

## ESSEX FARM CEMETERY

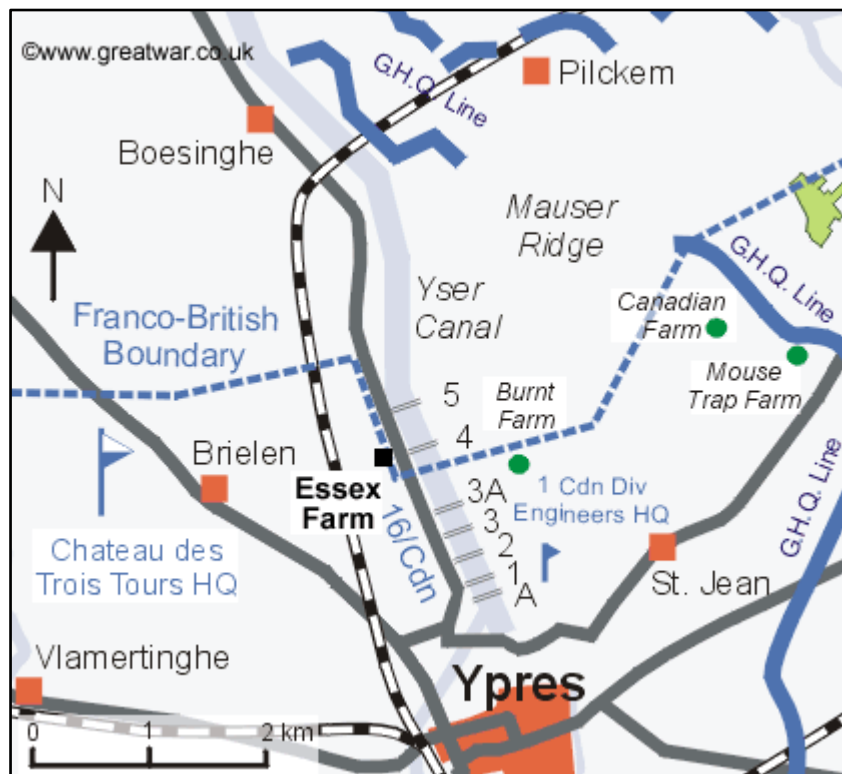
There are 1,200 WW1 servicemen buried or commemorated in this cemetery. Of these burials 103 are not identified. There are special memorials commemorating 19 casualties who are known or believed to be buried among the unidentified burials.

The cemetery was used by several British divisions holding this sector from 1915 to August 1917. Men from these divisions are buried throughout the cemetery. Plot I contains the dead of the 49th (West Riding) Division from 1915. The dead of the 38th (Welsh) Division dated in the autumn of 1916 are buried in Plot III.

### Origins of Essex Farm Cemetery

#### French Army Burials

The burials on the site of this British military cemetery were begun by the French Army during the First Battle of Ypres (19 October - 22 November 1914).



*Map of the Ypres-Yser canal shows the location of Canadian units east of Brielen and on the western canal bank in April 1915. Army bridges are cross the canal from A to 5. The blue dashed line is the French-British Army boundary north of Ypres as it was in April and May 1915*

The French Army was occupying this sector of the Allied Front Line north of Ypres (Ieper) until mid April 1915. The French war dead who were buried here were removed after the First World War and reburied in a French military cemetery. It is likely that they were re-interred in the French cemetery located in the northern part of the Ypres Salient named Saint-Charles-de-Potyeze.

#### British Army Takes Over from April 1915

On 17 April 1915 the British Army extended the Front Line it was holding in the Ypres Salient, taking over a section of Front Line from the French Army to the east of Langemarck. The rear area behind the Front Lines and north of Ypres around Essex Farm, on the western bank of the Ypres-Yser canal, was also taken over by the British Army.

Only a few days later the German Army launched an attack with gas and the Second Battle of Ypres began. Canadian field guns were brought to the western canal bank to assist with the defence of the sector by the British and French Armies.

Essex Farm was located on the western end of Bridge Number 4, also known as Brielen Bridge. The village of Brielen was a few kilometres to the west of this bridge. It was from this time that the Canadian field artillery established a small, basic dressing station near Essex Farm to tend to wounded casualties in the vicinity. British casualties who died near to the location of Essex Farm were buried in this cemetery.

## **Advanced Dressing Station in the Ypres-Yser Canal Bank**

### **Dugouts in the Spoilbank**

*Preserved A.D.S. (Advanced Dressing Station) bunker in the west bank of the Ypres-Ijser canal at Essex Farm cemetery.*



Initially a British medical post located here was simply a number of dugouts cut into the spoilbank of the western (left) side of the canal.

### **Concrete Shelters**

Gradually over the years as the war went on into years the Advanced Dressing Station (A.D.S.) located in this position west of the canal was developed by the British Army into a number of concrete shelters. These provided better protection against enemy artillery fire or aerial bombing.



## **In Flanders Fields the poppies blow..."**

The location of Essex Farm Advanced Dressing Station (A.D.S.) is believed to be the place in May 1915 where the Canadian Army Doctor and artillery brigade commander Major John McCrae composed his now famous poem "In Flanders Fields".

The red poppies growing in the warm spring weather, amongst the military graves near to the makeshift medical bunker he was working in at that time, are believed to have been the inspiration for the poem. The symbol of the red poppy and the death of a friend, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, deeply affected John McCrae during the time of his involvement in the Second Battle of Ypres.

### **IN FLANDERS FIELDS POEM**

#### ***The World's Most Famous WAR MEMORIAL POEM***

***By Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae***

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place: and in the sky  
The larks still bravely singing fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead: Short days ago,  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved: and now we lie  
In Flanders fields!

Take up our quarrel with the foe  
To you, from failing hands, we throw  
The torch: be yours to hold it high  
If ye break faith with us who die,  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields

Composed at the battlefield on May 3, 1915  
during the second battle of Ypres, Belgium



*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place: and in the sky  
The larks still bravely singing fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*



*We are the dead: short days ago,  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved: and now we lie  
In Flanders fields!*



*Take up our quarrel with the foe  
To you, from failing hands, we throw  
The torch: be yours to hold high  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.*

On May 2, 1915, John McCrae's close friend and former student Alexis Helmer was killed by a German shell. That evening, in the absence of a Chaplain, John McCrae recited from memory a few passages from the Church of England's "Order of the Burial of the Dead". For security reasons Helmer's burial in Essex Farm Cemetery was performed in complete darkness.

The next day, May 3, 1915, Sergeant-Major Cyril Allinson was delivering mail. McCrae was sitting at the back of an ambulance parked near the dressing station beside the *Yser Canal*, just a few hundred yards north of Ypres, Belgium.

As John McCrae was writing his *In Flanders Fields* poem, Allinson silently watched and later recalled, "His face was very tired but calm as he wrote. He looked around from time to time, his eyes straying to Helmer's grave."

Within moments, John McCrae had completed the "*In Flanders Fields*" poem and when he was done, without a word, McCrae took his mail and handed the poem to Allinson.

Allinson was deeply moved:

"The (*Flanders Fields*) poem was an exact description of the scene in front of us both. He used the word blow in that line because the poppies actually were being blown that morning by a gentle east wind. It never occurred to me at that time that it would ever be published. It seemed to me just an exact description of the scene."

**Comment:**

"On behalf of everyone on this trip, we must thank the girls from Geschwister Schol Gymnasium Aachen for reading the poem, in English, and with the reverence and feeling it deserves. "

**Ken Porter**

**Chairman – Basildon Heritage**