the influence of Major John Morris, his employer, who had lost six of his male employees in WW1. Being a retired army major, John Morris was no doubt someone who would have influenced his employees to go and do their patriotic duty and go off to war and no doubt felt strongly their sacrifices should be remembered.

As one of the major employers during the war it is likely that Major John Morris would have joined other notables on the village committee which organised the design and building of the war memorial, which would have included deciding which names should be inscribed on it. These included Mr

have commissioned the St Michael's plaque. He had been the Rector of St Michael's before the war but served as an Army Chaplain during the war, so it may be that he had not known or met Joseph Connolly, especially as we do not know how long Joe had lived in the village before he went off to war.

Francis Kimmer and George Clacy died in November and December of 1918 and were the last two names added to the memorial, and it can be seen that Francis Kimmer's name was added to the tablet after the original names had been inscribed.



The above picture is as seen today of the trenches in Kimmel Wood on top of Kimmel Hill, which were restored in the 1980s to what they would have looked like when occupied by the Germans in 1915. They are open to the public by ticket entry only to try and preserve their integrity.

At the front Joe would have been given immediate first aid by medics soon after being wounded. He would then have been taken down the casualty evacuation chain carried by stretcher bearers until under cover and away from immediate danger, and then maybe by hand cart. First stop would have been the Regimental Aid Post (RAP) where he would have undergone a rudimentary assessment.

After assessment at the RAP, his next destination would have been to a medical collecting post where there were medical orderlies and first aid trained staff. The rationale was to get the men away from the front line and then to arrange transportation to the Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) as soon as possible - in Joe's case at Kimmel Church. Often a church in the vicinity was used as it would probably still have an intact roof after any bombardment, and was large enough to provide room for the wounded to be gathered.

During very "busy" days it was commonplace to see an ADS swamped by casualties and with a triage system set up, but the period covering Joe's wounding was a quiet period and he would probably have been quickly admitted at the ADS, checked over and then, due to the seriousness of his wounds, evacuated on down the casualty



evacuation chain. (See Appendix One 'Casualties of war' for more details).

Again, as there was no ongoing offensive at that time it is more than likely he was quickly evacuated by road, either by horse drawn or motor ambulance, to the next medical station - which would have been the Main Dressing Station (MDS) at Remy Sidings. After assessment at Remy he would have been sent to the 2nd Canadian Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) in the grounds of Esquelbecq Chateau near the Belgium border - about 10 miles behind the front line and about 20 kilometres south of Dunkirk.

No 2 (Canadian) CCS specialised in the treatment of head injuries - although it would treat a plethora of other injuries as well – so it may well be that Joe was sent to Esquelbecq with a gunshot wound to the head – a likely sniper's target. Joe's injury was clearly a serious one and it was beyond the abilities of the medical unit to save him.

Joe's was the only death recorded at the CCS that day – and at the end of September the Esquelbecq CCS was moved to another position. Joe was therefore one of the last casualties to be treated there.

The regimental war diary for that week listed as killed 3 officers and 14 O.R. (Other Ranks). It also lists D of W (Died of Wounds) 1 O.R. I think that this "died of wounds" was Joe Connelly.

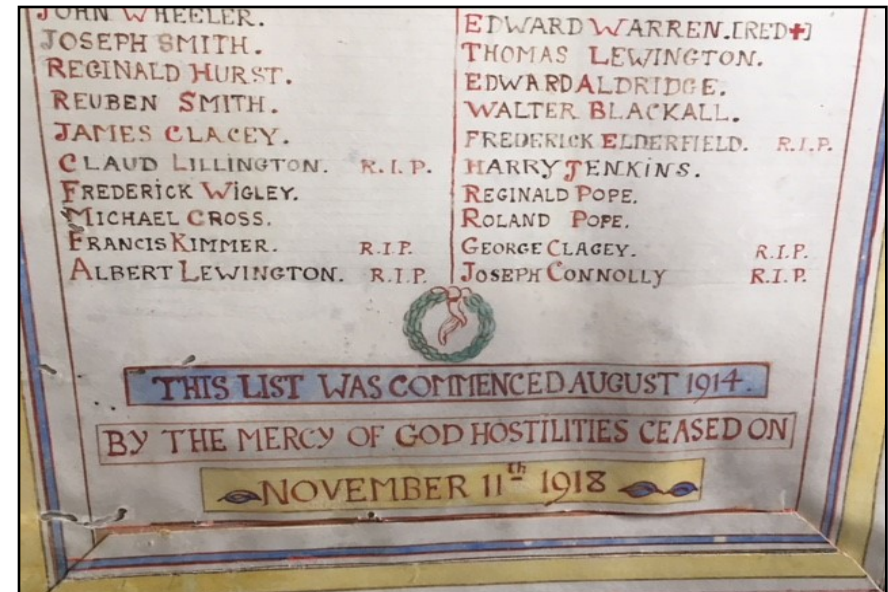
(See Appendix Two: Regimental War Diary. 2nd 4th Battalion, Queen's Royal West Surrey).



*Nursing staff and medics outside the Esquelbecq CCS
circa April 1918.*



The Astons' war memorial unveiling ceremony in 1921.



St. Michael's Muster Roll.

7. 'We shall remember them'

Joe lies in "some corner of a foreign field, that is for ever England" (from Rupert Brooke's 1914 poem "The Soldier"). Sadly, eight of the Astons war dead have no known grave and are only remembered on memorials in France or Belgium.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission official entry for Joe Connelly reads thus:

In Memory of
Private JOE CONNELLY
Remembered with Honour
Esquelbecq Military Cemetery
G/72559, 2nd/4th Bn., The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment)
who died on 13 September 1918 Age 18
Son of William and Jane Connelly, of Bridge of Dee, Castle Douglas,
Kirkcudbrightshire.

His name is commemorated on local war memorials and plaques both in and around his home town of Balmaghie, and in Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe in Berkshire.

Astons' memorials:

There are four separate memorials within the two villages of Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe commemorating Astons' fallen, and no two are the same.

1) In St Michael's Church, Aston Street the Muster Roll lists 73 men connected with the two villages who went off to war or served in WW1 in some capacity. There is a R.I.P set against 16 of those names, showing which men died. Joseph Connelly is the last name on the list.

2) Also in St Michael's Church, there is a stone tablet set on the east wall in the Lady Chapel.

However Joe Connelly's name is missing from this stone tablet list, for reasons which are unclear as the list is otherwise complete.

A clue may be that this memorial seems to be associated with the return of the Reverend Lumley Green Wilkinson, who appears to



On the night of 13th September 1918 the battalion was withdrawn from the front line, and it is sad to think that if Joe had not been in the line of fire just hours earlier he may just have survived the war.

The death notice published in the family's local newspaper, the Kirkcudbrightshire Advertiser on 27 September 1918, reads as following:

"Connelly. On the 13th instant, at No. 2 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, France, of gun-shot wounds received in action on the same date, Private Joseph Connelly, Queen's Royal West Surreys, aged 18 years and 8 months, the dearly beloved eldest son of Mr and Mrs William Connelly, Bridge-of-Dee".

Joe Connelly was the youngest of all the men in our villages to die.

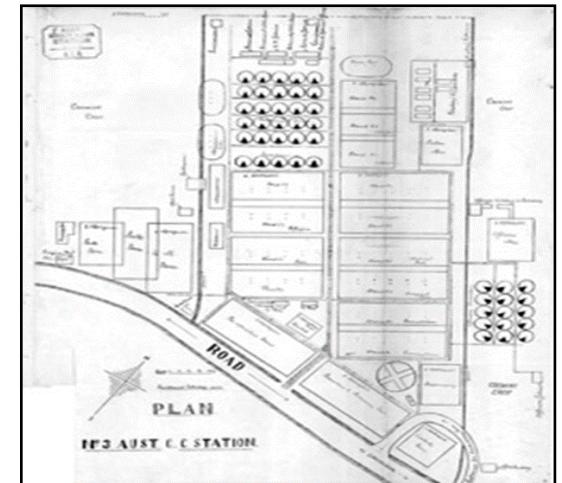
Joe was buried in the military cemetery at Esquelbecq, which had been opened in April 1918 during the early stages of the German offensive in Flanders when the 2nd Canadian and 3rd Australian CCS was established there. (Many WW1 CCS positions are today the sites of large military cemeteries).

It is a small graveyard, beautifully kept, and has a wonderfully tranquil and peaceful feel about it. Joe's grave is set at the end of the cemetery right in front of the Great Cross – in the last row ever to be completed before the graveyard shut. Row H. is half a row, with just 17 graves in it. Joe's grave is number 16. He was the last but one burial in the cemetery.

His headstone in Esquelbecq Cemetery bears the words "Wee Joe. To Memory Dear" - it is from this that we know his family nickname for him.

The cemetery closed at the end of September 1918 when the CCS moved to another location. After the war it became an official war cemetery, and the wooden crosses were replaced with stone ones.

The Solley family do not know if anyone from the family visited Joe's grave after the war - it was a long way to travel from Scotland and not the easiest place to find, so it is possible that no one did.



Map of Esquelbecq CCS in 1918.

I commissioned the following report from Iain McHenry - a military historian and founder member of the La Boisselle Project Study Group, which carries out archaeological and archival studies on WW1 battlefields. Extracts are given below.

G/72559 Private Joe Connelly, 2nd/4th Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment).

The 2nd /4th Queens at the time in question was part of the 101st Brigade of the 34th Division whose insignia was the Chequerboard. They had been part of this Division since June 1918 where they had been transferred as a battalion from the 53rd Welsh Division, which had also seen service in the Palestine Campaign. (A battalion was the basic tactical unit of the infantry of the British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918).

The 34th Division was a very experienced infantry division and in the early part of September 1918 was deployed towards the south of the Ypres salient holding trenches in the Kemmel sector of line. Until April 1918 Kemmel Hill had been behind the British lines and the Messines Ridge over which Kemmel Hill looked had also been in British hands ever since the Messines Offensive of June 1917.

On the 9th April 1918 the Germans had launched Operation Georgette which was the second phase of their final offensive of the war. The hammer blow struck to the south of the Ypres salient and forced the British back, hopelessly exposing the right flank of troops to the north. The German advance forced the British off the Messines Ridge for the second time in the Great War. By the time the 34th Division arrived in the Kemmel sector of trenches in August 1918 the Kemmel Hill and Messines Ridge were ready to be recaptured.

Although initially successful and powerful, each phase of the German 1918 offensive failed to reach their final objective. The Germans were also running out of men and material and the allies were planning assaults all across the Western Front in order to recapture ground and drive the Germans back. This Allied offensive had started on the Somme in August 1918 and then later in Flanders. The recapturing of Kemmel Hill and the ridge would not take place until the last third of September. Upon arriving in the sector the 34th Division had fought a series of actions that had driven the Germans slowly back towards the Messines Ridge. From the 7th of September 1918 the Division had experienced a period of general inactivity in the trenches, experiencing only the daily attritional warfare seen by units outside of periods of offensives.

The 2nd /4th War Diary makes mention that on the night of the 10th and 11th September it moved from a reserve position and took over a section of the line held by the 4th Royal Sussex. The diary mentions that the frontage taken over

by the battalion was the Divisional "Right" sector and that the front was manned by three of the battalions' companies from a position known as Beaver Hat to map grid reference N35b.8.9

Trenches at this stage of the fighting were very sporadic in this sector and unlike earlier in the war were not continual lines. Their defensive positions would have been a series of small trenches and pre-existing shell holes that had been improved for defence.

A point well worthy of note here is that when looking at British trench maps of the day, until 1918 Allied trenches and positions were marked in blue and German trenches and positions were marked in red. The French army had adopted the opposite policy and in 1918 so did the British, so for the purposes of this report, allied lines are marked in blue and German lines in red!

The Battalion war diary for the 12th and 13th September states that enemy activity was minimal with occasional bursts of artillery fire, sniping and occasional trench mortaring. One point that must be considered here is that Connelly's family knew that Joe had been shot by a sniper. It was a very commonplace injury to sustain in the vicinity of trenches. Today we automatically assume the sniper to be this well qualified marksman capable of causing casualties at great distance, who has excelled in what is a very difficult job. In terms of WW1 writing and description, sniper fire covers both professional rifleman and also those men engaging the enemy from a normal position who have a "lucky" shot. It would be impossible to know who fired the killing shot on Joe. An examination of the British trench maps of exactly this period and place (September 1918) show just how close the opposing lines were. This would greatly increase the chance of becoming a target.

If Joe was indeed in the immediate vicinity of the trenches when he was shot, it is not unusual that he did get as far back as the CCS at Esquelbecq (about 10 miles) where we know he dies of his injuries.

Iain McHenry (2017).



This picture is not of Kemmel Church, but shows a first aid post based in a church.