

# Connected to Codford



*Lest we Forget*

## World War I



5572 SERJEANT

**H. J. DOWN**

WILTSHIRE REGIMENT

21ST MARCH, 1918

## Hector James DOWN

Hector James Down was born at Bournemouth, Hampshire on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1883 to parents James & Frances Jane Down (nee Polden). Hector's birth was registered in June quarter, 1883 in the district of Christchurch, Hampshire.

The 1891 Census recorded Hector Down as an 8 year old, Scholar, living with his family at 4 Herve Cottage Christchurch, Bournemouth, Hampshire. His parents were listed as James Down (Railway Engine Stoker, aged 32, born Stockton, Wilts) & Frances Down (aged 28, born Chitterne, Wiltshire). Hector was the eldest of four children listed in this Census – Hector then Harold (Scholar, aged 6, born Southampton, Hants), Mable (Scholar, aged 4, born Chitterne, Wilts) & Leslie (aged 7 months, born Bournemouth, Hants).

A death was registered for James Down, aged 40 in the June quarter, 1894 in the district of Christchurch, Hampshire. James had died of smallpox.

In 1900 Hector James Down enlisted with the Wiltshire Regiment. Hector James Down enlisted at Devizes, Wiltshire. He was listed as residing at Codford at the time of enlistment (UK Soldiers Died in the Great War). He was posted to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion & sailed to India with his Battalion. He remained on empire garrison duties until 1909 when they moved to South Africa.

The 1901 Census recorded Mabel Down (Hector's Sister) as a 14 year old orphan in an Institution at 80 Teffont Rd, Lambeth, London. Three of Mabel's younger brothers – Douglas, Leslie & Bertie were living with their grandparents – Augustus (aged 69, Thatcher) & Ann Polden (aged 70) at Bitton Lane, Chitterne St. Mary, Wiltshire.

The 1911 Census recorded Hector James Down as a 29 year old Private in the 1<sup>st</sup> Wiltshire Regiment. He was based in South Africa. The 1911 Census recorded Frances Jane Down (Hector's mother) as a 49 year old, Widow, living with her Widowed mother – Ann Polden (aged 81) at Clematis Cottage, Chitterne St. Mary, Codford, Wiltshire. Frances had 12 children during her marriage with only 6 children surviving.

Private Hector James Down & his Battalion returned to Tidworth, Wiltshire, England in 1913.

According to his Medal Index Card, Private Hector James Down first entered a Theatre of War on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1914.

Serjeant Hector James Down was killed in action on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1918. He was attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment at the time of his death.

Serjeant Hector James Down was buried in Achiet-Le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension, France - Plot II. G. 18. His death is acknowledged by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists Serjeant Hector James Down, 5572, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn., Wiltshire Regiment. No family details are listed.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment**

#### **1914**

In August 1914 the 1st Battalion were based at Tidworth and the 2nd Battalion at Gibraltar. The 4th (Territorial) Battalion were at their Annual Camp at Sling Plantation, on Salisbury Plain. On mobilization the 1st Battalion left for France on the 13 August, taking part in the battle of Mons 10 days later and followed by the retreat from Mons. The 'retreat' was a fighting withdrawal with a number of significant actions fought along that route. The battalion remained intact and ended the retreat on the outskirts of Paris. Once the line stabilized the battalion took part in the First Battle of Ypres, and Neuve Chapelle by which time they had lost 26 officers and 1000 men, the equivalent of a whole battalion. This was followed by trench duty at Hooze and then Kemmel where they remained for the remainder of the year.

#### **1915**

The 1st Battalion spent the first few months on the Messines Ridge engaged in Trench warfare until March 1915. In March they took part in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, followed by several more months in Trenches in the

Dickebusch area. In June they took part in two attacks on the German Trench system round Hooge chateau, where the fighting was most severe. The next few months were spent in the trenches near Ypres, Hooge, alternating with rest periods in the ramparts at Ypres, itself under shell fire. In September they took part in a Major battle at Loos. In October together with the rest of their Brigade they were transferred to a New Army Formation, the 25th Division to provide experience. They spent the remainder of the year in the trenches at Ploegsteert Wood. Christmas dinner was not eaten until the 1st January 1916.

## 1916

At the start of 1916 the 1st Battalion were in reserve at Papot. They remained here for three months when they went south spending three weeks near St Pol. After relieving the French at Vimy Ridge they spent two months engaged in trench warfare near La Targette. Unspectacular work but it still resulted in 82 casualties. In July the Battalion moved towards the Somme area. They did not take part in the attack on the 1st July but did go into action at Thiepval on the 4th. On the 22nd together with the 3rd Worcestershire Regiment they assaulted and captured the Leipzig Salient, including the Hindenburg trench. They withstood a number of counter attacks by the Prussian Guards all of which were beaten off. Other attacks followed together with more time spent in the trenches. In October they moved north and took up a position in the Ploegstreert where they were at the end of the year.

## 1917

The 1st Battalion started the year in the area of Ploegsteert, being relieved mid January for a fortnights hard training. In February they carried out a daring daylight raid in conjunction with the 10th Cheshire's. The raiders won six Military Medals. In late February they were relieved by New Zealand units, spending the next seven weeks training. This was required due the reorganization of all battalions whereby each platoon became self sufficient in terms of weapon capabilities. The Army was starting to move towards mobile tactics. In April they took over some trenches from the Australians near Plogsteert. They went in and out of the lines until the 7th June when the battalion took part in the attack on Messines Ridge. Two days later after hard fighting they had taken 148 prisoners and 7 machine guns, but they had sustained 170 casualties. One of the officers being awarded the Military Cross in this action was Captain R Hayward (Later to win the Victoria Cross). This was a significant action because in taking this high ground it improved the situation in the Ypres salient, which had been overlooked by the Germans for most of the war. In July they moved to Ypres and had their first taste of mustard gas. At the end of July they took part in the attack on Westhoek Ridge remaining in the area under heavy shell fire until the 5th August. After a short rest they returned to the Ridge to support other units under pressure from the Germans. On the 10th September they moved south to join the First Army moving into the Givenchy Sector, near Bethune where they took up a position in October remaining for two months. At the beginning of December they were transferred once again, this time to the Third Army, to the Laqnacourt Sector near Bapaume. They were at this location at the end of 1917.

## 1918

The 1st Battalion started the year in the Laqnacourt sector, North East of Bapaume remaining there for two months. On the 21st March 1918 they were in reserve at Achiet-Le-Grand when the German Army launched a major offensive. The battalion were in contact with the enemy for the next six days during which Captain Hayward MC won the Victoria Cross. By the end of this period the battalion was reduced to Company strength.

### War Diary – 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1918

Location – Achiet Le Grand, France

*On the morning of this day at 4.40 a.m. the German offensive commenced and at 5 a.m. the enemy commenced shelling the station and vicinity of ACHIET - LE - GRAND with high velocity shells of large calibre one of which pitched in the Camp wounding three officers. Lieut Holmes, Lieut King and Lieut Riddle and causing considerable casualties to 4 Warrant Officers, 6 Sergeants and 47 other ranks. At 11.30 a.m. the Battn moved to the area NW of FLEMICOURT and the same evening proceeded to the Army Line occupying the central position in the Bde on a line running from the E of BEUGNATRE and FLEMICOURT.*

*(Information from [The Wardrobe](#) – Home of the Infantry Regiments of Berkshire and Wiltshire)*

Serjeant Hector James Down was entitled to 1914 Star, British War Medal & Victory Medal. According to his Medal Index Card he was also entitled to the Clasp. The Clasp was awarded with the 1914 Star which was sewn onto the ribbon, bearing the date '5th AUG. - 22nd NOV. 1914' which indicated that the recipient had served under enemy fire during that period.



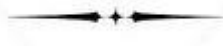
**1914 Star, British War Medal & Victory Medal**

H. J. Down is remembered in the Casualties of WW1 Memorial Book for the Dioceses of Salisbury for the parish of Chitterne.

Hector James Down is remembered on the Chitterne War Memorial, Wiltshire.



**Chitterne War Memorial** (Photos courtesy of Michael Day)



### **Achiet-Le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension, France**

Achiet-le-Grand is a village 19 Kms south of Arras.

Achiet-le-Grand was occupied by the 7th Bedfords on 17 March 1917, lost on 25 March 1918 after a defence by the 1st/6th Manchesters, and recaptured on 23 August 1918. From April 1917 to March 1918, the village was occupied by the 45th and 49th Casualty Clearing Stations. Achiet station was an allied railhead.

The communal cemetery and extension were used by Commonwealth medical units from April 1917 to March 1918. The extension was also used by the Germans to a small extent in March and April 1918, and again by Commonwealth troops in August 1918. After the Armistice Plot III and most of Plot IV were made when 645 graves, mainly of 1916 and March and August 1918, were brought in from the battlefields around Achiet and from the following small burial grounds:-

ACHIET-LE-GRAND GERMAN CEMETERY, on the road to Bihucourt, in which one soldier from the United Kingdom was buried by the Germans, and five by their comrades in August, 1918.

ACHIET-LE-PETIT COMMUNAL CEMETERY and the GERMAN EXTENSION on the East of it. The former contained the graves of three soldiers from the United Kingdom and one from New Zealand, buried by the Germans. The latter was begun by the Germans, carried on by the 1st Bedfords and other units in August, 1918, and completed after the Armistice by the concentration to it of 360 German Graves; it contained, in all, the graves of 50 soldiers from the United Kingdom, 39 from New Zealand and 1,147 German.

BEAUMETZ-LES-CAMBRAI COMMUNAL CEMETERY, containing the graves of six soldiers from the United Kingdom, three from Australia and one from Canada, all buried by the Germans, and 201 German soldiers; and the GERMAN EXTENSION, containing the graves of one soldier from the United Kingdom and 298 German soldiers. BEHAGNIES CHURCHYARD, used by the Germans in 1916, and containing the graves of 86 German soldiers and one from the United Kingdom.

BEHAGNIES GERMAN CEMETERY, on the main road through the village, used in 1918 and containing the graves of 100 German soldiers, four French and one from the United Kingdom.

BEUGNATRE COMMUNAL CEMETERY GERMAN EXTENSION, containing 200 German graves and those of two soldiers from the United Kingdom, (one of whom is now buried in Bancourt British Cemetery).

BEUGNY CHURCHYARD and GERMAN EXTENSION, containing the graves of 46 soldiers from the United Kingdom and six from Australia (who fell, for the most part, in 1917, and of whom 34 belonged to the R.G.A.), and 19 French and 183 German soldiers.

BEUGNY GERMAN CEMETERY, called the Heldenfriedhof, and one of many in BEUGNY. It was in the North-West quarter of the village, and it contained the graves of five soldiers from Australia, four from the United Kingdom and 831 German.

BOURSIES COMMUNAL CEMETERY GERMAN EXTENSION, containing the graves of 173 German soldiers, one R.A.F. officer, and one Canadian soldier.

DOIGNIES GERMAN CEMETERY, on the South side of the village, containing the graves of 15 soldiers from the United Kingdom, one from Australia, and 150 German.

HERMIES COMMUNAL CEMETERY, in which six soldiers and airmen from the United Kingdom and two Australian soldiers were buried by the Germans.

LOUVERVAL GERMAN CEMETERY, DOIGNIES, outside the Eastern angle of Louverval Chateau grounds, containing the graves of seven unidentified Highlanders and 138 German soldiers.

QUEANT COMMUNAL CEMETERY, containing the graves of 180 German soldiers and of three from the United Kingdom who fell in March, 1918; and the GERMAN EXTENSION, in which ten soldiers and airmen from the United Kingdom and 140 German and four Russian soldiers were buried by the Germans, and 420 German soldiers by the British.

VELU GERMAN CEMETERY, on the East side of the village, containing the graves of 850 German soldiers, five from the United Kingdom, two from Newfoundland, one Australian, one Indian and one French.

VILLERS-AU-FLOS GERMAN CEMETERY, on the North side of the village; it contained the graves of three soldiers from the United Kingdom and three from Australia who fell in 1916.

VRAUCOURT CHURCHYARD, VAULX-VRAUCOURT, it contained the graves of two Australian soldiers who fell in 1917.

The COMMUNAL CEMETERY contains four Commonwealth burials of the First World War.

The EXTENSION contains 1,424 Commonwealth burials and commemorations of the First World War. 200 of the burials are unidentified but there are special memorials to eight casualties known or believed to be buried among them. Other special memorials record the names of ten casualties buried in other cemeteries whose graves could not be found. There are also 42 German war graves in the extension.

*(Information from CWGC)*



**Achiet-Le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension**

*(Photos courtesy of David Milborrow)*



Photo of Serjeant H. J. Down's CWGC headstone in Achiet-Le-Grand Communal Cemetery Extension, France.



*(Photo courtesy of David Milborrow)*



