



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

A tribute to one of the many - an uncle we never met.



Sgt. George Leslie Forster
Born 1899, killed 1st April 1917.

Uncle George Forster (the spelling of the surname was changed for some unknown reason in the early part of the 20th century) was the fourth child of Leslie and Mary Jane Forster. He was born at the family farm at Ballymackilroy, Lisnaskea, Co. Fermanagh.

He joined the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers while underage. He served in Dublin during the 1916 Easter Rising before going to France.

He was killed in action at Savy Wood, close to the village of Savy which is a few miles from St Quentin, in Picardy, France.

A younger brother, my Uncle William, told me the story of how, when he was in training, having just joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary in 1922, he met a former British Army captain who had also joined. On learning my Uncle's surname, he related how he had a sergeant served under him in France by that name. It turned out it was Uncle George. The captain was able to relate the circumstances in which Uncle George was killed. The captain was leading one half of a patrol with Uncle George leading the other on 1st April, 1917. Uncle George was going down one side of Savy Wood and the captain going down the other. They had nearly met up when a German shell killed Uncle George. *New York Times* reports of this action at Savy can be seen online [here](#).



Uncle George's grave with the text chosen by my grandmother just showing.

He is buried at Savy British Cemetery.

In 2012, my daughter Lois and her husband, Brian along with their four children, Elisabeth, Kerith, David and Grace, visited Savy Cemetery. Thirty seven years earlier, in 1975, my wife Ann and I along with our four older children, Andrew, Richard, Lois and Stephen, visited

Savy Cemetery. Sadly, the photos are too faded to be printed. We were the first of the Foster family to do so.

In Memory of
Serjeant
G Forster

28831, 2nd Bn., Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers who died on 01 April 1917 Age 18
Son of Leslie and Mary Jane Forster, of Ballymackilroy, Lisnaskea, Co Fermanagh.

Remembered with Honour
Savy British Cemetery




Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Memorial certificate for Sgt. George Forster, Savy British cemetery



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It was moving to look upon the gravestone and gratifying to see how well the cemetery is looked after.

Below are pictures taken by Lois and Brian.



The entrance to Savy British Cemetery.



Some of the many hundreds of gravestones.

I have lived with the sense of grief and loss that my grandmother and my father felt at his death, as it was set forth in an account of an incident on Armistice Day, 11th November, 1918, told me by my mother.

She was a wee girl of ten years of age and helping her father, James Prentice, gather potatoes at her home in Keenaghy, about one mile from the Foster home, when my father, then a lad of fourteen years of age, drove past in a cart, returning from his daily trip to the local creamery where he had taken a cartload of creamery cans belonging to his mother's farm and that of some neighbours.

My grandfather shouted at him: "Why are the church bells ringing?", for the bells in Lisnaskea about 3 miles away could be clearly heard. My father stopped on the road and with tears running down his face, replied, "The war has ended but it's too late for George."

There were always tears in my mother's eyes when she related that incident. My father's love for his older brother was seen when he and my mother named their first child, my older sister, Georgina Hazel.

My Grandmother Foster received a pension of a few paltry shillings along with a bronze disc and a standard letter of condolence.

It wasn't much for a mother who gave her child! My mother, who was close to her mother-in-law, said that, in the end, Granny Foster died of a broken heart.

Doubtless, that could be said of millions of mothers worldwide in the days that followed that terrible time



David and Grace McClung, the youngest children of Rev Brian and Mrs Lois McClung, stand at the gravestone of their great-great uncle George.



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This I do know. She found solace in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ for the text she chose for Uncle George's military gravestone in Savy Cemetery declares that. She asked that these simple words be engraved on the stone : "Jesus himself drew near", (Luke 24:15).

I believe that the tragic death of her beloved son was the means of her seeking the Lord Jesus for salvation. My own father told me that he was led to the Lord by a brother-in-law, William Hawthorne, in 1919.

Even in the midst of such human misery, 100 years ago, the merciful hand of God is at work.

Ivan Foster.

1st August, 2014.



Road sign outside the village of Savy, in northern France.



Uncle George, home on leave, with his oldest sister Lily and her baby son, George, who sadly died in infancy.

The following information is being added to the original article above, which was published on the 'Burning Bush' website in August 2014, to mark the 100th anniversary of the commencement of the First World War which began on 28th July, 1914. It is being republished to mark the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme on July 1st, 1916.

Uncle George Forster joined the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in January 1916. He was just 17 years and one month old. Some Army records were destroyed during the London Blitz in the Second World War. For that reason only an estimated date can be given based upon his service number but we have been assured that the January date is accurate.

Service numbers were issued in sequence so by examining the enlistment date of some soldiers whose service numbers are either side of Uncle George's, an approximate date can be arrived at. It is recorded in the "Fermanagh War Memorial Book of Honour: 1914-1921", published by the Inniskillings Museum (page 413), that he enlisted in January 1916.

That means he was in the army for only some 15 months and that by the time he was killed he held the rank of sergeant. That is quite a remarkable record indeed.

The page devoted to his memory in the "Fermanagh War Memorial Book of Honour: 1914-1921" also records this about Uncle George.

"George Leslie Forster was born at Ballymackilroy, Lisnaskea in 1899. His parents were Leslie and Mary Jane Forster. He had two older sisters, Elizabeth and Margaret and an older brother, James. He also had two younger brothers, William and Thomas. George's father died in 1913.

George enlisted in the 2nd Battalion, Inniskillings in Enniskillen, in January 1916. By November, he had been promoted to sergeant in 'A' Company.



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On 1st April 1917, the 2nd Battalion moved to Chateau de Pomery, south of the Somme and formed up to attack Savy Wood. At 3pm, the battalion advanced in extended order. It met heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire, but within half an hour the Germans were driven out and the position was consolidated. 32 men were killed and 127 were wounded. George was killed in the assault. He was only 18 years old."

The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers had their origins in the 27th (Inniskilling) Regiment of Foot. It was an Irish infantry regiment of the British Army, formed in 1689 and amalgamated with the 108th (Madras Infantry) Regiment of Foot into The Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in 1881.

The regiment was raised as local militia at Enniskillen by Colonel Zachariah Tiffin in June 1689, to fight against James II in the Williamite war in Ireland. They served successfully, most notably at the Battle of Newtownbutler, and their performance gained them a place on the English establishment in 1690 as a regular infantry regiment; as such they then fought at the Battle of the Boyne.

The following death notice appeared in the "Impartial Reporter" of 26th April 1917.

"Forster: Killed in action on 1st April 1917, Sergeant George Leslie Forster, aged 18 years. Dearly beloved second son of Mrs. Mary Jane Forster, Ballymackilroy, Lisnaskea.

The news was sad, the blow was hard,
God's will, it shall be done.
With a manly heart, he did his part
My dear, beloved son'.

Deeply regretted by his mother, sisters, brothers and brother-in-law".