

Following in His Father's Footsteps



Image from West Sussex Record Office RSR PH 2/14

A Case Study of 2nd Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young By Nicola McDowell

Summary

This Case Study researches the life of Second Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young, 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment. With reference to his own brief war diary, the transcript of his battalion diary and with the assistance of his service record and various other family records and photographs, this Case Study pieces together Nevill's life prior to joining the army and his service in the Royal Sussex Regiment during The Great War .

Introduction

Second Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young was one of the very many young men, who at the outbreak of World War 1, willingly gave up their lives to fight for their country. His story, like many others is a humbling and emotive one. Drawn by the intriguing prospect of reading an original war diary, that was written in the trenches and survived one of the most famous battlefields of The Great War, I chose to research Nevill's story and set off to West Sussex Record Office (WSRO) in Chichester to delve into the history of a young man who was neither a member of my family or known to me in any way at all.

Family Background

Nevill Lindsay Young was born on the 19th July 1897. His father was Major General James Charles Young, an Irishman who began his own prestigious military career in the 35th Regiment of Foot in 1877. Following service at home and abroad in Malta and Cyprus, and as a member of the 1st Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment in the Nile campaign in Egypt, James progressed through the ranks, becoming Deputy Assistant Adjutant in South Africa in 1892. It was here that he was to meet his future wife, Maria Madeline Leeb. They were married in Rondesboch, Cape Colony on the 17th September 1896 and returned to Worthing, England the following February for the impending birth of their first born and only son, Nevill. Four weeks later he was baptised by W. Elwin at St Andrews Church, Tarring, Worthing.¹

When Nevill was 18 months old, his father took command of the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment and the family moved to India. It was here that Nevill would spend his early years, and where on 6th October 1900 his sister Dorothy was born. Like all children, Nevill and his sister grew up participating in normal childhood events such as children's parties held by the regiment.

Many family photos have been found in an album given to Major General Young as a Christmas present, now held by West Sussex County Council Records Office.² They record the opulent and privileged conditions in which the children spent their early childhood years, at the family homes in Muree and Quetta in India.

Whilst his Father, Mother and sister remained in India, Nevill returned to England to commence his education. The 1911 census shows Nevill, aged 13, as a pupil at Claremont House, an annexe of South Lodge, a prep school perched on the cliff top, overlooking the sea at Kirkley Cliff, South Lowestoft.³

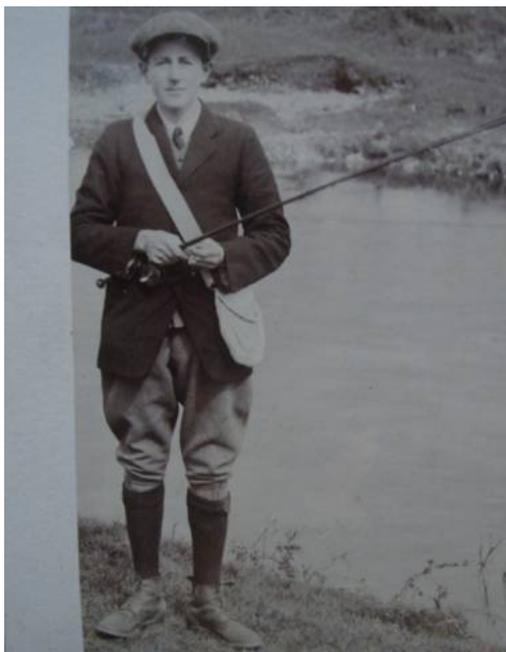
Originally founded in 1862, the school was bought in 1890 by the Rev W Richmond Phillips

(who also features in the 1911 census) and under whom it developed further. He purchased an additional house across the road, Claremont House. The school has since moved several times and is currently known as Old Buckenham Hall School (OBH).



Nevill and sister, Quetta 1905
 WSRO RSR PH/2/14 p40

The OBH School Website details the History of the school from its foundation in an online booklet by Donald Sewell. It includes the memoirs of a former pupil, Stefan E Cooke, who was a pupil at South Lodge from 1903-1908, and provides some idea of what school life would have been like for Nevill.⁴



A keen Fisherman
 WSRO RSR PH/2/14 p45

Claremont House was used for senior boy's dormitories and classrooms, Rev Phillips later added a gymnasium and carpentry shop. Its cliff top position was so close to the shore that the boys often experienced the excitement of a ship wreck and seeing the Pakefield lifeboat in full action. Academic work at the school was keen and several good scholarships were won at the leading Public Schools,

mostly in Classics. Sport and Games were much encouraged by the masters, particularly football and cricket. Chief events of the year were the Sports, the summer outing either on the Denes or on the river steamer Atalanta and the Christmas supper party. Cooke recalls occasional trips for the privileged few on Rev Philips yacht 'Oulton Broad' and other amusements such as fishing after tea or on half holidays on the Claremont Pier. Less enjoyed by the boys were the twice daily walks on Sundays to St John's church attired in their Eaton collars and Bowler hats.

In September 1911, aged 14, Nevill moved on to Clifton College, Bristol, where he was to continue his education. Clifton College held a long history of military tradition. Their Cadet Corps was founded in 1875 continuing the 'cult of muscularity' that characterised public schools in the closing years of the 19th century and militaristic spirit was entangled with the playing of games.



Nevill running for Clifton College 1911
WSRO RSR PH 2/14 p 45

Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the notion of soldiering was fostered as a 'manly sport' and the profession of arms a chivalric ideal. In the First World War alone, Clifton College provided, a Commander-in-Chief (Douglas Haig) an Army Commander (William Birdwood) 23 Major Generals, and 52 Brigadier Generals and 578 Old Cliftonians were to die.⁵

As a member of Watson House, Nevill would embrace life at Clifton for the next three years, gaining distinction in the Cadet Corps and earning a Prize cadetship.⁶ This was a competitive scholarship/bursary awarded to the highest scoring candidates who took the Army Entrance Exam. Candidates passed in order of merit according to the number of marks they achieved in a written examination in a variety of subjects. Nevill passed in 7th position resulting in a reduction in the fees for attending Military College.⁷

And so, on 23rd October 1914, aged 17, and just 3 months after Britain declared war with Germany, Nevill was to be admitted as a Gentleman Cadet in L Company at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Nevill spent approximately 22 weeks at the College, undergoing basic and leadership training. (The current commissioning course for officers is 44 weeks) On March 23rd 1915 he submitted his selection papers for first appointment. Naturally, his first choice was the Royal Sussex Regiment, with a note reasoning that his father was a serving Colonel in the Royal Sussex Regiment. His second choice was the Northumberland Fusiliers, and his third, The West Yorkshire Regiment. Written boldly across the top of the document is 'Granted Royal Sussex Regiment as son of serving Colonel'.⁸



Albert Hall Mansions
Taken by Author November
2013

The address provided by Nevill at this time was his parent's home address, 51 Albert Hall Mansions, Kensington Gore, Knightsbridge. The address was part of a large system of new super-smart apartment blocks for the middle and upper classes. Built in the 1880's and surrounding the Royal Albert Hall, the red brick buildings were six storeys high and their wine cellars, lifts, inside bathrooms and separate entrances for servants were innovative additions at the time. Today the market price for one such apartment in the block can reach as much as £8,000,000.

Granted his commission as a Second Lieutenant, in the Royal Sussex Regiment, Nevill was to leave the comfort and security of home as he followed in his father's footsteps and embarked on his Army career. He reported for duty on first appointment with the 3rd Battalion on 12th April 1915. 3rd (reserve) Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment were a depot/training unit, responsible for the training of men and drafting of reinforcement to overseas battalions, and in May 1915 the battalion were mobilised to Newhaven, Sussex for duty as Newhaven Garrison.

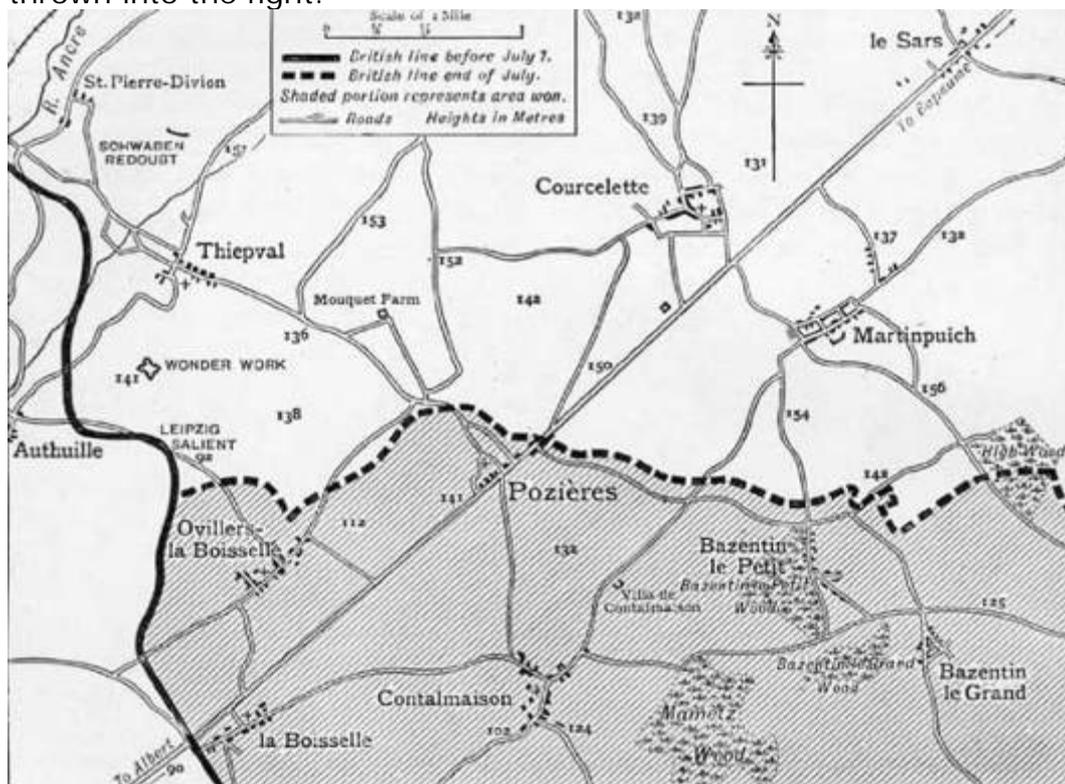


**Officer Training Corps Borden 2nd
September 1915**
WSRO RSR PH 2/14 p46

On 13th July 1916, after one year and three months, Nevill was struck off the strength of the 3rd Battalion and disembarked for France the next day. He joined the 2nd Battalion on 19th July 1916 at Contalmaison, France in the midst of war.⁹

Manoeuvres

The transcript of the 2nd Battalion's war diary, records Nevill's arrival with his unit, along with two other officers and 83 other ranks. The next three days were spent in Contalmaison, where they were shelled daily. On the evening of the 22 July 1916, the battalion moved up to the firing line to a previously dug trench, to the right of Pozieres. Orders were received that the Royal Sussex Regiment were to attack Munster Alley at 12.30am on the 23 July, preceded by 5 minutes intense bombardment. The enemy were positioned to the front and on either side of the area to be crossed, and as the first two companies (A and B) moved to their positions of deployment they were subject to heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire. The result was complete confusion and 108 casualties. The attack never properly gained way and C and D companies (of which Nevill was a member) were not thrown into the fight.¹⁰



Position of the British Line End of July 1916
 The Long Long Trail www.1914-1918.net

On the 24th July 1916 the battalion moved from Contalmaison to Franvillers via Becourt Wood. On arrival at Franvillers, two days were

spent carrying out routine tasks, and competing in a variety of novel sports, achieving a 1st for 'Water Cart' race, a 2nd and 3rd for 'Cookers' and a 2nd for 'Pack horse'. On the 30th July 1916 the battalion were on the move again to Hennencourt, where on the 31st they were inspected by the General Officer Commanding 2nd Brigade.

The battalion remained at Hennencourt for the next 12 days, during which time they undertook training in Drill, Night operations, Artillery formation, Woodland training, as well as sport, a regimental concert and commanding officers parade. On 13th August the battalion left Hennencourt and marched via Albert to Becourt Wood before continuing on to Mametz wood and High wood where they were to relieve the 11th Battalion Suffolk Regiment on the Firing line. At this time – the situation was 'quiet'.¹¹

It was on August 13th that the only surviving page of Nevill's personal war diary begins.¹²

His diary describes how the 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment relieved the 11th Suffolk Regiment at Bazentin le Petit. Battalion Headquarters were situated some way from the front line, in a shelter by the side of the road, and communication proved difficult. Immediately the battalion started to take casualties (26 in total) and Nevill describes water as being 'scarce'. At 2am on the night of the 15th-16th August the 'boche' trench to the left of High Wood was attacked by B Company but failed, resulting in the death of 2nd Lieutenant Collins and 33 other casualties. Communication broke down during the night due to heavy shellfire. B and C companies made a second attack on the enemy trench at 10pm. The attack was successful but was followed by a German counter attack with 'liquid fire and bombs'. The battalion diary records the success, noting the capture of 12 unwounded prisoners. At around the same time a shell burst over Headquarters, closely followed by another shell that burst next to the HQ mess.¹³

This is where Nevill's short diary ends.

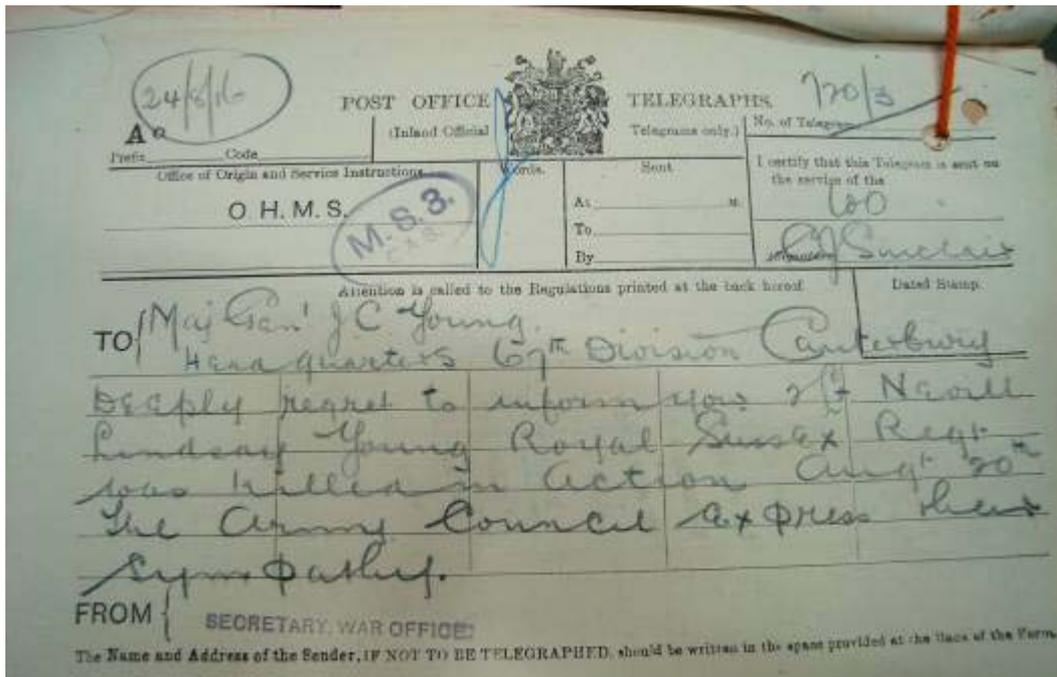
The battalion diary continues to describe the events of the morning of 17th August, whereby the Germans launched a determined counter-attack with flame throwers and grenades and considerable confusion ensued. The battalion were bombarded all day until they were relieved by the North Lancashire Regiment, allowing them to move into reserve in Mametz wood. Whilst in the wood, the heavy bombardment continued and the allies captured several important trenches in the direction of High Wood and the Switch. Fighting in the vicinity of High Wood was severe and the Germans actively pushed forward bombing parties. On the afternoon of the 19th August, A and D companies moved up to support the Northants Regiment who had occupied high ground west of High Wood.

Early in the morning of 20th August, the battalion received orders that they would be relieved about 2pm and proceed to billets in Albert. At 1pm, just one hour before the battalion were due to be relieved the order was cancelled. The two remaining companies in Mametz wood (B and C companies) moved up to reinforce the firing line immediately under the command of 2nd lieutenants Chad (B Company) and Nevill Lindsay Young (C Company).

About 8am the Germans with strong forces had moved against the Northants advanced line and driven it back. The Northants counter-attacked from Clarks trench (captured on night of 16th and 17th) and D company was moved forward from the original British front line to Clarks trench where later A company joined it.

The previous attack having failed, A and D companies now reinforced by B and C companies and the North Hants Regiment, attacked at 2.30pm. Raked by gunfire from the west (switch line) and from High Wood on the east by machine guns and meeting a very strong resistance in front, little headway was made, though a strong post was established by 2nd Lt Roberts near the crest of the hill. This advantage along with the rest of the line was handed over to 2nd Welsh Regiment. The 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment withdrew and reorganized south of Mametz Wood before moving into billets in Albert about 3am. The fighting strength of the 2nd Battalion on coming out was four officers and about 150 other ranks.¹⁴

On August 24th August 1916 a telegraph from the War Office was sent to Major General J C Young, at the Headquarters of 67th Home Counties Division in Canterbury.



24/8/16

POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS

Office of Origin and Service Instructions: O.H.M.S. M.S.3

TO: Major-General J.C. Young, Headquarters 67th Division Canterbury

Deeply regret to inform you that 2nd Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young Royal Sussex Regt. was killed in action Aug. 20th. The Army Council Express their sympathy.

FROM: SECRETARY, WAR OFFICE

Death Telegraph
 National Archives WO339/45865

It reads ; 'Deeply regret to inform you that 2nd Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young Royal Sussex Regiment was killed in action August 20th. The Army Council Express their sympathy.'

On 29th August 1916 an Obituary appeared in the Sussex Daily News, it reads;

**ONLY SON OF THE ROYAL SUSSEX
 REGIMENT'S COLONEL.**

Second Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young, a Royal Sussex officer, who has been killed in action, was the only son of Major-General J. C. Young, Colonel of the Regiment, and Mrs. Young. He was 19 years of age. From Clifton he went to Sandhurst, obtaining a cadetship (he passed seventh on the list). It was in April, 1915, that he was given his commission. He was signalling officer and had been acting adjutant of his battalion.

Sussex Daily News 29th August 1916 p6

Two days later Nevill's personal possessions were returned, a pocket book, pocket case and letters.¹⁵

Life continued for Nevill's Family. In 1917 Major General J C Young was appointed Order of the Bath and mentioned in the London Gazette, for services to war.

In December 1917, an article appeared in the Sussex Daily news regarding a Commemoration that was to be held at the Royal Albert Hall for the first seven divisions who took part in the fighting in France and Belgium from August 1914 until the first battle of Ypres. The Royal Albert Hall was to be decorated with banners of the Regiments involved, including the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment. The banners were arranged by the ladies associated with the regiments represented. Among the names involved in arranging the Royal Sussex Regiment banner was Mrs Madeline Young. The article goes on to describe how 'Major General and Mrs Young mourn the loss of their only son. Born in the Royal Sussex, he fought in it and sacrificed his life in the great cause for which so many are fighting. Only 19 he was a true soldier's son and a brilliant and highly promising officer. At the time of his death he was signalling officer of the 2nd Battalion.'¹⁶

Major General Young continued serving with the Royal Sussex Regiment until his retirement in 1919.

Nevill's grave had been marked and registered at a point one mile east of Bazentin-le-Petit. The Graves officer visited the spot, found a grave marked and duly registered it. His grave was one that had to be concentrated into a cemetery in accordance with French and Belgian governments that all scattered graves and small groups should be moved into regularly constituted cemeteries.

In 1920 a letter was sent to Major General Young from the Deputy Assistant Adjutant Generals office, its contents are summarised as follows;

'I very regret to have to inform you that when the grave was opened for this purpose, no body was found. The cross over the grave has been erected in Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, Longueval, East North East of Albert. I would point out that as you will readily understand in many areas which have been under constant heavy shellfire the whole surface of the ground has been so completely altered that landmarks and grave registration marks have been obliterated. As a consequence the work of accurately tracing graves has been and is one of extreme difficulty.

It has been thought best to let you know what has occurred, though the Director General of Graves Registration and Enquiries much regrets the distress which he fears the information now given will cause you'.¹⁷

Nevill's body was never located and a permanent memorial was eventually placed along with many others in Delville Wood Cemetery, Longueval.

Major General and Mrs Young continued living in London. Nevill's sister Dorothy eventually married in 1925 to Hugh A Wilson Esq.

On 7th January 1926 Major General Young died suddenly of heart failure at his home in London, aged 67. His obituary stated

'Of late years he was greatly affected by the loss of his son, a fine young officer who showed promise of following his father's footsteps'.¹⁸

A memorial to Major General James Charles Young can be found in St Georges Chapel, Chichester Cathedral which is also The Royal Sussex Regimental Chapel.¹⁹

A lasting memorial to 2nd Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young can be found on the south wall of the Southwest Transept of Canterbury Cathedral. The inscription on the alabaster tablet reads:

'Sacred to the dear memory of Nevill Lindsay Young, 2nd Lieutenant Royal Sussex Regiment. Killed in Action in the battle of the Somme at Bazentin le Petit August 20th 1916 aged 19 years and one month. Only son of Major General James Charles Young then commanding the 67th Division at Canterbury'.²⁰

Acknowledgements

With Thanks to Dr Morton, Curator of the RMAS collection for his assistance in providing some of the details of Nevill's Entrance into Royal Military College, Sandhurst.

Thanks also to Matthew Jones, Assistant County Archivist, West Sussex County Council Record Office for allowing the reproduction of the photographs from the Album, and for the Staff and Volunteers at the Records Office, whose work enabled me the privilege of gaining access to a variety of records within the archives and without whose help this Case Study would not have been possible.

Endnotes

- ¹ RSR MSS 9/6 Royal Sussex Regiment Service Record of James Charles Young at West Sussex Record Office
- ² RSR PH 2/14 Photograph Album Belonging to Major General James Charles Young at West Sussex Record Office
- ³ 1911 Census Ancestry.co.uk (Listed as Nevik Lindsay Young)
<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search>
- ⁴ History of Old Buckenham Hall School (formerly South Lodge)
<http://www.obh.co.uk/our-school/history-of-obh/> page 3
- ⁵ The Old Cliftonian Society Website – History and Archives
http://www.oc-online.co.uk/#h_warsandjubilees
- ⁶ Clifton College; Borwick, F. *Clifton College annals and register*.
Publisher: J. W. Arrowsmith, Bristol, 1925
- ⁷ Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS) Collection Curator,
Sandhurst Collection, The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst,
Camberley, Surrey
- ⁸ WO339/45865, Service Record of 2nd Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay
Young, at National Archives, Kew
- ⁹ RSR MSS 3/34 3rd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment Diary
1st April 1914 – 4th August 1919 at West Sussex Records Office
- ¹⁰ RSR MSS 2/57 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment Diary Transcript
2nd August 1914 – 12th April 1919 at West Sussex Records Office
- ¹¹ RSR MSS 2/57 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment Diary Transcript
2nd August 1914 – 12th April 1919 at West Sussex Record Office
- ¹² RSR/MSS 2/75 Papers of 2nd Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young
(Diary) at West Sussex Records Office
- ¹³ RSR/MSS 2/75 Papers of 2nd Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young
(Diary) at West Sussex Records Office

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- ¹⁴ RSR MSS 2/57 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment Diary Transcript 2nd August 1914 – 12th April 1919 at West Sussex Records Office
- ¹⁵ WO339/45865, Service Papers of 2nd Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young at National Archives, Kew
- ¹⁶ Sussex Daily News 27th November 1917 p5 at Worthing Library
- ¹⁷ WO339/45865, Service Papers of 2nd Lieutenant Nevill Lindsay Young, at National Archives, Kew
- ¹⁸ RSR MSS 9/12 Obituary Notice within Service Papers of Major General Young at West Sussex Records Office
- ¹⁹ Royal Sussex Living History Group Website – St Georges Chapel, Chichester Cathedral, Memorial to Major General James Charles Young
http://www.royalsussex.org.uk/RSLHG_main_index.html
- ²⁰ UK National Inventory of War Memorials: 2nd Lieutenant N L Young (ref 40948)
<http://www.ukniwm.org.uk/server/show/conMemorial.40948/fromUkniwmSearch/1>