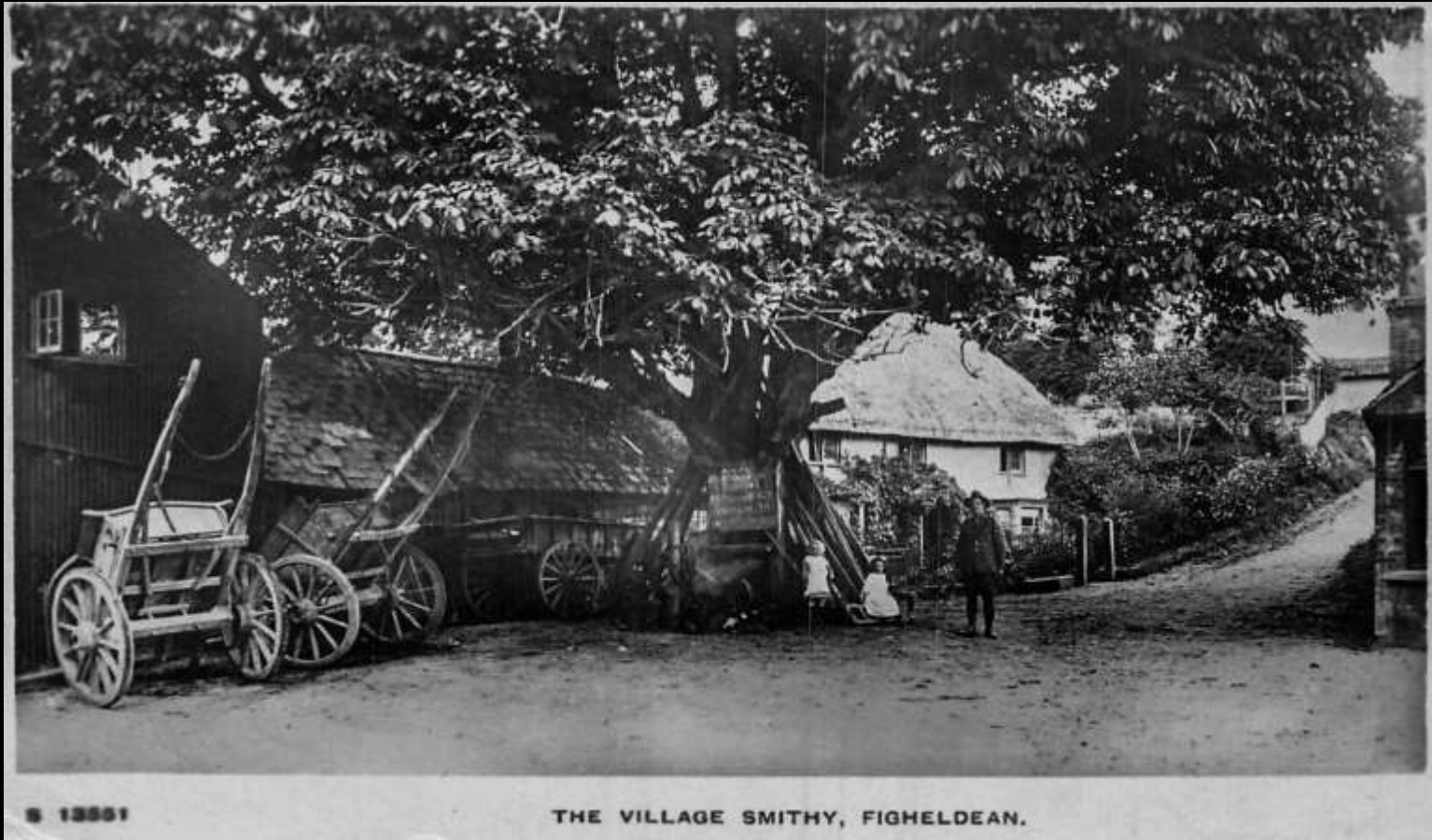


Under a Spreading Chestnut Tree



6 12551

THE VILLAGE SMITHY, FIGHELDEAN.

The Great War in Wiltshire Conference

World War One Centenary Project

Wiltshire-medieval-graffiti-survey.com



Brett Killington
64stops.com

Project Aims & Objectives

To record photographically all period graffiti within the church

Question why Figheldean received so much attention?

Isolate specific stories relating to the soldiers who visited Figheldean

Disseminate information to appropriate & beneficial sources

Locations

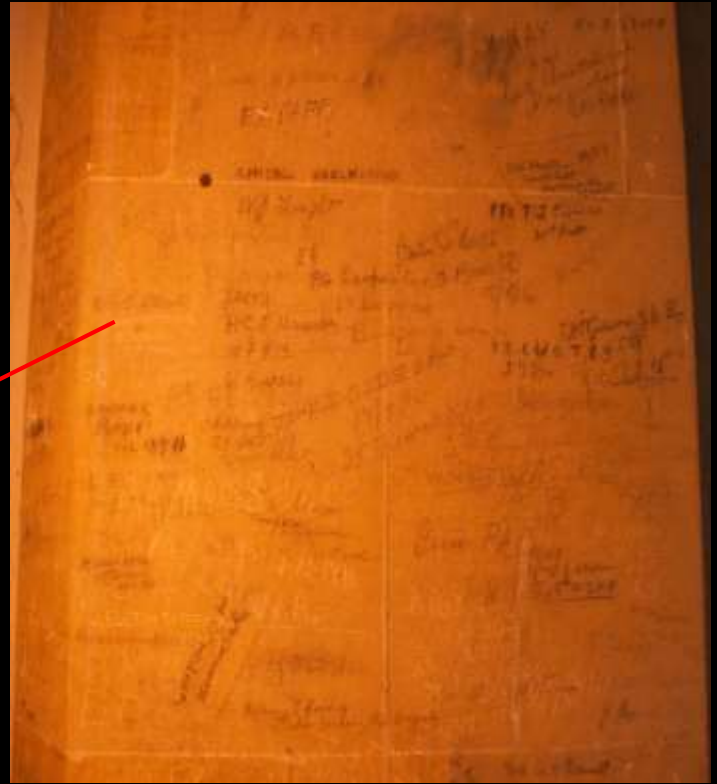


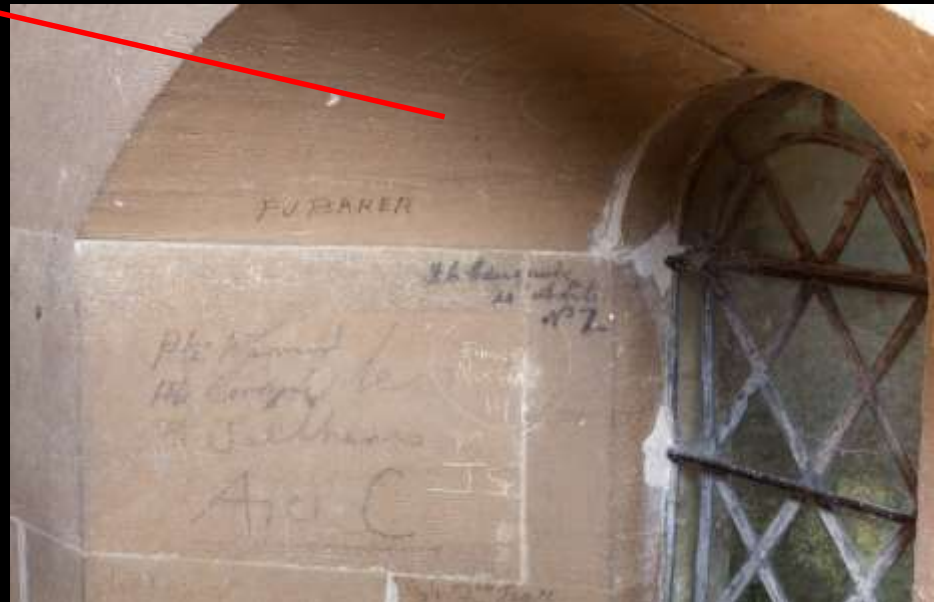
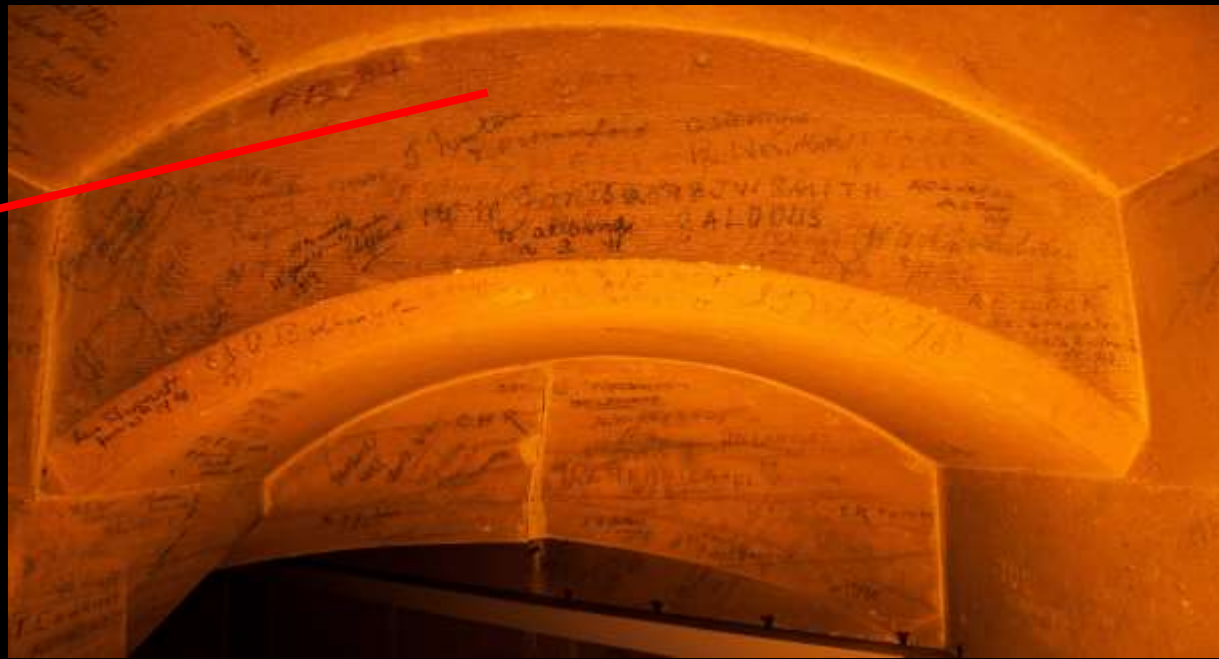
Church

Smithy

Copse

St Michael & All Angels





Stairwell & entrance to
gallery

Upstairs in the
bell tower



Clock Cabinet

No. 10
Lapse & Survey
Dec 4 1867
Geo H Anderson
16 W. Main St.



Smithy



Incised brickwork



Copse: Arborglyphs



Our findings so far:

400 plus individual examples of graffiti within the church

Circa 200 examples on the Smithy

90% can be dated to the First World War

Majority derive from Australian & New Zealand soldiers

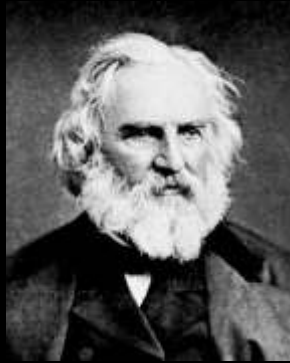
Majority written in the years 1916-17

Many include names, service number, unit & home town/district

Why here in Figcheldean? Why did so many ANZAC soldiers visit & leave their mark?

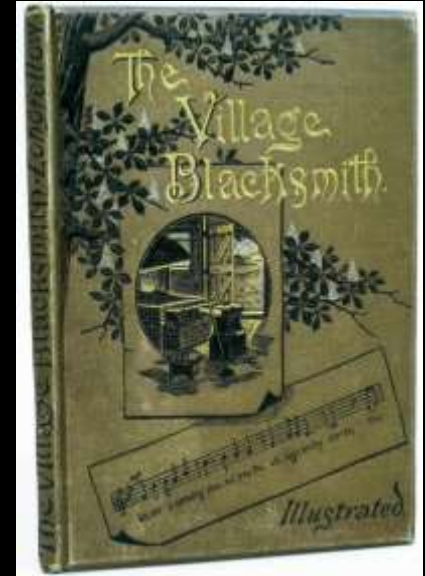


Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



The Village Blacksmith 1840

*“Under a spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.....”*



Based upon a local blacksmith in Cambridge, Massachusetts USA, The Village Blacksmith fits many a scenario throughout the developed world. Rooted in moral behaviour & “a way to live”. The Blacksmith was at the heart of many a community, from agriculture to transport to mending your shoes.....easily recognisable, identifiable & essential to survival.

Taught in schools, made into a parlour song, used as marching song, it's popularity was endemic

A distortion of the truth...



"A short time ago I saw in an English newspaper that the "village smithy" was in a certain English village; as everybody knows it was on Brattle St, Cambridge, Massachusetts"

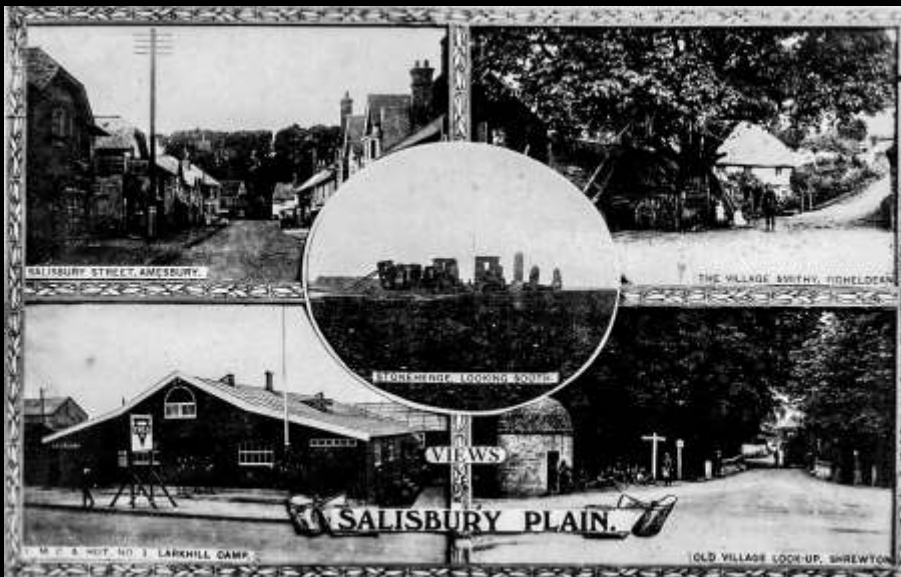
Ernest Wadworth Longfellow (Henry's son) 1922

Other Considerations:

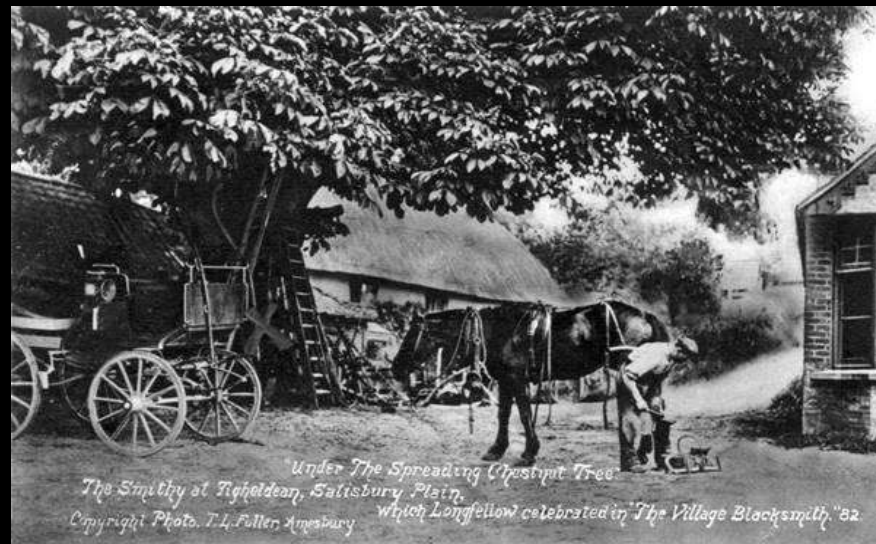
Days off, Rest & Recuperation & Tourism on Salisbury Plain



Souvenir Postcards (mentioning Figheldean)



Souvenir Postcards (*Figheldean specific*)





UNDER THE SPREADING CHESTNUT TREE.
The Smithy at Figheldean, Salisbury Plain.
Longfellow Celebrated in "The Village Blacksmith."
Copyright Photo T. L. Fuller, Amherst.



UNDER THE SPREADING CHESTNUT TREE.
The Smithy at Figheldean, Salisbury Plain.
Longfellow Celebrated in "The Village Blacksmith."
Copyright Photo T. L. Fuller, Amherst.



THE SMITHY FIGHELDEAN

"The Spreading Chestnut Tree"



UNDER THE SPREADING CHESTNUT TREE
THE VILLAGE SMITHY STANDS" FIGHELDEAN VILLAGE

The “Old World” Village



‘The Old World villages are a source of interest to New Zealanders and the beauties of rural England have certainly not been exaggerated by writers. There is a peacefulness about these quiet villages which one does not obtain in New Zealand’ (Dunedin Evening Star 1916)

*The ‘old fashioned village of Figheldean with its straw thatched cottages and ye olde inn that ye village yokels quaffed ye olde English ale in’
(Herbert Gadd’s Letters, 1916–18).*



Newspaper Articles

ANTOINETTE
THE SECOND.

ation of London's
y in Crinoline.

LINED COFFIN.

Doctor's Remarkable
Cure.

The Star

AND ECHO

LONDON. SATURDAY, JUNE 12, 1915.

THE ROYAL

Essad Pasha

UNDER THE SPREADING CHESTNUT TREE.



The trinity of Figheldean, near the big camp at Salisbury Plain, which Longfellow celebrated in "The Village Blacksmith."

Letters Home.

BEST DAYS BUT NO REST.

From Louis Corporal E. C. D. Andrews, of the Civil Service Rifles.

I am afraid life out here is not one of "constant excitement," even in the British line. There's a tremendous lot of hard work.

When we are "digging" we're always kept busy, generally in trying to improve the position of the French villages, which is made of mounds of earth, and we have to dig ammunition, water, food, and other things up to the firing line, or build barbed wire or dig trenches, etc.

When, on firing line, we have to hold and strengthen the defence, or put up barbed wire entanglements in front of the trenches, etc.

UNDERGROUND PALACES.

From a Private in the Sherwood Foresters.

There we can get the foreman's lot of their undergrounds with high ceilings, and then they want a lot of it. I think they make this, and that is why they are holding on so desperately.

They are on march for us in the night, but they are the last word in trench warfare.

The Germans have the reputation of being the best engineers in the world, and

BRITISH CRUISER IN THE ADRIATIC.

No Truth in Austrian Claim that Star Wars Sunk.

WAR NOTES.

Stories Told To-day by Special Correspondents.

Gunner G.E. Fowler also writes from Salisbury Plain; "Near us is a small village called Figheldean famed for being the site of the 'village smithy'. The old "Spreading Chestnut Tree' still flourishes over the old blacksmith's shop."

AT SALISBURY PLAIN.

Gunner H. Fowler writes from Salisbury Plain Camp, and says many scenes of historic interest surround the camp. "There are little mounds called Tumblers, where the dead were buried during the great plague. They used to put hundreds of bodies in one pit, and then fill it up with lime. It made me think of the cry, "Bring out your dead." This is a beautiful country, and no mistake."

Gunner G. E. Fowler also writes from Salisbury Plain, on 13th August, and says: "Near us is a small village called Figheldean, famed as being the site of the 'village smithy.' The old 'spreading chestnut tree' still flourishes over the old blacksmith's shop. We have been to Stonehenge. It looks like a big heap of rocks thrown about, some standing on end. The sacrificial altar stone is still easily found, as is also the oak stone, which casts the shadow on the altar. We expect to get to the south of France as soon as the cold weather sets in, and will finish our training there. There is, as near as anybody can get, an absolute certainty of the Allied win."

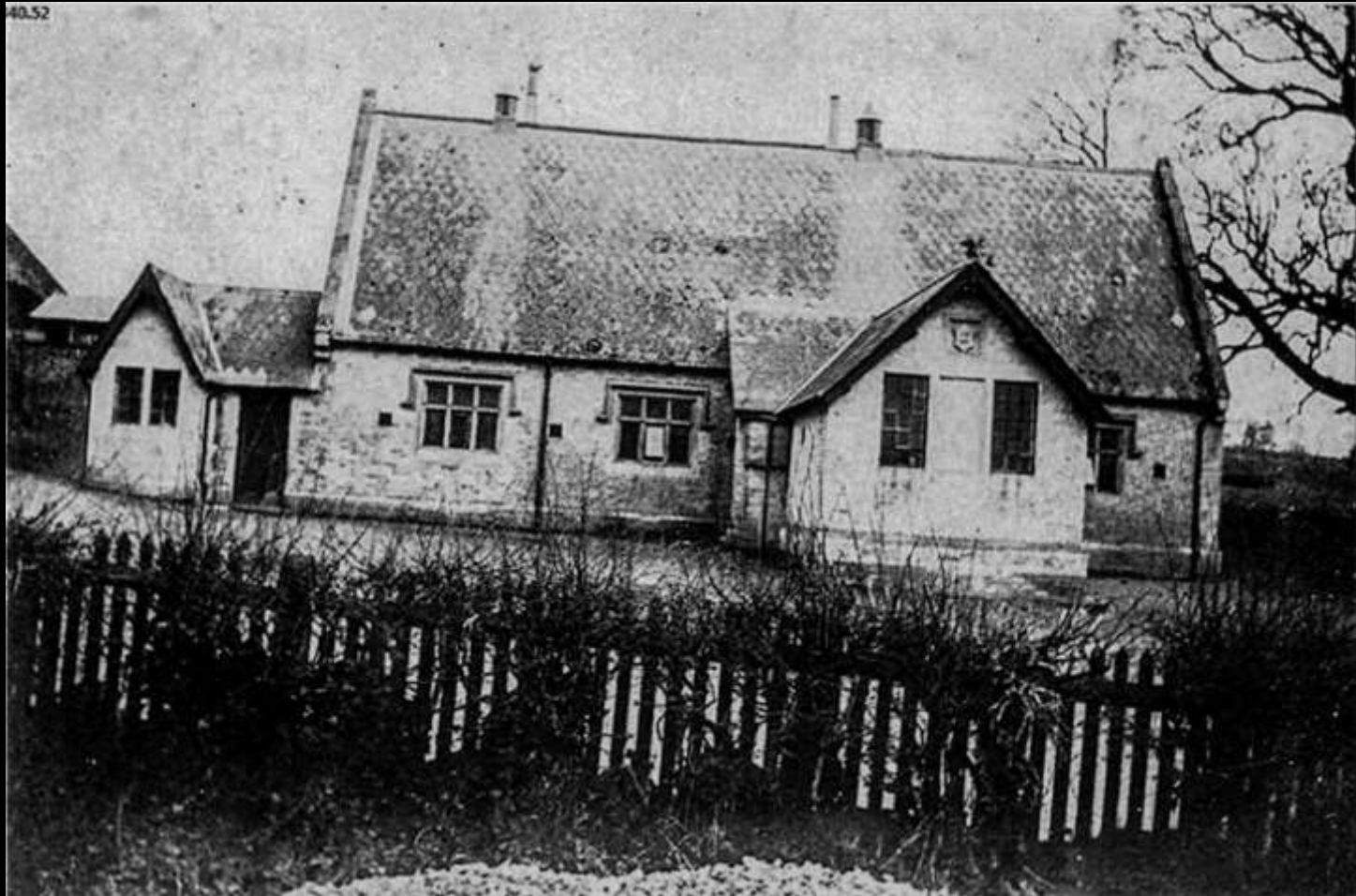
The Star & Echo publish Fuller's "The Village Blacksmith" on June 12th 1915.

Personal Photo's





Images c/o Ms Carol Bird Figheldean 1917









Private Jack Punch:

'the village people showed us round showing the different sites of interest'

Private Charlie Campbell in a letter:

"a parson had told him the chestnut tree was the same one as the poem and that there was also a brass plaque by the tree stating the origin of its interest to tourists"

Diary of Francis Hill 1917:

there were two armed guards and a barbed wire fence protecting the tree"

"the tree was badly damaged and that all the old tree would be carried away in pieces if they didn't guard it, it is half rung now with pocket knives and looks almost dead"



THIS LEAF WAS TAKEN FROM
THE SPREADING CHESTNUT TREE
FIGMELDENE NEAR SALISBURY
THIS SPOT IS CLAIMED TO BE WHERE
LONGFELLOW WROTE HIS GREAT POEM
"THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH"

Mrs. T. Pease, of Lambton, has received a letter from her husband, Private T. Pease, who is camped at Salisbury Plain, England, stating that he was sending home some leaves and nuts from the old chestnut tree of the famous poem.



Clarence Melvin Humphrys (2023)
24th September 1916

"After securing some leaves from the tree which were broken off by some soldier boys we visited the church and grounds where he used to worship & his daughter used to sing in the choir.

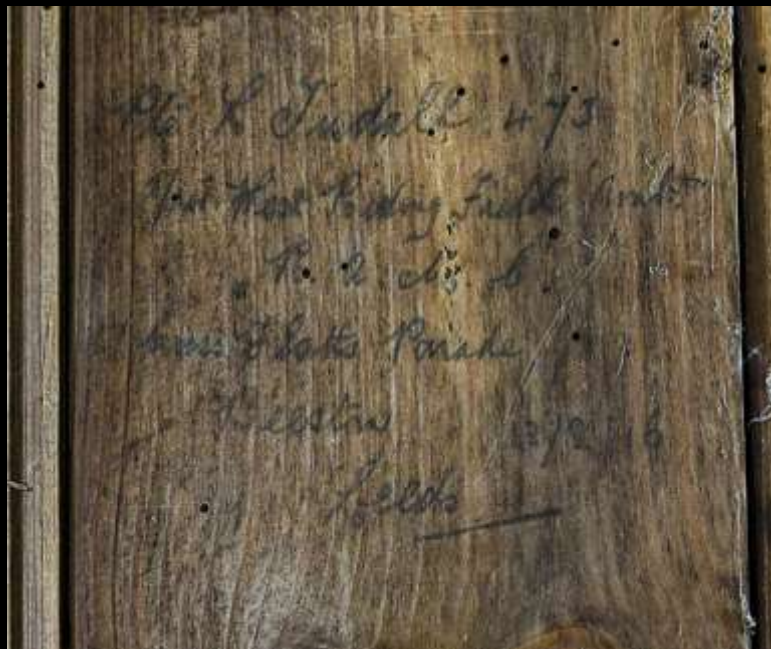
I wrote my name in the visitor's book, and on the wall above the doorway of the passage stairway. I got some wool off the rope with which the bell was rung"

Clarence embarked for France 25/11/16 and after serving at the Front suffered a foot injury & sadly died at the 11th Convalescent Hospital near Rouen on 6/10/17.

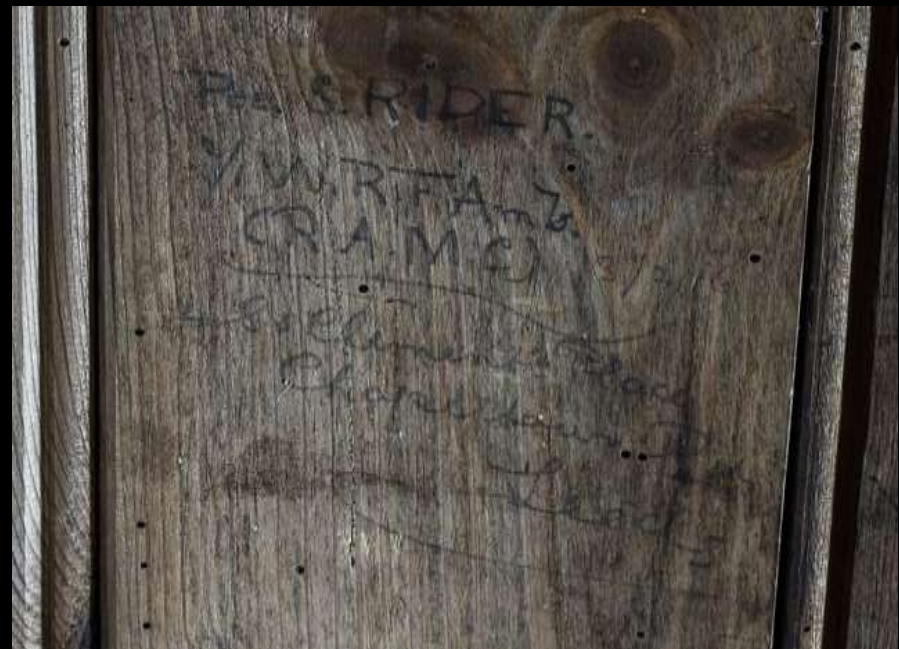


RAMC in the Great War

This website commemorates all those who served
in the Royal Army Medical Corps during the Great War

[Home](#)[Personnel Profiles](#)[The RAMC in war](#)[Chain of Evacuation](#)[Contact](#)[Research Help](#)

Pte Leonard Tisdall 473 13/2/16
2/1st West Riding Field Ambulance
Beeston, Leeds



Pte Samuel Rider 13/2/16
2/1st West Riding Field Ambulance
4 St Clements Place
Chapeltown Road, Leeds

The Edgecombe Brothers; Frederick Courtenay & Thomas Henry

First generation New Zealanders

Frederick enlisted 20th December 1916: Arrived at Sling Camp
29th July 1917

Awarded Military Medal for gallantry whilst in France with 12th ASC

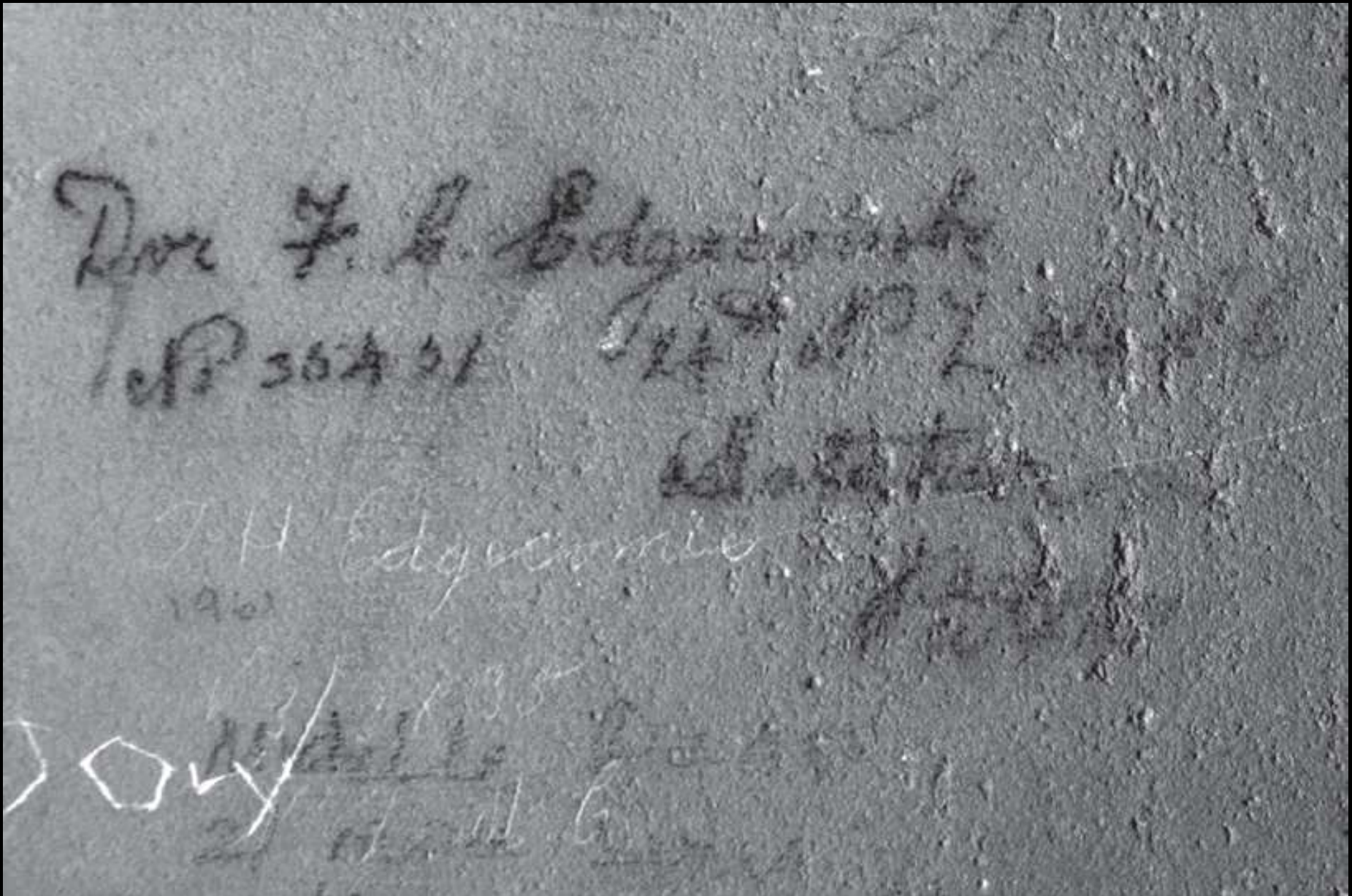


Thomas enlisted 29th June 1917 in NZ Medical Corps, arrived in England September 1918
via Suez & Italy

He spent two weeks at Sling Camp September 1918 so both were on the Plain but a year
apart.

Communication between them both re' Figcheldean

Brothers: Frederick Courtenay Edgecombe (35451) & Thomas Henry Edgecombe (3/3835)



Sgt. Horace Wycliffe Sommerville (20939)



Horace visited Figheldean whilst at Sling Camp, Bulford on Salisbury Plain. He incised his name on the stone parapet overlooking the church nave.



Horace enlisted 2nd May 1916 embarked for the UK 11th October 1916

Arrived Devonport UK 29th December 1916

Based at Sling Camp from 31st December – 11th February 1917 2nd Batt
Auckland Infantry Regiment

GSW 7th June 1917 receiving treatment at NZ General Hospital Walton on Thames convalescing at Hornchurch, visiting Codford on leave April 1918

Disembarked for NZ 21st September 1919

Descendants Murray & Vickie Buckman visiting Figheldean



IMAGES [CONTRIBUTE](#)

DOCUMENTS [CONTRIBUTE](#)

HW's Incised Graffito (WORD, 351.74 KB)

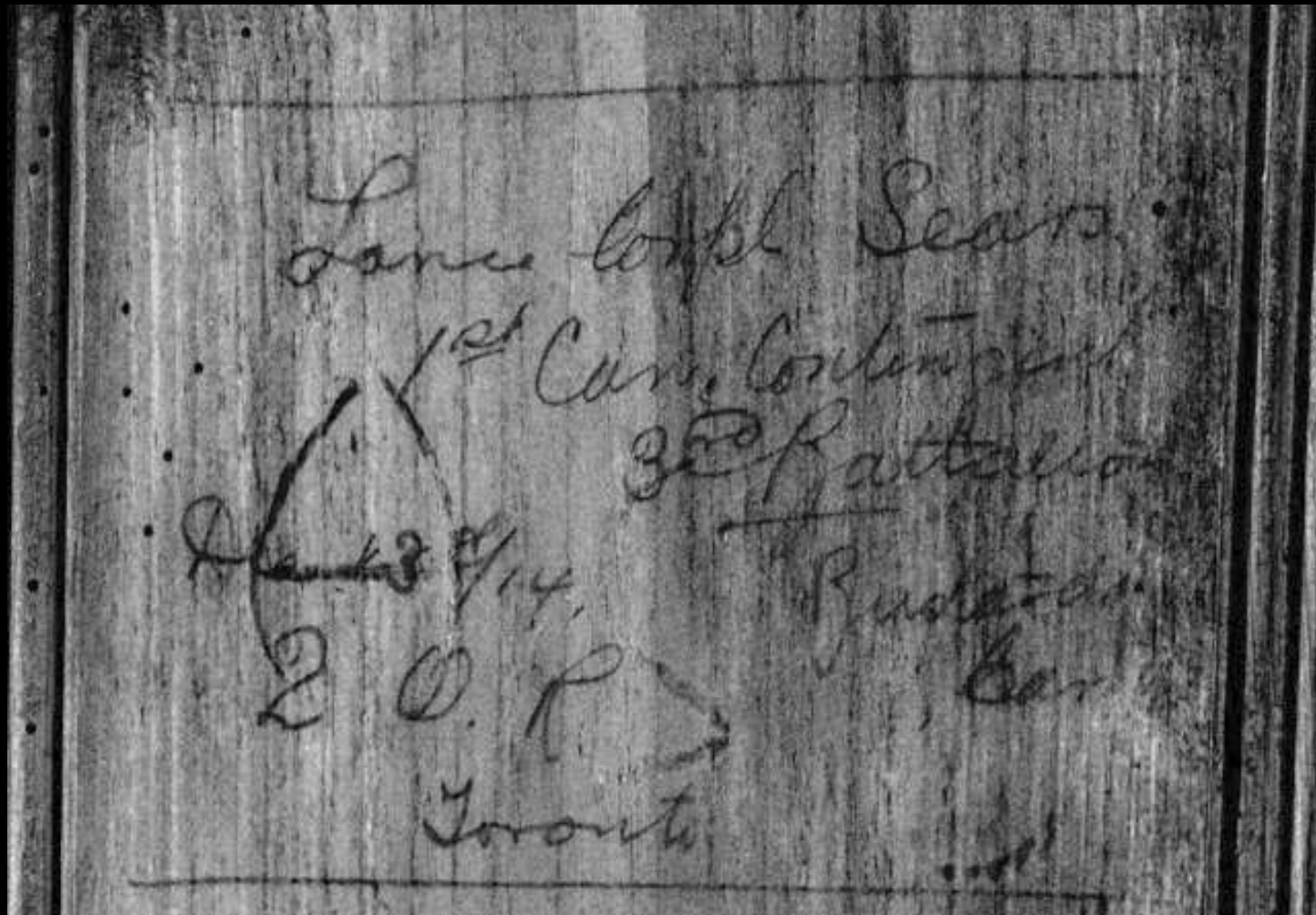
This is an incised graffito by HW Sommerville within the church at Figheldean during his time on Salisbury Plain during WWI. Research is being undertaken by Wiltshire Archaeology Field Group. Thanks for a great site, I hope this tangible graffito has a place here.

Public - Sony - Researcher - 23 June 2016 - www.wiltshire-military-graffiti-survey.com

Report



Lance Corporal Richard Roy Sears (9492) 1st Can' Contingent, 3rd Battalion



Canadian Virtual War Memorial

In memory of
Lance Corporal
Richard Roy Sears
April 5, 1915

Military Service:

Service Number: 9492

Age: 22

Force: Army

Unit: Canadian Infantry (Central Ontario Regiment)

Division: 3rd Bn.

Additional Information:

Born: October 15, 1892 Nassau, Bahamas

Enlistment: September 22, 1914 Valcartier, Québec

Commemorated on [Page 35](#) of the *First World War Book of Remembrance*.
[Request a copy](#) of this page.

Burial Information:

Cemetery: SWANSCOMBE CEMETERY ; Kent, United Kingdom

Grave Reference: 1978

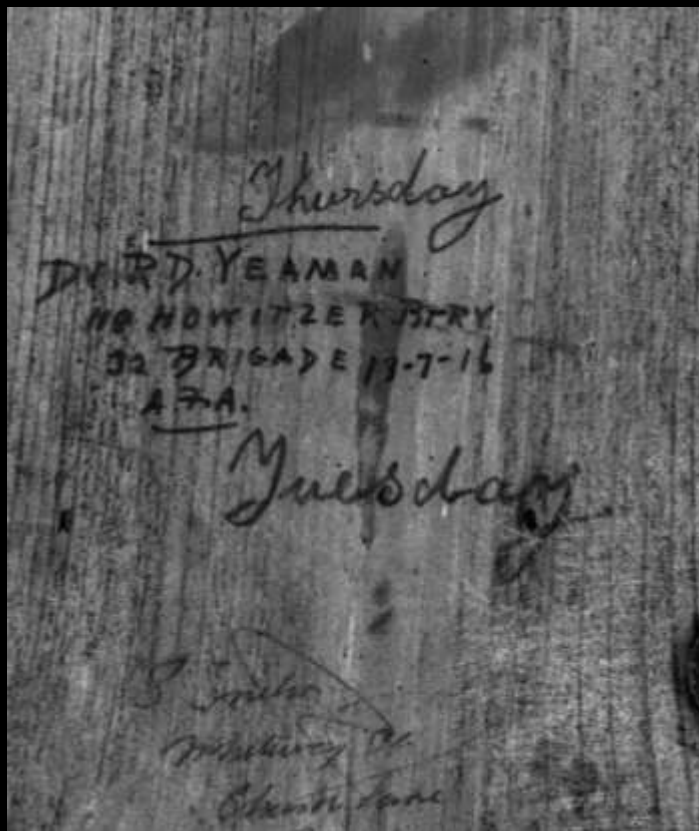
Information courtesy of the [Commonwealth War Graves Commission](#).

Digital Collection

[Send us your images](#)

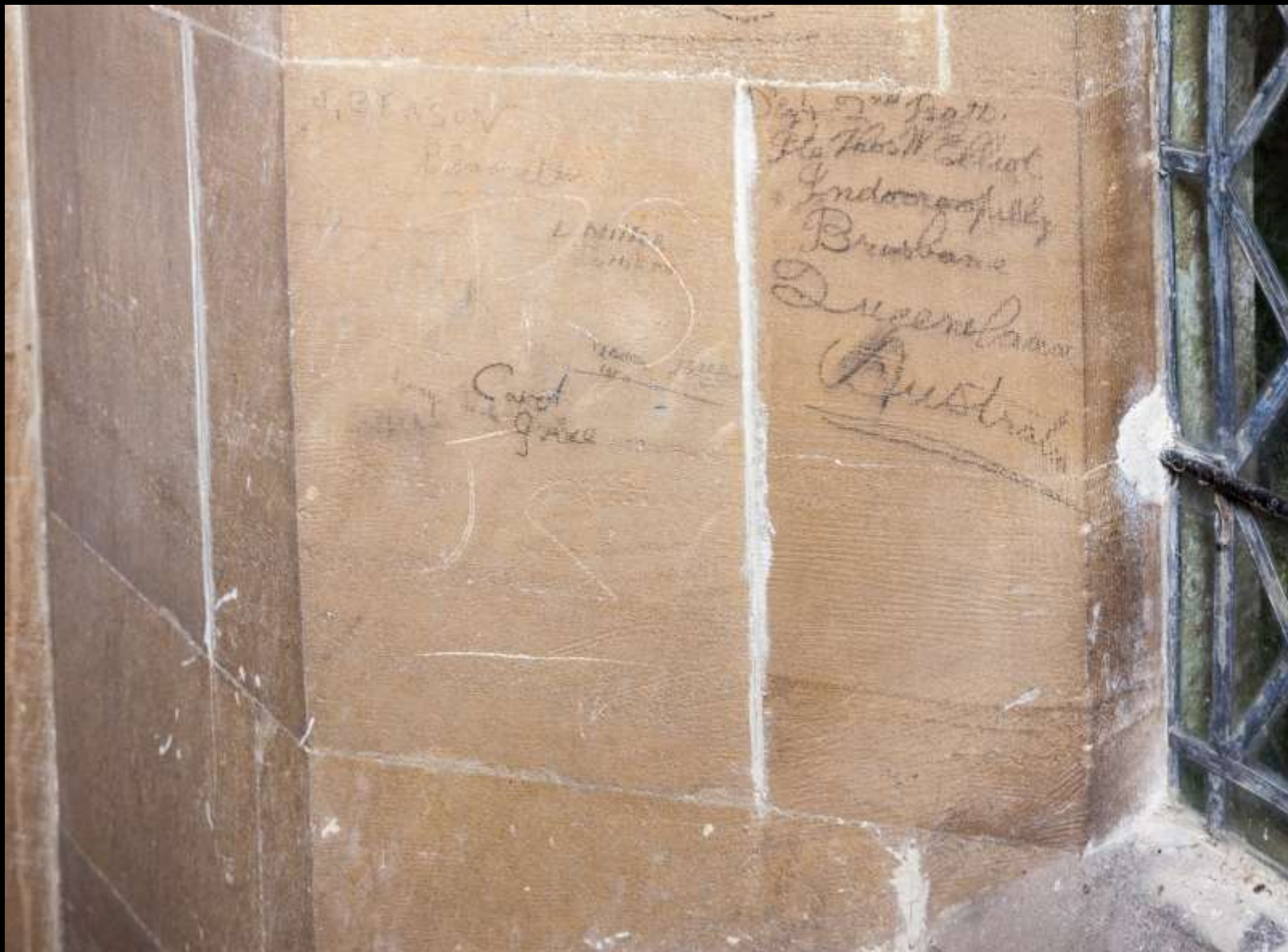


Reginald Dietrich Yeaman 20196
23rd Field Artillery Batt'

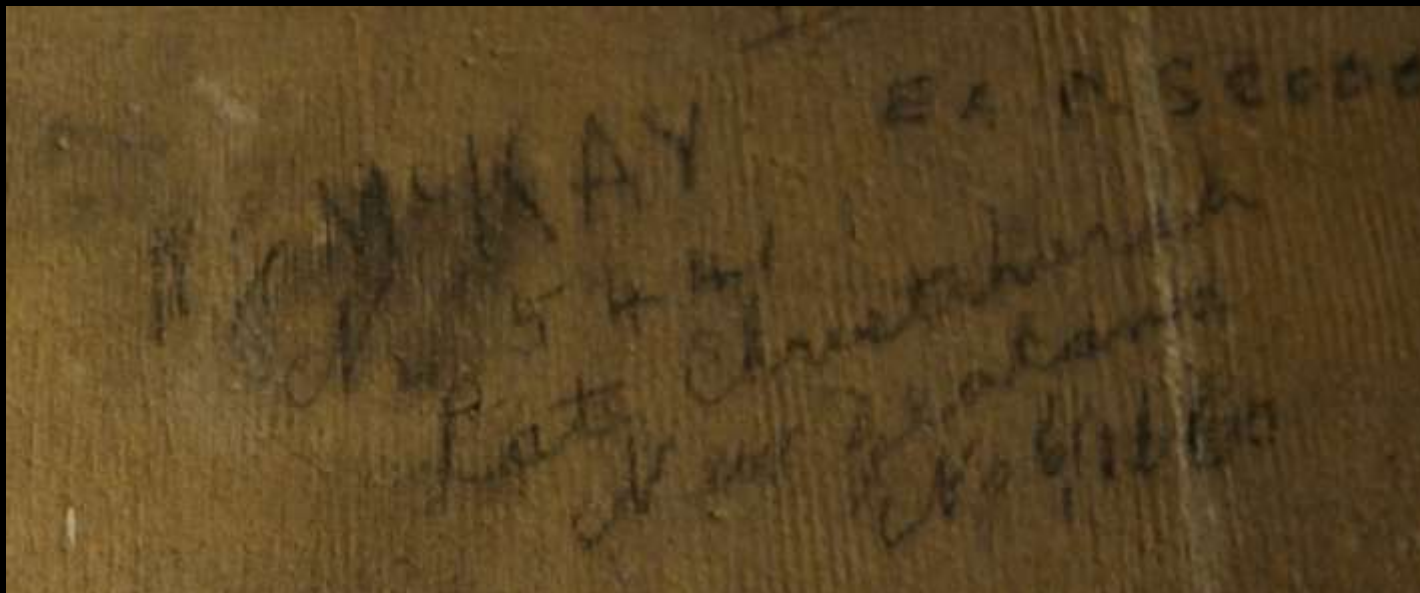


Taken ill soon after arriving in England, taken ill again being hospitalised passing away on 19th December of Spinal Meningitis aged just 21. He is buried at Durrington Cemetery

Private Thomas William Elliot (1894) Enlisted 30th Dec 1915



William McKay (5441) 21st Battalion Australian Imperial Force



Thoughts

The making of a mark is a personal statement, an affiliation with a place or a theme

It gives others information

We've seen both permanent & semi-permanent intention

Each have become their own memorial

Encouragement or Toleration of Graffiti within the Church?

The Vicar of Figcheldean, Rev. John Henry Calley lost his son; Lieutenant Oliver John Calley, of the Wiltshire Regiment on the 12th March 1915 at Spanbroek, Holland.

Might this tragic event have led Rev. Calley to allow the soldiers to leave a legacy within the church, knowing that many may well suffer the same fate as his son?

December 4th 1912: appointed 2nd Lt. Wiltshire Regiment from Territorial Force

September 1913: Transferred the 2nd Battalion at Gibraltar

October 27th 1914: Promoted to Lieutenant. Injured at Front, invalided home.

December 1914: Returned to the Front Line.

March 12th 1915: Killed in action. Buried initially at Spanbroek, now Ypres.



In memory of all those who fought & those we lost...

We will remember them

