

Chapter 2.30

JOHN GRAHAM GOFFEY
(“UNCLE JOCK”)

1897 – 1916



St. Peter's Church, Berkhamsted. On the town's war memorial by the west door of the parish church, among the list of names of citizens of Berkhamsted killed in the Great War, is engraved the name "J. G. Goffey".

Chapter 2.30. Uncle Jock

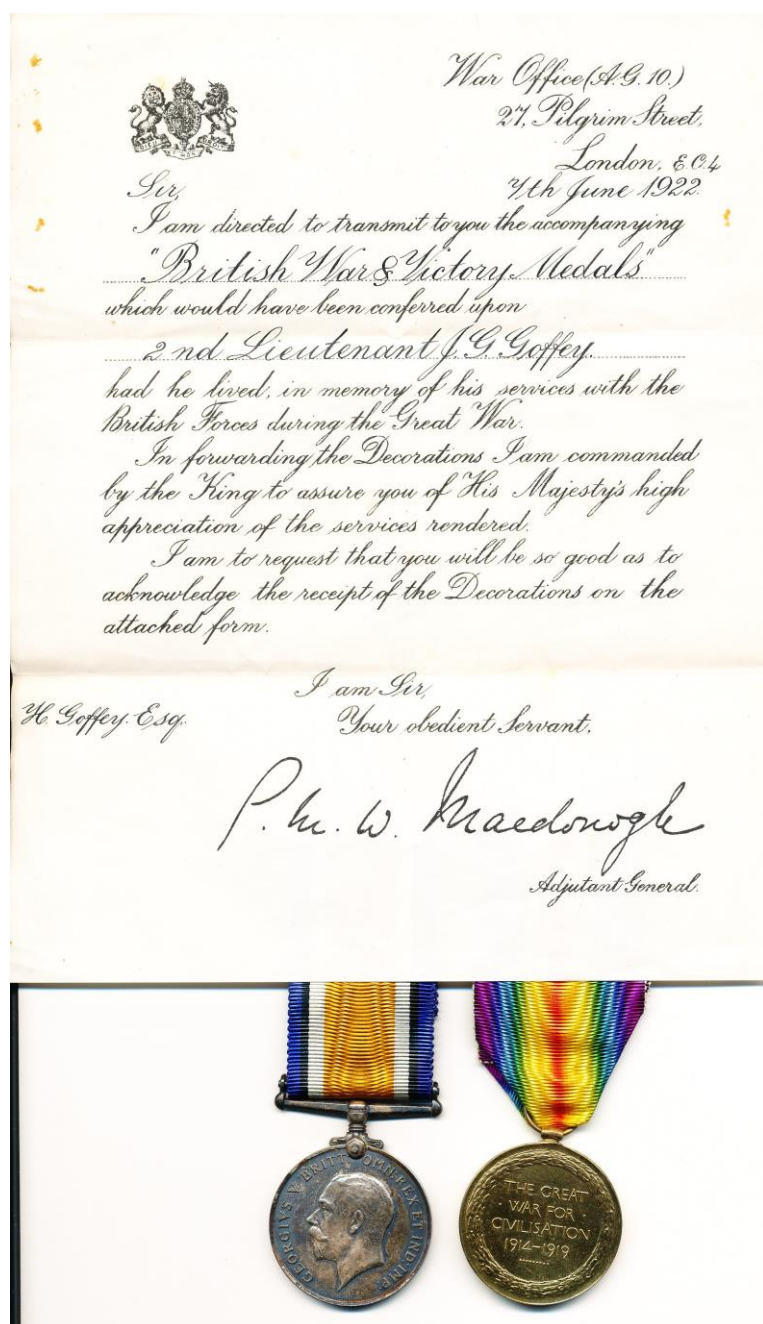
John Graham Goffey was the eldest son of Harry and Elinor Goffey and was always known as “Jock”. The reason for Jock’s nickname is not entirely clear but is believed to have been at the insistence of his paternal grandmother Mary Goffey (nee Graham). My assumption is that the nickname was in memory of Mary’s father, John Graham, who was born in Glasgow in 1807 and was therefore a “real” Scotsman and had presumably been known as “Jock”. Be that as it may, the name stuck and the Uncle John that we never met was always known in the family as “Uncle Jock”. Jock was killed on September 3rd 1916, shortly before his 19th birthday, near Beaumont-Hamel during the first battle of the Somme. He was a 2nd Lieutenant in the 17th Bn. King’s Royal Rifle Corps; all the junior officers in his battalion were killed that day.



Miniature of Uncle Jock in the uniform of the KRRC, by his father.

Jock's grave (ref. VI-B.21) can be seen in the Ancre British Military Cemetery, Beaumont-Hamel, which it is located on the west side of the main road (D50) from Albert to Miraumont, just south of Beaucourt-sur-Ancre, about seven kilometres north of the town of Albert (Somme). Ironically, the cemetery lies in the shadow of Thiepval ridge, one of the main strategic objectives of the Battles of the Somme. A lane leads from the D50 over a level crossing and up the hill to the village of Thiepval at the top of the ridge, where are located the Ulster Monument, a French military cemetery and the huge Thiepval memorial to the British and British Empire soldiers missing in the battles of the Somme.

In June 1922 Harry and Elinor Goffey received from the Adjutant General at the War Office in London, a letter conveying the King's appreciation of Uncle Jock's services in the British Forces during the Great War. Also enclosed were two medals, the War Medal and the Victory Medal, which Jock would have been awarded, had he lived. This letter and the two medals are reproduced below.





Uncle Jock's memorial bench at the Inns of Court training trenches, Berkhamsted common.

In 2013-14 the training trenches on Berkhamsted common were cleared of the trees that had grown up in the preceding 100 years and a display board erected for the information of visitors. A memorial ceremony marking the start of the First World War was held at the nearby Inns of Court OTC war memorial with due pomp and ceremony in August 2014. In memory of Uncle Jock, who trained with the Inns of Court OTC in these trenches, the grandchildren of Harry and Elinor Goffey still living in the area erected a memorial bench on behalf of the family.

In 2016 to mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, red earthenware poppies were produced, one for each casualty of World War I, and displayed in the moat of the Tower of London – which they largely filled. After purchasing a poppy, I painted the steel stalk green, added the grave reference number on the underside of the petals and took it to Beaumont-Hamel in 2017 and “planted” in front of Jock’s gravestone.



The headstone to Uncle Jock's grave with its "Tower of London" poppy, in the Ancre Military Cemetery, Beaumont-Hamel, France.