



Hauraki District Mayor to visit Arras in August

Hauraki District Mayor, John Tregidga is visiting France on a private trip overseas during August this year. Mayor Tregidga will be accompanied by his wife, Evelyn. They have kindly agreed to make a side trip to visit Arras on our behalf and will be in Arras between 10-12 August.

The Arras Tourism Office (ATO) is arranging a mayoral formal welcome, a visit to the Carriere Wellington Museum and a special wreath laying service at the NZ Tunnellers' Monument. ATO will also arrange visits to the Duisans British Cemetery, Faubourg d'Amiens and Roclincourt Valley Cemetery, to allow Mayor Tregidga to visit the graves of NZ Tunnelling Company men.

The Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association supports the Hauraki District Mayoral visit to Arras. On behalf of this organisation, Dr Stephen Clarke, RNZRSA Chief Executive has undertaken to provide a wreath and a plaque to be laid at the NZ Tunnelling Company Memorial in Arras. Poppies will also be provided by the RNZRSA and these will be left on individual graves.



Above: The New Zealand Tunnellers' Monument in Arras

The NZ French Embassy, the NZ Ministry of Culture and Heritage and the NZ Defence HQ has been advised of the mayor's intended visit and plans. We will continue to work towards advising other groups who may be interested in the forthcoming trip and in particular the wreath laying ceremony being planned.

Overseas, members of the Royal British Legion, an organization similar to our RNZRSA, have also been advised of the mayor's visit. We expect members of this organization, who have branches in Ypres as well as the Pas de Calais (Arras) region to be in attendance at the ceremony.

While in Arras, Mayor Tregidga will also be having discussions regarding a proposed 2010 Carriere Wellington Museum display featuring Waihi and the Hauraki Goldfields Tunnelling Company enlistments. If any descendants are able to loan material to be displayed during this exhibition we would love to know, so we can pass on an indication of how Waihi Heritage Vision can assist with the exhibition.

Any descendants or others who would like to send a message to France with the Mayor can write to the address provided below.

Tunnelling Company soldiers buried at Duisans British Cemetery, Faubourg d'Amiens and Roclincourt Valley Cemetery.

Of the four local men at Faubourg D'Amiens Cemetery, Arras, Pas-de-Calais, three died in the month of August, around the time the mayor will be visiting.

Sapper Ernest Davies Next of Kin and enlisted from Coromandel Killed in Action
2 August 1917 Grave Ref V.J.11

Sapper George Davis aka Davies age 29 Wife/enlistment address Waihi Killed in Action 5 August 1917 Grave Ref V.J.12

Sapper Robert Jones age 31 Enlistment address Waihi Killed in Action 15 August 1917. Grave Ref V.J.19

4/1384 Sergeant Claude Searle Pownceby, age 39 Married, Enlistment address Waihi was Killed in Action 14/9/1916. No known grave. His name is recorded on the Arras Memorial at the Faubourg D'Amiens Cemetery, Arras, Pas-de-Calais

The NZ Tunnelling Company War Diary notes:
14-9-16 Fine day. Enemy activity normal. At night, raid by Cheshires accompanied by Lt. DURANT and 8 of our men. Lieut. Durant and Sergt. POWNCEBY "Missing". Spr Edwards wounded badly in leg while looking for Lieut. DURANT

22-4-17 Fine. Good progress on roads. Enemy shelling road at times. One man wounded. Lieut. Durant's grave found at St Laurant-Blangy. Grave well kept and nicely set up, cross over grave and tiles around sides. Sergt. Pownceby evidently buried in the same grave, as the enemy had put on cross; "Here lies four brave Englishmen, Lieut. Durant, 2 N.C.O's and 1 man."

Excerpts from The New Zealand Tunnelling Company 1915-1919 written by J. C. Neill

For the month of August the company's footage again headed the list for the whole British front with 2.3 feet per man per week.

On the 14th September the company suffered a severe loss in the death of Lieutenant Durant and

Sergeant Pownceby who with eight of our men volunteered to accompany a night raid of the Cheshires into the German lines. Their job was to blow a passage for the raiding party through the enemy wire by means of a loaded pipe, and afterwards to investigate and if possible destroy any German mine entrances. The raid proved a failure, only Lieutenant Durant, Sergeant Pownceby and a Sergeant of the Cheshires apparently reaching the German trenches. There they must have put up a gallant fight against overwhelming odds, for after the advance of the next year a neatly kept grave was found at the Chateau St Laurent just beyond the then German line, bearing on its oaken cross the inscription, 'To the memory of three brave Englishmen, Lieutenant Durant NZ Tunnelling Company and two NCOs'.

In the darkness and confusion of the abortive raid no one had seen the three go forward and many of Durant's men spent the whole night searching no-man's land, in spite of heavy enemy fire, in the belief that he was lying out there wounded.

Accounts provided the War Diary and J.C. Neill's book vary in relation to the inscription on the cross and the spelling of Pownceby's name.

Twenty-one NZ Tunnelling Company men are buried at the Faubourg Cemetery. This is the largest group of Tunnelling Coy men in any one cemetery.

Five Tunnelling Coy men are buried at nearby Duisans British Cemetery. Three are Hauraki Goldfields' men.

4/1369 Lance Corporal Frederick McClymont Enlistment address Karangahake Died of wounds 30 December 1917, Grave ref V E 4
4/1562 Sapper Colin Adams Next of Kin and enlistment address Karangahake Died of Wounds 23 April 1917, Grave ref 1V.C.27
4/1392 Sapper George Trenberth, age 33 Enlistment address Waihi Died of Wounds 13 January 1918 Grave ref V. E. 29

The NZ Tunnelling Company War Diary notes:
19-4-17 Showery. Road work well in hand. Enemy shelled road. We lost one killed (Fahey) and one wounded (Adams)

Lance-Corporal Frederick George McClymont was awarded the Military Medal for Bravery in the Field. With two comrades, Corporal McClymont had approached a fallen enemy aeroplane when a shell burst close beside them, killing one and desperately wounded the other. Despite his mortal wounds, McClymont then dragged himself along the road until he could send assistance to his comrade. Corporal McClymont was one of eleven Tunnelling Company men to win the Military Medal.

Two NZ Tunnelling Coy men are buried next to each other at Roclincourt. Both died on the same day in 1916, around the date the mayor will visit.

4/1526 Sapper Joseph McCallum age 23, a native of Levin, Scotland. His parents lived in Westport before moving to Rotowaro, Huntly. Joseph is remembered on the Westport Cenotaph. Killed in Action 15 August 1916, Roclincourt Valley Cemetery 1V.F.4.

4/1511 Sapper James King Married Enlistment address Waimate, noted as being a native of Westland. Killed in Action 15 August 1916 Roclincourt Valley Cemetery 1V.F.5

The NZ Tunnelling Company War Diary notes:
14/8/16 Enemy active in front of J6, J4, and J11 and walking heard from J1. At 10.5 p.m. enemy blew large mine and 40 feet of gallery J1.2-11 were blown in, two men Sprs McCallum and M.J. King were buried and one injured. Other damage not ascertained yet.

15/8/16 Clearing up galleries after blow. Damage done J1. 22-100 feet lost additional 30 feet almost closed up; J1.2-11, 40 feet lost and considerable fall in another 40 feet. In other galleries of J1 and J5 mines, numerous small falls. Crater formed on S.W. lip of Clarence crater, size 150' by 120'. 200' of new trench on back of Clarence crater obliterated. Casualties two buried and one wounded of our own men; infantry as far as ascertained had about 25. In K Sector trouble with gas from K5 and three men sent in. Enemy active in front J11, J6 and J4.

Ian McGibbon's book *New Zealand Battlefields and Memorials of the Western Front* notes that there are only two New Zealand graves at Roclincourt Valley Cemetery.

Below is an edited letter, written to Andy and Shirley Horsburgh, descendants of Joseph McCallum by Allan Dick who visited Roclincourt Valley Cemetery in 2001.



*Above: Roclincourt Valley Cemetery.
Photo by Paul F. Wilson, part of the International War Graves Photography Project*

Roclincourt Valley Cemetery is one of many in the Arras area and is set in the middle of the fields. The drive to it is off a road and down what is nothing more than a track for about a kilometre out into the fields – maybe a little more. And then there is the cemetery – its immaculate sandstone wall, its neatly cut lawn, the flowers. We found Joseph McCallum's grave quite easily as there is a guide book in a box at the entrance. He is alongside another New Zealander and so we took photographs of both headstones.

It was a very moving experience ... We stood in silence with tears in our eyes and just thought of those two young men so far from home.

We signed the visitors' book saying we had come to visit Joseph McCallum and also found Sapper King.

These cemeteries aren't visited very often but the pride in the way they are kept is heart-wrenching.

Thank you for asking me to go to Roclincourt Valley – it was a privilege.

Warmest regards

Allan Dick, Auckland