

ON THE BRINK

The Politics of Conflict 1914-1916 Project

EASTER RISING & BATTLE OF THE SOMME

ACTIVE SERVICE

THE TORBITT FAMILY

Four months after the outbreak of war, four members of the Torbitt family were featured in the Larne Times and Weekly Advertiser for their patriotism and willingness to take an active role in the War. Robert, William and Thomas Torbitt had all enlisted in the 12th Battalion Royal Irish Rifles (Central Antrim Volunteers), and their sister Mary had joined the Factory District Nursing Corps.

Their Father, originally from Ahoghill, was a weaver. Their Mother was from Bracknamuckley, Portglenone. In 1901, they lived at 19 Ballybeg, Ahoghill, but by 1911 they resided at, Old Glenarm Road, Larne. They had nine children. Before the War, William, like other members of his family worked at Larne Weaving Company. He was also bandmaster of the Sir John Smiley Flute Band. He enlisted, aged 23. He was killed in action on 1st July 1916, at the Somme. By June 1919, a compensation payment of £4 7s 8d was made to his next-of-kin, his father. He is listed on Gardenmore Presbyterian Church Roll of Honour on Larne War Memorial and is remembered at Thiepval Memorial.



His brothers, Thomas and Robert, survived the War. Thomas had enlisted in Larne on 15th September 1914, aged 19. He served with the British Expeditionary Force from October 1915 until September 1918 and was wounded twice. Afterwards, he worked as a skipper on a Kelly's Coal Boat. During World War Two, he served with the Merchant Navy. He also survived this conflict. Robert was only 17 when he enlisted, in September 1914. By March 1918, he was "missing". This information was sent to the Reverent Robert Millar, Curran Road, Larne, so that he could notify the family. Robert had been taken Prisoner of War.

After the War ended, Robert resumed working at Larne Weaving Company. On 22nd June 1921, he married his wife, Isabella, at 1st Larne Presbyterian Church. Until his death, Robert suffered greatly from his war wounds and injuries. Because of this, he secured one of 12 newly built ex-servicemen houses, located on Upper Waterloo Road, Larne, where Isabella lived until 1978. Robert died on 5th December 1959. His death certificate confirmed that the coronary thrombosis which killed him, stemmed from old gunshot wounds on the neck and left thigh. He had sustained these during the War. Both Thomas and Robert were awarded the 1914-1915 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal for their service in World War One.

World War One.

Newspaper feature on the Torbitt family

Larne Times & Weekly Telegraph, 12 December 1914