

**Grange U3A Family and Social History
Group Project on the Grange WW1 War Memorial**



***A short biography in commemoration of
Frederick (Fred) Pratt 1888 – 1917***

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Frederick, or Fred Pratt as he was most commonly known, was born in Southampton c1888. So far his birth date has not been confirmed nor has much other early personal data.

The earliest information connected to Fred was the marriage of his mother, Jemima Jane Holt and his father, William James Pratt on the 26th December 1871 at Holy Trinity Church, Weymouth, Dorset.

William had been born at Southampton in 1849 and Jemima in Weymouth in 1848. William was a civil servant with the Inland Revenue and remained so for the rest of his working career.

In the 1881 Census William had a daughter, Edith, born in 1878 born at Newport, Isle of Wight. William had been transferred to the island a few months before his marriage in 1871. He had been living in Mitcham, Surrey at the time of the census. It seems likely that he met and married Jemima soon after he arrived on the island.

By the 1891 Census William and Jemima's family had risen to six children. Fred was 4 years old and had been born at Southampton as had 4 of his brothers and sisters. William had obviously been stationed on the mainland for a period in the 1880's.

In the 1891 Census, Fred was with his mother and some of his siblings, but there was no mention of his father. Jemima was stated as "living on husband's means"?

The trail for Fred goes cold at this point as he was not with his parents for the 1911 Census. My initial feeling was that Fred, now aged twenty-three had moved away from home. His parents were in Carlisle so the idea that Fred may have moved over the border became a plausible route to follow. He was not in the 1911 Census anywhere in England, Wales or Northern Ireland. Either he had left the country or moved north.

My gut feeling turned out to be correct as in his obituary in the Westmorland Gazette revealed on the 2nd June 1917 what I had suspected.

Fred had moved to Edinburgh to work in the design office of Bruce, Peebles & Co. Fred must have had some draughting skills before obtaining a job at this company, and showed enough ability to warrant being in the key design department. The obituary mentions some of his movements until his untimely death in May 1917.

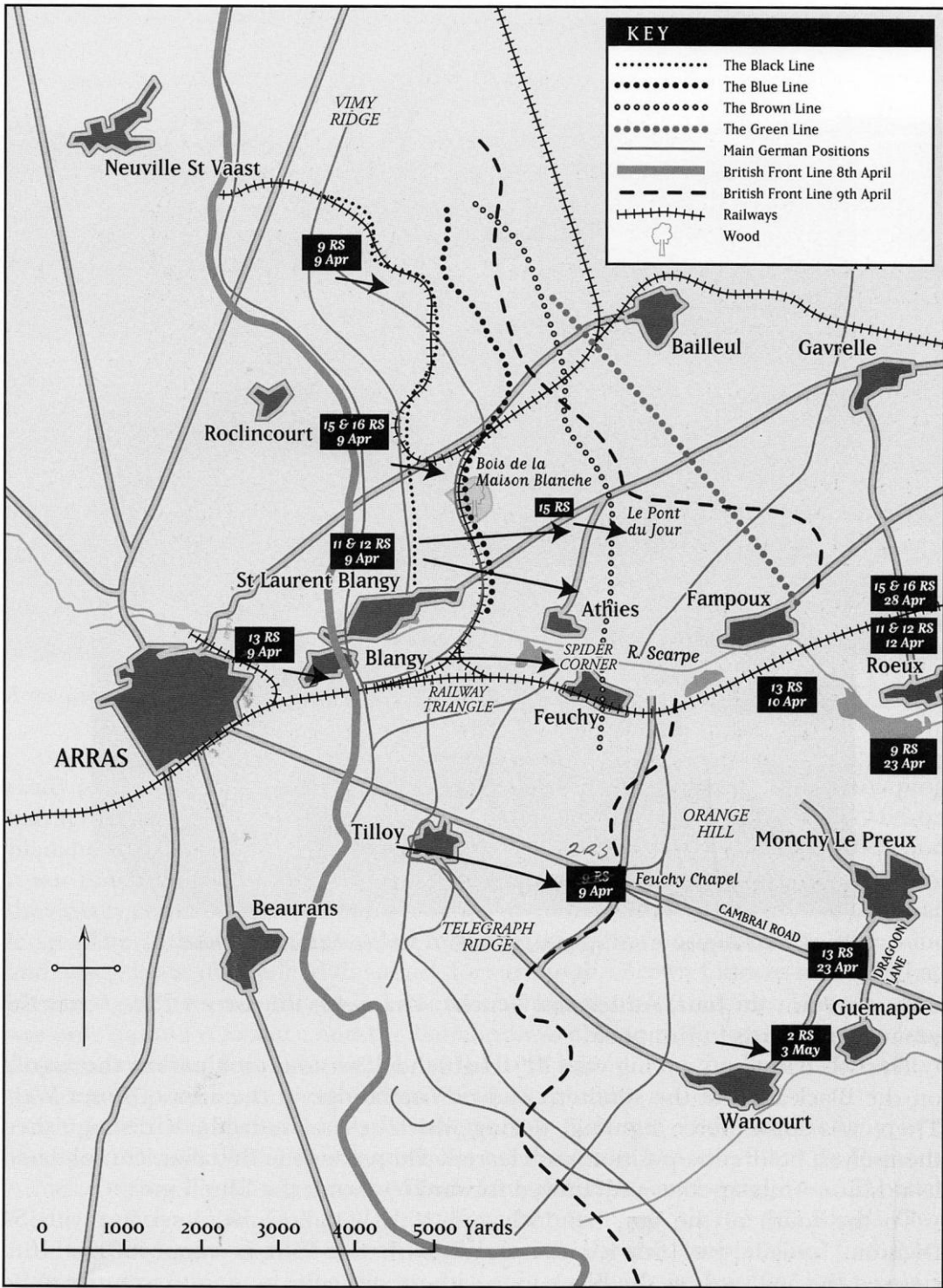
“PRATT, Sergt. F., eldest son of Mr and Mrs W J Pratt, Grange, is reported killed in action. He was one of the earliest to respond to Kitchener’s call. He left his post in the design office of Bruce, Peebles and Co., of Edinburgh, and joined the Royal Scots in that city as a private. His battalion took part in the “big push” of last July on the Somme, where he received a head wound. After the battle at Arras on April 28th, a large number of the Royal Scots were reported missing, and it was not till Thursday last week that official notice of his death was received. Mr Pratt had a fine baritone voice, and was a soloist in the choir of St George’s Church, Edinburgh. His younger brother is serving in France with an Australian Ambulance Corps.”



Reconnaissance patrol of Royal Scots moving off 1917

The action in which Fred was killed is difficult to establish. The Regimental War Diary is laconic about any details of the action, probably because so many were killed in that battle. The 15th Royal Scots lost eighteen officers and three

hundred and ninety-nine other ranks. They were reduced to three platoons of three sections in each of their three companies. A truly disastrous situation which meant they had effectively ceased as a fighting unit.

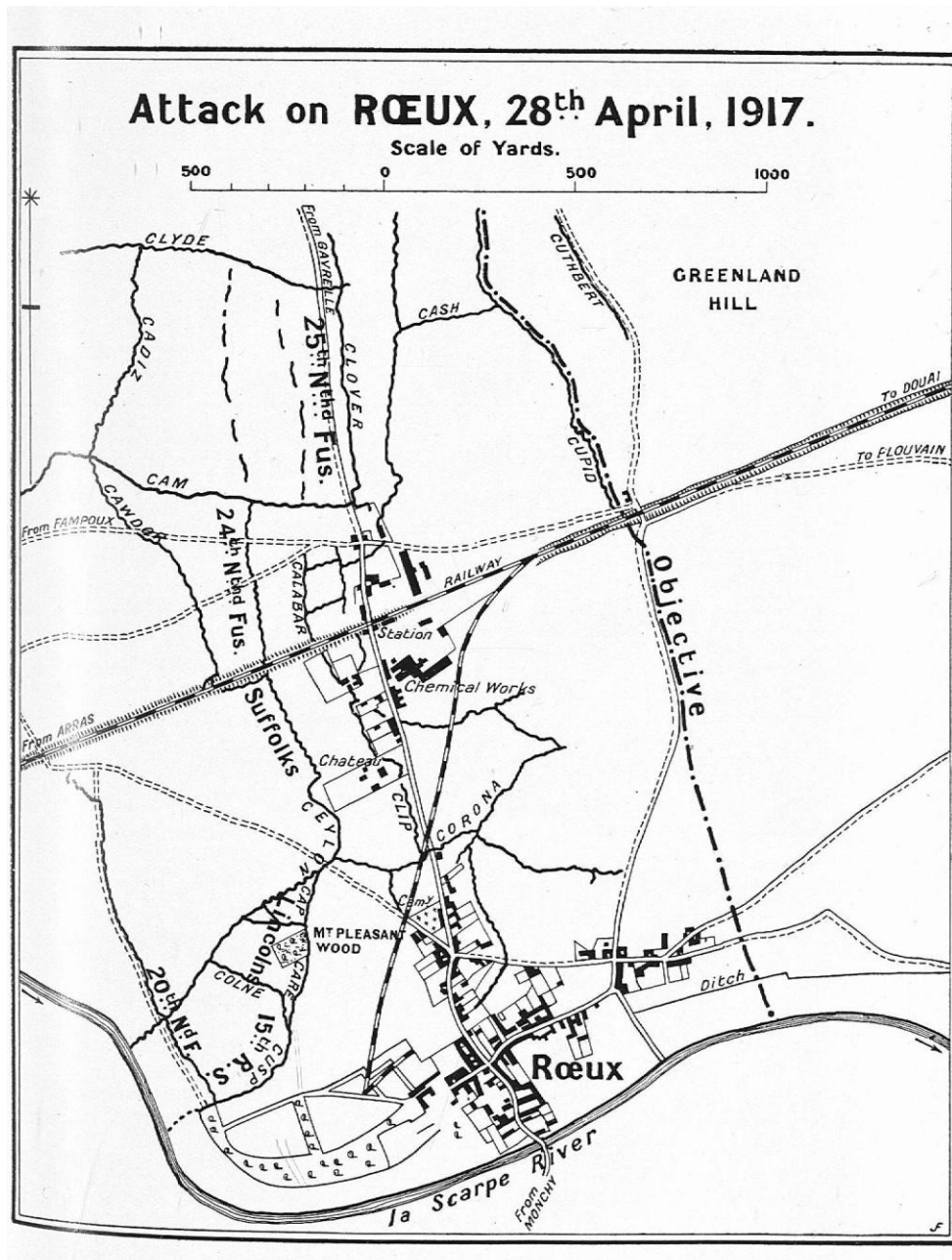


*The Battle of Arras, 9th April–4 May 1917
2nd, 9th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 15th and 16th Battalions, The Royal Scots*

Map 1- showing the scene for the Battle of Arras which started on the 9th April 1917

The details gleaned from the history of the 34th Division give the overall picture of the action.

The 101st Brigade was disposed with the 15th Royal Scots on the right next to the Scarpe (see diagram 2), the 10th Lincolns in the centre, and the 11th Suffolks on the left. The 16th Royal Scots were utilised as moppers up, two companies behind the 15th and one behind the each of the other battalions. Two guns of the 103rd Machine Gun Company went with each of the two leading battalions.



Map 2- Showing the position of the 15th Royal Scots Regiment on the 28th April 1917. The regiment was located alongside the River Scarpe (15th RS)

The battle did not start well as the planned bombardment did not hit the desired targets, either falling short or too long. The barrage did not silence the well prepared German machine gun positions so they wrought tremendous havoc on the advancing British battalions.

The 34th Divisional historian was able to use an account by one of the surviving officers, Lieutenant Leonard Robson to record the debacle.

"The 15th Royal Scots had "D" Company on the right next the river. This company was commanded by Captain Pagan, a very gallant member of the Church Militant. "A" Company was on the left, under Lieutenant Dixon. These were followed by the moppers up of the 16th Royal Scots, and then came "C" and "B" Companies of the 15th, under Lieutenants Wilson and Robson.

The line was formed in No-Mans-Land about midnight, and at zero they advanced and entered the wood. This was found to be strongly wired and full of machine guns, which must have taken a heavy toll of the attackers, but as it was very dark Robson can give no particulars. Another informant speaks of losses from snipers posted in the trees. They stumbled through the wood, and beyond it the going was better. In the ruined village little opposition was met with. They found themselves under the fire of our own guns, evidently having outpaced the barrage. Lieutenant Robson now found himself with some of the moppers up, and as they stayed to attend to the village he went on alone along the road towards the river. It gradually got lighter, and he came on Captain Pagan and two or three other officers and some one hundred and fifty to two hundred men. Being a little early they reorganised the line along the road already mentioned, and when the barrage had moved on they followed it to their objective. Captain Pagan took the right of the first line, and Lieutenant Robson the left; the centre was traversed by a ditch five feet wide. From each half a Lewis gun and bombing squad was sent forward about one hundred and fifty yards, and Lieutenant Robson's left flank being in the air he placed a Lewis gun and bombing post on that side.

The party was at this time entirely isolated, but it held on patiently, trusting that the other troops would soon appear on its flanks and from the rear. "We felt rather pleased to be living up to our reputation." Alas! no help came. Digging was almost impossible on account of the marshy nature of the ground, and the shell holes were full of mud. In this parlous state the little party was attacked by parties of the enemy, who crept round the left flank, and fire was opened from machine guns and rifles in the gardens and house on its rear. Lieutenant Robson did not dare attempt to crush these pests by rapid rifle fire, as his supply of S.A.A. (small arms ammunition) was getting low. About seven-thirty a.m. one of our planes came over, and the party lit flares. At perhaps eight-thirty a.m. a counter-attack was made against the right of the line, and Lieutenant Robson, handing over charge of his sections to Lieutenant Fisher, crawled in that direction, under heavy fire. He found that the men on the right were out of ammunition and that Captain Pagan was severely wounded. The casualties in the little line of Scots had been very serious, and it was evident that a withdrawal was imperative. An effort

to hold the road was frustrated by the enfilade fire from the village, and when refuge was sought in wood it was found to be held by the enemy, who saluted them with machine gun and trench mortar fire. "So far as I could judge, we were by this time reduced to about thirty men, many of whom were wounded. I myself had a bullet through my right thigh and a hit in my back, though this latter must luckily have been stopped by something in my haversack." Lieutenant Robson then tried to save the remnant by swimming up- stream under cover of the bank, but this proved impossible, and the end soon came. "Presently I found myself being helped to my feet- minus equipment- by two of my men under enemy supervision." On his way to the rear of the German lines he passed lines of machine guns in shell hole, each with a couple of men, and farther back six battalions at intervals. "So evidently they were taking no chances of a break through."

Thus disastrously, but surely very gloriously, ended the attack of the Royal Scots. The casualties of the 15th alone were eighteen officers and three hundred and ninety-nine other ranks.

Source: THIRTY-FOURTH DIVISION 1915-1919. The Story of its career from Ripon to the Rhine 2001 by Lt Col J. Shakespear.

Postscript

It seems very likely that this was the action in which he died in as the 15th Battalion and all its Companies were specifically involved in this sector on that date. I do not know which Company he belonged to, so he may well have been killed somewhere else in this area.

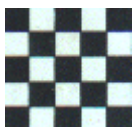
Fred was buried in the first cemetery at Roeux, shortly after the battle, but due to later shelling, the early graves were disturbed and he is now registered under a special marker grave.

Appendix 1

The 34th Division in 1914-1918

The history of 34th Division

On 10 December the War Office authorised the formation of the Fifth New Army. Like the other Kitchener Armies, it comprised six Divisions, in this case numbered 37 to 42. What eventually became 34th Division was originally numbered 41st. In April 1915, the original Fourth New Army was broken up and its units converted for training and draft-finding purposes. When this took place the Fifth New Army became Fourth New Army and its Divisions were renumbered to 30th - 35th: thus what we remember as 34th Division was born.



The Division was largely comprised of locally raised units often known as "Pals", notably those raised in the north east and known as the Tyneside Scottish and Tyneside Irish. There were also the Manchester Scottish, the Grimsby Chums and

others. After in most cases commencing training near home, the units were moved in mid 1915 to concentrate at Ripon in Yorkshire. It was not until late August that the Division moved for final training and firing practice at Salisbury Plain.

On 3 January 1916 embarkation orders arrived; by 15 January the Division had crossed the Channel and was concentrated at La Crosse, east of St Omer. (Note: it follows that no man who was with the original contingent of this Division was awarded the 1914-1915 Star).

The Division then remained on the Western Front for the remainder of the war and took part in the following engagements:

1917

The First Battle of the Scarpe**

The Second Battle of the Scarpe**

The Battle of Arleux**

*** the battles marked ** are phases of the Arras Offensive*

The fighting at Hargicourt (August)

The Third Battles of Ypres (fighting for the Broenbeek, 13-23 October 1917)

101st Brigade

15th Bn, the Royal Scots	(1st Edinburgh) left May 1918
16th Bn, the Royal Scots	(2nd Edinburgh) left May 1918
10th Bn, the Lincolnshire Regiment	(Grimsby Chums) left February 1918
11th Bn, the Suffolk Regiment	left May 1918
101st Machine Gun Company	joined 27 April 1916, moved to 34th Bn MGC 26 Feb 1918
101st Trench Mortar Battery	joined 18 February 1916, broken up 16 May 1918, reformed 2 July 1918
2/4th Bn, the Queens	joined June 1918
1/4th Bn, the Royal Sussex Regiment	joined June 1918
2nd Bn, the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment	joined June 1918

Source: Long long Trail

Author: David Clapp