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LASTPOST

Newsletter of the Leicester City, County & Rutland **At Risk War Memorials Project**



THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE

THE GREAT WAR ROLL OF HONOUR FOR
LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND

Michael Doyle



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Introduction by Denis Kenyon

This is the most amazing story of ambition, perseverance, grit and sheer hard work by Michael Doyle's father, Peter ably assisted by Michael, in creating a comprehensive record of those who died in The Great War and whose names are recorded on memorials of every sort throughout the city of Leicester and two counties of Leicestershire and Rutland.

An extraordinary undertaking by an extraordinary man, whose legacy demands our recognition.

LAST **POST** is proud to enable this to happen.

All stories have a beginning of sorts, some plunge headlong into the main subject, while others begin with a background scenario that eventually leads to the topic about to unravel, and I suppose that my story could be termed in very much the latter category, because the story actually began out of a curious, and at the time, a rather fleeting observation that was made by my father on what was a cold November morning in 1987.

My father Peter, who was in fact the prime mover, of what was to eventually evolve, deserves a little more of a detailed biographical description in order for the reader to gain an insight into the man behind what was to eventually become his long-term dream

Born in Leicester, on the 3rd November 1923, in the parish of St. Margaret's, Peter was one of a family of seven sisters and two brothers, his early life was one of reasonable happiness, given the general conditions prevalent at the time, living in a city centre of cramped housing, in which the vast majority of working-class families of the day lived.

Peter attended King Richard III intermediate school, completing his schooling and leaving just as the clouds of war were threatening the future of Europe, he found employment in the city's then thriving hosiery industry, and there he remained before enlisting in 1942 into the 42nd Royal Highlanders (The Black Watch), being posted to Queen's Barracks in Perth for his initial training.



© Doyle Family Archive
Peter Doyle, King Richard III School, Leicester
27th February 1937



© Doyle Family Archive
Private Peter Doyle, 42nd Royal Highlanders (The Black Watch)
Queen's Barracks, Perth, 1942

On completion of his training he embarked for active service to North Africa, eventually landing in Italy as the Allies began to slowly drive the German Army in a strongly contested retreat, after the initial landings, Peter was transferred to the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and it was with this unit, that at Monte Cassino at noon on the 18th May 1944, he suffered an appalling gunshot wound to the abdomen, the bullet exiting his right shoulder.

Suffering such an injury, it has to be claimed that God truly smiled upon him that day, because for a bullet to pass in that trajectory, and to miss his lungs and heart was truly a miracle, and of course he survived to tell the tale.

After recovering from his wound, Peter was subsequently downgraded from the role of infantryman, and was transferred to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, where he found himself often working with groups of German prisoners of war, and over time he became quite proficient in the German language, becoming more than able to converse with his captives, in later life he took to studying the German language of which he became extremely proficient.

But another event also evolved, as by now the British Army was driving the German Army North and into Austria, and so it was that my father found himself stationed in Casarsa della Delizia, a location that been used as an important railhead by the German's, and had now been taken over by the Allies and utilized for much the same purpose, and it was here that Peter was to meet a young Italian girl, Irma (always known as Mimi) who was just completing her teacher training at a college in Sacile.

The rest as they say is history because on the 15th March 1947, Peter and Irma married in the Army Free Church in Udine. The story then moved from Italy to England, when Irma travelled with many other Italian wives of British soldiers on specially chartered trains that would repatriate them with their husbands and their families.

Post war life in England produced two sons, myself, Michael in 1948 and in 1952 my brother Martin, we initially lived in the parish of St. Margaret's but were eventually rehoused during the early 1950's slum clearance programmes, first to a house on the Groby Road and then finally we moved to Narborough, where the family finally settled down.

And it is here that the story actually has its beginnings, as we return to that earlier mentioned Remembrance Day service on that cold November morning in 1987, where much, as in any parish church on this day in November, the congregation was comprised of villagers of all age groups, as well as many children representing the local groups that included troops of the Brownie's, Girl Guides, Cubs and Boy Scouts, also in attendance were the members of the Enderby Town Band, the service being taken by the Reverend Alan Green, (late Captain, 1st Battalion Border Regiment).

During the course of the service the names of the fallen were read out, and due reverence paid relating to their sacrifice, of course at that time there were not only many survivors of the Great War in attendance, but also many ex-service personnel of the Second World War, of which my late father was counted among them.

It was always traditional that at the conclusion of the church service, the members of the Enderby branch of the British Legion together with other local ex-servicemen and women, would then gather at the British Legion plot situated within the churchyard, and here a further short service would be led, by in this instance, the Reverend Alan Green, after which the bugler of the Enderby Town Band would sound the "Last Post."

The group then began to slowly disburse from the churchyard, and as my father and I stood together and watched the last of the group leaving through the churchyard gate, my father turned to me and commented. "We really do need to speak to the old soldiers of the Great War, and ask them about the sixty-six names we have just heard read out, or it will, one day be too late."

Prophetic words in retrospect, for at the time, little did I realise, not only the seriousness, but also the additional clear urgency of my father's intent in this regard, for on the following day he made a point of visiting the church and recorded all of the names of the Great War fallen into his notepad.

This simple act, thus marked the beginning of a venture that was continued, when the following day he made his way into Leicester city, with the express intention of obtaining as much information as possible from what was available in the Bishop Street Reference Library.

How disappointed he was, when he discovered that apart from a reprinted copy of the 1922 HMSO publication, *Soldiers Died in the Great War* for the Leicestershire Regiment and a copy of *Rutland and the Great War*, compiled by G. Phillips, these were the only means of identifying a few of the names that he had copied into his notepad the previous morning.

But apart from this discovery, that in itself came as a complete shock; in pursuing his quest, he was further disappointed to realise that there was in fact, not even a partial record of the Leicester city, Leicestershire and Rutland service men and women who had given their lives in the Great War.

In essence, this proved to be the catalyst for what was to eventually transpire from this early discovery, that quite clearly there was no point of reference in existence whatever that commemorated all of the casualties sustained by these two English Counties in the First World War.

Here then were the beginnings of the story that was to unfold, and that would eventually result, twenty-two years later, with the publication in 2009 of my father's long held dream of creating a lasting tribute in the form of a Roll of Honour to commemorate the fallen from the city and county of Leicestershire and Rutland.

After his initial disappointment in the realisation that no-one had seen fit to create a lasting testimony relating to the sacrifices of so many of our city and county, my father then made a quite outstanding statement to me, that it was his intention to visit and record the names of every war memorial within the city and county of Leicestershire, (Rutland at this juncture no longer existed, having in 1974 been assimilated into the county of Leicestershire, it resumed its county status in 1997).

So began the mission to visit for the express purposes of recording and then collating the names that appeared in whatever form upon all of the presently existing memorials that he could possibly find. This included, every conceivable non-conformist place of worship, Anglican churches, chapels of ease, chapelries, schools, industrial units and factories of varying sizes, village and memorial halls and institutes and even cottage hospitals both closed, as well as those that remained in operation, additionally all standalone memorials located in cemeteries, churchyards and villages.

During the course of his very many excursions, he also discovered a number of relocated memorials, as well as memorials that were being held in small museums as well as some in private ownership. His final list totalled what can only be described as a staggering achievement, of in excess of three hundred memorials visited and recorded, and all by hand!

At the same time that this task was being undertaken my father had purchased the full eighty volumes of the 1922 HMSO reprint, *Soldiers Died in the Great War*, and began to trawl its pages to identify every casualty listed that had a connection to Leicestershire, either having been born, enlisted or resided.

This had the important objective of adding further additional information to the meticulously and alphabetically recorded names that were being collated into A4 ledgers, however, this task also resulted in the discovery that a considerable number of the casualties with connections to Leicestershire, did not appear on any of the memorials that had been visited, and as such were duly listed in the constantly growing alphabetical inventory of names.

In parallel with this undertaking, my father also began to purchase on loan from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Library in Maidenhead, every cemetery and memorial register for the Great War period, and again he began to methodically trawl each page for any references to casualties with Leicestershire connections, he also added information from the registers to existing casualties contained in his alphabetical inventory.

This latter project proved to be a quite considerable, as well as time consuming undertaking, given that my father had now cast his net to a worldwide catalogue of the Great War fallen, and ultimately, and quite sadly it became a task that my father was never to fully complete, and indeed became my first priority when I resumed work on the project in 1996.

In the latter part of 1989 I became more involved in the project, in the main, I took on the photographic aspect of the research, and I began to create a photographic record of war memorials in whatever location they were to be found, as well as photographing churchyards, cemeteries and headstones connected to casualties.

We also began to regularly visit the Public Records Office in Kew, this enabled us to view medal award rolls, index cards, war diaries as well as surviving service records relating to our Leicestershire casualties.

In early August 1990 we made our first pilgrimage/field trip to the Western Front in a venture that was designed to discover and visit to photograph the locations of the sixty-six Enderby casualties, and then to create a photographic record of the graves, memorials and immediate surroundings in which they had served at the time of their untimely deaths.

This journey together with our initial aims, proved to be a far more difficult task than that which we had originally anticipated. What we had envisaged on paper prior to venturing forth, we quickly realised in sheer frustration, that we lacked both the time available to achieve what we had considered to be a relatively simple task, as well as failing to realise the logistical distances as well as the resources needed in order to enable us to pursue and achieve our original aims.

Returning to the UK we were very disappointed at the outcome of our first visit to the Western Front, but were both determined to succeed, and so upon our return to the UK we made contact with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Maidenhead, and from them we obtained a comprehensive list with the details of all the sixty-six casualties together with their locations, from this list we then created an itinerary of what we considered possible to achieve, and consequently we again set sail for Belgium and France on the 8th September, 1990.

This trip was far more fruitful, having been pre-planned and far more structured in its approach, and we managed to cover some considerable mileage and were able to create a considerable photographic record to aid us in our ongoing research.

The tasks in hand, both the photographic record, together with the continued transcription of information and collation of names in relation to memorials was now taking on enormous proportions, and so a further visit to France and Belgium was arranged for the beginning of September, 1991.

This time we were even more organised and methodical in our approach, and it was at this juncture that the seeds were being sown in my father's mind of compiling a reference work in published book format, this was intended to serve two purposes, first, and most importantly by creating a lasting Roll of Honour for the fallen of the city and two counties, and secondly to provide an invaluable work of reference for any future student and researcher, who may be seeking to understand and evaluate the contribution made in the Great War by the citizens of the city and county of Leicestershire and Rutland.



© Doyle Family Archive
Peter Doyle at the Ploegsteert Memorial, Belgium
September 1991

Returning home from this trip, we continued the task of collating photographs and listing details and ascribing them to the casualties, however we were now beginning to cast the net far wider than just the sixty-six Enderby casualties, and began to include the photographs of many of the other Leicestershire casualties that we were discovering in the cemeteries that we were visiting.

A further trip was arranged for September 1992 in order to continue to build on our records, but sadly in early April, my father began to suffer progressive ill health, resulting in a cessation of his undertaking any further work. However, at my father's insistence I made the trip alone. This was a most difficult time for me and, although I did obtain the information we had hoped to gather, it was not worked upon due to the circumstances of the time.

On the 18th January, 1993 my father passed into eternal life, leaving me with the legacy of what had been his dream. Albeit at this stage unfulfilled. Through the difficult and immediate aftermath of my loss, I felt less inclined to continue with the work, and as such all the related research material was gathered from my late father's home, carefully boxed and stored in my own home.

Moving forward to Armistice Day 1994, my wife, Margaret and I attended the Remembrance Day service at the Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium, and on the following day, on a misty November 12th morning, in accordance with my late father's wishes, his ashes were scattered along Row 38A, at Tyne Cot Cemetery, Passchendaele, Belgium, this was a row of unknown Australian Soldiers.

After which we then set out on a Southerly journey to the Asiago Plateau in Italy where our soldiers had fought alongside their Italian comrades against the might of the Austro-Hungarian army. Having driven through some very inhospitable mountain terrain to reach each and every one of the cemeteries, I found it hard to believe how heavy artillery and soldiers were ever able to make any headway. This they achieved, however, sometimes against seemingly insurmountable conditions. So, I managed, seventy-seven years later, to visit the last resting places of the men of Leicestershire and Rutland who made the supreme sacrifice in those now silent mountains.

Our continued return journey then took us North into Germany, in order to visit Cologne Southern Cemetery, where further photographs were taken of Leicestershire casualties interred in that location. And so, as 1994 drew to a close, returning home, the resulting photographs from the trip were duly catalogued, and then placed together with the other photographs accumulated over the years in the storage boxes mentioned earlier.

As the time passed, I began to reconsider my position with regard to the research that my late father had begun, and that it had, in later years, become more of a joint venture between us, and therefore after some serious soul searching, I decided that it would be a fitting gesture to the memory of my late father, to strive to attain his dream of publishing the work as a tribute to his determination not to allow the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Great War fallen become forgotten in the mists of time, given the sacrifice that they had made on our behalf.

It was to be that in late 1996, I finally made the decision to pick up the pen that my late father had so wearily laid down. Making a start on analysing his collection of forty two A4 binders filled with all the names and related information that he had so neatly and meticulously compiled, I was staggered to discover that there were in total over of twenty four thousand names recorded in his hand written inventory's, of course once I began the long process of transcribing all of this information into a rudimentary database, a task that consumed almost six years of my time, the figure became greatly reduced resulting in just over sixteen thousand names in total.

Essentially, what became apparent during the process of transcription, was that some individual names appeared on up to eight separate memorials, so much so that these duplications considerably exaggerated the total figure, and finally when the database had been fully transcribed, the adjustments that had been made to account for these duplicated entries, proved to have greatly condensed the total figure, and indeed it continued to do so in later years.

In parallel with the database transcription process I also began the task of collating all of the names and related information into a word-processed format that would make the possibility of a future publication possible, this additional work took a further five years of transcription, essentially being finally completed in 2007.

During this period of almost eleven years, I also undertook to visit a list that had been compiled by my late father of the many memorials that were situated mainly inside churches, to which he had failed to gain access, and I also visited a number of churches that had been closed, deconsecrated or repurposed, and inside which memorials still possibly existed.

At this point in my journey, it was becoming increasingly sad to note, that having visited and recorded information from many of the memorials that my father had been unable to access, many of them were falling into decay due to their location or lack of care. Representations were made in some quarters, and were responsible for saving at least one large memorial. Unfortunately, though, some had already been destroyed, while others remain in store rooms within churches, whilst a number have simply disappeared.

Whilst on the subject of memorials, where in the majority of instances they present a simple list of names, with either initials or full Christian names, some others are reasonably comprehensive in the information inscribed upon them. Most are simple tablets; others are quite detailed and elaborate with sculpting and decoration, the various materials used are stone, marble, wood, copper, brass and bronze. Many churches also keep written Rolls of Honour to their fallen and returned servicemen; these I have found to be most helpful due to the added information that is recorded against the names.

The difficulty in visiting churches of course remains accessibility, due in part to the simple facts of theft and vandalism. There were many church visits that upon arrival remained simply inaccessible, though every effort was made to gain entry, even if this necessitated a return journey.

It is also worthy of noting at this point in time, that during the ongoing compilation of the additional information that I was discovering, I strictly adhered to the notes by which my late father had decided would permit a casualty's name to be included in the Roll of Honour.

It was considered imperative that the casualty should meet the following criteria: - Appear on any war memorial within the city and county of Leicestershire. Have been interred within the city and county of Leicestershire. Have been born, enlisted or resided in the city and county of Leicestershire. This therefore is the criteria that continues in use with no exception.

The completion of the collation of information into word processed format created a total of almost two thousand A4 pages, which were then converted into a format that would allow them to be printed in book form, but unfortunately, try as I might, I was unable to obtain the services of any publisher who was interested in, or indeed prepared to take on the project, and ultimately it fell to me to self-publish at my own expense.

The latter of course is another story in its entirety, suffice to say that almost 500 copies of my books were sold, some as individual volumes, but most as five volume sets, after the cost of publishing was covered, in accordance with my late father's wishes, the profits were all donated to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission fund which pays for the upkeep of cemeteries and memorials throughout the world in which our fallen are either commemorated or lie sleeping.

In 2008 I flew to Istanbul and made my way to Gallipoli, where I visited to photograph all of the graves of our Leicestershire and Rutland fallen, then in 2010 I flew to Malta and visited the cemeteries that served the hospitals on the island to again photograph the graves of Leicestershire casualties who had died while hospitalised.

In 2011 a momentous decision was arrived at when having been approached by the newly founded Leicestershire and Rutland War Memorials Project team under the leadership of Graham Walley I was invited to join them in a collaboration that would see my casualty database launched alongside the war memorials database on their very own website.

This collaboration has continued most successfully for a number of years, and like all Great War related material on the internet reached its zenith of popularity during what I can only term as the Great War Centenary media circus that existed between the years 2014 and 2018, and then as media interest evaporated post November 11th 2018, so did general interest in the Great War accordingly wane.

This had a marked effect with my relationship with the War Memorials Project team, Graham Walley the team leader having retired, followed by two excellent ambassadors within the team resigning their posts to move on to pastures new, both a great loss to the project, and thus leaving me feeling somewhat isolated and in the wilderness, such that I had to reconsider my position and future with the project.

It is with deep regret that as of April of this year (2025), I have decided to end my collaboration with Leicestershire County Council, and have therefore asked that my casualty database be removed from the War Memorials Project web site.

With this newly found freedom, it is my intention to explore all of the options open to me, and at present I am committed to creating my own web-based casualty database, and therefore being able to be in total control of my web presence.

Although it is early days, I have an excellent web developer who is presently in the process of structuring a website for my casualty database, and with this in mind, I hope in the not-too-distant future to again offer a free search facility for anyone wishing to research their Leicestershire or Rutland ancestors who lost their lives in the Great War.

And so, as I endeavour to continue the unending work involved in maintaining the Leicestershire and Rutland Roll of Honour that was started by my late father, further information continues to be added to the many casualty records, although newly discovered casualties are these days few and far between. Today with the advent and continued expansion of the internet, there is now so much more information available that can be accessed on a personal computer, laptop, tablet and smart phone, that quite literally have made all research just a website visit away.

Where of course it will all end, both for myself, and the future of my casualty database, is of course the unanswered question.

FOOTNOTE:

No work as extensive as this could ever be created without inaccuracies, and I am sure that anyone who has completed any in-depth research, and has first-hand knowledge of an individual, will surely find errors and omissions in my contribution. For this I apologise unreservedly in advance, and would add that any corrections would be gratefully received so that I may amend errors for any future re-publication.

In conclusion, I admit to having gained immense pleasure during the twenty years of research that this book has taken to create, and it is with a sense of deep satisfaction that the years of reading, writing, visiting, photographing, and then collating all the facts, has finally seen the completion of this work of reference.

The one regret that I have, is that the dream was one that I had shared with my dear late father, Peter, and that sadly he is not here today to share with me both the joy and pleasure in its completion and subsequent publication.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the fond memory of my late father Peter,
in whose company I trod the morning dew in Flanders Fields,
“say not goodnight, but bid me good morning in some brighter clime.”

Your son, Michael