



Sheetlines

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“Reburial of World War One dead”

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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.

The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

Reburial of the World War One dead

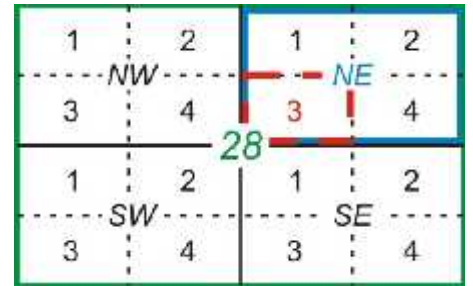
Chris Higley

Recent website developments by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the National Library of Scotland link to provide a poignant tool for the family historian.

In the 1920s the Imperial War Graves Commission undertook a major operation to retrieve the dead from small cemeteries and scattered battlefield graves in Belgium and France, and to rebury them in the large, well-kept cemeteries that we know today. Meticulous records were made of the process and these are now available, linked to the name of the casualty, at www.cwgc.org – the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website.

If we search for Private Elisha Andrews of the Devonshire Regiment we find that he died on 4 October 1917 and is now buried with nearly 12,000 others at Tyne Cot cemetery. In the linked burial return, we are also told that his body was recovered for reburial from map reference J.16.a.4.6 on Sheet 28.N.E.

As many readers will know, Ordnance Survey printed the GSGS 2743 series covering the Western Front. These maps retained the scale, sheet lines and sheet numbering of the pre-war 1:40,000 Belgian series on which they are based.¹ As shown in the diagram, the area of each 1:40,000 sheet may be divided into four 1:20,000 sheets of the GSGS 2742 series. The area of each of these may be further divided into four 1:10,000 detailed trench maps designated GSGS 3062.

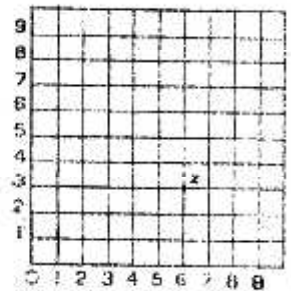


INSTRUCTIONS AS TO THE USE OF THE SQUARES.

1. The large rectangles on the map, lettered A, B, C, etc., are divided into squares of 1,000 yards side, which are numbered 1, 2, 3, etc. Each of these squares is sub-divided into four minor squares of 500 yards side. These minor squares are considered as lettered a, b, c, d. (See Square No. 6 in each rectangle.)

A point may thus be described as lying within Square B.6, M.5.b, etc.

2. To locate a point within a small square, consider the sides divided into tenths, and define the point by taking so many tenths from W. to E. along Southern side, and so many from S. to N. along Western side; the S.W. corner always being taken as origin, and the distance along the Southern side being always given by the first figure. Thus the point Z would be 63, i.e., 6 divisions East and 3 divisions North from origin.



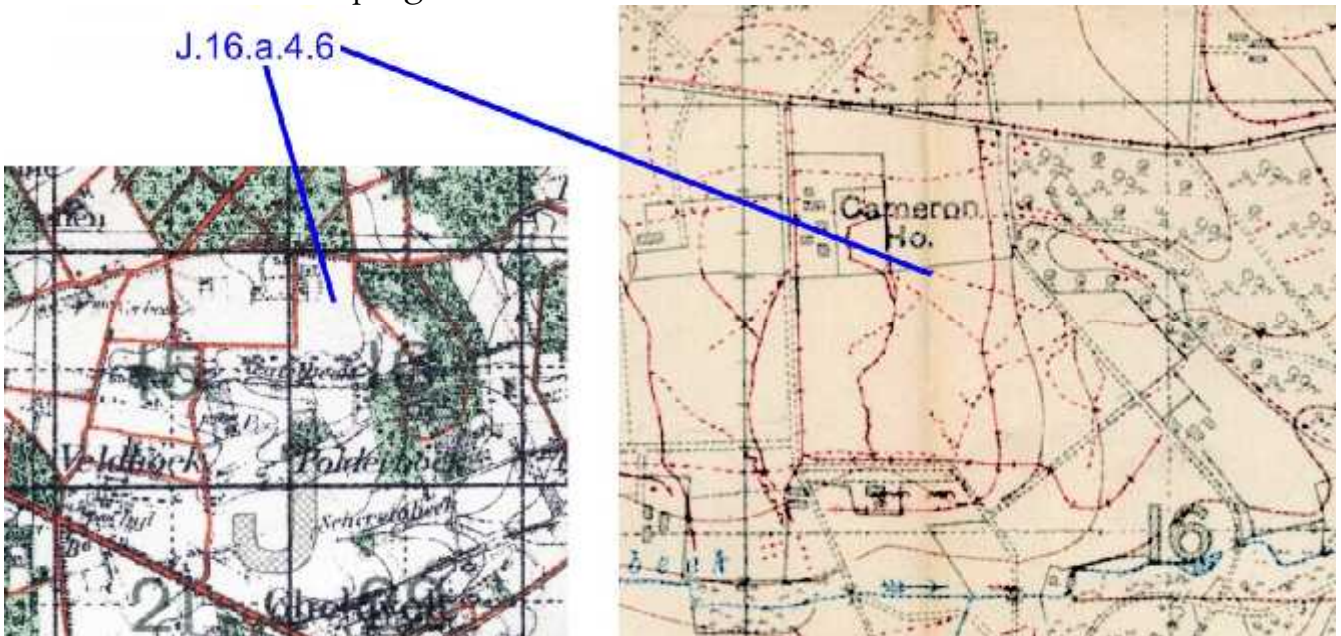
The face of each 1:40,000 sheet was divided into 1000 yard squares, whose use is explained in the above instructions. This is not a theatre grid; to interpret a map reference we need to know the number of the map sheet to which it refers.

¹ The rectangular sheet layout was extended into northern France, each new sheet number generally formed by taking the number of the first Belgian sheet to the east and adding a letter suffix. Sheets 44A and 44B were originally numbered 36C and 36B respectively.

However, the same squaring is then reproduced on the larger scale sheets into which that particular sheet is subdivided. So to find the original location of Elisha's body using the map reference given above, it does not matter whether we have 1:40,000 sheet 28, 1:20,000 sheet 28.NE or 1:10,000 sheet 28.NE.3. In each case we have the position of the body to an accuracy of 50 yards in each direction.

In our example, coupled with his date of death, the map reference shows us that Elisha was almost certainly killed during the battle of Broodseinde, one of the attacks in the enormously costly Passchendaele campaign.

And this is where the National Library of Scotland comes in. With over 300 maps of the Western Front now available online at <http://maps.nls.uk> you can normally see the very field in which your ancestor was originally buried – and since casualties usually lay where they fell or were buried close by, this will give you a pretty good idea of what he was doing when he was killed. I said the information could be poignant.



Extracts from GSGS 2743 1:40,000 sheet 28 and GSGS 3062 1:10,000 sheet 28.NE.3. The right hand extract is reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland.

Chris Fleet, Senior Map Curator, National Library of Scotland adds:

The *Great War British Trench Maps Coordinate Converter*² locates the position of trench map coordinates on a modern Google satellite or map base. Just type in as much or as little of the trench map reference (eg. '36c.' or '36c.N.11', etc) click 'Submit', and the map view shows the location, also providing latitude and longitude coordinates as decimal degrees. You can also copy and paste these into the 'NLS Explore Geo-referenced maps viewer'³ **Gazetteer / NG Ref:** box, ie. just as '50.2942, 2.7793' and the map will zoom to this location. This is rather clunky, but potentially useful, as from there you can view geo-referenced trench maps of the location directly.

² <http://rdf.muninn-project.org/TrenchCoordinates.html?q=50.379380,2.774023>

³ <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore>