



Jonathon Ernest Wilson (centre) with Howard Wilson.



# POST CARD.

## *The Wilson Family*

Jonathon Ernest Wilson was believed to have been born in 1892. He may have been born in Derbyshire but registered in Sunderland. He was an illegitimate son of a 16-year-old servant girl who worked in a wealthy house. He was brought up in Sunderland by his grandmother who he assumed to be his real mother until he died.

He probably moved to Witton Park to work as a coal miner and lived at 3 High Queen Street. At the outbreak of the First World War, Jonathon enlisted with 15th Durham Light Infantry. Also joining up was Robert Ballan; he and Jonathon had consecutive numbers, Jonathon was 196113 and Robert 196112. At the end of the war, Jonathon and Robert received each other's victory medals! It is unlikely that Jonathon saw active service as he received no campaign medals but may have used his mining experience to train other soldiers at Halton Park to excavate and plant bombs under enemy lines.

Jonathon went back to live on High Queen Street in Witton Park and had a daughter, Ida, born 1918, with future wife Mary Ellen Hope, who he married in 1919. Their son Horace Ernest was born 17 April 1920. Mary was one of 9 children of Joseph and Mary Hope who lived in "the top house" High Queen Street.

Jonathon returned to mining, where he inhaled some gas trying to explode pockets of firedamp (gas) and was sent home. He didn't recover from this and later died of chokedamp, aged 27/28.

Mary Wilson was the housekeeper for the local policeman, Mr Featherstone. It is said they were very close and she used to visit his family that lived near London.

Ida inherited her father's musical talents and seemed to have a photographic memory for tunes; by the age of 12 she was playing the organ in church. In later life she married a man called Ernie Gent, a well-known Crook family. They lived with Mary for a while before moving to Crook. After the Second World War Ernie led sand and gravel from Witton Park Slag Works. They had two sons, Barry and Stewart.

Horace had had to leave school at 14 and went to work in a private hotel in London, training as a chef. After leaving due to ill health, he went to live with his aunt in York where he worked in a high-end shoe shop. Moving back to Witton Park, he worked in a factory in the Bishop Auckland area before being conscripted into the Royal Engineers in World War II.

At the end of the Second World War, some of Horace's demob money went to his mother, Mary, who bought a fish and chip shop on the corner at the top of Low Queen Street, which she ran with Horace and family.

Horace married Vera Edith Watts, who he'd met in the army, in 1949. Howard was born in 1951, followed by siblings, twins Jean and Peter (1955) and Helen in 1963.







John William Mahaffey.

# POST CARD.

## *The Mahaffey/Bowen Family*

John Mahaffey of Escomb and Elizabeth Anne Bowen of Woodside, Witton Park, were married in 1912, both aged 22. When the First World War broke out, they lived at Thinford Road, West Cornforth, and had one child, Jeffrey.

John William was the son of John and Margaret Mahaffey. Margaret originated from Glasgow and John's family came from Ireland. The couple had four girls and two boys one of whom unfortunately died at the age of 14. Shortly after John's birth in 1890 the family moved to Escomb and then to 9 Garden Street in Witton Park.

John worked in a mine as an 'onsetter'. He was described as five feet three inches tall with dark hair and a sallow complexion in his army records.

In December 1914, John enlisted in Bradford with the Royal Army Service Corps. By the summer of 1915 he was attached to the newly established British Third Army in the Horse Transport Section as a driver. It is noted that he had an affinity with horses. Towards the end of the war it is likely his role would have involved transporting guns and artillery.

John and Elizabeth's eldest daughter Sarah Jane was born in January 1915; Elizabeth would have been heavily pregnant when John enlisted. Their second son, John, was born in Witton Park in January 1918.

On 2nd December 1918, after peace had been declared, John died in the 57th Casualty Clearing Station in France of the Spanish Flu, aged 28 years. He is buried at Valenciennes Communal Cemetery in Northern France. Elizabeth, who was living at 8 Jackson's Row, Woodside was left with three children aged five, three and just eleven months.

In 1922, Elizabeth married Joseph Hogg and had three more children - Marian, Ethel and Ellen Mildred, known as Millie. All six children were close and most remained in Witton Park. Sarah-Jane and Millie lived within a few houses of each other for their entire lives.

Elizabeth Mahaffey Hogg died in 1975, aged 85, living at 32 Woodside.







John Harbron, descendant of the Wilkinson family.

# POST CARD.

## *The Wilkinson Family*

Samuel Wilkinson was born in 1869 in Houghton-le Spring and was believed to be a miner. He married Ann Ryan in 1890 at Crook and they had five children: Fred (1890), Kate (1892), Mary (1895), Sarah-Ann (1898) and John William (1900). John William was killed during the First World War and Ann sadly passed away a year later in 1919.

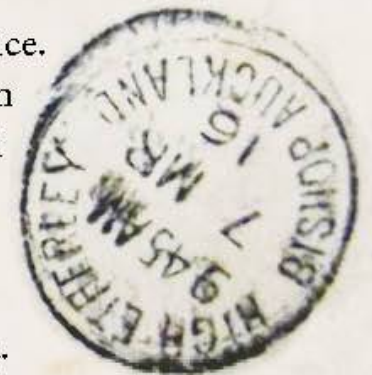
Fred was born in Crook, and the other four children were born in the Spennymoor area, probably Whitworth/Byers Green. They moved from the Whitworth area to Gateshead in 1900/1901 and to Witton le Wear some time before 1911. It is believed that, during The Great War, the family lived at 22 Garden Street, Witton Park.

The youngest son, John William, is believed to have served with the DLI during The Great War, joining the army at just 14-years-old. His records show him as being in the East Yorkshire Regiment (11th Battalion, No. 51054), which means he may have been transferred to the regiment. He was killed at the Battle of Nieppe on 8th September, 1918 aged just 18-years-old. He is buried at the military cemetery at Pont d'Achelles.

The eldest daughter Kate was probably a housekeeper in service before she married Ralph Smith in 1912. Ralph worked in the mining industry so did not serve in the military. He died in 1951. They resided at various locations in Witton Park including Woodside, Low King and High Albion Streets. She died in 1977 at Bishop Auckland and is also buried at Witton Park.

Fred lived with Kate for some time before moving to Bishop Auckland. He never married and died in 1969, returning to be interred at Witton Park cemetery. His burial featured in a BBC documentary about the village.

Sarah-Ann (Sally) lived in Garden Street, Witton Park and married twice. Her first husband was Henry Bolton who died in 1952. She then married John (Jack) Sloan in 1953. She had no children and they moved to Bishop Auckland. Jack died in 1969 and Sally died in 1974.





HEBRON J.

HOBSON G.

HOBSON W.

HOWE T.

George Hobson and Robert William Hobson's names on the Witton Park War Memorial.



# POST CARD.

## *The Hobson Family*

George Hobson was born in 1859 and married Julia Price, who was born in 1862 and was from Bilstone, Staffordshire. They had eight children, Charlotte (1882), Robert (1891), George (1893), Margaret (1895), Charles (1897), Albert (1899), Walter (1901) and Lily (1904). Albert passed away aged one.

George was employed at the coke works.

By 1911, the family were living in 3 Cement Row and Robert William married Ann Neesham (born 1894) in 1913. They had a daughter called Annie and moved to Coxhoe, living in Vicarage Terrace, Blackgate.

Robert served with the 18th battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps (A/202744) and died on 28th March 1918, aged 27. He is remembered with Honour at Arras memorial.

George enlisted at Bishop Auckland. He was a Private in the 14th Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry, before being transferred to 18th Brigade, 6th Division, Fourth Army, which was to prepare for service in the line at Nielles-lez-Ardres, Battle of Loos, 1915.

On 2 June 1916, George was involved in an accident when cleaning bombs and received a wound to the right leg and head and received treatment at York. He was later discharged on 3rd August 1916 and temporarily attached to 170 Company Royal

Engineers before re-joining his battalion on 24 November 1916. He saw action at the Battle of the Somme, the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, the Battle of Morval and the Battle of Le Transloy. He died on 23rd April 1917 from wounds at 33 Casualty Clearing Station and was buried at Bethune Town cemetery, aged 23. He is commemorated on Etherley War Memorial and roll of honour in St Cuthbert's Church. Serving a total of 2 years 22 days, he was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War and Victory medals.

By the time of George's death, his mother had moved to Low Etherley to run the Pot and Glass pub and received his possessions on 15th October 1917, which included photos, cards, cigarette case, soap case and cotton bag.

Margaret married Luke Raine (1894-1967) and Charles married Ada Raine.

Walter worked for the United Bus Company as a Bus Driver and married Florence Annie Sanders (1902 - 1982) in 1921. They moved to 2 Bluebell Cottages, Low Etherley. They had two children; George Hobson (1922 - 1981) and Nancy Hobson (1924 - 2010). Walter died on 26th June 1968 from a blood clot in his heart.







Reece Gittins.



# POST CARD.

## *The Gittins Family*

Abraham and Maria Gittins lived in Ferryhill when the First World War broke out. Their only son Reece was born in 1897 when his parents were both 40 years old. The family lived in 40 Woodside, Witton Park. Abraham was a coal miner and Maria was listed as an innkeeper.

Abraham came from a large family, with at least nine siblings, all born in Witton Park.

Maria's first husband, innkeeper William Bolton, died in 1895. They lived at 34 Woodside which is believed to have been The Castle pub. They had seven children between 1874 and 1888 – four sons and three daughters. By the time of Reece's birth, Maria's three youngest children also lived with Maria and Abraham. The remaining four siblings had married or left for work, all living in Witton Park and West Auckland.

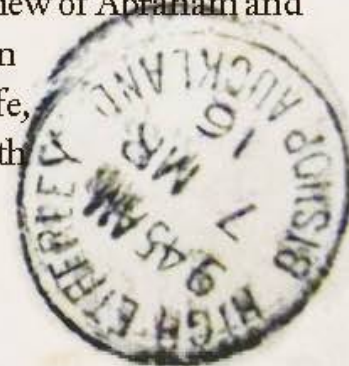
In November 1914, at the age of 17, Reece enlisted with the East Yorkshire Regiment at Beverley. He gave his age as 19 years old. His trade was listed as coalminer. He was described as 5 feet 9.5 inches tall, weighing 9.5 stones. He

had a fair complexion, green/blue eyes and light brown hair.

Serving with the 7th Battalion as a Private, Reece trained between November 1914 and August 2015 and for the next year he served in France. On the 7th August 1916, he was wounded with what was described as multiple gunshot wounds. He died a day later in the 38th Casualty Clearing Station, aged 18. He is buried in Heilly Station Cemetery, Mericourt-L'Abbe, France, and was awarded the British War Medal, Victory Medal and 14-15 Star.

Maria Gittins died in 1929 and Abraham Gittins in 1938.

The Gittins family appear in a number of other Witton Park families. Thomas W. Gittins, the nephew of Abraham and cousin of Reece, married Elsie Bowen in 1928 after the death of his first wife, Violet. Elsie was the sister of Elizabeth Mahaffey Hogg. Thomas's son from his first marriage, Joseph, married John and Elizabeth Mahaffey's daughter Sarah Jane.







Isabella Mary Guy and daughter Isabella.



# POST CARD.

## *The Guy Family*

Isabella Mary Heslop was born in Bishop Auckland in 1858 and married John Guy (born 1856 in Yorkshire) on 10 September 1877. After their marriage the couple lived in Fore Bondgate in Bishop Auckland. By 1913 the family were living in Witton Park at 22 Queen Street, where it is believed John worked at the slag works. Shortly after the First World War broke out, the couple opened a confectioners' shop on Main Street, Witton Park, where they also lived.

The couple had 12 children, of whom six unfortunately died in infancy. The surviving children were: John, born in 1881, Charles (1883), Harry (1885), Herbert (1888), and William (1891). In 1898, daughter Isabella - known by her brothers as Ella - arrived. By 1911, Charles and Harry had moved out of their parents' home and were boarding with a family in Lincolnshire. Both were iron founders. Herbert had also left home. John lived at the family home and was an unemployed labourer. William, aged 20, was also a labourer.

In January 1912, Charles and Harry both sailed to New Brunswick, Canada from Liverpool. Just seven months later, William, now a miner, left for Quebec. Herbert was the last to emigrate - he set sail from Glasgow in March 1913, arriving in Halifax, Nova Scotia, before settling in Toronto.

Aged 33 years when the First World War broke out, John became a Private of the 1st Battalion, Kings Own Scottish Borderers (Regiment No 5871), winning war medals (the 1914 Mons Star and campaign medal) but was killed in action on 17th May 1917. He was buried near Feuchy Chapel, East Arras, but his body was exhumed and reinterred near Tilloy, south east of Arras, in a British military cemetery.

Herbert, who was 26 when war was declared, was brown eyed and 5' 7" tall. It was likely he had been a farmer before enlisting with the 15th Canadian Infantry in September 1914 and returning to England to train in Surrey. Injured in 1915, he was admitted to hospital in England in November and 'struck off' in December 1915. Between 1916 and 1917 Herbert will still have been a serving soldier on light duties in England, with further spells in hospital with lung problems. By 1918 he was secretly studying for a commission. It appears he rejoined the infantry in March 1918 and was killed in action by a piece of enemy shell on 1st September 1918 at Crow's Nest Chateau Wood, near Hendecourt. He was buried at Dominican Cemetery.

Harry, Charles and William survived the conflict, Charles returned to England and was living in Lincolnshire with his wife Louisa, still working as an iron moulder into his late fifties. It is thought William was injured and in hospital for some time during the war. Little is known of Harry's experience of war.

Isabella Mary Guy, who was only 20 when the War ended, remained in Witton Park and married Thomas Anthony Robinson in 1920 in St Paul's Church. Thomas also served in the army during the War and was a miner at the time of his wedding. Isabella's father John is identified on the marriage certificate as a labourer, the shop on Main Street was still running at this time so it can be assumed that Mary Guy managed the running of the shop.

