

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:

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

1901 census (extract) – 10 Pritchard's Row, Little Neston

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

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

Number of Schedule
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection)

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (last birthday) and SEX	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE				PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards				BIRTHPLACE of every person	NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country	INFIRMITY
			State for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of—	Children born alive to present Marriage (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7)	Children born alive to previous Marriage (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7)	Children who have died	Personal Occupation	Industry or Service with which worker is connected	Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account	Whether Working at Home			
Henry Galt Millitt	Head	73	Widow				old age Pensioner			Little Neston			
Annie Elizabeth Millitt	daughter	25	single				charwoman - domestic go out temporary			Little Neston			
Mary Downey	daughter	40	widow				laundress go out washing			Little Neston			
Thomas Edward Downey	son	19	single				teamsman for farmer			Little Neston			
George James Downey	son	18	single				farm labourer			Little Neston			
Margaret Jane Downey	daughter	16	single				dressmaker improver			Little Neston			
Joseph Laurence Downey	son	14	single				errand boy on farm			Little Neston			
Annie Elizabeth Downey	daughter	4	single				go to school			Little Neston			
John Henry Downey	son	4	single							Little Neston			
Mary daughter													
John grandchild													

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

I certify that—	
(1) All the names on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex column.	Total. Male Females Persons.
(2) I have counted the names and females in Column 3 and 4 separately, and have compared their sum with the total number of persons.	
(3) After making the necessary enquiries I have completed all entries on this Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.	
Initials of Enumerator	

(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, Halls, or Apartments). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, 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.
Rooms	Signature <i>Mrs Annie Elizabeth Millitt</i>
	Postal Address <i>Little Neston Cheshire</i>

1911 census – Rodney Row, Little Neston

Margaret Millitt	73	widow, old age pensioner	born Little Neston
Annie Elizabeth Millitt	25	charwoman, go out temporary	born Little Neston
Mary Downey	40	widow, laundress, go out washing	born Little Neston
Thomas Edward	19	teamsman for farmer	born Little Neston
George James	18	farm labourer	born Little Neston
Margaret Jane	16	dressmaker improver	born Little Neston
Joseph Laurence	14	errand boy on farm	born Little Neston
Annie Elizabeth	4		born Little Neston
John Henry	4		born Little Neston

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

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:

Neston Soldier Victims.

News has been received this week of the deaths of two Little Neston soldiers. Pte. Davies, of Rodney-road, and Pte. Joseph Downey. Pte. Davies enlisted some time ago, and had been on active service in Salonica. He leaves a wife and four children, and much sympathy is felt for them and also for the relatives of Pte. Downey, who died in training from the effects of influenza.

Birkenhead News – Saturday 7 December 1918

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 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.

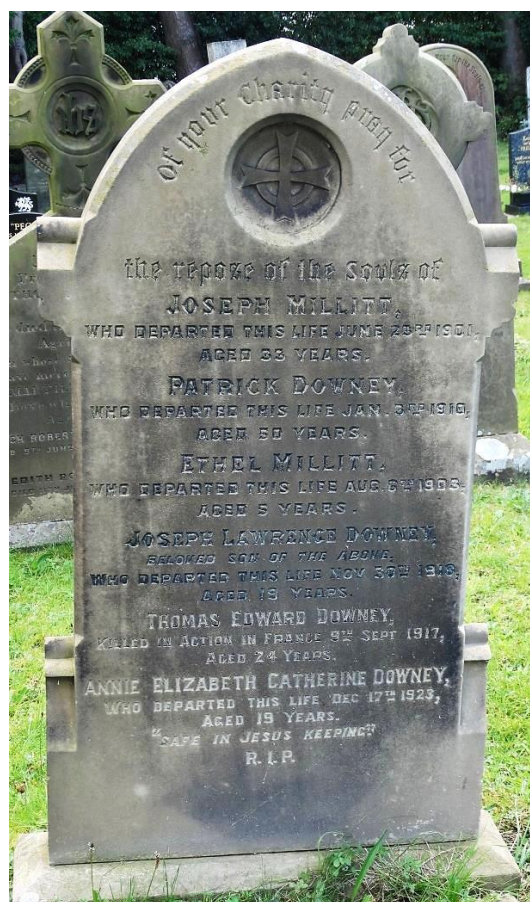
Margaret Jane Downey married John Evans in July / September 1935 in a Civil Marriage on Wirral and she died on Wirral in July / September 1971 aged 77.

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.

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. Pte. Davies, Rodney Row, died in Salonica and leaves a widow and four children; and Pte. 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



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 No.	Registry No.	Soldier's Name	Regiment, Rank, No.	Date and Place of Death	CREDITS			CHARGES			Date of Authority	To whom Authorised	Amount Authorised			
					Account and Date	£	s.	d.	£	s.			d.	Account and Date	£	s.
845586	419409	Downey Joseph Lawrence	6 th Tr. Dr. 20.11.19 South M.C.C. Pneumonia Pte Cannock 1/19 188612 (Rase)	20.11.19 South	3	17	4					27.6.19	Mrs. Mary	3	17	4
Enlisted 31.8.18. War Gratuity not admissible																

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 Wilhelm 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 tea-time. 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.