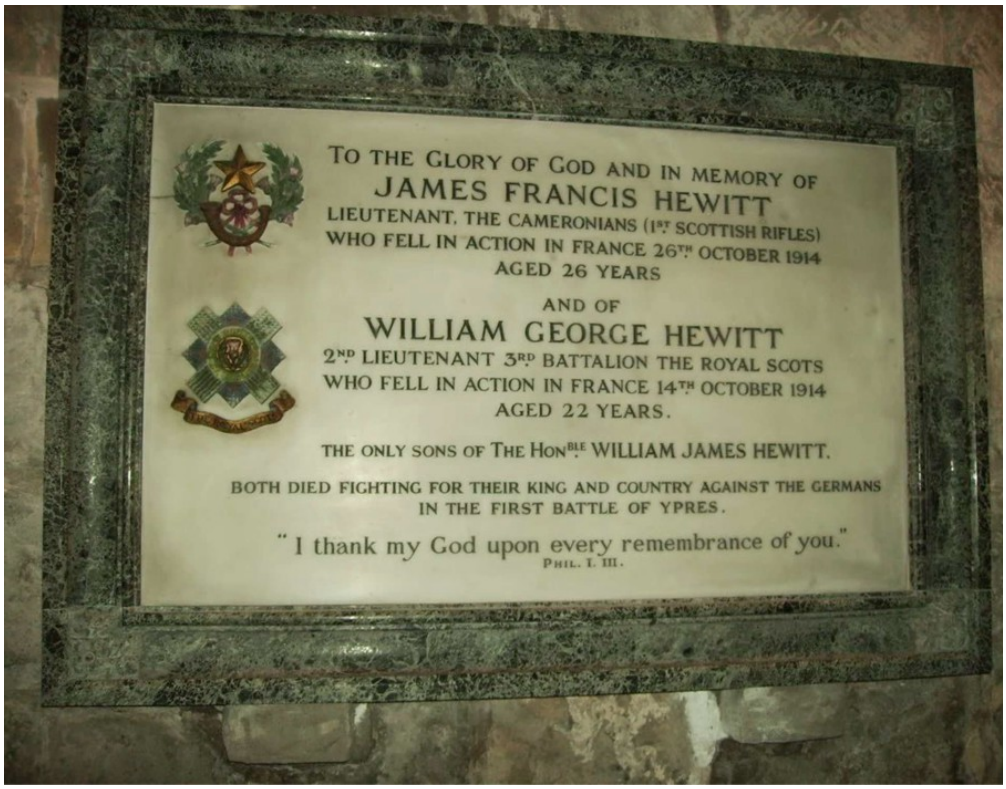
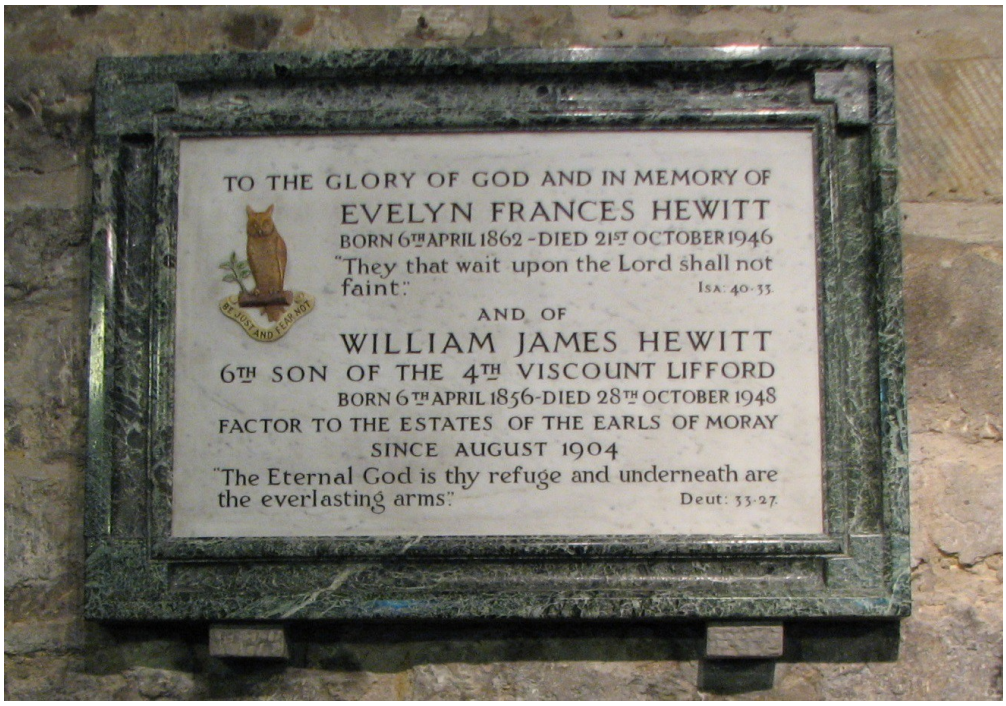
The Hewitt Brothers

When I look at the plaque on the church wall about the brothers who died during WWI, I think of their mother receiving two telegrams within days of each other - especially when the parents are commemorated on the plaque on the opposite wall.





James and William were not ordinary Aberdour children. Their father, William James Hewitt, was born at Astley Castle, Warwickshire and educated at Bromsgrove and Trinity College, Dublin. (Astley Castle was a 12th Cent. fortified manor house, it is a Grade II listed building but is now a ruin following a fire in 1978, it is in the process of being restored with Heritage Lottery funding.)



4th Viscount Lifford

The father was the 6th son of the 4th Viscount Lifford (he had a large Irish estate and sat in the House of Lords as an Irish Representative Peer). Their mother Evelyn Francis Carey, was born in Knightsbridge, she was the youngest daughter of Francis Evelyn Carey (he was born in Ireland) and was the Honorary Lieut-General of the Scottish Rifles. In 1881, her parents lived in Winchester and in that years census, living at the same address as well as 4 daughters, was a cook, ladysmaid, parlour maid and housemaid.

The parents, William and Francis were married on 26th April 1887. He was 31 and she 25. Not only did they have Irish connections but they had their birthdays on the same day! He became factor to his uncles estates of Broughton and Cally in Kirkcudbrightshire. Their first son James was born exactly 9 months later, followed by William four years later. In the 1891 census James was just 3 years old and they had three servants living with them. Later James was sent to a private school in Winchester, this happened to be close to where his Grandmother (Ellen Carey) lived.



Ellen Carey

In the 1901 census the Hewitt's are living with their great uncle and aunt in Cally House in Kirkcudbrightshire. The uncle, Horatio G Murray-Stewart is an important land owner both in Kirkubrightshire and Ireland. There is a famous picture of him as a child seated on sofa with long curly blond hair and wearing a tartan dress! His wife was the sister of the 4th Viscount Lifford's second wife. In the census entry, as well as the Great uncle and aunt, lives the mother Francis and the younger son William aged 8, also Francis's older

unmarried sister and 14 servants ranging from a 55 year old housekeeper to a 15 year old page. Today Cally House is a 4 star hotel.

William and the older son James are not at Cally house, instead they are in Winchester. James is at school and it appears that William is visiting him as he is at the home of his mother-in-law. She was now a widow and with her are her two unmarried daughters and an unmarried son (he is a captain in the Royal Navy) and only three servants.



Horatio G Murray-Stewart

In 1904, the father at the age of 48, became Factor (or agent) of the Earls of Moray Estates, they lived at St Colme House, Aberdour. James would have been aged 16 and William 12. The father took a keen interest in the affairs of the community and he was a keen dog lover. He bred and trained Labrador retrievers and won many prizes and championships. His participation in outdoor pursuits never waned and he later became president of the Scottish Field Trials Association. He was also a Justice of the Peace as he had been in Kirkubrightshire. He was probably an elder at St Colme's church as he was the convenor of the vacancy committee that appointed the Rev Johnstone in 1914. Today St Colme House is a listed building and owned by Shell Expro. William is known to have gone ice skating at Otterstone loch with other youngsters from the village.

The brothers did not attend the local schools, James went on to Haileybury School, a public school near Hertford. After leaving school, he went to Sandhurst then joined the 1st Cameron's (1st Scottish Rifles) - his Grandfathers regiment. A military career was not intended for William. He was educated at Edinburgh Academy then in 1911 went up to Christ Church, Oxford. There he studied a variety of subjects, from Divinity to Rural Economy. William was in the Officer Training Corps both at Edinburgh and Oxford.

James accompanied his regiment to India, where he remained for about a year. He was then transferred to South Africa, where he served for two years, and where he was attached to the Mounted Infantry. He returned with the Cameronians to Glasgow where he was in charge of the depot at Hamilton. At the outbreak of war the Cameronians and James were on manoeuvres in the highlands and were in prime condition. On 26th August he accompanied the 1st Cameronians reinforcements to France attached to the 19th Infantry Brigade.



James Francis Hewitt

In June 1914, William left Oxford and on 6th August (2 days after Britain declared war on Germany) and before the conferring of his degree, he joined the 3rd Battalion Royal Scots at Weymouth, where they were based. The 3rd (Reserve) Battalion was a training unit, it remained in Britain throughout the war. William though was attached to the 2nd Battalion, which on the outbreak of war was in Plymouth. After only a few weeks training William was sent to the front and joined his battalion as part of 8th Brigade in the trenches on 10th October. He fought continuously and on 13th a telegram was sent to his parent to say he was "missing", and then on the 16th a further telegram was sent to say he was "wounded". On the 18th they received the third telegram to say he was "found dead". The father was still not convinced and went to a lot of trouble trying to find what had happened, even enquiring of the American Consul in Paris. On 26th October a forth telegram was received - but this time it was to say that James had been "killed in action". He was in the fighting since he arrived and was killed in action on 26th October and buried at La Boutillerie.



William Heorge Hewitt

Later William's story emerged and the father received a letter stating that "he had been wounded on the 13th but he could not be picked up at the time owing to being under severe fire and that he was found dead on either the 15th or 16th by 2nd Lieut Pitman, 3rd Royal Scots, who knew him well as they were at Oxford together". It was all the more tragic that he may have been saved it it had been possible to recover him sooner.

Later the personal effects of James were returned to their father but not William's. The matter was investigated and the result was; "The Officer commanding 2/Royal Scots reports that the kit of the deceased officer was handed over to the Rail Transport Officer on 19/10/14 and his sword may be among those now in the Quarter Master's stores, but cannot be identified as it bears no distinguishing mark. The watch cannot be traced, it was not in the deceased valise and may have been buried with him. The belt containing £11 was despatched to the base but was lost in transit." These was an enquiry into the lost belt and money but the officer at the front who posted it explained, "they were being heavily shelled and the transport was loaded ready to move off, for the next few days they were entrenched and had difficulty in despatching mail and so a proper receipt was not obtained". The father said he was not concerned about the money he just wanted his son's personal effects returned. The correspondence continued until July 1915. There is a suggestion that William was awarded the Croix de Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur but I have been unable to verify this.

Here is an account from the history of the Royal Scots for the 13th & 14th, when William died.

"On October 13th the 8th Brigade started, at 6.30, the Middlesex being on the right, the Royal Scots in the centre, and the 1st Gordon Highlanders on the left. Their advance over flat country was made difficult by innumerable dykes, which could only be crossed by means of planks or ladders taken from neighbouring houses. Still by mid-day the Middlesex had captured the village of Croix Barbée, and the Royal Scots Pont de Hem. Then their advance was checked by a strong body of the enemy well entrenched, and a fierce fight ensued. In the course of a determined counter-attack by the Germans, Captain Passy’s company, on the left of the Middlesex line, suffered very severely and was reduced almost to the strength of a platoon. Never-the-less, they maintained their ground with the utmost determination and repulsed the

enemy with heavy loss."

"On October 14 the 8th Brigade entrenched itself in the position taken on the previous day, whilst the 9th Brigade, which had made less progress, pushed forward on the left. That day Sir Hubert Hamilton, the gallant general of the Division, was killed by a shell whilst visiting the trenches of the 8th Brigade."

I have been unable to find exactly how James died but here is an account of actions by the regiment on the day in question.

"The 26 October 1914 was not a good day for the 2nd battalion of the Cameronians' rifle regiment. Two months' bivouacking backwards and forwards in a state of chronic under-equipment around the Ypres hinterland had already caused them to sustain heavy losses, and it can never be easy to have a good day while wearing tartan trousers in any case. On that day they were bedding in around a little hamlet called Le Cateau, and in so doing, had they but known it, they were sowing the nightmarish seeds of four years' entrenchment. One officer and thirteen men were picked off by snipers in the course of the day." This was the day that James died.

Incidentally, on 22nd October Private Henry May of the Cameronians was also at La Boutillerie, there he was awarded the VC for dragging the wounded Lt D Graham to safety while under fire, two other men died in this episode.

James's name is on the Ploegsteert Memorial, it commemorates more than 11,000 servicemen who died in this sector during WWI and have no known grave. Those commemorated by the memorial did not die in major offensives, most were killed in the course of the day-to-day trench warfare which characterised this part of the line, or in small scale set engagements, usually carried out in support of the major attacks taking place elsewhere.

William was initially buried at a point just north of Croix Barbée. As this was just a small grave in March 1915 his body was exhumed and reburied at the Vielle-Chapelle New Military Cemetery, Lacoutures.

In 1914 St Fillan's church was a ruin and people worshipped at St Colme's, now the church hall. It was probably in 1926 when St Fillan's was restored that the plaque for the two brothers was erected. In 1940 Dr Johnstone retired

and in 1940 Rev Stalker was appointed as minister of the triple charge of Aberdour Parish Church (St Fillan's), Dalgety Bay Parish Church (Cornerstone) and St Colme's Church. In 1948 he was appointed Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Edinburgh University. After leaving he was responsible for the planning and arranging of the memorials to the Hon. & Mrs Hewitt.

James and William were like the other 27 people in Aberdour whose names are on the village memorial and whose mothers received telegrams. They are special, that because of their background it has been easy to trace part of their tragic story and every Sunday we can remember them. It would be interesting to discover the stories behind the other names.