

## 81: William Smith

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: William Smith

Rank: Lance Corporal

Battalion / Regiment: 8th Bn. att'd. 2nd Bn. South Lancashire Regiment

Service Number: 15253

Date of Death: 11 April 1918

Age at Death: ?

Buried / Commemorated at: Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Poperinge, West Flanders, Belgium

Additional information given by CWGC: The husband of Susan Smith, of Bowling Green Cottages, near Neston

William Smith was born in Heswall, probably towards the end of 1883, the second child of bricklayer's labourer Richard and Elizabeth Smith. Richard and Elizabeth eventually had 11 children, of whom 10 survived (1911 census).

In the 1881 census Richard (26, labourer, born Pensby) and Elizabeth (24, born Woodchurch) were living in Heswall with John, 3. Ten years later the family, now expanded, was still in Heswall:

Richard Smith	Head	M	35	bricklayer's labourer	X	born Barnston
Elizabeth	Wife	M	36	laundress	X	born Woodchurch
John	Son		13	gardener	X	born Heswall
William	Son		8			born Heswall
Mary E.	Daughter		6			born Heswall
Sarah	Daughter		5			born Heswall
Frank	Son		3			born Heswall
Owen	Son		2			born Heswall
Elizabeth	Daughter		3 months			born Heswall

1891 census (extract) – Heswall Hills

Richard Smith	35	bricklayer's labourer	born Barnston
Elizabeth	36	laundress	born Woodchurch
John	13	gardener	born Heswall
William	8		born Heswall
Mary E.	6		born Heswall
Sarah	5		born Heswall
Frank	3		born Heswall
Owen	2		born Heswall
Elizabeth	3 months		born Heswall

William Smith married Susan Swift (born 10 November 1881) of Neston in late 1905 at St Peter's Church, Heswall. Susan's parents were bricklayer William and Ellen Swift of Gladstone Road so it may not be surprising that, in the 1911 census, William is recorded as a bricksetter's labourer:

# CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Schedule 198  
(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
<p>of every Person, whether Member of Family, Visitor, Boarder, or Servant, who</p> <p>(1) passed the night of Sunday, April 2nd, 1911, in this dwelling and was alive at midnight, or</p> <p>(2) arrived in this dwelling on the morning of Monday, April 3rd, not having been enumerated elsewhere.</p> <p>No one else must be included.</p> <p>(For order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)</p>							
<p>State whether "Head," or "Wife," "Son," "Daughter," or other Relative, "Visitor," "Boarder," or "Servant."</p> <p>For Infants under one year state the age in months as "under one month," "one month," etc.</p> <p>Write "Single," "Married," "Widower," or "Widow" opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards.</p> <p>Completed from the present Marriage has lasted.</p> <p>Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)</p> <p>Total Children born alive.</p> <p>Children still living.</p> <p>Children who have died.</p> <p>The reply should show the precise branch of Profession, Trade, Manufacture, &amp;c.</p> <p>If engaged in any Trade or Manufacture, the particular kind of work done, and the Article made or Material worked or dealt in should be clearly indicated.</p> <p>(See Instructions 1 to 8 and Examples on back of Schedule.)</p> <p>Personal Occupation.</p> <p>Industry or Service with which worker is connected.</p> <p>Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account.</p> <p>Whether Working at Home.</p> <p>Write opposite the name of each person engaged in any Trade or Industry.</p> <p>(1) "Employer" (that is, employing persons otherwise than domestic servants, or</p> <p>(2) "Worker" (that is, working for an employer, or</p> <p>(3) "Own Account" (that is, neither employing others nor working for a trade employer).</p> <p>(See Instructions 9 and Examples on back of Schedule.)</p> <p>Write the name of each person carrying on Trade or Industry at home.</p> <p>(1) If born in the United Kingdom, write the name of the County, and Town or Parish.</p> <p>(2) If born in any other part of the British Empire, write the name of the Dependency, Colony, etc., and of the Province or State.</p> <p>(3) If born in a Foreign Country, write the name of the Country.</p> <p>(4) If born at sea, write "At Sea."</p> <p>NOTE.—In the case of persons born elsewhere than in England or Wales, state whether "Resident" or "Visitor" in this Country.</p> <p>State whether—</p> <p>(1) "British subject by parentage,"</p> <p>(2) "Naturalised British subject," giving year of naturalisation.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>(3) If of foreign nationality, state whether—</p> <p>"French,"</p> <p>"German,"</p> <p>"Russian,"</p> <p>etc.</p> <p>If any person included in this Schedule is—</p> <p>(1) "Totally Deaf," or "Deaf and Dumb,"</p> <p>(2) "Totally Blind,"</p> <p>(3) "Lunatic,"</p> <p>(4) "Insane," or "Feeble-minded," state the infirmity opposite that person's name, and the age at which he or she became afflicted.</p>							
1	William Smith	Head	27	Married	Bricksetter's Labourer	Heswall	
2	Susan Smith	Wife	28	5	9	3	Neston
3	Willie	Son	4	Single			Heswall
4	George	Son	2				
5	Susan	daughter	1				

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

I certify that—

(1) All the names on this Schedule are entered in the proper columns.

(2) I have examined the entries and find them correct, and have compared them 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: *J. S.*

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: *Susan Smith*

Postal Address: *The North Thurston Rd Heswall*

## 1911 census (condensed) – The Nook, Thurstaston Road, Heswall

William Smith	27	bricksetter's labourer	born Heswall
Susan	28		born Neston
Willie	4		born Heswall
George	2		born Heswall
Susan	1		born Heswall

William and Susan had been married for 5 years and all three children had survived. However, their first son, Willie, was killed in an accident (the details are unknown) on 21 September 1918, just 5 months after William was killed in Flanders.

In the census returns for both 1901 and 1911 Richard and Elizabeth Smith, William's parents, and their unmarried children, were living on Sandy Lane, Heswall, where Richard was recorded as being a 'waller or stonemason'.

Although, in the 1911 census, William and Susan Smith were living in Heswall the CWGC gives Susan's address as Bowling Green Cottages, near Neston. However, it is not known when they moved to this address, near the junction of the A540 and Boathouse Lane, close to where the railway line passes under the road.

As William's Service Record has not been found it is not possible to comment on his army record and the circumstances of his death on 11 April 1918. However, it is known that the South Lancashire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Volunteers) landed at Le Havre on 14 August 1914 as part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division but underwent a number of changes before, on 21 June 1916, being transferred to the 64<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 21<sup>st</sup> Division. In early 1918 the battalion seems to have been in the 89<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 30<sup>th</sup> Division but, by April 1918, were in the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion remained on the Western Front for the entire war and it is probable that William died during The Battle of the Lys (part of the April Offensive) which commenced with a German offensive on 9 April with an attack near the River Lys on a Portuguese division, which collapsed. German troops moved rapidly into the gap, attacking the exposed flanks and rear areas of Allied divisions to the north and south.



Field Marshal Haig, recognising the seriousness of the situation issued the Order of the Day on 11 April, the day on which William died of wounds:

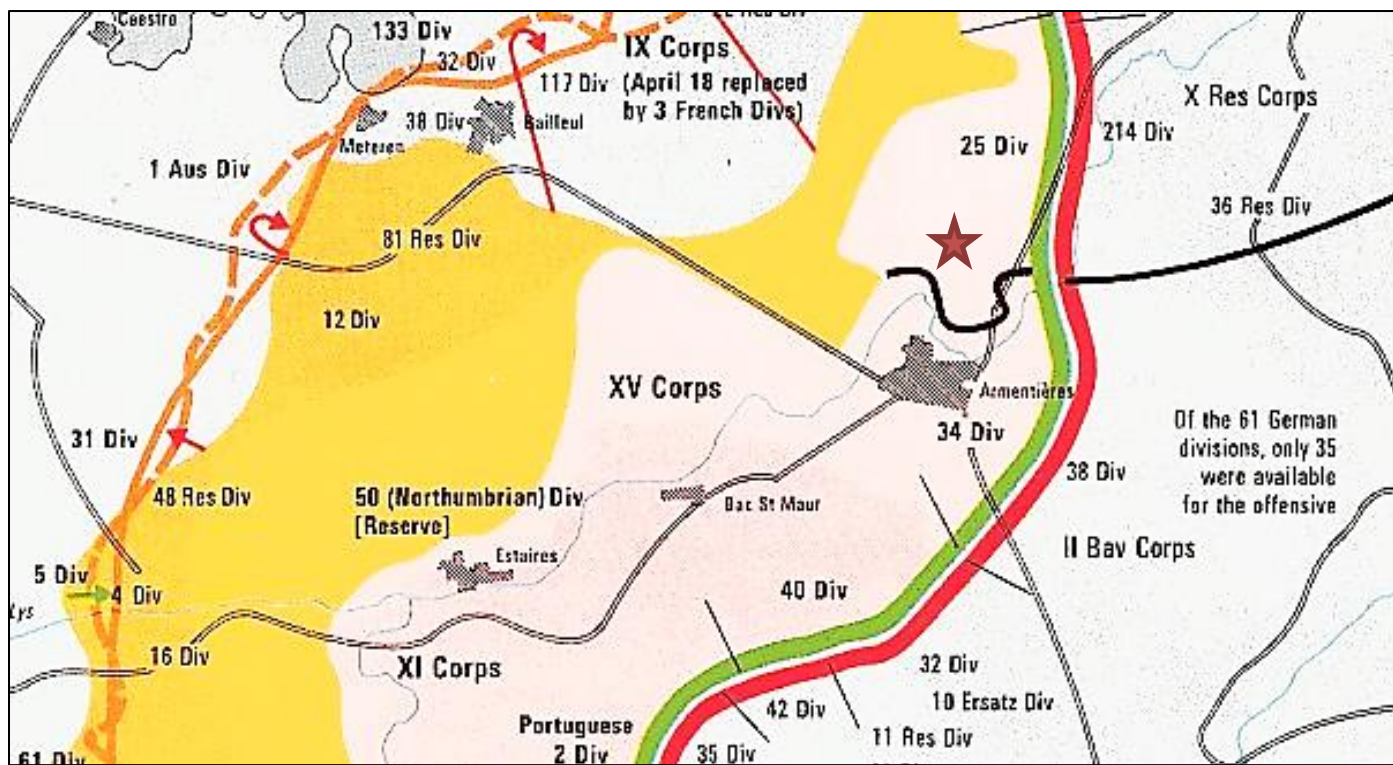
*There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end.*

A few miles to the east, the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Lancashires were in action on 10 April at Ploegsteert, and the next day they moved south to beat off two attacks at Neuve Eglise. It is very likely that William was injured at Ploegsteert and that he died the following day. Losses in the April offensive were high, the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Lancashires losing 662 men.

The War Diary entries for 9 and 10 April give some detail of the actions at that time:

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	references Appendix
Wednesday	10. April		<p>During the early hours it was reported that enemy was attacking along our line north of ARMENTIERES towards PLOEGSTEERT, and about 9.30 am Battalion Head Quarters with B and C Companies received orders to move forward and occupy a position about 2000 yards west of PLOEGSTEERT, on high ground in Taz d. and Taz d. C (near PLOEGSTEERT 1500).</p> <p>This position was successfully occupied. B Coy on right, C Coy left. Battalion Head Quarters at RECHINA FARM. Taz d. 9.4.</p> <p>About 11.30 am stragglers of 3rd Borders Regt. about 100 strong, under Major T. B. WILKINSON, were collected and settled on right of B Coy.</p> <p>About 1 pm our company Australian Engineers, our company Royal Engineers and two companies 6th South Wales Borders, arrived and were extended still further to the right. The whole now being under the command of our commanding officer, Major Colonel T. B. ALLSOPP.</p> <p>On our left was the 25th Battalion Machine Gun Company.</p> <p>At this time the situation was quiet but many of the enemy could be seen moving about between our line and the village of PLOEGSTEERT and enemy snipers were very active.</p> <p>At 3.30 pm a conference was held at Battalion Head Quarters and a counter attack arranged with a view to the retaking of PLOEGSTEERT village. The attack to be made on both flanks of the village.</p> <p>This operation took place at 5 pm but was unsuccessful and the troops engaged retired to original line, casualties being considerable owing to large numbers of machine gun emplacements by enemy.</p> <p>About 7 pm orders were received for the line now held to be re-organised.</p> <p>A and B Companies were to withdraw from LE BILLET and be placed on right of B Company, 3rd Borders to rejoin this Battalion at LE BILLET and all R.E. details to withdraw and rendezvous at ROMARIN FARM.</p>	
Thursday	11. April		<p>In connection with these operations and owing to the fact that the ROMARIN AREA was being shelled by enemy, transport moved from GODFORD LINES to PERLANCE LINES, on DE SEULE - NEUVE EGLISE Road, the move taking place about 8 am.</p> <p>By 1 am the re-organisation of the line was complete, with the exception of A Company who were some distance on the right and owing to intense darkness could not be got into touch with.</p> <p>About 2 am the Battalion Head Quarters withdrew to Taz d. 3.4. about 100 yards further west.</p> <p>About 6 am the enemy attacked all along the Battalion front, very heavily, but was repulsed with severe loss by rifle and Lewis gun fire, there being no artillery available.</p> <p>About 8 am enemy was again seen assembling and he repeated his attack about 11 am - this was again repulsed by the Battalion, but owing to enemy becoming stronger further on the right, the Battalion was forced to withdraw and took up a new position about 300 yards north east of ROMARIN, remaining there till about 3 pm when orders were received for the troops to move back to the right.</p> <p>This operation again affected the transport which about 6 am moved to houses on northern side of RAVELIN BARR.</p>	





Map showing the 25<sup>th</sup> Division position just north of Armentieres on 9 April 1918.

The green line is the British front line and the red one is the German front line. The broken orange line (extreme west of map) is the extent of the German advance during the subsequent days.

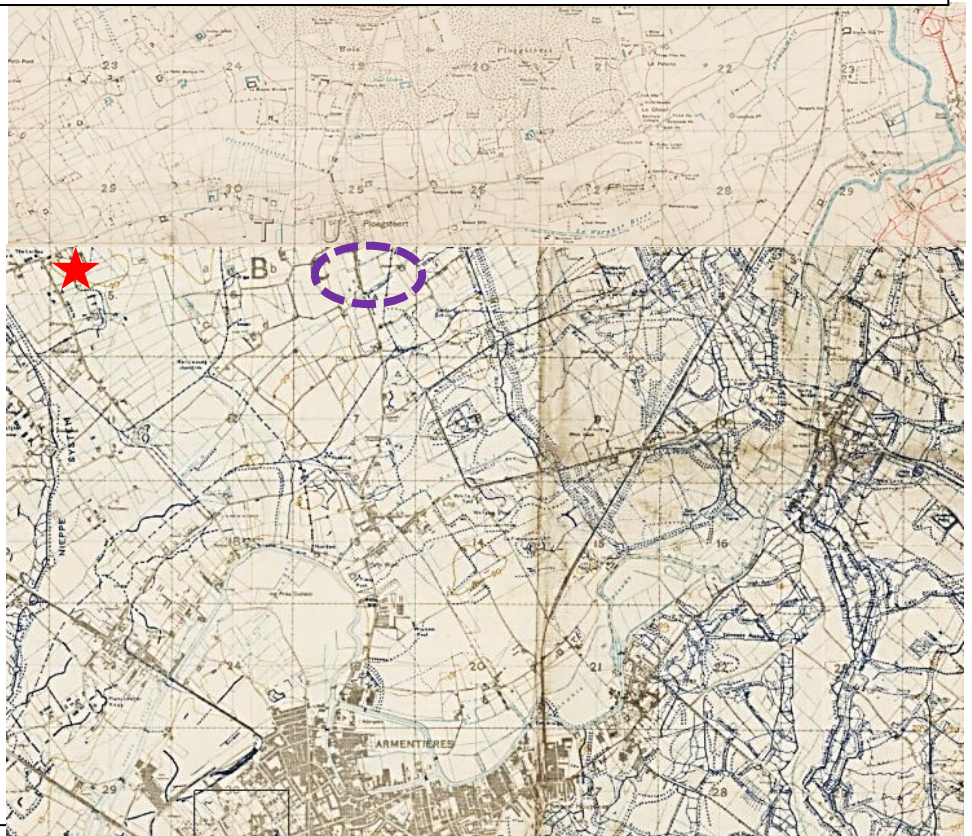
Ploegsteert, the village at the centre of the fighting by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on 10 April (the day on which it is presumed that William Smith was injured) lies approximately 2 km north east of the French border and around 4 km north of Armentieres. The position of Ploegsteert is shown with a ★. The river between Armentieres and Ploegsteert is the Lys.

[Source: <http://www.curme.co.uk/lys.htm>]

Trench map of the area between Armentieres and the village of Ploegsteert (encircled in purple), Belgium.

This is a composite map; the northern extract is dated 18 July 1917 and the larger southern extract is dated 26 June 1918 (no trench map showing the situation in April 1918 has been located). On both map extracts the Germans are seen to be holding the area; the German trenches and fortifications are shown in red on the northern extract and in blue on the southern extract.

On the morning of Wednesday 10 April the South Lancashire Regiment occupied the ridge of high ground (indicated by the red star) about 2000 yards west of Ploegsteert but, under sustained attack later in the day and on 11 April (when William Smith died) the troops were forced back a further 400 yards to the west.



1 mile

[Source: <http://digitalarchive.mcmaster.ca/islandora/object/macrepo%3A70141>]



It is quite possible that, having been wounded, William Smith was taken to the vicinity of Lijssenthoek a short distance to the north-west, and south of Poperinge, in Belgium:

*Lijssenthoek was the location for a number of casualty clearing stations during the First World War. The village was situated on the main communication line between the Allied military bases in the rear and the Ypres battlefields. Close to the Front, but out of the extreme range of most German field artillery, it became a natural place to establish casualty clearing stations. [CWGC]*

William was buried at the local Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery.

In loving memory of my dear husband,  
Lance-Corporal William Smith, who died  
of wounds received in action in France,  
April 11th. 1918. Also Willie, son of  
above, who died as the result of an  
accident, Sept. 21st, 1918.  
A loving husband. a father dear,  
A friend to all when he was near.  
When days are dark and friends are few,  
Tis then dear Bill, I long for you.  
—Deeply mourned and sadly missed by  
his Wife and Children, Bowling Green  
Cottages, Neston.



William Smith's CWGC headstone at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Poperinge, West Flanders, Belgium [photo : CWGC]



Birkenhead News – Saturday 12 April 1919

Name.	Corps.	Rank	Regtl. No.
SMITH, William	S. Lan. Co.	Pte.	15253

Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks
VICTORY	11/103	86	1144
BRITISH	do	do	do
15 <sup>th</sup> STAR	J/1/631	283	
Theatre of War first served in	1/ France		
Date of entry therein	28/9/15.		

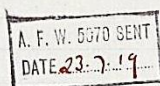
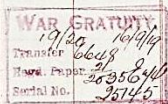
D. of W. 11/4/18.

K 1386.

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920



678698	6/001029/1	Smith William	1st Lt Lance 1st Cpl 18253	11-16-18 2nd Bnch. 83 France	Shrewsbury 5-18 6/18	10	9	2	10	9	2	no b. 18	19-6-19/1	Wid: Susan	10	9	2	children.
												87.0.9.18	19-9-18/1 15.1.20/3	Wid: Susan wid Susan	-	2	4	children DD



### 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.

William Smith had accrued two credits of £10 9s 2d and £2s 4d and the £10 11s 6d was received by his widow, Susan, and children. Susan received also the £17 War Gratuity.

The total payment, £27 9s 2d, is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of about £4200 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.

William and Susan Smith had a fourth child, Frederick, who was born on 16 May 1914. In the 1939 Register, single, he was a *dairyman, dairy hand* living at 5 Boathouse Lane, Parkgate. With him was his widowed mother, Susan, who was recorded as a *war widow's pensioner*. A further line of the Register has been redacted. It is believed that Susan died in early 1958.

Richard Smith, William's father, may have died in mid-1914 aged 57. Elizabeth Smith, William's mother, *may* have died in early 1933 aged 77.

Owen Smith (born 22 November 1888), William's brother, died in mid-1957 aged 68. He may have married Mary Roberts at St Giles Church, Wrexham, in mid-1920. At the time of the 1939 Register Owen, a general labourer, and Mary (born 28 January 1888) were living at 15 Gorsehill Road, Heswall. Mary died in early 1978.

Isabella Smith (born 29 April 1893), William's sister, married Joseph Moore (born 9 July 1891) at St Mark's Church, New Ferry, in July / September 1920 and she died, aged 68, in early 1962.

In the 1939 Register they are recorded as living at 51 Fern's Road, Bebington; Joseph was a process worker at a soap works. With them were two unmarried children:

Agnes - born 8 June 1922, a packer at a margarine factory. Agnes married Douglas Brown at St Barnabas Church, Bromborough, in late 1939.

Elsie - born 4 August 1924, a shop assistant. Elsie married John Whitehead at Christ Church, Higher Bebington, on 6 December 1948.

Nothing further is known of other members of the family.