

THE GREAT WAR

1914 - 18

**Ringstead Men
Who Served
*A to M***

David Ball



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Acknowledgements

I have been helped by so many people that I cannot acknowledge them all here. I have tried to thank those who have assisted this work either in the text or in the *Reference Section* at the back of the second book.

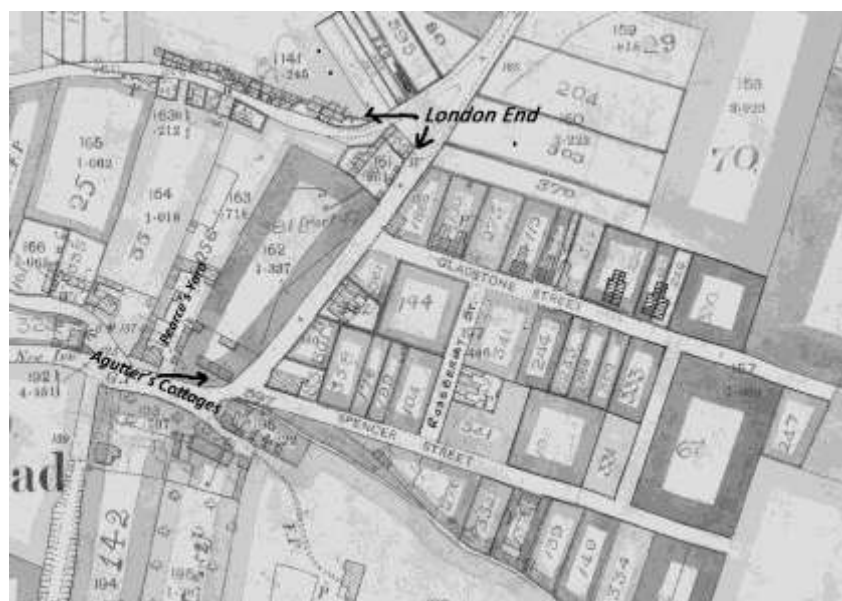
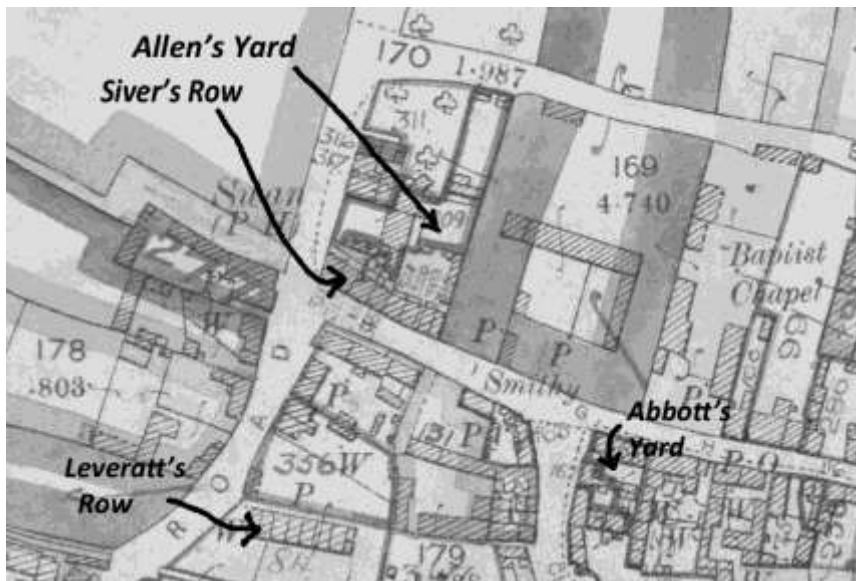
There are a number of people, however, who have given me consistent and vital support. I must first mention Jon Abbott of the Ringstead Heritage Group who has freely shared photographs, stories and introductions to descendants of the men. He also provided a copy of the original *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and helped with the map of *Rows and Yards*. I must also thank Kay Collins, Project Coordinator of Rushden Research, and the Rushden Heritage Group, for the use of the photographs and articles in Rushden newspapers on the Ringstead WW1 men.

The other major source for the stories has been the *Absent Voters' Lists* for 1918 and 1919 which were held by the Northamptonshire Record Office. I have missed my visits there during the *Covid 19* Lockdown.

The members of the *Great War Forum* website have been invaluable in providing doorways out of blind alleys time after time. Without their help these books would have been very much shorter and lacking many men's service details. I have tried to thank each one of the members in the text and the references.

David Ball

Ringstead Rows and Yards (Spellings vary) 1910



Introduction

We tend to remember the dead of the First World War by neat white headstones and memorials. We can forget that they were ordinary young men, many of whom would not have travelled outside Northamptonshire. Like us, they would have been a mixture of good and bad in varying proportions. We also can forget the many who came back changed mentally or physically, or both.

In these short biographies I have tried to sketch in a little of their lives before and, for many, after the Great War. Official documents only give the skeleton of the men's lives and, in the accounts which include family pictures and reminiscences, we see much more of the whole person.

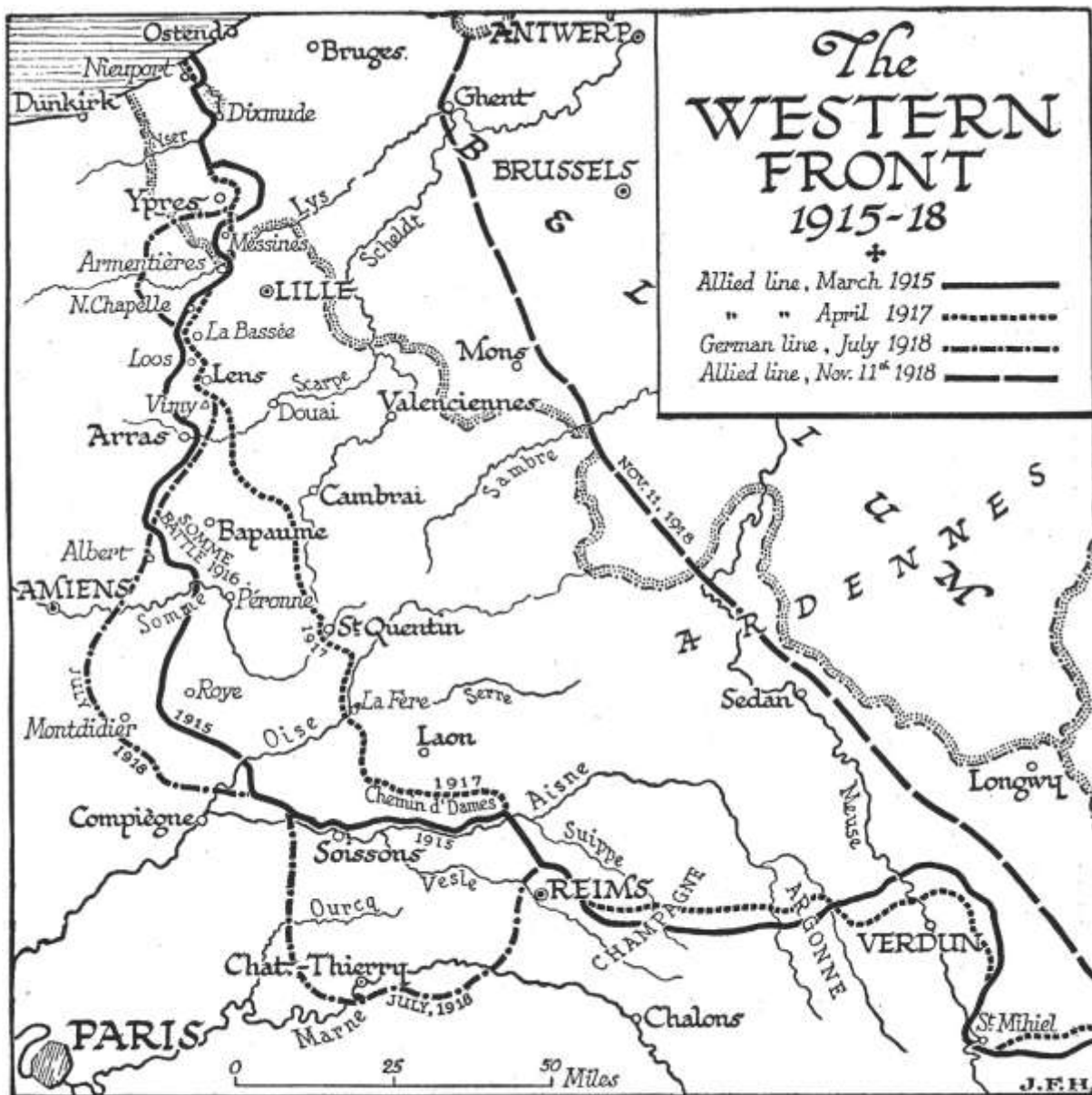
There is some repetition in the stories because I have tried to make each chapter stand as a separate piece. If a reader does follow through them all, I hope that they will gain a broader view of the war and the conditions that the men endured. These young men, many of whom would not be granted the right to vote until 1918, should be remembered by us all.

We should see ordinary men asked to undergo conditions that no human being should be asked to suffer.

I have written of these men, knowing that, for most, it is far from the final word. I hope that other records will come to light, and families will add their own stories to help this process of gratitude and remembrance.

David Ball

October 2020.



The Western Front 1915-18

H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1921)

Downloaded from *Maps ETC*, on the web at <http://etc.usf.edu/maps> [map #03695]

Chapter 1

The Abbott Family

William Abbot, a shoemaker from Ringstead, married Phebe (Phoebe) Wilson in the Parish Church on 21st July 1853. Phoebe had been a servant probably working for Margaret Ball, who had a draper's shop in Oundle. She was the younger sister of Hannah Wilson who had married William Weekley Ball and Rebecca who had married John Ball, William's brother. It was John Ball who was the witness who signed the Marriage Register.

The 1861 Census for Ringstead reveals that the couple had married quite late in life, for William was now 40 and Phoebe 35. They had made up for lost time, however, for with them are their children, Emma 5, Joseph 4, Elizabeth 3 and John 1. It is three of the sons of John and Joseph whose stories we are telling here.

Joseph married Annie Forscutt on 22nd April 1880. In the 1891 Census he was a grocer and coal dealer, living with Annie in Chapel Road, Ringstead. With them were children, Lilian, 9, Evelyn, 7, Olive 5, and William Henry 1. By 1901 Joseph and Annie were still at 2 Chapel Road with daughters, Lilian 19, Evelyn 17 and Olive 14, who was a pupil teacher.

Meanwhile, younger brother John had married Eliza Manning on 5th May 1884 in Ringstead. They too, quickly produced a family, Eva Emma in 1885, George, on 12th January 1888, Ted (sometimes Teddie) on 27th August 1890 and Reginald on 22nd March 1896. All were christened together on 10th May 1896. One suspects that Benjamin, was not expected to live and John and Eliza decided to baptise the other children as well. A final daughter, Kathleen was born in 1897 and her father, John, was buried the following year, aged just 38.

If we move forward to the 1911 Census we find George (23) and Ted (21) are living with their widowed mother Eliza in a four-roomed house in Allen Yard, Ringstead. In this small cottage Eliza has 3 children and one grandchild living with her. George is a stitcher and Ted a worker in a shoe factory making military boots and shoes. Meanwhile, in the High Street (with seven rooms) Joseph and Annie Abbott just have their two grown-up daughters at home. Lilian (29) was a manageress of the "Drapery and Boot Department" of the Co-operative Stores and Evelyn was a shop assistant.

In this Edwardian period of comparative peace, the military boot and shoe trade was in recession following the temporary boost of the Boer War. As we now know, just a few years later, another more terrible war was to suddenly explode across Europe and the globe. By its conclusion 8½ million people had died and some 29 million were wounded or missing.

It is the men of Ringstead who served in the First World War that we are looking at in these short biographies. The three cousins, George, Ted and William Henry Abbott are the first names on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*, which was published in Thrapston in June 1919.

George Abbott (1888-1946)

George Abbott had been born to John and Eliza on 12th January 1888 so he was 26 years old when the First World War broke out. He was working as a hand-sewn boot maker and, probably, had already been captain of the Ringstead football team.



*George in Ringstead Football Team in 1905-6 (about 17 years old)
With thanks to the Ringstead Heritage Group.*

As we have seen, in 1911 he was living with his widowed mother, Eliza. At some point he enlisted in the army but unfortunately almost all his records have been lost or destroyed, like so many others.



*George in his uniform
With thanks to George's son-in-law Alan Clipston for this photograph*

We do know that he joined the 9th (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. We have his *Medal Roll* and the *Ringstead Absent Voters' List* confirms that his Regimental

Number was 12526. He entered the “Balkans Theatre of War” on 25th September 1915. He would have missed the terrible carnage that the Battalion, as part of the 39th Brigade, had suffered that summer in the Gallipoli area. He would have been part of the draft of new soldiers sent out to bring the Battalion back up to strength. Unfortunately, this was to be a recurring necessity.



A map of the warzone that George was in. The small peninsula at the entrance to the Sea of Marmara (west of Constantinople) was where ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign was centred.

He would have joined the 9th in trenches near, what was called by the soldiers, “Chocolate Hill” because of its dark soil, where the 39th Brigade were pinned down, unable to move forward. On November 26th a torrential rainstorm broke and the trenches, cut out of the hard rock and clay, quickly flooded. At the time the 9th were resting in the reserve trenches where at least they could move around. Even here, the dugouts were flooded and washed away. Worse was to come, for the rain was followed by bitter frosts and then by blizzards of snow.

They were unable to light fires so the officers attempted to keep the men warm by marching them up and down and rousing those who fell asleep. There were many cases of frostbite and nearly two thirds of the Battalion were sick. When the weather abated it took some ten days to repair the trenches and dugouts while the men sheltered as best they could in holes and hedges.

Evacuation began in December and the whole of the battalion successfully embarked for Lemnos, a Greek island south-west of Gallipoli, and a short period of rest. They did return to the trenches again but it was realised that the enterprise had failed and the army was evacuated from Gallipoli. George would have sailed with the remnants of the Warwickshires to Port Said in Egypt, at the northern end of the Suez Canal.

Any respite was only temporary for they moved on into the area then called Mesopotamia, (mainly modern Iraq), reaching Basra (Basrah) where they disembarked. They journeyed up the River Tigris, reaching Sheikh Saad (Shayk Sa'd) on March 21st 1916. This area had been a part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire but only loosely held, mainly through local tribal leaders. The focus of the fighting was to relieve the town of Kut. Within a few weeks almost all the officers and many of the troops had been killed and some were forced to surrender. This pattern continued with the Warwickshires showing great courage in the face of a much larger army. Two of their officers were awarded the V.C. in this campaign.

The Battalion moved forward as part of the 39th Brigade, finally reaching Baghdad. The relentless fighting continued, the searing heat which producing shimmering mirages which masked the enemy's positions. As on the Western Front it was a warfare of small gains and terrible casualties often fought in almost unbearable conditions.



This is thought to be the 9th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshires in Persia in 1918 bartering with local traders near their camp. ©Imperial War Museum (Ref Q73062)

From late 1917 and into April 1918 the 9th, as part of the Brigade, were at Deli Abbas and Nahrin Kupri where they were victorious and took 1400 Turkish prisoners. They then moved into Summer quarters at Abu Said but on 10th July 1918 were ordered to proceed to Persia (now Iran). The civil war of the 1917 Revolution had left Russia unable for a time to

maintain an organised army. As a result, the German and Turkish armies had once more moved into Persia.

The final destination on the Allies was Baku on the Western coast of the Caspian Sea, with the task of safeguarding the oil wells there from the Turks and their German masters. The Royal Warwickshires travelled by train from Abu Saida to Ruz and then by lorry over the mountain to Hamadan. After ten days rest they marched over the Sultan Bulaq Pass to Kasvin (Qazvin). There they rested before being carried on by lorry to Kazian (Qaziyn) where they embarked for Baku.

Again, it was not a successful campaign and the British suffered a number of defeats losing many men, wounded, killed and taken prisoner. Once more they were forced to make an organised retreat to waiting boats and safety. On 28th September 1918 the Battalion sailed across the Caspian Sea to Krasnovdsk in Russia (now Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan) on its eastern shore. Here George and his comrades would have stayed until April 1919 helping to protect the railway against the Bolsheviks.



*A photograph of the Battalion football team brought back by George,.
Notice the antelope crest of the Warwickshires.. With thanks to Alan Clipston*

The family believe that he served in India. I have not found written evidence for this but in 1918 in the Royal Warwickshire 9th Battalion *War Diary* there are a number of "Leave Parties" bound for India. I think this must have been in lieu of home leave for the soldiers. Certainly, the photographs which George's son-in-law Alan Clipston has allowed us to use confirm that George was in India with the army. One photograph shows Dagshai a hill station in Northern India which had army barracks and gaol and was built originally as sanatorium for T.B. patients. An ideal place to recuperate, away from the burning heat of much of the campaign.



*George in India with two comrades in arms and three local boys.
With thanks to Alan Clipston*

By now the war on the Western Front was over and the attritional fighting had stopped. Early in April 1919 some of the 9th Battalion started the long journey home and, although the rest continued in the area, their numbers had fallen to five officers and 67 men. These last remnants of the 9th were transferred to the 9th Worcesters and the 9th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment was disbanded.

It seems likely that George Abbott returned with the first group. He appears to have been a brave reliable soldier and at some point was promoted to Corporal and probably to Sergeant. He was awarded the Victory, British and 1914/15 Star medals. At his demob on 31st July 1919 he was put on the "Class Z" list which meant they he might be called up if the Peace Treaty collapsed and there was another war or emergency. Fortunately for George it took another twenty years for this to happen.

George had endured 3½ years of continual warfare in burning heat and bitter cold with little respite and no chance to take home leave. He would have seen friends and colleagues in the 9th Battalion killed and wounded. The final release back to his home village and family must have been a wonderful feeling but many found it difficult to fit back into the lives of people

who would have found it hard to comprehend what the soldiers had endured and seen during the war.



*George as captain of the Ringstead Football Team (date unknown)
With thanks to Jon Abbott*

Nevertheless, he had to settle back into civilian life and early in 1925 he married Clara Braybrooke Smith. Clara had been born in Denford, on 27th April 1889, the daughter of Frederick Smith and his wife Lucy Elizabeth (née Braybrooke). Going back to the 1911 Census for Denford, Frederick had been a ganger in charge of a platelayer crew, working for the Midland Railway Company. Clara was an Elementary School Teacher.



*George and Clara outside the shed where he worked. He sold his boots from this shed.
With thanks to Alan Clipston.*

George and Clara had married late and had one daughter called Jean in 1927 who later married Alan Clipston. The 1939 *Register* has George and Clara in Church Street (I think the Register wrongly has Clara's middle name as Bertha). George was a handsewn boot maker, one of a diminishing breed. Clara was still an Elementary School teacher. They were just a few doors away from Harold Coates, the Ringstead Headmaster and his wife, but Clara would bike every day to Titchmarsh to work in the school there.

George died, aged 58, on 8th October 1946 having seen another World War come to a close. Clara lived another 25 years, dying in 1971, aged 81 years.

Ted Abbott (1890-1963)

Ted Abbott was born on 27th August 1890, some 2½ year after his brother George. It seems, from the Register of Births and Deaths, that he was christened "Ted" and it was not a nickname. He attended the local Ringstead School and then went into the shoe trade, like his father and brother. In 1911, after the death of his father, he was living with his widowed mother, Eliza, and his siblings.



Ted in the Ringstead School photograph (about 1900).

Unlike his older brother, Ted married before he went into the army, on 5th September 1914, just weeks after war had been declared. The marriage took place in Raunds and his bride was Ada Ellen Perrin, some three years his junior. Their first child, Rosalie Irene, was born in Raunds, 5 months later, on 20th February 1915. At the time they were living at 5 Wellington Road in Raunds but they soon moved to Ringstead High Street.

Ted first attested (joined up) in Raunds on 10th December 1915 and was put in the Army Reserve. He was 24 years 3 months old, 5ft 9inches tall, with a 34-inch chest when fully expanded. It was not until 15th January 1917 that he was "mobilised" and joined the Northamptonshire Regiment 7th (Service) Battalion (Regimental No. 202973). He reported three days later to the Territorial Force Depot 13 which was in Clare Street in Northampton.

The "Service" Battalions were ones raised at the beginning of the war from civilian volunteers. The 7th was known as "Mobbs Own" after Edgar Mobbs, a famous rugby player, who was one of the first to volunteer and whose charisma prompted many others to join

up. Unfortunately, most of these men, like Mobbs, had been killed by 1917 and the majority were, by this time, conscripts.



*Fred and Ada with children Rosalie and Jack
With thanks to Jon Abbott*

The 7th (Service) Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment embarked for France and, on 24th April 1917, they were at an Infantry Base Depot (IBD). This was a holding camp in northern France, near the coast where the men would be kept in training until they were moved up to the front. The 9th had been in France since 1915 so he would have been part of a draft replacing the sick, wounded and the dead. It is not clear if he had ever been moved up to the front line but he was only in France 43 days. On 3rd June 1917 he was diagnosed with an “inflammation of the connective tissue of the left heel” which could have been caused by too much “square-bashing” on hard surfaces. He was taken via the 138th Field Ambulance to No. 17 Casualty Clearing Station and returned to England for treatment.

He was back in England for 222 days before he was posted again to the Base Depot in France on 15th January 1918 before being posted back to the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment a day later. On his record sheet it states that he would now be in the Northamptonshire 6th “for Record Purposes” but it seems clear that he remained with the 7th and any stay with the 6th was only temporary.

He remained in France for 1 year 16 days. Returning home on 31st January 1919, some two months after the war had finished. It was in this period that Ted met Charles Laughton, who later became one of the most famous screen and stage actors of his generation. Laughton, born in Yorkshire, had originally been part of the 2/1st Huntingdonshire Cyclists (“The Gaspipe Cavalry”) but finished up in the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment at

the same time as Ted. After the war Ted and Charles exchanged a number of letters before fame and fortune beckoned for Laughton. Ted's descendants still treasure these letters.

In 1919, a former captain in the 7th Northamptonshires, H.B. King, wrote a history of the Battalion in the First World War in which he told of the area in front of Hargicourt where the 7th had moved on 26th September 1917:

Not a single house had been left standing for miles round, and hardly even a tree; the roads had been blown up at junctions, and all railway lines systematically destroyed by the enemy before he had withdrawn . . . except for a few huts, there was neither cover for man or animal.

It was into this scene that Ted was taken into in January 1918.

As the "Revolution" of 1917 had for the time discounted Russia as an effective ally, the Germans began to make progress again and in early 1918 an offensive was expected between St Quentin and Cambrai. The 24th Brigade worked over the first three months of 1918 trying to build up strong defensive positions in the devastated countryside but the weather was very wet and the front was too long to defend along all its length. On March 21st when the Germans attacked, in what was called the Battle of St Quentin, much of the defensive system was still in the planning stage, or as H.B. King described it:

". . . defences existed only on maps or in tape marks over the country-side.

The 7th, as part of the 24th Division had been had not been out of the line since the previous July but when it was clear an attack was imminent they were instructed that they would not be relieved. The Battalion were held in the Corps Reserve at Harcourt, ready to move to their allotted battle positions. At 4.30 on March 21st they moved up to these positions on high ground with trenches less than three feet deep and exposed to artillery fire. The enemy attacked in heavy mist and with its flanks overrun the 7th withdrew with difficulty to Harcourt. Their position was undefendable and further withdrawals took place to the high ground on the western bank of the Somme. In this withdrawal the troops had to cross a bridge at Falvey and the 7th were the last battalion to mount a rearguard to allow the retreat to the west bank.

After a brief respite the 7th were ordered to take part in a counter-attack but they were met by a much larger German force and were forced back to a line between Hallu and Chaulnes where they were placed on Brigade Reserve. Once more, they were called to the front and were involved in hand-to-hand bombing but the battalions on the flanks of the line gave way and, in danger of being encircled, the 7th had to withdraw again and again until they were given the task with others of defending the bridgeheads at Berteaucourt and Thennes.

The 24th Division had borne the attack of eleven German divisions from 21 March for some ten days although forced to lose ground in the process. They were finally relieved on April 5th. H.B. King wrote in 1919:

The whole army had been repeatedly threatened with annihilation, but the doggedness of the private soldier and the leadership of the subordinate commanders

had saved everything; and the 7th Northamptons, though reduced in numbers, survived that period of stress as a unit – individually depressed, perhaps but collectively confident of eventual victory.

The 7th went on “motor buses to Saleux and by train to the mouth of the Somme at the village of Escarbotin, near St Valery. Here they were given new uniforms. They had a day on the beach at Ault where the companies were photographed. But the time away from the front was short-lived and after a ten-hour train journey and a nine hour march they arrived at billets at the small town of Houdain. German aeroplanes flew over on April 23rd and dropped bombs on the billet killing seven men and wounding nineteen. On the 30th they marched five miles only to be recalled when an attack elsewhere was expected. Next day they marched ten miles to Les Brebis and relieved the Royal Canadian Mounted Rifles in the “Hill 70” area which had been in German hands when the 7th had been in the area earlier in the war.

Hill 70 had a network of old mining tunnels through chalk which had been opened up by the 3rd Australian Mining Company and were a great defensive position but could be a death trap if there was a successful attack by the enemy. After a time at the Front Line they moved back to the Divisional Reserve positions where they spent the time making dugouts. There was no major attack but a form of influenza, sometimes called pyrexia (fever), or Spanish flu, broke out affecting some 200 men in the battalion and several thousands in the Division. Fortunately, it also badly affected the Germans. Within a fortnight, however, the worst was over.

Time passed, and the German attack did not materialise. The men spent their time on “spit and polish”. King, in a slightly surreal report, relates:

At the 24th Divisional Horse Show held on August 8th the 7th Northamptons won first prize in the heavy draught horse class as well as the “VC race” for other ranks.

There was still night bombing causing casualties, and fighting continued among the ruins of Lens, where the Germans had taken over parts of the city.

On 30th September 1918 the 7th were relieved and marched to huts at Compigny and then by a series of train journeys and marches they reached the Front Line some four miles south-west of Cambrai. The 7th Northamptons and Canadian troops captured Cambrai. At 5.30 am on the 9th October, the Battalion moved forward against a German defensive position in the village of Cagnoncles. They won the day but with the loss of some 90 men killed and wounded. When this stronghold fell there was little further concerted opposition as they moved forward to Avesnes (Avesnes les Auber). Nevertheless, they again saw action at Rieux-en-Cambresis and Haussy while trying to cross the River La Selle.

After almost continuous marching and action the 7th they went to billets at Cauroir, three miles east of Cambrai, for a week’s recuperation. Here the battalion won seven of the events in the sports arranged by the 73rd Infantry Brigade.

They were soon in action again and the 7th were detailed to capture the village of Wargnies le Petit, which they achieved, and then went into billets there, being treated well by the few

French civilians still in the village. They then moved forward to Bavai (Bavay) and on to high ground east of Marivaux. On November 11th moving back to near Bavai the battalion learned that the Germans had accepted the Allies Armistice terms. It seems it was greeted with relief and thankfulness rather than euphoria. They had been part of a war of attrition, sometimes losing ground but maintaining their discipline in the face of overwhelming odds.

Although the Armistice had been agreed, a Peace Treaty had not yet been signed and the 7th remained in France for a further seven months. The battalion made a number of marches before billeting at Bachy where, discovering that the 2nd Northhamptons were a few miles away, a football match was arranged which the 7th won 1 – 0. The billets here were poor so they moved to Tournai. At Tournai, after disruption caused by an unexplained fire, they billeted in an Asylum. Classes were held in Arithmetic, French and other subjects. Christmas Day 1918 was spent in the Asylum! On January 11th the first party of other ranks were dispatched to England and then continued once or twice a week.

Ted Abbott received an advance of £2 on his pay and was given a 28-day furlough on 31st January 1919. He was given a *Protection Certificate and Certificate of Identity* to prove he was not a deserter. His army career was over. He signed to confirm that he had no disabilities and was formally demobilised to “Class Z” on 28th February 1919 and he remained on this until 31st March of the following year. He was entitled to the British and Victory Medals. He returned to his wife and family in Ringstead and settled down to working in a shoe factory. It may have been a difficult transition.



The Old Post Office in High Street. Ringstead in the early 20th Century. Later, the Post Office moved and Ted and Ada lived there with their family.

The couple had five more children after the war to follow Rosalie and Jack. They were Leonard (1919), Dora (1922), William (1927), Derek (1929) and Greta (1937).

As an aside there is a strange glimpse of him in the “Out of Town Bargain Section” of the *Sheffield Independent* in November and December 1930 where it lists:

£2 ELGIN WATCH silver, 8-day; Charles II 5/= 1673; two Motor Covers, Tubes hardly worn 26x3. Offers – Ted Abbott, Ringstead, Northants.

In the 1939 *Register of England & Wales* Ted is still a shoehand in a shoe room. He is with Ada and family in Ringstead High Street. At some point he had problems with his right leg due to poor circulation and had to have part of that leg amputated. He contacted a disease of the lung and died in Oundle Hospital in the last quarter of 1963 aged 73.

William Henry Abbott (1889-1978)

As we saw in the introduction, William Henry Abbott was the son of Joseph and Annie and cousin of George and Ted. He was born on 26th September 1889 and in the 1891 Census he was living with his parents and siblings in Chapel Road, Ringstead. His father was a grocer and coal dealer but by 1891 he had become a shoemaker so perhaps the business had failed. William’s older sister, Olive, was a pupil teacher and the other sister, Lilian was a shop assistant in the Co-op Stores.

I have not found William in the 1911 Census for he was not with his family. Also, when we look for his military career we find his records are part of the burnt papers which were destroyed in the Second World War by a German air raid. Much of William’s records did survive, however so we can follow much of his wartime life.

William signed a “Territorial Force Attestation Form” for four years’ service on 22nd November 1915 and was given the Regimental Number 5026. Initially the men signing up for the Territorial Forces were guaranteed only to serve in this country in defence of the nation. As the casualties mounted many volunteered to serve abroad and this guarantee was revoked. When William signed up he was 26 years 2 months old, 5feet 6½inches tall and had an expanded chest of 37½inches, with excellent eyesight and good physical development.

William was embodied into the 3/4th Battalion Territorial Force of the Northamptonshire Regiment. This Battalion had been formed on May 12th 1915 at Northampton, moved to Great Windsor Park and then In October 1915 to Halton Park near Tring in Buckinghamshire. On April 8th 1916 it became the 4th (Reserve) Battalion. Alfred de Rothschild had offered Halton Park as a training camp at the beginning of the war.

On the *Long, Long Trail* website it gives an insight into the what recruits should expect.

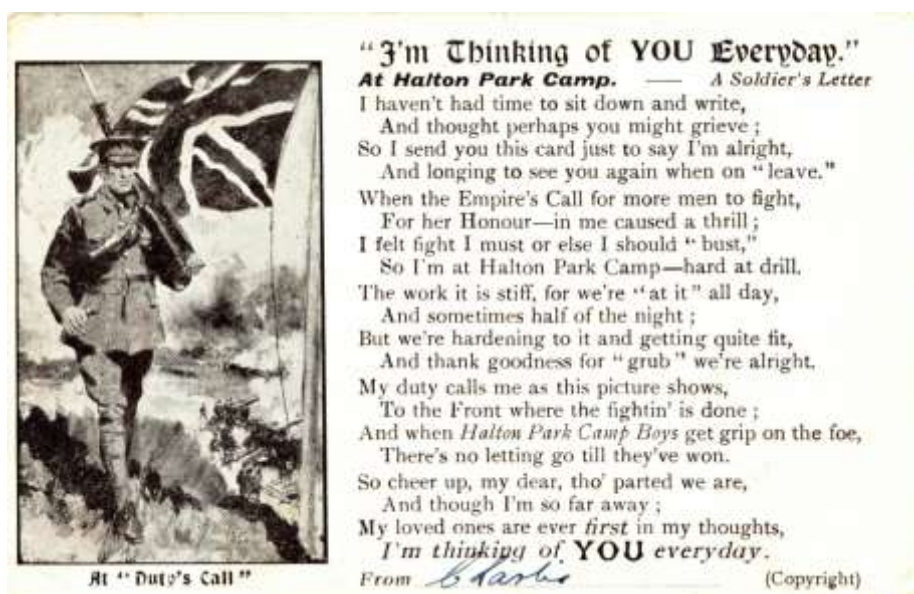
Training for ordinary Tommies began with basic training for physical fitness, drill, march discipline, essential field craft and so on. Later, as the soldier specialised (in the infantry, for example, as a rifleman, machine gunner, rifle grenadier, signaller or bomber, he would receive a course of instruction relevant to his role. Especially as he

was approached being warned for the active fronts he would receive basic training in first aid, gas defence, wiring and other aspects.



*William with his Sergeant's stripes
With thanks to Jane Baldock (née Riseley)*

William's fitness and leadership skills were quickly recognized and his record card shows him moving through the ranks from Lance Corporal to Acting unpaid Corporal to Acting Corporal (29th February 1916) and finally to Acting Sergeant on 22nd November 1916.



*A postcard produced by an enterprising Brighton company
With thanks to Chris Reynolds. www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk.*

It seems likely that William's main role was as a PT Instructor getting the new recruits fit enough for useful service at the Front. The British Establishment was appalled at the terrible physical state of many conscripts especially from the poorer areas of cities like Glasgow.

In August 1917 the 4th moved to Crowborough in East Sussex. For William, his time in the comparative safety of English countryside would soon be over. On 27th February 1918 he was posted to the Light Infantry Base in France and he joined the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. His territorial promotions counted for nothing here and he "reverted to Private" on embarkation. He was given the new Regimental Number of 201286.

As we have seen his cousin, Ted Abbott, had been posted to the 7th and returned to France on 15th January 1918 after more than a year away due to an ankle injury. The first three months of 1918 were spent in trying to build up the defences in their area and it was at this time that they would probably have met up again. From then on, the two cousins would have been involved in the same military actions so we will not describe these again.

William had to revert to Private but, unlike Ted, he once more moved up the chain of command. He became an unpaid Acting Corporal on 8th April 1918, possibly helping to run the sports when the 7th had a brief respite on the coast near St Valery. For some reason, he fell foul of his superiors, for on 25th May 1918 he reverts to private "for inefficiency" the next day, however, he was appointed to unpaid Lance Corporal and on 5th December to Acting Sergeant.

William's only injury had been when he sustained a sprain to his left ankle on 3rd October 1918 while on duty but he was stated to be "not to blame". It was not a deliberate injury to buy him a ticket home.

The Armistice was signed on the 11th November 1918 but, as we have seen with Ted, the 7th stayed in France into the new year. William signed his *Disability Statement* on 20th February 1919 and on this he is shown as Sergeant, so it seems that his promotion had been confirmed. He was examined in France and signed to confirm that he "was not suffering from a disability due to my military service". He was given a *Protection Certificate and Certificate of Identity* at Purfleet on 1st March 1919 and was given a 28-day furlough. He was "disembodied" on 29th March 1919.

Oddly, the Medal Roll only has him listed as a Corporal but this may have been written up before his later promotion was established. He was entitled to the Victory and British Medals for serving in active theatres of war. William's war was over and for him there appear to have been, among all the slaughter and mayhem, some benefits. In the *British Trade Union Members Service and Casualties List 1914-18*, published in 1920, a W. H. Abbott is shown as a member of the National Union of Teachers who served in the Great War. The Union Board was Oundle but this probably included the Ringstead area.

William would have had to settle back into civilian life and after all his injury-free time at the Front the *Northampton Mercury* reported:

Mr. William H. Abbott of Ringstead, who recently suffered serious injuries in a motor accident is making good progress in Kettering Hospital.

It seems that William went into teaching almost immediately after he returned, probably as a PT Instructor in a school, although this is not confirmed. We do know that he was a teacher from the following report in the *Northampton Mercury* on Monday February 19th 1923 under the heading "Physical Education",

The Elementary Sub-Committee reported that the Board of Education had intimated that the services of Mr. W. H. Abbott as Physical Training Demonstrator and Organiser could not be treated as "recognised service" for the purpose of the School Teachers' (Superannuation) Act, 1918, and that Mr. Abbott had made application for an increase of salary to compensate him for the loss of pension rights consequent on this decision.

Mr Allebone said that the Board had treated the Committee in a mean and contemptible manner over this appointment, which was only made somewhat reluctantly, at the request of the Board. They could, of course, terminate Mr. Abbott's engagement and let him return to his old job as a teacher, but he thought the present work should still be carried on whatever the Board might say.

It was decided that Mr. Abbot re re-appointed as from December 18th, 1922, at a salary of £303. 6s. 9d., rising as from April 1, 1923, to £325.

Perhaps William was thinking of safeguarding his future life for, in 1924, he married Kathleen Bull. In the 1911 Census, Kathleen, daughter of John Bull and Emily, was an assistant teacher. Her father was the local Ringstead tailor.



*Kathleen Abbott (Née Bull)
With thanks to Jane Baldock (Née Riseley)*

Over the next decades we see William setting up a number of successful sporting bodies and running events. He was secretary of the Leather Trades Athletic Association and in April 1927 William, as the County Organiser of Physical Training for Schools, convened a meeting at Wellingborough to form a Northamptonshire Schools Athletic Association and to affiliate to the national body. In the years that follow we see William organising an annual Schools' Championships.

In 1939 the England & Wales Register shows that William and Kathleen, with daughter Jean were living at 44 Lime Avenue in Northampton. His occupation was given as, "Local Government Officer Physical Training Organiser". The last mention I have found of him in the newspapers is at the Northamptonshire Schools Athletic Association's 16th annual championship at the *Richard Thomas and Baldwins Sports Ground*. The *Northampton Mercury* of 7th July 1950 reported that the meeting "marked the retirement after 23 years of service as secretary and treasurer of the N.S.A. of W.H Abbott, County P.T. Officer". He was presented with a cheque in recognition of all his hard work.

William would have been about sixty years' old. I am not sure if this was also the end of his working life.

We do know that the couple moved to Mersea island, near Colchester, in Essex. William died there in 1978 aged 88 and Kathleen followed him a year later aged 87.

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Chapter 2

John Francis Agutter (1895-1975)

William Leveratt had been born in Thrapston, one of twelve children. He married Sarah Agutter on the 9th July 1838 and probably became the first stationmaster of Ringstead Station on the Blisworth to Peterborough line. Sarah was a relative of the Ringstead Agutters. Their son, Charles, followed his father as stationmaster in the village. Two other children, John who became a guard, and Elizabeth Agutter Leveratt who became one of the few women who worked in the ticket offices in the area, also followed their father.

When she was 37 years old Elizabeth married John Agutter, her cousin, and became Elizabeth Agutter Agutter. They had two children. Their daughter, Bessie May, died on September 9th 1893, aged five months and a son, John Francis was born on the 20th January 1895.

John Agutter died on the 4th February 1901 and the widowed Elizabeth took over the running of the farm. She too, died in 1907 and, at the age of twelve, John Francis was an orphan. In the 1911 Census we see that he was sixteen years old and was living and working on his uncle, Thomas Agutter's farm. In the 1919 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead he is shown as living at Tithe Farm. Unfortunately the space for a named military unit is empty.

There is a J.F. Agutter in the military records and with other evidence I think we can establish that he is the Ringstead man. Our John's uncle, John Leveratt, who worked on the railways as a guard, lived in places from Doncaster to London. He married Sarah Rebecca Frankton on the 7th June 1869 in the village of Long Lawford in the Newbold-on-Avon parish. Her father, Thomas Frankton, was the village blacksmith. On John Leveratt's retirement the couple moved back to Long Lawford where they ran a greengrocery shop. Sarah Leveratt died and John followed in 1917.

If we now return to the orphaned John Francis Agutter, he was living with his uncle Thomas Agutter in Ringstead at Tithe Farm. As we have said, there was a J.F. Agutter who joined the Essex Regiment and we also discover that a "Mr. J.F. Agutter of Lawford, Rugby" was a founding member in 1920 of the *11th Essex Old Comrades Association*. The Lawford connection, confirmed by the later Electoral Rolls, verifies that this must be our man.

His records have been mostly destroyed but, by comparing him with another Essex soldier, Private W. Callaghan, whose Regimental Number, 18322, followed immediately after John's, we can sketch in his army career using his Medal Card and Roll. Callaghan, who was taken as a Prisoner-of-War, would have attested in the 11th (Bermondsey) Battalion of the Essex Regiment which had been formed in September 1914 at Warley of volunteers as part of Kitchener's Third New Army. It was based at Shoreham in March 1915 before moving to Blackdown Camp in June. John Agutter probably followed a similar path, and we know from his Medal Index Card that he was overseas from the 30th August 1915.

We have used the *Men of Essex Volume 11* produced by the Essex Branch of the Western Front Association and written by Bill Fulton for much of the following account of the 11th Battalion of the Essex Regiment's war.

The 24th Division had suffered in England with a lack of modern weaponry and of experienced officers to train the men. John, with the rest of the Battalion, disembarked in Boulogne on the 30th August 1915. Once there, the men were taken through rigorous training in battlefield tactics but, were still a very naïve unit, when forced to make exhausting marches to their first battle at Loos. This was to be a terrible baptism for the volunteers with much confusion and uncoordinated action. The death of their commanding officer seems of similar foolhardy courage to that of the Light Brigade in the Crimea over fifty years earlier.

. . . when the order to advance was received, Lieut-Colonel Radclyffe simply said '11th Essex get out of the trench' and, leading the Battalion, came in hand and with a small dog barking at his heels, he walked steadily forward until killed by a burst of machine gun fire which also killed his second-in-command Major J H Davies and badly wounded the Adjutant, Captain H H Heppell - seven more 11/Essex officers were to die before the day ended.

The 11th Battalion alone had casualties of 18 Officers and 353 Other Ranks. The High Command realised that experienced units must be part of any Division. Bravery was not enough. The 11th were withdrawn to reform as a fighting unit and were then transferred to the experienced 18th Brigade of the 6th Division on the 27th October 1915 and remained with it until the Armistice.

The 6th Division spent the next ten months in the area of the Ypres Salient in the Flanders mud. It was largely a period of stalemate trench warfare. By November the 11th were on the banks of the Yser Canal which the troops remembered as much for the mud and the rats as for the fighting. So it continued, a war of attrition with constant fear of snipers, artillery fire and gas. The 11th were in and out of the Line as was the usual pattern across the whole Western front.

In August 1916 the Battalion moved to the Somme area and were part of the Battle of Flers-Courcelette from the 15th to 22nd September. As part of this battle the 11th were part of an attempt to capture a German strong point called "The Quadrilateral". The Essex had a hopeless task against the strongest point of the German defences and lost 20 men killed and 80 other casualties. The Quadrilateral was finally taken but the 6th Division suffered 3,500 casualties in the action.

A successful attack on Lesbœufs followed on the 25th September but Colonel Spring later wrote:

This period was about the most trying I went through during the war. The Somme fighting was done under great physical and mental strain. The ground was so heavy and muddy, cut up by shell-holes, that to walk any distance over it was fatiguing. In

addition, we were continuously under shell-fire day and night, as we were living in old German trenches and so were properly taped.

The 11th Essex moved back to the Loos area where they had had so many casualties in 1915 but this time it was a comparatively quiet time but with trench raids and other small actions during which one 11th Essex officer, 2nd Lieutenant Frank Bernard Wearne, was killed and received a V.C. for his gallantry. On the 25th July 1917 they were relieved and had a much-needed rest during August.

At the end of 1917 the 11th were involved in the Battle of Cambrai where tanks played a significant part. It was believed that a single German gun took them all out but recent research has revealed that, although some were put out of action in this way, others survived to continue with the battle.

January 20th 1918 saw them in the Front Line opposite “Nine Elms”, a name given by the army to a group of trees 460 metres east of the Arras-Lens main road, between Thelus and Roclincourt. On the 21st March the Battalion were in the Battle of St Quentin. An attack was expected, but the German “Michael Offensive was much larger than had been prepared for, and the German use of elite stormtroopers to blast holes through weak points and mop up the trapped Allied units was very successful. The 6th Division lost huge numbers of men, killed, wounded and missing, and the 11th Essex, already fighting with half a Battalion ended with only 7 officers and 77 other ranks fit for duty. Casualties from all causes totalled 16 officers and 411 other ranks. Was it in one of these times when new men were brought in to bring the battalion nearer to its full strength that John Agutter was appointed a Lance-corporal?

From late March to November, the 11th were back at the Ypres Salient where the Germans launched a second offensive known to the Allies as the Battle of Lys. This again began as a successful German offensive but gradually it became a war of attrition and the enemy, slowly at first, began to lose ground. When the Battalion reached the Somme area the Americans were now a significant force and it was becoming clear that the Allies would win the war. Small fierce rearguard actions by the retreating Germans still killed and wounded men. The last casualties suffered by the 11th Battalion were on the 25th October 1918. On the 11th November they were in billets in Busquigny when news of the Armistice was received.

The 6th Division moved into Germany as part of the Army of Occupation. The *History* records:

All ranks worked hard at their equipment and the transport looked almost new, it being a proud and splendid Division which marched, with drums beating and colours flying, across the German frontier into the little town of Malmedy between 13th and 16th December. Marching generally by only one road, the length of the Division, when billeted, varied from 10 to 25 miles.

They were finally based in the Rhineland at Bruehl (Brühl), twelve miles SSW of Cologne by Christmas 1918.

I have not found that John Agutter was wounded or sick and he seems to have gone right through the war without significant physical harm, and was demobilised to Class Z on the 19th April 1919. He may have returned to Ringstead for he was shown as living at Tithe Farm

in the first Electoral Register of 1920. By the second Register of that year, however, he was in Main Street in Long Lawford, Warwickshire where we last saw his uncle John Leveratt. It seems most likely that he was lodging there with one of John and Sarah's children. Whatever the reason, he made the Rugby and Coventry area his home for the rest of his life.

By 1931 he had moved to Botomer Road at Cheylesmore in Warwickshire. He was living there in 1937 at the time of the Coronation of George VI. John celebrated too much and drove into a stationary car. He was arrested by the police. At the Police Court his lawyer pleaded on his behalf:

I ask your Worships to consider this case on the basis of a man who, on a great day, fell from grace.

He also asked for leniency because, John had been "a professional driver for twenty years, for the last 15 with the Hillman Company", and he had been offered a promotion which depended on him not losing his licence. He also revealed that he had fought throughout the war and had an exemplary record of service. The defence hinted that his army service may have had an effect on him. This may have been just a bid for sympathy but in these biographies we have rarely found evidence of the mental health problems that many of the men must have suffered in the years after they came home.

The court did treat him leniently and he was given a small fine. He never married and in 1939 he was lodging with widow, Rose Jordan, and her daughter Carol, in 5 Latham Road in Coventry. Of course, as a "Mechanic and Driver", he may have only been there for a night or two or on a more permanent basis. None of the Censuses reveal this.

John died on the 11th September 1975. He had been living at 29 Glebe Close, Conley in Coventry at the time of his death. It would be good to believe that he died quietly at home after his experiences of near death on the Western Front. It was not to be. A month before he died, on August 12th, he stepped off a pavement into the side of a Corporation bus. The *Coventry Evening Telegraph* of the 2nd October 1975 reported that he had broken his leg and this had failed to heal. His leg had been amputated but the cause of his death, according to the pathologist was "Broncho-pneumonia as a result of his being confined to bed".

In these biographies we have tried to tell all the stories, including the men who survived into old age. These were the opposite of the men who are usually remembered.

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.*

Chapter 3

The Archer Family

The Archer family seem to have arrived in the Raunds and Ringstead area in the 1830s. William Archer had been born in Weekley, some ten miles north-west of Ringstead, in about 1800 and had married Elizabeth Purser at Great Barford Church in Bedfordshire on 23rd November 1819. Their earliest children, Emma, George and Ann, were born in Great Barford although Ann, along with three of her younger siblings, John, Jane and William, were baptised as a "family lot" in Raunds Church on February 10th 1839.

One of these younger children, John, born in about 1832 in Raunds, married Elizabeth Nunley there on 3rd October 1853. John had become a bootmaker and the couple were living in Brook Street. John and Elizabeth had seven children but it is only the descendants of the oldest son, Owen, born in 1853, and the third child, Arthur, born in about 1858, who we are following here.

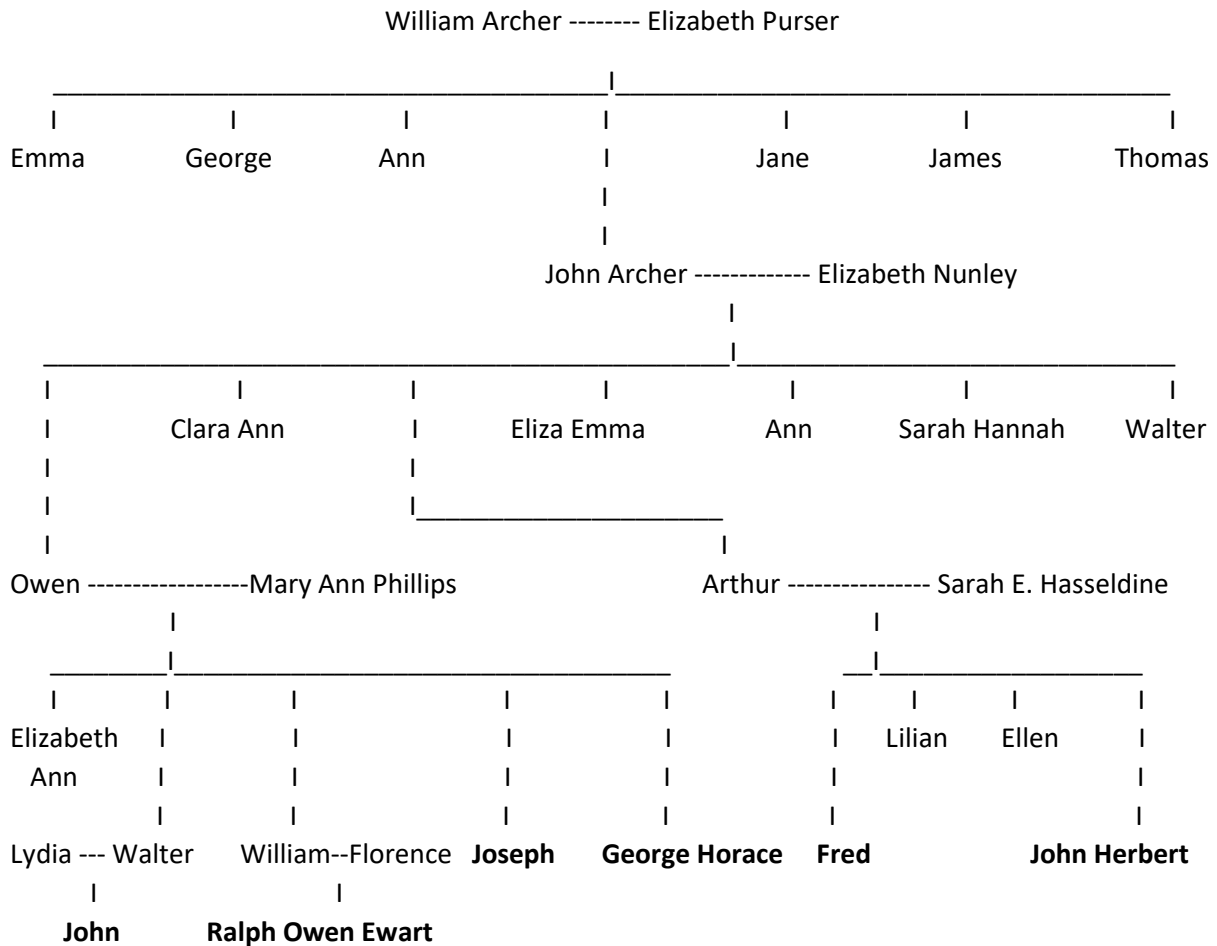
Owen married Ringstead girl, Mary Ann Phillips, in 1871 and the couple had five children all born there, including Joseph and George Horace. These two sons fought in the First World War. Another older brother, William born in about 1875 had a son Ralph Owen Ewart and he too also fought. Arthur, younger brother of Owen, married Sarah Ellen Hasseldine on 1st February 1884 and they had three children. The two sons, Fred born on 17th July 1884 and John Herbert, born on 11th June 1896, also could not escape the Great War. It was a time to be born in the Edwardian era for, with luck, the War would pass you by.

In this series of biographies we are considering the men in the Archer family who were from Ringstead and served in WW1. Some Archers, including the daughters who married, would have remained in Raunds or moved elsewhere. Those affected would have been wider than we are recoding here. An example of this is John Archer, born in 1895, the son of Walter Archer, older brother of Joseph, William and George Horace Archer. He married Lydia Harrison on 26th December 1894 in Raunds. They moved to Ringstead, like Walter's brothers, and had two sons. Theirs was a stormy marriage and in August 1906 Lydia accused Walter of persistently abusing her both mentally and physically. As a result she had moved back to Raunds to live with her father. The court granted a separation order and gave Lydia the custody of the two boys, John and Ernest, and ordered Walter to pay maintenance of 12s 6d, a week. Young John, who was only twelve, had to appear in court to corroborate his mother's story.

He became a Private in the 9th Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment and was killed on 21st March 1918 in France. Perhaps his parents had already reconciled or was it this tragedy that brought them back together? We do know that in the 1939 Register they were both, living in Grove Road in Raunds. So here we have a Ringstead born man who is not on the Ringstead Roll of Honour. Families would have had sons, brothers, cousins and uncles who served in that most terrible of wars, besides the men we are recording here.

The Archer Family

A Simplified Family Tree



Fred Archer (1884-1941)

As we have seen, Fred Archer was the son of Arthur and Sarah Ellen, born on 17th July 1884 and baptised on September 21st in Raunds Parish Church. Arthur was a shoemaker, born in Raunds but who, in the middle of the 1890s, took over the *New Inn* in Ringstead. Arthur continued with his shoemaking and, as was often the case, it would have been Sarah who ran the pub day-to-day. Most village pubs needed a second income to make them viable. Arthur died on 20th February 1913, aged 54 years, and his widow took over the licence of the *New Inn*.

Fred had already left the family home before then for, early in 1907, he married local girl Lilian Cobley and in 1911 they were living elsewhere in Ringstead with their three-year-old son Arthur.

Fred (rather than Frederick) was a popular name at the time because a jockey of this name had been the most successful and famous of the Nineteenth Century. He had died in 1886

and if we look at a record of WW1 soldiers, we find a long list of men with that name. One, born in Raunds a few years earlier, had joined the Northamptonshire Regiment and was charged with deserting his regiment at Gillingham.

As a family man, and working in the military boot trade, Fred would have had some protection from the initial conscription but huge losses meant that, very quickly, most men in a wide age group became liable to being called up.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that he served with the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). Unfortunately, most of his records have been lost so there is some uncertainty about his military career. Luckily, the *Absent Voters List*, which was first prepared in 1918 to give those soldiers still away from home a postal vote, lists Fred. His home was said to be Wyman's Road, which led to Slade Farm, and he was shown to be a Gunner in the R.G.A with Regimental Number 178148.

The Siege Batteries of the RGA had heavy howitzers firing large, high-explosive shells in a high looping trajectory from well behind the front line. Its job was to weaken and destroy the enemy before any soldiers "went over the top". Fred's entry in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that he was only engaged in "Home Defence". We must assume that he manned one of the coastal or other gun batteries which defended Britain in the case of air raids or invasion.

There is only one other record that I have found which records that on 20th February 1918 he had been serving six months so he must have enlisted in September 1917. It also records that he was in "B" Company, in No. 2 Siege Artillery Brigade of the Royal Garrison Artillery which was based at Catterick. He was admitted to the Camp Military Hospital there on 20th February 1918 and was discharged to two days light duties on the 5th March. Unfortunately for his place in posterity Fred had been suffering with piles, a painful condition that was the butt of many Music Hall jokes.

After the war Fred would have returned to Ringstead and it may be that he was home early for the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo* of 21st September 1918, reporting on the Ringstead Fete in aid of War Charities, states that in the Fancy Dress Competition. . .

Special prize given to Mr Fred Archer, Ancient Days, which created a great deal of amusement.

If he was our Fred, he could not have been home long for, as we have seen, he was on the *Absent Voters' List* for 1918.

Fred probably first went back into shoemaking but in April 1923, like his parents, he entered the beer trade and was granted the licence to run the *Red Lion Inn* in Raunds which was on the Stanwick/Chelveston Crossroads. It was demolished in the 1950s and replaced with a pub of the same name. Fred was there in 1925 but I am not sure how long he lasted as a publican. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* he was back working as a clicker and his wife, Lilian was a heel maker. They were living in the new Council Houses in Denford Road, Ringstead. He died just two years later in 1941, aged 57 years.

John Herbert Archer (1896-1917)

John Herbert Archer, younger brother of Fred, was baptised in Raunds Church on 11th June 1896, the son of Arthur and Sarah Ellen. The 1901 Census, however, confirms that he was born in Ringstead where his parents ran the *New Inn*. By 1911 he was 14 and acting as an “Errand Boy”, probably helping his mother in the pub and his father with his shoemaking.

If he had been born just a few years later he would have missed the call-up for the war but he was enlisted in June 1916 to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, also known as the City of London Regiment (not to be confused with the London Regiment). The Royal Fusiliers raised 47 Battalions for service during the Great War.



John Herbert Archer from his obituary in Rushden Argus (20th March 1917).

With thanks to Rushden & District History Society.

John was given the Regimental Number 5100 and by 8th December of the same year he was in France. He would first have been posted to one of the Base Camps near the coast of France, the largest being Étaples. From here he was posted to the 22nd Fusiliers just four days later.

He would have arrived at the front just after the terrible carnage of the Battle of the Somme when the war of attrition was halted more by fatigue and the coming of winter rather than any decisive victory.

In the following year the 22nd were involved in the smaller battle of Miraumont. It started on February 17th 1917 and was a disastrous one for the Allies. We get a glimpse of the, often futile, attempts to impose order on the chaos in this extract from *The Royal Fusiliers in the Great War* by H.C O'Neill. He was an officer at this battle and one can sense his frustration and anger at what occurred.

It had been freezing for months, and the ice and frozen snow in the broken trenches and “over the top” made the trek to the jumping-off position a trying and arduous task. A party of the battalion had a night or so previously spent time and patience in setting a tape to mark the line that was to be taken up at the start; but most of this was lost when the men arrived, tired and fed up, at about 11.30 p.m. on the night of

the 16th. Most of the tape had been blown up by the enemy shells, and some trodden out of recognition.

It was not until the file of men bundled into a line of another regiment of the same brigade that the approximate position of our starting line was ascertained.

The Boche were ready for us*, for his barrage opened even before our own, and before our battalion had passed over our own front line – a weak line of scattered shell holes – there were great gaps torn in our waves.

Just over the second enemy line our “waves” became groups, and the steady advance appeared to be in artillery formation. The officers, many of whom were in an attack for the first time, did all they could to put matters right, and some of them managed to continue their advance on approximately the right bearing and in correct formation.

Presently the notorious “Boom Ravine” was encountered but we met with no further danger than a lurking German here and there who whiled his time away until he should be taken prisoner by sniping. After this point the battalion appeared to me to vanish, and instead one saw small parties here and there moving in varying directions.

**It was reported later that some British soldiers had deserted before the battle and given away the plan of attack to the Germans.*



Miraumont: four soldiers in a destroyed trench or shell hole, at least two of whom may be dead. By Adrian Hill © Art.IWM ART 283

The 22nd suffered many casualties and men taken prisoner. John managed to come through but it must have been a terrifying, disorientating time for him. Sadly, it was when the soldiers were back in their defensive lines that John accidentally killed himself while cleaning his gun after the battle. His death was reported in this way to the local newspaper by a Private Burgess, a Northamptonshire man who was serving with John. We have no way of knowing if his death was just a mistake caused by fumbling fingers in the bitter cold or if a young shell-shocked man taking his own life rather than face another day of terror.

His death is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial and on the Ringstead War Memorial. He was twenty years old.

Joseph Archer (1880-1966) and George Horace Archer (1881-1962)

We now turn to the cousins of Fred and John Herbert. Joseph and George Horace were the sons of Owen and Mary Ann Archer who had moved to Ringstead and all their children were born in the village. Joseph was born on 1st July 1879 and, in the 1881 Census, he was one year old and living with his parents in Ringstead High Street. In 1899 he married Florence Minnie Fox. Florence came from the large family of ten children of Joseph Fox, an army bootmaker and Dinah, his wife. In 1891 the Fox family were living in Carlow Street and Florence, aged fifteen, was a shoe closer.

By 1911 Joseph Archer, aged 30, was an “Army handsewn bootmaker” but was “out of work”. Joseph and Florence had two children, Joseph Edward, aged nine, and Florence Winnie, aged three. They were now living in Carlow in Ringstead.

At the beginning of the war the army relied on regular soldiers and volunteers but, despite opposition, conscription became necessary. At first Joseph, as an older, married man with children in a protected trade, would have not been considered but as the slaughter continued the need for replacements stretched the conscription net ever wider.

Meanwhile, his younger brother, George Horace, born on 7th November 1881. I realised that I had come across George Horace Archer before, when telling the stories of the headteachers of Ringstead Church of England School. In January 1893, the School Logbook records the arrival of a new, very young headmaster called Albert Crew who tried to impose his will on the older boys and events quickly spiralled out of control. George had refused to salute the headmaster as they left school and laughed at his action. He was called back but tried to run away. The Log Book continues:

He was brought back to the classroom, took the cane and broke it up. Archer refused to receive any punishment and the master was compelled to resort to force. Archer lay on the ground and refused to get up. He was punished with a small cane, which was split halfway, as left by the late Headmaster. This cane has not and will not be used until after the 24th Inst.

The master had to use forcible means for administering punishment as the boys was extremely violent. After he was punished he (Archer) stood and returned the usual master salutation – with a salute of ‘Good morning, Sir’.

George's mother, and older brother, William, then came to the school and a small fight ensued between William and Albert Crew. It all ended in an inconclusive court case a few months later and in May 1893 Albert Crew left the school.

After his school career, George went into the Army boot trade. In the 1911 Census, aged 22, he was the only child still at home with his widowed mother, Mary Ann. Nevertheless, it seems certain that he had a son aged four months old at the time of the Census with his girlfriend, Martha Hepsiba (Hepzibah) Knighton. The name of the boy was Horace Aubrey Archie Knighton and he had been born in Irthlingborough. One suspects that the names Horace and Archie are deliberate clues to his father. They had a second child born in 1913 who was called Fred.

I have not found that George was called to pay for the maintenance of his children but, in May 1913, he was ordered by the court to pay one shilling a week towards the upkeep of his own mother, Mary, who was chargeable to the Thrapston Union. In the following July, along with his brother Joseph, he was again summoned but the case was dropped when it emerged that they had both signed an agreement to pay the Union.

In 1916 George finally married Martha Hepzibah Knighton.

There are very few army records for either of the brothers but the *Medal Rolls* show that Joseph's Regimental Number was 178107 and George's 178297 so they were enlisted quite close together. Neither was entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15 Stars which confirms that they were conscripted in 1916 or 1917.

They both joined the 498th Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery (R.G.A.) as gunners. It seems likely that both brothers and cousin Fred joined at a similar time because their Regimental Numbers were Joseph 178107, George Horace 178207 and Fred 178148. Unlike Fred, however, who also joined the R.G.A. both Joseph and George fought in France and Germany.

The 498th Siege Battery would have consisted of a group of five officers and 177 other ranks with seventeen riding, six draught and eighty heavy draught horses. There were also three two-horse carts and ten four-horse wagons. There would have been also a supporting ammunition column and a headquarters brigade. The 498th had six-inch Howitzers.

We cannot be sure when the brothers first saw action but we know that the 498th Siege Battery was attached to the 4th Army of the Allies and in 1918, after another German offensive which was pushed back, the Allies launched what turned out to be a decisive counter-offensive, pushing the Germans to the Hindenburg Line.

There followed what was later called the Hundred Days Offensive for, after years of stalemate and attrition, the Allies began to move forward in a number of small successful actions. The Allied commanders were not aware just how weakened and dispirited the Germans had become. The 498th had the difficult task of keeping up with the advancing troops. The Germans did fight a number of rearguard actions but they were forced to abandon large amounts of equipment and supplies. Finally, at 11am on the 11th November 1918 the Armistice came into effect.



*A 6-inch 26 cwt howitzer being manhandled through the mud during the Battle of the Somme 1916. The devices round the wheels to stop sinking were called girdles.
©IWM (Q1490)*

The 498th, as part of the Allied Fourth Army, rolled into the Rhineland and became an Army of Occupation. It was later considered by some historians that it was the shame of this prolonged occupation which created the fertile ground for the rise of Hitler and the Nazis.

After the war Joseph returned to Ringstead and we see in the *1939 Register for England and Wales* that he and his wife, Florence were living in Ringstead High Street, two doors away from the Post Office. He had now become a road labourer, probably because there was not enough work in the army shoe trade anymore. Still living with them was their son Joseph E[dward] who was single, 37 years old and a riveter of army boots in a local factory.

On 12th August 1966, Joseph, of 32 High Street Ringstead, died and probate was granted to William Joseph Freeman, a retired road foreman. His estate was worth £2,206.

George, too, returned to live in Ringstead High Street, probably living at number 55. He remained a handsewn shoemaker although in the *1939 Register* he was out of work. Martha was doing "unpaid domestic duties" and the three children were still living at home. Horace was doing "edge trimming and jointing" and Fred is "console lasting", both in the shoe trade. Dorothy Ann, born after the war, on 21st April 1920 was a tailoress and there may be another child whose record is "closed".

George died on 15th March 1962 and administration was granted to his wife, Martha Hepsibah with effects of £546. 10s. Martha died a few years later, on 29th February 1966 with administration granted to the oldest son, Horace Aubrey Archer, a shoe repairer.

Ralph Owen Ewart Archer (1899-1992)

George's older brother, was William Archer, born in 1875. It was William who had fought with George's headmaster when his younger brother had been caned. He married Florence Mayes in 1897 and had one child, Ralph Owen Ewart Archer, born on 11th August 1899 in Ringstead. By 1911 William was 36 and a handsewn military boot maker, living with Florence (33) and "Ewart" who was 11 years old and their only child. They lived in Rosebery Street in a small housing estate that had been built on the east of the village. They had six rooms which would have been very spacious compared to most of the old Ringstead cottages.

It may be that Florence had an underlying illness for, in 1914 she died aged just 37. William remarried the following year (1915) to Lilian Georgina Home and, with Ralph, they moved to nearby Gladstone Street. It was here that Ralph was living when he signed his Short Service Attestation for the duration of the war on 2nd July 1917. He was just 17 years 11 months old and was placed on reserve. On 1st November 1917 the form was countersigned by the Lieutenant Colonel who commanded the Northamptonshire Regimental Depot in Northampton.

Ralph was just 5 feet 5 inches tall with a 35¾ inch chest so he was small, but not particularly so, among the young recruits of the time. His Regimental Number was 47529. He became a private in the 4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment on 4th November 1917. It was not until 9th April of the following year that he sailed from Dover to Calais and was taken to the Base Depot. He finally joined his battalion at the front on 20th April and remained in France until 5th March 1919.

He seems to have moved between battalions of the Northamptonshires and on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour for World War One*, written in 1919 he is stated that he was in the 3rd Battalion. The 3rd, however, did not serve abroad and I think that it was with the 6th Battalion that he served in France; (his records are now very faded).

If this is correct it means that on his arrival at the Front on the 20th April 1918 he would have found himself in the Somme area and under attack from a German offensive. The 6th were part of sporadic fighting with heavy losses on both sides. On 8th August, however, although it was not clear initially, there began one hundred days of an almost uninterrupted Allied offensive. The static trench warfare of much of the war was replaced by a succession of successful assaults. By 18th September the Hindenburg Line was reached and quickly broken.

There was fierce fighting, however, and a number of V.C.'s were won by some heroic actions. But the push was now irresistible and the German army was finally broken. On 11th November 1918 the Armistice was signed and Germany defeated.

It is not clear, but it seems that Ralph suffered with an abscess on his right thigh on 27th October 1918. Was this the result of a wound or louse bite? The records do not tell us. He

was first treated in the field hospital and then moved to No. 6 British Red Cross Hospital, known as the Liverpool Merchants' Mobile Hospital. It had 252 beds and from September to December 1918 it was based at Trouville.

It may be that Ralph was invalided home at some point in early 1919 and joined the 4th Battalion. On 4th February 1919 he was in hospital again, this time suffering from the terrible "Spanish Flu" which killed more people than the War. He was, however, treated in this country, in the 2nd Eastern General Hospital in Brighton.

When he had recovered, Ralph was posted with the Northamptonshires, possibly with the 1st Battalion this time, to Ireland. This was not a soft non-combative posting, for the soldiers faced a largely hostile civilian population, and the IRA was in the middle of a campaign to kill British soldiers. It was also recorded that the Northamptonshires went on a rampage, setting fire to buildings, whenever a soldier or policeman was killed.

On September 8th 1919 he was examined at Templemore and signed to confirm that he had no disabilities caused by his army service. Ralph returned to England and on 9th October 1919 he was demobbed and placed on the "Z" Reserve List for those who could be recalled if there was a resumption of hostilities. His military career was over. He was twenty years old.

Ralph married Doris Maud Sawford in the Spring of 1925 and the couple were living in Gladstone Street in the *1939 Register of England and Wales*. Ralph was now a clicker in the shoe trade and Doris (also born in 1899) is a machinist. Living with them was Doris's widowed mother, Florence Sawford. Not far from them in 1939, living in Denford Road, was father, William Archer, still doing handsewn boot work, and his second wife, Lilian. When William died on 8th May 1964 he was living at "The Bungalow" in Denford Road.

Like many people, Ralph did not move far from his birthplace apart from some eighteen months from 1918 to 1919 which probably marked him for the rest of his life. His wife Doris, died in 1982 aged 83, and Ralph was 92 when he died on 14th May 1992. At the time of his death was living at 9 Gladstone Street in Ringstead. It appears that they did not have any children so his wartime trauma must be remembered by others.

Chapter 4

Henry William Attley (1896-1977)

Ringstead is mainly remembered in history for the alleged murder of Lydia Attley by William Weekley Ball in 1850 and for Margaret Thatcher's father coming from the village. Henry William Attley brought these two strands together. When Henry's grandfather, John Attley, died in 1907 the *Northampton Mercury* again linked him back to the death of John's sister Lydia and his belief that, although her body was never found, she had been "foully murdered" by William Weekley Ball.

John had married Sophia Pheasey at Ringstead on 17th March 1859 and among their children were Frederick, born in 1867, and Henry William, born in 1871. At first I thought that this Henry William Attley was the person I was looking for. Although he was a little old to enlist, older men did sign up and were often assigned to home defence duties..

I later realised that Frederick, who married Frances Alice Riddle on 25th December 1892 at Ringstead, had a son also called Henry William, born on 15th November 1896, and he was the man I was looking for. Some of the confusion was caused by the fact that he was born in Northampton. Frederick and Frances started their married life in Ringstead where their daughter, Lily, was born. They moved to the Northampton factories as a number of Ringstead shoemakers did in a time of hardship for the handsewn military boot industry. In 1901 Henry was four years old and living with his parents and sister at 30 Welby Street.

When Henry was five, however, the family returned to Ringstead and in the 1911 Census the family were living in Spencer Street in Ringstead. Lily was living in Finedon as a maidservant but Henry William was still at home and there were now other children; Ivy Francis (8) Bert Riddle (5) and twin daughters Iris Dora and Margaret Olive who were just one month old. It is worth noting, in view of Henry's later career, that these Censuses show that Frederick's wife, Frances, was born at Allahabad in India. The *India Select Births and Baptisms 1786 – 1947* shows her birth was on 30th November 1871 at Saugur in Bengal. We see that, at 14, Henry had left school and was working in a local factory at "heel building".

Henry spent most of his youth in Ringstead. In an article on Margaret Thatcher in the *Chronicle & Echo* in 1975, Henry recalled "blowing" the organ for Mrs Thatcher's great-uncle, John Roberts. The article continued:

Particularly does he recall one occasion when, a bit inattentive to his job, he let the pressure drop.

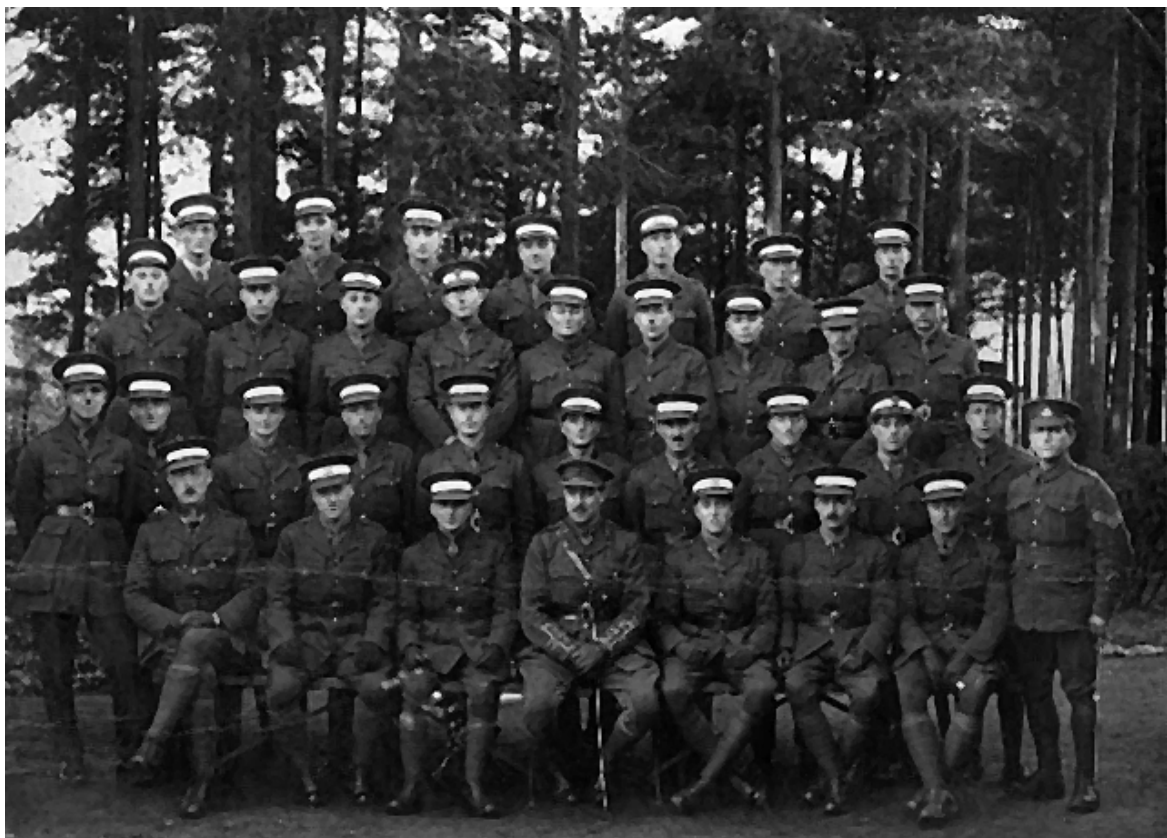
"Blow, boy, blow", old John hissed at him as loud as he dared without the congregation hearing.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour*, published June 1919, listing those who served in the Great War, recorded that Lieutenant Henry William Attley served with the 3rd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment in France and had been invalided home and was "now assisting

demobilisation at Crystal Palace". The Medal Card for Henry William Attley records that he served with the 12th (Yeomanry) Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. There are other anomalies between the Medal Card and other reported information but the coincidences are too great to ignore and I believe that the matter is sealed because at the bottom of the card it gives two addresses: 198 Kettering Road, Northampton and Ringstead, Thrapston, Northants.

Fortunately, I also received advice through the online *Great War Forum* that Henry's records, probably because of his WW2 service, were still held by the Ministry of Defence. These help fill in some of the gaps although they do not clear up all the discrepancies. One surprising fact they do show is that Henry was educated in an unnamed private school. We do know, however, that by 14 years old he was already working in the shoe trade.

In an article published in the *Market Harborough Advertiser and Midland Mail* on 12th February 1943, it stated that Henry enlisted in 1915 at the age of eighteen and was commissioned in the Royal Norfolk Regiment in 1917. I think that the first part of this statement is just wrong and the M.O.D. records show that he enlisted with the 13th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment on 8th December 1915 when he was just nineteen. He was immediately transferred to the Army Reserve until his services could be used and was first mobilised for service on 26th June 1916. Two months later, on 21st August 1916 he was promoted to Lance Corporal. Perhaps his height and bearing were an advantage because he was six feet tall when he enlisted which was much taller than most recruits at the time.



*Henry with other Officer Cadets. He is second from left on back row.
With thanks to the Attley Family*

It does not appear that Henry was in a war zone during this early period. The 13th (Reserve), Cambridgeshire, Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment was locally formed in 1915 and moved to Trowbridge. In February 1916 they had moved again to Leamington and then to Richmond Park. On 1st September 1916 it became the 108th Training Reserve Battalion of the 26th Reserve Brigade in Wimbledon.

Henry must have shown some leadership qualities for he was promoted again on 17th January 1917 to Acting Corporal. He was then selected for officer training. The group picture above shows him with other officer cadets. It may seem remarkable that a working-class young man like Henry should become an officer but war and the heavy losses of young officers forced some democratisation of the army. In February 1916 a new system of training for officers was introduced. Entrants had to be over 18½ years old and to have served as a “ranker”. The training course lasted just 4½ months and, if successful, the soldier would be given a temporary commission.

It may be that, after passing out, he was with the 1/1st Norfolk Yeomanry which became an infantry regiment, the 12th (Yeomanry) Norfolk Regiment, at the Suez Canal defences in Egypt, on 7th February 1917. Certainly the 12th are the first regiment to appear on his Medal Roll, when he was a Second Lieutenant. The 12th was attached to the 230th Brigade of the 74th Division and fought in the Second and Third Battles of Gaza, including the capture of Beersheba and of the Sheria Position. They were also involved in the capture and defence of Jerusalem and the Battle of Tell’Azur

The 12th sailed from Alexandria on 1st May, arriving at Marseilles on 7th May 1918. From there they would have moved north by train arriving by June at the Western front and were transferred to the 31st Division of the 94th Brigade on the 21st.

During the “Advance on Flanders” the Battalion was involved in the Action of Tieghem and crossed the River Scheldt on the 9th November 1918. When the Armistice was signed on the 11th November the forward units had reached Everbecque and the River Dender. The Battalion moved back to Arques-Blendecques and the process of demobilisation began.

At some point in these actions Henry was invalided back to England. His son, David, has a photograph of him, with a walking stick, in a group shot with other officers at a military hospital. They are all in uniform and in the centre is a very severe-looking matron. His uniform appears to be that of the Norfolk Regiment.

Henry then went to Crystal Palace and helped with the demobilisation at the end of the war. It was probably at this point that he was transferred to the 3rd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment (as reported in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*), because this “Reserve” unit was a training battalion which spent most of the war at Felixstowe and never moved out of England.

In November 1918, the British Army had numbered almost 3.8 million men. Twelve months later, it had been reduced to slightly less than 900,000 and by 1922 to just over 230,000. The supervision of the demobilisation was not the easy cheerful posting that one might

imagine. Lloyd George had promised that there would be rapid demobilisation but the transport and bureaucratic systems were overwhelmed by the numbers returning.

Writing on the *Kent History Forum* one of the posts by “*grandarog*” tells of his father who also helped at Crystal Palace:

He said that it was a real nightmare job as morale among the men was terrible. Lorry and busloads of men were arriving all the time from the holding camps so there was always a huge backlog throughout the day. The officers had extreme difficulty in keeping the men in order and fights often broke out as men tried to force their way to get to the desks. It was very bad late afternoons when new arrivals were turned away and some that had been waiting all day were sent back to the camps.

At some point, in late 1919 or possibly in February 1920, Henry sailed to India and became part of the Indian Army. It may be that there is a clue to his career direction in his ancestry. His mother’s father, Alfred Riddle, was a colour sergeant in the King’s (Liverpool) Regiment. When we look back at the 1881 Census for York we see him there in the Fulford Road Barracks. Living with him are his wife, Bridget, from Sligo in Ireland and four of their children, three of whom were born in India and span a period of 11 years. Among them is Fanny (Frances) who later married Frederick Attley. Perhaps his grandfather helped Henry with his career through higher connections? We have no way of knowing.

According to his Medal Card, Henry was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the 89th Punjabis which had been formed in 1917 and later, in 1922, became a training battalion. The Battalion was stationed at Nowshera in the North West Frontier province (now in Pakistan) when it received orders to mobilise for service in Mesopotamia (Iraq). In October 1920 the Battalion joined the 52nd Indian Infantry Brigade, 18th Indian Division in which it served until at least March 1921. There is some confusion in that the form he completed to become an “Emergency Officer” in WW2 states that he was with the 2nd Battalion of the 11th Gurkha Rifles from 1919 to 1921.

We see that Henry Attley served on the North-West Frontier of India and Iraq in 1920 and 1921 and also in Persia. From his WW2 records we know that he had a good to fair knowledge of spoken Hindustani as well as some knowledge of French.

After the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 the idea of the League of Nations was to establish Mandates in the defeated central Powers so they would move towards independence under the “tutelage” of one of victorious Allied Powers. The Iraq Revolt started in Baghdad in the summer of 1920 by officers of the Old Ottoman Empire (which had been allied with the Germans) against the British occupation of Iraq. Although the revolt was largely crushed by the end of October 1920, it festered on until 1921. Some six to ten thousand Iraqis and around 500 British and Indian soldiers died in the conflict.

The British decided to rule Iraq by more indirect means and installed Faysal ibn Husayn as King of Iraq. His family remember that Henry talked of meeting “King Faisal” in Baghdad.

We do not have absolute dating of his service but we do know that on 7th February 1920 Lieutenant H.W. Attley left Liverpool bound for Bombay on the *SS Patricia*. The following

year he arrived in London on July 11th 1921 from Bombay on the *SS Sardinia*. Further, on this voyage we have the information that, on returning to England, Henry was intending to reside in Tilcroft in Ringstead, near Thrapston and was 24 years of age. It seems likely that these voyages define his service in Iraq and India, a period of about eighteen months. On 10th August 1921 he was placed on the Indian Army Reserve of Officers and retained the rank of Lieutenant.

He received the Victory and General Service Medals, India Frontier Medal (1919) and Iraq Medal with bar (1921).

On leaving the army and returning home his work was in the leather trade. The *Daily Echo* on Saturday May 20th 1922 reported on a visit that Earl Haig made to “two typical Northampton factories” on that morning. One of these was the Chrome Tanning Company, Ltd, in Grafton Street. Some 60% to 70% of the staff were ex-servicemen of which 37% were in some measure disabled through war service. Earl Haig was escorted around the works by H. W. Attley and a Mr. Cross who explained the processes. It seems certain, as neither man is in uniform, that the photograph above was taken during this visit.

On 22nd April 1924 Henry married Mary Bertha Roskell, in St Joseph’s Catholic Church in Hartlepool. She had been born in Richmond in Yorkshire, the daughter of Richard Aloysius Roskell, a senior bank clerk. In 1911, aged 15, she had been attending a Convent School at East Wymer, Norwich, where her aunt was a sister and a teacher. It is not clear when and where Henry and Mary’s paths crossed.



*Earl Haig (left) shaking hands with Henry (probably taken 1922)
With thanks to the Attley Family*

The war memorial in Ringstead churchyard was dedicated on Sunday 29th June 1924. A procession to the site was headed by the Raunds' Temperance band and included sixty ex-servicemen led by "ex-Lieutenant H. Attley".

By 1939 Henry and Mary were living in *Prospect House* in York Road, Wollaston, some ten miles south-west of Ringstead. Henry was a Leather Trade Agent, but the Second World War had begun and, on 30th October 1939, Henry was given the "Regular Army Emergency Commission" of 2nd Lieutenant and promoted the following day to Acting Captain. He had begun his second army career. His service number on the Ministry of Defence website is given as P104483.

For two years, he was in command of "A" Company of the 4th Northamptonshire Regiment. The 4th Battalion was a 2nd Line Territorial Army formed in 1939 which never served abroad during the war. In 1941 he became Adjutant of the 8th Northamptonshires Home Guard Battalion which recruited from the Rushden area and on 27th May 1942 was promoted to temporary Captain. On 11th May 1943 he was again promoted, to Temporary Major, and posted to RAF Tempsford in Bedfordshire to undertake special liaison work with Bomber Command of the RAF. RAF Tempsford was, during the war, the base for the Special Operations Executive (SOE) which flew underground agents and their supplies into enemy occupied Europe. The station was home to "Special Duties" 138 and 161 Squadrons. Over eighty aircraft and most of their crew were lost from Tempsford during the Second World War. It was here that he met well-known people such as Odette Churchill and General de Gaulle.



*Henry in Northamptonshire Regiment uniform. WW2
With thanks to the Attley Family*

He became the Commanding Officer of Shalstone Prison-of-War Camp in Buckinghamshire. The Buckingham Advertiser and Free Press of 29th November 1947 had a letter published which showed another side to the war:

Dear Sir, - To many of us it has come as a surprise that the P.O.W. Camp at Shalstone is closing down during this week-end, those Germans not due for immediate repatriation being transferred to other camps. During the last few months many friendships have been made between the Germans and local people, and I am happy in the knowledge that some of the P.O.W.'s will return to their homes with pleasant memories of some contacts that they made in Buckingham.

Henry too made friends with some of the German prisoners, and his son remembers considerable correspondence between his father and former prisoners after the war. Henry went to Austria and Germany to visit some of them in about 1950.

Henry and Mary were involved in a great deal of community work and were particularly prominent in the British Legion which had been formed in 1921 to help look after soldiers and their families after they had left the services. Mary led the local women's section and Henry rose to become the chairman of the Northamptonshire branch of the Legion.



Major Attley

From 1975 Article about Margaret Thatcher (Chronicle & Echo)

He retained the Honorary Major rank in retirement and was awarded the War Medal 1939-45 and Defence Medal for his WW2 Service.

In later life the couple moved to Midland Road in Wellingborough. Henry died there aged 81 at the end of 1977. Mary died some six years later on 17th December 1983.



*A display of Henry William Attley's Medals
With thanks to the Attley Family*

Chapter 5

The Baker Family including Frank Robinson

As people researching their families find, life is full of coincidences. While looking around a “War and Peace Exhibition” at Ringstead on Saturday 2nd November 2013 I met up with Kay Collins from the *Rushden and District History Society*. She had a photograph of a family including four young men in uniform. It was thought to be in some way related to Frank Robinson from Ringstead and the men were named from the left (with their position in the family) Charlie (3rd), Herman (eldest) Arthur (2nd) Walter (5th). The women were Clara (6th) and Edith Ann (4th). There was some confusion about the older woman in the middle and it was wondered if she was Edith and the younger woman on the right was Ann.

Luckily Herman was an unusual name, and perhaps one which attracted some comments in 1914. It was comparatively simple to find him and thereby the family name and Frank Robinson’s connection. Frank was born in 1895, the son of Francis and Violet Robinson. In 1920 he married Clarice (Clara) Baker and it is her family that we see in the photograph.



Charlie (1892) Herman (1887) Arthur Harry (1889) Walter (1896)
Clarice (1899) Annie (1864) Edith Annie (1894)

The Baker Family with approximate birth dates and named as the pencilled note seems to indicate

That was how I started my brief look at the Baker family and brother-in-law Frank Robinson in Book 2 of *Ringstead People*. The Baker children were born in Ringstead to Ralph and Annie (née Mayes), who were married in Ringstead Church on September 14th 1885 . Ralph, an army bootmaker, died in 1906 and it is the widowed Annie proudly seated in front of her four enlisted sons with her two daughters sitting either side of her. Herman and Arthur did not enlist until 1917 so we must presume that the photograph was taken towards the end of the First World War or just after it had finished.

Herman Baker (1887-1948)



The eldest child, born on 30th April 1887, was Herman Baker who is second from the left in the photograph. He married Charlotte (Lottie) Octavia Gray on 21st September 1908 and the 1911 Census for Ringstead has them living in Chapel Yard in the Ringstead High Street with their one-year-old daughter Elsie Florence. Lottie is a year younger than Herman and was born in Heckmondwike, a small town south west of Leeds, in Yorkshire. Lottie was the daughter of Alexander and Albertine Gray. Alexander was a shoemaker but although born in Bradford, we can see, from the children's birthplaces, that he had pursued his craft in Yorkshire and Surrey as well as in Northampton. In 1901 the family were living at 9 Carlow Road in Ringstead.

What the photograph of the Baker family does not make clear is how small the brothers, and most men at the time, were in comparison with today's average young man. Herman looks one of the tallest of the brothers but his *Record of Service* shows that he was 5ft 6½ inches in height with a 34½ inch chest. For his trade or calling he has put down "shoe hand" and had asked to enlist in the RFA (Royal Field Artillery).

At first he went to a Field Depot but on the 1st February 1917 he transferred to the 6th Company of the Machine Gun Corps (Reg. No. 83933). On 11th April 1917 he was posted to the British Expeditionary Force in France. He embarked at Folkestone and disembarked at Boulogne before moving to the Base Depot at Camiers which was just north of Etaples. It was not until 4th May 1917 that he joined the Machine Gun Corps in the Front Line.

On the 1st June he became ill and was taken to the field hospital at Camiers where he was diagnosed with P.U.O. or Pyrexia (fever) of Unknown Origin which was usually called Trench Fever, (not to be confused with Trench Foot). Trench Fever was an increasing problem in the trenches as the war progressed and produced symptoms of headaches, rashes, inflamed

eyes and leg pains. It was not considered by the men a serious condition and often disappeared in under a week although some sufferers might need to be hospitalised for a further couple of weeks to fully recover. It also often recurred at 4-6-week intervals although usually with diminishing intensity. It must be remembered that soldiers afflicted with the disease would compare the symptoms to the fear and misery of their life at the Front. In 1918, it was discovered that P.U.O. was caused by the excretions of lice, which were one of commonplaces of life in the trenches, being rubbed into a wound or abrasion.

On 13th June 1917 Herman returned to England on the *SS Brighton* and remained for some 280 days. This indicates that he had a more serious attack. He was first at the V.A.D. Hospital at 27 Charles Street, Berkeley Square, a large Georgian house in Mayfair and then was sent to the Paddington V.A.D. Hospital at 37 Porchester Terrace, Bayswater. These V.A.D. or Auxiliary Hospitals had been set up by the British Red Cross and St John Ambulance working together as the Joint War Committee. Each establishment usually had a commandant, quartermaster and matron but were mainly staffed by members of the local V.A.D. (Voluntary Aid Detachment) who were trained in basic first aid and nursing. The patients were generally the less seriously wounded and these hospitals allowed the wounded or ill soldiers to recuperate under a more relaxed regime. One of the alternative names for Trench Fever was Shin Bone Fever for it could produce great pain and sensitivity in that area. In 1918 Paddington was designated an Orthopaedic Hospital so it may be that Herman was receiving some form of massage or even electrotherapeutic treatment for this condition.

On the 19th July 1917 he was certified fit enough to go home to his family in Rushden on an eight-day furlough. Was the family photograph taken then?

His war was not over, however, for on the 29th March 1918 he embarked once more at Folkestone and joined the Machine Gun Corps' Base Camp at Camiers and on the 6th April 1918 he returned to the Front Line. He seems to have remained there until 8th February 1919 but, from the 14th September 1918, he was performing the duties of a shoemaker for the army left in France. It is often said that an army marches on its stomach but of course it also needs well shod feet: a car certainly requires fuel but it also needs tyres.

Finally Herman returned to Purfleet and was demobbed on 14th February 1919. Appearances can be deceptive but when we look at Herman in the photograph we do see the character noted on his army record, He was described as temperate, reliable and intelligent.

At some point his mother and the family had moved to Rushden. Herman too had moved with his wife Lottie and their child, Elsie, to 3 Oak Street in Rushden and this is why he was not included in the 1919 Ringstead Roll of men who had served in the First World War.

Soon after returning home Herman and Charlotte moved to 73 Queen Street, Withernsea in East Yorkshire, still as a shoemaker. It may be that father-in-law, Alexander Gray, had some influence on this for in the 1911 Census he, with his family, had moved back to Yorkshire and was a boot repairer, living at 256 Division Road in Hull. Albertina had become a midwife.

What we discover from later events is that Herman played the clarinet and saxophone while Charlotte sang and played the piano and violin. The photograph of the Ringstead Band in the chapter on Benjamin and George Roberts in *Ringstead People*, and the many newspaper reports, show that the village had a long musical tradition which Herman and Charlotte carried on. While in Withernsea they had a son, born on March 1st 1921, who they named Kenneth. Kenneth as a child learned, probably mostly from his parents, to play piano, saxophone, violin and accordion. He later switched to the cornet and played in the local Gospel Mission Band. The family then moved on to Hull in about 1936, and Kenneth joined the West Hull Silver Prize Band as a solo cornet player. It is through the life stories of their son that we are told a little more about Herman and Charlotte because, known as Kenny Baker, he became one of the most well-known and internationally respected British jazz musicians of his age.



*Herman and Charlotte “Duellists”
Photograph from Kenny Baker by Robert G. Crosby*

The authorised biography of Kenny Baker makes clear that not only did Lottie help with the shoemaking, probably doing the “closing” of the uppers but also ran a boarding house for

the summer visitors. It also tells us that husband and wife both played in dance bands but she was the more accomplished musician, gaining qualification in piano, accordion, violin and singing. She formed a small orchestra to accompany the silent films at the local cinema and ran a female accordion band. She was also the main driving force in her son's early musical training, teaching him to sight read music and insisting that he had good musical grounding. In the local paper we see a few examples of her drive in her charity work. The *Hull Daily Mail* reported on 7th December 1922:

There was a charming scene at Unity Hall, Withernsea, on Tuesday evening, when some thirty children in fancy costumes, composing Mrs H. Baker's Juvenile Concert Party, gave a delightful entertainment on behalf of the fund for providing a Christmas treat for the children of ex-Servicemen.

We also see that husband and wife performed and daughter Elsie gave "a very pretty song and dance step" and that Mrs Baker designed and made all the dresses. Again in 1925 the *Hull Daily Mail* reported on a musical service at the Withernsea Brotherhood where Herman performed on the clarinet, Elsie sang sweetly and Herman, Lottie and Elsie were part of a quartet. We see a very musical family performing for the community before son Kenny started on his rise to fame.

On 30th July 1933 Herman was driving his car when he came upon a serious accident. A motorcycle and sidecar had overturned in an eight-foot drain on the Kilnsea Road to Spurn Head. The young wife of the driver was killed and a girl seriously injured but a nine-month old baby was found safe in the mud of the drain. We also note that Herman was stated to come from Withernsea. By October 1938, however, when he was found guilty of driving without insurance, (an oversight, Herman said, due to being on holiday at the time of its renewal), Herman was reported to be living in Hull. As we have seen this is confirmed in his son's biography and it seems possible that when he moved his business had been taken over by younger brother, Walter, but this has yet to be proved.

Surprisingly, in the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, Herman, a bootmaker, and Charlotte are shown at 26 Linden Avenue in Kettering with "General Shop Keeper", Arthur J Fox and his wife Florence. When we look a little further, however, we discover that Arthur is the son of Frederick and (Mary) Elizabeth Fox. Elizabeth was the older sister of Charlotte and the two families lived a few doors apart in Carlow Road, Ringstead in 1901. Lottie and Herman are staying with their niece and her family, probably on a short visit..

There is no sign of Kenny. He was back in Withernsea, a musician, staying with older sister Elsie who had married postman Sydney Cowen in 1929. It seems that this was one of the few times from then on, that Kenny was in Humberside for in 1939, Kenny had answered an advertisement and became part of comedian Sandy Powell's travelling show and his career had begun.

Herman died in 1948 aged 61 in the Holderness District of East Yorkshire. Lottie married again as we shall see in the story of Herman's brother, Charles Baker.

Arthur Harry Baker (1889-1974)



The second oldest son was the last of the Baker boys to enlist. He had been born in 1889 so, when he joined up in 1917, he was some twenty- seven years old. His brothers had been in the boot and shoe trade but Arthur was a farm labourer and was enlisted in the Army Veterinary Corps, (the prefix Royal was added in 1918). This Corps had qualified veterinary surgeons as officers but farmworkers, ostlers, blacksmiths and others used to working with horses formed the Other Ranks.

At the beginning of the war the cavalry regiments, along with the Guards, were seen as the premier regiments in the army. In 1915, at Mons, there was a major cavalry charge but that was the last one of real significance although some useless, suicidal attempts occurred throughout the war. Trench warfare and the machine gun ended the horse as a useful fighting force. The *Charge of the Light Brigade* had been over fifty years earlier but the old order could not believe that the cavalry had become obsolete.

Nevertheless, as the books by Michael Morpurgo and the subsequent *War Horse* play and film have once again made clear, horses still played an important part in the Great War and, despite the various veterinary corps' attentions it is believed that some eight million horses died on all sides during the conflict. Mechanised transport, especially over rough terrain was still unreliable and horses had a vital role in the movement of supplies and artillery to and around the battle front.

Originally, I had thought that Arthur's war records had not survived but I think, although not complete, there are enough to fill in some of his army career. The *Medal Roll* for WW1 shows that Arthur Harry Baker of the Army Veterinary Corps (Regimental Number SE29437) was entitled to the British War Medal, which showed that he had served overseas, and the Victory Medal, which meant that he had been in an area of active fighting.

In 1914 the Veterinary Corps was based in a number of places across the British Isles with detachments in Egypt and South Africa. With the start of the Great War, the Corps reorganised to provide a Mobile Veterinary Section as part of each Division that went overseas. I still have not found the Division to which Arthur was attached. Perhaps more details of his service will come to light.

Arthur's son, Derek, remembered that his father was said to have been discharged because of bleeding ears and had to have a metal plate inserted in his head. It does seem the sort of injury that could have occurred from the kick of a horse or perhaps from falling off one. On the other hand it could have been bomb blast damage.

In my research I was led astray by one of the coincidences that makes nonsense of many Ancestry family trees. An Arthur Harry Baker married Maud Estella Fox in 1922 in the Thrapston District. Maud was the widow of Ringstead bootmaker Nathaniel Fox who had died in 1920. The marriage was not a success and on 3rd August 1923 the Northampton Mercury reported a case brought by Maud telling of Arthur's assaults on her. This was dismissed as a "tissue of lies" but a fortnight later she successfully applied for a maintenance order of £1 a week. The couple had briefly lived together in Lower Street Ringstead and had a son, but Arthur moved to Kettering and I think he later died there.

Despite the name and the Ringstead connection this Arthur is not our man. He was probably a carpenter named Arthur Henry Baker who came from Rushden originally. I include these brief details just to show how easy it is to be misled without certificates or census details to confirm facts. [Just to confuse things more the older sister of Lottie Gray, who married Herman Baker, married Frederick, the brother of Nathaniel Fox.]

Our Arthur Baker married Constance Lily Houghton (possibly in Higham Ferrers) in 1920. Constance was the daughter of Silas Ponting and Elizabeth Ann Houghton. He was a currier's labourer and the family lived at 13 York Road in Higham.

After leaving the army the family remembers that Arthur became a gravedigger for some twenty years and in the 1939 England and Wales Register Arthur is a "Cemetery Caretaker" living in Higham Ferrers. During the Second World War Arthur worked at Chelveston air base for Braybrooke's Haulage. He then repaired Wellington bombers at Sywell Airfield. It may seem unlikely that a man with Arthur's background would be allowed to do this kind of important repair work. However, on the BBC WW2 People's War webpages, Olive Skinner was quoted as remembering that:

I was just 17 and working in the office of a shoe factory when the War broke out. As soon as the opportunity came, I took a job more useful to the War Effort, working for Brooklands Aviation at Sywell Aerodrome at Sywell in Northamptonshire. I would cycle the five miles from home to Sywell, where we would repair Wellington Bombers in vast hangars. The planes were a skeleton metal framework with heavy linen stapled to it, and then painted with 'dope'. They were extraordinary aircraft, and when we got them for repair I often wondered how they managed to fly with so much damage.

The planes were stripped to the frames and fabric replaced. I remember having to hand sew the seam along a length of wing with my curved needle. At the regulation

eight stitches per inch, it seemed like a mile. I still have my needle to this day, ready for any more repair work!

It was a world away from today's computer-packed fighting machines

Arthur finally worked as a stonemason for Marriotts the builders. I believe that Constance died, aged 70, in 1968 and Arthur in 1974.

Charles Mayes Baker (1892-1978)



Charles Mayes Baker [Charlie] was born on 23rd December 1891, (the Death Index on Ancestry has 1890 but I think this is incorrect). He worked as a platelayer for the *London and North Western Railway Company*. Charles enlisted as a Sapper when he was 23 years old, joining the 118th Company of the Railway Corps of the Royal Engineers at their headquarters at Longmore Camp in Hampshire on 9th December 1915. The Woolmer Instructional Military Railway had been constructed there and this was used in the training of the railway troops who would have to carry out their work in very different conditions to the ones they had been used to.

The railway troops are another less well-known part of the war effort in the First World War. There had been a large recruitment drive among the employees of the various railway companies. A special port was built at Richborough in Kent from which trains were loaded onto boats in a sophisticated roll-on roll-off system and taken across the Channel. Boats would also bring trains loaded with tanks to France so they could be taken to the Front. By mid-1915 there were eight Construction Trains operating in France which carried the Sappers and their equipment to where they were needed. Once at their destination they would pitch tents for their accommodation. They would try to lay standard gauge track as close to the front as possible and also carry out repairs to sections destroyed by shellfire. Where possible, light narrow-gauge railways would be run even close to the Front Line.

Charles first embarked with the British Expeditionary Force on 6th February 1916 and at some point joined the 298th Railway Company. He seems to have adjusted to army life well for he was first appointed a Lance Corporal, then promoted to full Corporal and finally to Second Corporal. Second Corporal was a rank only used in the Royal Engineers and Army Ordnance Corps and meant that the person held full non-commissioned officer rank.

In April 1917 he was admitted to hospital, perhaps with Trench Fever, but rejoined his unit within a week. In July he was given leave and on the 10th July 1917 he married Winifred Shallow and appears to have moved to 25 Red Row in Raunds. Winifred Shallow had been born in Pentney, the daughter of Robert, a bread baker, and his wife Clara from Irthlingborough. Clara had been a Britchford and in 1911 Winifred is staying with her mother's sister, Laura and her husband George Robinson. It does not seem that he was a relation of the Frank Robinson who married Charles's sister Clarice.

On 5th April 1919 Charles was demobilised as a Class Z Reserve. There were still some fears that Germany might not accept the terms of the Peace Treaty and these Class Z men would have been recalled immediately in the case of the conflict breaking out again. As we know, this did not happen for another twenty years and Charles went back to his work as a platelayer in the Rushden and Higham Ferrers area.

The *1939 Register of England and Wales* has Charles working as a "Colliery Permanent Way Foreman" in Leicestershire. He and Winifred, with son Frank (who was an electrician underground in the colliery), were living in a cottage at Measham Hall near the Colliery. Measham Hall is a few miles from Ashby-de-la-Zouch. We see that Frank was born on 31st December 1922 and a little research tells us that his birth was registered in early 1923 at Atherstone in Warwickshire. The couple had three sons in all, Kenneth, George and Frank.

At some point the couple separated or divorced, or Winifred died (although one Ancestry tree has her dying in the Northampton District in 1987 aged 92). Certainly, we know from Charles's descendants, that he married again in 1955 in the Coalville District of Leicestershire to Charlotte, the widow of his eldest brother Herman. In 1959 Charles went out to Australia with his son George and the rest of George's family followed. They remained, but it seems that Charles could not adjust to Australian life and returned home.

At some point, Charles moved to Harrow in Middlesex and, at the time of his death, on 17th April 1978, he was living there at 4 Heath Road. His birth date is given as the same as in *1939 Register* which confirms we have the correct man.

Walter Baker (1896-19??)



Walter Baker, born in 1896, was the youngest son in the family. He enlisted in 1916 like his oldest brother, Herman, but he went into the Northamptonshire Regiment rather than the Machine Gun Corps. Walter's records have nearly all disappeared so we only know a little of his army career from his Medal Card and a brief newspaper report.

He remained a Private throughout the war but changed regiment twice. The reasons for these transfers could have been because so many men in a battalion had been killed in action that it ceased to be a viable unit and the survivors were sent to bolster up other regiments. It was also the case that after the first wave of deaths the new recruits would be transferred to whichever regiment was in need of replacements.

By checking the records that have survived, of men with similar regimental numbers and military history, Steve (Stebie9173) on the *Great War Forum* website has managed to reconstruct the likely path of Walter's early army career. Like Horace Allen of Irthlingborough, Walter would have enlisted at Northampton in November 1916 and been posted to the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment for training.

He was sent to France on 1st February 1917, initially to No. 17 Infantry Base Depot at Étaples, south of Boulogne. Frank James in his recollections, *A Privates War*, describes "Étaps" as it was known to the soldiers.

It was a large bivouacked area near the sea and covered several acres. Its purpose was to hold and give further training to troops fresh from England and then send them off to join their various units in the battle zone.

This was in 1914, and James and the other men of the Northamptonshires travelled from Le Havre in overcrowded cattle trucks. There may have been some improvements by early 1917 but one suspects that it would have been a largely similar experience for Walter. He had travelled with the Northamptonshire Regiment (Reg. No. 30926) but it is likely that at Étaples he was transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and his Regimental Number became 40722. He joined his new regiment and soon after, on April 1st, as part of the 32nd Division, he took part in the fierce battle to take Savy Wood near St Quentin. The Battalion *War Diary* for April 1st records:

Battalion receives order at 11.30 am to advance at 1.30 pm. Battalion advances to SAVY in Artillery formation, under hostile artillery fire. Battalion formed up and advanced at 3 pm in extended order. C, B and D companies in front line and A company in support. Battalion met with heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire.

The Inniskilling Fusiliers, as part of this advance, gained the wood after thirty minutes intense fighting and consolidated "strong posts" but at the cost of 152 casualties: Officers 1 killed and 10 wounded; Other Ranks 31 killed, 107 wounded and 3 missing. John William Elliot of Raunds was also in the same battalion and was killed there. He is remembered on the Raunds and Stanwick War Memorials.

Walter was badly injured in one leg and would have been taken back, via a chain of casualty posts to a Field Hospital behind the lines. He was probably evacuated from France on 17th April to Newcastle Military Hospital. It may be that his return to England was delayed by the mining of the hospital ship *Salta* on the 10th April.

He was in Newcastle Military Hospital (a requisitioned lunatic asylum) for five months. It is presumably, after he had recovered, in the autumn of 1917 that he was transferred finally to the Royal Irish Regiment (Reg. No. 18580).

Walter joined the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment and fought with them at the Battle of Albert on 21st and 22nd August 1918. which was part of the lead into the final Battle of the Somme and the Allied victory. *The Rushden Echo* of 13th September 1918 reported that, youngest son of Mrs R [Ralph] Baker of 32 Winchester Road, Rushden, was again in hospital. He was in Birmingham suffering from a shrapnel wound in his leg sustained on August 22nd 1918. The report continued:

Pte. Baker had once before been wounded in the leg, and as this limb had occasionally caused him inconvenience during the last time out he asked the doctors at the hospital of which he is at present an inmate to make an examination. The X-Rays have revealed the cause of the trouble, viz., a machine gun bullet which has thus been embedded in the muscles for twelve months.

One would imagine that Walter's war was over and he was demobilised before June 1919 when the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* was printed.

It was believed by the family that Walter moved to Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire where he worked as a winder in a local colliery. This may be true but his older brother Charles worked at the colliery at Measham Hall which is only a few miles from Ashby-de-la-Zouch. On the other hand, in the *1939 Register*, there is a Walter Baker, born on 24th November 1896 who worked in a Boot and Shoe Repair Shop living at 31 Cammidge Street, Withernsea. (Oldest brother Herman had also lived in Withernsea with a similar job.) With him is his wife Alice M. Baker, born on 5th May 1905. Checking further a Walter Baker married Alice M. Gallagher at Patrington, (5 miles from Withernsea), in Yorkshire in the last months of 1921. The Banns had been called on the 11th, 18th and 25th September 1921 in the Owththorne with Rimswell Parish Church. Could there have been some confusion between the brothers or is it just a coincidence of names?

If the Withernsea man is the correct Walter, he died in 1977 in the Hull District.

The Three Baker Women in the Photograph

The two younger women in the photograph are Clarice Emma (Clara) who married Frank Robinson and, on the right Edith Annie Baker. Edith married Herbert Woodham from

Kimbolton in 1921. Herbert too had served in the army, in the 4th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment and had received a severe gunshot wound in his left arm.



The father of the family, Ralph Baker, had died on 3rd August 1906 and it his wife, Annie, who sits in the middle in her black “widow’s weeds”. Ralph had been buried in Ringstead Cemetery in 1906 and although Annie moved to Rushden sometime in the 1910s, when she died on 31st August 1944, she was buried near her husband in her home village.

Francis Horace Robinson (1895-1970)

If we now return to Francis (Frank) Horace Robinson, who was born on 23rd March 1895 in Ringstead. He was the grandson of Elijah Robinson who had been the landlord of the Black Horse public house in Ringstead High Street as well as being a small farmer and carrier. Landlords of small village pubs often had a second occupation and it meant that the wife, in this case Sarah Ann (née Childs) would have done most of the bar work. Elijah gave up the licence to his eldest son William in 1894 but continued with his carrier business and perhaps a little farming. He became ill and was diagnosed with “consumption of the throat”. He became very depressed and committed suicide by cutting his own throat on 31st October 1902. He was 62 years old.

In 1901 his son, Francis senior, and wife, Violet were living at 5 Denford Road with their children, Frank, Dora and Beulah. Francis was an army boot welt sewer and by 1911 his son, Frank, aged sixteen, was a shoe finisher. The family was now living in the High Street. The military boot and shoe trade began to improve as by 1913 war with Germany seemed inevitable. Most of Frank’s records have been lost but we know that he enlisted on 20th January 1916 and joined the 28th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (Reg. No. G/11402). At some point he was injured and also transferred to the 7th Battalion of the Queen’s (Royal West Surrey) Regiment (Reg. No. G/14941). As we have said, losses were often so great that whole Battalions were almost wiped out and became part of another Regiment and it may be that Frank (or Horace as he was known by his family) was part of this movement. The exact sequence of events is unclear as Frank’s records were probably burnt with many others in a German bombing raid in 1940.

The *War Diary* of the 7th Battalion of the Queen’s (Royal Surrey) Regiment has survived and been put online. We do not know when Frank was wounded and captured but it seems certain that the two occurrences were linked. His early repatriation would have been

because of his wounds so it seems likely that he was taken some time early in 1918. We know from the Diary that the 7th Battalion was involved in the attack on the Bois de Hangard, some 20 kilometres west-south-west of Amiens on 26th April. The Battalion was attached to the 53rd Brigade which was itself part of the 58th Division. Like many battles at this time it was an attempt to retake positions previously held and lost.

The rain was falling heavily when the Battalion moved off, soon after 7.30 pm. They struggled to the Villers-Bretonneux - Domart Road after having been badly guided, arriving at 10.30 pm. They halted in Artillery formation, while being shelled at intervals by heavy explosives and gas. Everywhere was confusion, made worse by a mist which crept up soon after midnight hiding the wood from their view. They eventually reached their allotted positions by 4 a.m. and were told that zero hour had been brought forward from 6 to 5.15 am. Three tanks took part in the operations that morning but had little effect and returned back to their base. The Diary continues:

From midday till 3 p.m. 26th the enemy subjected the whole area of VILLERS – BRETONNEUX and DOMART to a most intense bombardment of H.E. and gas. No infantry action followed. Troops holding the line South of the wood were forced to leave their posts during the bombardment but returned immediately it ceased.

The Queens were finally relieved by a French Battalion and by 1. 30 am of the 28th they moved back to bivouacs at Blangy-Tronville, having “partaken of tea” at Gentelles Wood on the way. The list of the Battalion’s total casualties shows that two officers and ten “other ranks” were killed but only one officer was wounded, one missing and one “wounded and missing”, whereas Other Ranks had 85 wounded, 41 missing and one “wounded and missing” and a further four had died of their wounds. The whole daylight attack was called a “dismal failure” in the official history of the Great War and the capturing of the wood by the Queens was one of the few successful actions, however temporary.

It seems a possibility that Frank was one of the men listed as missing although we cannot be sure. What we do see in the *Diary* is the training, drill, billet cleaning and organised football matches behind the lines; the carefully drafted battle instructions with details of meeting points, dress, equipment to be carried, and battle formation that would have defined Frank’s daily life. We also glimpse how quickly the conditions and enemy action shredded these plans so that at Hangard Wood it became a series of separate skirmishes with almost all coordination gone. It was often in this sort of action that prisoners were taken.

Certainly we know that Frank was captured by the Germans and taken to Langensalza Prison of War Camp in Germany. Conditions may have improved a little by the time Frank became a prisoner but in December 1916 George Mulford from the 12th Yorks and Lancs Regiment recalled:

Think of the conditions of 12,000 men huddled together on a large sized ploughed field so situated that it caught all the water draining from the surrounding hills. . . Food of the vilest and unhealthiest nature for human consumption. Long ramshackle dilapidated barracks to hold 7-800 men with no thought in their construction for comfort and accommodation.

George also stated that the guards at Langensalza were the most brutal and ferocious that he ever saw and it is likely that at the time when Frank was there it could still be a very hard place. Even as late as November 27th 1918, Corporal Golding of the Leicestershire Regiment recalled an officer named Krause exacting revenge. There had been a wooden theatre and the various nationalities had built small changing rooms on the side. These they were now dismantling for firewood. The camp had a Help Committee made up from the prisoners which tried to make life at the camp as bearable as possible and it seems they had their own hut. Suddenly Krause came with his men and surrounded the theatre and committee hut. Golding continues:

There must have been 15 to 20 prisoners standing outside the hut and I should say about 30 others round the theatre. When the order to fire was given, I tried to get into the committee hut, but the door was so crowded by others endeavouring to do the same that I could not get in. At least 15 shots were fired in the direction of the committee hut.

He saw three of the men who were killed and two others were wounded. It must be remembered that on 11th November 1918, over two weeks earlier, the Armistice had been signed. Fortunately for Frank he had been repatriated on 5th May 1918 almost certainly because of his injuries which were considered to have rendered him incapable of taking part in any further military action.

The dates are unclear but it appears that early in May 1918, just before his repatriation, Frank had been allowed to send a postcard home, addressed to his father stating his name, regiment, prisoner number and the camp and the simple message, "I am well".

On the front of the postcard is a photograph of Frank in his darker uniform with another prisoner. It seems to have been taken in a substantial place with ornate windows. Perhaps it was in the chapel which we know was in the camp but is also possible that it was taken in a photographic studio with one of the painted backdrops that they used. We also know that there was a bootmakers' workshop at the camp and perhaps Frank worked there to help repair the prisoner's boots.

We also learn from Derek, a son of Arthur Baker, that there was another side to the Germans' treatment of the POWs. The stories of brutality must be balanced by their treatment of Frank. As we can see in the photographs of Frank he has a scar across his chin

and he holds his mouth awkwardly. His nephew has filled in some of the details of what happened to Frank. He knew him not as Frank or Horace but as Uncle Joe. He recalls:

He was taken prisoner after being shot in the mouth and the Germans fashioned him a set of false teeth. He had no lower jaw, however, so the teeth were fitted with metal springs to enable him to open and close his mouth [and] when he talked he never moved the bottom of his mouth but his head moved instead! A source of fascination for all the children at the time.



*Frank (Horace) is on the left in the darker uniform
With thanks to Rushden & District History Society*

Frank (wrongly entered in the roll as “F.A. Robinson”) was deemed entitled to a “War Badge” which was awarded to soldiers wounded and unable to serve further. He was discharged on 31st July 1918 when he was 23 years and 4 months old. He was shown as being at the Regimental Depot which is where he would have been sent after his repatriation to England. He would have returned to Northamptonshire soon after. There is a photograph of Frank in the blue “hospital” uniform worn by wounded soldiers. The main reason for the badge and the uniform was to make clear that the wearer had served his country and was not avoiding enlistment. Besides the white feathers that were sent, there could be abuse and even violence against men suspected of not “doing their duty”.

Frank returned to his job as a shoehand in a factory and married Clarice E. Baker on 31st July 1920 in St Mary’s Church, Rushden.

In the *Register of England & Wales*, taken in 1939 to get an accurate list of the population at the beginning of the Second World War, Frank and Clarice were living at 74 Shirley Road in Rushden. He was now a foreman in the "Heel Building Department" of a local shoe firm. Mother-in Law, Annie Baker was living with Herman, Clarice and their family. He died in 1970



Frank is on the left in his wounded soldier's uniform. The man on the right appears to be from the North Staffordshire Regiment and I have not found a local man in that regiment.

With thanks to the Rushden & District History Society

At each Remembrance Day we are asked to remember the dead of the Great War but all those men who served are now dead and we should also remember the millions who survived and lived shattered or troubled lives because of the terrible places that these ordinary men found themselves. We also see that the war memorials do not show just how many people in a village like Ringstead were directly affected by this deadly attrition of men by machines.

Chapter 6

The Ball Family

Thomas Ball (1879-1918)

Thomas Ball was born in Ringstead in about 1879, the third child of John and Susannah. In 1891 he was shown with his widowed mother, living in Findings Terrace, Raunds. Their father, John Ball, had been killed in a quarry accident in islip while they were living in Ringstead. His mother was an “army boot closer” and his older brother George (13) an errand boy but Thomas (12), although, it seems, attends part time at school, was also a boot riveter. By 1901 the family were at Hill Street in Raunds. Susan, at 46, was still an army boot closer, as was daughter Eliza (26). Her son, George (23), was now a clicker, as was younger brother John (19). Thomas (22) remained a riveter. All seem to have been working at home although George may have been employed in a local factory.

Thomas married Charlotte Cade on the 1st January 1902 in Keystone. Charlotte had been born in Bythorn in Huntingdonshire in 1880, the daughter of a farm labourer. By 1901, aged 20, she was working as a “general domestic servant” for Alfred Williams, a Wesleyan Minister, and his wife at Berrister House, Vicarage Place, Raunds.

Thomas and Charlotte had two children, Harold in 1902 and Leonard in the third quarter of 1905. At some stage, soon after the birth of Leonard, the family moved to Wollaston where they lived with his younger brother John and his family in York Cottages. Thomas was working as a “Bottom Stuff Rivetter “in a local factory and Charlotte was working at home as a hand boot closer. Leonard (5) was with his parents but Harold (9) was staying with unmarried Uncle George (33), Aunt Eliza (36) and grandmother Susan Ball (56) in Hill Street, Raunds. A further child Roland was born on 20th September 1912.

Soon after this, brother John and his family returned to Raunds but Thomas and Charlotte stayed in Wollaston and took over a fish shop in the village. He was also a well-known local Rechabite (a temperance organisation). He was 37 with a young family and establishing his own small fish and chip business. He did not wish to join the army and stated that he wanted to continue to supply fish to the area and also cited the threat to his business if he was called up. He was granted two temporary exemptions but finally, in 1916, the Tribunal decided that his business was not “of national importance”, and his appeal was dismissed.

He was forced to enlist in Wollaston and initially joined the Northamptonshire Regiment (30339). He transferred to the 15th Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles as Rifleman 41592. I have a copy of a picture from Gillian Jolley (daughter of Ronald Ball) which is said to be Thomas (in uniform) with son Harold. If this is the case it was probably taken about 1911/12 and means that Thomas was almost certainly in the Northamptonshire Regiment Territorials before the war. This may be one reason why his appeal was dismissed.

The 15th Battalion was engaged in the Battle of Courtrai on the Western Front in Belgium. This was part of the Allies final advance in Flanders. On 15th October 1918, it was in reserve in Gullingham near Courtrai, after being in action on the 13th. The *Kettering Leader* of 29th November reported:

Rifleman Ball was with a party that was in a farmhouse some miles away from the fighting line when a shell came and killed three of them (including Thomas Ball) and wounded several including the padre. The chaplain wrote to Charlotte, paying a high tribute to his “character as a soldier”.

Thomas had been acting as a servant to the Chaplain and he wrote to Charlotte:

I was very fond of your husband and he was very good to me. He was a most upright man, and a man of good principles. We were good friends and he went with me everywhere I went. One day . . . we got into a very tight corner, where there was a lot of heavy shelling; we got out safely in the end, but during it all Tom never lost his nerve and was as brave and steady as he could be. That incident showed me his worth.

It must have been a terrible blow to the family, especially being so close to the end of the war. The Armistice was signed on the 11th November 1918. Thomas is on the Wollaston War Memorial. Charlotte died in the Wellingborough District in March 1964 aged 83, nearly 46 years later.



*Thomas and Charlotte with their 3 sons (from left) Harold, Roland and Leonard
(Thomas's hat badge is for the Northamptonshire Regiment)*

My memory of the family is of the cycle shop. *L. & H. Ball*, in Cambridge Street, Wellingborough that Harold and Leonard ran in the 1950s. In 1956, when I passed the 11+, my parents bought me my first brand-new bicycle. It was one of the first breed of "teenage" bikes by Triumph, electric blue with straight handlebars, white plastic mudguards, cable brakes, and whitewall tyres. It came from Harold and Leonard's shop and my mother paid a weekly amount.

John Ball (1882-1953)

John, or Jack as he was usually known, was the third "John Ball" in a direct line, only separated by his grandfather Thomas. They span the years from 1783 to 1953 and he was the only one that I touched, in his old age. I did not know him well, for I was only seven when he died.

John was born in Ringstead, the fourth child of John and Susannah, (or Susan), Ball, on 11th February 1882. He followed Eliza, George Henry and Thomas. In 1881 his parents and his siblings had been living in Carlow Street, Ringstead. His father, an ironstone labourer in the Islip quarries, had been buried in a fall of earth in the limestone pit, on the 21st September 1886 and killed. John junior was only some three years old at the time.

We do not know how Susannah coped with four young children on her own but by 1891 she had moved back to her home town of Raunds. She had not been able to write her signature at her marriage in 1874 so opportunities must have been limited for her. She became an army boot closer, sewing the uppers, and her children also worked to help keep the family from the workhouse. Eliza was away from home, also working as a boot closer and the two older boys were 'Errand boy' and 'Riveter and School'. At nine years old, John was still a 'Scholar'.

By 1901 the whole family, including Eliza was living in Hill Street and all were engaged in the army boot trade. Susan, the widowed mother, and Eliza, her daughter, were both closers and Thomas was a riveter but John had followed his older brother George and was a clicker. It appears that all the family were working at home, except George and John who were probably in a local factory. This is what we would expect because 'clicking' was considered the most skilled work and the one which cost or saved the employer the most money. The ability to match parts of the leather and cut the maximum from a hide were valued abilities. It was also true that it required room and was for all these reasons was often centralised into a factory before the other shoeworking crafts. All around them in Hill Street were people in the boot and shoe industry, mostly working at home.

So, by 1911, the industry had changed. George Henry and Eliza appear to be working in a factory, George a boot clicker and Eliza a boot closer, although Susan, now 56, continued to work at home. They still lived in Hill Street. Two of the sons have left the nest. John had married Ringstead girl, Eunice Andrews, on 23rd December 1905, some five months before the birth of their first child. They were now living in Highfields Cottages, Marshalls Road, at the time of his birth. Thomas had married earlier, in 1902 to Charlotte Cade and the two couples have moved to Wollaston where they share York Cottages which had six rooms,

excluding the scullery and any outbuildings. Thomas was now a 'Bottom Stuff Riveter' and John a clicker. Both work in the local factory but the two wives are 'Hand Boot Closers' at home.

By 1914 Jack and Eunice and the family were back in Raunds, living at 63 Marshalls Road which was in Nene Cottages, built for workers of *R. Coggins and Sons* whose factory was on the opposite side of the road alongside Highfield cottages, an almost identical row. In the *1914 Raunds Directory* almost all the "Heads" of houses were shoehands.



Jack as part of the winning Wollaston Victoria team which won the Wellingborough and District League title in 1909-10.

From a newspaper cutting provided by the late Brian Ball, Grandson of Jack and Eunice.

John and Eunice already had three children, the older two, Aubrey (4) and Sydney (3), born in Raunds and Ronald (5 months) born in Wollaston. John and Eunice moved back to Raunds but Thomas and his wife stayed in Wollaston and ran a fish shop. I know this because Aubrey went to stay with them for a time to help in the shop and was, he believed, treated badly by Thomas.

The two rows of cottages were locally known as 'The Colony'. My father said they were cheaply built and always cold but they are still there today. Before central heating and insulation most terraced houses were freezing cold in winter with one coal-fired room sucking icy draughts from the rest of the house.

John, like his older brother, was conscripted. He enlisted on 24th June 1916 but was not called for service until 17th September 1917. He put his preferred option to be the *Essex Regiment* but he became a Gunner in the *Royal Field Artillery* with Regimental Number 236994 and was posted to the *4a Reserve Brigade* of the 56th Reserve Battery. This was based at Woolwich and as far as I have found, did not go to any war zone. We know from the army records that John was 5ft 7 inches tall with a 37-inch chest when he enlisted. He

was discharged on 27th November 1918 as being “surplus to military requirements”. His character was described as “good”.

John returned home and carried on with his life. It appears that some time near the end of the war he was awarded a “silver badge” which carried the legend, “ For King and Empire – Services Rendered”, which was given to those who were discharged as a result of sickness or wounds contracted during the war whether abroad or at home. He had a 20% pension for a time after discharge for a disability which was not attributable to his service years. He had been diagnosed with “neuralgia of the testicle”. It seems the pension was cancelled in March 1919.



John and Eunice with their sons (from left) Aubrey, Ronald, Dennis and Sidney (Probably just after the First World War).

As we have seen John played football but he had also been a talented local runner and won many prizes over the years. After his own career as a runner was over he trained some local athletes including his youngest son Dennis who was born in 1917 and whose middle name was Verdun, after the First World War battle, and his nephews, Harold and Len. These athletic competitions also reveal a weakness that he shared with many shoemakers. He was an inveterate gambler. Amateur race meetings were organised but there would be a line of bookies also at the meets.

I have an original copy of a photograph which fills in a little more of John’s history. It shows him standing in a clicking room. The same photograph is in *Raunds, Picturing the Past* and it tells us that it was taken in 1929 to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of John Horrell and Son Ltd of Wellington Hill, Raunds.

The next glimpse of John came to me when I saw a copy of the *Rance Revisited* magazine in the local library. To my surprise I saw a piece on *Adams Brothers* by Paul Roberts. He movingly describes the clickers breaking into song as they worked. They would sing in harmony, with descant, songs from *Nellie Dean* to *Abide with Me* and *Crimond*, which was known locally as the 'Ringstead Hymn' because of its Dissenting associations. He goes on to tell of an incident involving Jack Ball (which seems to imply that he was working at Adams at the time).

They credited Jack Ball with causing Labour to lose the seat in the 1935 General Election. Wing Commander James, the Conservative candidate, had as his agent a Finedon man called Chapman, nicknamed 'Sugar Chapman'. They always introduced him at political meetings as a 'Conservative Working Man'. His presence at political meetings was like a red rag to some of the Raunds' Radical shoemakers. No one can recall hearing Sugar Chapman speak because of the uproar that his presence caused. As Wing Commander James left his Eve of Poll meeting in Raunds, Jack kicked his backside for bringing 'Sugar Chapman'. 'CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE ASSAULTED AT RAUNDS,' said the headlines in the next day's Evening Telegraph.



John (third from right) in Clicking Department of John Horrell & Sons Ltd (1929).

I first encountered John when I was a young child and I went on the bus from Wellingborough to Raunds to visit my grandparents. I remember my grandmother a little. She was a proud woman who kept a neat house with polished brass jugs, full of coloured wooden spills, in the fireplace. I can remember using these spills to make pictures and roads for toy cars on the mat in front of the fireplace. She had a special tiered plate for cakes and

was mortified when I discovered a fly in my Tizer. Of my grandfather I have only two memories. One is of him standing in the workshop in his son Ronald's garden where he was still doing outwork. He did the old clickers' trick for me of taking a circle of leather, sticking it to the bench with a small curved knife and then pulling to make a shoelace. Magic and shoemakers are often associated. The other memory is of him sitting silently in the corner in Marshalls Road, as the grandfather clock beside him ticked the seconds slowly away.

He died on the 8th February 1953 aged 70 years to be followed by his 'beloved wife' Eunice on 21st August 1956. They are buried together in Raunds Cemetery. In 1919 *The Shoe and Leather News Illustrated Biographic Dictionary of British Shoe and Leather Traders* listed six boot and shoe firms in Raunds: *Adams Bros.*; *R. Coggins and Sons*; *Tebbutt and Hall Bros Ltd.*; *The St. Crispin's Productive Society Ltd.*; *Regulation Boot Co. (Raunds) Ltd.* and *John Horrell and Son*. All have fallen silent and many have been demolished. Most of the backyard workshops have also disappeared. What was once the vibrant lifeblood of the Nene valley communities is now archaeology.

Sons of Thomas Samuel and Harriett Ball

This is another story of two brothers. Their grandfather was James Ball, born in Ringstead in about 1831. He was the son of Daniel and Phoebe Ball and most of the large family joined the military or looked for their fortunes in the New World. James was one of the few who stayed close to home.

James, together with his brothers Thomas, Samuel and Elisha, was baptised in Ringstead Church on September 12th 1841. He is aged 9 in the Census which preceded the baptism by a few months so he was born in about 1831/2. He left home early and I believe that he might be wrongly entered as John Ball, aged 19, born in Ringstead, a shepherd living in at Wold Lodges in Tansor which is downstream on the Nene, on the other side of Oundle.

James married Emma Storks (or Stocks) from Riseley, some ten miles south, in Ringstead Church on 17th October 1855. Like his siblings, James had to leave Ringstead to find work, but he did not have to travel far, and was by 1861 a shepherd, like his father, living in Titchmarsh. He was with his wife Emma and their two children Phoebe and John who had both been born in Denford. The family had returned to Ringstead by 1871 and two further children Thomas and George have been born (all children now shown as born in Ringstead).

It is Thomas whose sons we are following here. He was born on 29th December 1865 and had a Methodist baptism on 6th May 1866. It seems that his middle name was Samuel and he was sometimes known by this name. In the 1881 Census he is Samuel, aged 16, still living at home in the Ringstead High Street and working as a farm labourer. By 22nd April 1889 when he married Harriett Christiana Wright at Islip he had become a bootmaker.



Pearce's Row was in the narrow lane on the right between the Police House and the old row of cottages. Church Street now ends at the road sign but in the Census continues to the corner.

The couple moved to Pearce's Row, Church Street, in Ringstead and by the 1891 Census they already had two children, Thomas Horace (1) and George James who was just one month old. By 1901 the family had moved to High Street in Moulton where Thomas was an army boot maker. There were two further children, Leonard who was born on 28th February 1893 and Emma born about 1897. The couple moved back nearer to home and in 1911 were living in Francis Street in the Westfields area of Raunds. Only their youngest children, Leonard who was 17 and unemployed and Emma (15) who was a "shoewoman girl", were still at home.

George James Ball (1891-?)

Thomas junior and his younger brother, George James Ball, had already left home. It is George who we are following first. His story after the 1901 Census is a murky one and much of it I have found in retrospect as it is referred to in reports of later crimes.

In the Northampton Mercury of 12th April 1912, Inspector Dunn, who was a witness in a reported case against George, states:

He was a native of Ringstead and had on several occasions enlisted, each time deserting and taking with him valuable property. The Witness [Inspector Dunn] held a warrant for his arrest in connection with the robbery of £50 worth of silver from the barracks of the Loyal Lancashire Regiment.

George was travelling the country trying to get money wherever he could and, it seems, usually by criminal means. We know that he had returned to Northamptonshire because the case which revealed his past wrongdoing was held at Northampton. George was charged with a jewellery robbery at the Corby warehouse of Leslie Ansell between the 16th and 19th of December 1911. The list of jewellery stolen was extensive:

. . . 247 gold rings, six long gold guards, eight gold bracelets, one rolled gold bracelet, eight gold chains, three gold pendants, one silver cigarette case, three silver matchboxes, eight long silver guards, 12 silver curb chains, 25 gold pins, nine silver brooches, and 16 watches.

George, as seems to have been his habit, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 15 months with hard labour.

After being released, George must have made his way down to Portsmouth, and enlisted again, this time in the Royal Navy. George James Ball born in Ringstead in Northamptonshire signed up for the Royal Navy on 25th November 1913. He had a union jack with "Unity" tattooed on his left forearm and a scar on the back of his left hand and a white scar on his chest. We know that he was 5ft 8¾ inches with a chest size of 38¾ inches with brown hair, grey eyes and a fresh complexion. (nearly all the military had grey eyes). He first served on *Victory II*. This was the name given to the barracks and administrative base in Portsmouth.

He was given a "very good" character and ability rating on 31st December 1913 and moved to serve on a light cruiser, the *HMS Liverpool* on 7th May 1914 as a storekeeper.

It was at this point that something went wrong for he was discharged with "Services No Longer Required" (D.S.N.L.R.) on 27th May just a few weeks after his move. His record also notes the "Recovery of his GCB" [Good Conduct Badge]. He was sentenced to Confinement to Barracks (C.B.). There is some confusion because his official military service records give his date of birth as 26th March 1893 rather than 1891 but this is either a typographical error or perhaps part of George's subterfuge.

Under *The Prevention of Crimes Act* of 1871 habitual criminals were recorded in detail in a register. These records are now online and in them we find "George James Ball, alias Thompson and George Ball". His rank is now given as Stoker in the Royal Navy. He is shown as being born in Ringstead and to have a "flag, flower and UNITY" tattooed on his forearm and that at the end of his sentence he intended to live at 40 Pratt Road in Rushden, Northamptonshire.

From the *Calendar of Prisoners* tried at the Portsmouth Quarter Sessions of July 1914 we learn of the two thefts of which he had been accused. They both took place in May 1914 and included a suit of clothes, a vest, a cigarette case, a tie and a Post Office Savings Book. He had been arrested on 29th May and as we have seen confined to barracks. He was charged on the 9th June and pleaded guilty at his trial on 9th July when he was sentenced to two concurrent terms of six months with hard labour.

Great Britain had entered the First World War on 4th August 1914 when George would have still been serving his sentence. He was released on 10th December 1914 so what happened to him after that? Did he sign up again or was he the George Ball from Peterborough Co-op who was appealing against being called up in 1917. Without another lead we may never know.

Leonard Ball (1893 – 1917)

His brother, Leonard had a very different military career. When we left him in 1911 he was seventeen years old (but I think actually 18) and an unemployed shoehand living in Raunds. Late in the previous year Leonard had signed up for the Northamptonshire Regiment Special Reserve. He was 5ft 5¼ inches high, weighing 113 lbs. (8 st 1lb). He had scars on both knees and one wonders if this was from his shoe work. He received a reference from Mr. Lawson from Adams Brothers who said he had worked there for three years but had had to be laid off because of “slackness of trade”. He was a private in the Special Reserve from 31st October 1910 until 30th March 1911 when he left to join the Royal Navy.

Like his brother, he started his training at Portsmouth (*Victory II*) before joining various ships for periods of service, returning to Portsmouth in between ships. He was a Stoker Second Class on the *Renown* (30/04/1911-23/06/1911); *Hecla* (22/09/1911-30/04/1912; *Topaze* (01/05/1912-31/12/1912) where he was made a Stoker First Class on 1st June 1912; and *Princess Royal* (14/11/1912-14/07/1916).

As we can see, Leonard served on the *Princess Royal* from the start of the war until 14th July 1916. During this time, he had taken part in the Battles of Dogger Bank, Heligoland, Bight and the great Battle of Jutland. The *Princess Royal* went on to have a comparatively action free war but Leonard moved to the 10th Destroyer Flotilla of the Harwich Force He was first briefly on *HMS Dido* (09/09/1916 – 10/10/1916) which was the Depot Ship of the Flotilla and then *HMS Myngs* (11/10/1916 – 16/02/1917), before joining *HMS Torrent* (17/02/1917 – 23/12/1917).

HMS Torrent was part of the 10th Destroyer Flotilla of the Harwich Force. The *Torrent* was a brand new R Class destroyer and was the best type that the Royal Navy possessed. Leonard must have been pleased to be working in the most modern engine room.

On the 4th June 1917, the Dover Patrol had bombarded the port of Ostend and *Torrent* along with other light cruisers destroyed and damaged German torpedo boats. Leonard was made an Acting Leading Stoker on 11th November 1917.

In the summer of 1917 Leonard had married Bertha Mary Skevington from Harrold, just across the border in Bedfordshire. He then went back to *HMS Torrent* which along with sister ships *HMS Tornado* and *HMS Surprise* sailed as part of a convoy.

The Harwich Force destroyers formed part of the “Beef Run” convoys to and from the Netherlands. On this occasion they escorted the convoy to the Hook of Holland and waited near the Maas Light Buoy for it to return. At about 2pm on the morning of 23rd December they ran into a German minefield set to protect the port of Rotterdam and *Torrent* struck a mine and three other destroyers went to her aid. She struck another mine, however, and her sister ships *Surprise* and *Tornado*, trying to rescue the crew from the water also struck mines and sank. *Radiant* was undamaged and picked up men from the sea. 252 sailors died but only three men from the *Torrent* survived.

Among those lost was Leonard Ball. His body was never found and he is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial. He was twenty-four years old and had been in the Royal Navy for eight years.

Leonard's parents Thomas and Harriett had moved sometime after 1911 to 92 Queen Street in Rushden and it was there that they received the death of their son Leonard. It seems that Leonard had been living in Pratt Street in Rushden but his new wife moved back to Harrold, perhaps to be with her family after Leonard's death. They had only been married five months but had spent little of this time together.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Bertha remarried to John Drage in the summer of 1922 and moved to Bozeat and lived to be eighty-one years old.

Thomas Horace Ball (1889-1963)

I ought to add, briefly, that the oldest brother, Thomas Horace Ball, born on the 14th October 1889 in Ringstead, was also a soldier in the First World War. In 1911 a Horrice [sic] Ball, aged 21, was a boarder with Jonathan and Miriam Ellis at 6 Woburn Place in Rushden. He was single and a shoemaker. I believe that later that year he married Ada Ward, who had been born in Northampton in 1893.

It seems likely that he was the T. H. Ball, a "Nailer on Army Work", who came before the Northamptonshire Military Tribunal on the 1st April 1917. He was 27 years old at the time and he was probably enlisted within the next few months.

There is some uncertainty about Thomas's army career but the Medal Roll shows that he served abroad with the 5th Royal West Surrey Regiment (Regimental No. 60528) and the 9th Middlesex Regiment, sometimes known as the Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex) Regiment with Regimental No. 57010. Another local man, Herbert Brawn had been given the number G/60532 with the Royal West Surreys (RWS) and transferred to the Middlesex with number G/57009 so would have followed a similar path to Thomas Ball. Both may have progressed from the RWS to the Middlesex but were then "attached" back to them when the former suffered heavy casualties. According to his Medal Card, it was with the Middlesex that he ended the war but we know that Brawn was killed on the 25th May 1919 in Kurdistan while attached to the West Surreys.

With extra wartime units being demobilised after the Armistices there was often more fluidity between Regiments to maintain a fighting force. The Medal Card shows that he was entitled to the British and Victory Medals but, unusually, also the General Service Medal (1918). This had been instituted for those who had served in minor operations for which no separate medal was intended. He also received the Kurdistan Clasp which clarifies where he had fought.

The 9th Middlesex had been fighting against the Ottoman Empire in Mesopotamia and were in the area of Tikrit when the Turks surrendered. Demobilisation began but then some companies were ordered to join a punitive column into Kurdistan, The Kurds had rebelled

several times against the Turks and were promised a small “homeland” but this plan was later abandoned by the Allied Powers.

In the 5th Battalion Royal West Surreys’ *War Diary*, we see that, on the 13th March 1919, 5 British Officers and 194 Other Ranks arrived from the 9th Middlesex and were played into camp at Baiji and given breakfast. Other units had also arrived over the last few days. The Kurdish warlord Sheyk Mahmud Barzani had risen against the British Mandate in Kurdish Iraq. He gathered together troops from different disaffected groups in the region and ambushed a British military column. The rising was eventually, temporarily defeated, and Sheyk Mahmud was sent for a year in exile in India. That was not the end of the story but conscripted men like Thomas would have only wanted demobilisation and a return home. Herbert Brawn had been denied that choice.

Thomas returned to Rushden and he and Ada were together at 14 Sartoris Road in Rushden in the 1925 *Electoral Register*. They were also there in 1939 when he was described as a “Motor Lorry Driver”. He possibly died in 1963.

Chapter 7

Sons of Henry and Rhoda Bannister

Henry Bannister (1860-1940)

Usually, when I am writing these short biographies, I look at the man's family tree to see where he came from. In the case of Henry and Sydney Bannister I first thought that it was a simple father and son relationship although I thought Henry was old to have been accepted as a recruit. It turned out that the family was more complicated than I had expected.

In the 1911 Census for Ringstead, Henry Bannister, a 50-year-old shoehand born in Northampton, was living in Carlow Road. With him was his wife Roda [sic] 47 and born in Ringstead and their children Mag [Margaret] (14) and Sydney (11) both born in Finedon, Julia (10) born in Northampton and Florence (8), Maud (7), and Kitty (5) all born in Ringstead. It also showed that Rhoda had been married 10 years and had had six children all of whom were still living. Again, it all seemed very straightforward.

Looking back, the 1901 Census complicated the family situation a little. Henry Bannister was 40-years-old and living at 13 Francis Street in Northampton. With him was Rhoda Warren (36), a boot closer who is shown as his housekeeper. With them were Margaret (4), Sydney (1), and James (1 month) and Henry's brother, James Bannister (50). Sandwiched between the two Bannister men it appears that the children are dittoed to Rhoda's surname, Warren.

The Register of Births for England and Wales records the older children: Margaret Warren in January – March 1897; Sidney Bannister Warren in July-Sept 1899 (both in Wellingborough District); James Bannister Warren in April-June 1901 in the Northampton District. The National Marriage Register also shows that Henry Bannister married Rhoda Warren in the January-March period of 1904 in the Thrapston District.

Once again this is not very complicated. Henry and Rhoda had children before their marriage, common today and far less uncommon then, than is often supposed. Once again, however, it is not that simple.

Rhoda Warren was of gypsy heritage, through her mother, Vashti Smith who was baptised on February 3rd 1839 in Corby, the daughter of Robert and Rhoda.

In late November 1882 an Inquest was held at the *Black Horse Inn* in Ringstead. Vashti Warren stated that her daughter Rhoda Warren had been living in Finedon and she had not been aware until very recently that she was expecting a child. Vashti's husband, Thomas Warren had gone to the Relieving Officer in Raunds to obtain a certificate so that Rhoda could be taken into Thrapston Union Workhouse, which had a hospital wing. A midwife was called and Thomas went for a cart to take her, but the child was born before he returned. It was healthy and not premature but was said by the doctor to have never breathed. He also said that the anti-bilious pills she had taken the night before may have accelerated the birth but had not been taken to procure an abortion. They consisted of jallup ("jalap" was from

the root of a *Morning Glory* type plant and was a purgative) and rhubarb. The Inquest Jury found that the child had been stillborn.

We see that she had been living in Finedon and that there may be children earlier than the ones we already are aware of. It is another report, this time in the *Northampton Mercury*, on 19th March 1897 that shows how bad rural poverty could be at this time and also gives a further twist to the story.

Alfred Drage and Rhoda Warren, Finedon, were charged by Inspector W. Ward, N.S.P.C.C. with cruelty to children by neglecting the same in a manner likely to cause injury to their health between March 6th and 22nd. . . [The prosecutor] said the parties had been living together for 15 years unmarried and the children were illegitimate. . . On examining the house, the Inspector found two of the four rooms used only for lumber. The bedroom occupied two beds, one composed of straw and the other of shavings and were on the floor. They were alive with vermin and were rotten with filth. For bed clothing they had rags and old clothes. Warren said she had neglected the children and house to enable her to keep her work, boot closing, by which she could earn 10s. a week. The boy, Oliver earned 6s. . . . Drage earned on average 18s. per week. . . All the family slept in one bedroom. . . Mr. H. Burland, surgeon, next gave evidence. The youngest children, he said, were poorly nourished. The baby weighed 5 lbs instead of 8 lbs and Frances only weighed 14 lbs and ought to have weighed 20 lbs.

A friend vouchsafed that Rhoda was hardworking and cleaned her house every week but they were both sentenced to three months imprisonment.

It was probably at this time that the children were taken into Wellingborough Union Workhouse. It seems possible that, at about this time, Alfred Drage was committed to Berrywood Lunatic Asylum in Northampton for he died there on 23rd January 1899.

Meanwhile it appears that Rhoda had met up with Henry Bannister and, as we have seen, they had further children and married. Apart, perhaps, for Margaret, born in 1897, it does not seem that any of the children from her partnership with Drage ever lived with the Bannisters.

If we now move on to the beginning of the First World War, many in government were horrified when they saw the undersized and unhealthy soldiers who now emerged from the slums to make up the New Army. This was particularly so of large cities like Glasgow but we can see it across Great Britain in the military records.

Henry was the first to enlist, on 26th July 1915. He was 5 feet 4½ inches tall with a 36-inch chest. He was in his mid-fifties but. He must have lied about his age because he said he was 39 years 5 months old. The army would only take men between 18 and 41 at this time although some did lie about their age. One may ask why he would leave his wife and 6 children to voluntarily join the army. Was it patriotism? He joined the 4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment (Regimental No. 4520) which was a Territorial force and never left England. He went to Halton Park where much of the training took place. It soon became

obvious that he was not fit to be a soldier or handle a gun ("do musketry"). He was invalided out, the reason given was that he had an old shoulder injury sustained in a fall before he joined the army, he was now said to be 56 at his next birthday.

After serving for one year and 15 days he was discharged on 9th August 1916 and, duty done, had to return to civilian life. He received a gratuity of 24 weeks from 5th June 1918 to 19th November 1918. Interestingly, the first child on the pension card is listed as James Warren *Drage* born 24th April 1901, Florence born 29th November 1902, Maud born 23rd November 1903 and Kitty born 13th July 1905. He was not entitled to any medals it appears.

In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Henry was living in Carlow and his birth was given as 4th May 1860. He is shown as retired and formerly a shoemaker. Rhoda is shown as being born on 20th May 1873 which I think is ten years too late and has the most usual occupation for married women in the Register, "unpaid domestic duties", beside her name. Henry died the following year aged eighty. Rhoda died four years later in 1944 aged eighty-one.

Sydney Bannister (1899-1998)

If Henry had a quiet war spent in England, as one would expect for a recruit of his age, his son Sydney Bannister (as I will call him) had a very different experience of military life. Unfortunately, apart from his Medal Card, I have not found any other of his records.

We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he joined the 1st Battalion of the Rifle Brigade and had served in France, Belgium and Germany. His Medal Card records that his Regimental Number was 41313. He was not entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15 Star and we must assume that he was conscripted when he was eighteen years old in 1917 or 1918 and was sent for training with the 52nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade in Colchester, but probably did not get posted abroad until he was nineteen years old in 1918.

The 1st Battalion of the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own) fought in 1917 at Arras, being in action at the First and Third Battles of the Scarpe. They then headed north for the Third Battle of Ypres where they fought at the Battle of Polygon Wood, the Battle of Broodseinde, the Battle of Poelcapelle and the First Battle of Passchendaele. In 1918 they were in action on the Somme before returning to Flanders where they fought in the Battle of Hinges Ridge during the Battle of Hazebrouck and in the Battle of Bethune. The Brigade then became part of the Advance on Flanders, the Second Battle of Arras, the Battles of the Hindenburg Line and the Final Advance into Picardy.

It seems that the 1st Battalion ended the war in Belgium but we see in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that Sydney was part of the Army of Occupation and had served in Germany. Unfortunately, at the moment we cannot tell just how this came about and the details of Sydney's part in these operations. We do know that he was entitled to the British and Victory Medals.

After the war, Sydney returned to Ringstead and lived with his parents for a couple of years but he then moved north. It seems likely that he had become a labourer on the railway. We know this because Sydney had contracted Diphtheria while in the Army and as a result of

this disease he developed "VDH" which stood for valvular disease of the heart. He had been awarded a pension. From his Pension Cards we can see that he was not discharged until the 21st November 1919 and that the pension was first paid to him in Ringstead but then he had moved to Station Cottages in Tamworth.

This information provides us with a link that allows us to look briefly at the rest of Sydney's life. In the Autumn of 1922, he married Jessie Brierly in Tamworth District. By 1939 the couple were living at 20 Moor Lane in Amington, which was just over a mile to the east of Tamworth. Moor Lane ran alongside the main lines and bent across a bridge over the railway. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* Sidney [sic] was shown as born on the 27th July 1899 and, in the longest occupation description that I have found, he was a "Permanent Way Labourer Railway Engineering Maintenance and Repair Staff". Jessie had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". Two daughters are shown and there are two others in the residence whose records have been officially closed, so perhaps there were four children. Gloria, the oldest child shown, was "A Textile Machinist in Relation to War Work".

With his heart problems after the First World War one would not expect Sydney to have had a long life but I believe that he died in 1998, in his 99th year.

Chapter 8

Arthur Frank Barnard and Ronald Barnard

The Barnard Family had moved to Ringstead from Elton in Huntingdonshire in about 1896. The tracing of their ancestry is confused by the fact that, in the 1861 Census, Emmanuel, who was the father of the two brothers we are looking at in this biography, had the surname Barnett. He had also been christened Barnett on 29th April 1860 when he was two year's old, son of Hannah Barnett, a single woman. Hannah had been a servant, aged eight, at Winwick in 1851 and a housemaid aged 19 to a farmer and his wife in Elton in 1861.

In 1871, however, Hannah and her son Emmanuel were living with her parents. William and Mary Ann, who in 1861 were Barnett and are now Barnard, so the whole family has changed its name. This may be due to acceptance of a Census Collectors version of their surname because of their lack of literacy or it might be a deliberate act. It was not uncommon especially among people of gypsy heritage.

Emmanuel became a labourer on the railways and in Spring 1884, as Emmanuel Barnett, he married Margaret Hilliard in the Oundle Registrar District. They spent their early married life in Elton and had three children: two sons, Jesse and Arthur Frank (born 10th April 1889), and a daughter, Kate. In about 1890 they moved to Ringstead. In the 1891 Census for Carlow Street in Ringstead Emmanuel Barnard was a platelayer on the London and North-Western line. Visiting Emmanuel, Margaret and the three children was Arthur Hilliard, aged twelve and born in Elton, thus confirming the Barnett/Barnard transformation.

By 1901 they were living in Carlow and Emmanuel was still a platelayer. There is another child, now, called Ronald, aged four and born in Ringstead. Emmanuel was 52 years old by 1911 and appears to have a platelayer's pension which would seem to imply that he had some kind of disability. Frank, who seems to have discarded his first name, Arthur, was 22 years of age and working as a horseman on a farm. Ronald, aged 14, was a carrier's boy. The family were now living in Barritt's Yard in Ringstead.

It is Frank (as I will now call him) and Ronald who are the soldiers of the First World War that we are following here.

Arthur Frank Barnard (1889-1949)

In the year before the war started, on 5th July 1913, Frank married Sarah Elizabeth Judd at Thrapston Register Office. They had two children, Florence Mary, born on 28th August 1913 and Lily, born on 4th December 1914, both in Raunds. It was in Raunds, too, that Arthur Frank Barnard" signed the Military Attestation Form on 9th December 1915. He was 27 years 8 months old and a milkman on a farm. He was 5 feet 3 inches tall with a 35½ inch chest. Initially, he would have been on reserve but on 25th May 1916 his attestation was approved and he was mobilized. On 30th May 1916 he was posted to the 3rd Battalion of the

Northamptonshire Regiment. He remained in England, training, until 13th September 1916 but the next day he embarked at Folkestone and disembarked at Boulogne in France.

He would have been taken to one of the base camps before being allocated to the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshires, in the field, on 30th September 1916.

He was to remain in France for 240 days. He saw the last days of the Battle of the Somme, which was the name given to the campaign around the area of that river which, confusingly, encompassed a number of individually named battles. The *War Diary* for the 6th Battalion reveals that it had just been engaged in the Battle of Thiepval Ridge where it had lost 13 of its officers wounded or dead, and 157 Other Ranks, wounded, missing or dead.

The Diary for the 1st October reported that one hundred men had joined the Battalion at night and Frank would have been one of these new boys. The next day there was company training but on 3rd they were taken by train to Candas and then marched to Bernsail, arriving at 9 pm in the dark. The following days were spent in training, Church parades and intercompany football matches. It would have been obvious that they would soon be in action in what became known as the Battle of Ancre Heights.

They moved with the rest of the 54th Brigade on 15th October, finally ending in billets in Bouzincourt and began to practise their roles in the plan of attack. They moved again to Albert and on 25th October 1916 they relieved the 7th Bedfordshire Regiment in the trenches north of Coucelette. Immediately they were under enemy fire and had six casualties on that first night. Frank would have been quickly introduced to the reality of war.

On the 26th October the *War Diary* recorded:

Weather fairly fine. Light continuous shelling of REGINA and VANCOUVER trenches specially on left of REGINA which was constantly being blown in by enfilade of 5.9 guns from direction of LOUPART WOOD. About 1 a.m. two Germans came up to our parapet and gave themselves up. "A" Company H.Q. in REGINA TRENCH was twice blown in, in the early morning. Casualties 8.

They were relieved on the 29th by the 8th Suffolk Regiment and, in misty conditions, this went well. The Diary entry, however, is scathing about the conditions in the trench and the inability of the artillery to stop the enfilade fire. It records:

The enemy showed no activity in front but the continuous enfilade shelling of trenches which contained few traverses and no dug-outs made this a very trying time in the trenches. Total casualties 52 including 7 missing.

We see how the design of the trenches could be a matter of life or death. The traverses were angles or bend in the trenches and the dug-outs were small caves cut into the trench, often supported with boards or corrugated iron sheets which gave the men some respite from the weather. Both features also gave the soldiers some protection against "enfilade" fire where the enemy artillery was in a position to fire along the trenches from the side.

For most men it was the details that mattered. The ordinary soldier rarely had much of a grasp of the wider battle tactics but tried to do what was required of him in his small sector

and to survive day-to-day. The cold fogs and rain made life miserable, with long periods of boredom suddenly broken into by hellish times of gas, shells and bullets, of mayhem and fear.

The Battle of Ancre Heights finished on 12th November with some limited gains and led into the Battle of Ancre which was the last British attack of the Battle of the Somme. The rain had stopped on the night of 11th November and a full moon illuminated the landscape. Towards dawn, however, a thick mist reduced visibility to nil which masked the Allied attack but also led to units losing their way in the thick mud. The Northamptonshires did not take part in the first offensive but were moved up to the Front Line trenches on the 18th November as part of the 55th Brigade. For them the zero hour was 6.10 am but, because of lack of communications, they were “not able to carry out the consolidation allotted to them”.

After Ancre, the Battalion marched from Warley through Berneuil, Demqueury, Le Plevy and Oneux to Neuf Moulin where they trained and practised attacks before once again moving to Canchy on 14th December. On 25th December they had Christmas Dinner in two relays.

The new year continued with training and the occasional bath. They also received new box respirators which gave much more protection against the gas attacks.. On 11th January they marched along bad roads arriving on the 15th at the Front. They took over duties from 2/8th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment at Aveluy, where there was little action. On the 15th February they again took over Front Line trenches from the 8th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. The following day a party of officers and NCOs marked out their battle stations.

By 4.50 am the next morning the whole Battalion was in position at Miramont. The ground was now wet and slippery and the overcast sky made it very dark.. The attack began following an artillery barrage but found that the barbed wire had not been cut in enough places, so the soldiers had to funnel through the available gaps. After some good forward progress, they met considerable opposition and although still moving forward they suffered many casualties. This war of attrition continued through March at St. Leger and late in the month they moved to billets at Thiennes.

On 30th April they were once more in the trenches, this time west of Cherisy. The weather was fine and there was little shelling. On 1st May they were relieved and marched back to bivouacs at Neuville Vitesse where they once more prepared for battle and on 3rd May they marched back to the trenches. They were not a first engaged but were ordered to counter attack after a “rolling barrage” of shells from the artillery. [During the war the “rolling barrage” was developed where the artillery shelled just ahead of the advancing troops. It could be effective but it did lead to casualties from “friendly fire”.] There was much enemy gunfire and “B” Company suffered 50% casualties and “C” Company also suffered badly and had to withdraw to its original positions.

It was during this first engagement on 3rd May 1917 that Frank Barnard suffered a gunshot wound to his right hand. He went via the 44th Field Hospital to Le Treport from where he was taken, by the Hospital ship *St Denis*, back to England on 3rd June. Frank was to remain in

England for 159 days and would never return to the Western Front although his war was not over.

He went first to Wharnccliffe War Hospital in Sheffield, arriving on the 11th May and remaining there for 56 days. He seems to have been left with numbness in his index finger but it was a wound that many of his fellow soldiers would have welcomed. In July 1917 he went to Thetford for training and was posted to the 3rd Northamptonshire Regiment on 8th September. On 18th October 1917 he embarked at Southampton and on 1st November he went ashore at Alexandria in Egypt as part of the 1/4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment which had been in Egypt since the end of 1915, having fought in Gallipoli..

He was part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) fighting against the Ottoman Empire which was an ally of Germany in the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire had been created by Turkish tribes and, at its height controlled much of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. By 1914, it was disintegrating and was sometimes called “the sick man of Europe”

The EEF was a very multicultural force with troops from the British Isles, India, Australia, New Zealand and the West Indies. The original reason for its establishment was to protect the Suez Canal but its brief had been widened and a series of defensive posts had been built extending into Palestine. In March 1917 the EEF had tried to take the Ottoman garrison in Gaza but the two attempts had been disastrous failures.

When Frank arrived in Egypt he was promoted to Acting Corporal. Neither the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* nor his military records show that he served in Palestine and it may be that he remained in the Suez area protecting the canal. The 1/4th, however, did take part in the Palestine campaign so it is certainly possible that he served there too. In 1917, they had fought in Battles of Gaza and then the Battle of Jaffa. Frank would have joined them late in this campaign.

In 1918 they were also involved in the fight at Ras al Ain. This was the site of one of the death camps where mainly Armenians were sent. The word “genocide” was first used about the systematic extermination of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottomans, mainly during the First World War. The able-bodied men were either massacred or put into forced labour camps and the women, children and the infirm were taken on death marches into the Syrian desert from which few returned.

On 1st June 1918 Frank had attended the Imperial School of Instruction at Zeitoun, rejoining his unit on 28th of the same month. This establishment on the outskirts of Cairo was mainly a training school for officers and non-commissioned officers. It did, however, also run courses in Stokes Mortar, Machine and Lewis Gun instruction, as well as course in Signals and Telephones, and Artillery.

The 1/4th Northamptonshires were also involved in operations at Berukin. The final offensive of the EEF, known as the Battle of Megiddo, opened on 19th September 1918 with the Battle of Sharon which was ultimately successful although the Battalion suffered many casualties including the death of the Commanding Officer.

That was their last action and the 1/4th ended the war on 31st October 1918 in Beirut, which at this time was part of Palestine. The Armistice of Mudros was signed on that same day.

He would have remained after the Armistice as part of an Army of Occupation. In early 1919 the Battalion had to suppress riots in Egypt which delayed their demobilisation.

On 16th February 1919 Frank Barnard was sent to the demobilisation camp at Kantara. The following day he was admitted to the hospital suffering from scabies. On 25th February he embarked at Port Said and was shipped home. Finally, on 12th April 1919 he was demobbed and transferred to "Class Z" which meant that he could be recalled if hostilities suddenly broke out again. His character had been assessed as "Very Good".

His Medal Card shows that his Regimental Number was 25165 and that he was entitled to the Victory and British Medals. It may be that this card was written before his time in the Middle East so he may have been entitled to at least one other medal.

The *Electoral Roll* for 1920 recorded that he was living in Bank Cottages in Ringstead and he and his family lived there for most of that decade. In 1931 he is recorded as living in the Council Houses in Denford Road. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Arthur F. Barnard was a "road man" for the N.C.C. (Northamptonshire County Council). Sarah was with him and there are four children: Lily born 4th December 1914, Arthur born 27th November 1919, Clifford born 14th October 1923 and one record officially closed.

Arthur died, aged sixty, early in 1949.

Ronald Barnard (1896-1917)

Some would have said that Frank Barnard had a good war, a small injury taking him away from the trenches. His younger brother, Ronald, born on 27th August 1896 and baptised on October 18th in Ringstead Parish Church, was not so fortunate.



Ronald Barnard

Rushden Argus With thanks to the Rushden & District History Society.

In the 1911 Ringstead Census Ronald was fourteen years old and a "carrier's boy" living with his parents Emmanuel and Margaret. He followed his father onto the railway, as an

employee of the *London and North Western Railway Company*, and in 1913 or possibly 1914 became a junior porter on Ringstead Station. It seems likely that he was still there when war was declared.

Details of his medals are all that now exist of his military records. They do show that he was entitled to the British and Victory medals but not the 1914 or 1914/5 Stars which probably means that he was called up in early 1916 following the introduction of conscription in January 1916.

By this time the "Old "Pals" Battalions which could take out a whole generation of young men from a community, had stopped and men were allocated to a range of regiments. Ronald was posted to the 7th Suffolk Regiment and given the Regimental Number 45027. At some point he was transferred to the 1/4th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment. We know that the 1/4th Battalion was, in 1916, at the Battle of the Somme, fighting in the Battle of Albert, the attacks on High Wood and the capture of Boriska and Dewdrop Trenches, In 1917 they took part in the First and Second Battles of the Scarpe which were part of the Battle of Arras, The Actions on the Hindenburg Line, Operations on the Flanders coast, the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge and the Battle of Polygon Wood.

Unfortunately, we cannot be sure when Ronald joined the Battalion in the field so we will just tell of his final days.

The names of the later 1917 battles fought in by the 1/4th Suffolk Regiment may not register with most people because they form part of the Battle of Passchendaele or the Third Battle of Ypres which are the names given to this overall campaign. This was fought in Flanders at the western end of the Front, near the coast of Belgium. Like most actions in this terrible war, it was a story of small gains and reversals, with heavy loss of life. It was the wettest August for 30 years and heavy rain and the consequential mud made movement difficult for the soldiers and almost impossible for the heavy artillery.

On 12th October 1917 the Allies tried to gain ground around the village of Passchendaele but the continual driving rain caused the High Command to abandon the planned attack. The 4th Battalion of the Suffolks were in what had been called the "Railway Dugouts" near Ieper (Ypres). The War Diary for the Battalion recorded:

October 12th. Bad weather. Parties as usual. 1 O.R killed 1 O.R. wounded. The minimum reserve under Capt. H. Pretty left at 11 a.m. for KORTEPYP Camp

October 13th Bad Weather. Parties as usual

October 14th " "

October 15th Orders received from C.R.E. 1st Division at 12.10 p.m. that Bn. Would be relieved at about 12 noon that day. After numerous enquiries from the Division and the 9th Bd. Who knew nothing about it, the Bn. Was eventually relieved by the 7th Leicestershire Regiment.

It was during this period that Ronald Barnard was wounded. It may be that he was the "Other Rank", for only officers and N.C.O.'s tended to have names, who had been wounded on October 12th.

Ronald was taken to Godewaersvelde casualty clearing station where he was put on a train to Rouen. He was admitted to hospital in Rouen on 13th October with gunshot wounds to his right arm and left thigh. The transcription of the hospital records state that he was discharged back to duty on the 14th October. This seems unlikely and he almost certainly died at the hospital of his gunshot wounds on 15th October.



*No. 5 General Hospital at Rouen (posed in good weather). There were a number in Rouen.
Wikipedia Commons: © Wellcome Images RAMC 738/8 Phot No. L0027212
<http://welcomimages.org>*

His death was listed in the *Northampton Mercury* on Friday 23rd November 1917, although he is shown as coming from Thrapston. His name is on the Ringstead War Memorial in the churchyard. He has a grave at the St Sever Cemetery Extension near Rouen which was one of two burial grounds for the hospitals. He was twenty years old.

Chapter 9

Sons of John and Edith Bates

Bates was a common surname in the Ringstead area in the Nineteenth Century. They were not all related, however, and one John Bates came into the village as a Baptist Minister.

It was a Church of England Bates family who we are looking at first. Gabriel Bates married Hannah Mitchell on 24th March 1829 in Ringstead Parish Church. He became a shepherd, just over the border, at Keyston in Bedfordshire and the couple had a son, born there in 1841, who they also named Gabriel. He did not follow his father but became a shoemaker and, on 3rd July 1863, he married Hannah Ball in Denford Church.

It is this couple's son, John, born in 1871 who was the father of our two Great War soldiers. John married Edith Jackson in Woodford on 26th December 1892. Two of their children, James (or more usually, Jim) born on 9th November 1895 and William Baden Powell Bates, born on 10th (or 12th in some military records) May 1900, we will be looking at here.

James (Jim) Bates (1895-1952)

We start with something of a mystery. In the 1911 Census for Ringstead, the father, John Henry Bates, aged 39, was with his two sons, James aged 15 and already a worker in a local factory shoe room and William Baden Bates (10) still at school. John was shown as having been married for eighteen years and having had five children, four of whom were still living. This information is normally put in the wife's section but Edith and two of the children are not there. John is not shown as widowed but I have not found Edith in 1911 or later. There may be some simple explanation for this, such as a clerical or transcription error.

There are some newspaper reports of John Bates being involved in fights. Was he a violent man? On the other hand, maybe it was the dogs that drove her away! On 27th November 1908 the Northampton Mercury had reported:

John Bates, shoe operative, Ringstead, was summoned for keeping a greater number of dogs above the age of six months than licensed to keep, at Ringstead on November 12th. – Defendant pleaded not guilty and the Bench dismissed the case.

Jim Bates, aged 19 years 4 days, volunteered for war service and joined the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and was posted for duty on 31st March 1915 at Northampton. He was a shoehand when he enlisted. He was 5ft 6¾ inches tall, weighed 112 lbs (8 stone or about 50.8 kilos) with a 34½ inch chest and excellent eyesight (6/6). He was given the Regimental Number 17727. It seems that his only misconduct was when he was warned that he was due to go on active service. He was stationed in Kent and overstayed his leave by 2 days 23 hours 55 minutes on 25th June 1915.

He embarked for France on 21st July 1915 and after a brief time in one of the base camps joined the 5th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment on 23rd July 1915. Jim was to

remain in France until September 1917. The 5th Battalion took part in the Battle of Loos in 1915 and the Battles of Albert, Pozieres and Le Transloy in 1916. In 1917 they were at the First Battle of the Scarpe, the Battle of Arieux, the Third Battle of the Scarpe and the Cambrai Operations.

On 3rd July 1917 Jim went down with P.U.O.. This was an abbreviation of Pyrexia (Fever) of Unknown Origin and was usually known as Trench Fever. It accounted for about one third of all British soldiers seen by the doctors during the war. It was not considered a particularly serious but perhaps it was only in the trenches that it would be so described. The symptoms could include front headaches, dizziness, severe lumbago, a feeling of stiffness round the joints and severe pains in the legs, particularly the shins. Men felt weak and often were slow to recover. It was only towards the end of the war that it became clearer that it was a disease carried by body lice which lived in the soldiers' clothing and fed on their blood. No effective cure was found during the war and, instead, preventative measures including strip inspections and fortnightly baths were instituted and clothes were disinfected. At the end of the war all soldiers were also disinfected to stop the disease spreading to the civilian population in Britain.

Jim was found to be suffering with the fever on 3rd July and over the next weeks he moved from the front line to Rouen and on to Calais. He returned to duty in the field on 31st August 1917 but once more went down with P.U.O. on 9th September and this time, after going to one of the hospitals in Rouen, on 31st September, he was taken on *HMHS (His Majesty's Hospital Ship) Aberdonian* back to England.

While in England Jim married Ada Rose Fairey. The military records show that they then lived at 69 Harborough Road in Rushden which I think may have been Ada's parents' house. The *Rushden Echo* of 25th of January 1918 reported:

Bates – Fairey – *The marriage was solemnized at the Park-road Baptist Church, Rushden on Monday [21st] by the Rev. R.C. Law of Miss Ada Rose Fairey, youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C.F. Fairey of Harborough-road Rushden, and Pte. Jim Bates, eldest son of Mr. J.H. Bates, of Church-street, Ringstead.*

The bride, who was given away by Pte. Harry Newland, was charmingly gowned in crepe royal, trimmed with swansdown. She wore a bridal veil and wreath of orange blossom and carried a choice bouquet of lilies and chrysanthemums, the gift of the bridegroom . . . Mr W.B. P. Bates (brother of the bridegroom) carried out the duties of best man.

He returned to his base and embarked again for France from Folkestone on 4th February 1918. He landed at Boulogne and joined the L.I.B.D. [Light Infantry Base Depot] at Calais the next day. From there he went to the Corps Reform Camp which allocated men to the reformed battalions following the terrible losses in 1917. On 15th February 1918 he joined the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in the field.

The 21st of March 1918 marked the start of the Germans Spring or Ludendorff Offensive which was a last desperate throw of the dice to win the war before the United States

manpower could swing the balance in the Allies favour. On that first day in the early morning fog the German Stormtroopers and artillery attacked and the British lost 7,512 men dead and some 10,000 wounded. The 5th Army was in full retreat. In *1918: A Very British Victory*, Peter Hart wrote of this time:

All along the British Front units were fragmenting: divisions were arbitrarily split up into brigades and rushed into action, brigades were losing track of whole battalions, the battalions were fragmenting into companies, the companies lost all cohesion and fell into their constituent platoons, the platoons became mere sections and soon all that was left were isolated groups of just a few men making their way across the battlefield as best they could.

The *7th Battalion History* by Captain H.B. King tells of this time for Jim:

At the beginning of March, it became evident that the German offensive would soon commence and the 7th Northamptons were held in Corps Reserve at Hancourt . . . The battle stations allotted to the 7th Northamptons consisted of four so-called redoubts between the villages of Jeancourt and Vendelles . . . These positions situated on high ground were very exposed to artillery fire and being little more than scrapes in the ground about 3 feet deep, afforded no cover of any sort.

At about 4.30 a.m. on March 21st the noise of a heavy bombardment could be heard at Harcourt and it was evident that the offensive had opened. At 5.40 a.m. the battalion received orders to "stand to" and move up to their battle stations. [They were later forced to withdraw.]

The next days were ones of almost continual retreat and trying to stop it from becoming a rout. After concentrating at Harcourt (Hardecourt) the Battalion proceeded to Meraucourt (Mericourt) but were forced to withdraw again and the Northamptons had to hold, as the sole rearguard, the bridge across the Somme at Falvy, while the rest of the Division crossed. The line was forced back again to the village of Warvillers on 27th March.

It was probably in this desperate time, on the 27th March or the following day, that Jim Bates was badly hurt, possibly south of St Quentin. By 31st March the German surge was running out of steam, or more accurately, men, and the tide turned in the Allies favour.

The Casualty Form records that his wound was received on the 27th March but on the form, "Statement by a Soldier Concerning his Own Case", Jim Bates stated:

I have a gunshot wound in my back, right leg and right arm received in action, March 28th 1918.

On the other hand, his Medical Report prior to discharge states that it was on 31st March 1918. The report also shows his movement through the hospital system:

He states that whilst in action he was wounded in the chest. He was removed to hospital at Rouen and transferred to St Mary's Hospital [possibly St Mary's V.A.D. Hospital in a former church hall in Plaistow] and on 16th December 1918 to the 2nd London General Hospital [set up in St Mark's College and adjoining school in

Chelsea]. On 3rd January 1919 he was transferred to the Military Hospital, Endell Street.

The *Endell Street Military Hospital* in Covent Garden was opened in May 1915 by Suffragists Dr Flora Murray and Dr Louisa Garrett Anderson. It was the first unit to be entirely run and staffed by women. Most of these hospitals set up in church and community buildings were closed soon after the end of the war.

Jim's only consolation would have been that he had survived and that his army days were over. On 17th January 1919 he was discharged, "being no longer physically fit for war service". The report also stated:

His general condition is good. He has one healed scar over the right chest. Portions of the 6,7,8 ribs have been removed. There is collapse at the base of the right lung.

There is also the revealing question which is just ticked which reads:

18. In the case of loss of teeth. Is the loss of teeth the result of wounds, injury or disease directly attributable to active service or through service under such conditions that treatment was unobtainable?

He returned finally to Ada who would have seen his "Wounded" notice in the Northampton Mercury on Friday 12th April 1918.

Bates, Pte. J., Northants. Harborough Road, Rushden, dangerously wounded in the right arm.

He received the British and Victory Medals as well as the 1915 Star.

By 1936 we know from a minor court case that Jim was now a dairyman living in "Montrose", Newtown Road, Rushden. By the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* he was still living in Montrose but was now doing heavy work in a boot factory as a yardman. It must have been hard going for a man with his disabilities.

At the end of the Second World War, on 2nd April 1945, Jim and Ada's daughter, Muriel married William E. Foose, as her parents had, at Park Road Baptist Church in Rushden. We see that the Bates family was firmly Baptist now. William Foose was an American who had served in the United States 8th Air Force and had flown 25 missions over Europe. Perhaps he had been based at the nearby Chelveston Aerodrome.

The married couple emigrated to America in March 1946 and a year later, on March 9th 1947, Jim and Ada flew from Bovingdon, an RAF and Civil Aerodrome near Hemel Hempstead, to America, probably staying with William's parents initially.

Jim died some five years later and was buried a hundred miles south-west of New York in Bridgeport, Perry County, Pennsylvania on 9th August 1952. We know that Ada travelled from America to England and back in 1954 on the *Queen Elizabeth* and her place of residence was, appropriately for a Northamptonshire woman, Tannersville in Pennsylvania. She died near her daughter at Quincy, Adams, Illinois in May 1981. There is also a memorial

to Ada at Bridgeport. Through the Foose line Jim and Ada have many descendants spread across the United States.

William Baden Powell Bates (1900-1969)

On May 17th 1900 the town of Mafeking in South Africa was relieved by a small British force after a 217-day siege by the Boers. The hero of the stubborn resistance was Robert Baden Powell, whose idea to use boys in a quasi-military role, led, later to his setting up of the Boy Scout movement. There was great rejoicing all over the country. Just before the relief, on May 10th (or 12th in some sources), Edith Bates gave birth to a son. When, over a year later, on 17th September 1901, she and her husband John, had him christened, they decided to name him William Baden Powell Bates in honour of the Mafeking hero.

In 1911, William was ten years old, living with his father and older brother Jim (Edith seems to disappear from the records). When the war started in 1914 it seemed unlikely that William would be involved and it is possible that he did just miss the fighting. Unfortunately, most of his military records have been destroyed but there is one that may shed some light on his time as a soldier. His name has been transcribed as W.P.R Bates but it seems likely that this is a transcription error. The form details how William was discharged back to duty after two days in hospital for influenza, that terrible epidemic that killed so many in the immediate post-war period.

He was a Lance-Corporal in the 7th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment with Regimental Number 103221. He was nineteen years old and had been in service for one year three months so he would have been conscripted in early May 1918 when he had just turned eighteen. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that William was in the 7th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment and was in the Army of Occupation. He was shown as a Private in that list but it would have been prepared before he received his promotion.

In 1918 the 7th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment had fought at the 2nd Battle of Arras, the Battle of the Hindenburg Line and the Final Advance in Picardy. At Armistice the infantry were in a rest period but the artillery were still in action. The Division received orders to join the British force to occupy the Rhine bridgeheads but these orders were cancelled on 21st November when they were in the area of Harveng undertaking road and railway repairs.

There is some disagreement about when the 7th demobilised but we do know that they were part of the Army of Occupation as part of the 122nd Infantry Brigade who in turn were part of the London Division. We also know from the hospital discharge form that he was attached to the 52nd Mobile Veterinary Section. Both this section and the 7th finished their tour of duty in October 1919 (In some accounts demobilisation was in May 1919).

Unfortunately, as I have been unable to find any other records - even the usual Medal Card, we cannot be sure that William ever fought in the war but he may have just been part of the army of occupation. This is one of those occasions where family knowledge is invaluable. One reason for believing that William probably only went to Germany in late 1918 or early 1919 is that in the last quarter of 1918 he married Winifred Bailey in the Thrapston District.

At some time after returning home William became a Lineman with the *Rushden & District Electricity Supply Company*. Certainly, we know that by 1933 this was his job through an article in the *Northampton Mercury* on 23rd June of that year. It tells of a serious accident that he suffered. [I transcribed this article from a British Newspaper Archive digitised original copy and some of the words are lost in the fold. I have put the guessed words in bold.]

*Terrible burns **were suffered** by William Baden Powell Bates **of** Ringstead on Tuesday **when he was** engaged in electrical repair **work in a** kiosk at Islip which was **struck by** lightning on Tuesday evening.*

*Bates is a lineman **employed by the** Rushden and District Electricity **Supply** Company and he was **with some** men at the junction **kiosk near** the Woolpack Inn. Bates was in the kiosk **when** there was a blinding flash **of lightning**. He was seen hanging on to the cable through which a current **of electricity** [11,000volts] was passing.*

*Having cut off the **current** workmates pulled him **free from the** cable and it was found **that he was** alive but had been burned **badly** about the arms and face.*

*Two doctors were hastily **called** and after they had given him **treatment** Bates was taken to **Northampton** General Hospital in a **critical state**.*

We know that William survived his ordeal and in 1937 was elected to Ringstead Parish Council. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* he was shown as a lorry driver. We see that William and Winifred probably had three children, John, Winifred and one record closed. William died on 6th December 1969 and Winifred followed him on the 4th July 1972.



*William Baden Powell Bates on the extreme left at the final closure of the Swan Inn in 1955
With thanks to Jon Abbott for this copy of the photograph*

Chapter 10

Stuart Dimbleby Bates (1891-1971)

Stuart Bates was the son of John Bates, a well-respected Baptist Minister in Ringstead for 32 years. John had previously been the Minister at Kislingbury where Stuart had been born on 17th November 1891. He was given the middle name Dimbleby after his mother's family for she had been born Rebecca Jane (but also known as Jennie) Dimbleby.

In 1911 the Bates family were in "The Manse" in Ringstead. Living in the eight-room house with John and Rebecca were two grown up daughters, Beatrice and Ethel who were both school teachers and Stuart who was nineteen years old and working in a local butcher's shop.

When the Great War started, there was initially no conscription, although plenty of exhortation from local bigwigs. On 29th June 1915 Stuart enlisted at Thrapston. He was 23 years 7 months old, 5ft 10½ inches tall with a 36-inch chest. When we look through his military records we see that Stuart seems torn between his desire to "do his duty" and his beliefs. We see this clearly in a letter sent by the officer in charge of records for the Army Veterinary Corps, (A.V.C.) to the Recruiting Officer at Thrapston. It states briefly:

As this man refuses to enlist into the infantry, rather than lose his service, I will accept him for enlistment into the army veterinary corps.

It was received at Thrapston on 28th June 1915. Some six months later, when conscription came in, he would have been seen as a conscientious objector but in June he was a volunteer and did not need to enlist in any capacity.

After joining the A.V.C. he remained on duty in England as a horsekeeper for 111 days but was then posted to the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that Stuart first went to Egypt where the first main task for the British troops was the protection of the Suez Canal. His Medal Card shows that the code of the initial Theatre of War that he entered was "4a", which, after January 1916, referred to Egypt. Before this date it referred to British East Africa, but I suspect this is a not an unknown mistake in writing up the cards.

In Egypt the A.V.C. would have cared for the mules and horses and there were a number of specialist hospitals for treating camels.

At some point Stuart was posted to Salonika and, in all he was in the eastern Mediterranean for 2 years 93 days.

The ailing Austro-Hungarian Empire was allied with Germany in the Great War. The Serbians had been at war with the Austro-Hungarians and had achieved some success. At the start of the war, however, the Germans decided to shore up its allies against the Serbs. It became clear that, if the Allies did not intervene, the Bulgarians would take advantage of the

situation. On 14th October Bulgaria had allied itself with the Central Powers and attacked Serbia.

The only practicable base for the Allies to use was the Greek port of Salonika, even though Greece itself tried to remain neutral. They bullied the Greeks into acceptance of this intervention. The first Allied troops had begun to disembark at Salonika on 5th October 1915. They then advanced to support Serbia but it was already too late and some 250,000 Serbian troops were rescued by the Royal Navy and evacuated to the Greek island of Corfu. The British and French fell back to a line just inside the Greek border and this “Salonika Front” became static and, despite a failed Allied attack in early 1917 the stalemate continued until the Autumn of 1918.



Army Veterinary Corps staff tying an obstinate mule before attempting to shoe the animal at a British Army Veterinary Hospital near Salonika April 1916. ©IWM (Q 31912)

Stuart's role, as part of the A.V.C. would have been the care of the horses and mules that were the main means of supplying the troops through the difficult terrain to the Front Line. We know that at some point in his army career that Stuart was stricken with malaria and it seems most likely that it was during his service in Greece. The area was full of stagnant pools and was blisteringly hot in Summer. As a result, it was one of the worst areas in Europe for malaria. Added to this, the poor sanitary arrangements led to Enteric Fever and Dysentery being almost endemic among the troops.

During the campaign the British forces lost 23,787 casualties in combat, but there were 162,517 cases of malaria and, in total, 505,024 non-battle casualties.

Despite having this illness, which was debilitating, with the symptoms often recurring at intervals, Stuart seems to have worked well and on 26th July he was appointed a Lance Corporal and then, on the 28th November 1917, a Lance Sergeant. The use of this last rank varied in the Regiments but usually meant a sergeant who could be demoted by his commanding officer and not only by court martial as was the case with a normal Sergeant.

On 18th January 1918 he embarked at Salonika and disembarked three days later at Taranto in Italy. He remained in Italy for 58 days, excluding a 16 day "Overseas Furlough" that he received from 20th March to 4th April 1918. At the start of the Great War the Italians had withdrawn from their agreed alliance with the Central Powers and fought on the Allied side.

On the 19th April 1918 there was a sudden and unexplained change in Stuart's army career. A *Statement of Service* records that he was "compulsorily transferred to the Northumberland Fusiliers 1/5th Battalion", but he retained his Lance Sergeant rank and pay. His regimental number now changed to 73010. The problem is that the 5th Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers were fighting on the Western Front in Belgium during all of 1918.

Stuart finally left Italy, and was in France from 15th July 1918. On 29th August 1918 he was again transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the South Staffordshire Regiment. I can only presume that he was put on the strength of the Northumberland Fusiliers but his move to France was delayed.

It is unclear just what Stuart's engagements were, but we do know that he had arrived in France just as the tide was turning in the Allies' favour. The German Spring Offensive, although it forced a large Allied retreat, so weakened the Germans that when a counter attack came their resistance finally crumbled. In what is usually known as the Hundred Days' Offensive the Allies, for the first time in the war moved forward rapidly and the static trench stalemates were broken. Nevertheless, it was often a hard progress that cost many Allied, as well as German, lives.

On the day of the Armistice, 11th November 1918, the 2nd Battalion of the South Staffs were at Amfroipret, north of the Foret de Mormal and East-North-East of Cambrai.

Stuart remained in France until 21st March 1919, when he had been there some 250 days. He arrived back in England on 22nd March and was finally demobilised on the 19th April 1919. He was declared to have a 20% disability because of the effects of the Malaria and received a pension of eight shillings a week from 13th February 1920 until 22nd March 1921. He was awarded the 1914/15 Star and the British and Victory Medals.

On returning to civilian life in Ringstead, Stuart married local girl Ivy Elizabeth Adams in 1920. At first the couple lived in Denford Road, possibly with Ivy's parents in "Fernlea". His mother died in 1924 aged 71 and his father, John died in 1928, his funeral attended by very large crowds.

In 1931 Stuart and Ivy moved to Yew Tree Farm in the High Street and, on 8th May 1932, their only child, Janet, was born. They had become farmers and, in the 3rd February 1933 edition of the Northampton Mercury, we see an advertisement for eggs and chicks of the "Noted Light and White Sussex hens" which we are told are "All Blood Tested Stock Selected

for Type and Stamina". It was the dairy herd that became the mainstay of the farm and they sold milk around the village from churns which they ladled into the customers' jugs. A few older villagers still remember that Ivy sold home-made ice-cream at the back door of Yew Tree Farm and that airmen from USAF Chelveston were appreciative customers.

In 1939 the couple were living at the farm with daughter Jane and "hirehand" Winifred Jessie Walker who had been born in 1898. They are also said to have had an evacuee living with them during the war. Stuart was shown as a farmer and Ivy has the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties" but she was known in the family as a dressmaker (as well as the ice cream making). A small farmer's wife can never be lazy.

We know, from a later auction sale in 1951, after the death of William Robinson, that Stuart had rented two meadows on the east side of New Road containing 9.919 acres and an enclosure of arable land situated in Ham Lane and known as "Pit Field" containing 8.237 acres.



*Stuart and Ivy on the farm
With thanks to Adrian Farr and Jon Abbott*

In 1943 Stuart found himself in a similar position to that of Alan Bennett and his “Lady with a Van” many years later. He had brought a case against Percy Bellamy. His solicitor stated:

Bates . . . gave the man permission to put a caravan on his land. He had lived in it for two or three years until it rotted and he had replaced it with an old, small eight h.p. car. He was living in it although there was barely room in it for a person to lie down.

On October 9th Bates gave him notice to leave but although he said he would go he was still there . . .

The Bench granted the application.

When we see the photographs of Stuart on the farm or in a sporty car there does seem in him a little of Pop Larkin in his namesake, H.E. Bates’ novels. It is type of rural life that flourished in the “Back to the Land” movement of the 1920s and 1930s and flickered again in the 1970s but has now almost entirely disappeared from the landscape.



*Stuart, cigarette in mouth, with Ivy and probably daughter Jane in the 1940s
With thanks to Adrian Farr and Jon Abbott*

Stuart died in late 1971 and Ivy in 1979.

Chapter 11

Sons of Arthur and Louisa Baxter

The Baxters had originally come from Tansor but by 1881 were living in Oundle where Joseph, aged 36, was a house painter. Their son, Arthur, had been born in Tansor in 1868 and in 1881 the couple had five other children.

By 1891 Arthur had become a labourer on the railways and, aged 23, was lodging near the station in Woodford. In the same 1891 Census, Louisa Braybrook was a servant in Kingsthorpe in Northampton, but, somewhere, their paths crossed and, on 30th September 1895, they were married in a church at Louisa's home village of Keyston, just over the border in Huntingdonshire.

Soon after their marriage they moved to Ringstead and, in 1901, were living at 19 Church Street with two sons, Percy William aged four and Herbert aged two. Arthur was a platelayer on the railways. By 1911 they had moved to Spencer Street in Ringstead and Arthur, aged 14, was working as a "heel fettler". Herbert was 12 and still at school and Louisa's widowed father, James Braybrook, a farm labourer, was living with them in their six-room cottage.

Percy William Baxter (1896-1917)

It must have seemed that the world was a settled place but, over the Channel, national ambitions were beginning to create turmoil. Suddenly, in 1914 war exploded in Europe and initially the Government sent the Regular Army under the title "British Expeditionary Force" to assist the French against the German invasion. The British Army was far too small in this man-eating war and were soon in rapid retreat. Then came the jingoistic slogans and rallies to raise a new volunteer army from the civilian population. This new army began in optimism but soon the fighting ground to a halt and the battles continued to use up men like shells. Finally, against much opposition, conscription was brought in, in January 1916. If the soldier was not entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15-Star Medals it almost certainly meant that he was a conscript.

This was the case with Percy Baxter who, probably, was posted to France some time in 1916. At first he had enlisted with the Northamptonshire Regiment but because most of his military records have been lost we would usually only be able to guess that he had gone to a base camp and was then transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Inniskilling Fusiliers.

In fact, because of the clever research done by *Stebie9173* on the Great War Forum, we can be more definite. By looking at the Regimental Numbers, he was able to compare a number of soldiers, including Percy Baxter, with Horace Allen of Irthlingborough. Horace enlisted in Northampton on 16th November 1916 and was posted to the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment with Regimental Number 30909. Percy was given the number 31925. Horace went to France on 1st February 1917 and was sent to Base Camp No. 17 at

Étaples. On arrival in France he was posted to the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshires but he never joined them and instead became part of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers on 16th February 1917 and renumbered 40712. Percy was given the number 40724, just twelve numbers later.



Percy Baxter

From the Rushden Argus. With thanks to the Rushden & District History Society.

It seems certain that the career path of Percy followed that of Horace Allen's very closely and he arrived at the front in mid-February 1917.

The 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers were part of the 96th Brigade which included the 16th Battalion of the Northumberland Regiment and the 15th Lancashires. In the fighting around Savy Wood Percy Baxter was wounded and died from his wounds on April 2nd 1917. He was twenty years old and had probably been in France for less than two months. His grave is in the Foreste Communal Cemetery in Aisne. This is a local cemetery with some ninety-five Commonwealth war graves. On Percy's grave the inscription at the bottom, chosen by his family, simply says:

"ONE OF THE DEAREST ONE OF THE BEST"

Herbert Baxter (1899-1918)

Percy's younger brother Herbert, usually known as Bert, had been working for Adam's Brothers, Boot Manufacturers of Raunds. He too was conscripted, at Kettering, and joined the 1st Battalion of the East Kent Regiment ("The Buffs") and was given the Regimental Number G/24815. Again, few of his military records remain but we do know that, like his brother, he remained a Private.

Operation Michael, which was the German offensive planned to finish the war before the American fire and manpower could tip the balance for the Allies, started with the Battle of St Quentin on 21st March 1918. It was announced by an overwhelming artillery barrage along a forty-mile front. The Germans used trench mortars, Mustard Gas, Chlorine gas and smoke canisters and three-and-a half million shells were fired in five hours. After this the

German troops broke through and the Allies were forced to withdraw. This continued on the second day among thick fog with the Allies trying to keep the integrity of the line so that the Germans could not get in behind them. This meant that small groups of soldiers had to fight delaying actions in order to allow all the troops to fall back in an orderly retreat.



Herbert (Bert) Baxter

From the Rushden Argus. With thanks to the Rushden & District History Society.

It was on this second day that Herbert died of wounds on 22nd March 1918. He was not to know that, although the German offensive continued to make progress, they were running out of supplies and men and eventually the tide would turn. Herbert is commemorated at Favreuil British Cemetery, north of Bapaume. The inscription reads:

"STILL OURS IN MEMORY THOUGHT AND LOVE. MOTHER & DAD"

Arthur and Louisa Baxter received the official letter telling them that Herbert had also been killed. They had lost both of their children and, when the celebrations came later in 1918, they must have left a bitter taste. To make sure there was some remembrance of their two sons, Arthur and Louisa donated a brass lectern to the Ringstead Parish Church. It now stands on the floor beside the pulpit.



Arthur and Louisa

With thanks to Jon Abbott and the Ringstead Heritage Group

Above is a photograph of Arthur and Louisa outside their neat wood and corrugated iron bungalow some time after the deaths of their sons. It seems a place of sadness.

Chapter 12

Cecil Bellamy (1888-1968)

Cecil Bellamy was the illegitimate son of Jane Ann Bellamy. He was born on 9th January 1888 and christened in Ringstead Parish Church on January 24th 1890. In the column for “Father” the name “Michael” has been written in and then crossed out. It seems possible that when the vicar asked Jane who the father was, she misunderstood the question and gave her own father’s name.

In the 1891 Census, Jane was a shoe stitcher. She and three-year-old Cecil were boarding with Reuben and Lucy Shipley and their children in Church Street. On 6th August 1895 Jane married Albert Victor Smith and it may be that Cecil never lived with his mother again. In the 1901 Census, aged thirteen, he was still living with the Shipleys at 18 Church Street. He was now shown as a nephew. Living next door were Percy and Herbert Baxter.



*Cecil with his employer John Pearson outside the March shop
With thanks to Jon Abbott*

Jane, meanwhile, was living with her husband in Wood Street in Wellingborough. With them was Jane’s daughter, Bertha aged nine, and three children from their marriage. By 1911 they had moved to 57 Nelson Street in Kettering but by now Cecil had found a new home in March in the Cambridgeshire Fens. He was boarding again, this time with John Pearson, a bootmaker and dealer, at 5 Nene Parade. Cecil, now 23 years old, was working for John as a Boot Repairer. When we look more closely we see that John Pearson was the famous man

on the Raunds March in 1905. He had lost a leg to childhood tuberculosis and had walked all the way to London on crutches. He had later set up business in March and Cecil had joined him there as an assistant.

It was at March, on 11th December 1915, that Cecil enlisted in the Suffolk Regiment and was placed on the Army Reserve List. On 29th April 1916 he had his army medical at Bury St Edmunds. He was 28 years 2 months old. His height was first recorded as 5 feet 3 inches tall which was originally the minimum height for soldiers to be accepted into the army. Later, in 1915, this was relaxed and the “Bantam Battalions” were introduced. In Cecil’s case his correct height of 5 feet 1 inch was later inserted. The officers, who mainly came from the affluent classes, were on average, some six inches taller than the men that they commanded. He had a 35-inch chest and weighed 99 lbs (7 stone 1 lb or just under 45 kilos). His physical development was described as “good for size”. He had upper and lower dentures.

Cecil stayed in England, training with the Suffolk Regiment, from 18th May until 28th August 1916. He was then transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. On the 3rd September he was taken to Devonport and the following day he boarded the H.M.T. Tahiti. I think it was actually, His Majesty’s New Zealand Transport Ship (H.M.N.Z.T.) Tahiti which on 22nd August 1916 had been part of a convoy bringing various New Zealand Brigades (including some Maori contingents) to England to be taken to the Western Front. On her voyage home she took some of the 2nd Norfolks to Basra (now in Iraq) where they disembarked on 28th September 1916.



H.M.N.Z.T. Tahiti

Cecil remained in the area, then known as Mesopotamia, for one year 280 days. He was fortunate in that he had missed the Siege of Kut. Despite attempts by the British to lift the siege and rescue the 2nd Norfolks being starved into submission, they were forced to

surrender on 29th April 1916. Most of the Battalion were taken into captivity and many died under the harsh regime. It was one of the British Army's worst defeats. For a time, the 2nd Battalion ceased to exist and Cecil was part of the draft of troops brought in, in its reformation.

One major cause of the defeat was the lack of a transport infrastructure and the British now put their efforts into improving the port of Basra, building roads, bringing in more and larger river steamers and putting new field hospitals into service. This enabled troops to be moved quickly up to the Front Line and to be better supported.

When Cecil arrived he went to Sheikh Sa'ad as part of the new 2nd Battalion and spent the next few months in training.

The British, now properly prepared, advanced up both sides of the Tigris River. They retook Kut and by early March were at the outskirts of Baghdad. On 11th March 1917 they entered Baghdad and were greeted as liberators. Unfortunately, Cecil could not have been part of this victory celebration for, a week earlier, on 4th March, he was admitted to Field Hospital A36 with diarrhoea, the scourge of European in Africa and Asia. He was fortunate not to have been in the area a year earlier. As we have seen in the biography of Henry Attley many Indian troops fought in Iraq. The Brigade Major of the 69th Punjabi, Thomas Catty, wrote in his diary on 19th January 1916:

At Amara we heard tales of the bad medical arrangements but it wasn't till we got to Sheikh Saad that it really came to our notice. On landing there the place was ankle deep in mud. The OC [Officer Commanding] told us that he had 1000 Indian sick and wounded and only one IMS [Indian Medical Service] man, who was down with dysentery, to look after them. There were no dressings or medicine and most of the wounded . . . had not had their 1st Field Dressing removed . . . all agreed that the state of affairs was disgraceful. The fellows on shore were very despondent and said the boats going down stream were awful – when you went on board the stench nearly knocked you down.

Cecil was discharged from hospital on 9th March and on the 22nd went to a rest camp in Sheikh Sa'ad.

It appears from his records that Cecil did not rejoin the 2nd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment at Baqubah, some 31 miles north-east of Baghdad, until 20th September 1917. On 1st December he travelled with the 2nds to the Ruz Canal Camp and attended a training school for the Stokes Mortar. This was a small British 3-inch trench mortar which had only recently been introduced. It was a simple weapon but, because the barrel was only three times the weight of the bomb it was delivering, it had a large recoil that could cause serious injury if it was not properly set up.

We may think of this posting as an easy option compared to the Western Front but as John Ball, writing on his website about his father who served in Mesopotamia, makes clear, it could be a draining place to serve in. He quotes from a newspaper article written by Edmund Candler.

The heat of the desert in trenches and tents is staggering. One feels as if one were standing at the edge of a huge fire in a high wind, licked by gusts of flame.

The flies were unbelievable. You could not eat without swallowing flies. You waved your spoon in the air to shake them off: you put your biscuits and bully beef in your pocket and surreptitiously conveyed them in closed fist to your mouth, but you swallowed flies all the same . . .

However, the 1917 summer was even worse and it was known in Baghdad as “the hottest season in the memory of man”.

Cecil remained in Amara until 9TH March 1918 when he went to the post camp at Hinandi, near Baghdad before, once again rejoining his battalion at Mirzana on 23rd April 1918. He then left his unit for leave in India on 29th May. It was not until the 10th June that he embarked on the A.T. (Army Transport) *Versova* at Basra for India and returned there on 5th August 1918. On 23rd August 1918 he rejoined the 2nd Norfolks at Mirzana. He then remained in Mesopotamia until 30th October 1919 as part of the Army of Occupation.

He left Iraq finally by ship on 31st October 1919 arriving in England on 2nd December but was not finally demobilised, on Class Z, until the 31st December.

It seems that Cecil never returned to Ringstead to live. In April-June 1921 he married Emily Spencer in the North Witchford District of Cambridgeshire. Emily had been born in Wimblington and in 1911 was a servant in Wisbech. March is just ten miles from Wisbech so did she meet Cecil when taking shoes to be repaired for her employers or was she now living in March? At the time of her marriage she was residing at 5 Johnson Square in March. Both of them were in their early thirties for the war had delayed marriage for many couples.

They lived at 4 Nene Parade in March, next to the Ship Inn, where Cecil had his shoe repair shop. They had at least three children, with the oldest, Jack, becoming a boot repairer at the shop. In the *1939 Register of England & Wales* we see the family together there, and it may be that Cecil and Emily lived in March for the rest of their lives.

Certainly in 1965 the Bellamys were still there with son, Jack, still at home. Cecil died in 1968. He was eighty years old.

Chapter13

William Thomas Billing (1879-1918)

William Billing was not a local lad and was not in the village for long but he is on the Ringstead War Memorial. He had been born at the end of 1879 and baptised in Towcester Church on 4th April 1880. He was the son of William and Sarah Anne and in the 1881 Census he was living with his parents in Spring Gardens, Towcester. His father was a miller's labourer but by 1891 he was a labourer on a farm, living in 2 Farm Cottages in the High Street.

William first worked as a groom on a farm but when he was eighteen and one month old he enlisted as a soldier. He "attested" for the Northamptonshire Regiment on 23rd February 1897 and was given the Regimental Number 5116. He signed up for twelve years, seven years in service and five in the army reserve. His father, meanwhile, became the landlord of the *Plough Inn* in Towcester High Street.

Unfortunately, most of his army records have been lost but we know that he served with the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in India and the Second Boer War. Exactly when he finished and took up his next career is not clear, but probably in about 1904. Like many other old soldiers, he joined the Northamptonshire Constabulary. In later records it states that he served for fifteen years with the police after his seven years with the Northamptonshire Regiment but this cannot work if the time period is 1897 to 1915 so perhaps they are counting his police service up to 1918.

We must remember that although he might have had a small pension he was still only in his mid-twenties and had his life before him.

We find in the local papers that William was involved in a number of cases in the area. We also see in the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo* on Thursday 5th July 1906 that at the Northampton Police Sports he came second in the "Throwing A Cricket Ball Competition" with 77½ yards. He is shown as being in the Kettering force. He was also shown as a Police Constable when he married Victoria Alice Payne at St. Andrew's Church in Kettering on 17th July 1907. At the time he was living at 88 Princes Drive. She was a shoe machinist and the daughter of local newsagent, Tom Payne from Leicestershire and his wife, Elizabeth, from Leeds.

He was transferred to Bulwick a dozen miles north, north-east of Kettering. From the births of his two sons we can see that this was in about 1909/10. In 1911 he was living there in the police house with Victoria, their two sons, William Tom Frederick and Harry Gordon and widowed mother-in-law, Elizabeth Payne. Meanwhile, his brother, Herbert had enlisted in the Grenadier Guards in 1906 and by the end of WW1, which he survived, had become a Company Quarter Master Sergeant.

At some point, William was transferred to Ringstead and the family moved into the police house opposite the *New Inn*. A daughter, Elizabeth, was born in 1914. Again we pick up William in local news reports. One sad case was that of Ada Jane Robinson and her dog who he found drowned in the river by Ringstead Mill. This was reported in the *Northampton Mercury* on 20th May 1915. A few months later, in July 1915, he was making ready to return to the army. At Thrapston Corn Exchange on 7th July he was given a cheque for £5 10s. and praised for his work as an instructor for some fifty of the local Special Constables who would take over some to the role of the professionals during the war. Their special role was to protect the water supply against German “infiltrators”.



*The Police House on the left edge of the photograph opposite Raunds Road
With thanks to Peter Davies*

Soon after, William Billing left his family in Ringstead and joined the Military Foot Police Corps. (There was a separate Mounted Corps.) He was given the Regimental Number P1850

The recruitment into the Military Police had been strictly overseen with a probationary period. With the large-scale trench war of the Western Front, the number of Military Police required soared from an initial 508 to 25,000 by the end of the war, so standards were lowered and civilian police officers were transferred into service en bloc. The Military Police Corps had a number of important roles. One was the manning of “straggler’s posts” or “battle stops” which were collecting points behind the front lines where prisoners of war were taken to be escorted back to base camps. There were also runners and message-carriers to be checked and directed. The walking wounded were also directed to first aid posts and “stragglers” were, if necessary, re-equipped and sent on to re-join their units. In

the chaos of many battle zones individuals and small groups of men were often separated from their companies.

Of course, they also apprehended deserters and there were rumours of the military police using their own pistols to carry out summary justice. These stories were probably almost all false but it would not have been, generally, a popular post to hold.

They did not only operate behind the lines, however, and could sometimes be called upon in difficult circumstances to fight alongside the infantry. During the course of the war the Military Police Corps suffered 375 casualties and received a number of gallantry awards. William, with his past experience seems to have acquitted himself well and was appointed first to Lance Corporal and then to Acting Corporal. The Lance Corporal rank, however, was awarded as standard to give more authority to the Military Police over most ordinary soldiers.

We do not know exactly where on the Western Front that William was in action but it was in the Somme area. On 2nd August 1918, as the tide had turned after the final great German offensive, sometimes known as Operation Michael, William was killed. All we know about the circumstances is that it was as a result of an accident. Was this by his own hand or the result of "friendly fire"? He was thirty-nine years old and was buried in the Crouy British Cemetery, some 16 kilometres north-west of Amiens, to the west of the River Somme.

The inscription, chosen by his family, at the bottom of his gravestone was simply:

EVER IN MY THOUGHTS CISS

Who was Ciss? Was it his wife Victoria? His War Gratuity was £23 17s. and this went to his widow, as his sole legatee. He was entitled to the 1915 Star and the British and Victory Medals.

His youngest daughter Elizabeth became a nurse in a Mental Hospital and was living with her mother at "Kynance" Old Watford Road, St Albans in the *1939 Register of England and Wales*. Three doors away is "Vimy Ridge".

One son, William Tom Frederick, known as Fred Billing, became a mounted police constable in WW2. I think he may have spent most of his life in the London area but retired to Ringstead, at 43 Denford Road, where he died on 1st December 1987.

William's name is on the war memorial in the churchyard and on the *Ringstead and Kettering Rolls of Honour*.

Chapter 14

The Braybrook Family

Each of these stories is trying to reveal a little of the individual lives of the men of Ringstead who fought in the Great War. We see that, sometimes, a number came from one family but this is not the only connection hiding below the surface. Some men were neighbours or friends, or members of extended families masked by differing surnames. There was a tangled web of ties, bloodlines and friendships that would have involved most of the village.

James Braybrook was a farm labourer born in Keyston in Huntingdonshire in about 1837. Today, the A45 slices through between the two villages but for many years there was a well-used cart track between them starting in Denford Road. He married Frances Knighton from Tansor on 24th July 1857 and they produced at least ten children: Rebecca, Elizabeth, John, Joseph, Mary, Emma, Frederick, Charles, Louisa and Matilda.

One daughter, Louisa married Arthur Baxter and lived in Ringstead. We have seen that both their sons, Percy and William were killed in the war. Her father, James, lived in Ringstead with the Baxters after the death of his wife, Frances, in 1898.

John, the oldest son, born in about 1862, also moved to Ringstead marrying Mary Ellen Dunkley there, on 30th March 1891. He seems to have had an entrepreneurial spirit because although originally a labourer like his father, by his wedding he was a carter and, in the Census of that year, he was a coal merchant. In 1897 he wrote to George Capron about renting some vacant land and his address was *The Swan*, Ringstead. In 1901 he was described as an innkeeper and coal merchant.

In the 1901 Census the couple had three sons, Herbert (9), Frank (7) and Sydney (2) and by the following Census there were also three daughters. The 1911 Census states that they have had eight children, one of whom had died. This was Margaret Annie who had died in 1897 as a baby. Another daughter, Violet, was with her maternal grandparents. Herbert had already left home and was working as a groom in Thrapston. By 1910 John's tenure of *The Swan* had finished and his coal business also seems to have failed. He was now an ironstone labourer and the family were living in Rosebery Street.

Herbert John William Braybrook (1892-1917)

Herbert, the oldest child, began his working life as a groom in Thrapston, where he was in 1911, before moving to Leicestershire. Soon after moving, in 1913, he married Annie Sarson in the Barrow-on-Soar District. She was the daughter of Thomas and Sarah who had come from Derbyshire. In 1911, her father was working from home in School Street in Syston as a tailor. The newly-wed couple also lived in School Street, at number two, perhaps with Annie's family.

They were not to have a long married life but between 1913 and 1916 they had three children, Margaret, Herbert and Thomas. Before the birth of the youngest, Thomas, Herbert had volunteered at Leicester, for the Leicestershire Regiment. He was, initially, given the Regimental Number 16166 but later changed for 20087, and then 203181 when a new system of six-figure numbering was introduced.



*Annie with baby Thomas, Margaret and Herbert
With thanks to George and Gill Braybrook*

He embarked for France on 30th July 1915 and fought on the Western Front. The 6th, 7th and 8th (Service) Battalions had been formed in Leicester in September 1914. In April 1915 they all became part of the 110th Brigade, 37th Division and followed the same path in the war. They first landed in France on 29th July 1915 so it seems likely that Herbert was initially in one of these battalions.

The 7th Battalion, in 1916, were in action in the Battle of the Somme, including The Battle of Bazentin Ridge (14th-17th July) which was initially a successful Allied attack but which, as usual, descended into a continuing attritional action with neither side gaining a decisive advantage. The rain and the mud in a shell-holed landscape weighed the balance in favour of defenders over attackers. In September there followed The Battle of Flers-Courcelette and The Battle of Morval. Just before this, however, Herbert was wounded and may have missed these later actions. On 22nd August 1916 he appeared on the *War Office Casualty List*. He was entitled to wear a "Wound Stripe". These stripes had only just been introduced by an Army Order of 6th July 1916. Accidental or self-inflicted wounds were not eligible.



Wound stripe on left sleeve



Herbert John William Braybrook. *Possibly in training camp*
With thanks to George and Gill Braybrook

It was a small stripe of Gold Russian braid (or, later, sometimes brass, because it was easier to detach and clean) which was worn vertically on the left arm of the uniform between elbow and cuff. It was quite inconspicuous and not easily seen in faded old photographs.



Herbert in Rushden Argus
With thanks to the Rushden & District History Society.

Herbert's wound was reported on 25th August 1916 in the *Leicester Journal*, but we are not sure if he returned to England. It may be that he did, and it seems likely that it was at this time that his regimental number changed from 16166 to 20087.

We do know that in 1917 he was serving with the 1/4th Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment. In May of that year the 4th Battalion were in trenches at Lievin, near Vimy, preparing for an assault against the Germans. On 8th June the day started at 5 a.m. with a heavy shell bombardment of the enemy positions. It continued until "zero hour" which was 8.30 p.m. plus three minutes. The troops began to assemble in the trenches ready to move forward. At 8 p.m. the enemy barraged the assembled troops. Had they had intelligence about the intended assault?

At zero hour the Leicesters "went over the top" and started towards the enemy trenches, with a creeping barrage of shrapnel bombs moving ahead of them. Herbert was part of "A" Company which had been specially trained for "wiring" but it was not called upon. "Wiring" was dangerous work, done at night, to repair and rebuild wire defences and cut the enemy's. On the Western Front, cutting parties tried to create breaches in the wire lines, giving a better chance of crossing no man's land. On this day some 70 "Other Ranks" in the Leicesters were killed.



Ruined principal street of Lieven 15th July 1917. ©IWM 78490

Herbert was one of these casualties of the 8th June and was buried in La Chaudiere Military Cemetery at Vimy. He was twenty-five years old. His death was recorded in the *Northampton Mercury* on 6th July 1917 (which has his death as June 9th) and in the *Leicester Journal* on the 20th July 1917. His Regimental Number was now given as 203181. He was entitled to the 1915 Star and the Victory and British Medals. He is not on the Ringstead War Memorial but he is on the large imposing one at Syston.



My thanks to Sue Blaxland for this image from a contemporary Syston Parish Magazine.

His widow, Annie, had had a very brief time together with Herbert but she never married again. In 1939 she was recorded as still living at 2 School Street in Syston with her three children, Margaret, Herbert and Thomas. She died in 1968, over fifty years after the death of her husband.

Sydney Edward Braybrook (1897-1976)

I have not found any military records for the middle son, Frank although this does not mean definitely that he did not serve in the army. He remained in the area and in 1939 he was living with his family in Raunds. The youngest son, Sydney Edward Braybrook, certainly did join the army and served on the Western Front.

In 1911, Sydney was twelve years old and in the occupation column has written "school" and "errand boy". He was only sixteen when the war started and one suspects that his parents would have hoped that the war would be over, if not by Christmas, at least before he reached eighteen years of age. Unfortunately they were wrong and conscription was introduced. On 26th June 1916 Sydney was posted to the Queens (Royal West Surrey Regiment) just one month after his eighteenth birthday.

He was given the Regimental Number G/30153 and became part of the 8th (Service) Battalion. In the previous year, at the Battle of Loos, the Division it was part of, suffered 4178 casualties and spent the rest of the year rebuilding its numbers.

His military records are largely lost but he should not have been in France until he was nineteen years old. but it seems likely that he was there some time in 1917. The Queens were part of the 72nd Brigade, 24th Division, and fought in the Vimy area as part of the Battle of Arras. This started on 9th April 1917 but when one reads the *War Diary* for the 8th it is almost lost among the small actions and continual losses and the details of movement to and from the trenches and the days of comparative rest and training. On the Royal West Surrey website, Michael Page quotes from a letter sent on May 18th by Harry Brodie, an officer who saw action there, and who had this unique view of the battle.

I saw a good deal of the so-called battle of Arras – a huge operation lasting for days. One day in particular I was on a ridge a few miles in front of Arras – shells from our own heavy guns & from the German guns were [coming] in the air above – not many. A mile or two further ahead was a line of small explosions & puffs of smoke when the shells were playing on the contending front lines. Our guns were letting off not far ahead at all sorts of angles. A battalion on the right were cooking their evening meal, while waiting to go forward. An occasional shell dropped into a mined village about 100 yards to my left – aimed at the X [cross] Roads in the village – but not so far stopping a ceaseless stream of lorries & waggons. A little further to my right a game of football was proceeding. A little to the front – perhaps a quarter of a mile nearer the enemy a regimental band was playing popular airs – & right above aeroplanes – not bigger than dragon flies were flitting about [hounded] by the little white puffs which represent the shrapnel bursts from Anti-aircraft guns – in a line below the moving aeroplanes were our stationary balloons – called (and they are very like) sausages. Green rolling country dotted with tents – horse lines – several with trenches strewn with rusty barbed wire – all villages in sight in ruins – all trees cut rather neatly down & evidently in process of conversion into sleepers for light railways – & perhaps for dug out[s] – the whole gilded by an afternoon sun – with some nesting partridges calling amidst all the din & confusion.

As Hardie says later in his letter, the ordinary soldiers in the trenches, “see practically nothing of what is going on”.

There followed the Battle of Messines in June, the Third Battle of Ypres in October before they moved south to take part in the Cambrai Operations when the Germans counter-attacked.

The campaigns of 1918 really started in March with the great German offensive often known as “Operation Michael”. This was, by World War 1 standards, a successful German attack which the Allied forces managed only to slow and make expensive, in terms of Germans killed. In this terrifying scramble to safety many acts of heroism were recorded. One was by Lance Corporal J.W. Sayer of the Queens who held the Germans back from Shepherds Copse in the defence of Le Verguier on 21st March 1918. He was awarded the V.C. but this goes unrecorded in the Regimental History written in 1925 perhaps, partly, because he was not from one of the Regular Army Battalions. For Sydney and the 8th it would have been a time of chaos with battalions separated and trying to hold the line to enable some sort of orderly retreat.

The Germans, however, had nearly exhausted their supply of men and the “100 Days” of the Allied decisive counter attack followed. The Surrey’s final engagements were The Battle of the Sambre and the Passage of the Grand Honelle. They ended the war at Bavais in France.

One wonders if Sydney celebrated too much for, three days after the Armistice, he was taken by train from Delsaux Farm to Carnieres to be treated for inflammation of the connective tissue of the right hand. He was only in hospital for a day and, on the 15th November was discharged back to duty.

He remained in the army,, but on 20th March 1919 he was deemed no longer physically fit for war service. On 16th May 1919 he was given a silver badge and was finally discharged from the army. The silver badge could only be worn on civilian clothes and was designed to stop the wearer being bothered by the white feather women, although by this time this seems less likely. He was awarded the Victory and British Medals. On his Medal Roll it has him in the 10th Battalion so perhaps he was transferred near the end of his military career.

Sydney was still only twenty years of age. He returned to Ringstead and married Ellen M. Groom in the last quarter of 1919. I have not found any children of this marriage. Ellen died early in 1939, aged forty years, and Sydney married again to local woman Evelyn Louisa Weekley in the third quarter of the same year. So, in the *Register of English & Wales*, taken on 29th September of the same year, it is Sydney and Evelyn who are together.

Sydney was now an Iron Blast Furnace labourer and must have, to some extent, recovered from his wartime injury. Evelyn died too on 19th April 1960 at the Kettering General Hospital. At the time of her death the couple were living in “Sunnyhill” in Denford Road. This may be 34 Denford Road where Sydney died too on 6th April 1976

Chapter 15

The Bull Family

Joseph Ashley Bull (1893-1982)

William Samuel Bull was born in Oundle, the son of Isaac and Eliza. His parents moved to Ringstead and in the 1861 Census Isaac was a “Tin Plate Worker and Brazier”, born in Islip. His wife, however, had taken up the local craft and was a shoe finisher and son Benjamin was a shoemaker. Next door, William, now married, was also a shoemaker. His wife was Susannah, maiden name Dicks and they had married on 19th April 1859 in Ringstead. Isaac died in 1872 and William took over his father’s business.

He became a grocer, brazier and tinsmith, the grocery business almost certainly managed by Susannah. If that was not enough he successfully applied in 1877 for a licence to sell beer from the shop. William and Eliza did not have any children and aged just 45 she died and was buried in Ringstead on 13th February 1886. At the end of the following year, on 19th December 1887, William, now 49, married 23-year-old Emma Titman from Polebrook. And the children came: Anne Maria in 1888; William Isaac in 1889; Joseph Ashley in 1893, Ivy May in 1896 and Eliza in 1903. [There may have been another Eliza in 1900 who died as an infant.]



*Ashley, on the horse, and his sisters with father, William.
image on horse's head appears to be George V (Coronation 1911?)
With thanks to Peter Davies.*

The family were living at *The Swan* in the 1891 Census which William probably took over in 1884/5. They now had two of their children but also William's 75-year-old, widowed mother was living with them as well as five male lodgers. Emma had one 14-year-old girl to help her. It must have been a hard life for Emma and a news report in the Northampton Mercury of January 24th 1896, shows that that it was what would now be called an abusive marriage. They have Emma's first name wrong but there are enough details to show that the case involves our couple.

William S. Bull, Ringstead, was charged with an aggravated assault on his wife at Ringstead on January 13th. Hannah [sic] Bull said her husband went out in the morning of the 13th without speaking to her, and when he came back in the afternoon she asked him to have a cup of tea. He then kicked her. She further said, "I have been married eight years and he has ill-treated me on and off all the time. He has drawn a knife and threatened me." . . . Bull said in defence he had led a married life for 35 years and this was the first time he had been brought up for cruelty. His first wife never charged him and the present one would have no cause if it was not for her violent temper.

William was fined £5 with 6 shillings costs but he said that he "had no money and what was he to do?" The Chairman replied that he would have to go to Northampton Gaol for a month. He also had to get two bondmen to keep the peace for 6 months.

I think that this was probably the end of his time as a landlord at *The Swan* and by the 1901 Census the family, for they were still together, lived at 5 Chapel Road, which was also the workshop and shop. It is possible that he retained ownership of these premises during the time at *The Swan*. In 1911, William, now aged 72, was a tinsmith and Emma a grocer. Ashley, for he was always known by his second name or "Ash" for short, was now 17 years old and a tinsmith with his father.



Ashley Bull in Ringstead football kit

William died in 1913 and the following year the Great War began. Emma had lost her husband, which may not have been altogether unwelcome, but she had also lost the main source of income for her family. She took over the beer licence and carried on the grocery business. Then the government wanted to take away her son. Ashley was probably a painter

before the war because this was given as his occupation when he was fined for “riding a bicycle without lights on 30th August 1914. Perhaps he had to go out and get a wage after the death of his father.

He had been born on 10th August 1893, so it was inevitable that he would be called up once conscription was brought in, in January 1916. Emma was a strong woman who did everything possible to keep her son out of the army. Exemption had been refused so she wrote to the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee asking what further steps she could take. She tried to lodge an appeal with the Central Tribunal but this was sent to the Thrapston Tribunal in error and was again refused. Then Ashley broke his arm and injured his nose. Was it a cycling accident? The military sent him home to await call-up. Emma again appealed but the original decision was upheld.



*A 1913 Recruitment Poster
©IWM PST 0553. (From Wikipedia Commons)*

The last case was heard on 3rd November 1916 and on 11th Ashley was in the army. He was 23 years 3 months old and was 5ft 7 inches tall with a 32 inch chest. It may be that he was posted straight to the Royal Flying Corps which had been established as the air arm of the British Army in 1912. But his records are rather sketchy and it appears that he only entered

the RFC on 11th December 1917 so it is possible that he was transferred from another Regiment but I have not been able to find any record of this. His official number was 108526 and he seems to have been at the School of Training at Halton Park. In 1917 a School of Technical Training was also established there for the Royal Flying Corps and Ashley transferred to that. It seems certain that he was being trained to use his tinsmithing skills in the repair of aircraft.

He was promoted to Air Mechanic 2nd Class on 11th December 1917.

On 1st April 1918 the R.F.C. and the R.N.A.S. (Royal Naval Air Services) amalgamated to form a new service the Royal Air Service (RAF). This change had been recommended by the South African, Jan Smuts, who realised the aircraft's potential for the "devastation of enemy lands and the destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale".

Ashley was transferred automatically into this new service and became an Air Mechanic 3rd Class. This seems like a demotion but it may be due to an extension of the ranks in the new RAF. The Air Mechanics' ranks included Armourers, Acetylene Welders, Blacksmiths, Tinsmiths and Sailmakers. When we look at these WW1 aircraft in museums such as the Shuttleworth Collection in Cambridgeshire we realise what flimsy, wood and sailcloth, contraptions they were. It is perhaps an indication of how little human life was worth that throughout the war the pilots were not issued with parachutes, although the military balloonists had them. It was felt that if there was trouble the men would bail out too soon rather than try to control the aircraft.

Ashley worked in No. 9 Aircraft Repair Depot which was in the former Eley Cartridge Factory in Edmonton, North London. These Repair Depots, started in 1917, but Edmonton did not come into action until April 1918, when the cartridge factory was closed. The depots were spread geographically and needed to be near good rail and road links as well as close to industrial centres.

On 25th January 1919 Ashley was sent to Purfleet to be demobilised. His Medical gave him an "A" fitness grade.

There may have been another reason for Ashley's mother's pleas, in 1916, for his exemption from military service, for in the Spring of the following year, aged 54, she died. On Tuesday 12th June 1917 the licence for the beerhouse was transferred to her eldest daughter Annie Bull.

Ashley returned to Ringstead and began a "Tinsmith and Sheet Metal Working" business in The Square in Raunds and was working there by 1924 at the latest. The tinsmith had originally been known as a tinker but this was associated with itinerant Irish workers and had become a term of mild abuse. A naughty child was often called a "little tinker". The tinsmith made and repaired light metal objects such as pots and pans. His workshop would have been a much quieter place than the roar and banging of a blacksmith's forge. By the 1920s it is likely that the shop would also have had some factory-made housewares.



*Ashley Bull's shop in Raunds
With thanks to Jon Abbott*

Tinsmithing was a craft which, like shoemaking, was being taken over by the cheaper factory wares but in 1939 Ashley, still single, and apparently now living in Church Street in Ringstead continued as a sheet metal worker. He never married and became increasingly reclusive.

In his youth he had been a boxer, footballer and all-round sportsman but he gradually withdrew into himself. Some say that he was unlucky in love. After the Second World War he bought a plot of wooded land down Ham Lane which had some small corrugated iron sheds on it. He began to live there, with only some chickens and perhaps the rats for company. As he grew older he became something of a person of local folklore and myth. Always a quiet man he began to live in his own solitary world. On the other hand, Jon Abbott, has told that, although the girls were a little frightened of him, he and the other boys would visit Ash in his shack in the woods. Ashley had taught himself to play the penny whistle and he would play the hymn tunes that he had sung in the Baptist Chapel.

Some of the villagers tried to look out for Ashley and left food for him. But in the winter of 1981/82 there was the severest December recorded in the 20th Century in England with a long period of snow and frost. In early January it became a little milder before once again deteriorating into blizzards and extreme cold. Jon Abbott has told how some locals became concerned and went to see if he was in trouble. Ashley was discovered, with a frostbitten leg, sitting in a chair and barely alive. An ambulance was called and he was carried, with

some difficulty, out of the shack and taken to Kettering General Hospital. The affected leg was amputated but it was to no avail.

He died on 16th and was cremated on 21st January 1982. In the *National Probate Calendar* his address is given as 1 Back Lane. Did he own this property or was it the address of a relative? He was 88 years old. He is still remembered by many in the village as a quiet proud man who retreated from the world.

William Isaac Bull (1889-1962)

Ashley Bull's older brother, William Isaac Bull, was not included in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*. He was some five years older than Ashley, born on 29th December 1889. When he was eighteen years old he joined the newly formed Territorial Force. This had been created in 1908 and was commanded by the War Office but administered by local County Territorial Associations. It replaced the existing mixture of local voluntary and part-time groups and was originally designed to reinforce the Regular Army abroad. There was much opposition to this and its role was changed to one of wholly home defence.

William Isaac Bull joined the "Special Reserve Territorial Force" at Northampton on 4th January 1909. He was given the number 8609 and signed up for six years. He stated that he was willing to serve in the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. He was 5ft 5¾inches tall with a 35½inch chest and weighed 116 pounds. He had, like most recruits, grey eyes and his hair was brown.

Each year at the end of June, or early July, he attended annual training sessions which lasted about a month. During this time William moved to Peterborough and in the 1911 Census was lodging with Henry and Martha Bottom at 637 Lincoln Road. He was no longer a shoehand but was now working as a labourer on the railways. The following year, on 17th February 1912, he married Kate Searle at Peterborough Registry Office. There was perhaps some urgency in the marriage for their first child, Ivy May, was born on 2nd July 1912. Another child, William Ashley, followed on 21st June 1914.

With the outbreak of war on 4th August 1914, William, like many other territorials volunteered for overseas service and on 11th September 1914 he joined the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) in France as part of the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. His next of kin, shown in his records, was his wife Kate, living at The Grocer's Shop in Ringstead. It seems likely that she stayed with his mother initially and perhaps, on her death in 1917, with William's sister.

In the beginning the B.E.F. was made up of regular soldiers with some former part-timers like William. Ill-prepared for this new type of technological warfare much of the Regular Army was wiped out during 1914. They were replaced largely by the volunteers in the "Pals' Battalions" and then, finally, by the conscripted men, as the furnace of war consumed soldiers. On 23rd August 1914 the B.E.F. was confronted at Mons by a much larger German force. It fought with courage and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy but was greatly outnumbered. The men were forced to retreat before the German onslaught for some

fourteen days. They were on the outskirts of Paris before, with the French, they counter-attacked at the Battle of the Marne.

This battle marked the end of the German sweep through Belgium and into France and the beginning of the attrition of trench warfare which characterised the war on the Western Front. It lasted from the 6th to the 10th September 1914. William arrived in France, the following day, on 11th September 1914.

His arrival was closely followed by the Battle of the Aisne which was fought from the 12th to the 15th September, with the Allies attacking after the Battle of the Marne. The Germans, however, had dug in, and it ended in a typical stalemate with defenders almost always having the upper hand. This battle was part of the "Race to the Sea" where both sides attempted to force round the opposing army's northern (or western) flank. The North Sea was reached with no real breakthroughs. The Battle of the Yser was fought between 16th October and 2nd of November. Once again it ended in stalemate but with the loss of many more lives.

William would have perhaps been considered fortunate in that on the first day of the battle, on 16th October 1914, he suffered a gunshot wound to his left ankle. He had been in France just 36 days. He returned to England and remained there for one year 79 days.

At the end of this home service, on 3rd January 1916 (not 1915 as signed in his Medical History Form), he was discharged, perhaps surprisingly, because of the "termination of his engagement". He had served seven years (one more than he originally signed for). Before conscription was introduced, a man who had served under a Regular or Territorial engagement and had reached the end of his agreed term could, and would, be discharged from the army. As the *Long Long Trail* website explains this even applied to experienced men who were serving in the Front Line trenches at the time. William was fortunate in that Army Order 202 was brought in on 8th June 1916. This stated that, except in certain specific circumstances, mainly age and length of service, such soldiers would not be discharged.

It appears therefore that William had completed his agreed military service and would not have to do further service during the war. He was awarded the usual British and Victory Medals, but he also received the 1914 Star, because he had served on the Western Front between 5th August and 23rd November 1914. In 1919 was also awarded a clasp, with two silver roses, for the Star because he had been under fire or within range of enemy mobile artillery during this period.

His military character was stated as "very good" and he was described as a "sober, honest and reliable man". He was now 5 ft 7 inches tall with a 36inch chest.

After demobilisation he returned to Peterborough with his family. He took up again his life on the railways and, in the 1939 *Register of England & Wales*, he was living at 141 L.N.E.R. Cottages, New England, Peterborough. He was now a Railway Fitter's Assistant. Living with William and his wife Kate was their son Cyril, born on 7th March 1919 who was shown as a clerk but "incapacitated".

William Isaac Bull died, aged 73, in the April to June period of 1962 in the Peterborough District.

John Alfred Bull (1892-1977)

Benjamin Julian Bull was the son of Isaac Bull and the younger brother of William “Tinker” Bull, the father of Ashley and William. He had married Ellen Manning in Ringstead Parish church on 25th December 1881 when he was 34 years old and Ellen just 19. He was a handsewn army boot maker by trade, although he did work as an Insurance Agent for a time around the turn of the century. They had nine children, of whom seven survived infancy.: Ruth, Eliza, Joseph, Louisa, Alfred, Maggie and Evelyn.

It is Alfred, or more accurately, John Alfred, born on 14th May 1892, who became a soldier in the Great War. He was, as we have seen, the cousin of Ashley and William Bull. In 1911, his father, who seems to have preferred to use his second name, Julian was, like many in the handsewn military boot trade, unemployed. John Alfred was a leather pressman in a local boot factory. They were living in Rosebery Street in Ringstead and, what was to give the military boot trade a temporary respite, was a few years away. The Great War began in August 1914.

Unfortunately, almost all of John’s military records have disappeared and the couple that possibly remain do not contain enough personal detail for us to be sure that they are about the correct man. The most likely soldier is a John A. Bull whose medal card shows that he first served in the Queen’s (Royal West Surrey) Regiment with Regimental Number 17948. He then was transferred to the Labour Corps and given the number 55836. We know from the Ringstead Roll of Honour that our man served in the 94th Labour Corps and also that he was in Belgium and France. The Queen’s Regiment number indicated that he was conscripted and so served in 1916 at the earliest. This is confirmed by his medal entitlement which was for the Victory and British Medals and not the 1914 or 14/15 Stars.

Fortunately, using the excellent *Long, Long Trail* website for guidance we can add a little more detail. Firstly, under Army Council Instruction of 1917 men from the 13th (Labour) Battalion of the Queens (Royal West Surrey) became part of the new 94th Labour Corps and were given numbers in the range from 55801 – 56400 (John was 55836). It now seems most probable that we have the correct Medal Card for our man.

The 13th (Labour) Battalion of the Royal West Surrey Regiment was formed at Balmer in the July to September period of 1916 and it (along with the 15th) embarked for France in September 1916.

The Labour Battalions were capable of fighting as infantry but their main purpose was to do the labouring work that was needed, especially in trench warfare. Most of them would have some kind of labouring background but smiths, carpenters, bricklayers etc., would also be included. These battalions carried out crucial tasks on the Western Front building and repairing docks, roads, railways and airfields, manning ports, stores and ammunition depots, unloading ships and trains, digging trenches and constructing camps.

John would not have been away from danger for much of the work was done within range of enemy troops and many from the Labour Corps were wounded. As the war wore on Chinese and South African Black Corps were formed to help with this work but were given little or no recognition for their contribution to the British war effort.

In 1917, Army order 85/17 authorised the formation of the new Labour Corps and as we have seen John was transferred to the 94th Labour Corps.

We know that at about this time, in the third quarter of 1917 that John was at home for he married Raunds' girl Bertha Tebbutt. Perhaps he had been injured and was on home leave. We cannot be sure. At the end of the war John was awarded the British and Victory Medals.

After his demobilisation it seems likely that he moved to Raunds and in the 1939 *Register of England & Wales* he and Bertha were living there, at 39 High Street. John was a "Levelling Boots Operative" and Bertha's occupation is shown as "Housework, Hand Closer Boot Trade". John died on 13th November 1977 and Bertha, aged 94, on 7th July 1983.

Chapter 16

John Wilfred Reginald Cave (1898-1916)

The Eady family was a dynasty of millers in eastern Northamptonshire. We will start with Thomas, born in 1792, who married Ann Irons. He had North Mill in Burton Latimer. His son, Moses Irons Eady, worked this mill for some 24 years from about 1840. His father still owned the mill and, after Moses moved away, it was worked by various tenant millers, using steam as well as wind power. We know much of this from an unsuccessful action brought in 1865 by Thomas Eady against the *Kettering, Thrapston and Huntingdon Railway Company*, alleging that in building the new railway the access to the mill was made more difficult and so devalued the rental that he could charge.

His son, Moses had taken over the Woodford Mill, usually known as Willy Watt, in Woodford Parish (but nearer to Ringstead village). In 1879 he bought the mill, house and lands from the main local landowner, George Capron. Moses and his wife Harriett had a daughter Harriett Ann, born in 1847 and, in 1874 she married John Thomas Cave. In the 1881 Census they were living with Moses in the mill house with their sons, Herbert (5) and John George (2) both born in Little Addington. We see that John Thomas was working as a machinist but it is not clear exactly what this occupation implies.

Moses moved back to Burton Latimer, where he died in 1887 and by 1891 John Thomas Cave was shown as the miller at Willy Watt. In 1897, his son, John George Cave married Ada Mary Eldred. At about this time the Willy Watt was sold to the Dodson family although the semi-derelict Ringstead Mill was retained by the Cave family until 1912.

John George Cave and his wife Ada also moved back to Burton Latimer where their son John Wilfred Reginald Cave was born on 11th July 1898 and baptised in the local church on 3rd August. John George appears to have been something of a nomad probably exaggerated by the ten-year Census cycle. In 1901 he and Ada were living at Westbury House, Lindsay Street, in Kettering. He was still only 23 years old and was a "Corn Merchant". A further son, Bernard Cyril Cave, had been born and was just one month old.

By 1911, in a sudden change of direction, John George was living in Hospital Drove, Long Sutton, in Lincolnshire. His occupation now was, "fruit growing, poultry keeping etc.," They have had two further children and all the three younger ones were born in Kettering. Meanwhile his parents John Thomas and Harriett had retired to Denford Road in Ringstead.

It is John Wilfred Reginald Cave, whose short life we are following here. We left him in 1911 when he was just twelve years old and living in Long Sutton. Soon after that the family moved to Ringstead. They were living there in 1914 but it appears that in the next few years they moved.

What we do know is that John was eager to sample the excitement of military life. It was on 24th September 1914 that he enlisted in the Royal Marines Light Infantry. He joined in

Birmingham which perhaps implies that his parents were in process of moving there but we cannot be sure because, in his records, his parents' address is given as "The Hollies" in Rlngstead.

John was 5ft 6½inches tall with blue eyes and brown hair. He was given number 17906 and appears to have been based in Portsmouth. His conduct was described as "very good" but he was discharged less than two months later. The reason was simply that he was underage, for he was only sixteen years old.

He returned to Northamptonshire and became an assistant baker in Brixworth but he had not given up on joining the military. It was at Brixworth that he joined the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given the Regimental Number 20272. We do not have a date for this but it must have been close to his eighteenth birthday if not before. He was transferred to the recently formed 44th Machine Gun Corps with the new number of 10536.



John Wilfred Reginald Cave

From Rushden Argus. With thanks to Rushden & District History Society

The Machine Gun Corps were set up from the various companies in October 1915 and over the next few months they were organised and in action. It was believed, by many who served in them, that the Corps was looked down on by the Regiments, with their colours and rich histories. Some ex-machine gunners felt that the fire that destroyed all their records after the Great War was suspicious. The British Army first used the outdated Maxim machine guns but in 1916 the Vickers gun replaced them. They were the weapon feared by attacking enemy troops and therefore they were specially targeted, and casualties were high.

John's eighteenth birthday was on 11th July 1916. At this point the 44th Company of the Machine Gun Corps were fighting around Pozieres as part of the campaign called the Battle of the Somme. It was the usual story of attack and counter-attack, of gain and loss, with terrible artillery bombardments. Both sides sustained great losses, with the Australian troops being most badly hit among the Allies.

On the 25th August 1916 John was killed in action. We know almost exactly where he was first buried. During the war, using reconnaissance on the ground and with tethered balloons and increasingly with aircraft, detailed and updated trench maps were produced. These were divided into ever decreasing squares like Ordnance Survey maps but with a different numbering system. John's grave was at 57.X.5.b.4.25. which places it near to the village of Pozieres. His body was later exhumed and re-buried in the Pozieres British Cemetery. The Burial Return Form for that cemetery has a final column headed "Were any effects forwarded to base?" For John, in this column, it simply and sadly has the single word "spoon."



Machine Gun Corps badge

He was entitled to the British and Victory Medals. His parents had, by the end of the war, moved to 36 Henry Street, Ashted Row in Birmingham. John was described as a "native of Ringstead" and it may be that he considered himself such for the Willy Watt Mill is just in the parish and Woodford but feels part of Ringstead. His uncle Herbert Eady Cave had been ill for some time and died on 17th August 1920. There is a gravestone for him in Ringstead Cemetery and at the bottom of the stone it also remembers John Wilfred Cave. He is on the Ringstead War Memorial and is also remembered on the Brixworth Memorial which has the dedication:

**THEY, WHOM THIS CROSS COMMEMORATES,
WERE NUMBERED AMONG THOSE, WHO, AT
THE CALL OF THE KING AND COUNTRY, LEFT ALL
THAT WAS DEAR TO THEM, ENDURED HARDNESS,
FACED DANGER, AND FINALLY PASSED OUT OF THE
SIGHT OF MEN BY THE PATH OF DUTY AND
SELF SACRIFICE, GIVING UP THEIR OWN LIVES,
THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE IN FREEDOM.**

Chapter 17

Cyril Cottingham (1898-1981)

The Cottinghams were a family with aspirations. They were Nonconformists who originally came from Thorpe Achurch in the eighteenth century. In the family tree were men like William Frost Cottingham, a Baptist missionary who died within weeks of reaching Africa and Edwin Turner Cottingham who became a clockmaker in Thrapston and took part in an expedition to help prove Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

Cyril's father, Ernest Cottingham, with a friend, cycled to London and back in 1891 to set a local record. Ernest married Sarah Daisy Braine in 1897. He was a handsewn shoemaker by trade who became the Assistant Overseer for the area.

Ernest and Sarah had two sons, Cyril and Edward, and in 1911 they were together, living at 7 Spencer Street, in Ringstead, part of the Tilcroft new estate. Cyril was aged twelve and still at school, but also earning money as a "milk boy", probably helping with the delivery of milk around the village in the early morning.

Much of Cyril's Service Record has been lost, probably in the Second World War bombing of the Record Office. When war was declared in August 1914, Cyril was only sixteen year's old. His medal card does survive and from that we know that he was not entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15 Star, so it seems likely that he was part of the conscripted army which started in 1916. He only became eighteen on 24th June 1916 so it seems certain that he did not join up until the Summer of 1916 at the earliest.

When he enlisted, it was with the First Battalion of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment. The Royal West Surrey was a regiment to which a number of local men were posted. The First Battalion was, at first, a Regular Army battalion made up of career soldiers, but the war had destroyed much of the professional army and it had to be made up again from the new volunteers and conscripts.

Cyril had a particularly active and distinguished army career. We know that he won the Military Medal and Bar and from this, and the Battalion's War Diaries, we can get some idea of his time at the Front. He was "gazetted" (listed in the London Gazette), on 14th December 1917. It was the norm for these to appear some months after the action for which the medal had been awarded which would place it in September 1917.

When we look at the *War Diary* for the 1st Battalion we find that the Queen's spent the whole of July 1917 in billets in Picquigny engaged in training but then received orders to march to Longpre and travelled on by train through Abbeville and along the coast through Etaples, Boulogne and Calais and finally to Dunkirk. From there they marched some eight miles, to Ghyvelde on the Belgian border.

After the Battle of Arras the Allied High Command turned their attention to the area north of Ypres in another attempt to make a conclusive break through the German Front Line. On

August 14th the 1st Battalion moved up to the front but were caught in a devastating barrage on the way there. In September it moved back to training ready to move to Dickerbesch to take part in the Third Battle of Ypres which had begun on 31st July 1917.

This campaign, often remembered by the evocative name of Passchendaele, was a series of actions, which carried on into November, to try to control the ridges south-east of Ypres. The Allies had planned a major offensive in great detail, trying to avoid the mistakes of the past. At first it was successful although at the cost of great loss of life on both sides. As was usually the case the advantage was with the defenders and the attack faltered and the Germans counter-attacked.

What really bogged down the campaign was the terrible weather in Flanders. In one of the worst summers in living memory some five inches of rain fell in August, with little sunshine to help dry the sodden ground. Writing of the Flanders front in August 1917, Lieutenant General Sir Hubert Gough stated:

The state of the ground was by this time frightful. The labour of bringing up supplies and ammunition, of moving or firing the guns, which often sunk up to their axles, was a fearful strain on the officers and men, even during the daily task of maintaining the battle front. When it came to the advance of the infantry for an attack across the water-logged shell holes, movement was so slow and so fatiguing that only the shortest advances could be contemplated.

[Quoted by Peter Hart in "The Great War"]

As usual, offensive was met by counter-offensive, and it was in one of these see-saw actions that Cyril Cottingham distinguished himself. The British had a planned attack for the 26th September but either from captured soldiers or other espionage, the Germans had gained knowledge of this. On the previous day, the 25th September, at 3.30 in the morning the enemy opened up an artillery barrage greater than anything seen before in the war. It not only targeted the Front Line trenches but also carpeted the supply area behind so that it was impossible to move transport or troops up to the forward positions.

Following the barrage, the Germans attacked in a massed formation. Parts of the 1st Battalion of the Queen's were overwhelmed. The enemy were described as:

"... debouching from the village of Ghelavelt armed with flame throwers, the stream of burning oil thrown from those devilish weapons reached a length and height of 100 yards and set fire to the trees, which being as dry as tinder, immediately took fire.

The bombardment lasted all day and the following night. The two Front Line companies of the 1st Battalion lost all their officers and most of their men. Many were never found in the deep mud-filled holes.

The British attack of the 26th was ordered to go ahead, even though the Division, (of which the 1st Battalion was a part), had suffered some 5000 casualties. The remains of the Division, reinforced by other Brigades, swept forward and made some limited progress.

In the midst of this mud and slaughter, Cyril Cottingham acted with bravery, beyond the normal resolution needed just to exist in this hell and was recommended to receive the Military Medal. This decoration had been instituted on March 25th 1916, (although made retrospective to 1914), for other ranks, including non-commissioned officers, to mirror the Military Cross for officers. There was also had a small gratuity attached to the award.



*Australian soldiers near Hooze 29th October 1917 on duckboard track
© Australian War Memorial (E01220) Wikipedia Commons*

It was reported in the Appendix to the October 1916 section of the 1st Battalion's *War Diary* that Cyril, along with twenty-one other men had been awarded the Military Medal for their heroism in the actions of the 25th and 26th September.

Of course, the Passchendaele Campaign lumbered on but, in early October, the 1st Battalion of the Royal West Surrey Regiment moved to Wizernes and then by train to Bailleul and from there marched to "Aldershot Camp" near Neuve Eglise. In early November they once more moved up to the Front Line to relieve the Canadians on the Passchendaele Salient.

Conditions had worsened. The local stream, the Revibeeke had overflowed its banks and shell holes filled with water and a single, constantly shelled, duckboard track was the only pathway to the front line. The horror of men being sucked into this quagmire has been often told. It was this mire that brought the 1917 campaign to a standstill although there were still sporadic actions and artillery fire.

It was in this final phase, continuing into the new year, that Cyril won the bar to his Military Medal for his bravery under fire. He was gazetted on 12th March 1918 but the award was for his actions in early November 1917.

Cyril, now a Lance Corporal, was part of two raiding parties sent out to find out more about the Germans opposing them and also to kill as many as possible. In all the chaos, it is easy to believe that these actions were ill-prepared, but this was rarely true although it sometimes was possible that, because of all the detailed preparations, the High Command went ahead with actions, even though conditions had adversely changed. A section from the final orders for the raid attached to the *War Diary* will give some idea of the detailed planning.

1. *Zero will be 2.15 am 11th inst.*
2. *Raiding Party will be in allotted positions at 1.30 a.m.*
3. *On conclusion of raid, party will return to Bn: Reserve Trenches.*
4. *Gaps in our own wire at "P" and "Q" will be cut by 12.30 a.m. by "D" and "B" Company and will be mended by "D" and "B" Companies respectively as soon as possible after completion of the raid.*
5. *Company Sergeant Major of "A" Company will be at point "P" and Company Sergeant of "B" Company at point "Q" for the purpose of checking number of men returning by name.*
6. *Very Lights will be fired by Units on our flanks as well as by "D" "B" and "C" Companies from Zero Hour plus 3 minutes to Zero plus 15 minutes.*
7. *Stokes Mortars will fire at a medium rate of fire from Zero minus 1 minute to Zero hour on the enemy's front line trench between B and D, at zero they will fire at selected targets.*
8. *At Zero plus 20 two buglers will sound a succession of high "G's" as a signal from withdrawal. The bugler will be with O.C. "A" Company the other at point "Q".*
9. *Hot tea will be taken to all Companies, leaving BETHLEHEM FARM at 4.0 a.m. 11th inst. A half issue of rum will be mixed with the tea for Raiding party and a half issue will be served out on return to Battalion Head Quarters.*

Unfortunately, the reality often quickly turned all the careful planning to mud. There was also attached to the *War Diary* a report of the raids. The "Left Party" found the barbed wire was uncut and they could not reach the enemy trenches but gave and received fire so that four were wounded. The "Right Party" did make their target and it seems likely that Cyril was part of this raiding group. The report graphically describes their experience:

Right Party encountered no opposition and no machine gun fire. Found gap about 10 yards wide and first four men got into trench and a group of Germans got out behind their trench and started bombing and shooting, except one who was taken prisoner. In the trench. Of the others in this group one was shot by Sergeant HAYES, one killed by 2nd Lieutenant PARKES with a revolver, one was bayoneted and a fourth shot. The trench was waist deep in water and impossible to work along it – one man had to be pulled out, leaving his gum-boots behind. No sign of other Germans and being unable to get along this party returned. No casualties with this party. Our artillery was

bursting well just beyond the enemy trench and barrage on right was very good, about forty yards clear of the party.

There was no artillery retaliation except for a few Trench Mortars and no rifle or Machine Gun fire on the return.

Our Very lights worked well and greatly assisted the party.

Both parties worked their way back by tapes laid out as they went, which were then pulled in.

Report on Raid of Night of 10/11th November [Some shortened names given in full]

The Battalion's *War Diary* records that Lance Corporal C. Cottingham received a bar to his military medal for his gallantry in this action and five other men received the Military Medal.

Cyril's war was far from over because the Royal West Surrey's 1st Battalion continued to see much of the action in 1918, the last year of the war. The battle season opened with a great Spring offensive by the Germans against the fragile British Front Line, designed to drive a wedge between the British and French forces and win the war before the Americans could tip the balance of power firmly in the Allies' Favour.

The "Michael Offensive" was fought over much of the wilderness left by the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The Germans started, as in 1914, by forcing the British to retreat and capturing territory. The 1st Battalion were in the Battles of Messines (10th – 11th April), Hazebrouck (12th – 13th April), Bailleul (13th – 15th April) and Kemmel Ridge (17th – 19th April).

By the 29th April the Germans had made great advances and continued to advance but also suffered heavy casualties and were running out of men and supplies. In this terrible arm wrestle, the Germans appeared to have the upper hand, but the energy slowly drained from them, and when the Allies once more applied pressure the enemy were broken. After the trench war stalemate the Hundred Days Offensive saw the Allies drive rapidly to victory. The fortified Hindenberg Line was breached and the Germans were rolled back until the signing of the Armistice on 11th November 1918.

It was a hard-won victory, however, for the soldiers on the ground. The Battle of the St. Quentin Canal ran from the 29th September to the 2nd October 1918. In this offensive the British managed to cross and secure one of the few bridges across the canal allowing the Allies to surge over and overwhelm the Germans, taking some 5,000 prisoners.

Nevertheless, there was still great loss of life on both sides and it was not an easy victory for the Royal West Surreys, because the use of various types of poison gas had become part of the armoury of both sides. It was not a great killer of men, but it created an atmosphere of constant fear. Yellow-green Chlorine Gas was the first gas used, by the Germans, on 22nd April 1915 but Phosgene followed, which was six times more deadly and being colourless could give a fatal dose without the soldier being aware. The victim's lungs would fill with fluid and they would suffocate in an agonising death. Finally, Mustard Gas, first used by the Germans in July 1917, was used more in the final years of the war. It caused painful blistering and temporary blindness.

On 1st October 1918, Cyril Cottingham was taken to Number 3 Casualty Clearing Station Hospital suffering from the effects of gas poisoning. He was immediately transferred to the Sick Convoy and spent 33 days in hospital so that it is unlikely that he would have re-joined his battalion until the time of the Armistice.

Cyril's fighting days were over after a short but distinguished army career. He had one last affliction to face, when he went down with an illness that took the lives of more people than even the Great War. The epidemic of the "Spanish Flu" found a home in the exhausted soldiers of the Western Front. Cyril reported sick with this influenza on 27th November 1918.

Eventually, he was demobbed and returned home to Ringstead. He was entitled to the British and Victory Medals as well as his gallantry awards of the Military Medal and Bar. Some 80,000 Military Medals were awarded during the Great War but far fewer received the Bar which was a second medal award. It seems rather sad that his bravery does not seem to have been really appreciated in the *Northampton Mercury*.

Cyril appears to have returned quietly home and became a labourer on the Midland Railway at Thrapston. He was still living in Ringstead as he remained on the Electoral Roll until 1925, although probably leaving the area the previous year. He had joined the National Union of Railwaymen on 19th April 1919 when he was still only twenty years old. He transferred to Staveley, near Chesterfield, in Derbyshire and joined the local branch there on 16th November 1924 as a porter.

When he married Edith Annie Houghton, some three years his senior, on 14th June 1925, at the Independent Wesleyan Church in Rushden, he was living at 12 Wharf Lane in Staveley. By the time of the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* he had moved within Staveley to 10 Bond Street. Although not all the family have been "unlocked" for public viewing, it looks as if the couple have two children still at home. Cyril died on 11th July 1981, aged 83. He was living at the time at 74 Fern Avenue in Staveley. Did his second home for nearly sixty years appreciate the quiet hero that they had in their midst.

Chapter 18

The Dainty Family

The Dainty family was originally from Titchmarsh. We will begin with William, an agricultural worker, born there in about 1809, and his wife Elizabeth. They had a son, also named William, baptised there on the 8th November 1835. He was in Back Lane, Titchmarsh in the 1851 Census with his parents and brother, John.

William, the younger's, marriage arrangements were more complicated. From the records, it appears that he may have married Rebecca Plowman in Titchmarsh on the 26th July 1858. For some reason the couple parted and by 1861, aged 25, he was lodging at 196 Great King Street in Hampton, Birmingham, with tailor John Humphrey and his wife Jane, who were from Moreton Pinkney in Northamptonshire. With William was his wife "Ann", aged 30, and also born in Moreton Pinkney, and their five-month-old, baby, George.

I do not think that the couple could marry without William committing bigamy and when they returned to Titchmarsh they had to revert to their unmarried status. Their son, George Dainty aged three was buried there, on 28th December 1863. I have not been able to find them in the 1871 Census but, in 1881, William was shown as 45 and single. He was an agricultural labourer living again in Back Street, Titchmarsh. With him is Maria Wilson, single, aged 50, with her two children Jane E. (11) and Mary M. (6). If we look back we find that Maria Wilson (sometimes Willson) had been born in Moreton Pinkney on 5th April 1827 and baptised there on 1st March 1829. She was the illegitimate daughter of Comfort Wilson, who married John Prestidge a few months after Maria's birth. Comfort died in 1842.

The couple's daughter, Jane Wilson, had been born in Titchmarsh but Mary was born in Sheffield. Matching the ages and place of birth it looks likely that "Maria" was the same person as "Ann" in the 1861 Census. The movement of the Dainty family between Northamptonshire and Yorkshire also complicates the issue.

But what about the male heir that we need to move forward with this surname? George William Dainty had been baptised in Titchmarsh on Whit Sunday, 20th May 1866, the son of William Dainty and Maria. Tellingly, the surname "Dainty" has been underlined four times. In 1871 he was six years old and staying with his grandparents, William and Elizabeth in Titchmarsh. He was called by his second name, George, probably to distinguish him from his father (and perhaps to replace the George who had died in 1863). I cannot find him in the 1881 Census. Perhaps he was making his way north because on 13th June 1886 he married Sarah Ann Schofield in the church at Brightside Bierlow. In 1891 George William and Sarah Ann had a first child, Walter aged one year, and they were lodging with Sarah's father-in-law, Charles Schofield at 10 Upwell Lane in Brightside Bierlow near Sheffield.

His father William, too, had moved to the Sheffield area and aged 55 was working as a bricklayer's labourer. With him and Maria "Dainty" there was still one daughter, Mary Maria (now also Dainty) and a granddaughter, Rebecca Dainty who was just five months old. They

too are living in Brightside at 49 Woodbine Lane. By 1901 William and Maria were living at 11 Clarendon street with their daughter, Maria and her husband William Slack from Middleton in Derbyshire, and their children. They had married in 1892 in the Sheffield area. Her sister, Jane Elizabeth Dainty had married William's brother, George Slack, the previous year and he features in the second book of these biographies.

It seems possible that something had happened to William, the father's, first wife, Rebecca Plowman, for a William Dainty married Maria Wilson in the West Riding of Yorkshire in the 2nd Quarter of 1904. Is this the couple able to marry at last? It is also possible that the death of their daughter Mary Maria in the Thrapston area in the Spring of 1904 may have been the catalyst.

Meanwhile, their son George William Dainty was only two doors away at number 15, and, aged 36, was a stone quarryman. With him was wife, Sarah aged 33 and children Walter (11), Charles W. (6), Mary M. (6), Florrie (4) and John W. (1). Now living with them was father-in-law, Charles Schofield (72) a widower and Emma Baugh (69), perhaps his partner.

By 1911 the family were back in Northamptonshire. They were living in Thrapston and George William was an ironstone miner (above ground), probably working in the quarries around Islip. With him was wife, Sarah Ann. They had been married 25 years and have had nine children, seven of whom are still living. The oldest son, aged 21, was an ironstone labourer like his father, but Charles William (19) was a shepherd on a local farm. The other children were Mary Maria (16) a domestic servant, Harriett (16) no occupation, George (8), William (6) and Violet (3). One suspects that Harriett was being kept at home to help with the housework and the younger children.

George William's father had remained in the Sheffield area. We know this from a tragic accident that had happened a few months after the 1911 Census had been taken.

William had been blind for some ten years and he would walk around the district, guided by his twelve-year-old granddaughter (probably Lily Slack). On Saturday 6th May 1911 she was guiding him from Attercliffe Common to Newhall Street. As they were walking past, a man stepped out from behind a tramcar and was struck by a motor car. He was knocked back unconscious, but in falling he collided with William who fell violently striking his head on the ground. He was taken to Firvale Hospital but died later that day.

More heartache was to come for the family, for the Great War was soon to begin and the two oldest sons, Walter and Charles William, were called to fight for their country.

Walter Dainty (1889-1965)

Walter Dainty had been the first child of George William and Sarah to survive into adulthood. Their eldest child, George William, like his father, had been baptised at Brightside on 18th May 1887 but was buried there on 13th March of the following year.

Walter was born on 12th September 1889 and baptised at Brightside Church on 25th of the same month. In the 1891 Census he was with his parents, lodging with his grandfather Charles Schofield. Judging from the dates and places where the children were born it appears that the family moved back to Northamptonshire in about 1904. By then Walter had followed his father into the ironstone mining industry as a labourer.



Charles (seated) and Walter Dainty

We can see the two vertical wound stripes and a good conduct stripe on Charles' left sleeve. Above these there appears to be a silver badge designed to be worn by wounded soldiers but which should not be worn on a uniform. This is thought to be in early 1917.

With thanks to Jon Abbott

They were first living in Thrapston but within the next few years they moved to Rosebery Street in Ringstead. We know that they were there when Walter attested on 17th December 1914 at Rushden. He was twenty-five years old and five feet 5 inches tall.

His mother, Sarah Ann, suffered something of a shock. Ernest Edward Slack, her nephew from Sheffield, had joined the Northumberland Fusiliers. During his sick leave from his

Regiment, he stayed with the family. Ernest stole a ten-shilling money order from her and was sent to gaol for a month, with hard labour.

Walter had signed up with the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given the Regimental Number 16763 (sometimes shown as 16765). He was posted to the Northampton Depot on the 18th December 1914 and sailed to France on 22nd April of the following year. The 2nd Battalion had suffered terrible losses in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle and Walter was one of the men from the New or “Kitchener’s” Army who filled the gaps.

He was to remain in France for 108 days and fought in some of the terrible battles of the Western Front. He would have been in the Battle of Aubers Ridge where the 2nd Northants were one of the lead Battalions in the offensive. The “No Man’s land” between the opposing trenches was less than 200 yards across. After heavy artillery fire, with the 2nd East Lancs, they moved forward. *The History of the 2nd Royal West Surreys* described what happened.

9th May 5.40 am. On further advance the East Lancs are hit by heavy machine-gun and rifle fire by the time they had progressed thirty yards from their own trenches; the Northants coming up ten minutes later, were similarly hit, but a party got through one of the gaps [in the barbed wire] blown by the field guns, and into the German front trench.

6.10 am. The front and communication trenches are by now crowded and chaotic. German shelling adds to the confusion. By now the fire across No Man’s land was so intense that forward movement was all but impossible. The support battalions of the 25th Brigade, the 2/1 Lincolns were ordered forward, to cross the craters; they did so losing many men on the way. Men of the Brigade were at this time seen to be retiring to their front line, having received apparently a shouted order. German prisoners making their way to the British lines were mistaken for a counterattack and there was great confusion.

As was often the case, the attack crumbled into stalemate. There were more than 11,000 British casualties on the day, the vast majority of those who died were killed within a few yards of their own front-line trenches.

It is difficult to imagine the impact this mayhem would have had on inexperienced young soldiers like Walter Dainty. Originally a Regular Army Battalion the 2nds had lost most of their professional soldiery in the first year of the war. Nevertheless, on 18th October 1915 the 24th brigade, of which the 2nd Northamptons were a part, were transferred to the 23rd Division to show the ropes to the less experienced battalions. The casualties had been so great that experience was a rare commodity.

In March 1916 they moved to the front line again between Boyau de L’Ersatz and the Souchez River where they were exposed to heavy shelling. The 2nd Battalion of the Northamptons were in that long Summer and Autumn campaign known as the Battle of the Somme which ran from 1st July and the 18th November 1916. It was an Allied Offensive by the British and French Armies and is remembered particularly for the great losses on the first day.

On 23rd July 1916 the Battalion marched to billets at Annequin and were training and preparing for action until the 30th. It is possible that Walter was injured, along with three other men and an N.C.O. when a Mills No. 5 Grenade went off prematurely during a practice on 28th July. All the men were sent to hospital and the matter reported to the Brigade H.Q.

On 30th July they marched back to the trenches. There was no major action in their sector but the Germans were continually peppering the trenches with “moaning minnies” (minenwerfers were a type of trench mortar) and aerial darts. The latter never became an important weapon but were feared by the ordinary soldiers. Invented by the French but used by both sides, they were like thick five-inch nails, with a sharpened point. They were packed in boxes of 500 and placed in a hole in the aircraft’s cockpit. The pilot pulled a string to release them and they spread over a large area, producing horrific injuries if they struck home.

It was most likely that it was during this period in the trenches that Walter was injured. He would have been sent, via the Field Ambulance, to the nearest Field Hospital and then ferried back to England in one of the Hospital Ships on 8th August 1916. He was taken to the Northumberland War Hospital where he was treated until 4th September 1916 and then, perhaps, sent to a Reserve Battalion for rehabilitation. It was only on 16th September 1916 that the *Chronicle and Echo* reported that he had been wounded.

He reported to the 17th Infantry Brigade Depot on 19th October 1916 and then was transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment on 30th October and given the new Regimental Number of 37472. He joined his new Battalion in the field on 1st November but it appears that on the 10th he was “Permanently attached for fatigues” to the 256 (Tunnelling Company) of the Royal Engineers, the last to be formed.

The records are a little confusing but it seems that he remained part of the Royal Berkshires and was, in effect, “seconded” to the Royal Engineers. Fatigues were often given as a punishment but referred to any duty which does not require the use of an armament. In March 1916, many former miners had been withdrawn from the ranks to establish a Tunnelling Company of the Royal Engineers. It seems very probable that because of his background and strength, (unusually he had a 40-inch chest), he was thought to be most useful in the dangerous work of the tunnelling engineers. The www.tunnellersmemorial.com website quotes the words of E. Synton, written in 1918:

Everybody damns the Tunneller; GHQ because he invariably has his job finished months before the rest of the Army are ready for the ‘Great Push’; Army troops because he invariably upsets all their preconceived notions as to the safety of trenches and dugouts; Divisional troops damn him because he is outside their sphere of influence; Brigade troops because he refuses to move when they do and because he knows by heart that part of the line to which they come as strangers; Brass hats because they dislike his underground habits; Regimental officers because he refuses to allow them to use his deep and snug dugouts; Subalterns because of his superior knowledge; Tommy because he is the direct cause of numerous extra fatigues and – alas that it should be so – because of his extra pay; and last and loudest, the Boche damn him because of his earnest and unceasing attempts at uplifting and converting

them into surprised angels. It is also owing to his success in this noble work of the missionary that the Tunneller is highly respected by all branches of the forces.

The only blot on his record seems to have been when he left “works without permission whilst on active service”, He was sentenced to four days No. 2 Field Punishment. Field Punishment No.1 was quite a common sentence where a soldier was placed in fetters and handcuffs (or similar) and attached to a fixed object. In the early part of the war this was often done with arms outstretched and the legs tied together, as in a crucifixion. There were stories that men had been placed in view of the enemy or with their feet not touching the ground. No. 2 Field Punishment was less onerous, for the man was fettered and handcuffed but not attached to a fixed object, so he was able to march with his unit. Nevertheless, he still had to endure hard labour and usually loss of pay.

Walter seems to have finally been transferred to the Royal Engineers 254 (not 256) Tunnelling Company on 3rd April 1918, with Regimental Number 359899 and it was as a Sapper that he finished the war. His service abroad finished on 15th December 1918 and he returned to England the following day. He was finally demobilised on 21st January 1919 and put on the “Z” Reserve which meant that he could be recalled if hostilities erupted again. He was entitled to the 1915 Star as well as the British War and Victory Medals.

He returned to Ringstead and probably took up again his pre-war job as a railway labourer. Early in 1926 he married Audrey May Liddington, some fourteen years his junior, in the Wellingborough District, possibly in Finedon where Audrey was living with her family, at least until 1916. Her father’s brother, John Francis Liddington was killed right at the end of the war in October 1918.

In 1939 his father, George William, now retired, and mother Sarah Ann, together with Walter’s brother William Charles who was a stockman and shepherd, were still living in Rosebery Street. Walter, a railway labourer, was living with wife Audrey in Agutter’s Cottages, set in the bend of Denford Road. It does not appear that they had any children

Walter died, aged 75, on the 30th July 1965 in the Thrapston District and Audrey died ten years later.

Charles William Dainty (1891-1932)

Charles William Dainty was born in the Sheffield area on 19th December 1891 and baptised at Brightside Parish Church on January 16th 1892. He was the son of George William Dainty and Maria Wilson. He moved with his family back down to Northamptonshire, first to Thrapston and then to Rosebery Street in Ringstead, shortly before the First World War.

He was a stockman on a local farm, although it appears that he had previously been an ironstone labourer like his brother. Charles attested on 23rd November 1915, aged 23 years 11 months and was put on the Army Reserve. He was mobilized on 8th February 1916 and became a soldier in the Northamptonshire Regiment with Regimental Number 22985. He was much slighter than his older brother being 5ft 5½ inches tall with a 35inch chest but was

deemed “fit for general service”. The war was to put a great strain on his mental and physical health.

He was first posted to the Northamptonshire Regimental Depot and joined the 8th Battalion on the 10th February 1916. He was appointed Lance Corporal on 5th June 1916. In a reorganisation of the Reserve Battalions following conscription, the 8th became the 28th Reserve Battalion. Increasingly, after conscription, soldiers were allocated to a Regiment and Battalion, partly to prevent the wholesale slaughter of the young men from a particular village or town who had signed up together.

On 6th September 1916 Charles sailed to France and joined the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in the Front Line on 23rd of the same month. Just three days later, on 26th, he was shown to have been wounded and in brackets beside the entry it has the words “Shock Shell”. As he progressed through the hospital system the words become transposed to “Shell Shock”. It seems likely that it was the mental effect of action rather than a purely physical condition that Charles was suffering from.

His brother, Walter, was also serving in the 2nd Battalion although at this time he was returning to England after being wounded. Physical wounds were treated with respect but mental trauma was often looked on by fellow soldiers as weakness and even cowardice. By the end of the war 80,000 men had been treated for “Shellshock” and many suffered from it after the war had finished. Treatment did improve but the main purpose was to get the men back to the Front as quickly as possible.

In 1917, Siegfried Sassoon, who was treated for “war neuroses”, wrote with bitter irony:

*No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain
Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
Of course they're 'longing to go out again,'—
These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk.
They'll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed
Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died,—
Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud
Of glorious war that shatter'd all their pride.
Men who went out to battle, grim and glad;
Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad.*

Charles was finally sent back to England for treatment on 2nd November 1916 and remained there for 171 days. He first went to Birmingham War Hospital where he was described as still being in a very nervous state. He remained there until 14th November before being transferred to Woodcote Park Convalescent Hospital which was used mainly by the Canadian and troops from the Empire, especially after the carnage of Gallipoli. He recuperated until 28th January 1917. It is likely that the main “cure” was exercise and fresh air. His report stated that he was, “Still out of breath and cannot march far. Improving”.

He returned to the Depot of the 3rd Northants on 30th January 1917 but was deprived of his Lance Corporal stripe because he was “Absent off sick leave on 2nd/3rd April 1917 by twenty-

three hours 55 minutes. It may be that he had been deemed as not suitable for this role and one would guess, pride apart, that he would have been glad to lose it.

On 23rd April 1917 he sailed from Folkestone to Boulogne and joined the 17th Infantry Brigade Depot at Calais. It was not until 4th June 1917 that he re-joined the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in the field. 31st July 1917 marked the beginning of a new phase of the war usually known as the 3rd Battle of Ypres. This started with a planned assault by the Allies. It was also the day when Edgar Mobbs the charismatic leader of the Northamptonshires' 7th battalion, was killed.

For Charles, it would have been a day, once again of panic and fear for his military record shows that he was "Buried by Shell" blast with, in brackets, "Concussion". On August 3rd he once more returned to England, this time on the Hospital Ship *St Patrick*, a converted ferry from the Fishguard-Rosslare route, requisitioned for the duration of the war. There is some confusion here because the Register for the No. 2 Military Hospital at Old Park, Canterbury has Charles admitted to hospital on the 2nd July 1917 but I think perhaps this should be 2nd August and he was in hospital for 15 days until 16th August. He was once again diagnosed as having shellshock. One could hardly be surprised in the circumstances.

He remained in England until 30th September 1917, before returning to Boulogne on the following day. On 3rd October 1917 he was posted to the 17th Infantry Brigade Depot in Calais before joining the 7th Battalion of the Northants in the field on 9th October. Just three days later on 12th October he was sent to the Field Hospital. Again, he proceeded through the system to Rouen. He had been diagnosed as suffering from Myalgia (acute muscle pain). Once more he returned home and finally was sent to the Red Cross Hospital in Gloucester to recover until 16th January 1918 when he was granted a furlough until the 25th.

I think he must have then been posted to a Reserve Battalion although I have not found any evidence for this. He embarked for France on 4th April 1918 and joined the 7th Battalion on 18th April. Six days later, on the 24th April, he was once wounded, in the leg by a bomb (probably a shrapnel shell). Again, he went through the casualty system from Carrieres to Étaples and on to Trouville.

This time he did not return to England but re-joined the 7th Battalion of the Northants in the field on 16th June 1918. On the 19th June he was treated for Pyrexia (Fever) or P.U.O. (Pyrexia of Unknown Origin). This was more usually known as Trench fever and was an unpleasant and sometimes very painful condition caused by the excretions of lice entering a wound. He was at Trouville, also suffering a "mild" attack of influenza, until 21st September. On 5th November he was sent to the 24th Division's Reception Camp and on 10th November he re-joined the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. The Armistice was signed on the following day.

Charles remained in France until 28th January 1919, returning to England on the following day. On 24th February 1919 he was demobilised. Perhaps surprisingly, he was placed on the "Z" Register which was for soldiers who could be recalled if hostilities began again.

Charles returned to Ringstead and in the 1920s was living with his parents in Rosebery Street. We have seen that throughout the war he had suffered from mental and physical “wounds”. It is difficult to believe that these problems did not stay with him in his civilian life. He died in 1932 aged 39 years of age. He was a casualty of the war as much as those who appeared on the Ringstead War Memorial.

Chapter 19

William Davis (1897-?)

The life of William Davis, including his army service, is more difficult to uncover than for most of the men we have written about. We know that he finished the war in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, which is generally not so well documented as the Regimental Battalions. There also happens to be a number of men called William Davis in the Ordnance Corps, and in the Northamptonshire area, of about the right age. His military records have been destroyed but further research and the publication of the 1921 Census may solve some of these problems.

We do know that William was the son of Silas Davis who had been born in North Crawley in Buckinghamshire. Silas's father had been a sawyer there but, at some point, he moved up to Northamptonshire for in 1895 he married Edith Emma Ellen Bradshaw, the daughter of Frederick, the Ringstead village blacksmith. Silas became the village blacksmith like his father-in-law.

The couple had a daughter, Mahala, born on the 11th May 1896, and William followed a year later. In the 1911 Census, we see the family were living in Chapel Road in Ringstead. William was thirteen years old and still in school.

We do not know when William enlisted or even if he went first to another Regiment before joining the Army Ordnance Corps (AOC). There are a number of men named William Davis who were in the AOC, (the "Royal" was added in 1918) but from the *Absent Voters' Lists* for Ringstead we know that his Service Number was 8145.

The *Western Front Association* on its website describes the Calais A.O.C. Base:

The AOC issued immense quantities of ammunition for anything from a rifle to a monster siege gun. Some idea of the range and scale of other items supplied can be gained from the following issues made by the Calais Base Ordnance Depot . . . during the first ten months of 1916: 11,000 compasses, 7000 watches, 40,000 miles of cable, 40,000 torches, 3,500,000 yards of flannelette, 1,250,000 yards of rot-proof canvas, 26,000 tents, 1,500,000 waterproof sheets, 12,8000 cycles, 20,000 wheels, 5,000,000 ant-gas helmets, 4,000,000 pairs of horse and mule shoes, 447,000 Lewis gun magazines and 2,250,000 bars of soap. There was, of course, much else besides including weapons, clothing, footwear and blankets.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that William served in both France and Italy. The AOC had to store and supply the Front Line with weapons, armoured vehicles, ammunition but also it was given responsibility for other supplies such as clothing and mobile baths. During the course of the war it had to become a much larger and more complex organisation to keep pace with the new industrialised warfare. One of the major home bases was Weedon Bec in Northamptonshire. The march tune of the RAOC was "The Village Blacksmith".



*Interior of hangar, Case Goods Depot of the base Supply Depot, Vendroux (near Calais).
©IWM (Q10019)*

It was not an easy posting and the AOC soldiers were often a target for enemy artillery fire. William would have first served in France and then moved on to Italy. The Italian Campaign is one of the most neglected aspects of the hostilities. The Italians had been allied with the Germans and Austrians but never fought with them and changed sides in 1915. In October 1917 French and British troops were sent to Italy after the German-Austrian Army had broken through the Italian Front at Caporetto. They began to close in on Venice but the Allies first defended against and then, finally, defeated the Austrian Army, although it was the Italians, against expectations, who rallied and were the major force in the action.

We know that William was in Italy in September 1918 for, on the 25th, he was admitted to No. 39 Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) when he had suffered a sprained right thumb. At this time 39 CCS was in a village school building at Dueville, a few miles north of Vicenza. William was discharged back to duty five days later.

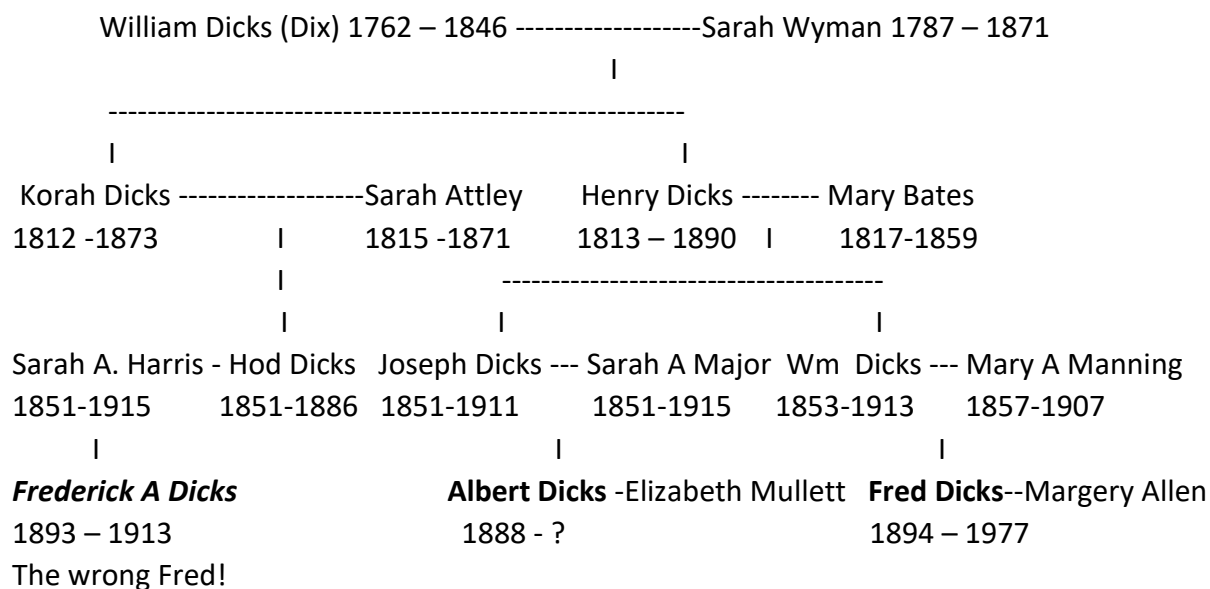
William was still serving when the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* was published in mid-1919 but we see from the Electoral Register that he was back in Ringstead by 1920 and was recorded there until the mid-1920s. In 1939, his father, Silas, was still a "Master Blacksmith", living with his wife Edith, in Chapel Lane Ringstead.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to find William, with any confidence, after that. I had thought that he might be the William Davis who married Raunds girl, Emily Maud Stringer, in 1917 and, after she died in 1924, married her youngest sister, Rose in 1927. The Marriage Certificates show, however, that his father was George and the *1939 Register of England & Wales* shows that he was a younger man. There are many other possibilities but we must leave his story there for the present.

Chapter 20

The Dicks Family

A Simplified Family Tree



Albert Dicks (1885-?)

Joseph Dicks was a local man who, in the 1881 Census was living with his wife Sarah Ann in Church Street in Ringstead. He was an army shoemaker, born in about 1851. Living with the couple are their children Mary J. (9). Emily (8), Thomas H. (5), Ellen (3) and Charles E. (1), all born in the village. By 1891 Sarah and Albert had been added to the family which was now living in Carlow Street.

Albert, who had been born on 27th October 1885 was, in 1911, staying at 84 King Street, Ramsgate, in Kent. The house belonged to Harold Hughes who was a hairdresser. Albert was one of three hairdressers classified as “visitors” and there were also three other young men who were apprenticed to the trade.

It is not clear if Albert was working in Ramsgate but, if so, he moved back initially to 13 Orchard Place, Rushden and then to 60 Irthlingborough Road in Finedon. This information comes from his military records for he had volunteered and attested with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) on 13th September 1915 at Rushden. He was given the Regimental Number 65718. At the time of enlistment he had been working as a hairdresser with Arthur Smith at 130 High Street in Rushden.

He would have first undergone basic training. Before the war this would have been at Aldershot but, between 1914 and 1918, the number of men in the ranks of the RAMC rose from 9000 to 154,000. It had been necessary to open up many other training centres with

Blackpool being the headquarters. The training would have been part medical and part military but would have been of a basic standard: First Aid together with instruction in the correct carrying and loading of stretchers etc. He seems to have been awarded a 5th Rate C.P. on 23rd October 1915. A C.P. was a Collecting Post in a war zone and although I have not found a definition of this award, it seems likely that it was a basic training qualification for attending to, and carrying, casualties.

On 11th January 1916 Albert went with the British Expeditionary Force to France. He was not to return to England until 24th April 1918.

The new mechanized warfare was producing casualties on a huge scale week after week, month after month. The RAMC evolved a system for dealing with this carnage called the "Chain of Evacuation". Lt/Col. T.B. Nicholls of the RAMC wrote:

All through the chain of Medical Units from the Front to the Base the wounded man is kept the very minimum of time to attend to his wounds, and then he is moved on, and kept on moving, until he reached either the Base or Home. . . The reason for rapid evacuation is twofold. Firstly, it is very bad for morale if troops see wounded men lying about in large numbers; and secondly, unless Medical Units are cleared they lose their mobility, and also cannot deal with a fresh influx of wounded that might come in quite unexpectedly – e.g. from a surprise counter attack.

As the soldier was moved further from the Front Line, the more sophisticated the facilities for treatment became. A casualty would be looked at first at a Regimental Aid Post (RAP) within the trench area by a Battalion Medical Officer and his orderlies and stretcher bearers. If necessary, he was then moved to an Advanced Dressing Station, still close to the Front Line manned by members of the RAMC Field Ambulance. If further treatment was required, he would have been taken to a Casualty Clearing Station, usually a tented camp behind the lines. From there he was moved to a Base Hospital, mostly situated near a railway station and the coast. If further treatment was then needed, he would be taken by one of the converted hospital ships to Britain. Here, hospitals began to specialise in certain types of injuries which is why some men seem to have been taken to a more distant hospital than expected. Finally, he might end up in a convalescent hospital run by voluntary organisations.

At each stage along the way, those deemed "cured" were returned to duty because one aim of the system was to put men back into service as quickly as possible.

It seems most likely that Albert was one of the RAMC men working near the Front Line. He was wounded on 19th March 1918 when, during an attack, he was struck by a bullet (or shrapnel – records vary). The track of the bullet passed through his triceps but seems to have lodged because he was said later to also have an "extraction wound". The 19th of March was just two days before the massive bombardment heralding the German "Michael Offensive" which, for a time, seemed might win them the war.

So, Albert himself had to pass through the system from the Casualty Clearing Station to the Base Hospital. In Albert's case he was taken to 54 General Hospital, known as "London General", in Wimereux, on the coast just a few miles north of Boulogne. From Calais a

hospital ship took him back to England and on to the East General Hospital in Cambridge. This was on a huge eight-acre site, now occupied by Cambridge University Library and part of Clare College Memorial Court. At one point it had 1,700 beds and treated some 70,000 casualties during the war.



*East General Hospital Cambridge
With thanks to Addenbrookes Arts*

He was at Cambridge for just a week before being transferred to the V.A.D. Hospital in Abbots Ripton. This was one of the hundreds of convalescent hospitals set up in large houses, halls and chapels which were run by voluntary organisations. This one was set up in Abbots Ripton Hall, now the home of Lord de Ramsey. Albert would have worn a blue uniform and red tie to show that he was being treated and to prevent him being abused as a “shirker”. It was not until 5th June 1918 that it was published that he was entitled to wear a “Wound Stripe” above the left cuff of his uniform.

He was diagnosed with, or developed, anaemia in July 1918 and, at his later Disability Board, it was reported that “Mucous membranes of the face, pale” and that he “always feels run down”. It did add that he “may improve”. It is possible that the poor diet of the soldiers’ life, or intestinal parasites such as hookworms, or even the continual exposure to mild doses of mustard gas may have been the cause.

Albert never returned to France and was demobilised on 23rd July 1919. He was later assessed as having a 20% disablement and was granted a small pension. At first it was eight shillings a week from 24th January 1921 for a year and then seven shillings and sixpence for a further seventy weeks. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

During his convalescence he probably met Elizabeth Mullett (an interesting name for a barber’s partner) and married her on the 1st March 1919 at St George Hanover Square, in

London. He was still in the RAMC and his address was given as 43 Yorkshire Street in Blackpool.

Albert took up his trade again and at some point he moved to St Ives (now in Cambridgeshire) where he had a barber's shop at 42 The Broadway. St Ives is only some seven miles away from Abbots Ripton so perhaps he had decided that he liked the place during his convalescence. In the 1939 *Register of England & Wales* we find Albert and Elizabeth living there with their two children Joseph L., born on 7th March 1920, and Joan, born of 8th February 1923. It is at the start of another World War and Albert is in the A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions) who supervised the observance of the blackouts and he was also a First Aider.

Albert's son, Joseph, remained in the St Ives area until his death in 1983 but I have not yet found Albert or Elizabeth's deaths so it may be that they moved elsewhere for their retirement.

Fred Dicks (1894 -1977)

The life story of Fred Dicks was one that was difficult to trace, partly because most of his military records have been lost but also because it took some time to work out which, of two possible Fred Dicks, he actually was.

Looking back to the early Nineteenth Century, William Dicks (or Dix) and his much younger wife, Sarah (née Wyman), produced a large family including Korah born in Leicester St. Margaret's, possibly in the Workhouse, in 1812 and, a year later, Henry, born in Ringstead. Korah was an unpleasant, rascally man who I have written about elsewhere. He married Sarah Attley and they too had a large family in Ringstead including one son called Hod (or sometimes Odd) in about 1851.

Hod, who seems to have inherited some of his father's characteristics, married Sarah Harris on 25th December 1873, the year his father died. Hod, too, died young, at the beginning of 1886, when he was only thirty-five years old, leaving Sarah a young widow. In the 1891 Census she, and her three children, were living in Church Street with Hod's older brother, John Dicks. By the 1901 census Sarah had had another son, Fred, born in about 1894, some eight years after her husband's death. Was bachelor, John Dicks, the father?

The Civil Birth Registration was in the 2nd Quarter of 1893 with the mother's maiden name given as Harris. It is the *Ringstead Baptismal Register*, however, which reveals that Fred was actually christened Frederick Arthur, the son of Sarah Dicks on 5th February 1894. It is the full name plus the birth date which allows us to identify this Fred and to say that he is the Frederick Arthur Dicks who died, aged twenty, in the Thrapston District, in the third quarter of 1913.

This Fred was a second cousin of Albert whose story is given above. There was another cousin however, the son of William, a brother of Joseph (the father of Albert). In the 1901 and 1911 Censuses for Ringstead there are two children called Fred Dicks. who were seven and seventeen respectively. We have just looked at one, son of Sarah (widow of Hod). The other Fred was also a great grandson of William and Sarah Dicks (nee Wyman).

William and Mary Ann's son, Henry had a son also called William, baptised on 8th February 1853. William junior married Mary Ann Manning and had a son on 26th April 1894 who appears to have been given the shortened name, "Fred". It was this Fred who was in the First World War.

His mother, Mary Ann (née Manning) had died in 1907 and in the 1911 Census, his widowed father, William was an army boot maker living with his two sons, Archie and Fred in Carlow Street. Fred, aged sixteen, was working as a boot riveter but his father and older brother were both unemployed. His father died in 1913 and a year later, the temporary saviour of the army boot trade, the Great War, began.

Unfortunately, as we have indicated earlier, there are few military records for Fred, and none tie them to a home address, so there is a lack of certainty about any of them.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows Frederick Dicks in the 17th Mountain Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery and, in late 1918, he was part of the Army of Occupation there. The 1918 and 1919 *Absent Voters' Lists* for Ringstead also reveal that his Service Number was 168710. His few military records put him in the 11th Mountain Battery. Could this be a simple clerical error? It is possible he was posted to a different unit but as both the 11th and 17th were in Egypt at this time it does not alter our account.

It is possible, however, that he had served in another Regiment or Corps prior to this. He would have been in a protected trade as army boots needed to be made in increasing numbers. He was, however, a single man of the right age so it is almost certain that this protection would not save him from conscription for the whole war.

The Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) had been formed in 1899 as an arm of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, alongside the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) and the Royal Horse Artillery (RHA). Its main role had been seen as the manning of the guns of the forts and coastal batteries of the Empire but it also became responsible for the heavy gun batteries attached to each Infantry Division.

The Mountain Batteries were the part of the Royal Garrison Artillery tasked with working in mountainous areas and places with difficult terrain, even behind the Western Front. There were seventeen Mountain Batteries, including some manned almost exclusively by Indian troops. There were also a number of Territorial Units.

Mountain Batteries 10 to 17 were sent to be part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) in 1917. The war against the Ottoman Empire, allies of the Germans, and by this time known as the "Sick Man of Europe" was around the Eastern Mediterranean. The EEF had been sent to Egypt initially to protect the Suez Canal but by 1917 operations had extended into southern Palestine. In April 1917 the British lost the 2nd Battle of Gaza, with 6,444 casualties in a humiliating defeat. The Commander of the Force was replaced and after extensive reinforcing and re-fitting the next campaign pushed the Turks back to Jerusalem. In 1918 the Ottomans were forced back further, to Damascus and Northern Palestine, and on 31st October 1918 an Armistice was signed which signalled the end of the once great Ottoman Empire.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

A02969

Members of the 11th Mountain Battery in action using a light field 3.7-inch mountain howitzer. August 1918 Palestine West Bank Abu Tellul.

Glass stereo negative Accession Number A02969. www.awm.gov.au. Public Domain

After the Armistice the EEF had to remain in Egypt and Palestine as an unpopular Army of Occupation. In March and April 1919 it had to suppress with force an Egyptian Rising. The occupation was also unpopular with the conscripted and volunteer soldiers because it delayed their demobilisation, long after most of their fellow soldiers were home with their families.

The men were finally demobilised and Fred was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals. He returned to Ringstead and in 1919 was in the Electoral Register, living in London End in Denford Road. He married Margery Gwendoline Allen from Woodford in 1926. In the 1911 Census she had been living with her sister and widowed mother in Denford and it appears that all three were working for *Wallis and Linnell*, clothiers, who had a factory there.

At some point the couple, who do not appear to have had any children, moved to 10 Church Street in Hatfield in Hertfordshire and were there in the *1939 Register of England and Wales*. Fred was still a boot and shoe maker and Margery was doing, as was the norm, "unpaid domestic duties".

I believe that the couple did move back to Northamptonshire, living at 4 Grove Road in Thrapston. Fred died on 29th October 1977 aged 83 and Margery followed him on 20th January 1982.

Archibald William Dicks (1889-1917)

After posting the stories of Fred and Albert Dicks on my website I received an e-mail from Brenda Hazel telling of an older brother of Fred called Archibald William Dicks. He had been born in Ringstead in 1890, the son of William and Mary Ann. The 1891 and 1901 Censuses show him living with his family in Carlow Street. His mother, Mary Ann, died in 1907 and in 1911 "Archie" was living with his widowed father, William, and brother Fred.

His father died too in 1913 and it may have been at this time that he left Ringstead for factory work in Irthlingborough. Both he and his father had been out of work in the 1911 Census so it is possible that he had left the Ringstead handsewn men even earlier.

Certainly, he was living in Addington Road, Irthlingborough and working as a Shoe Machine Operator when he married Florence Andrews Botterell (various spellings) in Wellingborough Register Office on 13th November 1915. Florence (or Florrie) had been living with her widowed mother in Hudson's Cottages in Irthlingborough. Her mother had been forced to work as a laundress after the early death of her postman husband.

The couple set up home in Hudson Cottages, probably in Florence's family home. Archibald was working for boot manufacturer John Spencer in Station Road in Irthlingborough. Florence gave birth to their first child, William Reginald Dicks, on 22nd May 1916, so Archie would have seen his son before he enlisted in the following July. The army boot trade was one which could give some exemption from conscription but this carried less weight as the war progressed, and increasingly men had to enlist.

It appears that he was first enlisted with the Suffolk Regiment and given the Regimental Number 35092, but it is likely that when he was sent to France in November 1916, he was transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Essex Regiment with new number 32961 (sometimes 32931). Unfortunately, few of Archie's military records survive so we can only assume some of his service. At the end of November the 1st Battalion were in the Trones Wood bivouacs, resting between tours of duties in the Front Line. The, now desultory, warfare following the long campaign known as the Battle of the Somme was drawing to a close.

With the new year the German High Command were planning to withdraw their troops to the strong defensive positions they had constructed known as the Hindenburg Line. This withdrawal began on 21st February 1917. The new French Commander-in-Chief of the Allies, General Nivelle, planned to make a grand assault on the enemy, hoping to bring the war to a swift end. The French assembled a million troops to launch an attack in the Second Battle of the Aisne. The British were to launch a diversionary attack a week before to draw German troops away. This campaign was called the Battle of Arras.

The British offensive began with the First Battle of the Scarpe which ran from the 9th to the 14th April. The Essex Regiment's part in this battle was focussed around the village of Monchy-le-Preux. The battle is remembered partly for the terrible losses sustained by the

cavalry of the Essex Yeomanry in holding the village after its capture. They were ordered to advance from the village against the enemy but were forced back by machine gun and artillery fire. The men had to dismount and seek cover in the cellars, but the horses could not escape and the streets were soon littered with the bodies of dead animals, and it was said that the gutters ran with their blood.

The weather was very cold with sleet and snow but the 1st Battalion was directed to carry out a follow up attack, together with the Canadian Newfoundland Regiment, to take the strategically important, but vulnerable, *Infantry Hill*. The terrible weather and the blocked streets delayed the attack for a couple of days giving the Germans time to reorganise. The attack had also been planned to be by the 87th and 88th Brigades but, when it was realised that the 87th would not be ready in time, it was hurriedly decided to attack with only the Essex 1st Battalion and the Newfoundland Regiment.



Simplified map showing attack on Infantry Hill

At 5.30 am on April 14th the two Regiments started this ill-conceived attack, uphill, against a partially surrounded position. The two Regiments had captured Infantry Hill by 7.30 am but before they had time to dig in the Germans counter-attacked. They were on a salient surrounded on three sides by the enemy. The tide rapidly turned and many soldiers were quickly either casualties, or captured, or both. Jeremy Banning, on his website, quotes from the press release given out when a memorial to the Essex Yeomanry and 1st Battalion, (among others), was unveiled in Monchy-le-Preux on 21st May 2016.

On 14th April, the 1st Battalion Essex Regiment attacked east of Monchy into a wooded area aiming for their objective, some high ground known as Infantry Hill. Initial success, with ground captured and prisoners taken was reversed by a heavy German artillery barrage plus a simultaneous counter attack by the 3rd Bavarian

Regiment, one of the enemy's finest fighting units. The battalion suffered 661 casualties, so many that a temporary battalion formed with the Newfoundland Battalion named the 1st Newfoundessex comprising only 400 men.

The Essex 1st Battalion's War Diary has two brief entries for the day:

14. 4. 17 Attacked German line at 5.30 am. Casualties 17 officers 644 other ranks.

14. 4. 17 Remainder of 1st went into Caves in Arras at 8 pm.

Archibald Dicks was one of the men in this ill-fated attack. It was not until 25th May that the *Wellingborough News* reported that Archibald's mother had received official confirmation that he had been missing since April 14th. Again, on the 6th June 1917, the *Chronicle and Echo* reported:

Dicks, Pte. A. (27) Essex R. of 8 Hudson's Cottages, Irthlingborough, missing since April 14th is now reported badly wounded and a prisoner, enlisted July 1916, going to the Front in November.

It must have been an agonising time for Florence but she would now have had some hope of better news, after thinking Archie was probably dead. Jean Rowland has said that, in May, Florence had received a letter from Archie in his prison-of-war camp saying that he was seriously wounded in the leg and was a prisoner in Germany. It was again reported in the *Northampton Mercury* of 31st August 1917 that he was a POW.

In fact, the death of Archie on 7th May 1917 had been published in the *Daily Casualty Lists* on 22nd August. His death certificate records that he died, aged 26, in Hamborn-en-Rhein, now a district of Duisburg. There was a prison camp at Hamborn and I think he was in a hospital there, or nearby, when he died. It is thought that he may have died of the virulent "Spanish Flu" but, if so, his injuries were probably a contributory cause. He would have been buried locally but in 1922 it was decided that the graves of Commonwealth servicemen, who had died all over Germany, should be brought together in four permanent cemeteries, one of which was Cologne. This was done in 1923 (when there was still an army of occupation) and more than 1000 Allied soldiers were buried there as well as some German servicemen. His grave was in Cologne Southern Cemetery (Plot XI. G. 12.).

He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

Florence and son, Reginald, as he was usually called, had to carry on life without Archie. She received a small war pension and did not re-marry. She died in 1933, just 43 years old, and Reginald, aged 16 and now an orphan, had to go and live with his aunt.



Archibald's Grave in Cologne (I think he was 26)

With thanks to Brenda Hazel

Charles Dicks ?

There is a Charles Dicks on the *Kettering Roll of Honour* website, who was born in Ringstead (possibly in 1897), and died at home. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate this man although there is a Charles Edward Dicks born in about 1880. I have contacted the compiler of the website but there is no longer contact with the local person who researched this Roll of Honour so no further information is possible.

Chapter 21

The Dickens Family

George Thomas Dickens was originally from Finedon but he was living in Ringstead when he married local girl, Mary Ellen Bates, on 22nd June 1897 in the Parish Church. They went on to have a large family but fortunately it seems that only the oldest two sons had to fight in the Great War. The event that would bring work to their bootmaker father, George, would also put the two boys, Horace George and Arthur in danger of their lives. The following sons, Bert, William and Ernest were lucky enough to be too young to be conscripted.



*George & Mary Ellen Dickens with their family
From left: Ernest, Bert, Ivy Arthur & Horace. (c 1908/09)
With thanks to Caroline Dickens*

Horace George Dickens (1898-1966)

The oldest son, Horace George, was born on 27th September 1898 and baptised in Ringstead Church on 19th July of the following year. We see, in the 1901 Census, that the couple had first lived in Wellingborough, where Horace had been born, prior to moving on to Rushden before the birth of Arthur. It was in 21 Robert Street in Rushden that the family were living in 1901. George was working as a bootmaker in a local factory.

By the 1911 Census there were eight children, the youngest being just five months old. They were now living in a five-room house in Chapel Street, Ringstead and George was a handsewn army bootmaker. Horace (12) and Arthur (11) were still at the local school although Horace was also described as an “errand boy” which could be for a local shop. Certainly George, his father, was not shown as working at home but perhaps Horace was collecting boot and shoe parts from the factories in Raunds for some of the Ringstead homeworkers.

Unfortunately, once again, most of Horace’s military records have been lost. As a result we can only give some idea of his wartime service. We do know that he would have been eighteen years old on 27th September 1916 so would have been conscripted after that date. He was posted to the 15th Battalion of the Nottingham and Derbyshire Regiment, known as the “Sherwood Foresters”, and given the Regimental Number 73524.

The 15th had been formed in February 1915, by the Mayor of Nottingham and a Committee, as a “Bantam Battalion”. This was in the days of volunteer “Pals Battalions”. The Bantam Battalions were formed because it was discovered that many men were under the minimum height needed to become a soldier. Poor diet and living conditions had seen the stature of many working-class men diminish compared with earlier ages. The “Bantams” were for men between five foot and five foot three inches in height with an expanded chest of at least 34 inches. As the war progressed, and men were killed and transferred, the Bantams began to lose their unique status. On the *Wartime Memories Project* website it quotes that in 1916:

The division received new drafts of men to replace losses suffered on the Somme, but the CO [commanding officer]. soon discovered that these new recruits were not of the same physical standard as the original Bantams, being men of small stature from the towns, rather than the miners and farm workers who had joined up in 1915.

We know that, when the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* was published, Horace Dickens had been wounded and demobilised. We also know that the 15th Battalion had taken part in 1917 in the German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line, the fighting at Houthulst Forest and the Second Battle of Passchendaele. We cannot be sure that Horace was with the Sherwood Foresters during this time but it seems certain that he had joined them by 1918.

In this year the 15th fought at the Battle of Bapaume, the Battle of Ypres, the Battle of Courtrai, the action of Tieghem (near Oudenaarde In Belgium) and ended the war north-east of Renaix in Belgium.

Horace did not see this year out with the 15th Battalion. *The War Office Weekly List* for May 28th 1918 records in the May 23rd Casualty List that H.G. Dickens (Ringstead) of the

Sherwood Foresters had been wounded. This appears to be after the great German Offensive of March and was in the “comparatively” quiet May period. Perhaps he was one of the three casualties when a Battalion working party was helping to dig a new line of reserve trenches on the 11th May or was he hit when German aeroplanes dropped bombs near the billets? We may never know but it seems likely that he came back to England and, after treatment, he was demobilised.

He returned to Ringstead and married Dorothy Lilian Hodson, daughter of a Raunds’ shoemaker, at the end of 1924. They did not stay long in the area and the 1928 *Kelly’s Directory* records Newsagents, *Hodson and Dickens* at 65 Canterbury Street in Coventry. I am not sure if the “Hodson” was because of Dorothy or if Horace was in partnership with a member of her family.



*Horace outside the Hodson & Dickens Newsagents in Coventry
With thanks to Caroline Dickens*

In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* Horace and Dorothy were living in Colchester Street. Their newsagent’ business was on a corner, with the shop address being in Canterbury Street and their house door in Colchester Street. In the 1940’s edition of *Kelly’s Directory* the shop was in the name of Horace Dickens only.

It seems likely that they retired to Northamptonshire, thought to be in Stanwick by the family. Horace died on 16th August 1966, aged 67, and Dorothy in 1990 in the Wellingborough District.

Arthur Dickens (1899-1928)

The second son of George and Mary Ellen Dickens also saw action in the Great War. Unlike his older brother, many of his military records still exist but they do give a confusing picture.

Before he was conscripted under the M.S.A. (Military Service Act 1916) he was a “pressman” in a local Boot and Shoe Factory. The pressman operated presses to cut boot or shoe pieces out of the leather. My understanding is that he would have cut the “rough stuff”, the soles, insoles, heel lifts, etc., and the “clicker” would do the more skilled cutting of the uppers to make best use of the hide and ensure that the pairs of boots or shoes matched. He was only eighteen years one month when he signed up so he had quickly learnt his trade.

He enlisted on 14th March 1918 at Northampton and was 5 feet 4 inches tall with a 34-inch chest. Perhaps, surprisingly, he was deemed to have a good physical development. With unusual care, he was stated to have auburn hair and hazel eyes, with a fair complexion and first-rate eyesight. He weighed 124 pounds (56.25 kilos.).



Arthur Dickens with his Lance Corporal stripe

With thanks to David Dickens for use of the photograph and Jon Abbott for copying it.

His records have survived but they are often smudged and faint and difficult to decipher. He was first posted to the 53rd Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment. With the destruction of much of the Regular and Volunteer Battalions there was continuous reorganisation to cope with new recruits, many of them eighteen years old. It appears that he was first allocated to the 27th (Training Reserve) Battalion but this may have been a clerical error as it had been reorganised as the 53rd (Young Soldiers) Battalion.

The idea of the 53rd was to provide three months of basic training for new recruits. It was based at Brocton Camp in Cannock Chase, Staffordshire from January 1918. Brocton was one of two camps built from scratch on the estate of Lord Lichfield at the beginning of the war.

After this training he was transferred to the 52nd (Graduated) Battalion of the Bedfordshires where he would remain until he was considered ready for active service. The 52nds were based in Taversham in May 1918 but returned to its previous home base in Norwich soon after and remained there until after the Armistice. It was then sent to be part of the Army of Occupation, allowing the war-weary and increasingly disgruntled troops from the Western Front to return home and demobilise.

Arthur seems to have progressed well because he was appointed Acting Lance Corporal on 31st May 1918 which was about the time when he would have joined the 52nds. Unfortunately, on the 30th July 1918 he overstayed his draft leave from 11 pm to 12.30 am at Taversham and was “deprived of his stripe” on 3rd August. The Conduct Sheet shows the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry rubber stamp so it may be that he transferred to them just before he sailed to France

The page of his records detailing his various moves has almost faded into oblivion. It appears, however, that he was first posted to the Infantry Brigade Depot in France as part of the 52nd Battalion of the Bedfordshires, presumably in August 1918. He was soon after transferred to the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Regiment (possibly the 2/4th Battalion). He was given a new Regimental Number 47695. Whichever is correct, it was at about this time that the transfer happened.

Again we have no dates but it seems that he was quickly transferred again, this time to the 2/5th Gloucestershire Regiment, and gained another number, 51319. As he was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals it would seem that he was in France before the Armistice was signed and was in a war zone. Without some idea of dates it is difficult to be clear about where and with which regiment Arthur saw action. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* compiled in late 1918 or early 1919 shows that he was with the Gloucesters and part of the Army of Occupation. He was, therefore, with them after the war finished on November 11th 1918.

We know that Arthur was transferred one last time and became a Sapper in the 2nd CCC of the Royal Engineers. As battalions left France and demobilised, recent recruits were transferred into units still in service in France and Belgium. I believe that “CCC” stands for Canal Control Committee. This was established to operate the inland waterways in France and Belgium. The Royal Engineers during the war had, among other tasks, maintained the railways, road, water supply, bridges and transport as well as telephones, wireless and other signalling equipment. The Engineers also built the front-line fortifications and maintained the artillery and specialist units had dug the mines to allow the blowing up of enemy positions. They were also involved in the destroying of infrastructure where necessary. After the war they used their varied skills to help put the countries back together again.

We know that Arthur was in the Royal Engineers in September 1919 because he once more overstayed his leave from 6.30 a.m. on the 20th September until 6.30 am on the 23rd. For this he was put on open arrest (not locked up), given seven days Field Punishment number 2, and docked three days' pay. At the side of the entry it appears to say, "L. Signs" and I wonder if this means he was in one of the Signals Companies of the Royal Engineers. After the war they became a separate Corps.

In spite of his run-ins with authority, he elected to extend his service until 15th February 1920. On that date he was examined at Wimereux, just north of Boulogne. This had been a large hospital complex and became the British Army headquarters in France. He returned to England on 17th March 1920 and was finally demobbed on 7th April. I am not sure if they were still being stripped and de-loused by this time.

He returned to Ringstead soon after. Also living in in Ringstead, in the Sivers Building, were Oliver John and Bertha Ellen, (or sometimes Helen), Potheary. Oliver, who was from Woodford, had served in the Royal Army Medical Corps in the war. He had married Bertha Bates, daughter of William and Maude, in 1917. Sadly, he had contracted Pulmonary Tuberculosis (T.B.), probably during his war service, and died on 19th October 1923 aged about 26, he was one of the many unseen casualties of the war [See later biography.]. Bertha was granted a small army pension for herself and her three children, one of whom had been born a few months after her husband's death.

In 1926 Arthur Dickens married widow, Bertha Potheary, and they had two sons, Eric and Roy. Sadly, Arthur too did not live long. The Northampton Mercury of Friday 19th October 1928 reported:

DEATH. – Mr A. Dickens of Ringstead, died on Saturday morning in Northampton Hospital following an operation for appendicitis. He was only 26 years of age, and an employee of Mr. Child's heel factory at Rushden.

The age is wrong but the Death Index of England and Wales confirms that he was actually 28 years old. The removing of the appendix was an operation that had been around since the Eighteenth Century but the one performed on Edward VII, that had delayed his coronation in 1902, made it an increasingly popular practice. The maxim seemed to become – if in doubt whip it out. But all surgery carries risks and it seems far less common today. It may be, however, that he had peritonitis caused by a burst appendix and this was the cause of death

Bertha, a widow twice before she was thirty and with five children married for a third time, to Percy Mayes, in 1936. The couple with their large family of mixed surnames are together, in the Sivers Buildings. in the 1939 Register of England and Wales. There are two closed records so it may be that there were two further children. Bertha E Mayes died in 1950 aged 51.

Chapter 22

Hubert Archibald Edwards (1889-1931)

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* could miss men who were born of local families and spent their childhoods in the village. It could also include soldiers whose time in the village was brief.

The grandparents of Hubert Edwards, William and Hepzibah (née Smith) Edwards were from Irchester and moved to Raunds soon after their marriage in 1857. Their son, John Henry, was baptised there on 28th February 1864 and he married local girl, Mary Ellen Coles, on 19th November 1885.

John was a shoe riveter in a local factory and Mary Ellen, a dressmaker. Their children were all born in Raunds. Hubert Archibald Edwards, their third child was born in 1889 and baptised in Raunds Church on the 18th August of the same year. In 1901 he was living with his parents in Grove Street. By 1911 Hubert and his older brother, James William, had followed their father into the shoe trade. His parents had been married 25 years and had had six children, all of them still living. The family were living in Highfield Cottages, next to the Coggins factory in Marshalls Road.

They would have been unaware that the Great War was only a few years away. Hubert's older brother, James, enlisted with the 1/4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment as a very early volunteer, on 24th November 1914. He survived the war and rose to become an Acting Lance Sergeant. Hubert enlisted a year later on 26th November 1915, a few months before conscription was introduced.

He enlisted at Raunds and was put on the Army Reserve List. He was 26 years 4 months old, 5 foot 8 inches in height with a 35 inch chest. He was working as a pressman in a local boot and shoe factory. Just a few months before, on 12th June 1915, he had married Florence Mary Hodson and they had set up home in Church Street in Ringstead.

His records are a little confusing but it appears that he was posted to the 4th (Reserve) Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. The confusion is that written around the top of the Attestation Form are a number of notes, including Norfolk County T.F.[Territorial Force] Association 387, Kettering and Group 32. Just what connection these notes have to Hubert's enlistment is unclear. He was not mobilized until the 1st March 1917 and possibly joined the 1st Norfolks with Regimental Number 203705, on 23rd May 1917 and travelled with them to Infantry Base Depot (IBD) 17 in France.

The IBDs were holding camps, situated in Europe, within easy distance of one the Channel ports They received men on arrival from England and kept them in training while they were awaiting posting to a unit. Depot 17, like many others, was based at Étaples, south of Boulogne. These Depots were hubs where both supplies and soldiers were kept and then transported to the Front as needed. Later in the year, in September and October a number

of mutinies took place there, fuelled by the harsh regime which the New Zealand troops especially took exception to.

It was from here that Hubert would have been posted to the 10th Battalion of the Essex Regiment on the 14th June and given the Regimental Number 203038. The 10th had been fighting in the Battle of the Scarpe as part of the British Offensive known as the 2nd Battle of Arras. They had then been moved to the Flanders region and it seems likely that Hubert joined them there.



Cinema Queue Étaples 1916. At the YMCA Hut. (pastel and gouache)
By Iso Ray an Australian artist who was a V.A.D Nurse at the camp. Public Domain.
www.awm.gov.au/collection/C173377.

The first significant engagement was the Battle of Pilckem Ridge which started on 31st July 1917, a French and British attack. On the 31st rain began to fall and the shell blasted ground became a quagmire for which the campaign, often known as the Battle of Passchendaele is now remembered.

It appears that, on 10th November 1917, Hubert returned home. It may be that the army found Hubert a less than sturdy soldier but if this was the case we begin to see a possible reason. On 20th November he was admitted to the East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital and from there to the Military Hospital at Purfleet. He was granted a furlough from there from

24th January to 2nd February 1918 at which time he was still part of the 10th Battalion of the Essex Regiment. His medical category was B2. This was defined as, able to walk 5 miles and to see and hear sufficiently for ordinary purposes.

He was again transferred, on the 3rd February 1918, to the 4th (Reserve) Battalion of the Essex Regiment. The furlough entry also has a Labour Corps stamp so perhaps this was the point at which he was immediately transferred to them. The note on his records states, "Re-transferred having been retired as unsuitable for duties with above unit".

His transfer to the Labour Corps was "permanent and compulsory". He joined the 576 Home Employment Company of the Corps and I think that it is unlikely that he saw any further action. He was absent without leave from 10.30 pm on 10th March 1918 until 12 pm on the 11th March for which he forfeited two days' pay.

There is some confusion here, for the Essex Territorial Force Association wrote to the 4th Essex on the 5th September 1918, to inform them that Hubert's wife had moved to Strood Lodge in Buxted, Sussex. Could it be with his continued absence she had been forced to take a job in service? This Memorandum also has the Labour Corps stamp so it may be that the local man had not been aware of Hubert's transfer and it was forwarded on to them.

Hubert was not finally demobilised until 25th February 1919 (although still six months before his brother James). He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals. We see that he was also due for an Army Pension because of a 40% disablement, becoming 30%. He was to receive eleven shillings for 26 weeks and then eight shillings and threepence for a further 26 weeks. After that it was conditional. We now see that the diagnosis for his illness was V.H.D.. These initials stood for Valvular Disease of the Heart and this indicated a serious organic disease or heart malfunction. It was stated that this had been "aggravated" by his army service. It was no surprise that Hubert may have struggled as a soldier.

After the war Hubert lived first in Rotton Row and then in North Street in Raunds. Florence had returned home and the couple had two children, John in 1920 and Mary in 1922. Perhaps surprisingly, Florence died first, aged 40, in 1930 but Hubert soon followed her, aged 42, in 1931. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, on the eve of another World War, daughter Mary, a coat machinist at a clothiers was living with her grandparents John and Mary Ellen Edwards at 46 Marshalls Road in Raunds.

Hubert Edwards was a man who survived the war but his army service probably hastened his death. Really a Raunds man, his brief time in Ringstead during the war has written him into the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*.

Chapter 23

The Farr Family

Christopher John Farr (1886-1968)

The Farr family had originally come from Haynes in Bedfordshire. Thomas Farr, son of William and Martha, had been born there in 1865. He had married Eliza Randall in Haynes on 18th October 1884. The couple had a daughter, Elizabeth Jane, first, who seems to have lived with her grandparents and died aged just 20 in 1905. Their second child was a boy, Christopher John, born on 2nd September 1886, (1887 according to the 1939 Register, but I think this may be wrong).

Christopher John was only known by his first name in the official records at the beginning and end of his life. This causes some problems because Farr was not an uncommon name and there was a John Farr born in Haynes in 1888. I had come across some very unflattering reports on a John Farr's scholastic achievements at the Haynes Charity School, which I first thought were about our man but I now think are about a younger John Farr.

The family moved to Souldrop and then to Covington and John started work as a labourer. At some point, while still living at Covington with his parents, John met Mary Ann Dicks from Ringstead. She was shown on the marriage certificate to be still living there, when they married at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel at Nether (or Lower) Dean in Huntingdonshire, on 25th December 1909. This is only a couple of miles from Covington and six miles from Ringstead.

In the 1911 Census John and Mary Ann, ("Polly"), were living in the Doddington Road Cottage in Wellingborough. He was working on a farm as a shepherd and the couple had one daughter, Elizabeth Mary, who was just nine months old. Further children followed, Gladys on 22nd July 1912 and John Thomas William on 7th June 1915.

The military records of his namesake, John Farr from Haynes (born about 1888), have survived but for our John they have been largely destroyed. We see in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he had been in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, had served in France and Belgium, and had been "Released for Munitions" before demobilisation.

Fortunately, the *Ringstead Absent Voters' Lists* also show that at some point, our John Farr was with the Royal Fusiliers and gives his Regimental Number as 51907. This allows us to be certain that the *Medal and Award Roll* and *Medal Card* for a John Farr who was first with the 20th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London) Regiment is our man.

The Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) had, at the outbreak of the First World War, four regular battalions but then went on to raise 43 more reserve, service, labour and garrison battalions. The 20th Battalion had originally been formed in Epsom by the *Public Schools and University Men's Forces* on the 11th September 1914 but this volunteer force

was taken over by the Government on the 1st July 1915 and the public school element had largely been dissipated by casualties and commissions.

There still remains difficulty in working out how his time with the 4th and 8th Battalions fit together. The 8th Battalion disbanded in France on 6th February 1918 as part of the general reorganisation of the Regiments. It is possible, however, that the “8th Battalion” entry in the *Roll of Honour* may be a mistake or a very temporary posting.

What we have been able to deduce, with help from Craig (ss002d6252) on the *Great War Forum* website, is that using his Regimental Number as a guide, John Farr was first called up around the 29th May 1916. We also know from Medal Roll that he arrived in France on the 2nd December 1916, where he joined the 10th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers. The Battalion had been in and out of the Front line throughout 1916 and, in September, had suffered heavy casualties, losing some 375 men killed, wounded or missing at the notorious Battle of High Wood.

The Battalion had moved west to the coastal area around Bray, near Dunkerque but once more moved east to take part in the campaign known as the Battle of Arras. John would have taken part in the First and Second Battles of the Scarpe. As usual, it was a period of gain and loss with the defenders almost always having the advantage. The main purpose of the British offensive was to draw German troops from the French offensive further east but they had suffered terrible losses and were in some disarray.

The British Commander-in-Chief, General Haigh, had been long planning a Flanders Offensive and the Third Battle of Ypres was launched on the 31st July 1917. As part of this, the 10th were in the Battles of the Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood. The Allied tactics had now changed to one of “bite and hold” where a concerted attack was made on a comparatively small front with an agreed objective. When taken, this was to be consolidated against counter attack, before the next “bite”. The Battle was a comparative success but at the cost to the Australian, who led the attacks on Polygon Wood, of 5,700 lives.

After that, although not out of the fighting line, the 10th was being prepared for disbandment, as part of the reduction in the number of Battalions in each Brigade. During February 1918, men were posted to the 2nd, 4th and 13th Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers and by the end of the month the 10th ceased to exist.

John moved to the 4th Battalion on the 5th February 1918. They were in the Cherisy to Fontaine Sector and on the 19th March the *War Diary* records that they were in Shaft Trench and it was a “quiet day”. On the 21st, a massive enemy bombardment signalled the start of the German, Michael Offensive. As with many other Allied units on the Western Front the 4th Royal Fusiliers had to try to make as orderly a retreat as possible. The Germans had also evolved a new tactic where elite troops punched holes in the Allied lines and then the isolated troops were encircled and cut off. This offensive continued to make progress for weeks but eventually the Germans became exhausted of men and supplies and the decisive Allied counter-attack followed, although not without resistance and casualties, until the Armistice on the 11th November.

As we have seen, the Ringstead *Roll of Honour* states that he had been “released for munitions” and this appears to have happened on the 13th July 1918. We do not know the reasons but perhaps it was decided that, either mentally or physically, John was no longer fit for active service. He would not have had specialist skills for munition work but was probably part of a “bulk release” to work in the munitions factories and supply chain which was struggling to keep pace with the huge demand for ammunition for the Western Front.

After demobilisation John and Mary Ann set up house in Pearce’s Yard in Ringstead. They had two further children, Ivy in 1920, and Cyril Archibald on 24th August 1923. The 1924 Electoral Register shows the couple in the Council Houses in Denford Road during the 1920s.



The Council Houses in Denford Road. With thanks to Peter Davies.

The 1939 *Register of England and Wales* shows John and Mary Ann still living in Denford Road. John was a labourer in a quarry and their five children were still living with them. Elizabeth and Gladys were tailoresses and [John Thomas] William was a “Tip Heeler” in Adams Brothers’ factory in Raunds. The younger two children’s records have not been “unblocked”.

There is a link between the Farris and Ringstead’s most infamous death for, on Wednesday 31st May 1939, the *Mercury and Herald* reported that:

Digging a hole in their garden for a clothes-post, tenants in a house in Denford-road, Ringstead Northants, unearthed a skeleton – and they have probably solved an 89-year-old mystery. They are hoping that the remains can be identified as those of Lydia Attley, a girl who disappeared from the village after a love affair with a married man.

If that hope is realised the tenants Mr. John Farr and his son Cyril, will claim from the Home Office a £200 reward. [The newspaper thought it very unlikely that the Home Office would pay out.]

When Lydia vanished, suspicion fell on her lover, a butcher named Weekly Ball. Mr Farr's home was built on the site of the field where Ball kept his cattle.

Christopher John Farr, aged 81 years, and still residing at 61 Denford Road in Ringstead, died on 22nd July 1968 and was cremated on 25th July at Kettering Crematorium. Mary Ann lived to be 96 years old and died on 15th June 1983.

David Farr (1894-1968)

John's Farr's brother, David, was born on 13th September 1894 in Haynes, Bedfordshire, the son of Thomas and Eliza. Thomas was a "horsekeeper" on a farm and it appears that he had to keep moving to find work as his family grew.

In the 1901 Census the family were living in Souldrop. There were five children now with the eldest, John (14) already working as a farm labourer and bringing in a small wage. By 1911 the family had moved again, this time to Covington, seven miles south-east of Ringstead. John, the eldest, had moved away with his wife and child but still at home were Bert (sometimes Burt - or it seems likely - Archibald), David and Persey (Percy), all farm labourers.

David may have had to go in search of work for on 14th September 1914 he married Dora Ann Robinson at Brafield-on-the-Green, some five miles south-east of Northampton and 16 miles west of Souldrop. There was a Dora Robinson, born and living in Ringstead, but she was Dora M. This Dora was from a Brafield family, daughter of George and Mary Elizabeth. Ages seem to slide a little in the Robinson and Farr Families. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Dora's birth date is shown as 26th October 1897, which has been later amended to 1894 and which I think was actually 1893 for she was baptised on December 3rd of that year. David's birth year was shown as 1896 but I think was really 1894.

The First World War had begun on the 28th July 1914. At this point in time it probably seemed unlikely that it would touch David, or were they getting married, as many did, in case he was called up at some stage. At the beginning of the war, it was mainly Regular soldiers who were involved, soon to be joined by the volunteer battalions.

Unfortunately, most of David's military records have not survived but the few that remain give a few, sometimes confusing, clues into his time in service. We must try to sew these together without stretching the fabric too far.

As usual, we will start with the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* which was published in Thrapston in June 1919 and so we would expect it to be accurate. It shows that David had been wounded and was, at the time of the compilation, (late 1918 or early 1919) a Private and had been in the 11th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment. He was now in the Army of Occupation. Using these facts as a basis we can search the Medal Cards and there only

seems one David Farr who fits these facts. He was a Private in the Suffolk Regiment and had two Regimental Numbers 4515 and 201520.

If we then look at the three Casualty Forms for D. Farr we can deduce that he enlisted around March 1916 (after conscription was introduced) and was with the 4th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment. The two records for 1916 give the Regimental Number as 6515 but no medal card exists for this number in the Suffolks and we must assume that it is a clerical error. From these forms it seems that he was sent to the Western Front in June or July 1916.

It seems likely that David fought in the campaign of 1916 known by the overall name of the Battle of the Somme. At this time the 4th Battalion were in the 98th Brigade of the 33rd Division. David may have missed the opening battles of this campaign including the infamous first day of the battle of Albert, on 1st July, when the British suffered 58,000 casualties of which more than 19,000 had been killed.

Other battles followed for the Suffolks but it was not a war injury that carried David into the casualty hospital system. On the 8th December 1916 he was transferred from the 99th Field Ambulance to Number 39 Casualty Clearing Hospital which at this time was at Allonville near Amiens. He was suffering from German Measles. In the crowded quarters of army life at the Front contagious and infectious diseases spread rapidly. He was in the Hospital for 19 days but on the day of his release, on 26th December, he was re-admitted with Myalgia. This was chronic and severe muscle pain which had a number of causes and it may be that the Rubella was the main cause.



A Red Cross Train, France by H. Septimus Power 1918: Australian War Artist.

©IWMART 1031

He was only in hospital for a further three days before, on 28th December 1916, being transferred to the Sick Convoy. The transcription also states that he was sent to No 3 Ambulance Train. It is not clear but this may mean that he was sent by ambulance train to the main hospital centre at Rouen for further treatment. On the *Discovering Anzacs* website it tells the story of Gunner Maurice Chambers who was wounded and taken to No. 38 Casualty Clearing Station at Heilly and was then transported by No. 3 Ambulance Train to Rouen on 1st January 1917. Heilly was ten miles from Allonville where David was being treated.

We know that David returned to active service but probably he was transferred to the 8th Suffolks and given a new Regimental number 201520. In early 1917 all the Territorial forces were given six-figure numbers. The *Medal and Award Roll* has David serving in the 4th, 8th and 9th Battalions of the Suffolk Regiment as well as the 1st Battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment. On top of this we know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he was later in the 11th Battalion of the Suffolks and was finally in the Army of Occupation, possibly with this battalion. As we have no dates for these changes, it makes tracing his service almost impossible.

What we do know is that he was wounded while still serving with the Suffolk Regiment. The "Incident Date" is given as 14th December 1917. This would usually mean that the actual date of his wounding would have possibly been some six weeks previous to this date, perhaps in late October or early November so it was probably in the last throes of the terrible Battle of Passchendaele. David was allowed a wound stripe above his left cuff to show that he had been a casualty.

The 8th Battalion was disbanded in France on 7th February 1918 and the 9th on the 16th February. This may explain the two battalions in his records, with his time in the 9th being a brief time before a more permanent transfer. On 24th May 1918 more than 400 men from the 7th Battalion of the Suffolks were transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment with Regimental Number 210520. The great losses of Passchendaele in 1917 and in the German offensive of April 1918, had led to battalions having to be amalgamated and reformed and it seems that David was caught up in this confusion and change.

The Great War had finally ended on 11th November 1918 and David then served with the Army of Occupation. He returned home, probably with the 1st Cambridgeshires and by now would have been beginning to believe that he had done his bit and wanted to return to his family. It seems that he took matters into his own hands. The *Northampton Mercury* reported on 16th May 1919:

David Farr, of Raunds, D Co., 1st Cambridgeshire Regiment was charged with being a deserter since March 5th – Remanded to await an escort.

I have not discovered what punishment was imposed. David was finally demobilised and returned to his family. He was entitled to the Victory and British War Medals.

He continued as a farmworker. The 1939 *Register of England and Wales* has David born 13th September 1896 (but I think 1894) and working as a general farm labourer. Dora was

performing the usual “Unpaid Domestic Duties” and there are two children Hilda, born on 18th November 1919, who was a machinist in a boot factory and Daisy, born 13th August 1926, who was still at school. They were living in Joy Cottages next to Mapleton Lodge in Raunds.

The couple later moved to 25 Hill Street in Raunds and it was there that David died, aged 73, on 16th May 1968. He was cremated on the 21st May at Kettering and his ashes scattered in the Garden of Remembrance. Just a few months later, on 23rd August 1968 Dora, aged 74, died too, and was cremated like her husband and her ashes scattered.

Percy Thomas Farr (1898-1969)

Percy Thomas Farr was the fifth child of Thomas and Eliza, born in Haynes in Bedfordshire on 23rd November 1897. He was with the family in 1901 in Souldrop and in 1911 in Covington. He was fourteen years of age and, like his two older brothers, a farm labourer. The family moved soon after to Chapel Street in Ringstead. By 1914 Percy had changed career and was working in a factory as a shoehand.

When war was declared in August 1914, he would have hoped that it “would all be over by Christmas” but it was not to be. In November 1915 Percy turned eighteen years of age and on the 5th February 1916, aged eighteen years three months he attested for the army.

He first joined the 8th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment at Thrapston and was given the Regimental Number 19668. He was 5ft 2½inches tall with a thirty-five-inch chest and grey eyes (as almost all new recruits seemed to have).

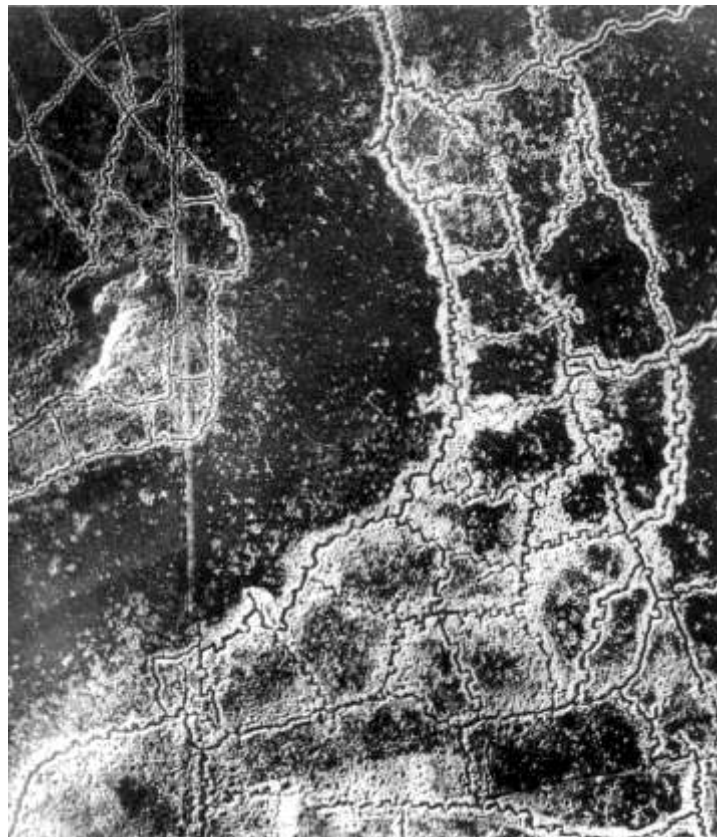
The 8th Battalion never left England but acted as a reserve battalion, training the new recruits and then feeding them into the fighting units. On 1st September 1916 it became the 28th Training Reserve of the 6th Reserve Brigade. After he had completed his initial training and reached nineteen years of age, he was posted to the 9th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment and given the new Regimental Number of 50272. He embarked for France on 6th December 1916 and joined the 9th Battalion in the field on 15th December.

The 9th (Reserve) Battalion had been formed in Bury St Edmunds in September 1914. It had been sent to France and, on the 30th August 1915, it landed in Boulogne. On 11th October 1915 it transferred, with the 71st Brigade, to the 6th Division.

On 25th November the 6th Division had taken over the La Bassée sector which included the Givenchy Ridge and the Cuinchy Brickstacks. After a month it moved to the Cambrin-Hohenzollern Front of about 5,500 yards. The 192nd Machine Gun Company joined the Division on 13th December. It was at about this time that Percy joined the Battalion in the field. Because of the terrible fighting of the earlier Somme battles this would have been a feared posting but the troops of both sides were by then so exhausted that it proved a comparatively quiet four months. It was only the raids that were ordered that caused any great casualties.

On 1st March 1917 the 6th Division took over a 11,000-yard Front from the Double Crassier at Loos, (two, hundred-foot high slag heaps), to Hulluch and Hohenzollern. Through March and into April there were raids and counter-raids and considerable trench mortar and artillery bombardments.

The role of the 9th Battalion of the Suffolks within the 6th Division is a little more difficult to establish. As we have seen, in November 1916, the Battalion had gone into army reserve at Noeux-les-Mines, south of Bethune, where they had spent Christmas. By early January 1917 it had moved to the Quarries Sector around Hulluch. From then on, they followed the usual routine of time in the Front Line, interspersed with time in Support and in Reserve, at either Philosphe, Mazingarbe or Labourse throughout the rest of the summer. Then they were ordered south to take part in the Cambrai operations.



Aerial view of Loos-Hulluch trench system 22nd July 1917. German trenches right and bottom showing complexity of the systems that had built up by this time. (IWM Q 45786)

Percy did not make it to Cambrai. On 1st June 1917 he was badly injured. He received gunshot wounds to his right eye (omitted from some records), hand, shoulder and thigh. Although recorded as “GSW” it seems most likely that his wounds were caused by a shrapnel artillery shell. These were anti-personnel shells which carried a large number of bullets close to the target which they then ejected, the velocity of the shell carrying them forward. Even when not formally titled as a “battle” there was almost always some moral-sapping enemy artillery fire.

Percy would have gone through the field hospital system probably ending up at Boulogne. He was ferried across the Channel by the Hospital Ship *St Patrick* on 8th June 1917. Percy did not return to the Front.

We do not have any details of his time in the British hospitals but on 28th March 1918 he was posted to Felixstowe, one of the bases of the Suffolk Regiment. He would have been trained and assessed here and it was obviously decided that he was still not fit for active service.

Percy was transferred on 25th April to the 436th Agricultural Company of the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) which, it appears, was based at Northampton. He was given a new Regimental Number, R/452130. He would have been allocated to a farm to work, possibly living there. The war ended but he continued with the Company

On 3rd June 1919 he was posted to the Eastern Command Labour Centre at Sutton in Surrey. This was the headquarters and training centre of the Labour Corps. From there he was briefly transferred to the Remount Depot of the RAMC at Romsey. The RAMC Remounts were responsible for the provision of horses and mules to all other army units. Some 120,000 passed through Romsey during the war and up to 5,000 horses, looked after by some 2,100 men, were at this hilltop camp at any one time. Soldiers who served in the Remounts usually had the letter "R" as a prefix to their number and we see this in Percy's case. The horses and mules would have been sent to Southampton for shipment to France but this traffic was coming to an end and Romsey closed in November 1919.

On 27th September 1919 Percy was finally demobilised. His parents had moved to Raunds and during his military service, Percy had changed his next of kin from his father to his mother. I had thought, at first, that he had died but I do not think that that was the case. Percy seems to have first lived with his parents at 28 North Street in Raunds. He had been given medical category B1 and a 30% Disability Pension. Despite this he was put in Class Z which meant that he could be recalled in an emergency. [At some point he seems to have been given another Regimental Number 333200.]

In 1922 Percy married Elsie May Copperwheat. From the Electoral Rolls, it appears that he may have lived for a time with his brother John and his wife, but this is not clear. We do know that by 1931 Percy and Elsie had moved to North Street in Raunds, possibly in the house of his parents, as his mother had died in 1923. He still kept an allotment in Ringstead.

The couple had two children, Kenneth, born on 12th April 1924, who in 1939 was working in the clicking department of a local shoe factory and Lily, born on 15th March 1927. According to the *1939 Register*, Percy was working on a "Brushing-Up Machine" in the Finishing Department of a Boot Factory.

Elsie died first, aged 67 on 12th April 1968 and Percy followed her, aged 71, on the 23rd January 1969. At the time of his death he was living in 20 Clare Street in Raunds.

Chapter 24

George Robert Feary (1884-1969)

The Feary family had originally come from across the meadows to Ringstead, in the Addingtons. James Feary had been born in 1834 in Great Addington. His first wife May Chapman, who he had married on 13th April 1857, died in 1863. He had married again, less than a year later, to Hannah Sharpe from Little Addington. She was some ten years his junior.

James spent much of his early working life in Burton Latimer working as a foreman on a farm. He returned with his wife and family to Great Addington in about 1882 where he worked as a miller and farm labourer. In all, he had had at least ten children, but it is the youngest child of James and Hannah whose story we are telling here.

George Robert Feary (and the surname has many variations) was born on 11th April 1884, although put as 1885 in the *1939 Register*, and baptised at Great Addington on 17th August 1884. By 1901 James was 67 years old and his occupation was now "Ordinary Agricultural Labourer". Hannah was 56, and only Mary (26), an "Army Boot and Shoe Top Closer" and George (17), a shoemaker, were still at home.

James died in 1906, aged 72, and in 1909 George Robert Feary married Gertrude Sophia Taylor, originally from Bidford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, but living with her family in Raunds. Her father Frederick had died too on 10th June 1907. He had moved to the area to become the Manager of one of the Raunds Distributive Co-operative shops when it first opened in the 1890s.

In the 1911 Census for Great Addington George Feary, aged 26, was with Gertrude and their daughter, Hannah, who was one year old. George was working as a farm labourer and he had described his house as a "2 up 2 down", although the Census officer had crossed this out and substituted "4" [rooms].

The couple had two further daughters, Maud in 1912, and Ada in 1914. But war was threatening to break up the young family.

At some point after 1911 George had moved to Ringstead, probably in order to change his occupation. He found work as an edge setter at C.E. Nicholls' Boot and Shoe Factory in Raunds. Edge-setting was basically the neatening of the sole around the front of the boot. This could be done with a special knife but there were, from the late Eighteenth Century, simple edge cutting machines in the factories which is probably what George used.

The workers in the boot and shoe industry had some exemption from conscription because, despite what Napoleon may have said, an army marched on its feet. The army did use trains and motor vehicles to move troops about but marching was still a vital part of getting battalions from A to B. But, as the casualties mounted, and more and more men were

needed the Military Tribunals began to turn down more appeals from shoemakers and their bosses for exemption.

On 1st April 1917, George was 32 with a young family but the local Military Tribunal decided that he could not resist conscription any longer and the appeal by the Nicholls' Factory was dismissed. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour*, compiled at the end of the war, tells us that George served with the 1st Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment in Italy, France and Belgium. The Medal Roll and Card add that he remained a Private and was given the Regimental Number 205451.

Unfortunately, few of George's military records survive so we do not have any dates for his call-up, or dates of service abroad. We do have, however, a later Hospital Admission Form for the 5th October 1918 which states that he had been one year six months in service and ten months with the field force. This would indicate that he was first enlisted in April 1917 and joined the 1st Battalion of the Norfolks in December 1917.

This ties in with the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* which gives Italy as the first country in which he served. George joined the Norfolks when they had been posted from the Western Front to Italy. In the First World War the Italians, after first being part of the Axis Powers decided to join the Allies and fought against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Italians were gaining the upper hand but the Emperor of the Austro-Hungarians appealed for help from the Germans. At the Battle of Caporetto on 21st November 1917, near the town of Kobarid (now in Slovenia), the enemy onslaught used everything, including poison gas, mines, artillery and machine guns. The Italians, who were trying to fight uphill, were badly defeated and forced to retreat. They fell back, finally to the Piave River, and their position looked precarious.

In December 1917 the British sent five and the French six divisions to reinforce the Italians. The 1st Norfolks, probably including John Feary, were part of the 5th Division and travelled by train from Versailles through Lyon, Avignon, Marseilles, Nice, Savona and Mantua to Montagnana near Padua, where they were billeted in a church. They did not move to the Front at St Andrea until January 25th 1918 and remained there until February 2nd with only an occasional bomb dropped by enemy aircraft to show that they were in a war zone. It seemed almost a holiday to many of the soldiers after the Western Front, despite the many casualties.

The 1st Norfolks finally moved to a position on the River Piave near the destroyed bridges of Ponte Priula. There was little enemy activity and the weather was generally sunny. On 17th March there was some heavy shelling from the enemy but at about this time the Norfolks were relieved by an Italian Regiment and they went back to near Padua. Their Italian campaign was over. The Italians had proved more resolute and capable than had been thought by the other Allies and it was its troops who led the defeat of the Austrians.

The 1st Norfolks returned to France in early April 1918, travelling in two "half battalions" and after another long journey arrived in Doullens in the Somme battle area on April 8th. On the way the *War Diary* records that at Mordane, just over the border from Italy:

. . . all watches were put back one hour to agree with French time.

The Germans, following the withdrawal of Russia from the war after the 1917 Revolution, brought all their troops together for one great assault and against the British lines near Ypres and Hazebrouck. The first phase of the German "Operation Michael on the Somme" had started on March 21st had ended as the Norfolks arrived back. The second phase was against the British in the low-lying Lys River area. The Germans were steamrolling forward and had driven the Portuguese back to near Neuve Chapelle. It was here, as part of the 5th Division that the Battalion was sent on 11th April. They first occupied the Forest of Nieppe and were ordered to retake the nearby village of Merville. In fact, the artillery had not had time to move up, so the attack was aborted. From April and right into August the Front around Nieppe remained stationary.

The Norfolks suffered badly from enemy mustard gas attacks which were odourless and often soldiers only became aware of them when, inhaled, it blistered the lungs and throat. Unfortunately the gas mask was little protection because it would soak into the soldiers' woollen uniforms and produced terrible, painful blisters all over the body. Contaminated uniforms had to be stripped off as fast as possible and man and uniform washed. Imagine this when under fire.

The Germans began to run out of men and supplies and their morale started to wane. From August 21st the Norfolks, as part of the 5th Division, began to drive the enemy back and by the 3rd September had moved some 14 miles although with the loss of 4,300 casualties. We see a pattern of almost continuous advance, slowed by the need of the artillery to keep pace, but still, sometimes, met by enemy bombardments of high explosive and gas shells.

On November 5th, the Battalion led the attack at Jolimetz which met little resistance. It was here, while resting after a further Allied attack that, on November 11th they learnt that hostilities were to cease at 11 am that day. The 1st Norfolks, like most Battalions, received the news with relief rather than wild rejoicing. The Battalion's *War Diary* records:

<i>Puissance Farm</i>	<i>10/11/18</i>	<i>11.00. The battalion moved via AULNOYE – LA GRAND CARRIERE to JOLIMETZ where the battalion was accommodated in billets.</i>
		<i>17.00. Battalion reported in billets</i>
<i>Jolimetz</i>	<i>11/11/18</i>	<i>09.00. Reorganisation and general cleaning of billets and surroundings.</i>
		<i>10.05 [minutes not clear]. Notice received of ~~termination~~ suspension of hostilities</i>
	<i>12/11/18</i>	<i>Reorganisation and cleaning continues</i>
	<i>13/11/18</i>	<i>The battalion moved to LE QUESNOY where billets were taken over from MG Corps</i>
<i>Le Quesnoy</i>	<i>14/11/18</i>	<i>Delousing started.</i>

It is possible that George missed these last few weeks for, on the 5th October 1918, he was admitted to the 14th Field Ambulance with “Pyrexia of unknown origin” which was usually known as Trench Fever, caused by lice droppings infecting a wound or graze. He was moved up the chain to the 43rd Casualty Clearing Station. We do not know if he was discharged back to service from there. Trench Fever, like Covid 19, was a very variable disease in its effects on people.

The rest of November was spent by the Norfolks at Le Quesnoy and then the Battalion moved gradually into Belgium to arrive at Grand Leez on 23rd December where they remained until the end of the year.

We do not have the date of George’s return to England but it is possible that he was unlucky in that the 1st Norfolks were a Regular Army Battalion, although the personnel were much changed. They would not have been quickly demobilised and would have contained soldiers who would continue to serve after the war. From the *War Diary* it appears that the Battalion spent most of the next three months at Grand Leez, a village now part of the city of Gembloux, in Belgium. Here, every day was filled with route marches, P.T., parades, bathing and de-lousing. It was not until April 1919 that they proceeded to embarkation camp at Antwerp. The *War Diary* ends on 20th April 1919 and it is likely that this was about the time that they embarked for England

George Feary finally returned to England and was demobilised. We know from the *Register of England and Wales* that by the Spring of 1920 he was with wife, Gertrude, in Church Street in Ringstead. The *Registers* show us that they remained there until 1929 and that they then moved to Carlow Street. They were there in 1931 when daughter Hannah was also shown as being entitled to vote.

It is often overlooked that, for many working-class couples, the woman and the man both gained the right to vote in the *Representation of the People Act* of 1918. This gave 5.2 million men and 8.5 million women the right to vote. Previously the property requirement had excluded most working-class men.

The couple had at least two further children, Ivy, born on 28th February 1920 and Harold who was born in 1923 but died the following year.

Jon Abbott has written, on the *Ringstead Heritage Group* website, that electricity came to Ringstead in 1927, with the first substation built in Church Street, opposite the Carlow Road junction. He also reports that George Feary was one of those people who refused have it in his house and preferred instead to rely on oil lamps.

In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, George was working as a bricklayer’s labourer and Gertrude carried out the usual “Unpaid Domestic Duties”.

Gertrude died in 1965 and George Robert Feary died, aged 84 in 1969. For him, his time in the 1st Norfolks had been less than two years in a long family life.



*George and Gertrude with daughters Annie (Hannah), Maud, Ada and Ivy
With thanks to Lorraine Piper*

Chapter 25

Albert Ambrose Fensome (1883-1969)

The tragedy of a young man's violent death is not confined to warzones. In the 1911 Census for Ringstead, widowed Charlotte Fensome, now living with her son, had mistakenly put down that she had been married 50 years and had had 12 children, 4 of whom had died. As she was not the wife of the "Head" or the Head herself, this information was not required and has been crossed out. Nevertheless, it gives us a picture of many couple's family lives. One of these four children had been Albert who had died with other young men in his own parish.

On January 27th 1858, Charlotte Ann Saddington had married Stephen Fensom, (the "e" seems to have come later) in Denford, where they both lived. Stephen worked as a shoemaker, probably at home, and his wife and older children would have helped him produce his handsewn boots and shoes. By 1871 the family had moved to Spring Gardens in Ringstead and there are five children shown: Thomas (12); Albert (8); Herbert (5); Amelia (3) and Joseph just four months old. More children followed by 1881 but Albert is missing.

On the morning of 30th January 1877 Albert, aged just 14 was working with other boys and men in one of the fields in Ringstead when the wind and rain increased in intensity. All the workers hurried for shelter and huddled together in a small hovel. Some of the boys decided that this was unsafe and dashed for a thatched stone-built barn nearby. It looked more solid, but when a whirlwind hit it, the roof was ripped off and the gable ends and walls fell in burying some of the boys. Three died, and Albert Fensome was one of these. Their gravestone still stands to the left of the short path to the north door of the church.

Another son was born later and, as was often the custom, he was also called Albert, in remembrance of his dead brother. He was christened Albert Ambrose Fensom, with his sister Kate, on 5th February 1894 in Ringstead Church although he had been born on 21st May 1883. By the time of the christening there had been further tragedy for Charlotte for, on 5th May 1887, her husband Stephen had been buried in the churchyard, aged 47 years.

By 1891, living in Carlow Street, Charlotte was working as a shoehand with son Joseph (30) also in the trade. Albert was still at school and there was also a female lodger. In the 1911 Census the family were still living in Leveratt's Row as Spring Rise or Gardens was later known. It became derelict and was demolished in the 1970s. "Ambrose" Fensome aged 27, was now given as the head of the family. He was still single and was working, doing "Army Welt Sewing". His mother, Charlotte, 72 years old, was living with him and there was a young boarder, Maggie Horsford, from Stowe in Huntingdonshire (probably Stow Longa 11 miles east of Ringstead), who was a lift (heel) maker.

Charlotte died in the third quarter of 1914 and it may be that she lived long enough to see the marriage of her youngest son, Albert, who had married Minnie Jane Hobbes in the second quarter of that same year. Minnie had been born in Woodford on 13th January 1884

and in the 1911 Census for Woodford had been living with her family in Pigs Lane there and working as a "Sewing Machinist, Tailoring". Bride and groom would both have been about thirty years old. At about the same time the Great War began and on 4th August 1914 Great Britain entered that war.

The belief by many, that the Germans would be quickly defeated, was soon shattered when the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), consisting of Regular Army Battalions, was knocked back and nearly destroyed by the well-organised and planned German offensive. At first local bigwigs, cajoled and hectored young men, to join up to fill the gaps in the old Battalions or the the new Pals' Battalions. At first these were volunteer units were like private armies but they became a part of the War Office's responsibility. It was soon clear that this would not be enough and, despite opposition from many MPs, conscription began in early 1916. The 1914 and 1914/15 Star Medals were for men who had entered the war before conscription and we know that Albert was not awarded either medal so he must have entered the Western Front, in 1916 or after, as a conscript.

Unfortunately, as is often the case, Albert's military records have largely been destroyed. The *Medal and Awards Roll* show that he served in four battalions. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* states that he served in France, had been wounded, and probably ended his military career in 1918 in the 2/5th Gloucestershire Regiment as part of the Army of Occupation. Finally, from the *Absent Voters List of 1918*, prepared for the December 1918 General Election, when newly enfranchised men and women would vote for the first time, we can see that he was with the 7th Bedfordshires near or at the end of the war in November 1918.

There is one further record, for the *Northamptonshire Military Tribunals 1916-18*, which adjudicated on whether a conscripted soldier should be exempted from service because of his work or other circumstances. On 1st April 1917 an A. A. Fensome who worked for *Eaton and Company* of Rushden on a Pounding Machine came up before a tribunal. Eaton and Company were a well-known boot and shoe maker and a pounding machine forced the uppers down on the last as flat to the insole as possible. We know that at in 1911 Albert had been in the shoe trade but on a different process. Unfortunately there is no further information on A. A. Fensome to be certain he is our man and no decision is reported. Rushden is only some six miles from Ringstead and it seems likely, although not certain, that he is our Albert and that he had to accept conscription at this or a future tribunal.

We know, thanks to the knowledge, of the Northamptonshire Regiment and its Regimental Numbers, of Steve (Stebie173) on the Great War Forum, that Albert would have enlisted with the 5th Battalion in mid-July 1917. He was given Regimental Number 39554. This Battalion had been formed as part of the Kitchener's first New Army made up of volunteers. At first these had been for home defence but quickly they were needed on the Western Front and almost all of the men volunteered. The 5th had first seen service on the Western Front at the end of May 1915 and it remained there until the end of the war.

After training, however, Albert Fensome was sent to the 17th Infantry Base Depot at Étaples in France. On arrival there, in early November, he was part of a batch of men from the

Northamptonshires who were transferred to the 4th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment and was given the number 41257.

At first, the 4th Bedfordshires had also provided Home defence as a “Reserve Battalion” but were sent to France in July 1916 and spent the rest of the war on the Western Front.

Albert, however, made a further transfer to the 7th Battalion which also served on the Western Front until May 1918. At this point, Other Ranks were transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Bedfordshires and some Officers and NCOs were given the task of training the newly arrived American troops.

We know that Albert was not in the 2nd Battalion but we also know that the May 9th *Daily List of Casualties* had a long list of wounded men in the Bedfordshires, and among them was Pte. A. Fensome (41257) of Thrapston. These lists could be published up to six weeks after the actual event so it was probably in March or April 1918 that Albert was wounded, possibly in the German “Michael” Offensive. We can only surmise that he was wounded while in the 7th Battalion and was hospitalised for some time. When he was fit again the 7th had disappeared and he joined the 2/5th Gloucestershires and stayed with them into the Army of Occupation.

Finally, he was demobilised, probably in early 1919, and returned to his life in Ringstead. The *Electoral Registers of England and Wales* for 1920 to 1932 show that Albert and his family lived in the Sivers Buildings in Ringstead. In 1939 they are still there. By now Albert was working as a Slag Filler in an iron furnace, probably at Islip. Living with them was daughter Gladys, born on 2nd November 1916.

The Islip Parish Council website reports that:

During the war [WW2] it was essential to keep the [furnace] site hidden from the eyes of the German bomber pilots, and the escaping burning gas was a problem, as it lit up the night sky. This surplus gas was allowed to lift an escape valve at the top of a small chimney on the working platform and burn off. It was decided the best way to hide this was to erect corrugated roofing over the working platform and ‘pig’ bays. The result of this was many of the men suffered the effects of gassing and extreme heat.

It would have been a sad fate for someone who had survived the poison gas of the Western Front to be gassed so close to home. Luckily he survived into old age and in 1942 the production of pig iron finally ended at Islip.

Minnie died on 1st August 1955 and Albert on 13th February 1969. He was 85 years old and was living at 66 High Street at the time of his death.

Chapter 26

Arthur James Fox (1900-1970)

In writing these brief biographies, I have sometimes discovered interconnections between families which were not at first obvious. When we consider all the men, we see that there was a web of family and friendship ties, leaving few in the village untouched.

One man in this network was Arthur James Fox, who was born on 14th May 1900, the son of Frederick and Mary Elizabeth. Mary Elizabeth, (often just Elizabeth), was the older sister of Charlotte Gray who had married Herman Baker, another Great War soldier. The Grays were a Yorkshire family, who lived for a time in Northamptonshire. In 1901 Frederick and Elizabeth Fox were living at 5 Carlow Road in Ringstead. With them was their first child, Arthur who was just 10 months old. The couple had four more children, Albert, Agnes, Walter and Elsie.

It was not a happy marriage, however, and in April 1907 Frederick was summoned for persistent cruelty to Mary. She said that he had abused her and threatened her with a carving knife. The court adjourned the case to see if the “parties could come to terms”. Mary Elizabeth refused to be reconciled and in May the Bench ordered Frederick to pay her eleven shillings a week. She had been staying with her parents who only lived a few doors away in Carlow Street. It seems that she went north with them when they moved back to Hull. She died there in 1908.

In the 1911 Census, widower Frederick was 32 years old, and an unemployed handsewn bootmaker with children, (Arthur) James 10, Albert, 8, and Agnes 5 years old. Walter was with his grandparents in Hull. The last daughter, Elsie Clorinda, was not with the family and I cannot find her elsewhere in the Census. In 1926 she emigrated to Canada on the SS *Canada*. She was 18 years old and was described as a “Vaudeville Artist”. As we have seen, in the Herman Baker biography, Charlotte Baker (her mother’s sister) was a talented musician. Her former address was given as Division Street in Hull where her grandparents had lived. On the same ship was Harry Mobley who she married in Canada that same year..

Despite his violent attitude to his wife, we must acknowledge that Frederick seems to have prospered by dint of hard work and imagination. Jon Abbott has written that he was said to have designed and patented removable spikes for running shoes. He also built up a successful boot making business employing several men. His family would take the orders to Ringstead Station for delivery to his clients. By 1939 he could describe himself as a “Boot Manufacturer”.

Arthur James Fox would only have been fourteen when war was declared in 1914. He could not have imagined that he would have to play a part in it. He would not have been eighteen until May 14th 1918 and we cannot be certain just what his service record was. We know

from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he was serving with the Army of Occupation at the end of the war. It also gives his unit as the 52nd Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment.

Arthur would have been too young to vote so was not included in the 1918 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead. The *Representation of the People's Act* of 1918 tripled the number entitled to vote from 7.7 million to 21.4 million by the end of the year. There was a proviso in the Act that men, who had turned 19 while doing war service, were also entitled to vote. This explains why Arthur is on the Autumn 1919 Absent Voters' List. It also confirms that he was also in the 52nd Royal Sussex Regiment and gives his Regimental Number as 28273.

The 52nd Battalion served in northern Germany as part of the Army of Occupation from March to August 1919. Previously to this it had been a training unit and had been based from April 1918 in Thetford. We must presume that Arthur joined the Battalion in Thetford and went with it to Germany in March 1919. This would explain why he does not have a Medal Card, as his service was after the Armistice on 11th November 1918.

After he was demobilised, he returned to Ringstead and lived with his father, Frederick, in Carlow Street. In the third quarter of 1922 he married Florence Doris Pentelow. Florence was a Raunds' girl, the daughter of Ralph and Polly (née Skinner) Pentelow. They lived in Rotten (or Rotton) Row and Ralph had been a riveter in a local shoe factory when Florence was christened on July 16th 1899.

We have shown that Arthur's father, Frederick, was something of an entrepreneur. Is it possible that he helped set up his eldest son in business? Certainly by 1939 Arthur was living at 26 Linden Avenue in Kettering and was now a "General Shop Keeper". At the time of the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* Herman and Lotte (Charlotte) Baker were staying with the Foxes. As we have said, in Herman Baker's biography, Charlotte was the sister of Arthur's late mother. The couple now lived near Hull but obviously had kept their links with their Northamptonshire relatives.

In the same year, on 19th July 1939, Arthur advertised in the *Evening Telegraph*:

CARAVANS for hire at Skegness. – Apply Fox General Stores, Linden Avenue, Kettering. Booked August week.

It must have seemed that the world was more settled after the traumas of the Great War and the Depression Years but, of course, another World War was about to start which would be even longer than the first and shook civilisation by the terrible toll of civilians across the World.

Florence died on 21st February 1966 and Arthur followed her on the 25th May 1970.

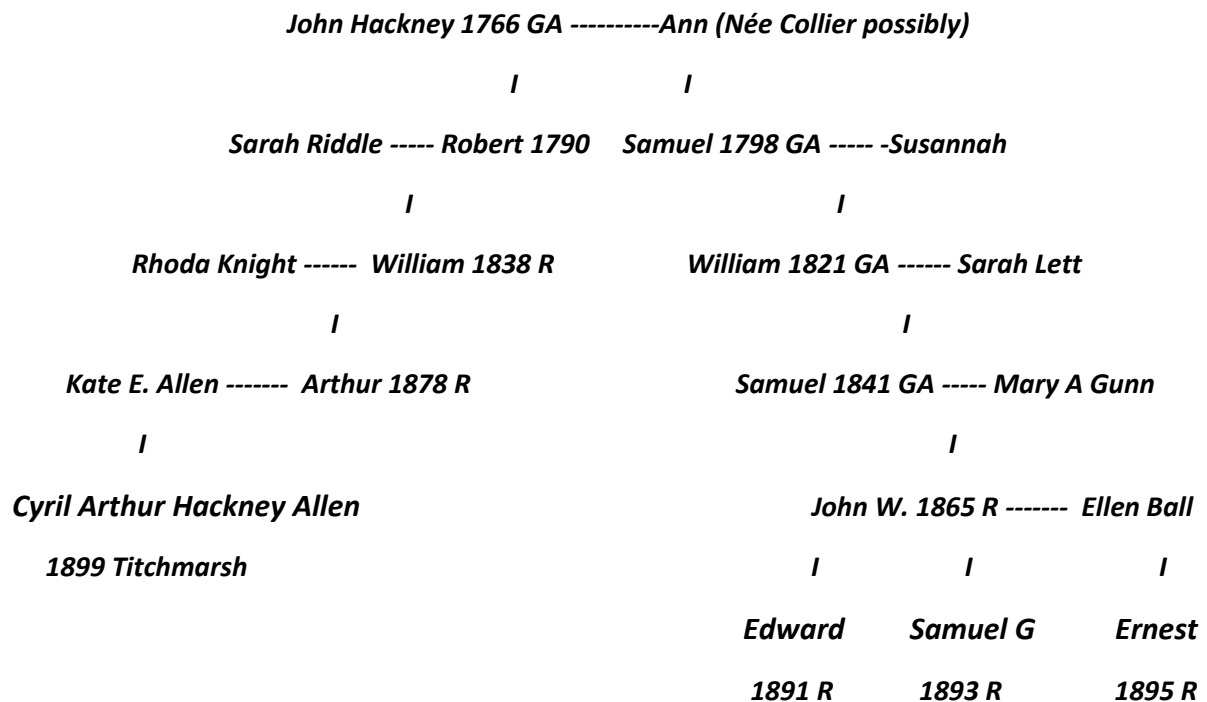
Chapter 27

The Hackney Family

The Hackneys originally, like others, came from across the Nene in Great Addington. The men from the family who we are looking at here were descended from the sons of John and Ann Hackney. They had five sons, William (1788), Robert (1790), Thomas (1791), John (1792) and Samuel (1798). The names William, Robert, John and Samuel reverberate down the various family branches. It is the lines starting from Robert and Samuel that we will be following here. Robert's line led to Cyril Arthur, although as we shall see there is some confusion about his birth.

The other three Hackney men descended from Samuel, the youngest son of John and Ann.

SIMPLIFIED HACKNEY FAMILY TREE FOR WW1 SOLDIERS



Approximate birth years given. GA – Great Addington R - Ringstead

Unfortunately the military records of the Hackney men have largely been lost. The Second World War German bomb that fell on the building containing the records seems to have hit some parts of the alphabet harder than others. Nevertheless we can give some idea of the service of these men during the Great War.

We will begin with Cyril Arthur Hackney.

Cyril Arthur Hackney (1898-1985)

Cyril Arthur Hackney Allen was born on 13th July 1898 in Titchmarsh. He was the son of single woman, Kate Elizabeth Allen. Kate was the daughter of William Allen a pedlar or hawker from Polebrook and his wife Jane from Washingley in Huntingdonshire. In view of Cyril's second and third names it seems likely that Cyril was the son of "shoe finisher" Arthur Hackney, who Kate married on the 18th December 1899 in Titchmarsh. Arthur was the son of William Hackney, a labourer from Ringstead and his wife Rhoda (née Knight)

In 1901 Arthur (23) and Kate (22) Hackney were living at 11 Carlow in Ringstead. Cyril was with them and was two years old. By 1911 Arthur and Kate were in the Bank Cottages in Denford Road, Ringstead, and had been married eleven years. They have had four children, all of them still living. The younger children, Lilian, Earnest [sic] and Bernard had all been born in Ringstead. Cyril was twelve years old and still at school.

We know, as they did not, that the Great War that just waiting for a shot to start it. In 1911 many handsewn military boot makers were out of work but in 1914 the war would give them work and take away their sons.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that Cyril served with the 3rd Battalion of the Queens (Royal West Surrey) Regiment and was still serving after the war had finished. He does not appear in the 1918 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead but he was not 21, nor had he turned 19 while in service, so was not yet able to vote. He was also missing from the Spring 1919 *Absent Voters' List* but was in the Autumn edition. His home address was shown as High Street and he was serving in the 19th Battalion of the Queens (Royal West Surrey) Regiment with Regimental Number 31592.

In the military records Cyril was recorded as A.C. Hackney but with the correct Regimental Number (31592). From the *Silver Badge Register* we can see that he enlisted on 29th June 1918 and had never served overseas. He was discharged on 26th September 1919 because he was deemed no longer physically fit for service. The reason for his discharge was a "weak bladder" which was "not attributable" to his army service. He did receive a small pension from 27th September 1919 which ended on 1st July of the following year. So it seems that Cyril joined the 3rd Battalion of the Queens and was transferred to the 19th from which he was finally discharged. His was not a glorious war but, like most of the men, his main hope when he enlisted would have been to survive.

The Pension Card for Cyril Arthur Hackney has his address as c/o Mrs. Gunn (mistranscribed Garn), Church Green, Woodford. In the fourth quarter of 1919, which must have been soon after he had been discharged, he married Kathleen E. Gunn. He gave his name as Cyril A[rthur] Hackney Allen. At first the couple lived in the High Street in Ringstead, possibly with his parents. Kathleen would not yet have had the vote as the couple did not have any property qualification and she was not yet thirty. By 1925 they had moved to Spendlove's Yard in Ringstead. By 1929 they were both enfranchised.

During this time, Cyril was probably a furnace worker. Certainly this was his job when he was a witness in a court case reported in the *Chronicle & Echo* on Thursday 19th March 1925. A Raunds' cyclist had been knocked off his bike by a hit-and-run driver. The report tells that Robinson had been cycling home from Thrapston when he was knocked down on the Ringstead side of the hill from Denford. He was found there by Cyril Arthur Hackney and Reginald Weekley who came to his aid and he was taken home in a buggy, presumably horse-drawn.

Before the 1930 Register of Voters' List had been drawn up, Cyril and Kathleen moved to Church Green in Woodford, her home village. Now he is shown as Cyril Arthur Hackney Allen and she is Kathleen Annie Allen. Could this be related to the death of his mother who had died in 1930 or was he just being accurate for the official records? To add to the confusion in the 1931 Electoral Register for Woodford our Cyril is living in Church Green and Cyril Arthur Allen is living in The Green in Woodford.

By the 1939 *Register for England and Wales* Cyril's father Arthur Hackney was living in Denford Road in Ringstead but Cyril and Kathleen were living near the *White Horse* public house in Woodford. Cyril was still a Blast Furnace worker.

Kathleen Emma Annie Elizabeth Allen died on 2nd October 1957 at Allege Brook in Woodford and Cyril Arthur H. Allen died on 30th January 1985, aged 86. He was living in Whittlesey Terrace in Woodford at the time of his death.

Edward Hackney (1891-1966)

We now look at the other line of the family which led to three brothers who became soldiers in the First World War. Edward was the oldest child of John William and Ellen Hackney although Ellen (née Ball) had had two children before her marriage. He had been born on 20th December 1891 in Ringstead. In 1901 he was living with his family at 3 The Terrace, High Street. His father, John William, was a bricklayer, originally from Great Addington.

By 1911 Ted (Edward) was working as a farm labourer and the family were now living in Gladstone Street which was part of the Tilcraft estate. Was his father drawn across the Nene by work on this new housing area?

The excitement of the Raunds' March in 1905, in which Ringstead men took part, was over and many of the handsewn men were out of work by 1911. This recession in trade may partly explain why some of the proposed Tilcroft estate was never built. As we have seen before, 1914 would bring salvation to the army bootmakers but at a terrible price for some.

It seems likely that Edward and his younger brother Samuel George went to enlist together. They both joined the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) and were given consecutive Regimental Numbers. Edward was 50875 and he was first posted to the 10th Battalion.

We do not have a record of when Edward enlisted but the Medal Roll for his brother Samuel shows that he was in France from 10th October 1916. It seems likely that Edward would have had a similar start date, although as he was first in the 10th, unlike Samuel who remained in

the 8th Battalion all through the war, there could be some differences. But on the same page of the Medal Roll there are soldiers in the 10th so it may be that some of them travelled together.



*10th Battalion Royal Fusiliers marching to the trenches St Pol, November 1916
Photograph by Ernest Brooks ©IWM Q 1607*

We know that at some point he was transferred to the 8th Battalion, his brother's Battalion, although Reg Hackney was told that they were kept apart in the Front Line. The lesson of the "Pal's Battalions" had been hard learned. It seems likely that he remained with the 8th until the Battalion was disbanded, in an Army reorganisation, on 6th February 1918. Edward was transferred to the Royal Sussex Regiment and given a new Regimental Number GS/36411. I am not sure which Battalion he joined but the 7th Sussex were in the vicinity of the 8th Royal Fusiliers in the latter's War Diary.

While with the Sussex he suffered a gunshot wound to the left hand. As a result he was taken back to England and, when he had recovered, he was transferred to the 612 Home Service Employment Company (HSEC) which was based in the Eastern Command region. He was given a new number 459764. The HSEC would only take the lowest medically graded soldiers who were unable to serve in a warzone. It kept lists of the men under such categories as: Batman, Cook, Storeman or Caretaker, Sanitary Duty, Orderly, Clerk, Shoemaker, Salvage, Loader and Brakesman, Bath and Drying Room. They would be used to do the work once done by the ordinary soldiers, in order to keep the fighting units up to

their highest possible strength,. It was a branch of the Labour Corps but the men in those units would often do dangerous work in or near the Front Line.

We have no records for these transfers but in the Ringstead *Absent Voters' List* for 1918 he was shown as already being in the HSEC so it seems likely that he was not long in the Royal Sussex. He was finally discharged on 3rd October 1919.

Edward returned to Ringstead and seems to have lived with his brothers in Gladstone Street for the next few years. He married widow, Violet May Robinson, in the Spring of 1927. Violet had been born a "Lowe" and had married Harry Robinson in Woodford on 6th December 1911. Harry had been an engine driver at the Blast Furnaces and he had enlisted in the 5th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. He died of wounds on the 6th July 1916 in France. Harry and Violet had had three children, Arthur in 1912, Frederick in 1913 and Bessie (sometimes Betty) in 1915.

At some point Edward moved to Woodford and became friendly with the young widow. In a case reported in the *Northampton Mercury* of 26th March 1926 Edward was said to have been a shepherd but I think this may be a case of mistaken identity by the reporter. He and Violet were drinking after hours in the *Baker's Arms* with the landlord and the travelling actor, Arthur Persse and his wife. They were all fined.

There were two Edward Hackneys born in Ringstead who moved across the river. Our Edward, and an Edward John Hackney, son of Robert who worked as a stockman although he lived in a cottage next to Islip Furnace House. He had married Violet E. Fleming. It seems that the Hackneys connived to make life difficult for future genealogists.

We see from the 1928 and 1929 Electoral Registers that our Edward and Violet were living in Church Street in Woodford but by 1930 they had moved to Pig's Lane. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* Edward was a platelayer in an ironstone quarry and Violet May, besides the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties", was an "Ironer and Finisher at a Clothing Factory". Living with them was Betty, who was a booking clerk at the same factory. There is another record but it at the moment it is officially closed. Living with the family was an eleven-year-old girl, Vera D. Doble, who may be an evacuee from the London area.

Edward died on 2nd April 1966 and was cremated at Kettering Crematorium. Violet followed him almost twenty years later, on 2nd June 1985.

Samuel George Hackney (1893-1961)

Samuel was the middle of the three brothers who went to war. He was born on 3rd December 1893. In the 1901 and 1911 Censuses he was living with his parents, bricklayer John, and his wife, Ellen. In the 1911 Census, which was the first one completed by an increasingly literate population, the two boys are shown as Ted and Sam which was obviously how they were known in the family. Sam was already working as a farm labourer.

When war came it was fought first by the Regular Army and then, when this was decimated, by the new volunteer battalions. It soon became clear that, although opposed by many in Parliament, conscription would be necessary. It was introduced in early 1916 for some men,

and gradually the age and other exemptions were stopped, and more and more men were drawn into the military according to their age and marital status.

Samuel was a young man of about 21 years old with no wife or children so he was an early conscript and was enlisted on 15th February 1916. It seems that, unlike his brother he was posted directly into the 8th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment). He was given the Regimental Number GS/50876 (GS just stands for General Service). The Medal Roll shows that he went to France on 10th October 1916 with the 8th Battalion.



*Ted (left) and Samuel in their Royal Fusiliers uniform
With thanks to Reg Hackney*

During the long series of battles that summer and autumn, collectively known as the Battle of the Somme, the 8th had lost many men, with the terrible weather being the only winner. By the time that Samuel reached the Western Front the rain and mud was bringing the campaign to an inconclusive conclusion.

Samuel soon experienced the squalor of trench life. he told his grandson, Reg Hackney, that he had been asleep in the trenches and was shocked awake when a rat bit his ear. He then struggled to staunch the blood.

The Germans had been planning and building a heavily fortified series of defences during the autumn and winter of 1916-1917. This became known as the Hindenburg Line and from February 1917 the Germans carried out a retreat to this line, destroying anything useful to the Allies as they retreated. In the Spring of 1917 the Allies carried out a planned assault, with the British troops' attack being a diversion to assist the main thrust from the French further south. This opened with the First Battle of the Scarpe.

The 8th Battalion were billeted under Arras. There were many large old cellars beneath Arras and, under the suburbs of St Sauveur and Ronville, were caves, many very large, which had been discovered by accident in October 1916. Together they were able to house over 15,000 men. This underground world had piped water, electricity, a telephone system and gas-proof doors. Long tunnels were excavated to enable troops to travel to the Front Line in comparative safety. The Germans knew of the tunnel system and counter-mined it, causing many casualties in the New Zealand Tunnelling Company.

The 8th Royal Fusiliers were now part of the VI Corps and were given the task of capturing the enemy "Black Line" and then to try to move onto the further "Brown Line". *The Wartime Memories Project* quotes from this uncredited account of the battle.

The artillery bombardment opened on 4th April 1917 and the infantry – many of whom had been able to approach the front line in the long tunnels and subways reaching out from Arras itself- advanced behind a creeping barrage on 9th April. Resistance was rapidly overcome; fine counter-battery work had stifled the German guns. The leading troops quickly captured the Black Line but German fire increased as successive waves came through to advance on the Feuchy Switch trench, notably from Observation Ridge. In places the German troops were seen retreating at a run and by noon 37th Division had pushed through with orders to capture Monchy le Preux. The 12th Division remained in position as snow and sleet fell.

On the night of 11-12 April, 36th and 37th Brigades moved up and relieved units of 8th Cavalry Brigade east of Monchy. Next day, 29th Division relieved 12th Division, whereupon the units moved back to the area between Arras and Doullens. The attack had been highly successful making an advance on the Divisional Front of some 4000 yards for a total of 2018 casualties.

We see how success had come to be measured in casualties per yard. It seems likely that it was in this attack that Samuel was first wounded. The *Chronicle and Echo* of 25th April 1917 briefly reported that he had been wounded on April 11th. The *Medal Rolls* shows two periods of service in a warzone for Samuel, the first ending on 27th April 1917 and the second starting on 24th July of the same year. This gap probably indicates the time spent by Samuel in England recovering from his wounds.

If Samuel returned to the Royal Fusiliers 8th Battalion at the end of July 1917 he would have found it in the Monchy area with little enemy action. In September, however, they moved to Wancourt in the Feuchy Line but after billeting at Achicourt the Battalion relieved the 9th Essex near Monchy again. The Battalion now followed the usual pattern of periods in the trenches followed by periods in reserve, training and having some relaxation. The weather in October was very wet and cold and windy. The 8th then marched and entrained during early December to Moulin le Comte. It seems most likely that Samuel had been wounded again before the December moves so, probably, in the Monchy area.

On 22nd December 1917 the War Office Daily List No. 5449, reported that Samuel had been wounded and was entitled to wear a "wound stripe". There was usually a gap of at least a month between the wounding event and its report in the *Daily Casualty List* so we cannot be sure of the action in which Samuel sustained his second injury. It seems that he was only back at the Front for a few months before being wounded again. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he had been wounded twice. His second injury was a gunshot wound to his right leg which had fractured his femur.

From his grandson, Reg Hackney, we heard that the two wounds were in the same leg and he had difficulty in walking for the rest of his life. Reg also remembers his grandfather telling of being stretchered away from the Front Line when the enemy began shelling again. In the panic he was tipped into a ditch, in even greater pain.

From his Silver Badge record we know that he was discharged on 18th July 1918 because of his wounds. The Medal Roll gives a discharge date of 18th January. There may be error in the month, as "1" and "7" can look very similar, or the January date was when he left France and the July date was his final discharge date. He was given a pension from 18th July 1918 to 15th July 1924, which was longer than many, and indicates the seriousness of his disablement.

Samuel George Hackney was in the *Absent Voters' List* for 1918, shown with his two (absent) soldier brothers in Gladstone Street but he was in the *Register of Electors* for 1919. He remained in Gladstone Street with his father, John William and Edward and Ernest until his marriage in the Summer of 1926 to Margery Mabel Wilson. Margery had been born on 4th February 1900, the daughter of Herbert and Emilia Wilson. Herbert was a wheelwright by trade but by 1911 the family had moved to Pearce's Yard in Ringstead and he had become a millwright.

Samuel and Margery had two children, Wilson born in 1927 and Jean in 1929. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* they were living in High Street, some five doors from the Post Office. Samuel was working as a plumber and painter and Margery as a heel cutter and the two children were living with them.

Samuel George Hackney died on 24th December 1961 in St. Mary's Hospital in Kettering. Administration was granted to his widow, Margery. The "Effects" were given as £840. He was living at the time of his death at 17 Gladstone Street, which may have been his old family home. Margery died on 13th March 1963, with Administration granted to her married daughter, Jean.

Ernest Hackney (1895-1978)

Ernest Hackney was the youngest of the three brothers who fought in the Great War. He was born on 21st October 1895 (19th on his death registration) and by 1911 he was 16 years old and working as a farm labourer like his two older brothers.

We do not know exactly when Ernest enlisted but, as he did not receive an 1914/15 Star, he must have been a conscript in 1916 or later. Unlike his brothers he was posted to the Machine Gun Corps and given the Regimental Number 65877.

The Machine Gun Corps (MGC) had been formed in October 1915 when it had become clear that this weapon would play a decisive role in trench warfare. Unfortunately, without the organisation and history of the old Regimental system, few of its records survive. Its members, however, looked back on their service with pride. George Coppard, a former machine gunner, wrote in his autobiography:

No military pomp attended its birth or decease. It was not a famous regiment with glamour and whatnot, but a great fighting corps, born for war only and not for parades.

The devastating firepower of the machine gun was, of course, recognised by both sides and so it was an important target for the enemy. Some 170,500 officers and men served in the MGC and there were 62,049 casualties, including 12,498 deaths. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that Ernest was wounded twice, like his brother, Samuel.

The lack of MGC records make his army service more difficult to trace than most but we do know a little about his wartime experiences. Ernest was reported as wounded in the *War Office Daily List No. 5415* on 13th November 1917 and was entitled to wear a wound stripe.



Machine Gun Corps Badge

We also know that Ernest became a member of the 30th Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps. This had been formed, following a reorganisation, from the Machine Gun Companies of the 30th Division. In 1918 the 30th were on the Somme Front and took part in the Battle of Lys. They were also in the Advance on Flanders and, at the time of the Armistice, had crossed the River Scheldt with the most advanced units reaching north-west of Lessines.

Ernest was "Gazetted" on 19th August 1919 (issue 31512). He had been awarded the Military Medal which was given "for acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire". His great nephew, Reg Hackney, believed that it was for his action, in destroying a machine gun nest, that Ernest received the award.

Although it is a very long time after the event, it seems most likely that it was awarded for his actions in the final advance prior to the signing of the Armistice on 11th November 1918. Certainly in the *Roll of Individuals Entitled to the Victory and War Medals*, Ernest is shown as being put into "Class Z" on 13th February 1919 and this would have been a part of his demobilisation.



*Ernest in his Machine Gun Corps Uniform
With thanks to Reg Hackney*

Further, we know that in January 1919 the 30th Division returned to the bases in Dunkirk, Calais, Boulogne and Étaples and began to demobilise. In the chaos at the end of the war,

with the return to the United Kingdom of soldiers from Britain and the Commonwealth, the bureaucracy struggled to deal with the required records. It may be, therefore, that so long after the event, Ernest's award slipped by almost unnoticed, and I have found no mention of it in the local newspapers.

Ernest returned to Ringstead. He was shown in the *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead in 1918 and, like his brothers, was shown in Gladstone Street in the *Register of Electors* for 1919.

In the last quarter of 1930 he married Florence Bannister. Florence was the daughter of Henry Bannister, a shoehand originally from Northampton, and his wife Rhoda, a local girl. In 1911 the Bannister family had been living in Carlow Road in Ringstead.

In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* Ernest was a general labourer to a bricklayer. His wife Florence was hand-cutting heels. Two doors away was his brother Samuel and his wife Margery with their family. They were all living near the Post Office in Ringstead High Street.

Ernest died, aged 82, on 13th May 1978 and Florence, who lived to be 95, died in 1998.

Chapter 28

James Hathaway (1863-1940)

Not all those who served away from home were in the military. Some performed important duties in this country to help the war effort.

James Hathaway had been born in Wolverhampton on the 15th March 1863. His father, an Iron Worker, had married Lydia Brant on the 25th October 1857 but the family moved to Ashton in Lancashire (probably Ashton-on-Ribble, now part of Preston) where James senior was working as a “Puddler” at an Iron Works. This was a skilled trade, turning brittle pig iron into wrought iron using a furnace. It was extremely hot, hard work in a toxic atmosphere and men usually died in their thirties.

It was Lydia who died, in 1872, in her early thirties and James remarried and moved to Aspull, near Wigan. He was there in the 1881 Census with his new wife, Margaret, and two new children. His eighteen-year-old son James, however, had moved out and was boarding in Aspull and had become an iron worker. He was lodging with widow, Elizabeth Robinson and her children.

The family seems to have stayed in Lancashire and his father continued in the ironworks. At some point in the 1880s he decided that this life was not for him and he moved south to London. On the 24th February 1890 he joined the Metropolitan Police Force at Old Scotland Yard. This was to be his career for the next twenty-five years. On April 13th 1890 he married Elizabeth Bigg at St Martin in the Fields in Trafalgar Square. He was living in Leicester Square at the time.

There may have been some urgency to the marriage for the 1891 Census, taken on the 5th April, has the couple with their young son Thomas who was nine months old. They were now sharing 26 Bidborough Street, south of the Euston Road, near Kings Cross Station. By 1901 they had moved to Marcellus Road in Islington which had been built in 1882 and was demolished ninety years later. In 1897 Charles Booth and the Salvation Army produced a Poverty Map of London. His assistant, George H. Duckworth, met Inspector William Dyball in the Police Station, next to Hornsey Road Baths and Laundry, and walked him round the local area. Marcellus Road was coloured light blue on the map indicating it was a “Poor” area.

In the years following the Census Elizabeth died, although I have not found the death. James married again to Eliza Ann Martin at St Barnabas Church in Hornsey Road, Islington on the 25th July 1909. We see from the 1911 Census that Eliza had been born in St Ives in Huntingdonshire and that the couple were living at 251 Hornsey Road in Holloway in London. Eliza was 38 and would have been considered old to start a family, but the children came. Agnes Martin was born on the 24th February 1913 and Walter Ernest on the 26th November 1914, both baptised at St Marks in Tollington Park in Islington.

Meanwhile. Thomas James Hathaway, the only child from James's first marriage had emigrated to America and in 1917 was living in San Francisco and working as a Hotel Clerk. He was married with a four-month-old baby.

The war came, and James continued working as a Constable, but on the 8th March 1915 he retired from the Metropolitan Police Force. At the time he was in the Highgate Division and had served 25 years and 6 days. He was entitled to a pension of £64. 14s. 1d. a year.

What happened next? How did the family end up in Leveratt's Yard in Ringstead in 1918 with James an "absent voter"? When we look back at His wife's family we see how it may have happened. He parents, in 1911, were living in Leveratt's Yard (or Row) in Ringstead. Edward was born in Hilton and Edith in Toseland which matches the earlier records. He was working on a local farm and we see from the 1901 Census that they have been in the village at least ten years, along with their children. The couple were now living on their own and perhaps Eliza hoped for some help and support with her young family, from her family, while her husband was away.

We do not know if James had a part-time job to supplement his pension but at some point in the war he was called to use his old skills for the war effort. The 1918 *Absent Voter's List* for Ringstead shows that he was in the "Police, Vickers Ltd".

Vickers Limited had started out in Sheffield as a steel foundry and became famous for making church bells. This led on to work on shafts and propellers for ships, armour plating and then artillery such as machine guns. It expanded into ships, tanks, torpedoes and airships and aircraft. The various products were produced in factories and shipyards all over the United Kingdom so we cannot be sure where he was based.

After the war he would have returned home and we see the family in Leveratt's Yard through the 1920s and early 30s. Eliza's father, Edward Martin, died in 1926 and Edith followed in 1933. Sadly, Eliza died in 1935 and in the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* we see the widowed James, a "Retired Police Officer" living in the Council Houses in Denford Road. Living with him is daughter Agnes, a "Garment Stitcher" and son Walter a "Piece Sole Parer and Grip Clicker"

James died the following year aged seventy-six.

Chapter 29

Arthur Haxley (1892-1974)

The Haxleys were a well-known Raunds family although originally from neighbouring counties. George Haxley had been born in Melchbourne in Bedfordshire and married Elizabeth Mason from Catworth in Huntingdonshire in 1863. The places are all less than ten miles apart and George, who was a shoemaker, was probably drawn to Raunds for the chance of making a decent living in the military boot trade. Judging by the ages and birthplaces of the children, the family first lived in Great Catworth before trying life in Ringstead in about 1866. They returned to Catworth before finally settling in Raunds in 1878/9. Of course, this may not always reflect the movement of the whole family. Perhaps Elizabeth went back to her family for the births of her children.

Harry Mason Haxley was the oldest child, born in Great Catworth on 14th January 1864. Other children followed, there were nine in total, and the youngest son was John Herbert Haxley born in 1886.

John married Florence Beatrice Mayes on the 24th October 1910 but just over three months later she died and was buried on the 9th February 1911, aged 23. John, or Jack as he was usually called, was a well-known local footballer and captain of Raunds Town. He was also, like the family, a committed Baptist.

When war came he was conscripted in January 1917 and was enlisted with the Northamptonshire Regiment for his initial training and given the Regimental Number 202986. After training he was posted on the 14th May 1917 to the Machine Gun Corps' Base at Camiers with service number 89380. The Machine Gun Corps (MGC) could be sent to any company on the Western Front when they arrived in Camiers and we know that John was with the 105th Company in the field.

The Machine Gun Corps was known as a dangerous unit to be in. The machine gun was the most lethal weapon of the Great War and this made the men who fired them a prime target for the enemy. John was with the 35th Division in the Action of the 22nd October 1917 which was a British attack as part of the Third Battle of Ypres by the 5th Army. As part of this offensive the 35th attacked into Houthulst Forest. It was across sodden ground churned up by constant bombardments. They struggled to cross this quagmire and it developed into a stalemate. It was during this battle, on the 22nd October, that John went missing and he was later declared killed.

Meanwhile his oldest brother, Harry, had married Mary Annie Groome on the 4th January 1890 in Rushden and by 1911 was living in Raunds High Street with his wife and family. The couple had had five children, all still living. The oldest son still at home, Arthur, was eighteen years old. Harry was a "Hand Boot Sewer", in a factory but keeping the old skills alive.

Arthur, however, was a “Boot Operator – Tacker” and daughter, Ann, at fourteen, was a “Boot Factory Bench Girl”.

Arthur had been born on the 28th July 1894. War came in 1914 and later that year he married Martha Elizabeth Shaw. She was born in Ringstead, the daughter of Thomas and Martha. In 1911 she had been living at home in Spendlove’s Yard, which was off Cherry Hill, in Ringstead and working as a heel builder in the local factory. It was a three-room cottage so it seems unlikely that the young couple set up home with the Shaws but they did move to Ringstead at some point.

We have few of Arthur’s military records remaining but he had a Machine Gun Corps’ number, 89382, which was only two later than his uncle. We cannot be certain but it seems very probable that the two men enlisted together with the Northamptonshire Regiment in January 1917 and, after training, went to the Machine Gun Corps’ Base at Camiers in May 1917. After that it seems most likely that they went their separate ways.

The movement of men would not always follow a numerically logical pattern but we know that at the 1918 *Absent Voters; List* that he was in the 25th Battalion of the MGC. This was formed in February/March 1918 when the Corps was reorganised and the Machine Gun Companies of a Division were formed into Battalions with the same number. The Companies in the 25th Division were merged into the 25th Battalion. This probably means that he had been in one of the Machine Gun Companies of the 25th Division.

The 25th Division had fought at the Battles of Messines from the 7th to the 14th June 1917. As we have seen in previous biographies it was a British offensive designed partly to give some relief to the French who were in temporary disarray. It was also a very well-planned assault remembered chiefly for the huge detonation of mines that had been laid under the German positions by the Royal Engineers. The Machine Gun Companies fired a barrage over the top of the advancing British troops. It was one of the most successful Allied assaults in the war but many casualties were inflicted by German artillery on the new positions that had been gained. The Allies were also not yet able to follow up on this success.

Later in the year, in the Third Battle of Ypres, the Division was in the Battle of Pilckem Ridge (31st July – 2nd August 1917).

The following year, the *War Diary* for the new 25th Battalion reported for 1st March 1918:

Achiet le Petit. Fine bright morning followed by wind working northwards with some snow and cold night. The 4 Companies of the 25th Division having been assembled together in BUCHANAN CAMP ACHIET LE PETIT as and from the 14th February and moves completed by the 18th the formal formation under the new Establishment took place . . .

Training continued with no casualties and “glorious” weather but then the German “Michael Offensive” forced the Allies back and the 25th Division suffered badly during this terrifying time for the army. It lost men in the first German surge and moved north to refit so that, by

the end of March the Battalion were at Wulverghem, some seventy miles north, in Belgium. They received reinforcements on the 1st April of 11 Officers and 260 Other Ranks which gives some idea of their losses. They moved to Ploegstreet where, on the 9th and 10th April, they suffered a heavy shelling, including gas. On the 11th April the Germans attacked again driving the British back and inflicting many casualties but the line held. By the 16th April the Battalion had been forced to withdraw to Boeschepe and on to Nonne Bosch where they bivouacked in a field . It began to snow heavily.

At Grabbo Camp a roll call showed that in this period they had lost 3 Officers and 20 other Ranks killed, 12 Officers and 136 Other Ranks wounded, and 9 Officers and 149 Other Ranks were missing. They moved back into the line and launched some attacks but lacked support and by the end of April, when they were at Le Clytte, they had suffered a further 14 Other Ranks killed, 3 officers and 70 Other Ranks wounded and 12 Other Ranks missing.

They moved back from the Front and trained and reorganised but, on the 27th May, they once more had to withstand another ferocious enemy attack and had to withdraw as the line was breached and they were in danger of being surrounded. This was part of the Third Battle of the Aisne which lasted until the 6th June 1918 where they once again suffered very heavy losses with 5 Officers and 10 Other Ranks killed, 10 Officers and 120 Other Ranks wounded and 5 Officers and 108 Other Ranks missing. The large number of men missing reflects the actions of the enemy breaking through the lines and capturing the cut-off units.

On the 9th June the Battalion retired into bivouacs at Allemant and then, by marching and train, moved south to Connantray-Vaufrey and then north-west to Crequy, just outside Boulogne. They were transferred to the 59th Division (there appears to be no *War Diary* for the July-September period) and then, on the 9th October 1918, to the 66th Division.

This was not the end of their war, however, and on the 8th October they were part of an attack at Bony. From now on we see the line advancing but still meeting opposition with men killed and wounded. By the end of October, they were at Fontaine and the *War Diary* records:

Quiet day. Usual shelling of villages in forward area. Preliminary instructions issued for further operations on a large scale.

On the 4th November at 6.15 am the preliminary barrage opened up and the attack began. There was some limited opposition and it may be that it was at this time that Arthur was wounded. On the 11th November the Battalion was at Bousies, 20 miles east of Cambrai. The *War Diary* hardly mentions the important event of that day.

Cleaning guns, kit etc and checking stores. News received on the morning of the 11th that an Armistice had been signed.

Now it was mainly training, cleaning and salvage work with occasional football and rugby matches. On the 4th December 1918, the King and Prince of Wales came and the Battalion marched to Quiévy and lined both sides of the road to welcome them. Then it was back to

the cleaning, training and salvage work with a break for Christmas. And so it continued until the 9th April when the Battalion embarked on the *USS Nopatin* for England.

We know that Arthur had been wounded and was entitled to wear a wound stripe, This Casualty Report was published on the 30th December 1918 but could refer to an event many weeks earlier. Nor do we know the extent of his wound. It may be that it was a “Blighty” and he missed the final few weeks of the war. He was not finally discharged to Class Z until the 26th June 1919 so perhaps this was after his time in hospital. We cannot be sure.

Returning to Ringstead, he and Martha first lived in Leveratt’s Row. I believe that they had three children, Jack Alfred in 1921, Philip in 1925 and Ivan in 1930. Arthur continued in the boot and shoe trade. They moved to the Sivers Buildings, opposite the Swan Inn in the High Street. By the middle of the 1920s Martha Elizabeth had reached 30 years old and so could vote for the first time.

In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Arthur and family were still shown in Sivers Buildings and was a “Nailer in a Shoe Factory”. Two of the children were still at home. Earlier that same year, Arthur’s parents celebrated their Golden Wedding. The event was reported in the *Rushden Echo* on the 6th February 1939. Harry claimed to be one of the oldest hand-sewn boot makers and repairers in the district.

Martha died on the 27th September 1965 and probate was granted to her eldest son, Jack, who was a painter and decorator. It may seem surprising that she did not name her husband as trustee of her Will. There may be some answer in the death of Arthur who died on the 3rd February 1974 aged 81. At the time he was an inmate in St Crispin’s Hospital in Duston. This was a large psychiatric hospital near Northampton. We do not know how long he had been there or the cause of his committal.

Chapter 30

Sidney William Hunt (1893-1962)

Arthur James Hunt had been born in Brington in Huntingdonshire, the son of Joseph, an agricultural labourer, and his wife, Elizabeth. Arthur married Charlotte Furnell in 1890 and in the 1891 Census the couple were living next to the *White Hart* in Bythorn, another village a few miles away. During the second half of the Nineteenth Century these villages lost population; Brington from 172 in 1851 to 86 in 1901 and Bythorn from 294 to 108.

There was a general drift from the land to the towns and cities as mechanisation and foreign imports led to agricultural depression and men and women left the countryside in the hope of better lives. Ringstead was different to many in that it had the shoe-making industry and also, later, the ironstone pits and blast furnaces within walking (or cycling) distance. These took men away from the land and Arthur was one of the men who came in. The family moved to Ringstead in about 1892/3. Their eldest son, Ernest Arthur was nine years old in 1901 and born in Bythorn, but Sidney William was seven and born on 18th December 1893 in Ringstead.

Arthur was working as a horsekeeper on a local farm and they were living at No. 1 Station Road Lodges. By 1911 the address was given as Agutter's Farm Cottages but may have been the same house. The couple had been married twenty years and had had four children, three of whom were still living. Emily Mabel Hyacinth had been born in 1896 and buried early the following year. Their youngest living child, [Violet] Mildred May, had been born in 1904. Both sons had followed their father into agriculture: Ernest, aged 19 was a shepherd and Sidney a horseman on a farm.



Northamptonshire Yeomanry Cap Badge

When war came, Sidney's work was to define his army career. He joined "C" Squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry and was given the Regimental Number 1932. The

Headquarters of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry was in Northampton but "C" Squadron was based in Kettering. Chris (CLK) on the *Great War Forum* has compared Sidney's number with other soldiers in the Yeomanry whose records have survived which show that Sidney enlisted between the 24th and 31st May 1915.

We now associate the "Squadron" with the RAF but originally it was a subunit of the cavalry and is still used to refer to units in the Royal Armoured Corps. The Yeomanry were volunteer cavalry regiments and the Northamptonshire Yeomanry originated in 1794 but, because of its voluntary nature, it had been formed and disbanded over the years as conflicts came and went. The *Territorial and Reserve Forces Act* of 1907 established the part-time Territorial Force which initially was only for home defence in the case of war. When war did come in 1914 so many members of the force volunteered to serve abroad that a 2nd line had to be instituted for home defence for those unwilling or unable to serve overseas. Finally a third, reserve line was established to provide trained replacements to the other two lines.

As we would expect, there is no sign of eligibility for a 14/15 Star on Sidney's medal records. It may be that he joined the 2nd Battalion and, after training was later sent to France to join the "C" Squadron of the 1st line. We cannot be sure. We do know, however, that he fought in France and Italy with the "C" Squadron.



Northamptonshire Yeomanry in WW1

The Northamptonshire Yeomanry had first landed in France on 4th November 1914 and in May 1916 it had become the VI Corps Cavalry Regiment. Fred Lawrence, a London-born man living in Wellingborough joined the Yeomanry in May 1915, like Sidney, and was given Regimental Number 1965. His records do still exist and he sailed from Southampton on the

4th July 1916 and arrived in Rouen on the 5th. He did not join the Yeomanry in the field until 11th December 1916. It may be that that Sidney's service followed a similar pattern.

At this time, the Northamptonshire Yeomanry were stationed in the Arras area of the Western Front. The troopers usually acted as a mounted infantry rather than the traditional cavalry. It was clear, although still sometimes ignored, that the cavalry charge was suicidal in the face of modern weaponry and trench warfare. Often the Yeomanry were used as a relief for the infantry in the line.

All the Territorial soldiers were renumbered from April 1st 1917, mainly with six-figures (and some five-figure numbers). The Northamptonshire Yeomanry were allocated the number range 145001-150000 and Sidney was given the new Regimental Number 145994.

Steve (Stebie 9173) on the *Great War Forum* website has researched the Northamptonshire Yeomanry and tells how, in May 1916, the three Squadrons of the Yeomanry had come together after being support cavalry in different Divisions (C Squadron in the 5th). They were then attached to the army at Corps level.

On 11th April 1917 they were involved in the infamous battle of Monchy le Preux which we have covered in the story of Archibald Dicks. The Northamptonshire Yeomanry, who followed the Essex Yeomanry and the 10th Hussars, were trying to reach the village of Monchy le Preux and occupy the village to save it falling into German hands. As the support cavalry, the Northamptonshire Yeomanry are sometimes missed out of accounts of this action but they were under intense fire and lost a dozen men and had about 50 wounded or shell shocked. Sixty-five horses were either killed or wounded. You get a real sense of the troopers' view of the battle from a report from "a gentleman serving in the Yeomanry" that appeared in the *Northampton Independent* on the 28th April 1917. For once I think it is worth quoting at length.

We passed behind a ridge for the night with no cover save the sky and it snowed like the deuce. We kept our saddles on all night and in the morning you couldn't distinguish the saddle from the horse, the snow was so thick. At (the next) night we had to perch again and believe me, the snow and the cold were far harder to stick than the shells which came pretty often. At daybreak next morning we dug our saddles out of the mud and saddled up, thinking that we were going back owing to the weather being unfit for cavalry work. But we were mistaken and not a trifle disappointed. Not one of us could hold a limb still, we were so cold and we only had biscuits and bully.

Then the colonel told us that we were going to take Monchy le Preux, which the Germans were still holding. About 10.30 the Brigadier General came up and said that the village was clear, but that the infantry were weakened by losses, the cavalry were to charge and hold it. We lined up across a huge field, with 2000 brigade cavalry on the left flank, my regiment in the centre and about 2000 cavalry on the left flank. From right to left was only half a mile.

The left flank went over first and they had such a reception. They cantered along in massed formation and before they had gone 200 yards the Bosche artillery opened fire. There were soon 200 empty saddles. Horses were hopping back over the ridge wounded, another galloping with the trooper hanging in the stirrup. We were standing on the ridge . We were getting men knocked out right and left. Then the Colonel said, "Mount!" and we were off. "A" Squadron leading. As we galloped down Orange Hill to the village, the infantry in support who had dug themselves in, jumped up and cheered, shouting, "Give em hell boys."

I have never seen such a bombardment. As we galloped down the hill men and horses were blown up by high explosives. I should say 400 cavalrymen and horses lay dead or dying on that field. There was not a piece of ground 10 feet square without a shell hole. When we entered the village, what a sight met our eyes. All the way up the main street were dead horses and men, fellows groaning, horses whinnying and kicking, one licking his dead master's face; and infantry galore all dead. We had to ride over our own dead to get through and when we were there we were subjected to a heavier shelling than before and had to stand in Monchy for an hour and a half and hold the village until the division came up.

In November 1917 the Northamptonshire Yeomanry left the Western Front and moved to Italy and became the 14th Corps Cavalry. They arrived on 5th November.

Italy had, eventually, joined the Allied side in the First World War and had declared war on Austria on 23rd May 1915. At first, the Italians had made good progress in the mountainous area of northern Italy where it bordered Austria. In 1917, however, the tide seemed to have turned and, at Caporetto, on 24th October 1917 the Italians were badly defeated and forced to rapidly retreat. British and French troops were rushed to Italy but, in the event, largely acted in a reserve capacity. The Italians, contrary to some accounts, managed to turn the tide by the efforts of their own troops. The Northamptonshire Yeomanry, however, as a last hurrah to the past, did fight as cavalry, pursuing the retreating Austrians in the closing actions of the war in October 1918.

The British lost 2,000 men but the Italians lost 460,000 and had a further 960,000 wounded, including some half a million who were disabled for the rest of their lives.

It may also be, that Sidney like many of the British soldiers, unused to wine, suffered by their first encounter with it.

Sidney was in the *Absent Voters' List* for 1918 but was shown as demobilised by the time that the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* was compiled and by Spring 1919 was in the *Register of Electors*. It seems likely therefore that he was demobbed in late 1918 or early 1919. He was entitled to the Victory and British War Medals.

In the summer of 1920 he married Ellen Ann Furnell. Ellen, like Sidney's mother, was a Furnell from the Bythorn area so it seems likely that husband and wife were distantly

related. At first the couple lived with his parents in Carlow. Ellen would not have been qualified to vote but in 1928, ten years after her husband, she was enfranchised.

We do not know if Sidney ever returned to farm work but at some point he became a blast furnaceman, probably at Islip. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* this was his trade. They were now living in Carlow Street and had had two children, Benjamin born in 1921 and Kathleen in 1923.

Ellen died in 1951, aged 56, and Sidney, aged 68, in April-June 1962.

Chapter 31

William Henry Jackson (1891-1919)

Two young people, John Henry Jackson and Susan Roberts, married in Ringstead Parish Church on 14th September 1891. On the 4th of the following month their son, William Henry was baptised in the same church. At the time, the family was living across the river in Woodford. He had been born on 15th September just one day after the marriage.

John Henry was originally from Brigstock, although the family had moved to Woodford, but Susan was a local Ringstead girl. By 1901 the family were living at No. 3 Barritt's Yard, (a yard beside the present Post Office), and William, now nine, had a sister Gertrude Mary who was just four years old. John was a shoe finisher in a local factory. By 1911 John and Susan and daughter Gertrude were still living in Ringstead High Street. John had continued as a shoe finisher and Gertrude was a "lift packer", making leather heels. Shoe finishing was usually done by men and, as the name implies, was a series of operations to make the boots or shoes ready for sale. In *the Art of Boot and Shoemaking, A Practical Guide*, published in 1885, John Bedford Leno explains one process:

With a little spittle applied to a piece of rag clean the upper and wipe dry, pull out the tack from the block and remove the last, and scrape away the pegs from the inside.

Good preparation for the spit and polish of army life. But where was William? He was staying with his father's youngest brother, Charles Jackson, born in Woodford, and his wife Lillian. The couple were only 29 years old so were only nine years older than their nephew. Charles and William were also both working as shoe finishers. They were living at Lilley Terrace in Irthlingborough.

Unfortunately, once again, like many others, William Jackson's records were destroyed in the Second World War. We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and *1918 Absent Voters' List* that he was in the 5th Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and had been given the Regimental Number 30048. The *Roll of Honour* also noted that he had fought in Salonika and France.

When we look at William's entry in the *Roll of Awards and Medals* we find six other soldiers of the 5th and 6th Battalions of the Inniskillings. Further research shows that Henry Kennell (30050) from Rushden who had died in Egypt on 6th March 1918 and Archibald Hollingsworth (30047) from Thaxted in Essex who had been killed in France on 17th October 1918 had been in the Northamptonshire Regiment prior to being transferred to the 5th (Service) Battalion. It seems likely that William followed a similar path. He would have enlisted with the Northamptonshires and, after training, been transferred to the Inniskillings.

The 5th Battalion had been formed from volunteers, in August 1914, as part of Kitchener's First New Army. In April 1915 it moved to Basingstoke for final training. In August 1915 it

was part of the Gallipoli Campaign against the Turks (Ottoman Empire), allies of the Germans. In late September 1915 they then moved on to Salonika (or Salonica).

Before he was posted abroad William married Edith Neville from Irthlingborough in the third quarter of 1916. It seems likely, therefore, as Salonika was the first warzone mentioned on the Roll of Honour, that it was late in 1916 that he joined the 5th Inniskillings in Salonika.

The 5th saw service on the Macedonian Front (the area north of Greece, part of the troublesome Balkans). An officer of the 5th at this time was Henry Lamb who was a doctor and artist (and became part of the Bloomsbury Set). His story is told by “Inniskilling” on the Inniskilling Museum website. It tells how the 5th were in the Stuma Valley, a marshy area, where there was little action but where malaria was endemic. This debilitating disease quickly reduced a soldier’s fighting capability.

In September 1917 the 5th were posted to Egypt. They were based near Rafa where they trained for the campaign in Palestine. The Battalion joined the Expeditionary Force led by General Edmond Allenby. There had been major setbacks previously but this time progress was swift and Jerusalem was captured in December 1917.



*Irish Troops in the Judaeen Hills Surprised by a Turkish Bombardment. Henry Lamb
©IWM (Art.IWM ART 2746)*

The campaign against the Turks (Ottoman Empire) was far from over. We have seen that Henry Kennell, of the 5th, from Rushden was killed in March and in early May 1918 they were caught by a surprise Turkish bombardment. Four soldiers were killed and eight wounded. When Henry Lamb was asked to do a large commemorative painting of the war for the Irish Hall of Remembrance, it was this incident at Jiljila in the Judaeen Hills that he chose as his subject. Was William one of the figures desperately running for shelter?

Between April and June 1918 Indian units replaced the British in the area, and the 5th Battalion of the Inniskilling Fusiliers were posted to France. The German offensive of Spring 1918 was threatening to win the war before the American forces could bolster the Allied cause. The Battalion was part of these troops brought back to the Western Front to help resist this onslaught. They joined the 198th Brigade, 66th (2nd East Lancashire) Division on 19th July 1918.

The following months were part of the final phase of the war as the Allies pushed the Germans back but the progress was still hard won and there were many casualties. The 5th Battalion fought in the Second Battle of Cambrai (8th to 10th October 1918), The Pursuit of the Selle and the Battle of the Selle (17th to 26th October).

On 31st October 1918 the Division was withdrawn from the Front Line and moved to the Serain area, south-east of Cambrai, but, on the 2nd November, they quickly returned to the action and were part of the advance through Le Cateau and fought up to the Armistice on 11th November 1918.

We get some idea of the intensity of the fighting the 5th endured from the local casualties in this period. On 10th October Charles Henry Spriggs from Wellingborough was killed, and Frederick Bridgement from Chelveston on the 8th November.

For these men to die so close to the end of the war seems even sadder and, when we look at the family around William Jackson, we see the heartaches felt by many back home. William's uncle, Samuel Jackson, had been killed on 23rd March 1918 and the May 3rd edition of the Northampton Mercury reported that Charles Jackson, the uncle, who William had been staying with, was reported missing. Fortunately, although I have not discovered any later report, Charles did return to his family in Irthlingborough.

William also returned to his family and he was in the *Electoral Registers* for 1918 and 1919, living in the Ringstead High Street. On 11th August 1921 the couple had a daughter, Dorothy Jackson. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, William and Edith, with daughter Dorothy, were living at 20 Cherry Street in Irthlingborough. It was part of a row of semi-detached Council Houses. William was still a boot and shoe finisher and Dorothy worked in a boot and shoe packing department.

Edith died in the third quarter of 1972 and William, aged 81, in the April to June quarter of the following year. Their daughter Dorothy, who had married George Hingle, had predeceased them in 1968.

Chapter 32

The Major Family

The Parish Registers of Ringstead are littered with the Major surname. In looking for the young men who fought in the First World War, we can trace their descent from two sons of John and Mary (née Knowles) Major. Charles had been baptised on April 13th 1819, following the death of an earlier Charles, and his line leads through Lot Major and Susannah Ball to Charlie and Charles Arthur. Another son of John and Mary was baptised Morris on September 14th 1843 and his line leads through James and Mary Ann (née Medlow) to James Henry Major.

Charles Major (1896-1982)

Lot and Susan Major had ten children, six of whom survived into adulthood. Lot had married Susan Ball on 25th December 1878. Their family started with early tragedies when daughter Eliza May was buried, aged 13 months, on the 20th February 1880 and another Eliza was also buried on March 29th 1883, aged just six weeks. Polly who was born between the two Elizas did survive although, certainly in later life, she was disabled. Then followed Harry, John, Ernest, Charlie and Charles Arthur.

As we can see, rather strangely, the couple named one son, born on 12th March 1896, Charles, but always known as Charlie. Another son, born the following year, was named Charles Arthur, although sometimes known as Arthur. The family had moved to Raunds for a few years and the two “Charles” sons were born there. By 1901 they had returned to Ringstead and were living in 15 Carlow. By 1911 Lot was 59 and Susan 53. They were now living in Rosebery Street in the new Tilcroft Estate.

Lot had always been a handsewn army bootmaker but in 1911 he was “out of employment”. The oldest daughter, Polly, now 30 years old, was a boot closer but she too was out of work. Harry (28) was a laster in a local factory, Ernest (18) was a heel builder, Charlie (16) a shoe hand in the Lasting Department and Charles Arthur (14) was a “heel feeder for a heeling machine”. The only child who was not in the boot and shoe trade was John Thomas (22) who was a horsekeeper. Living with them were also grandchildren Willie and Florence Major.

As we have seen before in these biographies, the terrible irony for the handsewn men working on military boots and shoes, was that they needed wars to bring in the orders but they also knew that those same wars might take away their sons. None would have predicted the scale of losses that were suffered by the community and the nation.

Few of Charlie’s military records have survived but his Medal Card shows that he was in The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) with Regimental Number 25818 and the Queens (Royal West Surrey Regiment) with number 79303. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* has him in the 16th Battalion of the Buffs and demobilised but I think that this is a mistake. The *Absent Voters’ List* for 1918 has him in the 3rd Buffs but this may refer to the old name for the Buffs which

was the 3rd Regiment of Foot. The Medal Roll, however, has him in the 10th Battalion of the Buffs (East Kent Regiment), transferring to the Queens (Royal West Surrey Regiment) and we will assume that this the correct record of his service.

Charlie's Regimental Number, 25818, indicates that he probably enlisted with the 10th in late May 1918. The 10th Battalion of the Buffs had been formed from the Royal East Kent and West Kent Yeomanry in Egypt on 1st February 1917. They had been sent to France and landed in Marseilles on the 7th May 1918 on board the *HMT Malwa*. They moved to the Western Front and took part in the Second Battle of the Somme, the Battles of the Hindenburg Line and the Final Advance into Artois and Flanders, ending the war in Tournai in Belgium.

They were now under the command of the 74th (Yeomanry) Division and the 23rd Infantry Brigade. At first it remained at GHQ Reserve as it built up numbers and the soldiers were trained and re-equipped for trench warfare. We cannot be sure but is likely that Charlie joined the Regiment in the field in the July to September 1918 period.

On 11th July the 10th moved into Front Line billets at La Miquellerie but it was not until 4th August that they took over positions in the right section of the Front line near St Floris. Their first real action was on 5th August when they were part of a concerted attack by the Allies along a wide front. In some areas there was little opposition and good progress was made but the 10th, apart from B Company, met determined opposition.

The story of the next two months was one of almost continual forward movement as the Germans retreated, destroying bridges and anything they thought might be useful to the Allies as they went. But it must not be thought that this was an easy process and many lives were lost. If we look at an advance on 21st September by the 10th we can see the dangers that Charlie and his fellow soldiers had to face. Chris (Drew-1918) writing on the *Great War Forum* in 2013 recounted the events of that day.

The advance was made behind a barrage which was successful enough to get them among the thick belts of wire near Zoo Trench. The infantry had to wait here while the barrage went on. A few men got through the wire and then the enemy came out of his dugouts and commenced a huge fire of shells and machine gun bullets. C and D Companies in front could do nothing but try to hold on in shell holes. A Company was just as badly off as they could not move forward and had to fall back from an enemy counterattack. C and D were now in danger from the rear. The telephone was disconnected and though two runners got back, nobody could return a message. When darkness fell the Buffs managed to get back having lost Captain Hatfield MC, 2nd Lt Oxley and 12 men killed, 2 officers and 28 Other Ranks "wounded or missing". Also 20 more missing.

After this action the 10th Buffs were relieved by the 15th Suffolks and remained in reserve under intermittent shell fire until the 25th.

At first the progress was quite slow, often moving in and out of enemy trenches, and the Germans often launched counterattacks, using gas shells. Also the Royal Engineers were kept busy trying to construct temporary bridges across the rivers. The tide had turned but ground

was still hard-won. At the end of September the Battalion was taken out of the Front Line and entrained to Lillers and from there to billets in Aubigny

October saw the enemy retreating at a faster rate as the resolve of the, often very young, troops began to break. In *Historical Records of the Buffs*, Colonel R.S.H. Rooney wrote:

The country had been for four years in the possession of the Germans and it is impossible to describe the joy manifested by the French inhabitants at their release at last from their horrible servitude. The Buffs never experienced, nor are they likely to again, such exuberant tokens of welcome and gratitude as they met in the neighbourhood of Lille.

The Buffs reached Marquin (or Marquain), three miles west of Tournai, and the gas and high explosive shelling by the Germans became very severe as they made a last stand. The 10th were at Tournai when the Armistice was finally declared on 11th November 1918.

At some point after the end of the war, Charlie, with many soldiers from the 10th (and 7th) Buffs, were transferred to the Queens (Royal West Surrey Regiment). Chris (clk) on the *Great War Forum*, whose research has greatly helped in establishing Charlie's war service dates, has shown that he almost certainly would have been transferred to the Queens in February or early March 1919.

Another post by ken48 on the *Great War Forum* confirmed this by quoting from the 1st Queens War Diary which had noted on March 8th 1919 that two officers and 110 Other Ranks had joined from the 10th East Kents on instructions from GHQ. The Queens had been tasked with setting up and administering No.2 Reception Camp (Demobilisation) at Harfleur. It seems certain that Charlie was transferred to the Queens as part of a structured demobilisation process. This would explain why he was included in the *Ringstead Register of Electors* for Spring 1919.

Charlie returned to Ringstead and in 1920 was living with his parents, Lot and Susan, and older brother Harry in Rosebery Street. They were still all there in 1925 but the following year Charlie married Florrie Dainty. Florrie was the sister of Walter and Charles Dainty, Great War soldiers, whose stories we have already told. She had been born in Sheffield but her father was a Northamptonshire man and the family were living back in Ringstead. Her mother had died in 1920 and she probably had had to look after her father. She was 29 when she married Charlie Major who was just nine months her senior.

Before the war Charlie had been in the boot and shoe industry but by 1939 he was working as a horseman on a farm and Florrie was heel-cutting in a local factory. Living with them was Polly Major, Charlie's disabled sister and a niece, Florence who was also a heel-cutter.

Florrie died on 11th May 1981 and, just under a year later, Charlie died, aged 86 on 4th April 1982. They had still been living at 12 Rosebery Street.

Charles Arthur Major (1897-1917)

As we have seen in the story of his older brother, Charles Arthur was the second Charles in quick succession for Lot and Susan Major. Both had been born in Raunds, in a short stay up the road from Ringstead, before the family returned to its home village. Aged fourteen, he had been a “heel-feeder” for a heeling machine in a local factory in the 1911 Ringstead Census. It seems, as we shall see, that he joined up before his older brother and enlisted in the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment with Regimental Number 30917.

Few military records now exist for Charles but we know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he was in the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshire and from his Medal Card that he had not been entitled to the 1914 or 1914/15 Star so had not seen service abroad until 1916 at the earliest.

Following links for two soldiers suggested by “Acknown” on the *Great War Forum* we find that a William Andrews of Raunds had Regimental Number 30913, just four digits before Charles, and he attested on 12th December 1915, was put on the Army Reserve and was mobilized on 17th November 1916. He was posted to the 3rd Northamptonshires two days later. He was not posted to France until the following year and was ferried from Folkestone to Boulogne on 9th February 1917. He joined the 6th Battalion on that day but did not join them “In the Field” until the 5th March 1917. Another soldier, Charles Templar had Regimental Number 30922 and was sent to the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshires on 3rd March 1917.

We can, cautiously, deduce that William Andrews is the “best fit” and it seems likely that Charles too, sailed from Folkestone to Boulogne on 9th February 1917 and then, probably by rail, was taken to the 17th Infantry Base Camp at Étaples. These Camps received men from England and “toughened them up” ready to be posted to the Front Line. As a result Étaples was seen as having a harsh regime. The poet, Wilfred Owen, described the camp as a “bull ring” because of the brutality of some of the instructors. This caused unrest, particularly among the New Zealand troops and eventually led to a mutiny in September 1917.

It seems likely that Charles, like William Andrews, joined the 6th Battalion at the Front in the Arras area some time shortly after the 5th March 1917. In terrible conditions, the 6th had just taken part in a, finally inconclusive, attack, around a notorious area known as the Boom Ravine. At the beginning of March they had moved into dugouts and tents in Thiepval Wood. The *War Diary* for the 6th records that, on the 8th March, drafts of 50 and 92 men had joined them, helping to bring the Battalion back up to strength. This must have been when Charles Major and William Andrews arrived.

On the 12th March the 6th moved back up to the Achiet to Loupart Front Line although it was the following day that they moved into the trenches. What was happening, although the Allies did not at first realise it, was a planned withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, a heavily fortified line from Arras to the Aisne. This had been decided at the end of 1916 when the Germans realised that they did not have the manpower or resources to defend the long front line that they were struggling to hold. This withdrawal took some five weeks from 21st February. They destroyed everything behind them, damaging wells and watercourses as well

as buildings and railways. Nevertheless they also fought a fierce rearguard action in places, the Allied scouts then discovering that the enemy trenches had been vacated.

The 6th were fighting alongside the 12th Middlesex and the 7th Bedfordshires and as they pushed forward they were sometimes accompanied by a Squadron of cavalry and a one of cyclists. On the 21st March 1917 they left the Front Line and carried out a series of marches, linking bus and train journeys from Miraumont, via Warley (Warloy Baillon), Villers Bocage (north of Amiens), Dury, Bacouel (sur Selle), south of Amiens, and then north to Berguette and on to billets in Thiennes by the end of the month. This was a journey of about 100 miles going first south-west and then north.

On 1st April 1917 the *War Diary* noted that:

The blankets of 2 Company and transport men were sterilized during the day.

For the following fortnight the 6th were in camp undergoing general training together with various gun and bomb practices. The weather, however, was still very wet and sometimes the instruction took the form of lectures in the billets, which probably did not generate much enthusiasm, even if the men were glad to be out of the rain. On 21st April the Battalion moved to Manqueville and continued with the routine of training, and the occasional bath.

On 27th April the Battalion marched to entrain at Pernes for Arras. It was a long arduous journey made worse by an accident on the railway at Pernes which necessitated another march to the next station at Bryas with further delays along the way. They had originally arrived at Pernes station at 9.20 am and finally had to march to bivouacs at Neuville Vitasse, arriving there at 1.45 the following morning. This was a total journey of some 50 or 60 miles

On 29th April, A and D Companies were in the Front Line with C and B Companies in support. The War Diary reports:

A little shelling by the enemy of our trenches during the day. Lt. F.D.S. Walker and 4 Other Ranks wounded (1 remained on duty). Weather fine.

Yet it was on that day that Charles Arthur Major was reported to have been killed. The War Diary continues telling of the shelling and the digging of trenches. But the war for Charles was over. The *Northampton Mercury* of Friday 8th June, some five weeks later, had in the "Killed" column:

Major 30917, Private C.A. Northants. Ringstead.

I have found no further reference to him in the newspapers. He was twenty years old and is remembered on the Arras Memorial at Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery Bay 7. He does not have a grave. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website records:

At the entrance to the Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery in France stands the Arras Memorial. The memorial commemorates nearly 35,000 soldiers of the British, South African and New Zealand forces with no known grave. Most of those commemorated were killed in the Battle of Arras, fought between 9 April and 16 May 1917.

James Henry Major (1884-1951)

As we have seen in the brief introduction to the Major family, James Henry had descended from Morrice another son of John and Mary. According to his entry in the 1939 *Register of England & Wales* he had been born on 5th September 1883 but most records suggest that it was a year later.

His father, also James, had married Frances Medlow from Spaldwick in 1872 and in 1881 they were living in Butchers Lane in Ringstead with children Mary Ann (7), Louisa (6), Martha (4) and Elizabeth (2). By 1891 they had moved to London Road (now Denford Road) and there were four further children: Samuel (8), James Henry (6), Frances (4) and Priscilla (2). James is shown as an Ironstone Labourer now and still married but there is no wife shown. Frances had died the previous year and one suspects that eldest daughter, Mary Ann, would have acted as his housekeeper. James married again, at the end of 1899, to local woman Emma Jane Abbott who was a middle-aged spinster. In the 1901 Census James and Emma were living in Carlow Road but only Samuel (18), [James] Henry (16), and Emily [Priscilla?] were still at home.

Emma Jane Major died too in 1909 but by then James Henry, her stepson, had already left home. He had married, on 17th August 1907 in Thrapston, to Mary Ann Sawford, who was also from a Ringstead family. Her older brother, John William, had volunteered as part of the St John Ambulance to serve in the Boer War. Unfortunately, like many others, he had died of Enteric Fever not long after arriving in South Africa.

In the 1911 Census the couple were living in Carlow Street with children Maurice James (3) and Eileen Mary (2). James was an "Army Boot Sewer" working in a local factory. Another daughter, Frances Joan, was born on the eve of the Great War.

We know that James was enlisted in the army on 24th June 1916 but was placed on reserve as part of the 26th Training Reserve Battalion. In November a tragedy hit the family unconnected with the war. The *Northampton Mercury* of Friday 1st December 1916 reported:

A RINGSTEAD TRAGEDY

An eight-year-old lad named Maurice Major, son of Mr Henry Major, Carlow Street, Ringstead, met with his death in a shocking manner on Monday morning. A motor petroleum wagon was going slowly along the street when the little boy tried to get on the side step. He slipped and the wheels of the motor went over him, killing him instantly.

We know that James, or Henry as we can see he was usually known, quite naturally, tried to keep from being posted abroad. To be more exact, his employer, Walter Lawrence had applied on his behalf. The records of the Military Tribunal show that James worked at the Walter Lawrence factory as a heel scourer. The workers in the military boot industry had initially been granted exemption from call-up as boots were vital to the war effort. As the war dragged on, however, the need for men outweighed this other need and the tribunals

set up to hear these cases increasingly dismissed appeals against conscription. On the 15th June 1917, this is what happened to James Henry Major.

We get some idea of James's appearance from his enlistment form. He was 5ft 7¾ inches tall with a 37½ inch chest when fully expanded. He was only categorised as B1 by the medical officer. What this meant varied throughout the war but probably excluded him from General Service in the Front Line.

After his appeal failed he was called up to the Depot in Northampton, then posted to the 26th Territorial Reserve Battalion and given the Regimental Number TR9/77355. On 6th December 1917 he was transferred to the 3rd Battalion of the Buffs (East Kent Regiment) at Canterbury with new number 535513. The 3rd Battalion remained in England throughout the war, at first based at Canterbury, later moving to Dover. Like many others, his records have faded badly and are mainly illegible so these "facts" must be treated as probabilities.

Near, or after, the end of, the war James was released from the Buffs and was posted first to 438 Agricultural Company which was based at Northampton. It then appears that he was posted again, this time to Western Command of the Labour Corps based at Sutton. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that he was assisting at a Remount Depot. The Army Service Corps Remounts Service was set up to find and train horses and mules for service abroad. Animals were obtained from the United Kingdom by compulsory purchase (as illustrated in "War Horse" by Michael Morpurgo) but were also bought from all over the world.

By the time that James joined the service it was mainly about bringing fit horses home and the depots were beginning to close down.

James was diagnosed as suffering with heart trouble "aggravated" by his war service. He was "disembodied" (term for "discharged" for a territorial soldier) on 22nd November 1919 with a 20% Disability Pension, to be reviewed after a year. This gave him eight shilling for himself plus four shillings and eightpence for his wife and two children, giving him twelve shillings and eightpence a week. He was thirty-six years old. He returned to his family in Ringstead and in the 1920 *England & Wales Electoral Register* both James and his wife, Mary Ann, are listed. By the *Representation of the People Act* of 1918 women over 30 years old received the vote, but only if they were registered property occupiers (or married to a registered property occupier) of land or premises with a rateable value greater than £5 or of a dwelling-house. As a man, James only had to be 21, with no other qualification although before this Act he too would have had to have had a property qualification so it is possible that they both gained the vote in 1918.

Life returned to normal. Their girls joined the "Merry Comrades" and wrote letters to Auntie Dick at the *Northampton Mercury* telling of their pet bantams, chickens and rabbits. The Sawfords and the Majors were Nonconformists and involved in village and political life. In August 1926 the Labour Fete was held at Ringstead and both [James] Henry and Mary Ann were there as part of the organisation. The main speaker was Miss Ishbel MacDonald, daughter of Ramsay MacDonald, the first Labour Prime Minister. She spoke of it being "more especially a women's day". She continued:

The men had not made the world a fit world for the children; and the women were coming in to work with the men to secure that end. They wanted to work for peace. They did not want another war. They wanted the children to grow up to live for their country, and not to die for their country; to work for their country and not to fight for their country. [Applause].

Many of the families there had reason to wish for that. There would be another war at the end of the next decade but it would be a very different one from the last.

We do not know if James returned to the shoe industry but by 1939 he had become a “fettler” in an Iron Foundry. He would have cleaned the sand and any loose iron from a casting with a file, wire brush or abrasive wheel. Mary Ann had for an occupation, the standard “Unpaid Domestic Duties”. Their two daughters Frances and Ellen had married and left home, Ellen just before the 1939 Register was compiled.

James died in 1951 aged 66 and Mary Ann in 1965.

Chapter 33

Ernest Robert Manley (1896-1946)

John Manley, son of Rebecca, was baptised on March 21st 1858 in Stoke Doyle, some nine miles north-north-east of Ringstead. The previous christening in the church, a few months earlier, had been for Frederick Hugh, son of clergyman, George Halliley Capron and his wife, Henrietta. The Caprons were lords of the manor of Stoke Doyle and in 1840 had bought Southwick Hall and also much of Ringstead at the time of the Enclosure in 1839-41. George's father had made a fortune as a lawyer at the time of the railway boom of the early 19th century, in which he acted for railway companies in acquisitions of land. Later, George moved back to Southwick Hall.

I think that it was possibly in Stoke Doyle in 1869 that Rebecca married William H. Taylor, an agricultural labourer, originally from Thurleigh in Huntingdonshire. Was there any Capron connection with Rebecca's move to Denford after her marriage? Certainly, she was there in the 1871 and 1881 Censuses before moving to Spring Gardens in Woodford by 1891. William was now an Ironstone Labourer.

John had by this time left home for, in 1884, he had married Ringstead girl Mary Ann Warren. The couple were to have twelve children, nine of whom survived infancy. The children had been born in Finedon, Ringstead and Woodford. One of them was Ernest Robert Manley who had been born in Woodford and baptised there on November 15th 1896. In 1901 his father, John, was an ironstone worker like his stepfather before him and, in 1911, was described as a "Blast Furnace Man".

In 1911 Ernest was 14 years old and working as an errand boy for a local carrier. Three years later the Great War began. Ernest had become a furnaceman like his father. It does not appear that he was called up when he became 18 years old. A furnaceman was a protected profession for iron was essential for the armaments industry but it was not an absolute exemption and, like the military boot makers, the country began to need them more as soldiers than craftsmen.

On 15th December 1917 Ernest married Dorothy Emma Marguerite Walker. Dorothy had been born in Ringstead, although her father, Thomas, came from Raunds and mother, Mary Ann, was from Peterborough. Thomas worked as an army bootmaker and in 1917 the couple and five of their six children were living in Leveratt's Row. Dorothy was a domestic servant which was not a particularly common occupation for Ringstead girls.

Early the following year, on 5th January 1918 their first child, Olive May, was born. Nevertheless, Ernest was called up to the Medical Board in Northampton and given an "A" Category. He was then conscripted on 13th May 1918 and on the 16th posted to the 3rd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment and given Regimental Number 38590.

We do get a general idea of Ernest's looks from his attestation form. He was quite short, even by the standards of the time, being only 5ft 4½ inches tall with a sallow complexion

and blue eyes. He was said to have a good physical development but had varicose veins at the back of his right leg.

On 30th August 1918 he was finally to cross from Dover to Calais and was taken to “L” Infantry Base Depot, which had been at Rouen but from May 1918 was at Calais. He was immediately posted to the 1st Battalion of the Norfolks. On 2nd September he went to the Divisional Refit Camp and on the 8th he joined the 1st Norfolks in the Field.

The Battalion had just moved back from the Front Line, south-east of Arras, at Lebusquiere to billets near Biefvillers Les Bapaume. The *War Diary* for the Norfolks reported on the 5th September 1918 that a draft of 125 Other Ranks had joined the Battalion and Ernest would have been one of these men. He, along with the rest of the Battalion, was trained, route marched and carried out practice attacks. After years of trench stalemate the German lines had crumbled and the Allied lines were moving forward, although not without opposition. The army was having to devise new tactics to meet this mobile warfare.

After weeks away from the warzone, on 20th September 1918, the 1st Norfolks moved south-east to Metz en Couture. The *War Diary* simply states, “This day was Z [Zero] day”. At 5.20 am the barrage from the artillery began for an attack by the New Zealand Division, on the Norfolk’s left. At 7.52 am the barrage then began for the attack by the 5th Division, and the Battalion moved forward to Flag Ravine near Gouzeaucourt. They paused there for a day before pressing on with the attack in conjunction with the 1st Cheshire Regiment. Having reached the agreed front line they were relieved by the 10th Fusiliers and returned to billets. By the terrible standards of the great WW1 campaigns the losses were not huge but in September 1918 the Battalion still lost 37 Other Ranks killed and 185 wounded with eight officers killed or wounded.

Again the Battalion moved back to the Metz-en-Couture area and camped a few miles west of Ytres where training once more continued although there were also football matches to pass the time and use up any excess energy. Then they were on the move, bivouacking or being billeted along the way, finally arriving near the Front Line at Caudry, some twenty-two miles further east. Here they trained in attacks on specific targets such as sunken roads.

It was becoming clear that this really was the endgame but the Germans were still managing their retreat with brave rearguard actions so that there were continuing casualties on both sides. In October only two Other Ranks were killed and three wounded and Captain R.W Dugdale was killed in action. It was usually only officers who had names in the War Diaries.

November continued with training before a move to Louvignies. The Battle of the Sambre began on 4th November with the Germans defending the line of the Sambre-Oise Canal. More troops went into battle than in the First battle of the Somme although this time with comparatively minimal losses. But, it was on this first day, that the poet Wilfred Owen was killed. He had written

My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.

The Norfolks were attacking along with the 1st Bedfordshires. On the 5th November the Battalion moved forward to engage the enemy but were met with no opposition and the 1st

Bedfords “passed through” them to continue with the attack. The Norfolks re-formed at a crossroads at Le Godelot but they were not needed and proceeded to billets at La Haute Rue, ready to continue the attack the next day. This was to be across the Sambre River. They had believed that a bridge was still passable but found that the Germans had mined it and work was started on constructing a temporary crossing. The Devons now led an attack but were resisted by the Germans, and sustained casualties. The Norfolks’ *War Diary*, however, shows that on 8th November there had been no enemy shelling since the previous day.

On 11th November the Battalion was in Jolimetz “cleaning up the billets and surroundings”. The entry below this, states:

Notice received of ~~termination~~ suspension of hostilities.

Fortunately, the original word proved correct and the war was finally over. The *War Diary*’s entries were now brief and full of route marches, physical training and parades and, latterly, “educational classes”. It must have been difficult to keep bored young men, wanting to go home and lacking the discipline of fear, out of trouble and in order.

During this time they were billeted at the fortress town of Le Quesnoy before moving to Grand Leez north of Naumur in Belgium. At the end of January 1919, Ernest was treated for P.U.O. and spent a few days receiving treatment from the 15th Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps. P.U.O. stood for Pyrexia (Fever) of Unknown Origin although by this time in the war its cause was known. It was usually known as Trench Fever and was caused by a bacterium present in the droppings of human lice which the men would scratch into a small wound. It was an unpleasant and debilitating disease which could cause rashes, headaches, dizziness and loss of energy. It could also sometimes cause extreme pain in the shins and in some men could lead to depression. Baths at least once a fortnight and stripping and killing lice in the seams of the men’s clothing helped and, late in the war the “Russian Pit”, a large hot air delouser for clothes, was introduced.

The Norfolks proceeded to demobilisation but, at Calais, on 18th March 1919, Ernest was transferred to the 15th Battalion of the Essex Regiment and given new number 48141. The 15th had only been in France from May 1918. After the Armistice, the Battalion was in charge of the demobilisation at Calais, so its members were denied early demobilisation themselves. Ernest was granted leave in the United Kingdom from 27th April to 11th May 1919. Unfortunately, he arrived back in Calais “2 days 14 hours late” and was sentenced to 21 days Field Punishment No.2 and also forfeited three days’ pay.

Field Punishment No. 1 was when a soldier could be handcuffed and/or fettered to a fixed object for part of the day and would also be subject to hard labour at other times. Field punishment No.2 was for a lesser offence and the soldier would not be fixed to an object. The army rules for punishment, however, emphasised that it should not cause injury or leave any permanent mark. Incapacitated soldiers were of no use to the army.

Ernest remained with the Essex Regiment as part of the Army of Occupation but was once more granted leave in England from 24th September to 8th October 1919. Finally, on 27th November 1919 he sailed from Boulogne to Dover for demobilisation.

Ernest returned to his family in Ringstead and he and Dorothy had a further four children: Freda in 1920, Norah in 1924, Laurence in 1926 and Ernest in 1930. But all was not right for Ernest, the father. In the *1939 Register of England & Wales* Dorothy was living in the Council Houses in Denford Road with her children and her older brother, Percy Walker.

Ernest was not with his family. He was in Berrywood Hospital in Northampton. In 1939 there were some 1400 patients and over 100 "Mental Nurses" for Berrywood was what had previously been called a "lunatic asylum". Attitudes and treatment had improved over the years. The hospital had its own farm, market garden, shoemakers, tailors, carpenter and upholsterer. Ernest is shown as a furnaceman and he was there among the shoemakers and leather workers, the farm and general labourers. Berrywood later became St Crispins and was a leading institution in abandoning the straitjacket approach and trying to generate a more "homely", caring atmosphere.

It seems possible that Ernest never returned home, for he died in 1946, and his death was registered in the Brixworth District which included the hospital. He was 49 years old. Dorothy lived to be 77 and died in 1974. Had the war claimed another victim?

Chapter 34

Albert James Manning (1892-1919)

We have seen in this series of biographies that, from the late Nineteenth Century, many Ringstead men had left the farm or the shoe factory to work in the local quarries and blast furnaces at Islip. James Manning was one of these Ringstead men, whose father had been a farm labourer but had become an industrial worker.. He had married Emma Maria Warr from Little Addington in 1887 and by the 1901 Census they had five children: Emily (13), Gertrude (11), Albert (9), Florence (6) and Alec (4).

By 1911 Emily was an Army Boot Closer, Gertrude was a School Teacher, Florence a Monitress (in a school) and Alec a Baker's Assistant. It would have been seen as an "upwardly mobile" family. Only Albert James, aged 17, whose story we are following here, had become an Ironstone Labourer like his father.

When war came in 1914 Albert did not enlist with the usual infantry regiments but joined the Royal Engineers. In his work at the Islip Iron Company he had become a shunter on the ironworks site. His employers had applied for him to be exempted from service because of his work but the appeal was rejected.



Albert Manning in the Rushden Argus 14th February 1919

With thanks to Rushden & District History Society.

On 13th December 1915 Albert enlisted with the Royal Engineers whose work was an essential support to the fighting units. It maintained the railways, roads, bridges and water supply. It often had to improvise new structures quickly, to replace ones destroyed by the enemy. It also had specialist tunnelling companies and built frontline fortifications. The list could go on.

Albert joined another branch of the Engineers which dealt with the communication systems in the warzones and the chain of command. At the beginning of the war the telegraph was the most important means of military communication. Brian Hall in a paper for the University of Salford, explained what this entailed in terms of engineering work.

The army utilised two types of line: "Airline" and "Cable." The former referred to bare wire fixed to poles, buildings or trees, while the latter consisted of gutta-percha or rubber-insulated wire laid along the ground. Airline was the prominent feature of the telegraph and telephone system to the rear of divisional headquarters, beyond the range of enemy artillery fire. Lines forward of divisional headquarters were laid on short poles or stakes, along the sides or the bottom of trenches, or simply along the ground. However, the closer to the frontline the more susceptible to faults and breakages from enemy shellfire these lines became, not to mention their vulnerability to enemy interception. Throughout the war, the British Army implemented numerous measures to combat these problems, including twisting the cable to reduce "leakage," duplicating the number of lines laid and burying them to ever-greater depths to protect them from shellfire. By the summer of 1915, the standardised depth of lines forward of divisional headquarters was 2 feet 6 inches. By the end of the year this had been deepened to 5 feet and by the start of the Somme offensive in July 1916, all lines up to battalion headquarters were laid to a depth of 6 feet.

It is clear that this was often difficult, dangerous work and an obvious target for snipers and artillery.

The telephone became the main system of communication as the war progressed but, like the telegraph, the lines were very vulnerable to shellfire and were difficult to maintain in a moving situation. The early systems were also unreliable over distance and vulnerable to interception. Wireless technology (radio) was in its infancy and its range was very limited. It is therefore not surprising that human runners and carrier pigeons still had an important place in the army's communications.

Albert Manning joined the 24th Airline Company GY Cable Section (the Sections were numbered alphabetically, usually with two letters) and given the Regimental No. 32672. He went with the 24th to Salonika in April 1916. The Macedonian Campaign had begun in October 1915 and initially the Greek government, which was trying to remain neutral, was very ambivalent about the British presence. As a result, the army was not allowed to use the existing civil telecommunication network and had to try to create their own with very limited skilled manpower and resources. A couple of months after Albert arrived, the Allies formally took control of the civil telegraph offices and things improved. There was also more skilled labour and supplies of cable sent to the region.

In the Medal Rolls, Albert was described as a "driver" but he was also described as a "Pioneer" which was a term for a Private who was allocated to general duties in the Royal Engineers. Without his service record we cannot see the chronology of these descriptions.

We have seen in the story of Stuart Dimbleby Bates, who left the Salonika area at about the time that Albert arrived there, that much of the fighting was in a region of marshes and stagnant pools where malaria was endemic. Albert was treated twice for the disease in his time in Macedonia. Malaria was rarely fatal but it caused extreme fatigue and vomiting and would often recur. We know now that "Plasmodium", the parasite responsible for malaria, also impairs the ability of key cells of the immune system to trigger an efficient immune

response. As a result the men who had contracted malaria were susceptible to a wide range of other infections.

Certainly, this was the case for Albert and he was to suffer illnesses from this point on. In September 1917 he crossed the Mediterranean as part of XX Corps of the British Egyptian Force. The army had originally been sent to Egypt to defend the Suez Canal but it later also moved north into the Palestine area. Albert was with this force but contracted diphtheria there and had to return to Egypt for treatment before returning again to Palestine in September 1918.

With the end of the war the Royal Engineers began to move back through Europe for demobilisation. Albert had been away from home for three years and must have been looking forward to home and good health. Unfortunately "Spanish Flu" and Pneumonia were rife in Europe at the time. We know that he was taken to the 1st Rest Camp Hospital at Tourlaville, just outside Cherbourg, suffering from Lobar Pneumonia. He died there on 3rd February 1919. An amount of £20 19s 10d was authorised to be paid to Albert's father. He was also entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

He was buried near the hospital in the Tourlaville Communal Cemetery Grave C.6. He was twenty-seven years old. The text his parents selected for his gravestone was the refrain from a popular hymn, *Now the labourer's task is o'er*, by John Ellerton:

*Father in thy Gracious Keeping
Leave we now our loved one sleeping.*

Chapter 35

William Edward Mason (1887-1964)

A farmer, called Amos Mason, living in Molesworth in Huntingdonshire, had 99 acres of land. He had been born in 1814 and had married Jane Howell from nearby Catsworth. For some reason the couple, who had seven children, decided to move west across the county line to Ringstead in the 1860s. He became the landlord of the Swan Inn which stood in Carlow and faced down the High Street. There were also some nine acres of land for Amos to run a smallholding.

Amos died, aged 65, and was buried in the churchyard on January 12th 1879. His widow, Jane, took over the licence but by the mid-1880s had moved to London End, in the poorer cottages at the other end of the main village.

One of Jane Mason's children was Frederick, who had been born in Molesworth in about 1859, and moved to Ringsted with his parents. In 1881 he was living at The Swan but, aged 21, was working as an army shoemaker. On 26th February 1886 he married Denford girl, Anne Elizabeth Horne. By 1891 they were living next to Anne's parents, Fortescue and Emilia Horne. Fortescue was 66 years old and a "cottager" or smallholder. Frederick and Anne now had two children, Amos Fortescue (5) and William Edward (4). Amos had been born on 12th April 1885 and William's as 25th March 1887. By 1901 Amos (15) and William (14) were both shoemakers, working at home with their father at 15 Carlow Road. Frederick died in 1908, aged just 49, and in 1911 Amos (25) was shown as the head of the household and widow Annie (53) and brother William (24) were living with him.

The following year, William married Coral Lucretia Cope, just a year his junior, in Ringstead Parish Church. The Cope family was one which had, and was to have, more than its fair share of troubles. James Cope, Coral's grandfather, had been born in Wilden in Bedfordshire. In 1861, aged 17, he had moved to Keysoe, just a few miles from Ringstead, working as a shoemaker, with his uncle, Thomas Cope. James married Jane Hillson in Ringstead on 24th December 1862.

The couple had at least six children, among them Louisa and Henry. James seems to have supplemented his income by a bit of poaching, shooting partridges. He was caught, along with nephew George and other local men on 11th February, and, as the perceived ringleader, was fined £2 with 10 shillings costs. His wife, Jane, was buried on 1st July 1881, aged 36 years. It may be that it was as the result of infection following childbirth for on February 11th 1882 Ruby Jane Cope was also buried aged just eight months.

James remarried, in early 1886, to Hannah Elizabeth Austin and had two further daughters, Maggie and Maud. At about the time of his second marriage, daughter, Louisa, left home and moved to Peckham in London. We know this from later Censuses which show that her daughter, Coral Lucretia, was born there on 7th March 1888. Was hers the fate of many young women who went into service? We do know that soon after, on 8th May 1889, she

was taken into Berrywood Mental Hospital (sometimes Asylum). There were instances of women being taken into asylums because they were giving birth to illegitimate children but in Ringstead it was a far from unusual predicament and the women continued to live in the community, so it seems unlikely that this was not the cause. Whatever the reason, her time there was not long for a year later, on 19th May 1890 Louisa died of Enteric Fever, usually called Typhoid. Typhoid is caused by a type of Salmonella, often contracted from a contaminated water supply. I have not found any news item on there being an outbreak at the hospital but it was around at this time in some of the local towns such as Raunds and Burton Latimer.

Louisa's daughter, Coral Lucretia was baptised, after Louisa's death, in Ringstead on 1st May 1892. In the 1891 she was seen to be living with her grandfather, James, and his second wife, Hannah. Hannah too died in 1910 and, in 1911, aged 23, Coral was living alone with James in Wymans Road in Ringstead. He was still an army bootmaker and Coral was now a shoe stitcher.

On May 25th 1912 Coral, aged 24, married William Edward Mason in Ringstead. We can see on the marriage certificate that she had no known father. The young couple's life together was short for, on 7th October of that same year, she died. She was 24, the same age as her mother when she had died. The cause of death given on her death certificate was "Acute Bright's Uraemia, Cardiac Arrest". Bright's Disease was a name given to a disease of the kidneys which caused waste materials to build up in the body rather than being excreted. It could lead to further complications in the body's organs and, as in this case, cardiac arrest. It was an unpleasant way to die with, among other symptoms, extreme fatigue, itching sensations and twitching, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. William was present at her death and it was to be one of many that he would witness.

Two years later, on 6th November 1916 William was with the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment) and had been given the Regimental Number GS/42550. His military records have largely disappeared and it is likely that this date was when he first landed in France. He was with the 2nd Battalion for only a few weeks, possibly at an Infantry Base such as Étaples, on the French coast. On the 26th he was posted to the 20th Battalion "in the Field".

The 20th Royal Fusiliers was one of its three "Public School Battalions" which in 1914, at a time of romantic patriotic enthusiasm, had been formed entirely from men from the British Public Schools and Universities. It was assimilated into the British Army and gradually became similar to other units with drafts of conscripts coming mainly from the working classes.

The Battle of the Somme earlier in 1916 had weakened the German Army and Sir Douglas Haig wanted to maintain this advantage so, throughout that winter of 1916-17, there were repeated raids and small actions along the Western Front. At the time that William arrived with the 20th they were in rest billets at Merlessart but, on 1st December, they moved by train and by foot into the Front Line, South-East of Grancourt, opposite St Pierre Vast Wood. In this sector the 20th saw no major offensives by either side but there was sporadic infantry

and artillery fire. This was to be the pattern over the winter months with short periods in the Front Line interspersed with time in reserve or in rest billets behind the lines. It was not a pleasant time in the trenches foreshadowing the terrible conditions later in 1917. The War Diary of the Battalion reports on the period between 18th and 22nd December 1916:

. . . a hard frost was succeeded by a thaw when tracks had been [laid] became impassable in places. As a consequence movement was very slow and the relief of companies in the front line carried out nightly, occupied the greater part of each night.

Lack of sleep had to be added to the long list of privations suffered by the soldiers.

The German High Command had decided on a planned withdrawal to a fortified line which had been constructed from August 1916 and was known by the Allies as the Hindenburg Line. The withdrawal started on 21st February 1917 and as they left they destroyed buildings, bridges, road, railways and anything that might be of use to the Allies.

The first significant engagements fought by the 20th were the First and Second Battles of the Scarpe which were part of a campaign around Arras that began in April 1917. The British attacks had very limited success but, further south, the French offensive was a complete failure with 187,000 casualties leading to widespread mutinies. In the Second Battle of the Scarpe the 20th were in Divisional Reserve at first but moved up into the Front Line trenches facing Fontaine-les-Croisilles. The following day they moved back into billets. The *War Diary* gives little indication of the ferocity of the fighting but it does record that in April the Battalion lost 71 men killed, 111 wounded and 18 missing.

The period from May to mid-June was spent around Arras, moving for short periods into the Front line with times in reserve or training behind the lines. On 30th June, however, they received orders to entrain to Dunkerque, where they boarded a barge up the Canal de Dunkerque to Bray Dunes, and camped opposite the Parish Church.

This area of the Western Front, in the Nieuport area in Belgium, was next to the North Sea coast and was important because the ports of Dunkerque, Calais and Boulogne were essential to the Allies for the movement of troops and equipment.

On 16th August 1917 the 20th took over trenches in the marshy Lombartzyde sector of the Front. The British had planned to make amphibious landings in this area when they had achieved a breakthrough in the Ypres area but the Germans were aware of the plan and set up their own attack, using mustard gas for the first time and causing very heavy casualties. Operation Hush was abandoned.

When the 20th were in the Front Line it was still very active but once again they were on the move, 25 miles south, to take part in the Third Battle of Ypres. On 25th September they were near Polygon Wood and under the orders of the 98th Brigade. Here, they were bombed by enemy aircraft, with mustard gas becoming a common occurrence. In September 1917 the 20th lost 2 men killed, 70 gassed and one missing with 9 officers wounded.

From this point on you get an impression of a Battalion being not a Front Line force. In October they were attached to the 3rd Australian Division and spent most of their time in working parties and this continued when they moved to Ypres, reporting to the 2nd Canadian Railway Troops. We see in the Diary a hint of the old traditions that continued among all the mayhem. On 29th October 1917 it records:

3 p.m. Drums and Fifes left camp for Penzance Lines. 2nd Lt. Worley proceeded there to take command of all Bands, Drums and Pipes of the Brigade.

This campaign of the war is usually called the Third Battle of Ypres, with the final phases from mid-October to the 10th November often known as the Battle of Passchendaele, a name associated with terrible mud, and slaughter on both sides. We see the diminishing role of the 20th in the list of their casualties for October; Officers nil; other Ranks 1 killed and 10 wounded.

On 3rd November the Battalion moved up into the Front Line and three days later were relieved and marched, "via STINKING FARM – WULVERGHEM – NEUVE EGLISE – to KORTEPYP A Camp". Passchendaele continued on its terrible progress but the 20th were mainly in carrying or supplying roles and, during the whole of November, the only casualty was one man wounded. This pattern continued into the new year and from 14th January they were billeted in the cellars of Ypres. On 1st February 1918 the War Diary records:

Orders received for disbandment of the Battalion. Personnel to be posted to the 2nd, 4th and 13th Battalions.

According to the Medal Rolls, William had already been posted to the 13th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers on 30th January but this probably records when the order was sent, rather than acted upon. The 13th Battalion were one of Kitchener's New Army units formed in 1914. They had landed in Boulogne on 30th July 1915. The War Diary for the Battalion records on 9th February 1918:

Draft of 8 officers and 213 Other Ranks from disbanded 20th R. Fusiliers joined Bttn.

It seems likely that this is when William joined them. In February, the 13th were in the Dickebusch area, south-west of Ypres, and then moved up into the Front Line where, initially, there was only "slight" shelling. On the 25th, however, the enemy opened up a heavy bombardment of gas shells. A captured German stated that they were about to attack.

In early March 1918 there was snow with cold winds, but it turned to rain and the 13th moved up to the Front Line astride the Menin Road. At 1 a.m. on the 8th a message was received that an enemy attack was expected and, at 6.30 a.m., heavy shelling began. A desperate message was received from No.3 Company:

Please send as many stretcher bearers as possible – only a few men left to carry on and no officers fit to carry on. 2 officers killed 2 wounded. Please send reinforcements as soon as possible. A CLARK Sergt. No 3 Company.

Reinforcements were sent and the situation saved. This seems to have been a precursor to the German, "Michael Offensive". The 13th were in billets or on the march for the rest of March, finishing at the end of the month in billets at Rossignol Farm.

In April the German offensive gathered force, with infantry attacks and heavy bombardments. The 13th did not receive the main thrust of the attack and were able to hold their line but elsewhere the enemy were breaking through and so the Battalion was forced to retire to prevent becoming surrounded. The Allies generally had to give ground and the Germans seemed to be in the ascendancy but they too had suffered heavy losses of men and resources. The offensive dwindled to a halt and, for the 13th, much of May was taken up with training at Louvencourt and Vauchelles, south-west of Arras.

On 7th May 1918 there was an important note in the War Diary:

Capt. Cooke, American E. [Expeditionary] F. [Force] attached for instruction.

The Americans had arrived and the impetus of their troops and armaments would tip the balance for the Allies.

The Battalion was still in and out of the Front Line from Noyon to Montdidier, south-east of Amiens. It was from this point that despite setbacks and losses the move forward gained momentum and they began to find empty but booby-trapped enemy positions as on 29th July near Bucquoy Cemetery where one man was killed and four wounded in this way. There was still stiff opposition, however, as the enemy covered their retreat.

The 13th were part of the Battle of the Canal du Nord. This canal had been started just before the war and when hostilities broke out it was only partly finished. Much of the canal was empty but it was still a formidable obstruction because it was approximately 40 yd (37 m) wide, with a western bank that was between 10 and 15 ft (3.0 and 4.6 m) high and an eastern bank about 5 ft (1.5 m) high so temporary bridges were needed. In early September 1918, the 13th took part in the preparatory skirmishes but were not involved in the main attack at the end of September but were in relief in Bertincourt and then, ten miles west, in a tented camp at Warlencourt-Eaucourt.

On 8th October the Battalion, as part of the Battle of Cambrai, took part in an attack but met fierce enemy gunfire. A second attack on the 10th was successful, however, and was "without difficulty except for the supporting tanks which persistently fired at our own troops and from our own barrage which was late and short". This included the relief of the town of Caudry and on the 27th a letter was received from the Maire, thanking the Battalion for liberating the town. Over 200 prisoners were captured but the Battalion suffered many casualties. After time in billets at Caudry, on the 23rd October, in part of the Battle of the Selle, the Battalion moved to Salesches and attacked the enemy in a fierce battle around Ghissignies, leading to 102 Other Ranks casualties.

On 1st November the Battalion was at Beaurain and then moved into support as part of the Second Battle of the Sambre but were not to be tested again and on 11th November the *War Diary* had two entries:

Bttn formed Guard of Honour for Prince Yorahito at Berthincourt. . .*

Armistice took effect from 11.00 hours.

**Japan was on the Allies side in WW1. Possibly Hirohito who later became Emperor..*

On 16th December 1918 the War Diary had a rare entry for a woman

The Military Medal was also awarded the Mme. MARGUERITE LESNE who rendered considerable assistance to the wounded of the Battalion at GHISSIGNIES during the action of 24/10/18. This lady assisted wounded in the open under artillery fire.

During December 1918 and January 1919 the Battalion were in the Naumur area and demobilisation began in earnest, although not without problems. The *War Diary* records:

There is a certain amount of very natural discontent, chiefly arising out of the mistakes of the Home Labour Ministry.

While William was in France seeing death as a daily occasion, another tragedy was unfolding back home in Ringstead as a result of the war. There was a postal service maintained to the soldiers at the Front and it seems likely that he would have heard of the events involving his late wife's uncle. The *Northampton Daily Echo* of Wednesday February 27th 1918 reported:

A terrible tragedy was discovered at Ringstead shortly before seven o'clock on Tuesday, when Harry William James Cope, a shoe operative living in London End, was found dead in a bedroom in his house.

His throat was cut, and in the same room were found the dead bodies of his two children, whose throats were cut also.

Harry Cope's wife had died some five weeks earlier, leaving him with three young children. He had been granted an exemption from war service but this had expired in December 1917 and he had received a call-up notice. He had appealed but had been late in returning his form which meant that the Tribunal could not deal with his case. They did, however, write to the military to ask them to reconsider their decision and it seems likely that this plea would have been successful. Unfortunately, Harry Cope was suffering from some sort of breakdown and he killed his two sons and himself. His daughter was staying with another family and so remained the sole survivor. His sister, Louisa, had died in Berrywood Mental Hospital so could there have been a genetic illness? We may never know.

William returned to his own family but the deaths in his late wife's would have haunted him. The village had many houses where sons, husbands, fathers, brothers and lovers had been killed, or injured and returned home with physical and mental disabilities. We know that many old soldiers never talked of their war experiences, wanting it to be left in the past. As William's army records have largely been destroyed, we do not know when he was promoted to Lance-Corporal or, more importantly, when he was awarded the Military Medal. The London Gazette of 13th May 1919 (No. 31338) listed his award for "bravery in the field". There was no mention of this award in the *Northampton Mercury*. Did other villagers know of his courage?

In 1920 William was living in Carlow Road with his widowed mother, Annie Elizabeth, and brother Amos and his wife Annie Jane. It does not appear that Amos Fortescue Mason had been called up. In 1912 he had married Ann Jane Swingler from Little Addington and had sons Frederick John on 29th March 1914 and another son William Frank on 22nd May 1920. Does the gap indicate that Amos was away serving his country in some capacity elsewhere?



*William Edward (Ted) Mason in 1921
From a photograph Of Ringstead F.C. With thanks to Jon Abbott*

It appears that Amos and his wife were the first to leave Ringstead and move to Heckington in Lincolnshire to set up business as a boot and shoe repairer and seller. The *Kelly's Directory* of 1926 list him as a boot and shoemaker with a shop in St Andrews Street in Heckington. Oddly he is in Ringstead's Electoral Register for 1923 and in Banks Lane in Heckington in 1922. I think this is probably just an oversight in not taking him off the Roll.

By 1924, brother William had joined him in Heckington in Banks Lane. Also living in Banks Lane were Samuel and Jane Mowberry and in 1926 William married their daughter, Edith. In 1928 there was another tragedy for William for their first child, William Edward Mason, was buried in Heckington Cemetery on 10th April 1928. He was just ten hours old.

By 1930 William and Edith had moved to 118 Harrowby Road in Grantham and in the 1931 Register he is shown as having a shoe repair shop on the East side of London Road in the town. They were still in Harrowby Road in 1939 where William was a "Boot Repairer and Retail Dealer. Edith had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties" and living with them is son Brian, born on 29th April 1930. Brother Amos was still a boot dealer and repairer living in Banks Lane.

William and Edith moved, perhaps in retirement, to Rose Cottage in Wilsthorpe near Stamford. On 15th June 1964, that was their home when he died in the *Stamford and Rutland Hospital* in Stamford. He left £682 to his widow. He would have been about 77 years old. Edith followed him some seventeen years later in 1981.

Chapter 36

Ralph Mayes (1881-1918)

In writing of William Mason, I told a little of the troubled story of the Cope family. In the 1901 Ringstead Census, Charles and Charlotte Mayes and their family were living at 3 Rosebery Street, next door to the family of James and Hannah Cope. Charles Mayes was born in Ringstead but he had married Peterborough girl, Charlotte Hawkins. The ceremony had been in St Mark's Church in Peterborough on 6th December 1875. St Mark's was built in 1856 in the Victorian Gothic style to cater for the growth in population following the coming of the railway. It is not far from the rail lines and sidings and would have numbered railwaymen and their families in the congregation.

Charles Mayes' father, Daniel, had also been born in Ringstead and had become a railway labourer. He married Charlotte Cuthbert in 1852 in Ringstead but it may be that his work took him to Peterborough for a time where Charles met his future wife. If this was the case it happened between Censuses. Charles had been born in 1855 and in 1861 his mother, Charlotte, was with the family in Ringstead but father, Daniel, was in Northampton Infirmary. Was it an accident at work? In 1871 he was back in Shop Street, Ringstead and we know that he spent his working life on the railways and in 1911 aged 80 was a Railway Pensioner living with his daughter Eliza and her husband Joseph Cobley in Barritt's Yard.

Charles meanwhile had become a shoemaker and after his marriage he was living with his wife, Charlotte in Oak Cottage on the west side of Lincoln Road in Peterborough. They now had two daughters, Florence (3) and Lavinia (1). By 1891 they had moved back to Ringstead and had had two further children, Ralph (8) born in Peterborough and Miriam (4), born in Ringstead. It seems that they moved back around 1885.

By 1901 they were living in the new houses of the Tilcroft Estate in Rosebery Street (named after Liberal politician and, briefly, Prime Minister, the Earl of Rosebery). Charles was a shoemaker and Charlotte a boot closer (sewing together the leather pieces or uppers before they were attached to the sole). Their son, Ralph was 19 years old, and also working as a shoemaker. As we have seen, another shoemaker, James Cope, and his wife Hannah and their family were living next door. With them were son, Harry (23), and daughter Maggie (16) with granddaughter, Coral Lucretia (13) who in 1912 briefly married William Mason before her sudden death.

Ralph Mayes (21) married Maggie Cope (18) on March 21st 1903. Both bride and groom were shown as shoemakers. Over the next decade, in the period between the Boer and First World Wars, the military boot and shoe industry around Raunds and Ringstead, went through a very difficult period. The War Office reneged on an agreement made with the union on the stated piecework rates for the various types of military footwear. The lower rates being paid meant families were struggling to survive.

Mass meetings were held in Raunds and Ringstead and a strike was organised by the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives. Most of the handsewn men worked at home and kept their own hours. This had brought them into dispute with men in other areas who felt that they were being undercut by the homeworkers. Nevertheless the strike went ahead and trouble began to ferment against the strike breakers who were not in the union and continued to work. Money was raised for the non-union men's families but the working men were followed home and threatened with rotten eggs and tin cans. It finally escalated and on 21st March 1905 the blacklegs, including Margaret Thatcher's uncle, George Henry Roberts, were followed by a crowd beating pots and pans and their houses were stoned, breaking the windows.

Ralph Mayes was one of the men charged with harassing George Roberts and was fined 2s. 6d (12.5 pence). The strike seemed to be faltering so "General" Gribble decided, on his own initiative, to have a march to London to present the men's grievances to the Government. He organised it on military lines, choosing the men to go, with a Billetmaster and a Paymaster. Cycle outriders went ahead to find food and accommodation, and a band (many from Ringstead) led the column.

He also had five "Sergeants" each in charge of a group of men. Ralph was one of the "sergeants" which indicates that Gribble thought that he had standing in the community. On May 8th 1905 some 115 men left Raunds for London.

The march made the national newspapers and did gain some concessions but by the 1911 Census many handsewn men were out of work. The lack of any largescale military action was compounded by the War Office increasingly using the cheaper "inferior" factory made boots. The 1911 Census also shows Ralph, aged 29, with Maggie and their children, Hilda, Louise, Edwin and Kenneth. They were living in the Bank Cottages in Ringstead. In 1913 they had a final child, Coral, named after Maggie's niece who had died at the end of the previous year. Ralph was in work and shown as a shoemaker, but not at home. This means he was employed in a local factory.

When war came in 1914, Ralph, as a worker in the military boot industry, had some protection. Also he was married with a young family. As we have seen in other biographies, however, men who had exemption at the beginning of the war, found their position was being eroded and by 1917 many had been called up in an order governed by age and marital status.

On 1st April 1917 Ralph's appeal against his call-up was held at a local Military Tribunal and he was given a temporary exemption. We know that, at this time, he was working in the large Raunds' factory of Adams Brothers on the corner of Spencer Street. He was a "Hand Welt Worker" there. His case was heard again on 8th May 1917 and this time his appeal was dismissed. It appears that Adams Brothers may have appealed further because of the nature of his work, for a final decision was deferred to the 25th June. At this hearing he was granted a final period of exemption until 10th July 1917.



Ralph Mayes
With thanks to Alan Mayes

Ralph was conscripted and became a Gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery with Regimental Number 178299. The Garrison Artillery was originally designed for home defence and many did guard the shores and important sites against enemy attack by sea or air. Increasingly, however, they became part of the heavy artillery of trench warfare. He would have undergone a period of training and may have served some time in a home-based unit. Most of his military records have been destroyed but it seems likely that he did not join the 164th Siege Battery until April 1918. At about the time that Ralph joined the Battery in the Front Line, the 164th had been made up from four to six six-inch, 26 hundredweight howitzers. It had also been attached to the 52nd Canadian Heavy Artillery Group in the Second Army and remained with it until the end of the war.

This was a critical phase of the war. The Germans had launched Kaiserschlacht, usually known as the Michael Offensive, which started on the 21st March 1918 and went through several phases over the next few months. The Allies had to give ground rapidly as the Germans broke through some sectors and threatened to surround them. It seemed for a time this could be the decisive action of the war but, as they raced forward, the German

troops became exhausted and the food and armament supply chains became impossible to maintain. The tide then turned.



6-inch howitzer battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery in action at a farm near Strazeele 13th April 1918 at the Battle of Hazebrouck during German Spring Offensive.

From Wikipedia Commons. © IWM Q8723

Although we cannot be certain, it seems likely that the 164th were located in the Flanders area of the battlegrounds in Northern France and Southern Belgium. Gas was increasingly being used by both sides to kill and debilitate the enemy with shells now delivering it more effectively. Ralph was gassed on 9th May 1918. Another Gunner in the 164th Siege Battery, Thomas Chillmaid, was gassed at the same time as Ralph. Both were taken to No. 1 Casualty Clearing Station by No. 16 Ambulance Train. Chillmaid died on May 12th and, three days later, at 1.30 am on 15th May 1918 Ralph Mayes died too.

He was buried at Étaples Military Cemetery, near Boulogne, which is the largest Cemetery of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. He was 36 years old and had been at the Front for a month. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals and his widow Maggie, to a small pension. She would also have been sent a memorial death plaque. Over one million were issued in total.

Maggie had already endured the horrific tragedy of her brother Harry's killing of his sons and of his own suicide. Her sister, Maud had married Raunds man, Evelyn Wood, and he too died on the Western Front on 3rd September 1918. In 1919 Maggie was still living in Bank Cottages but she moved to Gladstone Street on the Tilcroft Estate and at some point before 1939 she moved in with her widowed sister Maud Wood in a cottage in Whymans Road.

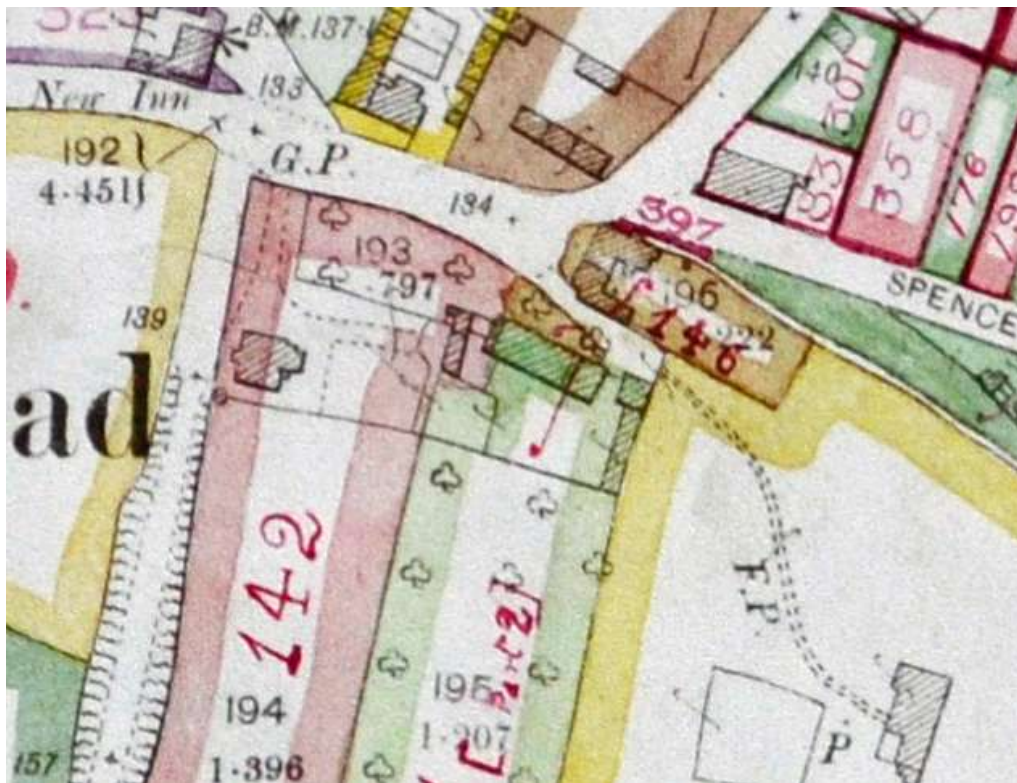


Maggie taken by Alan Mayes near the end of her life

Maggie was to live for a further fifty-three years after Ralph's death and died in 1971 aged 87. Her grandson, Alan Mayes, who served his "National Service" in the RAF, represented Ralph at the Ringstead War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday each year. He also told how on these occasions he always wore a pair of gold cufflinks given to Maggie for him, for "being a good boy" by Mr and Mrs Baxter who lost both their sons in the Great War.



*The cufflinks originally given to one of the Baxter boys killed in WW1
With thanks to Alan Mayes*



1900 OS Map showing Whymans Road.

This was the road that becomes a footpath leading to Slade Farm.
Maggie's house was part of the hatched area before the **146** lettering

Chapter 37

The Other Mayes Family

Hubert Stanley Augustus Mayes (1894-1986)

Stanley, as he was usually known, was born in Ringstead on 26 May 1894, the eldest child of Harry Abbott Mayes and Edith Ellen Mayes. His father, Harry, was a shoemaker, born in Ringstead in 1872, the fifth of the ten known children of William Farey Mayes and Mary Elizabeth Mayes (née Abbott). William, also a boot and shoe maker in the village, was the son of another Ringstead shoemaker, William Pariss Mayes.

Stanley's mother, Edith Ellen Mayes, had been born in Ringstead in 1873, the illegitimate daughter of Phoebe Mayes, a shoe stitcher. Phoebe was the daughter of Ringstead labourer, George Mayes and his wife Ann (née Ball). Phoebe later married Joseph Rowlatt in Ringstead on the 25th December 1875 and went on to have a further ten children from this marriage.

Stanley had three younger siblings: Harry Irving Mayes, born in 1897 at Ringstead, Arthur Edward Mayes, born in 1903 at Ringstead, and Hilda Phyllis Mayes, born in 1908 at Raunds.

He was a pupil at Ringstead village school and was very proud of his time there. As a five-year-old, he was awarded a Certificate of Merit for Proficiency in Religious Knowledge, dated 31 July 1899, and signed by Thomas W. Johnson, the headmaster. He always treasured this and his two school photographs, one of which also featured the father and aunt of the first female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

His musical talents were apparent from early childhood. The *Northampton Mercury* reported, in November 1902, an evening of entertainment by the children of Ringstead Baptist Chapel at the Temperance Hall. Stanley, aged eight, sang and played a piano solo.

In the 1901 Census, young Stanley was with his parents and brother, Irving, at 9 Gladstone Street in Ringstead. One son, Arthur was born there in 1903 but by 1906, at the latest, the family had moved to Raunds. We know that, because the father, Harry, had been a Baptist, he may have had a minor crisis of faith and was baptised in Stanwick Parish Church on the 4th March 1906. The Register shows that he was living in Raunds at the time. The next month, on the 29th April, his three sons, were also baptised in Stanwick. It is in the Baptismal Register that we see that Stanley had an impressive list of names, Hubert Stanley Augustus Mayes, although, as we have said, he was usually known by his second name only.

Stanley's enthusiasm for music continued to develop and in 1908, at the early age of 14, he had become the organist at St. Laurence's Church in Stanwick,. This was a position he held for many years, until well after the First World War. His very first organ recital took place there in 1911. In his youth, he also achieved success at various Northamptonshire vocal and instrumental competitions - for example, at Oundle in 1909.

In the 1911 Census, the family were living at 24, Wellington Road in Raunds and Stanley, aged 16, was described as a “Clicker” and his father as a “Boot Maker”. The clickers, who cut out the pieces from the hide, were considered the most important and skilled of the shoemakers so he was very young to have this responsibility. Stanley’s work in the shoe trade and as church organist continued after the outbreak of war. However, he was soon to witness the tragic repercussions of war, in December 1914. The *Northampton Mercury* reported on the funeral at Stanwick of the Rector’s son, Private Frank Leonard Richards of the 12th Royal Fusiliers. Aged 20, he died of pneumonia on 11 December, following a chill contracted while in camp at Shoreham. Stanley was the organist at the funeral service.

On 24 May 1915, two days before his 21st birthday, Stanley married Pauline Farey at St. Mary’s Church, Rushden. There is a very detailed report on this “very pretty motor wedding” in the *Rushden Echo* on 28 May 1915. The article noted that “the happy couple left by the 2.49 train en route for Bournemouth, where the honeymoon is being spent.”

Pauline also had family ties with Ringstead. She was born in Rushden on 22 July 1892, the only child of George Farey and Jessie Mary (née Tyrer). George Farey had been born in Rushden in 1866. He was a Boot Clicker by profession, but also a very talented and well-known musician. He gave public performances from an early age, singing, piano and organ being his specialities. He was the church organist at the Baptist Church in Rushden for 20 years. In 1911, when Pauline was aged 18, her father left for Canada, to find work in Toronto, but sadly, only two years later he died there of pneumonia. George’s father, Ebenezer Joseph Farey, born into a family of Ringstead shoemakers, had moved to Rushden with his parents as a small child. On her father’s side, Pauline Farey was a direct descendant of Leonard Joseph Abington, the Baptist Minister in Ringstead from 1830 to 1842.



Pauline with baby Hubert. With thanks to Vivienne Marshall

Pauline's mother, Jessie Mary Tyrer, was born in the Liverpool area in 1863. She trained to be a teacher at Warrington Training College and her career took her to Northamptonshire, where she was Headmistress at Rushden South End National Infant School from 1886 until 1892. After her marriage and the birth of Pauline, Jessie set up her own Private School and Kindergarten in Rushden. She was only 48 when she died in 1912.

As a child, Pauline lived with her parents in Rushden, initially at 11, Griffith Street, and then by the 1901 Census at 39, Grove Street. After the deaths of her parents she lived with her paternal grandfather, Ebenezer Joseph Farey, at 14, Park Road in the town.

Following their marriage, Stanley and Pauline moved to Brookside in Stanwick, within a stone's throw of the church where he was organist. However, the happiness of their early married life was to be interrupted by World War One.



Royal Naval Division Recruiting Poster
Wikipedia Commons

On 16 February 1917, Stanley enlisted in the Royal Naval Division. This unit had been advertising widely in the area from 1915 with a football match against "The Cobblers" and an event in the New Theatre in Northampton. An advertisement in the Northampton

Mercury on 12th May 1915 also told of a list of “Separation Allowances available to the family of men who “allot at least 20s [£1] a month to their family”. His Service Record describes him as over 5 ft 7 ins in height, with a 34 inch chest, a fresh complexion, brown hair and blue eyes. Two scars were noted on the left knee and one on the right knee.

Stanley’s civil occupation was given as the “Boot Trade”, his religion was Church of England, and, importantly, he could swim. His next of kin was his wife, Pauline Mayes, and their address was Brookside, Stanwick, Northants.



*Stanley in uniform (about 1917)
With thanks to Vivienne Marshall*

Stanley’s initial rank was Ordinary Seaman, with Service Number R/762. He was mobilised on the 20th February 1917 and attached to 3rd Reserve Battalion which was at Blandford Forum in Dorset. The British Naval Division was a strange land fighting unit made up initially from Royal Navy and Royal Marine reservists who were not needed for service at sea. In 1914 two Naval Brigades and a Brigade of Marines were hastily formed.

The first men did not have khaki uniforms and lacked basic equipment like mess tins and water bottles. They also had very old charger-loading rifles and had no artillery or field ambulances. Their first engagement was the defence of Antwerp which, not surprisingly did not go well. They did manage to withdraw successfully, but with many men captured and interned in Holland. After a proper refit and reorganisation they were sent to Egypt and took part in the Gallipoli Offensive, a terrible campaign that cost many lives. In April 1916 they were redesignated as the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division and moved to France the following month. By this time very few of the men remained who had seen sea service.

The rest of the war the Division served on the Western Front as a normal infantry unit and took part in the Battle of Ancre towards the end of the Somme Campaign. They continued in the Ancre area into 1917 and then fought in the Battle of Arras.

It was not until the 9th July 1917 that Stanley was drafted into the Hood Battalion of the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division. The following day, having been now rated Able Seaman, he embarked at Folkestone for Boulogne. On 11 July, he joined Base Depot at Calais, finally joining the Hood Battalion on the 29 July. The campaign known as the Third Battle of Ypres was about to begin.

According to his service record, Stanley very soon was given leave to the UK between 30 August and 9 September 1917. His wife Pauline had given birth to the couple's first child, Hubert, in early 1917, but the baby later died. Stanley wrote on the reverse of Hubert's photograph: "Hubert. Died September 1917 whilst I was in France". Presumably, the leave to the UK was on compassionate grounds.

On his return to France, Stanley received a gunshot wound to his face and was sent to the 149th Field Ambulance on the 18th September. Luckily it was only "slight" and he was patched up, given 500 units of Anti-Tetanus Serum, and sent back to his unit the following day.

He was soon back in the Front Line and was injured again, on the 23rd October 1917, during the final phases of the Third Battle of Ypres often known as the Battle of Passchendaele. This time he was sent to the 148th Field Hospital and, after treatment, was first posted to the Depot Battalion, on the 30th October, before returning to his Battalion on the 10th November 1917, a date which is usually recorded as the end of the Battles of Passchendaele. .

In the first half of 1918, Stanley's record shows that he was moved around several times. On 1st January 1918 he was posted to the 63rd Royal Naval Divisional Wing as an Office Orderly but rejoined Hood on 29th March. Then, on 6th April, he was transferred to Hawke Battalion. His service record states that he was cross-posted (which was an exchange of personnel) to Hawke Battalion on the 14th June.

Between 21st August and 4 September 1918, Stanley was given 14 days leave to the UK, via Boulogne, missing the Battles of Albert and Drocourt-Queant. On 21st September, he joined the 63rd Royal Naval Divisional Headquarters.

After the war ended, he remained in France until 11 February 1919. During that time, his musical talents were put to full use, when he became conductor of the 63rd Divisional Orchestra. He sent his parents a postcard embroidered "From Your Loving Son", and wrote the following:

Am getting on well with the orchestra and are going to perform before the general tomorrow. I hope we get on well as it's the job of a lifetime. Send me some good uptodate waltzes and ragtime as soon as possible.



The embroidered postcard sent by Stanley. With thanks to Vivienne Marshall.

He was finally demobbed on 13th February at Fovant which was a camp on Salisbury Plain. M.A. McKenzie of the *Fovant History Interest Group* has written:

When the fighting finished Fovant was one of three camps in the South West designated as demobilisation centres for returning soldiers. Soon trainloads were arriving to hand in their uniforms and weapons, receive civilian clothes a small amount of money and train ticket home. Some days as many as 40,000 were processed in a day. Unfortunately, more than train tickets were needed for the Australian soldiers who stayed in Hurdcott for many months. Lacking the motivation of training and the structure of army discipline, boredom quickly became a problem. Unlike the fatal rioting on the Plain there was a little "rowdyism" at Hurdcott. One farmer tells of being stopped by a barricade at the camp entrance and made to drink a pint of beer with the 'guard' before being allowed to continue to his home at Fovant.

Stanley received his £10 10s and, like the men in the quotation above, he returned home. He had survived the war, but the horrific memories were always with him. In 1964 he visited Ypres for the 50th anniversary of the start of the Great War, to honour his fallen comrades.

On his safe return from the Western Front, Stanley resumed his role as organist and music teacher at Stanwick for a short time. However, by 1920, his musical career had taken him in another direction. Pauline and Stanley left their beloved Northamptonshire for him to become organist, choirmaster and music teacher at Worksop Priory in Nottinghamshire.

Around 1926, the couple and their two small children moved to Derby and in 1929 they were living there, at 4 Queen Street, before moving to 46 Kedleston Road by 1931. Initially, Stanley was employed in the leather trade, although his musical interests were still a huge part of his life. Indeed, he was very proud of the fact that he was invited to participate as choral conductor in two Royal Command Concerts at the Albert Hall in 1934 and 1938. By 1938 the family were living in 53 Stafford Street and in the 1939 *Register of England and*

Wales the couple were there and Stanley's occupation was shown as, "Leather Warehouse Tanner – Unemployed".



*Stanley playing the organ at St Werburgh's Church in Derby
With thanks to Vivienne Marshall*

During this time Stanley held an astonishing list of musical posts in the Derby area. Besides being a private music teacher, he was Conductor of the Derby Orpheus Choir; of the Derby Co-operative Society Choir and Orchestra; of the Melbourne Male Voice Choir (eight miles south of Derby) and of the L.M.S. Choral Union and of the Operatic Society. He was also Organist and Choirmaster of the King Street Methodist Church.

Outside music, he was adopted as a Labour candidate for the local elections and was elected a Councillor in 1938. Music, however, was always his first love and, in 1942, he returned to it as his full-time occupation. He was appointed organist and choirmaster at St. Werburgh's Church in Derby - a position he held until his retirement in 1960. In his later years he acted as an adjudicator at various festivals and competitions. He was honoured to be elected in 1956 to the Honorary Fellowship of Trinity College of Music, London, in recognition of his service to music.

The couple returned to Rushden for a brief period after Stanley's retirement, but then moved back to Derby to be near their family. Pauline died in 1979, but Stanley lived for

another 7 years. In his final years he was living in a nursing home in Louth in Lincolnshire to be near his daughter and her husband who had retired there. He died on the 29th April 1986 in his 92nd year and was cremated at Grimsby Crematorium. He was one of the lucky ones who survived the First World War and had afterwards been able to lead a long and rewarding life.

Harry Irving Mayes (1897-1970)

Harry Irving Mayes, the younger brother of Stanley Mayes, was born on the 27th July 1897 (wrongly put as 1898 in the Death Index) and christened with his younger brother, Arthur on the 29th April 1906 at Stanwick Parish Church. He had moved, with his parents, Harry and Edith from Ringstead to Wellington Road in Raunds around the year 1905. In 1911 Harry Irving, usually known by his middle name, was aged thirteen and working as a baker's assistant.

On the 24th May 1915, he was the best man at the wedding of his brother, Stanley, in Rushden Parish Church. The terrible nature of the war was now known to everyone and the early optimism of a quick victory was dissipating. Conscription came, in early 1916, and Irving was enlisted in the Royal Sussex Regiment in the mid-May to mid-June period of that year. The 1918 and 1919 *Absent Voters' Lists* for Raunds show Harry Irving Mayes home base as Wellington Road and his unit as the 1st Sussex (11788).



*Harry Irving Mayes (probably 1916). Note the Royal Sussex cap badge
With thanks to Vivienne Marshall*

It seems that Irving was fortunate, because the 1st Battalion was the one of the few infantry battalions that remained in India throughout the war. Almost all the Regular Army Battalions stationed there, were posted to the Western Front and their places taken by the various Territorial, Volunteer and conscripted units that were raised after the beginning of the war. It is said that the 1st Battalion asked to fight alongside the other Regular Battalions but to no avail. For the few replacement conscripts, it hugely boosted their chances of survival. During the war, the 1st Battalion lost 44 men whereas the 2nd Battalion lost 1723.

The 1st Sussex was part of the 1st (Peshawar) Division of the Indian Army, moving to the 2nd Rawalpindi Division in December 1917. There is however a problem because it shows on the Medal Roll that, although retaining the same Regimental Number, Irving was posted to the 40th Division Signal Company and then the Signal Service Company and finally the "A" Company of the Signal Company. As he retained his Regimental Number this would have been an attachment rather than a transfer. It is known in his family that he served in India, so it seems certain that he did travel there initially. He would not have been 19 years old until the 27th July 1916 so probably did not arrive there until after that date.

Looking at the Medal Roll for the Royal Sussex Regiment, the thirty-page batch of Sussex Numbers around Harry Irving Mayes show only one other man who was in the 1st Battalion and he was Sergeant, William John Herbert Black. He had been born in Burma and baptised in India in 1886, so was probably from an army family. No other of the men from this group had been attached to the Signals from the Royal Sussex. On the *Brighton Roll of Honour* website, there is listed a William Baker who was with the 1st Royal Sussex in the Indian Army. He was attached to the Signals Section and was captured in the Siege of Kut. He died in captivity near Baghdad. Another soldier from the 1st Battalion, Private A. Dearing, had been transferred to the 14th Indian Divisional Signal Company in March 1917 and sent to Mesopotamia. We see a pattern of men moving from the Sussex in India to the Indian Signal Corps and then seeing service in Mesopotamia and it may be that path that Irving followed.

Amanda Swain, a granddaughter of Irving has given me a copy of his Certificate of Employment During the War and this shows that he was a G.D. [General Duties] Pioneer from the 10th May 1916 to the 30th October 1919. He was in the Royal Sussex 1st Battalion as part of the 31st Indian Signal Company. This would indicate that he was attached to the Signals from the start of his time in India. Was Irving also at Kut? He later told his son that he had seen things too awful to talk about. This description would certainly apply to this siege, but the war was littered with other terrible events. It is perhaps more likely, as Vivienne Marshall has suggested, that he was part of the force that finally retook Kut.

In 1914, the Royal Engineers' Signal Service had 12 Regular Companies and 29 in the Territorial Force. By the end of the war there were 589 companies. Add to this that the numbering and organization of these companies was fluid, responding to changing need, and we can see why it is difficult to be clear about Irving's service.

The 40th Divisional Signal Company served on the Western Front so it is possible that he was attached to the 40th Division of the Signals in France near the end of the war, or

Summing this up, it may be that Irving first went to India with the Sussex but was attached to an Indian Signals Company soon after his arrival there. He may have continued in India for some time but he then was sent to the Mesopotamian war zone. Finally, he was posted to the Western Front, near the end or after the war. We must, however, accept that some or almost all of this may be wrong. Irving was demobilized on the 30th October 1919 and returned home. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

We can then find that, in the 1931 Electoral Register for Clacton, Harry was staying with Sidney and Elizabeth Bruce at 4a Pallister Road. Some of the Bruce family were in the grocery business and Irving worked in this trade during this period. Was it the work or the football that took him to Clacton? It was probably the work, for even though he was playing at a good standard, he was still an amateur.



His career was ended by a serious knee injury. He then had to have a full-length caliper to keep his leg in alignment.

In late 1933 he married Eugenie Lillie Arthur and they set up home in Higham Ferrers. Eugenie, who was usually been known as Lillie, was the daughter of, carpenter and joiner Samuel, and Gertrude Arthur. Samuel had been in the Royal Air Force at the end of the Great War with the trade of "Joiner". Lillie had been born in Rushden but in 1911 the family had been living in Thrift Street in Irchester. I had thought at first that Irving had met Lillie after he had moved back to Northamptonshire, but Amanda knows that they had met before he went to Clacton for they exchanged love letters through these years.

Lillie was something of a pioneer for Amanda was told that she was the first woman trained by Wellingborough firm, Saxby's, as a pork butcher. It is also likely that she had the background knowledge from her mother Gertrude whose father, David Darnell, born in Irchester, was shown as a "Pie maker and Bread Maker's Assistant" in the town in the 1901 Census. Her grandfather too, William Darnell, was a "Baker and Grocer" in the 1871 Irchester Census in a Grocer's Shop (Co-operative's). Grocery, and especially pies, ran in the family. Amanda believes that Lillie and her brothers received substantial legacies from a relative and she had bought a shop premises with her portion.

Lillie's Stores was at 3 Market Square in Higham Ferrers. It was a grocery shop, but she specialised in pork pies which she made herself, buying pork from the abattoir and preparing and baking the pies in-house. Granddaughter Amanda remembers with affection, how she and her brother later helped Lillie prepare the pies. Great niece Vivienne Marshall also stayed with them during her school holidays and served in the shop.



*The wedding of Irving and Lillie
With thanks to Amanda Swain*

On the 23rd February 1936 the couple had a son, Paul Arthur Darnell Mayes. In the 1939 Register of England and Wales they were still living in 3, Market Square in Higham and Irving was working as a lorry driver. Lillie was shown as a "Shopkeeper-Pork and General". Amanda has added that she was told by her father that he also worked as a coal man in the Higham area. As a boy, her father accompanied Irving into the coal yard to collect the coal on one of the horse-drawn carts that still delivered coal up to the 1950s. He would get off, however, before they left the yard. The amount taken was calculated by a weighbridge, in and out, and the boy's weight in coal would have been free.

Despite the knee injury, Irving had continued with his sporting interest after his football career was over, for he became a keen bowls player. Harry Irving Mayes died on the 14th January 1970. After his death Lillie's Alzheimer worsened and she struggled to run the business and it was sold to the Woolwich Building Society. She died in 1981.

Albert Edward Mayes (1896-1963)

Leonard Eustace Mayes was born in Ringstead on the 15th December 1873, the third child of William Fairey (or Farey) Mayes and his wife Mary Elizabeth (nee Abbott). In the 1891 Census, he was 17 years old and a shoemaker, like all the children above school age. It seems that Leonard wanted a little more adventure in his life. On the 29th June 1892 he attested with the North Staffordshire Regiment at Northampton. He was 5ft 5 inches tall with grey eyes, a fresh complexion and light brown hair. His Regimental Number was 3754. After his initial training he was posted to Portsmouth but on the 5th December 1892 he was in hospital there for five days with "inflammation of the connective tissue". This could point to several disorders of varying seriousness, but symptoms could include numbness and pain in the joints.

It seems that Leonard found army life was not as he had hoped, or perhaps his joint problems made it unbearable. He bought himself out for a payment of £18 on the 22nd March 1893. He had been a soldier for 237 days. Did his father have to find the money? The comparison of money values with today can vary greatly but £18 could have a buying power of over £2000 today and would be at least a month's wages.

Leonard returned to Ringstead and became a shoehand again. On the 25th May 1895 he married local girl, Sarah Ball. They had four children, three of whom survived into adulthood. In 1901 the family were living in Abbott's Yard in Ringstead. In 1905, Leonard was part of the Ringstead Band selected to go with the men who marched from Raunds and Ringstead to London to put the army shoemakers' case to Parliament. This march brought some concessions to the handsewn men but the demand fell and, by 1911, many were out of work.

By 1911 Leonard and the family had moved to 18 Mill Street in Luton in Bedfordshire. Leonard was still working as a bootmaker but Albert Edward, the oldest child, born on the 12th December 1896, was now an assistant in a straw hat warehouse. Luton had become the global centre of the straw hat industry and by the 1930s it was producing some seventy million.



*Albert on right with his cousin Stanley Mayes. Ringstead School photograph c1900
With thanks to Vivienne Marshall*

War came and Albert enlisted with the Bedfordshire Regiment. He was with the 1/5th Battalion which was a volunteer Territorial force. The 5th Battalion had moved from Bury to Norwich and on to St Albans by May 1915. On the 25th July they were issued with “hot climate uniforms”, stores and equipment were hurriedly collected and, cheered by the crowds in St Albans, they entrained for the south coast. The men were in good spirits and there were songs and cheers. They were bound for “somewhere out east” and many soon succumbed to sea sickness. They called at Malta on the 3rd August and by the afternoon of the 6th had landed at Alexandria, in Egypt. The following day they sailed for the Greek island of Lemnos, arriving at its main port of Mudros on the morning of the 9th.

The next day they sailed east to another Greek island, Imbros (now Turkish). They were bound for the isthmus at the entrance to the Sea of Marmara and disembarked in Suvla Bay on the western coast. The Medal Roll shows the 10th of August as the first day of his service in a war zone. They were now on the infamous Gallipoli Peninsular and the enemy was the army of the, once great, Ottoman Empire, who were allies of the Germans. They moved first into a rest camp and then into reserve.

Albert wrote home and the *Bedfordshire Advertiser and Luton Times* printed extracts from these letters on the 3rd September 1915. He is described in the article as a “Signaller”, which would usually indicate that he was in the Royal Engineers, but the Battalion had its own group of Signallers. Albert would have undergone training in signals but would have retained the rank of Private in the Regiment. “Signaller” was a description of his role.



*The 5th Battalion Bedfordshire Signallers in their hot climate uniforms (St Albans 1915)
From www.bedfordregiment.org.uk (with thanks to Mark Stuart)*

The letter that Albert Mayes sent was some five days after they had landed at Suvla, so would have been about the 15th August 1915. It is full of the gung-ho bravado of a young man trying to face up to his first confrontation with the enemy and trying to hide his fear. He wrote:

*They are good lads, and all we think about is doing the enemy in. They are a lot of l---
--- and squeal like women at the point of a bayonet. They are getting a rough time
from the guns, which are just against us. Big things are going to happen. It almost
makes me wish I was going up in the trenches with the Company's chaps but we shall
have a hot time from the shells. I had a bathe in the sea last night and another this
morning. It's just as hot in the morning but we feel a treat. Our chaps may go up any
time. They are all looking forward to it. I am on Headquarters duty at present. I had a
dixie full of Oxo and some biscuits in it for breakfast and it was just good. We are
being well looked after and living well. I don't mind a bit. We are all getting used to
the noise. The guns did not wake me once in the night. We are not troubled with a lot
of flies yet, but perhaps they have not found us yet. It is a desolate place, with lots of
big hills all the way.*

This was the start of the Assault against the Kiretch Sirt. When they moved forward under heavy fire, the metal flashes on their uniforms glinted yellow in the sunlight. This was seen by an observing Staff Officer through his binoculars and he is said to have exclaimed:

“By Jove! If only we had one or two more battalions of those yellow devils we should be across the peninsular by tomorrow”.

The 5th has proudly retained the nickname “Yellow Devils”. Disease claimed many of the troops but, during the campaign, the Battalion was awarded 120 gallantry medals including one Victoria Cross.

Another letter, a day or two later, was more subdued in tone after some of the company had moved up to near the firing line. He wrote:

We were shelled yesterday for nearly an hour, but they did not do any harm, only one being wounded. Their ammunition is no good. Half the shells did not explode at all, and so, if we meet nothing worse than their shells we shan't hurt. But the boys tell us it is jolly rough up in the line. We are fighting snipers and thousands is of them at that: - mostly girls and women they seem. They are all in green: painted legs and everything green. We get on fairly well. You can't expect a lot of fine food on a job like this. It is all biscuits and no meat – no bread – but we get Oxo and things like that to make a soup and beef tea. There is Stan, Jim and his brother George, all of us under a shelter we have rigged up, and Jim is grumbling all the while because they won't send him up to the firing line. Nine of us are going up tonight. I don't know whether I am going up or not. We are beginning to be worried by flies now. I think we shall be as brown as berries before another month is up. We have four or five men and an officer hurt but not badly except one. The warships, which are only a mile away, keep letting the enemy have it on the hills.

We do not know exactly what happened to Albert next. He was at some point promoted to Acting Corporal, a rank he seems to have retained throughout the war. The Gallipoli campaign which had started out with such optimism soon became a disaster and despite great bravery by the troops the Allies had to retreat from the peninsular before they were annihilated.

Descendants of Albert understood that he had suffered from gas poisoning and the *Medal Roll* shows that from the 27th October 1915 to the 10th February 1916, he was in Malta. Malta did not see any fighting in the First World War but was a British base for military hospitals. These took in many of the casualties, particularly from the Dardanelles Campaign. It is generally believed, however, that no poison gas was used in Gallipoli, although gas masks were issued for fear of its use by the Turks. On the other hand, the poet John Masefield, who worked in a military hospital for the French soldiers wrote in “Gallipoli”:

*The trenches curved and zigzagged in the earth; the men in one section could neither see nor hear what the men in the nearest sections were doing. What went on under the ground there in the making good of those trenches will never be known. From half-past five till midnight every section of the line was searched by bombs and bullets, by stink pots, and sticks of dynamite, by **gas-bombs** and a falling tumult of shell and shrapnel, which only ceased to let some rush of Turks attack, with knives, grenades and bayonets, hand to hand and body to body in a blackness like the darkness of a mine. At midnight the wounded were lying all over the trenches, the*

enemy dead were so thick that our men had to walk on them, and bombs were falling in such numbers that every foot in those galleries was stuck with human flesh. No man slept that night. At half-past seven next morning (the 7th) a small quantity of bread and tea was rushed across the plateau to the fighters, who had more than earned their breakfast. Turk shell had by this time blown up some of the head-cover and some of the new communication trenches were still only a few feet deep.

It seems certain that Albert had been gassed, wounded, or otherwise incapacitated, so that he had to be evacuated to Malta. By December 1915, the 5th, like other battalions, had lost most of their men to disease and enemy action and had retired to Egypt to be rebuilt back to strength in the early months of 1916.

As we see in the accounts of other Ringstead soldiers, this was a posting which had its own difficult challenges, both on the battlefield and particularly because of the climate and disease. *The History of the 5th Battalion of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment* by F.A.M. Webster records that 26 Officers and 750 Other Ranks left England in 1915 but reinforcements during the war numbered 231 Officers and 4939 Other Ranks. This huge number of replacements was due to 660 ranks wounded in action, but mainly because of the 4,125 men who went down with sickness.

They 5th had been brought up to strength by March 1916 and then had a year-long posting guarding the Suez Canal. Albert rejoined the Battalion in Egypt on the 18th February 1916 and remained with them until the 31st July 1918. In March 1917 they were part of the advance through Gaza and Palestine. At the time of the Armistice with the Turks in October 1918 they were stationed in Beirut.

Before this, however, on the 1st August 1918, Albert had been transferred to the 19th Rifle Brigade and given the new Regimental Number 212316. [There is some confusion here because the Medal Roll has Albert finishing with the Bedfordshires on the 31st July 1918 and starting with the Rifle Brigade on the 1st January 1918. Looking at other men on the Medal Roll, it is obvious that it should be the 1st August 1918.] The Battalion *War Diary* records that two Officers and four Other ranks left the Battalion at and went to Egypt on a short leave on the 28th July. Could it be that it was decided that they were no longer required in Palestine? *The War Diary* does record some enemy action, but most days were labelled "Quiet".

The 19th Rifle Brigade had been formed on the 29th November 1915 from the unused Territorials and were deployed initially to guard vulnerable places in Great Britain. In 1916 they were sent abroad to perform similar duties. The 19th were on garrison duty in Egypt and it may be that Albert were sent on leave from Palestine to Egypt and it was decided that they were more need in Egypt as the war in the Middle-East was almost over. The *Medal Roll* shows his service finished on the 11th November 1918 but, perhaps, this is indicating when the war ended. Albert was entitled to the 1915 Star and the Victory and British War Medals.

Albert returned to Luton and, in the summer of 1920, married Cassy Maude Heley. Her father, Joseph Heley, was a straw hat dyer from Totternhoe in Bedfordshire and her mother, also Cassy, was from Chalk Hill (now part of Houghton Regis). Her four older siblings were all

involved in the straw hat trade. Like the Northamptonshire boot and shoe industry it moved from the villages into the towns as it became industrialised, before being finally overtaken by fashion and overseas producers.

At first the couple lived with Frederick Thrussell at 48 Pondwicks Road before moving to 65 Biscot Road in Luton and then 25 Hermitage Road in Hitchin. They also had a shop and commercial premises at 88 Inkerman Street in Luton.

We know from the *London Gazette* of the 27th March 1936 that it was hat manufacturing and millinery business that the couple ran in Inkerman Street. Unfortunately, the entry in the *Gazette* was because of his bankruptcy. His grandson, Tim Farr, had revealed that Albert was angry about this, because it had been enforced when the amount owed was small. He had ordered felt for hat making and because of changes in fashion had been unable to pay the account. After the loss of his business, he became depressed and worked as a bookie's runner for a time. The Second World War changed his fortunes. The *1939 Register of England and Wales* shows that Albert's occupation, although it is difficult to decipher, appears to be "Commission Agent's Clerk and Food Control Clerk". I think Commission Agent here, is another name for an unlicensed Bookmaker.

Tim has confirmed that he became a local Food Officer during the Second World War, part of the rationing regime, trying to keep people fed through difficult times. Apparently, he would have been given a medal but, as an undischarged bankrupt, he was unable to receive the award.

The couple had two children, Derek Leonard had a successful acting career, under the stage name of Richard Mayes, and became a Shakespearean theatre actor. He also worked in film and television, including a part in *Dr Who*. A daughter, Audrey, was born on the 24th July 1928. In the *1939 Register* they also had an elderly piano teacher, Florence Fitzgerald, living with them. Was she a lodger to help with the finances? Albert's father, Leonard, had provided funds to enable Cassy to set up a Draper's Shop and this was an important source of income.

Albert suffered from increasingly poor health. He had been a heavy smoker and perhaps this, more than his possible wartime gassing, led to his early death. He died in 1963 aged 67 but Cassy lived into her nineties and died in 1993

Chapter 38

William Meadows (1888-1976)

More than most, the life of William Meadows had many surprising twists. His early life was touched with tragedy and this caused him to look for a life outside Ringstead and gain a measure of fortune and fame.

We will start his story with another William Meadows, born about 1826 in Slipton, a few miles north of Ringstead. On 19th December 1850 in Ringstead, he married Emily Tilley, a local woman, daughter of glazier, Jonathan and his wife Elizabeth. She had been born in 1818 but tended to underestimate her age. She was about 32 when they married and it appears that the couple did not have any children. By 1871, their niece, Rebekah (or more usually Rebecca), aged 14, was living with them. She was the daughter of Joseph Tilley, the younger brother of Emily.

In September 1878 Rebecca, aged twenty, was walking home to Ringstead from Raunds when she was attacked and sexually assaulted by Thomas Baker, an eighteen-year-old labourer. She struggled and managed to get away and told some men on the road what had happened and urged them to catch Baker. A Hargrave coal agent and news vendor, called Walter Yorke, pursued him in his horse and cart and spied Baker on the Hargrave Road. He fetched a policeman from Raunds and Baker was caught and identified by Rebecca. At the Quarter Sessions in Northampton, Thomas Baker was sentenced to twelve months hard labour.

In the 1881 Census, taken on the 3rd April, Rebecca (23) was still living with William (56) and Emily (60). Also living with them was Emily's unmarried sister Rebecca (73), a lacemaker, one of the few women in the village still practising that craft. On 1st August of the following year, Emily was buried in the local churchyard. Her age was given as 64 years so she had aged four years in five months. William then married his niece, although not a blood relative, the young Rebecca, the following year. They quickly had three children, Emily, Elizabeth and William. William, the father died, aged 63, and was buried on 20th December 1889, leaving Rebecca with three young children.

William, who is the main subject of our story, had been born on 23rd October and baptised on 23rd December 1888, just a year before his father's death. In the 1891 Census, the widowed Rebecca, aged 34, was working as a shoe hand. The three children, Emily (8), Elizabeth (4), and William (2), were with her and she had two lodgers to help with the finances, Isaac Tilley, 34, a farm labourer and probably her brother and James Worsley (45), a house painter, born in Douglas, capital of the Isle of Man.

The following year Rebecca married John James Worsley (now 48) who was a widower, on 11th September 1892. By the 1901 Census the couple were living in Barritt's Yard in Ringstead. Rebecca's eldest daughter Emily was now 19 and a dressmaker, Elizabeth, 15, a boot closer, and William (13) for whom no occupation was shown. The couple also have two

more children, John James (8) and Eleanor (4). There were also two new lodgers, Samuel French (33) and Joseph Drew (34).

Any temporary stability for William and the other children was soon to be shattered because, early in 1904 Rebecca too died. Her eldest daughter, Emily, married Thomas Hallam, an older man with children, and went to live at 52 Station Road in Ilkeston, Derbyshire. She seems to have become the surrogate mother for the younger children and Nellie (Eleanor) was visiting her in the 1911 Census. She was also the person who William gives as his next of kin on military forms, as did his stepbrother John James Worsley.

By 1911, William's stepfather, John James Worsley, aged 67, was in Thrapston Workhouse and may have died there, aged 85, in 1920

Soon after the death of his mother, on 9th April 1906, William Meadows had filled in the Military Attestation Form to join the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. He was 5ft 5¾ inches tall with a 34-inch chest and had brown eyes and hair. He was only 17 years 6 months old (but his age sometimes has a year added). He was given the Regimental Number 7512. The 3rd Northamptonshires was a reserve battalion for training new recruits and on 29th June 1906 he was transferred to the 15th (Kings) Royal Hussars, possibly after some basic training at a camp at Little Brington. As we shall see, there is some confusion about his new Regimental Number which was probably 6021.

In 1909 the 15th Hussars were posted to South Africa from India, where there would still have been tensions following the Boer Wars. It is therefore probable that William had served in India. In the 1911 Census there is one for the 15th Hussars and we see William Meadows in the list of Officers and Other Ranks. He is shown as 23 years old and formerly a shoemaker born in Ringstead. As to where he was, the Census states Egypt, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Sudan for the 15th Hussars which is not very helpful.

On January 17th 1913 the Battalion arrived in Southampton from South Africa after an absence from Great Britain of thirteen years, though nearer to seven for William. They docked and entrained for Longmoor Military Camp in Hampshire which had accommodation for men and horses. It is not clear if at this point, having completed his seven years, William decided to return to civilian life for William Meadows with number 6021, who we know to be the correct man did not enter the warzone until January 1915.

Meanwhile the officers of the 15th spent time competing in various polo competitions and possibly, like Siegfried Sassoon, some went fox hunting. But very soon war loomed and, on 18th August 1914, the Battalion arrived in Rouen in France and their world changed. The Battalion was split up into three separate squadrons and each was attached to a different Army Division. At first, the terrible stupidity of the cavalry charge against modern weapons was ignored. It was a lesson that should have been learnt at the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War in 1854, some sixty years earlier. Policing duties in South Africa were one thing, charging against machine guns was quite another. In the *Rushden Echo* of 20th November 1914, local man Private Sharpe reported to the parents of another local trooper:

. . . Harry was the only one who returned after a glorious charge of the 15th Hussars, and he was on foot when he reached the British lines, his horse having been shot from under him.

If, as seems likely, he did miss these naive early encounters, he was very fortunate. The main task of the Hussars, however, was as reconnaissance units, trying to report on enemy positions and movements. When William arrived in France in late January 1915 trench warfare was already establishing itself as the major fighting regime. The three squadrons of the 15th were still in separate Divisions with A Squadron billeted in a farm near Mont Noir, B Squadron near Locon and C Squadron in Bethune. The Regimental History records:

The town of Bethune, which was still almost untouched by gun-fire, became quite gay, the streets were crowded, the shops all did a roaring trade and the cafes were always full. The mining country where both B and C Squadrons now found themselves, the prominent pilons and fosses [pitheads] and the acres of mining cottages, seemed at first very strange after the Aisne and Ypres country but this area became later on very familiar to everyone in the Regiment, as it did indeed to the whole British Army.



*Bethune after the German Offensive in August 1918
©IWM (Q11257)*

The Regimental History continues by describing the role that the 15th and the other Divisional Cavalry units played at the time.

During the ordinary period of trench warfare the squadrons of divisional cavalry did not as a rule have very much fighting to do, but they were by no means idle, as there were many different duties upon which they were employed. There were examining posts to be found on bridges and cross roads, guards over headquarters and important buildings. The various brigade and divisional headquarters had to be supplied with mounted orderlies. The Provost Marshal also required his share of men for traffic control and various other duties. The remainder of the men had to be ready at a moment's notice, for they acted as a mobile reserve in the event of anything serious taking place.

On 10th March the Battle of Neuve Chapelle was fought but the 15th were not called into action. You feel that, without the "charge", the army was not quite sure what to do with the Hussars, to use their mobility to best advantage, in the increasingly static warfare.

It is not a surprise, therefore that on 9th April 1915 the three squadrons were ordered to leave their respective divisions and were once more re-united as a Regiment and became part of the 9th Brigade with the 19th Hussars, the Warwickshire Royal Heavy Artillery and, later, the Bedfordshire Yeomanry.

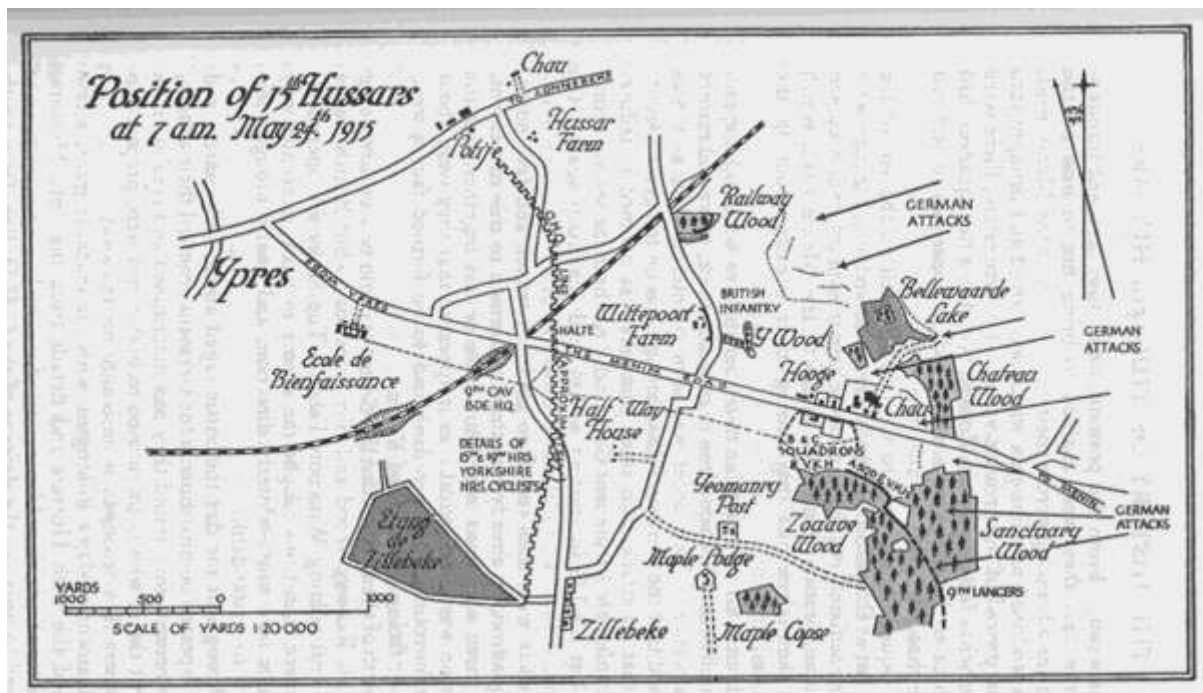
They began training as a unit again but, at 7.45 am on 23rd April, without prior warning they were ordered to saddle up. The panic was caused by the Germans using poison gas shells. On the 24th the 15th moved to a wood and spent the whole night and the following day there in the pouring rain. On the 28th, however, William and the rest of the Battalion had to proceed to a farm a mile west of Ypres as a digging party. Under the direction of the Royal Engineers they dug new trenches next to a canal north of the city. But the Germans were forcing an Allied retreat and new trenches had to be dug anew as the Front Line gave ground. At this time there was a severe shortage of ammunition so often the troops had to huddle in the trenches as the German bombardment went unanswered.

On 13th May 1915 the Germans launched the heaviest bombardment of the war so far. Following this German assault, the 15th were part of an attempted counter attack. The History records:

At midnight, in pitch darkness and in pouring rain, the 15th Hussars formed up, and with fixed bayonets advanced to the assault of the German trenches, the position of which was only vaguely known. The reader can well imagine how very difficult and hazardous was this task. Luckily an officer who had been through the First Battle of Ypres remembered a track which led to the ruins of a farm near which the German trenches were supposed to run. The Regiment was thus enabled to keep its direction, and to the relief of everybody the trenches were found abandoned by the enemy. They were, however, badly knocked about, and almost untenable, consisting for the most part of shell holes filled with liquid mud. Our dead, our dying and our wounded were lying in all directions, mostly from the 8th Cavalry Brigade and the first thing to be done was to evacuate the wounded.

It was decided, however that these trenches were not defensible and a new line further back was dug by the Hussars. The men were tired and wet but from 3 am they worked feverishly in the rain to provide some cover from the enemy. Fortunately, the next morning dawned with heavy mist and they were able to make some reasonable trenches. The Hussars had originally been based on the colourful Hungarian Hussars and had prided themselves on their glamorous uniforms. Now they were in khaki and there was little glamour.

On the 18th May 1915 at 6.45 pm the 15th Hussars left their huts at Vlamertinghe and marched one and a half miles to Ypres where they occupied some five hundred yards of Front Line from the stables at Hooze Chateau to Sanctuary Wood. These trenches were in a terrible condition with mud and water over two feet deep in some sections, there was little defensive wire and there were no communication trenches behind the line. At night the men worked to improve the trenches, put up wire and dug communication trenches. All the time they were under the threat of sniper fire and occasional machine-gun bursts.



Map by Captain C Shaw (15th Hussars) from The History of The Kings Hussars 1914-1922

On 23rd/24th May the 15th were relieved by the 9th Lancers. Fortunately for the 15th, it was only now that the Germans released clouds of poison gas and attacked behind it. The 9th Lancers suffered badly but the gas thinned further back, and in spite of the inadequate gas masks, the 15th had only light casualties. Captain Stanhope of C Company realising that the Lancers were in trouble moved forward to assist. The other two companies also moved into the Front Line and there was heavy fighting. Despite lost ground by the Allies, the Germans failed to break through. It was probably during this turbulent period that William Meadows was wounded.

I have put "probably" because we do not have detailed records of William for this period and the man recorded as wounded had Regimental Number 1045 (not 6021). There is,

however, no trace of another William Meadows with this number in the 15th and it seems very likely that it is our man and some mistake has been made in the ambulance train. As Peter (PRC), on the *Great War Forum* has pointed out.

Don't put all the blame on sloppy record keeping by the RAMC medical clerks - you may have a badly injured GSW victim, doped out of his mind on pain relief and speaking in a regional accent, it may be dark, his injuries may have made his ID disc unreadable or lost, none of his mates are with him, the tag from any earlier medical assessment has been lost or disfigured and it's fairly clear this guy needs to be moved on asap once stabilised and there are more coming in. The clerk isn't likely to get a second chance.

On the 25th May William was taken first to No. 3 Casualty Clearing Station, where he would have been assessed and then, because of the severity of his “gunshot wounds” caused by a shrapnel shell he was loaded on No. 5 Ambulance Train and taken back to England on a hospital ship.

Luckily, later records do seem to confirm that he was our man. They state that he was in France between 26th January 1915 and 27th May 1915 when he was brought back to England dangerously ill from shrapnel wounds and was treated at the Military Hospital in Aldershot. I think that the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that has him wounded and demobilised was based on information from this period and William had disappeared from local view.

He did return to France, however, but over a year later, on 19th July 1916 and it seems likely that this was when he joined the Royal Engineers. Had his injuries made horse-riding difficult or was there now less demand for cavalry? He was given the Regimental Number 357555. We have no detailed records of his service with the Engineers except that he was promoted to Corporal. In view of his later career, he also picked up what we would now call “transferable skills”. He probably served with the RE until the 2nd May 1918

The Royal Flying Corps had been formed as a unit within the Royal Engineers but on 1st April, it, together with the Royal Naval Air Service, became an autonomous body, the Royal Air Force. The RFC had worked hard to slow the German advance during the Michael Offensive ensuring that the controlled retreat of the Allied Armies did not turn into a rout. The battle reached its peak on 12 April, when the newly formed RAF dropped more bombs, and flew more missions than on any other day during the war. The cost to halting the German advance was high however, with over 400 aircrew killed and 1000 aircraft lost to enemy action. It may be that William was part of an urgent drive to recruit replacement pilots

On 4th May 1918 William Meadows joined the new organisation and was given another Regimental Number 319080. He seems initially to have remained as a Corporal, the RAF only introducing its own ranking system in 1919. He would have returned to England on the 2nd May and undergone the training to become a pilot which by this time was an 11-month structured course. He first went to the Cadet Distribution Depot (CDD), was deemed “Fit as Pilot” on the 17th May and was posted to the 16TTW (Transition to War?) on the 25th. On the 2nd June he was sent to the 10th Cadet Wing where he would have had a two-month course which included drill, physical training, military law, map reading and signalling using

Morse code. His record shows that he moved to the 5th Squadron of the RAF but the RAF Museum website states that he would have moved to a Training Depot Station (TDS) where he would have completed a minimum of 25 hours elementary flying training, both dual and solo, on Avro 504 aircraft logged over three months followed by a second phase of 35 hours flying time with five hours on a modern front-line type of aircraft. Students also had to demonstrate proficiency in cross-country and formation flying, reconnaissance work and gunnery. Finally, the men completed the training in the skills they would need to survive in combat.

By the time that he had completed his training the war was over and it may be that William did not complete this final phase until later. On the 18th December 1918 he was posted to a Rest Camp near Bedford and then, on the 3rd March 1919, to Crystal Place which was used by the RAF as a Ground School and balloon observation station. Perhaps it was here that he finished his training and was permitted to wear his Pilot's Wings. His records show that he was "Discharged to Commission" on 5th April 1919. He was now an officer.

The periods of training outlined by the RAF Museum website do not seem to fit exactly to the records of William's movements but I think that it is approximately correct. It also seems likely that soon after gaining his wings that William left the RAF. When we look at the brief record of his RAF career there is a surprising entry that decided his future career. His permanent home residence is shown as c/o Sir Charles Walpole, Broadford, Chobham, Woking, Surrey. In 1926 Walpole was found dead in his London home in Kensington Court, having committed suicide with a shotgun. He was said to have been suffering with sunstroke. Charles Walpole's gardener at his Broadford estate had also been diagnosed with sunstroke when he threw himself under a train on his wedding day in 1899. Was there any connection?

One of Charles's sons, John Robsart Walpole, had been a regular soldier who re-joined in WW1 and was killed on 1st July 1916. More relevantly, another son, Charles Archibald, was the Manager of the *Anglo-Persian Oil Company*. When William married on August 2nd 1924 his occupation was "Engineer" and it seems certain that he had already joined the Anglo-Persian (or later Anglo-Iranian) Oil Company. His new wife was Marianne (or Marianna) Alice Stokes, of Paris Farm, Lingfield, Surrey. At the time of the marriage William was living in Powis Square in Bayswater, about one-and-a-half miles from Kensington Court, Charles Walpole's London home. We can see William's direction of travel by the profession he had given for his father, which was "Gentleman". The Electoral Rolls show that William Meadows senior did have the right to vote which meant that he had some land interest but his fellow shoemakers would have been surprised by this description of him.

The 1911 Census for Wisbech in Cambridgeshire shows Marianne Stokes staying with her older sister and her husband. It shows her as 28 years old and a hospital nurse. It also describes her as a "British Subject by Parentage" born in Coney Hall in West Wickham in Kent. Her father, William was a farmer at Coney Hall Farm. The whole estate was later sold and became an area of the London Borough of Bromley.

Marianne was living in a bungalow on Paris Farm and through the 1920s the Electoral Rolls show her there but not William. On the 26th September, only weeks after his marriage, William Meadows, a “Driller” was on the British Tanker Company’s *British Mariner* bound for Abadan in Iran. The tanker company was part of *Anglo-Persian Oil Company*. It seems likely that most of William’s life was spent working on the oilfields in Persia. He was at home sometimes, however, and on 10th August 1926 Marianne gave birth to a son, William and she travelled with him and her husband to Abadan from Swansea on the *British Viscount*, on 27th November 1927. They were not together long for in 1930 Marianne died and was buried in the churchyard of St Peter and St Paul in Lingfield. Within the next few years William married Olga Mary Oldham, some twenty years his junior, in the British Consulate in the inland port town of Mohammersh [Khorramshahr] in Persia. Olga had been born in the Goldstone District of Surrey.

As we have seen, William had become a driller, which was a team leader in charge of oil well drilling. The driller also led the crew and the running of the rig, monitoring and dealing with any emergencies. It was an important role and as we have seen, meant that most of his life would have been on the oilfields. We see again that he left Falmouth on 12th October 1932 for Abadan. This time the tanker ship was the *British Commodore* and William’s occupation was given as “Petroleum Engineer”. His intended country of permanent future residence was given as Persia.

In the *London Gazette* of 12th June 1947, under “Foreign Services” in the Civilian Division, William Meadows, Driller, Anglo Iranian Oil Company Ltd [The title changed in 1935 and later became British Petroleum]. was awarded the British Empire Medal for “Meritorious Service”. Was it for service during the Second World War? With reason, the Iran government had always believed that it was not receiving as large a share of the oil profits as it was entitled to and there were always tensions. In 1941, the British and Russians occupied Iran to safeguard the oilfields and secure a safe supply route to the USSR, although a number of the tankers were sunk by the Germans during the war. A continuing supply of oil was vital to the Allies’ war effort.

On 10th June 1948 William Meadows, engineer, aged 58, sailed with Olga (38) and their 4½ year-old daughter, Dawn. The port of departure was Banare E Mahshahr [Bandar-e Mahshahr] and was heading for Grangemouth in Scotland. The intended future country of residence was still given as Iran. Their residence in England was now Woodglade in Lingfield.

There appears to have been one last voyage, when William, now 60, with Olga, 49, and six-year-old daughter Sylvia (Dawn was Sylvia’s second name) who had been born in Ahwaz in Iran. William was now shown as retired. The arrival date was the 17th June 1949 and they were heading for Wood Glade in New Chapel Road, Lingfield. I believe that, at about this time, the couple bought a large Georgian house in Wells-next-the-Sea called Marsh House. When we look for William’s death, there is one last surprise. The entry reads:

MEADOWS, William de Warrenne, otherwise William of Marsh House, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk. Died 5th April 1976. Probate Ipswich 18 June. £16,487.

At 87, William's gentrification seems complete. Olga lived to be 81 and died on 22nd January 1990, leaving £251,276. She had continued to live in Marsh House.

We have seen a remarkable journey for William Meadows from a poor childhood marred by tragedy. He had been badly injured in the First World War but it also gave him access to a successful career. Did he ever go back to Ringstead to visit those who stayed behind? All these brief biographies only give a glimpse of lives now gone but with William, more than most, you need the personal accounts of family or friends to join the public record dots together.

Chapter 39

Victor Marshall Moon (1896-1916)

Victor Marshall Moon was not listed in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*. The Moon family were constantly on the move and Ringstead was just a port of call in their travels. When war came they were living elsewhere. His father, George Thomas Moon was born in Finedon in 1873, son of furnace labourer, John Moon and wife Louisa. George did not follow his father's trade but became a finisher in a shoe factory and on 17th September 1894 he married Esther Judge.

Esther was the daughter of Thomas Judge, a painter and glazier from Brackley and wife Martha who had been born in Radstone. In the 1881 Census the Judges were living in Kettering Road, Northampton. We see that it was another family that was always on the move. The children had been born in Waddington and Stone in Buckinghamshire and Brackley and Northampton in Northamptonshire.

Were the family of gypsy stock? Certainly the wandering life was to continue for the young couple. In the 1901 Census they are living in Westfields, Raunds and we can see from the birthplaces of the children that they had lived in Finedon, Ringstead, and Irthlingborough before Raunds. It was in Raunds that Esther lost her nine-month-old son, Ernest William, who died of "Convulsions" on 4th January 1905. The family were living in Francis Terrace at the time which is in the Westfields area. They were soon on the move again. The *National School Admissions Register* for Old in Northamptonshire show that three children, Victor, Annie and Raymond, had been admitted to the local school on 1st March and Lewis on 26th April 1909. Previous to this, they had been at Walgrave School, just a few miles away. It also shows that they all left the school and the area on 7th June 1909, just three months later. The parent's name was shown as Thomas Moon but the use of a second name was a common practice.

The family moved on again and in the 1911 Census were living in Wymington, just south of Rushden. We see that a new child, Rhoda Alice, had been born in Old in 1910 so the move to Wymington cannot have been long before the Census. There has been a major change in the family, however, because George Thomas Moon has disappeared and the head of the household is shown as Stanley Underwood, aged 46, and also born in Finedon like George.

The children attended the South End School in Rushden and the *Admissions Register* shows that a son, Lewis Arthur Moon, had started at the school on 6th November 1911. The person in the Guardian/Parent column is Esther Moon who was now living at 48 Crabb Street in Rushden. Surprisingly, for Elsie Rhoda Moon, who entered on 13th May 1912 the parent/guardian was shown as George Thomas Moon. Finally, there is another son called Herbert Stanley Underwood Moon, on 9th November 1914, and his parent/guardian was shown as Joseph Stanley Underwood of 48 Crabb Street.

It seems certain that [Joseph] Stanley Underwood was Esther's new partner. Strangely, George Thomas Moon seems to disappear from the official records. Did he die, change his name, emigrate or take to the road where he went unrecorded. There are many George Moons in the records but none seem to match our man.

It is George and Esther's son, Victor Marshall Moon, born on 9th September 1896, who we are concerned with in this biography. He probably finished his education at Old School in 1909 and, in 1911, was at Wymington with his mother and her new partner. In the period soon after the Census he probably moved with his family to 48 Crabb Street in Rushden and started work at Knights, a large Rushden boot manufacturer.

Whether it was the upheaval in his family, or a need to find a more exciting career, he joined the army before the war. In March 1913 he, along with a few shoe workers, had been summoned for gaming with cards at Rushden. Card playing in all forms was extremely popular with the shoemakers, and gambling was also prevalent. He was fined 10s. 6d. including costs. Was his enlistment a way of getting away from bad company? Whatever the reason he enlisted with the Northamptonshire Regiment at Northampton, probably later that year and was given Regimental Number 9745

Although most of Victor's military records have been destroyed we do have a great insight into his time in the trenches from articles in the Rushden and Wellingborough newspapers. These have been transcribed by Nicky Bates and posted on the Rushden Heritage website and I would recommend that anyone interested should read the full account.



Victor Moon in uniform
With thanks to Rushden & District History Society

The 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment, at the beginning of the war, was stationed at Dettingen Barracks at Blackdown, a "suburb" of the large Aldershot Camp. The *Regimental History* describes it as a "collection of huts erected at the South African War". It was after this war that the British Army had been re-organised and an "Expeditionary Force" had been formed. This had some 160,000 men divided into six Divisions with a Cavalry

Division and “line of communication” troops. Every Division consisted of three Infantry Brigades, each of four Battalions and had 76 guns and a quota of cavalry, engineers etc. The 1st Northamptonshire Regiment was in the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Division. It all seemed a great improvement, and it was far better than the mass of individual units with their own organisation that had gone before. Unfortunately, the Great War was also different to anything that had gone before and the army nearly cracked under the strain.

There were delays between Victor’s letters to his mother, and their publication so it is sometimes difficult to be sure of dates or even months. As we have seen the 1st Northamptonshires were in Aldershot but, in a letter home, Victor wrote in late September or early October 1914 that he was billeted with E Company in Weymouth and was having “a fine time by the sea”. Now the 8th (Reserve) Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment was formed in Weymouth in October 1914. It may be that he was in training with the 8th when the 1st Battalion embarked for France on 12th August and so missed the chaotic retreat after the Battle of Mons and also the Battle of the Marne.

The minimum age for joining the Regular Army was eighteen, although, theoretically you needed to be nineteen before being sent abroad for foreign service. Many recruits did not have birth certificates and usually their age was taken as told to the recruiting officer. The youngest soldier known to have fought in the First World War was twelve years old.

Soon after he had written home, he had been ordered to the Western Front and joined the 1st Battalion in a position a few miles from Le Bassee on 12th November 1914. He later told a Rushden Echo “representative” in the bullish language of a new recruit.

This was my first experiences of war in any shape. . . It was night when we got to the firing line, and you could hardly realise what all the confused noises meant. A burning haystack near to us showed the enemies our movements. Bullets kept coming ‘ping, ping’ all around us. A few yards at a time we progressed, one lot laying down firing while the others ran a short distance with bayonets ready to stick any German that came near enough. In this way we eventually got to the trenches we were aiming at. . .

. . . The following morning, the trenches we had won were lost to the Germans, who stormed them too hotly for us. Some of the trenches were so full of water that it came up nearly to your neck!

He told how he had seen a body badly mutilated and how it had affected him badly. He continued:

But since then I have seen thousands of bodies similarly mutilated, and they do not affect me quite so much. One can get used to sights even as bad as that in time. I have known bodies to lie for three weeks before it was possible to bury them.

It seems that the interview with Victor took place when he was in hospital or recuperating in England after he had been wounded in the head. The report date was 3rd February 1915 although the actual wound may have happened earlier. It seems now, perhaps from his

mother, that it had been discovered that he was not yet nineteen years old. He would have reached the necessary age on 9th September 1915 but did not return to France until November.

The 1st Northamptonshires had fought in the inconclusive Battle of Loos which took place from 25th September to 8th October 1915 on the Western Front. It was the biggest British attack of 1915 and the first time that the British used poison gas and also the first mass engagement of the “New Army” units.

It was not a success and no breakthrough was achieved. The 1st lost ten Officers and 362 Other Ranks during the action. The Battalion was then not in any major battle until the summer of 1916. Victor was not to see the summer because, on 8th or 9th April 1916, he was seriously wounded in the abdomen, back, head and arm. After the battle the Northamptonshires were in billets in Les Brebis, a mining village, about eight miles south-east of Bethune, before moving up as a Reserve Battalion behind the Front Line at Loos. The War Diary tells of the 8th April:

Quiet day – Relieved 2/KRRC in front line. Signallers Adv[ance] Parties, Lewis Gunners, and Crater Parties at 3 P.M. C1 move 7.15 pm. Relief completed about 10 p.m. 2/Lt G.H. Crawford was killed in front of HART’s CRATER by a fragment of shell.

No sign of anyone else being injured, but Other Ranks rarely reached the *War Diaries*, except as occasional statistics.

There was, however, more activity the following day so I think that the 8th is a typing error and he probably died on the 9th as the official records show. The War Diary for the 9th April records:

Enemy active with rifle grenades. Capt. MARTIN of the right company wounded in the head by a fragment of one. We retaliate with Trench Mortars. . .

. . . About 10.30 am a small party of Bombers went into SEAFORTH SAP beyond our barrier and got under the near lip of Rifleman’s Crater. From there they threw bombs into the crater. Then Pte. Neville crawled up the lip and looked into the crater. He saw 6 dead Germans but no live ones. No defensive works but three holes supported by wooden frames. Possibly entrances to dug-outs. The party then returned to our barrier in the Sap.

It seems likely that somewhere in this activity that Victor was badly wounded. He was taken to the *33rd Casualty Clearing Station*, which would probably have been a tented area behind the line with a basic operating theatre. It was from there that the Chaplain wrote to Victor’s mother that his condition was critical. It was probably obvious that he was not going to survive. According to another Northamptonshire soldier, H.J. Partridge, Victor had been wounded in the morning and died that same night and he did not think “that he suffered much”. The Chaplain gave the time of death as 8pm and told Esther that:

He sent you his love and said you were not to fret over him.

It may have been so, but if it was otherwise, who would tell a grieving mother?

We see in the photograph and in his interview and letters that he was an optimistic, cheerful young man, much loved by his mother. Many thousands like him were buried in the cemeteries of France or still lie strewn under the fields of France and Belgium. He was buried the day after his death at the Bethune Town Cemetery, Pas de Calais, Grave III. G.47. He was entitled to the 1914 Star and British War and Victory Medals.

In Rushden, as we see today by roadsides after traffic deaths, shrines were erected to the dead in various streets. Crabb Street had its own, with flowers and Union Jacks, which, in March 1917, had the names of six young men including Victor Moon.

After her early travels, Esther had now settled and, in 1939, she was still living at 48 Crabb Street. She died in July 1956.

