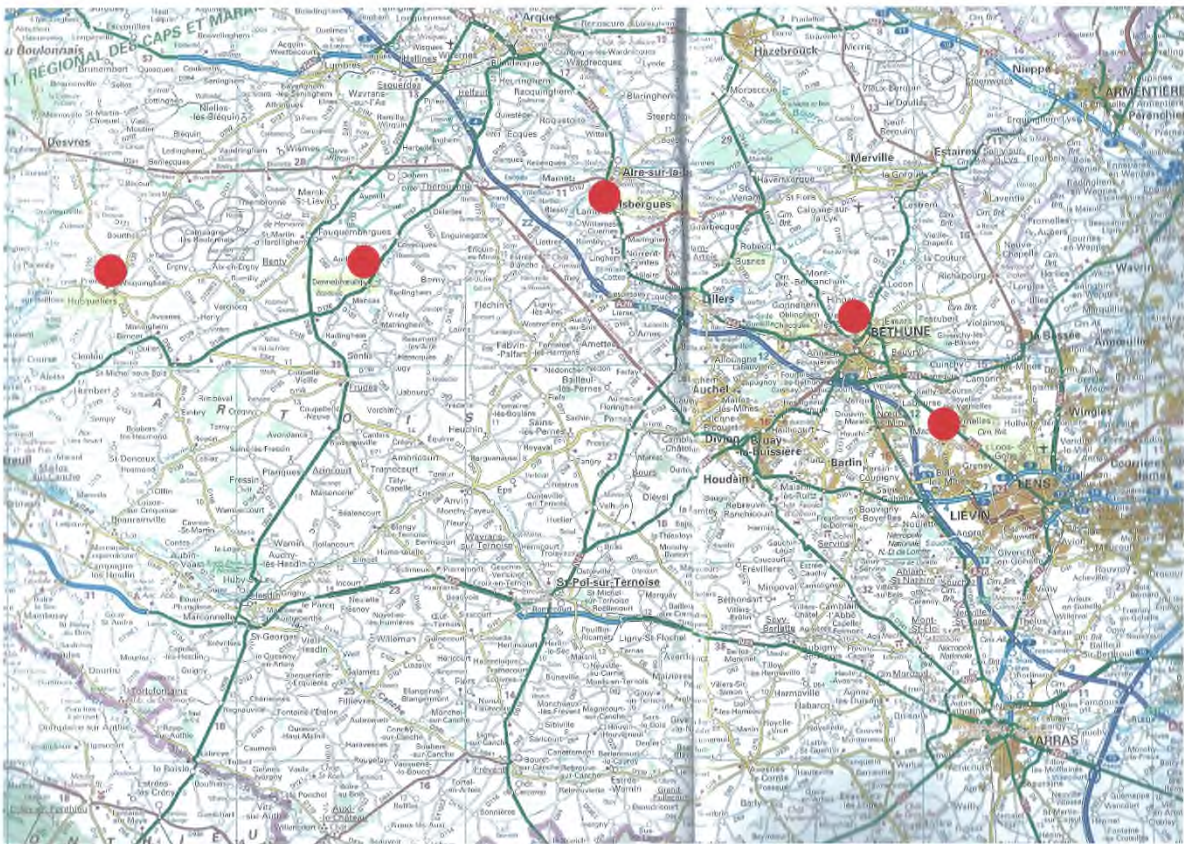


# A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF ARTHUR JAMES PURFIELD

## POSTSCRIPT (J ALISTAIR RIACH, 2016)

In July 2014, Margaret and I, with Jamie, Gilly and Evie, spent a week in Pas de Calais. Jamie and Gilly walked, over 4 days, the route that Margaret's father, Jim Purfield, had taken over four nights in September 1915.



We stayed in Aire-sur-la-lis, and drove Jamie and Gilly to their starting village, and picked them up from their destination village. So we were able to see the places that Margaret's father had described a century before. Of course, the villages have all changed since then. But most of the village squares, where the Battalion had paraded, still exist.

Following their landing at Le Havre, the Battalion travelled by train over 17 hours, before arriving at Huquelliers, where they were billeted for three weeks.



*Huquelières*



*Dennebroeucq*

(Not much of interest here except the church of St Leger and a theme park)



*Bethune market square.*

The top photograph, taken from the bell tower, shows the corner of the square where the buildings are unchanged since 1915. The rest of the town centre was destroyed by fire when the German army attacked it with artillery and incendiary bombs in 1918. It burned for four days.

The last part of the walk was from Bethune to Loos. Evie joined Jamie and Gilly, while Margaret and I went into Loos.



*The village of Loos in 1915 and 2014*

The most memorable and moving part of our journey was to walk from the village of Loos, across the flat fields of no mans land.

Where Jim Purfield's battalion had led the Brigade into the attack across this 2km of plain.

Where enemy fire slaughtered his friends and comrades.

Where he lost the remnants of his battalion in the chaos.

Where he rested overnight in an abandoned trench.

Where he wandered about in the morning looking for his colleagues.



This view looks across to what was the German front line and is where Jim's battalion marched into a wall of death.

And most poignant of all is The Lone Tree. In 1915 this tree – one of the few remaining stumps in the area, was a recognised focal point in the battered landscape. It was a gathering place for troops, and a reference point for the area. Its position was marked on every trench map of the battle of Loos. Bits of the original tree stump were taken as trophies and souvenirs, one slice finding its way to the Imperial war museum.



*The slice of the original Lone tree complete with embedded bullet.*

In September 1995, a replacement of the Lone Tree was planted. Le Rutoire farm is in the same family as a century ago, and M Fouquenelle gave permission for the replanting of a cherry tree in the original position. At the planting ceremony, attended by British, German and French representatives, a memorial plaque was unveiled at the base of the tree. The trilingual wording reads:

LONE TREE

REPLANTED IN MEMORY OF ALL THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES AT THE  
BATTLE OF LOOS 1915

By coincidence, Margaret and I, walking out to the Lone Tree from Loos, and Jamie, Gilly and Evie walking from Bethune, arrived at the Lone Tree at the same time. And there we stood, as so many others have done, thinking of all the slaughter that it represents. But especially of Jim Purfield, who survived.



And finally, we visited the cemetery in Loos, known as Dud Corner, where many of the men who died in the battle are commemorated either in individual graves or named on wall panels.



And on the far end of the right hand wall, the name of Jim's friend, Herbert Baines, who went with him from Hitchin.

