

Current photo of
"Bellevue".

Finally, almost 90 years after his untimely passing, Dr O Connor receives much-deserved and long-overdue public recognition. The well-earned plaudits reflect his heroism in conflict, and later, selfless dedication to our community as a skilled surgeon doctor.

We are pleased to welcome Sheena Ludgate, with her husband Paul, to visit the home of her Grandparents where her Mother, Patricia, spent her formative years with her siblings.

Bessbrook is steeped in history and Dr O Connor and "Bellevue" are threads woven into this rich tapestry of heritage. The house, built in 1835, predates the Richardson era in the Mill by more than a decade.

This project highlights an intense collaborative effort which has delivered fantastic outcomes and thanks to Michelle and George Simonds-Gooding, a lasting tribute is sited in the most appropriate place, "Bellevue", his former home.

We wish to sincerely thank, and deeply appreciate, the following for all their help and support,

Colin Whiteside, Eddie McCullough and The Royal British Legion, Newry & Bessbrook.

Tommy Murray and Maud Hamill, Historians.

Chris Cassidy, Newry Branch, Libraries NI.

Kerri Morrow, Newry DEA Coordinator

Mr John Henry (Tullyvallen Silver Band)

Pipe Major David Hanna (Altnaveigh Memorial Pipe Band)



Unveiling of a Commemorative
Plaque in tribute to
Dr Edwin Fitzgerald O Connor
at his former residence, "Bellevue", Bessbrook.
Saturday 6th April 2024.

Tribute to Dr O Connor from the Royal British Legion with the Last Post and Reveille sounded by Mr John Henry (Tullyvallen Silver Band) Pipe Major David Hanna (Altnaveigh Memorial Pipe Band) will play a Lament. We thank Michelle and George Simonds-Gooding, current owners of "Bellevue", for facilitating the plaque on their property.

Newry Maritime Association (NMA) is proud of the role they have played in obtaining long-overdue recognition for a man who gave so much to so many and is a doubly decorated war hero.

Edwin Fitzgerald O Connor was born on 11th March 1889 in the Curragh Army Camp, Co. Kildare where his Father, an army chaplain, was a Church of Ireland minister. Edwin was one of 3 boys and 2 girls born to Rev. Daniel and Mary O Connor and he graduated from Trinity College Dublin with a Degree in Medicine as a Surgeon Doctor in June 1912.

The ambitious young graduate quickly relocated to the industrial heartland of Merseyside where he was appointed as a Surgeon Doctor in the busy Victoria Hospital in Wallasey. Rising political tensions in Europe led to the outbreak of WW1 on 28th July 1914, a terrible conflict which raged for almost four and a half years, until 11th November 1918 by which time almost 17 million lives were expended.

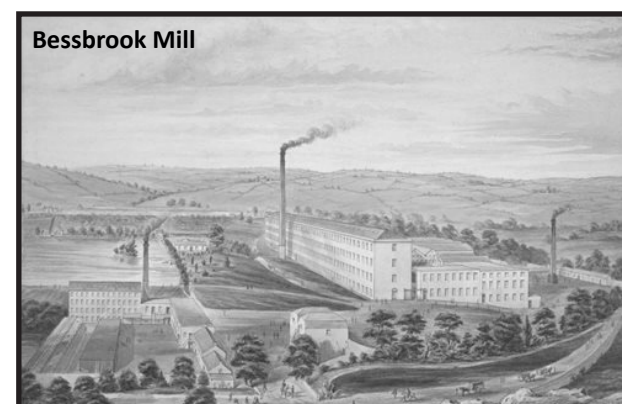
Dr O Connor answered the call of duty and enlisted with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) on 29th November 1914 with the London Gazette of 7th October 1919 announcing his appointment as Temporary Captain RAMC. He saw service in France and Gallipoli, amongst other theatres of war, where his gallantry and heroism were recognised and rewarded. He was awarded the Military Cross (MC) and in 1918 the French Government awarded Edwin the Croix De Guerre in recognition of his role in evacuating an asylum, without a casualty, whilst under heavy enemy fire. Despite the wartime mayhem, the young medic found time for romance and married an English girl, Evelyn Cecilia Morris in 1915.

Following the cessation of hostilities, Captain Edwin Fitzgerald returned to "Civvy Street" and new career prospects. Undoubtedly, the young Surgeon Doctor gained more experience in his harrowing spell with the RAMC than many medical colleagues would accrue in a lifetime. He came to Bessbrook in 1920 to take up an appointment as Medical Officer for the Bessbrook Spinning Company. His predecessor, Dr Samuel Scott, was also a veteran of WWI. He contracted "Trench Fever" and succumbed to the disease in May 1920. Dr Scott is also buried in Christ Church Cemetery.

Following the establishment of the Royal British Legion in 1921, Dr O



Trinity College Dublin



Bessbrook Mill



O'Connor Home Stead, Photos Credit, Bessbrook Heritage and Historical Group.



Photos Credit, Bessbrook Heritage and Historical Group. Christ Church Bessbrook

Connor became an active member of both Bessbrook and Newry branches and held the office of Vice President of both. He was a member of the Masonic Order with connections to Lodges 18 and 83. A keen sportsman, he was an international hockey player and was attached to Banbridge Hockey Club and regularly hunted with Newry Harriers. A man of deep faith, he worshipped in Christ Church where he held many offices including Parochial Nominator. In 1933 a committee was formed to oversee the construction of a War Memorial in Bessbrook and Dr O Connor was appointed Chairman. The project came to fruition with the unveiling of the memorial by the Earl of Kilmorey on Saturday 7th April 1934.

Resulting from the death of Dr Samuel Martin in 1926, Dr O Connor was appointed Medical Officer of Newry Workhouse and moved into "Bellevue" on Chapel Road, Bessbrook with his wife, Evelyn, and their 4 children. James Mac Mahon was a prominent 19th-century merchant and NMA delivered a very successful project around him last year. He lived in an imposing residence, Bellevue" on Dorans Hill, Newry and during our research, we accidentally stumbled across "Bellevue" in Bessbrook and curiosity led to further investigation.

We contacted a local historian, Tommy Murray, (Bessbrook and Camlough History Group) and what a story Tommy had to tell. He had researched Dr O Connor, his war service, and related how he was buried with his wife in an unmarked grave in Christ Church. Further detailed research was undertaken by the eminent historian and genealogist, Maud Hamill and a more complete picture emerged. Mr Trevor Kinnin confirmed the location of the grave and made burial records available and the consensus was that this situation needed immediate redress. We contacted Colin Whiteside, Chairman of Newry British Legion, who on hearing the story immediately pledged to have the situation resolved. Colin and the Branch contacted and liaised with RAMC and they were pleased to fund a headstone for Dr O Connor. The stone has been erected on the grave by Mr Kenny Wharton.

1934 was a bittersweet year for the O Connor family. Early Spring brought the joyous unveiling of the War Memorial but sadly on 5th December 1934, Dr Edwin Fitzgerald O Connor, a true Christian, eminent medical professional and war hero passed away following illness. At his request, his British Legion family bore his remains from his home to Christ Church for burial. Shortly afterwards, Evelyn and their children moved to Yorkshire but following her death her remains were repatriated to Bessbrook and she was reunited with her beloved husband in Christ Church.



Unmarked Grave of Dr. O'Connor



War Memorial Bessbrook