

Private James Lawless

Eva O'Hara - Wicklow



Family and Early Life

- James Joseph Lawless was born in Greystones, Co. Wicklow in 1890. Son of Andrew and Mary Lawless, he was one of Six children – Annie, Ellen, Thomas, Bessie and Susan. According to the 1901 Census, James's father worked as an Agricultural Labourer . The family were Roman Catholic. The Lawless Family have lived in Greystones for generations.



Greystones main street
c.1890

- He attended the local national school in Blacklion. He did not attend secondary school.

Life Before The War

- Greystones was always a small fishing village, but in the mid 1800s it became famous as a Victorian sea-side resort. Many well to-do families flocked to Greystones to live or to simply holiday.
- This meant that many occupations held by people of old Greystones families were domestic servants and gardeners. And that is exactly what James and his sisters became.



CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1911.

Two Examples of the mode of filling up this Table are given on the other side.

FORM A.

No. on Form B. 258

RETURN of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY and their VISITORS, BOARDERS, SERVANTS, &c., who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the 2nd of APRIL, 1911.

NAME AND SURNAME.	RELATION to Head of Family.	RELIGIOUS PROFESSION.	EDUCATION.	AGE (last Birthday) and SEX.	RANK, PROFESSION, OR OCCUPATION.	PARTICULARS AS TO MARRIAGE.	WHERE BORN.	IRISH LANGUAGE.	If Deaf and Dumb; Dumb only;
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Residents of a house 258 in Greystones Town (Greystones, Wicklow)

Show all information

Surname	Forename	Age	Sex	Relation to head	Religion	Birthplace	Occupation	Literacy	Irish Language	Marital Status
Eustace	Elizabeth Jane	75	Female	Head of Family	Church of Ireland	City Dublin	-	Read and write	English	Widow
Eustace	Elinor Stafford	43	Female	Daughter	Church of Ireland	Co Dublin	-	Read and write	English	Spinster
Eustace	Gerald Needham	37	Male	Son	Church of Ireland	-	Engineer M A I T C D M I C E I 850 Legion of Frontears Man	Read and write	-	-
Lawless	Ellen	30	Female	Mistress's Ownmaid Domestic Servant	Roman Catholic Church	Co Wicklow	-	Read and write	English	Single
Lawless	Susan	16	Female	Cook Domestic Servant	Roman Catholic Church	Co Wicklow	-	Read and write	English	Single
Lawless	James Joseph	22	Male	Gardiner Domestic Servant	Roman Catholic Church	Co Wicklow	-	Read and write	English	Single
Cluxton	Florence	19	Female	House Gardiner Maid Domestic Servant	Roman Catholic Church	Co Kildare	-	Read and write	English	Single

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14										
15										

I hereby certify, as required by the Act 10 Edw. VII., and 1 Geo. V., cap. 11, that the foregoing Return is correct, according to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Henry G. Dwyer
Signature of Enumerator.

I believe the foregoing to be a true Return.

Elijah J. Eustace
Signature of Head of Family.

Life Before The War

- In 1911, James Lawless is listed as working for Elizabeth Jane Eustace as a Gardener Domestic Servant. His sisters Ellen and Susan are also working in the same house. Ellen as a ladies maid/domestic servant and Susan as a cook/domestic servant. It is not clear how long he was working as a gardener, but we know that taking a job in domestic service was popular among the Lawless family. This is clear from 1901 when James's eldest sisters Annie and Ellen are listed working as domestic servants.

Lawless	Andrew	50	Male	Head of Family	Roman Catholic	Co Wicklow	Agricultural Labourer	Cannot read
Lawless	Mary	46	Female	Wife	Roman Catholic	Co Wicklow	-	Read and write
Lawless	Annie	23	Female	Daughter	Roman Catholic	Co Wicklow	Servant Domestic	Read and write
Lawless	Ellen	20	Female	Daughter	Roman Catholic	Co Wicklow	Servat Domestic	Read and write
Lawless	Thomas	15	Male	Son	Roman Catholic	Co Wicklow	Scholar	Read and write
Lawless	James	13	Male	Son	Roman Catholic	Co Wicklow	Scholar	Read and write
Lawless	Bessie	10	Female	Daughter	Roman Catholic	Co Wicklow	Scholar	Read and write
Lawless	Susan	7	Female	Daughter	Roman Catholic	Co Wicklow	Scholar	Cannot read

Life as a Soldier

- James enlisted in Greystones, Co. Wicklow in early 1916. There is no record of his enlistment found except on his death certificate from the war office. However historian Liam Dodd was able to confirm for me that he was a late joiner, as his regimental number was 20380, meaning 20380 men have enlisted before him. Also he did not receive the 1914 or 1915 medal, meaning he did not complete service in either of those years.
- Nobody knows why James joined the war. Perhaps he was looking for adventure, or perhaps a better avenue of income to support himself.
- Now, James Lawless , was a private in the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

The RDF 2nd Battalion in WW1

- The 2nd Battalion was extremely instrumental in the run up to the beginning of the first world war. The first band of 2nd Battalion soldiers arrived in France a month before war was declared as part of the 10th Brigade, 4th Division as the British Expeditionary Force.
- The 2nd Battalion was also involved in the retreat following the Battle of Mons, their first engagement taking place at Le Cateau where they fought bravely on 26th August 1914. However there were large numbers of casualties and a badly depleted 2nd Battalion faced the Germans once again at the Battle of Marne (5th-9th September 1914) which finally halted the enemy's advance.
- The 2nd Dublins went on to fight in the Battle of Aisne and their largest engagement of all, the Battle of Armentières (13th October-2nd November 1914). But it was not over for the soldiers yet.

The RDF 2nd Battalion in WW1

- 1915 saw the beginning of major losses of lives in many Subsidiary battle such as second Ypres and the Battle of Saint-Julien , the latter effectively disintegrating the battalion as a fighting unit due to serious Poison-Gas attacks.
- At this time, the British Army as a whole had no defence against Gas attacks, resulting in the horrible deaths of thousands of men. Due to this, the 2nd Battalion did not take part in any more battles for the rest of 1915 due to lack of men.



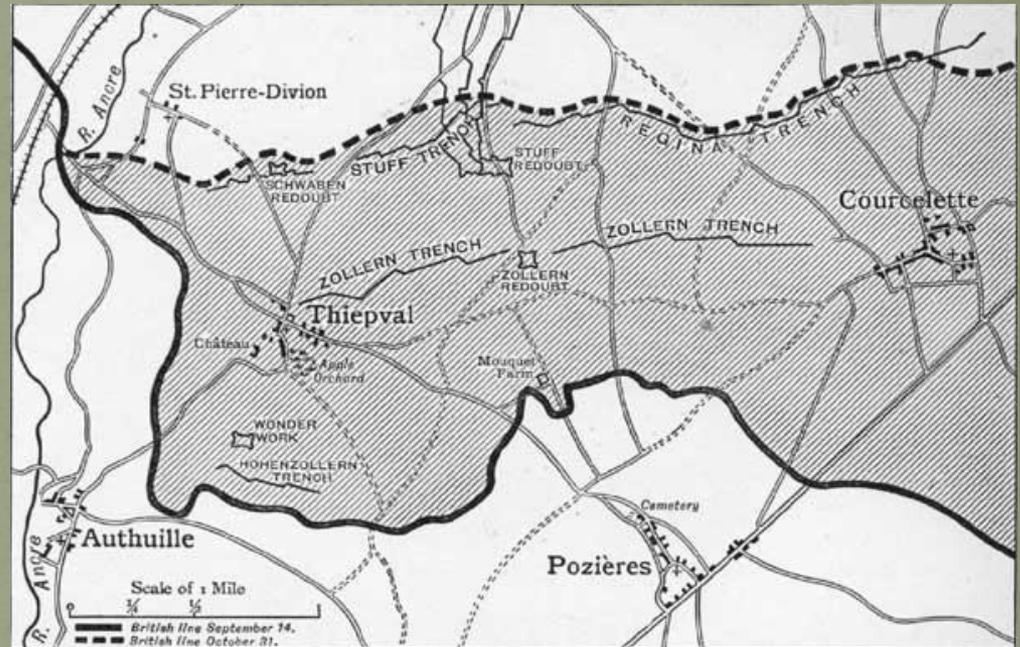
2nd Battalion Signal Section ww1



Group of 2nd Battalion Soldiers 1915

The RDF 2nd Battalion in WW1

- On 1st July 1916 the Battle began where which Private James Lawless lost his life. The opening days of the battle took the lives of thousands of men, especially from the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. There were horrific casualties, some days hundreds of men from every Battalion losing their lives. Men of all ages, including boys my own age.



Thiepval area of the Somme from the 14th September to the 31st of October. This is what the area would have looked like at the time of Private James's Death (23/10/16)

Private James Lawless' s War

- Private James Lawless arrived in France in some time after March 1916. Before he was posted to the front the 2nd battalion had faced many bloody battles and suffered horrendous losses. From the time he arrived at the front to his last battle in October, it is clear that his battalion was victorious in a battle – shown on his medal card.
- However James Lawless's war only lasted a few months. On the 1st of July, the Battle of the Somme began. This was his final battle.

Private James Lawless's War

- Private James Lawless, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel R.G.B Jeffreys, died during the hardest battles fought by the 2nd battalion. The 2nd battalion fought in the Lesboeufs sector, attacking Hazy Trench. James' battalion was the second wave of men to attack the German Trench, the first being shot down by Machine Gun fire. Private Lawless made it to the German Trench where hand to hand combat ensued with the use of Bayonets. 36 men were accounted missing from that particular attack, James Lawless was assumed one of those missing men. They say Private James Lawless was killed in Action on the 23rd of October 1916. However he was actually missing from this date on (Died).
- On the next slide, we see the Lieutenant Colonel's letters home to his family discussing with them the horrors he witnessed from the 20th of October onwards.

Lesboeuifs
October 25th 1916

I was not able to write yesterday, we have been fighting hard and I think the last three nights and two days are quite the hardest I have ever had in my life. The regiment had a hard task and they did it well and covered themselves in glory. They got at the Hun with the bayonet, a thing they were longing to do and I can tell you they had some fighting, just as much as an Irishman wants. The Hun gave no quarter and you can bet our lads did not either and the dead Hun was appalling. I gave orders that no prisoners were to be taken, as I did not want a lot of Boches in the trenches in case of a counter attack and it takes too many men away to send escorts to the rear with them. I also told them not to waste any ammunition, so you can imagine what happened with the bayonet. I got to bed at 5 am this morning and slept till 2pm and am now going to have breakfast 3 pm !!! I will write more fully tomorrow.

7 NEW V.C.s.
—
"COME ON, THE DUBS!"
—
**SERGEANT'S WAR CRY THAT
LED TO VICTORY.**

Sgt. Robert Downie, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

When most of the officers had become casualties he moved about under heavy fire utterly regardless of personal danger and reorganised the attack when it had been temporarily checked. At the critical moment he rushed forward alone, shouting: "Come on, the Dubs!" This stirring appeal met with immediate response and the line rushed forward on his call.

He accounted for several of the enemy, and in addition captured a machine gun, killing the team. Though wounded early in the fight he remained with his company. It was owing to his courage and initiative that this important position, which had resisted four or five previous attacks, was won.

Camp
October 26th 1916

Billets
October 28th 1916

Account of Lesboeufs Fight

tell you what we have been through in battle and the regiment and simply went for the time and got at him like a beast at bay, but there is no superior in the manner in actual hand to hand fighting splendid fight and when he started throwing up his hands they got away. Considered an extraordinary light casualty battalion with one other course we had our supplies exceptionally well and by moment. The "old regiment" has kept up its honour to its list. My regiment acquitted the commanders who b

The General had the battalion on parade and congratulated them on their last display in battle. I also had an opportunity of thanking them just before he arrived. I hope to get ample opportunity of getting the battalion well together again and I suppose will get some reinforcements soon. I got seven new officers yesterday. The men are awfully pleased and bucked at their fine display the other day and have all got their tails up. One sportsman took too much wine last night and started "bucking" to four men of another regiment, no doubt putting it well on, it resulted in the four men throwing him down a well, from which he was extracted by the Provost Sergeant who was attracted to the spot by yells of grief mixed with a certain

It is clear that the Lieutenant Colonel was not really 'in touch' with what his soldiers were really facing on the front and outside the safety of his office!

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was not at all

Lieutenant Colonel R.G.B. Jeffreys



Collected Letters 1916-1918

Edited by Conor & Liam Dodd

Men of the 2nd Battalion who died whilst the battalion was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel R.G.B. Jeffreys

Allen James 17152 Private K.I.A. 23/10/1916

Anderson John Charles 20234 Private K.I.A. 23/10/1916

Ballantyne John 18214 Sergeant K.I.A. 23/10/1916

Bannings John Frederick 24046 Private K.I.A. 21/11/1917

Bannister Edward 40498 Private K.I.A. 07/06/1917

Kinane Michael 43024 Private K.I.A. 23/10/1916

Lane Frederick 24254 L/Corporal K.I.A. 16/08/1917

Larvin James 14892 L/Corporal K.I.A. 13/10/1916

Lawless James 20380 Private K.I.A. 23/10/1916

Lawlor Peter 22107 Private K.I.A. 21/09/1917

Leavy Edward 16936 Private K.I.A. 11/10/1916

Ledwidge Michael 8332 Private K.I.A. 24/05/1916

Lemass Herbert Justin 2nd Lieutenant K.I.A. 23/10/1916

Lemathy William 8640 Private K.I.A. 23/10/1916

Lester Richard George 43186 Private K.I.A. 01/06/1917

Little James 25783 Private D.O.W. 05/11/1917

Lynam Thomas 12931 Private K.I.A. 12/10/1916

Lynham Allan 21135 Private K.I.A. 23/10/1916

McCabe William John 22554 Private D.O.W. 21/10/1916

The Aftermath

- No one knows exactly what happened to James Lawless. He has no grave. It seems that the war office did not have much of an idea either, as it took nearly a year for the Lawless family to find out what happened to James. This resulted in countless attempts from the family to find any information which would lead them to find out more about James's last days. His mother, recently widowed and now worried about her Son, had no idea what happened to James. We assume she ceased to receive letters home from the front.

The Lawless Family's attempts to find James

- The Wicklow People, 25th November 1916
Private James Lawless, 20380, RDF 2nd Battalion
Missing since 23rd October 1916, Family searching for information
- The Irish Times, 27th November 1916
Private James Lawless, 20380, RDF 2nd Battalion
Missing since 23rd October 1916, Family searching for information
- The Wicklow Newsletter, 2nd December 1916
Private James Lawless, 20380, RDF 2nd Battalion
Missing since 23rd October 1916, Family searching for information
- The Irish Times, 30th July 1917
Private James Lawless, 20380, RDF 2nd Battalion
Missing since 23rd October 1916, Family searching for information

DUBLIN SATURDAY JUNE 2, 1917.

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(correspondent.)
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Heroes of the Advance.

Men Who Have Fought and Bled for Us



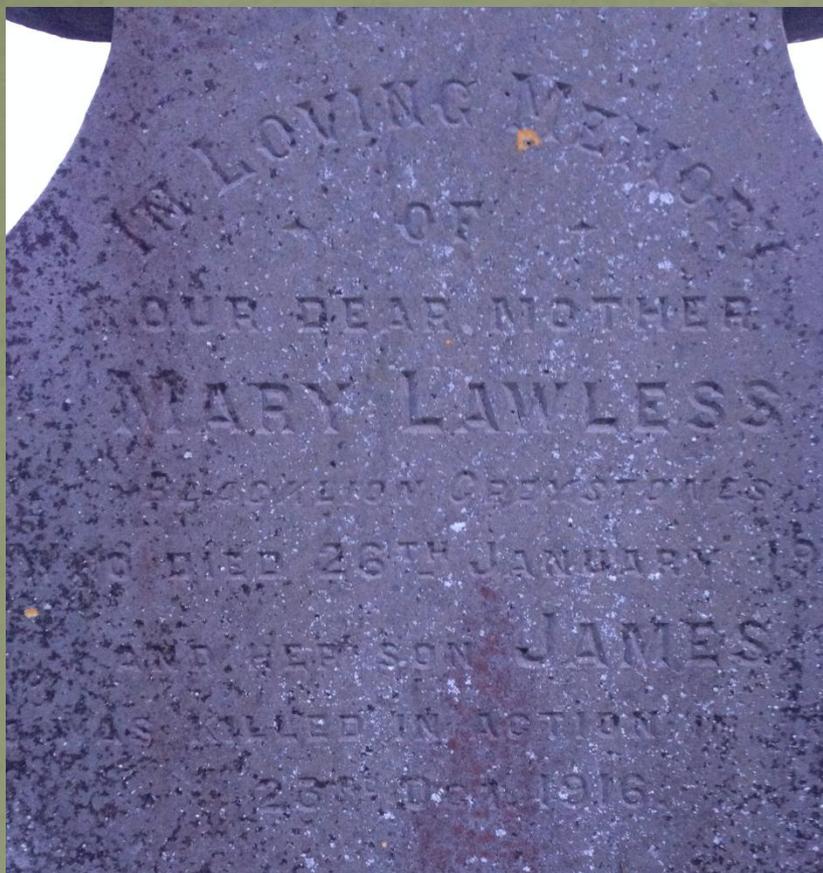
- 2nd June 1917
- Missing since 23rd October 1916

(Every day, various newspapers across the country published the photos of missing soldiers or soldiers who died at the front, often requesting information by the family's request. James's sister Susan put forward the request)

- 1—PTE. F. ROONEY (10056), Innis, Fus. Missing July 1, 1916; now reported killed. Mother, 17 Little Mary St.
- 2—PTE. R. BUCKLEY, R.D.F. Missing Sept. 9, 1916; now reported killed. Mother, 17 Poolbeg St.
- 3—PTE. R. M'GALEY (12135), R.E. Fus. Killed April 11, 1917. Mother, North King St. Father accidentally shot in Easter week.
- 4—PTE. J. LAWLESS (20380), R.D.F. Missing Oct. 23, 1916. Sister, Belgrave square, Monkstown.
- 5—PTE. BENTLEY (M.G.S.), S.I.H. Killed, gallantly serving his gun. Mother, Rialto Bldgs., S.O.B.
- 6—SGT. MAJ. CAMPBELL (9121), Innis, Fus. Killed April 1, 1917. Bro-in-law also killed. Wife, 13 Iveagh Buildings, New Bride St.
- 7—PTE. M'GOVERN (4209), H.L.I. Wounded April 30, 1917. Sister and brother, 40 8th. Earl St.
- 8—PTE. J. T. NOLAN (23647), R.D.F. Missing Sept. 7, 1916. Wife, 372 Mathieson St., Glasgow.
- 9—PTE. M. FLANAGAN (43073), Manchester Regt. Military Medal for gallantry May, 1917. Mother, 39 Clarendon St.
- 10—PTE. A. DUNNE (23117), R.D.F. Died of wounds received April 25, 1917. Father serving. Mother, 6 Canal View terrace, Crumlin road.
- 11—PTE. J. LEAVEY, R.A.M.O. Killed while serving May 6, 1917. Wife, 109 Lr. Gardiner St.
- 12—PTE. WM. BYRNE (3844), R.I. Regt. Died of wounds Sept. 7, 1916. Parents, 13 George's place Blackrock.

The Aftermath

- It is unclear if James' Mother , Mary, or any other family members received any more information about James from the war office, or they just decided to give up hope on his return.
- Whatever they thought, they announced his death in the Irish Times and the Wicklow Newsletter on the 4th August 1917, dating his death as the 23rd October 1916, aged 26. They never heard from him ever again nor did they ever learn what happened to him. It remained a horrific mystery to his mother Mary to her dying day.



No.68

In Loving Memory | of | our dear
mother | MARY LAWLESS | Blacklion,
Greystones

|
who died 26th January 1954 | and her
son JAMES | who was killed in action
23rd
Oct. 1916



The mother never forgot her Son
who never returned home.
James's name is at his Mothers
final resting place, written on her
grave. Mary never got a chance to
visit the Thiepval Memorial,
where James is remembered.

Name:	James Lawless
Age:	26
Birth Date:	abt 1890
Death Date:	23 Oct 1916
Cemetery:	The Thiepval Memorial
Burial Country:	France
Father:	Andrew Lawless
Mother:	Mary Lawless
Regiment:	Royal Dublin Fusiliers
Regimental Number:	20380
Region or Memorial:	France

LAWLESS, Pte. James, 20380. 2nd Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 23rd Oct., 1916. Age 26. Son of Mary Lawless, of Blacklion, Greystones, Co. Wicklow, and the late Andrew Lawless.

UK Commonwealth war graves records

Name:	James Lawless
Birth Place:	Greystones, Co. Wicklow
Death Date:	23 Oct 1916
Death Place:	France and Flanders
Enlistment Place:	Greystones
Rank:	Private
Regiment:	Royal Dublin Fusiliers
Battalion:	2nd Battalion
Regimental Number:	20380
Type of Casualty:	Killed in action
Theatre of War:	Western European Theatre

UK Soldiers Who Died In The Great War Records

IRELAND'S MEMORIAL RECORDS 1914-1918

LAWLER, THOMAS. Reg. No. 2988.
Rank, Sergeant, Royal Engineers, 7th Field
Co.; killed in action, France, November
13, 1917; born Athy, Co. Kildare.

LAWLER, WILLIAM. Reg. No. 1009.
Rank, Private (Lance-Corporal), Royal Irish
Regiment, and later; killed in action, France,
July 29, 1916; born Tauxmalan, Co.
Wexford.

LAWLER, WILLIAM. Reg. No. 1964.
Rank, Private, 7th Royal Irish Fusiliers;
killed in action, France, June 23, 1916;
born Dublin.

LAWLESS, GEORGE. Reg. No. 3073.
Rank, Private, Irish Guards, 1st Batt.;
killed in action, France, September 15, 1915;
born Tipperary.

LAWLESS, JAMES. Reg. No. 1124.
Rank, Lance-Corporal, Cheshire Regiment,
12th Batt.; killed in action, France, June
23, 1917; born Dundalk, Co. Louth.

LAWLESS, JAMES. Reg. No. 1669.
Rank, Sergeant, and Leinster Regiment;
killed in action, France, March 22, 1915;
born Dundalk, Co. Louth.

LAWLESS, JAMES. Reg. No. 8264.
Rank, Lance-Sergeant, Royal Dublin Fusiliers,
4th Batt.; died, home, December 24,
1901; born Dublin.

LAWLESS, JAMES. Reg. No. 2026.
Rank, Private, and Royal Dublin Fusiliers;
killed in action, France, October 23, 1916;
born Greystown, Co. Wicklow.

LAWLESS, JOHN. Rank, Private, Royal
Dublin Fusiliers; died of wounds, Bally-
marina, Co. Wicklow, 1916; born Bally-
marina, Co. Wicklow.

LAWLESS, JOHN. Regimental No. 5229.
Rank, Sergeant, Royal Dublin Fusiliers;
died of pneumonia, Dublin, March 20, 1907;
born Ireland; age 26.

LAWLESS, JOHN. Regimental No. 12033.
Rank, Corporal, The East Lancashire Regi-
ment, 5th Batt.; killed in action, Gallipoli,
August 9, 1915; born Dublin.

LAWLESS, MARTIN. Reg. No. 3000.
Rank, Private, 1st Leinster Regiment;
killed in action, France, February 24, 1915;
born St. Thomas', Dublin.

LAWLESS, MICHAEL. Reg. No. 2179.
Rank, Private, Royal Dublin Fusiliers;
died of consumption, Rathfrone, Co. Wicklow,
June 4, 1915; born Ireland; age 20.

LAWLESS, MICHAEL. Reg. No. 2122.
Rank, Private, Irish Guards, 1st Batt.;
killed in action, France, September 15, 1915;
born Kilkenny.

LAWLESS, NICHOLAS. Reg. No. 22077.
Rank, Private, 7th Royal Irish Fusiliers;
died of wounds, France, July 23, 1916;
born St. Peter's Port, Guernsey.

LAWLESS, PATRICK. Reg. No. 6501.
Rank, Private, Connaught Rangers, 6th Batt.;
died of wounds, France, July 28, 1916;
born County, Co. Kildenny.

Final Note

- Private James Lawless's case is really a mystery. Not only to us learning about him now, but a mystery to his family at the time. However there were thousands of men out there in the exact same situation. Its as if they were wiped from the face of the earth, known to no one ever.
- It was not only interesting to learn about the ordinary soldiers lives, but the lives of their superiors, such as Lieutenant Colonel R.G.B. Jefferies. These men were in safety behind their own desks and quite often were very out of touch with what was going on or the consequences of their orders.
- It was also interesting to see that at the time of James death how the political landscape in Ireland changes dramatically in the space of a couple of years. As you can see on the newspaper page enquiring information on James featuring his picture, the opposite article was announcing the new Sinn Fein's first proper assembly and the trouble it was causing. The public opinion shifted to supporting the Irish soldiers in the war whole-heartedly to almost forgetting about them completely.

Final Note

- This whole experience has been both educational and extremely moving. It teaches you so much about the First World War and its effects on Ireland let alone the men that fought in it, which was for some reason almost completely forgotten. Perhaps because people did not want to talk about it, or perhaps it was because it took place at the same time Ireland was fighting for its independence and to finally achieve independence from the Empire that some of its men were fighting for.
- Either way, All these men, including James and every single man who will feature in the Adopt a World War 1 Soldier Project, fought for Ireland. They just fought for Ireland in a different way we have been taught in school. They fought for the future generations and the right to be free also. However similar their fight was to the men and women searching for Irish Independence, their struggle was almost completely forgotten. And in my opinion, I think that's one of the biggest mistakes their descendants, we the people of Ireland, have ever made. More needs to be done to remember these men and I am so happy I have been given this opportunity to honour and remember the brave men that fought for us and never returned home.



Private James Lawless, Died 23rd October 1916
Died for Ireland and will never be forgotten.