

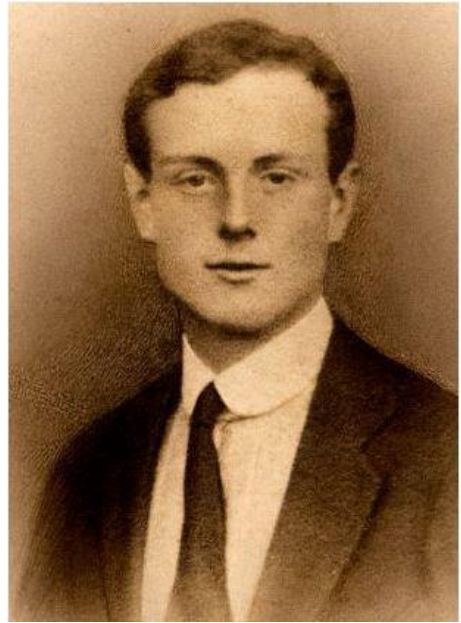
WIGAN'S OWN WW1 SAVING PTE RYAN STORY

The Earlam Johnson Family

Most of us have seen 'Saving Pte Ryan' the film loosely based on the story of the four Niland brothers from New York who served in the Second World War. After the reported deaths of three of his siblings, Frederick Niland a Sgt in the 101st Airborne in Normandy was sent back to the USA to complete his service and to avoid his mother the pain of losing all her sons.



Lt. William Godfrey Earlam Johnson
1/5 Bn Manchester Regt



Lt. Pieter Earlam Johnson
No. 4 Sqn Royal Flying Corps



Capt. Henry Earlam Johnson
2 Bn King's Royal Rifle Corps



Capt. Alfred Earlam Johnson
1/5 Bn Manchester Regt

Wigan has several similar accounts of its own. The First World War names on the Cenotaph at the Parish Church include three families who lost three sons. At least 48 families lost two sons and four families lost father and son. Not included

on the Cenotaph as they didn't live in the old Wigan Borough are the four sons of Rev C.H James, the Vicar of St. David's, Haigh, all killed in action.

What started as research of casualties of the 1/5th Bn (TF) Manchester Regt at Gallipoli has evolved and grown into another story with the theme of mining, military, medicine and the constantly recurring name of Earlam.

THE FAMILY HISTORY

In 1888 Alfred Earlam Johnson, a mining engineer aged 24, married 19 year old Florence Rosalie Van-Eeden in the Holy Trinity church, Southport. Alfred, the son of James Henry Johnson, the wealthy co-founder of Abram Colliery, had been born in Low Green House in Stoney Lane (now Liverpool Rd) in Hindley, Wigan. His bride had been born in Georgetown, the capital of British Guyana in South America. After their marriage Alfred and Florence lived in Eccles near Salford where their first two children, Henry Earlam Johnson and Ethel Marjorie Earlam Johnson were born.

In 1892 the Abram Coal Co, a Limited Liability Company was formed. Alfred became Managing Director and took over the running of Abram Colliery in Bickershaw from his older brother William. He moved into Bickershaw Hall in Bickershaw Lane, close to the pit in Bolton House Rd. The moated property, entered by a brick gatehouse and drawbridge was leased to the Abram Coal Company for use by the management.

Although Abram Colliery had been a profitable pit due to the valuable Cannel coal being mined in one of it's seams, it was an unfortunate time for Alfred to take over. The next year a miners strike was triggered by a significant drop in the price of coal. In an attempt to maintain profits, colliery owners tried to introduce a 25% reduction in miners wages. This was rejected by the Miners Federation who called for a 'Living Wage'. The result was a lockout that went on for much of the summer. The Government stepped in and the miners went back to work with their original rates of pay guaranteed for a year. The following year the miners agreed to a 10% drop in wages.

The Pit had a fairly good safety record but disaster had struck in December 1881. An explosion in the Yard Seam killed 48 miners, 24 others, most of whom were working in the Arley Seam were brought out alive. The disaster left 25 widows and 73 children fatherless.

The suffering of miners on a daily basis cannot be underestimated. Between the 50 year period between 1869 and 1919 it is estimated that a miner was killed every six hours, one was seriously injured every two hours and the number of minor accidents necessitating more than seven days off work, one every few minutes.

Alfred was to waste no time on making his mark in the area. On 30 Dec 1890 whilst still living in Eccles he had been initiated as a Freemason into the Lindsay Lodge in Wigan, named after Lord Lindsay, Earl of Balcarres and Crawford. He became a Councillor and was Chair of Abram Local Board and Urban District Council for 13 consecutive years from 1901. He also became Chairman of Wigan Co-operative Movement as well as being a Justice of the Peace.

By 1906 Florence had given Alfred four more children, all boys. The three eldest, William Godfrey Earlam Johnson, Alfred Earlam Johnson Jnr and Pieter Cedric Earlam Johnson were all baptised at St. John CE church, Abram. Their youngest child James Frederick Earlam Johnson was baptised at the nearby recently opened Parish church on Bickershaw Lane on 6 Jan 1907.

The church which had cost £5000 to build had been given to the people of Bickershaw as a gift by the Johnson family in memory of young James's grandparents, James Henry and Elizabeth Johnson. Originally it was called the Johnson Memorial church, but after it's consecration in 1905 by the Bishop of Liverpool it was fittingly renamed St. James & St. Elizabeth church.

Weddings, baptisms and funerals had taken place at St John's church in Abram before the new church was opened with regular church services having to take place in Bickershaw school. As the area's main employer and benefactor the Johnson family had also built schools accommodating 400 children, along with houses let out to miners for a comparatively low rent.

Abram was considered a forward thinking colliery and Alfred even explored the possibility of a profit sharing scheme with his workers. It is believed that Abram Coal Co. was the first Colliery Company in Lancashire to possess an ambulance carriage for evacuating injured miners and one of the first to have classes for their employees to be taught first aid under the tutelage of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

The 1911 census shows Alfred Snr, Florence and four year old James in residence at Bickershaw Hall, along with two domestic servants and a Governess.

Eighteen year old William was at Haileybury College in Hertfordshire and a Cadet Corporal in the Officer Training Corps. On leaving College he returned to Bickershaw and became an articled clerk to Peace & Ellis, Solicitors based in King St in Wigan. He also became a prominent member of Wigan Cricket Club.

Sixteen year old Alfred Jnr was at Giggleswick Boarding School in Settle, North Yorkshire where he was a Cadet Sgt in the OTC.

Twelve year old Pieter was at Mostyn House School, in Neston on the Wirral but shortly was to join older brother William at Haileybury College where he too became a member of the OTC.

EGYPT AND THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN

On 4 Aug 1914, the day Great Britain declared war against Germany, William was a Captain and Alfred a Lieutenant in the Wigan based Territorial Force unit, the 1/5th Bn, Manchester Regt. Along with the other Territorial Bn's the 1/6th, 1/7th and 1/8th they formed the Manchester Brigade, part of the East Lancashire Division. The number 1 before the Battalion number indicated that it was a First Line or 'Foreign Service' Unit. The Regt raised the 2/5th Bn which also served on the Western Front and the 3/5th Bn which remained in the UK and was used for training and providing draft replacements to the other two Battalions.

Shortly after mobilisation for war the Battalion moved to their allotted war station, a tented camp at Hollingworth Lake, Littleborough, near Rochdale. The East Lancs Div was the first Territorial Division to be sent overseas in the First World War. It was warned for movement on 5 Sept and on 10 Sept 1914 as part of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force the Division sailed from Southampton on board the SS Caledonia. The convoy consisted of 15 Troop Ships carrying over 30,000 Lancastrians, escorted by HMS Ocean and HMS Minerva. (The SS Caledonia was later sunk by a German U Boat, U65, 125 miles off Malta in Dec 1916).

The MEF arrived at Alexandria in Egypt on 25 Sept and 1/5 Bn was quartered in Mustapha Barracks in the city. The Manchester Brigade remained in Alexandria to guard key military installations and by October 1/5 Bn was training at nearby Sidi Gaber Barracks. The remainder of the East Lancs Div moved to Cairo as part of the Suez Canal Defence Force, acting as a deterrent to Turkish aggression and expansion in the Middle East.

On 16 Dec 1914 whilst William and Alfred were in Egypt their father Alfred Earlam Johnson Snr died suddenly aged 51. He was buried three days later at All Saints CE church in Hindley. The newly widowed Florence vacated Bickershaw Hall and went to live in Stafford Rd in Eccles.

The Dardanelles Campaign started on 17 Feb 1915. It was an attempt by the Allies to force Turkey out of the war and relieve the deadlock of the Western Front in France and Belgium by opening a supply route to Russia through the Dardanelles and the Black Sea. With the bulk of the British Army fighting on the Western Front it was originally meant as a Naval only operation. The Royal Navy suffered badly, losing many ships, so a decision was made for the Army to invade the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The invasion force was a hotchpotch of units, British regiments were brought back from India along with Indian troops and Gurkhas. The Anzacs from Australia and New Zealand sailed to the Middle East to join the campaign, along with a French contingent. And of course the men from East Lancs Div who had been sent to protect the Suez Canal, the Territorial soldiers from Lancashire.

On 11 April William and Alfred's cousin, Henry Norman Johnson joined them in Egypt. Born in Bristol in 1894 he had returned to Lancashire as a young boy when his school teacher father Robert Thorley Johnson (younger brother to Alfred Earlam Snr) got a teaching post at Rivington Grammar School. The 1911 census shows Henry as a boarder at the Abbey School in St. Bees, Cumberland. After finishing his education Henry gained an officers commission on 14 Oct 1914 and followed his two cousins into 1/5 Bn Manchester Regt.

At the beginning of May 1915, 1/5 Bn were at Abbassia Barracks in Cairo where they received orders for their move to Gallipoli. Thirty two officers and 816 other ranks embarked aboard SS Derfflinger (a German passenger ship captured at Port Said in Aug 1914) and departed Alexandria at 1700 hrs on 3 May. The embarkation state shows that

both William and Alfred were members of 'D' Coy and that Henry was a supernumerary Subaltern with 'B' Coy. On board with the three officers was my grandfather Cpl Frank Taylor, also of 'B' Coy.

On the afternoon of 6 May the Bn reached Cape Helles and finished disembarkation at 23.45 hrs. Bn HQ immediately came under long range shell fire from the Turkish Fort at Kum Kale whose three guns, collectively nicknamed 'Asiatic Annie' had a range of nearly 10 miles. The Manchesters spent the first night on the beach bivouacking under blankets.

On 25 May the same day that the unit was redesignated as 127 Brigade, 42 Division the Bn moved up from the reserve trenches into the firing line. Two days later whilst handing his position over to the 1/7 Bn William was wounded with another officer and evacuated to hospital in Valletta in Malta.

On 4 June 127 Bde took part in the Third Battle of Krithia. For the attack on the Turkish trenches 1/5 Bn were in the centre with 1/8 Bn to their left, 1/7 Bn on the right and 1/6 Bn in Reserve. 'C' and 'D' Coys from 1/5 Bn were the advance Companies and captured the first line of trenches. 'A' and 'B' Coys then secured the second line of trenches 500 yards in advance.

The withdrawal of French troops and the Royal Naval Division forced the 1/7th Manchesters on their left to pull back leaving 'A' and 'B' Coys isolated. They held on for four hours but with no reinforcements or support and in danger of being cut off they withdrew back to the first objective. This was held during the first night despite two Turkish counter attacks.

On that first day the Bn suffered three officers killed and six wounded, 35 other ranks were killed and 131 wounded. The casualties over the four day battle were 178 wounded and 56 killed in action. Among the wounded on the first day were both Alfred and his cousin Henry who were to join William on the casualty list.

William and Henry were able to continue with their convalescence but Alfred who had a gunshot wound to his chest was evacuated back to England. The wound proved to be so serious that he was discharged from military service on medical grounds and took no further part in the war.

My grandfather was wounded on 6 Aug, shot in the spine during the Battle of Krithia Vineyard. It was supposed to be a minor action diverting attention away from the planned landing at Suvla Bay and the break out from Anzac Cove. Two Brigades from 42 Div and a Brigade from 29 Div faced overwhelming Ottoman Forces consisting of four Divisions with two more in reserve.

Over the two day period 6th and 7th Aug 1/5 Bn suffered 20 killed in action, 158 wounded and 51 missing, a total of 229 casualties.

My grandfather was evacuated back to hospital in Egypt, followed by a spell in Mustapha Convalescent Camp in Alexandria. He recovered enough to rejoin the Battalion on the Peninsula as his paybook shows that he was paid in Mudros in November and that he received £2 pay at Gallipoli on 13 Dec.

Conceding that the campaign had been a failure, plans were made for a phased withdrawal from the Gallipoli Peninsula starting on 7 Dec. At 21.30 hrs on 29 Dec 1915 the remnants of 1/5 Battalion embarked at 'V' Beach onto SS Hibernia and then transported to Mudros on the Greek Island of Lemnos. After a period at the tented Camp at Sarpi they returned back to Egypt.

During the eight month campaign 1/5 Bn had suffered a total of 686 casualties, 151 killed in action, 478 wounded and 57 missing. Six separate drafts had arrived, bringing in 361 replacement troops for the battle casualties. On withdrawal the strength of the Battalion was 239 all ranks from a total of 1179 who had fought in the campaign. From the original 818 members of the Bn that started the campaign only 152 remained and from the 361 replacements only 87. A costly attrition rate of 80% casualties.

TRAGEDY STRIKES

The first of Florence's sons to die was her eldest child Henry. He had gained a Commission on 17 June 1915 in the King's Royal Rifle Corps shortly after returning from Ceylon where he had been working as a tea planter The Commonwealth War Graves Commission incorrectly shows him having served in the 5th Battalion when he was killed

in action. Initially a training and reserve Bn at Winchester the 5th Bn stayed in England for the duration of the war as part of the Thames and Medway Garrison at Sheerness in Kent.

His Medal index Card shows that he in fact served with the 2nd Bn KRRC of the 2nd Infantry Brigade and entered the theatre of war in France on 22 October 1915. The other units in 2 Inf Bde were 2 Bn Royal Sussex Regt, 9 Bn King's Liverpool Regt (Territorials), 1 Bn Loyal North Lancashire Regt and 1 Bn Northamptonshire Regt.

He joined his unit a week later on the 29th at Lillers, a few miles to the NW of Bethune in northern France. The Bn had recently come out of the line and arrived at Lillers the previous week for training, refitting and to await the arrival of new draft replacements. Henry was posted to 'B' Company and billeted in the Rue de Pernes, a street in the centre of town.

On 21 Nov after three weeks out of the line 2 Inf Bde moved by rail to Noeux-les-Mines, south of Bethune. From there they marched to billets in Mazingarbe before relieving 17 Bn London Regt in the front line where Henry witnessed the horrors of trench warfare for the first time.

The Bn War Diary notes that on 1 Dec Henry went on attachment to a Royal Engineers Mining Section and that on 22 Feb he had returned to his unit from a Lewis machine gun course.

Henry was killed in action on 4 June 1916, shortly after returning from a short visit to see his mother in Eccles. His Company positions had suffered heavy shelling all day and he was killed by a 5.9" shell whilst handing over his crater position to another officer from the 1st Bn Northants Regt. This other officer was wounded and three of his men killed by the same shell.

2 Lt. Henry Earlam Johnson, aged 26 was buried at midnight in Maroc Military Cemetery, Grenay, near Lens in France. Grave No. I.A.1. The Commonwealth War Graves cemetery contains 1,379 Commonwealth burials, 264 of which are unidentified and also 45 German and French graves.

The next son she was to lose was her next to youngest child Pieter, a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps who had gained a Commission into the RFC on 5 Aug 1916. His rapid progress in training allowed him to gain his wings in an exceptionally short time, starting active service early. He was just 18 when he was posted to No.4 Sqn of the 15th Wing in France on 30 December. No.4 Sqn's role was ground support, engaged in reconnaissance, observation and artillery spotting. In their slow two seater BE2e aircraft they were vulnerable to anti aircraft fire and marauding German fighter aircraft. In a letter home to his mother he described his experiences in battle.

'I have had one scrap so far. I had three Boche all firing at me at the same time but they gave up after hitting everything in the machine but the Observer and me. We made it quite hot for them too'

Life expectancy of aircrew at the time was very short, measured in just weeks, and so it proved. On 28 January 1917, after less than one month, his aircraft was hit and brought down by artillery fire over enemy lines. The bodies of 2 Lt Pieter Cedric Earlam Johnson and his Observer were never found. Their names are commemorated on the Arras Flying Memorial in France along with 990 other Commonwealth Airmen who have no known grave.

THE WESTERN FRONT

After recovering from their wounds suffered in Gallipoli, William, now promoted to Captain and his cousin Henry rejoined 1/5 Bn in Egypt, part of the Suez Canal Defence Force. Between 3-5 Aug 1916 127 Bde took part in the Battle of Romani on the Sinai Peninsula 23 miles east of Suez.

At 0900 hrs on 2 March 1917 thirty one Officers and 919 other ranks of the 1/5th Manchesters finally left Egypt after two and half years in the Middle East. They departed Alexandria onboard the Troop Transport ship Corsican and sailing via Malta they disembarked at Marseilles eight days later to join the war on the Western Front.

From Marseilles they were transported 590 miles by train to Pont Remy, near Abbeville in Northern France, they then marched 11 miles to billets in Cerisy-Buleux. The next two weeks were spent training and refitting. On 28 March they left Cerisy-Buleux and started their slow inexorable journey east to the front line and whatever fate awaited them.

A combination of route marching, entraining and detraining took them via Hallencourt, Pont Remy, Chuignolles, Villers Carbonnel and Peronne to Flaucourt where they underwent four more days training. The weather during this period was very poor with rain and even snow falling. After being in the Middle East for the last couple of years the Bn suffered badly and during the Month of April 53 men were admitted to hospital.

Finally on 30 April 1/5 Bn relieved their sister Bn the 1/7th in the front line at Epehy. The next day they suffered their first casualty in France, who was wounded from shellfire. On 2 May Brigadier Ormsby the Commander of 127 Brigade was killed by artillery fire whilst touring the front line and the CO of 1/5 Bn, Lt. Col Darlington took over temporary command of the Brigade.

On 3 May the Bn came out of the front line and into Reserve positions. Two days later my grandfather now with the rank of Col Sgt and the appointment of CQMS proceeded on a month's leave to the UK, his first home leave for two and half years.

Originally TF recruits were engaged for up to four years and this could be extended in further blocks of four years. After a four year block the soldier would 'Time Expire' and could leave the service.

In 1916 the Military Service Act came into force meaning that any time served Territorial soldiers could be mandatory re-enlisted if they filled the criteria of the MSA Act and would be required to serve for the duration of the war. Whilst in the UK he re-engaged into the colours at Preston and was paid a bounty of £5.

The Epehy area was a fairly quiet sector of the line apart from the daily shelling. The Bn War Diary shows a constant trickle of men admitted to hospital sick but it wasn't until 2 June that the Bn's first death in France occurred. The casualties for June were 7 killed in action, 1 died of wounds and 16 men wounded.

The Manchester's now fell into a cycle of a spell in the trenches followed by a short period as Brigade Reserve, which usually involved work details such as moving ammo and stores up to the trench line or helping the Royal Engineers digging, tunnelling, wiring and road making.

The Bn would then move to a safe rear area for rest and refitting. There would be a visit to the Divisional showers, reissue of kit and equipment and integration of draft replacements. After a short leave in the local area a camp routine of visits by senior officers awarding gallantry medals, church parades and training programmes would start. These included route marches, weapon training and musketry on the ranges. The rotation would then continue with a move to another location into Brigade Reserve, followed by another spell in the trenches.

The Bn War Diary states that exactly 14.11 hrs on 23 August 127 Bde left Aveluy station near La-Boiselle, just north of Albert and travelled 90 miles across the border into Belgium, arriving at Hop Outre rail head sidings in Poperinghe at 4 am the next morning. They then marched to billets at Clyde Camp for training. A week later they marched to the north of Poperinghe to St. Lawrence Camp for further weeks training in readiness for joining the war in Flanders.

On 7 Sept the Manchesters arrived in Ypres by train and marched through the famous Menin Gate, they were joining the 3rd Battle of Ypres, more commonly known as the Battle of Passchendaele. On the front line at Frezenberg they relieved the 1/5 Bn Lancashire Fusiliers and elements of their sister Bn the 1/6th Manchesters.

The next day 1/5 Bn was warned off for an attack which was to take place on 13 Sept on Borry Farm, a concrete emplacement on the site of a ruined farmhouse which contained five machine guns. They moved back out of the line and for the next three days trained constantly for the attack.

Mercifully the attack was cancelled on 12 Sept as the Division on the Manchesters left had failed to take their objectives in time. It would no doubt have been a very costly affair with many casualties for 1/5 Bn. Borry Farm was in front of a formidable fortified German strong point in the second line of defence known as the Bremen Redoubt, which sat astride the Ypres to Zonnebeke Road.

The Bn War Diary shows that on 22 Sept, the same day that 127 Bde left Frezenberg for rest billets at Canada Camp 26 miles away at Coxyde, William proceeded on two weeks leave. It was to be the last time that Florence would see her second eldest son alive.

On his return from leave on 5 Oct 127 Brigade was stationed at Nieuport Bains, in between Dunkirk and Ostend on the Belgian coast on anti-aircraft duties. On the 7th Oct the Bn marched to Canada Camp at Coxyde to undergo training

and to provide work details for the Royal Engineers. The camp which was approximately six miles from the front line was considered relatively safe but within range of German artillery and occasionally shelled. Three days later on the 10th William was wounded by a salvo of shells along with another officer and three other ranks.

He was transferred to No. 36 Casualty Clearing Station at Zuydcoote just over the French border near Dunkirk and died there of his wounds on the 13th Oct 1917, aged 24. Capt William Godfrey Earlam Johnson is buried in Grave No. I.F.19 in Zuydcoote Military Cemetery along with 326 other Commonwealth servicemen.

Florence was to receive the dreaded telegram telling her she had now lost three of her sons killed in action. Accompanying a letter of condolence from King George V was a commemorative scroll and a bronze plaque more commonly known as the 'Dead Man's Penny' or 'Death Penny', so called because of its resemblance to the penny coin. It symbolised the ancient tradition of placing a coin with a buried corpse to pay passage to the next world.

The Bn War Diary records that on 5 Oct, the day that William had returned from leave Henry departed for a gas course. It would be nice to think that the cousins had met and spoken for the last time. When Henry returned from the course William had been wounded and evacuated to hospital.

At the start of Nov 1917 1/5 Bn was on the coast at Lombartzyde just to the north of Nieuport. The front line was squeezed between the sea and a large basin of water off the Yser Canal. The area was Polder, low lying land reclaimed from the sea and criss crossed with canals and dykes. It was defended by a series of outposts, each manned with a NCO, six men and a Lewis machine gunner. The German front line, marked as 'Lorry Trench' on trench maps was 100 yards away.

On the evening of 2 Nov just two weeks after the death of his cousin, Henry was part of a patrol that left the support trench and passed through No 10 Post to reconnoitre the dyke in No Man's Land in front of the Post. He was accompanied by 2 Lt D. Mather, Sgt Dempsey and Pte Webb from his own Company and Capt W. Sivewright and a Sgt from 1/7 Bn.

The Bn War Diary describes their fate. About 30 yards out they were attacked with bombs by an enemy covering party. The Manchester soldiers scattered, Sgt Dempsey and Pte Webb who were both wounded managed to get back to No.10 Post along with the Sgt from 1/7 Bn. A short time later a wounded 2 Lt Mather reached the post but was killed on the parapet as he entered the trenches. A patrol was sent out later but found no trace of Henry and Capt Sivewright.

As no letters arrived home and no news of their capture filtered through from the Red Cross the pair were officially reported as missing in action presumed dead. It was to be over a year later after the war had ended that their bodies were eventually found by a battlefield clearance team and buried in Ostend. Lt Henry Norman Johnson 1/5 Bn Manchester Regt aged 23 and Capt William John Sivewright 1/7 Bn Manchester Regt aged 22 now lay side by side in Graves B4 and B5 in Oostende New Communal Cemetery.

It wasn't until 19 Nov 1921 that Florence wrote to the War Office requesting her dead son's medals. All three received the British War Medal and Victory Medal, Henry and William also received the 1914/15 Star.

Henry, Pieter, William and their cousin Henry are commemorated on the War Memorial cross outside St. James & St. Elizabeth church on Bickershaw Lane. A lasting tribute to the church that their grandfather James had built.

THE LEGACY

The story after the Great War is equally as intriguing. The 1939 Register of England and Wales taken in September just after the start of World War 2 shows Florence living with Alfred, the son who came back from war, in Hoylake on the Wirral. His occupation is shown as tin can manufacturer and poultry farmer. Alfred returned to uniform during WW2, was promoted to Capt and acted as Recruiting Officer, first in Wigan, then in Carlisle with the Border Regiment.

In Oxfordshire in early 1943 Alfred, now 48 married his childhood sweetheart Ena Foster Chivers, a schoolteacher who hailed from New Brighton on the Wirral. They settled in Cumberland, living at Grinsdale Hall, a Grade 2 listed building near Carlisle on the banks of the River Eden. Capt Alfred Earlam Johnson died in St. Mary's Hospital, London in 1957 aged 62.

Florence Rosalie Johnson the family matriarch returned to Wigan and died during the Second World War on 9 Oct 1943 aged 74. She was buried alongside her husband Alfred Earlam Snr in All Saints churchyard in Hindley. At the time of her death she was living in Spencer Rd in Wigan, near the Cherry Gardens.

Bickershaw Hall was demolished in the 1940's, ironically because of mining subsidence and today Bickershaw Hall Nurseries is located on the land. To keep the prominent name alive a cul-de-sac off Bickershaw Lane was named Johnson Ave.

Florence's fifth son James Frederick Earlam Johnson, who had been too young to enlist in the Great War remained single, moved to Cheltenham and became a doctor where he died at the age of 59 in 1966.

Florence's only daughter Ethel married Charles Lester Graham on 2 October 1915 at St. James & St. Elizabeth in Bickershaw.

Parish records show that at the time of the wedding Charles, the son of a surgeon was a doctor in the Royal Army Medical Corps based at Tweseldown camp, a military training and transit establishment near Church Crookham in Hampshire.

Charles had previously been a member of the 1/5th Bn Territorials in Wigan with Ethel's brothers, William and Alfred. The 1911 census shows Charles at Ashton Under Lyne on attachment to the Regular 1st Bn who were shortly to depart for India.

Charles and Ethel had three children, Mary Rosalie, Godfrey Earlam Lester and Pieter Robert Geoffrey. The family medical profession was destined to continue for the next couple of generations, Godfrey and Pieter both becoming doctors.

After Oxford University Godfrey graduated at St. Mary's Hospital in London in 1941. He gained a Commission in the RAMC and shortly after marrying his wife Nansi in 1945 he was posted first to India then to Japan shortly after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

On his return from Japan in 1946 Godfrey moved back to Wigan to join his father's medical practice in Dicconson St, Wigan along with his brother Pieter and his brother in law William Bennett, who had married his sister Mary. Dr. Godfrey Earlam Lester Graham, who had been Church Warden at Wigan Parish Church for many years, died in 2016 aged 96.

EPILOGUE

On leaving school I was tempted to make a career in the mining industry. After some training at the Old Boston training school in Haydock I descended Plank Lane Pit in Leigh. But I decided that a life underground wasn't for me and it would be less dangerous to pursue a military career which I eventually did.

The Graham's became our family doctors and to us Godfrey was simply known as Dr Earlam. It was his brother in law Dr. Bennett who delivered me screaming and kicking into the world in the back bedroom of a Council house in Beech Hill in 1948. I was to see Dr. Bennett and Dr. Earlam many times over the years in medical consultations and Dr. Earlam became my wife's occupational health Doctor at her workplace.

Earlams' younger brother Pieter who died in 1996 had three sons, all of whom became doctors. Two of them Robin and Anthony were to become partners in the Beech Hill Medical Practice in Gidlow Lane, Wigan. Just like their uncles I saw both of them many times in medical consultations. Little did I know at the time that our family histories would have a connection owing to my grandfather serving with their two great uncles in the Great war.

In September 2017 on a WW1 battlefield trip I visited Frezenberg in Belgium. With the help of the Bn War Diary, trench maps and Google Earth I located the positions that 1/5 Bn had occupied in Sept 1917 and left a poppy cross in remembrance on the old trench line at the edge of a field. It was exactly a hundred years to the day that I was walking in the footsteps of my grandfather and William and Henry Johnson. All is peaceful now, Borry Farm was rebuilt and is a working farm again and the Wienerberger brick works now occupies the site on which the Bremen Redoubt once stood.

Graham Taylor

2020

MILITARY ABBREVIATIONS

Pte - Private

Cpl - Corporal

Sgt - Sergeant

Col Sgt – Colour Sergeant

CQMS – Company Quarter Master Sergeant

NCO - Non Commissioned Officer

2 Lt - Second Lieutenant

Lt - Lieutenant

Capt - Captain

Lt. Col - Lieutenant Colonel

CO - Commanding Officer

Coy - Company

Regt - Regiment

Bn - Battalion

Bde - Brigade

Div - Division

HQ - Headquarters

KRRC - Kings Royal Rifle Corps

RAMC – Royal Army Medical Corps

OTC - Officer Training Corps

TF - Territorial Force

RFC - Royal Flying Corps

MEF - Mediterranean Expeditionary Force

CWGC – Commonwealth War Graves Commission

MSA – Military Service Act