

67: William Robert Oxtan

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: W. R. Oxtan

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 2nd / 6th Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regiment

Service Number: 29090

Date of Death: 24 October 1918

Age at Death: ?

Buried / Commemorated at: Crucifix Cemetery, Vendegies-sur-Ecaillon, Departement du Nord, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France

Additional information given by CWGC: None

William Robert Oxtan was the sixth, and youngest, son of building labourer James and Martha Oxtan of Little Neston / Ness Holt.

James Oxtan, the son of Little Neston stonemason Joseph and Mary Oxtan, married Martha Glover of Neston at Our Lady & St Nicholas & St Anne, the Liverpool Parish Church, in early 1882. Martha was a daughter of Neston bricksetter Thomas and Elizabeth Glover. Their first child appears to have been Joseph Henry, born in late 1882, although no baptismal record has been found.

By the time of the 1891 census the family had expanded:

James Oxtan	Head	M	24	General Labourer			Phoebe L. Martin
Martha	Wife	M	26				
James H.	Son		8				
Edwin	Son		6				
Charles T.	Son		3				
John G.	Son		1				
George	Brother	S	22				
Joseph	Brother	S	20				

1891 census (extract – Little Neston)

James Oxtan	24	general labourer	born Little Neston
Martha	26		born Little Neston
James H.	8		born Little Neston
Edwin	6		born Little Neston
Charles T.	3		born Little Neston
John G.	1		born Little Neston
George	22	brother, coal miner	born Little Neston
Joseph	20	brother, coal miner	born Little Neston

William Robert Oxtan was born in mid-1898 and a sister, Ada Roseline, was born in 1900 but died the following year. Another sister, Martha's final child and also named Martha, was born in mid-1903; she also died and was buried on 18 November 1903 aged 5 months. The family at that time was living on Victoria Road in Little Neston.

By the time of the 1901 census the family was living at Ness Holt:

James Oxton	Head	M	35	Bricklayer's Labourer	Worker	Do Little Neston
Martha Do	Wife	M	36			Do Neston
James H. Do	Son	M	18	Apprentice Bricklayer	Worker	Do Little Neston
Edwin Do	Do	S	15			Do Do
Charles Do	Do	S	13			Do Do
John G. Do	Do	S	11			Do Do
Bertie Do	Do	-	9			Do Do
Emily M. Do	Daughter	-	7			Do Do
Gladys Do	Do	-	5			Do Do
William R. Do	Son	-	2			Do Ness Holt
Ada R. Do	Daughter	-	8 months			Do Do

1901 census (extract) – Ness Lane, Ness Holt, Ness

James Oxton	35	bricklayer's labourer	born Little Neston
Martha	36		born Neston
James H.	18	apprentice bricklayer	born Little Neston
Edwin	15		born Little Neston
Charles	13		born Little Neston
John G.	11		born Little Neston
Bertie	9		born Little Neston
Emily M.	7		born Little Neston
Gladys	5		born Little Neston
William R.	2		born Ness Holt
Ada R.	8 months		born Ness Holt

The birth (from the 1939 Register) and baptismal dates are:

James Henry	born 26 September 1882 - no known baptism
Edwin	born 14 April 1885 - baptised 19 June
Charles Thomas	born 2 September 1887 - baptised 30 September
John George	born 3 August 1889 - baptised 13 October
Bertie / Bert	born 2 November 1891 - baptised 11 December
Emily Maud	born 2 June 1894 - baptised 22 June 1894
Gladys	baptised 29 May 1896
William Robert	baptised 8 May 1898
Ada Roseline	baptised 7 September 1900 - buried, aged 15 mths, 26 October 1901
Martha	born about June 1903 - buried on 18 November 1903

In the 1911 census the family was recorded as living at 'Late "Durham Ox"', Little



The Durham Ox (later renamed as Durham House) – the two-storey white building on The Green, Little Neston.

Neston. A public house on The Green in the village, the Durham Ox has been reported to have closed in 1928, yet this census suggests it was already a private residence.

In 1911 all the male members of the Oxton family were involved in the building & decorating trades.

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Schedule 84
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection)

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.

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.	Children who have been adopted.	Personal Occupation.	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.	Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account.				Whether Working at Home.
James Oxton	Head	50	married						Labourer to Joiners	Building	Worker	Cheshire, Little Neston		
Martha Oxton	Wife	48	married	30	10	8	2					Cheshire, Little Neston		
Jas. Hy. Oxton	Son	38	married	1	1	0			Bricklayer	Building	Worker	Cheshire, Little Neston		
Jas. Hy. Oxton	Grandson	7										Cheshire, Little Neston		
Edwin Oxton	Son	26	single						Joiner	Building	Worker	Cheshire, Little Neston		
Charles Thos. Oxton	Son	24	single						Plasterer	Building	Worker	Cheshire, Little Neston		
John George Oxton	Son	22	single						Joiner	Building	Worker	Cheshire, Little Neston		
Bertie Oxton	Son	20	single						House Painter	Building	Worker	Cheshire, Little Neston		
Emily Maud Oxton	Daughter	17	single						Apprentice Dressmaker		Worker	Cheshire, Little Neston		
Gladys Oxton	Daughter	15	single						At Home			Cheshire, Little Neston		
William Rbt. Oxton	Son	12							School			Cheshire, Little Neston		

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

I certify that—
(1) All the names on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex columns.
(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.
(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: *J.H.*

(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, Bathrooms, 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.

Signature: *James Oxton*
Postal Address: *1st Durham St Little Neston Chs.*
(Little Neston)

1911 census – late 'Durham Ox', Little Neston

James Oxton	50	labourer to joiners	born Little Neston
Martha	48		born Neston
Jas. Hy.	28	married, bricklayer	born Little Neston
Jas. Hy.	2	grandson	born Little Neston
Edwin	26	joiner	born Little Neston
Charles Thos.	24	plasterer	born Little Neston
John George	22	joiner	born Little Neston
Bertie	20	house painter	born Little Neston
Emily Maud	17	apprentice dressmaker	born Little Neston
Gladys	15	at home	born Little Neston
William Rbt.	12		born Little Neston

James and Martha had been married for 30 years and eight of their ten children had survived.

The eldest child, James Henry Oxton, married Maria Handley at St Peter's Church in Liverpool in mid-1908. Maria (sometimes *Marie*, born 6 August 1886) was a daughter of carpenter William and Mary Handley of Gladstone Road and the sister of Ratcliffe Handley who died in WW1 on 9 August 1916 [see [73: Ratcliffe Handley](#)]. It is believed that James and Maria had at least five children:

James Henry	born mid-1909
Emma V. P.	born mid-1912
Frank	born late 1913
Steve	born mid-1915
Joan	born 21 February 1917

At the time of the 1911 census James Henry Oxton snr, and his son, were visiting his parents and siblings in Little Neston. It is not known where James and Maria lived;

she is recorded, in 1911 aged 24, as being a cook at the home of barrister Alexander and Ruth Miller at 'Rocklands', Heswall. It is recorded that James Henry ['Harry'] served in the Royal Engineers during the war and, although no army records of his service have been found, the *Birkenhead News* reported in early 1918 that he had injured his arm and was in hospital in Rouen.

The 1939 Register records James Oxton as a builder's general foreman living with Marie (shopkeeper, general dealer) at the Domino Stores on Liverpool Road, Neston. Joan Oxton, their unmarried daughter, a hairdresser, was living with them; she married Ronald Francis Evans at Neston Parish Church in mid-1940.

Maria Oxton died in East Wirral in early 1945 aged 58 and James Henry Oxton died in mid-1966 aged 83. Their son, also James Henry, died in early 1972 aged 62.

Edwin Oxton married Anne Jane Roberts at Neston Presbyterian Church on 15 November 1914 and they lived on Beaconsfield Road, Parkgate. Their son, Edwin Howell Oxton, was born 5 February 1918.

A journeyman joiner, Edwin, enlisted in the Army Reserve in June 1916 and on 26 July 1916 (aged 31 years 1 month) he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps.

On 1 April 1918 Edwin transferred to the RAF and, on 14 February 1919, to the Air Force Reserve. He was discharged on 30 April 1920.

Edwin and his family have not been located in the 1939 Register but he died on Wirral in mid-1972 aged 87.

Charles Thomas Oxton, aged 28 years 4 months (a plasterer, married to Lillian Maud and living at 'The Newlands', Little Neston) joined the Cheshire Field Coy. (Royal Engineers) as a Sapper on 28 January 1915. He was discharged after 23 days as being medically unfit. He had married Lillian Rooke (born 31 May 1888) at a Civil Marriage on Wirral in late 1911.

In September 1939 Charles and Lillian were living at 'West View' on Mellock Lane; Charles was a *slater and plasterer, seeking employment* and living with them were unmarried children:

Ethel Norah (born 21 August 1919), a ladies' hairdresser. Ethel married William Kent at Neston Parish Church in mid-1940.

Henry Edwin Rooke (born 6 July 1928). He was still at school but, in early 1946, he married Mavis Jones at a Civil Marriage on Wirral.

Charles Thomas Oxton died on 11 November 1957 aged 70. The family gravestone in Neston Cemetery gives some detail of his family.

John George Oxton married Martha Newby at a Civil Marriage on Wirral in mid-1915 and in 1939, recorded as a master builder, was living at 'Newton', Barnsdale Avenue, Thingwall. With John and Martha (born 13 June 1895) were unmarried sons:

William John (born 1 December 1915), a joiner and woodworker

Geoffrey (born 11 August 1924), an apprentice joiner

John George Oxton died in Birkenhead in early 1963 aged 73. It is not known when Martha died.

Bertie / Bert Oxton, aged 24 years 10 months, joined the 2nd Battalion Cheshire Yeomanry on 18 October 1916 - he gave his address as Durham House, Little Neston and was recorded as a painter. He was found to be physically unfit for service and was discharged on 24 February 1917 having served for just 178 days. In the 1939 Register (born 2 November 1891, house painter) he was living at 7 Cambrian Terrace, Badger Bait, Little Neston. Bert had married Beatrice Evans in a Civil Marriage on Wirral in late 1917 and Bert was with Beatrice (born 23 March 1896) and unmarried daughter Margaret (born 6 June 1920, part-time paid domestic duties). Margaret Burton Oxton married Frederick Johnstone Ferguson at Neston Parish Church on 28 June 1941.

Bertie Oxton died on Wirral in mid-1965 aged 73 but it is not known when Beatrice died.

Emily Maud Oxton married Ernest Mason at a Civil Marriage on Wirral in mid-1918 and in the 1939 Register she was recorded as living with her parents James (born 27 June 1861, builder's labourer) and Martha (born 3 December 1862) at 'The Homestead', West Vale, Little Neston. Ernest Mason is not shown in the Register although one line of the record has been redacted (as of March 2018). Emily died in August 1989.

James Oxton, William's father, died 18 June 1941, aged 78, and Martha Oxton, his mother, died 22 December 1945 aged 82.

No further record has been found for Gladys Oxton and she has not been located in the 1939 Register.

William Robert Oxton was single and enlisted in Birkenhead in the 16th Battalion Cheshire with the service number 62270. He later transferred to the 2/5th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and then to the 2/6th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment although no dates or details of his Service Record are known.

The 2/6th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment was formed in Birmingham in October 1914 as a second line battalion and it became part of the 2nd Warwickshire Brigade, 2nd South Midland Division. In August 1915 it was re-designated as the 182nd Brigade, 61st (2nd South Midland) Division and the troops were landed in France on 21 May 1916.

The Division was involved in the protracted First Battles of the Somme 1918 (21 March - 4 July 1918), when they had been involved in continuous action since August 1917. The remnants of the Division were moved north to what had been a quieter part of the line on the La Basse Canal near Bethune; unfortunately it was near where the Germans launched the second phase of their offensive on 9 April 1918. The Division became involved in this action and many casualties were

incurred. It took quite some months for the Division to be rebuilt, but once ready it played an important part in the final defeat of the enemy.

It joined XVII Corps and took part in actions in October 1918 at Bois L'Eveque, Pommereuil, Bousies Forest and Vendegies-sur-Ecaillon. It pushed on, across the rivers Rhonelle and Selle and into the industrial area of Valenciennes.

In the first week of November, the Division crossed the Sambre, the last prepared defensive position held by the enemy and it was probably during the final days of The Battle of the Selle (17 - 26 October 1918) that William was killed in action.

In a surprise joint night attack in the early morning of 20 October, Third Army formations secured the high ground east of the River Selle. Following a two day pause, to bring up heavy artillery, the attack was renewed on 23 October with a major combined assault by Fourth, Third and First Armies; the fighting, which continued into the next day, resulted in further advances. At this stage, the German Army was retreating at a forced but controlled pace; on 24 October, the German Army counterattacked at the Canal de la Dérivation but were repulsed and pushed back by the Belgian Army. [Adapted from details in *The Long, Long Trail* and Wikipedia]

The War Diary gives some brief detail of the action in which William Oxton died:

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information
Sheet 37B 1/40,000	18/10		Battalion moved by route march to billets in area S.W. of CAMBRAI (A.26.c & d.)
	19/10		Remainder of day devoted to resting and cleaning up.
	20/10		Battalion moved by route march to billets in RIEUX. Remainder of day devoted to resting and cleaning up.
	21/10		In billets at RIEUX. Church Parade and Post-Marching in the morning. Remainder of day resting.
Sheet 51A S.E. 1/20,000	22/10		In billets at RIEUX. Training under Company Arrangements, to include Close Order Drill, tactical scheme, and crossing open country with Box Respirators on.
	23/10		Practice attack on strong point carried out at night.
	23/10		In billets at RIEUX. Training consisted of Practice attack scheme.
	23/10		Battalion moved to MONTRECOURT WOOD in the morning, prior to relieving the 9th Welch Regt. In the evening just west of VENDEGIES. Dispositions :- L.F. 'B' Coy. R.F. 'D' Coy. Support 'C' Coy. Reserve 'A' Coy.
	24/10	04.00	Under cover of artillery barrage, the village of VENDEGIES was attacked and the river ECAILLON crossed, but the Battalion had to withdraw West of the river, owing to strong enemy resistance. Fighting continued throughout the day, and at about 18.00 hours the enemy withdrew. The village was occupied immediately. Casualties sustained 5 Officers, 182 O.R.
	25/10		2/8th Worcesters occupied the Left Section of the Corps Main Line of Resistance, E. of VENDEGIES, when the Battalion became Right Section with H.Q. at VENDEGIES. Captured 2 prisoners, one 4.2 How., 1 Anti-tank Rifle, 11 Heavy and 12 Light Machine Guns.
	26/10		In support in billets at VENDEGIES.
	27/10		do. At night, Battalion relieved 2/8th Worcesters in
	28/10		Corps Main Line of Resistance, Batt. H.Q. remaining at VENDEGIES. Holding Left Section of Corps Main Line of Resistance until evening, when relieved by 2/4th Ox. & Bucks. Light Infantry, the battalion withdrawing to VENDEGIES.
	29/10		In billets at VENDEGIES. During night of 28/29th, gas shell fell in billet occupied by 'C' Coy., causing 78 casualties.
	30/10		Relieved 11th Suffolk Regt. in left section of Corps Main Line of Resistance, A9915 Wt. W11422/M1169 35,000 12/16 D.D. & L. Forms/C/2118/14.

War Diary, 2/6 Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment, 18 – 30 October 1918

Transcription of 22 – 24 October entries

22/10 In billets at RIEUX. Training consisted of Practice attack scheme.

23/10 Battalion moved to MONTRECOURT WOOD in the morning, prior to relieving the 9th Welch Regt. In the evening just west of VENDEGIES. Dispositions:- L.F. 'B' Coy. R.F. 'D' Coy. Support 'C' Coy. Reserve 'A' Coy.

24/10 04.00 Under cover of artillery barrage, the village of VENDEGIES was attacked and the river ECAILLON crossed but the Battalion had to withdraw West of the river, owing to strong enemy resistance. Fighting continued throughout the day, and at about 18.00 hours the enemy withdrew. The village was occupied immediately. Casualties sustained 5 Officers, 182 OR.

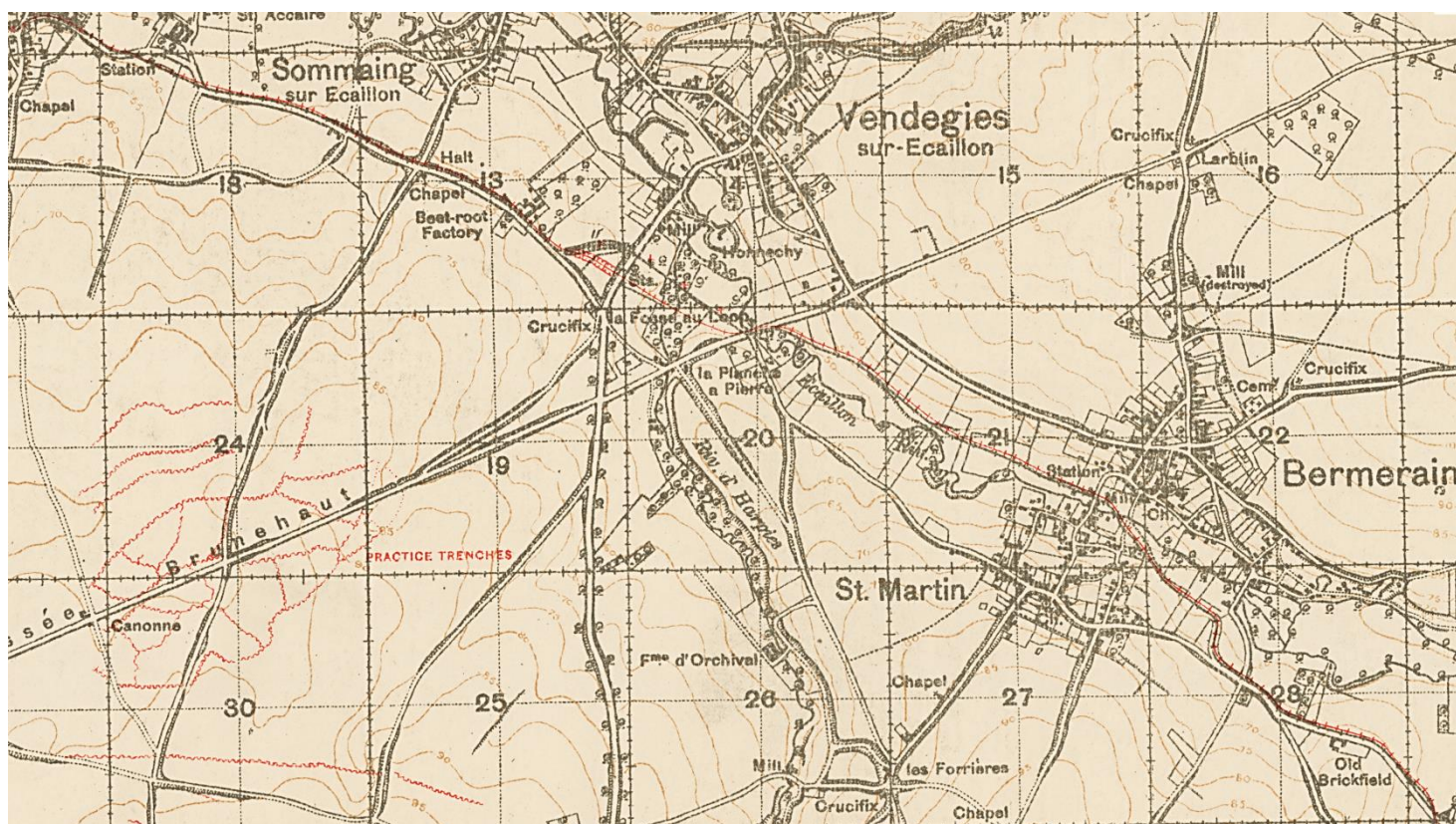
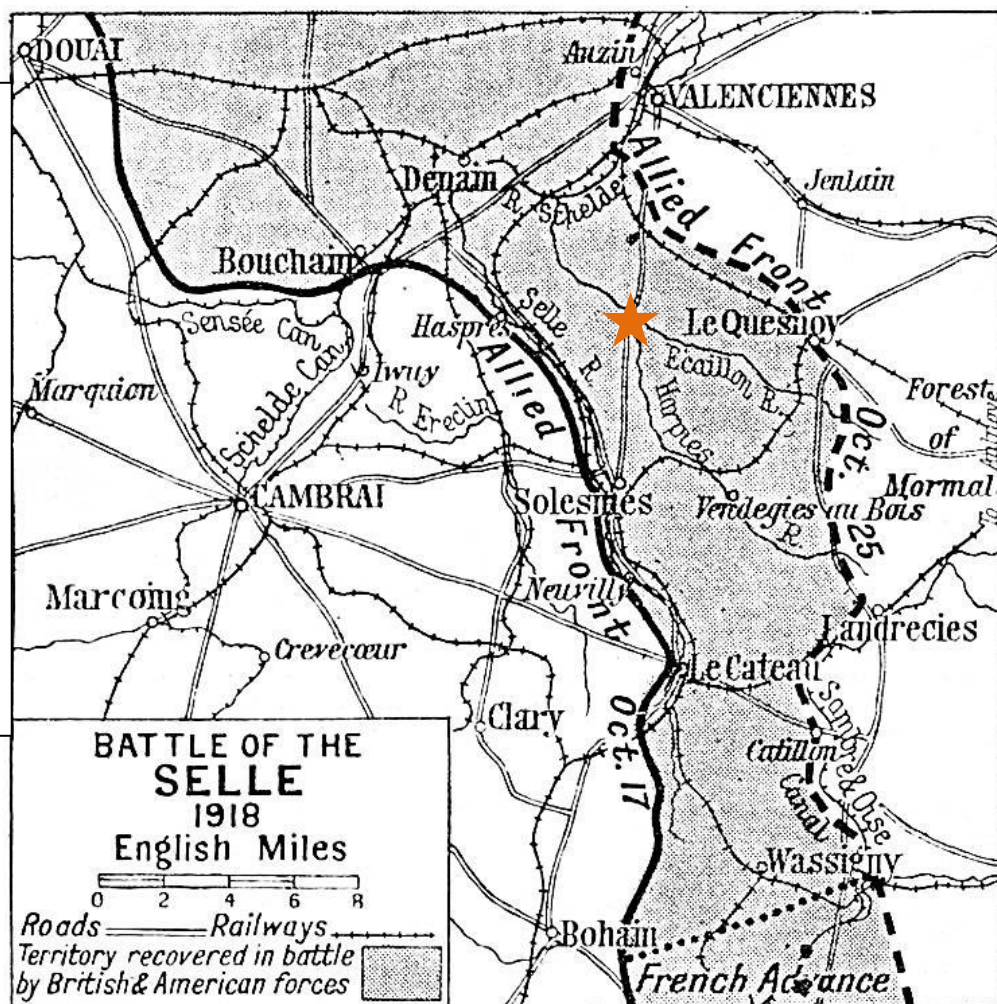
[Note: L.F. = Left Flank R.F. = Right Flank OR = Other ranks]

The map shows the eastward advance of the Allied forces and the area taken between 17 October and 25 October (the day after William Robert Oxton was killed) 1918.

The village of Vendegies-sur-Ecaillon is shown by the orange star.

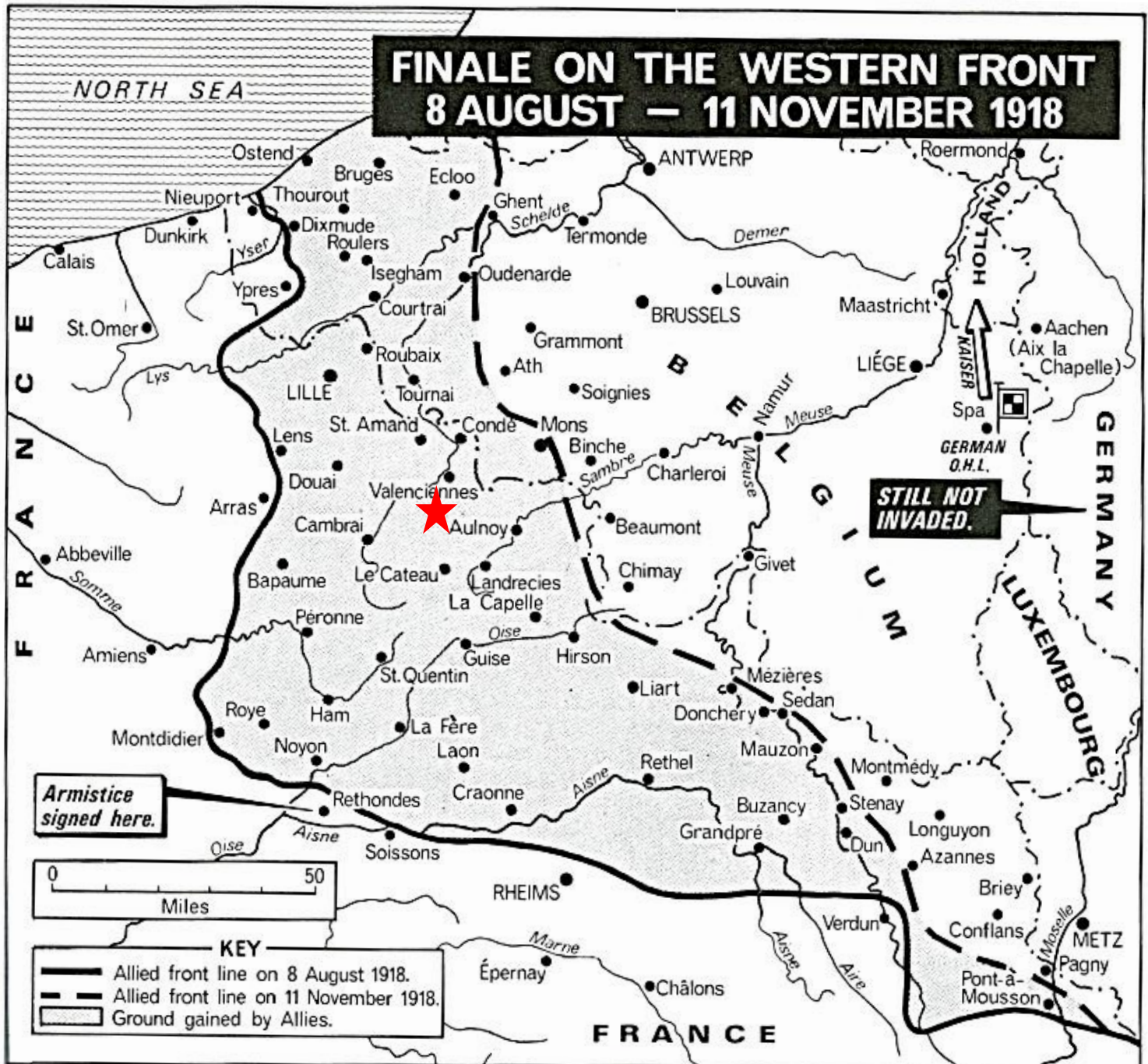
[Note: this is a different village from Vendegies au Bois which lies to the south]

[Source: www.ossett.net]



The military map of 12 October 1918 of the area around Vendegies-sur-Ecaillon when the area was held by the Germans. Although no extensive trenches are shown on the map – networks of practice trenches are indicated to the south-west of the village – the strategically-important railway line is shown in red. [Source : <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/index.cfm#zoom=15&lat=50.2614&lon=3.4827&layers=101465047&b=1>]

FINALE ON THE WESTERN FRONT 8 AUGUST – 11 NOVEMBER 1918



Since 18 July, when Foch sent Mangin and Dégoutte to open the Allied attack, the following prisoners had been taken: 188,000 (by the British), 140,000 (by the French), 44,000, (by the Americans), and 14,000 (by the Belgians). Plus some 7,000 guns captured. If German killed and wounded are added, it is plain that the German armies could not continue to fight on effectively.

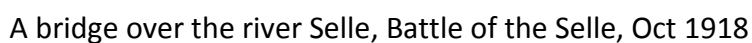
On 10 November, the Kaiser fled to Holland, followed by the Crown Prince. The basic Armistice terms signed at 1100 hours on 11 November were: immediate cessation of hostilities: German evacuation of invaded territory and of Alsace-Lorraine: repatriation of Allied citizens and prisoners of war: surrender of war materials and weapons: evacuation of the Rhine's left bank and bridgeheads: surrender of U-boats: internment of German surface warships: a declaration that the Treaties of Bucharest and Brest-Litovsk were null and void.

© Arthur Banks 1973

NOTE: MONS (FROM WHICH THE BRITISH RETREAT HAD BEGUN IN 1914) WAS RETAKEN BY THE CANADIANS A FEW HOURS PRIOR TO THE ARMISTICE.

William Robert Oxton died on 24 October 1918 near to the village of Vendegies-sur-Ecaillon indicated on the map by the red star.

[Source: *A Military Atlas of the First World War* Arthur Banks Leo Cooper (an imprint of Pen & Sword Books) 2001]



W.R. Oxton's CWGC gravestone at
Crucifix Cemetery, Nord-Pas-de-
Calais, France [photo : CWGC]

Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In mid-1919 the army paid the outstanding wages of soldiers together with a War Gratuity. As William had died, the money - £12 7s 5d including the War Gratuity of £9 – was paid to James Oxton, William's father. This would be equivalent, approximately, to a *labour value* (ie wages) of £1900 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.

Note:

There were two different Neston soldiers named William Oxton who fought in WW1, the other being the son of coal miner William and Margaret Oxton of (in the 1911 census) 6, New Road, Little Neston. 'New Road' was, in fact, New Street.

William jnr was, in 1911, recorded as being single, 21, a coal miner's drawer (loader) and born in Parkgate. He survived the war.

Neston Men in Hospital.

Private William Oxton, of the Colliery, has been wounded while serving with his regiment abroad. Pte. George Jones is in hospital in Mesopotamia, and Sapper Joseph Woodfield is also in hospital in Egypt suffering from fever. This is the second time the latter has been in hospital.

Birkenhead News – Saturday 27 October 1917

Strange Coincidence at a Military Hospital.

A BRAVE NESTON SOLDIER.

An interesting letter has been received by Mr. and Mrs. James Oxton, Little Neston, from their son, Sapper Harry Oxton, who is at present in hospital at Rouen. He had been there some little time, suffering from a bruised arm, when happening to glance through the window one day he was greatly surprised to see his younger brother, Pte. William Oxton, passing. On calling out to him he found that he was actually an inmate of the same hospital, and was suffering from the effects of gas. Sapper Oxton also relates an interesting incident. A fellow-patient was in a very dangerous condition, and it was found necessary to inject a pint of blood into his body. Sapper Oxton at once made the offer, which was accepted, and to which his comrade probably owes his life. It is gratifying to learn that both are now on the way to recovery, and Sapper Oxton has been warmly congratulated on his brave act.

Birkenhead News – Saturday 2 March 1918



Oxton family grave in Neston churchyard, close to Church Lane

The plinth has inscriptions on all three levels

Top level – metal plaque

In ever loving memory of Pte W.R. Oxton 29090 2/ 6 Royal Warwickshire Regt who was killed in action at Valenciennes France Oct. 24th 1918 aged 20 years (see enlargement, below).

Middle level – metal plaque

In ever loving memory of Ada Roseline the beloved daughter of James and Martha Oxton, who departed this life Oct. 22nd 1901 aged 15 months. Also Martha, sister of the above, aged 6 months.

Lower level – inscription on the stone

Also James Oxton, father of above, died June 18th 1941, aged 78.

Right hand side of stone plinth, inscriptions read

Martha Oxton, beloved wife of James Oxton



Oxton family gravestone, Neston Cemetery

