

71: John Pyke

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: John Pyke

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 8th Bn. Cheshire Regiment

Service Number: 8/12691

Date of Death: 22 May 1916

Age at Death: 22

Buried / Commemorated at: Amara War Cemetery, Al `Amarah, Maysan, Iraq

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of James and Elizabeth Pyke of Liverpool Road, Neston

John Pyke was the second child of railway platelayer James and Elizabeth Pyke and he was baptised in Neston 5 April 1894 (he may have been born on 1 April).

James Pyke was a son of Neston farmer John and Mary Pyke.

James Pyke married Elizabeth Edwards at St Peter's Church in Liverpool in April / June 1890 and in the 1891 census, when they were living on Bridge Street, Neston, James was recorded as a platelayer. It is not clear whether they later lived in South Wales but Mary, their first child, was recorded as having been born there in the 1901 census when they were then living on Liverpool Road:

151	to	1	James Pyke	Head	Mr	32	Foreman Platelayer	to	to	to
			Elizabeth	Wife	Mrs	32		to	to	to
			Mary	Daughter		9	Scholar	Glandovey, Cardiganshire	✓	
			John	Son		7	to	to	to	✓
			George	to		4		Neston, Cheshire		
			Thomas J.	to		1		to	to	

1901 census (extract) – Liverpool Road, Neston

James Pyke	32	foreman platelayer	born Neston
Elizabeth	32		born Glandovey, Cardiganshire
Mary	9		born Glandovey, Cardiganshire
John	7		born Neston
George	4		born Neston
Thomas J.	1		born Neston

Glandovey, the anglicised version of Glandyfi, is a small hamlet in west Wales inland of Aberystwyth.

It is known that John's younger brother, George, joined the Royal Engineers as a joiner in October 1916 when he was aged 20 years 1 month. Whilst it is known that he served at Deganwy, and was posted to France on 24 April 1917, he was hospitalised several times (once in an isolation hospital) and he may have seen very little active service.

By the time of the 1911 census John Pyke, 17, was a motor works engineer and the family was still living on Liverpool Road, Neston:

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.															
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
			For Infants under one year state the age in months as "under one month," "one month," etc.	Write "Single," "Married," "Widowed," or "Divorced," opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards.	State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of—	Personal Occupation	Industry or Service with which worker is connected	Whether Employee, Worker, or Working on Own Account	Whether Working at Home						
James Pyke	Head	42		Married	20	6	6	0	Platelayer on Rly		Employed	At home	Neston, England	English	
Elizabeth Pyke	Wife	42		Married	20	6	6	0					Glandyfi, Cardigan	English	
John Pyke	Son	17		Single					Motor Works Engineer		Employed	At home	Neston, England	English	
George Pyke	Son	14		Single					Joinery Works		Employed	At home	Neston, England	English	
Thomas James Pyke	Son	11		Single					School Boy		Employed	At home	Neston, England	English	
Margaret Elizabeth Pyke	Daughter	7		Single									Neston, England	English	
Sarah Pyke	Daughter	2		Single									Neston, England	English	

1911 census - Liverpool Road, Neston

James Pyke	42	platelayer on railway	born Neston
Elizabeth	42		born Glandyfi, Cardigan
John	17	single, motor works engineer	born Neston
George	14	joinery works	born Neston
Thomas James	11		born Neston
Margaret Elizabeth	7		born Neston
Sarah	2		born Neston

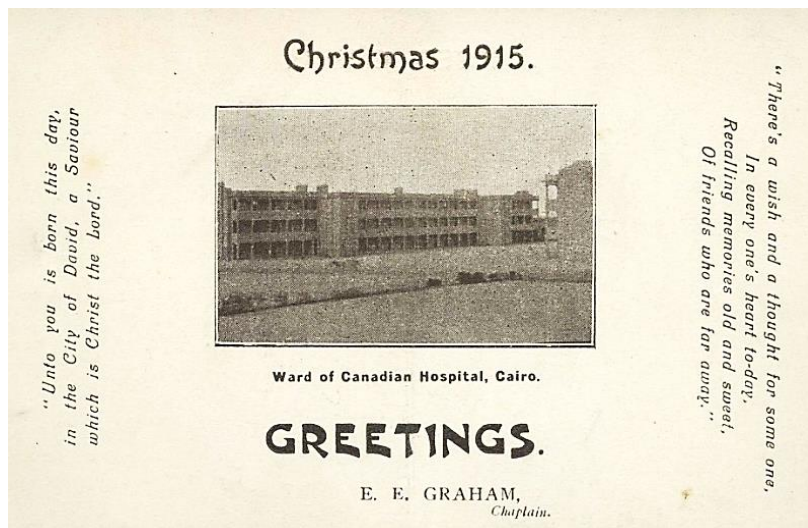
James and Elizabeth had been married for 20 years and all of their six children had survived.

It is believed that John, having learnt to drive, became a chauffeur for Dr. Lewis Grant the Neston GP who lived at Cheltenham Villas on Parkgate Road. Certainly, when he attested for the 8th Battalion Cheshire Regiment in Birkenhead on 1 September 1914 he was recorded as being a chauffeur. He was then aged 20 years 153 days, was 5ft 9ins tall, single, weighed 154lb (11 stone / 70kg), had a 36-inch expanded chest, a fresh complexion, brown eyes and dark brown hair.

The 8th (Service) Battalion, Cheshire Regiment was raised in Chester on 12 August 1914 as part of Kitchener's First New Army and joined the 40th Brigade, 13th (Western) Division. The battalion moved to Tidworth Garrison on the Wiltshire/Hampshire border in early September to undergo basic training, but by October 1914 was at Draycott Camp, Chiseldon, Wiltshire.

In February 1915 the battalion moved to Pirbright, near Guildford (Surrey) and towards the end of that month the Division concentrated at Blackdown, Hampshire.

In stages the troops moved to the Mediterranean from 13 June 1915 - John Pyke embarked on 26 June at Avonmouth - landing at Alexandria in Egypt then moving to Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos by 4 July to prepare for a landing at Gallipoli. By the date of his embarkation John had served for 298 days in Britain.



Christmas card from the Canadian Hospital, Cairo

On arriving in Mudros John was admitted on 3 August to the 16th Stationary Hospital suffering from diarrhoea, then transferred to the 24th Casualty Clearing Station before being discharged back to his unit on 28 August 1915. It appears that John eventually made his way to Gallipoli but, suffering from dysentery, was moved back to the Canadian Hospital in Cairo where he was admitted on 20 September 1915.

On 19 November John was discharged back to duty in Alexandria, Egypt; by mid-October 1915, Allied forces in Gallipoli had

suffered heavy casualties and had made little headway from their initial landing sites. The campaign here was, clearly, going badly and plans were already being made to withdraw troops so those men, such as John, who had moved away from Gallipoli, were generally not returned. Full evacuation from Gallipoli began in December 1915, and was completed early the following January.

On 14 February 1916 John Pyke, having presumably been engaged in defence work - and not involved in any enemy action - in northern Egypt, embarked at Port Said for Basra in Iraq (then known as Persia) where he disembarked on 28 February.

Britain had a strong vested interest in this region as the oilfields at the head of the Persian Gulf supplied much of the oil used by the British navy. Although, on the outbreak of war with Germany, British authorities were anxious about this supply, Winston Churchill who was then First Lord of the Admiralty echoed the sentiment of the British government that no British troops could be made available in that region and that "We shall have to buy our oil elsewhere. The Turk can be better dealt with at the centre." Nevertheless, Indian troops were sent to the area but control was uncoordinated and, eventually, British troops - in particular the 8th Battalion Cheshire Regiment - were sent in to provide support.

Arthur Crookenden summarised critically the unfocussed nature of the objectives in the area of Mesopotamia, the zone between the Tigris and Euphrates river systems which stretched north-west from Basra and the Persian Gulf to Baghdad and beyond:

This was the beginning of the Mesopotamian Campaign. It was started as a private enterprise of a Department of State without any reference to the requirements and resources of the nation as a whole. No attempt was made to obtain the advice of the experts as to the conduct of the operation. No warning was given to the experts that part of the forces earmarked for their disposal were being withdrawn; no enquiry was made from the people who had to do the work, whether they were able to do it or not. An ill-considered objective was chosen, for the attainment of which no proper plan was made. Such was the start, and it will be agreed that it did not promise well.

A sort of "Mass Direction" was instituted. The "Mass" consisted of the Secretary of State for India, the Military Secretary to the Secretary of State, the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief India, and the Finance Member of the Government of India. They had no co-ordinated method of control, but worked together or individually, by official wire or *private* wire, as they thought best. The G.O.C. Mesopotamia received instructions from all.

The trouble came in full measure. Nobody, unless he was actually there to see, would believe that our men could be called upon to suffer such hardships as they did. However, the operations struggled on. Their scope was altered from time to time, always in the direction of extension; first Abadan, then Basra, Kurna, Amara, Kut, Baghdad. The force was gradually increased to two divisions and some cavalry. At first, a large measure of success was attained, and it was the only bright spot in all our theatres of war at this time. But these early successes were a snare. They gave the impression to the controlling authorities that everything was all right and that a cheap victory was to be gained. Further, it made the soldiers shut their eyes to much that was wrong and, in short, take chances.

Much was indeed wrong. India was supposed to maintain this force. She could not do it. She had not the necessary material. She could not provide transport on a sufficient scale either for land or water. In fact, she was short of everything in the way of supplies. This was the direct result of the tremendous power which the financial authorities had obtained since Lord Kitchener had left India. Further, she had to supply other forces, in East Africa and Egypt, while she had a frontier campaign going on as well. She had no plant to produce material, even if raw material could be found. The force, originally never intended to exceed one division, had been sent out without base organizations of any sort.

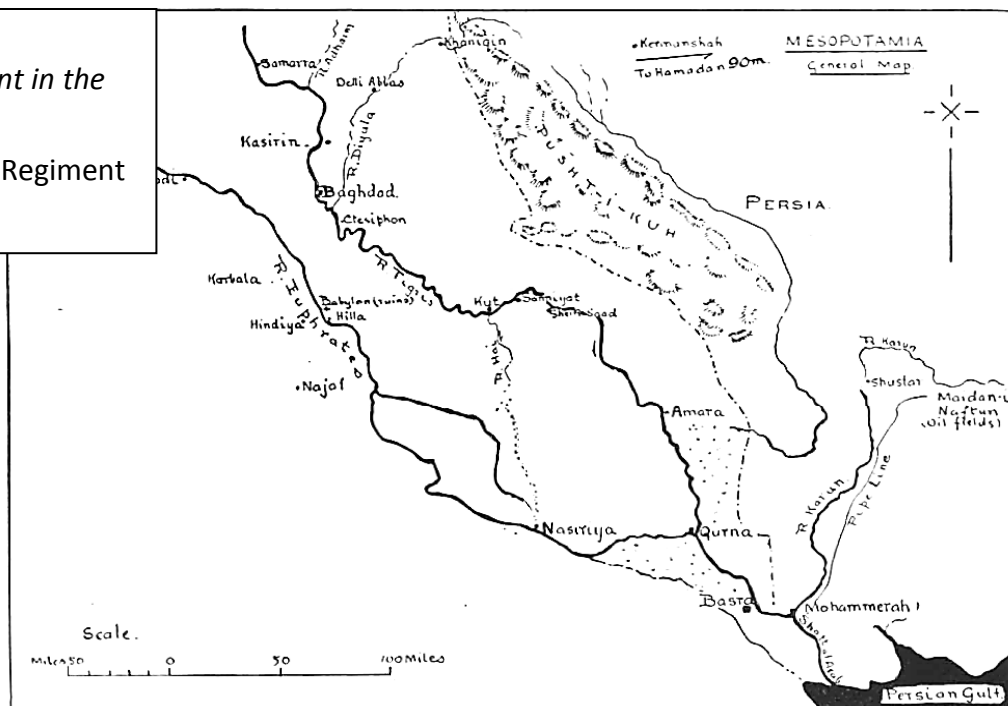
Adapted from:

The History of the Cheshire Regiment in the Great War, 1914-1918

Arthur Crookenden, Colonel of the Regiment
WH Evans, Sons & Co. Ltd. 1938

It is almost certain that John Pyke was injured at The Action of Fallahiya during the Siege of Kut-Al-Amara (7 December 1915 - 29 April 1916), also known as The First Battle of

Kut, when the Ottoman army was besieging the 8,000 strong British-Indian garrison in the town, 100 miles south of Baghdad. Arthur Crookenden recalled that:



The 8th Battalion arrived in Mesopotamia, or Mespot as they called it, at a moment when hope of relieving the garrison besieged in Kut was almost gone. The great attack on the Dujaila (or Es Sinn) position had failed through too rigid adherence to the plan of attack, itself open to criticism on the ground of rigidity and over-caution on an occasion when it would have been justifiable to take a risk. This failure was one of a series of reverses, the like of which the British Army had never before experienced.

But as long as any smallest chance of relieving Kut remained, it had to be tried. The 8th Battalion spent a month training under Colonel W. W. B. Gover, a regular officer of The Regiment.

Action of Fallahiya.

It was decided to make the next effort on the northern, or left bank of the Tigris. A river's banks are called right or left as they appear to one facing down stream. The first Turkish position, and apparently the only one on this side, was that at El Hanna.

Saps had been dug to within fifty yards of the enemy's wire, ample artillery was available, and we were able to bring fire to bear on the Turks from both flanks. The 13th Division had rehearsed the attack, during its month's training, over full scale dummy trenches. Every battalion, every company, knew its task thoroughly.

On the 5th April, the 8th Battalion passed through the leading Brigade to the attack of the 3rd Turkish line. But the Turks had gone and the Battalion found itself advanced guard to the Division moving into the "blue." Nothing could be seen of the enemy but gradually fire was felt on the left flank, and Colonel Gover changed direction in this direction, the Battalion covering a front of some 2,000 yards. After moving forward some 300 yards, the enemy fire became heavier, and after advancing a further 300 yards by short rushes, the Battalion halted and dug in. They were quite unsupported. Here they remained till dark, when they were relieved by the 38th and 39th Brigades. Our losses were Captain H. Delves Broughton, Captain C. W. Boote killed, seven officers wounded; 28 men killed, 170 wounded and seven missing.

After a bombardment, the 38th and 39th Brigades made a night attack, which was successful. The Turks were driven back to a position at Sannaiyat with one flank in the river and one on the Suwaikiya marsh as before. So we were no nearer Kut. An attack made in daylight on this position by the 7th Division was defeated with terrible loss.

It was on 5 April 1916 that John suffered a gunshot wound to his right hand and was taken to the Stationary Hospital at Kut-Al-Amara for treatment on 7 April.

On 22 April 1916 John was discharged for duty but soon fell victim to cholera from which he died, on 22 May 1916, at the Cholera Hospital at Filayish near Amara.

Like Gallipoli, conditions in Mesopotamia defy description. Extremes of temperature (120° F was common); arid desert and regular flooding; flies, mosquitoes and other vermin: all led to appalling levels of sickness and death through disease. Under these incredible conditions, units fell short of officers and men, and all too often the reinforcements were half-trained and ill-equipped. Medical arrangements were quite shocking, with wounded men spending up to two weeks on boats before reaching any kind of hospital. These factors, plus of course the unexpectedly determined Turkish resistance, contributed to high casualty rates.

[The Long, Long Trail : www.longlongtrail.co.uk/]

The official HMSO statistics (London: 1920) showed that, in the conflict in Mesopotamia, 12,678 died of sickness compared to 14,997 who were killed in action or who died of their wounds.

John was buried at the Amara War Cemetery - Amara was occupied by the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force on 3 June 1915 and it immediately became a hospital centre. The accommodation for medical units on both banks of the Tigris was greatly increased during 1916 and in April 1917, seven general hospitals and some smaller units were stationed there. Amara War Cemetery contains 4,621 burials of the First World War, more than 3,000 of which were brought into the cemetery after the Armistice. [CWGC]

Form B. 103. Army Form B. 103.

Casualty Form—Active Service.

Regiment or Corps *8th Cheshire Regt.*

Regimental No. *12691* Rank *Private* Name *Pyke J.*

Enlisted (a) *1-9-14* Terms of Service (a) *Duration of War* Service reckons from (a) *1-9-14*

Date of promotion to present rank } Date of appointment to lance rank } Numerical position on roll of N.C.Os. }

Extended Re-engaged Qualification (b)

Date	From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 25, or in other official documents. The authority is to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 25, or other official documents.
7/8/15	16th S.Hosp.	Diarrhoea.	Mudros.	3/8/15	C 2853
28/8/15	24th C.C.S.	Disc to Duty.	Mudros.	28/8/15	C 3228.
28/9/15	Can.Hosp.Cairo.	Dysentery.	Gallipoli.	28/9/15	A 11671.
20/11/15	13th D.E.D.	Disc to Duty.	Alexandria	19/11/15	B 213.
		<i>Embarked</i>	<i>Suez</i>	<i>14.2.16</i>	
		<i>Disembarked</i>	<i>Buwa</i>	<i>28.2.16</i>	
<i>9.4.16</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Wounded.</i>	<i>16.4.16</i>	<i>5.4.16</i>	<i>B. 213</i>
<i>8.4.16</i>	<i>3a B.S.R.</i>	<i>Sub. M. R. H. H.</i>	<i>Amara</i>	<i>7.4.16</i>	<i>A. 36</i>
<i>23.4.16</i>	<i>T.O.A.S.</i>	<i>Disc to Duty.</i>	<i>-1-</i>	<i>22.4.16</i>	<i>B. 213.</i>
<i>22.5.16</i>	<i>Colon Hosp</i>	<i>Died of Cholera</i>	<i>May 22</i>	<i>22.5.16</i>	<i>W. 107.</i>

(a) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or enlisted into Section D, Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered. (P.T.O.)

(b) e.g. Signaller, Wheeling Smith, etc., also special qualifications in technical Corps duties.

25.5.16

For D.A.A.S. (4)



Elizabeth and James Pyke

NESTON SOLDIER DIES IN HOSPITAL.

Official intimation was received on Monday last by Mr. and Mrs. James Pyke, of Liverpool-road, Neston, that their eldest son, Pte. John Pyke, of the Cheshires, had died in hospital in India on the 22nd May, it is thought of cholera. Up to the commencement of the war he was employed by Dr. Grant as chauffeur, and after training has been for some time abroad, and a few weeks before his death wrote home saying he had been slightly wounded in the hand, but stated that he hoped by the time they received his letter to be well on the road to recovery. He received the wound in Mesopotamia, and was in the great bayonet charge there. He was taken to the hospital at Fibzal, where he died. Previous to being in Mesopotamia he went through the Dardanelles campaign. He was only in his 22nd year. Much sympathy is extended to the family in their bereavement.

Chester Chronicle - Saturday 22 July 1916

Mistakenly, the report on John Pyke's death records that he died in India.



John Pyke

Birkenhead News – Saturday 22 July 1916 (extract)

Transcription:

Neston's Dead and Wounded

Deep regret has been occasioned at Neston by news of the death of Private John Pyke, of the 8th Cheshires, eldest son of Mr and Mrs James Pyke, which occurred on May 22nd in Mesopotamia from cholera and Gordon Jones of the South Lancashires, who was serving with his regiment in France. Both were well known and very popular. They had given their service to their country in the first days of her need, and the sympathy of all is extended to their relatives in their great sorrow. Touching references to the sad events were made at the Parish Church on Sunday morning and the 'Dead March' was played at the close of the service.

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PYKE—In loving memory of Private John Pyke (8th Cheshires), the beloved son of James and Elizabeth Pyke, Neston, who died in Mesopotamia, May 22, 1916 aged 22 years.

Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away.

In Jesu's keeping we are safe and they.

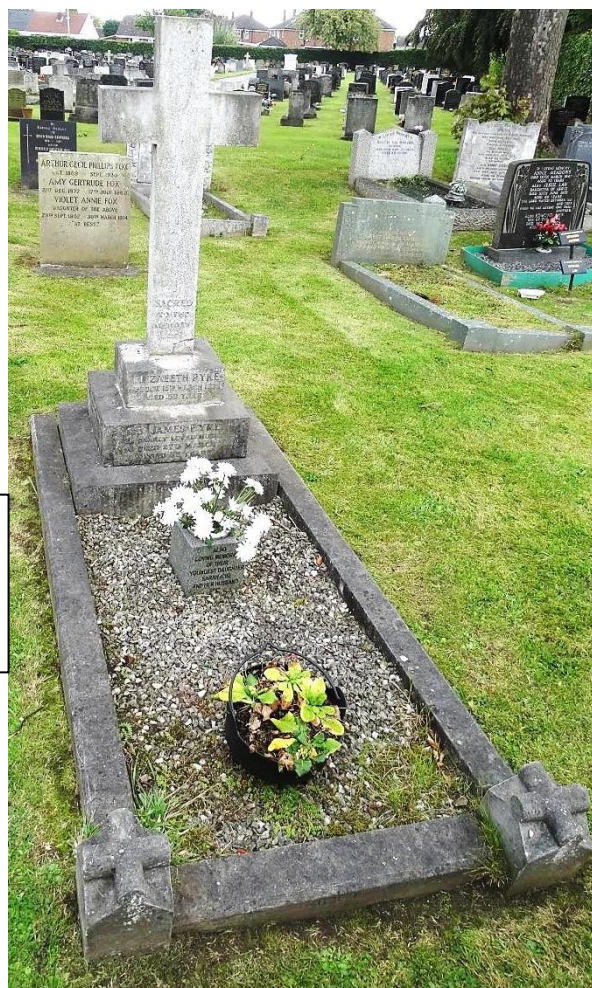
(Fondly remembered by Father, Mother, Sisters, and Brothers.)

Liverpool Daily Post - Tuesday 22 May 1917

Elizabeth Pyke died on 15 March 1928, aged 59, at Eglwys Fach, Glandovey and James Pyke died 27 March 1932 aged 63.

The Pyke grave in Neston Cemetery where Elizabeth and James Pyke are buried.

The flower vase is inscribed *Also loving memories of their youngest daughter Sarah (Cis) and her husband Eric.*



B.5091.
Ches. I hereby acknowledge the receipt of the
BW + V Medals.
granted in respect of the service of N^o 12691
J Pyke. The Cheshire Regt.
Date
Mr J Pyke, Liverpool Rd, Neston, Ches. Signature James Pyke

I hereby acknowledge the receipt of the
1914-1915 Star
granted in respect of the service of N^o 12691,
J Pyke. The Cheshire Regt.
Date 21-8-20 THS
Mr J Pyke Signature James Pyke

