

# Otterford Remembered

Otterford men  
who fought in  
the Great War  
1914 - 1918

OTTERFORD PARISH COUNCIL





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IN THE MEMORY OF THE MEN OF THIS PARISH  
WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR  
1914 - 1918

WALTER CLARK	EARL MATTHEWS
WILLIAM SPENCE	ALBERT STARR
WILLIAM LLOYD	THOMAS SMITH
JOHN HENRY BLAKE	ROBERT LYON
WALTER ARMY	WALTER SPENCE

WE WILL NEVER FORGET THE SACRIFICE OF THOSE WHO GAVE US THIS DAY

1919-1945 JAMES PITMAN



# Introduction



**They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.**

*'For The Fallen'* : Laurence Binyon

In 2013 Otterford Parish Council decided to commemorate the Centenary of the end of World War 1 (on 11th November 2018) by researching and publishing details of the lives and times of the ten men commemorated on the memorial plaque in the parish church of St Leonard's and some of the other men with an Otterford connection who fought and died or came home.

As 'the lamps were going out all over Europe' (Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary, 3rd August 1914) young men from all walks of life rallied to the call 'Your Country Needs You', and volunteered to serve their King and country. The men of Otterford were no exception. Why men enlisted is rarely documented but we assume that at the beginning of the war it was out of a sense of duty - perhaps seduced by the strident recruitment jingles and/or a need to escape the humdrum life many led in occupations such as farm labourers or roadmen. Some will have gone because their work colleagues or friends were going (perhaps into one of the 'Pals Battalions'), and they didn't want to miss out. Later in the war, men were conscripted.

With the passage of time, the passing of survivors and/or immediate descendants, and the loss of some official records (particularly the armed forces records destroyed by bombing in World War 2) we simply don't know how many men with

Otterford connections fought and sometimes died - but this booklet is intended to shed a little light on those we do know about.

## **And what did our research find?**

Life in the early 1900s was very different from today. Many people remained living in and around the area where they were born throughout their lives: perhaps moving only on marriage or to find work. It is not, therefore, surprising to find that most of the men in this booklet moved periodically or regularly between Otterford and neighbouring parishes - particularly Buckland St Mary, and to a lesser degree Churchstanton and Yarcombe - with some establishing a much stronger connection with that other parish. Without doubt, some of the men in this booklet would feature strongly in a 'Buckland St Mary Remembered' booklet!

Our research also showed there is considerable variation, between men, in

the number and level of records and detail available. Major John Neill Black, the only officer on the memorial plaque, whose family lived at Otterhead House (the de-facto Manor House) between 1909 and 1915, is particularly well documented. His family's social status and wealth ensured that he was not forgotten. To our knowledge he is commemorated on seven war memorials, and had a memorial bed in the local hospital. Some other men are also well documented - perhaps because of a particular incident, or because their death or home-coming attracted the attention of the local press. But for some we have struggled to find much information, and for one man - Albert Stagg - commemorated on the memorial plaque we have simply been unable to find an Otterford connection.

Much of our information came from the 1871 - 1911 census returns, church and Parish Council records, births/marriages/deaths records, school admissions registers, and those armed forces records that survived the World War 2 bombing.

The horrors of World War 1 are well documented and the only thing we can be sure of is that whether road mender, farm labourer or heir to the manor they all must have suffered in ways we cannot imagine. What is perhaps shocking is that the majority were so young. Nineteen was the official age for a British Soldier to be posted abroad, but many lied about their age. Most of the men from Otterford were in their early twenties.

It has been estimated that close to three quarters of a million British servicemen were killed in World War 1, and grieving families at home were denied much chance to come to terms with their losses. The dead were not repatriated, there were just too many of them. Otterford residents doubtless had their share of grieving along with the rest of the country.

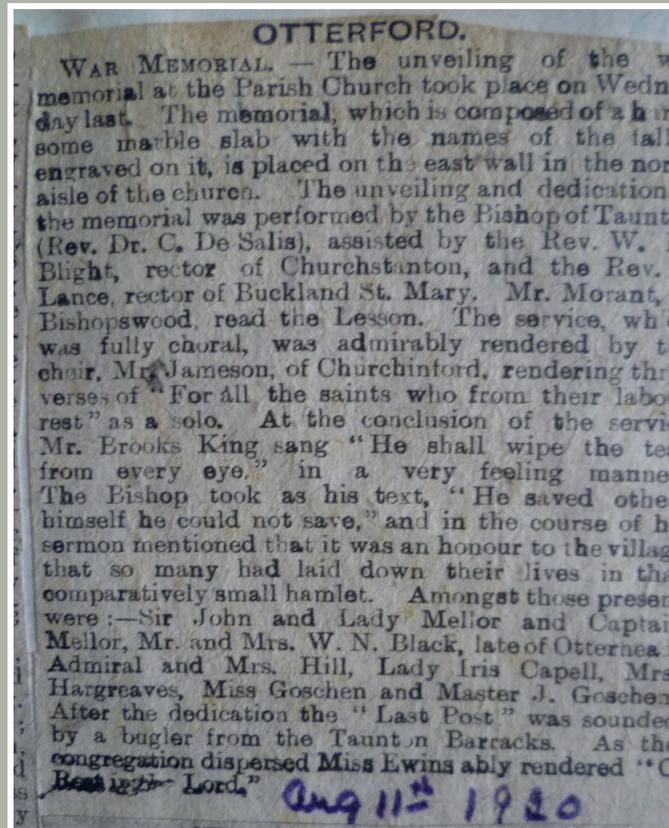
After the war the parish felt that some lasting tribute should be made to those who had given their lives. We know from minutes of an Otterford Parish Council meeting on 26th September 1919 that Messrs Mobray of London had supplied a coloured sketch of a 'plain tablet'; and that the Vicar had applied to the diocese for a Faculty to place a memorial tablet in St Leonard's Church. This was granted and the tablet (or plaque) was purchased and sited in the church at a cost of £76 (£3,294 in today's money) - a copy of the press cutting reporting the unveiling is shown on the next page. The Parish Council chairman is noted as saying he would approach Mr Black - father of John Neill - for a contribution towards the cost. We can find no evidence that such a donation was forthcoming; although Mr and Mrs Black did attend the unveiling and dedication service.

This booklet is our tribute to those brave young Otterford Men who set out on a great adventure, perhaps for 'a bit of a lark', but which took them into hell on earth. An experience which left those who returned irreparably scarred for life. An experience which left those who did not make it buried, or simply forever missing, where they fell - in a "foreign field".

The booklet was launched on Saturday 10th November 2018 at a Barn Dance in Otterford Parish Hall in Bishopswood - part of a weekend of events to commemorate the Centenary, organised jointly with our friends and neighbours in Buckland St Mary Parish. Copies have been distributed to all Otterford households, and to local reference/research organisations.

**Mike Canham**

Chairman, Otterford Parish Council  
November 2018



## OTTERFORD

WAR MEMORIAL - The unveiling of the war memorial at the Parish Church took place on Wednesday last. The memorial which is composed of a handsome marble slab with the names of the fallen engraved on it, is placed on the east wall of the north aisle of the church. The unveiling and dedication of the memorial was performed by the Bishop of Taunton (Rev Dr C De Salis), assisted by the Rev W H Blight, Rector of Churchstanton, and the Rev Lance, Rector of Buckland St Mary. Mr Morant, of Bishopswood, read the lesson.

The service, which was fully choral, was admirably rendered by the choir, Mr Jameson of Churchinford rendering three verses of "For all the Saints who from their labour rest" as a solo. At the conclusion of the service Mr Brooks King sang "He shall wipe the tear from every eye," in a very feeling manner. The Bishop took as his text "He saved others, himself he could not save", and in the course of his sermon mentioned that it was an honour to the village that so many had laid down their lives in that comparatively small hamlet.

Amongst those present were:- Sir John and Lady Mellor and Captain Mellor, Mr and Mrs W N Black, late of Otterhead, Admiral and Mrs Hill, Lady Iris Capell, Mrs Hargreaves, Miss Goschen and Master J Goschen. After the dedication the "Last Post" was sounded by a bugler from the Taunton Barracks. As the congregation dispersed Miss Ewins ably rendered "O Rest my Lord".



TO THE MEMORY OF THE MEN OF THIS PARISH  
WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WARS  
1914 - 1919

WALTER GLODE	DAN MATTHEWS
WILLIAM SPARKS	ALBERT STADD
WILLIAM LOCK	FRANK SMITH
JOHN HELL BLACK	SAMUEL LOCK
WALTER DARBY	WALTER SPARKS

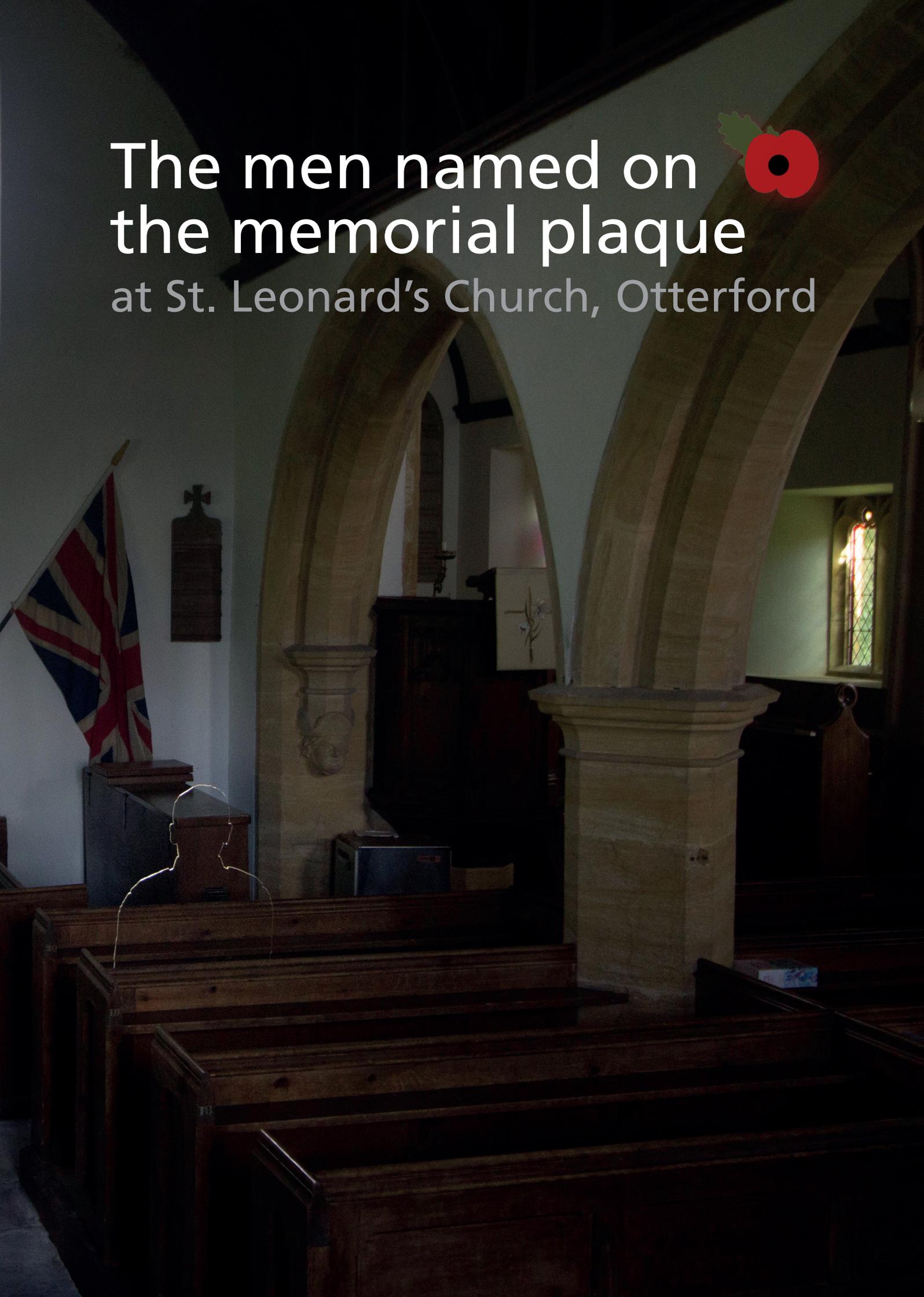
YE SHALL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF GLORY THAT FADETH NOT AWAY

1939-1945 JAMES PITMAN



# The men named on the memorial plaque

at St. Leonard's Church, Otterford



# John Neill Black



## John Neill Black

Born in Cochin in India: the family were living at Otterhead House at the outbreak of war

Joined the Somerset Light Infantry, 6th Battalion, as a Second Lieutenant (Service No: 28047)

Final rank: Major

Fought in France and Belgium

Killed in action on 9th April 1917 at the Battle of Arras, France

Buried at Tigris Lane Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery, Wancourt, Pas de Calais

Commemorated on the War Memorial at St Peter & St Paul in Churchstanton; at St Nicholas of Myra Church in Ozleworth, Gloucestershire; on the War Memorial at Bilton Grange Preparatory School in Yorkshire, in the chapel at Malvern College; in the chapel at Clare College, Cambridge; on the Cenotaph at St Francis' Church in Kochi (formerly Cochin), India; and on the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford

Also commemorated on a plaque given to East Reach Hospital in Taunton (subsequently Musgrove Park Hospital, and recently donated to the Somerset Heritage Centre)

John's father, William Neill Black (an East India merchant, born in 1856 in Hackney, died 3rd November 1926 in Gloucestershire), and his mother Mary Black (nee Gordon, born in Abbey Wood in Kent in 1867, died 19th April 1950 at Budleigh Salterton, Devon) were living in Cochin, in India, when John was born on 13th June 1894. He was baptised on 10th August that year at Coonoor. John's older sister, Ruth, had been born on 9th September 1892, also in Cochin: she was baptised on 13th October that year.

By 1901 the family had returned to England and were living - along with William's widowed mother Rosalind (born in Belfast in 1834), and unmarried sister Lillian (born in Canonbury, London, in 1874) - at Stoner House, Steep, Petersfield, Hampshire. They were a wealthy family with five live-in servants: a cook (Mary Beak), a parlour maid (Alice Roper), a housemaid (Sophia Elsay), an under-housemaid (Annie Wynnich), and a kitchen maid (Fanny Gregson).

John attended Bilton Grange Preparatory School, near Rugby, between 1902 and 1908. Sadly, apart from a reference on the war memorial there, no other records survive.

In 1908 he moved to Malvern College, remaining there until 1913: he was in House 4, Middle IV B Matriculation Class. No records remain of his educational achievements here either, but the June 1913 edition of *The Malvernian* magazine includes notes on his cricketing ability "A hard hitting but unsound batsman. He made some useful runs, but his defence is weak. Very slow in the field". His best performance of the season was 67 not out against *The Incogniti*. The team captain that day was Donald John Knight (born 12th May 1894 in Sutton, Surrey, died 5th January 1960 in London) who went on to win a Blue at Oxford either side of the war, and play for Surrey (where he regularly opened with Jack

Hobbs) and England. John was a Sergeant in the College Corps.

In 1909 the Blacks leased Otterhead House (in Churchstanton parish, but the grounds were in both Churchstanton and Otterford).



Otterhead House

John, shown in the admissions register as "the son of W N Black (Gentleman) of Taunton)", was admitted to Clare College, Cambridge, in 1913. He was admitted as a pensioner - that is a student paying their own fees for tuition, board and lodging. He was at Clare for only three terms (Michaelmas, Lent and Easter) after which the entries in the term book change to 'ms' (military service) for the subsequent terms: the book also records that he was killed. Unfortunately the various College publications ceased publication during the war years so there is no recorded information regarding his time there: nor does the College hold any examination results prior to the early 1920's.

John applied for a temporary commission on 24th August 1914, requesting an infantry posting in the Somerset Light Infantry. His application was countersigned by his father as he was aged under 21, and supported by W D Beresford of Cambridge University. He was interviewed by Major Rawling of the



**OFFICERS OF THE SOMERSET LIGHT INFANTRY.**—Back row (left to right): Sec.-Lt. Sir C. Lampson, Bart., Lt. H. Moore, Sec.-Lt. S. E. Birrell, Sec.-Lt. R. A. Sommerville, Sec.-Lt. J. N. Black, Sec.-Lt. J. N. Purkis, Lieut. A. MacConnell. Middle row: Sec.-Lt. F. H. Fuge, Lieut. F. Bramwell, Sec.-Lt. C. Thatcher, Lieut. F. C. Caillard, Lieut. G. B. Walrond, Lieut. G. Manson, Sec.-Lt. C. H. C. Nash. Front row: Capt. A. R. S. Sale-Hill, Maj. T. F. Ritchie, Capt. L. E. Worthington-Wilmer (Adjutant), Lt.-Col. C. G. Rawling, C.I.E., Maj. C. F. Lennox, Maj. A. O. C. Cust, Capt. F. D. Bellew.

6th Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry, and subsequently joined that Battalion as a Second Lieutenant: his Service Number was 28047. On enlistment his height was 5' 10" his weight 10st 4lb and his chest measured 36". His health, teeth, and vision (both eyes 6/6) were good, and he was deemed 'fit'.

The 6th (Service) Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry was raised at Taunton in August 1914 as part of Kitchener's Army and was attached to 43 Brigade, 14th (Light) Division. They proceeded to France in May 1915 and served on the Western Front throughout almost all of the remainder of the war - returning to England briefly between 18th June and 1st August 1918.

In 1915 the Blacks moved to Ozleworth (or Ozelworth) Park, Wootten-Under-Edge, in Gloucestershire, and in May that year John went with his Regiment to France.

As part of the 14th (Light) Division, John's Regiment saw action between 22nd April and 31st July 1915 at the Second Battles of Ypres (which saw the first use of a new German weapon on the Western Front: a cloud of poisonous gas); on 30th July the Division

fought at the Battle of Hooge (which saw the first major use of the flamethrower - the flammenwerfer - by the Germans); and was in action again on 25th September at the Battle of Bellewaarde Lake.

John was promoted to Captain in November 1915.

On 15th July 1916 the Division fought at the Battle of Delville Wood, finally achieving its objective (the capture of the Wood) on 25th August: and between 15th and 22nd September at The Battle of Flers-Courcelette, in reality the third main phase of the Battle of the Somme (which featured the first tank battle in history).

John was promoted to Acting Major - and second in command of the Battalion - in January 1917. He was Mentioned in Despatches in 1917. Though not a medal, for actions during WW1, soldiers were entitled to receive a





Some of the war memorials naming John Nell Black.  
From left to right: Malvern College, St Francis' Church, Kochi, India and Clare College, Cambridge.

certificate and wear a decoration of a spray of oak leaves in bronze which could be displayed on the Victory Medal

In 1917 the Division was involved in the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, before taking part in the first day of the Battle of Arras on 9th April, 1917. The attack east of Arras was slow but ultimately successful, pushing forwards to capture Delville Wood, Feuchy and Monchy-le-Preux in the initial stages. However, casualties were heavy and John - hit by shrapnel - was among the fallen. At just 22 years of age, he was remarkably young for his high rank, probably due to the social position of his family and his competence on the battlefield.

John is buried at Tigris Lane CWG Cemetery (Grave I. E. 12), Wancourt, Pas de Calais. The inscription on his grave includes the words 'NON CRUX SED LUX' which translates as 'not the cross but its light' which was the Black family motto.

The Black family's social status ensured that John was not forgotten: he is commemorated pretty much wherever he had lived and studied. In addition to the Memorial Plaque at St Leonard's Otterford, John is commemorated on the Cenotaph at St Francis' Church in Kochi (formerly Cochi/ Cochin), now a Church of South India and the oldest European Church in India; on the War Memorial at Bilton Grange Preparatory School; in the chapel at Malvern College (where there was an entrance exhibition in his memory); on the War Memorial inside the church of St Peter & St Paul, Churchstanton; at the church of St Nicholas of Myra, Ozleworth, Gloucestershire (which also has his original WW1 wooden cross on display) and in the chapel at Clare College, Cambridge.

John's parents funded a bed in the hospital at Taunton (the old hospital in East Reach) in his memory, with the proviso that a photograph of their son should be kept over the bed - and preference for use of the bed



The WW1 wooden cross which originally marked his grave

John's grave at Tigris Lane Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery



The Plaque from East Reach Hospital, including the letter from John's commanding officer.

be given to patients from Otterford and Churchstanton. The plaque was transferred to Musgrove Park Hospital when East Reach closed, and subsequently donated to the Somerset Heritage Centre in 2014.

The hospital plaque contained a copy of the letter to his parents from John's Commanding Officer, dated 11th April 1917 (two days after John's death).

*"In the midst of success in war follows the bitter side. Your son John Neill was killed in action on 9th inst. His Company led the Batt in a most successful attack right up to the enemy third line defences. We were consolidating this line before advancing further when your son was hit by a hostile shell. The shrapnel burst just above him so death must have been instantaneous. You have indeed had a grievous loss but the loss of the Batt, is, I can assure you, as great and deeply felt. Your son joined the Batt. at the beginning of the war and has been with us ever since. He has always been the life and soul of the Batt. cheerful always even when the rest of us were depressed by trying circumstances. His men worshipped him and would follow him anywhere. I have written at once though this is only a damp pause in the fighting and will send you further particulars later as to burial. Please accept our sincere condolences for you and Mrs Black.*

*We the few remaining original members of the Batt. who have served with him for so long know the loss and know it irreparable. Your son acted as a Major, 2nd in command of the Batt. under me all January and February. He did magnificent work."*

John was entitled to the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal, and the Victory Medal: claimed by his father after his death.

## History almost repeating itself

Ruth Black (sister) married Kenneth J Harper on 26th March 1915 at Otterford Church: after the wedding they returned to live in India. Kenneth had been born on 13th November 1882 /1883: his family lived at the Manor House in Pilton, Somerset. He attended Kings School in Bruton for his matriculation, and went on to study at Pembroke College, Cambridge in 1900: graduating with a BA in 1903. When war broke out he was a Lieutenant in the Indian Army Reserve of Officers (IARO): he served from 1914 to 1919 attached to the 12th Cavalry (Indian Army) in Mesopotamia. During the Second World War, back living at Ozleworth Park, he served, from 1st February 1941, as a Second Lieutenant in the 6th Gloucestershire (South Gloucester) Battalion of the Home Guard.

He died in 1957 aged 75 at Laois, Granstown Manor, Killermogh, Ireland.

## And history repeating itself?

Kenneth and Ruth's son John Neill Harper - named we presume in memory of, and as a tribute to, his uncle John Neill Black - was born in India on 24th April 1917: just fifteen days after his uncle was killed at Arras. He was baptised on 10th June that year at St Stephen's Church, Ootacamund 'Ooty' a British hill station in the Nilgiri Hills near Madras.

For his matriculation John Neill Harper studied in House 4 at Malvern College (following exactly in the footsteps of his uncle) between 1931 and 1936. He was a School Prefect and a Sergeant in the College Corps.

# Walter Clode

On 16th September 1936 he enlisted as a Second Lieutenant in the 21st Royal Gloucestershire Hussars, Armoured Car Company, in the Royal Tank Corps - a Territorial Army Battalion. His Service No was 68817. On 16th September 1939, just after the outbreak of war, he joined the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars and was promoted to First Lieutenant. He was further promoted to (Temporary) Captain on 17th January 1940.

He was killed in action at El Gubi in Libya on 19th November 1941, aged 24. His Commanding Officer, Major W R B Trevor, wrote *"The Squadron had to stand up to some 150 Enemy tanks and we had to take some heavy punishment. John as usual was right up at the front and giving them everything he'd got: (Killed instantaneously by small arms bullet.) John was far and away my best Trooper Leader in G. Squadron. And his wonderful keenness and complete fearlessness was a grand example and inspiration to us all."*

He is buried at El Alamein at Matruh in Egypt and commemorated on the Alamein Monument (Column 24), and on the War Memorial at Ozleworth (name misspelt as 'John Neal').



John Neill Harper



## Walter Clode

Born in Otterford, on 2nd July 1886

A regular soldier, a Private, in the Somerset Light Infantry, 3rd (Territorial) Battalion, he subsequently transferred to the Coldstream Guards, 2nd Battalion (Service No 6945)

Fought in France and Flanders

Killed in action in Flanders on 22nd October 1914

Commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial; and on the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford

The Clodes were an Upottery family, their name in the Parish Registers go as far back as the 16th century. Walter's father George and grandfather Edward were both Master Masons in Upottery, but by Walter's early childhood a series of deaths in the family had disrupted the regular pattern of their lives. This broke up the family, and perhaps explains why Walter joined the Army at 19.

George Clode married Flora Huggins of Upottery in 1873; two sons, Frederick & Richard, were born in Upottery in 1874 and 1876, Mary Jane in Otterford in 1883 and Walter John himself in Bishopswood on 2nd July 1886. By 1890 things had begun to go badly wrong. Richard, aged 13, died early that year, and Flora died of TB on 4th July at School Farm, Otterford, after an illness of 18 months.

On 25th September George married again, to Catherine Sage, the 39 year old widow of Matthew Sage of Exeter; he was 52 when he died, and they had been married six months. George's rapid re-marriage seems startling, but widowed men in his situation with young children were in a difficult position. Catherine is described as an Innkeeper on the marriage certificate; Frederick Clode, now 16, was a witness.

Catherine had a history, which brought another member into the family, and it seems, close companionship for Walter. Born Catherine Crook, in the 1880s she was working as a domestic servant in Taunton; in April 1886 she had a daughter, Rosina, at 24 Alfred Street - no father named.

In 1891 the newly constituted family were living in Churchinford - George & Catherine, with three young children, Mary Jane, Rosina & Walter; George is described as a carrier. Frederick by this time was working at Pitlands Inn in Bishopswood. The Clode children, and Rosina, went to Smeatharpe, Brown Down and Buckland St Mary Schools, marking their moves between villages.

On the 3rd August 1897 George too died of TB, which must have brought their family life to an abrupt end; Frederick was with him when he died. What happened next we don't know, but by the 1901 Census the family was scattered: Walter, aged 14, was living with his mother's sister Sarah Jane and her husband Frank Doble, a gamekeeper on the Otterhead estate. Rosina was with her uncle George Crook and his family in Burnham; Mary Jane can't, so far, be traced and Catherine was working as housekeeper to a widower and his son in Blagdon Hill. Frederick, set apart by being that bit older, was married with children (also at Buckland St Mary School), working as a mason and living at Lodge, Buckland St Mary. His wife, Louisa Holly,

had been a neighbour in Churchinford; she was born in Burlescombe. They were living at Burlescombe, keeping the Royal Oak Inn, when Walter was killed in 1914.

Walter re-appears in 1906 when, now a member of the 3rd (Territorial) Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry, he joined the 2nd Battalion of the Coldstream Guards on 13th September. His Short Service Attestation and his Enlistment papers give us a revealing snapshot of the young man at just over 19 years old. He gave his occupation as Groom; he had earlier been rejected as unfit for Military Service because he was 'under chest Measurement' - but this seems to have been dealt with. On enlistment he was 5' 7", weighed 137 lbs, and had a chest measurement of 36 inches. He had a fresh complexion, grey eyes and brown hair, and a scar on the first joint of his left thumb. After 6 months' service he was 5' 8" and weighed 146 lbs; his chest expansion though had dropped from 2 inches to 1 inch! His Religion was C of E. We don't know why and under what circumstances he joined the 3rd SLI - there are no surviving records.

We meet him again in 1911, as a Private in the Coldstreams, stationed at Ramillies Barracks, Aldershot.

Again, there is a gap - we know no more of Walter until 1914, the beginning of the War. But when War broke out, there was a sudden burst of detail as Walter wrote what was in effect a Soldier's Will, in the form of two letters to Rosina, now Rose, telling her what was happening in those early days of August, and what he wanted done with his possessions if the worst happens - which, of course, he assured her wouldn't be the case.

These are affectionate letters, warm and loving in tone, which speak of a happy relationship between step-brother and sister,

so close in age, brought up together from the age of four. It's striking that after the death of George Clode, Walter's father, in 1897, they must have remained close, despite being brought up in different families. Rose is 'My Dearest Rose' most paragraphs begin 'Dear', and Walter signs off with '*fondest love and kisses I remain your loving Walt*'.

They are a little stilted, not the product of someone used to the pen, but none the less affecting for that. They're also business like; he explained how and to whom he wanted things left (but not to Fred - 'he has been no brother to me')

and made arrangements for sending his bank books to Rose and how his pay would be arranged and his money left.

The Coldstream Guards, part of the 4th (Guards) Brigade, stationed at Windsor, sailed from Southampton on 12th August. Arriving at Le Havre, they moved north, first by train and then marching in very hot weather. They were the advance guard to the Brigade, and crossed the frontier into Belgium at Malplaquet on 23rd August at 4.30am. The conditions were hot and trying. At 11am they reached the outskirts of Mons, and moved into the firing line, digging in.

*My dearest Rose*

*Many thanks for your nice letter which I was pleased to receive from you; trusting that this will find you quite well as it leaves me in the very best of health at present.*

*Dear, I don't know yet when we shall move from here - any hour after tomorrow. We are just about ready now; [I] shall be glad to move or do something - about had enough of packing up this last day or two, also getting things together for [us] to go.*

*Well Dear I have packed all my things up here that [are] any good and am leaving it all with a lady friend of mine, but am sending you on my two bank books tomorrow to keep for me. I have also put you down to take all my money that I shall have to come from the Army if anything happens - which I hope not. Also left a shilling a day to you for the time I am away, if you will keep it for me until such time that I come back. They will send to you I expect if anything happens, if not before. Up to the present I have left you everything but I want you to give some away to other people if I don't come back, but [I] am going with a good heart and hope to come back to my friends.....*

*.....Don't let Fred have anything - he has been no brother to me.*

*Will let you know what to give them if all well.*

*Bye bye for now; I will now conclude with fondest love and kisses, I remain your loving Walt*

*P.S. Thanking you for your kindness. I had a letter from Aunt [Sarah Doble at Woodend, Bishopswood]; she is not very well at present, worried to death thinking I am going out. Ta Ta, with love; hope to see you soon.*

But on the 24th they were, on the contrary, ordered to form the rearguard for the retirement of the 2nd Division in the retreat from Mons, and marched south under enemy pressure, but at first with few casualties. On 30th August 'Marched 3am to Pasly arriving 6.15pm where the brigade bivouacked. A very long march and very hot'. They retreated under these trying conditions 'til September 6th, when 'Forward movement at last ordered'. On 9th September they crossed the Marne and on the 13th the Aisne, coping with attacks all the way. The Battalion endured heavy attacks at Soupir and then Chavonne; trenches were dug. The hot weather was giving way to heavy rain. They remained at Chavonne until 12th October, when the 332nd French Regiment relieved them, and they entrained north for Hazebrouk in Flanders.

This was the start of the First Battle of Ypres. At dusk on the 20th the whole Battalion was moved forward and bivouacked in a position of readiness on the high ground North West of Zonnebeke.'

1914 Oct 21

On the 21st the battalion was ordered to advance at 8am and to gain the Zonnebeke- Langemarck road, from which point it was to conform with converging attacks by the Irish Guards and 3rd Bttm Coldstream Guards on the right and left flanks respectively. Considerable opposition was met with, and by degrees the whole of the Battalion was absorbed in the firing line, but by 3pm the line of the road had been gained, though further advance was checked owing to the co-operating attacks being held up. This gave rise to a critical situation on our flanks and the Battalion was therefore ordered to fall back during the night to a line running N/S through Pt 37 in order to conform with the general line held by the remainder of the Brigade.

OCTOBER 22nd-23rd

This operation was successfully carried out under cover of darkness, and the Battalion entrenched a strong position which they held throughout the 22nd and 23rd, under an exceedingly heavy fire (principally high explosive) from the enemy's artillery.

The Casualties of the Battalion during the operations were: Officers 1 killed Maj. B A Markham 1 wounded Lieut R L C Bewicke Copley Other Ranks 15 killed, 34 wounded & 4 missing.

Army Register of Soldiers' Effects

Extract from War Diary, 2nd Bttm Coldstream Guards

This was the action in which Walter was killed. Was he among the 15 killed, or the 4 missing? Whichever it was, his body was lost, his only memorial the Ypres Menin Gate Memorial with its 54,613 names. His last letters to Rose, and the Army Register of Soldiers' Effects set out his final wishes. Originally his effects went to brother Frederick, his next of kin (see Probate Registry). It must have been when Rose came forward with his last letters to her that this was corrected, as Walter had wished.

Campaign: 1914

(A) Where decoration was earned.  
 (B) Present situation.

Name	Corps	Rank	Reg. No.	Ball on which included (if any)
(A) CLODE	6 Gds	Pte	6945	MEDAL ROLL PAGE
(B) Walter				62/1016 93
				STAR 69/68
Action taken				K in A
Qualifying Date				12-8-14

(6 24 46) W251-1175590 500,000 4/19 HWY(1200) R608

# Walter Darby



## Walter Darby

Lived at The New Inn (now The Candlelight Inn), Bishopswood

A regular soldier, a Private, in the Royal Marines Light Infantry (Service No PLY/4689)

Served on various ships, the last the SS Calliope

Drowned in the Mediterranean Sea on 5th April 1917, after the ship was sunk by a U-Boat

Buried in the Trapani Town Cemetery in Trapani on Sicily (where his body was washed ashore)

Commemorated on the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford

Walter Darby was born in Puncknowle ('Punnel'), Dorset, north east of Bridport, on 26th June 1870, the youngest of the nine children of Edward and Rhoda Darby. As one would expect from the location, their occupations were shaped by the sea and the countryside. Rhoda, and some of their neighbours in the 1871 Census, are described as Braiders of Fishing Nets; his oldest brother was a fisherman. It's an unexpected background for someone living in Otterford before WW1, but Walter had gone into the Royal Marines Light Infantry as a 19 year old, and, having retired in 1909, must have looked for another livelihood. In 1911 he had been married for six years to Kate Foot (there were no children) and was working as a general labourer, living in Litton Cheney,

Dorset. At some point before 1914 they must have decided to go into the licensed trade, no doubt looking for any not too distant pub, hence the move to the New Inn (now The Candlelight Inn), Bishopswood.

Walter served nearly 18 years actually afloat from his attestation in 1888 to his discharge to the Reserve in 1909. From the Reserve he was recalled at the outbreak of War in 1914. We're very fortunate in having his records preserved at the National Archives in Kew and in the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton, some in duplicate and some unique to one or the other archive, so have an unusually detailed record of his whole service career.

He enlisted, for 12 years, in Dorchester on 12th December 1888, having previously served in the Militia with the 3rd Battalion the Dorset Regiment. He was 19, a little over 5' 6", with a ruddy complexion, blue eyes and dark brown hair. He had a chest measurement of 34", and two small moles over his left shoulder blade. He was transferred to the Plymouth Division, E Company, on 20th June 1889. On 17th August 1901 he signed up for a further 9 years, but was finally discharged to the Reserve on 22nd December 1909.

His Statement of Service details the vessels on which he served; a study of them reveals that he served all over the world, from Australia to China to America, and in the Mediterranean and the Home Fleet.

His service began on HMS Undaunted, from 18th February 1890 to 20th June 1893. She was one of seven Orlando class cruisers built in the 1880s; she was completed in 1890 and served two commissions on the China station.

He was then posted to HMS Vivid from 1st October 1893 to 1st October 1895. She was an iron screw yacht bought from civilian service for use as a tender for the Devonport



HMS Undaunted

naval base, Plymouth and as a yacht for the Port Admiral.

He joined HMS Revenge on 14th January 1896, leaving on 5th November of the same year. She was one of seven Royal Sovereign class pre-Dreadnought battleships built for the Royal Navy in the 1890s. She spent much of her early career as flagship for the Flying Squadron and in the Mediterranean, Home and Channel Fleets.

HMS Ramillies was another Royal Sovereign pre-Dreadnought battleship, built in the 1890s. She was commissioned in Portsmouth in October 1893, and served as a Flagship in the Mediterranean up to 1899. Walter Darby joined her on 24th November 1896, leaving on 19th August 1897.

On 9th November 1897 he moved to HMS Ringdove, a Redbreast class gunboat built in Devonport; he left her on 10th June 1901. She commenced service on the Australian Station in March 1890, returning to England in 1901.

Walter Darby joined HMS Defiance on 1st October 1901, leaving on 30th September 1904. She was built at Pembroke Dock, being completed in 1862. She was the last of the wooden line of battleships launched for the Royal Navy. In 1884 she became a schoolship for torpedo and mining training.

After service on HMS Defiance, he was posted briefly to HMS Nelson - from 18th January 1905 to 8th May of the same year. She was a Nelson class armoured cruiser



HMS Goliath

built in the 1870s; by the time Walter Darby served on her she had been degraded to Dockyard Reserve and hulked as a training ship for stokers.

HMS Goliath was another pre-Dreadnought battleship, a member of the Canopus class. She was commissioned in March 1890, and served on the China station until 1903. Walter Darby joined her on 9th May 1905, by which time she was based in the Mediterranean. He left her on 14th March 1907.



HMS Duke of Edinburgh

HMS Duke of Edinburgh was the lead ship of the Duke of Edinburgh class armoured cruisers. She was built at Pembroke Dock at a cost of nearly £2 million, and commissioned in 1906. She was assigned to the 5th Cruiser Squadron from 1906 to 1908 and then transferred to the 1st Cruiser Squadron of the Channel Fleet. Walter Darby served on her from 10th March 1908 to 9th September 1909.

His Statement of Service on 22nd December 1909 concludes: 'General Character - Very Good - In possession of 5 G.C. Badges the last awarded 12th Dec 1909. Has the L.S. and Good Conduct medal. 15th March 1904, Recommended for a gratuity of £5.'

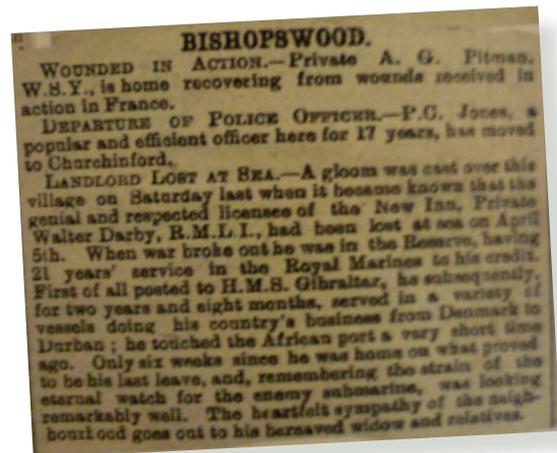
As a matter of course Walter joined the Royal Fleet Reserve on 23rd January 1910; he served a week's training with the Plymouth Division each year to 1913. In 1914 he was in training on HMS Magnificent from 15th July to 25th July. On the outbreak of War on 4th August he transferred to HMS Gibraltar where he remained until 27th November. He then spent ten days in Plymouth, transferring on 9th December to HMS Eskimo where he served until 31st March 1915. Back in Plymouth for three weeks he then transferred to Plymouth-based tender HMS Vivid from 23rd April to 28th October.

On 29th October 1915 he was promoted from Private to Lance Corporal, and was based, on paper, on HMS President III, a 'stone frigate' or shore-based establishment. From this he appears to have been assigned to Defensively Armed Merchant Ships - DAMS. They carried a stern-mounted gun, possibly a 12-pounder, for defence against attacking U-boats, with one or two Marines to operate it.

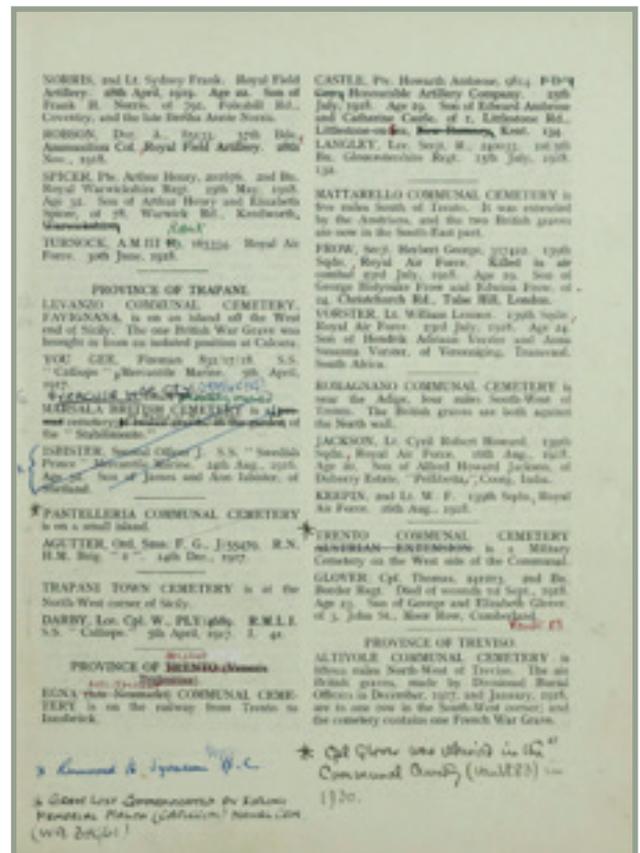
Walter Darby was lost on 5th April from SS Calliope, a British steamer. She was on a voyage from Cardiff to Malta with a cargo of coal, and was sunk by the German submarine U-65, 35 miles west of Ustica Island, off Sicily. Six of her crew, including Walter, were lost, and three taken prisoner. There is a detailed account of the ship, her sinking and her current location in [www.wrecksite.eu](http://www.wrecksite.eu).

Walter's widow, Kate, remained at the New Inn as landlady until at least 1935, listed in Kelly's Directory. She died on 25th December 1960, aged 91, by which time she

had returned to Dorset - she was living in Litton Cheney, where she and Walter had lived 50 years before.



The Courier, April 1917



From Commonwealth War Graves cemetery details. Note that it mentions another victim of the Calliope's sinking, Fireman Yon Gee, buried on the island of Favignana; his body must, like Walter Darby's, have been washed ashore.

# Samuel Lock



## Samuel Lock

Lived at Underdown (now Mill Leat), behind The New Inn (The Candlelight Inn), in Bishopswood

Conscripted, as a Private, in the 10th (Pioneers) Battalion, the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (Service No: 24817) in February 1916: subsequently transferred to the 1st Battalion

Fought in France

Died of wounds on 29th June 1918

Buried in Aire Communal Cemetery, in the Pas de Calais in France

Commemorated on the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford

The Lock family were a typical Blackdown Hills farming family - agricultural labourers from the 1841 Census onwards, and very likely earlier. Samuel's grandparents, John and Priscilla Lock, were born in Yarcombe, John around 1814, Priscilla in about 1823, but by the 1841 Census were living in Bishopswood, and there the family stayed. His father, another John, married Annie Collins on 25th June 1885 in Buckland St Mary, her own parish. Her father Charles was a gamekeeper.

Samuel, the eldest of seven, was born on 28th July 1886, and baptised in Buckland St Mary on 12th September that year. By 1891 he had a brother and a sister, Frank and Alice; Samuel and Frank were born in Combe

St Nicholas, where father John must have been working. By 1901 they were joined by John, Fred, William and Minnie; at four she was the youngest of the family; Samuel and Alice had by now moved out. Alice, at 12, was living with her aunt Emily Pavey and family in Yarcombe; grandfather John, by now a widower, and blind, and described as a retired thatcher, was there as well.

Samuel, now 14, was working as an agricultural labourer for farmer Sidney Dummett at Holmes Farm, just over the River Yarty in Buckland St Mary. The Lock family were by 1901 at Underdown (now known as Mill Leat), on the same river, behind the New Inn (now the Candlelight). They remained there, listed in Kelly's Directory until 1935 under the commercial section of the Parish, perhaps as millers, though not listed as such in the Censuses.

In the 1911 Census, Samuel was back with the family at Underdown; Frank, William and Minnie were still part of the household; the boys were all farm labourers. For this Census the householder was asked to complete the form; it's evident that the enumerator must have completed this one, with John Lock signing rather laboriously. The number of children born and surviving is also listed - seven out of seven in 1911, but by the end of the War both Samuel and William, the youngest son, were dead.

As a young unmarried man Samuel would have been obliged to enlist by 1916 at the latest; he appears on the enlistment record of the 10th Battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI) in February 1916. We can do no better than to quote in full the information provided in 2018 by the DCLI Archivist, Hugo White:

*"Samuel Lock was initially enlisted into the 10th Battalion DCLI (Pioneers). This was a unit*

*with a distinctly unorthodox beginning, being raised by the Mayor and citizens of Truro on 27th March 1915 rather than the War Department. At first it had only two officers (both unpaid) - an elderly retired Royal Engineers officer, and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, a distinguished academic and author, but a man with no military experience whatsoever. Most of the day to day work fell on Sir Arthur who attempted to keep ahead of his charges, reading the training pamphlet each night, instructing during the day, while at the same time attempting to deal with the mass of paper work which continuously piled up on his desk.*

*On 21st August 1915, the War Department assumed control of the 10th DCLI; officers were posted in, and the two original founders of the Battalion withdrew, their unenviable task accomplished.*

*On 15th October 1915, the 10th DCLI was re-organised as an Infantry Pioneer Battalion. The primary role of Infantry Pioneer battalions was to support the Royal Engineers. This included the building and maintenance of roads, light railways and bridges, the construction of command posts, dug-outs and other defensive works, and the erection of the vast hedges of barbed wire that encompassed the forward defensive lines. Much of this work was carried out in or near the front line, always within artillery range and often under small arms fire. Machinery of any kind was seldom available and, even if it had been, could not have been used so close to the enemy. Pioneers were therefore required to be men of strong physique, capable of carrying heavy loads, and working long hours with pick and shovel. Quite apart from their field engineering duties, all Infantry Pioneers were trained and equipped as infantrymen. They were fully capable of taking their place in the fighting line. This they did on many occasions, acquitting themselves with great honour. For all this, Infantry Pioneers were paid, regardless of rank, an extra 2d per day. Infantry Pioneer battalions were made up, at least in theory, of 50% tradesmen (particularly smiths, carpenters, bricklayers and railway*

*gangers) and 50% 'pick and shovel' men (men used to doing heavy manual work in all weathers). Cornwall was an ideal county for finding such soldiers, with the tin mines in the west and the clay pits in the east providing exactly the sort of man-power required.*

*On the night of 19th - 20th June 1916, the 10th DCLI, now a fully trained Infantry Pioneer battalion, crossed the Channel to land at Le Havre. After a very short period of introduction to the war in France, the Battalion was thrown into what was arguably the fiercest battle of the Somme offensive - the Battle of Delville Wood. There, apart from carrying out their field engineering role, they were called upon to fight in the line.*

*Because of its strange origins, 10th DCLI soldiers did not pass through the Dépôt at Bodmin. They are merely listed in the Enlistment Record as Serving with 10th Battalion, no details of age, employment or physique being shown. Samuel Lock appears on this record in February 1916 when the Battalion was stationed in Plymouth.*

*Regrettably, it is impossible to say when Samuel was transferred to the 1st Battalion. The 1st Battalion fought at High Wood (one of the Somme battles) on 23rd July 1916, suffering a total of 500 casualties in a single day's fighting. Its strength before that terrible day was only about 700 all ranks, so obviously there was an urgent need for immediate reinforcements if the Battalion were to remain viable as a fighting unit."*

*Studying the history of the DCLI in WW1 and the War Diaries of both the 1st and the 10th Battalions it is not possible to determine when Samuel moved from the 10th (part of the 2nd Division) to the 1st, (part of the 5th) but, given the information about the 1st's losses at the Battle of Delville Wood in July, it's tempting to think it may have been at that point. The reticent accounts in the 10th's War Diary make it hard to grasp the full horror of what they went through; on the 30th July*

'C' Company reported that the shell fire was terrific and that they were holding the line in shell holes mostly. Amidst the accounts of actually holding the line there is a steady enumeration of their pioneering work, much done under shell fire:

"August 4-5 'A' Company Fire Trench from S s 24 b 4.9 to S 18d 4.4. Company came under severe shell and M.G. fire. Casualties about seven...'

The battles of the Somme petered out into the winter of 1916/17, but the Pioneers were still busy "laying trench-boards, clearing up and ballasting the light railways, excavating flint for ballast, draining shell-holes.....They were always, more or less, under shell-fire." (The History of the DCLI 1914-1918 - Everard Wyrall)



Delville Wood after the battle

Records show that Samuel was wounded on 12th December 1916, but no detail is given. We don't know what Company he was in.

The 1st Battalion was in the Cuinchy sector; a successful raid was carried out in February, after which they went into Reserve. April brought the Battles of Arras; the weather was brutal, cold and snowy, the ground a quagmire; the 10th Battalion was also involved. Little was achieved. For the rest of May the 1st Battalion was out of the front line, but still in the Arras area, keeping the enemy's attention focused on that front.

By October the 5th Division had moved north into Flanders, "countryside desolate in the extreme.....a vast wilderness of mud and shell-holes full of noisome water. Everything, roads, buildings, farms, cottages had been destroyed by the holocaust of shell." (Everard Wyrall)

We know those battles of October and November as *Passchendaele*, that name most suggestive of suffering.

Then in December came a curious change of fortune for the 1st Battalion - they were sent, briefly, to fight on the Italian front. Owing though to the German Spring Offensive, three of the British Divisions sent there returned to France, arriving at the beginning of April. They thus missed that first shock of the Offensive which had begun in March, but were plunged into the Battle of Hazebrouck on 12th April; dealing with a gap in the line "this manoeuvre .....cost [A] company nearly half of its strength in casualties, including the company commander and another officer, both killed" (War Diary). By the 17th they were in Reserve, and then began a period of 'active defence' with harassing tactics increasing, "gaining an ascendancy over the enemy which was never again lost" (Everard Wyrall).

By the beginning of June the Battalion was preparing for a new assault, on the Le Sart front - the action of La Becque. They attacked at 6am on the 28th:

*"At 6am our Artillery Barrage opened on line 200 yards in advance of our front line and at 6.44am commenced to creep forward at the rate of 100 yards in 4 minutes until it reached the line of the Plate-Becque. The barrage was most effective and when our troops left their trenches and advanced towards the enemy's front line they met with little or no opposition and all objectives were gained without the slightest difficulty. The enemy seemed to have been taken completely by surprise and in most cases surrendered to our men without making any attempt to defend their line.*

*'D' Company who had the special object of capturing and clearing L'EpINETTE attained the object without meeting any serious opposition. After L'EpINETTE had been cleared 'D' Company withdrew to the old enemy support line NW of that place and established themselves.*

*At 7.15am 'A' Company had gained their final objective and at 7.20am 'B' Company on the left reported that they had gained their final objective so that the Battalion had carried out its part of the programme without the slightest hitch and reached all its objectives well up to time.*

*Companies commenced digging in about 7.30am and by evening a line had been established and our positions made absolutely secure.....*

*.....Our own casualties amounted to approximately 40% of the total strength - the majority of these being wounded. [Two officers] were killed and six other Officers wounded..... The operation was undoubtedly a brilliant success and attained the object at which it aimed viz. shortening our line and reducing the pressure from the French."*

1st Battalion DCLI War Diary

It's worth pointing out that such frank acknowledgement of success is by no means routine in these War Diaries. Samuel Lock must have been in that unlucky 40%; he's recorded as having been killed in action, but in the Roll of Honour at the end of Everard Wyrall's History he's recorded as having died of wounds. This makes better sense, as his date of death is given as the 29th, the day after this action. The 1st's Diaries contain what appear to be full lists of casualties, but Samuel's name is not among them. He had survived in France just a shade more than two years.

Samuel is buried in the Aire Communal Cemetery (Grave/memorial ref: III. E. 35). Aire is a town about fourteen kilometres south-south-east of St. Omer - in the Pas de Calais, in France.

## William Lock



**William Lock**

Born in Otterford and lived at Underdown, Bishopswood

Conscripted as a Private in the Somerset Light Infantry, 3rd Battalion (Service No 20485)

Died in the 4th General Hospital in Plymouth, England, in June 1916

Buried in, and commemorated at, Efford Military Cemetery at Egguckland near Plymouth; and commemorated on the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford

William Lock was born in Otterford in 1895, and baptised in St Leonard's on 12th July that year.

His family was well established in the parish. Records show that his family had been living in Otterford for several generations. (For fuller family details see the preceding entry for his brother, Samuel Lock).

By the age of fifteen William was working on a farm.

William was conscripted, as a Private, in the Somerset Light Infantry and was assigned to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion: a training unit through which new recruits passed. This unit had been transferred from the Taunton area to Devonport in 1914 and it was no doubt here that William spent his brief army service.

Sadly he died on the 10th April 1916 in the 4th General Hospital Plymouth before he could see active service abroad. The cause of death is given on his death certificate as 'rheumatism, pneumonia and heart failure'. It is hard to believe that a young man who had previously worked as a labourer succumbed to a fatal illness so easily. However, training camps rarely had enough huts for men. Most of the recruits had to sleep in tents. Conditions in these tents, especially in winter, were appalling. Several 'flu epidemics swept Plymouth at about this time so it could be that his pneumonia developed as a result of secondary complications.

William is buried in Plymouth (Efford) Military Cemetery (Grave/Memorial Ref: Church C 4524)

Army records show that he was not awarded a war gratuity, so he must have died within six months of having been conscripted.

William was the first son the Locks lost in The Great War; Samuel his older brother was to be killed two years later in France. No doubt the fact William did not see active service did not make the family's grief any less felt.



## Dan Matthews



### Dan Middleton Matthews

Born in Otterford and lived there throughout his life

Conscripted as a private in the Somerset Light Infantry, 8th Battalion (Service No 21335)

Fought in France and Flanders

Killed in action in France on 1st July 1916 in the Battle of Albert on The Somme

Commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial in France, and on the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford

Dan was an Otterford boy through and through. He was born in Otterford in July 1892, baptised on 17th July that year at the parish church of St Leonard's, went to school in Otterford and lived in the parish until he enlisted.

In the 1901 census his family are shown as living in Holman Clavel Cottage, Culmhead. His father, also Dan, was born in Buckland St Mary in 1866 and is listed as a worker (an agricultural labourer). Also listed as living in the household were his Mother Rose or Rosa (born in Otterford in 1864), Dan and his four younger sisters, Mary Ann, Nellie, Emma and Fanny.

By 1911 it would appear that they were still living in the same location, but by then Dan was 18 and is shown as a road worker, while

his father (who died in 1939) had his own business. Four more siblings had appeared: brothers Tom and John, and sisters Kate and Harriet.

Dan was conscripted, as a Private, in the 8th Battalion, the Somerset Light Infantry in Taunton (Service No: 21335).

In the first quarter of 1916 he married a local girl, Ethel Hunt. She was the daughter of the publican at the Holman Clavel Inn.

Just a few months later he was in Flanders and, along with thousands of other young men, was killed in action on 1st July - the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Like many of his comrades he was no doubt still a raw recruit. Despite some encouraging reports of the battle in the contemporary press we

now know that these small successes were in effect pyrrhic victories. The reality was that some of the greatest losses in the whole war occurred that day. Commanders had totally underestimated the strength of the German lines. George Coppard, a machine gunner vividly described the carnage that greeted the survivors the following day. 'Hundreds of dead were strung out like wreckage washed up to a high watermark. Quite as many died on the enemy wire as on the ground, like fish caught in a net.'

Dan Matthews was just 24. He left a war gratuity of £1.17s.6d (about £90 in today's money) to his widow Ethel.

In addition to the memorial plaque at St Leonard's he is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial - Pier & Face 2A.



# Frank Smith



**Frank William Smith**

The family lived at different addresses in Otterford, and surrounding parishes

Enlisted as a Private in the West Somerset Yeomanry, and transferred to Somerset Light Infantry, 8th Battalion (Service No: 27672)

Fought in France and Belgium

Died of Wounds 5th May 1917

Buried Etaples Military Cemetery: commemorated on the Buckland St Mary War Memorial, and the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford



The reports of Frank Smith's death - and there are five of them - seem to respond to something special about him. Maybe it was his youth, just 19 - 'such a bright young life', but maybe too something in his personality: 'of a bright and cheerful disposition', 'of a happy disposition and liked by all who knew him', 'my best war chum, liked by all officers and men of his company and platoon'.

Frank, or Francis, was born on 19th April 1898, the oldest child of Frank and Bessie Smith. They were a young family (all Frank's brothers were young enough to serve not in WW1 but in WW2). Frank senior was baptised at Otterford in August 1871, the son of John Smith, a Dairyman at Hayne Farm. Interestingly the Smith family were living next to the Buttles at Waterhayes in 1881.

Frank senior and Bessie Hartnell were married at Otterford in Autumn 1897. They seem to have moved around in the area; young Frank was born at Curland; in 1901 they were at Courtsmoor, Churchstanton where Frank senior was a groom; their next child was born in 1904 at Clayhidon, but then they are back in Otterford, living as tenants at North Hill Farm, Higher Widcombe (on the site of the current Abbeywood House). Frank senior was a Farmer's Carter.

Frank attended Otterford School from 9th October 1905 to 13th May 1911. As a boy he worked for Mr Brooks-King of Widcombe, and then in the garden at Buckland House, Buckland St Mary for the Reverend Mr A P Potts; when there he lodged with the Every family at Meanwood.

Frank joined the West Somerset Yeomanry, probably in 1915 'when he was barely 17 years of age'. The two surviving photographs of him are in his Yeomanry uniform, booted and spurred, looking absurdly young and very handsome. He was transferred to the

8th Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. His friend Private Bill Savery writes that they trained together at Tidworth on Salisbury Plain. According to The Taunton Courier Frank, and Bill too probably, had been in France for five months when he died; they must have arrived in a draft late in 1916. This suggests that Frank was kept in England until he was 18 plus.

Did they arrive for the last stages of the Somme battles, before they petered out in the mud of winter? About the middle of December the Battalion went into billets at Paradis, near Vieille Chapelle, where they stayed 'til March. Travelling north, they arrived in the Arras area on the 10th of March, where they remained out of the Front Line in detailed training on model trench systems built to resemble the German front line.

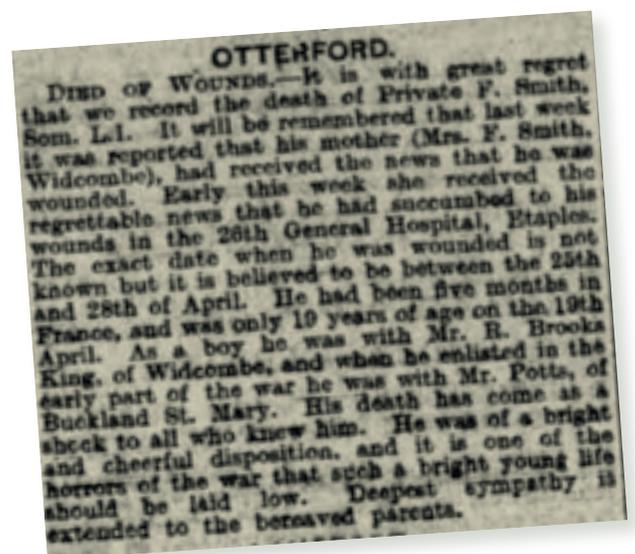
The Battle of Arras, or to describe its initial phase more precisely, the First Battle of the Scarpe (which ended on 14th April) began on 9th April after days of terrifyingly heavy bombardment of the German lines. The 8th, part of the 63rd Infantry Brigade, 37th Division, fought till withdrawn to Arras on 12th April with heavy losses: two officers wounded, 26 other ranks killed, and 70 wounded and missing. The weather was terrible; heavy rainfall, followed by snow, so bitterly cold and wretched for the men.

The Second Battle of the Scarpe (23rd-24th April) began for the 8th as they were moved up on the 22nd / 23rd ready to attack at 4.45am. Again, attacking with fellow Battalions, they suffered heavily, 'the whole front ...swept by heavy machine gun fire and a terrific hostile shrapnel barrage'. This was the day on which Frank was wounded. Bill Savery wrote to Frank's family:

*'We were blown up by the same shell, which also buried us. Afterwards when we were dug out, I heard him call "Bill", "Bill". Then I went unconscious and don't remember any more. They reported me killed, but I recovered by nightfall and then made inquiries for Frank, and was told that he was gone back to the dressing station, so I did not see him again, although we may have been taken to the same hospital. It was 12.35pm when he met with his wounds which cost him his life on the 23rd day of April in the big push, for I had just taken my watch out to see the time.'*

He was reported in the Somerset County Gazette as 'having been badly wounded in the legs'; Bill writes that 'I really cannot say whether he was wounded in the legs, but I am told in hospital that his wounds were on his right arm and on the side of his face' - which can't have been much of a comfort to his family.

Frank and Bill had a pact to 'write to one another's folks at home' if anything happened to either of them.



Taunton Courier, 16 May 1917

Between the 20th and the 28th April 4 officers and 17 other ranks were killed, 14 officers and 180 other ranks wounded, with 99 missing. A terrible toll. The whole attack (Bill Savery's all too familiar 'big push') gained 7,000 yards at a cost of 160,000 killed and wounded.

Frank would have been taken to a Casualty Clearing Station, and ultimately to the 26th General Hospital at Étaples. This was located in a vast complex near the coast, with the necessary rail, road and boat transport for bringing troops and the sick in and out. Elsie Tranter, a Nurse at the 26th, writes:

*"2.5.1917 - At present, our work in the theatre is hard and we have very long hours. We are on duty most days from early morning till very late at night. Three times this week it has been well into next morning when we have got to bed, then Sister Shann and I take it night about for emergency calls. These calls, unfortunately, are rather frequent and as they are almost invariably for haemorrhage, we have to be very quick in getting across from our tents to the theatre. Today I had to assist at ten amputations, one after another. It is frightfully nerve-wracking work. I seem to hear that wretched saw at work whenever I try to sleep. We see the most ghastly wounds and are all day long inhaling the odour of gas gangrene. How these boys suffer! This war is absolute hell. We see and hear all day and every day the results of its frightfulness. We can hear the guns quite plainly here."*

Frank is commemorated on the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford, and on the Buckland St Mary Memorial. As well as the photographs of him, his family have a lovely embroidered postcard, complete with flowers and patriotic butterfly, which he sent back from France.



Particular thanks to the Smith family for allowing us to use their photos and mementoes.

### Buckland St Mary

Frank Smith is commemorated on the Buckland St Mary War Memorial in the Churchyard and on the Memorial Board in St Mary's Church

Details of his life and war service were displayed at the Buckland St Mary World War 1 exhibitions in 2014 and 2018, and a folder containing fuller information remains available to view in the Church



# Walter Sparkes



## Walter Sparkes

Born in Otterford: the family lived at Foxes Castle, Deadman's Lane, Otterford  
Enlisted, as a Private, in the 8th Battalion, the Gloucestershire Regiment, (Service No: 12453)

Fought in France and Flanders

Taken prisoner and died in a German Military Hospital on 3rd October 1918

Buried in Charlesville (in the Ardennes) old cemetery: in 1962 his remains were re-interred in Terlincthun British Cemetery at Wimille, Pas de Calais, France

Commemorated on the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford



Walter attended the Board School on Brown Down (at the junction of the B3170 and Holman Clavel Road), which taught children up to the age of 13/14. It is now a private house called Six Gables.

By the age of 17 Walter was working for Mr Denning on the nearby farm at Westhay, Buckland St Mary.

Walter enlisted, as a Private, in the 8th (Service) Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment at Weston-Super-Mare in early 1915: serving as a stretcher bearer.

The Battalion, part of Kitchener's New Army (K2) was formed in Bristol in September 1914, and joined the 57th Brigade. The Division went to France, initially around St Omer, on 18th July 1915: Walter arrived on 9th August 1915. It was first in action at Pietre, a diversionary action supporting the Battle of Loos. In 1916 the Division fought at the Battle of the Somme, capturing La Boizelle and the attacks on High Wood, the Battles of Pozieres Ridge, and the Battle of Ancre Heights and Ancre. In 1917 the Division was in action at the Battle of Messines, and the Third Battles of Ypres.

During 1917 a report appeared in the local 'Courier' newspaper while Walter was home on leave.

In 1918 the Division fought at the Battle of St Quentin, the Battle of Bapaume, the Battles of the Lys at Messines, the Battle of Bailleul, the First battle of Kemmel Ridge, and the Battle of Aisne; and during the final advance in Picardy was in action at the Battle

Walter Sparkes was born on 28th January 1894 in Otterford to James Charles Wescombe Sparks (a road contractor - born Otterford 1st December 1854, died Otterford 19th January 1928) and wife Elizabeth (nee Spencer - born Thorncombe, Dorset 1855, died Otterford 6th July 1931). James and Elizabeth had married in Trull on 28th March 1878. The seventh of eleven children (eight boys and three girls) Walter was part of a large family - even for the times.

The family lived at Foxes Castle, Deadman's Lane, Otterford. The site, at the very eastern boundary of Otterford adjoining Buckland St Mary parish, is derelict today and absorbed into Wallands Farm. The only building that remains is a small barn where James Sparks kept his horse. The house itself stood facing South sideways onto the lane with a cobbled yard and entrance.

of the Selle, the Battle of the Sambre, and the Passage of the Grand Honnelle.

Having survived so much Walter was unlucky to be taken prisoner towards the end of hostilities. Whilst we cannot be certain, the Regimental War Diaries indicate this was either on 22nd or 23rd March around Velu Wood when there was fierce fighting as the Battalion withdrew to Bancourt and the diaries record that 'all wounded, except walking cases, were captured' - or between 29th May to 1st June when there was a prolonged battle, involving other regiments, near Chambrecy with very heavy losses of men killed, wounded or captured.

Walter was obviously one of the wounded and was sent to the German military hospital in Charlesville in the Ardennes department of France. He died here on 3rd October 1918 and was buried, along with 341 allied casualties, in the town's old cemetery known as 'Cimetiere Boutet'.

In 1962 this cemetery was closed and the remains of British and American casualties were removed and re-interred in Terlincthun British Cemetery at Wimille, Pas de Calais, France.

Walter was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Four of Walter's brothers also served in the War - all returned. Brief details of each are given in "The men who came back" section.



# William Sparks



## William Sparks

Born in Otterford: the family lived at Howstead for a while, but also moved between Buckland St Mary and Churchstanton parishes

A regular soldier, a Private, in the Somerset Light Infantry, 2nd then 1st Battalion (Service No 7928)

Fought on the Western Front

Killed in action on 19th December, 1914.

Buried in Belgium: commemorated at the Ploegsteert Memorial; and the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford

William was born on 2nd January 1889. His baptism records that he was from Birchwood, in Buckland St Mary parish, and his mother was Sarah Jane Sparks. No father's name was in the record.

Sarah Jane's parents were Elizabeth and John Sparks, who was a sawyer. When Sarah Jane was aged 3 in 1871 they lived at Accombe in Churchstanton, but by 1871 they lived in Birchwood, where there was a thriving sawmill.

In 1890 Sarah Jane married William Rowsell, and at the time of the 1891 Census the family were living at Howstead - occupants were William Rowsell 30, Sarah Jane Rowsell 23, William Sparks son-in-law (understood as stepson) aged 2, and Robert Rowsell son aged 2 months. William and Sarah were to have four more children. The family had moved back to Birchwood by 1901. William Rowsell died

on 18th August 1932: Sarah on 6th September 1937 - both are buried in the churchyard at St Leonard's Church.

By 1911 William, now 22 and calling himself William Sparks Rowsell, had enlisted in the 2nd Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry and was based at St Andrews Barracks in Malta: he was a cook. In October that year the 2nd Battalion were sent to China to help put down the Boxer Rebellion: no records survive but it is likely that William went with them.

In October 1913 William married Alice Seaman (born in Norton Fitzwarren in 1897), when she was only 16. Alice had previously been living-in as an unpaid servant with Mr William Wood, a newspaper editor of York Villa, Greenway Road, Staplegrove, Taunton. William and Alice had a daughter Alice Mary born in April 1914 who died in December 1918, aged four, and is buried in Pitminster churchyard.

Some time after 1911 William transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 7928).

On 22nd August 1914 he went to France with the Battalion, landing at Le Havre, and by November was in action on the Western Front at the first Battle of Ypres - defending the town and the area around. The Battalion was fighting around Ploegsteert, eight miles south of Ypres, and in the nearby woods. The weather was atrocious: days of very heavy rain had filled the trenches with water. The German trenches were protected by fences of barbed wire which were labelled the 'bird cage'. From the 1st Battalion war diaries we learn that it was planned to attack these defences. Time had been spent making mattresses using rabbit wire stuffed with straw which would be thrown over the wire to make a bridge.

On 18th December orders were given for an attack on the Germans in the 'Birdcage' the following day, and men had to remain in billets that night. At 2.30pm on 19th December an attacking company dashed forward, some carrying the 'mattresses' and others wire cutters. However, their progress was stopped by heavy cross fire and supporting groups were also held back. The only result obtained was that the Germans were driven out of the woods. There were heavy losses of officers and men, and it was decided not to resume the attack again. It seems highly likely that this was when William lost his life.

After William's death Alice remarried in 1917, a Mr Channon with whom she had a son, Robert Seaman. By 1939 she was divorced and living with 8 year old Robert at 3 Tiley Cottages, West Monkton; working as an unpaid domestic servant. She remained in West Monkton and died on 14th November 1961. Robert Seaman Channon married Eizabeth Kellow in 1956: he remained in the Taunton area and died in 2002 age 71.

In addition to the memorial plaque at St Leonard's, William is commemorated on the Ploegsteert Memorial: a Commonwealth War Graves Commission Memorial in Belgium for missing soldiers of WW1. It commemorates men from the Allied Powers who fought in the northern Western Front outside the Ypres salient and whose graves are unknown. The memorial is located in the village of Ploegsteert.

William was entitled to the British War Medal, the 1914-15 Star and the Victory Medal.

# Albert Stagg



## Albert Edward Stagg

Born 2nd September 1891: no evidence of him ever having lived in Otterford

A regular soldier, a Private, in the 1st/5th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry (Service No 240052),

Final Rank: Sergeant

Fought in the Middle East

Died at Battle of Nabi Samwell in Palestine on 20th November 1917 aged 25

Buried in the Jerusalem War Cemetery.

Commemorated on the memorial plaque at St Leonard's Church, Otterford

Why Albert Stagg's name is on the Otterford memorial is something of a mystery. We are unable to discover what linked him to the parish. We can only assume that he was either related to an Otterford family, or, that before he enlisted, he worked but did not live in Otterford.

Albert Stagg came from an army family. His father served in the Somerset Light Infantry and Albert was born in Aldershot on 2nd September 1891. When his father left the Army the family settled in Taunton and in the 1911 census are shown to be living in Mary Street. Albert was working as a butcher's assistant. In 1911 Albert married Clara Wood, in Taunton, and their son - Aubrey Edward Stagg - was born later that year.

On 10th October 1913 the Shepton Mallet Journal reported that Albert was up before the Bench for being an accomplice in the theft of six hams from the Rowbarton Bacon Factory in Rowbarton, Taunton where he worked. He was bound over for 12 months. Soon afterwards, perhaps to keep out of trouble, Albert enlisted as a Private in 1st/5th Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. Whilst no detailed records remain he must have done well in the Army because by 1914 he had been promoted to sergeant.

The Battalion was sent to fight in the Egyptian campaign. In November 1917 they were engaged fighting the Ottoman Army in a bid to capture Jerusalem. The village of Nabi Samwell (Samuel's Tomb) constituted an important target for the success of the campaign. Although the British eventually managed to take Jerusalem, it was at a price. In the Battle for Nabi Samwell between the 18th and 23rd November, the odds were stacked against the British. The Ottomans held the high ground. The battle coincided with the rainy season making what few inadequate roads there were impassable. Consequently the artillery became bogged and to make matters worse the troops were only equipped with desert kit and had no warm clothes. The date of Albert's death is recorded as 23rd November so we can assume that it was during this battle Albert Stagg either lost his life or was fatally wounded along with three officers, two other sergeants and thirty four other men. He was eventually buried in The Jerusalem War cemetery. Albert was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Posthumously his widow Clara was paid £5, 9 shillings and a penny 'for the benefit of children' and his war gratuity of £18 (£390 and £1,168 current value). His son Aubrey died on 31st August 1983: at the time of his death he was living at 7 Roughmoor Crescent, Taunton.



MacDonald  
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THE BEST OF  
SUMMER

GUINNESS

From Fresh Apples

GUINNESS

San Miguel

AMSTEL  
BIER

SANDFORD ORCHARDS  
DEVON BEER

Carlsberg

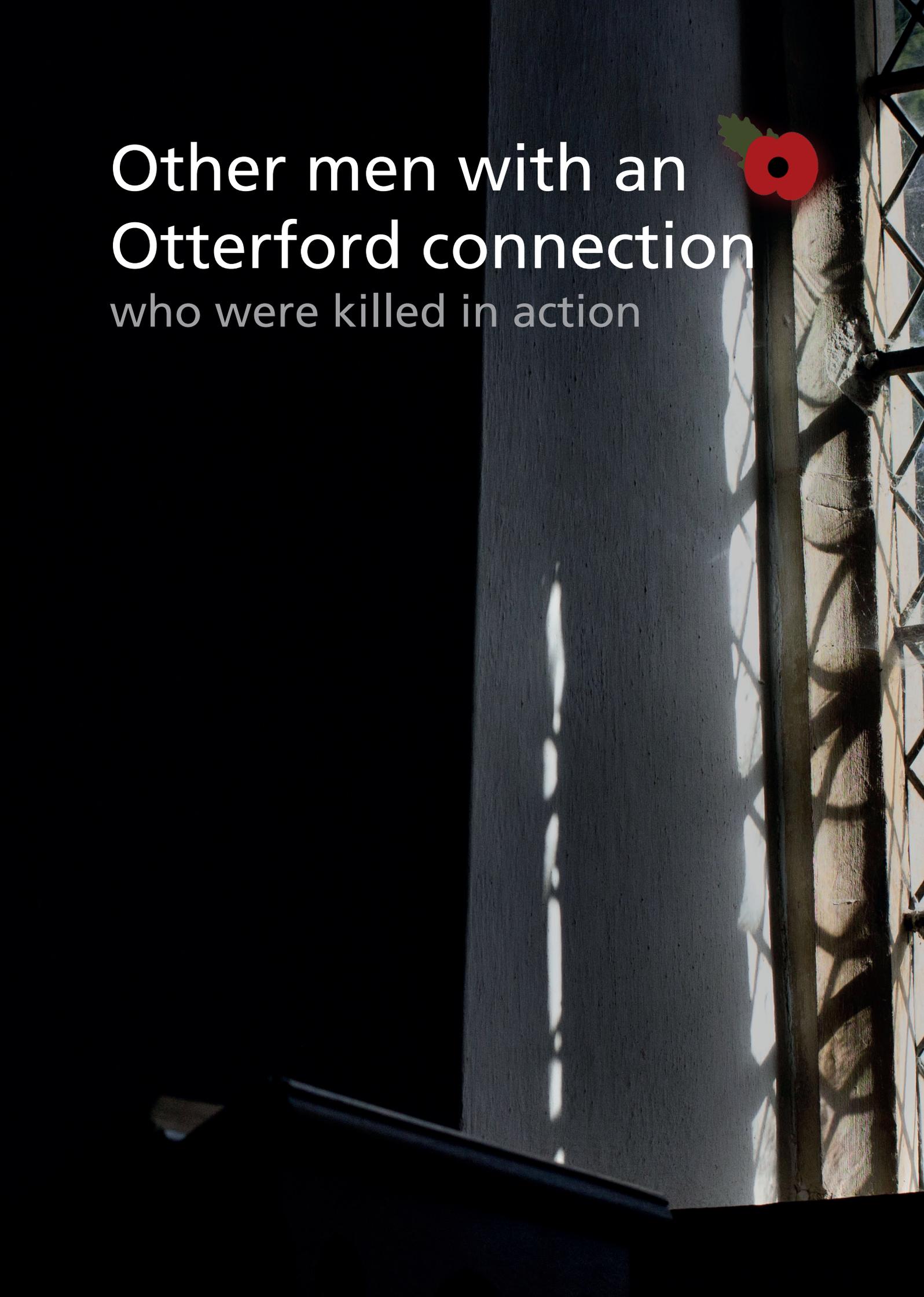
THATCHERS  
Gold



OTTER BREWERY  
Relax with an Otter



Other men with an  
Otterford connection  
who were killed in action



# Frederick Buttle



## Frederick (Fred) Buttle

The family lived at Howstead and Waterhayes Cottage in Otterford, and in Buckland St Mary and other neighbouring parishes

A former regular soldier, on reserve and called up to the 1st Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry at the outbreak of war (Service No: 6098)

A Lance-Corporal during earlier regular service; a Private when called up

Fought in France and Flanders

Died between 10th and 13th November 1914

No known grave

Commemorated on the Ploegsteert Memorial, and the War Memorial at St Mary's Church, Buckland St Mary

The Buttles were originally a Churchstanton family, from at least the early 18th century - there is a Buttles Farm and Lane in Churchstanton. In 1851 Fred's grandfather, William, was serving as a Gunner in The Royal Marines Artillery. By 1861 he was back in the West Country, living at Howstead, working as an agricultural labourer, and married to Mary Ann, with one year old son Samuel.

From that point, neither William nor Samuel moved very far from home. By 1881 Samuel had married Edith Collins of Buckland St Mary, and was living with his parents and

baby Annie at Waterhayes Cottage, Otterford. They had nine children, the youngest, Katie, dying of diphtheria (caught at Brown Down School, it was suspected) in 1907.

Samuel worked as a Carter and general farm labourer. But in 1914 the family moved right out of their area to Thornfalcon. Why? Probably in pursuit of work; Fred never lived there, but his younger brother William worked in Thornfalcon.

Edith Buttle was obviously the power behind this family. When Fred was killed in 1914, it was she whom the local reporter interviewed, and again when William died in 1917. It was to her that William left his belongings in his Will, and she who signed for their returned possessions. In a photograph of her in middle age she looks formidable; 'well known local midwife' the caption tells us; 'no arguments allowed', her expression suggests. An unofficial midwife, we deduce, but skilled in all nursing tasks; her great granddaughter, Jean Carey, says that she was urged to train properly, but did not (Samuel was against it).

Fred, the eldest son, was born on 15th September 1882, and christened at Buckland St Mary on 3rd December. He started school at Brown Down in March 1890, leaving in March 1894. In summarising his life up to 1914, a graphic account is given in Edith Buttle's December 1914 interview for The Taunton Courier, which gives a sense of what both she and Fred must have been like - and a flavour of the Edwardian style of the news reporter:



Photo from The Courier

*'The deceased and his parents, and the family generally, are well known 'on the hill'. The late Lance Corporal Buttle was but thirty years of age; albeit he was a typically stalwart West Countryman, and turned the scale at over fourteen stone. He came home [in August 1914] on a visit to his parents for ten days from his employment as an attendant at Fishponds Asylum, Bristol. The day after he returned from his holidays he was called up as a Reservist. He was fifteen years and two months old when he joined the 3rd Battalion Militia in 1899. [He] saw active service in South Africa for which campaign he received two medals. He also served in Malta for some years. In 1912 he was employed at Wiveliscombe, where he stayed for about two years, and made many friends. In one letter that he sent home from France he stated that his Regiment was having a very warm time indeed. Much sympathy is felt with the parents in their loss, and with the deceased's fiancée in the great shock she has sustained.'*

Private or Lance-Corporal? There's a photo of Fred in the Somerset County Gazette, probably in his earlier South African uniform, with his stripe displayed. Maybe this rank was lost when he went onto the Reserve list; from 1914 he was recorded as 'Private' - except in his mother's account. Another, more mature shot of him from The Courier, is reproduced here. We also have a charming pre-War picture of him in civilian clothes. These photographs, and those that survive of his brother William, make their loss seem, even 100 years later, horribly real.

The 1st Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry, were in France by 23rd August, part of one of the earlier waves of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Fred's Medal Roll Card lists him as in France by 30th August; the SLI records give him as embarking on the 29th. The Battalion War Diary records that on that day 'Lieutenant Montgomery and a further party of NCO.s and men rejoined the Battalion': this must have been Fred's draft. Or, possibly, it's the draft that joined on 5th September: 'First

reinforcements arrived, ninety men under 2nd Lieutenant Read'.

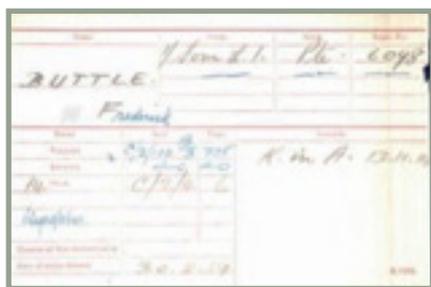
War was declared on 4th August. The Germans had marched into France via Belgium, sweeping round to come south and head for Paris. The Belgian Army were no match for them, and the French too had difficulty resisting. Ironically, they were fighting over the same Napoleonic battlegrounds of 100 years earlier. After holding the Germans at Mons, the BEF (whose numbers were tiny) found themselves retreating southwards in a series of desperate forced marches, turning to fight when they could, to keep up with the French and protect their flank. It must have been a major shock to the SLI to be thrown into this and forced straight into retreat.

This was the situation Fred found himself in on 30th August: still retreating by forced marches in desperately hot weather, staff and supply work very off the cuff. For example, on 5th September the War Diary records: 'On the way a two hour breakfast halt was taken at La Ferriere and an excellent breakfast was provided for the officers by Baron Rothschild. Supplies issued tonight. Bread, chocolates, cigarettes and matches were purchased locally for the men.'

By 5th September Arthur Cook of the 1st Battalion records: 'THE RETREAT IS ENDED, but not our marching, for now we must turn round and chase Jerry for a change.' They re-crossed the River Marne, but by the 11th 'the Germans seem to have got clean away and our visions of getting round them have vanished'. By this time the debilitatingly hot weather had gone, and wet weather had set in. The Somersets had a series of forced marches, on short supplies & in wretched weather, back to the Aisne. Trenches were dug in the Bucy le Long area: a foretaste of things to come for the next four years.

By a series of train journeys and marches and skirmishes the Battalion moved into Flanders, ending at Ploegsteert, which is essentially where they remained for the rest of the year. For them, the war was static at this point: attacks and shelling backwards and forwards, with the loss of many troops, but no real movement. The weather was terrible, and they were in marshy country. On 11th November, two days before Fred's death, Arthur Cook writes: 'Trenches are wet and full of water, nowhere to sit down, or lie down, only to stand up with water over your boots in inky blackness. Occasionally a shell smothers you with mud and earth. What an existence for human beings.'

Fred's death is recorded as 13th November, but the War Diary records no-one as killed that day. It is likely he was killed three days earlier, on the 10th: 'B Company lost heavily in right trench today, losing four killed and six wounded including Serjeant Willcox who was Mentioned in Dispatches. It was not however thought advisable to relieve them tonight as a German attack was expected.' It was probably impossible to retrieve these bodies, for Serjeant Willcox too has no known grave, but is recorded along with Fred (Panel 3) on the Ploegsteert Memorial.



Fred Buttle's Medal Roll Card

As a postscript to Fred's death, here is the 1st Battalion Diarist's record of 25 December 1914:

*'There was much singing in the trenches last night by both sides. Germans opposite us brought up their Regimental Band and played theirs and our National Anthems followed by 'Home Sweet Home'. A truce was mutually arranged by the men in the trenches. During the morning officers met German officers half way between the trenches and it was arranged we should bring in our dead who were lying between the trenches [but not Fred Buttle or Serjeant Willcox]..... A very peaceful day.'*

Our thanks to members of the Buttle family - especially Jean Carey, Angela Dicks and Trevor Whitlock - for their photographs and memories.

### Buckland St Mary

Fred and his brother William (next entry) Buttle are commemorated on the Buckland St Mary War Memorial in the Churchyard and on the Memorial Board in St Mary's Church

Details of their lives and war service were displayed at the Buckland St Mary World War 1 exhibitions in 2014 and 2018, and a folder containing fuller information remains available to view in the Church

# William Buttle



## William Buttle

Born on 2nd December 1891 at Howstead, and christened at Otterford on 6th March 1892. The family lived at Howstead and Waterhayes Cottage in Otterford, and in Buckland St Mary and other neighbouring parishes

Started school at Brown Down in September 1895, leaving in December 1904

Enlistment as a Gunner in the 173rd Brigade, Royal Artillery (Service No: 65065)

Fought in France

Died on 3rd December 1917

Buried at Grevillers British Cemetery  
Commemorated on the War Memorial at St Mary's Church, Buckland St Mary, and on the Thornfalcon Memorial

William Buttle was nearly 10 years younger than his brother Frederick. He was born on 2nd December 1891 at Howstead, and christened at Otterford on 6th March 1892. He started school at Brown Down in September 1895, leaving in December 1904. For further background to the family, see Fred Buttle's entry. In 1911 William was living at Road Farm, Buckland St Mary, working as a farm labourer for a well-known local personality, farmer and dealer W D Berry.

When his parents moved to Thornfalcon in 1914, he moved with them, working for Mrs Greenway, of Lower Farm. He was still with them at Church Lane Cottage when he enlisted. As The Courier reported after his death: 'he had won regard as a faithful workman, and generally by all who knew him, for his upright personal qualities'.

William Buttle's Service Records have survived, so we know more than usual about his Army career. The only problem is that these records have been damaged by fire and water (in the Blitz in 1942) and are not easy to read. We also have two photographs, one taken, we believe, when he enlisted, which shows him looking a little raw and nervous. The second, which we believe could have been taken when he came home on leave late in 1916, shows (we think) a more assured and mature young man.

His Attestation Form shows us that he enlisted in Taunton on 16th January 1915. This was two months after Fred had been killed. Was he spurred into volunteering because of this - there was no compulsion (other than a well-publicised moral one) at this stage. What did his parents think? He gave his occupation as Cowman. On the 18th he was transferred to No 3 Depot, RFA at Hilsea, Portsmouth, being posted to the 13th Reserve Battery of the RFA as a Driver. More often at this stage of the War men joined their local regiments.

His grandfather, who died before he was born, had served as a Gunner with the Royal Marines Artillery. Driver of course meant not that he was driving a vehicle, but in charge of or riding the horses that pulled the guns.

He was 5'5", weighed 134 lbs, had a chest measurement of 38", with an expansion of 3", his physical development noted as good. He had a scar on his right cheek and upper lip. In April he was vaccinated, and in May inoculated twice against enteric fever.

On 2nd February he was posted as Driver to the 24th DAC.

*'The 24th Divisional Ammunition Column, Royal Field Artillery served with the 24th Division [which] was established in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Third New Army and began to assemble in the area of Shoreham. The division suffered from a lack of equipment and a lack of trained officers and NCOs to command the volunteers. In late June 1915 they moved to Aldershot for final training and they proceeded to France at the end of August. The Division concentrated in the area between Etaples and St Pol on 4th September and a few days later marched across France into the reserve for the British assault at Loos, going into action on the 26th September and suffering heavy losses. In 1916 they suffered in the German gas attack at Wulverghem and then moved to The Somme seeing action in The Battle of Delville Wood and The Battle of Guillemont.'*

The War Time Memories Project, online.

William left for France with the 24th on 4th September 1915. 'The whole Division's first experience was truly appalling. Having been in France for only a few days, lengthy forced marches brought it into the reserve for the British assault at Loos. GHQ planning left it too far behind to be a useful reinforcement on the first day, but it was sent into action on 26th September totally inexperienced and already exhausted, whereupon it suffered over 4178



casualties for very little gain.' - from The Long Long Trail, online.

The Divisional Ammunition Columns had the responsibility of supplying munitions to their section of the Division, and also of providing wagons to move military equipment about. So William, a country boy, was well suited to this job. Reading the 24th DAC's War Diary from 1916 it would seem they were at as much risk from stampeding horses and mules as from hostile gunfire: death and injury to both men and animals are reported.

On a more mundane note, on 3rd October 1915 he was in trouble: 'Improper Conduct on Parade', sentenced to two days Confined to Barracks. Then again on 30th October: 'Leaving rifle on wagon'; that earned him 7 days CB from the same officer, Captain Cameron Smith.

In a series of RFA reorganisations he was posted to the 36th DAC on 12th August, 1916, to the 154th Brigade on the 14th and finally to 173rd Brigade, part of the 36th Division, on the 12th September 1916. On the 24th November he was mustered Gunner, though by 19th September 1917 he was mustered as Driver again. On 12th December 1916 he was 'Granted leave to UK with Ration Allowance', returning on the 22nd. He was awarded a pay increase of 3d a day on 16th January 1917, just two years from his original enlistment.

In September 1916, the 173rd War Diary notes, amid a plethora of RFA reorganisations, the arrival of William's Battery from the 154th Brigade: 'B/154 Battery RFA - a complete six gun battery posted with the whole of its personnel, horses and equipment to B/173

thus completing the Brigade up to the new establishment moves. All Battery wagon lines moved to new locations.' These batteries consisted of 18 pounder field guns. Once William was away from the DAC and with a Brigade as Gunner or Driver he was in more danger.

In the Autumn of 1917, a new offensive was planned near Cambrai, using tanks (still a very new weapon) and new use of technology for directing the guns. Secrecy was essential, so preparations had to be made unobtrusively. New gun platforms and weatherproof ammunition dumps were constructed; 700 rounds for each 18 pounder were brought up and Batteries moved up. Zero hour was 6.20am on 20th November. The attack was extremely successful - church bells were rung in England when the news came through - but then the Germans regrouped and counter-attacked, the tanks failed, and Allied direction from above ran out of inspiration, despite the bravest of fighting. On 30th November, between 7am and 7pm the Brigade fired approximately 12,000 rounds; B Battery (William's) fired 3800 rounds and kept 6 guns in action throughout.

He was wounded on 2nd December 1917 with gunshot wounds to his legs and right arm. Taken first to an Advanced Dressing Station, he was then taken to the 5th Field Ambulance (a medical unit, not a means of transport) and finally to the 3rd Casualty Clearing Station near Grevillers. The Casualty Clearing Stations were quite large, tented units, set some way back from the Front Line. He died of his wounds there on the 3rd. The records of the 3rd CCS survive, but are not much more informative than the abbreviated information in William's Service Record. William is buried at the Grevillers British Cemetery (Grave VIII.D.5)

The surviving documents then show officialdom going through all the necessary formalities to record William's death, where he was buried, return his possessions to the family and get the correct acknowledgements from them that they have received everything: his personal possessions (July 1919), his 1914-1915 Star (July 1920), his British War Medal (November 1920), his Victory Medal (September 1921). How these delays - especially the 18 months before his personal possessions were returned - must have increased the pain. All the receipts are signed by his mother (his father was in fact illiterate). And what they never did get back was his Will; written on the page provided at the back of his Active Service Paybook, this was filed away by the Army, with many other personal documents, which only came to light in 2013. He left everything to his mother.



This is confirmed by the Army Register of Soldiers' Effects. His back pay of £34.2.7 was authorised as going to his mother on 13th March 1918; his War Gratuity of £13.10.0 went to her on 3rd December 1919.

On William's CWGC listing he's recorded as Gunner, and as being with "R" Battery, 173rd Brigade. In fact, although he had earlier that year been a Gunner, by his death he'd reverted to Driver. "R" is a misreading of the letter on his Casualty form; there were four batteries in his Brigade, A,B,C & D - no R; William had been posted to B/173rd, and that's what was intended.

## THORNFALCON

**GUNNER WILLIAM BUTTLE KILLED** - the sad news has reached his parents, Mr and Mrs Samuel Buttle, of Thornfalcon, and formerly of Buckland St Mary, of the death in action of their son, Gunner William Buttle, of the R.F.A. Mr and Mrs Buttle had already lost one son in the war, and sincere sympathy will be felt for them in this second mournful sacrifice on behalf of the country. Gunner Buttle, who had done nearly three years' man service, sustained his mortal wounds on Sunday, December 2nd, his twenty-fourth birthday, probably in the heavy fighting in which the Germans sought to deprive us of the advantage of our victory before Cambrai. His injuries to the arms and legs were very grave, and he only lingered till next day. Among the missives received from him were several of quite recent date, the latest being a trench postcard written on the day when he was wounded. Previous to joining the Army, early in 1915, he was employed by Mrs Greenway, of Lower Farm, Thornfalcon, and he had won regard as a faithful workman, and generally by all who knew him, for his upright personal qualities. In sending deepest sympathy to his parents his officer writes: 'If not now, than at least presently, it will help you to remember that he died fighting bravely, and has gone home to Him Who said, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Taunton Courier, 17th Dec 1917



William is also commemorated on the Thornfalcon Memorial.

Our thanks to members of the Buttle family - especially Jean Carey, Angela Dicks and Trevor Whitlock - for their photographs and their memories, and thanks to Peter Naylor for putting us in touch with the family.

# William Hawkins

## William Frank Hawkins

The family lived in Bishopswood for some time, before moving to Ilminster.

At the time of William's death his mother had returned to Otterford.

Emigrated to Australia in 1912.

Enlisted as a Private in the 15th Australian Infantry Battalion (Service No: 854)

Final Rank: Company Sergeant Major

Fought at Gallipoli

Killed in action at Gallipoli on 7th August 1915

No known grave. Commemorated on the Lone Pine Memorial at Gallipoli, the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, and on the Memorial Tablet at St Mary's Church, Ilminster, Somerset

William Hawkins was born in Hemyock, in Devon in 1885 or 1886. His parents, Frank and Martha Hawkins, lived in Bishopswood.

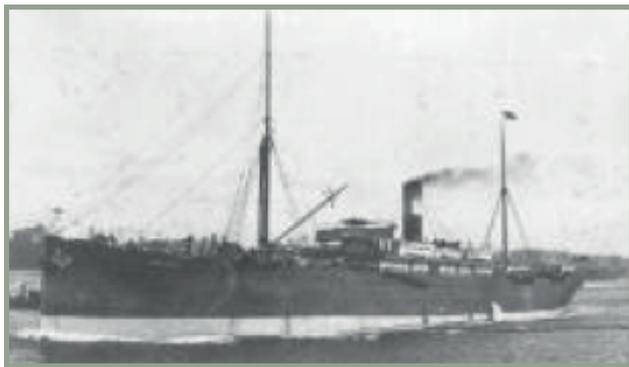
By 1891 the family had moved to Hill Pound, Donyatt, near Chard in Somerset; and William was attending Donyatt School - he later moved to Ilminster Board School.

Ten years later - William, his widowed mother Martha (nee Sparkes, born in Clayhidon), and siblings Louisa, Florence, James and Albert - were living at 6 Bellmoor, Ilminster. His father had died in 1894. William, now aged 16, was apprenticed to William Redwood at Ilminster (a position he held for three years). William subsequently lived in Yeovil working as a storekeeper's assistant to a Mr W Edwards, and later moved to Bridport as a manager.

During this time he spent over three years as a member of the 4th Dorset (Territorial)

Regiment, and in 1911 shot at the Bisley Championships. He left the regiment at his own request (probably when he emigrated).

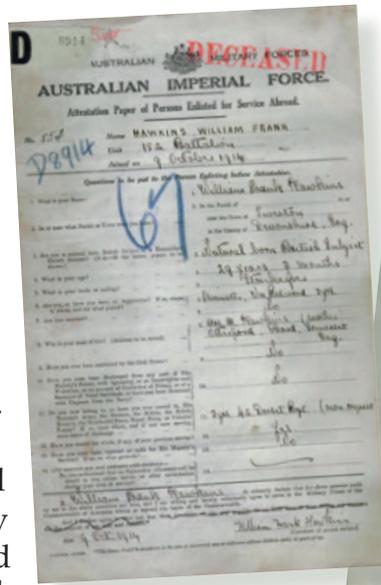
In 1912, aged 27, William emigrated to Australia. He left London on Tuesday 27th February aboard the SS Narrung, and arrived at Port Adelaide on Saturday 7th September (five years later - on 5th February 1917 - the ship was torpedoed and sunk off Holyhead with twenty-nine lives lost). He went to live in Lismore, New South Wales, and never married.



SS Narrung

On 9th August 1914, following the outbreak of war, William enlisted as a private in F Company (Service No: 854) of the 15th Australian Infantry Battalion, part of the Australian 4th Brigade in Lismore. His enlistment papers show he was 5' 7" tall with a 39" chest, weighed 11st 12lbs, had a fair complexion with blue eyes and brown hair. He gave his religion as Church of England. See attestation papers below. He was promoted to Corporal on 5th November 1914, and to Sergeant on 7th November 1914.

His Company embarked from Melbourne on board Transport A40 HMAT Ceramic on 22nd December 1914 en route to Egypt. Formerly the SS Ceramic, the ship was a British ocean liner built by Harland & Wolff in Belfast for White Star Line, launched on 11th December 1912. In 1914 she was requisitioned



for the First Australian Imperial Force as the troopship HMAT (His Majesty's Australian Transport) Ceramic, with the pennant number A40. She was armed with two stern-mounted QF 4.7 inch (120mm) naval guns.

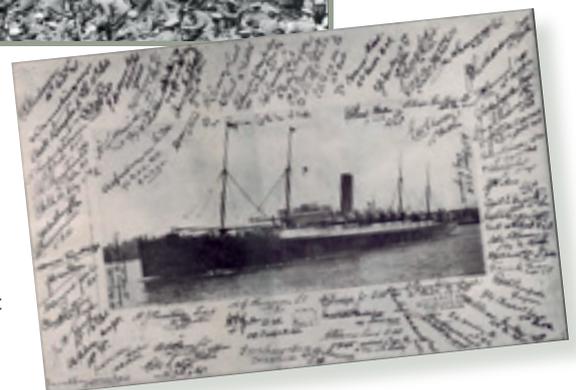


SS/RMS (later HMAT) Ceramic



Embarkation at Melbourne

Souvenir from the voyage from Melbourne to Egypt in 1914 (cannot find William Hawkins' signature)





# Robert Evan Lewis-Lloyd

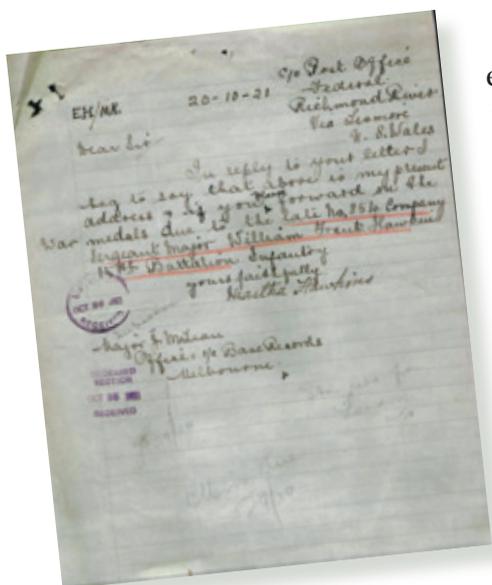
On 20th September his brother telegraphed the Minister of Defence asking for confirmation of William's death. His effects were returned to his mother in Otterford.

William is commemorated on The Lone Pine Memorial (Panel 44) at Gallipoli, on the Australian War Memorial (Panel 46) in Canberra, and on the WW1 memorial tablet at St Mary's Church in Ilminster.



Lone Pine CWG Cemetery

After his death William's mother Martha, still living in Bishopswood, wrote to the British Government as his next of kin. By October 1921 she was resident in Richmond River, New South Wales, Australia (see letter regarding William's medals).



He was entitled to the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal, and the Victory Medal.



**Robert Evan Lewis-Lloyd**

Born at Otterhead House (in Churchstanton Parish) - which the family owned - in 1895, and baptised on 9th May that year at St Leonard's Church

Enlisted in the Royal Navy

Final Rank - Lieutenant

Drowned when his ship HMS Opal, and the accompanying HMS Narborough, ran aground off the Orkney Islands on 12th January 1918

Body not recovered: commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial

Robert's grandfather, Robert Lewis-Lloyd (born 9th January 1836, died 7th September 1915) was a Welsh rower and barrister (called to the bar on 6th June 1864). He was High Sheriff of Radnorshire in 1872, and umpired the University Boat Race between 1881 and 1888 (having previously rowed for Cambridge in 1856 and 1857).

The Lewis Lloyd family purchased the Otterhead Estate for £32,425 in August 1893, having been forced to leave Nantgwllt in the Elan Valley in Radnorshire, their ancestral home for several centuries, by Birmingham Corporation's Elan & Clairwen valleys reservoirs project. In 1812 the poet Shelley - whose uncle, Percy Bysshe, lived close by in 'Cwn Elan' another of the houses to be lost to the reservoir project - stayed at Nantgwllt and had negotiated to buy it as a home to settle into with his wife Harriet, but was not successful.



Nantgwilt

In 1894, under Lewis Lloyd ownership, the Otterhead Estate reached its greatest extent with the purchase of Trents Farm and Yalham Farm. Almost all of the estate land was in the parishes of Churchstanton and Otterford: Otterhead House itself was in Churchstanton - in Devon until the county boundary changes in 1897.

Robert was born at Otterhead House on 6th April 1895, and baptised on 9th May that year at St Leonard's Church. His parents were Robert Wharton Lewis Lloyd (born 16th February 1866 in Aberystwyth, Cardiganshire, Wales) and Elizabeth Alice Lewis Lloyd (nee Williams, born in 1872 at Nantmel in Radnorshire). The couple married on 16th November 1893.

By 1901, whilst still owning the Otterhead Estate, the family had returned to Wales - living at Bryntirion, Rhayader, in Radnorshire. In 1904, following an unsuccessful attempt to sell the estate, Otterhead House together with 235 acres was let for five years to Arthur Reginald Bovill.

Robert's father died on 1st February 1905, and Robert inherited the estate.

In 1909 the estate was let to William Neill Black (father of John Neill Black who is commemorated on the plaque at St Leonard's - see Section 2). Six years later he sold the lease, after the Black family moved to Ozleworth (Ozelworth) Park, Gloucestershire.

Robert enrolled as a Naval Cadet in the Royal Navy on 15th January 1908, and by 1911 was studying at the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth in Devon. He served in the Royal Navy throughout the war: his last posting as a Lieutenant on the destroyer HMS Opal.

Earlier in the war HMS Opal had taken part in the Battle of Jutland, and also participated in

other major fleet sorties during the following two years as well as pursuing her regular duties of minesweeping, convoy protection and anti-submarine patrols in the North Sea.

On 12th January 1918, she joined her sister ship HMS Narborough and the light cruiser HMS Boadicea in a night patrol to hunt German auxiliary warships suspected to be laying mines on the Scottish coast. By 17:30, the weather had deteriorated to such an extreme degree that the destroyers were in danger of swamping and foundering and visibility was near zero. Fearing that her companions might sink, HMS Boadicea ordered the two destroyers back to Scapa Flow while she continued alone. For the next four hours, HMS Opal regularly sent reports indicating her course and intention to return, but at 21:27, a garbled message stating 'have run aground' was received, followed by silence. The weather was so atrocious that no vessels could be despatched until the following morning, and it was two days before HMS Opal was found, battered, broken and empty on the Clett of Crura off the east coast of South Ronaldsay in the Orkney Islands: HMS Narborough was found in a similar position nearby.



HMS Opal

One survivor - William Sissons - was later located on a small islet, and he related that the ships had been sailing a regular slow course making frequent soundings and radio reports, but had suddenly crashed headlong into the rocks, probably



HMS Opal aground and breaking up



Belfast Newsletter

due to a navigation error by HMS Opal's captain. Both wrecks were abandoned and broken up by the sea over the next few weeks. All other members of both crews - including Robert - drowned.

He is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial (Panel 28), and the Rhayader War Memorial in Radnorshire (now Powys).

Following Robert's death the Otterhead Estate was managed by the Public Trustee.



Portsmouth Naval Memorial



Rhayader War Memorial

# Walter Charles Pring



## Walter Charles Pring

The family moved between the parishes of Otterford and Buckland St Mary several times: Walter was baptised at St Leonard's Church, and attended Brown Down School

Enlisted as a Private in the 8th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 19064)

Fought in France

Wounded at the Battle of the Somme on 3rd July 1916; and died in the Auxiliary Military Hospital, Tranmere, on the Wirral, Cheshire, England on 31st July that year

Buried at Bebington Cemetery on the Wirral

Commemorated on the War Memorial at St Mary's Church, Buckland St Mary

The Pring family were, almost without exception, agricultural workers and, by the time of Walter's father's generation, solidly fixed in the Blackdown Hills. His grandfather Charles was born in Broadway, and his grandmother Hannah at Haselbury Plucknett, near Crewkerne. But his father George and mother Annie (nee Every, daughter of Robert Every, a lime burner) were born in Buckland St Mary.

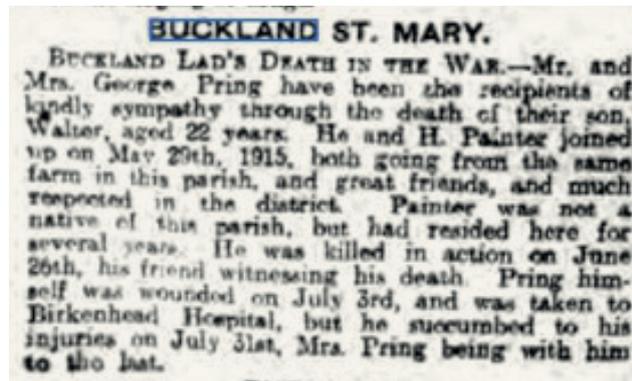
They had seven children, three boys and four girls, all of whom survived childhood; it was WW1 that took two of the boys, Walter and William. Walter was the oldest son, his sister Emma the oldest of the family. Walter,

and William, went to Brown Down School; Walter, born on 27th August 1894, entered school on the 17th March 1902, and left on 27th August 1907, his thirteenth birthday. Both boys were baptised at Otterford, Walter on 4th November 1894.

The family had moved about within the parishes of Buckland St Mary and Otterford, no doubt following work. In 1891, George, before his marriage, was working as a farm carter for William Manley, the miller, at Otterford Mill. George and Annie married at Buckland on 27th April 1893; by 1901 George was working as a carter at Howstead; they had five children. In 1911 they were living at Hornsey Cottages; four of the children were still at home, but the two older girls were working away, and Walter, now 16, was living just down the road at Madgeon Farm, working as farm servant to Sidney Dummett.

Walter's Service Records have not survived, but we do have some pointers to what happened to him from press reports, the Somerset Light Infantry 8th Battalion War Diaries, and contemporary accounts. The Taunton Courier reports that Walter and his friend Harry Painter enlisted together (in Taunton) in the Somerset Light Infantry, 8th Battalion, on 29th May 1915, 'both going from the same farm in this parish, and great friends, and much respected in the parish'. We don't know which farm; for what it's worth, Harry was working at Pound Farm in 1911, and Walter, as we know, at Madgeon. On Walter's Medal Roll Card (kept as a record of what Service Medals were due to each man) is recorded the day he (and Harry Painter too) landed in France; 4th October 1915. His death certificate tells us he was with 'D' Company of the Battalion.

After the Battle of Loos in the Autumn of 1915, there were no major operations for the 8th Battalion who, after refitting, moved



Courier, 9 August 1916

to Armentieres. They were part of the 63rd Brigade, 21st Division. They mounted a cutting-out expedition from an area known as the Mushroom on 16th December which was conspicuously well planned and successful. It consisted of volunteers. It seems, perhaps, unlikely that two recently arrived recruits would have been involved in this. At the end of December Walter's 'D' Company were taking over front line trenches when their Commanding Officer, Lt Col Howard, was killed by a sniper. They were in and out of the front line trenches during the first three months of 1916, and then on 1st April moved south from the Ypres Salient to the Somme, where troops were massing for the Somme attack of 1st July; another 'big push'.

There were immensely elaborate preparations going on for that attack. As well as day-to-day trench warfare the troops were expected to carry out these preparations, an exhausting business: digging new communication, assembly, assault and wire trenches, new dugouts, gun emplacements, and bringing up thousands of tons of ammunition and stores. And most of this work had to take place, unseen, at night. The writer C. Day Lewis describes the strange contrast: 'By day the roads were deserted; but as soon as dusk fell they were thick with transport, guns, ammunition trains and troops, all moving up... to take their positions in or behind the lines ...Endlessly, night after night, it went on ...Yet when dawn came, all signs of it were gone.'

The Somme had been a quiet part of the line. The British had the major disadvantage of occupying the lower river land, while the Germans held the heights: the drawbacks are obvious, and became more so as the attacks

proceeded and the ground was churned up to a quagmire.

The preliminary bombardment began on 26th June and continued without respite until 1st July. The 8th Battalion moved up to the assembly trenches on the night of the 27th. It was during this operation that Walter's friend Harry Painter must have been killed, 'his friend [Walter] witnessing his death'; not a good omen.

The 8th Battalion War Diary continues the tale: 'At 6.30am trench ladders and bridges were put in place and an intense Artillery barrage was opened. 7.30 was ZERO Time for Assault. 7.25 Front waves of B and C Coys crawled out.'

What the Diary doesn't make plain is the disaster of those five minutes before zero hour when the 8th left their trenches and crawled forward in readiness: many lost, the Commanding Officer dead, and all officers except three lieutenants out of action. They were followed by 'A' Company, and 'D' (Walter's Company), the latter weighed down with supplies - bombs, picks and shovels, trench stores. Heavy machine gun fire continued to mow them down, but they pressed on to the German trenches, 'battered out of all recognition, and only [consisting] of a mass of craters'. Eventually two groups, both under Second Lieutenants, managed to join up and held out in a trench all night, repulsing a bombing raid. By this time, half of them were dead.

Next morning reinforcements and more senior officers arrived; counter attacks were expected and prepared for; '[we] remained in the same position all day and throughout the night of the 2nd' Officer reinforcements arrived on the night of the 2nd/3rd. Attacks and counter-attacks were planned or expected, but the Battalion remained in

position till relieved in the early hours of 4th July. It seems remarkable that Walter managed to survive until the 3rd, when he was mortally wounded. These first days of the Somme were a disaster: enormous loss of life, and nothing substantial gained. He would have been picked up by stretcher bearers, taken to an Advanced Dressing Station, then to a Field Ambulance, then the Casualty Clearing Station and finally evacuated back to England. Vera Brittain, writing in Testament of Youth of her days as a VAD, says:

*'At the end of June, the hospital received orders to clear out all convalescents and to prepare for a great rush of wounded. We knew that already a tremendous bombardment had begun, for we could feel the vibration of the guns in Camberwell. On 4th July began the immense convoys which came without cessation for about a fortnight and continued at short intervals for the whole of that sultry month and the first part of August.'*



Walter was taken to the Auxiliary Military Hospital, Tranmere (on the Wirral) but he didn't recover; 'he succumbed to his injuries on July 31st, Mrs Pring being with him to the last' The Courier says with sad restraint. His death certificate says he died of a gunshot wound to the shoulder, followed by secondary haemorrhage. (There is a death certificate because he died in this country.) He is buried at Bebington Cemetery on the

# William James Pring

Wirral, but with no individual headstone; there is a joint Memorial headstone to all those buried there.



Bebington Cemetery, Wirral - joint headstone to W C Pring and fellow servicemen

A footnote to Walter's death: he had written a will in the back of his Active Service Paybook, leaving everything to his mother; this was dated 9th October 1915, after his arrival in France. It seems certain that she never saw this, for it was filed away - mistakenly, one must presume - until re-discovered in 2013 with a large collection of other similar documents.

## Buckland St Mary

Walter Pring is commemorated on the Buckland St Mary War Memorial in the Churchyard and on the Memorial Board in St Mary's Church

Details of his life and war service were displayed at the Buckland St Mary World War 1 exhibitions in 2014 and 2018, and a folder containing fuller information remains available to view in the Church



## William James Pring

Born and baptised in Otterford, and attended Otterford Primary School

Conscripted, as a Private, in the Cambridgeshire Regiment; later the 2nd Battalion, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (Service No 204349)

Fought in France and Flanders: died of wounds on 6th March 1918

Buried in Dozinghem Military Cemetery, in Vieteren in Belgium

Commemorated on the War Memorial at St Mary's Church, Buckland St Mary

William, brother of Walter, (see previous entry) was born on 31st July 1897. He was fifth in the family and was baptised at Otterford on the 12th September that year. William, and his brother Walter, went to Brown Down School; he started on the 17th March 1902 and left on the 27th July 1910, just before his thirteenth birthday.

In 1911 William, aged 13, was living at home and working as a farm hand. Where else he may have worked in the time between 1911 and 1916 is unknown, there is unfortunately no record. The only possible clue is that when his brother Walter drew up his Army will in 1915, the family were living at Tanlake Cottage, and that's the address given on Walter's 1916 death certificate. By the twenties they were at Westhay Cottage, now a ruin, beyond Westhay Farm on the Bishopswood road.

William probably didn't join up till 1916, by which time conscription obliged him to. No Service Records remain for him, but his Medal Roll Card (detailing which Service Medals were due to him) records no 1914-1915 Star (this indicates service abroad before the end of 1915). He enlisted in Yeovil, originally into the Cambridgeshire Regiment, but was then transferred into a Regular Army Battalion, the 2nd King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry; this is the Regiment named on his Medal Roll Card. Its traditional soldiers were Yorkshire miners; by 1916 there must have been many other recruits like William, drafted in from all over the country.

*"The 2/KOYLI was perhaps more constantly in action than any other unit of the Regiment, and, like other battalions on the Western Front, when not in action was either in the trenches or preparing for the next battle."* History of the KOYLI in the Great War 1914-1918 - R.C. Bond. They were in Dublin when war was declared, so went straight to France, and were involved, with great losses, in the retreat from Mons and subsequent fighting. They continued to be heavily involved, serving in the Ypres Salient. There was a constant loss from enemy fire in day to day trench warfare. In 1915 they were among those who captured Hill 60, a prelude to the Second Battle of Ypres. Capture and re-capture went on throughout April and May, with heavy losses and little rest.

At the end of 1915 they were transferred to the 97th Brigade of the 37th Division. They moved south in 1916 to prepare for the Somme battles from 1st July; they fought in the front line for 15 days: 42 other ranks dead, 242 wounded, 7 with shell-shock, 42 missing. They were then in reserve till November, when the last battle of the Somme campaign was fought on the 18th; again the losses were enormous: 14 officers and 351 other ranks killed or wounded.

Precisely when William Pring joined them we don't know; he wasn't 18 until July 1915, and, as we've noted, conscription wasn't introduced until 1916; his brother Walter was mortally wounded in the July Somme attacks, dying in England on 31st July. This must have made William's conscription particularly hard for the family - so many families would have been affected in the same way. It is probable he was in the army before the end of 1916; the Battalion War Diary notes that on 14th October 1916 a draft of 100 men arrived - they had never been in France before and were mostly conscripts. This might have been William's draft. If so, he was unlucky enough to be there for the 18th November attacks - but he survived.

Until February the Battalion was then either in reserve, in training or forward in the trenches. 10th-12th February saw a successful operation north east of Beaumont Hamel which 'culminated in the capture of 600 yards of enemy ground and the enemy line of trenches at Ten Tree Alley'. A similar pattern followed through the Spring, with another successful attack on 2nd April, and the capture of Fayet on the 14th, but with heavy losses.

The War Diary records the outcome of the Battalion's Sports Day on April 30 (Walter wasn't among the winners!), and the arrival of another 100 plus men during the month; more joined in May, and continued to arrive each month.

At the end of May the Battalion transferred to XIV Corps, and travelled north to Douliou. They were held in reserve for the Messines operation in early June, but weren't needed. Later that month they were posted to the area of Nieuport (by now a town in ruins), on the coast (the War Diary has a fine word picture of its state). They held the trenches there under prolonged intense fire over the summer months, training and improving their section, with periods in reserve, moving

in July to Bray Dunes, and then to Dunkerque. A page of Battalion Orders for August 15, which we've copied, gives a clear account of day-to-day training life out of the trenches.

At this point they were in a fairly quiet part of the line, so that turns in the trenches were followed by training, route marches and even sea bathing. Between 12th and 15th November officers *'delivered lectures ...to the men on 'Measures to be taken to avoid Trench feet', 'The Offensive Spirit' and 'The use of the Compass in warfare'... On the 16th 'the majority of the Battalion attended the Delousing Station at Poperinghe and the men had their clothing disinfected.'*

It was a swampy coastal area with dykes and watercourses and a tidal flow which threatened the trenches. Quiet, but still a flow of dead and wounded day to day. On 23rd November the 2nd KOYLI moved into trenches  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from Passchendaele; the description in the Regimental History evokes all one has heard about that dreadful place: *'Some idea of the difficulties of moving about this place of enduring hope may be gathered from the record that, before the forward companies completed the relief at 8pm, there were 30 casualties. The front line companies had to wade through mud that was knee deep, and the weight of battle stores carried was from 67-68 lbs per man.'* - The KOYLI in the Great War - R.C.Bond

On 1st December they were part of an attack to attempt to take the ridge before Westroosebeke from the enemy; the key was surprise, but there was bright moonlight that night, and this, added to the ground conditions, led to failure and the now expected awful toll of dead and wounded: some 20 officers killed or wounded, and 184 other ranks killed, wounded or missing.

At the end of December the Battalion moved to Zuofaques, near Calais. Their total strength

### Buckland St Mary

William Pring is commemorated on the Buckland St Mary War Memorial in the Churchyard and on the Memorial Board in St Mary's Church

Details of his life and war service were displayed at the Buckland St Mary World War 1 exhibitions in 2014 and 2018, and a folder containing fuller information remains available to view in the Church

was 588, but by the end of February this had been built back up to 1038. The early days of 1918 were quiet enough, but the German Spring Offensive (in which they overran the Allies by many miles) was looming - and known to be looming. They moved again to the Het Sas area (still in boggy Flanders) in January. Out of the trenches it was training, route marches and such routines as foot inspection: *'foot treatment at the pedicurium'* becomes a common entry in the War Diary, the problem of trench feet being particularly pressing in such an area.

In the Front Line it was wiring, strafing and listening patrols. All routine stuff, but still with a now routine trickle of casualties. On 5th March the War Diary notes, while they were in Divisional Reserve: *'Training in musketry was carried out during the morning. At night the Battalion was employed in digging and revetting, draining, screening and tracklaying in Main Posts and Corps Line of Defence. 2nd Lieut. W. Beardsall and 2 other ranks were wounded while engaged on the working party.'*

This was probably William Pring's almost unnoticed end: he died the next day, 6th March. The records of the Casualty clearing Station to which he must have been taken don't survive.

William is buried at Dozinghem Military Cemetery (Grave XIII G 19) in Vieteren in Belgium.



# Herbert Shire



## Herbert Shire

Born and baptised in Otterford, and attended Otterford Primary School

Enlisted as a Private in Somerset Light Infantry, 8th Battalion (Service No 16206)

Fought in France

Killed in action on 1st July 1916

No known grave

Commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France and the Trull War Memorial

Herbert Shire was born in Otterford in on 4th December 1879, the son of William (a labourer) and Emma (or Emmah) Shire (nee Vincent) who lived at Eastview Terrace, Trull. His siblings were brothers Richard (b1869, d1931), William (b1876, d1933), Ernest (b1882) and Arthur Alic (b1888); and sisters Nancy (b1871) and Bessie (b1884). Herbert was baptised at Otterford on 9th January 1887; and admitted to Otterford Primary School on 18th February 1885.

In 1891 the family was living in Otterford: ten years later Herbert was a journeyman - living with and working for the Chappell family in West Buckland.

In 1905 Herbert married Minnie Jessie Pyke of 5 Fairview Terrace, Trull. They lived initially in Trull. One hundred years ago infant mortality in Britain was very much higher, and both children - a son Percy James (born 26th July 1906, baptised 4th August 1906) and a daughter Ivy Bessie (born 14th April 1909,



Thiepval Memorial

Trull War Memorial

baptised 23rd May 1909) - died soon after birth. Ivy was buried in Pitminster on 5th August 1909. By 1911 Herbert and Minnie were living at Ivy Cottage, Eastbrook, Pitminster; and Herbert is recorded in the Census of that year as a road contractor.

Herbert enlisted as a Private in the 8th Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry in Taunton in November 1914. Having completed training towards the end of August 1915, the Division received orders it was to move to France. Advance parties left on 2nd September and by 13th September the Division was concentrated in the Tilques area.

By 6th October 1915 the Battalion was in action at The Battle of Loos, fought between 25th September and 14th October. It was the first time the British used poison gas and the first mass engagement of 'New (British) Army' units. In 1916 the Battalion fought, from 1st to 13th July, at the Battle of Albert, the official name for the British efforts during the first two weeks fighting of the first Battle of the Somme.

Herbert was killed in action on 1st July, the first day of the Battle and the most costly day in British military history: He has no known grave. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France (Pier & Face 2A), and the Trull War Memorial.

A record of his effects - his wife, Minnie, was given £3.1s.9d on the 2 November 1916 and a war gratuity of £7 on 16 September 1919.

Herbert was entitled to the 1915 Star, the British War Medal, and the Victory Medal.

# William John Wakely



## William John Wakely

(Wakley/Wakeley)

Born in Otterford in early 1881

Enlisted originally, as a Private, in The Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own) in 1900 (Service No: 7546), but was discharged after less than three months following conviction for a civil felony. Subsequently re-enlisted (or was conscripted), as a Driver, in the Royal Field Artillery (Service No: 164310); before transferring, as a Private, to the 9th (Service) Battalion, Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own (Yorkshire Regiment) (Service No: 42503)

Fought in France and Flanders

Died on 7th June 1917 at the Battle of Messines

Commemorated on the War Memorial at St Peter's & St Paul's Church in North Curry, Somerset, and on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial

sisters Elizabeth Mary, (who died aged one), Florence, Bessie, and Lucy. Fred and Elizabeth Mary died when very young children. The family were living at North Down in Otterford at the time of William's birth.

In 1891 the family were living at Winders Cottage, Canons Grove, Pitminster.

In the late 1890s William, still in his late teens, was a labourer, living with his family and Charlotte's father, Eli, at Watchford Moor Cottage in Yarcombe, Devon.

He enlisted as a Private in the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own) on 8th February 1900 (Service No: 7546). Aged 19; his height was 5' 4", he weighed 123lbs and had a 34" / 36" chest. He had a fresh complexion, with black eyes and brown hair. William's first period of army service did not last long; less than three months later - on 30th April 1900 - he was discharged following conviction for a civil felony.

In 1902 William married Mary Maud Harris (born in Buckland St Mary on 25th July 1883) at St John the Baptist church in Yarcombe. They subsequently had two sons - William John (born in Durston, Somerset, on 22nd June 1907) and Percy Walter (born in Norton Fitzwarren, Somerset on 6th January 1909, baptised on 19th July 1911 at Nynhead, Somerset; died in Taunton in 1986).

Documentation on this family is confusing as the spelling of the surname is recorded varyingly as Wakley, Wakely, and Wakeley.

William was born in Otterford in early 1881 to John (born in Broadway, Somerset in 1851) and Charlotte Wakely (nee Lee, born in Yarcombe, Devon in 1860) - and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 15th May that year. He was to be the oldest of eight children - with brothers Walter (who fought in the war and returned - see entry in Section 4), Thomas, and Fred; and

By 1911 William was a farm labourer, and the family were living at Hornshay Cottage, Nynhead, nr Wellington in Somerset.

Some time after that (we are not sure when), and living in North Curry, he re-enlisted (or was, more likely, conscripted) as a Driver in the Royal Field Artillery (Service No: 164310), subsequently transferring, as a Private, to the 9th (Service) Battalion, Alexandra, Princess Of Wales's Own (Yorkshire Regiment) (Service No 42503).



Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres, Belgium

The 9th Battalion was formed at Richmond on 26th September 1914 as part of K3 (the third phase of Kitchener's 'New Army'), and in October was attached to 69th Brigade, 23rd Division; moving to Frensham, and then in February 1915 on to Folkestone and Maidstone in Kent. The Battalion landed at Boulogne on 26th August 1915, and after initial training and familiarisation took over front line duties on 14th September - remaining there, or in reserve for rest and recuperation, for the next two years. During this period the Battalion fought in a number of battles - Albert, Bazentin Ridge, Pozieres, Flers-Courcelette, Morval and Le Transloy.

On 7th June 1917 the launch of the infantry assault at the start of the Battle of Messines was preceded by the explosion of nineteen huge mines under the German Front Line along the ridge of high ground. Preparations for an attack on the ridge had been carried out since early in 1916. German senior commanders did not heed warnings by some commanders in the field that the British might be carrying out significant mining operations, and, fortunately for the British,

the German Front Line was not withdrawn to the eastern part of the ridge. The attack was successful in pushing the German Front Line off the Wyteschaete Ridge.

William was killed in action on the first day of the battle: his body was never found. He is commemorated on the War Memorial at St Peter's & St Paul's Church in North Curry, Somerset; and the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial - Panel 33

In 1939 Mary and Percy were living at Higher Knapp, North Curry; Percy was a Farm Carter, and Mary looked after the house. She remained there until she died, aged 78, in Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton, on 20th October 1961. She left £2038. 11s. 0d to her older son William John.



# Frank Woodley



## Frank Woodley

Born in Otterford

Enlisted in the 2nd Battalion, The Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own)  
(Service No: 5604)

Final Rank: Lance Corporal

Fought in France

Missing, and presumed killed in action,  
24th June 1915

No known grave: commemorated on  
the Ploegsteert Memorial, and the War  
Memorial at the Blessed Virgin Mary  
Church, Kingston St Mary in Somerset

Frank Woodley was born in 1897 in Otterford. His father was Henry Woodley (a gardener, born in 1875 in Cothelston, Somerset), his mother was Lucy Emily Woodley (nee Venn, born in 1875 in Broadway), and his only sibling, sister Florence (born in 1901). He was baptised in Pitminster on 19th September 1897. In 1901 the family was living at 7 Blagdon Hill, and subsequently moved to Kingston St Mary, living at 5 Alpha Cottages.

By 1911 Frank was living in Kingston St Mary and working as a messenger/telegraph boy at the Post Office in Blagdon Hill.

He enlisted in the Second Battalion The Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own) in Hounslow, Middlesex - Service No 5604. (According to his family he lied about his age, because at the time of his death - see below - he was just seventeen).

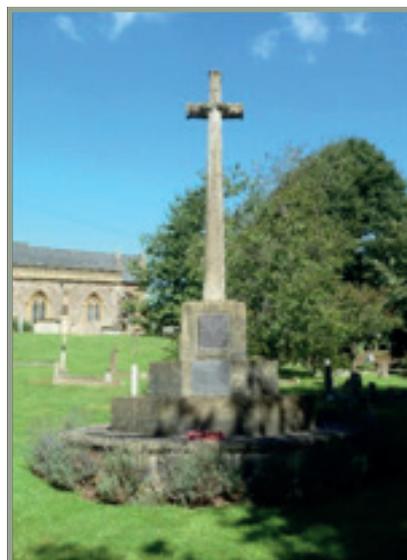
At the outbreak of war the Battalion was in Kuldana in India, and was recalled to the UK - arriving in Liverpool on 22nd October 1914. The Battalion was billeted at Hursley Park, in Hampshire, becoming part of the 25th Brigade, the 8th (Light) Division; and subsequently sailed to France, landing at Le Havre on 16th November.

Between 10th and 13th March 1915 the Division fought at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, in the Artois region of France, the first deliberately planned British offensive of the war.

Frank was promoted to Lance Corporal, and at the time of his death (see below) was an Acting Corporal.

On 9th May the Division returned to action at the Battle of Aubers Ridge south of Armentieres. The 2nd Battalion, the Rifle Brigade, was one of the lead battalions in the attack on the German positions.

Frank was killed that day: although originally listed as 'casualty' (24th June), and subsequently as 'wounded and missing' (11th July) on the Casualty Lists issued by the War Office. He was not alone: the British



Kingston St Mary  
War Memoria

suffered more than 11,000 casualties during the day, many of them killed within yards of their own front line.

Frank has no known grave: he is listed on the memorial at Ploegsteert (Panel 10), and the war memorial at the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Kingston St Mary in Somerset.

### **Postscript**

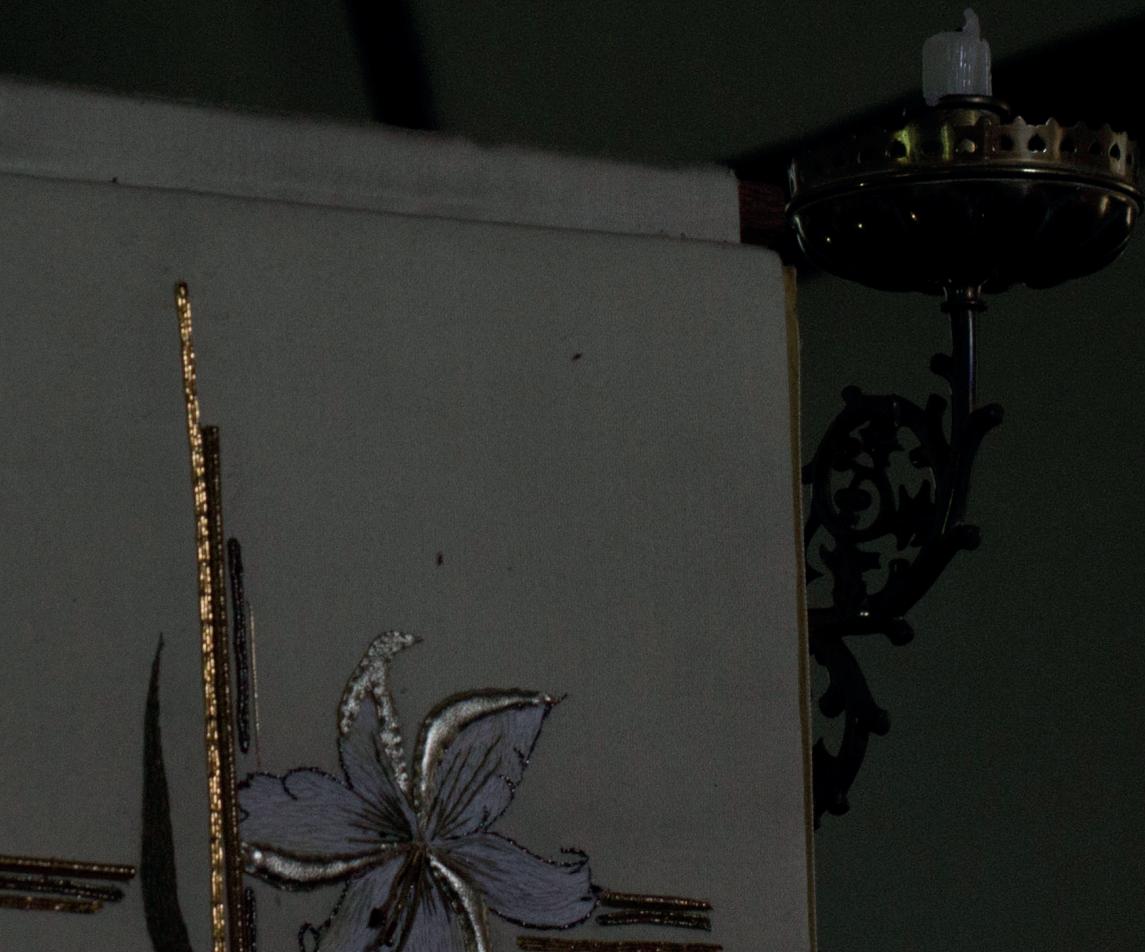
Frank's father, Henry, enlisted for army service in December 1915 aged 40 - just seven months after his son's death. He was placed

on the reserve list and eventually called up in July 1918 and posted to an Army Service Corps Horse Transport unit. He did not serve outside the UK and was discharged in February 1919. His service record is stamped 'no longer physically fit for war service' although it gives no reason.





Otterford men  
who fought  
and came back



# Frederick James Stanbury Clark(e)



## Frederick James Stanbury Clark(e)

Born and baptised in Otterford  
Served in the Merchant Navy during  
the war  
Survived the War



Mercantile Marine War Medal

Frederick was born in Otterford on 11th February 1900, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 8th April that year. His father was Hugh Clark(e) the Head Gardener at Otterhead House, and his mother May or Mary Clark(e) (nee Stanbury) who married in the second quarter of 1899 in South Molton, Devon.

And that was pretty much the end of Frederick's connection with Otterford. A year after his birth the family had moved to Saltash in Cornwall: ten years later they were living at Countisbury in Devon and Hugh was a gardener. By 1911 they were living at Lynton in Devon.

Frederick didn't fight in the war, but his contribution serving in the Merchant Navy was equally valuable.

He was entitled to wear the British War Medal and the Mercantile Marine War

Medal. The latter was approved by the King to reward the war service of the officers and men of the Mercantile Marine who, while only trained as peacetime mariners, continued to serve while running the risk of being attacked at sea during the war. One or more voyages through a danger zone during the war qualified a mariner for the award of the medal, as did service at sea for not less than six months between 4th August 1914 and 11th November 1918. Men who served in coastal trades, such as pilots, fishermen and lightship and post office cable ship crews could also qualify.

There is no record of Frederick returning to Otterford after the war. In 1920 some of the medals, to which he was entitled, were sent to East Burnham Park, Slough, Berkshire - and another two followed in 1922. Frederick died in the fourth quarter of 1969 in Torbay.



# Harry/Henry Cuff



## Harry/Henry Cuff

Born in Otterford on 28th January 1883, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 13th July 1884

Enlisted, as a Private, in the 2nd/4th Battalion, the Devonshire Regiment (Service No: 65505), transferring to the 1st/5th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 55153)

Based in England and India initially, fought in Palestine

Survived the war, and (we believe) emigrated to Canada in 1920



Harry Cuff - son of William (a labourer, born in Upottery in Devon in 1846) and Ann (or Annie) Cuff (nee Barter, born in Otterford in 1844), who married in 1886 - was born in Otterford on 28th January 1883, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 13th July the following year. He was the couple's sixth child after Lucy (b1869), Albert (b1873), George (b1876), John (b1877) and Fred (b1879): Annie and Emma were to follow in 1886 and 1889 respectively.

Harry attended Otterford Primary School from 21st June 1886 (a separate record shows him as starting on 27th February 1889 - but by



then he would have been 6 and rather old to start school).

The family moved around Otterford. In 1891 they were living at Waterhayes House, Birchwood Road: by 1901, with Henry aged 18 and working in a milk factory, they had moved to School Farm. By this time Albert and John had left home but George and Fred were still there, working as cattlemen on a farm.

By 1911 his mother was widowed (father William had died in 1907, aged 62), and the family had moved to Warren Farm - Lucy, John, Harry and Emma were still living at home. Harry, now aged 28 and still single, was now a Manager at the Milk Factory, and brother John worked with him.

Harry enlisted (or was conscripted), as a Private, in the 2nd/4th Battalion, the Devonshire Regiment (Service No: 65505): subsequently transferring to the 1st/5th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 55153).

The 2nd/4th Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment was formed from volunteer units at the beginning of the war. It recruited mainly from South East Devon and was based at Exeter and subsequently Exmouth. As a Territorial Force the Battalion did

not see a great deal of action in the War - posted to India in 1916 where it remained in Madras, training and dispatching drafts to the 1st/4th Battalion. In 1917 the Battalion went to Palestine joining the 234th Brigade, and in March 1918 took over the front line near Deir Battut. Here records show that losses from illness far exceeded casualties from shell and sniper fire.

In July 1918 the 2nd/4th Battalion was disbanded and it seems likely it was then that Harry transferred to the 1st/5th Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry as it was also serving in Palestine - ending the war at Kalkiliah near Haifa.

Harry was entitled to the Victory Medal and the British War Medal.

Harry transferred to the Reserve on 10th December 1919. We are not sure when he returned to England or when he finally left the army as records are scarce and inconclusive: but believe he sailed (and possibly emigrated) to Canada - leaving Liverpool on board the SS Melita, destination Quebec - in August 1920.

We are unsure what happened to Harry after that: his mother Ann/Annie died in Chard on 3rd December 1924.



## Henry/Harry Ewins



### Henry/Harry Ewins

Born in Otterford on 11th December 1886

Enlisted in the 7th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 16713)

Fought in France and Flanders: captured at the battle of Cambrai in 1917 and held as a Prisoner of War

Survived the War

Henry was born in Otterford on 11th December 1886. One of a family of five born at fairly regular intervals (William 1883, Florence 1885, Henry and his twin Lillian on 11th December 1886, and Henrietta 1889). Their parents were Henry (senior) Ewins (a gamekeeper, born in 1850 in Churchstanton) and Anna Ewins (nee Peters, a dressmaker, born in Churchstanton in 1853) - who married on 22nd December 1878. Henry (junior) and Lillian were baptised at Churchstanton on 13th March 1887: and joined Otterford Primary School together on 7th September 1891.

In 1881, a little before the first of the children were born, Henry (senior) and Anna lived at Widcombe in Otterford. By 1891 the family were living at Fir Cottage, one of the 'Scattered Houses' in Otterford Parish - and they remained there into the 1900s.

Culmhead had a Post Office by 1906 at the latest (the property was known as Gamekeeper's Lodge, now High Beech

Cottage) - we know this as the Parish Council was trying to arrange for Sunday deliveries from there. We believe Henry (senior) and Anna were living there and running it: they were certainly still there in 1911 (by which time all the children had left home), and remained here throughout the war.

Henry (junior) was living, alone, at Burnworthy in Churchstanton in 1911. Prior to enlistment Henry was the second gamekeeper for Lady Portman at Hestercombe House.

Henry enlisted in the 7th (Service) Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 16713) - no detailed records of his service have survived. The Battalion was formed at Taunton on 13th September 1914 as part of the Second New Army (K2). In 1915 the Battalion was mobilised for war, and landed at Boulogne on 24th July. Following trench familiarisation and training in the Fleurbaix area the Battalion served on the Western Front. In 1916 it was in action at the Battle of Mount Sorrel, the Battle of Delville Wood, the Battle of Guillemont, the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, the Battle of Morval, and the Battle of Le Transloy. In 1917 the Battalion fought during the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, and at the Battle of Langemarck, at the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge, at the Battle of Polygon Wood, and at the Cambrai Operations.

Cambrai was a major British attack using new tactics of no prior artillery bombardment (to retain the element of surprise); guns placed further forward than usual (so they could keep firing a creeping barrage further as the infantry advanced); and, for the first time, 400 massed tanks. The initial attack was very successful, capturing much ground and several lengths of the Hindenburg Line, but was followed by the biggest German counter-attack against the British since 1914, and many prisoners, including Henry, were



taken - although we do not know the exact date or detail of his capture.

His subsequent homecoming was reported in the local press.

Henry married Gertrude Anne Nickless (born in Shropshire on 29th August 1889) in Atcham, Shropshire in September 1919. Their son Raymond George Henry Ewins was born in Atcham on 29th May 1921.

Henry (senior) died on 16th July 1927 and is buried in the churchyard at St Leonard's Church.

In 1939 Henry, Gertrude and Raymond were living in Newport, in Wales: Henry, aged 52, was working for Great Western Railway undertaking heavy maintenance and repair.

Henry died in the first quarter of 1964: Gertrude in March 1987.



Henry senior's grave at St Leonard's Church.

# Samuel Edgar Grabham



## Samuel Edgar Grabham

Born in 1894 in Buckland St Mary:  
family later moved to Church Farm,  
Otterford

Conscripted, as an Able Seaman, into  
the Royal Navy on 21st August 1916  
(Service No: J57529)

Served in ships patrolling around  
the Shetland and Faroe Islands, and  
protecting merchant shipping in the  
Atlantic Ocean

Survived the War



Samuel was born on Christmas Day 1894 in Buckland St Mary. His parents were James Levi Grabham (a farmer, born in 1864 in Buckland St Mary) and Emily Grabham (nee Sparks, born in 1866 in Clayhidon), who married in 1891. He was educated at Otterford Primary School - joining on 29th August 1898.

By 1901 the family, now with six children - Alan/ Allen James (born 1891), Walter Sydney (born 1893), Samuel, Gladys Julia (born 1897), Ada Jane (born 1900), and Daisy Emily (born 1901) - were living at Owlhayes Farm in Buckland St Mary. They had two servants - Frank W Venn (born in Otterford in 1885) was a farm labourer; Minnie Hooper (born in Yarcombe in 1883) was a general servant.

Around 1906 the family moved to Church Farm in Otterford. Two further children were born here. Abraham (or Abe) Frank (born 1906): and Lucy Mary (born 1909). By 1911 the servants had disappeared - perhaps there were enough growing children to help with tasks in the house and around the farm!

Samuel joined the Royal Navy for 'the period of hostilities' on 21st August 1916 (it is unclear why he was not called up earlier). At the time of his enlistment he was 5' 5" tall; with a 37" chest, brown hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion. His initial posting was to HMS Vivid 1 (now renamed HMS Drake), a Royal Naval Barracks in Plymouth.

Samuel served as an Able Seaman throughout the war. His first ship (for nearly a year) was the armoured cruiser HMS Devonshire - part of the Grand Fleet based at Scapa Flow, and largely assigned to patrolling the waters around the Shetland and Faroe Islands and the Norwegian coast, before redeploying to protect allied shipping in the Atlantic.

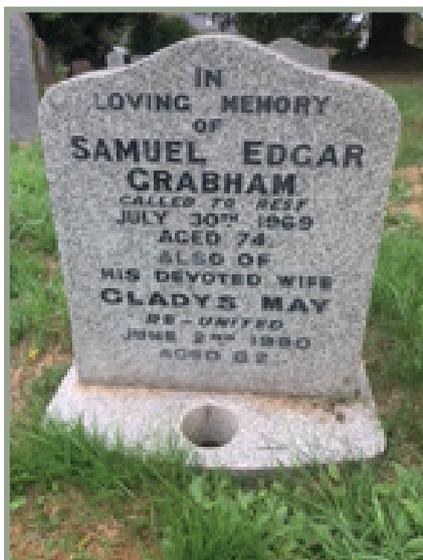
Samuel subsequently served on a number of ships or at shore bases, each for no more than a few months, before ending up back at the shore base HMS Vivid prior to discharge on 21st January 1919.

Samuel's mother, Emily, died on 4th July 1934, aged 69, and is buried in the churchyard at St Leonard's Church, Otterford.

His father James continued to live locally - in the last years of his life at Windy Ridge on the B3170 in Otterford - and died on 11th May 1954 aged 90. He is buried with Emily at St Leonard's Church. Probate shows his estate of £10,176.19s.9d was left to two of his sons - Alan James, and Abraham (Abe) Frank - both farmers.

On 15th April 1936 Samuel married Gladys May Hunford (born 20th April 1908 at Thorncombe in Dorset) at Beaminster in Dorset. Gladys' parents were Fred William Hunford (born in 1867 in Combe St Nicholas) and Hannah Hurford (nee Notley, born in Chard in 1872): she had a brother, Edward (born 1904, and a sister, Ela (born 1910).

Samuel died on 30th July 1969 aged 74. Towards the end of her life Gladys lived at Blackdown View, Staplehay. She died on 2nd June 1990 aged 82 - her estate valued at £12,672. Both are buried in the churchyard at St Leonard's Church.



## Postscript

Two of the four Grabham brothers - Samuel Edgar and Walter Sydney (see next entry) - served in the armed forces in the war (both returned home safely).

Alan/Allen James Grabham was born on 28th August 1891 (in the Chard District so could be BSM). Joined Otterford Primary School on 1st June 1896. He did not serve. Records are scarce but it is likely that he remained at home to help manage the farm. In the second quarter of 1921 he married Catherine Amelia Dampier (born 15th December 1891 in Churchstanton). Her family lived at Hunter's Lodge, Churchstanton, just outside Otterford Parish but very close to Church Farm. It seems likely that Alan and Catherine lived at Hunter's Lodge after their marriage as Catherine's father Nicholas had died in 1891, aged 61, leaving his wife (who was sixteen years his junior) coping with the farm.

In 1939 he was certainly living at Hunter's Lodge, and was a dairy farmer (a 'heavy worker' working with horses and dairy). At the time of his death - 17th January 1961 - he was living at The Hut, Hunter's Lodge. He is buried in the churchyard at St Leonard's Church. Probate to Catherine (widow) £6221.18s.0d.

Catherine kept a comprehensive family scrapbook - which the family have made available to us, and which has proved invaluable in our research.

Abraham Frank Grabham was born in 1906, and was too young to serve. He died on 5th January 1972, and is buried - along with his wife Alice Maud May, who died on 1st April 2000 - in the churchyard at St Leonard's Church.

# Walter Sydney Grabham



## Walter Sydney Grabham

Born in Buckland St Mary on 21st March 1893: family later moved to Church Farm, Otterford

Enlisted, as a Private, in the 6th (Service) Battalion, the Dorsetshire Regiment (Service No: 43037)

Fought in France and Flanders  
Survived the War

Walter was Samuel Edgar Grabham's brother - see fuller family details in Samuel's section. He was born on 21st March 1893 in Buckland St Mary: like Samuel he attended Otterford Primary School - joining on 31st August 1896. In 1911, aged 18, he was working on the family farm.

Walter enlisted as a Private (Service No 43037) in the 6th (Service) Battalion, the Dorsetshire Regiment. The Battalion was formed at Dorchester, on 6th September 1914, as part of the Second New Army (K2): and then moved to Wareham, Dorset, attached to the 17th Division. Rumour has it that whilst training at Bovington, near Wareham, Walter cycled home to meet a girl - then cycled back again! In March 1915 the Battalion was transferred to the 50th Brigade of the 17th Division, and moved to Romsey, Hampshire.

On 14th July 1915 the Battalion was mobilised for war, landed at Boulogne, and subsequently very actively engaged in various actions on the Western Front

including holding front lines in southern area of the Ypres salient in 1915; the Battle of Albert and the Battle of Delville Wood in 1916; the First Battle of the Scarpe, the Second Battle of the Scarpe, the Capture of Roeux, the First Battle of Passchendaele, and the Second Battle of Passchendaele in 1917; and the Battle of St Quentin, the Battle of Bapaume, the Battle of Amiens, the Battle of Albert, the Battle of Havrincourt, the Battle of Epehy, the 1918 Battle of Cambrai, the Pursuit to the Selle, the Battle of the Selle, and the Battle of the Sambre.

The Battalion ended the war, in November 1918, at Eclaiibes north of Avesnes, France.

Walter was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

In 1921 he married Florence Ann Hutchings (born in Hemyock, Devon). Prior to her marriage Florence had been living at Prior's Park in Pitminster with her family, and working as a supplementary teacher. Their one child, also called Walter, was born on 26th February 1922.

By 1939 Walter (senior) was a dairy farmer at Fields Farm in Clayhidon, his son was still living at home and was a Cowman. This remained Walter (Senior's) home until he died - on 13th November 1941 at the Cottage Hospital in Wellington. Probate shows that he left £2789.0s.10d to Florence Ann Grabham (widow) and Walter Grabham (farmer).

Florence died on 10th July 1948, aged 56, at Stonehouse in Trull.

# Percy James Hayes



## Percy James Hayes

Percy James Hayes

Born in Otterford in October 1895, and baptised at St Leonard's Church a month later

(Probably) conscripted as a Private into the 3rd (Reserve Training) Battalion, the Dorsetshire Regiment in 1916, and subsequently transferred to the 5th Battalion, Dorsetshire Regiment (Service No: 19969)

Served mostly in the UK, before going to France in July 1917

Survived the War

Percy was born on 23rd October 1895 in Otterford, and baptised in St Leonard's Church a month later on 24th November. He was admitted to Otterford Primary School, at Brown Down, on 30th April 1900.

The family - his father Henry (born 1856) a farm labourer and past publican of the Holman Clavel Inn, mother Ann or Annie (born 1866) brothers Frederick and Stanley, and sisters Elsie and Jessie - moved around various farms in Otterford (we assume to find work).

In 1901 the family were living at Prior's Park Farm in Culmhead. By 1911 Percy was living and working as a farm servant at Cannon Grove Farm in Pitminster, but by 1916 he was back in Otterford living at Walland Farm.

In 1916, at the age of 22, Percy joined the 36th (Training Reserve) Battalion, the Dorsetshire Regiment (Service No: TR/8/1009): the date given suggests Percy was probably conscripted, and this must have been particularly hard on his mother Ann(e) (Annie) as she is shown on the Attestation to be the only other member of the household living at Walland Farm (his father, Henry, had died in 1915).

The Battalion's first wartime role was guarding the railways, waterworks and other sites of strategic importance; they also worked with The Portland Garrison, presumably on coastal defence. Quickly, however, its prime purpose became equipping and training men who would be drafted to the Regiment's service battalions in the various theatres of war. The Battalion had marched to billets in Wyke Regis in 1914, where conditions initially were said to be sparse.

By the end of 1915, over 100 officers and 6,000 men had already passed through Wyke Regis as reinforcements for the Dorsets and other front line regiments. Over their five years at Wyke Regis other drafts of men also passed through the camp under training - including Dragoon Guards and a detachment of the 'Non Combatant Corps', who were conscientious objectors.

Unusually for the time there are detailed records for Percy's army service. We know he served on the Home Front between July 1916 and July 1917. There are medical and physical details - he had a 32" chest, was 5' 4¾" tall, and weighed 128lbs - on various reports that have survived. In early July 1917 he was docked six days' pay for 'having deficiencies in kit', and later that month he was transferred to the 3rd/54th Service Battalion of the Dorsetshire Regiment (Service No: 19969) and sent to their Base

# Stanley Francis Hayes

Camp in France. It is not clear from the records whether he remained there or saw active service in Northern France.

Percy remained in the Army until 1919. Local hearsay suggests that he might have been gassed when in France but in fact when he demobbed he signed an affirmation stating that he was in good health

He was entitled to the Victory and British War Medals

By 1939 he was still single and living at Trickey Warren Farm, in Churchstanton, with brothers Stanley and Fred: working as a 'cowman and heavy worker'.

He died in 1969 and his death is registered in Taunton

## Postscript

Frederick Sidney (or Sydney) Hayes born 16th February 1890 in Otterford was Percy James Hayes' brother.

Started at Otterford Primary School on 17th September 1894.

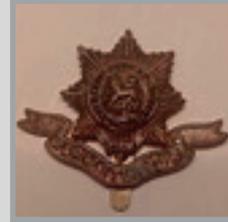
Farm labourer in 1911.

No evidence that he fought in the war.

In later life lived at Greenway House, Culmhead, and died in Taunton on 9th September 1961.

Arthur Richard Hayes born 1905 was Percy James Hayes' brother

He was too young to see active service in WW1.



## Stanley Francis Hayes

Born in Otterford on 12th November 1891, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 24th January 1892

Conscripted into the 5th Battalion, the Worcestershire Regiment in June 1918, later transferring to the 7th (Reserve) Battalion (Service No: 66860)

Final Rank: Acting Captain

Went to France on 20th October 1918  
Survived the War

Stanley was born in Otterford on 12th November 1891, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 24th January 1892. He was Percy Hayes' brother - see previous entry for family details. He was admitted to Otterford Primary School on 13th May 1895.

Stanley was conscripted into the 5th Battalion, the Worcestershire Regiment on 26th June 1918 (Service No: 66860). He gave his occupation as farmer, and it is likely that this is why he was one of the last to be conscripted. He was 5' 0½" tall, and had a 34"/36" chest, and weighed 104lbs. He had brown eyes, brown hair, and a fresh complexion.

Stanley arrived in Boulogne in France on 20th October 1918 - just 22 days before the war ended.

He transferred to the 7th (Reserve) Battalion, the Worcestershire Regiment on

# Albert Ewart Mainhood MC

23rd January 1919, and was discharged on demobilisation on 31st March 1920.

We know almost nothing about Stanley's life after the war - other than in 1939 he was still single and living with brothers Fred and Percy (also both still single) at Trickey Warren Farm in Churchinford. He died, aged 84, in Taunton in the first quarter of 1975.



## Albert Ewart Mainhood MC

Born in Birmingham in Warwickshire: family lived in Otterford during the war

Enlistment / Served in the East Kent Regiment; the Dorsetshire Regiment (1st Bttn); and the the Devonshire Regiment (Service No: G3427)

Final Rank: Acting Captain

Fought in France: was badly wounded at the Battle of the Somme and hospitalised in England.

Awarded the Military Cross

Survived the War

Albert Ewart Mainhood was born in Birmingham on 8th March 1892. His parents were Albert Edward Mainhood (born 1864 in Adderbury, Oxfordshire) and Amy Mainhood (nee Collett, born in 1864 in Northfield, Warwickshire). On 15th October 1893 Amy had a second child, Leslie Norman, described in some records as a half-brother to Albert - although several later documents show Albert (senior) still alive and with Norman.

By 1901, aged 9, he was living with mother Amy and (half) brother Leslie (aged 7) in Northfield, Worcestershire. Ten years later he was an assistant schoolmaster living in Southgate, Middlesex.

Albert initially enlisted in the Buffs - the East Kent Regiment (Service No: G3427) - arriving in France on 2nd July 1915.



On 28th November 1915 he transferred to the 1st Battalion, the Dorsetshire Regiment, and was promoted to Temporary Second Lieutenant. The Battalion had been in France almost since the war started, landing at Le Havre as part of the British Expeditionary Force on 16th August 1914. At the end of July 1915 the Battalion moved to the Somme, which - despite trench raids and shelling - remained a relatively quiet sector until the launch of the British offensive eleven months later.

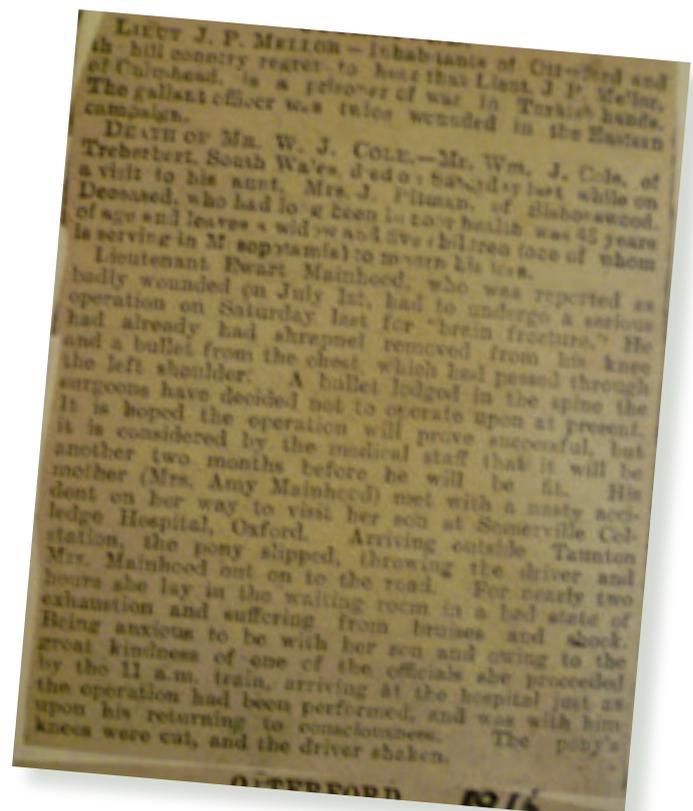
Between 19th January and 2nd February 1916 Albert was attached to the 179th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers. Tunnelling Companies were created for offensive and defensive mining actions - placing and maintaining mines under enemy lines; constructing deep dugouts for troop accommodation; and digging subways, cable trenches and underground chambers for signals and medical services. The 179th Tunnelling Company is particularly known for its role at Boiselle and for firing the Lochnagar mine at the start of the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

On 1st July 1916, at the start of the Somme offensive, the Battalion attacked near Authuille Wood (now Haie Wood), suffering casualties of 501 men killed, wounded or missing (including 69 dead) in the first three days of the battle. It was here that Albert

was badly wounded (and subsequently hospitalised in Somerville College in Oxford, England), and won his Military Cross.

Instituted on 28th December 1914 the Military Cross (MC) is the third level military decoration awarded to Officers for an act or acts of exemplary gallantry during active operations against the enemy. The award of Albert's Military Cross for bravery was gazetted on 1st January 1917, for his actions on 1st July 1916. Also on 1st January 1917 he was promoted to Temporary Lieutenant.

Albert's mother Amy was the head of Otterford Council School at this time: it is likely she was living at the School House. As the press cutting below reveals, she was thrown from a horse cart at Taunton Station on her way to visit Albert who was about to have a major operation for a 'brain fracture'. He had already had shrapnel removed from his knee and a bullet from his chest which had passed through his left shoulder. He also



had a bullet lodged in his spine, but doctors had decided not to operate again at that time. Amy was bruised and shocked, but continued on her journey and arrived at the hospital just as the operation finished.

We are not sure when he transferred to the Devonshire Regiment, but think it likely he did so once recovered from his wounds and fit for active service again.

In November 1918 he was further promoted to Acting Captain whilst commanding a Company. When this role ended on 18th June 1919 he relinquished this acting rank. Albert relinquished his commission on completion of service on 4th November 1920, and was granted the rank of Captain.

Albert married Decima Eunice Alphonsine (also known as Agnes) Rowley (born on 22nd October 1894 in Weymouth, Dorset) in Thanet, on 22nd October 1924. They had four children - daughters Rosemary Jean (born 1st October 1925, died in September 1995) and Anne Caroline Eunice (born 16th November 1935, believed to still be alive); and sons John Stephen Rowley (born in June 1927, died 26th July 2012) and David Charles (born in March 1931, died 2014). When David died his sister Anne - Anne Britt living in Tucson, Arizona, USA - wrote on a memorium website how she missed him, and remembered their happy childhood.

Albert's mother Amy lived at Kewstoke near Weston-Super-Mare in her later life, and died at Glenthorpe Nursing Home in the town on 28th November 1918.

Throughout the 1930s Albert lived with his family at Overton, 12 St Mildreds Road, Ramsgate: Albert was working as a private tutor. He died in Bournemouth in June 1973: his wife on 31st May 1980 whilst living in Margate, Kent.

## Postscript

Leslie Norman Mainhood - Albert's (in some records half) brother was born in Handsworth on 15th October 1893. During the war Leslie enlisted in the 15th (1st London Welsh - or Welch) Battalion, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers - initially as a Private with subsequent promotions to Corporal and Sergeant (Service No: 22510). He served in France from 2nd December 1915, and survived the war.

On 26th April 1922 he married Elizabeth Katherine Grice at Herne Hill in London. At that time he was a chemist's assistant. In the 1930s he lived in Paddington, London.

He died in 1968, aged 67, and is buried at Greenford Park Cemetery in London.

There is no evidence to show that he ever lived in Otterford - although he may have stayed with his mother on occasions.



Military Cross

# Sir John Serocold Paget Mellor



## John Serocold Paget Mellor

Born in Chelsea in 1893, the family divided their time between London and Culmhead House (just over the Otterford border in Pitminster)

Enlisted as a Second Lieutenant in the 5th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 8199). Subsequently attached to the 1st Battalion, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, and promoted to Lieutenant on 1st June 1916 and to Captain on 29th May 1917

Captured by Ottoman/Turkish forces and spent 2 ½ years as a Prisoner of War: arriving home in December 1918

Subsequently worked in industry, and was a Midlands MP for twenty years

Became second Baron Culmhead on death of his father in 1929: died in 1986



John was born on 6th July 1893 in Chelsea, London, and baptised at St Peter & St Paul Church, Churchstanton, on 6th June 1897. He lived close-by although never in Otterford, but is closely associated with the parish.

His father, John Paget Mellor, (born 13th March 1862, died 4th February 1929) was educated at Cheltenham and Trinity College, Cambridge. He was admitted to Inner Temple in 1883 and called to the Bar in 1886, practicing on the Midland Circuit. Sir John was Assistant Solicitor to the Treasury between 1894 and 1899; and the United Kingdom's Treasury Solicitor, King's Proctor, and Procurator General between 1914 and 1919. He was also a talented amateur artist who contributed caricatures to Vanity Fair under the pseudonym Quiz. After the award of a CB in 1905 and a KCB in 1911, he was created the first Baron Culmhead in 1924. He was a director and chairman of the Prudential Assurance Company from 1923 until his death in 1929.

His mother was Mabel Richardson Pearce-Serocold (born 1866 in Duransland, Australia) who was living in Torquay in England when the couple married at St Jude's in South Kensington, in London, on 24th July 1890. After her husband's death Dame Mabel lived mainly in Chelsea until she died on 31st August 1953.

John's one sibling, a brother Vincent Charles Serocold Mellor, was born in 1897 in Chelsea and baptised in Churchstanton on the same day as his brother. During the war Vincent fought as a Second Lieutenant and then Lieutenant with the 5th Battalion, the King's Royal Rifle Corps, and was successively attached to the Northamptonshire Regiment, Suffolk Regiment, the Cheshire Regiment, and finally as a Headquarters Staff Officer and Aide-de-Camp in Egypt and Palestine. No details survive, but he was admitted to

the Red Cross Hospital for Officers in London and died on 21st March 1919. He is buried at Churchstanton.

From the late 1890s John's family divided their time between London and Culmhead House in Pitminster. He was educated at Elon and New College, Cambridge

John enlisted as a Second Lieutenant in the 5th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 8199) on 22nd August 1914 – just eighteen days after the Battalion was mobilised at Tidworth, Hampshire.

In July 1915 the Battalion was posted to India, arriving on 7th August. After serving in India and Burma, John was attached to the 1st Battalion, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry fighting in Mesopotamia. He was promoted to Lieutenant on 1st June 1916.

In December 1915 John was part of the British/Indian force which retreated to Kut al Amara, a town on the River Tigris about 100 miles south of Baghdad. The town was besieged by Ottoman (Turkish) forces between 7th December 1915 and 29th April 1916. On the latter day the British/Indian forces surrendered as food and other supplies – although not ammunition, which was destroyed prior to the surrender – were virtually exhausted.

John was captured that day, and was to remain a prisoner of war for just over the next two-and-a-half years. British and Indian officers were separated from other ranks, and the other ranks were forced to endure a horrific death march from Kut al Amara to the northern railhead at Ras-el-Ain (in modern day Syria) – many died mainly from starvation, dehydration and heat related illnesses. From there the survivors were moved on to prisoner of war camps – John to the camp at Castamouni. Officers who



## BRITISH ARMY BOWS TO TURK

Gen. Townshend Surrenders After Holding Kut-el-Amara Five Months.

OTTOMAN CAPITAL SAYS 13,300 MEN WERE TAKEN

London, April 29.—After holding out for nearly five months, the British army under Maj. Gen. Charles V. Townshend, which had been besieged by Turkish armies at Kut-el-Amara, has been compelled to surrender because of the exhaustion of supplies.

In the official announcement of the surrender, which was issued this afternoon, it is stated that Maj. Gen. Townshend's army consisted of only 1,970 British troops and 600 Indian troops. It was generally believed that the British force was much larger than this.

To prevent the Turkish forces from capturing them, all the British guns and ammunition were destroyed before Gen. Townshend surrendered.

The surrender of a British army is an event of very rare occurrence, and much sorrow was caused in London by the announcement.

Constantinople, via Berlin wireless to London, April 29.—The vice chief commander of the Turkish forces operating in Mesopotamia, reports officially that Gen. Townshend, with a force of 13,300 men, constituting the English garrison at Kut-el-Amara, has surrendered unconditionally to the Turkish command.

were captured were generally treated better than "other ranks", who almost always experienced terrible conditions, hard work and little food, often leading to death. Of the approximately 2,962 British officers and other ranks captured at Kut al Amara, 1,782 died in Ottoman captivity.

John was promoted to Captain on 29th May 1917, and finally arrived home in December 1918.



British and Indian forces after the surrender

After the war John worked in industry: following his knighthood John became the Second Baron Culmhead when his father died in 1929. He was a Member of Parliament for Midlands' constituencies between 1935 and 1955. He was first elected at the 1935 general election for the Tamworth constituency in Warwickshire, holding that seat through the ten-year wartime parliament. When the constituency was abolished for the 1945 general election, he was elected for the new Sutton Coldfield constituency. He was returned at the 1950 and 1951 elections, but stood down at the 1955 general election.

Sir John married three times.

On 24th May 1922 he married Rachel Margaret Cook (born on 7th April 1903) in Richmond, Surrey. The couple had two sons: John Francis Mellor (born 1925, married Alix Marie Villanet but the couple were childless, and died 8th November 1990); and Simon Hood Mellor (born 1928, died aged just 6 in 1934). Sir John and Rachel divorced in 1937, with Rachel granted a decree nisi with costs on the grounds of misconduct by Sir John. Subsequently, Rachel married Captain William Eric Lloyd (born in 1914) – then serving in the Royal Berkshire Regiment and No 3 Commando - in 1939. William was killed in action in Sicily, Italy, on 14th July 1943 and is buried at Syracuse War Cemetery on the island.

On 23rd December 1937 Sir John married Raie Ada Mendes at the Chelsea Register Office: they honeymooned in Paris. Six months earlier, on 15th June 1937, he had been cited as a co-respondent in the Divorce Court when Raie's then husband, Jacob, was granted a decree nisi with costs. Raie died on 31st August 1965.

In 1971 Sir John married Jessica E de Pass (originally Jessica E Desola, born 26

November 1904, first married to Ronald David de Pass) in Westminster. It seems likely that Jessica's first marriage also ended in divorce as Ronald did not die until 1977.

Sir John died on 15th July 1986 at Chesterfield House in Mayfair, London. His son, Sir John Francis Mellor became the third Baron Culmhead, but the Baronetcy ended in 1990 when the third Baron died without any successors.

Sir John was entitled to wear the 'trio' – the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal, and the Victory Medal.



### Postscript

Sir John's aunt, Geraldine Elizabeth Mellor, married Sir William Goschen who took on a twenty-one year lease of the Otterhead Estate when the Black family (see entry for John Neill Black) left in 1915. The Estate is close to Culmhead House.

Captain John Mellor accompanied his parents to the unveiling of the memorial plaque in St Leonard's Otterford in August 1920.

# Arthur Alick/ Alec Shire



## Arthur Alic(k)/Alec Shire

Born in Otterford on 30th July 1887

Enlistment in the RNAS or RFC, and transferred to the Royal Air Force as an Air Mechanic 3rd Class on 9th April 1917 (Service No: 75178)

Survived the war

Royal Air Force as an Air Mechanic 3rd Class (Service No 75178). He was enlisted for 'the duration of the war'.

We know no more about Arthur until 1939 when the limited available records show he was an invalid, and Laura was working as the proprietress of an hotel.

Arthur, then living at Melville House, Middle Street, in Taunton died on 7th December 1949, aged 62. His estate of £461.13s.2d passed to his wife.

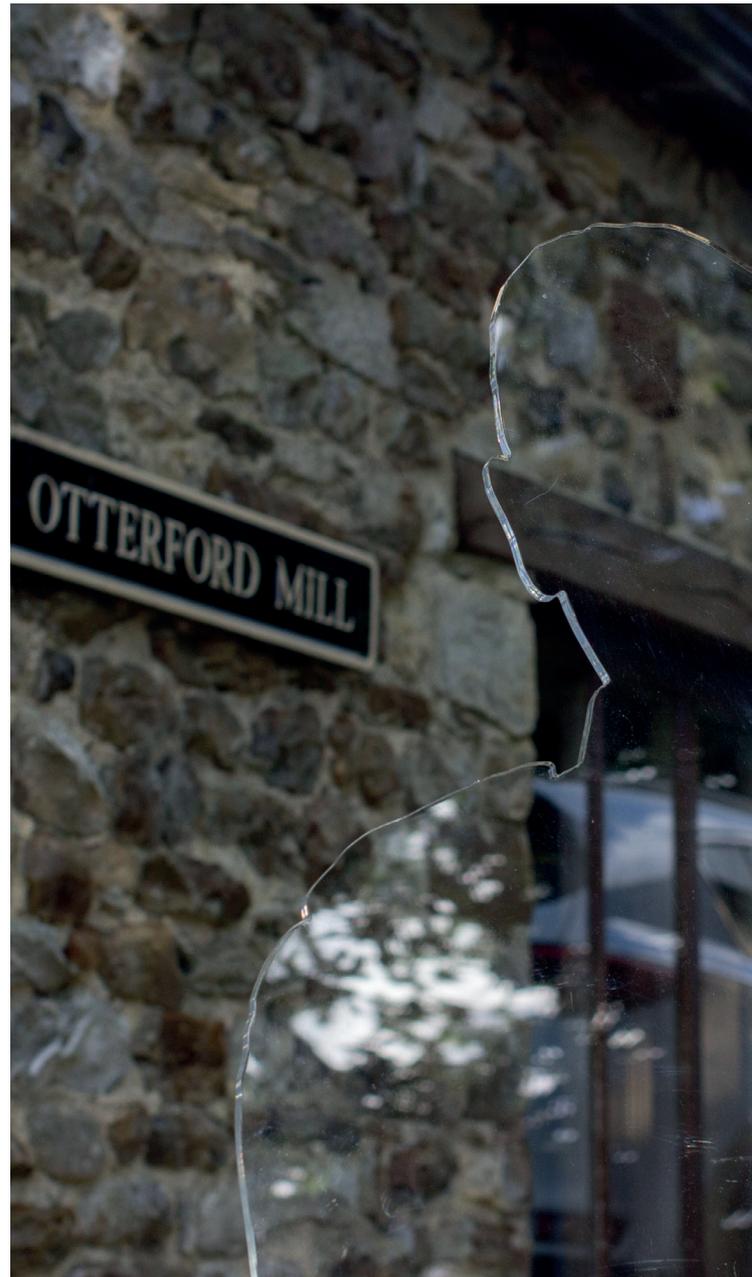
Arthur Alic(k)/Alec Shire (variations of his name appear in different documents) was born in Otterford on 30th July 1887 - the only child of William Shire (born in Otterford in 1849) and Elizabeth Shire (born in Pitminster in 1850). Both parents were in their late 30s when Arthur was born, which was unusual for the time.

In 1901 the family were living at The Lodge, Poundisford, nr Pitminster, and, at 13, Arthur was an under-groom.

By 1911 Arthur was still single and living at home: the family had moved to 2 Eastview Terrace, Trull. He was a domestic groom.

On 23rd August 1914 Arthur married Laura Mary Hake (born in Corfe on 26th December 1886, and baptised there on 30th January 1887) in Trull. The family subsequently moved to Buckland St Mary. Prior to her marriage Laura worked as a domestic servant in Taunton and Farnham in Hampshire.

We could find no details of when Arthur first enlisted or was conscripted. On 9th April 1917 he transferred from either the Royal Naval Air Service or the Royal Flying Corps, where he had been an Air Mechanic 2 working as a Chauffeur, to the newly-formed



# Albert Sparkes



## Albert Sparkes

Brother of Walter Sparkes (see earlier entry)

Born in Otterford on 20th January 1891, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 15th February the same year

Enlisted in the 2nd/5th Battalion, the Gloucestershire Regiment on 15th April 1915 (Service No: 242538)

Final Rank: Lance Sergeant

Fought in France and Flanders

Survived the war

Albert was born on 20th January 1891 in Otterford, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 15th February the same year. He attended Otterford Primary School from 3rd April 1895. See Walter Sparkes' entry for details of family life.

Albert joined the Police Force on 16th April 1913.

On 15th April 1915 he volunteered for service in the Army, and enlisted in the 2nd/5th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment (Service No: 242538). The 2nd/5th was a second line territorial battalion, formed in Gloucester in September 1914.

The Battalion, as part of the 61st Division, began its active service in the Laventie sector, alongside the newly arrived 5th Australian Division. Both divisions took part in the ill-fated attack on Fromelles in July which cost the Australians 5,500 casualties and the 61st Division 1,550. It also earned the Division the soubriquet "61st and worst" from the

Australians. The 2nd/5th Gloucesters were in reserve and it was they who had the depressing task of bringing in and burying the dead, which took three or four days. The Germans did not fire a shot on stretcher bearers and others wandering about No Man's Land in broad daylight. The Battalion moved to the Somme at the end of October, too late for any of the battles but in time to follow up the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line in March/April 1917. The Third Battle of Ypres, then the Battle of Cambrai, and the German counter-attack followed. During the first two weeks of the March 1918 offensive the Division suffered some 6,000 casualties.

Albert served until 1919, achieving the rank of Lance Sergeant: he returned to duty with the Police Force on 16th January 1919. During his time with the Police he took part in wrestling matches for the service.

He was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Albert died in Weston-Super-Mare in December 1959.



# John (Jack) Henry Sparkes



## John Henry Sparkes

Brother of Walter Sparkes (see earlier entry)

Born in Otterford on 28th May 1898, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 3rd July that year

Enlisted, as a Private, in the 6th (service) Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 202870)

Fought in France  
Survived the war



John was born on 28th May 1898 in Otterford, and baptised in St Leonard's Church on 3rd July that year. He attended Otterford Primary School from 6th May 1902. See Walter Sparkes' entry for details of family life.

John enlisted, as a Private, in the 6th (Service) Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry (Service No: 202870) - and served as a Signaller.

The Battalion, raised in Taunton in 1914 as part of 'Kitchener's Army', was full of enthusiasm but initially without arms or equipment. By May 1915 the recruits were judged ready and proceeded to France - although a lack of rifle and artillery ammunition delayed a move to the front line. The Battalion served on the Western Front throughout the war.

He had still not returned home in 1919 - showing on the Taunton Absent Voters List of

Spring and Autumn that year - but once back joined the Police Force and was stationed at Mells in the Frome Division in Somerset.

John married Olive Ada Woolard in Shepton Mallet in 1922. His son Mervyn Cecil was born in 1924.

After only seven years' Police Service The Courier reported that he died, aged just 28, in Frome Hospital on 2nd March 1927. A police pension was awarded to Olive and (until he was ten years old) Mervyn.

John was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

# Samuel Sparkes



## Samuel Sparkes

Brother of Walter Sparkes (see earlier entry)

Born in Otterford on 29th September 1880, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 14th November that year

Conscripted, as a driver, into the Royal Flying Corps on 4th July 1916, and transferred to the Royal Air Force in April 1918 (Service No: 35460)

Final Rank: Air Mechanic, 1st Class

Served in Egypt

Survived the war



Viscount Portman appealed at the Court in Blandford for the exemption of his head chauffeur, saying that he had already sent seventy of his men to the army and Sam was a skilled mechanic and the only man left who knew London. The appeal was dismissed!

Samuel was born on 29th September 1880 in Otterford, and baptised at St Leonard's Church on 14th November that year. He joined Otterford Primary School on 3rd January 1885. See Walter Sparkes' entry for details of family life.

By 1901, aged 20, he was boarding with Charles Peter in Anders Lane (whilst not fully confirmed, this is thought to refer to Otterhead House where Charles Peter was the Head Gardener in the early 1900s) and working as a groom.

Samuel married Sarah Louise (or Louisa) Warner on 15th October 1908 in Weston-Super-Mare. Their first son, William James (Jack), was born in London on 23rd February 1909 - but died in 1914.

In 1911 Samuel was working as a chauffeur for the Portman family at Bryanston, Blandford St Mary, Dorset. When he was called up The Western Gazette reported that

Samuel joined the Royal Flying Corps on 4th July 1916 as a driver (Service No: 35460); transferring to the (newly created) Royal Air Force - 113 Squadron - as an Air Mechanic 1st Class in April 1918. He served in Egypt.

He was discharged in July 1919 and, although no detailed records are available, it seems very likely that he resumed his previous employment.

Samuel and Sarah's second son - Eric John - was born in London in 1920. Eric married Edwina Elsie Stewart (born in 1931) and, after a long life, died aged 93 in 2012.

Samuel himself died in Bournemouth in 1967: his wife, Sarah, in 1978 aged 97.



# William Sparkes



## William Sparkes

Brother of Walter Sparkes (see earlier entry)

Born in Otterford on 18th June 1892, and baptised in St Leonard's Church on 10th July that year

Signed a Short Service Attestation to the Army Reserve on 11th December 1916, and was mobilised, as a Private, to the 3rd Battalion, the Coldstream Guards in 1918 (Service No: 24707)

Fought in France

Survived the war

William was born on 18th June 1892 in Otterford, and was baptised at St Leonard's Church on 10th July the same year. He joined Otterford Primary School on 10th January 1896. See Walter Sparkes' entry in Section 2 for details of family life.

In 1911, aged 19, he was working as a farm labourer for Hartley Hardwick at Wisteria Farm Worle, near Weston-Super-Mare in Somerset. He then joined the Police Force and was stationed in Shepton Mallet, living at 21 Victoria Grove in the town.

He married Alice Elizabeth Cullen (born 15th July 1886 in Puxton, Somerset) at St Anne's Church, Axbridge, Devon, on 27th Jan 1916.

They were to have three children - daughter Joyce Christine (born in Shepton Mallet on 17th December 1917: died in November



2001), and sons Brian Walter (born in Ilminster on 5th October 1919: died 2nd May 1982) and Evelyn R (born in Taunton on 8th May 1921: died 31st July 2012). Joyce's first husband Harold Ernest Connibeer, whom she married in Taunton in 1936, was killed in action in World War II serving with the Royal Engineers in Rangoon, Burma.

William signed a short service attestation to the army reserve on 1st December 1916, and was mobilised to the 3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards in 1918 (Service No: 24707) - serving in France. It is not known exactly when William went to France as his service records appear as 'burnt documents' - but the 3rd Battalion fought in the Battle of St Quentin, the Battle of Bapaume, the First Battle of Arras, the Battle of Estaires, the Battle of Hazebrouck, and the Defence of Nieppe Forest that year. William ended the war in Criel Plage, south west of Le Treport in France.

William was demobbed on 15th February 1919, and returned to police duties.

William was entitled to the British War Medal and the Victory Medal

William's wife Alice died on 10th December 1925 in Frome, Somerset. William lived another twenty-six years and died in Weston-Super-Mare in 1951.

## Two further men, who may have served and survived

**We have researched these men thoroughly. We know they both have an Otterford connection, but we cannot be sure they fought in the war**

### Page Shire

By the time Page Shire was born in Otterford on 8th October 1890 there had been Shires living in the parish for at least 200 years. He was baptised in St Leonard's on 14th November the same year. His parents were Edward Shire (a road contractor, born in Otterford in 1849) and Mary Ann (or Anna) Shire (nee Hartnell or Hartwell, born in Otterford in 1863) who married at St Leonard's on 30th October 1889. The family lived with Edward's father, also Page (who was born in Yarcombe in 1808), and brother Mark at Hayne in Otterford. He was admitted to Otterford Primary School on 17th September 1894.

In 1901 Page was living with his parents, brothers John and Walter, and sister Daisy Ela at Holman Clavel Cottage: his father died in 1903. Ten years later brother John had moved out, Page was still at home and a harness maker, and sister Elizabeth had arrived.

Local knowledge and hearsay tells us that Page fought in the war, was wounded and captured. He may have been the Page Shire who served in the Royal Engineers (Service No: 223783) or the Private in the Lancashire Fusiliers (Service No: 46098) but we have been unable to establish any link to prove or disprove this.

In late 1919 Page married Agnes Clara Holland (born in early 1894, and baptised on 10th April that year at Harrow on the Hill), in Hendon. The couple had two daughters - Dorothy Edith (born 18th February 1921) and Winifred Joan (born 9th November 1924)

By 1939 he and Agnes had returned to Somerset and were living with his father at Widcombe Farm in Otterford, now a specialist saw-mill. Page's occupation was 'farmer'. He died in June 1968, aged 77, and is buried in the churchyard at St Leonard's Otterford.

### Walter Wakely (Wakley/Wakeley)

Walter was born in Otterford on 15th March 1885, the son of John Wakely (a labourer, born in Broadway in Somerset in 1851) and Charlotte Wakely (born in Yarcombe in Devon in 1860). See entry for William John Wakely for fuller family details. He enrolled at Otterford Primary School on 18th March 1889.

In 1891 the family - John, his father and mother, two brothers and three sisters - were living at Winders Cottage, Canons Grove, Lowton, nr Pitminster. By 1911 Walter was a labourer living on a farm in Marsh and working for the Love family there, in the parish of Yarcombe, Devon. His brother Thomas lived and worked there as well.

The Minute Book of the St John the Baptist Parochial Church Council in Yarcombe makes mention of those men of the parish who went to war (ie went and returned), recording them separately from those who died and are commemorated on the war memorial. One of the men is Walter, who apparently served in the Somerset Light Infantry - but we can find no trace of his service.

After the war Walter returned to Yarcombe, living at Beacon (Cottage), then in 1919 at Stout Cottage, and - by 1920 - with his parents at Watchford Cottage, Watchford Moor. He died towards the end of 1965, aged 79, in Taunton.



A peek into  
the future



# James (Joe) Pitman



## James (Joe) Pitman

Born in Otterford on 8th February 1915

Served, as an Able Seaman, in the Royal Navy in World War 2 (Service No:

D/JX217172)

Killed in action aboard HMS Galatea on 15th December 1941 when the ship was torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean Sea off Alexandria in Egypt

Commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial, and on the memorial plaque in St Leonard's Church

Joe joined the Royal Navy as an Able Seaman. On 15th December 1941 - aged 26 - he was serving on HMS Galatea, a light cruiser, in the Mediterranean Sea thirty five miles west of Alexandria in Egypt when the ship was torpedoed by the German submarine U557. The ship sank with the loss of the Commander, 22 officers and 447 ratings: 144 survivors were picked up by other Royal Naval ships. U557's 'victory' was short lived. The following day, west of the island of Crete, she was spotted by the Italian torpedo boat Orione, mistaken for a British submarine, and rammed. She sank with all (43) hands.

Joe is commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial (Panel 48, Column 1) "The Register of the names of those who fell in the 1939-1945 War and have no other grave than the sea", as well as the memorial plaque in St Leonard's Church.

His father Alfred died, aged 85, in Taunton in 1944

Joe is the solitary, lonely, World War 2 addition to the memorial plaque in St Leonard's Church.

He was born in Otterford on 8th February 1915: his parents were Alfred (Alfie) Pitman (born 2nd February 1859 in Yarcombe), and Jennie Pitman (nee Hardwill, born 18th March 1878 in Thurloxtton in Somerset) who lived at The Nook in Bishopswood, Otterford, and had married in 1909.

In 1939, aged 24 and still living at home with his parents at The Nook, he was a labourer.



HMS Galatea



# Credits

We could not have published this booklet without the help of many people and organisations

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The 'Otterford Men Project Team' - Rosanna Barton, Mike Canham, Penny Gale and Rosie Viant - for the many, many hours they dedicated to researching the Otterford Men, including the frustrations when a dead end was reached, and the joy when another piece of the unfolding jigsaw was solved and slotted in to its rightful place.

*The Parish Council would particularly like to thank Rosanna Barton - who lives in Buckland St Mary, and willingly shared the earlier research she and Val Pym had undertaken on those men included in the 2014 Buckland St Mary 'Vanished Lives' exhibition. Not content with that she undertook much research on some of the other men, and - based on her considerable research experience - was able to guide and assist the remainder of the Project Team.*

All those residents, and the descendents of some of the Otterford Men, who contributed local knowledge and/or some of their family history, and graciously allowed details to be printed.

Penny Hart, our Parish Clerk, for proof-reading successive drafts of the booklet.

Tanya Hetherington for design and art-work.

Michael Crilly for his superb photos of the silhouettes.

All the organisations - listed in 'Sources' - contacted for advice and information about certain periods in the lives of individual Otterford men.

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| 49 Letter from mother<br><b>National Archives of Australia</b>                 | 74 Medal Roll Card<br><b>Army Medal Office</b>                                     |
| 50 Photo - Nantgwllt<br><b>history.powys.org.uk</b>                            | 74 Press cutting, operation/mother’s journey<br><b>Dampier Grabham’s scrapbook</b> |
| 50 Photo - HMS Opal<br><b>Willie Watters/Orkney Image Library</b>              | 74 Military Cross<br><b>Wikipedia</b>  |
| 51 Newscutting ‘Two Destroyers Lost’<br><b>Belfast Newsletter</b>              | 76 Sir John Serocold Paget Mellor<br><b>Bassano Ltd</b>                            |
| 51 Photo - HMS Opal aground<br><b>MOD – Navy News</b>                          | 77 Photo – Indian soldier at end of siege<br><b>Wikipedia</b>                      |
| 51 Portsmouth Naval Memorial<br><b>Wikipedia</b>                               | 77 Press Cutting ‘British Army Bows to Turk’<br><b>British Newspaper Archive</b>   |
| 51 Rhayader War Memorial (Powys)<br><b>Rollofhonour.com</b>                    | 77 British & Indian forces after surrender<br><b>dailysabah.com</b>                |
| 52 Press cutting reporting death<br><b>British Newspaper Archive</b>           | 78 Sir John Serocold Paget Mellor<br><b>Mellor family</b>                          |
| 53 Medal Roll Card<br><b>Army Medal Office</b>                                 | 80 Albert Sparkes<br><b>Sparkes Family</b>   |
| 54 Bebington Cemetery, Wirral<br><b>CWGC</b>                                   | 81 John Henry Sparkes<br><b>Sparkes Family</b>                                     |
| 57 Thiepval Memorial<br><b>CWGC</b>  | 82 Samuel Sparkes (two photos)<br><b>Sparkes Family</b>                            |
| 57 Trull War Memorial<br><b>Mike Canham</b>                                    | 83 William Sparkes<br><b>Sparkes Family</b>  |
| 59 Attestation papers<br><b>National Archives</b>                              | 87 HMS Galatea<br><b>Wikipedia</b>   |





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