

125: George Thomas Devaney

Basic Information [as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC]

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: George Devaney

Rank: Sapper

Battalion / Regiment: 1st/1st (Cheshire) Field Coy. Corps. of Royal Engineers

Service Number: 1376 Date of Death: 04 November 1916 Age at Death: ?

Buried / Commemorated at: Courcelles-au-Bois Communal Cemetery Extension, Courcelles-au-Bois, Departement de la Somme, Picardie, France

Additional information given by CWGC: None

George Thomas Devaney, and his older brother James [see [126: James Devaney](#)], both died in WW1. George was the (probably) eleventh child of John and Sarah Devaney (sometimes Devanny/Devanney/Devany) of Neston.

John, the son of Irish farm labourer Cornelius and Margaret Devaney, had been born in Neston. John Devaney married Sarah Thomas at a Civil Marriage in Chester in July/September 1874 after their first child, Margaret, had been born (29 May 1874, baptised 28 June). In the 1881 census, John and Sarah were living on Brook Street, Neston:

John Devaney	29	ag. Lab	Neston
Sarah	28	Scholar	Neston
Margaret	6		Neston
Ellen	5		Neston
Annie	3		Neston
Edith	8 months		Neston

1881 census (extract) – Brook Street, Neston

John Devaney	29	agricultural labourer	born Neston
Sarah	28		born Gayton
Margaret	6		born Neston
Ellen	5		born Neston
Annie	3		born Neston
Edith	8 months		born Neston

Edith Devaney was born on 23 July 1880 and was baptised at St Winefride's on 23 July. She died, aged 1 on 14 October 1881.

At least five further children were born in Neston to John and Sarah but by the time of the 1891 census John had changed his profession - he was now a bricklayer, a profession that he appears to have maintained for the rest of his working life - and the family had moved to Barnston.

In 1891 Margaret (16), Ellen (15) and Annie (13), the three eldest children, were recorded elsewhere as domestic servants. Margaret and Ellen were both in the home of Arthur L Burton and Octavia L Burton in Barnston. In the census Arthur Burton, 32, was said to be 'living on own means' (the description given to him also in 1901)

although in the 1881 census he was recorded as a merchant. Annie Devaney was a domestic servant at nearby Townsend Farm, the home of farmer and carrier John C Sparkes.

John Devaney	Head	40	14	Bricklayer	X	Neston
Sarah	Wife	38	14			Neston
John	Son	9	14	Schooler		Neston
Sarah	Daughter	7	14			Neston
Edward	Son	5	14			Neston
James Devaney	Son	3	14			Neston
George	Son	2	14			Neston

1891 census (extract) – Pensby Lane, Barnston

John Devaney	40	bricklayer	born Neston
Sarah	38		born Gayton
John	9		born Neston
Sarah	7		born Neston
Edward	5		born Neston
James	3		born Neston
George	2		born Neston

By 1901 the family had moved again and was now living in Frankby:

John Devaney	Head	51	14	Bricklayer		Frankby
Sarah	Wife	49	14			Heswall
John C.	Son	19	14	Bricklayer		Neston
Edward	Son	15	14	Bricklayer's apprentice		Neston
James	Son	13	14			Neston
George	Son	11	14			Neston
Elizabeth	Daughter	9	14			Pensby

1901 census (extract) – Frankby

John Devaney	51	bricklayer	born Neston
Sarah	49		born Heswall
John C.	19	bricklayer	born Neston
Edward	15	bricklayer's apprentice	born Neston
James	13		born Neston
George	11		born Neston
Elizabeth	9		born Pensby

In 1901 Ellen Devaney (25) was in service, a waitress in the household of Eleanor E Wolstenholm, the widow of cotton broker Charles Wolstenholm, at 19 Charlesville, Claughton. Margaret Devaney (26), in 1901, was a servant in the house of civil engineer William H Le Mesurier at 32 Slaty Road, Birkenhead. Her place of birth was recorded as being Willaston, as it was in the 1911 census.

Annie Devaney (23) was a domestic servant in the home of Liverpool sea pilot William T Harrison at 7 Rockville Street, Tranmere.

Sarah Devaney (26) was also in service - she was a domestic servant in the home of merchant seaman Alexander and Louisa Brown at 5 Rockville Street, Tranmere. Margaret Devaney married joiner Charles H Phillips in early 1905 and in 1911 Margaret, Charles (37, joiner at shipbuilder's, born Craven Arms) and their three young daughters were living at 29 Grassville Road, Tranmere.

By the time of the 1911 census John and Sarah and some of their family were living at Ivy Cottage, Greasby; three of John's sons who were still living at home had followed him in the bricklaying trade although it appears that George was operating independently of his father and brother:

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1	John Devaney	Head	60	Married	34	13	10	3	Bricklayer (Builder)	Builder	worker	Neston Cheshire	British
2	Sarah Devaney	wife	58	Married								Heswall Cheshire	English
3	Edward Devaney	Son	25	Single					Bricklayer	Builder	worker	Neston Cheshire	born
4	James Devaney	Son	23	Single					Bricklayer	Builder	worker	Neston Cheshire	born
5	George Devaney	Son	21	Single					Bricklayer	Builder	worker	Neston Cheshire	born
6	Ethel Devaney	Daughter	18	Single								Barnston	born

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

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

Initials of Enumerator: *AWD*

Total		
Males	Females	Persons
4	2	6

(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.

4 rooms

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

Signature: *John Devaney*

Postal Address: *Ivy Cottage Greasby Birkenhead*

1911 census (condensed) – Ivy Cottage, Greasby

John Devaney	60	bricklayer (builder)	born Neston
Sarah	58		born Heswall
Edward	25	bricklayer	born Neston
James	23	bricklayer	born Neston
George	21	bricklayer (own account)	born Neston
Ethel	18		born Barnston

John and Sarah had been married for 37 years and ten of their thirteen children had survived.

Ethel was the last child of John and Sarah; although she was born in mid-1893 she has not been located anywhere in the 1901 census. Ethel may have married James S Jones in mid-1922.

Another of John and Sarah's son, John Cornelius Devaney (29), was also a bricklayer and he was living at Rockbank, Upton, Birkenhead, with his family in 1911. John had married Margaret Griffiths (born Shotton) in the Holywell district in late 1909 and in 1911 they had a young daughter, Catherine (7 months) who had been born in Greasby. Living with John and Margaret in Upton was John's unmarried sister, Annie; she was recorded as being 33 and a domestic nurse. It is believed that Annie married Frederick J Bayliss in Coventry in late 1911.



Ellen Agnes Devaney married Frederick Davies in the Birkenhead area in July / September 1904. In 1911 Ellen was with her three young children (Margaret, George and Frederick, all born in Coventry) at 34 Cash's Lane, Coventry. Fred, Ellen's husband, was recorded on the census as being away.

Ivy Cottage (232 Greasby Road, near Coronation Park) is a small, low, two-bedroomed sandstone house and considered to be one of the oldest properties in Greasby. Restored in 1995 it is a post-medieval cruck cottage.

Sarah Devaney, George's sister, married labourer William Henry Rothwell at a Civil Marriage in Birkenhead in mid-1906 and in 1911 they were living with their two young

daughters at 1 Old Bidston Road, Birkenhead. However, in January 1920 she was recorded (in an army document of her brother, James Devaney) as being Sarah Barton of 29 Church Road, Tranmere. No record of the death of William Rothwell has been found and no record of a further marriage of Sarah.

In 1911 Elizabeth Devaney (19, born Pensby) was a general domestic servant at the home of Joseph and Ellen Chubb at Shirley House, Moreton Road, Upton, Birkenhead. Joseph Albert Chubb was the Director of Museums in Liverpool.

The following summarises the known children of John and Sarah Devaney:

	born	baptised	married	died
Margaret	29 May 1874	28 June	early 1905	unknown
Ellen Agnes	8 January 1876	23 January	mid-1904	unknown
Annie	5 May 1877	3 June	late-1911	late 1939 aged 63
Maria	6 May 1878	2 June		27 May 1880 aged 2
James	10 June 1879	29 June		26 January 1880 / 8 months
Edith	23 July 1880	10 August		14 October 1881 / 8 months
John Cornelius	11 February 1882	12 March	late 1909	early 1943 aged 61
Sarah	17 September 1883	7 October	mid-1906	unknown
Edward	24 March 1886	20 April	not known	mid-1934 aged 48
James	31 January 1888	31 January	unmarried	killed 30 October 1918
George Thomas	5 June 1889	15? July	mid-1916	killed 4 November 1916
Elizabeth	3 rd quarter of 1891	unknown	unknown	unknown
Ethel	2 nd quarter of 1893	unknown	mid-1922	mid-1951 aged 59 (?)

Ethel Devaney married James Samuel Jones at a Civil Marriage on Wirral in mid-1922 and it is known that she had at least one son, Pip Jones (died mid-2013), who became a well-known GP in Birkenhead. The Devaney Medical Centre at 40 Balls Road, Oxtou, is named after the family.

George Devaney enlisted for the 1/1st Cheshire Field Company, Royal Engineers (a Territorial force), in Liverpool on 20 November 1915 when he was described as being 26 years and 5 months in age, 5ft 10¾in tall, having a 37-inch expanded chest and

weighing 158lb (11stone 4lb / 72kg). As expected for a bricklayer, his physical development was stated to be 'good' and it was noted that he had a scar on the right side of his neck. On enlistment he was attached to the Army Reserve Class B Cheshire Field Company with the Service Number, which he retained, of 1376. His entry to the Field Company does not appear to have been approved (at Chester) until 26 February 1916 and two days later an attestation on his bricklaying skills ("very good") was provided by Fred Dawson, one of the partners of J Dawson & Son of 20, Grange Mount, Heswall.

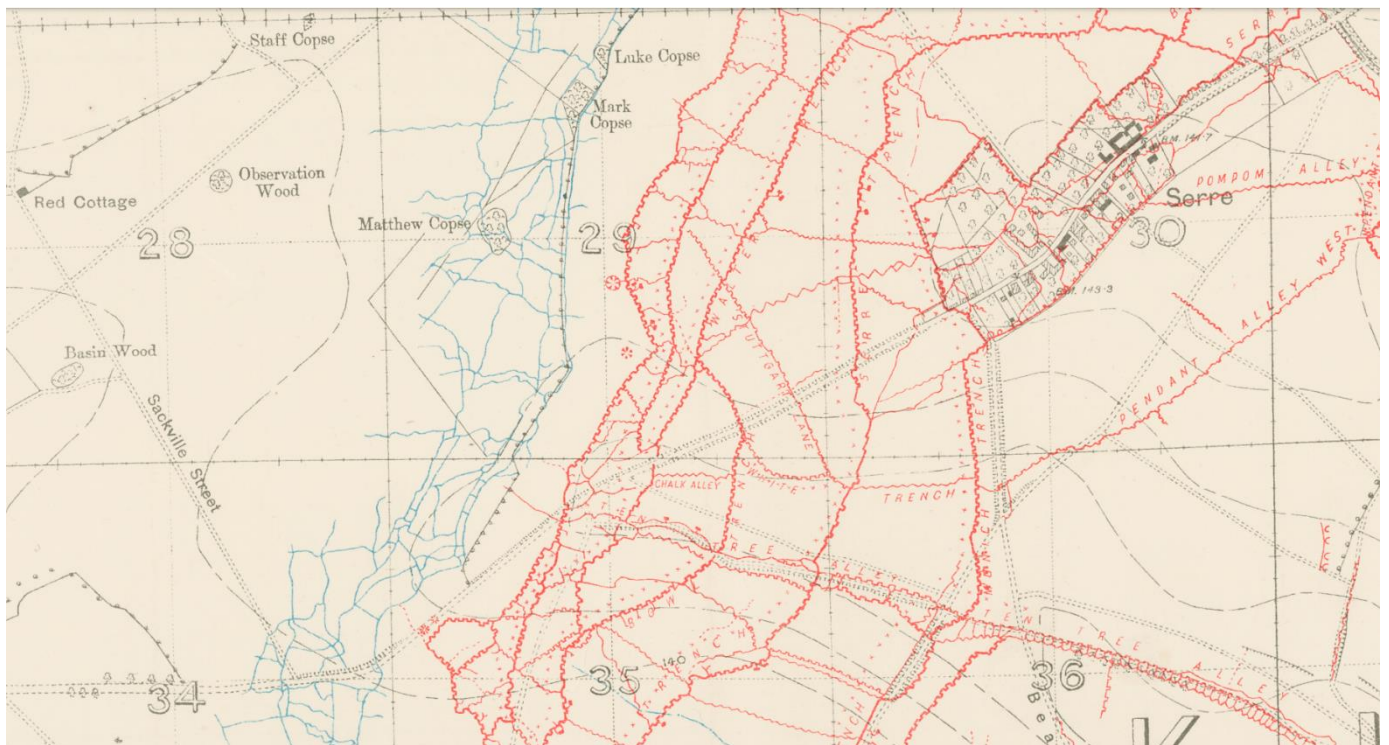
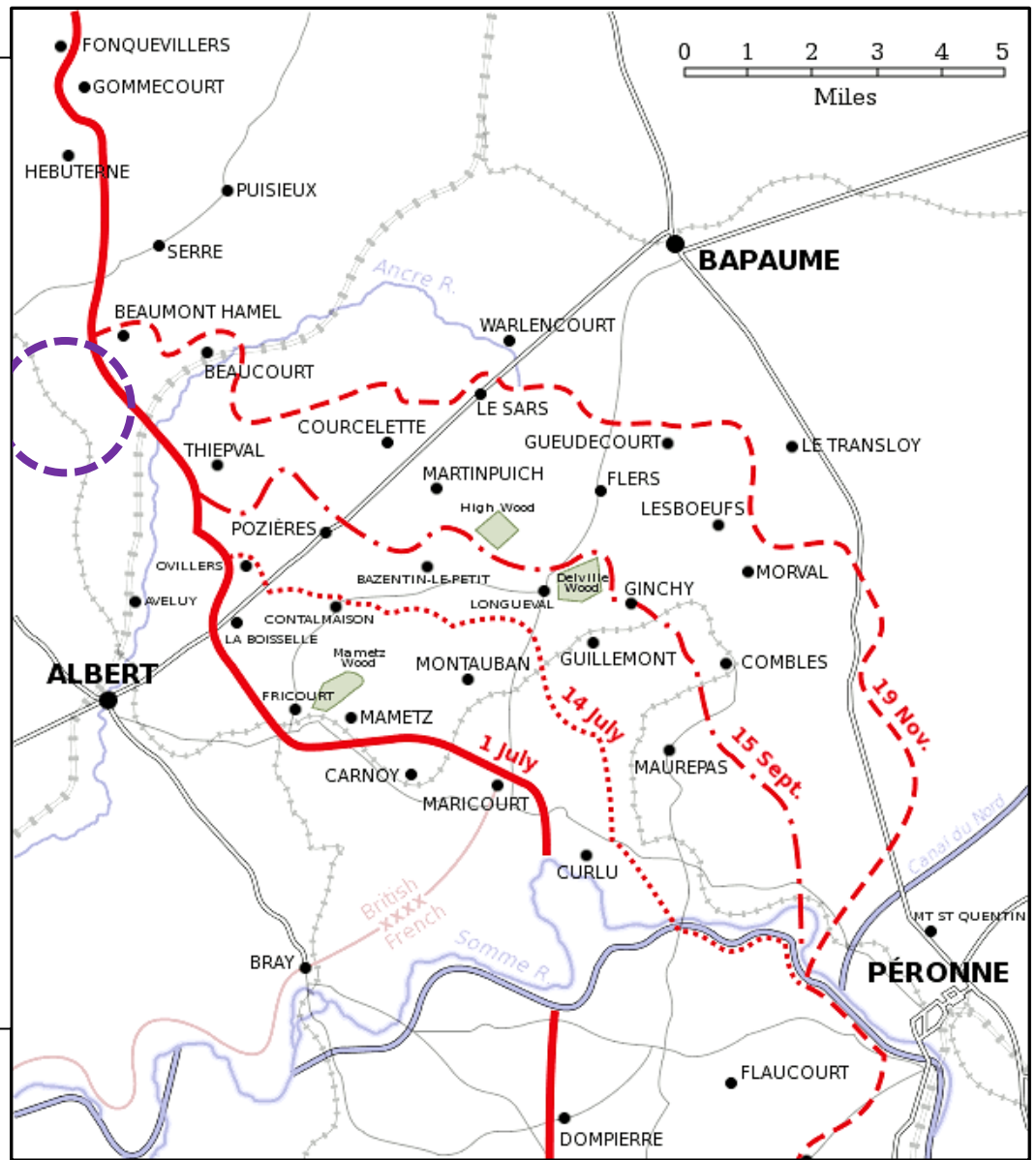
Although we have no details of George's training with the Royal Engineers it is probable that he was in camp in Caernarvon and it is recorded that he was transferred to the Lord Derby War Hospital, Warrington, on 10 May 1916, suffering from gastritis and that he was discharged for duty 18 days later on 27 May. Certainly, in mid-1916 he was in Caernarvon as it was here, at St Peter & Paul's Chapel on 12 July, he married Mary Elizabeth Pemberton of Bidston. Mary (described in 1911 as being a 'mother's help') was a daughter of farmer and milk dealer Thomas and Mary Pemberton of Hill Side Farm, and Mary Devaney was still living here after George died. It does not appear that George and Mary had children - George died only a few months after their marriage - and Mary married James Masterson at a Civil Marriage on Wirral in July / September 1920. Mary and James seem to have had two children, Mary (born early 1923, died mid-1931 aged 8) and James (born early 1925).

The 438th (1/1st Cheshire) Field Company ¹, The Royal Engineers, joined the 3rd Division on 22 December 1914. During late 1914/early 1915, before George enlisted, they took part in The Winter Operations of 1914-15, The First Attack on Bellewaarde and The Actions at Hooze. In 1916 they took part in The Actions of The Bluff and St Eloi Craters then moved to The Somme for the Battle of Albert, The Battle of Bazentin Ridge helping to capture Longueval, The Battle of Delville Wood and The Battle of the Ancre. The Battle of the Ancre (13 - 18 November), was the final large British attack of The Battle of the Somme in 1916 but George had died (Saturday 4 November) some days before this conflict commenced although the circumstances of his death are not known. In fact, having spent 281 days in Britain, George finally went to France on 27 August 1916, just 70 days before he died. He had been in the RE for 351 days. Following George's death Mary was awarded a pension of 13s 9d per week from 21 May 1917.

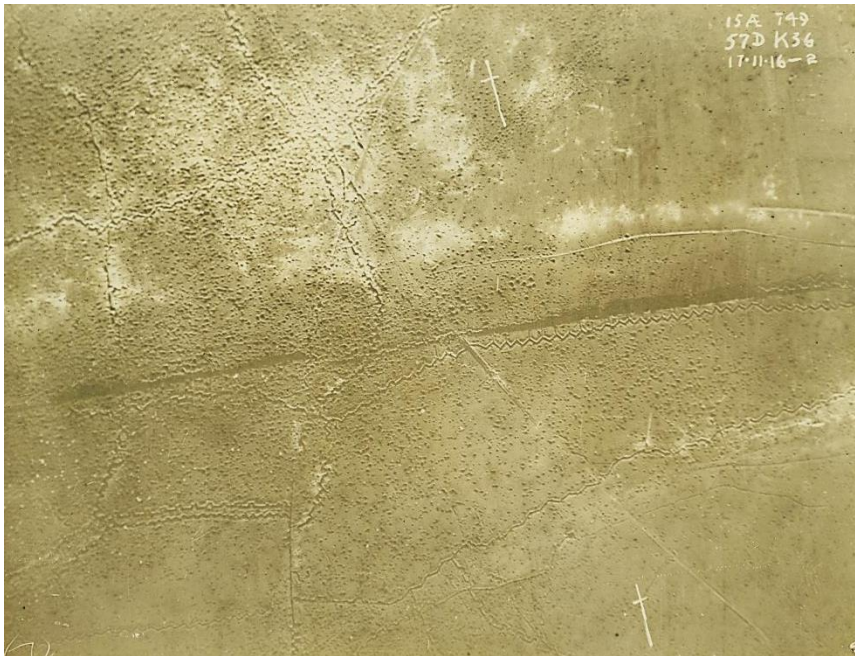
George's two older brothers, James and Edward, both also served in WW1. Edward served in the Royal Garrison Artillery, and survived, whilst James (detailed in the following entry) served with the Monmouthshire Royal Engineers and died at the end of October 1918, only a few days before the signing of the Armistice.

¹ Little information has been found on this unit.

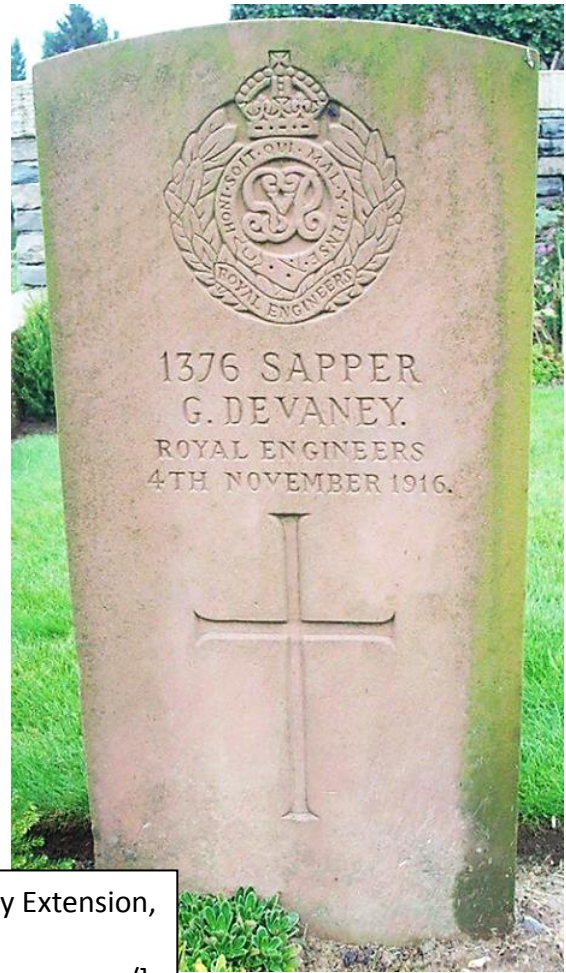
Although the circumstances of George Devaney's death are unknown, and the precise location and actions of his unit at this time are uncertain, it is believed that the 1st (Cheshire) Field Coy. Corps. of Royal Engineers were in the area encircled in purple, supporting the troops who were to attack Serre on 13 November. Serre was the most northern point of the 15 mile Somme offensive; it was never taken by the BEF during the Somme campaign. The map shows how, further south, the British front line pushed eastwards from July to November 1916. [Source: <http://www.westernfrontasociation.com/>]



The military situation around Serre, north of the Somme, on 16 October 1916, three weeks before George Thomas Devaney died. The red lines show the German trenches and positions and, to the west, the blue lines are the British trenches along the front line. 0.5 miles



Aerial photograph of the area south of Serre on 17 November 1916. The ground is heavily pock-marked with shell craters and some of the zig-zag trenches can be seen. [Source: <http://digitalarchive.mcmaster.ca/islandora/object/macrepo%3A5080>]



George Devaney's grave at Courcelles-au-Bois Communal Cemetery Extension, Picardie, France
 Photograph by Bernadette Acquette [<https://grangehill1922.wordpress.com/>]

Further details of George Devaney's life, and particularly his sporting connections, are recorded on two websites:

A problem arose when researching the life of this soldier – the spelling of his surname. The Frankby parish memorial spells it with two “ns”, whereas other records spell it with one. When we learn that the name is Irish and was originally spelled either “O’Duibheamhna” or “O’Duibheannaigh”, a roving “n” in the Anglicisation of the name would appear to be a minor inconvenience. George’s grandfather, Cornelius Devany, an agricultural labourer from Westport in County Mayo, was the founder of the Wirral branch of the family. Interestingly, the 1861 census records him as living on Pemberton Green in Neston, where 39 of the 96 residents (nearly 41%) were Irish. It is possible that, rather than being emigrants to Liverpool who had later settled in Wirral, they had come directly to Wirral via Parkgate.

George attended St. Joseph’s Roman Catholic School in Upton and was taught by a Canon Dallow. He was a very good all-round sportsman who excelled at football and sprinting and always liked to keep fit. His first football club was Gilbrook Mission, presumably based at Gilbrook Square in Birkenhead. He then played for Hoylake, Wrexham and finally Tranmere Rovers. The Deeside Advertiser of 17 November 1916 said that “at Prenton Park he was simply unbeatable, many of his saves being executed in a manner which stamped him as a goalkeeper with a future ... and he soon became an idol of the crowd.” The same article mentioned several other famous local footballers of the day, including Sid Bird, Tom Rainford, Harry Jackson, Bill Fenner, Harold Lees and Joe Mercer. The latter player originated in Ellesmere Port and was the father of Joe Mercer (1914-1990), sometime professional player for Everton and Arsenal, manager of Sheffield United, Aston Villa, Manchester City, Coventry City and England and Hoylake resident.



The Deeside Advertiser said that he had only been at the front for a few weeks before he was killed instantly during the Battle of the Somme. His pals buried him somewhere "behind the firing line". It went on to report that "George was one of those clean-living lads whom it was a pleasure to meet, and the news of his death will be heard by a host of friends with severe regret, but they and his relatives should be happy in the knowledge that he died in the defence of his country... His loss will be keenly felt by local sportsmen, but more particularly his young wife and relatives, to whom the sympathies of the hundreds of admirers of the brave soldier are extended.

['An Imperishable Record : The People of North-West Wirral and the Great War']

Whilst researching the Aintree Munitions Girls in 1917 I happened upon a small article by one of three brothers, James Devaney (who played for Hoylake FC), from Greasby who were all in the service at some point during the war. Sadly one of the brothers had been killed the previous year, George Devaney.

Before the war George had been a keen sports man and before joining the army was goalkeeper for Tranmere Rovers. George has been described as one

of the best-known all round sportsman from the Wirral and he played for several local teams including, Gilbrook Mission and Hoylake.

He moved from Hoylake FC to Wrexham and made 195 appearances for the Welsh side at the Racecourse. After winning a Welsh Cup medal without conceding a single goal he was transferred to Tranmere in 1911.

George always believed in keeping fit which probably gave him the skills to be almost unbeatable in front of the Rover's goal. His natural abilities made him an instant hit at Prenton Park and the future for George looked bright.

Sadly like so many of his generation the War cruelly took his life before he was able to show his full potential.

The article by George's brother James spoke of how Football had given him and several of his footballing friends the edge in fighting the war. Three of James friends had connections at Prenton Park with one being Joe Mercer...

The article in the Birkenhead Advertiser gave us a glimpse of some of the names and lives that were touched by the First World War. The author James Devaney talked of football giving him and others the edge to be better soldiers. Unfortunately Lance Corporal James Devaney of the Royal Engineers was killed in action on the 30th October 1918 just twelve days before the Armistice was signed.

[Stu Ashton - <http://tranmereroverspast.wordpress.com/>]

Both George Devaney, and James Devaney, are commemorated on the Grange Hill Memorial (the Hoylake and West Kirby War Memorial); this has the names of 334 local war casualties.



Hoylake and West Kirby War Memorial, Grange Hill, West Kirby (west aspect).
The names of those who fell in WW1 are shown on the north- and west-facing aspects.

The Late George Devaney.

Although Association Football has been as dead as a door nail at Wrexham since the very early days of the war, the crowd of sportsmen who used to spend their winter half holidays on the Racecourse are still to be reached through the medium of the "Border Counties Advertiser," which finds its way each week to France, Egypt and the East, to the training camps at home and to those retained in civil life. Consequently (writes X.Y.Z) the opportunity is taken here of acquainting old friends far and near of the loss the game in general and the Wrexham F.C. in particular have sustained by the death, on the battlefield, of George Devaney, who kept goal for the Welshmen during several Birmingham League campaigns, and in many well-remembered English and Welsh cup-ties. Like Arthur Berry, Goode, Llew. Davies, Llew. Morris, Joe. Mitchell, and others, whose names will be recalled by all the old "turf" habitués, Devaney joined the colours to take part in what Mr. Punch called "the greater game," and a few days ago the news came through that he had been killed at the front. Those who were privileged to be regularly associated with this quiet, unassuming player will learn of his death with keen regret. The directors, who discovered him on the West Cheshire playing fields, his club-mates from Wrexham, Liverpool and the Potteries, his admirers in the Midlands, at Tranmere (where he played for a while), at Cardiff, and at Swansea, will always think of him as one who "played the game" and played it well. He was not destined for the charmed circle of the English

League; but he stood out amongst the Birmingham League custodians and in his day could perform quite brilliant feats of goalkeeping. He was one of the links in a strong chain of defence—F. Hughes, Ll. Davies, Fenner, Matthias, P. Williams, and Huffadine—which carried the Wrexham club colours to victory many times in the days before the war. Whether Association football is revived on the pre-war scale or not is an open question: but the game will be certainly played again on Wrexham Racecourse, and those who live to see the day will hope to find on the field many more like George Devaney.

Llangollen Advertiser, Denbighshire, Merionethshire, and North Wales Journal – Friday 24 November 1916

George Devaney is buried at Courcelles-au-Bois Communal Cemetery Extension, around 13 km north of Albert. *The extension was opened in October 1916 and used by*

field ambulances and fighting units until March 1917, when the German Army withdrew from the Ancre. It was used again in April 1918 during the German attack on Amiens. The village was in German hands for some months, but was retaken in August 1918. There are now 115 First World War burials in the extension, including three brought in from the communal cemetery in 1934. [CWGC]

...eyer.
 —His loving Sister, Sarah Banton, and ...
 France.
 DEVANEY—In loving remembrance of our dear ...
 in-law, Sapper George Devaney, who was killed in
 action on November 4, 1916.—Sincerely regretted by
 Mr. and Mrs. T. Pemberton, and all at Hillside
 Farm, Bidston.

Liverpool Echo - Monday
 5 November 1917

372653	8/240999	Devaney	11 th th Co.	4-11-16	Shrewsbury	3	4	11	4	3	1/17	16.3-17	Wid: Mary Elizabeth	4	3	=
		George Thomas	Cheshire	14/16									25.10.17	Wid: Mary Elizabeth	3	—
			R. E.	In	Oct 1894	Supp 4	18	1								
			T. F.	Sapper	13/16	4/17										
			A. F. W. 6076 SENT DATE 21 JUL 1916		WAR GRATUITY: 4/3/15											
									3							

Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In Summer 1919 the army paid outstanding credits – mainly remaining wages – to soldiers or, in the case of those who had died, their family or nominated representatives. At the same time a War Gratuity was often paid. In July 1919 George's widow, Mary Elizabeth, received a payment of outstanding wages of £4 3s from the army and, in October, a War Gratuity of £3. This, a total value of £7 3s, is equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £1110 in 2016.

The War Gratuity was introduced in December 1918 as a payment to be made to those men who had served in WW1 for a period of 6 months or more home service or for any length of service if a man had served overseas. The rules governing the gratuity were implemented under Army Order 17 of 1919 but the amount paid was related to the length of war service.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
DEVANEY	R. E.	Spt. (C)	1376
George			

Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	R E/101 B225	5730	
BARRIKEN			
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

K. 1380

British Army WWI Medal Rolls
 Index Cards, 1914-1920

Sarah Devaney, George's mother, died in July/September 1921 in the Woodchurch area aged 68.

John Devaney died in the Tranmere area, aged 71, in early 1923.