

**THE ORIGINAL
BLUE ARMY**

by Steve Newman

INTRODUCTION

Britain declared War on Germany on August 4, 1914 continuing a chain of events that would lead to the First World War. By its conclusion some 704,000 men from Britain would be killed with a further 250,000 from its Empire. The global total would be staggering with around 8.5 million killed and a further 21 million wounded.

The initial reaction to the declaration of war though was one of enthusiastic patriotic fervour, that a glorious adventure was being embarked upon that would be 'over by Christmas' and there was a huge rush of young men keen to enlist so as not to miss out on the action, they needn't have worried. Immediately the effects could be seen on communities large and small around the country as first men on the reserve list and then others who had been quick to enlist left for training or the front.

Among the pastimes that were to be affected was football. In some parts of the press it was being actively criticised that whilst some young men were going off to fight, some were still playing football and should be ashamed of themselves. Others reasoned that providing entertainment for war workers and soldiers on leave was an essential part of keeping up morale. On August 22, 1914 British troops fired their first shots and the war suddenly became very real. Four days later, amongst many others, a Sergeant with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, William Sutherland, was killed at Le Cateau. It would appear he was the first former footballer to be killed, residing with his wife at North Avenue Southend he was a former player of our club Southend United, he would not be the last.

The debate continued about suspending the league and with attendances dropping as more men went into the military and with casualties mounting in France the league was eventually suspended from the end of the 1914-15 season. Many players and former players had already enlisted but now entire teams flocked to the flag. Such were the numbers of footballers enlisting that a Footballers Battalion was formed as well as a Sportsmans Battalion allowing them to serve alongside their own. It would be a particularly unlucky draw for any other army sides to draw either of these units in regimental and army cup matches!

Southend United associated players would fall in each of the next four years, thus surely making it one of the hardest hit clubs. Equally Southend would have players wounded, some badly and at least one would become a prisoner of war. In this the 90th anniversary of the end of the Great War it seems a fitting time to remember their sacrifices particularly at a time when our own armed forces are heavily engaged around the world.

This roll of honour though is in no way complete yet and is still a work in progress. I continue to search for pictures of some of the players and any assistance anyone reading this can give would be gratefully received. With Southend being in the Southern League and this not being classed as professional at the time, researching the players is a difficult and time consuming task and it may well be that others are confirmed or there are errors in what I have recorded thus far, for any such mistakes I apologise.

As to the future perhaps Southends move into a new stadium would allow for these brave men to be recorded at our new home?

So this year when you bow your head to remember and observe the November silence take a moment to remember those lads from your own club, who left all that was dear to them and never came home and today lie, mostly undiscovered, in a foreign field, these are their stories.

Steve Newman

email: city.steve@btinternet.com

ANDERSON Edward Ernest 'Dits'
33437 Sapper, 56 Company, Royal Engineers
Died of Wounds France & Flanders December 11, 1915 Age 24
Remembered with honour, Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery,
Belgium, Plot IV, Row C Grave 24A



Edward Anderson was born in Prittlewell in 1890, the son of Charles and Jane Anderson of 5 Stuarts Cottages, Prittlewell, he was one of five children. His family moved first to 23 Chelmsford Road and by the outbreak of war they were living at 263 North Road, Southend. Whilst born as Edward he preferred to use his middle name but was more commonly known to friends and supporters as 'Dits'.

Anderson went to Leigh Road School before moving on to Southend High School for Boys. Whilst at Leigh Road he attracted attention by his cleverness as a footballer and for three or four seasons he was the captain of the Leigh Road team. He was selected to play several representative matches and was the recipient of at least two Championship medals.

He next joined Southend United as an inside forward where he played for two seasons, although his appearances with the first team were somewhat limited. During Southend's tour of Germany in 1910 he went with them and played a number of games on this successful tour. On his day he was known as 'an exceptionally good inside man' and joined Woolwich Arsenal where 'he did good work for them'. In 1913 he went to live at Tottenham (although it is not clear if this was for footballing reasons) and it was from here that he enlisted at the Shoreditch recruiting office for the Royal Engineers in January 1915.



Like many other young men of the day he was quickly trained and despatched to France for a life in the trenches. Unfortunately for Anderson his career at the front would prove to be tragically short and whilst in the trenches near the infamous town of Ypres, for the week December 7-14, he was mortally wounded by a shell on December 10, only four days after having taken position in the front lines. He received dreadful injuries to his back and head and was immediately removed for medical assistance. It was the following day that he succumbed to his wounds at No.7 Casualty Clearing Station near Dixmude, Belgium.

Anderson lies in Lijssenthoek, Belgium with nearly 11,000 of his comrades. The area was between the front line and the town of Ypres and location for many of the field hospitals, including the one where Anderson passed away. (Photo John Baker)

Painfully for his family letters from him dated the day before he was wounded, arrived after his death and it was a letter from a comrade to his fiancée that confirmed the sad news.

Like many who died at Casualty Clearing Stations he was buried nearby and today he lies with nearly 11,000 of his comrades at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery in Belgium, the second largest Commonwealth cemetery in the country.

BASSETT, Spencer Thomas,
70384 Bombardier, 140th Siege Battery. Royal Garrison Artillery
Died of Wounds, France & Flanders April 11, 1917 Age 32
Remembered with honour Pozieres British Cemetery, France, Plot II, Row J, Grave 35.

Bombardier Spencer Bassett was born at Blackheath, Kent, in 1885, the son of Thomas and Agnes Bassett, of 65, Vicarage Rd. Plumstead.

Bassett's footballing career began at Maidstone United where he played on the right of midfield. In 1909 he was picked up by Woolwich Arsenal as being a potentially fine player. He however did not stay long with the Gunners and scored only a single goal before being transferred to Exeter City where he spent three successful seasons 'as a very fine centre half'.



A brief period with Swansea City followed before joining Southend United for the war disrupted 1914-15 season. It was not until the latter part of that season that he got a permanent place in the first eleven where local football writers of the day noted 'he had already played many fine games with the reserves. Of fine physique he was a brainy player, if latterly a trifle slow, but he fed the forwards well.'

He was residing at Plumstead at the outbreak of war and elected to enlist in nearby Woolwich, home of the Artillery with whom he found himself. He died of wounds on April 11, 1917 during the early stages of the Battle of Arras.

Bassett lies with 1400 of his comrades in one of the original plots of Pozieres British Cemetery and not one of the later ones that were made up of casualties re buried here at the end of hostilities from the many small and isolated cemeteries that littered this area of France. (Photo Robert Pike)

KENNEDY, William,

3593 Lance-Corporal 'A' Company 1/14th County of London Battalion (London Scottish)

Killed in Action, France & Flanders, October 13, 1915 Age 25.

Remembered with honour, Loos Memorial to the Missing, France, Panel 132.

William Kennedy was born in 1890 the son of John and Jeanie Kennedy of 31 Cromwell Road, Grays. He was a teacher at Quarry Hill School and later a student at Borough Road College, however he was always a keen footballer.

Whilst only playing for Southend on a few guest occasions following a period at Northfleet, it was with West Ham that he played some of his best football. He joined them in 1910 scoring on his debut and the following season bagged a hatrick against Brentford. A serious knee injury sustained away at Middlesbrough in the FA Cup ended his West Ham career

He joined the colours in London, early on in the war and became part of the 1/14th County of London Battalion, also known as the London Scottish. On October 13, his battalion was part of the ongoing Battle of Loos and were assigned on this day to attack near the fortified German position known as the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

At 1400 the attack began into a smoke screen that was already clearing, against defences and wire that were untouched by the feeble artillery barrage and with German shells now landing heavily around them, the outcome was already doomed. With immediate heavy losses of officers and men including those with wire cutters the survivors were left facing impenetrable wire with little cover and no way to get through. The gallant men of 'A' Company were some of those who reached the furthest forwards. However, whilst this halt in the 'advance' was forced upon the men, and they did their best to seek cover, a call was made for volunteers to cross the shell swept zone to the dressing station in order to obtain aid for wounded comrades. Kennedy and two others volunteered to go and they were last seen crossing the area amid the falling shells. It was foggy at the time and for some considerable period afterwards there was hope that they had lost their way and become prisoners. The hope was futile though and it can only be presumed that he was killed in the shelling mentioned as no trace of him or his two fellow volunteers was ever found.



With no body to bury he appears on the Loos Memorial to the Missing, along with some 20,500 other British and Commonwealth missing who have no known grave on this section of the Western Front.

Kennedy, like so many others killed on the western front has no known grave and is thus commemorated on the nearest memorial to where he vanished. In this case the Loos Memorial where his name is joined by nearly 21,000 others with a further 885 buried there. (Photo Robert Pike)

LACEY, Dudley,
103094 Driver, 169th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery.
Died, France November 28, 1918 Age 27.

Remembered with honour Etaples Military Cemetery, France Plot L1, Row D. Grave 1.

Dudley Lacey was the eldest son of Emma Lacey of 7, Stornoway Road, Southchurch.

Known as 'Tom', he was well-known around Southend through his work as a postman and a promising footballer, he had lived in Southend with his parents for fifteen years.

He first played as centre forward and later developed into a centre half, and initially assisted Southend Amateurs and later Southend United Reserves.

He enlisted in the Artillery at Easter 1915, when football ceased for the duration of the war and despite surviving over three years in France and Belgium he died in hospital in France of pneumonia on November 28, 1918, seventeen days after the end of hostilities.

McLAUGHLIN, Patrick,
6005 Company Sergeant Major, 1st Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers,
Killed in Action, France & Flanders, March 27, 1916 Age 32

Remembered with honour, Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing, Belgium, Panels 8-12.

Patrick McLaughlin was born in Jarrow early in 1883, the son of Michael and Mary McLaughlin, of 32, Stanley St., Jarrow, Co. Durham. He would at the end of his well travelled footballing career return to his wife, Helena McLaughlin, who lived nearby at 1, James St., Hebburn, Co. Durham.

McLaughlins football career is certainly varied in terms of clubs but as a position he played centre-forward. His first recorded club is Blaydon United, from where he moved to Hebburn Argyle, and then to Chorley before returning to Hebburn Argyle for a second spell. Other North East teams followed in the form of Blyth Spartans and South Shields Adelaide. In 1909 he moved down south and joined Fulham, at that time in the Second Division, where he gained their No. 9 shirt. However he only appears to have played for them twice but did score at least one goal. His next move was to Wallsend Park Villa, before then joining Southend United. It is not clear how long he stayed with the Blues but clearly a return home was what he sought as his next club was back in the North East with Jarrow Caledonians before his final club appears as Scotswood.

McLaughlin joined his local regiment the Northumberland Fusiliers at the Jarrow recruiting office and was initially posted to the 3rd Battalion before later joining the 1st Battalion. He was made up to Corporal and then Acting Sergeant on August 31, 1914. He went overseas to France on December 18, 1914 before becoming a permanent Sergeant on March 20, 1915, in pre war days a man could've expected to take 10 years to reach this rank. He was wounded in July 1915 and a month before his death was made up to Company Sergeant Major.

In the week leading up to the action in which McLaughlin was killed his battalion had been at rest in camps around Reninghelst. At 1900 on March 26, they were transferred by bus (ex London double decks were often used for this purpose) to the rendezvous point for the following days attack. The action was to take place near St Eloi and was timed to coincide with five large mines that had been

laid under the German trenches. The mines exploded at 0415 and the advance began immediately. The Germans fired up red flares warning of an attack and called in artillery on the advancing British troops who were now struggling to overcome the untouched barbed wire in no mans land.

Such was the surprise that by 0445 following a rough period caused by German machine guns on the flank, that were eventually knocked out, the objective had been taken. 'X' Company which McLaughlin was in were tasked initially as a reserve but was one of two company's tasked with pushing up and helping clear enemy dugouts which was a hazardous occupation. At 0815 the Germans launched a counter attack from the west which was repulsed and the unit set about consolidating the position under 'medium' shell fire for the remainder of the day. During the mornings actions over 50 men of the battalion were killed with a further 150 wounded. Like many men lost in these frontal assaults there was little time or chance to bury the dead and many were never recovered. McLaughlin is amongst those who was never recovered but his name along with nearly 55,000 of his comrades is engraved on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing.



McLaughlin was a keen footballer from an early age and had success even as a young man. Living in the North East he played for a number of local teams including Jarrow Hibernians. Seen here third from left seated the team are photographed with the Samboteet Cup which they won in 1895-96 and again the following season. (Photo courtesy Patrick Brennan)

McLaughlin's body was never recovered but his name is recorded on the Menin Gate Memorial along with nearly 55,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers. The memorial is situated on the road to the old front line which most of the men commemorated on it would've marched along when going to the front. Every evening traffic is stopped from passing through whilst the Last Post is played a tradition that has continued since the memorial was unveiled in 1927. McLaughlin's name features with those from his regiment on panels 8-12. (Photo Robert Pike)



OWEN, Harry

SPTS11725 Lance Corporal, 23rd Battalion Royal Fusiliers (Sportsman's Btn.)

Killed in Action, France & Flanders March 13, 1916 Age 34.

Remembered with honour at Lievin Communal Cemetery, France, Plot IV. Row F. Grave 14



Harry Owen was born at Sulgrave, Northants, in 1881 and had a twin sister with whom he resided with, at Ivor Villa 2, Horace Road, Southend.

He first came to the attention of Southend United when playing for Southend Athletic with whom he did so much to ensure they won their Championship in the 1905-06 season. It was in the deciding game against Wanstead where he man marked the soon to be Southend United and later Manchester United forward Harold Halse and kept him 'out of the game' that appears to have cemented his move to the Blues. The then manager Bob Jack having seen him play and tasked with the building up of Southend United signed him as his centre-half. Owen was instantly popular with the fans and his play helped the club achieve success in winning the Championship of the Southern League, Division II, in two successive seasons 1906-7 and 1907-8 whilst his continued good form helped the Blues achieve a commendable display in their first two seasons in Division I.

Owen was part of the team that historically beat the then mighty Clapton Orient in a November 1907 cup tie. A football writer at the time wrote of Owen's performance 'was one of those games which have made an indelible impression on my brain.' In the away draw at Homerton it was not only Essex football writers who reported highly of him but the London Press also joined in, noting the manner in which he had held up the much vaunted Orient attack. Better was to come in the replay at Southend where shocking the football world of the day Southend rode out 3-1 winners. It was said Owen not only dominated the Orient attack but also their full backs as he fed the strikers to send Orient crashing out.

Another game in which he excelled was against Millwall in September 1908, where the sports writer of the day covering the Blues wrote about his performance that day shortly after Owen's death 'that it will not readily fade from public memory, how he checkmated every move of the Lion's attack and kept on putting his own forwards in motion stamped him as a master of tactics. I could go on giving instances of his brilliances, but I have said enough to prove his worth even to those who did not know him.'

It was a cruel twist of fate that a serious thigh injury away at his home club Northampton brought an end to his playing career on December 30, 1909. With his loss the team fell apart suffering their heaviest ever defeat 11-1 (the Southend goal was scored by Sutherland who would also be killed in the Great War). Owen never really recovered full fitness and despite turning out for the Blues when they were in desperate need his playing days were over. However, he kept a keen interest in the club and followed their fortunes with great enthusiasm.



He was also a keen cricketer, bowls and billiard player and he concentrated on these sports following his retirement from football.

Like many patriotic men of the day Owen joined up fairly early in the war enlisting in Hornchurch in May, 1915. He joined the 23/Royal Fusiliers a battalion known as the Sportsmans Battalion as it was made up entirely of sportsmen of the day. It would over the next few years gain an excellent record for its fighting. Owen left for the front from Salsbury Camp in November 1915. During the winter he suffered a number of narrow escapes. On one occasion he was nearly blown up by a mine when several of his comrades were buried alive, whilst on another occasion a shell took away the butt of his rifle, which he was carrying on his shoulder.

However, his luck was destined to run out on the early hours of March 13, 1916. His battalion had been holding the front line at Souchez North for a four day stint and were on the 13th being relieved by the Kings Royal Rifle Corps and heading back to 'safe' billets behind the line at Noulette. Alas before Owen had been relieved he was on sentry duty from 0300-0400. Alas at 0355 -just five minutes before he would have been relieved - a trench mortar bomb came over. One of his comrades writing home to his sister takes up the story 'Owen saw it coming and gave a warning to his section, with the result that he saved the lives of three parts of the section The mortar, however, burst right in front of him, inflicting forty or fifty wounds on the unfortunate man. He was not killed outright, but lived about an hour in an unconscious condition, and then passed peacefully away.' He was buried by the chaplain, Rev. A.G. Duthin 'in an orchard set aside as the cemetery for British troops near the lines where he fell. His comrades have erected an admirable cross to mark the spot where he was laid to rest, inscribed with his name.' Further tragedy would strike the family with both his nephews George and Fred Owen losing their lives whilst serving.

The loss of Owen as a popular and well known local man was immediate and 'Centre Half' the local sports writer who knew him well penned these fitting words to the memory of his friend.



'Whatever he took up he believed in doing thoroughly and he was a gentleman on and off the field. It was a rare thing to see a free kick given against Owen for a foul, and when it did happen it was brought about by over-keenness or accidentally. The war had not been long in progress before Owen felt the Call of King and Country. I remember meeting him in the High Street about twelve months ago one Saturday night, when he said, "I am going to join the Sportsmen's Battalion tomorrow. I have no ties and I feel all of us single men ought to go." He went and I remember seeing him at a meeting one Wednesday evening just before his departure for the front. When I gripped his hand and wished

Harry Owen was buried immediately close to where he fell but unfortunately post war it was impossible to maintain all the small cemeteries so a number of them were concentrated into larger ones. Owen was one of those moved and today lies in Lievin Cemetery, along with 700 of his comrades of whom only 300 were ever identified. (Photo Robert Pike)

him the best of luck I little thought it would be the last time we should ever meet. The cruel lottery of war has, however, claimed him, but the memory of Harry Owen will remain a treasured recollection to the end, as it must do with all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. What better epitaph could he have than “He died for his country”

SUTHERLAND, William Urquhart

8260 Sergeant, ‘D’ Company 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

Killed in Action France & Flanders, August 26, 1914 Age 30.

Remembered with honour at La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial



William Sutherland was born at Falkirk, Scotland in 1884. He served with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in the South African Campaign of 1899-1902. He was a keen footballer and gym instructor for his regiment but on leaving the military, the then manager of the Blues, Mr Bob Jack, signed him for Southend United. He played for two and half seasons for the Blues scoring many goals along the way and was also part of the team that toured Germany in 1910. He also met his wife Enid whilst living in Southend and by 1914 they had two children. On leaving Southend Utd he linked up again with Bob Jack who was now manager at Plymouth Argyle where he again signed Sutherland who in turn later moved on to Chatham FC. After his football career came to an end he returned to Southend where he lived with his wife at 44 North Avenue (later 63 North Avenue) and was upon the opening of the Jones Memorial Ground for children at Southend, appointed groundsman and caretaker under the Southend Education Committee.

It would appear that Sutherland is possibly the first footballer playing for what are today professional clubs that was killed in the Great War. As no precise list exists its impossible to prove but over 200 players have thus far been researched and Sutherland being killed on only the fourth day of the war appears to be the first of many.

At the declaration of war, being on the reserve list he joined his old regiment on August 5 and was sent to France immediately, arriving with them at Boulougne on August 14. The battalion became part of the 19th Infantry Brigade and were sent forwards to meet the German advance. At this point of the war the whole vision of static front line trenches had not even been conceived and it was expected that cavalry would be the main weapon. The first shots fired by



Sutherland seen in full dress uniform and his Plymouth football strip would be another former player of Southend United who would disappear into the fog of war and his body never recovered. Today his name is recorded on the La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial to the missing.

the British Army came about shortly after dawn on August 22, 1914. Two days later with skirmishes taking place on a wider and wider front Sutherlands Battalion found themselves retreating towards Haussy, having already fallen back from Elouges to Jenlain. The following day (25th) would see them again fall back this time from Solesmes to Le Cateau, for what would become known as the Battle of Le Cateau.

The day started early at 0400 as the battalion marched through Le Cateau with bayonets fixed following reports that German troops had entered the town. By 0900 the unit was moving across the Le Cateau-Estrees road. They took up position on a south facing slope overlooking Le Cateau. Shell and machine gun fire increased throughout the day but despite this four platoons moved through the shell swept slope and on towards the German Infantry. Alas many became casualties as the machine gun fire was accurate and deadly against any man who showed himself. This party despite being checked by the heavy shell fire from the German artillery to the north and west when called on again to go forwards went straight through the storm of fire, past the retreating firing line and forced a desperate attack onto the frontline German infantry advancing from Le Cateau. 'A' Company went into the attack again when ordered to do so to and succeeded in holding up the vastly superior forces opposing them from advancing. All the men of Major Alexander MacLean's unit involved in this attack were not heard from again and it would appear it was this action that cost William Sutherland his life.

A letter home from a soldier allegedly wounded by the same shell that appears to have killed Sutherland states that he was badly wounded and his last words to his men were 'look out for yourselves; I am done for anyway.' However a second letter from another man from his unit to his wife who was frantically searching for information, reports that he was killed by a single shot to the head, the truth perhaps we will never know.

The Germans now sensing their superiority in numbers started probing attacks forcing the remaining men from the battalion to again fall back to a ridge to the east of Reumont. Further German flanking manoeuvres continued and again the unit was forced to retire, first to the high ground north west of Honnechy and then south to the railway line at Busigny, whilst other stragglers made their way towards Estrees where officers would try and get the three separate surviving groups of the battalion back together. Alas such was the confusion and losses it would be more than ten days before they were reunited. By the scale of later battles the events of August 1914 are small but even so the battalion had 44 officers and men killed on this one day of whom only seven were identified and given proper burials. The remaining men including Sutherland were all posted missing and whilst later posted as killed in action his body and those of his comrades have never been found and all are therefore commemorated on the nearby La Ferte Sous-Jouarre Memorial to the missing, along with nearly 4,000 other British troops.

TOSSWILL, John 'Jack' Speare

72726 Corporal, Northern Signal Service Training Centre, Royal Engineers

Died UK September 28, 1915 Age 25

Remembered with honour at Eastbourne (Ocklynge) Cemetery Grave UA250

'Jack' Tosswill was born in Eastbourne in 1890. His footballing career started at Eastbourne Borough before moving on to nearby Hastings and St. Leonards, next was Aberdare Athletic, Tunbridge Wells Rangers and then Maidstone Utd. Bigger clubs then followed and he joined QPR before moving to Liverpool where he only managed 11 games and scored one goal for the reds. It was from Liverpool that Southend acquired him in 1913 with who he stayed for one season before moving on to Coventry City before the war ended the footballing calendar.

He enlisted in his home town of Eastbourne and for at least some of his time with the military he served with the Royal Engineers Signal Depot based at Dunstable. The signal training services taught the ever improving art of communications, something that had been found to be woefully lacking in the early days of the war. As a training centre they would have taught all forms of signal work such as semaphore, lamps, telephone line laying and the newly utilised wireless. Tosswill was taken ill whilst the unit was based at Southampton, possibly awaiting to be shipped overseas, he was forced to have an operation but unfortunately later succumbed to its effects. He was buried close to the convalescent home in his native Eastbourne.



Photo: Terry Denham

WILEMAN, Arthur Harold MM

G/19825 Sergeant, 11th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment.

Killed in Action, France & Flanders April 28, 1918 Age 36.

Remembered with honour at Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing, Belgium, Panels 86-88

Arthur Wileman was born in Newhall, Derbyshire in 1889. At the time of his death he was shown as being married to Blanche Wileman, of 34, Temple St, Keynsham, Bristol.

Wileman's footballing career began at Gresley Rovers in the 1904-05 season. The following season he was their joint top scorer with seven goals, although it appears not all his goals were recorded at this level. He then joined league side Burton Albion in 1906, where he played eight times and scored two goals for the team towards the end of the season but it was not enough to save them and they were not re-



The Tyne Cot Memorial bears the names of nearly 35,000 British and Commonwealth troops who were killed near Ypres after August 1917. It marks one of the furthest points forwards reached by Allied troops on this part of the front and within the cemetery boundary can still be seen a number of German concrete strong points (Photo Glyn Warwick)

elected to the Football League, however it appears he continued with them before signing for Chelsea along with his brother (This is believed to be Heneage Wileman who would become a prolific goalscorer for Southend both before and after the war) in 1909. He scored on his Chelsea debut away to Woolwich Arsenal but even with this the team lost 3-2. Despite a good start to his Chelsea career and a couple of excellent games he never fulfilled his full potential and the signing of Bob Whittingham from Bradford City for £1300, ended his career at Chelsea where he had scored five league goals. He moved on to Millwall and then to Luton Town before joining Southend United in the run up to the war. It would appear that he never had the opportunity to make an impact at Southend before world events put an end to the football calendar.

Arthur Wileman was serving with the 11th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment when he was killed. It was with this unit that he had won the Military Medal (MM) for bravery in the field in 1917, during the conflict around Ypres better known as the Battle of Passchendaele, the award was recorded in the London Gazette on January 28, 1918. In April 1918 Allied forces were just starting to stem the German Spring Offensive that had proven to be hugely successful and pushed the allies back over all the territory they had fought so hard to capture over the past four years. Wilemans unit were in the front line at Elzenwalle Chateau and were heavily shelled throughout the 23rd-24th before being heavily attacked on April 25. The attack was repulsed but the Germans came again following another heavy barrage on the 26th. This attack was also repelled and a counter attack was launched that captured some prisoners and two enemy machine guns. The 27th again brought another heavy enemy attack which was supported by enemy aircraft but this too was repelled with heavy loss to the enemy. That evening the unit was relieved by the Kings Liverpool Regiment and returned to the support lines. The following day (28th) again heavy shelling fell on the front lines and whilst most men rested in the support lines following the hard stint at the front, 2/Lieutenant Richard Ellis led a patrol out on reconnaissance. There are only three casualties recorded for the battalion on this day so it would appear that Wileman was with Ellis on this patrol and both men were killed along with another private soldier (Harold Durston). None of their bodies were ever recovered and all three are thus commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the missing

WILSON, Archibald

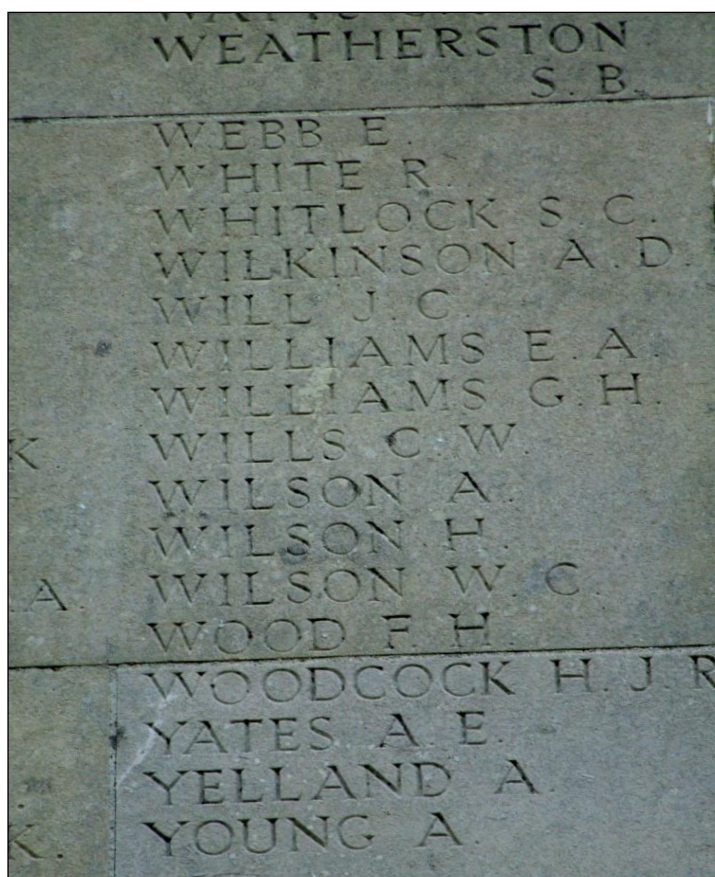
5480 Private, 1/14th Battalion London Regiment (London Scottish)

Killed in Action France & Flanders July 1, 1916 Age 25

Remembered with honour at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, Panels 9C-13C

Archie Wilson was born at Newmilns Scotland in 1890. In his early youth Wilson developed a keen interest in football, and before he left school, he was regarded as an up and coming player. At the age of 17 he got his junior Scottish Inter-League cap, subsequently moving to Nottingham. He was signed for Spurs at 18 but was perhaps too young to make an impression although he made many fine appearances for the reserves. In March 1911 Wilson was signed for £50 from Spurs and this was later called 'one of the most judicious £50 ever spent by the club'. Southend were in this season in deep relegation trouble and look doomed to be relegated by some distance. Wilson still only a young lad made his debut against Leyton on March 18, 1911 a game that ended 1-1. Having only gained a mere 17 points all season the introduction of Wilson changed Southends performances and their fate went down to the last game of the season where the Blues needed to win at New Brompton and Bristol Rovers needed to lose at Brighton. Sadly for the blues despite them winning, Bristol pulled off a draw and Southend were relegated by the slimmest of margins. The late season form that had been excellent with five wins and two draws from the last ten games, bode well for the next season.

The following season saw Southend United in Division II, and then began the brilliant and successful partnership of Wilson and Wileman. They proved the best and most prolific scoring duo Southend had ever had, Wilson and Wileman played on the wing together and were always out together, and became best friends. Wileman fed Wilson most assiduously, and the latter used to electrify the crowd with his dainty runs down the wing and his perfect crosses, while not infrequently he also hit the back of the net. Wilson was said to be an artist with the ball; he often beat opponent after opponent with his wizardry, and above all, he was absolutely fearless. Though only 5ft 7ins in height, and carrying only about 10st 7lbs of weight he had not the slightest fear of the biggest defenders in the world. Due to his close ball control and skills the better the surface the more Wilson could torment defenders and this was, probably the reason why, brilliant though he was at home, he showed much of his best form away. He seemed to have a great liking for Ninian Park, Cardiff where he was also feared by the home players and fans alike. It was here that he played one of his finest games for the Blues in a cup tie where the Blues won 0-3. In the League however Southend spent two seasons in Division II but it was largely due to his brilliance that Southend gained promotion in 1913.



Like all Allied missing their names are inscribed on memorials close to where they were posted missing, alongside those of their regiment also missing. Each name doubtlessly left a devastated family at home and stories of bravery and suffering we will never hear. The simple inscription 'A. Wilson' hides not only the sadness to the family but also the story of a successful and promising footballer cut short in his prime.

Back in Division one of the Southern League the partnership of Wilson and Wileman continued on the right wing for the third season. The consistency of Wilson was one of the highlights of the season and throughout the whole season he only missed one game, for the club it was also successful as for the first time ever the club made a financial profit. High profile cup ties against Brentford and Birmingham bought Wilson's talent to the attention of scouts from other clubs. The then manager of Middlesbrough came to Southend to watch Holmes who played for Coventry City but was so taken

by Wilson's ability that he made immediate moves to sign him. The deal went through for £400 and whilst Wilson completed the last two games of the season for the Blues his association with the club was at an end.

Wilson made 21 appearances for Middlesbrough scoring four goals before the war put an end to his footballing career. Initially he got a job working in a munitions factory but he felt this was not for him so he returned south and enlisted in the London Scottish Battalion, but he also made ten guest appearances for Spurs in this period. His training was at Purfleet which gave him the chance to return to the borough. He told a sports writer at the time that he was particularly fond of Southend and his heart would always be with the club and it was with great regret that he had left but he hoped after the war to one day return. Alas on his last weekend before going to France he again returned to the town to say goodbye to his friends. He told many of them he would not be returning and had had a

premonition that he would never see them again, alas this was sadly to prove true.

At 0730 on July 1, 1916, following a week long barrage that could be heard in the south of England the Battle of the Somme began. It would prove to be one of the bloodiest battles of the entire war and would cost the British Army, just on the first day, nearly 70,000 casualties of whom around 20,000 were killed. Wilson's battalion the 1/14th London's known as the London Scottish were part of 56 Division that were attacking to the very north of the front around the village of Gommecourt in what was a diversionary attack to pin German artillery and manpower down and thus stop them pushing south to help repel the main attack.

The battalion moved up from Bayencourt to the trenches east of Hebuterne the night before the attack began and set about trying to clear some of the German wire in front of them before they went 'over the top'. At 0730 the men of the battalion went forwards attacking the German line with the aim of encircling the German position around Gommecourt from the south and meeting up with 46 Division who were attacking from the north in a classic 'pincer' movement. Initially the attack started well for the London's and they captured three lines of German trenches, for what could by the comparison of the day be viewed as light casualties. However, despite the optimistic views that no Germans would survive the barrage it was becoming blatantly clear that the Germans were still holding them and in force and at 1000 a force of 59 men were sent forwards as a bombing party to start clearing the remaining Germans from their trench. Alas due to the heavy artillery fire now raining down on the attackers only three of this party reached the German lines the others all being hit. Despite this some members of the unit did reach the meeting point to the east of Gommecourt, for the attack coming from the north but alas this was bogged down by stiff resistance and as German artillery got heavier and no reinforcements could get through to them, they were forced to retreat back through the artillery barrage or become completely cut off. They joined the remainder of their unit around 'Fall' 'Farmer' and 'Fair' trenches from where they were again forced to fall back to the south of the position known as 'The 'Farmyard'. Eventually the remains of the unit were reformed in what was the old British front line.

In the kind of carnage and chaos that was taking place on a day such as July 1, 1916 it is virtually impossible to track exactly what happened to any individual and that is true of Archie Wilson, who we will probably never know his exact fate. His battalion had been cut up badly and of the 871 men who went over the top with him some 616 became casualties of which around 220 were killed. Most of their bodies would never be recovered and Archie Wilson along with 72,091 of his comrades killed in the Somme battles is today commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing.



The Thiepval Memorial on the Somme is the largest on the Western Front and bears the names of over 72,000 British and Commonwealth troops who were killed on this sector before March 20, 1918. The majority were killed in the fighting from July-November 1916. The memorial itself is situated near the village of Thiepval which was an objective for the very first day of the offensive on July 1 but was in reality not captured until September. (Photo Robert Pike)