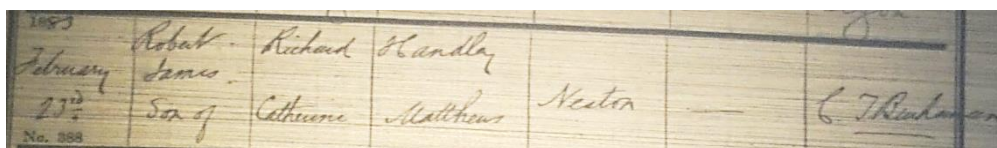


150: Robert James Matthews

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Robert James Matthews
Rank: Private
Battalion / Regiment: 2nd Bn. Manchester Regiment
Service Number: 52048 Date of Death: 02 November 1918 Age at Death: ?
Buried / Commemorated at: Saint Souplet British Cemetery, Saint-Souplet, Departement du Nord, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France
Additional information given by CWGC: None

Robert James Matthews was baptised at Neston Parish Church on 23 February 1883, the illegitimate son of Richard Handley and Catherine Matthews of Neston:



Whilst Richard Handley can be traced in the census returns, Catherine Matthews remains elusive.

Richard Handley, born in Neston, was the son of joiner Peter and Elizabeth Handley of Liverpool Road, Neston and he was recorded as living with them in the census returns of 1861 (aged 8), 1871 (baker, aged 18) and 1881 (baker, aged 28). Peter Handley died, aged 61, on 28 March 1886 and Elizabeth died on 20 December 1891 aged 63; they are buried in a family grave at Neston churchyard.

Catherine Matthews is less easy to identify, the only local possibility being *Catharine*, a daughter of domestic coachman Richard and laundress Catharine Matthews of Leighton. At the time of the 1871 census the family was living at Leighton (near to Leighton Court) and Catharine was aged 13, born Cheshire. At the time of the 1861 census the family (Catharine's father, a domestic coachman, was then recorded as *William*) was living at Ness Colliery and Catharine's birthplace was recorded as Sutton, Cheshire¹. However, it has proved impossible to locate the family after the 1871 census although it appears that Catharine (recorded as Catharine M Matthews) may have been, in 1881, a domestic servant aged 21 at a farm in Carr Lane, Halewood.

No record of Richard Handley having married Catharine Matthews has been found and nothing further is known of her. However, at the time of the 1891 census Richard, 36, was a baker living on Medlock Street in Kirkdale, Liverpool, with his wife Elizabeth (30, born Birkenhead). No record of this marriage has been located.

At the time of the 1901 census Richard (46, breadmaker / baker) was a boarder at 307 Netherfield Road, Kirkdale, now married to Ellen (31, born Liverpool) and with daughter Selina, 9, born Liverpool. No definite record of this marriage, or of the death of Elizabeth Handley, has been located.

¹ A Catherine Mathews was born in the Eastham district in 1858.

In the 1911 census Richard (56, baker, born Liverpool) and wife Nellie (39, born Liverpool) were boarding at the home of grocer shop keeper Hannah Harrison at 155 Walton Village, Liverpool. Richard and Nellie - clearly a variation of *Ellen* - had been married for 20 years and they had one child. This marriage has also not been located in the records but it would appear to have taken place not long after the 1891 census when Richard was recorded as being married to Elizabeth. In 1911 Selina Handley (19, born Liverpool) the only child of Richard and Ellen, was a domestic servant working for the Kardomah Tea Company and living with her uncle William Cork (42, house joiner, born Liverpool) and his wife Selina (38, born Liverpool).

Robert James Matthews has not been found anywhere in the census returns for 1891 or 1901 but in 1911 he was living at Ashfield Cottages, near Ashfield Farm, Neston:

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.
1	Robert James Matthews	Head	28	Married					Gardener, Domestic		0		Neston Cheshire		
2	Jane Matthews	Wife	25 25	Married	2	2	2	0							
3	William Handley	Matthews Son	1												
4	John Matthews	Son	months												

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)			Total	
(1) I certify that —			Males	Females
(1) All the ages on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex columns.			3	1
(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.				4
(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 <i>EEB</i>				

(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 (Kitchens, Tenements, or Apartments). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count sanitary, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, nor warehouse, office, shop.	I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.
3	Signature <i>Robert Matthews</i>
	Postal Address <i>Ashfield Cottages Neston</i>

1911 census (condensed) – Ashfield Cottages, Leighton, Neston

Robert James Matthews	28	gardener, domestic	born Neston
Jane	25		born Neston
William Handley	1		born Neston
John	2 months		born Neston

Robert and Jane had been married for two years and both their children had survived.

It seems probable that Robert married Jane Hancock at West Derby Register Office, Liverpool, in late 1909; Jane was the daughter of labourer John and Jane Hancock and had been born in Burton although no record of her baptism there or in Neston has been found.

In 1901 Jane, aged 15, was a servant at Cherry Brow Farm in Willaston.

It is significant that Robert and Jane gave their first child, William, the middle name of *Handley* after Robert's father.

In addition to the two children recorded in the 1911 census it is probable that a third child, James, was born in late 1912 and that Jane died in late 1913, aged 28, and was buried at Neston Parish Church on 3 November. Her address was then recorded in the register as being Evans Cottages, Little Neston:

Jane Matthews	Evans Cottages	Nov. 3 rd	Years	
	Little Neston	1913	28	19. Chelton
No 1484				

If this is, indeed, Robert's wife, Robert now had three small children to raise. Whilst we have no information as to what happened to the children it seems that Robert moved from Neston to the area of Ince, south of Wigan.

Although the Service Record for Robert James Matthews has not been found, it is recorded that he was serving with the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment when he died on 2 November 1918. It is also recorded that, born in Neston, he was living at Ince, Lancashire, when he enlisted at Ashton-under-Lyne.

[<http://www.wiganworld.co.uk/ww1booklet.pdf>]

The 2nd Battalion The Manchester Regiment were in Curragh serving with the 14th Brigade, 5th Division when war broke out in August 1914. They mobilised and proceeded to France landing at Le Havre on 17 August 1914 and entrained to La Cateau. They went into action on 23 August forming a defensive line near Wasmes on the Mons-Conde canal at The Battle of Mons and the subsequent retreat. They were also in action at The Battle of Le Cateau, The Battle of the Marne, The Battle of the Aisne, at La Bassee, Messines and The First Battle of Ypres. In 1915 they were in action at The Second Battle of Ypres and The Capture of Hill 60. In autumn 1915 many units from the 5th Division were exchanged with units from the newly arrived volunteer 32nd Division, to stiffen the inexperienced Division with regular army troops, and the 2nd Manchesters moved with the 14th Brigade to the 32nd Division on 30 December. In 1916 they were in action during The Battles of the Somme 1916 and in 1917 they were involved in The Operations on the Ancre and The Pursuit of the German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line. On 6 February 1918 the battalion transferred to the 96th Brigade, still with the 32nd Division. In 1918 they were in action on the Somme, in The Battles of the Hindenburg Line and The Final Advance in Picardy.

[<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/>]

Robert James Matthews died on 2 November 1918 – this was just nine days before the signing of the Armistice and the formal ending of WW1 – two days before the poet Wilfred Owen was killed in the same area.

Leading up to this time '*The Manchester Regiment 1899 – 1958*' notes, for the 2nd Battalion:

October 1st The battalion attacked the enemy system (Hindenberg line) with "complete success" at 4pm with 4 tanks, broke through the Beaufort-Fonsomme line after hand to hand fighting, capturing 210 prisoners. There were then subjected to repeated counter attacks during the night but the 2nd Manchester's successfully maintained their position with the assistance of a company of the 15th Lancs Fusiliers (another local pals battalion). The following message was sent to all companies on the 2nd:

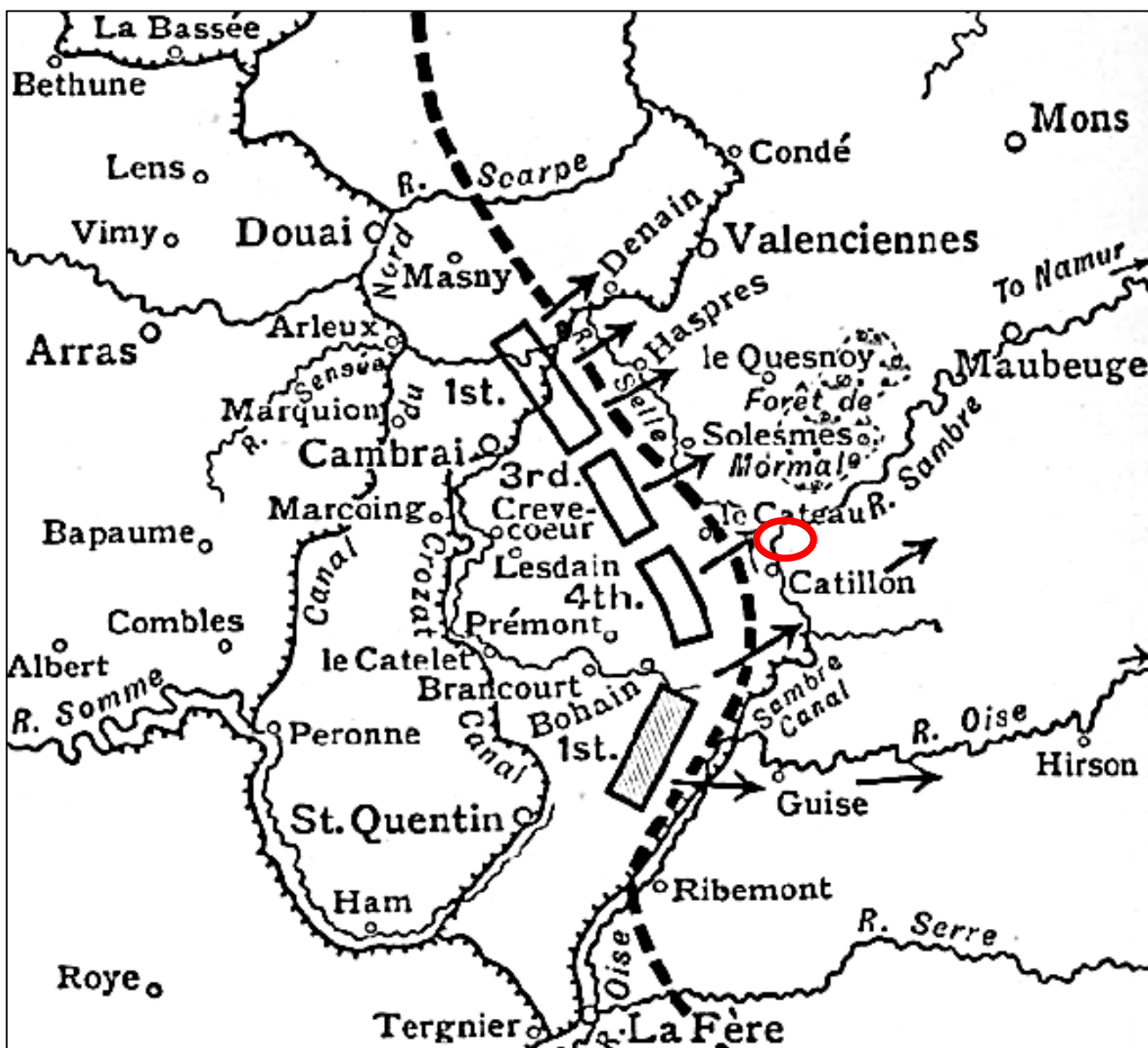
"The GOC desires me to thank you on his behalf, all ranks for their extremely gallant conduct yesterday and especially last night. He will tell them when they come out what extreme importance was attached to their behaviour, and if today's operations are successful, their conduct will have led to one of the greatest successes of the war, maybe. They are the only men in the division who did their task and held it....."

On November 4th the battalion attacked on the left flank of the Brigade meeting intense shell and machine gun fire across the canal north of Ors. Lt. Kirke paddled across the canal on a raft and engaged the enemy with a Lewis gun, (he did not survive but was awarded a posthumous VC) but a bridge was erected and 2 of his platoons crossed but were held by enemy fire and the bridge destroyed. The remaining troops were sent to another crossing which had been secured by the 1st Dorsetshires. They attacked the Germans at La Motte farm and achieved their objectives. The attack continued unabated.

The war came to an end on the 11th November but the part the 2nd Battalion played came to an end on the 6th; it went into billets at Sambretton where it learnt about the Armistice.

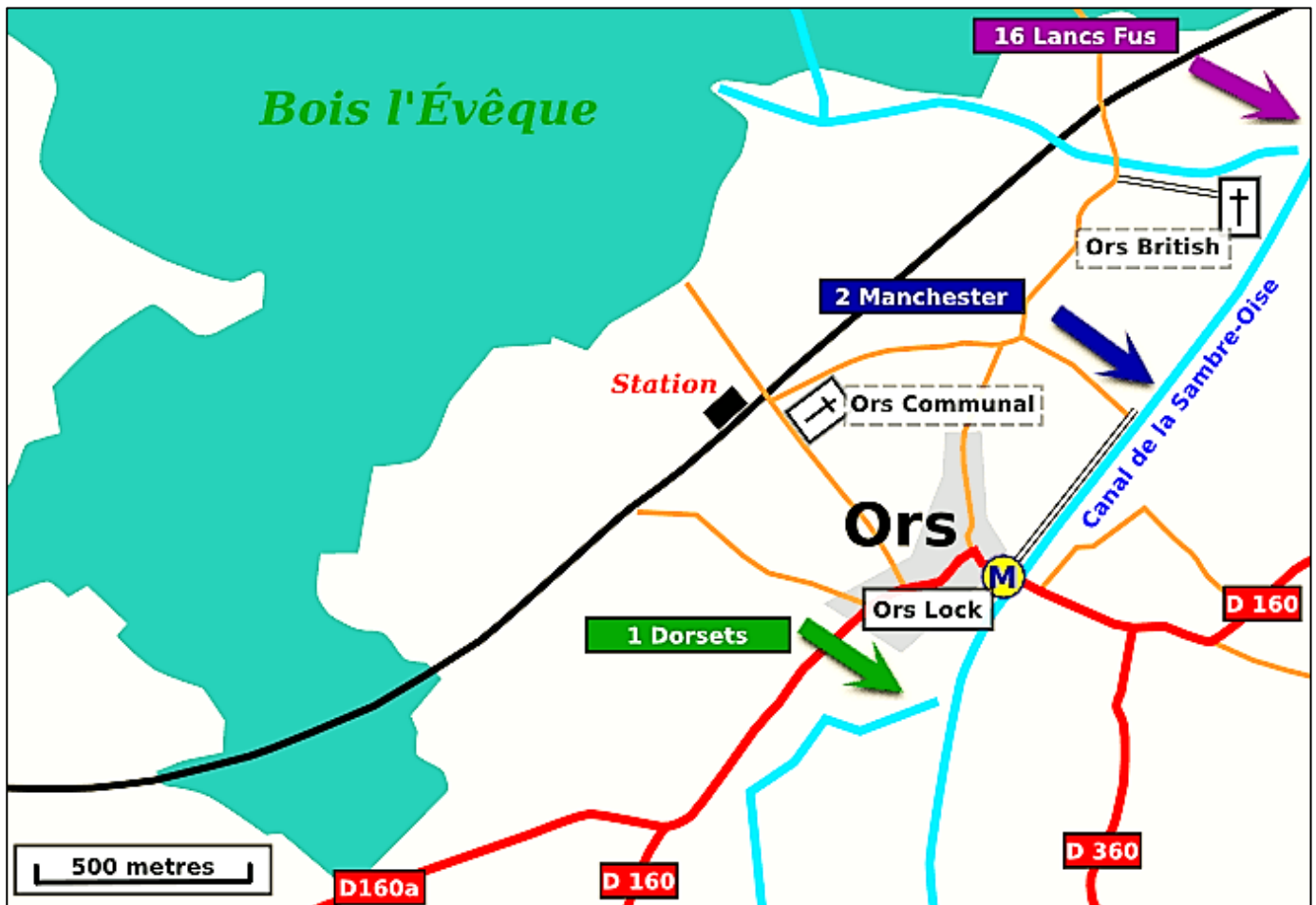
[with minor amendment from : <http://www.themanchesters.org/2nd>]

It was, perhaps, this last engagement that led to the death of Robert James Matthews.



□ British 1st., 3rd. & 4th. Armies **▨ French 1st. Army**

The position of Ors (encircled in red), the area in which Robert James Matthews was killed, at the commencement of the Battle of the Selle (17 – 25 October 1918) which led into The Final Advance in Picardy in early November. [Source : <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battles/battles-of-the-western-front-in-france-and-flanders/the-final-advance-in-picardy/>]



Ors : 4 November 1918, two days after Robert Matthews died, showing the position of the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment as they attacked over the Sambre-Oise Canal north of Ors.
 [Source : <http://www.webmatters.net/txtpat/images/2990.gif>]

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
63 MATTHEWS Robert J.	Manch. R.	Pte.	52048
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	47/104	45	
BRITISH			
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

Robert James Matthews was buried at St Suplet British Cemetery.
St. Souplet village was captured by the American 30th Division on the 10th October 1918. The American troops made a cemetery of 371 American and seven British graves on the South-West side of the village, on the road to Vaux-Andigny. A smaller British cemetery was made alongside. The American graves were removed after the Armistice and the seven British graves were moved into the British cemetery. Further British graves were brought in from the surrounding battlefields and [numerous] smaller burial grounds. [CWGC]

806340	72382	Hughes Robert James Mathews	2 Bn Chester	2 11.18 West	✓ 4 15 -	20.5.19 Guardian Margaret Rigby Guardian Margaret	4 15 - 5 = =	
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WAR GRATUITY.

Effects 19.12.18

Transfer 29.5.19

Exp Paid 29.12.19

Serial no 31262

A. F. W. GOVERNMENT SENT
DATE

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 June 1919 Robert’s guardian, Margaret Rigby, received a payment of outstanding wages of £4 15s from the army and, later, a War Gratuity of £5. This, a total value of £9 15s, is equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £1500 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.

Margaret Rigby, the recipient recorded in the Soldier’s Effects document of 1919, and designated as *guardian*, was presumably the guardian of Robert’s children who in 1919 would have ranged in age from about 5 to 10. It has not been possible to identify Margaret Rigby and she does not seem to be an immediate relative of Robert. Nothing further is known of the future of Robert’s children and it is uncertain as to when Richard Handley, Robert’s father, died.

Robert is listed on the memorial plaque of St Mary's, the Parish Church of Lower Ince & Spring View (Wigan).