25: Joseph Laurence Downey

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Joseph Lawrence Downey *

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: Machine Gun Corps. Infantry

Service Number: 188612 Date of Death: 30 November 1918 Age at Death: 19

Buried / Commemorated at: St Winefride's RC churchyard, Little Neston

Additional information given by CWGC: None

* Whilst the CWGC, and the inscription on his grave, gives Joseph's middle name as *Lawrence*, it appears from the register of his birth and census returns that it was *Laurence*

Joseph Laurence Downey, a son of Patrick and Mary Downey of Little Neston, was born on 4 November 1897 and baptised at St Winefride's RC church on 21 November. In the 1901 census the family was living at Pritchard's Row:

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Patrick Downey Mary Thomas E. George J. Joseph L.	42 36 10 9 3	coalminer, hewer	born Ireland born Little Neston born Little Neston born Little Neston born Little Neston

Joseph's older brother, Thomas, also died in WW1 [see entry 26: Thomas Edward Downey].

Patrick Downey married Mary Millitt (recorded as *Millet*) in Liverpool in late 1888 and Patrick Downey died, aged 50, 3 January 1910.

At the time of the 1911 census, just 15 months after Patrick's death, the family was living on Rodney Row in Little Neston with Mary's mother, Margaret Millitt. The family was Roman Catholic and the records of St Winefride's Church, Little Neston, record both the dates of birth and the baptismal dates for each child:

Thomas Edward	born 9 October 1890	baptised 9 November 1890
George James	born 8 February 1892	baptised 6 March 1892
Margaret Jane	born 4 January 1895	baptised privately 16 January 1895
Joseph Laurence	born 4 November 1897	baptised 21 November 1897
Ann Elizabeth Catherine	born 25 April 1901	baptised 9 May 1901
John Henry	born 21 April 1906	baptised 7 May 1906

The contents of the Schedule will be tree	,	1		ase read the L	lxamples.	and the	Instruct	tions g	riven on the other	AND AND side of the paper, as well to individual persons. Th	l as the headings of the C	olumns. The			Number of Sched (To be filled up after o	
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of every Person, whether Member of Family, Visitor, Boarder, or Servant, who	i y	For	r Infants .		State, for each Married Wor entered on this Schedule, t number of :		the	Pars	onal Occupation.	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.	Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account.	Whather Working at House,	(1) If born in the United King dom, write the name of th	State whether; (1) "British sub- ject by parent age," (2) "A Naturalised British sub- ject," giving year of natu- ralisation. (3) If of foreign nationality	if any p included in Schedule is (1) "Total de and Dumb," (2) "Totally g (3) "Lunatic or "Fe minded," state the inference or posite that and the state of the state the inference or posite that and the state of the state the inference or posite that the state of the	
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As Joseph's Service Record has not been found it is not possible to give any of his details and it is known only that he was training in the UK when he was taken ill with influenza (probably whilst at Cannock Chase) and, two weeks later, he died. His death occurred nearly 3 weeks after the 11 November 1918 Armistice and he may have died

Neston Soldier Victims.

News has been received this week of the deaths of two Little Neston soldiers. Predeaths of two Little Neston soldiers. Predeaths of Bowney, Predeath, and Predeath Loseph Downey. Predeaths enlisted some time ago, and had been on active service to Salonica. He leaves a wife and four children, and much sympathy is felt for them and also for the relatives of Predeaths, who died in training from the espects of influence.

Birkenhead News – Saturday 7 December 1918 in Staffordshire as his death was registered at Lichfield. The Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects notes that he enlisted on 31 August 1918 when the war was coming to an end and just 10 weeks before the Armistice.

As Joseph did not see any active service he did not qualify for any medals or a War Gratuity.

Mary Downey, Joseph's mother, died 3 August 1933 aged 65.

The details known of Joseph's siblings are:

Thomas Edward Downey (see following account) married Mary Smith in 1913 and he was killed in action on 9 September 1917.

George James Downey married Victoria

Dorothea Maxfield (born 12 June 1897) in the

SOLDIERS DEATH.—We regret to have to record the death of two more soldiers, both of whom belonged to the Little Neston district and were well known. Pto. Davies, Rodney Row, died in Salonica and leaves a widow and four children; and Pto. Joseph Downey, who was in training in this country passed away on Monday, after a fortnight's illness. Much sympathy is expressed for the relatives.

Cheshire Observer - Saturday 7 December 1918

Monmouth district in mid- 1919 and the 1939 Register records them living at 13 Bromborough Road, Bebington. George was a bricklayer's labourer at a soap and glycerine works. George died in April / June 1948 aged 56 and Victoria died in early 1978 in the Birkenhead area.

Margaret Jane Downey married John Evans in July / September 1935 in a Civil Marriage on Wirral and she died on Wirral in July / September 1971 aged 77.

Annie Elizabeth Catherine Downey died on 17 December 1923 and is buried at St Winefride's with her father and brothers Joseph and Thomas. However, although the grave inscription records that she was 19 she was, actually, aged 22.

John Henry Downey married Agnes Campbell in a Civil Marriage on Wirral in early 1930 and he died in April / June 1959 aged 53. The 1939 Register records John (market salesman, gardener) and Agnes (born 1 February 1897, market sales woman) as living at 'Sunshine Bungalow', Whitehouse Lane, Heswall.



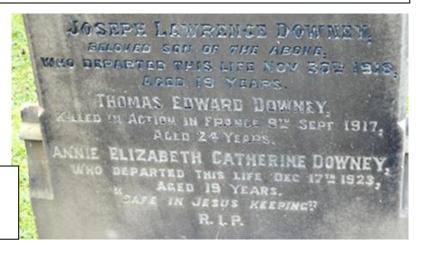
The Millitt and Downey gravestone at St Winefride RC church, Little Neston.

In addition to the four Downey inscriptions, the stone commemorates Joseph Millitt (died 23 June 1901 aged 33) and Ethel Millitt (died 6 August 1903 aged 5).

Joseph Millitt was the younger brother of Mary Downey (née Millitt), Joseph Downey's mother. He is recorded as a coal miner/hewer at Neston, married to Ellen and with a young family (Thomas, 9; Joseph, 7; Louise, 5) and living at 6 Broster's Cottages, Little Neston, when he died

Ethel Millitt was the eldest child of George and Louisa Millitt of 4 Broster's Cottages, Little Neston. George, also a coal miner / hewer, was a younger brother of Mary and Joseph.

Detail of the headstone of brothers Joseph Lawrence Downey & Thomas Edward Downey, St Winefride's RC church, Little Neston.



Record Registry No. No. No.				D.				CHARG	ES .								
	Soldier's Name	Regiment, Rank, No.	Date and Place of Death	Account and Date	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	Account and Date	Date of Authority	To whom Authorised	Amount Authorised £ s. d.			
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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 although Joseph Downey did not qualify for this.

Joseph Downey had accrued a credit of £3 17s 4d and this was received by his mother, Mary. This is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of £580 in 2016.

The 'Spanish Flu' pandemic of 1918 was one of the greatest medical disasters of the 20th century. This was a global pandemic, an airborne virus which affected every continent.

It was nicknamed 'Spanish flu' as the first reported cases were in Spain. As this was during World War I, newspapers were censored (Germany, the United States, Britain and France all had media blackouts on news that might lower morale) so although there were influenza (flu) cases elsewhere, it was the Spanish cases that hit the headlines. One of the first casualties was the King of Spain.

Although not caused by World War I it is thought that, in the UK, the virus was spread by soldiers returning home from the trenches in northern France. Soldiers were becoming ill with what was known as 'la grippe', the symptoms of which were sore throats, headaches and a loss of appetite. Although highly infectious in the cramped, primitive conditions of the trenches, recovery was usually swift and doctors at first called it "three-day fever".

The outbreak hit the UK in a series of waves, with its peak at the end of WW1. Returning from Northern France at the end of the war, the troops travelled home by train. As they arrived at the railway stations, so the flu spread from the railway stations to the centre of the cities, then to the suburbs and out into the countryside. Not restricted to class, anyone could catch it. Prime Minister David Lloyd George contracted it but survived. Some other notable survivors included the cartoonist Walt Disney and Kaiser Willhelm II of Germany.

Young adults between 20 and 30 years old were particularly affected and the disease struck and progressed quickly in these cases. Onset was devastatingly quick. Those fine and healthy at breakfast could be dead by teatime. Within hours of feeling the first symptoms of fatigue, fever and headache, some victims would rapidly develop pneumonia and start turning blue, signalling a shortage of oxygen. They would then struggle for air until they suffocated to death.

UK Hospitals were overwhelmed and even medical students were drafted in to help. Doctors and nurses worked to breaking point, although there was little they could do as there were no treatments for the flu and no antibiotics to treat the pneumonia.

[Source: http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-Spanish-Flu-pandemic-of-1918/]

It has been estimated that the pandemic affected up to 500 million people globally and estimates of death range from 20 - 100 million. This is at least three times the number killed in WW1. In Britain the flu killed around 228 000 people, 25 times the death rate for a 'normal' epidemic. In 1918 the UK population was 38.2 million and around 0.6% died of influenza. Globally, an estimated 10% to 20% of those who were infected died.