

Private Joseph Doherty (1878 - 1916)

Poppy Unveiling – Saturday 24th October 2026 at Egerton Community Hall, Brackley.

Today, we remember and honour Private Joseph Doherty, a soldier who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country during the First World War, with the unveiling of a poppy which is to be added to the memorial inside Egerton Hall here in Brackley.

Joseph was born on 12th April 1878 in Chorlton-upon-Medlock, Manchester. He was the third of five children born to Joseph and Alice Doherty. His siblings were James Joseph, Thomas Henry, Mary Jane and Emily. Joseph's early childhood was marked by unimaginable sadness and loss.

In 1881, when Joseph was just three years old, his eldest brother James died at the tender age of five. Further tragedy followed when his father, also called Joseph, died in 1885, and just a few months later, in 1886, his mother Alice also passed away.

The four surviving children were sent to the workhouse before being separated and placed with foster families. Their lives would take them in very different directions, Joseph, Mary Jane and Emily remaining in England, while Thomas Henry began a new life thousands of miles away in America. Thomas Henry was sent to Canada as a British Home Child, before eventually making his way to Kentucky in the United States, where he married and raised a family. Remarkably, that family connection has survived across the generations. Today, thanks to DNA, we are in contact with Thomas Henry's granddaughters, Alicia and Gloria, who live in Kentucky. It is a wonderful reminder that although the Doherty children were separated so many years ago, the bonds of the Doherty family have come together.

Joseph himself was fostered by a couple who ran The Crown pub in the Northamptonshire village of Moreton Pinkney. It was here that he spent much of his childhood, growing up far from the streets of Manchester where his life had begun. As a young man, Joseph moved to Brackley. He married Susannah May Small, and together they made their home at 3 Rock Terrace, Manor Road, Brackley, and together they had three daughters; Violet, Myra and Frances. With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, whilst living in Brackley, Joseph enlisted in the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment, serving as Private Joseph Doherty, Regimental Number 20263.

Joseph and his regiment were sent to France, where he would experience the terrible conditions and unimaginable horrors in the trenches. On Friday 18th August 1916, during the Battle of the Somme, the 7th Battalion advanced eastwards from Trônes Wood towards Guillemont Quarry. It was during this attack that Joseph was killed in action. He was 38 years old.

For almost twelve years, Joseph's final resting place remained unknown, but in June 1928, his remains were discovered near Guillemont Road, close to the battlefield where he had fallen. He was subsequently laid to rest in Serre Road Cemetery No. 2, on the Somme in France, alongside many of his comrades.

More than a century has now passed since Joseph lost his life fighting for his country, but his story has not been forgotten.

I myself, lived in Brackley for a short while, and whilst living there, I discovered that Joseph too had lived in the town, only a short distance from where I lived. I wondered why his name was not on the Brackley Town War Memorial. This was something I just had to put right, so with the help of Brackley Town Council and a lovely man called Mark Asplen from the Brackley Royal British Legion, we pieced together all Joseph's facts and eventually, after nearly a year of research and persistence, it was agreed that Joseph's name would be added to the memorial. In August 2022, a service of dedication was held and his new plaque unveiled. Joseph's name is now read out every year on Remembrance Day.

Today, as a poppy is added to the memorial in Egerton Hall, we remember not only Private Joseph Doherty's sacrifice, but also celebrate the descendants who have come together today. Firstly, my 2nd cousin Gerald Abbotts, who is Joseph's grandson and son of Myra Doherty, Joseph's middle daughter.

Today, I get to meet for the first time Julie Kelly and Kerry May Lord, who are both descended from Joseph's eldest daughter, Violet. Sadly, as yet, I have been unable to trace the descendants of Joseph's youngest daughter, Frances, who married James Henry Willis and had three children: Michael, Andrea and Stephen Willis. Also, Stephen Robinson who is his great great Grandson and Carl Robinson who is his great great great Grandson. Last, but hopefully not least, myself. I am the great-granddaughter of Emily, who was Joseph's youngest sister, so Joseph was my great-granduncle.

Also through DNA testing, I have been connected with Malcolm Wood who is the grandson of Mary Jane (May) who was Joseph’s sister. Sadly I havent met him yet but hope to in the future.

It is especially fitting that we remember him today with a ceramic poppy, in the community where he lived before going off to fight in WW1.

May this dedication ensure that his name, his life and his sacrifice will never be forgotten. All of Joseph's descendants and family are very proud of him.