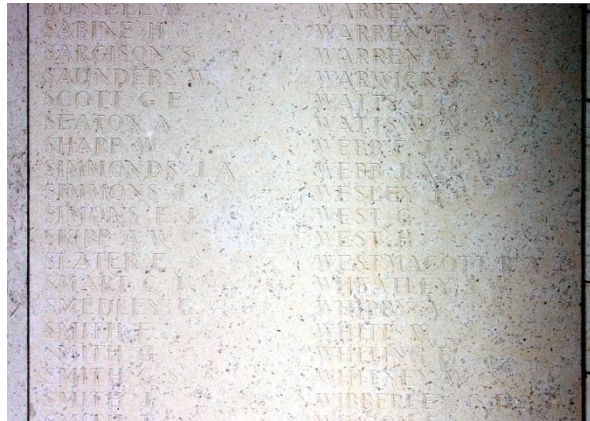




Joseph Watts was born in Lavendon in 1874 and spent his early years living in Castle Road. His parents were Charles Watts and Elizabeth Holmes who married in October 1867. Joseph was the fourth of 11 children.



Above: The simple inscription records Joseph Watts' name on Le Touret Memorial

Joseph's father, Charles, was also born in Lavendon and lived much of his adult life in Castle Road. However, back in 1861 when he was 13, Charles was to be found working as a Creeler (tending textile machines) in a cotton mill in Burnley where he was boarding together with his father (Thomas of Lavendon, also a shoemaker) and his mother and sister. By 1871 Charles had returned to his home village of Lavendon, married Elizabeth a few years earlier. He spent over 30 years working in the local boot and shoe trade, but by 1911 Charles had given up shoemaking and was working as a Farm Labourer, still living in Castle Road.

In 1891 when he was age 17, Joseph was working as a Shoe Rivetter in the same trade as his father Charles, grandfather Thomas, and great grandfather John Watts. Joseph was boarding with Ann Ellis a widow and her family at 21 Crabb Street, Rushden. It was there that he almost certainly met his wife Bessie who was born in Rushden; they married in 1897. By 1901 Joseph was a Shoe Laster and he and Bessie had moved to 9 Mellows Row in the St Giles area of Northampton. There they had a 6-month old son, Isaac Wilfred, evidently named after Joseph's next older brother.

Joseph and his family stayed in Northampton for a few years where a first daughter, May, was born in 1906. Then, in about 1908, they again all moved to Stony Stratford where a second daughter, Inez Elizabeth, was born in that year. In 1911 Joseph was working as a General Labourer and the family was living at 1 Swan Terrace.

Joseph enlisted at Wolverton and joined the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. His medal record card shows that he entered the theatre of war on 28th December 1914 which suggests that he had probably enlisted and been in training since near the beginning of the war in August 1914. At this time the Battalion was stationed in Alexandria but returned to England in October 1914. On 5th November the Battalion mobilised for war and landed at Le Havre in France.

Early in the New Year the Battalion was readied for an action at Neuve Chapelle to the west of Lille. Originally this action was intended as part of a wider offensive in the region but because of delays in receiving more troops the Battle of Neuve Chapelle took place in its own right. It was the first planned British offensive of the war. On 10 March 1915 some 40,000 men were committed along a 3km front. A concentrated 35-minute artillery bombardment of 342 guns across a 2,000 yard line preceded the British and Indian infantry advance which quickly managed to secure the village, often involving hand to hand fighting. However, the action was immediately plagued by supply and communications problems and further progress towards Aubers was thwarted. None of the 1000 troops who attacked Aubers survived and the offensive was halted on 13 March. Overall there were some 11,200 British and Indian casualties in the battle with comparable losses on the German side.

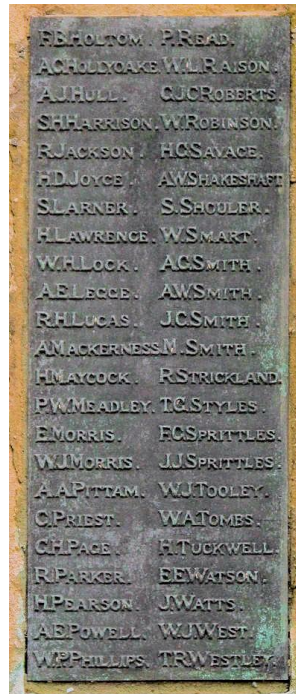
Joseph evidently lost his life on 14th March 1915 in the immediate aftermath of this initial battle. He was the second Lavendon soldier to be killed in the Great War. Joseph is remembered on the Le Touret Memorial which is located at the east end of the Military Cemetery. The Memorial records the names of some 13,400 British soldiers who died in the area between October 1914 and September 1915, and who have no known grave. Clearly because of his association with Stony Stratford, where his wife and family presumably remained, Joseph's name is also recorded on the war memorial of that town - his name thus appears on three separate war memorials.



Because of his early entry into the theatre of war, Joseph was entitled to the 1914-15 Star as well as the British and Victory medals.

Joseph's parents, Charles and Elizabeth, also lost their youngest son, Richard, who died on 11 March 1917; he too was serving with the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. They also lost their grandson, Alfred, some 6 weeks later on 28 April 1917 serving with the 2nd Battalion the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. Another son, Jacob, saw service from the outset of the war but fortunately survived, see the Postscript below. Two other sons,

Edward and Isaac, as well as two other grandsons, Ernest and William, also served in the war and survived.



Left: The Stony Stratford War Memorial and an associated plaque.
Photos courtesy of: buckinghamshireremembers.org.uk

Postscript: Jacob Watts (Joseph & Richard's brother)

In 1911 Joseph's brother Jacob, then aged 22 years, was already serving in the British Army, though he was resident at the time with his parents in Castle Road. Jacob

was with the 3rd Northamptonshire Regiment (no. 7461) and the fragments of his Attestation papers that remain show that he had joined some three years earlier when he was a Labourer aged 18 years and 7 months. He subsequently transferred and his medal record card shows that he had variously served with the Suffolk Regiment (nos. 38995 and 38955) and with the Essex Regiment (no. 22721). His service from the outset of the War entitled him to the 1914 Star in addition to the British and Victory medals.

The Watts Family: Their War

Charles Watts = Elizabeth Holmes

Thomas	Isaac	Joseph	Edward	Jacob	Richard	+4
b1868	b1871	b1874	b1886	b1889	b1898	female siblings
=Sarah	=Emily	=Bessie				
+Mary	+Ernest	+May				
+Frederick	+Herbert	+Inez				
+William	+Alfred	+Isaac				
+Albert	+Laura					

Names shown in **red** above, died during the War.

Names shown in **green** above, served in the War and survived.

Others may also have served.

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