THE GREAT WAR

1914 - 18

Ringstead Men
Who Served
N to Z

David Ball

THE GREAT WAR

1914 -18

Ringstead Men who Served

N - Z

David Ball

Contents

Introduction		***ix***
Chapter 1	**George Herbert Newell**	**1**
Chapter 2	**Joseph Arthur Norris**	**9**
Chapter 3	**The Peacock Family**	**15**
Chapter 4	**John William Pearson**	**29**
Chapter 5	**The Pentelow Family**	**31**

Chapter 6 Charles William Pettitt 35

Chapter 7 The Phillips Family 39

Chapter 8 Walter Shedrick Pitts 49

Chapter 9 Oliver John Pothecary 53

Chapter 10 The Roberts Family 57

Chapter 11 The Ruff Family 69

Chapter 12 The Sawford Family 79

Chapter 13 Alfred Edward Shaw 93

Chapter 14 William Sibley 97

Chapter 15 George Slack 103

Chapter 16 George Stanley Smart 107

Chapter 17 Sydney William Smith 111

Chapter 18 The Other Smith Families 117

Chapter 19 Frederick Sykes 135

Chapter 20 Harry Tilley and Horace Edwin Tilley 139

Chapter 21 Thomas Alfred Tomlin 143

Chapter 22 The Walker Families 149

Chapter 23 John Thomas Watts 161

Chapter 24 The Weekley Families 165

Chapter 25 Percy Reginald Wilson 189

Chapter 26 Evelyn Wood 195

Chapter 27 A Few Other Men that the *Roll of Honour* Missed 201

***References* 213**

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

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 were 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 we see in the accounts which include family pictures and reminiscences, how much more of the person we see.

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.

Chapter 1

George Herbert Newell (1888-1970)

In the life story of William Meadows, we saw how his early life was chaotic but how it seemed to produce in him a desire to seek his fortune elsewhere, with the war being the catalyst for these changes. George Herbert Newell also had a childhood, separated from his parents, but he remained in Ringstead and became an asset to his home village.

George was born on 9th June 1888 in Ringstead and baptised on January 24th 1892, the son of John and Sarah Ann Newell. John Burrows (sometimes Burris) Newell had married Sarah Ann Coleman on 25th October 1886. John was the son of shoemaker Zephaniah and Hannah, a shoe closer, and had been born in Chelveston.

In 1891, Sarah Ann Newell was living in Church Street in Ringstead with her three children. Frank, the eldest, had the surname Coleman and was six years old so born before his mother's marriage. The other two children were Kate (3) and George (2) and he is the subject of this story. We can also see that the father, John Newell is missing. Have the couple split up so quickly?

When we look for John, we find him lodging at South Lodge in Edgeware in Middlesex with gardener William Berry and his wife. He was a poultryman and servant, perhaps at the Elstree Hill School, or one of the large houses nearby. We see that he had been looking for work so that he could bring his family down to the big city. By 1901 the family had come together again and were living at 13 Plough Road in Battersea. John now works as a Railway Carman and oldest son Frank also worked on the railway as a "Carman Vanguard". Carmen were employed by the rail companies to make local deliveries from the stations and goods yards and to bring parcels to the station. Frank was probably working with his father keeping an eye on the delivery items while his father delivered and was away from the cart. Kate was also at home and there were new children Arthur (9), Mabel (6) Elsie (3) and John (1). The three younger children were born in Battersea so Arthur was the last child born in Ringstead. It seems that the family moved to London in the mid-1890s.

But where was George? If we look back at Ringstead in 1901 we see him there, aged 13, living with his widowed grandmother Ann Major, a boot closer. We know from a later newspaper article that George had returned to Ringstead when he was nine years old, so some four years before the Census. What we do not know is why George, of all the children returned to his home village.

His family settled down to big city life. Plough Road was close to Clapham Junction, an important railway hub. By 1911 they had moved to Shakespeare Avenue in Harlesden, near Willesden another large Railway area. John aged 49 was still a carter for the railway as was his son, Arthur while Mable (Mabel) was an electric globe maker and the younger children, including a new daughter, Clara (5) were all still at school.

But George never joined them and seems to have settled well into village life. In about 1905 he had joined the Juvenile section and had become a "Junior Warden" in the National United Order of Free Gardeners whose origins were in Scotland in the Seventeenth Century. This was one of the many Friendly Societies which, rather like the Freemasons, provided comradeship, and an early form of "National Insurance" held together by strange symbols and rites and talk of ancient secrets. For many working families the "Gardeners" helped them in times of financial stress and saved them from destitution. The Ringstead branch was known as Clove Lodge and George continued with this association for much of his life. He was also a keen footballer and played into the 1920s, for Ringstead, Raunds and Thrapston. Like others who met on the playing fields of Ringstead, his career was to be interrupted by the coming of a terrible war.

George as the goalkeeper for Ringstead Reserves 1922/23
With thanks to Jon Abbott

In 1910 George had married local woman, Eliza Jane Giddings, some seven years his senior. She too, had a complicated family background. She had been born in Peterborough but in 1891 was living with her unmarried grandmother, Dinah Giddings, who in the 1881 Census was, unusually, described as the "Mistress" of Daniel Major, her one-time lodger. It seems that Eliza Jane was the daughter of one of Dinah's children but I have not found the birth. By 1901 Dinah was in Thrapston Workhouse, now morphing into an old people's home for the poor working class. She died there, on 3rd July 1908 but her body was "collected by friends" and she was buried in Ringstead Cemetery.

By 1911 the couple were living in High Street in Ringstead with six-month old daughter, Lorna, born on 8th October 1910. Another child, Kenneth, followed on 5th June 1912. George was a married man with a young family but eventually the war machine came calling. We know that he served for three years and was demobilised in 1919 so it seems likely that he did not volunteer but was conscripted in early 1916.

Like a number of local men, he joined the "Suicide Club", the nickname given to the Machine Gun Corps and was given the Regimental Number 59100. Of the 170,500 officers and men who served in the Corps in the Great War, 62,049 men were killed, wounded or missing. He would have been sent to Belton Park, near Grantham in Lincolnshire. In 1915, the owner, Lord Brownlow, agreed to his land being used as a training base for the Machine Gunners. His estate was covered with one thousand huts, a railway, chapel, hospitals and stable. George would have been trained to use the Vickers machine gun and to be one of a

team. The carrying, setting-up and firing of the gun was heavy work and only the physically fit and intelligent were accepted.

The training period reduced as the need for casualty replacements became critical and may have been as short as six weeks. George was posted to the 62nd Machine Gun Company which was formed at Belton Park and sent to join the 21st Division on 4th March 1916 in France. It seems likely that George was with them. To get some idea how the men reached the Front during WW1 we will follow George on his journey from the *War Diary*.

The 62nd marched out of camp at 1 am on 24th February 1916 and arrived at Southampton at 10.30 am next morning. They embarked on a ship of the Australind Steam Ship Company in the afternoon but remained in Southampton Water until 3rd March waiting for favourable conditions. Eventually they arrived in Le Havre at 3 am on 2nd March. The Company disembarked, drew their winter clothing at 6.30 pm and marched to the train which left at 10.30 pm. At 8.30 am the next day they arrived at the railhead at Steinwerck. They detrained and marched some five or six miles to billets at Armentieres near the Belgian border, arriving there at 1 am, on the 4th March.

The life of the soldiers was full of fear, hardship, illness, tiredness but there were also long periods of boredom. The simple statement of a journey does not show how wearisome it would have been. The 62nd, however, did not have long to be bored after they arrived for, that same afternoon, they moved up twelve guns to the "subsidiary line and support points". Fortunately, there was no action by either side in this first session of three days in the trenches and they were relieved and returned to the billets in Armentieres.

This was the normal pattern of trench life on the Western Front from reserve to front line and rest. On 23rd they marched to La Crèche billets where they trained and were inspected. They then had a period of transit by train and marching between billets, finally reaching Mèaute, some sixty miles to the south, on 22nd April.

The War in 1916 was dominated by two major campaigns, the Battle of Verdun that lasted from February to December, which largely involved the French, and the Battle of the Somme which started on 1st July following an Allied bombardment greater than anything the war had seen up to that point. This first day is now remembered as the day when the British Army suffered more casualties than on any other single day in its history. On the 1st July the 62nd were moved up to Sunken Road in front of Crucifix Trench in a 21st Division attack to capture the village of Fricourt. The various battles along the Somme continued until November 1916 and we see the 62nd moving to where they were posted. In August they were in the Arras area but did not seem to have seen much action. Certainly the Captain, G.G.N. Hodge, the commander of the 62nd had time to issue minutely detailed instructions as to when and how the men should salute the officers.

By early 1917, the 62nd were in the Bethune and Vermelles area and by May were based at St Leger. By 1st July they were at the Hindenburg Line. It was in the following six months that they had a fierce challenge in the Third Battle of Ypres and then at Cambrai. In *Machine Gunner 1914-18*, C.E. Crutchley records the memories of a 62nd "front line runner":

My company was in the Bullecourt Sector during the summer months of 1917.

It was an area of devastation. The countryside was pitted with shell holes and only the stumps of once beautiful trees remained.

Our machine guns were set up amid the ruins on the outskirts of Bullecourt. It had been the scene of a big battle and when we took over there, bodies of dead soldiers still lay unburied. There was much strafing by day and night. Gunners not on duty rested in an old cellar of a house at the far end of the village. We had to share our rest billet with a team of trench-mortar men who had their gun fixed above us in the ruined house.

This soldier was appointed a messenger for the 62nd and we get some idea of the daily horror of trench life from his account.

Almost every day I had to pass along a deep trench which had been dug through the graves of soldiers.

Protruding from the sides of the trenches were portions of stockinged feet, and various parts of the human body. Although this spot was disinfected regularly by the pioneer squad, the stench was unbearable, and this was summertime and very hot weather.

Later in the year the 62nd were involved in the First Battle of Cambrai where tanks were an important part of the battle plan. Their task was to break through the German lines so that the infantry could follow in their wake. The machine gunners found it heavy work to keep up with this forward movement. They managed to get to the Hindenburg Line through the barbed wire and sniper fire and the next day reached a concrete dug-out which had been a German staff billet with beds and a wooden floor. They spent four nights around this area but as usual attack was followed by reaction. The "Gunner" wrote later:

On the morning of November 25th, 1917, the Germans launched a counter-attack, and I was once more a gunner with 62nd Machine Gun Company. The attack began in broad daylight, and looking across the valley on the opposite slope about half a mile away, I saw lines of field-grey figures steadily advancing, German artillery, supporting their infantry, sent over many gas shells, mixed up with shrapnel and H.E.'s. We quickly donned gas masks, sighted our machine-guns and opened fire on the grey figures, who rapidly withdrew to a distance our guns were unable to reach, and eventually disappeared in the valley below.

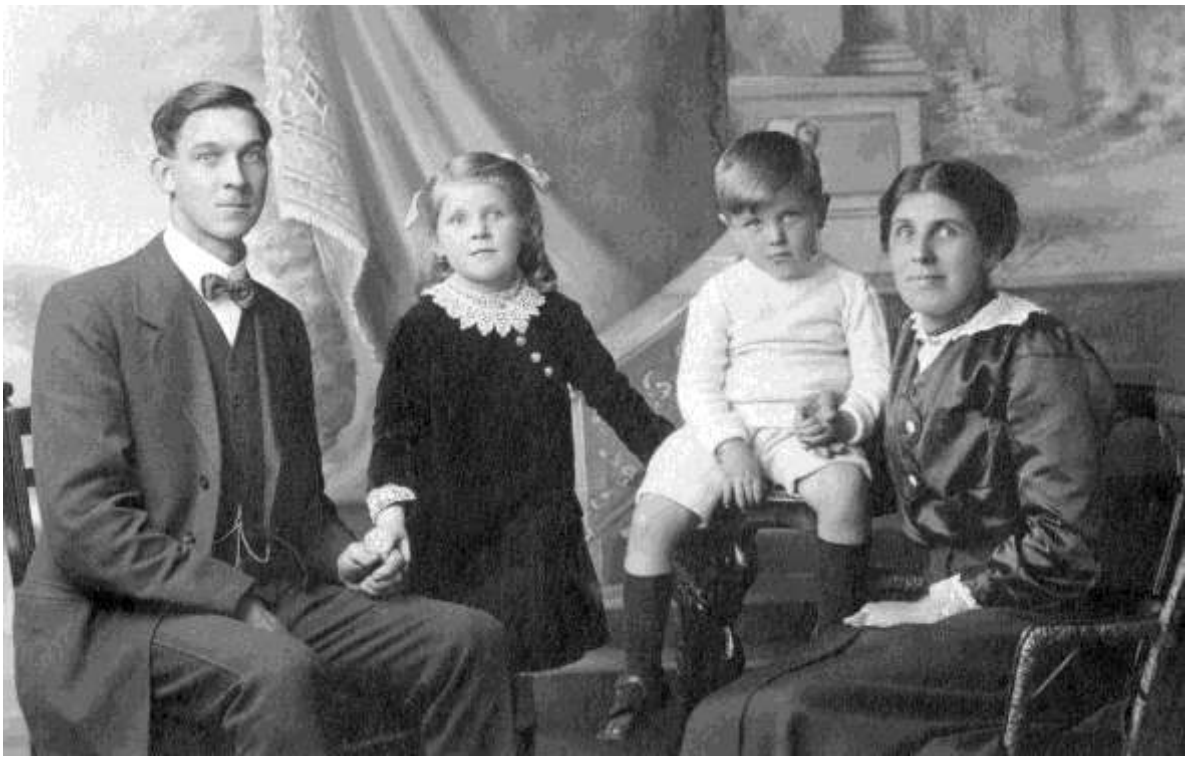
The 62nd and 51st Divisions held on all that day to the furthermost advanced positions reached in the initial attacks, but eventually the German counter-attack outflanked the British positions and forced a withdrawal. It was another nightmare experience.

By November the 28th we were back to where we had started. Many lessons were learnt at Cambrai regarding the use of tanks in open warfare, but the price in human lives was ghastly.

The Spring 1918 campaign was marked by the great German offensive which began in March. The 62nd Brigade Machine Gun Company had become part of the 21st Machine Gun Battalion on 24th February. On 19th March the Battalion's War Diary reported that the "enemy artillery ominously inactive". On 21st the Germans launched what they hoped would be the decisive offensive of the war. They attacked the British Third and Fifth Armies on the Somme in huge numbers. The 21st Machine Gunners were at the forefront of the battles that followed as they tried to stall the German assaults, and give the British troops covering fire, so that they could retreat in some order. As a result they were a prime target for the enemy and suffered many casualties. There was much ground lost by the Allies but the attrition of the machine gunners and the other troops gradually slowed the German onslaught to an exhausted halt.

As we have seen with the accounts of other soldiers, the tide slowly turned and the 21st Battalion of the Machine Gunners was part of the final advance into Picardy. At the Armistice on 11th November the Division was around Berlamont and on the 12th moved to Beaufort and then west to Amiens. Demobilisation began in January 1919 but it seems that George had to wait until 16th October 1919 for his release. We can see in the *Absent Voters List* for Ringstead that George may have become a V/L/Cpl which I take to mean that he acted as a Lance Corporal but was not paid for his promotion and was thus "Voluntary". He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

It would have been difficult time for his wife Eliza Jane (who seems to have been usually know as Janey) at home with her two children Lorna and Kenneth.



George with Eliza Jane and children Lorna and Kenneth
With thanks to Stephen Kett

At some time, probably before the war, George had become a handsewn bootmaker and he also continued with his interest in the National United Order of Free Gardeners. We can see in the local newspapers, his involvement. The 31st January 1930 issue of the *Northampton Mercury* celebrated George's appointment as District Manager and contained a short account of his part in the local area.

> *For 25 years he has been a member of the Clove Lodge, in which he has filled the offices successively of Junior Warden, Senior Warden, Deputy Master and Lodge Master. He was elected to the District Board in 1927 and has held various offices which lead up to the position he has now attained. He was in France for three years during the war with the Machine Gun Corps, and after demobilisation resumed his active interest in Friendly Society work generally and in that of the Free Gardeners particularly.*

It seems likely that it was at this time that he had his photograph taken in a local studio wearing his District Manager's collar of office.

George with his collar of office
With thanks to Stephen Kett

The same newspaper article also reported that he was the local secretary of the British Legion. We get a picture of a man who was willing to put time into helping his former comrades and the local community. He also seems to have had a wider interest in the

politics of the time and a clear view of his own beliefs. The reforming Labour Government, which had been elected by a landslide in 1945, at the end of another World War, introduced a National Insurance Bill in 1946 which would bring in a series of benefits to provide working people with some financial security in times of hardship and old age. This was seen by many in the movement as a threat to the Friendly Societies who had, for many years, struggled to help those in need. The members felt side-lined in the consultations for the new national scheme. I think George had a broader view [in the article it refers to *R* Newell but I think that this may be a mistake] which the *Mercury and Herald* reported in an article on a meeting of the "Gardeners".

> *The only voice of support for the Government came from Mr. R. Newell (Clove Lodge), Ringstead, who pleaded that politics should be left out of the discussion.*
>
> *"What would have been the position under a Conservative Government?" he asked. "Would the position have been the same? I have expressed the opinion that friendly societies would disappear, and now that time is at hand. Let us put our pettifogging ideas on one side and march towards the future".*

In fact, although the Friendly Societies lost many members, the Free Gardeners and others did survive. They were forced, however, to increase their charges and limit benefits in order to stay viable. The *Mercury and Herald* of 2nd February 1951 reported on a meeting of the Free Gardeners when an increase in charges had been proposed. George told the meeting that:

> *. . . his lodge, a small one, had lost some 50 members during the last two or three years. He was afraid an increase for the management fund of even 1d. might mean the loss of more members.*
>
> *Instead of building up capital he thought more should be used for benefits.*

Reading between the lines, we see that George felt that the time of the Friendly Societies was near its end. In 2000 the only lodge remaining in England was in Bristol but there are still some throughout the world and in 2002 a few lodges were re-opened in Scotland. Perhaps a sign of returning hard times.

Eliza Jane died in 1969 and George followed her in 1970, aged 81. He was one who stayed in the village of his birth but this did not stop him from leading a full and interesting life. Also, his descendant, Steven Kett, has written that he stayed close to his mother and father and the rest of the family throughout their lives. This bond was strengthened by the death of his youngest siblings, John in the First World War, and Clara on Armistice Day.

Chapter 2

Joseph Arthur Norris (1889-1931)

Like many of the young men who I have written about in these life stories, Joseph Arthur Norris's military records have been largely destroyed. He is different, however, in that I have not managed to find any evidence that he ever lived in Ringstead. However, he was put on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*, so it seems that he was for a time in the village and it may just be the lack of public records that have hidden his residence, perhaps in his early married life. We will assume that he was entitled to have been included on the *Roll of Honour* and try to write his story.

Joseph, who sometimes used his second name, was born in Irchester in 1889, the son of George and Lillie Norris. George had married Lillie Goddard in 1887. I have not found a christening for Joseph but the couple's later children were christened in the Irchester Parish Church. I mention this because at some point the family became stalwarts of the Salvation Army. This had been formed in 1865 in the East End of London so was still a young organisation in the 1880s and 1890s. It was an inclusive organisation and, although it thought baptisms and other rites unnecessary, it did not denounce them.

In the 1901 Census the family were living in London End in Irchester and there were seven children Fanny, Thomas, Joseph, Edith, George, Elsie and Doris. George was still a shoe finisher and all the children, including Doris who was less than a year old, had been born in Irchester. The oldest child, Fanny, has the surname Goddard, so was born before the marriage but is shown as George's daughter.

By 1911 the family had moved to Highfield Cottages in Raunds. These were a terrace of houses at the top of Marshalls Road, built beside the Coggin's Shoe factory for its workers. In the same Census we see two women living together in 7 Primrose Hill in Raunds. Louise Harrison was 25 years old and from Staffordshire and Edith Clifton was 25 and from Buxted in Sussex. They were both Salvation Army Officers. In 1901 Edith had been an under housemaid in Tunbridge Wells. The Salvation Army had not been welcomed there at first, and the Salvationists had been met with sticks and stones when they marched to the Common for outdoor preaching. They became accepted and a Salvation Army Citadel had been built in 1886. Was it here that Edith was converted and joined the "Army"?

The First World War came in 1914 but, at first, Joseph was not called to fight. He was working in a local factory as a shoehand which may have given him some exemption. He had also been a Salvationist since 1906, along with at least some of his family. It was in his involvement with the Army that he would have met the two young female officers and it was Edith Clifton who became his wife early in 1915. They had a child, Ivy, who was born in the second quarter of 1917.

We know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that Joseph was called up to the 5th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment. He was given Regimental Number 43673. The 5th was one of the new "Pioneer" Battalions which were created in 1914 to provide skilled labour for the Royal Engineers and to relieve the infantry from tasks other than combat. The 5th Northamptonshires had been formed in August 1914 but did not land in France until 30th May 1915 and took part in the Battle of Loos.

Unfortunately we do not know when Joseph joined the army or when he was posted to the Western Front except that, because he was not entitled to the 1914/15 Star, it was not until 1916 at the earliest. I have tried to find a similar Northamptonshire Regimental Number but have not managed to find a soldier whose entry date is known. By checking many soldiers of whom we have some idea of the time that they went to France I believe that it would probably have been at least late 1917 before he reached the Western Front. We do have evidence that shows that he was in Rouen on 9th July 1918.

Northamptonshire Regiment Badge (Regular Army badge would have battle honours).

It seems likely that Joseph was there when the German "Michael Offensive" took place and threatened to win the war. Although the Battalion was set up to help the infantry by doing non-combatant tasks they were often called upon to also join their fellow soldiers in the trenches.

We know that Joseph, if indeed he was in France, survived this attack. His brother, just a little older than Joseph, Thomas James Frederick Norris, had emigrated to Australia but returned and enlisted on October 23rd 1915. He was serving with the 7th Northamptonshires and had been promoted to Lance Corporal. On March 22nd 1918 he was killed in action. The *Rushden Heritage* website has a report from the *Rushden Echo* of 26th April 1918 from a comrade of Frederick, as he was usually known:

> *. . . two of their company were wounded, one could walk and the other could not. Lance-Corporal Norris, with three others, rushed out to fetch them in, and a shell came and killed them all.*

When and how did Joseph hear of his brother's death? Was he told by an officer in his regiment or was it a letter from home? He would probably have received another letter from home some two months later, telling him of the death of his younger sister, Doris. She was only seventeen years old and had been ill for some time. The local newspapers reported:

> *A full Salvation funeral was conducted at the Citadel by Captain Cecil Chapman; a band attended, made up by Wellingborough, Rushden and Raunds bandsman, also a number of small girls, dressed in white and each carrying a bunch of white flowers,*

represented the Sunday School. The procession marched to the cemetery, where Captain Chapman oversaw the interment watched by a gathering of nearly 200, many from the Regulation Boot Company and Messrs Adams Bros as well as family and other friends.

Had his time at the Front made him hardened to death? It is more likely that it added to the sorrow for the deaths of his comrades in arms. The *Wartime Memories Project* records that the 5th were in action at the Battle of Bapaume and spent the Spring engaged in heavy fighting as the enemy advanced across the old Somme battlefields. From then they were in constant action in the Battle of Amiens and then the final forcing of the Germans back to the Hindenburg Line and beyond. We can see Joseph's war in more details from the War Diary of the 5th Battalion

This was very different to the usual Infantry records. If we look at the entries from early February 1918 when the Battalion was at Sailly Sur La Lys we see:

Strength of Battalion on 1st February 1918.

Officers	*W.O. Class ll*	*Sgts*	*Cpls*	*Ptes*	*Total*	*Total all ranks*
34	*3*	*41*	*42*	*946*	*1029*	*1066*

Feb 1st 1917 [should be 1918] 'A' Company work on CHARRED POST, WINDY POST and Strong Point 'K' at M.6. Central, trench boarding, revetting and banking and repairing parados [banks at the rear of a trench]. 'B' Coy commenced work on a strong point at H.18. C. 3.3. [from a detailed trench map]. 'C' Coy continued work on strong point at M. 5. B. 1. 9. This is now almost completed. 'D' Coy continued work on FLEURIE SWITCH and BOIS GRENIER constructing new fire bays.

When the great German Offensive began in late March 1918, they had to put down their tools and pick up their rifles. The official history of the Northamptonshires records that:

The men of the 5th were rushed up by motor-buses to Albert and succeeded in holding up heavy attacks at a cost of 34 killed and 45 wounded.

On the 24th March they were sent to Bouzincourt to reinforce the 7th Norfolks and 7th Suffolks who were being overrun. They suffered 11 Other Ranks killed and 40 wounded with 23 missing and 5 shell shocked. The line could not hold and there were retreats to new Front Lines. Now the men were trying desperately to construct new defences but they also had to serve their time in the Front Line trenches.

By May we see the tide has turned and despite counter-attacks by the Germans, the Pioneers were now trying to repair and improve captured German trench systems. By July the War Diary entries are brief and although there is some trench work we see increased training and resting. It was during this period, unrecorded in the Diary, that the deadly "Spanish Flu" reached the Battalion. On 9th July 1918 Joseph, with some of his fellow 5th Northamptonshires soldiers, was struck down by the influenza. He was admitted to No. 1 Australian Hospital at Rouen but it is not recorded how long he was there before returning to duty.

The tented wards at 1st Australian General Hospital at Rouen (E03422).

There was still determined opposition from the Germans but there was also a continual Allied advance and by September the men of the 5th were repairing and constructing bridges, tracks and crossings and craters around Manancourt as well as still putting out wire to protect positions.

Now the Battalion were enjoying, "Training, rest and recreation at Aniche" They were trying to repair roads and bring back into use some of the infrastructure destroyed in the war. There was also time for practising the "March Past" ready for inspection on the 20th. From February 2nd to 4th 1919:

> *All companies employed on roads and making Divisional Racecourse and grandstands on Divisional Football Ground.*

The work had become mainly the repairing of roads, and other fatigues. We see the Battalion strength reducing as demobilisation increased. Also on 30th March 1919, at Aniche, the Diary records:

> *A draft of 1 Captain, w Subalterns, 1 C.S.M., 5 Sergts, 12 Corporals and 62 Privates were ordered to be despatched to 351 Prisoners of War Coy. BETHUNE. Only 1 Subaltern, I Sergt and 56 ORs can be found at present. . .*
>
> *31st March. Draft standing by for entrainment orders.*

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows that he was with the 351 Company but I have not managed to find where the camp that they were guarding was situated. It is most likely that it was at Bethune and was only there until all the Germany prisoners gathered at the end of the war were sent home. I have also had information that it might have been in Jersey but this seems less likely.

All we can say is that in 1919 or 1920 Joseph returned to Edith at 35 (or possibly 30) Brooks Road in Raunds. He took up his employment again as a finisher in Adams Brothers shoe factory and also continued with his work in the Salvation Army. We know that he had at some point the roles of Treasurer and also Bandmaster. Their only daughter, Ivy was an invalid and probably took most of Edith's time. In February 1931 Joseph, aged 42, had been distributing "self-denial week" envelopes in Leighton and Spaldwick with Captain Thomas Whitehead. It appears that they were both on motorcycles and, when on the Keyston to Bythorn Road, Joseph was in collision with a car driven by artificial stone contractor, Mr. F. Fentiman. He was knocked unconscious and Whitehead stayed with him while Fentiman went to Bythorn and telephoned Dr E. Gainer of Thrapston.

It does not appear that he regained consciousness and was taken home and seen by Dr McInnes of Raunds who ordered his removal to Northampton General Hospital. On February 22nd 1931 Joseph died of "laceration of the brain". His effects were £63 15s.

Early the following year Ivy, the invalid daughter of Joseph and Edith had also died. Edith now was on her own. I have not established certainly what happened to her after this double tragedy but it may be that she returned to the Royal Tunbridge Wells area where she had been a servant and, in 1939, was living with widow Edith Brown and was a "Daily Domestic Servant". If this was the correct person she died, aged 89 on 6th June 1975.

Chapter 3

The Peacock Family

The name Peacock has been in Ringstead at least since the Seventeenth Century, and first appeared in the Parish Registers with the christening of John Peacocke, son of John and Anne, on May 10th, 1629. We pick up the family with another John, christened on November 11th 1832. He married Jane Bates on 25th July 1856 and they had at least seven children: Eliza Jane, William, Sarah Ann, John Thomas, Sarah Ann again, Arthur Henry and Agnes, Both Sarah Anns died in infancy. Childhood was a dangerous time and between 1846 and 1865, nine children with the surname Peacock were buried in Ringstead Churchyard before their nineteenth birthday.

It is the two younger sons, John Thomas and Arthur Henry, whose own sons we will be looking at in this chapter. John Thomas had been baptised on 24th August 1864 with his seven-year-old brother William, and Arthur was baptised on 25th March 1867.

John Peacock ---------- Jane Bates
1832 – 1892 1837 – 1892
I
---------- I
Martha Ellen Bellamy --------John Thomas Peacock Arthur Henry Peacock ------Eliza Emma S. Bugby
1864 – 1928 1864 – 1896 1867 – 1957 1868 – 1956
I I I I
*Thomas **Cyril** **Horace** John **Thomas** Arthur E **Raymond***

A very simplified family tree to show the relationship of the four Peacock men, with the name they were usually known by, highlighted.

John Peacock, the father was a shoemaker and he and his wife, Jane were living in Church Street in 1871 with children William, aged 14 and an apprentice shoemaker, Eliza 10, [John] Thomas 8, Arthur 4 and youngest child Agnes two years old. By 1881 John Thomas had followed his father and become an apprentice shoemaker. Also living in Church Street was an army shoemaker called Michael Bellamy. He had been born in Sudborough but had married Ringstead girl Charlotte Childs and by 1881 there were seven children. Martha Ellen, the eldest, was seventeen years old and was a shoe stitcher. She like John Thomas preferred to use her second name.

The two obviously got to know each other because they married, both aged 20, on the 4th October 1883 in the local church. Perhaps surprisingly, at this late date, when John Thomas would have attended the village school, he made his mark on the Marriage Register although Martha Ellen signed her name in a clear hand. By 1891 the couple had four equally spaced children with Albert, the eldest seven and the youngest Oris (Horace) just one month old.

There was another dangerous incident prior to this, although we cannot be sure which John Peacock was involved. The Northampton Mercury of 6th August 1887 reported:

> *On Saturday morning, last week, an accident happened that might have resulted fatally. It appears that Mr Samuel Lockie went into the shop of a shoemaker named John Peacock. While there he took hold of a revolver and began to finger it about, not knowing it was loaded, when it went off and shot Mr Peacock in the thigh. Surgical aid was as soon as possible obtained and the ball extracted, and we understand that Peacock is progressing favourably*

Th couple had one more child, called Thomas, but a terrible tragedy struck the family before his birth. Ellen, pregnant with Thomas went to bed at about 11 o'clock on the 15th January 1896. She left her husband sitting by the fire reading by the light of a paraffin oil lamp. A few minutes later, he finished reading and started up the stairs to bed, carrying the lamp to light his way. Ellen heard a shout and then the crash of the lamp falling. She rushed out of their bedroom to see what had happened.

She saw Thomas enveloped in flames and ran back into her bedroom and opened the window and screamed for help. Amos Weekley, a neighbour, heard her screams and forced

the door open. He found John Thomas in flames and running about the house. Amos helped put out the flames and Thomas told him that that he had trod on his long shoemaker's apron on the stairs and fell forward on the lamp which at once caught fire and ignited his clothes.

A doctor was fetched and Thomas was taken to Northampton Infirmary suffering from severe burns to his right thigh and both hands. He survived for some six weeks but died on 27th February from "the shock to his system and the burns". His long survival may indicate that it was an infection which finally killed him, for this was still the most usual cause of death in burns cases.

At the inquest the jury returned a verdict of accidental death and the coroner, in summing up:

> *. . . commented on the regrettably large number of accidents caused through people using improper and unsafe lamps. He did not wish to praise any particular lamps but it was a grave misfortune that so many people had common lamps which easily caught fire, while there were so many kinds which did not allow the oil to escape into the flames.*

Ellen was left a widow with a young family and by 1901 she was living at 30 High Street in Ringstead with her five children aged from seventeen to four. Her younger sister, Ethel, a boot closer, was staying with her, perhaps also helping with the children. A year later, Ellen married widower Benjamin Phillips, a shoe worker in a local factory. In 1911 Benjamin and Ellen were living with Bert, Benjamin's young son from his first marriage and four of Ellen's children. Bessie aged 21 was a heel builder and Thomas, at fourteen, a "factory lad". Horace, aged 20, was working on a farm but it is Cyril, a year older, whose occupation is something of a surprise, for he was a hairdresser.

It was Cyril, Horace and John Thomas who fought in the Great War and it is their stories that we will first look at here.

Thomas Cyril Peacock (1887-1964)

In telling of the life of John Thomas Peacock Senior and his tragic death, after he had been badly burnt by an upset oil lamp, we briefly mentioned his second son Cyril, born on the 1st November 1886. Cyril first followed his father into the shoe trade and was shown as such in the 1901 Census. His father died in 1896 and his mother, left a widow with a young family, had married widower Benjamin Phillips in 1902.

Cyril had been baptised Thomas Cyril but he was known by his middle name, probably to distinguish him from his father, who also tended to use his own second name. At some time after the death of his father, perhaps because of difficult times in the military boot trade, he had become a hairdresser. The 1911 Census showed him living with his mother and stepfather but a year later, on August 12th 1912, he married Rose Brayfield in Raunds Parish Church.

Cyril and Rose
With thanks to Glenda Burton

Cyril joined up on 10th December 1915 and became part of an Army Reserve Battalion. At this time the army was made up of regulars and volunteers with single men being used first from the latter group. In the following month Parliament introduced conscription. It was a controversial measure and some ministers resigned but the carnage on the Western Front meant that the need for new men was urgent. Cyril had expressed an interest on his Attestation Form that he would like to be considered for the Royal Flying Corps which had only been formed some three years earlier and consisted of balloons and aircraft. It seems from his later career that Cyril may have been looking to be in the ground crew but what mechanical background he had is unclear.

When he took his army medical in 1915, Cyril was 29 years old. He was 5 feet 5 inches tall with blue eyes. He had a chest size of 33¼ inches and a "range of expansion" of 1¾ inches (this was later changed to 3 inches). The minimum height for conscription was 5ft. 3 inches but even this was reduced in the so-called "Bantam Regiments" as men died in their thousands. It was the revelation of the poor health and small size of many recruits in the First World War that stimulated the movement towards the Welfare State.

We know that, at first, he stayed in Ringstead and ran his own hairdressing shop in the High Street. In April 1916 he was summoned before the Thrapston Magistrates' Court for not having subdued the lighting of his shop.

He was mobilised on 9th December 1916 and posted twelve days later to an Infantry Reserve, or Training, Battalion. On the 8th February 1917 he joined the Machine Gun Corps (Motors). This was potentially one of the most dangerous postings, as the machine gunners were a vital target for snipers as well as other artillery. It looks, however, as if Cyril did not see front line fighting and served the rest of the war in England.

On the formation of the Machine Gun Corps in October 1915 the Motor Machine Gun Services was absorbed into it and became the Machine Gun Corps (Motors). It had machine

guns mounted on motorcycles, cars, armoured vehicles and even trains. The real industry of war had begun.

Cyril joined the No.6 Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps which was based at Belton Park and Harrowby Camp in Grantham. On one official form (B103) it calls it, No. 6 Dominion Battalion which seems to imply that it was composed of soldiers from Canada and perhaps also from Australia and New Zealand. Cyril remained a Private or Gunner throughout his army career and it is not clear what role kept him away from the fighting. He had gained a "Machine Gunner First Class" qualification so perhaps he was an instructor or demonstrator to the new troops. It is also a possibility that he was a driving or motorcycle instructor. There is also the nagging thought that he was the dreaded man who gave the troops their "regulation" haircuts. On his discharge there is no indication of a new skill that he could take into civilian life so it may be that he was a military instructor of some sort but we cannot be sure as his army records give no clue.

On 26th July 1917 he was posted to the newly formed Heavy Brigade of the Machine Gun Corps soon to become the Tanks Corps and then the Tank Brigade. It was based at Bovington near Wareham in Dorset and Cyril became part of the Central Schools of Instruction. Originally Cyril had asked to be in the Royal Flying Corps and tanks were the other great innovation of the First World War.

The tank was based on ideas from before the war but the stalemate and terrible slaughter of the Flanders trench warfare had once more ignited interest among the military and political leaders. The tank was under development in all the main warring nations but the prototypes, often based on tracked agricultural machinery, had many problems and research and progress was top secret. The name "tank" itself was part of this secrecy, designed to give the idea that water tanks were being built. Some of the first British production tanks were marked with Russian lettering and the rumour was propagated that they were snow ploughs intended for Russia. It was designed as a weapon to cross the rough terrain between the opposing trenches, the "killing field", and break into the enemy defences. Many designs were tried and failed. Eventually, on the 15th September 1916, tanks were used but it was only late in the war that they played a major role in the Allied victory.

British Mark 1 male tank: Somme 25 September 1916
Photograph by Ernest Brooks. Imperial War Museum. Wikipedia Commons (Public Domain).

Cyril had a good army record and his only offence was to overstay his leave pass from Grantham by 12½ hours in April 1917. As his daughter Ellen Louisa had been born on the 16th March there was some excuse and the four days' pay, that he initially had deducted, was reduced to one. His only injury seems to have been a dislocated elbow on 20th October 1920 which kept him in Wool Military Hospital, near the Bovington Camp for thirty-two days. As we can see from this date Cyril had been retained at the end of the war, first for six months and then for a further three and he was finally demobbed on 12th December 1920.

He stated on his discharge papers that he wanted to be a publican when he returned to civilian life. Cyril did fulfil his ambition. The *Electoral Register* for 1920 records that he was at the Red Lion, Winfrith in Dorset. The 1939 *England and Wales Register* confirms Thomas Cyril Peacock is the "proprietor" of the Red Lion. Living with him is wife Rose, who is doing "General Hotel Work" and daughter Ellen Louise (born 17th March 1917). There is one closed entry (which could be daughter Rita Julia). I am sure that we have the correct man but there is one anomaly. When he was baptised in Ringstead on 6th April 1900 it stated that he was born on 5th November 1887 but here and in his death certificate in the USA he is said to have been born on 1st November 1886. However, the Civil Registration shows his birth was in the last quarter of 1886 so it seems certain that this was a clerical error.

The Red Lion at Winfrith (early 20th Century Postcard)
This was one of three pubs that Thomas Hardy amalgamated into "The Quiet Woman" in The Return of the Native.

He seems to have been successful for, on the 12th October 1949, Cyril and Rose with their unmarried daughter, Ellen Louise, sailed into New York harbour on the *Queen Mary*.

The family were bound for Texas and we know that Ellen, aged thirty-two arrived in El Paso after having crossed the border from Mexico. She was bound for Alpine in Texas and it seems that it was here that her parents had settled.

It may be that Alpine was chosen because they were hoping to improve the health of Rose. She died on 1st August 1956 after having lived there for seven years. The causes of death included a chronic peptic ulcer which she had also had for seven years. She had suffered, as well, from Hypertension for six months and was killed finally by a "Massive Coronary Occlusion". She was sixty-nine years old and obviously had been unwell for some time.

Thomas Cyril Peacock died eight years later, on 6th February 1964, of lung cancer aged seventy-seven and was buried in Elm Grove Cemetery, nearly half a century after many of his former comrades

Horace Peacock (1890-1922)

Horace Peacock, son of John Thomas and Martha Ellen was born in 1890 but not baptised in Ringstead Church until September 22nd 1901. This baptism was some five years after the tragic death of his shoemaker father, from burns, and just a year before his widowed

mother married Benjamin Phillips. By 1911 Horace was 20 years old and working on a farm, still living in Gladstone Street with his mother and her new husband.

In the Spring of 1913 Horace married Rose Hannah Taylor. She had been born on 14th October 1891 in Bidford-on-Avon in Warwickshire but had moved with her parents to Raunds in the mid-1890s. Her father, Frederick, had been appointed the manager of one of the new Co-operative grocery shops in Raunds but he died on 11th June 1907, aged 49, after a short illness. By 1911 the family were living in 3, Spencer Street in Raunds and Rose was working as a machinist in a shoe factory.

The young couple possibly moved to Ringstead after their marriage, and certainly they were living in Gladstone Street in 1918. Before then, of course, there had been the Great War, and Horace had been in France on the Western Front.

He joined the 6th (Service) Battalion of the Buffs (East Kent Regiment) which spent all the war, from June 1915, fighting on the Western Front. At some point Horace was transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Buffs. It seems likely that it was with the 1st that he was wounded near the end of the war. The report date was the 13th November 1918 just two days after the signing of the Armistice but it was likely that the incident was weeks or even months before this publication. He was entitled, under the Army Order of 6th July 1916, to wear a wound stripe on his uniform.

He was probably ferried back to England for treatment and, on recovery, became a part of the 3rd Battalion of the Buffs. This had remained in England throughout the war, and by this time was based in Dover. At the end of the war the 3rd Battalion were sent to Ireland to help with the policing there, following the 1916 Easter Rising and were, I believe, based in the Cork area.

We cannot be sure but it seems possible that the “wound” had actually been Trench Fever, and it became clear that he had not recovered from it. Trench Fever was a debilitating illness transmitted in the faeces of body lice. Symptoms included high fever, severe headaches, pains in the eyeballs, soreness of muscles in the legs, back pain and pain in the shins. It became a scourge of the Western Front with some one million casualties among the soldiers of all combatants. It was rarely lethal but, in severe cases, could lead to heart and other problems.

From his pension records, we see that he was finally discharged from the army on 9th October 1919 because of his illness. He returned to Rose in Ringstead and they continued with their family life. The couple had four children although Thomas, born in 1913, had died as an infant. Irene was born in 1915 and twins Alma and Horace in 1920.

He received a small pension but Horace died on 8th March 1922 aged 32 as a result of complications following his Trench Fever and his widow received a funeral grant. Horace was one of the unseen casualties of war not found on any memorial.

The 1939 *Register of England and Wales* records that Rose Hannah Peacock was a "Boot and Shoe Hot Wax Shoe Machinist living at 32 Cantrell Street in Raunds with her widowed mother, Ada Taylor. Rose died in 1974 aged 82, so she was nearly fifty years a widow.

John Thomas Peacock (1896-1956)

John Thomas Peacock was baptised in Ringstead Church on 19th July 1896, the youngest child of John Thomas and Martha Ellen. Only his mother was at the christening for John Thomas had died some five months earlier from burns.

It would have been a difficult time for John Thomas's widowed mother. In 1901 he was living with her and his siblings at 30 High Street. Ellen remarried, to Benjamin Phillips and in 1911 Thomas, as he was usually known, was living in Gladstone Street in the new Tilcroft Estate, with her and his stepfather. He was fourteen years old and he had left school and was "a factory lad"

As always in these biographies, war came to call him from the small village world. In the *1918 Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead he is shown as a rifleman in the 25th Rifle Brigade with Regimental Number 50313. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows that he had been in the 1st Battalion of the London Rifle Brigade and, having served in France, was demobilised.

Although having similarities in their names these are two separate Regiments and he would have had a second Regimental Number. Unfortunately, and unusually, there appears to be no other military records for John Thomas Peacock, not even a Medal Card. This may be due to clerical errors but it makes it impossible to make any sensible record of his army service.

It seems unlikely that he was sent to France before 1916 and possibly he was first posted to the London Rifle Brigade and served with them on the Western Front. Andy (stiletto_33853) has posted on the Great War Forum that large numbers of the London Rifle Brigade were placed in the 25th Rifle Brigade at the end of the war prior to demobilisation. The 25th Rifle Brigade was actually the 25th (Reserve) Garrison Battalion and was stationed at Falmouth for the whole of the war.

Thomas was included in the Spring 1919 *Absent Voters' List*, although without any military unit shown, so we must presume that it was later in 1919 or even 1920 that he was demobilised and returned to Ringstead. It may be that he lived with his mother and stepfather for they are all listed in Gladstone Street in the 1920 to 1929 Electoral Rolls. In 1929 Thomas married Rushden woman, Elsie Lilian Dickens, and they moved to Pierce's (or Pearce's) Yard which was down a narrow lane beside the police house opposite Ringstead House.

Thomas worked in a local shoe factory and, in 1939, his occupation was shown as "Boot and Shoe Trade, Stitching Operator, Government Work". Ellen had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties" and living with them was Ellen Bessie Peacock, Thomas's unmarried older sister who

had “occasional work” as a fitter in the boot and shoe trade. I do not think that Thomas and Elsie had any children.

John Thomas Peacock died on 12th December 1956. He was sixty years of age and at the time of his death he was living at White Cottage in Ringstead High Street. He was still working as a boot operative. Elsie died in 1970, aged seventy-three.

There was another Peacock, a cousin of the men we have so far considered who had a short but tragic army career.

Arthur Edward Raymond Peacock (1890-1914)

Throughout the Nineteenth Century, especially when agriculture or shoemaking were suffering hard times, some young men from Ringstead left to join the army, marines or navy. Some returned to their home village but many settled elsewhere or died in service.

Arthur Henry Peacock was the son of John and Jane (nee Bates) Peacock and the grandson of Thomas and Sarah. He was born on the 18th August 1866 and baptised on 23rd March 1867 in the Parish Church. John had become a shoemaker and the 1871 Census finds the family living in Church Street with their five surviving children. Two girls called Sarah had died in infancy.

Arthur was the youngest son and by 1881, aged 14, he had also started work as military boot maker. He probably married Eliza Emma Sophia Bugby from Raunds sometime around 1890. It is a little unclear because, perhaps due to a bureaucratic anomaly, the marriage of Arthur and Emma, (as she was usually known), is not on the National Register of Marriages. On 3rd May 1890 their first child, Arthur Edward Raymond Peacock, was born. The couple only had a further two children, both sons, Leslie Montrose, baptised on 15th May 1903 and Harold William, who was born on the 14th February 1908. This would normally have meant that other children had died in infancy but the 1911 Census makes clear that they only had three children, and none of them had died. There may have been early miscarriages but, as, increasingly, most children survived infancy, and there was greater access to contraception, the large Victorian families began to decline and the small modern unit began to emerge.

Arthur Edward Raymond was always known to his family as Raymond, perhaps to distinguish him from his father. The military boot industry was going through one of its periods of depression and Arthur signed up with the Northamptonshire Regiment. After the Boer War a recruit could sign up for twelve years but opt to be on active service only for the first three years. He then would have nine years in the Reservists but, in time of war, would have an obligation to return to the “Colours”. I have sought advice on the Great War Forum website and *Stebieg173* has advised that that Raymond was almost certainly a Special Reservist who had signed up for a “Six Year Special Reserve” term.

His Regimental Number 3/8607 was a Special Reserve number dating from January 1909 and the first letter we have of his, is from "The Barracks", which was the Gibraltar Barracks in Northampton, and dated January 1909. This starts:

> *Dear Mother and Father*
>
> *I hope that you are in the best of health as it leaves me the same. I received your letter with love and was very pleased with it. The reason I have not written before was because I thought I would wait till I could send something. I went to the football match on Saturday, but I could not see Dad, and when he came down to the barracks with the other chaps it fair made me jump I was so glad.*

This affectionate letter assures his mother that he is getting enough to eat and he is sorry that his baby brother is not well. He signs off with nine kisses and:

> *PS. Tell Ralph the barber his fags were alright and thank him for them.*
> *PPS. Give my love to Rose and the others [and another seven kisses]*

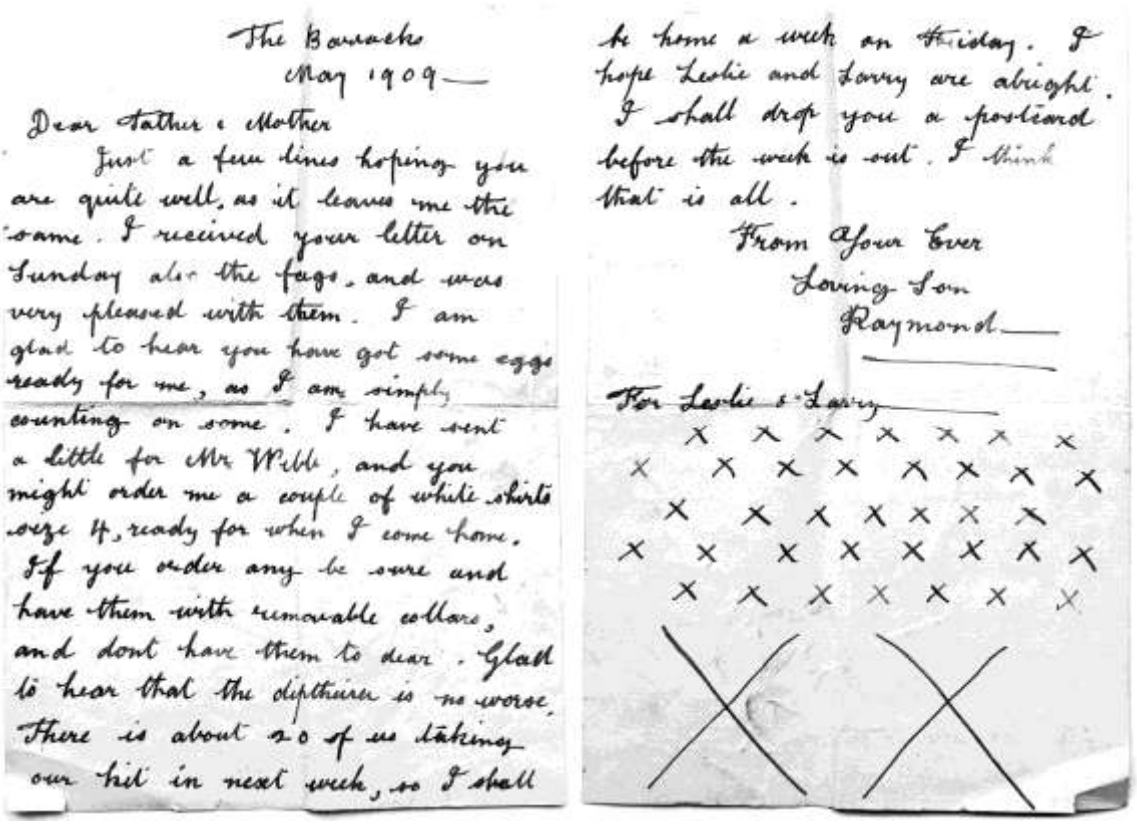
His letters tend to follow this pattern but with glimpses of his army life. In April he remarks:

> *While I am writing this I am very near asleep for we are digging trenches this morning. I think I shall get a job in the sewer when I come home.*

This time he fills half of the page after signing off with kisses for his younger brother, Leslie and Larry [Harold].

Raymond would have served a five-month training period and in May he tells his parents that he has paid 2s 10d to get his boots repaired. He also fills in a little more detail about army life:

> *We have to get up at half-past five in the morning, and we are done for the day at 1 o'clock. But I shan't have much more of it as we only have about a month to do.*



The Barracks
May 1909—

Dear Father & Mother

Just a few lines hoping you are quite well, as it leaves me the same. I received your letter on Sunday also the fags, and was very pleased with them. I am glad to hear you have got some eggs ready for me, as I am simply counting on some. I have sent a little for Mr Webb, and you might order me a couple of white shirts size 4, ready for when I come home. If you order any be sure and have them with removable collars, and don't have them to dear. Glad to hear that the diptheria is no worse. There is about 20 of us taking our kit in next week, so I shall be home a week on Friday. I hope Leslie and Lovey are alright. I shall drop you a postcard before the week is out. I think that is all.

From Your Ever
Loving Son
Raymond—

For Leslie & Lovey—

Letter from Raymond May 1909

With thanks to Kevin Varty

A second letter in May tells how he is "counting the time" to when he comes home. He adds:

> *I have sent a little for Mr. Webb*, and you might order me a couple of white shirts size 4, ready for when I come home. If you order any be sure and have them with removable collars, and don't have them too dear. Glad to hear that the diptheria [sic] is no worse. There is about 20 of us taking our kit in next week, so I shall be home a week on Friday.*
>
> *This may refer to Alfred Webb, a draper in Denford.

He would have attended a trainee's musketry course from the 18th June until the 11th July 1914 followed by a summer training camp at Landguard, near Felixstowe in Suffolk until the end of the month. He was obviously looking forward to getting home for he wrote:

> *We shall be home a week today, so you need not trouble about that. We start from here about half-past six in the morning, and get to Northampton about half-past twelve, so that I reckon I shall be home for tea on Saturday.*

He also adds:

I am sorry to here [sic] about J. Scholes little girl, and I hope that you will mind and not let Leslie go out to [sic] much. I hope that he is alright, and the Baby better. I have sent 7/6 more, so that I think I shall have a little for August. I think that is all.*

From Your Ever
Loving son
Raymond

**This refers to the local baker's daughter, Rita Mary Scholes, who had died aged ten years old.*

Below are four rows of kisses for his young brothers. Leslie and Larry

Interior of Landguard Fort, Felixstowe (Author's Photograph 2017)

That was the end of his initial full-time training and he would have been a part-time soldier from then on, rather as in the Territorial Army today. He would still have continued with his full-time job and by the 1911 Census he was back in Ringstead working in a local factory as an "Army Boot Stitcher". The days of the home-based hand-sewn army boot makers were numbered and his father, now 45, was unemployed.

There is a letter written in 1912 although the date is rather ambiguous. In it, Raymond tells his parents:

They gave us our own insurance cards yesterday, and they are going to put two stamps on it, and they stop us 8d. Dad might ask Joe Smith, about me going in the Trade, so when you write let me know what he says. I hope Leslie and Larry are alright. I am sending another order for 5/- as that is better than losing it. I am glad Dad done alright at Thrapston.

It is possible that this letter was, like the others from the army while he was doing the compulsory annual training, but it may be that Raymond was working away from home in a factory, perhaps in Northampton.

The *1911 National Insurance Act* introduced the idea of benefits based on contributions paid by the employed persons and the employer. Stamps were put onto a card and if a person lost their job they were "given their cards" to pass on to the next employer. At first this was for unemployment benefit only and a scheme ran alongside it administered by "approved societies" which could include trade unions. I think that the "trade" that Raymond mentions in his letter means trade union and we know that he joined the *National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives* and his card for 1913/1914 is filled in until the end of December 1913 but from January 10th 1914 it appears that he did not pay his eight pence weekly contribution. The collector seems to have signed each week across the *Sick Pay* and *Unemployed Pay* columns. Was Raymond out of work or taking part in the military training exercises of 1913?

On 8th August 1914 the Special Reservists were called up and Raymond would have reported to the Depot at the Gibraltar Barracks in Northampton. He did not go with the main force of the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment to France. They had sailed on the *S.S. Galeka*, on the 12th August 1914 arriving at Le Havre on the following morning. Raymond would probably been on the second draft which was sent after the first major casualties were suffered by the Regiment. It consisted of some seventy men under the command of Lieutenant Ralph Davison. Raymond's medal card shows that the arrived in the "Theatre of War" on 12th September 1914, although it was not until the 21st that the draft finally joined up with the 1st Battalion in the field.

There is a tantalising note which seems to have been written by Raymond as he waited ready to go to France. Unfortunately, it was scribbled on rough grey card in soft pencil and time and wear has made much of it is difficult to decipher. It appears to say:

Southampton [?]
Dear Dad [?] & Mother
Just a line hoping you are all well, as it leaves me the same.
I am writing this in the train [?] while it is in the dock [?]
We sail [?] in the morning [Rest completely undecipherable].
With Love
Ray
X X

This lack of clarity was also apparent in the official record of Raymond's movements at the time and his mother, Emma, after his letters stopped, tried to find out what had happened to him. She received formal letters from the Infantry Record Office, the local Member of Parliament, Stopford Sackville, and the War Office assuring her that Raymond was not on any casualty list. This continued into 1915. Even as late as 31st March 1916 the *Northampton Mercury* was reporting that he was "Missing". We are not sure when Arthur and Emma were told that their son had died just a few weeks after he had arrived in France.

Raymond would not have taken part in the early engagement with the Germans at the sugar refinery at Troyan. At the beginning of the war, the battles were far more open with only scrapes for the soldiers to lie in. It was often close quarters hand-to-hand fighting rather than the grinding stalemate of trench warfare that quickly developed. The Northamptonshires had been relieved and were resting behind the lines from 19th September and it is there that Raymond's draft probably joined them. There had been heavy rain and the trenches then being built were filling with mud. The terrible nature of trench warfare was beginning to dawn on the soldiers.

The 1st Battalion returned to the Front on the 29th September and remained there until mid-October. We can only guess at how a sensitive young man was affected by entering this terrible world of mud with the constant noise of the artillery and the sight and fear of death. Raymond was killed on the 16th October 1914. He was buried at Vendresse British War Cemetery, the neat white stone concealing the confusions of his death. Most of the bodies had been buried elsewhere on the Front and were re-buried in the ordered ranks at Vendresse.

Raymond was awarded the Victory Medal, the British Medal and the 1914 Star and Clasp. His mother received the back pay due to Raymond and a small pension, as the War ended, in 1918. Emma died on 2nd February 1956 aged 87 and Arthur Peacock died of heart failure and old age, aged 90, in Glapthorne Road Hospital, Oundle on 12th March 1957. They were buried together in Ringstead Cemetery.

.

Chapter 4

John William Pearson (1895-1944)

The Pearson name was well known in Ringstead and became nationally famous when John William "Crutchy" Pearson was part of the Raunds March to London in 1905. The March was to press Parliament for better piece-work rates for the military boots and shoes that were the staple product of the Raunds and Ringstead "handsewn men". John walked all the way

on crutches because he was lame in one leg and he became an obvious target for the newspaper photographers and reporters. He is not our man, however, for he was born in 1869. He married and by 1911 had a cobbling business in March in Cambridgeshire although he had retired back to Ringstead by 1939

Our John William Pearson was born on 16th February 1895, the son of Tom George and Martha Jane. He was baptised on 11th August 1896 in Ringstead Church. His father was a local man but his mother, Martha Leigh was originally from Polebrook. Tom was a handsewn man and, in the 1911 Census, we see that he was working at home and, at a time of much unemployment among the shoemakers, he was still in work. John William, now 16 years old was also shown as a "handsewn shoemaker". He was very young to have earned this description.

The Great War began and John would have seen the local men going to France and the heartbroken families when they did not return. Others would have returned with terrible stories to tell. The reality of the war set in and the early optimism of a quick victory disintegrated. The Regulars, Territorials and Volunteers were not enough to stem the German onslaught and Conscription was brought in in early 1916.

John was conscripted on 16th February 1916 and became part of Machine Gun Corps and was given Service Number 65638. Once again, few of his records survived the German air raid in the Second World War. This is complicated by the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* which states that he was in the 50th Battery of the MGC. There was no such unit, but there was a 50th Machine Gun Company as well as, from 1st March 1918, a 50th Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps. As a result, the following account is my best attempt but may not be reliable outside the basic facts.

It seems most likely that the R*oll of Honour* refers to the 50th Battalion of the MGC which was formed from the Machine Gun Companies of the 50th (Northumberland) Division. This Division had several Machine Gun Companies which were the 149th, 150th and 151st. Looking at the list of men who were transferred into the Machine Gun Corps, which was produced by Steve (hmsk212) on the Great War Forum, it seems likely that he went to France in late 1916 or early 1917. This list was based on transfers from other regiments and the numbers do not give a strict chronological order but do give some broad indication.

If we assume (and it is far from a certainty) that, in 1917, he was with the 50th Division Machine Gun Companies, which, moved into the 50th Battalion, he would have fought in the First Battle of the Scarpe, the Capture of Wancourt Ridge and the Second Battle of the Scarpe, which were phases of the offensive usually known as the Battle of Arras. The 50th then moved to the mud of Flanders and took part in the Third Battle of Ypres in a phase called the Second Battle of Passchendaele.

In 1918 there was a reorganisation and, on the 1st March 1918, the three Machine Gun Companies, the 149th, 150th and 151st were amalgamated into the 50th Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps but remained part of the 50th Division. The new Battalion was at the Battle of St Quentin, the Actions of the Somme Crossings and the Battle of Rosieres, part of the Battle of the Somme 1918.

Perhaps the Division's hardest battles were in response to the last Great German offensive, at the Battle of Estaires, Battle of Hazebrouck (Battle of the Lys) and the Battle of the Aisne.

This would have seen the Division at its lowest ebb. It had suffered heavy casualties and was exhausted. It was taken out of the front line and the infantry units were replaced. It did not go into action again until October 1918. By then the German Offensive had been fought to a standstill and the pendulum had swung, with increasing speed, in favour of the Allies.

The 50th Battalion, as part of the 50th Division fought in the Battles of the Hindenburg Line and the Final Advance into Picardy. It was resting at Soire le Chateau when news of the Armistice came through on 11th November 1918.

The demobilisation began in December 1918 and John William Pearson was finally discharged on the 12th February 1919.

We know that John had been appointed Lance Corporal and also that he had been wounded twice. We do not have any dates for these events but we do know that he suffered a gunshot wound to his right thigh and received an Army Disability Pension. It may be that he had been wounded near the end of the war and was in hospital recuperating until his discharge

He returned to his family in London End in Ringstead and later, in 1919, he married Florence Manning. A John W. Pearson joined the National Union of Railwaymen in February or March 1919 and is shown in the records to have been working as a labourer based at Thrapston. It seems likely that this was our man. I think that the couple only had one child, Gertrude, who was born on 16th November 1919.

At some point he changed his work and became a foreman in a local Ironstone Quarry. This was his job in 1939 when the *Register of England and Wales* was taken, identifying the home population, as the Second World War began. Florence had become an Assistant Mistress in a local school. Their daughter, Gertrude, aged nearly twenty, was a student. The family were now living in Spencer Street on the Tilcroft Estate.

John died in Kettering Hospital on 10th July 1968, aged 73. At the time of his death his address was still 11 Spencer Street and he was a "Retired Steelworks Staff Foreman". Florence lived to be 88 and died in 1982.

Chapter 5

The Pentelow Family

The Pentelow name is a popular one in the East Northamptonshire area, stretching back through the centuries. The father of our two WW1 servicemen, however, came from just over the border in Dean in Bedfordshire. His name was Thomas Pentelow, born on 28th April

1870, the son of William and Mary Ann. His wife, Edith York (or Yorke) was born in Denford in 1872 and baptised there on January 19th 1873, the daughter of Eli and Emma.

Edith's family moved to Ringstead and the first time we meet her and Thomas together is in the 1901 Census for Irthlingborough where they were living in Queen Street. Thomas was working as a shoe finisher. They had four children and the three youngest children, Percy (8), Robert (5) and Daisy (3) were all born in Irthlingborough, but the eldest child, John Thomas, aged ten was born in Denford.

There is another complication because his surname is given as York, his mother's maiden name. I have not found his christening (although he is recorded in the fourth quarter of 1890 in the Civil Registration Birth Index), nor the marriage of Thomas and Edith, and I cannot find any of them in the 1891 Census. There is one possibility for a 22-year-old shoe laster named Thomas Pentlow, his wife Elizabeth (not Edith) aged 20, a shoe finisher, and their son Thomas, aged 11 months were visitors at 41 Boston Street in Shoreditch in London. They apparently came from Durnford in an unknown county (N.K.). There is a Durnford in Wiltshire but I cannot find the family again. Could Durnford be Denford? We cannot be sure.

By the 1911 Census the family were living in London End in Ringstead. Thomas stated that they had been married 19 years and had had eight children, six of whom were still living. The two new additions to the family are Fred (8) born in Irthlingborough and Elen 4 born in Ringstead. We see that the family must have moved into the village around 1905.

John Thomas Pentelow [York] (1890-1962)

As we have seen, the early years of John Thomas are a little confused. I think that he started using his father's surname in the period after 1911 and it may be that, except on official documents he and his family used "Thomas Pentelow" from the start. The changes in his name and the number of men with similar names in the area does make it sometimes less certain that we have the correct person.

We do know that in 1911 he was recorded as an "out of work" boot finisher. His trade was confirmed by a court case, recorded in the Northampton Mercury of 30th April 1909 where:

> *Thomas Pentelow, shoe operative and Percy Pentelow, labourer, of Ringstead were summoned by Ralph Whyman, farmer, of Ringstead for damaging a quickset hedge at Ringstead.*

His military records show that he had become a currier. Currying was the cleaning, scraping, stretching and finishing of the previously tanned hides by oiling, waxing or colouring them to the required surface finish. Again, we have confirmation of his new trade from a newspaper report, this time the Chronicle and Echo of 10th September 1915.

> *Thomas Pentelow, currier, Ringstead, was summoned for using obscene language at Irthlingborough on August 23, - Pleading guilty, he was fined 15s.*

We may conclude from these two cases that Thomas was something of a rough diamond but they would have been considered minor cases by most of the young men of the village.

It was not long after this, on 25th October 1915, that he attested for the army at Rushden. He was 24 years 6 months old and was 5ft 4 inches tall with a 33-inch chest which was quite small even by the standards of the time., The records also show that he had fair hair and blue eyes and was still living at London End in Ringstead. He had enlisted with the 8th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given Regimental Number 22280. The actual description in his records is the 8th Garrison Battalion 2nd Reserve

The 8th Battalion had been formed in October 1914 and, in May 1915, had moved to Colchester and become a reserve battalion, moving on to Sittingbourne in March 1916. They finally were sent to Maidstone and became the 28th Training Reserve Battalion but, before this move, Thomas had already been discharged on 27th July 1916. His records show that he had suffered from "fits" all his life and had been diagnosed as having epilepsy. He had never served abroad and had been a soldier for just 277 days. His character was described as "Fair" which indicates that he had a few issues with authority or perhaps his illness was not looked on with sympathy

It was not the end of his war, however, for, just over a year later, on 18th August 1917 he enlisted with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and was given the Service Number 124593. The RAMC had expanded rapidly during First World War from 9000 Other Ranks in 1914 to 154,000 in 1918. It served all over the world but for Thomas it was just service at home. He was a Private and probably had no or little medical training so would have done the necessary menial tasks of the old hospital porter.

The records do not show where he worked but do record that he was finally demobilised, again, on 10th October 1919. Once more the reason given was his epilepsy.

The story of his life after he returned home also has some uncertainty. It may be that on the 13th April 1919, he married Grace Adelaide Dawson. Certainly, a Thomas Pentelow, aged 27, and a member of the RAMC, whose father was also Thomas and a shoe finisher, was married at St Mary the Virgin Church in Lower Edmonton in Enfield. Grace's brother, Joseph Dawson, was married at the same time. He is also shown as "married" on a second Pension Card that was completed for him. We cannot be sure, but it does seem that there is enough, evidence to say that this is our man. There is also the likelihood that the couple had a child, Grace Pentelow, born in the Spring of 1919. The child's mother's maiden name was shown as Dawson.

What happened next lies outside the records that I have researched. In 1939, a Grace Pentelow was shown as an inmate in Enfield House, a "Public Assistance Institution" at 17/19 Chase Side Crescent in Enfield. She had been born on 31st December 1896 and was shown as a married domestic servant. Could this be Thomas's wife?

If this is the case, I think that Thomas returned to Ringstead alone. It is still not certain and the 1921 Census when it is released may give us a clearer picture. There is, in the *1939 Register*, a John T. Pentelow, born on 13th April 1890 who had a hut in the Ringstead

Allotments in Denford Road. He could be our "Thomas Pentelow" but his occupation is shown as "Drover" not Currier. There is also an earlier article in the Northampton Mercury of the 28th September 1934 which reported on a case where a man was convicted for driving a lorry recklessly. Rounding a bend on the Denford Road he had shed one of his barrels of tar. This time Thomas was a witness and told how he had to take sudden avoiding action to escape the barrel. This Thomas is again described as a drover.

Thomas was buried in London Road Cemetery in Kettering on 9th June 1962. He had died in Glapthorne Road Hospital in Oundle, aged 72, and was described as a "retired leather dresser". Was the drover and leather dresser the same man? It was not an uncommon name. I think that Grace Pentelow died in Enfield in 1965.

Robert Pentelow (1895-1959)

Thomas's younger brother (or half-brother) was born in 1895 when the family were in Irthlingborough. He was the son of Thomas Pentelow from Dean and Edith Yorke (or Yorke) from Denford. In 1901 the family were living in Queen Street in Irthlingborough but by 1911 they had moved to London End in Ringstead. Only the youngest child, Elen (Ellen) aged four, had been born In Ringstead and the next eldest, aged eight had been born in Irthlingborough so they must have moved to the village in about 1905.

Robert, aged sixteen, had become a coal hawker. A hawker was normally somebody who went around the villages selling goods. Could Robert have done it with a horse and cart or perhaps a barrow, yelling his wares? On the other hand he may have gone around the houses taking orders for the coal merchant.

By 1915 he had become an Ironstone Labourer. On 20th November 1915 he attested and was put on the Army Reserve. He was 20 years 8 months old and was mobilised on 26th June 1916 with the 28th Reserve Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers with Regimental Number 52947. As this unit's name implies he remained in England at first and we know that he was in the Ringstead area for some of the time for he married Eliza A. Joy in the Wellingborough District in the October to December 1916 period. Perhaps his imminent posting abroad precipitated the marriage but there was another possible reason. The couple had a daughter, Edith Ethel Pentelow, born on 25th September 1916.

Certainly, Robert was about to begin his military service and, on 14th December 1916, as part of the 8th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, he was posted to the Western Front. The 8th had first landed in France in May 1915 and saw action as part of the 36th Brigade of the 12th (Eastern) Division. During 1916 they had seen heavy fighting at the Battle of Albert, the Battle of Pozieres and the Battle of Le Transloy which were part of the 1916 Campaign known as the Battle of the Somme. In the Battle of Albert, on the 7th July the 8th, as part of the 36th Brigade, were sent to capture the village of Orvillers. The Battalion of 800 men was cut down by machine gun fire and were reduced to 160 by the end of the day.

Robert would not have joined the Battalion before the 1917 Campaign. The first major campaign of the year was the Battle of Arras and the 8th were in the First Battle of the Scarpe, the Battle of Arleux, the Third Battle of the Scarpe and the Cambrai operations.

It was at the Third Battle of the Scarpe on the 3rd and 4th May, that the 8th, along with the 9th, were given the task of advancing 1000 yards and attacking a German line 9000 yards wide. It was an almost impossible task and the 8th sustained heavy casualties from machine gun fire. Between them, the 8th and 9th had lost 282 killed and wounded and were then formed into one combined Battalion. At some point about this time Robert was wounded and on 10th May 1917 he left France for England. Later records show that he had received a gunshot wound to the right leg. He had been on the Western Front for 148 days.

For the rest of the war Robert was in England. His military records are a little difficult to decipher, but it looks as if he was sent to a Depot Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers and then transferred on 25th February 1918 to the 5th (Reserve) Battalion which was based in Dover. He remained there until he was transferred to the 9th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment on the 10th August 1918 and given Regimental Number 91549. He was then posted to the 339th Company of the Royal Defence Corps on the 1st November of the same year. He remained with them until the 1st February 1919.

The Royal Defence Corps (RDC) had originally been formed by converting the Home Service Garrison Battalions of the Line Infantry Regiments. In general, they consisted of soldiers who were too old, or medically unfit, for Front Line service. The 339th were a part of the "Protection Companies" of the Western Command. By April 1918, of the 27,000 men serving in the RDC, 14,000 were guards in prisoner-of-war camps. Was this Robert's role?

He was finally demobilised as being unfit for service, having a 40% disablement, but one wonders if there was also another, compassionate, reason. Eliza, who Robert had only married in 1916, just before he was mobilised, died, aged 29, in early 1919.

Like his brother, Thomas, there is some uncertainty about what happened next in Robert's life. Again, the 1921 Census may help clarify his life after demobilisation. A Robert Pentelow married Ethel Payne in the Norwich District in the second quarter of 1920. It seems likely that this is the same man. In the later 1920s Electoral Registers he is shown living with Ethel in Norwich Road in Flordon until 1929. In 1930 the couple are shown in "Gravel Pits" in Brooke in Norwich.

The 1939 *Register of England and Wales* has them in Chapel Barn Cottages in Downham in Norfolk. His birth date is shown as April 13th 1895 and Ethel's as October 6th 1890. He was working as a cowman. Robert died in Norfolk in 1959 and I believe was buried in Boughton Cemetery on 2nd February, aged 64. Boughton is some seven miles east of Downham Market and 15 miles south of King's Lynn. I also think that Ethel died in the King's Lynn area in 1976.

Chapter 6

Charles William Pettitt (1890-1954)

Charles William Pettitt was born in Raunds on 10th January 1890 and christened in Raunds Parish Church on April 6th. His parents were James and Sarah Ann. James was a shoemaker

from Lower Dean, just over the border in Bedfordshire and Sarah from Bythorn In Huntingdonshire. All three places were in a triangle, some six miles apart from each other.

In 1901 James and Sarah were living in Marshalls Road in Raunds with children James (26), Albert (18), Fred (16), Arthur (13) and William (11). Charles William seems to have often been called by his second name. All the men were in the shoe trade except William who was still at school.

James, the father, died in 1907 and in the 1911 Census the widowed Sarah, aged 65 was still living in Marshalls Road with four of her children, including "William Charles". She had had twelve children and, unusually, all of them were still living. Charles was twenty-one and now a Clicker, the man who cut out the uppers from the hides and considered the most skilled of the tradesmen.

War came in 1914 but, at first, Charles did not enlist. We know that he was not entitled to a 1914/15 Star so did not enter a warzone until 1916 at the earliest. We also know that he married Gertrude Manning on 24th April 1916 in Ringstead Church. We have already come across Gertrude in these biographies. Her younger sister, Florence married John William Pearson and both women were teachers in local schools.

Apart from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and the *Absent Voter's Lists* for 1918 and 1919, just Charles's Medal Card and the Medal Roll have survived so we only have a general idea of his war service. He did become a "Driver" with the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) and was given the Service number 182460.

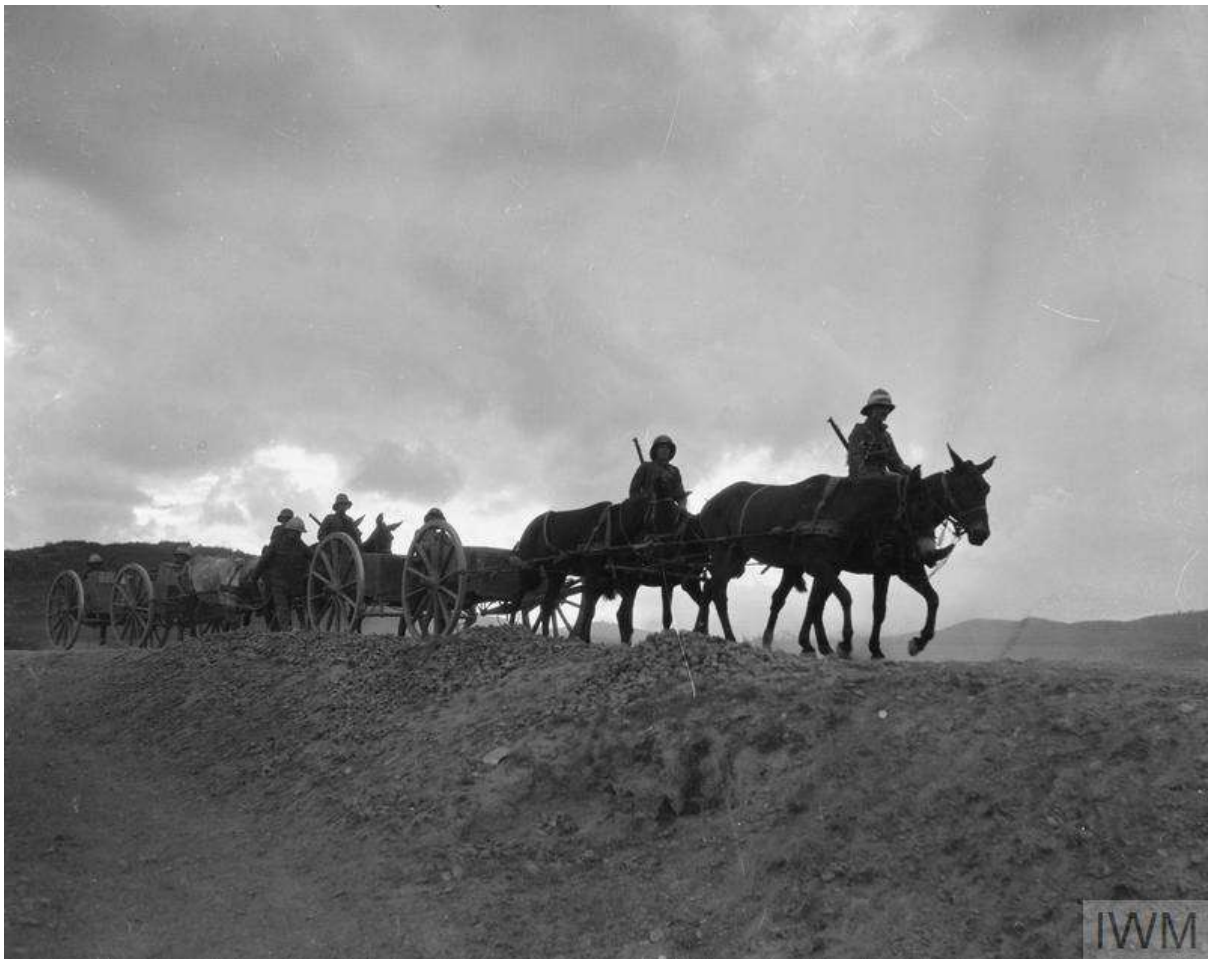
A Driver was a rank in the RFA for a soldier trained in the management and use of horses. Usually the guns or wagons were drawn by six horses, driven by three drivers, all on the nearside horses. Intensive training was given in order to make the drivers competent enough to work as a team. They would also look after the general health and welfare of the horses. At some point Charles had the additional appointment of Saddler which would have given him a higher rate of pay. His experience in the military boot and shoe trade would have provided him with the transferable skills to maintain the saddles and leather work, and make emergency running repairs as needed.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that Charles's war was in Palestine and Egypt. Then, as now, the Middle East was a volatile region with the once powerful Ottoman Empire becoming known as the "Sick Man of Europe" as it began to fall apart. The Turks were allies of the Germans and the area was strategically important, particularly around the Suez Canal, for British links with India, East Africa and Asia. Many men from these areas fought for the Allies, and the Chinese formed an important part of the Labour Corps.

The terrible defeat of the Allies at Gallipoli had made the position more perilous but, by the end of 1916, the Turkish threat to the Suez Canal had been largely beaten. Nevertheless, there had been defeats in the area and General Edward Allenby became the Commanding Officer and was given greater troop numbers and support. This led to the Turks being pushed back and Palestine was taken. By the end of October 1918 the Turks had been defeated and they sued for peace.

This was not an easy area for fighting, with poor communications, large desert areas and few clean water sources. The Allies' supply chains were critical to any success. It seems most likely that Charles was with the 75th Division of the RFA and later transferred to the 1st Section of the 191st British Ammunition Column (BAC).

The BACs, as the name suggests, had the task of moving ammunition from the "Third Line" to the Front ("First Line"). Exactly how they worked would depend on local conditions but most of the haulage would be done by horse-drawn ammunition wagons, although mules were also used. These would take the ammunition to a site behind the Front where it would be collected by the Batteries and Infantry Brigades. If needed, men from the BACs would be used as replacements for casualties in the gun batteries.



This is a British Ammunition Column moving along the Struma Valley between Greece and Bulgaria on 4th October 1916

© IWM Q32538

I have given below a very brief account of the battles which Charles would have been involved in, or supported, as part of the Ammunition Column. The 75th Division joined XXI Corps and took part in the invasion of Palestine, beginning with the Third Battle of Gaza on the 27th October 1917, leading to the capture of Gaza (6-7th November) and Junction Station (13-14 November), and the Battle of Nebi Samwil (20-24th November). In the Spring of 1918

the Division was involved in the actions at Tell 'Asur (11–12th March) and Berukin (9-11th April).

Following its reorganisation in the summer of 1918, the 75th Division joined General Allenby's final offensive (the Battles of Megiddo). At the Battle of Sharon (19th September) the Turks were defeated and a final pursuit began.

After the end of the fighting on 19th September 1918, 75th Division and the rest of XXI Corps were set on salvage work and road repair until the Armistice with the Turks was signed on the 31st October.

Demobilisation began early in 1919, but 75th Division was selected for the Army of Occupation of Palestine and we know that Charles was part of this. In March 1919 it returned to garrison duty in Egypt, becoming responsible for the Eastern Delta, which was renamed 75th Division Area.

The British had declared Egypt a "Protectorate", formally severing its connection to the Ottoman Empire. When war ended the Egyptians expected that there would be immediate independence and popular agitation began. There were mass demonstrations, but it was the uprising in the countryside that was more violent, involving attacks on British military installations, civilian facilities and personnel. By 25 July 1919, 800 Egyptians were dead, and 1,600 others were wounded. In 1922 Egypt was granted its independence although tension continued to simmer over British occupation of the Suez Canal area and broke out again with the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Nevertheless, after July 1919, the disturbances in Egypt had begun to die down, and units started to disperse to their home countries within the British Empire.

On the evidence of the *Absent Voter's Lists*, Charles was demobilised, probably in late 1919 or early 1920. We know that in 1920 he was living in Rosebery Street and, by 1925, he and Gertrude had moved to Gladstone Street, also on the Tilcroft Estate, In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* they were still living there. Charles was a Clicker's Sorter and Gertrude was an Assistant Mistress at Ringstead Church of England Primary School.

Charles died, aged 64, on the12th January 1954. He had remained in the trade and was shown as a "boot operative". Gertrude died in 1975.

Chapter 7

The Phillips Family

We will be looking at three men from the Phillips family of Ringstead who shared grandparents Thomas and Mary. The oldest son of the couple, also Thomas, was born in 1852. He had married Eliza Frances Roberts in 1872. Eliza had been born in Leicester but in the 1861 and 1871 Censuses we see that she was staying in Ringstead with her uncle and aunt, William and Charlotte Baxter. William was the local "Vermin Destroyer".

We will be looking at two of the couple's sons, Sidney (or Sydney) Thomas born on 26th September 1888 (1890 in the 1939 Register) and Ross born in 1896.

The youngest son of Thomas and Mary, Ralph, was born on 14th July 1867. He married Sarah Ellen Fox in 1890 and they had four children. It is the second child Arthur James, born on 3rd August 1895, who was the third young man called to serve his country.

Sidney Thomas Phillips (1888-1971)

In the 1901 Census, Sydney Tom Phillips was twelve years old and living with his parents, Thomas and Eliza. Thomas was a shoemaker and the eldest daughters, Rose Maud (17) and Ida Mary (15) were boot closers, and there were two younger children, Lily (10) and Ross (8). By 1911, only Sidney (21) and Ross (15) were still in Gladstone Street with their parents. Sidney was now a shoemaker, and, like his father, his occupation was in "Hand-Sewn Government Work". Thomas and Eliza had had ten children, seven of whom were still living.

Also in 1911, the older sister of Sidney and Ross, Rose Maud Phillips had married John Samuel Bates. He had been born in Kislingbury but he was the son of John Bates a Pastor of the Ringstead Particular Baptists for many years. John junior had not followed his father's profession, and in 1911 he had become a butcher in Scaldwell, just a few miles west of Brixworth. This move seems to have influenced Rose's younger brothers as we shall see.

Then came the First World War but, at first, Sidney remained in Ringstead and he, or his employers, sought to resist his call-up because he "was essential to business". He was a "Hand Welt Sewer" and, of course, good army boots were vital in the trenches of the Western Front. He had also married Ellen Storton at the end of 1917. Ellen was the daughter of Edwin, a butcher and farmer in Harlestone, and his wife Mary. In 1911, aged 20, she had been a student in a Training College in Dudley. Harlestone is some seven miles south-west of Brixworth. We see that butchery and the Brixworth area were key factors in bringing the couple together.

It seems that, at first, the couple may have lived in Ringstead, for this was given as his address on the 4th April 1918, when his second appeal against conscription, at the Northamptonshire Military Tribunal, was dismissed. It was only at this point that Sidney was enlisted with the 3rd Battalion of the East Kent (Buffs) Regiment and given the Regimental Number 20214. Not unexpectedly, there are few other military records for Sidney. The 3rd (Reserve) Battalion was a training unit which remained in the United Kingdom throughout the war.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows that Sidney had been demobilised, so he would have returned home in late 1918 or early 1919. It looks as if the young couple lived in Gladstone Street with Sidney's parents. At first Ellen does not show on the Electoral Register, perhaps because she does not have a property qualification through Sidney. By 1922, however, when she was 30 years old, she too was on the Electoral Roll.

At some point the couple moved back to the west of the county and in 1939 were living at 25 Glasgow Street, off the Weedon Road in Northampton. Sidney was still a handsewn shoe operative. Ellen was not doing paid work and their son Alan, born on 16th June 1923, was a Mechanical Engineer's Apprentice. I believe that Ellen died in 1955 and Sidney in 1971.

Ross Phillips (1895-1974)

Sidney's youngest brother, Ross Phillips, was born on 13th June 1895. Like Sidney, Ross was living with his parents at 7 Gladstone Street in 1901. This was one of three roads built on the Tilcroft Estate at the turn of the century as better modern housing for working families. The house had six rooms and was just up a slope from the ill-fated Britannia Co-operative Boot Factory which was built as part of the same scheme. By the 1911 Census Ross was fifteen years old and a "Butcher's Boy".

When war came Ross enlisted in the Northamptonshire Yeomanry and was given the Regimental Number 1074. We do not know exactly when he attested but his Medal Card does record that he first served in France on 27th March 1915 which means that he was one of the early volunteers. Checking his Regimental Number against others whose enlistment date we know, it seems that he joined up in September 1914, very soon after the start of the war.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* records that he was in "C" Squadron of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry. The Headquarters of the Yeomanry was at Northampton but "C" Squadron was based in Kettering. We have previously written about Sidney Hunt who also joined "C" Squadron but he arrived in France over a year later.

In the period before March 1915 the Yeomanry were the support cavalry for the 8th Division but, in April, the three Squadrons (A, B and C) went their separate ways. On April 11th 1915 "C" Squadron was at Nouveau Monde when they received orders to join the 5th Division as its support cavalry and the next day were on the road through Sailly and Bailleul to billets at Boeschepe. This was just on the French side of the Belgian border, some ten miles south-west of Ypres (Leper).

Ken Tout has written in his book, *Yeomen of England*, about the almost humiliating shock that the Northamptonshire Yeomanry had when they first arrived on the Western Front:

> *The NY men soon discovered the realities of the so-called Great War of 1914-18. A mounted regiment experienced very rare, if any spectacular cavalry charges and underwent much undignified hard labour; most tasks if not justified by the demands of patriotism might have been categorised as slave labour; heaving barbed wire, digging trenches, burying the dead or acting as reserve infantrymen at a moment's notice.*

The War Diary for "C" Squadron bears this out in page after page. Through the rest of April the Squadron were training, with working parties on dugouts, "traffic control" of the movement of troops and supplies and an unsuccessful patrol near Pilckem. This continued through May and June, with unglamorous trench digging, particularly in the Zillebeke area of the Front Line. This was often at night and sometimes under heavy shell fire. July saw the Yeomanry digging in the Voorzetsels trenches but still working from the Boeschepe billets.

Finally, on the 22nd July, "C" Squadron marched to new billets at Hondeghem where the routine continues for the next week. On the 29th they were on the move again, marching to Cassel Station where they entrained to Méricourt l'Abbé and then marched again, to billets

and bivouacs (tents) at Bussy les Daours. At the time, the strength of the Squadron was 5 officers, 130 Other Ranks, 143 horses, 8 mules and 6 four-wheeled vehicles.

On August 4th, the Yeomanry sent out patrols to reconnoitre the area. They also acted as guides at Méricourt l'Abbé on the River Somme to prevent the French and British troops crossing into each other's territory. The patrols and working parties continued and on 19th August they moved billets to Sailly-le-Sec. This mixture of patrols, working parties and reconnaissance continued until the end of 1915.

In January 1916, the "C" Squadron men were in a rest area at Frechencourt but on 8th January marched to Bertangles and then on the 15th on to Hangest-sur-Somme but still in a rest area. Then on the 24th January they marched to Berteaucourt-les-Dames and the following day on to Hardinval (near Doullens). The War Diary records for the 25th January:

> *. . . heavy fall of snow and blizzard, obliged to proceed greater part of journey dismounted.*

The unit's movement continued and on 29th January 1916 they marched to Grand Rullecourt in the Pas de Calais and then on to Noyellette, some seven miles south-east, where patrols along the Front Line went out over the next few days. There was also instruction for the men in the use of the Hotchkiss Rifle which was a lighter version of the Hotchkiss machine gun. On May 29th 1916, the Squadron marched to Harbarcq (one mile outside Noyellette) and joined up with the "A" and "B" Squadrons to become a complete Regiment once again.

The Yeomanry Regiment was now attached to the 6th Corps at Harbarcq where they received instruction in the use of the new "smoke helmets". An American, Arthur Empey, who joined the British Army, when the USA did not, at first, enter the war after the sinking of the Lusitania, wrote of the smoke helmets in 1917:

> We had a new man at the periscope, on this afternoon in question; I was sitting on the fire step, cleaning my rifle, when he called out to me: 'There's a sort of greenish, yellow cloud rolling along the ground out in front, it's coming ---'
>
> *But I waited for no more, grabbing my bayonet, which was detached from the rifle, I gave the alarm by banging an empty shell case, which was hanging near the periscope. At the same instant, gongs started ringing down the trench, the signal for Tommy to don his respirator, or smoke helmet, as we call it.*
>
> *Gas travels quietly, so you must not lose any time; you generally have about eighteen or twenty seconds in which to adjust your gas helmet.*
>
> *A gas helmet is made of cloth, treated with chemicals. There are two windows, or glass eyes, in it, through which you can see. Inside there is a rubber-covered tube, which goes in the mouth. You breathe through your nose; the gas, passing through the cloth helmet, is neutralized by the action of the chemicals. The foul air is exhaled through the tube in the mouth, this tube being so constructed that it prevents the inhaling of the outside air or gas. One helmet is good for five hours of the strongest gas. Each Tommy carries two of them slung around his shoulder in a waterproof*

canvas bag. He must wear this bag at all times, even while sleeping. To change a defective helmet, you take out the new one, hold your breath, pull the old one off, placing the new one over your head, tucking in the loose ends under the collar of your tunic.

The working parties continued as before, much of the time spent on burying telegraph cables. Training also continued with officers and NCOs going on courses on "gas", sniping, and trench warfare. There was also the escorting of prisoners of war, as well as having to search for escaped ones.

The *War Diary* reported snowfall on the night of the 16th/17th January 1917 and that the weather remained frosty for the rest of the month, so that mounted training was impossible. A month later the "thaw commenced". On March 1st, the Diary reported:

Regiment collected for training (with exception of 24 O.R. employed threshing).

It seems that these ranks had been sent by the Regimental Purchasing Officer to a local farm to thresh corn that he had bought. Was it for the men or the horses?

What strikes you is that, certainly for "C" Squadron, there had been little Front-Line action. The Diary has little mention of action or casualties. Then things changed!

On 9th April 1917, the Regiment left Harbarcq. They had orders, as part of the 6th Corps to attack east of Arras. We now see the first account of a fierce battle since Ross had joined the Yeomanry in France. April 11th 1917 was an infamous day for the cavalry on the Western Front. The Northamptonshire Yeomanry arrived at Monchy-le-Preux to find that the planned attack had stalled because of heavy machine-gun fire. We do not get a real impression of the battle from the *War Diary* but, as we have seen in the stories of Archibald Dicks and Sidney Hunt, that they were under intense fire and lost a dozen men killed and fifty men wounded, shell-shocked or missing.

Just prior to this action, on 1st April 1917, all the Territorial soldiers had been renumbered and Ross's was changed from 1074 to 145345.

On 22nd April 1917, the Regiment moved to Agnez-les-Duisans. Here they were taking turns in the Front Line, as replacement infantrymen, and were under constant barrages sustaining casualties. Ross seems to have coped well with being a soldier. Unfortunately, we do not have records of when his promotions occurred but we do know that he had become a Sergeant by the end of the war.

The Regiment then moved back into reserve and on 23rd August marched to Fort Mardyck in Dunkirk, via Savy-Berlette, Pernes-en-Artois, Wittes, Staple and Wormhout, arriving on the 30th August. Here they took over the coastal defences and it seems that they were not again involved in further enemy action. In November 1917 they left the Western Front and moved to Italy to become part of the 14th Corps. They arrived there on the 5th November.

The Italians, who were our allies in the First World War, had been routed at Caporetto by and Austro-German force on 24th October 1917 and it was thought that their resistance would disintegrate. In fact, by the time that the French and the British arrived, the Italians

were retaking control of the situation. As a result, the Yeomanry found that they were largely held in reserve although the British did lose some 700 to 2000 men (statistics vary) in the campaign.

Ross (possibly a wedding photograph taken in 1922)
With thanks to Sarah Hayes

Ross does not appear in the *Ringstead Absent Voters' Lists* for 1918 or 1919 but it may be that he had already moved to the Brixworth area and it seems likely that he was demobilised in late 1918 or early 1919. He returned to Northamptonshire and carried on with his trade of butchery. It seems possible that this was first with John Bates who had married Ross's sister, Rose and become a butcher in that area.

In 1922 Ross married Lucy Margaret Williams in the Brixworth District. It may be significant that in the 1911 Census for Spratton, Lucy's brother, John Turner Williams, aged 13 years, was working as a "Butcher's Apprentice". Her father was a "Stud Groom, Domestic".

In 1939 Ross was living at 106 Milton Street in Northampton, just a couple of miles across town from his older brother Sidney Tom Phillips, He was now a "Master Butcher (Retired)". He was only forty-four years old at the time. The corner shop still exists (June 1918) although no longer a butcher's shop. On April 1st 1950, the couple were still living in Milton Road when their only child, June, married Noel Messenger in St Giles's Church.

At some point Ross and Lucy moved to The Headlands in Northampton, for Ross died there on 29th September 1974. I believe that Lucy died some ten years later.

Arthur James Phillips (1895-1972)

A cousin of Sidney and Ross, Arthur James Phillips, was the son of Ralph and Sarah Ellen (née Fox). He had been born on the 30th August 1895 in Ringstead, the second oldest of a family of four. He had an older sister, Florence, and two younger siblings, Gertrude and Reginald.

We may sometimes be guilty of over-romanticising village life in the past. Its closeness could also lead to bitter squabbles. The *Northampton Mercury* of 16th June 1905 reported:

> *Lavinia Mayes, married woman of Ringstead, was summoned for assaulting Sarah E. Phillips also of Ringstead on March 25th. – Defendant pleaded guilty and pleaded provocation by the continual insults made to her by the complainant. – Defendant admitted throwing a bucket of water over the complainant. – The Bench fined the defendant 10s. and 6s. costs; in default 14 days hard labour.*

It seems likely that that London End could be a rancorous place at times.

By 1911 Florence had left home and James (his second name seems to have been often used) was the oldest child still at home. He was now eighteen years old and worked as a "Fitter-up" in a local boot factory.

Arthur enlisted on the 15th January 1916 with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and given Regimental Number 40755. We know that at the end of his time he was serving in the 2nd Battalion and it seems likely that this was his unit from the start of his service.

In 1916 the main battles that the 2nd Battalion were involved in were on the Western Front as part of the Somme Campaign. The *War Diaries* are not always easy to relate to the minor battles that were in turn part of major campaigns (also called Battles). The naming often came later and the Diary was about the actuality of small sectors, sometimes measured in yards. For most ordinary soldiers we have to make a best guess as to where they were, for they were rarely named.

It seems likely, however, that Arthur was at the Battle of Albert (1st-13th July 1916) which was one element of the opening phase of the Battle of the Somme. The 2nd Battalion were part of an attack by the British in the Thiepval area. Although planned, it became chaotic when a late change of plan did not reach some of the units involved until too late. Half of the original planned artillery barrage went ahead before it was aborted and the new bombardment on a wider front was carried out, but now with only half the ammunition available. As a result, the battle was a familiar story of hard-won gains followed by counter-attacks and forced retreats to previous positions.

The Battalion lost ten Other Ranks killed and 128 wounded, with 16 missing: 154 men in all. Eight officers were also lost, wounded or missing.

On 5th July the Battalion marched some three miles south-east, to Hedauville, for three days before moving on to billets at Bouzincourt. On 10th July they joined the 14th Infantry Brigade at Orvillers-la-Boiselle and in the attack that followed managed to advance a short distance. The ruined village was finally captured. This area, which had been ravaged by warfare since 1914, was then relatively quiet until the final German offensive in the Spring of 1918.

In this period from the 10th to 14th July 1916 the Battalion lost 3 officers killed and 5 wounded, while Other Ranks lost 34 men killed and 163 wounded with 36 missing. The summaries of the action seen by the Battalion show that they were also at the Battle of Bazentin (14th-17th July 1916). The *War Diary* tells that the Battalion were then on the move from Bouzincourt to Neuvillette and that this movement continued throughout July, finally ending at the end of the month at Heuchin.

Continuing into August, this movement took them 19 miles east to billets in the Tobacco Factory in Bethune. They were then in and out of the Front Line trenches in the Ginchy and Thiepval area as part of the Battle of the Ancre (13th-18th November 1916). After that, they were not part of any major action but still in localised fighting. On 23rd November, in an unsuccessful sortie, a party tried to rescue men trapped by enemy fire in a dug-out. In this action one Officer was killed and three wounded and four Other Ranks were killed and 42 wounded, with 17 missing. Apart from this assault, a further man was killed and 41 Other Ranks wounded with 5 missing. The slaughter on the Western Front was so great that such everyday losses almost went unnoticed.

The first major action of the new year was in March 1917 when the Germans began to make their planned withdrawal to the strong defensive line that they had been building. This retreat to the Hindenburg Line saw the Allied forces moving forward but against a strong rearguard action by the enemy. By April 11th the 2nd Battalion was at Holnon where they constructed a "line of resistance".

In June 1917 the Inniskilling Fusiliers began a move some hundred miles north as part of the 32nd Division, finally arriving at Nieuport les Bains on the Belgian coast and Ghyvelde, just across the border, in France. It was still part of the Front Line with regular deaths and woundings, but not on a large scale. On 26th July 1917, however, this changed when the *War Diary* reported:

> *1 officer and 243 Other Ranks (Gassed).*

It continued:

> *"Gassed". Caused by Gas Shell used by the enemy for the first time and very difficult to detect. It affected the eyes in some cases causing temporary blindness as well as causing temporary loss of speech, in many cases the effect only became apparent after a lapse of a few days.*

This new weapon was Mustard Gas, only detectable by smell, and of course your nose became desensitised as to any pervading smell. It was more serious than the *Diary* seems to indicate and could hang around in cold weather for days so was unsuitable as a "pre-attack" weapon. Vera Brittain, the novelist, who was a WW1 nurse, wrote in *Testament of Youth*:

> *I wish those people who talk about going on with this war whatever it costs could see the soldiers suffering from mustard gas poisoning. Great mustard-coloured blisters, blind eyes, all sticky and stuck together, always fighting for breath, with voices a mere whisper, saying that their throats are closing and they know they will choke.*

The Battalion was in billets at Ribaillet Camp but this was not a safe haven. On August 14th they were bombed with Gas and H.E. Shells from midnight until 4.30 am. The *Diary* records, however, that the casualties were very small "owing to the promptness with which the men put on their Box Respirators". They also cleared the camp during the barrage.

British soldier wearing a Small Box Respirator
From Medical Service: Diseases of the War (HMSO 1923). en.wikipedia.com.

By the end of August, the Battalion was in billets in Canada Camp at Coxyde (Koksijde). In September the usual pattern of being in and out of the Front Line continued in the Lombartzyde sector which was just across the Rover Yser from Nieuport. Casualties continued in large numbers for, as the *Diary* makes clear, the area was important for both sides.

> *The sector that the Brigade was holding was most important as it was the main Defence of the Bridges and Locks round NIeuport. In the event of these being lost the enemy would have been enabled to flood the country for a considerable distance; it was also important as the ground just in the rear of the front line position that could have been used as the jumping off place in the event of further operations.*

On 20th October 1917 J.A. Phillips (we know that he is correct man from his Regimental Number and reference to Ringstead) was in the War Office Daily List No. 5395. These lists of casualties could refer to events six or more weeks before publication so we cannot be sure of exact dates. We do learn that he had been appointed at some stage to Lance Corporal.

Arthur was discharged on 24th July 1918 because of disability caused by his wounds. He had sustained gunshot wounds to his right leg and ankle and also to his right eyelid. He received a small Army Pension. Considering the severity of his injuries, Arthur would have been taken back to England for treatment and it seems likely that he did not return to active service

again. Certainly, he married Annie Laurie Haxley in the second quarter of 1918 so he was back home before his discharge.

Annie was the daughter of Harry Haxley, who was originally from Catworth in Huntingdonshire and his wife Annie who was a local Raunds girl. Harry was a "Hand Boot Sciver" (or Skiver – someone who pared or cut off excess leather) and daughter, Annie, at fourteen years of age was a "Boot Factory Bench Girl". In 1911 they were living in Raunds High Street.

The Pension Card for Arthur shows that after the marriage the young couple were living at 36 North Street in Raunds. They had at least two children: Dorothy born on 25th April 1919 and Geoffrey on 28th September 1930. By 1939 the family were living at 3 Barn Close in Raunds. Arthur was now a "Sole Cutter" and Annie had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties".

By 2nd December 1972, when Arthur died, he and Annie had moved to 43 Park Avenue in Raunds. Annie died four years later.

Chapter 8

Walter Shedrick Pitts (1890-1966)

John William Pitts was born in Tansor on 13th December 1863. His background was a little complicated but, looking at the 1871 Census, he appears to have been the son of Mary Pitts before she married Thomas Upex on the 25th September 1865. In that Census, Thomas and Mary were living with her father, James Pitts, in Tansor.

John William seems to have been missed by the 1881 Census officers but this was not unusual for young men "on the tramp" for work. We next catch up with him when he married Theodosia Atkins in the Oundle District in the second quarter of 1884. Theodosia can also be a little difficult to follow through the records mainly because of the many versions of her Christian name. She can be Theodicia or Dosia or even Doshe. She was the daughter of William, a labourer from Elton in Huntingdonshire, and his wife Sarah Atkins.

Theodosia had had a child called John William P. Atkins before her marriage. It seems very likely that the "P" was for Pitts and, looking at the names, that he was John William's child, and he does eventually take the Pitts surname. In 1891 the family were living in Ringstead and there were three children. John William, the father, was a platelayer, working for the *London & North Western Railway Company,* based at Thrapston. Walter Shedrick, and it is usually this spelling rather than Shadrick or Shadrack, was just five months old.

By 1911 John was still a platelayer, and he and Theodosia had been married 27 years and had three children, all still living. Walter was now twenty years old and working as a shoe greaser, doing government contract work in a local factory. Theodosia died the following year.

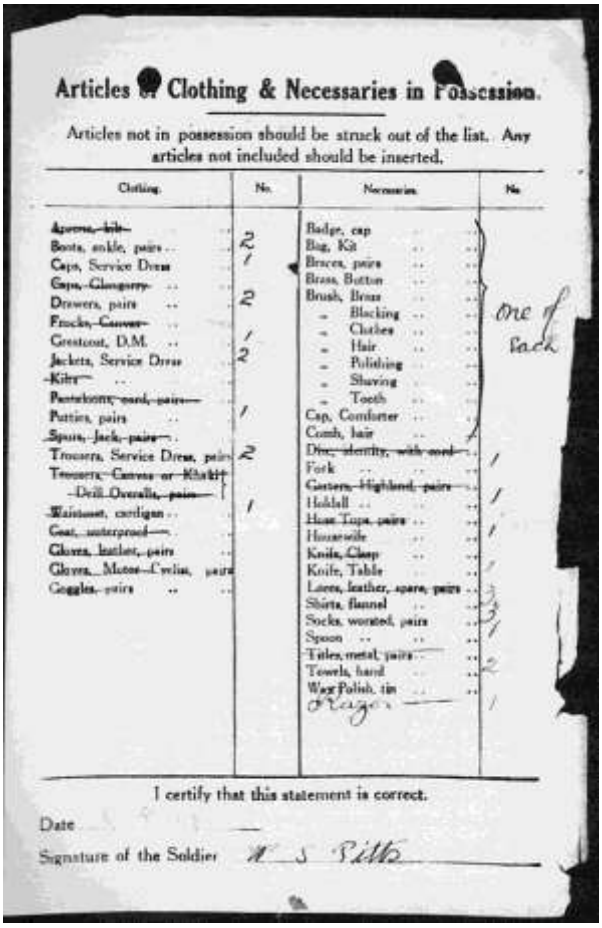
The Great War came in 1914, but like many others, Walter did not volunteer but carried on with his family life. On the 3rd April 1915 he married Mary Ann Hales. She was the daughter of farm labourer, John Hales and his wife, Emily, and in 1901 the family was living in Titchmarsh. By 1911, Mary Ann had become a domestic servant in Rockingham Road, Kettering. We do not know how Walter and Mary Ann's paths crossed but obviously they did. They had a daughter, Ivy May, born on 14th January 1916.

The young family set up home in Carlow Road in Ringstead, with John William Pitts, Walter's widowed father.

Walter was conscripted but, initially, was posted to the "C" Company of the 84th Training Reserve Battalion with Service Number T.R./5/59511. He was given a further medical examination at Northampton on 23rd November 1916. He was 5ft 8 inches tall with a 34½inch chest and a weight of 134 lbs. (9st 8lbs or 60.8 kilos). He occupation seems to have been given as just "shoe", but I believe that he was a labourer within the shoe trade rather than a craftsman.

He appears to be a reasonable candidate for active service but when we look at his other medical details, we see that he had poor eyesight (6/18 in both eyes) and deafness in both ears. He would have been a danger to himself and others in a warzone.

In June 1913 there was an *Army Council Instruction* which transferred the Agricultural Companies to the Labour Corps. On 18th June 1917 Walter was transferred to the 436th Agricultural Company of the Labour Corps, based at Northampton, and given a new Service Number, 495750. He took with him to his new unit a list of the army clothing and other items which helps give a picture of the non-combative soldier's pack. The items that he had were: 2 pairs ankle boots ; 1 service dress cap; 2 pairs of drawers; 1 D.M. {drab mixture] greatcoat; 2 service dress jackets; 1 pair of putties; 2 pairs service dress trousers; 1 cardigan; 1 each of cap badge, kit bag, pair braces, brass button, brass, blacking, clothes, hair, polishing, shaving, tooth, brushes; 1 fork; 1 holdall [like a cloth tool roll]; 1 housewife [sewing kit]; 1 knife; 3 flannel shirts; 3 pairs of worsted socks; 1 spoon; 2 hand towels; 1 razor.



Articles of Clothing & Necessaries in Possession.

Articles not in possession should be struck out of the list. Any articles not included should be inserted.

Clothing.	No.	Necessaries.	No.
~~Aprons, kit~~		Badge, cap	
Boots, ankle, pairs	2	Bag, Kit	
Caps, Service Dress	1	Braces, pairs	
~~Caps, Glengarry~~		Brass, Button	
Drawers, pairs	2	Brush, Brass	
~~Frocks, Canvas~~		" Blacking	one of
Greatcoat, D.M.	1	" Clothes	each
Jackets, Service Dress	2	" Hair	
~~Kilts~~		" Polishing	
~~Pantaloons, cord, pairs~~		" Shaving	
Putties, pairs	1	" Tooth	
~~Spurs, Jack, pairs~~		Cap, Comforter	
Trousers, Service Dress, pairs	2	Comb, hair	
~~Trousers, Canvas or Khaki~~ ~~Drill Overalls, pairs~~		Disc, identity, with cord	1
		Fork	1
~~Waistcoat, cardigan~~	1	~~Gaiters, Highland, pairs~~	
~~Coat, waterproof~~		Holdall	1
~~Gloves, leather, pairs~~		~~Hose Tops, pairs~~	
~~Gloves, Motor-Cyclist, pairs~~		Housewife	1
~~Goggles, pairs~~		~~Knife, Clasp~~	
		Knife, Table	1
		Laces, leather, spare, pairs	
		Shirts, flannel	3
		Socks, worsted, pairs	1
		Spoon	
		~~Tallies, metal, pairs~~	
		Towels, hard	2
		Wax Polish, tin	
		Razor	1

I certify that this statement is correct.

Date —

Signature of the Soldier W J Pitts

From British Army WW1 Soldiers' Records. www.ancestry.co.uk.

The Agricultural Companies were not a "formed" unit. The 436th had a small headquarters section in Northampton but the men would have either lived at home or were billeted near the farm where they worked. The farmer would be charged for their services.

The shortage of men to work on the farms had become acute. Besides the need to feed the nation there was a huge army and its animals abroad. Philip Wilson, in March 2013, on the Great War Forum pointed out that, besides ammunition at 56,000 tons a week that was shipped out to the Western Front, the second highest weekly tonnage was forage at 35,970 tons. This would have consisted largely of hay straw and oats for the horses and mules.

On 3rd April 1918 Walter was examined again and reported to have "chronic middle ear catarrh" and given medical category BII (two). He would never serve in a fighting capacity and he was sent to the Dispersal Unit at Purfleet and demobilised on 23rd January 1919.

He returned to Carlow Road where he, and his wife May Ann and their children continued to live with Walter's widowed father, John William Pitts. Walter now had the vote and appeared on the *Electoral Register,* but Mary Ann did not qualify, and it was not until the 1928 *Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act* that she was able to vote. The couple had at least three more children after Ivy: Walter Richard had been born on 30th October 1917; John in 1921 and Leslie in 1924.

It would not have been an easy life and Walter was charged with petty theft. In the Northampton Mercury of 22nd January 1926 there is a report of a local court case:

> *Walter Shedrick Pitts, a labourer, living with his father at Ringstead was charged with breaking and entering, in the day time, the dwelling house of Alfred Reeder, and stealing a metal watch, value 7s. and a pair of leggings value 7s. 6d. at Ringstead on the 15th January. Sergt. Johnson stated that when he saw prisoner at Ringstead, prisoner at first denied knowledge of the matter, but eventually said he did go to Reeder's house and took the watch and leggings. Prisoner produced the watch from a tin in a barn, and the leggings from a barn adjoining. – Prisoner was remanded and told that if he could provide a surety he would be liberated on bail.*

Jon Abbott, on the Ringstead Heritage website has told how, in 1927, Ringstead had its first electricity sub-station built in Church Street near the junction with Carlow Road. Although they were living in one of the first houses which had a potential electricity supply laid to it, John William Pitts refused to have it turned on and the family continued to rely on oil lamps.

By the 1939 *Register of England and Wales*, John William had retired and Walter was now a roadman with the County Council. His date of birth is shown as the 18th October 1891 but I think that this should be 1890 (and, in one of his military records, it is 1889).

Walter's eldest son, also Walter, married Edith Saddington in 1940. In October 1943 Walter Shedrick Pitts was once again in the newspapers because of a court case. He had stolen £30 in notes from his son's father-in-law Samuel Saddington, who was a smallholder and dairyman in Raunds. Samuel put in a plea for Walter, stating that he must have been desperate and at the time had yielded to sudden temptation. He also said that "during the last three years his troubles have been excessive".

We do not know all of Walter's troubles but his father had broken his thigh not long before this case. In the following year his youngest son, Leslie, was killed while fighting in Western Europe. What other troubles had assailed the couple?

Walter died on 8th November 1966 and Mary Ann, aged 87, died some ten years later, on July 4th 1976. She was living at 6 Greenbank Terrace in Ringstead at the time of her death.

Chapter 9

Oliver John Pothecary (1897-1923)

Pothecary was originally a Medieval surname, derived from the occupation of an Apothecary, who was a keeper of herbs and spices, or an early pharmacist. Our Pothecarys came from Woodford, where William John Pothecary married Mary Ann Gunn on the 26th November 1896. Their son, Oliver John was baptised in Woodford Church on the 23rd May of the following year. William was a "Furnace's Labourer" in the local iron ore blast furnaces.

In the 1901 Census they were living in Pleasant Row in Woodford and already had three children, Oliver (3), Herbert Victor (2) and William George (1). We see that William senior had been born in Wiltshire and the next Census shows that this had been in the small village of Corton on the edges of Cranborne Chase. Mary was a Woodford girl and perhaps it had been the work that had drawn William north. By the 1911 Census, the couple had two more children, Alfred and Horace Elijah. Was Mary Ann hoping for a girl? Oliver was thirteen years old and working as an errand boy for a fishmonger. War came in 1914 and conscription in 1916 but Oliver was not at first conscripted.

In the summer of 1917, he married Bertha Eleanor (sometimes Helena) Bates from across the Nene in Ringstead. She had been christened in her parish church, the daughter of William and Maud Bates, on the 16th April 1890.

Soon after the marriage Oliver was conscripted. He was enlisted with the Royal Army Medical Corps in August 1917 and was given the service number 123845. At some point, in late 1917 or early 1918, he was posted abroad to the 38th Field Ambulance (FA).

The 38th FA was part of the 12th (Eastern) Division) which fought on the Western Front throughout the war. On the 1st January 1918, the 38th FA were at Les Puresbecque and there was heavy snow. This was a farm 20 miles west of Lille in northern France, not far from the Belgium border. The 38th moved soon after to Fort Rompu in support of the Division, which was in the Front Line at Fleurbaix, west of Lille.

As we have seen in previous biographies, the Field Ambulance was not a vehicle but a medical unit that was based not far behind the Front Line. It included men and vehicles of various types. When at full strength, which was rarely, it had ten officers and 224 men. It would be divided into three sections and each one of these had a Stretcher Bearer and Tented subsection. Besides the doctors, the men would have a wide variety of roles, from nursing orderlies, to cooks, sanitation squads,, bootmakers, water carriers, and ambulance (some horse-drawn) drivers. The officers would also be responsible for inspecting the fighting men for illness and ensuring the drinking water and sanitation arrangements were safe from infection. Cleanliness was often impossible in the mud of Flanders.

The Field Ambulance was designed (in theory) to cope with up to 150 casualties and was also tasked with establishing and running the points along the casualty evacuation chain. This “chain” took the injured backwards from the Front Line through the Bearer Relay Posts to the Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) to the Main Dressing Station (MDS) and, if necessary, to the Field Hospitals, large coastal hospitals and on to England..

We do not know what role that Oliver Pothecary was assigned, and it may have varied, but it seems likely that it was one of the more physical tasks.

In March 1918 he 12th Division had moved over 100 miles further south, and were in the Senlis-le-Sec, Bouzincourt area, north of Albert, on the morning of the 24th March 1918. The Germans, however, pre-empted any Allied attack by launching the Michael Offensive. On the 26th March, the enemy were seen advancing down the slopes of the Ancre Valley and

the fighting started. The Division was engaged in the Battle of Bapaume which was part of the 1918 Battle of Arras. It suffered heavy casualties in facing the massed German advance.

The German offensive continued in the rain and the *War Diary* shows the 38th Field Ambulance was constantly on the move as the Allied Line was driven back. The entry for the 5th April records:

> *A large number of gunner casualties have been dealt with and the dressing station has been working at full capacity.*

On the 8th April it reports that the neighbouring village had been bombarded with gas shells which might be of a new type.

> *In the opinion of the Divisional Gas Officer the nature was Mustard mixed with Di-Phosgene and Chloropicrin. Cases presented certain unusual features such as delayed gastric irritation with sickness and retching. . . 6 Officers and 112 OR* affected and evacuated.

It also states:

> *Men are tired and sodden with mud, and trench foot is beginning to appear again.*

The Diary records that, besides the usual bravery awards, the men could be awarded "Blue Cards" in recognition of distinguished conduct in the field.

It is difficult to imagine the mental and physical strain of constantly moving patients, men, tents and equipment and setting it up again, often in terrible weather conditions and then having to be ready to deal with new casualties. The Diary notes on the 26th April:

> *No building being available, an operating tent was pitched in the field next to the water mill.*

By May the tide was turning for the last time and the 38th were at Franqueville, trying to work in old Nissen huts which were in need of repair and cleaning. June came and now there was some time and energy for a football match to be organised. We see a movement forward from Le Plouy which is east of Abbeville, to Raincheval and Puchevillers. Then it was on to Harponville where they made use of a small church for the "sick". It is important to note the emphasis on the word "sick", for although many more men would be wounded and killed before the war was won, another scourge had moved west which would take even more lives than the war. The Diary entry for the 24th May notes that:

> *The present epidemic is apparently undoubtedly Influenza. The typical bacilli having been isolated in nearly all cases. It is characterised by a short period of Pyrexia [Fever] – usually three days, associated with catarrhal symptoms in nose and throat and slight bronchitis.*

This was the notorious "Spanish Flu" which actually came from the East. By July, the flu had begun to affect the RAMC men, making life even harder for those not affected. On the 1st July, the 12th Division attacked the enemy at Bouzincourt but could not break through and, on the 10th July, were relieved and moved to a new part of the Front Line south of Amiens.

On the 10th July the 38th Field Ambulance moved to Herrissart, and made use of two schools for the sick, and then on to St Sauflieu. The Germans were still putting up a stiff resistance as they tried to make an orderly withdrawal and their aircraft continued to drop bombs on the troops. The Allies were still moving forward and had to take care to avoid booby traps left by the retreating enemy. Gas shells were a major source of casualties. In October, the 12th Division were part of the Final Advance in Artois. On the 21st October at Beuvry the Diary records:

> *The civilians have been in the habit of paying 5 marks for a visit from a doctor and 2 to 3 marks for dressing or medicine.*

On the 30th October, the Division was withdrawn for rest and by the 11th November the 38th Ambulance was at Rumegies and the Diary briefly notes:

> *Hostility ceased at 11 am today. Cleaning and training.*

The unit continued its work into December where the Diary shows:

> *Trouble is being caused to the Troops by civilians returning and so turning troops out of their billets.*

We sometimes forget that these battles were fought across a populated, or recently populated, landscape. The new year brought an easing of the workload and the Diary tells of "a good deal of football being played" and the Divisional Boxing Championships. On the 15th January 1919:

> *The unit was photographed by the 1st Field Survey Battalion about three weeks ago. Lt. Col. Forsyth D.S.O. had prints for each man done at home. These are being distributed today. It is an excellent photograph and a very acceptable souvenir*

For many, unfortunately, their main souvenirs were battered bodies and minds and, for Oliver Pothecary, it appears, the illness that would soon kill him.

He returned to Bertha and his child in Sivers Row in Ringstead and became a labourer on the railway. The couple had three more children, Irene on the 8th December 1919, William on the 6th March 1922 and Kenneth on the 9th January 1924.

By the time Kenneth had been born, however, Oliver was dead. He had died on the 19th October of the previous year. Bertha was entitled to a widow's pension which included extra money for her children. Oliver had died of Pulmonary Tuberculosis (T.B.) which he had probably contracted during his war service. He is not on the War Memorial or the Ringstead Roll of Honour

Bertha remarried, to Arthur Dickens, in 1926 but he too died, aged 26, after an operation for appendicitis, just two years later. Bertha married again, this time to Percy Mayes in 1936 and they were together, with the Pothecary and Dickens children in the *1939 Register of England and Wales.* She died in 1950.

Chapter 10

The Roberts Family

We have begun a number of these stories, of men who fought in the Great War, by saying that the family name was well known in the village. The Roberts also had this distinction but, because of a Roberts who later became the first female Prime Minister, it is also known worldwide. In the *Ringstead People* books we have traced the family back to William Roberts who killed a fellow worker in the harvest field. William suffered many other tragedies in his family and we will see that some of his male descendants also struggled with what life had to offer.

For the purposes of our biographies, we will start their family tree with John Roberts, born in 1791, who was one of the surviving children from his father's first marriage. John married Alice Page on 7th August 1830 in Ringstead Church. This was John's second marriage, following the death of Rebecca, his first wife. The couple soon had another family and it is the lines of two of these sons, John born in about 1834 and Thomas born in about 1839, which we will be following.

The Roberts Family

A Very Simplified Family Tree

John Roberts ---------- **Alice Page**

I I

John Roberts *born 1834 m* **Letitia Phillips** **Thomas Roberts** *born 1839 m* **Mary Coleman**

I I I

Benjamin *m* **Ellen Smith** **John** *b1860 m* **Sarah Lockie** **George Henry** *m* **Mary Elizabeth Smith**

I I I

Edward Roberts *b1897* **John Owen Roberts** *b1888* **John Thomas Roberts** *b1892*

John Roberts married Letitia Phillips on 12th September 1853 and among their children were Benjamin, born in 1858, and John, born in about 1860. Benjamin married Ellen Smith, and one of their children was Edward, born in 1897. John married Sarah Lockie and became a well-known organ builder and repairer. One of his sons was John Owen Roberts born in 1888.

If we now climb back up (or is it down?) the tree to Thomas born in about 1839 we find that he married Mary Coleman. When she died in 1872, he remarried, to Elizabeth Greetham, but it is a son of the first marriage, George Henry, born in about 1865, whose son we will be looking at. George married Mary Elizabeth Smith in1887 and one of their children was John Thomas born in about 1892.

So, we have our three men, Edward, John Owen, and John Thomas Roberts after an almost Old Testament trail through the family tree. We will start with Edward.

Edward Roberts (1897-1917)

We have written elsewhere in the *Ringstead People* books about Benjamin Ebenezer Roberts. He was born in 1858, just twelve years before the death of his father, John, in 1870. In the 1871 Census we see that he was aged 13 and living with his widowed mother, Letitia and was already working as a shoemaker.

In 1881 he was still working at this trade and living with Letitia and his siblings in Ringstead High Street. Next door lived another widow, Catherine Smith. Catherine and her husband had come over from Ireland and made their way through England from the west, possibly escaping the terrible famines in Ireland. One of her daughters, Ellen, married Benjamin at St Sepulchre Church in Northampton on 2nd March 1883. This was a High Anglican Church and one wonders if it was a compromise with Ellen's possibly Catholic background and away from the Nonconformist eyes of Ringstead.

Benjamin and Ellen had eight children, one of whom died in infancy. In age order they were Eleanor (sometimes Helena), Harold, Frances, George, Alfred, Jessie and Edward. I have not found the infant death.

By 1911 three of the children had left home. Eleanor and Frances were both servants at Upton Hall. Eleanor was a parlourmaid and her sister a housemaid. Alfred whose eyesight was too poor for shoemaking became a shopkeeper in Grantham. It seems unlikely that he would have been conscripted in view of his disability.

It is the youngest child Edward, born in 1897, who was the only son that we know fought in the war. In 1911 he was a "leather chopper" in a "Lift Factory". A "lift" was a heel made up from layers of leather. *A. E. Fox and Company* was a firm based in Burton Latimer but they had also opened a second factory at the bottom of Spencer Street in Ringstead.

In 1915, Frances, who we had last seen as a housemaid at Upton Hall, married in the village church there to "Drummer Thomas Garland" from the East Surrey Regiment. Alfred too married, to Beatrice Stephenson, on 2nd June 1917 at the Wesleyan Chapel in Grantham. The children were leaving home. Edward either volunteered in late 1915 or was conscripted in early 1916 and was posted to the Suffolk Regiment and given Regimental Number34620. *Charlie* and *Jay* on the *Great War Forum* website have helped me give some reasonably accurate dating for Edward's service.

It seems most likely that he attested in December 1915 and was mobilised in June 1916. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure when he transferred to the Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians) but we know that this is what happened. The Regiment had been formed in 1881 as part of the Childers' Reforms. It was a bringing together of former Regiments and one of these was Canadian, raised in response to a massacre of 120 women and children in India. The link with the Canadians weakened through the years but it still retained its nickname, "The Royal Canadians".

Edward Roberts
Rushden Argus. With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

Edward, probably with others from the Suffolks, joined the 6th Battalion of the Leinsters in Salonika. Clive Aslet wrote in *The Irish Times* in 2016:

> *Now called Thessaloniki, the city itself had, until a few years before, been one of the jewels of the Ottoman Empire – a mysterious compound of the exotic and cosmopolitan, the place to which St Paul had addressed his Letter to the Thessalonians, in which Roman ruins stood beside ancient basilicas, recently converted back to churches from being mosques. From the port, serving the Balkans, it was possible to see Mount Olympus, home of the ancient gods, across the bay. But outside the city, the countryside hadn't changed much from the days when Lord Byron was there, its tracks – there were no proper roads – still haunted by brigands. .*
>
> *. . . the French and British threw a ring of barbed wire fortifications around Salonika (it became known as The Birdcage) and occupied the plains; while the Bulgarians dug themselves into the mountains. That was how things remained until the last months of the war. Stalemate.*

It would have seemed a relief, at first, compared to the rain and mud of the Western Front but it had hidden dangers for the soldiers who were stuck there for two years. Writing of *Medicine and Medical Service in the First World War*, Leo Van Bergen stated:

> *At Salonika, the base of the British Balkan campaign, hospitals were in a dreadful state, every once in a while complicated even more so by extreme cold. Illnesses such as malaria, sand fever, typhoid, and dysentery raged among patients and doctors alike.*

61st General Hospital, Salonika

The Greek King changed his stance from neutrality to support of the Allied cause and, as a result, many of the British troops were not now required. In September 1917, the Battalion left for Egypt for service there and in Palestine. It seems unlikely that Edward travelled with them because he was already too ill to leave Salonika. He died of dysentery in the 61st General Hospital in Salonika on 1st December 1917. He was buried in the Salonika (Lambet Road) Military Cemetery in Grave 1300. He was 19 years of age. After the war he was also commemorated on the Ringstead War Memorial. He was entitled to the British and Victory Medals. His mother, Ellen, who, of course was Irish by birth, received a small pension.

Edward's sister, Frances, had also suffered. It appears that her husband, Thomas Garland had been reported wounded in 1916 and then in 1918 as missing. It is a little confused but it then seems that he was reported as killed on 6th May 1918. This, however, was not correct and he was a prisoner-of-war and he did return to England after the war had ended. He became a sub-postmaster in Asfordby in Leicestershire and he and Frances were there with their family in the *1939 Register of England and Wales*.

It would have been a terrible time for the Roberts family. When we look at photographs of Benjamin, he always had looked a rather sad, morose figure. This may have just been his natural look but we know that in the years after the war he began to sink into depression. In April 1925 he went to Irthlingborough Station and lay down, with his head on the rail, as a train approached the station. It was slowing, ready to stop, and the "lifeguard" in front of the wheels pushed Benjamin along so that he was not immediately killed but was badly injured. He was tried for attempting suicide and we learn that the family had sought to get him into a mental hospital but the required number of doctors had not agreed to certify

him. He returned home into the care of his wife Ellen, who was a St John Ambulance nurse. He died a few months later, on 17th September 1925.

Was he another victim of the war? We will never know and he was not the only Roberts man to suffer depression in his later years. As we will see.

John Owen Roberts (1888-1957)

Benjamin's younger brother was John Roberts who was first a shoemaker but later became a full-time organ maker and repairer. He had started his business in a barn behind the Post Office but later had a house he named *Mozart House* in Denford Road.

On 25th May 1885 he had married dressmaker Sarah Lockie in St Giles's Church in Northampton. Again, like brother, Benjamin, some two years earlier, he had chosen to marry, not in either the groom's or the bride's home villages but in the county town. He too was a Nonconformis,t so did his bride want a church wedding and he wanted it away from the local rivalries of church and chapel?

In the 1891 Census the couple were living in the High Street and John was working as a shoemaker. They had two children, Florence (5), and John Owen (3). In the same Census, living in Denford, were Freeman Arnold, a bricklayer's labourer, and his wife Lucy and their family, including youngest daughter Alice Martha Arnold, just three months old.

John Owen mother's connection to Denford may have led to him meeting with Alice and, in 1908, the couple were married. He had become an army bootmaker but by 1911, like many at the time, he was unemployed. He and Alice had by then had two children, Constance, two, and Winifred just five months old.

As we have seen in other biographies, the closeness of a village community could provide support in times of need but could also lead to tensions. The *Northampton Mercury* of the 14th March 1913 reported on a case in the Divisional Petty Sessions.

> *Neighbours' Squabbles – Harriet Bettles, married woman, Ringstead, was summoned for a common assault on Winifred Roberts, a child, at Ringstead on February 28 – Owen Roberts, shoe operative, Ringstead, (and father of Winifred Roberts) was summoned by Mrs. Bettles for assaulting her on March 1; and Mrs. Bettles was summoned by Owen Roberts for assaulting him on the same day. – Mr. J. Prentice appeared for Roberts – the Bench bound each party over in the sum of £5 to keep the peace for 12 months, each party paying own costs. – The case with regard to the child was dismissed.*

Of course, greater battles and tragedies were to replace the petty squabbles of village life.

Some nine months later, on 28th November 1913, the couple had a son, Wilfred Edgar. The war started in 1914 bringing much needed work to the handsewn men and, at first, married men in the trade had some protection from conscription which was brought in in early 1916. It was not until September 1917 that John was called up. John was quite unusual among the

Ringstead conscripts in that he was posted to the Royal Navy and was first sent to *Victory I*, the name given to the shore-based training unit in Portsmouth Harbour.

We do have a very brief account of his service and we see that he was 5ft 9½ inches tall with a 37½ inch chest. He had dark hair, brown eyes and a sallow complexion. John was given service number 7316 and trained as a "General Seaman" from 5th September 1917 to 15th February 1918 on "Victory I". It appears that he was still retained on the strength of *Victory*, so it may be as part of his training he was sent to *HMS Mars* and given a new number, 593, He was with his new ship from 16th February to 28th May 1918.

HMS Mars had been built in 1894 and it was coming to the end of its useful life. At this time, she was being refitted in Chatham Docks for conversion to a harbour depot ship and John presumably served on her during this time in harbour, continuing with his training.

On 29th May 1918 he was posted to *HMS Cardiff*, a light cruiser, which was based at Rosyth, on the Firth of Forth. From there it patrolled the North Sea.

John would have been witness to one of the great sights of the First World War. Ten days after the Armistice, the entire German Fleet surrendered in the Firth of Forth. It was the greatest gathering of warships that the world had ever seen. The German Fleet consisted of 9 battleships, 5 battlecruisers, 7 light cruisers and 49 destroyers. The seventy ships were escorted into the sheltered estuary of the Forth by hundreds of Allied ships and aircraft.

The Germans had been instructed not to have their guns loaded and to have everyone on deck except for the engine crew. The Royal Navy's Great Fleet had sailed into the North Sea forming two columns, six miles apart. Just before 10 a.m. it had met the German Fleet and it was *HMS Cardiff*, a small light cruiser, that led it to their surrender. A *Times* correspondent, on board *HMS Seymour*, witnessed this scene and described it as "a school of leviathans led by a minnow".

HMS Cardiff leading the main body of the German Fleet to the Firth of Forth.
Charles Edward Dixon 1918. National Maritime Museum. https://collections.rmg.co.uk.

At first the German crews were confined to their ships but gradually they were allowed ashore. After news of the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles which, among other

things, divided the fleet among the Allies, reached the Germans, Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter ordered the sinking of his own ships. On 21st June 1919 the remaining crew opened all the flood valves and watertight doors and smashed water pipes so that the whole fleet was sent to the bottom.

HMS Cardiff, however, by this time had sailed to Denmark where it was based at Copenhagen and Libau (now Liepaja in Latvia) and Reval (now Tallinn in Estonia) and also visited Riga. After its tour of duty, it sailed back to Scotland, reaching Rosyth on 7th January 1919 before returning to Portsmouth four days later.

John Owen Roberts was demobilised on 4th March 1919 and returned to his family in Ringstead. In the 1920 *Ringstead Electoral Roll* John was living in High Street. His wife, Alice Martha Roberts, had not yet qualified to vote although by 1923 she is shown on the roll because she had reached thirty years of age. As we have seen in Edward's story, John Owen's uncle, Benjamin Roberts tried to commit suicide in 1925 and died a few months later. John Owen's father, the organ-maker died in 1933. [Amazingly. His father-in-law, Lemuel Lockie lived to be 100 years old]. I think that Mozart House in Denford Road was, at some point after the death of John Roberts and the end of the church organ business, split into two cottages for John Owen and his married daughter.

John Owen and Alice Martha Roberts
With thanks to Terry Roberts

The *1939 Register of England and Wales* shows John and Alice in Mozart Cottages in Denford Road, John was still a bootmaker and Alice has the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". Living with them appears to be four children (the record of one is "officially closed" but may be Wilfred). Winifred, born on 28th December 1910, was still at home but is shown as "incapacitated"; John Owen junior, born on the 3rd April 1917, may be a shoemaker but he

did become a brickmaker. Muriel, born on 24th January 1929 was at school. John's widowed mother, Sarah, who has private means was also living with them.

A few months before the Register was completed, John Owen advertised in the local newspaper for a "Swarm or two of Bees". It gives an impression of a happy country life. The years passed and Alice, John's wife, died on 7th January 1957. We see from the *Administrations and Wills Index* that John, who had been granted probate, was still a boot and shoe operative in a local factory. I think that he retired at about this time and it seems that he was hit hard by the death of his wife.

He was living in Mozart Cottages in Denford Road and his daughter Muriel, and her husband John Henry Simms lived next door. One morning in May of 1957, just before 7 am, John Simms had gone outside to feed his chickens. He saw John Owen who greeted him with his usual, "Hello Boy". Only half an hour later he went to the barn to fetch his bicycle where he saw John "hanging from the rung of a ladder standing at an angle"

John Simms fetched John Owen's son, Wilfred Edgar from the Post Office where he lived, although he also worked in a local Boot and Shoe factory. The two men went back to the barn and took down John Owen's body. His death was confirmed by Dr Alistair McInnes from Raunds who later told the inquest that his neck had been dislocated.

They found a small note written in pencil in John's pocket. It was unsigned.

John Thomas Roberts (1892-1944)

Finally, we will trace the line of Thomas Roberts (born in about 1839), the youngest son of John and Alice. Thomas married twice but it is the line from his first wife, Mary Coleman, who died in 1872, aged 32, which we will be following.

Thomas and Mary had a son George Henry, born in about 1865, who married Mary Elizabeth Smith from Polebrook in 1887. One of their children was John Thomas Roberts, born on 29th April 1892 and he is our third World War One fighter. In the 1891 Census the family were living at 2 Carlow Road, just a few doors away from cousin, Benjamin, at number 8.

The decade after the Boer War was a difficult one for the military boot industry, with the Government trying to reduce the piecework rates. This led to great unrest in the area and then to the Raunds' March in 1905. As happened, many years later, with the Miners' Strike, tensions in the village and even within families became strained. George Henry Roberts was one of the men who continued to collect their work from the factory in Raunds in defiance of the strikers. Finally, violence broke out and he was "kettled" home with pots and pans and the windows of his house were broken by stones. At the trial of the men, William Roberts, George's younger brother appeared on behalf of one of the accused.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of this case, it would have been a difficult and sometimes frightening time for the family. John Thomas may have suffered in the village because of his father's unpopular actions.

In the 1911 Census, after the troubles of the Raunds March George had been married 24 years and the couple had five children, all still at home. The oldest child, Florence, aged 23, was a hat maker, and John, aged 18, a miller's carter. Also in this Census was Annie Loakes, aged 17, a laundress's assistant living in Great Addington with 56-year-old widow, Emma Ward. Emma was a "Dairy Keeper".

The couple may have already met but in 1914 the Great War was to take John away from Northamptonshire. He first attested on 27th December 1915. We can see from his form that he was now working as a platelayer on the railways and was 23 years 7 months old. Initially he was put on Army Reserve but he was not mobilised until 8th February 1916. He was first posted to the 3rd Battalion of Northamptonshire Regiment and given Regimental Number 22989. The 3rd (Service) Battalion was a training unit which was based for most of the war at Gillingham. At the end of his training period he was transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Northamptonshires, known as the Steelbacks, and first set foot in France on 31st May 1916.

July 1st 1916 was the infamous first day of the four-and-a-half-month campaign known as the Battle of the Somme. The British offensive was designed to draw the German forces away, to improve the chances of the French-led attack at Verdun. Unfortunately, the Germans were in strong defensive positions in the British sector.

The 2nd Battalion was part of the 24th Brigade, which temporarily formed part of the 23rd Division. The Battalion was involved first on the 7th July in the area of trenches known as *Lozenge* and *Crucifix*. With rain falling in sheets and casualties building up, these trenches rapidly became a congested quagmire. Any gains were soon lost and, all the time, the fighting was fierce with continual casualties.

On the 15th July 1916, the 2nd Battalion was transferred to the 8th Division and was in the Cuinchy sector. The book of the *Northamptonshire Regiment 1914-18* records that:

> *"The History of the 8th Division" describes how the front was a maze of trenches, old and new. German, French and British; trenches blown in and disused, or abandoned and derelict; British fire trenches which had once been German communication trenches; trenches ending in saps twenty yards from the enemy lines; salients, re-entrants and fortified mine-craters – all reeking of death and stagnation. Any attempt to dig new lines was gruesome in the extreme. Bodies were turned up at almost every yard. In many places the parapet was largely reverted with corpses, thinly concealed by rotting sandbags through which at night rats fled squealing from their ghoulish repasts. And here in this sector was a continual struggle of mine and counter-mine which had reared great crater mounds of gleaming chalk along the narrow No Man's Land. And here reigned day and night the nerve-racking expectation of being blown sky-high without warning. As a sector it was "unhealthy" in more ways than one.*

The campaign, for the 2nds, continued with sporadic artillery fire and raids on the enemy trenches. On October 12th the 2nd Battalion moved south to take part in another phase of the Somme campaign. The weather had broken and the battlefield was once again a sea of mud. The 2nd, with the rest of the 8th Division, arrived in the Front Line and on 23rd October

and were part of an assault designed to secure positions for the launch of an attack to take the village of Le Transloy. So it was, on 22nd October, that the 2nds relieved a battalion of the Sherwood Foresters in the Front Line. The Regimental history of the war records:

> *It was a typical Somme relief. Most of the guides lost their way – as well they might, considering that the country was blasted out of recognition and landmarks were hourly obliterated by shell fire – and it was nearly two o'clock in the morning of the 23rd before the relief was complete and the 58th [the old name of the 2nd Battalion] then took what rest they could, preparatory to the coming battle.*

It is worth giving one more long quotation from the *Northamptonshire Regiment 1914-18* to show that, for the ordinary soldier, it was not a series of major battles but a movement from one hellhole to another with more, or less, enemy fire and gas. It describes the conditions:

> *Everything was mud, mud – and again mud. There was thin, liquid, watery mud – mud like inferior gruel. There was a slightly thicker mud - a porridge kind of mud. But the bulk of the mud like simmering glue – in everything but the temperature, for it clung with icy chill. Billets in the back area were camps of dirty, wet and decrepit – gloomy archipelagos rising from the mud seas. The front line beggars description. It consisted of a mass of shell holes; of oceans of mud; of gulfs, inlets, lagoons and lakes of icy water. Trenches scarcely existed except for short lengths on higher ground: of communication trenches there were practically none; men had to do the best they could to improve such shell holes "as were least full of water and other unpleasant relics of the battle". Villages there were in profusion – on the map; but in reality they were flattened brickwork. Looking back to those days it is hard to realize how human beings could have existed in such conditions.*

1917 came with little achieved but the war of attrition was also wearing the Germans down. At the end of 1916 they planned and started building a strong line of defences, known to the Allies as the Hindenburg Line, which was back from the existing front line and was shorter so meant their troops were not spread so thinly. On the night of 23rd/24th February 1917 the enemy began a planned withdrawal back to this line.

The Allies tried to harry the retreating Germans but there had been a thaw and with, once more, heavy rain, the area in front of the Allies was turned into a morass so deep that men were pulled into it and drowned. Nevertheless, because the Germans were retreating, good progress was made at first although the German rear-guard fought with bravery and determination. In the offensive of the 4th March, the 2nd Battalion had 242 casualties. They moved into the back line but were quickly brought up again in terrible conditions. The *War Diary* drily remarks:

> *Working parties spent a great deal of their time digging each other out*.

The losses would have created a constant need for promotions and John must have shown resolution and leadership skills for, on 17th March 1917, he was appointed a paid Lance Corporal. A little over a month later, on 20th April 1917 he was promoted to full Corporal.

Despite the general successes, there had also been the failure, in the Nivelle offensive, to break through the Germans decisively and it was decided that another attack must be launched. The Third Battle of Ypres started on July 31st 1917, and, after intensive training in this more mobile warfare, the 2nd Battalion became part of this new attack with three objective lines, blue, black and then green. In this, often featureless, terrain the lines were taped in advance (often to be obliterated in the mud and shellfire).

It was a difficult area in which to attack, with a large lake and a water-filled ravine. There was fierce fighting and many casualties but as the year moved to a close the action quietened, although not without casualties. The 2nd Battalion moved to Wizernes, training and resting for three weeks. After more time in the line they rested at Warrington Camp at the end of the year.

John was once more promoted to Lance Sergeant on 24th January 1918 and he retained this rank for the rest of his army career.

The Russian Revolution had taken them out of the war, enabling the Germans to bring more troops to bear on the Western Front. The Americans had also entered the war on the Allied side and their troops and fire power would be an increasing threat to the German Army. They decided to try one last decisive offensive to win the war.

The Michael Offensive began on March 21st 1918, on a morning of thick white fog. The Germans everywhere gained ground. The 2nds, as part of the 8th Division were at first in Reserve and by the time they were instructed to move forward the whole Allied line was in rapid retreat. The 2nds were forced to move backwards with this retreat in order to maintain the line and prevent the Germans getting behind them.

This rear-guard action was very wearisome and demoralising but the German attack began to falter. They too were worn out and the supplies and artillery struggled to keep up with the forward surge. The Battalion was relieved by the French in the line and, by April 2nd, were out of the action for rest and re-organisation. On the night of April 19th/20th the 2nds again went briefly into the line east of Villers Bretonneux. On April 24th the Germans launched another desperate attack and the Battalion, although behind the Front Line, were heavily shelled with high explosive and gas. It seems likely that this was when John Thomas Roberts was wounded.

His military records show that he suffered a gunshot wound in the head of the left femur (thigh) on April 25th 1918. We know that the tide was about to turn and the Germans, exhausted, would soon be in rapid retreat but, for John, the war was over. He was taken back to England for his injury to be treated and was transferred back to the 3rd Battalion on 7th September 1918. On 16th October 1918 he was demobilised. He had been in France one year 332 days,

John returned home and either met, or renewed his acquaintance with, Annie Loakes from Great Addington who we last met in 1911, aged 17, as a Laundress's Assistant. The couple married in the second quarter of 1920. I think that, at first, they lived together in Great Addington but at some point they moved to 43 Ford Street in Kettering. That is where they

were in the 1939 Census. John was working as a "Railway Relayer" which is described as "Heavy Work". Did his war injury still cause him problems? There is a young child, Jean Small born in 1930, living with them but it does not look as if they had any children of their own. Could she have been an evacuee?

John Thomas Roberts died on 10th November 1944 at Kettering General Hospital. I have not managed to find the death of his widow, Annie.

Chapter 11

The Ruff Family

Arthur and Sarah (née George) Ruff had moved from Keysoe, in Bedfordshire, to Woodford. Soon after their marriage, around 1869, they moved once again, this time to Ringstead. The *Roll of Honour* has only one Ruff included but at least two other men from the family fought in the Great War. All three men were children of Arthur and Sarah Prudence Ruff. The couple had ten children, although the oldest child, Elizabeth died when only fourteen years old.

We are able to deduce the family's movements from the birth places of the older children but all of the youngest eight were born in Ringstead. Of these, the last three sons, Hessel, Harvey and Reginald are the subjects of our biographies.

The Ruff Family outside Ringstead Church (c1912)
With thanks to Martyn J. Wheeldon

Hessel Ruff (1880-1939)

Hessel, the seventh child, was the oldest of the three men who fought. He was born in Ringstead on 22nd May 1880 and in the 1881 Census was living with his family in Sivers Buildings. His father, Arthur, aged 36, was an army boot maker. The family were still there, at No. 7, in 1901 when Hessel was 21 and a boot finisher, Harvey (15) was a boot laster and Reginald (12) was probably still at school.

A descendant believes that at least one member of the family, possibly Arthur Ruff, was involved in the setting up of the Unity Boot and Shoe Co-operative Society. It is a little confusing for both Arthur, and eldest son, also Arthur, were of an age to be involved. The only reference in a newspaper I have found was that the secretary of the Unity was Mr. L. Ruff, who could have been another son, Lewis, born in 1878. Certainly, Arthur senior is shown in the 1901 Census as working at home.

On 22nd October 1907, Hessel married Eva Louise Weekley in Ringstead and they set up home in Denford Road. Eva had been born on 6th July 1880, so was just a few months younger than her husband. She was the daughter of William Bradley Weekley, a shoemaker and his wife, Elizabeth, and in 1901 they were living at No. 1 Church Street. By the 1911 Census the couple were living in the High Street in a five-room house and had a son, Edward Stanley born on 30th January 1909. While living there, they had a further child, Lily Ellen, born on 25th October 1912.

Hessel Ruff (standing)

With thanks to Martyn J. Wheeldon

Hessel's military records still exist, and we see that he was 5ft 9¾ inches tall with a 37 inch chest and weighed 149 pounds (67.6 kilos). He had dark hair with hazel eyes and was above average height and build for a working man of the time. He did have some physical problems, however, for he was assessed as 6/12 for both eyes and had varicose veins in his left leg. His *Attestation Form* also shows that he was a Baptist and was 35 years 9 months old when he first enlisted on 7th December 1915.

He was not finally mobilised until 3rd September 1918 and was posted to the Tank Corps at Wareham on 8th September. He was immediately transferred to the Tank Corps Reserve Unit for two weeks before being transferred again to the 22nd Light Tank Corps. He had been given Regimental Number 312427. I do not think that Hessel served in a war zone. A unit of the 22nd took one of their light tanks, a "Whippet", nicknamed Julian's Baby, (a larger tank named Julian had toured successfully before this), raising money for the War Savings Campaign by the sale of War Bonds. We do not know if Hessel toured with it.

The tanks were based at Bovington, near Wareham, and at the end of the war they were parked up there. We cannot be sure what exactly Hessel's role was during this time. All we know is that he was demobilised on 17th January 1919 as, the *Dispersal Certificate* states, because he had "an offer of employment"

Hessel and Eva settled in Denford Road and he worked in a local boot and shoe factory. The *Mercury and Herald* reported, on 4th January 1935, a case in Thrapston Police Court. The case related to an accident on December 7th. Hessel and two other men were walking in Ringstead. A lorry approached so they moved to the left but Hessel was hit by the mudguard of a motorcycle sidecar travelling the other way. It was said in court that Hessel was only brushed by the mudguard but he was knocked unconscious and sustained a fractured ankle and other injuries. Stanley Knight, the motorcycle rider was fined £5 with £1 2s 9d costs.

It was at about this time that the family moved to 1 Lancaster Street in Higham Ferrers. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, Hessel was shown there and working as a shoe finisher. Eva had no paid work but daughter Lily (25) was working as an uncertified teacher. Their son Reginald, born on 5th March 1921, was a milk roundsman.

Hessel had little time left to live, for he died on Thursday 9th November 1939. There was an account of his funeral in the *Evening Telegraph* on November 16th. This shows us that the official records only give a small part of anyone's life. Hessel was part of a working-class community that, denied by lack of other opportunity, continued to educate themselves and take pleasure in the world. The report states:

> *A native of Ringstead, Mr. Ruff resided there for 55 years before coming to Higham Ferrers, where he was employed by Messrs. John White (Impregnable Boots) Ltd. He was a member of the Rushden Adult School Choir and a past member of the Thrapston Band Club and leaves a widow, two sons and a daughter, Mr. Edward Ruff, Coventry, Mr. Reg. Ruff, Higham Ferrers, and Miss Lily Ruff, Higham Ferrers. Four brothers and three sisters are also bereaved.*

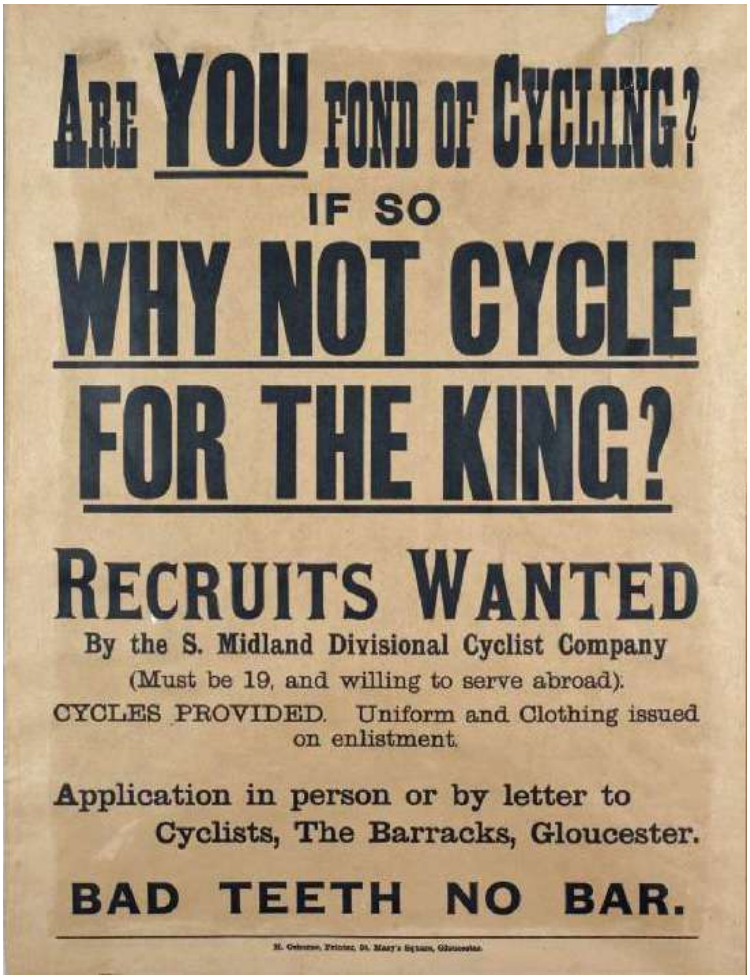
The report also shows that the service was held at Hessel's house and was conducted by a Minister of the Methodist Church. He was 59 years old. Eva died in the summer of 1954, aged 74.

Harvey William Ruff (1885-1962)

Harvey Ruff was the ninth child of Arthur and Sarah, born on 6th September 1885. By the 1901 Census he was fifteen years old and working at home with his father and siblings, as a boot laster. By 1911 Arthur was unemployed and Harvey, now 25, was the oldest child still at home, working as an army boot maker in a local factory. The time of the handsewn men, working at home, was drawing to a close.

In 1914, Harvey married Grace Evelyn (sometimes Evaline) Burton from Raunds. She was the daughter of William and Annie, born on 2nd April 1887 and by 1911 was living with her family in Wellington Street in Raunds.

Of course, war was imminent but we do not know exactly when Harvey first attested for the army. We do know from his *Demobilisation Certificate* that he served in the 67th Divisional Cyclist Company. This was a Second Line Territorial Force Division and served on home defence throughout the war but also recruited and trained men to provide drafts for overseas units. It is likely that the photograph of Harvey shown below, with other men from the 67th was taken somewhere in Eastern England.



Recruiting Poster for another area ©IWM PST4893
Bad teeth were a huge problem with more sugar being used and no National Health Service

The idea of a cycling unit may now seem odd but as Chris Baker, in an article in *The Gazette* has written:

> *As early as the 1880s, the army began to include the bicycle in its armoury. Prior to this the army relied on men or horse transport to cover the ground. Each had limits to speed and range, and the horse needed much by way of logistical support for its feeding and care.*
>
> *With a bicycle, an armed man could move relatively quickly across even poor ground and with a longer range than his marching capability. In other words, the bike brought new possibilities for the army to project its forces to where they were needed.*

Early in the war, each Division of the army had a cyclist company added. The main roles of the cyclists, rather like the more glamorous Yeomanry, were reconnaissance and communications but, like the Yeomanry, they would have to turn their hand to trench digging or as mobile infantrymen if required.

Harvey Ruff (back row extreme right)
With thanks to Martyn J. Wheeldon

Based on the research of Steve and Charlie on the *Great War Forum* website, on Harvey's Regimental Number (21934), it seems likely that he was not transferred to the XV (15th) Cyclist Battalion of the reorganised Army Cyclists Corps until September 1917 at the earliest and possibly not until April 1918.

In September 1917 the 15th were at Fort Mardyck, some four miles west of Dunkirk centre, undergoing training with numerous parades. They were still in a war zone, however, and were at times under fire, so that one man was killed and six wounded during the month. In the middle of October, the Battalion moved to Coxyde de Ville, (15 miles east of Dunkirk along the coast) carrying out fatigues, mainly digging trenches under the supervision of the Royal Engineers. This continued through November with the men carrying out "salvage fatigues" before moving back to Fort Mardyck where the work continued.

On December 3rd 1917 the Battalion moved to Wormhoudt and then, via Morbecque, to Estaires, where the working parties continued into the new year. At this time, they were mainly digging trenches for communication cables, to keep them, as far as possible, out of danger from enemy bombing. Lack of reliable communications was a constant problem, and as a result, some attacks started in confusion and the planned strategy disintegrated. Although not under intense fire the men did suffer occasional casualties from gas shell attacks.

The tedious, but essential work, continued through March with, on many days, the *War Diary* recording similar entries, such as:

> *1 Officer and all available OR [Other Ranks] on working parties under A.D. A.S. XV Corps.*

So it continued, but on April 9th there was a change and the *Diary* records that the Battalion came under "heavy bombardment" and sent out patrols to see what was happening with the enemy. They were now under sustained shell fire as part of the German's great Michael Offensive which had begun on March 21st 1918. The second phase of this offensive, known as the Lys Offensive was designed to capture the important rail centre of Hazebrouck and push on to the Channel coast so cutting off the British holding the Ypres Salient. The 15th were caught in the first attack in the Battle of Lys, known as the Battle of Estaires.

The *Diary* tells of the cyclists on patrol encountering and engaging the Germans and one patrol took part in fighting through the streets of Estaires. It was a frightening, chaotic time for all the soldiers, with the Allies in almost constant retreat. In the onslaught, one officer and two Other Ranks were killed and four officers and thirty-eight men wounded with twelve men missing (two believed prisoners) and eight Other Ranks wounded but remaining on duty.

The moved to Le Grand Hasard and were on digging duties, still in the Hazebrouck area, one of the prime targets for the Germans because of its rail links. The War Diary entry at the end of April shows the terrible times that Harvey and the other had endured:

> *Owing to the destruction, in action, of the Bttn documents and records the strength of the Bttn at the beginning of the month cannot be given. The Bttn are now 2 officers and 63 OR under strength.*

Although much ground was lost along the Western Front, the line finally held, and the German Offensive, men exhausted and supply lines overstretched, began to falter. Through May 1918 the Diary tells, beside the working parties, of the training of guides as well as Lewis Gun and musketry training. They were based at le Grand Hasard but now, through to July, there were few casualties. On the 7th July, the 15th moved into billets at Blaringhem where Platoon Training continued.

The pendulum was now swinging back at increasing speed and on 1st September the Battalion were instructed to pursue the enemy as part of a concerted Allied attack. The *War Diary* reports that they were now at De Seule-Sternwerck and that:

> *The cyclists were detailed to form a screen in front area of the infantry and to locate hostile snipers and the M.G.s [machine guns] when located, word was to be sent back to the infantry who would deal with the hostile opposition. If, however, the cyclists were strong enough to tackle the opposition themselves they must do so.*

On 17th October they were once more in the firing line with orders to reconnoitre the enemy positions. By the 18th the outskirts of the village of Petit Audenarde had been reached and there was now continual forward movement, although sometimes met by

heavy rearguard shelling by the Germans. Through early November the Battalion was at Mouveaux, undergoing training, and they were there on the 11th when they received news of the Armistice and were ordered to "stand to".

From then on, the *Diary* lists parades, educational lectures and classes, rifle drill and generally anything to keep the men occupied. This continued into December but now also with medical inspections and baths to try to clean the men up ready for a return to civilian life. On Christmas Day there was Divine Service, followed by dinner and a concert.

The military and educational training continued into January 1919 but, all the time, men were being sent back to the UK for demobilisation, or to other units as part of the Rhine Army of Occupation. By the end of March only three officers and 32 men remained. The entries in the *War Diary* for these last few days have faded away like the men although the numbers now stay constant until the end of May 1919 when the *Diary* ends.

Harvey was demobilised on 19th May 1919 and returned to Northamptonshire but he was not in the 1918 or 1919 *Ringstead Absent Voters' Lists* because he had already moved to Raunds where his service is remembered in the town's Memorial Project.

Harvey and Grace only had one child, a daughter Phyllis Marie, who had been born on 10th October 1916. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, the family were living at 26 Park Avenue in Raunds and Harvey was a stainer in the leather trade. Grace had the usual Unpaid Domestic Duties. Phyllis, who was a clothing finisher, married soon after the Register was taken, to Ernest Arthur Wheeldon and it is their son Martyn who we have to thank for the family photographs.

Harvey died on 20th May 1962 and Grace followed him, aged 85, in 1972.

Reginald Frank Ruff (1888-1956)

Reginald, the youngest child of Arthur and Sarah, was born some twenty-two years after the firstborn, on 12th August 1888. In 1901 he was twelve years old living in the Sivers Buildings in Ringstead with his family. By 1911 he was 22, and a clerk for a "Pork Pie Maker"

In the same 1911 Census we see that living in *The Manse* was Baptist Minister, John Bates, aged 55, and his wife Jennie (sometimes called Rebecca) who was 57. They had been married 29 years and had had five children, all surviving. Still at home were their two daughters, Beatrice (26), and Ethel (25), both schoolteachers in a County Council school and Stuart (19), who was a butcher and who we have encountered in these stories before.

John Bates had been a Baptist Pastor at Bugbrooke, where Beatrice and been born, and then at Kislingbury, the village of his birth. In 1893 he had been appointed by the Ringstead Particular Baptist Church and had been very active in fundraising in order to carry out extensive renovations to the Baptist Chapel. The family continued to live in The Manse until John's death in 1930.

On 12th October 1912, Reginald Frank Ruff married Beatrice Elizabeth Bates at Thrapston. Their only child, Kathleen Mary, was born on 14th November 1915 and, less than a month later, on 9th December, Reginald attested and was placed on the Army Reserve. He was mobilised on 22nd May 1916 and posted to the Royal Garrison Artillery and given Regimental Number 86198. We see in the *Descriptive Report on Enlistment* that Reginald was 27 years old and was 5ft 8½ inches tall. His occupation was still listed as "clerk". What is new is that his home address is shown as Shaftesbury Avenue in St. Neots in Huntingdonshire.

Reginald Ruff
With thanks to Martyn J. Wheeldon

We do not know if it was pork pies that had taken Reginald to St Neots but it seems likely that, when he was mobilised, Beatrice and Kathleen moved back to live with her parents in *The Manse* in Ringstead. His military records, like many, are difficult to decipher, but it looks as if he was first posted to Harwich and, on 27th October 1916, he qualified as a "First Class Signaller". On 9th November he was sent to "A" Siege Depot at Catterick as part of the Royal Garrison Artillery. This was to become a Signalling Training Centre in December 1916 so perhaps Reginald was sent to improve his skills.

He remained in the UK for 276 days but, as some point he joined the 266th Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery. It had been formed on 30th September 1916 and moved to Horsham and on to Lydd and Codford. Reginald joined them and embarked at Portsmouth (although the *War Diary* says Southampton) on 16th February 1917. He disembarked at Le Havre the following day. On the 19th February they entrained and during the next week after a series of daily moves they arrived at Dainville on 9th March and took up their first position at the railway station there. Nine days later they had to dismantle the battery and move it to Agny.

It would have been heavy work and we get a hint of the frustration that the men must have sometimes felt from the *War Diary*:

> *19th March. Arrived Agny and started to get into action. When nearly ready [we] were ordered to move to another position to make room for the 9.2inch Battery.*

By 21st March they were in a new position and in action. Most of the *Diary* is made up by details of how much ammunition has been fired, the time, and a map reference and type of target, such as "trenches". They were positioned in the Agny area until the 11th April when they moved to Neuville Vitesse. Of course, they were also a prime target for the enemy and at St Martin Sur Coseul seven men were killed and five wounded. Still the entries are mainly lists of map references and targets.

In May the Battery were on the move through La Herliere, Framecourt, St Venant, Morbecque and Fletre to Kemmel, some 85 miles north, arriving there at 1 am on 21st May. Immediately, they went into position. On 24th, however, they left the section and moved into billets, but by the 29th they returned to Kemmel. Once again the lists continue.

In June the 266th moved to Vlamertinge and the bombardments continued through July. On August 2nd they moved once again. We see now in the *Diary* the continual daily casualties and the lists of targets which include harassing fire on road, barrage fire, house, dugouts, trench, wire and neutralising fire on a hostile battery.

In October 1917 the 266th were stationed at Crucifix Road at St Martin-sur-Coseul and the litany of the bombardments continue, even on Christmas Day. Men only appear anonymously as wounded or killed.

The *Diary* does not even record the places they were at but merely states "In the Field". The lists continue into 1918 as before but at this point the *Diary* finishes, the rest, presumably, destroyed. We do get some idea of the daily slog amidst the mud and the fear but much of it lost in the detailed ballistics.

We do know that, at some point in 1917, he was appointed as an Acting Bombadier and this was confirmed on 18th July 1917. Also, on 13th April 1918, he was appointed Acting Corporal to stand in for a wounded man and this promotion was confirmed when this man was invalided out of the army. At some point after this he was, for a time, sick and in hospital. Martyn Wheeldon has confirmed that he was badly gassed and this caused chest problems for the rest of his life. There is also an entry to show that he was granted leave to the UK from 27th December 1918 to 10th January 1919, probably because of his exposure in a gas attack. Whilst on leave he was sent to Purfleet for discharge.

He returned to civilian life and it seems, from one undated note on his file, that at the end of the war, or just after it, he was residing at 37 Symington Street in the St James area of Northampton, with its rows of neat terraced houses. By 1926, however the family were living at "The Stores" in Grantchester near Cambridge and we see in the *1939 Register of England and Wales* that they were still there, next to the *Rose and Crown Yard*, and Reginald described himself as a *Grocer and Confectioner.* Beatrice had no paid work but daughter Kathleen, who married the following year, was a Municipal Clerk.

We know from the Electoral Roll that they were still there at least up to 1945 and Martyn has confirmed that in 1947 Reginald and Beatrice with Kathleen and her husband, moved back to Northamptonshire. They lived together in Raunds, at 65 Midland Road. Reginald became Secretary at Nene Plastics in Grove Road in Raunds, a post he held for seven years until his retirement at the age of sixty-five. He died on 15th September 1956 at Addenbrookes Hospital in Cambridge. I think that Beatrice may have moved back to the Cambridge area after his death, living in Girton, but she died in Woodlands Nursing Home in Earith in Huntingdonshire on the 10th September 1961.

.

Chapter 12

The Sawford Family

Very Simplified Family Tree

George Sawford *b 1795* ---------- **Ann Cobley**

I I

Thomas Sawford *b1818 m* **Elizabeth Whiteman (2nd)** **William Sawford** *b1821 m* **Mary A Barker (2nd)**

I I

Thomas Sawford *b1853 m* **Elizabeth Childs** **Walter Sawford** *b1854 m* **Elizabeth Perkins**

I I I

JESSE Sawford *b1879* **George Sawford** *b1873 m* **Minnie Braines** **ERNEST Sawford** *b1894*

L I I

ARTHUR *b1895* **WILLIAM** *b1897* **PERCY** *b1900*

The men who served in WW1 have forenames in CAPITALS

The Sawford (or usually Sorford in the early 19th Century Parish Registers) family have been an important part of Ringstead village life. The Sawford men who we will be looking at all trace their ancestry back to George Sawford and Ann Cobley who married in Ringstead Church on 14th October 1816. Two of their sons were Thomas, who was baptised in the same church on 24th July 1818 and William who was born on 23rd August 1821, but not baptised until July 24th 1831, (when they also tried to baptise Thomas again). Ann died, aged 47, and was buried on 16th April 1837.

Thomas, the older son, married Elizabeth Richardson on 10th January 1839 but she died just six years later, aged 28. He married again on 14th October 1847 to Elizabeth Whiteman and

it is a son of this second marriage, another Thomas, who was born in 1853, whose line we will follow. He married another Elizabeth, Elizabeth Childs, on 30th November 1876. The couple had at least six children but it appears that only one son, Jesse was called to service. There were other sons in the unlucky age range which qualified them to be conscripted but do not appear to have been called up. It may be that they had moved and do not appear on the Ringstead record, or they had illnesses or disabilities that exempted them from service.

As we have seen, George and Ann also had a son called William who was born in 1821. He married Esther Hornsby in a joint wedding with his brother Thomas's second marriage, on 14th October 1847. Esther gave birth to a child they called George but he died soon after, on July 6th 1849. Esther followed him before the month was out, on the 24th July.

Like his brother, William re-married, to Mary Ann Barker from Old. They had a son called Walter, born in 1854 who married Elizabeth (what else?) Perkins on 25th December 1872 in Ringstead Church. Walter and Elizabeth had eight children and the eldest son, George, married Minnie Braines and three of their sons were called to serve in the Great War. There were two other brothers of George, John William, born in 1880 who died of fever in South Africa in the Boer War, while serving with the St John Ambulance, and the youngest brother, Ernest Walter whose military service spanned a far greater period than most of the men from Ringstead.

Jesse Sawford (1879-1944)

Jesse was the second child of Thomas and Elizabeth, born in late 1879. He had an older brother Reynold (sometimes Reginald) and four younger siblings, three of them male, William Harold, Alec and Horace Ralph, none of whom appear to have been conscripted. [William] Harold did go to a Military Tribunal in 1917 and was given temporary exemption. He died in 1924 so may have had medical problems. Horace Ralph, born in 1891, died in 1917 so, again, he may have had good reason not to be called up.

In the 1881 Census, the family were living in Church Street, near the school. By 1891, now shown as living at 7, Church Street Jesse had become a shoemaker. He married Ellen Archer in 1910 and, in the 1911 Census, they were living in Church Street. Jesse was shown as an "Army Bootmaker" and more specifically a "Sewer", but like many at the time he was out of work. Next door lived his widowed mother, Elizabeth, and his unmarried brothers and sisters. The two sons, who were handsewn men working at home, were both out of work like Jesse. The factory-made boot was taking over the military trade.

Ellen (sometimes Nellie) was the daughter of Arthur Archer who was an innkeeper and shoemaker. He had taken over the licence of the *New Inn* in the mid-1890s. Arthur died on 20th February 1913, aged 54 and his widow, Sarah Ellen, took over the licence. It is likely that she had always done much of the bar work when Arthur had been the licensee. We have looked previously at the brothers and cousins of Ellen who fought in the war.

It may be that Jesse had to swallow his pride and get factory work when the Western Front demanded huge numbers of boots and the military boot trade was briefly reinvigorated in Raunds and Ringstead. In 1917 he was working for *Owen Smith*, a wholesale boot and shoe

manufacturer, who had a factory in Grove Street in Raunds. Jesse was working there as a "Hand Laster". He was called to appear before a Northamptonshire Military Tribunal to rule on his exemption from service. His case was first adjourned to the 26th June 1917 and he was then granted a further exemption until the 10th July.

That appears to have been the end of the delay to his conscription and he was posted to the Royal West Surrey Regiment. He was given the Regimental Number 61022. It is not clear, but it may be that he was first with the 1/4th (Territorial) Battalion and was perhaps transferred to the 1/5th at the end of the war. All we know is that he served in these two Battalions. Both served much of the war in India but the 1/4th spent the whole war there and the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* only mentions India in his entry.

Jesse with younger brother Alec
Picture on Ancestry in Family Tree of "rorystark".

The 4th Battalion of the Royal West Surreys was a territorial unit, originally a volunteer force, designed for home defence. With the coming of the Great War, many territorials volunteered for overseas service. This new reserve unit became the 1/4th Battalion. The Regular Army was initially desperately wanted on the Western Front so forty battalions were replaced by some 55,000 territorial soldiers in India.

Jesse did not see those early years where the 1/4th were on the North-West Frontier, close to the Afghanistan border. Like many Europeans, before and after, in the sub-continent,

they were struck down with sickness. In May 1917 while waiting at Tank the men contracted malaria, sand-fly fever, as well as suffering heatstroke. The Battalion was withdrawn from active service and sent to Dashai and Jutogh in the Simla Hills, to recover. Only some 200 men, out of a force of 750, could make the initial move, with many of the sick being left to recover at stations along the route, only rejoining the Battalion later.

The men then moved to Lahore and it is about this time, in early 1918, that Jesse probably joined the "Queens" as the Royal West Surrey were known. There was little fighting during this time but an outbreak of what was later, in Britain, called "Spanish Flu", swept through India, killing six million people in two months. Among the dead were twenty soldiers from the Battalion.

In January 1919 demobilisation began, with small parties of men returning home, when a new crisis on the North-West Frontier sent the 1/4th back into action. The end of the Great War meant little to the Afghans, still subject to foreign interference. The British had been concerned that the Russians would launch an attack on India through Afghanistan. There had been two Anglo-Afghan Wars in the Nineteenth Century and at the end of the First World War a third Afghan War flared up when they invaded northern India. The Afghans wanted greater recognition of their status and control over their own foreign policy. There were also political tensions within Afghanistan and, when their leader was assassinated, his successor decided to invade British India, partly to placate the hardliners in his own country.

The Afghan army was comparatively small and poorly organised but there were some 80,000 tribesmen who were formidable fighters, especially in the rocky terrain which was their home. The 1/4th were posted to the Peshawar area in May 1919. They were part of a British and Indian force that surrounded the city and threatened to cut off the water supply. The pro-Afghan faction's leaders were delivered to the besieging force and the crisis averted. By August the incursion was over but, in the following settlement, the Afghans did gain control over their own foreign policy and it is seen by them as an important War of Independence.

It was a short but sometimes vicious war and it was said that captured British soldiers could expect torture, mutilation and death. The whole Indian posting was unpopular with the territorial troops because they were mainly confined to garrison duties with, added to the dull routine, often sickness, heat, and little chance of home leave. Once the Great War had finished the men wanted to be back home and one can imagine that the 1/4th was not a particularly happy unit at this time.

From Peshawar the Battalion were sent to Bombay where, on 18th October 1919 they embarked, arriving in England on 14th November 1919.

Jesse was not entitled to the Victory Medal but he was to the India General Service Medal with a clasp inscribed *Afghanistan- North-West Frontier 1919*. By 1920 he was back living in Church Street Ringstead with wife Ellen.

In 1939 they were in Warners Cottages in London End in Ringstead. Jesse was working as a bench hand in s shoe factory. Living with the couple was Ellen's widowed mother, Sarah Archer.

Jesse died on 5th May 1944, aged 66, and Ellen in 1967 aged 78.

Ernest Walter Sawford (1894-1934)

We now look at the other side of the tree which comes down from William, born in 1821, who married Mary Ann. in 1854. Their eldest son, Walter, born in 1854, married Elizabeth Perkins on Christmas Day 1872 in Ringstead Church. They had eight children and the oldest son, George, born in 1873, had three sons, and we will look at these next. First, we will look at the youngest son Ernest Walter born on 27th July 1894.

As we have said earlier, Ernest's older brother, John William, had died of Enteric Fever in the Boer War in 1900. In the 1901 Census, Ernest was living with his parents in No. 1 Dearlove Cottages in Ringstead. His father, Walter, was the Manager of a Boot and Shoe Factory. By 1911, Ernest was the only child living at home and was working as a butcher.

Ernest's war career was unusual, although not unique, in the men of the village who went to War. He enlisted on 29th July 1912, two days after his eighteenth birthday, with the Royal Marines Light Infantry and was given Service Number 16385. We can see from his Service Register that he enlisted in Birmingham. He was 5ft 6¾ inches tall with hazel eyes and brown hair. He also had a birth mark on his upper arm and various scars on his face and body.

He was first sent to the Reception Depot at Deal in Kent and was in training there until 14th May of the following year. It seems likely that he was able to swim when he enlisted, for he was tested and passed on 16th September and, on 5th December 1912, he was given the Certificate and Medallion of the *Royal Life Saving Society* at Deal.

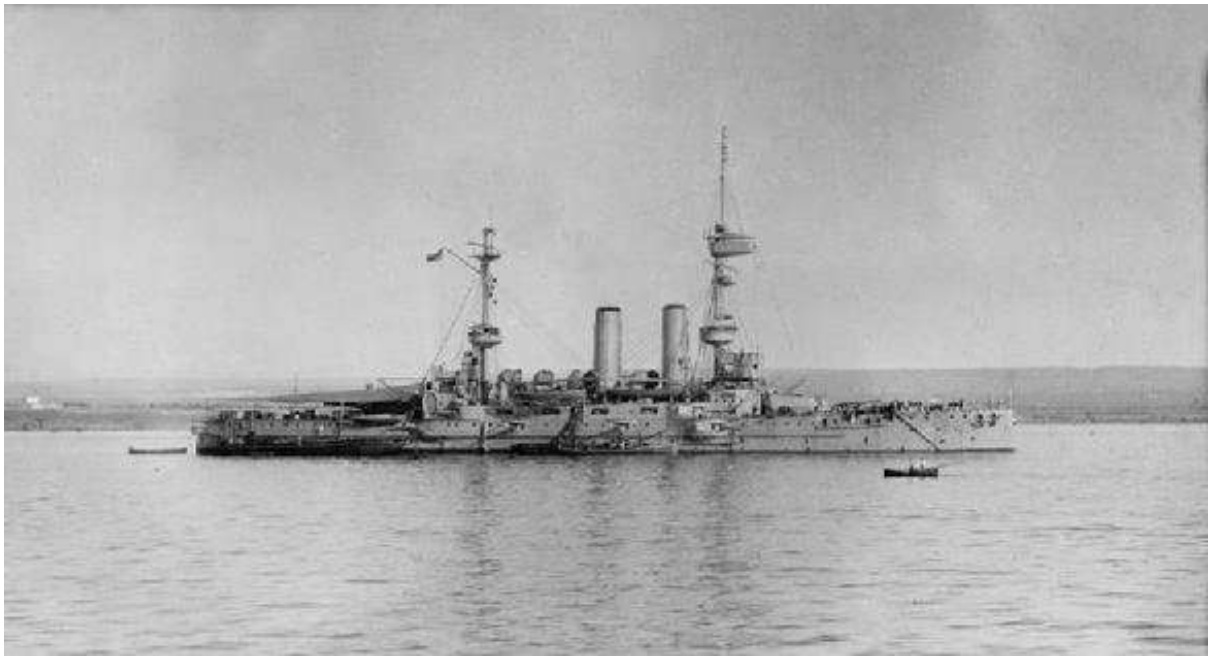
On 15th May 1913, he was sent to "E" Company of the Portsmouth Division. On 5th November 1913 he was posted to *HMS Glory* for which *HMS Argonaut* was the depot ship. *Glory* had been launched in 1899 and in 1909, after service abroad, she was reduced to reserve status and remained militarily inactive until the outbreak of the First World War.

Before then, Private Ernest Sawford was posted to the Portsmouth Division on 6th February 1914. He was posted again on 27th May to *HMS Venerable* and this was his ship for the first two-and-a-half years of the war. *Venerable* was a London Class Pre-Dreadnought battleship. She had four 12-inch (305mm) guns and a top speed of 18 knots (21 mph). She was launched in November 1902 and in 1909, after a major refit, she served with the Atlantic and Home Fleets.

When war broke out in August 1914, *Venerable*, with Ernest aboard, worked in the Channel covering the Portsmouth Marine Battalion's movement to Ostend and in October bombarded German positions on the Belgian coast. Areas around Nieuport were deliberately flooded, stopping the German attack which then diverted inland, out of range of the *Venerable's* guns.

She returned to home waters but once again sailed out to bombard German positions near Westende, designed to engage German attention to support a British offensive at Neuve Chapelle. She was used again in May to try to stop German artillery attacks on Dunkirk but was unsuccessful. It was at this time that Ernest sustained wounds in his head. She was sent to the Dardanelles and from 14th to 21st August bombarded Turkish positions at Suvla Bay. Bad weather made accurate shelling impossible and *Venerable* left the area and in October was refitted at Gibraltar. Then in December she was sent to the Adriatic Sea to reinforce the Italian Navy against the Austro-Hungarian fleet until December 1916.

Ernest Sawford returned on the *Venerable* to Portsmouth and, on 28th December 1916, was once again part of the Portsmouth Division, remaining with it until the 6th March 1917. He was then posted to *HMS Caledon* the following day.



HMS Venerable in Malta Harbour 1915
Photograph by Surgeon Oscar Parkes. © Imperial War Museum (IWM SO 596)

The *Caledon* was a modern cruiser and Ernest was part of its first crew as it completed its trials, ready for operational service. He now saw very different waters to the Mediterranean because the *Caledon* became the Flagship of the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron as part of the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow. This is an area of sea in the Orkneys, north of the Scottish mainland. Its importance through the ages has been that it is protected from the worst of the weather, in the lee of some of the main islands in the group. Another Ringstead man, John Owen Roberts was also in this area from 29th May 1918 on *HMS Cardiff.*

On 17th November 1917, the *Caledon* took part in a naval action against the German warships in Heligoland Bight. She was part of an attempt to cut off and destroy a force of German minesweepers which was being escorted by light cruisers. A chase followed but the British cruisers came under fire from German battleships and broke off the engagement.

Caledon was hit by a single 12-inch shell but luckily it did not explode and the ship did not sustain any major damage. Nevertheless, five men on the *Caledon* were killed and John Henry Carless was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for remaining at his gun after receiving a fatal wound.

Through 1918 the *Caledon* continued as part of the Grand Fleet, based in Scapa Flow. On November 21st the German fleet surrendered. When the Germans heard that the fleet was to be divided up among the Allies, they scuttled their own fleet on 21st June 1919. Before this, however, the *Caledon*, as part of the Grand Fleet, had sailed to the Baltic in support of shore operations against the Bolshevik forces who had taken over Russia and also blockaded a fleet, now in Soviet hands. The *Caledon* became Rear Admiral Cowan's flagship and moved to and from the Baltic.

We do not know exactly when *Caledon* ended these Baltic exercises but we do know that on 3rd March 1920, Ernest was 25 years old and staying in the *Union Jack Club* on Waterloo Road in London. On that day he married Dorothy Vavasour Elliott who was living at 22 Tenison Street in Lambeth. The wedding was at Lambeth Wesleyan Chapel. After the marriage the couple seem to have set up home in Portsmouth where Ernest was in the Portsmouth Division from 29th July 1920 until 5th September 1922.

On 6th September Ernest joined *HMS Fisgard*. This, however, was the name of a shore establishment used to train artificers and engineers for the Navy. It was based on old moored ships at Portsmouth. This training was widened to include an electrical and ordnance branch. On 25th September 1925 he moved briefly to the Portsmouth Division before a posting to *HMS Cardiff* on 24th October 1925. He was again at sea, for the *Cardiff* was the flagship of the Third Cruiser Squadron, in the Mediterranean. On 29th May 1928 he was back in Portsmouth, based at Deal from 13th August, until the end of 1930. He worked as a butcher at Deal Depot and received three pence a day extra.

On 19th November 1930 he started a year on *HMS Iron Duke*. The London Naval Treaty specified that the four Iron Duke Class battleships should be scrapped, or otherwise demilitarised, and it had been converted into gunnery training ships. Ernest then moved onto *HMS Dolphin* which was another shore-based establishment. It was at Fort Blockhouse in Gosport and was the home of the Royal Navy Submarine Service from 1904 to 1999.

Ernest's time in the Navy appeared over on 28th July 1933, which was the end of his second period of engagement. He received a pension of £57 1s 0d. He and his wife were living at 37 Henderson Road, Eastway, Southsea. He then enlisted in the Royal Military Police on 6th February 1934. These "pensioner special constables" were the forerunners of the Admiralty Constabulary. *Horatio2*, on the *Great War Forum* website, has revealed that "Applicants were accepted only after replacing substandard teeth with dentures at their own expense".

In many ways the military police fulfilled a role not dissimilar to the original duties of the Marines as maintaining order aboard ship. Unfortunately, Ernest did not have much time in his new post, for he died on 22nd October 1934.

The Sons of George and Minnie Sawford

We will look finally at three of the sons of Ernest's oldest brother, George. He had been born in 1873 and married Minnie Braines from Twywell in 1893. At first, the young couple lived in Rushden and Arthur their first child, was born there on 3rd August 1895. They soon moved back to Ringstead and, in 1901, were living at 4 Denford Road. The two youngest children, William (3) and Percy (9 months) had been born in the village.

By 1911 the family had moved to a six-room house in Gladstone Street. There were now five sons in the family but their mother, Minnie was missing. She was a patient in Crescent House, a "Female Convalescent Home" in Marine Parade, Brighton. The census show that she had had had six children, five of whom were still living. Was it the death of a child that led to Minnie's convalescence?

It is worth pausing a little, before we look at the three sons, who were called up to serve in the war, to consider George, their father. A newspaper article in the *Evening Telegraph* on 15th February 1939 reports on his life and his funeral. It shows us, once again that, for all the people we look at, the official records leave out much of the important things of their lives. In the case of George we see that he had been a member of the local Labour Party and of the Ringstead Co-operative Society for forty years and had held "a position of trust" at the "Working Men's Club" for many years. He had also worked tirelessly to raise money for the *Blind and Crippled Children's Fund*. He was obviously a well-liked and respected member of the community and these aspects of character, negative or positive, do not usually show up in the public records.

Arthur Sawford (1895-1981)

In the 1911 Census, Arthur, aged 15 had worked in a local boot and shoe factory as a "Boot Tipper". His work would have given him some exemption from conscription but not for long.

Most of Arthur's military records have been lost but we know from the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* that he was posted to the 21st Battery of the Royal Field Artillery in Egypt and Salonika. The *Absent Voters' List* reveal that he was also in the Army Service Corps (ASC) with Service Number 390437. There are also a couple of Medical Records that have survived and with these we can give some account of Arthur's wartime service.

Arthur would have enlisted, in about October1915, with the Royal Field Artillery (RFA), and was given the service number 114121. It seems likely that he had six months training, possibly at Woolwich, and was posted to active service, around March 1916, with the rank of Gunner.

There is some confusion about the units he served in, according to the *Roll of Honour* and the Medical Records, although it may be that he served in the 21st Battery briefly. When we look at his Medical Records, it would appear that he was first in "D" Battery of the 100th Brigade, which was part of the 22nd Division, in Salonika. There were various reorganisations and renumberings of the batteries and he was later shown as part of "C" Battery. The 22nd Division had been in the eastern European warzone, based in Salonika, from 27th October

1915 although the artillery units were still arriving into mid-December. We cannot be sure when Arthur arrived but we do have accounts of the original journey of the 100th Brigade which was through France and by ship from Marseilles. Certainly, part or all of Arthur's journey would also have been by ship under similar conditions.

The horses for the artillery would have travelled with the men and "mucking out" was an awkward job. Ivor Davies, from the 100th Brigade, is quoted in the *Under the Devil's Eye,* describing the scene.

> One man would manoeuvre the horse into the alleyway between the stalls – his mate would shovel and sweep away any manure into the alleyway. The other men would shovel the manure into large baskets, carry them outside and empty them overboard; those fellows soon found the windward side of the ship.

There was also a very real threat from the German and Austrian submarines and Hospital and Troop Ships were regularly hit and sunk.

The troopship would finally arrive in the Gulf of Salonika. The city had a fairy-tale appearance from afar with towers and minarets and Mount Olympus in the distance. Unfortunately, although it was a picturesque, vibrant and multicultural place it was dirty and smelly according to the men who served there. Also, the ships sunk by the enemy meant that human and animal remains would wash up on the beaches to the south of the city.

The early fighting against the Bulgarians, allies of the Germans, by the French supported by the British, had not been successful and they had been forced to move back to Salonika to regroup. At this time the British government was considering abandoning the whole campaign in the region, especially as the Greek King's government was a hostile host to the Allies. Nevertheless, during the winter, the army built defensive lines in the surrounding country and the city itself became a large military base, increasingly under Anglo-French control. The enterprise became too large to be abandoned.

It was the French who were the senior partners in the Salonikan Campaign, but the main focus of both governments was the Western Front and the upcoming French offensive at Verdun. It was decided that a breakout north from Salonika would tie down German troops and prevent them from reinforcing their army in France and Belgium.

It seems likely that Arthur was part of the 22nd Division that moved north out of Salonika on 15th April 1916, although some units did remain behind to protect the city. The new British commander in the area, Milne had decided that Sarrail, the French commander, was too much of a risk-taker and it was agreed that the British and French should have responsibility for different sections of the advance.

After long, exhausting marches in the intense heat, the British engaged the Bulgarians in the Battle of Horseshoe Hill. This was finally taken but the Bulgarians were strongly entrenched and in the following advance to reclaim Serbia, the Russians and Serbs particularly suffered many casualties.

On 2nd November 1916, Arthur was taken to 28th General Hospital suffering from "Debility". Debility was often used as another name for "Shell Shock" or "exhaustion of the nervous system". We would probably now see it as a form of Depression or Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. However, debility was a term that was also used when men suffered from lack of energy caused by other illnesses. Perhaps he had undiagnosed malaria. The area north of Salonika was often swampy and malaria was endemic. Arthur remained in hospital until the 20th December when he was "discharged back to duty".

The following Spring, on 15th March 1917, he was once again sent to the 28th General Hospital but this time diagnosed as "Malaria R", a reoccurrence of malaria, which perhaps throws light on his earlier episode of debility. This time, it was decided that he should be put on *H.M Hospital Ship Dover Castle.* He was taken to No. 2 Convalescent Hospital in Egypt on the Suez Canal.

A couple of months after Arthur was on board, on 26th May 1917, the *Dover Castle* was sunk between Malta and Gibraltar by a German U-boat. The captain of the U-boat was later tried for sinking a Hospital Ship but was acquitted by a German court as he believed that he was acting under Government orders.

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* states that he had been invalided home and demobilised so it seems that he did return to England and was discharged from the Royal Field Artillery. This was not the end of his war service, however, because, as we have seen, in the *Absent Voters; List,* he was in the Army Service Corps with Service Number 390437. Chris, on the Great War Forum, has shown that a number of men with adjacent service numbers to Arthur in the ASC were transferred in January 1918 but we cannot be certain.

The Army Service Corps were the support men of the army, taking supplies, food, equipment and ammunition to the troops. We do not know where Arthur served but it seems likely that it was a home posting. His service number has a "T" before it which indicates that he was in the Horse Transport section of the ASC where his experience with the Royal Field Artillery would have been useful.

He was discharged on 19th March 1919 and received a pension because of his malaria. It is also noted on his records that he had exophthalmic goitre. This is also called Graves Disease. Symptoms may include irritability, muscle weakness, poor tolerance of heat, diarrhoea and weight loss. It can also lead to eye problems including protruding eyeballs. Its cause is still not entirely understood but it can be triggered by stress. Could this be another explanation of his debility?

Arthur returned to Ringstead and in 1920 he was living with his parents, George and Minnie in Gladstone Street. In the following year he married Rose Harrison. They had two children, William born on 11th April 1922 and Kenneth on 6th November 1924.

Both Arthur and Rose worked in the boot and shoe trade. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales,* Arthur was a "Boot Operative, a Stitcher and Screwer" and Rose was a Hot Wax Machinist. They were now living at 27 Barn Close in Raunds.

In March 1939 William, their son, was hit by a car near Chowns Mill and had to be taken to Northampton General Hospital with an injured right leg. Arthur died on 8th September 1981 and Rose on 2nd September 1985. Her son William followed a few weeks later.

William Sawford (1897-1917)

Arthur had a brother born in 1897 who was called William. In 1911 he was thirteen years old and was still at school but he also worked part-time as a grocer's errand boy. When war started in 1914 it was thought that it "would be over by Christmas" but soon reality set in as the injured men came home and many never returned. On 31st March 1916 William was 18 years 7 months old and was medically examined for military service. He was 5ft 5 inches tall, weighed 124 lbs and had a 34 inch chest.

William Sawford
From Rushden Argus 18th June 1917. With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society.

William had started work at Adams Brothers (in the former Britannia Boot and Shoe Co-operative building in Denford Road) but he was called up for service on 17th November 1916 and first drafted into the 99th Training Reserve Battalion of The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) two days later. He had been given Regimental Number G/13877 and probably did his initial training at the Maida Barracks in Aldershot. He was then transferred to the 1st Battalion, which would have been a Regular Army unit at the beginning of the war, on 12th April 1917, and posted overseas.

The *War Diary* of the 1st Buffs recorded that on the 29th April 1917 the Battalion was in trenches near Philosophe, between Bethune and Lens. On that day 122 Other Ranks joined the unit to replace those lost. We can see the ferocity of the action the Buffs were confronted by, in that, in April, for three Military Crosses, one Distinguished Conduct Medal and eleven Military Medals were awarded.

On 1st May the 1st Battalion were in the Hulluch Sector but on 3rd they were relieved and went into huts at Mazingarbe. Another 50 Other Ranks joined the unit on the 6th. They were once again in the Front Line trenches on the 19th May. The *War Diary* shows a continual drip of the wounded and killed. On 23rd May one Other Rank was wounded in action and on the

24th two were killed. One of these men was William Sawford although some records show his death as on the 23rd May.

William had been in France for six weeks and only about half of that that time in a war zone. The Corporal of his company wrote to his parents:

> *It is with the utmost regret that I have the painful duty to perform of informing you of the death of your son on May 23rd. He was killed instantaneously by a shell and suffered no pain whatever. Although he had only been with the regiment a short time he made himself well-liked by his willingness and devotion to duty, showing signs of becoming a non-commissioned officer very shortly. Both the platoon and myself wish to tender our sincere sympathy.*

Was it really like that? We will never know. He was nineteen years old.

He is commemorated at Philosophe British Cemetery at Mazingarbe. The inscription on his grave, selected by his family was:

> *He rose from the ranks to a higher life.*

William had been the secretary of the Wesleyan Bible Class in Ringstead. A remembrance tablet for him and four other young members of the class, killed in 1917 and 1918, was erected in Ringstead Wesleyan Chapel. This was moved later to the back wall of the former Cemetery Chapel which is now the Ringstead Heritage Centre. His name is also on the War Memorial erected in the churchyard in 1924.

Percy Sawford (1900-1960)

The last of the brothers, old enough to serve in the Great War, was Percy, born on 18th June 1900. His parents would have thought that he at least would be safe from being in a war zone. In a way they were right although it must have been hard for them, especially after the death of William in 1917. Percy was conscripted but was not called upon to serve abroad.

He enlisted on 18th June 1918 when he was just eighteen years old. He was 5ft 4½ inches tall, weighed 115lbs with a 33½ inch chest, and had brown eyes and a pale complexion.

He was mobilised on 3rd July 1918 in Northampton and was first posted to the 53rd (Young Soldier) Battalion of the Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own) which had been founded there on 27th October 1917. Two days later, on 5th July, he was transferred to the 52nd (Graduated) Battalion.

The 52nd was based at Colchester and on 2nd February 1919 he was fined four days' pay for overstaying his leave pass. It was a common offence among the men who we have looked at in these biographies, especially after the war had finished. On 12th February he was compulsorily retained in service and on 21st March was posted to the 5th Battalion at Colchester.

The 5th (Reserve) Battalion had also spent the war in England. From March 1916 it had been stationed at Eastchurch on the isle of Sheppey, in the mouth of the Thames. It was separated from the north Kent coast by a narrow sea channel called the Swale. Eastchurch was part of a defensive system for the Thames and Medway. It was also the site of one of the earliest airfields and saw the development of the British aeroplane industry by the Short Brothers. The Isle of Sheppey was so important that it was sometimes called Barbed-Wire Island and a passport was needed to get on the island during both World Wars. It is not clear if Percy saw any service in Sheppey or spent his time only at Colchester Barracks.

He was finally posted, on 7th August 1919 to the 2nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade and on 24th September was appointed as an unpaid Lance Corporal. Demobilisation of all the volunteer and conscripted troops was now moving towards completion and on 24th October 1919 Percy "proceeded to No. 9B Disposal Station" at Purfleet. His short time in the army was over.

On 16th October 1918 he had had a medical examination and, although his eyesight and physical development were considered good, he was placed in category B2. It appears that he had flat feet and suffered from goitre, like his brother, Arthur.

Percy returned to Ringstead and in late 1922 he married Lily Waterman. Lily had been born in Sunderland in County Durham. Her parents were from Oxfordshire but her father, Cardinal William Waterman, had worked as a foreman in a clothing factory in Sunderland and the family were there in the 1901 Census. He obtained a new job as manager of a clothing factory in Woodford, across the Nene from Ringstead. In the late 19th century two clothing factories had opened in Woodford, *Wallace and Linnell* and the *Ideal Clothing Factory and* it was the latter which Waterman managed. In 1911 the family were living in "Sunnyside" in the village.

Percy became a worker for the *London Midland and Scottish (LMS) Railway Company* and, soon after their marriage, the couple moved to Nottinghamshire. In 1924 they had a daughter, Edna May born in the Mansfield District and, in 1930, another daughter, Mary, born in the Southwell District of Nottinghamshire. The 1927 Electoral Register shows Percy and Lily living in Main Street, North Muskham, a few miles north of Newark.

In the *1939 Register of England and Wales*, Percy was a "LMS Signalman" and Lily had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". There are two "officially closed" records at the address, probably the two daughters.

Percy died on 22nd October 1960. He was living, at the time of his death, at 9 Cedar Avenue in Newark and was still working as a signalman for British Railways. Although there is a small discrepancy in the given birth date it looks as if Lily died, aged 87, in 1987 in the Burnley and Pendle District of Lancashire. Her daughter, Edna, had married Thomas Pickles from Nelson in Lancashire so perhaps she was living near or with the Pickles at the time of her death.

Chapter 13

Alfred Edward Shaw (1897-1917)

Alfred's grandfather, William Shaw, was a basket manufacturer in Raunds and his son, George, carried on this trade, making domestic and industrial baskets, until his death in 1954. Another son of William, called Thomas, became an army bootmaker and married Ringstead girl, Martha Jane Tilley, on January 25th 1894. The couple lived at No.5 London End in Ringstead, next door to Martha's parents, Samuel and Catherine (Kate) Tilley.

Thomas and Martha had four children, Martha, Alfred Edward, Ellen Bessie and Thomas. In the 1911 Census they were in Spendlove's Yard and the oldest child, Martha was a leather heel builder, almost certainly working in the heel factory nearby, at the bottom of Denford Road. Alfred, aged 13, was working as an assistant baker. He had been baptised in the parish church on August 13th 1897 although Alfred, at least, had become a Wesleyan as a teenager.

Alfred first enlisted in the month from October 24th 1914 when he was just seventeen years old. It would have been in one of the Territorial Battalions of the Northamptonshire Regiment which volunteers could join at this earlier age. He was given the Regimental Number 3201. The men trained at weekends or in the evenings and went away to a summer camp. Territorials were not obliged to serve overseas but enlisted knowing that, in the event of war, they could be called upon for full-time service ("embodied"). In theory, no men could be sent to serve abroad until they were nineteen years old and, although some did, it appears that Alfred was posted when he had just reached this age.

He was sent to the 17th Infantry Base Depot (IBD) at Étaples near the French coast. The IBD was a holding camp for receiving men on arrival from England. Some of these camps were not liked, especially by the New Zealanders, because of the harsh discipline. The men were kept in training while awaiting being sent to a unit at the front. Alfred was posted to the 6th Northamptonshires on 28th September 1916 with a new Regimental Number, 40292.

The *Medal and Award Roll* shows that a draft of men transferred from the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment to the 32nd Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) on the 10th October 1916. The 32nd (East Ham) Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers had been raised by the Mayor and Borough of East Ham in London on 18th October 1915 and had first landed in France on the 5th May 1916. On the 12th October the 32nds were in Becordal Camp and the *War Diary* records:

> *Draft of 1 officer and 60 O.R. arrived.*

Further large drafts arrived in the following few days and the number of these replacements show the size of the casualties that the Battalion had suffered. Figures in the *War Diary* show that that at the end of the month there were 971 Other Ranks and 25 Officers but at one point before the replacements arrived there were only 493 men and 15 officers. Alfred was one of these new men. On 16th October they marched to Mericourt and entrained for Longpré where the new arrivals were trained, alongside the old hands, in company drill with

bayonet fighting and rifle exercises. They then moved to Ridge Wood, a few miles south-west of Ypres, where they were trained in the routines of life at the Front in old trenches.

On the 28thOctober 1916 the men experienced trench life for real when they relieved the 10th Queens. There was heavy rain and little enemy action so the men repaired the trenches during the lull in the fighting. The Battalion followed the usual pattern of periods in and out of the line. On 6th November the men were given the new "box respirators" which gave better protection against chlorine and phosgene gases that were being used by both sides.

History of the Great War Based on Official Documents. London: HMSO.
https://commons.wikimedia.org

They were now in the La Clytte (De Klijte) and Vierstraat area, providing working parties for the Front Line through November. For the most part, December continued with exchanges of artillery fire and on the 9th they were bombed with "Tear Gas" In January 1917 the activity slackened but, in February and March, the fighting became fiercer again. On the 22nd March they moved into billets at Steenvoorde

In April they were in the St Eloi section of the Western Front before moving to Houle and on the 20th May they bathed in the lake, with the weather warm and sunny. The weather remained fine in June when the battalion was based at Elzenwalle (Elzenwallekasteel). At first, they were in support, but the enemy's artillery was very active in *Ravine* and *Deny's Wood.*

A British offensive had been planned and, following a week-long barrage by the Allied artillery, on the 7th June 1917 the Battle of Messines began. The objective was the capture of the Messines-Wytschaete (Wijtschate) Ridge which overlooked the British positions and made any further progress in the Ypres sector hazardous and difficult. It had been gradually transformed into a German stronghold. The Royal Engineers, however had been mining beneath the German positions and 21 large mines had been laid. At 3.10 am these were detonated and 19 of them exploded. It was the largest explosion before the nuclear explosions later in the century and was said to have been heard by Lloyd George in Downing Street. It is now believed that the Germans suffered far fewer than the 10,000 men later

said to have been killed, but it was a morale shattering experience and made the task of the Battalion and the other troops, from Ireland and the Empire, much easier.

The 32nd were on the left in the initial night attack. The infantry had, as usual been preceded by a moving artillery barrage ahead of the attacking troops. The *War Diary* noted:

> *The whole ground and enemy trenches in this neighbourhood were so ruined by our shell fire as to be practically unrecognizable and a part of the Battalion in the excessive keenness which they showed throughout went on with the 26th Bn. Royal Fusiliers right up to the Dammstrasse [name given to a sunken road] and took part in the assault of it. The Stream marking the right of the RED LINE had been converted into merely a string of shell craters having more water in them than those in the neighbourhood.*

A smashed-up German trench on Messines Ridge 7th June 1917
Photograph by John Warwick Brooke ©IWM Q5787

The raid was successful and most of the Germans had fled. By 8.10 am the work of the 32nd was over except for consolidation and organisation of the positions. Many men were killed but the battle was considered one of the few clear successes for the Allies until the last months of the war. Unfortunately, it was followed by a continuation of the terrible war of attrition in the mud of the Third Battle of Ypres (Leper) often called Passchendaele.

Through July, at La Clytte, the Battalion was mainly engaged in working parties, digging trenches for cables. Nevertheless, there were actions on the 31st July and 7th August in

which 43 men were killed and 7 died of wounds and a further 90 were wounded. On the 5th August the Germans had attacked the line at Klein Zillebeke (four miles south-east of Ypres) held by the 32nd and temporarily broke through in one area but they were soon repulsed, and the line held.

September came with the Battalion in training. On the 14th September they began to move up to the Front Line, marching 12½ miles to billets at Zuytpeene and then over the next few days reaching the Canada Street Tunnels, near Zillebeke, by the 18th. The *War Diary* reported:

> *Battalion Concert Party gave a performance prior to the Battalion moving to the forward area.*

On the 19th September the Battalion moved forward to its assembly position for an attack on "Tower Hamlets". A new world of Anglicised French place names mixed with British names for features in the landscape had been laid over the map of the French countryside. August had seen a reduction in action because of the rain and mud but there was better weather in September. The British re-launched their attack with an assault on the German positions on the vital high ground of the Gheluvelt (Geluveld) Plateau astride the Ypres-Menin Road. This offensive became known as the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge.

There had been, first, a tremendous bombardment of the German front. The plan was called a "bite and hold", to take a position and then consolidate it before moving to the next objective. The Tower Hamlets sector held by the 32nd was just west of Gheluvelt village The Battalion made repeated attacks but by nightfall, the Germans still held their positions.

In the period from 20th to 25th September the British lost 20,255 wounded, killed or missing. One of the men who died between 19th and 22nd September (dates vary in the records) was Alfred Shaw. The page of the Service Medal and Award Roll which shows the transfer of Alfred from the 6th Northamptonshires to the 32nd Royal Fusiliers on 10th October 1916, shows four other men who followed an identical path. Of these George Trenwith was killed on 7th August 1917, Arthur Sargison was killed on 22nd September 1917 and Albert Waterfield died on 19th September 1917.

Alfred was entitled to the Victory and British War Medals. At some point he had been appointed a Lance Corporal. He was twenty years old and his parents received his small war gratuity. He is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial (Panels 28-30). Like William Sawford, William Sibley, Edward Roberts and Percy Wilson he was also remembered as a member of the Wesleyan Young People's Class on a tablet which is now on the back of the former Cemetery Chapel (now the Heritage Centre). Along the road from there, into the village, he is also on the war memorial outside the parish church.

Alfred's mother, Martha Jane died in 1922 but the family continued to live in Spendlove's Yard. In 1934, his father was attending to a dog whose sores, it was thought, came into contact with a scratched pimple on his arm. He developed blood poisoning and died in Northampton General Hospital a week later.

Chapter 14

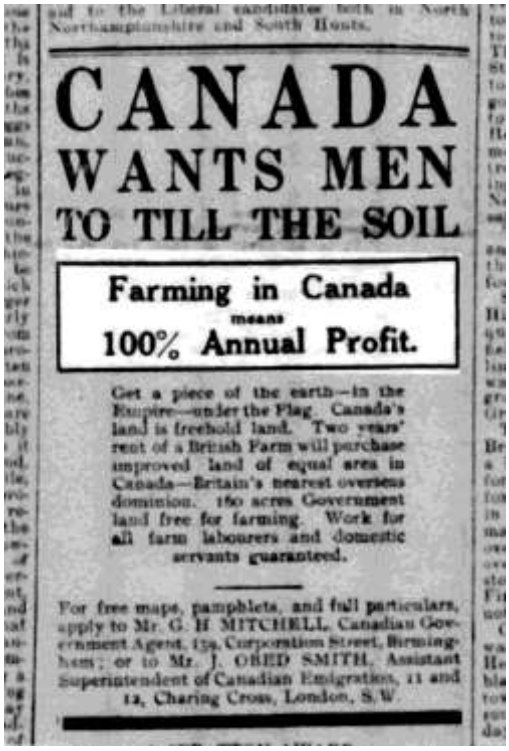
William Sibley (1894-1917)

William Sibley was born in 1863 in Old Bolingbroke in Lincolnshire. His father, Daniel, was a bricklayer's labourer, who had originally come from Crouchfield in Hertfordshire. In 1881 William was a labourer on the railways, lodging in the Nag's Head in Helpringham, a few miles south-east of Sleaford. In the same Census, Clara Childs, aged 17, was a domestic servant living in Leveratt's Row in Ringstead with her parents, Robert and Mary Ann and her six siblings.

Soon after this Census William moved to Ringstead, probably to find work in the ironstone quarries of Northamptonshire. On 25th December 1883, he married Clara Ann and by 1891 William aged 30, and Clara, aged 27, were living in Carlow Street with their two children Harry, four, and Marge, one. William was working as a labourer in a local quarry.

In the 1901 Census William was still working in a local quarry but eldest son, Harry, now 14, was a "shoemaker" although this probably exaggerated his role. Besides Margie there were now three more children, Bertie (Bertram Frank) aged 9, William aged 7 and Kathleen – Mary Katherine aged 3. By 1911 there were three more children, Florence, Olive Frances and Gladys. The Census also shows that Clara has had 12 children four of whom had died.

The oldest son still at home, Bertram Frank (19), was a farm labourer, and William (17), born on 25th March 1894 had become a porter on the railway.



Northamptonshire and South Hants.

CANADA
WANTS MEN
TO TILL THE SOIL

Farming in Canada
means
100% Annual Profit.

Get a piece of the earth—in the Empire—under the Flag. Canada's land is freehold land. Two years' rent of a British Farm will purchase improved land of equal area in Canada—Britain's nearest overseas dominion. 160 acres Government land free for farming. Work for all farm labourers and domestic servants guaranteed.

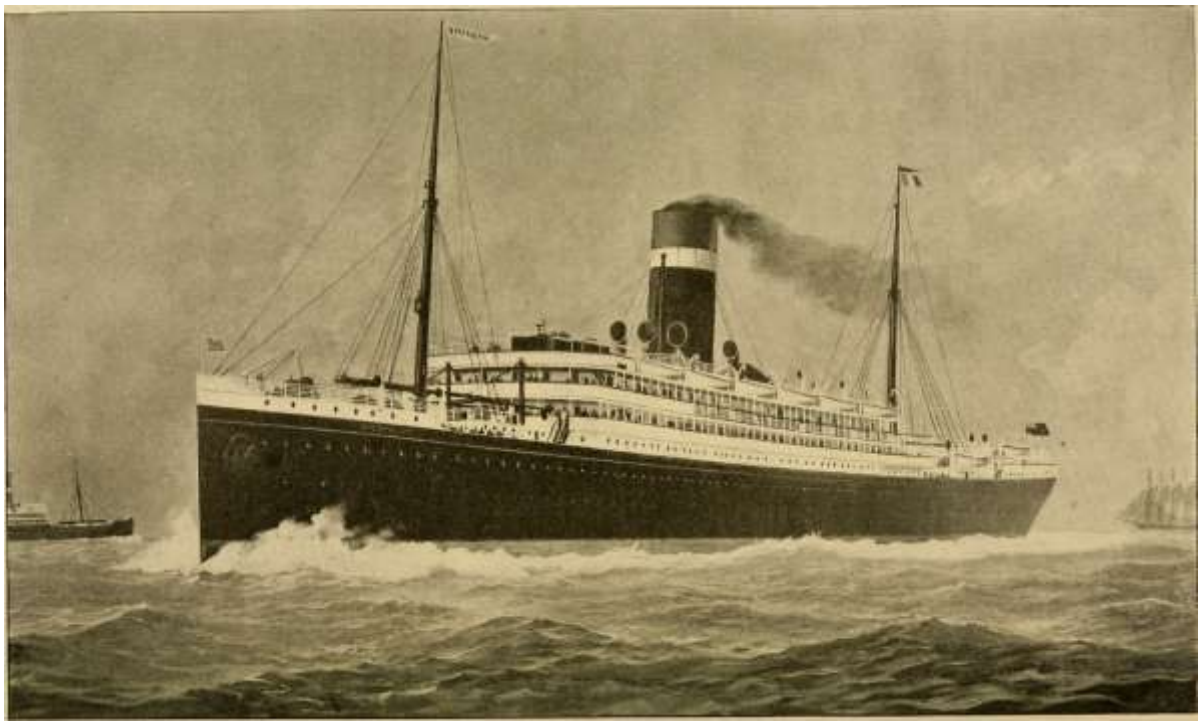
For free maps, pamphlets, and full particulars, apply to Mr. G. H. MITCHELL, Canadian Government Agent, 13a, Corporation Street, Birmingham; or to Mr. J. OBED SMITH, Assistant Superintendent of Canadian Emigration, 11 and 12, Charing Cross, London, S.W.

Northampton Mercury 3rd February 1911
www.britishnewspaperarchives.co.uk

At this time there were many advertisements in the local and national newspapers encouraging people to emigrate to Canada. There were also very well attended lectures, on the benefits of the new land, by representatives of the western Canadian states. Agents for the assisted travel were in towns like Northampton. In 1913, 158,398 people emigrated to Canada and from 1912 to the start of the Great War, the number was over a million.

One of these emigrants was Bertram Frank Sibley, William's older brother. He took one of the subsidised tickets on offer from the Government and the promise of free land and sailed in "Steerage" on the *S.S. Southwark*, arriving in Montreal on 4th May 1911. He was bound for Alberta and Saskatchewan. It was the end of *Southwark*'s career because she was scrapped in that same year.

Bertie became established in Hacke in Alberta. The settlement was named after William Hacke who was appointed postmaster of the post office there on 1st June 1914. We can imagine a small number of strung out homesteads with the post office becoming the point of reference to enable mail to arrive once a week from Magrath. It was not a village in the same way as Ringstead with shops and houses, church and chapels huddled together. Hacke later became known as Twin River.



RMS Victorian
Cassier's Magazine 1904 (Wikimedia Commons)

He would have written back to his family telling of his good fortune and William decided to also try his luck in the New World. He left Liverpool on the 16th July 1913 on the *RMS Victorian,* travelling Third Class. It was the first large civilian ship propelled by steam turbines and had been launched in 1904. In these large ocean liners 3rd class cabins had replaced the public dormitory conditions of "Steerage".

The family believe that the two brothers had been granted 50 acres of land each and that men with 75 acres were not conscripted. They tossed a coin to see who would have both lots. William lost and joined the army. The problem is that William volunteered before conscription and it seems that the two men lived some distance apart. This does not mean that these events did not happen in some form.

War came to Europe in July 1914, and the attitude in Canada to the conflict was very mixed. At first, large numbers of men volunteered, so that in the first two years 300,000 men signed up from a population of about eight million. By 1916 the terrible toll of soldier's lives meant many new recruits were needed but few came forward. Conscription was mooted but the French-Canadian population, particularly were opposed to it and there were riots in Quebec. Nevertheless, on 29th August 1917, it was introduced for all male citizens between 20 and 45 years old. It was evaded by many and most claimed exemptions of some kind so that the first conscripts did not reach Europe until 1918.

William Sibley
With thanks to Fay Hardwick

William, however, was a volunteer. He attested at Cardston on April 20th 1916 and was enlisted in the 13th Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMR but sometimes copied as OMR) and given Regimental Number 228244. At the time he was farming in Mountain View in Alberta,

which was a hamlet some sixteen miles west of Cardston and sixty-five miles south-west of Twin River. Mountain View had originally been called Fish Creek and had been founded by the Church of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) in 1890. In 2016 it had a population of ninety people. At enlistment, William's occupation was shown as "farmer" so it seems likely that, like his brother he did have a land grant from the Government.

We know that the Sibleys were Wesleyan and William had been a member of the Bible Class in the local chapel. From his *Attestation Paper* we can see that he had converted to the Mormon faith which was a popular sect in southern Alberta and had a large church built in Cardston.

William was 5ft 6 inches tall with a 34½ inch chest. He had a fair complexion with light brown hair and blue eyes. The *Attestation Paper* used in Canada was a little different to the one used in Great Britain. The recruits agreed:

> *To serve in the Canadian's Over-Seas Expeditionary Force and to be attached to any arm of the service therein, for the term of one year, or during the war now existing between Great Britain and Germany should that war last longer than one year, and for six months after the termination of that war provided His Majesty should so long require any services, or until legally discharged.*

William embarked in Canada on the *RMS Olympic* on 28th June 1916 and disembarked in England on 4th July. *Olympic* was the older sister of the ill-fated *RMS Titanic* and she could take nearly 6000 troops on each sailing.

At first, he was sent to the Canadian Cavalry Depot (CCD) and became, briefly, part of the Fort Gary Horse Reserve Regiment at Shorncliffe. The reserve provided officers and men for the Regiment on the Western Front. These barracks had first been chosen when the British volunteer battalions had vacated them. The first Canadian troops had been housed in tents on Salisbury Plain and had suffered many illnesses and deaths. As a result later Canadians went into quarantine barracks on Dibgate Plain for 28 days on arriving. Did he get a chance to visit his family in Ringstead before he left for France?

On the 27th September 1916 he was taken on the strength of the 11th Battalion at Shorncliffe and from there he was sent overseas on the 13th October 1916. He would have been marched with his fellow soldiers, from the barracks, the few miles to Folkestone to board the troopships. On the 31stOctober he joined the 8th Battalion in the field.

There is some confusion about the naming of the 8th Battalion and it is sometimes called the 8th Battalion Canadian Infantry (Manitoba Regiment). Certainly, he was in the 8th Battalion which had been in France from 13th February 1915 joining the 1st Canadian Division of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade.

William joined the 8th after they had endured heavy action at the Battle of Ancre Heights in the last actions at the end of the long, bloody campaign 1916 known as The Battle of the Somme. He was one of 262 Other Ranks who joined on the 31st October. On 1st November the Battalion moved billets from Bonneville, finally reaching a relief campsite in the Bethonval Sector some 30 miles north before going up to the Front Line. Intermittent

fighting continued before they moved back into billets in Chateau Cauvet at Gouy Servins. The *War Diary* reported:

> . . . hot tea for all on arrival, this is immensely enjoyed by all after the march out.

Amid all the death and terrible living conditions the small things held more importance. On the 20th of the next month the Diary states:

> *A Drying Room for rubber boots is in the trenches close to the Bttn Headquarters, a great boon.*

They moved on to a rest area at Bruay (Bruay-la-Buissière), six miles south-west of Bethune, where they remained for a month, with lectures such as "Christianity and War" in the Grand Theatre. The *War Diary* on the 23rd records:

> *British Columbians meet at Battalion H.Q. to vote on the question of WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE AND PROHIBITION.*

In 1917 some women in British Colombia did get the vote.

On the 13th December 1916 William was admitted to the Canadian No.1 Field Ambulance, (which was a mobile front-line medical unit not a vehicle), with an infected eye and discharged three days later

On 24th January 1917, the Battalion moved to Brigade Support at Bully Grenay where they remained during February. It was very cold and frosty with intermittent bombardments and raiding parties. On March 2nd 1917 they moved to Ecoivres and up into the line. It continued comparatively quiet. On March 17th the Diary has the entry:

> *One of our planes brought down in Afternoon by a German Plane known as the "Red Fellow" who appeared to have a remarkable speed.*

This was probably Manfred von Richthofen, usually known as the "Red Baron", who was the scourge of the British pilots. He was eventually shot down and killed near Vaux-sur-Somme on the 21st April 1918.

April 1917 saw the Canadians involved in the Battle of Vimy Ridge and the two Battles of the Scarpe. The 8th Battalion was not one of the lead battalions in these battles but during this time in the first half of April they still lost 19 men killed and 90 wounded. After the battle they rested up in the Douai Tunnels.

On 26th April they moved up into the Front Line in Brigade Support at Farbus Wood in the Battle of Arleux. During early 1917, the Germans carried out a planned retreat to the line of fortifications that they had been building which became known by the Allies as the Hindenburg Line.

During May and June, the 8th Battalion moved to Haillcourt and into the old British Front Line trenches at St Vaast. The Germans were still moving back but the Canadians found that the enemy trenches were still heavily defended. On July 1st they were based in the Railway Area of Vimy Ridge.

On July 16th 1917, the Battalion was instructed to move their camp forward from Fosse to Hersin, ready to move up to the Front Line. During the night of 20th/21st July they relieved the 5th Battalion in the trenches. The changeover was a dangerous operation, with the German artillery shelling the Canadian lines intermittently during the night. William was one of three men who never made it to the Front Line but were killed during this transition on 21st July. A soldier, who knew William, was reported in the *Rushden Argus* in August as saying that he had been killed instantly by shrapnel from a shell.

He was twenty-three years old and was buried in Loos British Cemetery near where he fell. This cemetery was begun by the Canadian in July 1917 and, after the Armistice, was filled up with the graves of men from battlefields all around the village of Loos. He is recorded in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and on the War Memorial as well as on The Canadian Virtual War Memorial. His British War and Victory Medal, and his Memorial Scroll were sent to his mother in 1920.

Before he left Canada, like most soldiers, he made a Will in case of his death in action. His brother, Bertram was one of his trustees. We see from the Will that William grazed cattle on his small farm. He had bequeathed his property to his mother in England. This consisted of:

> *One Red Cow & Calf Branded KS Left Ribs, Calf Branded on Right Ribs, Four Yearing [sic] Heifers Branded KS Right Ribs, One Yearing Holstein Heifer Branded Left Thigh, One Steer Calf Branded KS Right Ribs and all other property accruing from the other said property.*

He also gave to his brother and J.S. Parker, as his trustees, all his estate and effects although it is not clear exactly what this means.

In Canada, his brother, Bert, had been granted his homestead at Hacke on 9th August 1915. In 1918 he married Pauline (or Paulina) Elvira Lewis at Cardston when she was only seventeen years old. Her parents, Jesse Jerome and Elvina (née Fredericksen) Lewis, also had obtained a homestead in Hacke in 1913. The couple may have been of Norwegian origin although this would have been some time back in their family's history.

Bertram and Pauline had eight children. The second oldest, Floyd, became a ranch hand in Montana. In the 1921 Census Bertram was 30 and Paulina was 19 years old and they already had two children, Stanley (2) and Roy (6 months). It appears that on 16th October 1928 Bertram was granted further land. From 1951 to 1965 Pauline ran the Twin River Post Office. Bertram died on 26th February 1974 and Pauline in 1985. Both are buried in Milk River Cemetery.

Back in England, William and Bertram's father, William, died in 1932 and after a ceremony in the Wesleyan Chapel, he was buried in Ringstead Cemetery with most of his family still around him. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales*, Clara was still living in Carlow Street with her unmarried daughters, Florence and Gladys. She died, aged 85, in 1949.

Chapter 15

George Slack (1870-1942)

We have come across the Slack family before, when we told the story of the Dainty brothers. Walter and Charles. The two families interlink, moving between the counties of Yorkshire and Northamptonshire. The Dainty family had originally come from Titchmarsh but George William had moved north to Brightside Bierlow, near Sheffield where he had married Sarah Ann Schofield. He had been working as a stone quarryman and in the early 1900s they had moved back to Northamptonshire, living in Thrapston but still working as a quarryman. His father, William who had also moved north, had remained in Sheffield.

One of the children of George and Sarah was Jane Elizabeth Dainty and, aged 22, in the 1891 Census she was a domestic servant for Thomas Garbutt. He was a sixty-six-year-old Turkish Bath Proprietor, living at 8 Armstead Road in Attercliffe. Later that year she married George Slack. George had been born in Wirksworth in Derbyshire on 4th May 1870.

In the 1911 Census, we see that twelve children had followed, of whom eight survived childhood. When we look at their birth places, we see that they had moved around the south Yorkshire area, from Grimethorpe to Darnell and Masbrough. We also see that two of the children Rose (Titchmarsh) and Arthur (Woodford) had been born in Northamptonshire so probably the family had moved south for a few years before returning to Yorkshire. The family were living at 73 Titterton Street in Attercliffe with seven of their children, Ernest Edward (17), Lily (12), Beatrice (11), Willis (10), Rose (8), Arthur (5) and Bernard (2), and Jane's elderly parents, William and Maria Dainty. William Dainty is shown as blind and he was killed in a tramcar incident soon after the Census.

At some point in the next few years George and Jane Elizabeth moved back to Ringstead and certainly, by 1918, they were living there.

Two of their sons joined the services. Their eldest son, George William Slack, had left home in 1911 and was boarding in Attercliffe and working as a miner in a colliery. The following year he joined the Royal Navy and served throughout the war. The second eldest son, Ernest Edward, was still living with his parents in 1911 and, aged seventeen, he was working as a pony driver at a colliery. He seems to have been into mischief as a young man for, in 1913, he was in Wakefield Prison accused of stealing a jacket on 28th March 1912 and the following year of trying to obtain money with a forged document. He had been "received into custody" on 11th July 1913 but, when tried, he was found not guilty and discharged.

Ernest may have first enlisted in 1912 with the 4th (Hallamshire) Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment but was then (it seems) transferred to the Northumberland Fusiliers. It may be that he was discharged when accused of the crimes and then re-enlisted at the start of the war. I have not managed to sort out his army career. By December 1914 he was home on sick leave and on December 18th he was staying in Ringstead with his aunt, Sarah Ann Dainty. While there, he stole a ten-shilling money order from her, which he used, first to buy a pint of beer and some bread, and cheese at the *Red Lion Inn* in Raunds. He was tried,

found guilty, and sentenced to one month's prison with hard labour. Was it preferable to the army?

If we return to George Slack, the father, most of his military records have been lost but we know from his pension card that after the war he was living in Chapel Lane in Ringstead and this is confirmed by the 1918 Register of Electors. The card has his date of birth as 1873 and there may have been a reason for this discrepancy. Until April 1918 the official upper age limit for enlistment was 41 and George would have been nearer 45 years old. Nevertheless, we can find other men in the 270th who were older than George.

He enlisted as a Pioneer in the 270th Railway Labour Company of the Royal Engineers. The Pioneer rank or appointment was used in a number of ways but here it probably denotes a labourer working for the Sappers who were the more skilled men. His medal card has him entering a war zone on 25th November 1915. The list of Railway Companies on the *Long Long Trail* website has the 270th in Egypt and it may be that after being formed in Cheltenham, they first sailed to Egypt before moving on to Salonika (sometimes Salonica). A man from Leeds in Yorkshire wrote to his brother, Frank Hayes, of his experiences with the Royal Engineers. In his letter, published in the *Leeds Mercury* on the 7th February 1916, he wrote:

> *My stay in Egypt was a fine experience. We had late passes in Alexandria nearly every night, and we had some good fun.*
>
> *In Egypt we had not much work to do; we were generally done by one o'clock in the afternoon, and it was too hot for parade. At four o'clock went into the sea to have a dip. I can tell you I enjoyed it. We were to have gone to the Pyramids at Cairo, but it did not come off, as we left the country so soon. I was very sorry. . .*
>
> *[In Salonika]. We have moved up now nearer to our work, and at night, when all the ships light up, and with the mountains behind, it is indeed, a grand sight. We generally find time to have a song and a bit of chat. Some begin talking about home, and what everyone will be doing in their respective homes. In that way we always put a good night in when the letters and parcels come. We always tell each other what is going on at home. We have a tent full of good company. Parcels are always shared round.*

The initial campaign against the Bulgarians by the Allies had been a chastening experience and they retreated back to Salonika to lick their wounds. The Royal Engineers would have been working around Salonika building defences and stringing barbed wire, giving the city the nickname, "The Birdcage". In 1916 the Allies took over control of the railways from the Greek government. Railheads were established, allowing them to have headquarters "up country". A large marshalling yard was constructed at Dudular near Salonika to allow the fast movement of stores away from the congested port to secure places where they could be sorted and protected. There was also the construction of several narrow-gauge light railways to help the supply of troops to the front lines.

The Balkans campaign, although often ignored in commemorations, had many British casualties. It was also a very unhealthy place, especially for troops unused to the conditions. It often had hot humid weather but could also be very cold. The areas to the north of Salonika were marshy and Malaria was endemic. It was hard work in these conditions for the men in the 270th who were often middle aged, the younger fitter men being taken for the fighting units. Sickness was prevalent and we see from the sickness forms that some of these older men also succumbed to rheumatism. One Royal Engineer humorously described the conditions in Salonika in a piece published in the *Bath Chronicle* in 1917.

The Macedonian Health Resort

Bright! Briny! Breezy! Balkans!
(For the holidays)
ATTRACTIONS
A war held daily (Wednesday early closing day).
Aeroplane and artillery exhibitions (no extra charge for night stunts).
No railway – but Shanks's pony to all parts.
Big Game Hunting
Bulgars, Turks, snakes, mules, mosquitoes, wild dogs, flies, ants, creepers, crawlers, and jumpers of all species.
Fishing
All kinds of fever caught every day.
Mails
Delivered daily (one a month) unless otherwise disposed of
Bathing
Mixed, six or seven to every bucket.
Miles and miles from civilisation and from the influences and flirtations of the fair sex.
Temperature
Boiling point guaranteed. "Hotel Berrypole" not five minutes from the front.*
Menu
Biscuits or bread (G.S. mark cut) with bully beef or meat (fresh), jam issue, marmalade (every day sometimes), wine list, quinine nightly.
Our Motto – "Wot Opes"

- *Does this refer to a cemetery with wooden markers on the graves or to tent poles?*

Like many other, George did not last long in these gruelling conditions. He was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis and on 18th October 1916 and was discharged from the army. He returned home and was awarded a Silver War Badge so that he could not be accused of shirking his duty by the White Feather brigade. He was awarded the 1915 Star as well as the British War and Victory Medals.

As we have said, he is shown in the 1918 *Register of Electors*, living in Chapel Lane in Ringstead and the *Electoral Registers* record that he and Jane were still living there in 1931, with, as they too had reached voting age (21), their sons, Arthur, Willis and Bernard being also recorded in the village.

George Slack on the right
With thanks to Jon Abbott

It seems likely that he continued labouring despite his arthritis and the *1939 Register of England & Wales has* the couple, with unmarried son, Bernard, still living in Number One, Chapel Lane. George is shown as a "General Labourer, Retired", for he was nearing seventy years old. He died early in 1942, aged 71. Jane Elizabeth Slack lived to be 88 years old and died in 1958.

Chapter 16

George Stanley Smart (1884-1917)

A Henry Smart had been born in Raunds in about 1814. He married Mary Ann Litchfield of Rushden in the Rushden Parish Church on June 4th 1838. Henry was a shoemaker and both the couple's fathers were also in the shoe trade. Henry, however, changed his occupation and by 1851 the couple were living in Newton Bromswold, just three miles south-east of Rushden, and seven miles south of Raunds.

Henry was now a publican and grocer at the *Swan Inn* and Mary Ann was working at home as a dressmaker. Over the last decades we have seen the closure of many village pubs and it is worth remembering that, even in the Nineteenth Century, many needed at least a second income to survive. It is also likely that Mary Ann took an important part in the running of the business.

Among the couple's children was Charles William Henry Smart who was baptised on April 2nd 1858 in Newton Bromswold.

On 24th 1862 Henry Smart appeared, at the Old Bailey in London, charged with trying to sell "a large quantity of beef unfit for human food". From the court case we gather that Henry only had a couple of cows. Fortunately for Henry the cow was "thin" and poor-quality meat but not diseased or unfit for human consumption. He was therefore acquitted.

By 1881, Mary Ann was temporarily apart from her husband and she was in Rushden High Street with her son, Charles. He was twenty-three years old and shown as a farmer of 155 acres, employing two men and two boys. His father, Henry was still in Newton Bromswold living with his daughter Mary and her farmer husband. It appeared that the fortunes of the family were on the way up.

Later in that Census year, Charles married Maria Reynolds, on the 18th October in Pertenhall. By the 1891 Census he was still shown as a farmer living in Rushden High Street with Maria and their three children, George, (7), Florence (6) and Harry (1). Living with them was William Bailey, aged 18, an "Agricultural Servant" from Ringstead. Their son, George Stanley Smart, who is the subject of this biography had been baptised on March 2nd 1884.

It seems that the family's circumstances waned because, by the 1901 Census, they were living at 5 Sivers Buildings in Ringstead. These "buildings" were a row of fairly poor cottages with few amenities. Charles, aged 42, had become a cattle stockman working on someone else's farm. George, aged seventeen, was a boot and shoe maker.

By 1911 Charles, aged 53, was shown as a labourer on a farm and both George, aged 27, and his younger brother, Harry, were army shoemakers, but "out of work". In 1914 the Great War was to bring work again to the army boot and shoe makers but in 1916 it also brought conscription which took many of the sons of the village.

George attested with the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in the weeks after 27th June 1916 and given Regimental Number 19334. After that, the dates are more problematic. He was probably transferred with a large group of his fellow soldiers to the Machine Gun Corps between the 14th and 16th September 1916 and given new number, 57027. They all would all have been sent on a six-week gunnery course at either Belton Park near Grantham or Clipstone Camp near Mansfield. Once this had been completed George would have been posted as soon as possible to France, to arrive by mid-November, at the Machine Gun Depot at Camiers. This was part of the vast Étaples Base Depot of the British Army.

A rather poor picture of George Smart from the Rushden Argus
but showing the MGC badge quite clearly
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

From Camiers the men would have been sent to whichever Machine Gun Company most urgently needed their services. For the Corps the manning of the units was far more fluid than for the Regiments for the guns needed to be at constant full strength.

When George joined the 8th Company of the Machine Gun Corps it was in the closing stages of the Somme campaign They were in action there, in the Battle of Ancre, from the 13th to the 18th November.

In early 1917 they had moved to the Arras area and fought in the Battles of the Scarpe and the Battle of Arleux. The Company then moved north into Flanders and were in action again in the Battle of Menin Road Ridge (20-25th September).

At this point the picture is a little confusing. Graham Sacker, on whose research much of the account of George's military career is based on, admitted in his e-mail to me:

> *As a researcher and port of call for enquiries about the fate of MGC soldiers, this is one case I would hope never to be called upon to explain!*
>
> *There are obviously some serious issues with the official version of events surrounding the death of George Smart.*

Simply put, there seems to have been a confusion of Company and, more importantly, of place. When one considers the tens of thousands of men and the huge number of military units involved, organised on a system based on index cards, it is surprising that there were not more mistakes. One must also add into the mix, the often terrible, chaotic conditions under which field reports had to be written or typed. With the rider, that some things cannot be stated with absolute certainly, Graham Sacker did manage to bring some clarity to the confusion.

It seems likely that the "5th Company" in George's records is an error and he was with the 8th Machine Gun Company throughout this time and certainly at the time of his death. We

know from the *War Diary* that George Smart was named as part of "D" Section of the 8th Company on the 18th May 1917.

Following the Battle of Menin Road Ridge, the 8th were fighting, as part of the Flanders Offensive, in the Battle of Polygon Wood from the 26th to the 30th October 1917. "D" Company, which, as we have seen, George was part of earlier in the year was initially in reserve but was called forward and the War Diary records:

> *. . . the 4 guns of D Section were sent up at 9.30 am to consolidate, 2 guns being directed to Hill 40 + 2 guns to Leys [?] Cottage. The Section were much delayed by sniping and the Section Officer and several men became casualties on the way up. On finally arriving at the front line, there were only sufficient men and ammunition to service two guns; the guns were therefore sited in pairs [?] in shell holes, on the ridge between the WINDMILL CAB and the Railway Station.*
>
> *At about 6.30 pm, while the teams were engaged in digging emplacements the enemy delivered a counter-attack. One gun came into action and fired a few bursts, but the line was forced back a little distance, and as the teams were reduced in numbers, the guns could not be got away and were lost.*

The D Section suffered significant casualties during this opening phase of the battle, including one man killed, twenty wounded, thirteen gassed, one sick and four missing. George was one of these casualties.

It seems likely that he was one of the "four missing" for in the War Office Daily List 5412 of the 9th November 1917 he was reported as such. It was not until the 25th January 1918, in the Daily List (5475), that he was shown as:

> "Previously reported missing, now reported killed"

Finally, it was clarified that he had been killed on the 26th September 1917. Unfortunately, it was also recorded that he was in the 5th Company and, later, he was commemorated on the Jerusalem Memorial (Panel 54 Upper). It seems certain that both of these "facts" are wrong. The correct version of events was recorded in the *Army Register of Soldiers' Effects* which show that he was killed in action in France or Belgium and was with the 8th Company of the Machine Gun Corps.

It must have been an agonising wait for his parents, Charles and Maria, having some initial hope that he might have survived, but finally being informed of his death. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

His mother, Maria, was awarded a dependant's pension of four shillings a week (20 new pence) on the 4th June 1918. George's name was inscribed on the Ringstead War Memorial which was erected in the churchyard in 1924.

Chapter 17

Sydney William Smith (1897-1947)

Although village populations were more settled in the past, it would be a mistake to believe that they were completely static. In the biographies of various Ringstead people we have seen emigration to the rest of the world as well as movement, in and out, from all over the British Isles. Mostly, however, this migration was comparatively local as men, for the most part, followed the work. As a result, there was a steady influx of newcomers into the village.

John Smith was one of these incomers. He had been born in about 1864, in Harpole in the west of the county. On 4th August 1890 he married Annie Hephzibah Barrs in Ringstead Parish Church. Annie's father, James, although he appears as Charles in the 1871 Census, was also an incomer from Spaldwick in Huntingdonshire. He had married a local woman but had been living in Holbeach in Lincolnshire, when he married Elizabeth Saddington in Raunds on August 10th 1856.

John Smith became a shoe riveter and, in the 1901 Census, the newly married couple were in Irthlingborough High Street. Living with them were their children, Esther and Sidney, born in Harpole and John, four months old and born in Irthlingborough. By 1911 they had moved to Ringstead where John was a boot laster. They were living in Carlow with children Hester (Esther) 18, a boot heel builder, Sydney William (14) an errand boy, and John Arthur (10) who was still at school. Living with them was Annie's father, James Barrs who was a seventy-eight-year-old widower but still recorded as a farm labourer.

Sydney William Smith
With thanks to Heidi Smith

It is Sydney William (sometimes shown as Sidney), born on 3rd February 1897, who the Fates had chosen to be male and of the right age to go to war.

Very few of Sydney's military records have survived the Second World War German bombing raid, but we do know that he joined the 1/4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and at some point, was given the Regimental Number 200638. This was a Territorial Battalion originally formed in 1908. The minimum age of enlistment for the Territorials was seventeen and, with the help of the experts of the Great War Forum, it seems that he joined up in October or early November 1914. These units were made up of part-time soldiers who, after an initial training period, would have an annual camp. They were designed for home defence in case of war but the Regular Army, who made up the first British Expeditionary Force, suffered such unexpectedly high casualties that replacement soldiers were needed almost immediately. Most of the territorials signed up for overseas service and, although, at first looked down upon by the regulars, they soon became an essential part of the wartime army.

The official age for overseas service was nineteen so Sydney would not have been considered for overseas service until his birthday on 3rd February 1916. It seems likely that sometime in the months after this date he was sent abroad to join the Battalion.

The 4th had been at Gallipoli but moved to Egypt as part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. In February and March 1916, they were at Mena Camp near Cairo. New drafts from other Regiments as well as from home brought them back up to strength after their losses. It is possible that Sydney joined the 4ths at this point as part of the 162nd Brigade of the 54th (East Anglian) Division. The Battalion, however, suffered many casualties over the next six months and there were further drafts brought in as replacements.

Part of Mena Camp, Cairo (Australian War Museum P00152.022)

In April 1916, the Division moved to the Suez Canal. The Northamptonshires marched into the desert and manned the defence posts at Darb el Haj, Halfway House and the Kubri Railhead. They remained there throughout the rest of 1916, improving the defences and

sometimes forming part of the columns that marched into the hills leading to small skirmishes with enemy troops.

It was blisteringly hot with the May temperatures reaching 122 degrees Fahrenheit (50 Celsius) in the tents. This almost unbearable heat was only relieved by rest periods in Alexandria.

In January 1917 the 4th were in camp before entraining at Kantara (El Qantara). They then marched across the Sinai Peninsula and prepared to move into Palestine. Although unopposed, the Battalion had to endure some sixteen days marching, to Bela, south-west of Gaza, which was the objective. On March 26th there was a general advance on Gaza, held by the Ottoman (Turkish) troops, with the 4th in trenches along the Gaza Road. Suddenly it was realised that the Turks were advancing and the Northamptonshires were in grave danger of being cut off by the enemy. They had to retreat across a country without roads, trees or landmarks to rejoin the safety of the rest of the Brigade. What became known as the First Battle of Gaza was over, ending in an ignominious retreat. For three weeks then, the whole Division held their line awaiting orders.

On April 17th 1917 the Second Battle of Gaza began with the Northamptonshires in support. By the 19th they were in the Front Line but, in a battleground devoid of trees and covered in barley only nine inches high, they were totally exposed to enemy fire and some 80% of the Battalion were casualties. When dusk fell, they were forced to retire to some shallow trenches dug a thousand yards back from their original positions. When the position was finally taken in November the dead were found lying on the Turkish parapet.

There followed a comparatively quiet period, during which the Battalion was, once again, built up to strength. Another attack was launched, this time from Beersheba to the sea, with the Northamptonshires in the coastal section. At first there was some success although the tanks, which it was hoped would play an important part in the attack, mostly broke down. Then the Turks counter-attacked and forced the Allies to withdraw. The Northamptonshires lost five officers killed and three wounded and 45 Other Ranks killed, 129 wounded and 33 missing. During the retreat most of the badly wounded soldiers had to be left to their fates.

There had been some success on the Beersheba flank of the attack and the Turks had been forced to withdraw along the whole front. The 4th held part of this new line at Wilhelma which was a German colony so the inhabitants, rather worryingly, wore German hats and spoke German.

On November 27th1917, the Turks advanced, dug into their positions and started shelling the Allied line. The Turkish troops then launched an attack but, as so often in this war, the defenders were at an advantage and the enemy was repulsed, suffering many casualties. There were two further attacks and the second one did make some headway, threatening the Allies' position. A counter-attack stabilised the line and the threat was averted. The Northamptonshires suffered badly again with 69 men wounded and 20 killed.

The Battalion was then relieved and moved back out of the line. Its next action was on December 22nd 1917 with an advance on Ras-el-Ain in which they encountered little

opposition. Heavy rains set in, stopping any further significant action, and they camped in the neighbourhood of Mulebbis.

On 12th March 1918 the 4th were part of an advance to near Mejdel Yarba, by the River Jordan and there followed a period of desultory trench warfare. At one point the Division was ordered to proceed to France but, after packing up and travelling to Kantara by train, the order was cancelled and they returned to the Palestine force.

On September19th the final attack began, but in very hot conditions, and with little drinking water available, it was an exhausting march for Sydney and his fellow soldiers and, again, they suffered badly, with 75 casualties. The Turks, however, like the Germans on the Western Front, were now broken and they retreated in disorder. The fighting for the infantry in the area was over. They marched through Haifa, Acre and Ras el Ain to Beirut. On the day of their arrival there, the Armistice with Turkey was signed. On December 4th1918, the Battalion embarked at Beirut and travelled by sea and rail to Helmich, outside Cairo.

The men must have thought that at last their fighting was over but the Egyptians wanted the British out of their country and 1919 began with Independence riots which the Northamptonshires had to suppress. Order was restored and, finally, demobilisation began.

Sydney was in the *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead in Spring 1919 but he was missing from the Autumn list so was obviously back home with his family in Carlow. We also see him in the early 1920s in the *Electoral Rolls* with his parents, John and Annie. In late 1926 Sydney married Annie Redhead. Annie had been born on 10th April 1901 in Peterborough, the daughter of John and Bertha. They had been living in 1911 in 9 Gladstone Cottages in Water End in the Woodston area of Peterborough. We see in the various Censuses that John had worked as a coal porter on the barges and in 1939 was a Coal Wharf Foreman.

We cannot be sure of Sydney's work after his demobilisation but in the *1939 Register of England & Wales* his occupation, which is something of a scribble, looks like a "Chrome Calf Tanner – Pit and Lime Worker". He would have worked in a local tannery, probably in the Wellington Works in Raunds, preparing the hides for tanning. The lime pit was the first process where the hides were de-haired and cleaned before the tanning began.

Sydney and Annie had three children, Edith Margaret Annie (Peggy) born on 14th February 1927, Jean Elizabeth, born on 11th June 1928 and Sydney William on 14th November 1931. Sydney, the youngest child has written a fascinating account of his childhood in Ringstead. He tells how the family lived in Leveratt's Row which was a terrace of six two-bedroomed cottages in Carlow. During his childhood in the 1930s they had no electricity, running water or indoor toilets. The bucket toilets were a little distance from the end of the terrace and had to be emptied regularly into a hole dug into the garden. This was far from uncommon in the village at this time.

Soon after the war Council Houses were built in the High Street with, as Sydney the son recalled, bathrooms, electricity and hot and cold water. Homes fit for heroes! Unfortunately, one reason for the family being allocated a house was, besides the

overcrowding, Sydney's illness. Sydney William, the subject of our story, died suddenly, on 30th March 1947 when he was fifty years old but Annie lived until 1981.

Leveratt's Row just before demolition in the 1970s

Chapter 18

The Other Smith Families

There were other Smith men who were in the army in the First World War who were not related to Sydney William and did not appear on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*. They had left the village before the war but we will include them briefly in our life stories.

The lines of these other Smiths all lead back to William and Sarah and their two sons, George born in 1848 and William born two years later.

We will start with Frank, the child of George.

Frank Smith (1873-1942)

George Smith married Susan Ager on May 2nd 1870 when they were both living in Northampton. George was working as a shoemaker there but, by 1871, the couple were back in Ringstead, living in Shop Street with their eight-month old daughter, Lily. We see that Susan was originally from Grafton Underwood. They were still in Ringstead in the 1881 Census and now had five children. Sadly, Lily was not with them because she had died and had been buried in the churchyard on February 2nd 1872.

One of these children was Frank Smith, born on 8th August 1873, and it is his story that we will be following. By 1891 Frank was seventeen years old and working as a shoemaker, like his father. Another ten years went by and the family had moved to 47 Victoria Place in Rushden. But Frank had left home.

We can see from his later military records that Frank had joined the Regular Army a year after the 1891 Census, on the 9th April 1892. He first enlisted in the Northamptonshire Regiment and would have sailed with the 1st Battalion when they left for India on 5th October 1892. We know that the 1st Battalion was stationed first at Bangalore and then in 1897 moved through Secunderbad (now part of Hyderabad), some 356 miles due north. It continued on a further 900 miles north to Tirah in June of that year before returning in April 1898 to Secunderbad.

It was at this time that Northamptonshires were part of the Tirah Campaign against the feared hill tribes of the North-West Frontier who were in revolt. The purpose of the campaign was to restore order but also to establish control of this area which posed a constant threat to British India. It was a difficult kind of war for the British army and it was the Gurkha and Sikh regiments who really understood the terrain and the type of warfare. They were often faced by guerrilla tactics, with small ambushes and skirmishes, in the often barren, mountainous country. In November, the Northamptonshires were trying to take a mountain crest known as Saran Sar, held by the enemy. The Regiment, with the 36th Sikhs, took the ridge with little opposition as, it transpired, the enemy had vanished into the hills. It was decided that the position could not be held, and a decision, widely criticised later, was made that the Northamptonshires should retire. The enemy fighters quickly reappeared and fired from overhanging crags onto the troops as they retreated down the steep ravine.

The *Northampton Mercury* reported, on the 12th November1897, that most of the casualties had occurred as the men tried to save the wounded and bring them to safety. One group was cut off and had to be left behind and their naked bodies were later found. It proved a disastrous day for the Regiment and the *Mercury* of the 19th November recorded the names of the dead and the wounded. Among the wounded was Private F Smith of Ringstead who was twenty-three years old.

1st Northamptonshire Regiment
London Illustrated News December1897

We do not know the exact nature of his wound but, judging by the total length of his service in India it seems that he recovered and did not return home.

In 1899 the Regiment were in Fyzabad, some eighty miles east of Lucknow. Finally, in 1902, it was posted to Dagshai, which was a hill station where Prisoners-of-War from the Boer War were kept for a time. We do not know if Frank was in this last posting for it was about this time that he completed his term of service and returned to England. He had served just over 11 years, of which ten years five months had been in India.

On his return to England, Frank was quick to re-enlist. In late 1903 or very early 1904 he joined the 3rd (Depot) Battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment, based at the Fulwood Barracks near Preston, with Regimental Number 7882. While based there, he must have had

some home leave for, on December 28th 1907, aged 34, he married 21-year-old Ada Meadows in Rushden Parish Church.

He served ten years with his new regiment but on the 1st May 1913, aged 39, he was assessed by a doctor for his pension and discharge. Did his young wife assume that his army life was over? They moved to 32 Winsdon Road in Luton and he was possibly working as a professional musician. That was how he described his calling when he enlisted again with the 5th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment on the 5th May 1914. He gave, as his employers, Messrs Carruthers Brothers who were a large company producing straw and felt hats in Luton. Was he working with them as a musician or was he having to work in the factory while he found enough work as a musician?

He was given the Regimental Number 3547 and three months later was appointed a Lance Corporal. Four days after that he was promoted to full Corporal. Nevertheless, he was not destined to go to war. The 5th was a Territorial Battalion designed for home service, and he remained in England. After 206 days in the Bedfords he was examined and found medically unfit for further military service. It appears that he had varicose veins and had refused to have an operation to correct the condition.

After his discharge he returned to life at home in Winsdon Road. I have not found any children for the couple but the *Luton Reporter* of 28th June 1921 reported that Frank had been summoned and found guilty of having two dogs but only one licence. His defence was that he was going to get rid of one dog but his "boy" had persuaded him to keep it and he had forgotten about the licence. The couple therefore had at least one child. In the court case he had described himself again as a musician. By 1939 he was now a "Professional Musician – Unemployed". Fortunately, his wife, Ada, was working as a "Forelady in a Fancy Leather Goods Factory".

Frank died, aged 68, in the second quarter of 1942. Ada married again, just a year later, to widower George Bowles on 4th April 1943. He, too died, aged 72, in 1945. She then married finally, on 23rd February 1949, to John Stevenson. I think she may have died on 26th December 1954 in Surrey.

Richard Smith and his brothers

The other son of William and Sarah, also called William, was a Raunds shoemaker who, on September 14th 1876, married Ann (usually Annie) Ball of Ringstead. Annie was the sister of my great grandfather, John Ball and he married Susannah Phillips in Ringstead Parish Church on the same day.

Annie and William with their eleven sons and three daughters. The family are (from left) Back Row: Albert, William, Fred, Richard, Thomas, John. The two young boys standing in front of this row are Arthur and Walter. The older seated row are Sarah, William, Annie, Elizabeth and Eva. The three youngest boys seated in the front are Alfred, Sidney and Ernest. (Taken about 1903)
With thanks to Karen Wright

Two years later, on August 4th 1878, in Ringstead Church the Smiths had their three children, Sarah Ellen, Richard and Thomas all christened and John and Susan Ball had a son, George Henry christened. In 1886, tragedy was to befall the Ball household for John was killed by an earthfall in Peray Pit near Islip. The Smiths went on to have an exceptionally large family, even for those times. Annie gave birth to sixteen children, three of whom died before 1911.

I believe that fifteen of them (with approximate birth dates) were: Elizabeth Annie (1874); Sarah Ellen (1875); Richard (1876); Thomas (1878); John (1879); William (1881); Frederick (1883); Albert (1885); Eliza Emma (1886); Eva (1887); Walter (1889); Arthur (1890); Alfred (1893); Sidney (1896) and Ernest (1897). Even with one child missing, the dates seem impossible but Annie confirmed the number in the 1911 Census.

Annie and William must have dreaded the coming of war, with so many sons of an age likely to volunteer or be conscripted. Only the first four brothers were born in Ringstead before the family moved to Raunds and, of these, only Richard was conscripted. Thomas and John were not forced to serve by the Northamptonshire Military Tribunals and, I believe that,

William may have died in 1909. There were, in total, six other sons who fought and we will briefly describe their lives later but first we will look at Richard Smith.

Richard Smith (1876-1918)

Richard was the oldest son, born on the 24th November 1876, and christened with siblings Sarah Ellen and Thomas on the 4th August 1878. By 1891 the family were living in Sanders Gardens in Thorpe Road in Raunds. Richard was fourteen years old and working as a riveter in a shoe factory.

Like many young men, he was a keen footballer and played for Raunds Town around the turn of the century. In 1901 he was still at home, aged 24, and working as a shoemaker like his father. They were now living in Brook Street in Raunds. At the end of the following year, on Christmas Day 1902, he married Lucy Ellen Stanhope, (always known as Nell or Nellie), the daughter of John Stanhope, a shepherd, born in Lincolnshire.

At this time the local military boot industry was going through a difficult time, with factory-made boots undercutting the hand-sewn men and the piece work rates being reduced for government work. Richard was one of the 115 men selected from, the 300 volunteers from Raunds and Ringstead to march to London. The Raunds March in 1905 was an eighty-mile trek, led by James Gribble on military lines, to present the shoemakers case to the Government. The men were preceded by outrider cyclists who found food and lodgings for the men at various stops along the way, and a brass band, made up mainly from Ringstead men. All along the way they were cheered by crowds and interviewed by journalists. In London Gribble spoke to huge crowds in Trafalgar Square and they came triumphantly home. The Government did give some concessions but it was the First World War that gave the industry a temporary respite.

In the 1911 Census we see that Richard and Lucy had been married eight years and had four children, Harold (7), Fred (4), Albert (2) and Doris Jane (1). Richard was working in a local factory and they were living in "The Colony", the two facing terraces at the top of Marshalls Road. Richard was working for the *Regulation Boot Company* in Raunds. At some point after 1911 the family moved to 38 Albert Road in Kettering.

In 1912 and 1916 the couple had two further daughters. Richard was now forty with a large family but this did not protect him from eventual conscription. He was enlisted in the 9th Battalion of the Essex Regiment on 1st October 1917 and was given the Regimental Number 38537.

The 9th Battalion had first landed in Boulogne on 31st May 1915 and had taken part in the Battle of Loos and, the following year, in the Battles of Albert, Pozieres and Le Transloy. In 1917 they were around the Arras area and fought in the First and Third Battles of the Scarpe and the Battle of Arleux.

Richard in late 1917 or early 1918
With thanks to Karen Wright

Richard did not join the 9th Battalion on the Western Front until 1st February 1918. As we now know, 1918 was to be the decisive year of the war. The Germans were aware that the Americans would enter the war in increasing numbers and that their own resources were becoming exhausted. The German Supreme Command planned a great final assault to break through the Allied lines and push the British to the coast and trap them there. The "Kaiserschlacht", codenamed *Operation Michael*, was launched on 21st March 1918, between Cambrai, St Quentin and La Fère on the Somme battlefield. The British, taken by surprise, were outnumbered by the enemy, three to one, and were inevitably forced into rapid retreat. Great courage was shown, however, and the line was maintained and a major German breakthrough was narrowly averted.

The 9th Essex were at the First Battle of Bapaume (24-25th March) and the First Battle of Arras on the 28th March. It was a constant retreat as the enemy pushed relentlessly forward. The British were driven back to the outskirts of Amiens but that was the nearest the Germans came to taking the city. The line held there and the German army, exhausted and with supply lines stretched to breaking point, now ground to a halt. The pendulum swung back and they were suddenly giving ground and trying to maintain an orderly retreat until the Armistice, on 11th November 1918, ended the most terrible war in history.

Richard did not live to see this final victory for, in the defence of Amiens, he was "killed in action" on the 5th April 1918. (The Commonwealth Graves Commission's website has the 7th April.) His death was reported in the *Weekly Casualty List* on Tuesday 14th May. He was buried some five miles south-west of Albert in the Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension with the epitaph "Rest in Peace". Richard had been at the Front for little more than two

months. He was later put on the Kettering and Raunds' War Memorials but is not on the Ringstead Memorial, the place of his birth.

Lucy, (Richard's widow) with her six children (1920s)
With thanks to Karen Wright

Lucy was a widow with six children aged between two and fifteen. She received an initial grant of £5 paid on the 25th April 1918 and then a widow's pension of £1 6s 8d and a children's allowance of £1 5s 6d giving a weekly total of £3 2s 2d.

It would have been a hard time for her and the family but she did not re-marry. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* she was living at 90 Stamford Road in Kettering and running a small greengrocer's shop with daughter Kathleen helping in the house. [Her granddaughter, Karen Wright believes that the Census collector has mixed up the two women's occupations and it was Kathleen who worked in a Co-op grocery in Stamford Road]. She moved to Wellingborough with Kath, her youngest daughter in 1951. In her later years she suffered

from Rheumatoid Arthritis and died in the Park Hospital in Wellingborough on 27th December 1958, aged 78.

The rest of the Smith men, after John (Jack), had all been born in Raunds but because of the connections to Annie we will briefly record their lives.

Albert Smith (1885-1942)

Albert was born on the 15th August 1885 and, in the 1891 and 1901 Censuses, we see that he is with his family and working as a shoemaker after he left school. When he was twenty-two years old, he decided that he would try his luck in the New World. He sailed from Liverpool and arrived in New York on 20th October 1907. His final destination was Buffalo, a city of some 400,000 people, in New York State. It is on the eastern shores of Lake Erie, sixteen miles south of the Niagara Falls. Buffalo is also only a few miles from the Canadian border.

It appears that he did not marry and was possibly staying with his Aunt Sarah who lived at 343 New Abbey Street in Buffalo. I think that she may be have been the wife of Walter Smith who was born in Raunds in about 1862 but had lived in Buffalo for many years. Walter seems to have continued to work as a shoemaker in his own shop.

Canadian Wartime Recruiting Poster (©CWM 1994001-300)

On February 25th 1918 he crossed the border into Toronto in Canada and attested with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). He was now 32 years 7 months old and was five feet

five inches tall with brown hair and blue eyes. He had an appendix scar and his left hand had been stiffened as the result of a burn. He became a gunner with the 69th Battery of the Canadian Field Artillery and was given the service number 340544. The 69th did not see action but it provided reinforcements for other CEF units.

I have not found any military service in Europe for Albert but we do know that he arrived back in Buffalo on 13th December 1918 and that his passage was paid for by the army. On return he became a labourer at an oil refinery and had moved to Baraga Street in Buffalo but still staying with his aunt, Sarah Smith.

Albert in the Rushden Argus 19th April 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

There was another voyage when Albert arrived back in New York on *S.S. Adriatic* from Southampton on 17th October 1919. Was this a visit home to see his family in Raunds and Ringstead. We do not know what happened next and many Ancestry.co.uk family trees have him dying in England but an Albert Smith died on 17th July 1942 in Buffalo aged 56. Was this our Albert?

Walter Smith (1889-1970)

Walter, the next soldier son, was born on the 20th May 1889 [His passport application has 24th May 1890]. The 1911 Census shows that he had left the family home and was a servant living with Milk Retailer, William Mitchell and his wife, Minnie. The house was in Brick Kiln Road in Raunds and Walter was helping with the milk delivery.

The following year he followed his older brother to America. He was on the *S.S. Mauretania* which arrived in New York on December 12th 1912 en route to Buffalo. He did not have a shoemaking trade but became a worker in a steel plant. Unlike Albert, he became a naturalised American which meant that he would become part of the American army in Buffalo rather than cross the border to join the Canadian force in the First World War.

His Draft Registration Card shows that he was living at 343 New Abby Road in Buffalo in New York State. His trade was described as “Pipe Fitter” for Contact Processes”, in Albert Road in Buffalo. There was a slightly chilling instruction on the Registration Card which stated, “If person is of African descent tear off the corner”

Walter was 28 years old when he started his service on 26th May 1918. Unfortunately, I have not found if he was actually sent to Europe to fight with the Allies. Nor have I found his marriage for certain. A Walter Smith married Florence Jaspers on the 8th September 1919 in Manhattan. Could this be the right man?

Walter (back right) with his sister Sarah Ellen (who had married John Henry Hall) seated in the centre. With thanks to Debbie Billson.

Certainly, we know that his wife was called Florence and the 1920 Federal Census records them living at 201 Baraga Street in Buffalo. On the 8th November 1923 Walter applied for a United States passport. On the application form he wrote:

> *I, Walter Smith, a naturalized and loyal citizen of the United States, hereby apply to the Department of State of Washington for a passport.*
> *I solemnly swear that I was born at Raunds, England on May 24th 1890, that my father is William Smith and now residing at Raunds, England that I emigrated to the United States, sailing from Liverpool, England about December 7th 1912 that I have resided uninterruptedly in the United States from 1912 to 1923 at Buffalo, New York, that I was naturalised as a citizen . . . on 5th July 1918.*

He wanted the passport to visit the British Isles to see his parents and intended to return within six months. He had already booked to sail on the 15th December 1923 on the *S.S. Majestic*.

By the 1925 New York State Census they are in 670 Hopkins Street and have three men lodging with them. Walter's job appears to be an "awning maker". I have not found the birth of their three children, but there is a later photograph which shows the family visiting Walter's older sister Sarah Ellen who was some fifteen years his senior. In the picture appear to be two of Walter's children.

We must leave his life there. I think he may have died in Buffalo in 1970 aged 81 but, like much in this life, this has to be confirmed.

Arthur Smith (1890-1987)

Arthur, the next in line of the Smith soldiers, was born in Raunds on the 2nd October 1890. By 1911, he was a shoemaker, probably working for Owen Smith and was living with his family in Marshalls Road,

Certainly, he was working for this firm as an "Army Welt Sewer" when he signed his Short Service Attestation Form on 11th December 1915. He would soon be wearing the military boots that he had been making. He was still living with his family at 84 "Fairlawn" Marshalls Road. He was also a member of the Rechabites which was a popular temperance organisation but also acted as a friendly society giving sickness and death benefits.

Arthur Smith in the Rushden Argus 19th April 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

He would have been attested by the Northamptonshire Regiment but was sent first to the 5th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers which was a training unit, based at Dover from the 26th June 1916 to the 17th October. On the 18th October 1916 he was posted to the British Expeditionary Force in France and joined the 17th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers.

The 17th had fought in the Battle of the Somme which finally ended with the battles in the Ancre area. These continued sporadically into 1917 when the Germans carried out a

planned retreat to the fortified line that they had been building, usually known as the Hindenburg Line.

In 1917 there followed the Battle of Arras and then the Battle of Cambrai. It was in this latter battle, in the Bourlon Wood area of the Front in the Battle of Cambrai that the 17th were in a long trench called the Rat's Tail which took the brunt of a huge attack made by four German Divisions. The Battalion fought heroically and helped prevent the Germans from breaking through. During this battle on the 30th November 1917 Captain Stone was ordered to withdraw and he sent three platoons back but remained behind with a rear-guard to give them time. The *British Empire* website records:

> *His last stand was one of the great heroic feats of the war. He and his men fought with rifles bayonets and grenades while Captain Stone stood at the forefront, with telephone in hand to report back vital information. It was a suicidal act of defiance and they were all killed. The battalion was, for the most part, withdrawn to a safer part of the line but C Coy remained in the Rat's Tail behind a block and fought throughout the day*.

It was during this ferocious battle that Arthur received a gunshot wound in his left hand. He had been previously wounded by a gunshot in his left arm on 2nd May 1917 during the Battle of Arras. This time, however, his time in the Front Line was over.

He returned to England to be treated on the 6th December 1917 and on 10th April 1918 was declared no longer fit for physical service. He was also “permanently excluded from liability to medical re-examination” which shows that his wound had left him with a permanent disability. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

He would have suffered the deaths of his brothers, Richard and Sidney in 1918 and in 1919 and his sister, Eva also died. He decided to follow his older brothers, Albert and Walter, to seek a better life in America. He was not alone, for he travelled with his younger brother, Alfred and his wife Rose, on the S.S. Mauretania. They arrived in New York on 16th May 1920, bound for Buffalo. Both the men were “bootmakers”.

In the 1930 Federal Census, Arthur, still single, was staying with his Aunt Sarah Smith and her sister, Ellen Nugent, at 351 Baraga Street in Buffalo. He was now 38 years old and working as a cobbler, repairing shoes.

In about 1980, Lilian Coggins of Raunds went to America to visit relatives and while there met Arthur, who was now ninety years old. He gave Lilian the photograph of the family shown at the beginning of this article and asked if she would try to trace his relatives in Raunds. He told her that he went to America because of the difficulty of finding work in England. I am not sure if she managed to find any long-lost relatives.

I have not found him after that but some Ancestry.com family trees have him living to be 95 and dying on 22nd June 1987 in Hamburg, on the shores of Lake Erie, some fifteen miles south of Buffalo.

Alfred Smith (1892-1976)

Alfred Smith was one of three sons of William and Annie who joined the Royal Fusiliers. In 1911 he was eighteen years old and working as a "Milk Hawker", presumably trying to sell milk around the streets of Raunds. He had been born on 11th May 1892.

He was close in age to his brothers Sydney and Arthur and all three were posted to the Royal Fusiliers. Arthur had the Regimental Number 49444, Sydney 50873 and Alfred 50877. We see that the last two must have signed up at the same time. The old "Pals Battalions" which could see whole families or villages' young men being wiped out in an engagement had been abandoned so although they were all in the Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment) they were posted to different Battalions.

It was to the 8th Battalion that Alfred was sent. The 8th had been raised in Hounslow as part of Kitchener's First New Army. They first landed in France between the 29th May and the 1st June 1915. Alfred, probably, would not have joined the Battalion until late 1916 at the earliest.

Alfred Smith in Rushden Argus 19th April 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

At the end of 1917 Alfred was wounded and was entitled to wear a wound stripe on the sleeve of his uniform. He was wounded again and this was reported on 25th September 1918, although the next of kin were living in High Wycombe. The initial and Regimental Number are correct so perhaps this is a mistake.

On the 6th February 1918, the 8th Battalion were disbanded in an army reorganisation and it seems that Alfred was transferred to the 23rd Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers which was known as the "1st Sportsman's". It had been raised in the *Hotel Cecil* in the Strand in London on 25th September 1914. We see the patriotic fervour of the times reflected in this extract from a later poem by "Touchstone" in the Daily Mail, quoted in the Battalion's History:

Sportsmen of every kind,
God! We have paid the score
Who left green English fields behind
For the sweat and stink of war!

New to the soldier's trade,
Into the scrum we came,
But we didn't care much what game we played
So long as we played the game.

By the time that Alfred joined the personnel would have been different and it would not have been looked on by any of the men as a "game" of any kind.

We also see in the *Gazette* published on 13th June 1919 that Alfred had been awarded the Military Medal. At this time there was often a long delay in the announcements of the Military Medals, and I think it may refer back to the action in 1918 when he had been wounded.

He was discharged from the army and possibly, immediately after that, or during his sick leave, he married Rose Annie Bailey in September 1918. She was a Raunds' girl, daughter of George and Mary.

After the war, Alfred and his new wife, Rose decided to follow his brothers to America. On May 8th 1920, together with brother Arthur, he arrived in New York on the *S.S. Mauretania*, bound for Buffalo. Both men were given as bootmakers. In 1925 the couple were living at 10 Boone Street in Buffalo. Alfred was working as a wheelwright and they had a three-year-old daughter, June.

Unlike his brothers, Alfred did not settle in America and on 18th November 1927 the small family arrived in Southampton, on the *S.S. Homeric,* bound for Red Row in Raunds and their intended country of residence was shown as England. By 1939 they were living in 68 Alexandra Street in Kettering and Alfred was a "Dairyman and Retail Grocer". Rose was shown as having "unpaid domestic duties" but one suspects that she would also have taken some part in the small business. Rose died on the 1st August 1966 when the couple were living at 79 Brook Street in Raunds and administration was granted to Alfred, a "retired dairyman". Alfred was living in Red Row when he died on 12th April 1976 aged 84.

Sydney Smith (1895-1918)

Sydney, the fifteenth of sixteen children for Annie Smith, was born in 1896 and in the 1911 Census was fifteen years old and was already earning a living in "shoework". He was with the family in "Fairview", 84 Marshalls Road in Raunds.

When war came, he did not volunteer, like some of his brothers, and his parents would have prayed that the war would be over before he was called up. This was not to be, and he was conscripted and called up to the Depot of the Northamptonshire Regiment around the 26th June 1916. He was then posted to the 28th Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment) and given Regimental Number 11409. This was a Reserve Battalion which trained the men for transfer to a fighting unit abroad. He would have been renumbered when this unit became the 104 Training Reserve. Sydney landed in France on the 10th October 1916 and was posted to the

8th Battalion and was given a new Regimental Number GS/50873 ("GS" is short for General Service).

It seems most likely that he was finally with his battalion in the Front Line on 19th October 1916 when a draft of sixteen men arrived at Bernafay Wood, located near Montauban village, which had captured by the 9th (Scottish) Division on 3-4 July 1916 during the opening days of the Somme offensive. On the 22nd, the 8th marched to Ribemont and were taken by buses to Fosseaux. After a brief spell settling into billets, they marched to occupy the same trenches they had been in September at Agny. The Somme campaign was stuttering to a close and there was comparatively little artillery fire and few casualties through to the end of the year where they were finally behind the lines, training at Moncheaux. This lasted until the end of January 1917 when the Battalion moved to Noyelette and Habancy and continued with their training and working parties.

Sydney Smith in the Rushden Argus 19th April 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

On 7th February they moved again to billets in Arras and on the 11th were once more in the Front Line. Again, it was a quiet time and in March the Battalion moved back to Beaufort for training and working parties. They were now mainly providing working parties, for other Regiments and the Royal Engineers, improving trenches.

On the 9th April the 8th received attack orders and they "went over the top" and secured their allotted targets but at a great cost. The *War Diary* reports that 40 men were killed, 2 died of wounds, 119 were wounded and 7 were missing. There was no immediate respite and they received orders to move up again and sustained further casualties before being relieved and moving back into "the caves" to rest and clean up. On the 14th they moved back to Grenas for training and reorganisation. It was not for long, for, on the 26th April they were once more in the Front Line at Feuchy near Arras.

The 8th were next sent to near Monchy and on the 3rd May they attacked the enemy positions but were met with heavy machine gun fire. During the action 40 Other Ranks were killed, 144 wounded and 92 were missing. The Battalion moved back out of the line to Arras and trained and reorganised again, finally at Sus St Ledger.

By the 26th June they were back in the trenches at Monchy-le Preux and they were in and out of the line for most of the rest of 1917, mostly described as "quiet" in the *War Diary,* but still regularly sustaining casualties. They moved back to St George for rest and training before, in November, moving into the Front line at Gonnelieu where they were part of an attack which cost 15 Other Ranks killed and 78 wounded. Another attack at Balouzelle added more wounded and killed.

At the end of November 1917 the Battalion was in the trenches east of La Vacquiere when, on 30th November the enemy "opened a violent bombardment" and by the end of the day the 8th had ten officers and 247 Other Ranks as casualties. The 8th were finally allowed back for rest and reorganisation until the end of the year.

1918 found them in billets in Bannigues and, on 5th January, they celebrated Christmas Day as they had been in close support on the 25th December. The moved to "Dirty Bucket Camp". There was one final spell in the Front Line before the moved back to Hospital Camp at the end of January. Sydney had been with the 8th until 29th January 1918 but the Battalion was to be disbanded under an army reorganisation, and, a week later, Sydney joined the 7th Battalion.

The 7th Battalion *War Diary* tells that 6 officers and 180 Other Ranks joined the 7th from the 8th on the 5th February 1918 at Beaulicourt where they were furiously digging revetements. They moved into the Front Line at Ribecourt but with little action and few casualties. In March they were in Havrincourt Wood in the reserve trenches carrying out wiring and digging duties before moving into the Front Line. They were attacked with gas shells and 250 men were affected.

The great German, Michael Offensive began and the 7th were part of the British retreat. In March, 4 Other Ranks were killed, 40 were wounded and in the chaos 104 were missing. April found them at Forceville as the British began to try to hold the line and force a counter-attack. In May the fighting continued and 30 Other Ranks were killed, 95 were wounded, 8 were poisoned with gas and 8 were missing. Among the wounded was Sydney Smith. He had shrapnel wounds to his right chest, back, right arm and right foot. He was taken to the Casualty Clearing Station and given 750 units of Anti-Tetanus Serum. It was put on his casualty sheet that "he could be put forward as an eligible candidate to be awarded a wound stripe". He was sent on to a hospital but he did not survive his wounds and died on the 27th May 1918.

Sydney was buried, aged 23, in the cemetery at Doullens Communal Cemetery Extension (I. C. 21). He was entitled to the British War and Victory medals. His mother, Annie, received a five shillings a week dependant's pension.

Ernest Smith (1897-?)

Ernest was the youngest of the children born on 28th October 1897. In 1911 he was with his family in Marshalls Road and was thirteen years old.

War came, and Ernest would not have been eighteen until the end of 1915. He enlisted with the Bedfordshire Regiment and was posted to the 6th (Service) Battalion with Regimental Number 33577. We do not have his Attestation papers but, from later records, we see that he enlisted around September 1916 and joined his Battalion in France in December 1916 or January 1917.

Ernest Smith in Rushden Argus 19th 1918
With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society

The 6th were one of the Battalions raised for Kitchener's New Army (K1). They had first landed in France on 30th June 1915 and had suffered terrible losses in the Battle off the Somme, particularly at the Battle of Bazentin Ridge.

Ernest joined them as one of the replacements after all this carnage. In 1917 they were in the campaign known as the Battle of Arras, specifically in the First and Second Battle of the Scarpe and the Battle of Arleux where, in the assault of Greenland Hill on 29th April, they finished with only 58 men standing.

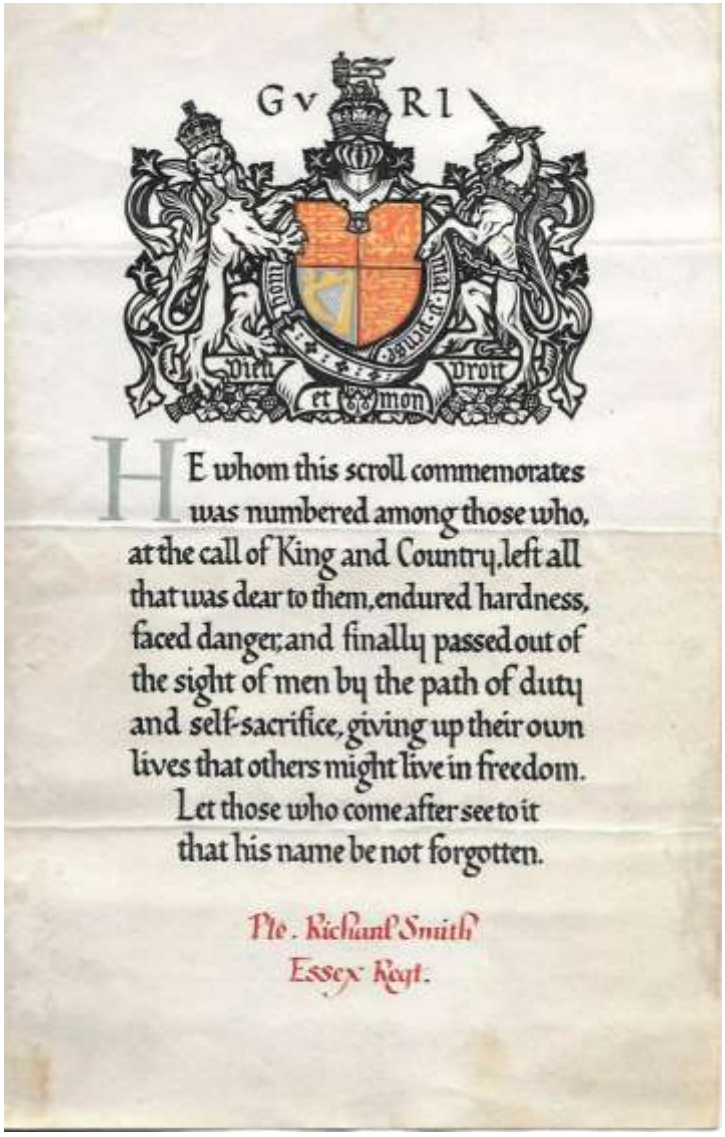
Later in the year they were engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres, a campaign which ran from the end of July until November 10th and is now best remembered for the terrible mud and slaughter of the last phase in that Autumn, often called the Battle of Passchendaele. Ernest was wounded in the head by gunshot. He was taken to 140th Field Ambulance on 23rd September 1917 and transferred by the Sick Convoy to No. 21 Ambulance Train. The wounding was reported in the War Office Daily List on 22nd October 1917.

We are not sure of the seriousness of the wound or whether Ernest was treated in one of the hospitals on the French Coast or returned to England. We do know that by the time that the local newspapers reported on the seven sons, in April 1918, that Ernest had been transferred to the Machine Gun Corps and given new number, 139381. Looking at other numbers in the Corps it looks as if his transfer would have probably been not long before the articles were published. Nor do we know if Ernest entered the war zone again or when he was discharged.

He returned to civilian life but I have not yet clarified what exactly happened to him. There were a surprisingly large number of Ernest Smiths around, of about the same age, at that time. I believe that he married late, to Ringstead woman Gertrude Phillips in 1935 and in the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* they were living in West End, Chapel Lane, in Ringstead. Gertrude is shown as a heel builder and Ernest as a boot and shoe finisher. I do not think that they had any children.

Afterword

What about the parents of the sixteen children? William died in 1926 but I believe Annie lived to the good old age that she deserved. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* she is shown widowed and now living on her own in 19 Red Row in Raunds with her date of birth shown as 7th May 1855. Annie had been baptised on 8th November 1863 in Ringstead Church, aged eight years. I have not yet confirmed the date of her death.



The Death Scroll that was sent to the next of kin of men killed in WW1
With thanks to Karen Wright

Chapter 19

Frederick Sykes (1887-1914)

Frederick, usually known as Fred, was born in late 1887 to Henry and Rachel Sykes. Henry was an agricultural labourer from Ellington in Huntingdonshire who had married Ringstead girl, Rachel Ball, on 13th November 1873. Fred was baptised with three of his sisters, Rose, Ida and Elizabeth in Ringstead Church on the September 30th1888. There had also been three older children, Mary Ann, Henry and William and two more sisters, Maud and Gertie, were to follow. By 1891 Henry, the father, had become a platelayer on the Midland Railway. The family were living in The Terrace at the end of Shop Street (part of High Street) in Ringstead. Rachel was also working as a shoehand, as were the older children, Mary Ann and Henry.

By 1901, they were now living in Carlow. Henry was still working as a platelayer, heavy work as one gets older. In 1906 he died, aged 53, and in the 1911 Census, the widowed Rachel, aged sixty, was a "charwoman out of employment". The only child still at home was 32-year-old daughter, Eliza, who was working as an "Army Boot Stitcher" and she was in partial employment. A granddaughter, Ivy Robinson, was also living with them. Times would have been very tough.

The children had flown the nest and Frederick, was lodging with widow, Emily Yeuell, and her family at 179 Eastfield Road in Peterborough. He was 22 years old and now working as a shoemaker. We know that he had other part-time employment that would have given him a small extra income. On 9th January 1909 he had joined the 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment.

Over many centuries, men had been called to serve, however unwillingly, in the armies of their lords and monarchs. We see the remnants of this in the Eighteenth Century Militia Lists for Ringstead and all other parishes. In 1801, when Napoleon threatened an invasion, a military reserve force was established and during the Nineteenth Century various forms of these part-time soldiers' units existed. In 1908, the system was reformed and the militia infantry groups became known as the "Reserve Battalions", mostly attached to Regiments. There were one hundred Infantry battalions, 33 Artillery regiments, and two Engineer regiments of special reservists.

Unlike the militia, which was intended solely for home duties, the new "Special Reservists" were designed to make up drafts to serve where needed in time of war, at home or abroad. Fred signed up for six years' service and was given Regimental Number 3/8618. He first had to undergo six months of basic training, for which he would be paid as a regular soldier. After that he had to attend an annual training camp for three to four weeks each July.

Fred had been "temporarily unfit" for the 1914 training camp but now he was called upon to fulfil his contract and was transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshires. It may be that his temporary unfitness delayed his joining with his Battalion. It crossed the Channel

on 13th August 1914. Hopes were high that the war would soon be over, and cheering crowds lined the streets when they marched through Le Havre. The men then entrained and passed through Amiens, Arras and Cambrai, places they had never heard of, but which would soon be seared on their memories. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was shocked by the next month when, at the battle of Mons and Le Cateau, they were beaten and found themselves in almost constant retreat. It seemed the war would be over quickly with a German victory. The enemy had, however, as would happen again in 1918, stretched their supply lines to breaking point and the front line had become fragmented.

Through this period, although they did suffer some casualties the Battalion was largely on the periphery of the main action. At the Battle of the Marne the Allies did first push the Germans back. It was at this time at the end of the long retreat, on 11th September 1914, that Fred joined the Battalion in France. The Allies' mood had become more optimistic believing that the tide had turned, but not for the last time, it was premature. The Germans had conducted an orderly retreat to a predetermined line that was a position of strength.

On September 13th, the Battle of The Aisne began in earnest. The British attacked all along their front. They were allowed to cross the wide Rive Aisne by an aqueduct with little opposition. The Germans held a strong position on a plateau overlooking the British who now had a deep, unfordable, river at their backs.

For the first time, the Northamptonshires faced an enemy determined to stand their ground and in a naturally strong position. The Germans also held a sugar factory, north-west of Troyon, which provided a base for their artillery. This stronghold resisted the British attacks. The weather was cold with persistent rain. The Northamptonshire were stationed on a small hill trying to work out what was happening, through the driving rain. At 11.30 am the Battalion was ordered to back-up the preliminary attack on the guns at the sugar refinery and on the ridge. The German firepower inflicted heavy casualties particularly on the Loyal North Lancashires, but also on the battalion, which was forced to dig itself in for the night on the slope of the German-held ridge.

Over the next two days the holes that they had dug into the ridge were desperately turned into shallow trenches. There was one notorious incident during this time when a group of Germans, under the pretence of surrendering, reached the Northamptonshires trenches and then began firing. They were saved by a nearby battalion's machine gunners who saw what was happening and mowed them down from the side and the survivors fled back to their own trenches.

The British High Command were concerned that the troops were too far away from their supply bases in the Channel Ports. Liaising with the French who filled the gaps they moved west. The Germans too were looking to cut off the supply to the British and to get around the Allied Front Line. The result was a westward movement which became known as the "Race to the Sea". The Northamptonshires entrained at Fismes and travelled through Amiens and Étaples to Cassel where they rested in billets.

The rest was brief for, on the 19th October, they marched to Elverdinghe (Elverdinge) and then moved up to Pilckem where they occupied trenches dug by the French. There was now

persistent heavy fighting as the campaign, known as the First Battle of Ypres, began. The 1st Camerons, despite a gallant resistance, had been driven out of their trenches and the Battalion moved forward to assist them and to mount a counter-attack.

The town of Ypres was, at this time, described as a "lovely place". It was soon to be a shattered ruin. The Germans were attacking with a much larger force along the British lines and the Northamptonshires were constantly on the move trying to shore up one position after another as the German attacks ebbed and flowed.

On October 30th 1914 the Battalion, with the Royal Sussex, were ordered to a place later called Bodmin Wood, south of the Menin Road, due west of Gheluvelt (Gueluveld) where they dug temporary trenches. The next day saw the critical action of the Battle of Ypres. The Germans mounted an attack and the Northamptonshires were forced to withdraw. The battalion on one side of them had retired which forced the Northamptonshire to do the same in order to keep the line. Unfortunately, they were badly hit by enfilading fire along the road which had protected them and suffered many casualties.

They now held a position on a crossroads in what was known by the troops as "Shrewsbury Wood", but the Germans were already inside the wood. The Northamptonshires, with the Royal Sussex, and Gordons, with loud cries charged the enemy with fixed bayonets. They killed some two hundred and routed the rest. It was the brutal hand-to-hand fighting that soldiers, going back through the centuries, would have recognized.

The Germans, however stood firm in their positions and both sides tried to straighten and strengthen their trenches. Continual German attacks and bombardments led to many casualties and even the reserve trenches were often under fire.

On November 8th, the depleted Battalion moved to a trench in the support line on the north side of the Menin Road and came under heavy shell fire. On November 11th the elite Prussian Guard launched an attack, but they were repulsed. The battalion was then ordered to advance into Polygon Wood where the men again came under heavy shellfire.

It was during this time, on 11th November 1914, that Fred Sykes was killed. This was to be the last significant action of the First Battle of Ypres. Both sides were utterly exhausted.

Fred Sykes is remembered on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial at West Vlaanderen (West Flanders) on Panel 43 & 45. He is also on the Ringstead and Irthlingborough War Memorials. Besides the British War and Victory Medals he was entitled to the 1914 Star with Clasp. The Clasp was awarded to those who had been under fire between 5 August and 22 November 1914 but was said to be only awarded to the recipient if he claimed personally, Frederick must have made a Will before he was posted abroad because he left his War Gratuity divided almost equally amongst his mother and his eight siblings. Each received eight shillings two pence or eight shillings one penny. A Mary Ellen Cappo was also left the latter amount.

Chapter 20

Harry Tilley (1895-1915) and Horace Edwin Tilley (1899-1969)

For some men their service in the First World War was a long, terrible experience that scarred them physically or mentally for the rest of their lives. For others it was a brief interlude which, if not forgotten, was not a major influence on their later life. I think for Horace Tilley his military experience was more like the latter case although it was not without danger and unpleasant memories. For his older brother, Harry, it was even briefer.

There is some confusion about their father's ancestry. Jonathan Tilley senior married Elizabeth Dixon on 25th December 1865. Jonathan junior was probably born on 29th December 1861, four years earlier, although he seems to have claimed a younger age sometimes, perhaps because of the age of his wife. When he married Susannah Dicks on 17th September 1894 he was shown as thirty years old and Susannah as seventeen. At his marriage his surname was given as Tilley-Dixon but he later dropped his mother's surname and became John Tilley

Harry Tilley was born on the 31st November 1895 and Horace Edwin on the 22nd December 1899, the sons of Jonathan (usually known as John) and Susannah (or Susan). Horace was baptised in Ringstead Parish Church on the 5th June 1900. In the 1901 Census we see that father, John, was a farm labourer and milkman and he and Susan were living in Drayton Cottages.

The 1911 Census had them in the same home, now known as Agutter's Cottages. John and Susan had been married 16 years and had had nine children, of whom five were living and four still at home. The children at home in 1911 were all boys, Harry (16), Horace, (11), Bertram (10) and Leslie (7 months). Susan's widowed mother Emma Dicks was also living with them. The father, John, was still working as a "milkman on farm".

The oldest daughter Jessie seems to be missing in the 1911 Census but she later married Wellingborough Engineer, Sydney Summers, in 1925 in Ringstead Wesleyan Church.

It was the oldest son, Harry who first enlisted. He volunteered on the 7th September 1914 in Northampton. He gave his occupation as "Carter" and was nineteen years nine months old. He was 5ft 5½ inches tall and weighed 134 lbs. Harry was enlisted in the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and given Regimental Number 15142. He was medically examined and declared fit for service. On the 10th October 1914, however, he was discharged as being unfit for service. His character had been good but he had "very bad flat feet". His service had lasted thirty-four days.

At the time, of course, marching both, in training and in troop movements, was a very important part of army life but perhaps there was something else wrong with Harry. On discharge he worked with the horses at Praed's Mineral Water Works in Wellingborough. He was living with his mother's widowed mother, Emma Dicks. In the 1911 census she had been in Ringstead with her daughter's family but in 1915 she was living at 23 Palk Road in

Wellingborough She may have moved but a Census is only a "snapshot" of one night so she could have been just visiting in 1911.

The *Northampton Mercury* of the 13th August 1915 told the story of his sudden death.

> *Emma Dix [sic] told that. . . he did not complain of anything and seemed all right. He was at work until 5 p.m. on Thursday and went out after tea in his usual health. He went to bed about 10.30. She awoke about two o'clock on Friday morning, and when looking to see what the time was she heard a noise in her grandson's room. She went to him and waited with him until he died. He did not speak but made a noise. He died about 2.15, before the doctor arrived.*

The doctor also gave evidence that he had died from double pneumonia and the postmortem showed evidence of "old-standing pleurisy".

His brother, Horace Edwin Tilley, was some five years younger than Harry so was only eighteen on 22nd December 1917 and nineteen, the official age for overseas service, at the end of the following year. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* does not have any wartime service listed for him but records that he was then (late 1918/early 1919) serving in Ireland with the 4th Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment.

We do not have any of his military records and, because he did not serve in a war zone during the Great War, he was not entitled to any service medals. I think the "4th Battalion" may refer to the 4th Reserve Battalion (rather than the 1/4th Battalion) which originally had been known as the 3/4th Battalion and on the 8th April 1916 had changed name. However, the only Norfolk Battalion to serve in Ireland in the 1918/1919 period was the 1/6th (Cyclist) Battalion which had remained on home defence during the war. It therefore seems most likely that he was transferred to the latter Battalion.

Although Horace had not served in the Great War, the posting to Ireland would have been a far from pleasant experience. At the end of the war, when the victorious powers were redefining the boundaries of many countries, Sinn Fein attended these meetings and argued that an independent Ireland should be included in this redrawing of the map. They were largely ignored and returned home empty-handed.

Frustrated by this lack of support and the long, dragged-out, passage of a Home Rule Bill, sections of the Independence movement began to organise on military lines and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was born. On the 21st January 1919, the IRA shot dead two Irish policemen. This began an escalating series of attack and counter-attack with the war-hardened British troops retaliating to incidents with harsh, sometimes misdirected, reprisals.

For a young man caught up in this, it must have been a frightening experience. At least, in war, one usually knew one's enemy.

At some point Horace returned home and, in 1921, he was living with his parents in Agutter's Cottages again. By Spring 1925 they had moved to Carlow Road. It seems likely that Horace continued with his father's milk round although I have not found proof of this.

In the Spring of 1914, before the war had started an Edward Tilley, who was probably Horace's cousin, had been summoned for selling adulterated milk in Ringstead. The case does show how different the local milk delivery was then to today's industrialised process. The *Northampton Mercury* of 10th April reported on the case:

> *Aubrey Butlin, assistant to Mr T. Mattinson (Inspector under the Food and Drugs Act, Kettering), proved the purchase of a sample of milk, which was found to be deficient in fat to the extent of 12 per cent.*
>
> *: - Defendant went into the box, and stated that he was milking five cows, two were in calf and three were not. On that particular morning he did not mix the milk as was his usual custom, as he was busy.*

The Bench took a lenient view of his mistake and he was fined ten shillings (50 pence).

In the booklet "*Stanwick – a retrospective glance No. 4*", Joan Whitby, talking of the 1940s, stated:

> *Taking the milk round was not like today – bottles and an electric float- but a horse and float and 2 gallon can with a measure. Customers used various receptacles – jugs, basins, etc.*

Horace married Ada Beatrice Robinson in Spring 1930 and I think that they had four children. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* he was still a milkman, living in Carlow Road.

Horace (standing) at the closing of the Swan Inn in 1953
With thanks to Jon Abbott and Robin Pentelow

Horace died on 2nd March 1969, still residing at 23 Carlow Road and Ada, his widow, was living there when she died on 26th April 1984.

Chapter 21

Thomas Alfred Tomlin (1884-1968)

Thomas Alfred Tomlin was the son of Charlotte Tomlin, born on the 14th May 1884 and baptised the following year on October 28th, in Raunds Parish Church. In the 1891 Census, Charlotte was living with her parents and her children, Thomas (6) and Nellie (2) in Rotton (or Rotten) Row in Raunds. She was working as a charwoman

In early 1893, Charlotte married Thomas Adams and the couple had further children together. In 1901 Thomas was sixteen years old and still living with his grandparents, William and Emily Tomlin. He had become a pressman in a boot and shoe factory. The pressman would put the "knives" of the shapes of the shoe or boot pieces, rather like pastry cutters onto the leather. He would then operate a foot pedal which brought down the press to cut out the shapes. It was a skilled job and certainly not one for a daydreamer.

By 1911 he was back with his mother and her husband, Thomas Adams, who was a local builder. They were living at 14 Rotton Row and Thomas Tomlin, aged 26, was still a leather pressman. On the 10th February 1912, his mother, aged 49 years, was buried.

The war came but at first the army's need for boots gave him exemption from conscription but, as the war dragged on, the rules tightened and also older men were being conscripted. On the 1st April 1917 he was called before a Military Tribunal and given a temporary reprieve but on the 15th June when he came before them again, the appeal by his employers, Adams Brothers, was dismissed. It was during the period of uncertainty that Thomas married Lily Henrietta Attley. Lily had been born in Ringstead on the 4th May 1893. Her father, Frederick was also born in the village but her mother, Frances, had been born in India. In the 1901 Census the family had been living in Northampton but, by 1911, Lily, aged seventeen, was working as a domestic servant in Finedon for butcher Edward Shelton and his wife, Ellen.

After their marriage in 1917, Thomas and Lily moved to Pierce's Yard (various spellings) which was a group of cottages down the side of the old Police House, nearly opposite Ringstead House. The young couple were to have a brief time together in Ringstead and Thomas was living in the Yard when his conscription came through.

Unfortunately, as for so many men, his military records have been mostly destroyed in a WW2 bombing raid. As a result, although I have been helped by Peter and Charlie on the *Great War Forum* website, the account of his army career I have given seems a reasonable fit but is far from certain and must be read with this proviso in mind.

From the *Ringstead Absent Voters' List* for 1918 and his Medal Roll and Card we know that he was first in the Norfolk Regiment and was given the Regimental Number 205464, These six-figure numbers were not given to men in the Regular Army battalions and it seems likely

that he was first sent in July 1917 to a training battalion, possibly the 4th Reserve (or 3rd) Battalion at Halton Park, near Tring, before being posted to the 2nd Norfolks.

A number of men were drafted, first into the 2nd Norfolks, and later transferred to the 7th Berkshires. One of these was John William Clement Thake, who boarded a ship on the 7th October 1917, and arrived in India on 4th December. He joined the Depot of the 2nd Battalion of the Norfolks at Belgaum in India. John remained there for one year fifty days and then, after the Armistice, was sent to Salonika, arriving there on the 19th December 1918.

As a result of this, because he had not been in a warzone, there was initially some confusion as to William Thake's entitlement to both of the basic war medals. It is possible that Thomas Tomlin followed the same path and it certainly seems, from the *Roll of Honour,* that he went to India first. There are differences, however, for the Roll also states that Thomas was posted to Mesopotamia, rather than Salonika. It may also be that Thomas went to a war zone earlier than John Thake. All we can repeat is that the following account is a possibility rather than a certainty.

In the summer of 1917, the 2nd Norfolks had been camped at Karnabit, east of the Diyah River on the Persian Front. There was also a separate "Segregation Camp" there because they had suffered a major outbreak of Diphtheria in the Battalion. On the 27th August 1917, the War Diary noted that, "the battalion is officially clear of diphtheria". On the 2nd September, the Diary also recorded:

> *100 B.O.R.s joined the Bttn this day. This is a draft from England and the majority of the men having had 8 weeks training before being sent out*

It seems possible that Thomas Tomlin was one of these men.

The 2nd Norfolks had been a Regular Army Battalion when war broke out but it had suffered a terrible and humiliating defeat by the besieging Turks at Kut-ul-Amara in present day Iraq. The Norfolks had been part of an ill-conceived attack on Baghdad which, after being taken with great loss of life, could not be held and the force retreated back down the Tigris, together with 1,600 Turkish prisoners and more than 4,500 wounded from both sides. They made at stand at Kut at the end of 1915 and into April 1916 but they were slowly starving to death. Cats and dogs were eaten and the Indian troops, unable to eat meat, were down to seven ounces of grain a day.

During the siege, some 1,750 men died. After the surrender the men were marched into captivity, with great brutality and two-thirds of the British troops did not survive. The 2nd Norfolks, as part of this force suffered terrible losses and as a result, for a time they were combined with the 2nd Dorsets and became the Norsets. Replacements were drafted in and the two units separated on the 21st July 1916 into their component parts. Few of the original "Regulars" would now have remained in the Battalion.

The war in Mesopotamia has been largely overshadowed by the horrors of the Western front but often the conditions were at least as bad as in the European theatre of war. The area could be very wet and cold but in the April to October period, temperatures were usually over 100 degrees Fahrenheit and often much higher. There were also many days of

strong winds and sometimes tornados, stirring up great clouds of dust. In the same way as the rain in Flanders was unusually bad so, the hot season in Mesopotamia, was the worst in living memory.

Jebel Hamrin (Hamrin Hills) in 1918 (Australian War Memorial website)

For the most part there was little large-scale fighting and heat and disease killed or incapacitated more men than the enemy. The area had few roads but did possess an important, ancient canal and irrigation system. In October 1917 the Brigade of which the Norfolks were part, was directed to occupy Jebel Hamrin and clear the Turks from the left bank of the Diyala River so that the Allies could control this canal system. The 2nd Norfolks task was to dislodge the enemy from the crest of the Jebel Hamrin. The Turks abandoned their positions before any real engagement and a pursuit began across the rugged hills and the broad plain beyond. After a brief skirmish at Kizil Robat, the Turks again quickly withdrew.

The Norfolks had to drive the Turks westerly from the far side of the river but the bridge had been destroyed and, when they tried to ford it, the men were swept off their feet and had to retire under cover of supporting machine gun fire. Eventually they did cross, using a makeshift pontoon bridge.

The enemy were in continual retreat north during early 1918 and in January the Norfolks were camping near the Ruz Canal, moving on to Kurdarrah where a tornado "flattened bulk of tents in camp". When the strong winds allowed, they were digging strong points. In March 1918 the rains came and on the 31st of that month, the Diary records:

Whenever the wind blows from the south rain is sure to follow.

In April 1918 they marched to Mirjana and on to Kizil Rabat (Quizil Rubat) and on to Kifri. The enemy, however, was generally retreating before them so there was little contact and it was the harsh conditions which were hardest to bear. On 5th May 1918, the *Diary* wearily reports:

> *Dust storms all morning. No tents for troops, very hot, mosquitoes by night and flies in enormous numbers by day.*

Now the *Diary* mainly reports on training, fatigues, firing practice and work on the railway. The heat began to increase in intensity. It is no surprise that on 12th June 1918, one man, Private Pocknall, decided to take a swim in the river and drowned.

By July 1918, the temperature had risen to 120 degrees and there was little activity. On the 12th July the War Diary irritably states:

> *The failure of Ordnance to supply us with Boots as required has now placed 102 men on the immobile list.*

Would Thomas have seen the irony of this?

Work continued on the railway with the only death reported in the Diary coming from heatstroke.

It may be, at this period of inactivity that Thomas and some other men were compulsorily transferred to other Regiments, although it is not recorded in the War Diary. As we have said, the Medal Rolls do show that many men were transferred out of the 2nd Norfolks but, unfortunately, no dates are given. It is even possible that it was at this time that Thomas had spent some time in India because of a wound or sickness and then transferred to the new Regiment. We cannot be sure.

What we do know is that at some point in late 1918 or early 1919 Thomas Tomlin transferred to the 7th Battalion of the Berkshire and was given the new Regimental Number 219036. At the end of September 1918, the 7th Berkshires were advancing towards Sofia as part of the Army of Occupation, after the Bulgars had surrendered. On the 15th October, however, they were suddenly diverted to go to Mustafa Pasha, a railway station outside Odrin (now Edime). They then moved some fifty miles south to Adrianople, named after the Roman emperor Hadrian, and now confusingly called Edirne.

The Berkshires had suffered, like many troops who served in this area, with malaria and now "Spanish Flu" hit the camp. They moved on the Rustchuk (Ruse) and, on 11th December 1918, they entrained for Dobritch (Balchik), north of Varna, on the eastern shire of the Black Sea. Here they put the ejected Rumanians back in charge, in place of the Bulgarians, and went out in small parties to quell any minor uprising in the surrounding villages as a result of this change back to the pre-war situation.

On the 4th May 1919 the Battalion, sailed from Varna, across the Black Sea to Batum (Batumi) in Georgia, which was in a confused state after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The Battalion entrained again and travelled to Tiflis (Tblisi) some 300 miles east.

Demobilisation had already begun before the Battalion went to Koda, a hill station south of Tiflis. For the diminishing Battalion, it was then back to Batum before a small residue sailed to Constantinople where they were absorbed into other Regiments.

It seems most likely that Thomas Tomlin had left for home before this final date and would have been back in England by the end of 1919 at the latest. He returned to his wife in Pierce's Yard in Ringstead. I believe that they moved back to Raunds in the early 1920s. By the time of the 1939 *Register of England and Wales*, they were back living in "Greyfriars", Rotton Row in Raunds. Thomas was still working as a Pressman and Lily was a Ladies Hairdresser. I do not think that they had any children

Thomas died on 2nd June 1968 and Lily on 13th March 1973. She was still living in Greyfriars at the time of her death.

Chapter 22

The Walker Families

There were two Walker families which had men who served in the First World War. One was an established Ringstead family while the other was only there for a few years. Both had complicated histories and, although I have not found any link between them, both had a son called Herbert Cecil, but born ten years apart.

We will first look first at the two families of Thomas Robert Walker.

The Sons of Thomas Robert Walker

Thomas Robert Walker had been born in 1843 in Raunds, to William, from Carlton in Bedfordshire, some fifteen miles south of Ringstead, and his wife Elizabeth (née Corsfort), a Ringstead woman. They had married in Ringstead Parish Church on the 9th May 1822 but had first lived in Raunds. The couple had six children, including Thomas, before moving to Ringstead. In the 1841 Census, William was shown as a "Farmer" but by 1861 he was just a "Labourer". His wife, Elizabeth, died the following year, and by 1871 William, aged 72 years, was in Thrapston Union Workhouse.

Meanwhile, Thomas Walker had married Rebecca Staines on the 24th August 1864 in the Church of St Sepulchre in Northampton. They remained in Ringstead and had seven children in rapid succession: George, Maria, Jane, Ralph, Anne, Frank and Harvey. Rebecca died and was buried in Ringstead Churchyard on 27th September 1884. Thomas re-married some three and a half years later, in 1888, to Mary Jane Baines. Mary had been born in Stanground in Huntingdonshire and was some thirteen years Thomas's junior. She had worked a servant and there is certain a nod to the Upper Classes in the names of the six children that the couple had. They were Horace Ross, Herbert Cecil, Hugh Lancelot, Percy Eric, Dorothy Emma Marguerite and Winifred Jessie.

Of the thirteen children of Thomas, only Frank, Harvey, Horace, Herbert, Hugh and Percy were of an age that made them likely to be conscripted. The oldest of this group, Frank, was born in 1874 and had moved to Higham Ferrars. The youngest was Percy born in 1893. I do not think that either, for whatever reason, was called to fight in the First World War.

Harvey Edward Walker (1880-1946)

Harvey was born on the 21st September 1880 to Elizabeth, Thomas Walker's first wife. By 1891 he was living with his father and stepmother, Mary Jane, in Shop Street in Ringstead. By 1901 they were in No.1 Barnwell Cottages, next to the church, and he now had six stepbrothers and sisters. Harvey, aged 20, was working as a shoe riveter.

Harvey married Edith Louise Abbott in 1910 and in the 1911 Census we see that the couple were living in Sivers Buildings at the west end of the High Street, opposite the Swan Inn. Both were thirty years old and Harvey was working as a boot laster in a local army boot factory. Sadly, Edith died the following year and when war came Harvey was a widower.

In a previous biography we saw that Thomas Tomlin joined the 2nd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment and was given the number 205464. It seems likely that Harvey was enlisted at the same time for he was given the number 205461 when he also joined the 2nd Battalion. As with Thomas Tomlin he would have been conscripted first to a training battalion as the six-figure numbers were not used in the Regular Army Battalions like the 2nds. Unfortunately, as we saw with Thomas, most of the records no longer exist, so any details of their service can only be seen as a possibility.

Unlike Thomas Tomlin, who served in India and Mesopotamia, Harvey served in India and the Salonica (or Salonika) warzone. After his initial training he would have been posted to India. He sailed out to Bombay (Mumbai) and then, probably mainly by train, travelled south some 300 miles to Belgaum where the 2nd Norfolks had a base camp.

The records show that many soldiers were posted to the 2nd Norfolks in India before being transferred to different Regiments in Salonika to fight the Bulgarians, or Macedonia against the Turks. It also appears, however, that most of the men first spent some time in India at the base camp. For example, it was raised in the House of Commons by his M.P. that Private Arthur William Corney, who was with the 9th Battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment:

> . . . was sent to India in July 1917, arrived in Salonica, just before Christmas 1918.

Harvey Walker was also posted to the 9th South Lancs. and the timings of his move were probably similar to that of Corney. He would have entered the war zone area after the Bulgarians had surrendered. The Medal Cards for this group of men, from the 2nd Norfolks, via India, all have a resolved doubt about their entitlement to the British War Medal. It appears, as Peter (PRC) has pointed out on the *Great War Forum,* that they were entitled to the medal because they were in transit to a warzone, even though the conflict had ended before their arrival.

The issue raised in Parliament was about the fact that Arthur Corney had not had any leave and his MP was urging his speedy demobilisation. On 10th January 1919 Winston Churchill,

who (as part of a Liberal Government) had become the Secretary of State for War, promised to look into the matter. We can only assume that Harvey was also fed up with life as part of the British Salonika Force (BSF), now an "Army of Occupation". The Battalion was sent by Destroyer to attempt a landing at Dede Agach (now Alexandroupoli in Greece) but had been forced back by bad weather. They finally managed a landing and reached Makri, now also swallowed up by Alexandroupoli, just before the Armistice was signed with the Turks.

They returned to Chugunsi, now the Greek village of Megali Sterna, due south of Lake Dojran where demobilisation began and was completed by March 1919.

We do not have evidence for when Harvey was demobilised but it was likely to have been by mid-1919 and we know, from the Electoral Registers, that he was back in Ringstead by 1920. Oddly, the 1920-1923 Electoral Registers only show him in "Ringstead" with no mention of a street. Was he living somewhere away from the main village? By 1926 he was back living with his father Thomas and brother Percy in Leveratt's Row (off Carlow Road, next to the Brook).

By 1929 Harvey had moved to Sivers Row (or Buildings) and in Spring 1931 he re-married, to Hilda Maria Abbott, both now in their fifties. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* they were shown as living in West End in Ringstead, which may refer to the same house as his father had lived in. Harvey was a bootmaker. Living with them was Gertrude (Gertie) Abbott, Hilda's unmarried sister who was a lift (heel) cutter.

Harvey died on 4th March 1946. Hilda lived for another fifteen years and died on 14th February 1961. At the time of her death she was still living in West End and the *Index of Wills and Administrations* has her wrongly as a spinster. She left her effects to her sister, Gertrude.

Herbert Cecil Walker (1890-?)

Horace Ross Walker, the first child of Thomas's second marriage, to Mary Jane Baines, would have been the next oldest child. He was a farm labourer before the war and had married Elizabeth Jane Headland on the 25th September 1912 in Woodford. I do not think that he was conscripted although we cannot be certain. He later became an Iron Ore Filler at a local blast furnace.

The next son after Horace was Herbert Cecil, born on 19th May 1891 in Ringstead. He had been christened with three of his brothers on 5th February 1894 in Ringstead Parish Church. He was with his parents in Leveratt's Row and, aged twenty, was working as a baker.

War came, and the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows Herbert as first having been in the Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment). It seems most likely that he was sent to one of the training battalions but was deemed not fit enough for military service in a war zone.

He may have been with the Regiment in the county of Surrey because he was sent to the 680th Agricultural Company, which was raised in Surrey, and given Service Number 464899.

Martin Stilwell, on the *Surrey in the Great War* website, has posted a fascinating account of agriculture at the time, and the role of the Agricultural Companies in the First World War. He tells how, before the war, agriculture was in recession particularly because of cheap imported grain and refrigerated meat. As a result, Britain had become dependent on imported food. The war took away men and horses from the land. At first, two good growing seasons mitigated this situation but increasing U-boat attacks, poor North American harvests and a bad local potato harvest, meant that, by December 1916, the Government realised that it needed to take action.

It agreed to pay a fixed price for the foodstuffs it wanted but it also took control of what farmers could grow. We know of the *Dig for Victory* campaigns of the Second World War but it was first in WW1 that "Ploughing Orders" came in, and pasture, cricket pitch or tennis court could be ordered to be ploughed and crops grown. This did not solve the food shortages and in 1917, among a raft of other help, the Agricultural Companies (ACs) were formed from those soldiers not fit enough for combat. It was also at this time that the Women's Land Army was first used. Further men were still needed and the 680th and the 694th Companies were added to the work force, along with a fleet of tractors.

When Herbert was demobilised, he returned to Ringstead and in 1919 was living in Leveratt's Yard (or Row) with his father, Thomas, and brother Hugh. He continued to live there until 1923, when he disappears from the Ringstead Registers. I have not managed to definitely place Herbert after that. There are some possibilities, including a "House Parlour Man" working for a Solicitor at Upton, but no one man whom we can identify as correct. We must leave it there.

Hugh Lancelot Walker (1891-1965)

The third "H" son, baptised on February 5th 1894 in Ringstead Church, was Hugh Lancelot Walker. There is some confusion about his date of birth. The Civil Registration records it in the January to March 1892 period which would normally mean that he was born at the end of 1891 or early 1892. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* he gave his date of birth as 3rd December 1894. I have found similar discrepancies in this register and I think his birth was probably on the 3rd December 1891.

In 1901, Hugh was living with his parents and siblings in No.1 Barnwell Cottages in Ringstead. He seems to have been missed by the 1911 Census but we know that he fought in the First World War. As for most of the Ringstead men, the military records of Hugh Walker have been largely lost in the Second World War German bombing raid. What we have are the *Absent Voters' Lists* for 1918 and 1919 which give some service details and his Medal Card and the Medal Rolls.

Fortunately, we have already written about George Stanley Smart who also joined the Machine Gun Corps with Service Number 57027, just four ahead of Hugh Walker, whose number was 57031. Like George, he would have first been enlisted in the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment for his basic training. They were both part of a large draft of soldiers who were then posted from the Northamptonshires to the Machine Gun Corps in mid-September 1916. Graham Sackler, the researcher for the *Machine Gun Corps Database*

website, states that Hugh, like most of those posted, after his initial machine-gun training, would have been sent first to the MGC Depot at Camiers, near Étaples.

At this point in the war the men would have been sent to reinforce, or bring back up to strength, any of the Brigades along the Western Front that needed new men. George Smart, went to the 8th Machine Gun Company and was killed, probably on the 26th September 1917. Hugh, however, may have been sent to another company, so we cannot be sure in which actions he took part.

What we do know is that he did serve with the newly organised 57th Machine Gun Corps Battalion, which was part of the 57th Division and had been formed on the 1st March 1918. The *War Diary* of the Battalion starts on the 1st April 1918 and charts its progress during the last nine months of the war and into 1919. It does not give a real sense of the progress of the war and, like many of the diaries, tells of small battles and high casualties as the Allies began to push the Germans north and east on the Western Front.

The great "Michael Offensive" of the Germans in March 1918 had forced the Allies back and threatened to win the war. On April 1st the 57th were at Mondicourt, some seventeen miles south-west of Arras. They moved nine miles east to Fonquevillers in the Front Line and were subjected to artillery fire but also the "Yellow Cross Gas Shells" which sent the dreaded mustard gas into the troops in the village. Unusually, the *War Diary* lists all the casualties, including the Other Ranks, giving names and service numbers. In most of the Battalion Diaries only the officers and the very brave were named.

By September they were a further seventeen miles east-northeast in the area of Hendecourt-lès-Cagnicourt and Fontaine-lès-Croisilles. The Front was moving forward fast by the standards of the trench warfare that had preceded it, but it was still hard-won, and the 57th Battalion continued to sustain heavy casualties. In early October they were again attacking further north in the Fromelles area. The WW1 maps plot the Germans retreating east and north but they were not usually giving ground easily. In the period from the 1st to the 14th October 1918 the Battalion lost 10 men killed or died of wounds, 43 men wounded and 11 men missing.

On 11th November 1919, the Armistice brought fighting (almost) to an end. It is not recorded in the *War Diary* and the only entry is "No Change" from the previous day. On 30th November it recorded that "Ploughing for local farmers ceased". On 17th December thirteen coal miners were released to demobilisation. Their services were needed urgently at home. On the 21st December "Salvage Operations Commenced".

The new year began an accelerating demobilisation of the soldiers. Hugh Walker had been appointed a Lance-Corporal at some point and the Medal Roll shows that he was discharged and placed on Class "Z" Reserve. In effect his army service had finished. *The Ringstead Roll of Honour* states, however, that he was a Sergeant in the *107th Chinese Labour Corps* and this is confirmed by the Ringstead *Absent Voters' List* for Autumn 1919. Graham Sackler has suggested that he only held this post for a matter of months and perhaps he was "attached" to the Labour Corps while remaining on the MGC books. It may also be that his was a

temporary promotion to enable him to have sufficient rank to carry out his new appointment.

The Chinese, until recently, have been the forgotten men of the Western Front. When we see China now, as a major world power, it may be difficult to believe that in 1914 this huge new republic was still in the thrall of various imperial powers including Britain, France, Germany and Japan. When war broke out the Chinese Government declared "Absolute Neutrality" but it began to believe that, to be on the winning side, would give it some standing in the world and a place at the table when the map of the world was redrawn. They also came to see that the Allies would be the ultimate victors and began to secretly petition to send soldiers and labourers to fight on their side.

At first, they were rebuffed but, after the terrible slaughter of the Somme in July 1916, the British followed the French, in accepting Chinese labour on the Western Front, in order to release soldiers to the fighting units.

The Chinese labourers were volunteers who signed a contract with their thumbprint and each was given a bracelet with their name (or nickname, if a written version of their name not known), and a number, in English and Chinese. This had to be worn at all times and the men, although technically civilians, were subject to military discipline.

Altogether some 94,000 men were used by the British during the war. With justification the Chinese considered that they were badly treated and not given proper respect. To get to Europe they had sailed across the Pacific in crowded ships and then were forced to cross an antagonistic Canada in locked train carriages with blackened windows. They were not allowed to set a foot on Canadian soil for any purpose or they would be subject to a prohibitive "head tax", equivalent to a labourer's wages for ten years.

Once in France or Belgium they were organised into companies under the command of British soldiers and worked behind the front lines. These men, from a quiet rural background, were often traumatised by the noise of artillery, gunfire, aircraft and bombs, as well as danger from enemy fire. Most did not believe that this is what they had signed up for.

After the Armistice the British soldiers began to demobilise but the Chinese remained until 1920. It was hard, unpleasant work and still had hidden dangers. In the *Chinese Labour Corps*, Mark O'Neill has written:

> *To the Allies, the Chinese men were as valuable after the war as they had been during the conflict. Large areas of Northern France and Belgium resembled a lunar landscape, with no buildings left standing, no roads, railways or telegraph poles, no farmland that could be cultivated. The countryside was covered with trenches and the debris of fifty-two months of fighting – the dead bodies of humans and animals, spent bullets, unexploded shells, barbed wire, rusting vehicles and scrap metal.*
>
> *The enormous task fell to the French and British armies, each with their own contingent of Chinese.*

Hugh became a Sergeant with the 107th Chinese Company. We do not know exactly when, but it seems most likely that it was early in 1919. As we have shown it would not have been an easy posting. The Chinese wanted to be home and many of the local people also resented their presence even though they were doing invaluable work which would enable the farms and factories to start working again. Discipline, through an interpreter, became more difficult to maintain as tempers frayed and fights broke out. Ten Chinese labourers were executed for murder during their time in Europe. One of these was Wang Ch'un Chi'ih who was in the 107th Chinese Labour Company. On the 8th May 1919 he was tied to a post and shot. The post is now on display in the town hall at Poperinge, near Ypres. Did Hugh have to stand and watch the execution of one of his men?

The Treaty of Versailles ignored the Chinese contribution and they were written, or painted out, of most of the memorial works produced after the war.

Hugh was finally discharged, as a Corporal in the Machine Gun Corps, on 3rd October 1919 and placed on the Class "Z" Reserve List, meaning he could be recalled if there was an unexpected resumption of hostilities. He returned to Ringstead and in the 1920 *Electoral Register* he was living with his parents in Leveratt's Row. By 1923 he had disappeared from the *Ringstead Electoral Roll* and had probably moved away. At the end of 1925 he married Ida May Joyce. Ida had been born in 1897 at Harringworth in Northamptonshire, the daughter of Alfred Henry and Mary Ann Joyce. I believe that Hugh and Ida had one child, also Hugh, born on the 16th December 1927.

It may be that Hugh had to move to Rushden to find work. Certainly, the family were living there, at 101 Westfield Avenue, in the 1939 *Electoral Register of England and Wales*. Hugh was working as a boot operative.

Hugh Lancelot Walker died on the 4th January 1965. Ida lived almost a further two decades and died on the 19th November 1986, aged 89.

The Other Sons

There were three other sons who, as I have said, I do not think fought in the Great War. It is possible that they only did home duties so went unrecorded in the Medal Rolls, other records having been destroyed. There are also many soldiers with similar names who, without other evidence, we cannot be sure are the correct men.

Frank Walker was born on 14th September 1873 and married Mary Hannah Jackson on 20th August 1894. They moved to Higham Ferrers and he first worked as the secretary of the Boot Production Company and became a boot manufacturer in his own right.

Horace Ross Walker was born on 1st January 1889. He married Elizabeth Headland on the 25th September 1912 and in 1939 was an "Iron Ore Filler" living in Gladstone Street. He died in 1972.

Percy Eric Walker was born in about 1893. I believe that sailed to Brisbane in Australia on 16th August 1911 in the Assisted Immigration Scheme. If so, he seems to have decided to return to England and in 1931 was living in Leveratt's Yard. He died in 1966, aged 73.

The Family of Alfred Walker

Charles Leigh Walker (1886-1966)

Andrew Walker, a saddler and harness maker, had moved, from the Kimbolton area of Huntingdonshire, with his wife Lucy (née Smith) to Raunds in the 1850s. In 1861 the couple were living next to the *Robin Hood* pub in Raunds with children, George (6), Alfred (2) and Walter (1). By 1871 Andrew had become the local Postmaster and the family had moved to the Post Office at 29 Brook Street. The Census shows that he was still a saddler and also had become a local preacher.

Andrew died on 7th January 1888 and in the 1891 Census we see that the oldest son, George, who had followed his father's trade of saddler, had also taken over the Post Office. It is the second son, Alfred, born in 1858, whose families we will be looking at. He married Elizabeth Miller in 1877 and the couple had four children: Thirza, Annie Elizabeth, Ethel Ashton and Charles Leigh. In 1881, Alfred, aged just 22, had become a "Rural Messenger" and they were living at 61 Huntingdon Road in Thrapston with daughter, Thirza, only one year old.

Charles was born on the 13th August 1886 in Raunds. It is at this point that the family story becomes more complicated. His mother, Elizabeth, died in 1890 and, in the 1891 Census, Charles and his older sister Ethel were living with their Uncle George, the postmaster, and his wife, Mary. We also see that Ethel had been born in Ilkeston in Derbyshire, so the family had been on its travels in the 1881 to 1886 period. This was almost certainly connected with Alfred's job, for in the 1891 Census, he was recorded as a "Railway Signalman" in the signal box at Spalding in Lincolnshire. Next door in "The Gatehouse" another signalman and his wife were living. Could it be that the Census found Alfred on night duty and he was lodging in the town or even in the Gatehouse?

Alfred remarried, to Alice Amelia Dent, on 16th October 1892 in Barnet in Hertfordshire and the couple had a further four children, Alice, Stanley Alfred, Leonard William and Herbert Cecil. As we have seen this last name had also appeared in the Ringstead, Walker family some ten years earlier. All the children were born in Hertfordshire.

When we look at the 1901 Census, we see that Charles and Ethel were still living with their uncle and aunt in Brook Street in Raunds where George continued as the postmaster and saddler. The couple also have a seven-year-old adopted son so perhaps they could not have children of their own. Meanwhile, Charles and Alfred's father, Alfred, shown as a Great Northern Railway Signalman was living with his second family who were born in London, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

Did Alfred keep in contact with the children of his first family? In 1911 Alfred and Alice were living with sons Stanley and Herbert at "Nantglyn" in London Road, Knebworth, near Stevenage. Of their four children, one had died. Alfred was now 53 and we might expect

that he would carry on being a signalman and then retire close by. This was, surprisingly, not quite the case.

Meanwhile, Charles Leigh Walker had become, a Post Office Clerk and in 1911 he was staying with his sister Ethel who had married Alfred Jesse Penny in Raunds Parish Church on the 10th September. The couple had moved back to Ilkeston, where Ethel had been born, and so, confusingly, had Alfred Penny. There is a hidden connection here to link the two families. Alfred was working as a stone mason and they had a one-month-old daughter, Jesse. Was Charles saying goodbye? The following month Alfred Penny sailed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, preparing the way for the couple's emigration. On 15th September 1911 Ethel, with six-month-old daughter, Jesse arrived in Canada bound for Calgary to join her husband.

Charles said by his family to be in Canadian Mounted Police uniform
With thanks to "Rosspenni" on www.ancestry.co.uk.

Did Charles join them for a time? The family have a photograph which they believe is of Charles, in Royal Mounted Police uniform as a young man. I have not found him definitely on a ship, to or from Canada, but Charles Walker (without the Leigh) is a common name. We also know that Alfred and Ethel Penny returned to Ilkeston during the war. Their son, Alfred Leigh Penny was christened in Holy Trinity Church there on May 4th 1916 and Alfred's occupation is shown as "soldier".

Charles was definitely in England in 1914 because he was in a court case, reported in the *Mid-Sussex Times* on October 19th 1915. A soldier had tried to fraudulently withdraw more money from his account than he had in it, by altering a number in his deposit book. Charles Leigh Walker was the clerk who, on November 23rd 1914 had been working in Rickmansworth Post Office and took the accused man's initial payment. By the time of the case Charles had moved to the Gerrard's Cross branch.

It was at Gerrard's Cross that Charles enlisted in the Royal Engineers on the 11th December 1915 and his address was given as "Llanberis" Knebworth Station, Hertfordshire so we see that he had kept in contact with his father, Alfred and his step family. His occupation was given as "Post Office Clerk and Telegraphist". At first, he was put in the Army Reserve Class "B". He was given a medical examination and was adjudged to have a very good physical development but "bad teeth" and was "slightly varicosed". On the 25th April 1916, Colonel A.M. Ogilvie, Director of the Army Signals Home Defence, wrote to the Recruiting Officer at High Wycombe, stating that Charles now needed to be called "to the colours". He was sent to the Stratford Signal Depot at Bletchley.

Charles became a Sapper in the Royal Engineers and was first granted an extra sixpence (2½p) a day from the 1st May 1916 and a shilling (5p) a day when he had successfully completed his initial training on the 29th May at the Signals School at Fenny Stratford. After finishing his training at Bletchley, he embarked for France on the 14th July 1916.

On the 22nd July he joined the 4th Divisional Signals Company in France. At the start of the war there were fewer than 6,000 in the Royal Engineer Signals Service in twelve companies, with the Regular Signal Companies supported by a single motorcyclist section of the Special Reserve, and by 29 Territorial companies. By 1918 there was 589 companies, the majority of which were in France and Flanders.

We do not know the role that Charles played in the Signals. Because of his background and training much of his time would have been operating the telegraph system but whether in the Front Line trenches or in the Company Headquarters we cannot be certain. The men not only operated the systems but laid, and repaired, the communication wire, handled the mail, and carried messages by foot or horse. They would also operate in forward positions to assist the artillery in providing information on the enemy targets. In these positions they were an obvious target for enemy snipers and many were killed and wounded.

We know that Charles must have had leave in England for at the end of 1917 he married Sarah Jane Warren in the Thrapston area. Sarah had been born in Little Addington, the daughter of bricklayer Thomas Warren and his wife Sarah. It looks possible that it was at this point that they set up home in Spencer Street in Ringstead but this is not certain.

Signallers working at the HQ of the R.E.S.S.in France WW1
Photograph by David McLellan. National Library of Scotland (CC BY 4.0)

Charles returned to the Front and, on 8th March 1918, he was admitted to hospital with Trench Fever. This illness had first occurred in the soldiers in 1915 and was characterised by symptoms including headaches, dizziness, severe backache and severe pain in the shins. The fever usually lasted a matter of days but sometimes reoccurred and could be serious in some patients. It baffled the doctors at first but was finally found to be caused by the faeces of lice in the trenches entering a wound or abrasion. That Charles was stricken by it does show that he was probably sometimes in the front-line areas. Initially he was in hospital for 22 days but it seems that at the end of this time he was re-admitted for further treatment.

We do not know the details of his service but he was discharged in early 1919 and given a "Protection Certificate" to show that he was a returning soldier. The next of kin had been written alongside one document showing "wife" at 9 Spencer Street in Ringstead.

Charles's half-brother, Stanley Alfred Walker, had been with the 17th (County of London) Battalion of the London Regiment, known as the Poplar and Stepney Rifles, as a Territorial soldier prior to the war. He fought in France from 9th March 1915 to 19th October 1916 but had been wounded in action and lost most of his right leg. Nevertheless, he later emigrated to Australia, as did his younger brother, Herbert Cecil. Perhaps more surprisingly, Charles's father, Alfred, aged 61, with his second wife, had also sailed to Brisbane on the S.S. Euripides on the 25th September. He became a well-known figure in Maroochydore, a coastal town, some seventy miles north of Brisbane, where he had settled. He died in 1939

aged 81. His death certificate shows all his living children, from both marriages, including Charles.

I do not think that Charles and Sarah remained long in Ringstead and he disappears from the Electoral Registers in the early 1920s. In the *1939 Register of England and Wales* he was living at 13 Milton Avenue in Barnet where he was still working as a Postal Clerk. It may be, however, that the couple did move back to Northamptonshire on Charles's retirement. When his wife Sarah died in Kettering Hospital on 7th July 1956 she was shown as the wife of retired Civil Servant, Charles Leigh Walker, and was living at "Denscot" in Little Addington.

Charles then seems to have moved, like many others, to the coast for the rest of his retirement and lived at "Sea Merge" Overstrand on the north Norfolk coast. He died on 12th June 1966 in Sun Court Nursing Home in Sheringham.

Chapter 23

John Thomas Watts (1887-1917)

Hannah Groom was born in Denford to brewer John Groom and his wife, also Hannah, in 1844. In 1861, aged 16, she was living in Church Lane with her father and her brother, Joseph, and his wife and family.

Hannah had not married, but had three children, George, Harry and James. Meanwhile, over the hill in Ringstead, William Thomas Watts had married, the unfortunately named, Fanny Elizabeth Annies on the 19th November 1874. I have not found any children for the couple who, in 1881, were living in Ringstead High Street. Fanny was entered under her second name, Elizabeth. She is shown as having been born in Pertenhall in Bedfordshire, but so is the next person in the Census, and I think this may be an error by the collector.

In 1886 Fanny died and was buried in Ringstead on the 14th August. William married again, to Hannah Groom of Denford on 10th October 1887. As we have seen, Hannah had three children of her own. She was seven years older than William and at 44 years old would seem unlikely to have a further child but, by the end of the year a son, John Thomas Watts was born. He was christened in Ringstead Parish Church on March 9th 1888.

William Watts
With thanks to Madeline Whiteman

In the 1891 Census, William, aged 40, and now an Ironstone Labourer, was living in Carlow Street with Hannah, her three grown up sons and three-year-old John Thomas. They were next door to the *Axe and Compass* public house. By 1901, William was a builder's labourer. Hannah died in 1908, aged 65, and in the following Census, at the age of 60, he was now a road labourer. Only George Groom, aged 49, an Ironstone Labourer, one of Hannah's older children, was still with his widowed stepfather. [John} Thomas, aged 23, and now a "Handsewn Army Man" was also with them in Carlow Street.

John was out of work, as many of the "Handsewn Men" of Raunds and Ringstead were in this Census. When the Great War came three years later, it brought work but took away fathers, sons, brothers and husbands.

As John's military records have been largely lost we can only estimate when he attested, mobilised and was posted to the Western front. We do have some evidence. He joined the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given Regimental Number 23449. Two experts on the Great War Forum, Steve (Stebie9173) and Craig (ss002d6252) have used the records to show that he would have attested in late 1915 under the Derby Scheme.

This scheme, named after Lord Derby, was introduced in 1915 to try to increase the number of recruits, because the initial flood of volunteers was drying up. All men between the ages of 15 and 65 had to register and this revealed that almost five million men of military age were not in the forces. Of these, only 1.6 million were in protected occupations. The Derby Scheme was brought in to allow men, who voluntarily attested, to either agree to

immediate service (Class B) or be put on a deferred list (Class A) under the understanding that they would be mobilised later.

John Watts attested under this Scheme and at about the same time he married Lucinda Bate (or Bates) at the end of 1915. I Have not managed to find Lucinda in other records before her marriage but I think this may be that she used another first name.

Craig, on the *Great War Forum*, has looked at John's pension records and has estimated that he would have been mobilised in February 1916 and Steve, on the same site, has worked out that he would have been with the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in France in late July 1916. We also know, however, that Lucinda became pregnant in late 1916 so, unless John was not the father, he either did not go to France before the end of 1916 or he had leave from the army at this time.

If John had joined the 6th in late July 1916, he would have joined a unit that had fought bravely, with terrible losses, at Tones Wood and Pozieres. After that the Battalion was in and out of the trenches, sometimes under heavy fire, but with no further significant actions. That winter was a bitter one for the men with snow and ice.

In February 1917 the 6th were in the line near Miraumont and Grandcourt, battles mainly remembered for the terrible conditions. The Germans had started a planned retreat to the heavily fortified Hindenburg Line that they had been constructing. Although they were giving up their positions, they had planned this an orderly retreat with a strong rearguard action to allow this to happen.

At the beginning of March, the Battalion moved to dugouts and tents in Thiepval Wood. They were fighting alongside the 12th Middlesex and the 7th Bedfordshires, supported by a squadron of cavalry and a company of cyclists. On the 21st March the 6th were relieved in the Front Line and in a series of moves by bus and train, linked by marches, they had reached Thiennes by the end of the month. In the following two weeks they were in camp, training but the weather was very wet and often the physical work was replaced by lectures in the billets. They may have been bored but at least they were dry.

On the 21st April 1917 the Battalion moved to Manqueville, still training and with the luxury of an occasional bath. They then received orders to move to the Arras area and by the 28th, the A and D companies were in the Front Line, with the B and C companies in support. It was here that another Ringstead man, Charles Arthur Major was killed. By May the Allies were in front of the Hindenburg Line with the 6th at Cherisy.

On the night of the 3rd May 1917, a preliminary bombardment was followed by a rolling barrage some 200 yards in front of the advancing troops. The *War Diary* has inserted a report of this attack by the 6th on Fontaine Trench, by Lieutenant Colonel R Turner D.S.O. which continues with the account:

> *. . . the Northampton Regiment attacked on a 2 Company front in three waves. They must have followed the barrage very closely having of course a certain percentage of casualties from our own barrage. Immediately they came into view over the crest*

they were under very heavy Machine Gun fire and they covered the ground at the double.

The left Company seeing that the way was clear and that there was cover in the CABLE TRENCH) O.32.a.3.8 got into the trench and bombed straight down FONTAINE TRENCH and were in the trench 10 minutes after barrage opened having a bombing post at O.32.a.5.7 to protect NORTH flank as the Company advanced down FONTAINE TRENCH they killed a few of the enemy and discovered a few dead from previous artillery fire and could observe from their position the right Company advancing to the attack. The right Company as they neared the trench did so in small rushes from shell-hole to shell-hole, when within 30 or 40 yards of enemy wire they were completely held up in shell holes by very heavy Machine-Gun fire.

A vigorous resistance was made but left Company Commander seeing that the right Company could not possibly gain their objective and as the left attacking Battalion was not in touch with him although he was actually in that area - he retired along CABLE TRENCH back to their original front line.

Some of the right Company started a gradual retirement from shell-hole to shell-hole.

The account does not give any hint of the noise or the fear of the battle. The estimated casualties for the day were 6 Officers and 105 Other Ranks killed, wounded, or missing. This disastrous attack was eventually successful but for John Thomas Watts the war, and his life, were over. He was now not a man but merely a statistic. His name is on the Arras Memorial, Bay 7. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

His widow, Lucinda, was given an immediate grant of £3 and a pension of 18s. 9d (about 95 pence) a week from the 19th November 1917. She is shown on the *Army Pension Card* as now living in Carlow Street, possibly with her father-in-law. A daughter, Gladys May was born four months after John's death on 29th August 1917.

Lucinda married again, to Ross Mayes at the end of 1919 and they had a child, Sylvia Bertha Mayes, born at the end of 1921. Ross Mayes died in 1928 and, in the *1939 Register of England and Wales* Lucinda Mayes was still living in Carlow Street with daughter Gladys and possibly Sylvia (usually known as Bertha), for a record has been officially blanked out. Also living with them was Harold H. A. George, a furnace labourer, who Gladys was to marry soon after the Register was compiled.

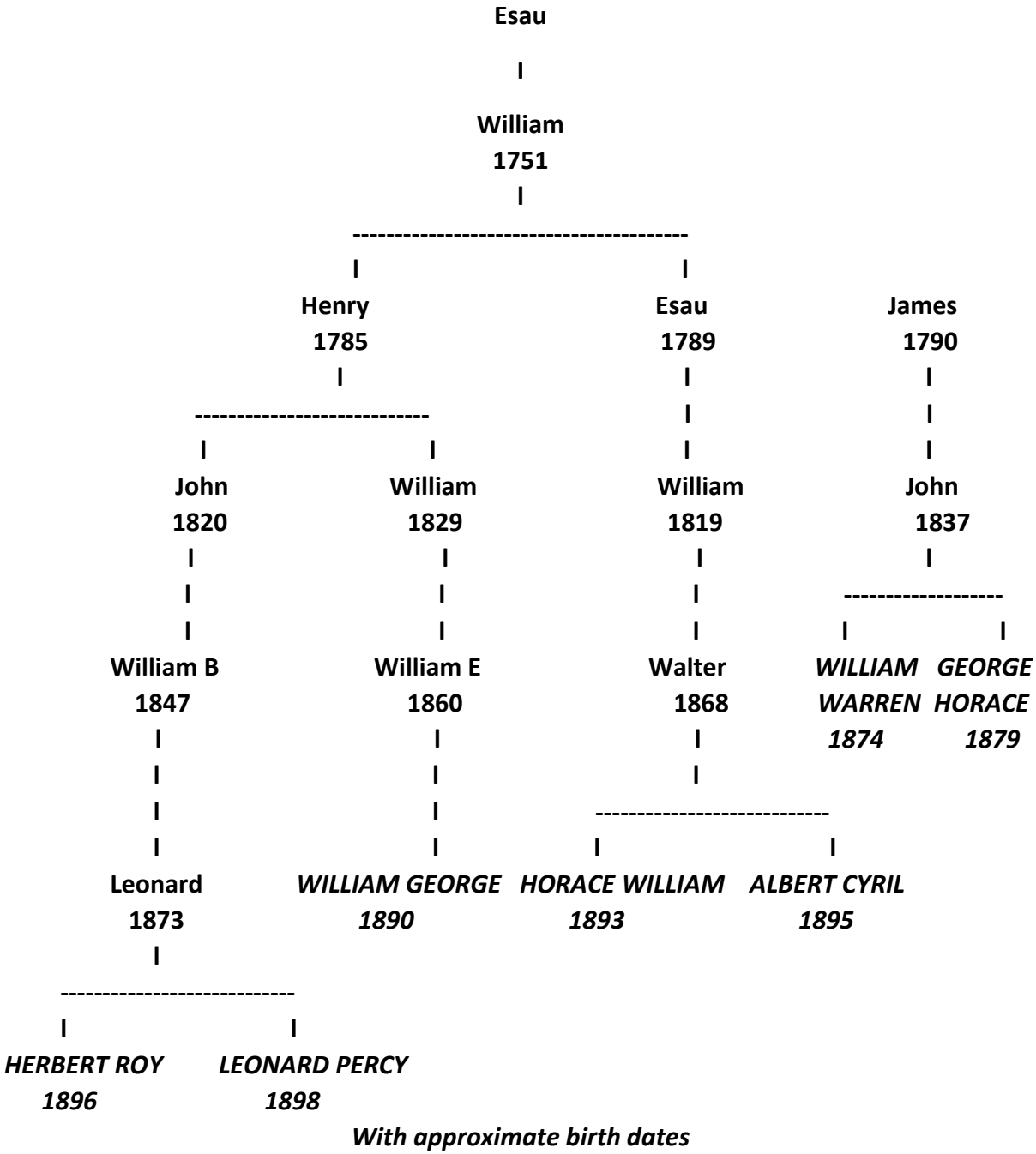
Gladys went on to work for BeBe Dolls, a firm which was set up in Ringstead by the Popper family, originally Jewish refugees from Czechoslovakia. They had first started the business in London and, when that had been bombed out in the Second World War, moved out to Ringstead. They made dolls, bears and other soft toys and employed many Ringstead women before selling the business in the early 1980s. It finally closed in 1987.

Lucinda Mayes died in 1984 aged 91 years, 67 years after the death of John Thomas Watts.

Chapter 24

The Weekley Families

A Simplified Family Tree following the male line only



With approximate birth dates

I have not found the link between the right-hand line and the others but Weekley is a common name in the area and in Polebrook (where the Bradley women came from). There would be other connections through the female lines but I hope this gives a simple basis for the relationships of the WW1 men.

The Weekley Families

The Weekley family name has been in Ringstead for centuries. It may be that it originally came from the Addingtons where they are shown in the Parish Registers in the Seventeenth Century. The Warwickshire Record Office holds the deeds relating to the Manor of Little Addington for a number of properties, and included in these was:

> *. . . a yearly rent of 2s. of Cotton Mills in Ringstead, the property of John Weekley, whose son Thomas inherited them after his death in 1633.*

The number of Weekley entries in the Ringstead Parish Registers increases through the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. We will be recording the lives of six men who saw service in the First World War.

We have looked back at some of the ancestors of the men, and found that links exist, but we cannot say definitely that they form part of one large family tree. There were farmers and butchers in the families and the land and money may have passed down some lines, leaving other to make their own way.

We will begin with two brothers who were a generation older than many of the young men who were called to serve.

Sons of John and Ann Weekley

William Warren Weekley (1874-1935)

James Weekley was born in the late Eighteenth Century and married Elizabeth Miller of Raunds on 11th December 1815 in Ringstead Parish Church. The couple had at least six children and one of them, John Miller Weekley was baptised in Ringstead on the 4th May 1837. John became a shoemaker and, in his turn married Ann Warren on 13th September 1858. Ann was a lacemaker, the daughter of Richard Warren who was to give evidence in the 1864 trial of William Weekley Ball for the murder of Lydia Attley. Both William Weekley and Ann Warren had been born in Ringstead but were both living in Raunds at the time of their marriage. Could there have been some ill feeling against the family after the disappearance of Lydia in 1850?

If this was true, by 1861 they were back in Ringstead and their two children, Thomas (1) and George (8 months), had both been born in Ringstead, as were all the rest of their children. John and Ann had at least eleven children between 1859 and 1879. The four oldest sons were past the age of call-up for the war but the two youngest, William Warren and George Horace did not completely escape.

William was born at the end of 1874 and, in the 1881 Census, his father, John, was a “Coal Hawker” and they were living in London End, a group of poorer cottages where Back Lane joined the Denford Road. William became a carrier, possibly working for a relative, Lot Weekley. He married, aged twenty, to Clara Jane, daughter of John and Jane Peacock, on the 16th September 1895 in Ringstead Parish Church. She was just seventeen years old. In the 1901 Census he was still a “Carrier’ Van Man”. He was 26 years old and Clara was 22 and they had two children, Florence (5) and Eleanor (Coral) just one month old.

We get a possible idea of what William's "van" may have been from a report in the *Northampton Mercury* on the 14th September 1906.

> *A party of young footballers had an unusual experience on Saturday evening. It appears that they had been playing at Rushden in the afternoon and were being driven home by Mr. William Weekley of Ringstead, in a horse-drawn brake. After leaving Stanwick and nearing Westfield-road, Raunds, a collision occurred with a pony and trap coming from the opposite direction. The impact was felt most by the occupants of the trap, three in number, who were thrown out, but fortunately escaped with a shaking.*

Was William blamed by his employer, although it appears that he was not at fault? All we know is that by the 1911 Census, aged 36, he was still living in Church Street but was now a farm labourer. The couple had been married 15 years and had had three children, Florrie (Florence) 15 who had become a domestic servant, Coral (Eleanor) 10 and (Oliver) Jethro, one year old.

The *Mercury* reported, on the 24th May 1912, that William had been summoned and fined six shillings costs for "neglecting his child", Jethro. This was because he had not had him vaccinated and he was ordered to get this done within fourteen days. An Act in 1836 had established the compulsory registration of all births, marriages and deaths from 1837. This began to provide an accurate record of the population and enabled further legislation to be enforceable. One area was the vaccination of children which was made law in 1840, first as a voluntary, but free, service. In 1853 it became compulsory, with a £1 penalty for parents who did not comply. Further acts followed in 1898 and 1907, and although, following some opposition, "Conscientious Objectors" were allowed to not have their children vaccinated, in practice this dispensation was rarely granted by the magistrates.

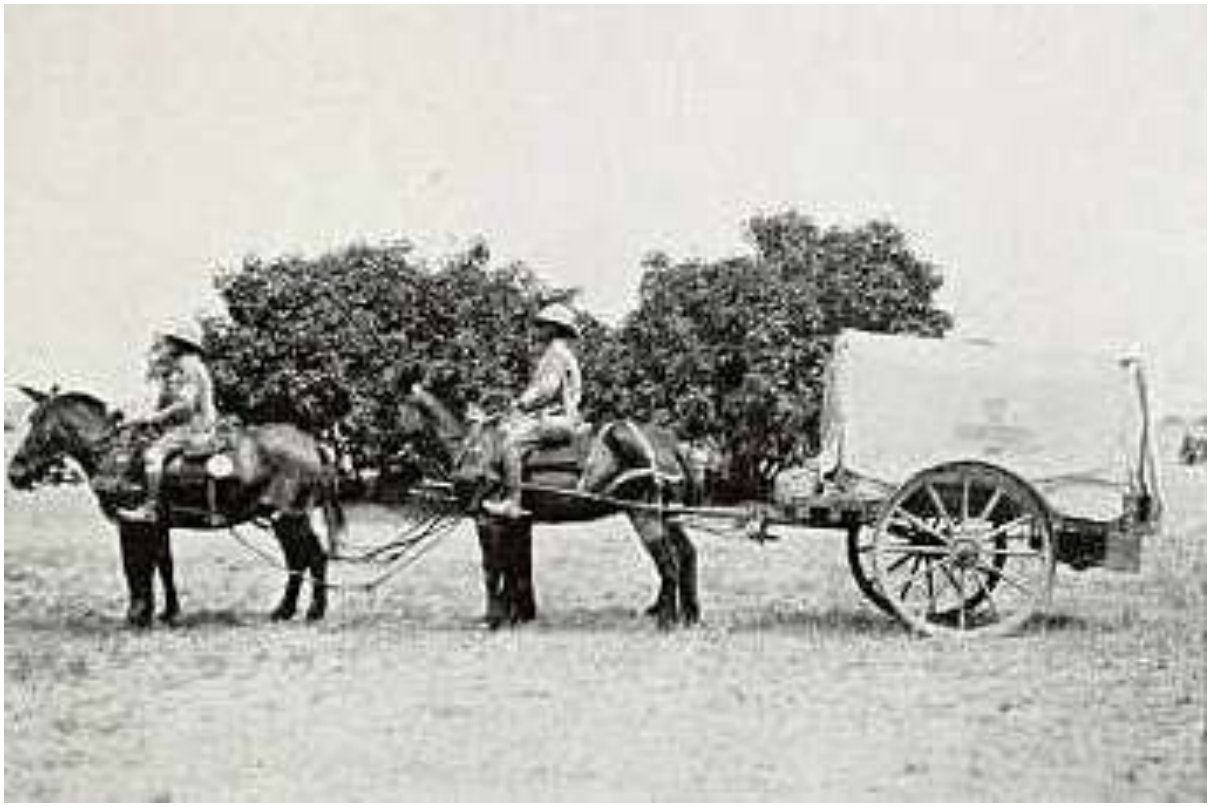
Was it through conscience or idleness that William did not have Jethro vaccinated? The *Chronicle and Echo* reported on the 7th July 1912, that he had been s fined 10 shillings with six shillings costs for not doing as the magistrates had ordered.

When war came in 1914, William would not have expected to have been asked to serve. The war dragged on and the army suffered terrible losses. Conscription was brought in at the beginning of 1916 when William was in his early forties but eventually he was called to service. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* shows that he served in the Royal Army Medical Corps in Egypt. The *Absent Voters' List* for 1918 adds that his service number was 84507. We only have a few of his military records but another man named Albert Scurrell was allocated 84506, the number before William's and he would have followed the same initial path. Albert was called up on 24th June 1916 and mobilised on the 24th August and William's dates would have been similar. Like Albert, he probably was sent first to Aldershot initially for basic army training with some simple instruction on handling patients and stretcher bearing.

The history of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) can be traced back to 1660 when each Regiment had its own Surgeon and Deputy appointed. Nevertheless, in the Crimean War many men were lost to disease because of the inadequacy of the medical support. On the 23rd June 1898 the RAMC was formed by Royal Warrant. Once more, in the Boer War of

1899-1902, the RAMC treated 22,000 men for wounds but 74,000 for dysentery and typhoid alone. This was mainly due to lack of water purification and poor sanitation. Lessons were learnt and the RAMC in the First World War, confronted by a volume of casualties and diseases, not seen before in the history of warfare, developed efficient systems that saved many lives.

As we have seen in the story of Albert Dicks, the main innovation was the “Chain of Evacuation”. Casualties were dealt with close to the Front and then, as quickly as possible, moved on through a series of hospitals with the cured returned to active service. The men needing further treatment or rehabilitation were moved down the chain to the larger hospitals (on the French Coast for the Western Front) and finally, for some, back to the UK.



A mule-drawn sandcart
From: With the Royal Army Medical Corps in Egypt. www.archive.org.

Albert Scurrell never left England but William was posted to Egypt. In Egypt there was not usually the same volume of casualties, although it was the main base that received the wounded from the actions in the Eastern Mediterranean. In 1915/16 the disastrous Gallipoli offensive filled the Egyptian hospitals, especially with soldiers from Australia and New Zealand. Besides being a base for the hospitals, the British were there to defend the Suez Canal from the Turks, it was a place from which to launch an attack on the Ottoman Empire in the Palestine area.

The "improved" cacolet for seated casualties
From: With the Royal Army Medical Corps in Egypt. www.archive.org.

Unfortunately, we cannot give an account of William's specific role in Egypt but we can give some idea of the work of the RAMC and the conditions there. These were very challenging for the Briton of the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The Western Front had mud, Egypt had dust and sand. A "Sergeant Major R.A.M.C." wrote a book, published in 1918, telling of his experiences in Egypt in the first three years of the war. He wrote:

> *I have said that the climate has a deal of influence over hospital-work in Egypt. Only those who have lived the year through in a hospital here can fully realise what that influence is. In Egypt, even in mid-winter, the days are always warm so long as the sun is up. It is only the nights that are cold, sometimes bitterly cold. The Egyptian winter is very short, however. Both days and nights, for the greater part of the year, are hot, with a peculiar dead dry, scorching heat that is particularly trying to sick and well alike. And there is always an impalpable dust in the air that even on the stillest days steadily collects upon everything - a dust that in all probability is capable of carrying the germs of almost every known disease. When the wind gets up, the dust gets up with it; and the harder the wind blows, the more dust it brings. The dust-storms in Cairo must be classed among the most unpleasant things that it is possible to conceive.*

The sand in many areas was also a major problem for the transportation of equipment and casualties, with no roads and few railways. Often motor transport was not possible and various designs were tried, such as mule-drawn sledges but in general the most useful

carriers were “sand carts” and camels and mules. Specially designed “cacolets” were made for camels to carry both seated and lying patients. It still would not have been the smoothest of rides for the wounded.

The *Absent Voters’ List* for 1918 has William in the “MT RAMC” and although this is difficult to interpret it seems most likely that William was part of this transportation system. His experience as a carrier would lead one to expect him to be a Private, working with a Driver from the Army Service Corps. The problem is that MT usually stands for “Mechanical Transport” but this may be an error in the *Absent Voters’ Lists* which were not infallible. Unfortunately, except for the facts we have so far given, we know little more of his career.

The RAMC was responsible for the physical welfare of the troops and there were weekly inspections to check for any signs of disease. One important area of the RAMC’s work which might come as a surprise was dentistry. The Egypt Expeditionary Force (E.E.F.) had thirty dental surgeons. The “Sergeant Major” tells us that:

> *Taking a typical specific period [not given]: we find that in this time a total number of 28,300 dental cases were treated, involving some58,600 attendances at the depots. These included the cleaning and filling of about 17,000 partially decayed teeth, of which number about half required preliminary treatment in the form of nerve devitalisation and removal of septic root-conditions, thus vastly increasing the work called for in the process of filling. New dentures supplied during the period reached a total of only 4,000. . . In addition . . . over 28,000 summary extractions of hopelessly decayed teeth were performed within the same typical period, the men in nearly all cases being returned to their units forthwith.*

Would the users of the service have had a different recollection of their treatment?

It is also often forgotten that the RAMC was responsible for ensuring that drinking water was not contaminated and that waste from the food, whether eaten or not, was disposed of, in a way that did not bring flies, vermin or disease. Near the main base, there was a supply of fresh water known as the Sweet Water Canal but the bacteriologists discovered that this contained many “disease germs” including the then incurable Bilharzia. It had to go through a filtration process and was then sterilised with acid sodium sulphate before it was safe to drink. For those in the desert in the area, the water was carried by camels in two light tanks on either side of their backs. Troops further out used water from local wells where possible which was then chlorinated and finally, if this was not possible, the men were issued with chlorine tablets to put in their water bottles. The problem was that the tablet needed to be in the water for at least half an hour to be fully effective and, in the heat, soldiers were sometimes too impatient.

With regard to waste, the sand provided a reasonable solution as the “Sergeant Major” described:

> *The disposal of urine, so formidable a task with a large force operating in ordinary country, proved a comparatively simple problem in the absorptive soil of the Desert. We found all that was necessary was to dig a fairly deep pit and fill it with drainage*

material such as stones or pieces of rock in which a number of light sheet-iron tubes or "trumpets" could be partially embedded. A thick layer of sand well beaten down round the bases of the tubes completed the contrivance. A precautionary spraying of the surrounding soil with an antiseptic was regularly carried out. The device proved to be entirely fly-proof, and on striking camp, nothing more was needed than to pull up the trumpets and fill in the holes with sand. The trumpets being graduated in shape, fitted one into the other, and were thus readily portable. They were also cheap, simple, and easily made. Waste water from cookhouses and ablution places were dealt with by soakage pits constructed on similar lines; but in place of the upstanding tubes, partially sunk petrol or other tins with cullender bottoms were fitted. The trapped contents of these were periodically removed and consigned to the incinerator.

In these short biographies we have, of course, concentrated almost entirely on the men but it is worth remembering that, particularly in the medical services, women also played an important part. The "Sergeant Major" writing of his time in Egypt told of the tensions that sometimes emerged between the male orderlies from the RAMC and the, much better qualified, ward sisters when they were reprimanded or given orders. Although his attitudes to women can sometimes seem patronising, and there is a caveat even in his praise, he does make it clear that the men should accept their role with good grace.

The sisters rule the wards simply because they are more competent to do so than the brothers; and any other arrangement, for the present at least, seems to be alike contrary to justice, to public policy, and to common sense.

He finishes the book by listing the honours the RAMC in Egypt gained, and states:

The women of the British Army Medical Service in Egypt have equal right to be proud of the distinctions conferred on them, as they have equally shared in the dangers and privations of the War.

We have no reason to believe that William Weekley was a Conscientious Objector but some did accept service in the RAMC, while others refused this and were imprisoned. It seems that, once in the RAMC, some men in Egypt were instructed to transfer to other units and refused. On April 15th1919, a Colonel Wedgewood asked a question of Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War, in the House of Commons:

. . . how many men are still imprisoned in Egypt for refusing to accept transference from the Royal Army Medical Corps to combatant units; how long have these men been in prison and whether he will now order their immediate release?

We do know that William was finally discharged on 20th April 1919 but it seems likely that he left Egypt before that date, possibly in 1918. His reason for discharge was injuries sustained in an accident. He suffered a fracture of a tibia and fibula but we do not know the cause. Was it a transport accident? His wound was declared as attributable to his war service and he received a small disability pension of five shillings and sixpence a week with an additional one shilling and fourpence for his son, Oliver Jethro.

William returned to his family in Church Street in Ringstead. He died, aged 60, in early 1935.

George Horace Weekley (1879-1960)

William Warren Weekley had a younger brother, George Horace, who was born on the 16th March 1879. By the 1891 Census he was twelve years old and living with his family in London End in Ringstead. He was, like his older brother, already a farm labourer. By 1901, however, still living at 1 London End, he was working at home with his father as a shoe riveter.

On the 16th November 1903, aged 25, he married Clara Maud Hayter, who was two years his senior, in Ringstead Parish Church. Clara had been born in Salisbury in Wiltshire, the daughter of Edward, a coachman for a wealthy family, and his wife Elizabeth. In 1901 Clara had been working as a domestic nurse for the family of retired Major General George Paxton in Midhurst in West Sussex. How did George Weekley and Clara meet? Perhaps she had moved to a new position in Northamptonshire but on their marriage certificate she is shown as a shoemaker like George. Her sister Edith Mabel Hayter, who was a housemaid at Cockley Cley in the 1901 Census, was one of the witnesses.

By 1911 George and Clara were living in London End with their three children, Minnie [Lizena] who was seven, Charles [Vivian] 5, and Hugh [Colin} who was seven months old. George's widowed mother, Ann, was also living with them. George was a bootmaker producing military boots for the Government but, as we have seen with many others in the area, he was unemployed.

When war came, George, naturally with his young family, did not volunteer and when conscription was introduced in 1916 the needs of the army's feet gave him some exemption. By 1917, the terrible number of men wounded and killed, led the Government to seek more recruits and the factories and farms were stripped to the bare minimum. On the 1st of April 1917 he was employed by *Owen Smith* in his Raunds' factory as a "hand laster" and the Military Tribunal granted him a temporary exemption until 31st July. The Government challenged this but it appears that he was confirmed in this stay of conscription until the end of July.

At some point after that, George was mobilised and, after basic and gunnery training, he was posted to the 65th Company of the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) which had been based in Malta since 1904. He became a Gunner and was given the Regimental Number 198492. It is possible that he never fired a gun in anger.

Malta was, at that time, part of the British Empire and was a strategic base in the Mediterranean. In the Second World War, with Italy part of the Axis Alliance and the greater range and destructive power of aircraft, submarines and ships, Malta became a prime target and was almost starved into submission. In the First World war it did not see any significant action although German submarines were a constant threat to the Allied shipping.

I have said that Malta saw no significant action but this is wrong in one important respect. It became known as the "Nurse of the Mediterranean" because of the Allied hospitals that

were based there. The worst of these times was caused by the disastrous Gallipoli Campaign which sent many casualties, especially from Australia and New Zealand to Malta and Egypt.

We do not know when George was demobilised but he was in the 1918 *Absent Voters' List* but not there in 1919. Also, the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* which was published in June 1919 has him as already demobilised. It seems certain therefore that it was in late 1918 or early 1919 at the latest. The records seem to show that he was only entitled to the British War Medal as the Victory Medal was for those, with some exceptions, who had served in a warzone not just overseas. It was rare for them not to be awarded as a pair, nicknamed Mutt and Jeff after cartoon characters.

In the 1920 Electoral Roll he is seen living with Clara in the Sivers Building and she too was entitled to vote after the passing of the 1918 *Representation of the People Act*. This gave women aged over 30 who occupied land or premises with a rateable value above £5, or whose husbands did. It is usually forgotten that many men got the vote in 1918 as well as women.

By 1930 George and Clara were still living in the Sivers Buildings and their son, Charles Vivian Weekley, was also entitled to vote. By 1939 George was working as a general labourer, probably for Northamptonshire County Council. Clara died early in 1944 and on the 30th October 1945, George, now in his sixties, married widow, Gertrude Duffey (née Ginns). George was living in Church Street in Ringstead when he died in St Mary's Hospital in Kettering, on the 4th October 1960. Probate was granted to his son, Charles Vivian Weekley who was now a Boot and shoe retailer, and William Freeman, a Council employee.

His daughter, Minnie Lizenza, had married William Sellick and died in Sidmouth on the 9th July 1947. His youngest son, Hugh Colin Weekley, married Margaret Gilbert and lived until 1999.

The Sons of Walter Henry and Adeline Weekley

We will now look at two more brothers whose line links back through Walter Henry to William and on to Esau who had been baptised on the 14th September 1789. He was the younger brother of William whose descendants we will look at next. As usual, the limited range of Christian names that most families used in the past, makes the extended tree something of a maze.

The brothers were the children of Walter Henry, often known as Harry, Weekley who had been born in about 1868 and his wife Adeline Richards, born in about 1872. She had come from Melksham in Wiltshire. They had married, however, in Woodford on the 4th May 1893 where both were shown as living at the time of the marriage. Adeline's father, William Richards, was a furnace labourer, working in the iron ore smelting furnaces that were in the Islip parish but sited nearer the village of Woodford. It seems likely that it was this work that had drawn the family to Northamptonshire.

By 1901 the couple were living at 6 Church Street in Ringstead and the children, Horace (7) and Albert (5), had both been born in the village, so William Henry's stay in Woodford had been brief. By 1911 Henry (as he now called himself) and Adeline had been married seventeen years and had four children, of whom Horace, aged 17, a shoehand, Albert, 15, a

shoe finisher, and Reginald, 9, were still living. Henry was a foreman in a local boot factory and they were living in Denford Road.

Horace William Weekley (1893-1972)

Horace was born on the 21st October 1893 and, as we have seen, had become a shoehand by 1911. The war came but, at first, his work in the military boot trade gave him exemption from conscription. In 1911 Eleanor May Smith, who had been born in Islip, was working as a servant in a Nursing Home at 34 Billing Road in Northampton. Horace and Eleanor met, and, on the 2nd August 1915, they married in Islip. The *Northampton Mercury* of Friday 6th August 1915 carried a report of their wedding.

> *At St Nicholas' Church, Islip on Monday, a pretty wedding was solemnised by the Rector (Rev. W. St. George Coldwell), the contracting partners being Miss Eleanor May Smith, second daughter of Mr and Mrs Frank Smith of Islip, and Mr Horace William Weekley, eldest son of Mr and Mrs Harry Weekley of Myrtle Cottage, Ringstead. The bride was attired in a silver-grey poplin dress with black hat trimmed with ostrich ruche. She was attended by Miss Dorothy Smith (sister) who was dressed in a navy costume with blue hat to match and Miss Edie Smith (niece of the bride) who was dressed in cream. The bride was given away by her father, while Mr Bert Weekley (brother of the bridegroom) was the best man.*
>
> *After the ceremony a reception was held at the Parish room. Mr and Mrs Weekley received a large number of useful and handsome presents.*

The protection given by Horace's work became weaker as the demand for men grew ever greater. Horace, like George Weekley, had been working for *Owen Smith* in his Raunds factory. Also, like George, he came before the Northamptonshire Military Tribunal on the 1st April 1917. Horace was working as a traditional hand sewer. He gained further exemption until the 30th June and, on the 7th September, although his appeal was dismissed, he was given a further six weeks.

The reason for his further appeal had been the illness of his wife, Eleanor. It may be that she was having a difficult pregnancy because their first child, Albert was to be born on the 16th November 1917.

Eventually, however, Horace was mobilised to the Royal Field Artillery and given Regimental Number 237383. Unfortunately, there is some confusion here. The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and the *Absent Voters' List* for 1918 have his unit as the 18th Siege Battery of the Royal Field Artillery (RFA). The only unit of this name was part of the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). The military records that still exist clearly show him in the RFA. He would first have completed his basic and gunnery training and would probably have not reached the Front Line until 1918 at the earliest.

At the end of the Nineteenth Century the Royal Artillery had been divided into the Garrison and Field Artillery. At the start of the Great War there were three sections to the Royal Regiment of Artillery: the Royal Horse Artillery (RHA) with light mobile, horse drawn guns; the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA), which had been developed from the coastal defence

units and was equipped with heavy large calibre guns and howitzers; and the Royal Field Artillery (RFA), the largest group, which had medium calibre guns and howitzers. The RFA operated close to the Front Line whereas the RGA were further back sending shells with a higher trajectory, often at unseen targets.

It seems most likely that he served in the RFA, but whichever unit he was in, we know that he was in France and Belgium with the artillery. Like the machine gunners, the artillery were a prime target for the enemy because of their capability to inflict terrible damage on men and machinery. The Imperial War Museum (IWM) has collected the recollections of the various "Gunners" in "Voices of the First World War". One of them was Tom Brennan who explained the various types of shells that they had to handle.

> *There were four kinds of shells. There was a DA, direct action; there was a shell they used for blowing up billets and that which didn't go off for a minute or so, it sunk into the ground before it went off, delayed action; then the third one was shrapnel and the fourth was poison gas. They were all painted a different colour so you'd know which was which. At night time, if it was dark, you would know which shell you were going to fire. The shells were very heavy and had to be carried up by animals or men to the guns.*

It was hard, dangerous work, with always the fear of a "Premature", a shell going off before it was fired, with terrible consequences for the, usually eight-man, crew.

We do know that Horace was wounded, as this was reported in the *War Office List of Casualties Number 5735*, on the 27th November 1918. The date of his actual wounding may have been many weeks before that, so he was probably not in the Front Line at the time of the Armistice on the 11th November. His Pension Card shows that he had suffered a gunshot wound (GSW) to his left leg. It also records that he had Bronchitis and this had been aggravated by his war experience. One can imagine that the daily conditions, with gun smoke, together with the various poison gases would not help any man with a respiratory complaint.

He was discharged, presumably from a hospital in the UK, on the 22nd February 1919. He was said to have a 20% disablement and was granted a small pension of eight shillings, with an extra three shillings and sixpence for his child. By the 8th December 1920, his disablement had been reduced to 14% and he received a total allowance of nine shillings and sixpence weekly allowance. He was entitled to the British War and Victory medals.

Finally, Horace returned home to Church Street in Ringstead. Albert had been born in 1917 just before he left for war. A daughter, Ivy Browett Weekly was born on the 15th November 1922. In 1939, the *Register of England and Wales* shows them all in the old family home of Myrtle Cottage in Denford Road. Horace was now a general labourer and Eleanor had Unpaid Domestic Duties". Their son, Albert, was a leather dresser and Ivy a machinist.

Horace died on the 14th November 1949 at Church Hill in Stanwick. Eleanor died almost thirty years later, in 1978, aged 83 years.

Albert Cyril Weekley (1895-1964)

Horace's younger brother, Albert Cyril Weekley, was born on the 22nd September 1895 but was not baptised until the 17th June 1908, along with his younger brother, Reginald. He also went into the shoe trade and was shown in the 1911 Census as working for *Owen Smith* in Raunds as a shoe finisher. He was living with the family in Myrtle Cottage in Denford Road, Ringstead.

By the time that he was old enough to be conscripted he had become a pressman in a factory and, with Horace, he came before the Military Tribunal on the 1st April 1917 and again on the 15th June. *Owen Smith* was putting the case for retaining staff for the military boot production, but it appeared that he accepted that Albert would have be conscripted. Towards the end of 1917 Albert married Elsie Annie Christobel (she had been born on Christmas Day 1896) Mayes, daughter of Ebenezer and Ellen who in 1911, aged 14 was already a leather cutter in a village lift (heel) making factory.

What happened to Albert next? We would expect that in late 1917 or early 1918 he would have been mobilised and served at least in 1918 but I have been unable to find any records for him. This does not mean that he was not conscripted but it is possible that he failed the medical or served in a home-based unit. We cannot be sure.

After the war we can see that the couple lived first in London End and then in Gladstone Street. By 1939 they were still there and Albert was a "Pressman – Insole and Through Cutter" while Elsie had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". When Albert died on 23rd October 1964 in Park Hospital in Wellingborough, the couple were living at 37 High Street in Ringstead. Elsie lived to be 83 years old and died in 1980.

Sons of Leonard and Emma Weekley

We have seen in the last pages how two brothers linked back to Esau and Mary Bates. An older brother of Esau was Henry Weekley, baptised on the 29th May 1785. He married Eliza Goodwin and it is their line which links down to Leonard born in about 1873, who married Emma Woodward form Woodford in 1895. Leonard Weekley had become a shoemaker like his father, William. There was also a link to William George Weekley through the Bradley family of Polebrook. The Weekleys would have had brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins living in the village.

It is the two sons of Leonard and Emma that we will be looking at in this section.

Leonard and Emma Weekley with their family
Herbert standing centre in his new uniform with brother Leonard Percy on his left
With thanks to Jennifer James (née Weekley)

Herbert Roy Weekley (1896-1983)

The oldest son, Herbert, was born on the 11th April 1896 in Ringstead and, in the 1901 Census, we see the family of three children Herbert, Leonard and Ivy living at 3 Denford Road. Ivy was only three months old, so one-year-old daughter Carmine Olive was living with her grandparents, George and Esther Woodward In Woodford to give Emma some respite. By 1911 the family had grown again and living with Leonard and Emma were Leonard Percy (13), Ivy Ellen (10), Dorothy Maud (8), Kate (6), Louise (4) and Eva (1). Also living with them was Leonard's widowed mother, Bessie Elizabeth (62) a sick nurse and Frank Brown, a one-year-old "Nurse child". Leonard was now the manager of a "Lift [Heel} Making Factory.

Two of the children are missing, [Carmine] Olive was still living with her mother's parents in Woodford. Herbert was staying with his uncle and aunt, William and Mary Ellen Neall in Daventry. Mary was Leonard Weekley's younger sister. William was a cycle manufacturer and Herbert, aged 14, was working as a clerk in the factory. Many small local cycle firms grew up in this period. The *Lightstrung Garage* in Rushden produced cycles locally and I remember my mother riding an old *Lightstrung* sit-up-and-beg bicycle in the 1950s. Most of these small makers disappeared as the large factories came into production.

Advert; September 1920. www.gracesguide.co.uk.

It is not clear if Herbert had returned home by the outbreak of the Great War but we do know that he enlisted and two of the major sources for our information, besides the Medal Index Card and Roll, are the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* and the *Absent Voters' Lists*.

We see from these that he joined the Machine Gun Corps which had been created by Royal Warrant on October 14th 1915. Before this, each Infantry unit had its own machine-gun section of two teams manning Maxim guns. Soon after its formation, the Maxim was replaced by the superior Vickers machine-gun. For some administrative reason the numbering of the men started at 3000 and Herbert's number was 3145 so he was only the 145th man to join the new Corps. At first the old system continued whilst the new Corps were trained and ready. Two training bases were set up, one at Belton Park near Grantham in Lincolnshire and one in Camiers in France.

The machine gun was the most lethal weapon of the war but the converse of this was that it was a prime target for enemy fire. It was not for nothing that the MGC was known as "The Suicide Club". The Vickers Gun was very heavy and required a team of six men to transport and operate it.

We do not have most of Herbert's military records but we do know a little more about a Private Charley Watts whose number was 3142, just three before his. It seems likely that Herbert, like Charley, first joined the Northamptonshire Regiment, possibly the 8th (Reserve Battalion) for his basic training, before being transferred to the Machine Gun Corps, on the 1st January 1916.

He would have then undergone intensive training for his new role, probably at Belton Park before being posted abroad. The 44th Company landed in France on 9th February 1916 and joined the 44th Brigade on the 12th February 1916 and was attached to the 15th (Scottish) Division.

.303inch Vickers Machine Gun ©York Castle Museum (Commons)

The 44th Machine Gun Company, was at the Western Front in the Battle of the Somme, fighting at the Battles of Pozieres Ridge, Flers-Courcelette in September and finishing at the Transloy Ridges in October. In 1917 the unit was in the Battles of Arras and Ypres. On March 17th1918, the companies were reorganised into battalions and the 44th along with the 45th, 46th and 225th became the 15th Battalion of the MGC. The problem is that we know that the Ringstead Roll of Honour has him in the 41st Battalion which had been similarly formed on March 17th 1918 from the Machine Gun Companies of the 41st Division (122nd, 123rd and 124th). The *War Diary*, however, does report that the numbers were made up to strength from other infantry units.

We cannot be sure when Herbert moved from the 44th Company and ended up in the 41st Battalion. One possibility is that he was wounded or incapacitated and went to the base at Camiers and, when recovered, was posted to another unit. Unfortunately, there is so much uncertainty that any attempt at plotting his time in the army could be mainly guesswork.

There is a gap in the *War Diary* of the 41st Machine Gun Battalion from the end of August 1918 to the beginning of November 1919 but they do show that it became a unit of the Rhine Garrison Troops and remained in Germany until early 1920 as part of the Army of Occupation.

There is further confusion for it is the Spring edition of the *1919 Absent Voter's List* that shows Herbert as a Corporal in the Labour Corps (607892) and the Autumn one which has him listed in the Machine Gun Corps. The Labour Corps are not on either the Medal Index Card or the Medal Roll so it may be that he was wounded or sick in Germany, was "invalided

home" and was appointed as a Corporal in the Labour Corps before returning to the MGC. Of course, the AVL entry could be a mistake. The Medal Roll shows that on the 9th of November 1919 he was demobilised and placed in "Class Z A.R." [Army Reserve] which meant that he was fit enough to be called up in the unlikely event of the war starting up again.

There are still anomalies in this explanation so all we can be reasonably certain of, is that he served with the Machine Gun Corps from early 1916 and was part of the Army of Occupation after the end of the War, before being invalided home.

There is a little confusion about what happened to Herbert after the war. He is in the *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead in 1919 but is shown in the lists for Daventry at 16 Badby Road for 1922, 1924 and 1925. In 1929 he was living in Carlow Road in Ringstead. In 1929, also, he married Rosetta Victoria Cook in Epsom. Rosetta had been born in Carshalton in Surrey on the 30th March 1901. In 1911, she was living with her parents, George, a jobbing gardener, and Elizabeth who was originally from Flore in Northamptonshire, at 33 Mill Lane in Carshalton. By 1929 she was with Edna Alice and Walter Harold Felton at 31 The Ridgeway, Carshalton. We do not know her occupation. Was she a domestic servant or a relative?

Nor do we know how the couple met. Flore is only some seven miles from Daventry, so was Rosetta visiting relatives in her mother's home village? The couple moved back to western Northamptonshire and settled in the High Street in Towcester. They were living there, at 5 Addison Terrace, when the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* was compiled. Herbert had become an "Accountant and Typist" which possibly means that he worked in the office of a local company. Rosetta had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". Herbert's mother, Emma, had died in 1936 and his father, Leonard died too, on the 6th September 1945. He was living in Carlow Street at the time and the *National Probate Calendar* shows that he left £1048. 9s. 11d to Herbert and his younger brother Leonard. The entry also reveals that Herbert was now working as the manager of a Tyre Depot

Herbert lived to be 87 years' old and died in the Daventry area in 1983 and Rosetta died in 1995, aged 94.

Leonard Percy Weekley (1898-1972)

Herbert's younger brother, Leonard Percy Weekley, was born on the 29th April 1898 and, in 1901, was with his parents and siblings in the new Ringstead housing estate at 3 Gladstone Street, the roads named after Liberal politicians. By 1911 his older brother was living away from home, but he now had five younger sisters. He was thirteen years old and was working in a local lift (heel) factory. A.E. Fox & Co. Ltd. were based in Burton Latimer where they made leather heels for shoes. For a time, they also had a factory in Ringstead, making heels for military boots, which was built on the outside of the sharp bend at the end of Church Street where it becomes the Denford Road.

When war came Leonard was only sixteen years old and it would have seemed very unlikely that the Great War would involve him. This was not to be, and he served on the Western Front. Also, like his brother, there is some confusion among the few records of his military

service that do remain. The 1918 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead has Leonard in the 25th Battalion of the Kings (Liverpool Regiment) while the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* (published in June 1919) also has him the same Battalion but invalided home and demobilised. On the other hand, his military records show him in the Manchester Regiment and the Labour Corps.

The following account was only arrived at with a great deal of help from the *Great War Forum*, especially Ken (kenf48), whose knowledge of the war records and especially the Regimental Numbers has enabled him to plot a course through the various stages of Leonard's career.

In March 1916 Conscription was introduced for single men born in 1897, who were deemed to have enlisted and were placed on the Army Reserve. In May 1916, men born in 1898 were attested and were placed in Group A. For men like Leonard who had become eighteen this Group closed on June 7th. The men were called up when they had reached the age of eighteen years and seven months. As Harry Patch remarked in his memoir, "We all knew when the call would come" and, for Leonard, this would have been in November 1916 at the earliest, though it is possible that he was not called up until January 1917.

He would have first reported to the local regimental depot and from there posted to a Reserve or Training Battalion. It seems likely that Leonard was one of a group of men from Northamptonshire who were posted to the 4th (Reserve) Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment, which had been formed at Tring in Hertfordshire in April 1916, although definitive details of his home service have been lost. Certainly, he was in a draft from the 4th Norfolks who embarked from Folkestone to Boulogne on 28th May 1917, barely a month after his nineteenth birthday, the official age for service abroad.

The draft arrived at 32 Infantry Base Depot at Étaples and were posted to active service battalions of the Norfolk Regiment, specifically the 8th or the 9th. They would have spent a few weeks being toughened up for front-line duty. On the 19th June 1917, the men were posted and renumbered to the 2/6th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment. Leonard was allocated the number 270116 and with his comrades, joined his Battalion in the field a few days later. The 2/6th War Diary records that, while the 2/6th were in billets at Allouange reinforcements arrived: 61 on the 20th; 122 on the 21st and 85 on the 26th.

The 2/6th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment were part of the 199th Brigade in the 66th (East Lancashire) Division. Ken believes that the men were posted to bring the Battalion and the Division up to strength, ready for a planned amphibious attack by the Allies on the Flanders Coast. By the 26th June, the 2/6ths were in billets in a Corn Warehouse at St Pol near Dunkerque. On July 15th they took over the coastal defences at Dunkerke Bains and spent time working for the Royal Engineers digging defences. On July 24th they moved into Front Line trenches at Lombartsyde where they suffered many casualties, 182 suffering from the effects of a gas attack. On July 1st 1917, the actual strength of the Battalion (as opposed to the strength on paper) was 34 Officers and 927 Other Ranks. On August 1st the "Trench Strength" was 15 Officers and 405 Other Ranks.

They remained in the coastal area near the Belgian border, but the planned "Operation Hush" did not take place and, in October, they moved from their base at Heuringhem to the Front Line near Ypres. The weather was now terrible with heavy rain and deep mud and they were often employed in working parties. In December they were in the Reninghelst area south west of Ypres still suffering casualties, mainly from shellfire.

In the new year the *Diary* reports that the Paper Strength of the Battalion was 41 Officers and 795 Other Ranks, but the Trench Strength was 28 Officers and 589 Other Ranks. By February they were in the infamous Passchendaele area. In March the last great German "Michael Offensive" broke upon the troops and, as with many battalions, there was a sudden headlong withdrawal before the onslaught. The *Diary* records:

> *Please note that, as all records. operation orders etc. have been lost in action, this summary has been completed from memory.*

Through March 1918 we see from the placenames in the Diary, Herbécourt, Harbonières, Gullaucourt, Aubercourt, Hangard Wood, a scramble south and west as they gave ground and tried to establish a holding point. Eventually the attack lost momentum as the German troops were exhausted and the supply lines overstretched. In April the tide began to turn. The 2/6th Manchesters did not see this as a unit for, in March, it was reduced to a small training cadre with the large majority of the men being sent to base to be added to other units. The Battalion was completely disbanded in July 1918.

There are now several possibilities for Leonard. He could have been wounded or sick and sent back to England and, when recovered, posted to the 25th Battalion of the King's (Liverpool Regiment) and returned with them to France. There is also the possibility that when the 2/6th Manchesters' men were reallocated to other units he returned to a base and, rather being posted to a combined Manchester unit was then posted to the 25th Liverpools in France.

If the posting was in England, the 25th Battalion was in Norfolk in 1917, first at Sheringham and then, from July, at Sidestrand. They left Cromer and sailed from Dover to Calais on 6th May 1918. It was a 3rd Echelon unit which meant that the men were not expected to fight in the Front Line and were known as a Garrison Guard Battalion. On arrival they were attached to the 59th Division, stationed at Estrée-Cauche where the men's main task was digging defensive positions.

Almost as soon as they arrived the Battalion was struck down by a "Pyrexia of Unknown Origin" (P.U.O) epidemic, losing, at the peak in June, over a hundred men a day to hospital. They had to have 50 reinforcements in July, before they lost anyone to enemy action.

P.U.O was better known as Trench Fever and could affect men several weeks after them being originally infected. It had a range of symptoms including a sudden fever, loss of energy, bad headaches, skin rashes, pains in the eyeballs, dizziness, muscle aches and severe pain in the shins which is why it was also known as "Shin Bone Fever". As in the 2019/20 Covid 19 pandemic, symptoms could be fairly brief and mild in some patients but could affect others very badly, causing heart problems and depression. In some it could lead

to relapses for up to ten years. It was only at the end of the war that it was found to be caused by bacteria in lice faeces, often infecting the men while they were feeding on their blood.

The exigencies of war now forced these soldiers, not considered fit for front line service, into the trenches. They were posted to the 176th Brigade in June 1918 and, on the 25th July, they first moved up into the trenches, suffering their first casualty on the way. Although the 25th (they had dropped the Garrison Guard part of their title) saw action, most of their work was in consolidating positions taken by the advancing army.

At some point, after the *1918 Absent Voters List* was compiled, Leonard had been invalided home and demobilised. It is possible that this could be as a result of the P.U.O, outbreak or he could have served with them in the subsequent action until the Armistice. In December 1918 he was transferred to the Labour Corps and given a new number 471672. Again, it may be that he worked in clearing up the battlefields on the Western front after the fighting finished which was a mammoth and often unpleasant task. The Labour Corps was not mentioned in the *Ringstead Roll of Honour*. This was published in Thrapston in June 1919 but the information may have been gathered some time before this date and not updated, or this may be because his time with Labour Corps was brief.

As this was his last unit, it was the one that completed the Medal Roll and gave the Manchester Regiment, his first in a war zone, as the one to go on his British War and Victory Medals. In the first part of 1919 Leonard was discharged from the army and by 1920 he was back in Ringstead, first in Gladstone Street, moving to Carlow Road by 1923. He married Elizabeth Whiteman Arnold in 1924. She had been born in Denford on the 8th February 1898, the daughter of Henry, who had died in 1914, and Annie Arnold. The couple moved to Front Street in Denford and they were there in 1939. Leonard was working as a "Boot and Shoe Operator (Pull Outs)" and Elizabeth was looking after the house.

Leonard died, aged 75, on the 19th July 1972, still living at 2, The Bungalow in Front Street in Denford. Elizbeth died on the 3rd May 1992.

William George Weekley (1890-1983)

The story of the final Weekley man from the family is very different from any of the others. He probably did not serve in the Great War although he did contribute at a distance. Nevertheless, it is worth briefly recounting, for it is one with some unexpected twists and turns.

William George Weekley was the son of William Edward Weekley and his wife Sarah, (née Povey). William Edward traces his line back on the Weekley side through William Edward, born in 1860, who was the son of William (baptised on 18th September 1829 in Ringstead) and Charlotte (née Bradley). Charlotte was the younger sister of Rachel who had married William's oldest brother, John. The line then leads back through Henry, another William to Esau and Mary in the early Eighteenth Century.

We will start with our William's father, William Edward who, in the 1871 Census of Ringstead, was ten years old and living in Sivers Row with his father William, aged 42, and working as a shoemaker. Charlotte the mother was not at home on the Census night but his

grandmother, Ann Bradley, a farmer's widow and now an annuitant, was living with them. Charlotte was elsewhere and in 1881 neither she nor William can be found. Meanwhile by 1881 William Edward, in one of the surprises in this story, was now a manservant at 103 Lexham Gardens in Kensington. The head of the house was John Strachey and next door lived 35-year-old barrister Sidney Woolf and his wife Maria. They have a daughter Bella and their son, Leonard Sidney, was just five months old. Leonard was to marry Virginia Stephens.

John Strachey had been a very senior Civil Servant in India and was for a short time, the acting Viceroy. He was the brother of Sir Richard Strachey whose son was author, Lytton Strachey. William Weekley was working among the children who would later form the Bloomsbury Group to surprise and shock Edwardian England. Also working for the Stracheys was a nurse, Selina Bradley from Polebroook, who was his mother's sister. Could this have been how William came into the household?

We must beware of thinking that the Censuses always define where someone was living, rather than visiting briefly, especially when a family member, who is merely stated to be a son or daughter. In 1891 William Edward was shown back with his parents at 21 Duke Street in Kettering. The form also shows that he was married and a "Shoe Manufacturer". Could this really be true? When we look for his wife, we find that he had married Sarah Povey in the Kensington District in 1888 and in 1891 she was living with her 78-year-old widowed father Francis Povey, an undertaker, at 23 Church Street in Chelsea. Also, with her, was her son, William George Weekley, who was just one year old. He had been born in Ringstead so it is possible that the family home of the Weekleys was in Northamptonshire rather than London and she was the one visiting relatives.

As usual in this story, the truth is a little more complicated. Her father was probably still counted as widowed from his second wife, Frances (née Holman). Even more surprising is that his full name was Francis de L'Horme de L'ile Povey. Like the D'Urbervilles in Thomas Hardy's novel, the title was a relic of a more illustrious past. His father, John Francis Mary de L'Horme de L'Ile, had been born in Martinique and held important posts in the French military and police He had fallen out of favour, when he had allowed a prisoner to escape, and lost much of his income. He had moved to London allegedly to because it was easier to get his income from Martinique in England. His wife, and mother of Francis, was Rebecca Smith. He divorced his first wife in 1818 and his son inherited much of his name but apparently little else. He seems to have left all his assets to the six children of his sister.

The domestic arrangements of father and son have a number of twists and turns, both possibly running two households. Francis had been born in 1813 and in the 1851 Census he was living at 39 Marsham Street with his wife Frances and their young family. Also in the household was a nineteen-year-old servant called Sarah Tilley. In 1861 he was a widower, still an undertaker, at 8 Broadway in Westminster. In 1871 he was running the Boar's Head Inn in Braintree with his nineteen-year-old "adopted daughter", Amelia Sheates. In 1881 Sarah Povey (née Tilley) is shown as married with her five children, including Sarah, born in about 1865 at 23 Church Street in Chelsea. Meanwhile, Francis aged 68, was a master coffin-maker, still a widower, in Broadway. Sarah Povey/Tilley was buried in a common grave in

Brompton Cemetery on September 5th 1881. Francis died in 1899 and left £1,280 to his unmarried daughter, Frances.

We left William Edward Weekley in 1891 in Kettering with his parents, and his wife and son with her widowed father. Soon after this, the "shoe manufacturer" and his young family had moved to Great Oakley, near Corby In Northamptonshire. William was now running a poultry business. His three children, William George, Edward and Alice, were christened there on the 24th September 1892.

By 1901 his parents were living in Anglesey and 72-year-old William was working as a caretaker. In the same Census we see that the poultry business had not been successful and William was once again a butler at Woodlands in Fulshaw Park in Wilmslow, some eleven miles south of Manchester and now, a very desirable postcode. William George had been born in Ringstead, Edward in Kettering and Alice in Great Oakley.

Once again, he was on the fringes of the famous radicals of the times. His employer was William Cobbett aged 54, a solicitor and his wife Fanny who had been born in New York. This man was the grandson of a famous William Cobbett who, in the early Nineteenth Century, had been a journalist, pamphleteer and reformer, and had been forced to flee to the United States for a time to escape a possible charge of sedition.

A *County Directory* entry shows that by 1905, at the latest, the family had moved again, and this is confirmed by the 1911 Census that shows that William, now 56 years old, was a milk dealer. The new home was 2 Kent Road in Birkdale just down the coast from Southport in Lancashire. The couple had been married 22 years and have had three children. Edward was working as an apprentice coach builder and William George (21) and Alice (17) were helping their father in the milk business.

William and Sarah did return to Northamptonshire and William died there, at Creaton on 17th January 1933. Both lived long enough to see a remarkable change in their eldest son's life and career.

As in all these biographies, war came in 1914. We do not have any military records for William and it seems likely that he never served in the British services. What we do not know is what he was doing between 1911 and 1915 because he then made a sudden change of direction which later accounts seem to imply was based on his work during this time. It is possible that he would not have been conscripted because we know from a form he completed in 1917 that he had to wear glasses with "thick lenses".

In fact, William had left England before he could be called up. He arrived in New York on the 15th October 1915 on the *S.S. Lapland*. It appears that from the start he wanted to become a naturalised American citizen. As part of this process, he later had to sign that:

> *I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy.*

He also agreed that:

It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereign and particularly to George V, King of Great Britain and Ireland.

When the United States joined the Allies on the 6th April 1917, Draft Cards were issued to call up men for the Expeditionary Force. The first draft was held on the 5th June 1917 for men ages 21 to 31. William had already served one month in the infantry in Plattsburg, New York in 1916. William completed his form which showed he was living at 277 Linwood Avenue in Buffalo, New York. He was already a Head Checker with the Curtiss Aeroplane Company in Buffalo. This could mean several things but according to the Dictionary of Occupational Titles produced by the United States Employment Service in 1945, it is a person who:

. . . checks requisitions for supplies for accuracy, agreement with authorised allotment and correctness of form.

It may be that his expertise was on the paper trail side of engineering but we cannot be sure. Nor can we be certain about his connections to the aeronautical industry in Britain immediately prior to his emigration. Before he formed his own company, Geoffrey de Havilland was a designer with Airco who produced some of the important British planes of the war and versions of its DH4 were manufactured in America, particularly after the USA joined the Allied cause. Was William connected to this collaboration? Again, we cannot find the evidence for this.

In the 1920 Federal Census William was living on 121st Street in Manhattan 13 and described himself as an Engineer with an aircraft company. He was lodging with Jean and Jeanne Leeman who were from Belgium. Jean was a teacher of French. An ability with languages was an important skill that William seems to have possessed.

We see that over the next decades William made several sea voyages. In November 1921 William arrived in New York from Hamilton in Bermuda on the S.S. Fort Hamilton. Earlier that year he had become a naturalised American citizen, having lived five years in the country.

In 1923 he sailed home to visit his parents in Creaton in Northamptonshire before returning to his country of adoption. He went again in 1927. It may be that there were also some work reasons for these trips.

He seems to have become a member of the Presbyterian Park Avenue Church and it was there that he met Arezona Celeste Turley. She worked in the Earth Science Laboratory of Columbia University but was also a talented artist and sculptor. The couple were married in Manhattan on the 29th May 1930 and had one daughter, Rosemary. The couple also did volunteer work in the deprived areas of New York including classes where Celeste gave sculpture workshops and William, classes in poetry.

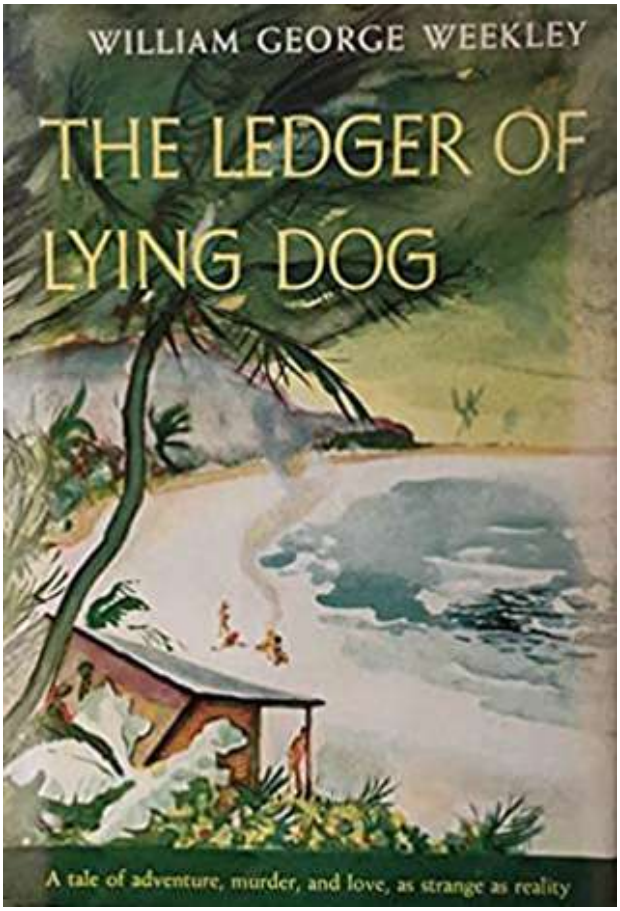
William's father died in 1933 and, in 1937, his widowed mother, Sarah, now 72, visited the family who were living at 3970 48th Street on Long Island. William's aeronautical work continued through the Second World War. In 1942 he had to complete another Draft

Registration Card. He was now 52 years old and was working in the Curtiss Wright Corporation – Wright Aeronautical Division. He was living in West Nyack in New York. The card also gives his physical appearance. He was 5ft 7 inches tall with black hair and blue eyes and weighed 140 pounds.

There is one more surprise in his story. On August 7th 1947 his novel, Ledger of a Lying Dog was published by Doubleday in America. One reviewer described it as:

> *A castaway story published for adults but my guess is that teens will adopt it as their own. A convincing story, purporting to be a log belonging to the author's great uncle. As the story unfolds, one is convinced that here is the day-by-day record of a youth, shipwrecked with a group of cut-throats and wretches (plus a woman of uneasy virtue) and finding in himself unguessed ingenuities, skills, abilities to fend for himself and fight his own battles.*

Do we see a metaphorical account of his own life?



It was successful and was re-issued, as a paperback, in 1951 under the new title of "Castaway Island" which had an attractive woman on the cover to draw in the young male readers.

When William died in 1983, he was residing at 10994 West Nyack, Rockland in New York. He merited a short obituary in the *New York Times.*

William George Weekley, an aeronautical engineer who was author of the 1947 novel "The Ledger of a Lying Dog" died Sunday in Nyack Hospital. He was 93 years old. His book, which was well received tells the story of a shipwreck and murder in the South Pacific. Mr. Weekley is survived by his wife Celeste, of West Nyack, N.Y. and a daughter, Rosemary of New York.

Another obituary in the magazine of the *Historical Society of Rockland County* reveals that there is much of his life's achievements that we have missed.

WILLIAM GEORGE WEEKLEY (1890-1983) was remembered during January in a memorial service at the Clarkstown Reformed Church, West Nyack of which he was a member. Engineer for aircraft needs during both World Wars, author (The Ledger of a Lying Dog reprinted in paperback as Castaway Island), translator for law firms of French and German scientific patents and a student in several languages of literature, physiology, interplanetary travel and development of an international language, he quietly lived most of his life in an old sandstone house on North Greenbush Rd., West Nyack. Born Jan 23, 1890, to William and Sarah Weekley of Ringstead, England, and educated in British schools, he died Dec. 11 at Nyack Hospital. Mr Weekley is survived by his wife, Celeste, a sculptor of note, and his daughter, Rosemary, of New York City.

Family remembrances seem to have expanded this background:

Bill was born in England, tutored in languages as a child and studied at Dijon University in France and Heidelberg University in Germany. He was a production engineer in the de Havilland airplane factory in England, transferring to Curtiss-Wright in the United States.

William certainly had a fascinating and full life and contributed to the war effort in World War One which justifies his inclusion in these series of short biographies. To fully research the truths of his life would need far more time than I can give. What we do know is that a man born in Ringstead had a remarkable life, achieved a little fame, and helped the Allies win two World Wars.

Chapter 25

Percy Reginald Wilson (1897-1918)

As we have seen with the Weekleys, some families had lived in the village for generations and were interwoven with other names, so, for better or worse, they could not turn a corner without meeting a grandparent, uncle or aunt, nephew or niece, or cousin. The name Wilson was not unknown in the village but our family came from the nearby town of Thrapston. Percy's grandfather, William Wilson had originally come from Wadenhoe but had become a millwright and publican at the *Fox Inn* in Thrapston High Street. The millwright

was a mixture of blacksmith, wheelwright and carpenter, and, as the name implies, he was often involved in the repair and construction of mills.

William's son, Herbert, had followed his father's trade. He met Amelia (or sometimes Emilia) Groom from Denford. In a case reported in the Northampton Mercury on 4th October 1881, about trouble at Denford Feast, it told of a "battle royal between the rival clans of the Yorks and the Grooms, old inhabitants of Denford". When we look for a marriage, we cannot find one. The only Amelia Groom who married locally was in the Wellingborough District in 1899 and the husband was James Britchford. He was part of another family that had its fair share of time in court for fighting and drunkenness. Is it possible she had an unhappy marriage but, for whatever reason, was never divorced? For now, it is just speculation. In 1911 Amelia and Herbert stated that they had been married 22 years which would be about the time of this other marriage. There could have been an error in the original records or its transcription but in the1939 *Register* the couple are both described as "single".

By 1901 the Fox Inn was run by Frederick Hodson and his wife Caroline. Herbert was now in the adjacent Brawn's Yard plying his trade as a millwright. He was 38 years old and "Emilia" was 30. They had six children living with them. On the 8th February 1904 all the children were baptised together in Thrapston Parish Church. The oldest, Rose Maud, had been born on April 4th 1890 and the youngest, Margery Mabel on February 4th 1900. Percy Reginald's birth is shown as October 7th 1898 but, judging by the Civil Registration Index, this is a year late.

Soon after this, the family moved to Ringstead and in 1911 were living in Pearce's Yard (various spellings exist) and Herbert was working as a "Millwright - Flour Mills" The couple have had nine children, eight of whom were still living. New additions were May (6) born in Thrapston and Samuel born in Ringstead. They are shown as having been married 22 years.

Percy was working on a farm but, by the time that he was conscripted on 29th November 1916, he was in shoe work. He was posted to the No. 13 Territorial Force Depot which was in Clare Street in Northampton and was in the 3/4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment with Number 7461. After his basic training there, he was posted to the Machine Gun Corps for his further training on the Vickers Machine Gun.

Percy was in England being trained for a total of 133 days. On 11th April 1917 he embarked on a troopship at Folkestone and disembarked at Boulogne on the same day. He went to the MGC Base at Camiers before finally joining the 9th Company in the field, on the 21st April 1917. The 9th Company were part of the 3rd Division who fought on the Western Front for the duration of the war.

The Allied High Command had planned a major offensive. It was forcibly argued for by the French, who believed that the time was right was an attack on the Aisne-Champagne Front, with the British providing a diversionary attack in the Arras area. The Germans rather pre-empted the attack by making a planned retreat to the Hindenburg Line where they had been building concrete reinforcements and bunkers.

The British attack became known as the Battle of Arras and the first action that Percy would have been involved in was the Second Battle of the Scarpe which ran from the 23rd to the 24th April 1917. Although the British achieved some limited success, the main French attack was a failure with terrible losses, leading to low morale and mutinies in their army.

Further phases of the Battle of Arras, in which the 3rd Division were involved, were the Battle of Arleux and the Third Battle of the Scarpe. With the French temporarily in disarray, the British needed to continue the fight in the Arras area to give their allies time to regroup. The resulting British engagements had some minor successes but few gains, mainly because of a lack of artillery. This holding campaign was bought at a terrible price in British casualties. Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, the British Commander, believed that in modern war, you had to wear down the enemy until they were unable to resist a decisive blow. The French attack had come too soon in this process.

The Battle of Polygon Wood (painted 1918) by George Edmund Butler
© Archives New Zealand (NCWA 474)

The British now moved to their own plan for a Flanders Offensive but the Germans, with the French weakened, could afford to concentrate their troops in this area. The result was the Third Battle of Ypres.

To prepare the way there was an attack on the strategically important Messines Ridge on the 7th to 14th June 1917. There was a four-day barrage followed by the detonation of twenty-one mines containing a million pounds of high explosive that the Royal Engineers had been laying in mines underneath the German positions.

The long preparations and the devastating explosions proved successful and the Messines Ridge was gained. But time was lost as the troops and artillery were made ready for the second phase. The 3rd Division entered the offensive at the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge

on the 20th to 25th September 1917, leading onto the Battle of Polygon Wood which finished on the 3rd October. The "wood" had been fought over through the war and now only had the burnt stubs of trees.

The later phases of the 3rd Battle of Ypres are often known as the Battle of Passchendaele, a name that has come to stand for all that was terrible about the Great War, with its misery and death but particularly for its mud.

The final engagement of 1917 for the 9th Company was the Battle of Cambrai which ran from the 20th November to the 7th December 1917. It is now most remembered for being the first Allied mass tank attack. The 450 Allied tanks led a surprise attack, not heralded by the usual artillery barrage. Ground was quickly gained but over the next days, in a familiar pattern, most of it was lost to German counter-attacks.

Percy Reginald Wilson
Rushden Argus April 5th1918. With thanks to The Rushden & District History Society.

The final year of the war came, and, on the 18th February, Percy accompanied an officer, as his servant, when he was sent to a training course with the 43rd Wing of the RFC. He re-joined the 9th Company three days later. This was just two days before the Machine Gun Companies of the 3rd Division became the 3rd Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps. He was then allowed to take 14 days leave in England from the 2nd to the 16th March 1918, rejoining the Battalion in the field on the 18th.

He had returned to the comparative quiet before the storm because, on the 21st March, the Germans launched a long planned onslaught on the Allied lines in a last desperate attempt to win the war before their own men and supply lines collapsed and the American might joined the frontline war. In the 3rd Battalion Machine Gun Corps Journal, William Cranston wrote:

> *Furious bombardments covering the entire system took place at 2.50 a.m. and 3.20 a.m., each bombardment lasting half an hour and was succeeded by utter stillness.*

Few barrages were so accurately synchronised as that which rang up the curtain on the great offensive. At 5.00 a.m. with one reverberating and tremendous crash every gun, mortar and projector the enemy possessed threw off its winter guise of idleness. Large number of heavy howitzers which had only moved in that night came into action.

The inception was like an unexpected peal of thunder overhead, so incisive and deafening was it, nothing escaped this annihilating barrage; front trenches and rear, roads and all headquarters were heavily barraged, chiefly with gas, while, during lulls one could hear H.V. shells travelling to the distant rear.

The Division had to resist and retreat, trying to keep some order in the desperate flight. For Percy, it must have seemed unreal after the normality of his time at home. By the 28th, the Battalion was continuing to move backwards, still inflicting heavy losses on the enemy, but also suffering many casualties themselves. The same Lieutenant-Colonel William Cranston, Commander of the 3rd Battalion, who wrote the piece above, spoke proudly in the *War Diary* of his men in this action.

Our line was penetrated at various points where the barrages had fallen with most accuracy and either annihilated or disorganised the garrison. There were many parts left who fought in a most heroic fashion with the enemy on every side of them, until at last were all wiped out in some cases, dying to a man or as a last desperate remedy, cut their way to the rear. Our machine guns in most cases were not in the same trench as the Infantry and their intentness in engaging targets prevented them noticing our Infantry was withdrawing. Other guns which had an Infantry garrison in the vicinity were ordered by the Infantry Commanders to stay and cover their retirement. Very few of these guns were got back to consolidate in the rear. Some fought to the death, some fought rear-guard actions, some withdrew what remained to them of equipment and fought with the Infantry. Not one withdrew until he was driven.

The tide would soon begin to turn and the exhausted Germans would be rolled back until the Armistice in November. Percy was not to see this for, on the 28th March 1918, he was one of the many men who were killed in this action.

He does not have a grave but is remembered on the Arras Memorial in Bay 10. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals and his mother to a small pension. He is also remembered on the Ringstead War Memorial, which was erected in the churchyard in 1924, paid for as a “humble offering of Herbert Billson who loved the village”. There is, on the back cover of the first volume of these biographies, a photograph of the quiet crowd at its dedication and one imagines his parents were there with the other relatives in their Sunday best.

Herbert and Amelia continued to live in Denford Road in Ringstead. A 1919 military form, unusually, lists all his immediate family. Besides his parents we see some of the family continued to live in Ringstead but four had moved to Finedon. In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales* we see Herbert is a “retired wheelwright” and “Emilia” are still in

Denford Road and, as we have said, are shown as single. Had they been some fifty years together, single?

Chapter 26

Evelyn Wood (1886-1918)

Evelyn Wood had been born in Raunds in 1886, the son of Edward, a bricklayer from Little Addington, and his wife, Ann. It would seem an unusual name for a boy but when you look through the military records you discover many men with the same name, even without exploring other surnames. It may be that these men were named in honour of Sir Evelyn Wood who won the Victoria Cross in 1858 and was a senior officer in the Boer War. He also championed the use of female nurses, against the views of many of his colleagues. Unfortunately, he became increasingly deaf and disorganised.

Our Evelyn Wood was baptised in Raunds Parish Church on March 21st 1886. By 1891 Edward and Ann had six children: Celia (12), Beatrice (10), William (9), Lily (7), Evelyn (5) and Ernest (3). Edward was still a bricklayer and they were living in Litchfield Yard In Raunds. By 1901 Edward had become a Bricklayer's Foreman and they had moved to Mapletoft Street and five children had been added to the family; Walter (10), Frances (8), Ralph (7), Emily (4) and Elsie (3). Edward died in 1909 and, in the 1911 Census, Ann, now a 36-year-old widow, was living at 11 Wellington Street and we see (though crossed out) that she had had 13 children but four had already died. Only four children were still at home and they were all working in the shoe trade.

Two of the sons had joined the Territorials, formerly the Rutland and Northamptonshire Militia. Evelyn was first to enlist in the 3rd (Militia) Battalion on the 21st April 1904 and was given the Regimental Number 7076. The Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907 changed the unit's title to the 3rd (Special Reserve) Battalion. The "Saturday Night Soldiers" had regular training sessions with a yearly camp. His records show that he attended this each year and, on the 26thJuly 1908 he was given a "Free Discharge". His military career seemed over.

His younger brother, Ernest, also joined the 3rd Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and was given the number 3/8631. We do not have details of when he joined up, but another local man, Cecil Burton, with number 8645, had enlisted on the 14th January 1909. Ernest would have joined up at a similar time.

Ernest married Ellen Favell on the 28th March 1910 in Irthlingborough and, we see in the 1911 Census that they were living there, at 11 Upper Victoria Street with Ellen's parents, Frederick and Margaret. Also, there, was the young couple's one-year-old son, Dennis.

War came, and Ernest was immediately called up to join the 1st Battalion of the Northamptonshires. The military records appear to have mixed up Ernest with Ernest Edward Wood (8501) who survived the war but we have some idea of his time in the war.

The 1st Battalion was taken by destroyers to Le Havre, arriving there on the 13th August 1914. Disembarking, they marched to their camp on the outskirts of the town. The History of the Regiment records:

> *The march was through crowds of rapturously enthusiastic French people and to the roars of "Tipperary" – that haunting marching song of the Old Contemptibles, as the British Expeditionary Force was soon to be known from the famous reference by the German Emperor to the "contemptible little army" of England.*

The German plan was to sweep through Belgium on a left wheel before marching on to Paris. The BEF, including the Northamptonshires, rushed to join up with the French to confront the German offensive. At first the Northamptonshires were in reserve after a tiring day-long march.

For the British Army, which was considered a professional force, although including many part-time soldiers, and few who had been involved in warfare, the first encounters with the enemy were a terrible shock. The Battle of Mons has attracted a number of myths but the truth is that the Allies were steamrollered by the German army. Streams of weary men were soon marching back along roads crowded with soldiers' horses and guns and fleeing civilians.

An unnamed Raunds School's former pupil wrote to his old headmaster telling of the other ex-pupils in the Battalion. He wrote:

> *There are several of us here now, and most of us have been out since the beginning of the war. I myself have been present at all of the engagements, including the retreat from Mons, the battles of the Meuse, Marne and Aisne. . .*
>
> *. . . We have had some rather exciting times up to now, and I suppose we shall have some more before the war is over. We did a bayonet charge on the Prussian Guard last month (14th September) which I dare say you have read about in the papers and I think that we did very well indeed.*

He mentions nine men of the Raunds' contingent, six of whom were killed later.

The First Battle of Ypres came, with the Northamptonshires at a small village near Pilckem. At 6pm on the 23rd October the enemy attacked all along the line and this continued through the night. The Regimental History records:

> *Shelling continues intermittently through the next day, the reserve company again being the chief sufferers. In the afternoon German shells set fire to the mill that stood in the vicinity of the centre companies of the 48th [1st Battalion]. Houses and haystacks were on fire in all directions, and when dusk fell the whole countryside was lit up by bright jets of flame. At 6 pm the enemy made another determined general attack which was preceded by heavy artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire.*

The Northamptonshires fought on bravely and suffered 150 casualties. Ernest was one of the men killed. Ellen received a pension of £2 10s. 10d. and also £5 1s. 8d. for her son, Dennis until he became 16 years old.

Ernest's older brother, Evelyn, had married Ringstead girl, Maud Cope, in 1904 and the young couple had moved there. As we have seen, he had served his time in the Territorials and had been given a free discharge in 1908. The couple had three children, Edward James who was born on the 7th March 1905, Mabel Evelyn, 18th April 1907, and Lawrence Evelyn on the 9th March 1911. Early the following month, the 1911 Census shows the family in Leveratt's Row in a two-up two-down cottage. Evelyn was a Handsewn Bootmaker working at the Unity Co-operative Society factory in the High Street.

At first his family and his military work saved him from being conscripted. His brother's death so early in the war would have been a great shock and he would have heard from others of the terrible conditions at the Front. He first came before a Military Tribunal on the 9th February 1917 citing "family commitments" as his reason for appealing against conscription. He was granted a temporary exemption but, on the 14th May, his case was considered again. This time we see that he revealed that besides family commitments that he had an invalid child. Despite this, his plea for a renewal of his exemption was refused.

Later documents indicate that the disabled child was probably his eldest son, Edward. We do not know the nature of his disability but we do know that, later, his "guardian" was Mr Boyden, who was the "Collector" for the Thrapston Union. Thomas Boyden had been appointed the Relieving Officer for the Union in 1917.

As so often, we have few military records for Evelyn after he enlisted in 1917 but there is a record of an injury that he sustained that does give approximate dates for his enlistment and time in a warzone. From this we see that he joined up in late May or early June 1917 and we know that he first was sent to the 4th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment and given Regimental Number 34300. After some four months training, he joined the 12th (Bermondsey) Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment in the field in September or early October.

The 12th had been formed in Bermondsey on the 14th May 1915 by the Mayor and the Borough and first landed at Le Havre on the 2nd May 1916. In early September 1917, the Battalion was in training in the Zudausques area of France, some forty miles due east of Boulogne. They then moved some thirty miles east into Belgium, south-east of Ypres. Starting on the 21st, the 12th were in the Battle of Menin Road Ridge which was part of the Third Battle of Ypres. This was an unusually successful, well-planned success leading to a run of small victories, all hard-won.

It is possible that Evelyn missed this battle and joined the Battalion after they had been relieved at the Front and moved to La Danne on the 1st October for rest and training. Soon after, they moved to coastal defence at Nieuport Bains near Dunkirk. The Front Line here was not without danger but was quiet compared to the areas around Ypres and Arras.

On the 27th October the Battalion was relieved by the 1st South African Brigade and were taken by lorries to Couderkerque for training and recovery. On the 12th November orders were received to proceed to Italy by rail. The Austrians, with the help of the Germans, had inflicted a terrible defeat on the Italians at Caporetto on the 24th October 1917. A quarter of a million Italians had been taken prisoner and some 200,000 deserted. It looked as if the Italians were going to be defeated and the French and British rushed troops to shore up the Front.

The *War Diary* charts the 12th Battalion's journey over the next few days through France from the Boulogne via Mesgrigney, through the Riviere. They halted on the 16th November at Campomorone (six miles north of Genoa) . . .

> *. . . where a cordial reception was given to the Battalion. Sandwiches and cigarettes were handed to them and the C.O. was presented with a bouquet.*

By the 17th they detrained at Mantova (Shakespeare's Mantua) and rested nearby at Guidizzolo and then had to move by a series of daily marches: Malavincina, Trevenzuolo, Isola Della Scalla, Bagnolo, Lonigo, Serego, Presina, Longare, Pieve, Casacorba, Musano, Falze, Selva, Conegliano.

It was near Casacorba on the 28th that Evelyn sprained his right foot. He was seen by the 138th Field Ambulance and No. 38 Casualty Clearing Station which would have been accompanying the Battalion. Perhaps he gained a few days rest from the perpetual marching.

It was not until the 1st December 1917 that they marched to the Montello Range and took over the Reserve Line from an Italian Regiment. On the 3rd the *Diary* reported that the Artillery were active on both sides. There was some rain but it was mainly frost and snow and the roads were treacherous in the mountainous country. There were casualties mainly from artillery and enemy planes. On the 8th December the Diary records:

> *An Italian Airman brought down an enemy machine in our vicinity. The prisoner was severely wounded and was attended to by our Medical Officer. The machine was a single-seater Albatross with two machine guns. The Airman was of German nationality and appeared very surprised to find English troops holding the Line.*

Some idea of this very different terrain can be seen from a brief extract in the Diary from the 12th December.

> *The enemy opened a heavy bombardment of our lines throughout the morning, shells, including Shrapnel and H.E. and several 15inch shells, about 1500 shells of different calibre fell in our area during the bombardment. Our "A" Company how 9 casualties, 2 killed and 7 wounded. "B" Company had two wounded. . . Great difficulties were experienced by the ration carriers owing to the steep inclines of the cliffs. The majority of our posts are situated on the Face of the Cliffs which ran along our entire front.*

After these first encounters by the British troops it soon became clear that the Italians had re-grouped and could win the war on this Front. The British first moved into Reserve and then were ordered back to the Western Front. Again we see their daily journeys through Vicenza, Verona, Brescia, Milan, Turin and just over the border, to Modane. Once in France they moved to Amiens and on to Mondicourt where training and route marches continued.

On the 21st March the Battalion entrained to Achiet le Grand, finally coming to the Front here at Sapignies on the 22nd March 1918. They arrived at a bad time for the Allies when the great Michael Offensive of the Germans forced the Allies into a desperate but reasonably ordered retreat. In early April they moved to Poperinge, some 75 miles north, and on the 7th relieved the 1st Guernsey Light Infantry. They were now on the Ypres Salient and took over the line on the Passchendaele Ridge. There was heavy shelling, including gas shells, by both sides and, on the 22nd June, the Battalion:

> *. . . marched to Divisional Gas Hut where men passed through the Hut and all Gas Respirators were examined by Divisional Gas Officers.*

In July 1918 they were in Reserve at La Clytte before moving into the line at Westouter. During July and August they were in and out of the Front Line.

After some time in billets in September, they once more moved forward to relieve the 27th American Division on the Vierstraat Road where they encountered strong parties of the enemy and suffered casualties from machine-gun fire. The British main attack came on the 4th September but Evelyn had been killed the previous day. Like so many others he had been killed when victory was assured but the fighting still continued for a few months more.

He was buried at Wytschaete Military Cemetery in Belgium (Grave 1A. B.B.) and he is the last of the names on the Ringstead War Memorial. He was awarded the British War and Victory Medals.

His widow, Maud, received a small pension for herself and her three youngest children (until each was sixteen years old). The pension for her oldest child, Edward was paid to Thomas Boyden who was his guardian on behalf of the Thrapston Union. He would have been sixteen in 1921, so the pension was not for long. I have seen, on some Ancestry trees, that he went to Australia but an Edward J. Wood, birth date about 1905 died in the Thrapston area in the April-June period of 1929. Was this him?

We have followed Evelyn in his army career and sad ending but he may have heard by letter from Maud, his wife, of another tragedy that had struck her family in 1918. Maud's older brother, Harry Cope, had married Lucy Bird in 1909 and they had had four children. Reginald, the oldest, was probably born before their marriage for he died in 1911 and he was registered as Reginald C [Cope} Bird. In late 1917 Lucy died of cancer and Harry was a widower with three young children. At this low ebb he received a call-up for war service. He did appeal but, not surprisingly in the circumstances, he submitted the form too late to be considered by the 14th February meeting. The Tribunal was sympathetic and had written to the military to reconsider his conscription. It seems likely that his appeal would have been allowed.

But it was too much for Harry and although he does not seem to have shown any outward change in his personality, he suffered a terrible mental breakdown. Just four days after the Tribunal met, he cut the throats of his two sons, despite the older one's struggles, and then took his own life. A neighbour saw the lack of activity in the house and broke in the next morning and found the bodies. The daughter survived as she had been staying with another family. Maud attended the funeral which saw the streets, from the house to the cemetery, lined with people from the village and the surrounding area.

She must have felt that the world was falling in on her. In 1939 she was living in Whyman's Road, still a widow, with her son Roland who was a motor mechanic. Her widowed sister Maggie Mayes was also with them. Maud died, aged 85, in 1971.

Chapter 27

A Few Other Men that the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* Missed

The *Ringstead Roll of Honour* published in Thrapston in June 1919 included most of the men who served in the Great War. Some, however, for a variety of reasons, were missed. We have covered a few of these but we will now briefly tell the stories of the rest of the ones who appear on the *Absent Voters' Lists* for 1918 and 1919 but were not included.

John Harold Allen (1894-1991)

John Harold Allen is one of the men who is not on the *Ringstead Roll of Honour* but is shown in the *Absent Voters' List* and *Electoral Roll* for the village in 1919 and has "NM" beside his name which indicates that he was a "Naval or Military Voter". There is not a military unit beside his name, however, and, like some other men we need more information to be sure of his military service. It also appears that he did not live in the village for many years. We will give a very brief account of his life in the hope that others may be able to fill in the missing details.

He was born on the 14th August 1894, in Maidwell, a small village, some ten miles north of Northampton, between Lamport and Kelmarsh and, significantly, not far from the Northampton to Market Harborough railway line. This had been built in 1859 by the *London and North Western Railway Company* and finally closed in 1981. His father, Jesse, had been born in Maidwell in1851 and was, in the 1901 Census, a "Platelayer" on the railway. His wife was from Bourne in Lincolnshire and, in this Census, they are shown with six children. They were living In *Railway Cottage* at Lamport Station. By 1908 John, aged 14, was also on the railways and we see him at Lamport and Ditchford (once famous for its Treacle Mines) learning his trade.

By 1911, he was sixteen years old and lodging at Seaton with a young married couple. He was working as a station porter. Seaton was again a small village in Rutland but in 1911 it

was a junction on the Rugby to Peterborough line and had branch lines to Stamford and Uppingham. A 1910 Timetable shows over 25 trains a day called at the station.

When the Great War came, it appears that John served in some capacity but, as yet, this has not been discovered.

In 1918 he married Mabel May Page at Uppingham in Rutland and, as we have said, in 1919 John was an absent voter from the High Street in Ringstead. We must presume that Mabel was living there at this time.

By 1939 John was still a station porter and Mabel had the usual "Unpaid Domestic Duties". They had three children with them, Cecil, at 18, was a railway cloak room attendant and Dorothy was an apprentice in the "Drapery Trade". The youngest, Christine was just five years old and still at school. They were living at the Station House in Twywell, just three miles west of Thrapston. It was on the Kettering to Huntingdon line which was in danger of being closed in the late 1930s but the needs for munitions traffic in the Second World War gave it a reprieve.

John's daughter Dorothy Mary married Reginald Childs and in the 1980s she recalled her time living at Twywell Station in *Strapetona*, the magazine of the Thrapston District Historical Society and which is now on the Thrapston Heritage Group website. It is a wonderful account of the life of a rural station. She tells that John first came to the station in 1929 and lived in the local pub until his wife and children arrived. She described him as a station master which may have been a later promotion but perhaps the station did not warrant a man of "stationmaster" grade, even if performing those duties. She remembered that he earned 32 shillings (£1. 60p.) a week.

The station closed in 1964 and Dorothy Childs recalled:

> *Now the activities and the station garden for which my father won prizes are only a memory.*

Mabel Allen died on the 20th April 1970 but John lived another two decades and died on the 17th December 1991.

Christopher Baseley (1882-1932)

George Basely (or sometimes Bazeley) was a yeoman farmer in Staverton, a small village a few miles south west of Daventry, in the west of Northamptonshire. He was born in 1836 and married Selina Marriott on 13th April 1857 but less than two years later she was buried aged 23 years old. In the 1861 Census he was living again with his parents. He was 25 years old and shown as a farmer of 80 acres (his father had 35). It was not until the 21st November 1878 that he married again, to Frances (Fanny) Adkins in St Sepulchre Church in Northampton. The couple continued to live in Staverton and had a family of eight children. The youngest, Anthony, was born in 1887 when George was 51 years old.

It is the fourth child, and oldest son, Christopher, who found his way to Ringstead and served in the First World War. He had been baptised in Staverton Church on the 25th May 1882 and by 1901, aged 18, was described as a "Farm Manager", presumably for his father who was a "Grazier and Farmer". In December of the following year George died in "Northampton Station". Was it suicide or an accident? There is nothing in the local newspapers so perhaps it was from natural causes.

This seems to have led to the dispersal of the family, although they were also of an age to begin setting up by themselves. By 1911 the widowed Fanny was living on her own private means. Only four daughters, all aged between 25 and 32 and single, were now at home. Two were teachers and one a dressmaker.

But what of Christopher, once the farm manager? In the 1911 Census he was 28 years old and working as a butcher for Charles Coombs with whom he was living in High Street, Finedon. The *1915 Electoral Roll* has a section on "Lodgers" and from this we see that he was paying 12s. 6d. a week, including board for a single one-room on the first floor of the house of T.H. Walters in Finedon High Street. Early that same year Christopher married Alice Georgina Weekley.

Alice was the daughter of the Ringstead Sexton (and Carrier), Amos Weekley and his wife, Ellen. Alice had been born in Wellingborough on the 23rd September 1892, but this seems to have been a brief stay for the family, and, in 1911, they were living in Ringstead High Street. The next few years are not clear but it appears that Christopher and Alice first moved to Peterborough and were living at 180 Oundle Road. This is from the *Absent Voters' List* so it was Alice who would have been there, presumably on her own. It then seems possible that she moved back to Ringstead and the *Absent Voter's List* shows the absent Christopher there in the Spring of 1919. It is likely that there would have been a delay in the bureaucracy catching up with this move to Ringstead which was in 1918.

Unfortunately, there is the same lack of information about his army career. He was not entitled to the 1914/15 Star so would have not entered the warzone until 1916 at the earliest. We also know that he was first with the South Lancashire Regiment with Regimental Number 45251 before being transferred to the Army Service Corps (255462). He was then moved again to the King's Shropshire Light Infantry (28404). While serving with this unit he was wounded. The report was on the 2nd July 1918 but probably happened in May or June. The next of kin are shown as living in Ringstead.

Creaton Sanitorium
Before antibiotics became available in the 1950s the main treatment for T.B. was fresh air, sunshine and a good diet. The huts appear to have beds in for patients to "take the air".

We later see from his Pension Card that he had suffered from multiple gunshot wounds. It appears that he recovered and was posted to the Royal Engineers (366959) and was discharged on the 23rd February 1919. He was entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

There is one last confusing Pension Card which is almost certainly for Christopher which shows that he had spent time at Creaton Sanitorium, some ten miles north of Northampton. It had been opened in 1910 as the first sanitorium in the county for Tuberculosis patients. We know that he had suffered from Pulmonary Tuberculosis. The confusion is that he is shown in the Royal Garrison Artillery with service number 160199 which may be a mistake.

I suspect that his time in most of these military units was brief and crammed into the last months of the war and its aftermath but, without more information, it is not possible to give a clear idea of his service.

Christopher returned to Alice in Ringstead with a small pension, because of his wounds and T.B., which were "attributable to his service". The couple took over the licence of the *Axe and Compass* public house in 1924. They were not there for long for, by 1928, they had taken up the licence of the *Melton Arms* in Melton Street in Kettering.

They were still there when Christopher died, aged 49, on the 29th January 1932 and was buried in London Road Cemetery. Alice kept on the licence for a few years but in November 1936 it was transferred to Charles Reuben Panter. In the *1939 Register* she was shown living at 34 Paradise Lane in Kettering and described as a "Licensee Retired". The following year

she married Frank Holland. He was a single man living with his two sisters and was a boot manufacturer. The marriage may have been one of friendship and comfort but it was not without incident.

On the 2nd March 1943 he was fined £10 for "importuning male persons at York Way in Kings Cross". He had pleaded not guilty and said that "he had trouble with a surgical belt". In July 1946 Alice, who was driving, parked on the Leicester Road near Market Harborough so that Frank could buy an ice cream. An RAF lorry and trailer, part of a convoy, skidded and ran into the side of the stationary car. Alice received slight injuries and Frank's two sisters in the back were unhurt.

Alice died on October 15th 1967 and is remembered on Christopher Baseley's gravestone.

Charles Leonard Bedford (1890-1960)

In the life story of John Harold Allen, we saw how it was the railways that brought him to the Ringstead area. Charles Leonard Bedford was some four years older than John but his early life followed a similar course. He had been born in Cogenhoe (surprisingly, to the outsider, pronounced "Cuckner") on the 29th July 1890 and was baptised there on September 7th. His father, Thomas, was a labourer and we see in the 1891 Census that he was fifteen years older than his wife, Sarah, and besides baby Charles, they had four older siblings.

In the 1901 Census Charles, along with his younger sisters, Hilda and Kathleen, were in the Fever Hospital in Hardingstone near Northampton. They were the only patients, being looked after by the Matron, Susan Mills. and her husband, George, who was the caretaker. Looking at the local newspapers at the time it looks most likely that it was Scarlet Fever that had taken the children there. The next year it was smallpox that caused most concern, but it was a time of many epidemics, with greater world travel and few effective treatments. We see the same concern about the need for separate isolation hospitals, the listing of annual cases and deaths from the various fevers and the concern by an affected community that it would not be avoided by others that we see in 2020 with the Corona Virus Pandemic.

All three children survived and in 1911, Charles was twenty, still at home, and working as a "Courier's Carter". Soon after that Charles joined the *London and North Western Railway Company.* He was employed on the 16th May 1911 and became a porter at Ashley near Market Harborough. On the 17th November 1913 he moved from Ashley and Weston to Ringstead and was now shown as a signalman and porter.

War came, and Charles volunteered for the army. We do not know his first training regiment but, on the 4thOctober 1915, he landed in France as part of the Royal Engineers. He was given Service Number 105822. He seems to have been a reliable Sapper and was promoted to Corporal. The *Long Long Trail* website lists the many ways in which the work of the Royal Engineers underpinned everything else in the army.

The war of 1914-1918 relied on engineering. Without engineers there would have been no supply to the armies, because the RE's maintained the railways, roads, water supply, bridges and transport. RE's also operated the railways and inland waterways. There would have been no communications, because the RE's maintained the telephones, wireless and other signalling equipment. There would have been little cover for the infantry and no positions for the artillery, because the RE's designed and built the front-line fortifications. It fell to the technically skilled RE's to develop responses to chemical and underground warfare. And finally, without the RE's the infantry and artillery would have soon been powerless, as they maintained the guns and other weapons. Little wonder that the Royal Engineers grew into a large and complex organisation.

At some point he was posted to the Waterways and Railways section of the Royal Engineers. Considering his previous career, he was almost certainly in the railway section. There were a number of different types of company within this heading. Some engaged in the construction of standard gauge lines so that goods and men could be taken as close to the Front Line as possible straight from the ports. There were also temporary light, narrow-gauge, railways to take arms and men on from there. Of course, the Front was not completely static, even in the years of comparative stalemate, and the enemy artillery were intent on destroying these lines of communication.

It is possible that Charles Bedford did not join the Railway Companies until the end of the war and was concerned with repair and salvage work. In the 1918 *Absent Voters' List* for Ringstead he was shown in the High Street and his Service number was 105822. This shows that he was posted to the RE's Railways Section late in the war.

After the war it seems that for a short time he returned to Ringstead for he was still in the High Street in the 1920. He had returned to his work for the *London and North Western Railways*. By the following year he had moved back to Cogenhoe. I do not think that he ever married and he continued to live with his family. By 1939 he was working as a Railway Signalman. Living with Charles in 8, The Council Houses in Cogenhoe were his widowed mother, Sarah, and sister, Kathleen, who was a shoe machinist.

Charles died in 1960 in the Brixworth District.

Thomas Charles Garland (1891-1970)

Thomas Garland is one of the men who appears in the Ringstead *Absent Voters' Lists* because his wife had returned home while her husband was away during the war rather than because of his own residency. He was born on the 27th October 1891 in Leighton Buzzard, son of Henry, who became a grocer is Linslade in Buckinghamshire, and his wife Minnie (née Bugg). By the 1911 census, Henry had moved back to Leighton Buzzard. He and Minnie were living at 48 Dudley Street and he was now a "Musical Instrument Merchant".

Minnie is shown to have had four children, three of whom were still living but only Henry James was still at home. He was 23 years old and a student working towards a Wesleyan

Ministry. In the same Census, Thomas was boarding with Henry Littlewood, a labourer in a blast furnace, and his wife Alice, in Asfordby near Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire. He was working as an assistant in a Grocery Shop.

At the same time, some fifty miles due south, in Upton Hall near Northampton, Frances Roberts and her older sister Eleanor were working as maids. These two young women had been born in Ringstead, the daughters of Benjamin and Ellen Roberts. Their younger brother, Alfred, also become a grocer in Grantham in Lincolnshire.

Thomas enlisted on the 7th September 1914 with the East Surrey Regiment at Harringay and was given the Regimental Number 1915. From his Army Medical we see that he was 5ft 7½ inches tall, weighed 132 pounds with a 35½ inch chest. Soon after he enlisted, on the 23rd September 1914 he was diagnosed with Cowpox and spent four days in Dover Military Hospital.

It appears that he first became a drummer. Was he part of the recruitment drive for volunteers to fill the depleted ranks of the British Expeditionary Force? We cannot be sure but, at some point, his and Frances Roberts' paths crossed for they were married in Upton village church on the 23rd February 1915.

He remained with the Dover command until the 18th May 1915 when he was posted to Purfleet and he remained there until the 21st September 1915. These movements seem to indicate that he was in the 10th (Reserve) Battalion. This had been formed in Dover as a Service Battalion. On the 10th April 1915 it became a Reserve Battalion and moved to Purfleet. Then, it appears, Thomas moved with them to Shoreham on the 21st September and remained there until the 20th January 1916.

The Medal Card only shows the units in which a soldier served in a warzone and in Thomas's case this was the 9th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. They had first arrived in France at the end of August in 1915 but he would not have joined them in the field early 1916, possibly after crossing to France on the 20th/21st January. The War Diary does not record any drafts of men arriving but the diaries are quite different in the information that they report. This one does record, for much of the war, the names of all the soldiers who are killed or wounded, not just the officers, as was usually the norm.

In the early months of 1916, the Battalion was in and out of the Front Line in the Zillebeke dugouts and Hooge trenches, a mile or so apart and a similar distance East-South-East of Ypres. We see the reports of whizzbangs, shrapnel and H.E, shells and the continual drip of casualties.

The *Diary* on the 21st February records, whether with glee or sadness, the death of one of the enemy:

> *Our snipers killed a German who was waving his hat.*
> *Enemy shouted several times from his trenches "Tommy" and "Friend".*

There was also the provision of working parties to repair damaged trenches. On the 30th March the Diary records:

> Our artillery retaliated making some excellent practice at enemy front line trenches opposite D.4. Groans were heard by our detached post in that trench. Sniping was fairly brisk during the night.

They had moved to near Wulverghen and were, once more, sometimes in the Front Line trenches and sometimes in Reserve at Dranoutre. This continued through May with a relentless daily exchange of fire and men being killed and wounded. By the beginning of June the Battalion was in Brigade Reserve but also sending out men for working parties, a job that was not without risk. It was on the 3rd June that Thomas Garland was wounded and it seems likely that he was part of one of these working parties.

He had received a gunshot wound in his left side. He would have been first examined in the Aid Post or Field Ambulance (a unit not a vehicle) and then sent through the casualty evacuation chain to the coastal hospitals and back to England. He finally arrived at the 2nd Western General Hospital in Manchester on the 19th June 1916. The bullet was extracted but the operation wound became septic and he had to undergo another small operation to clean the wound area. In all he was in the hospital for forty days.

Following his operation, he probably had some home leave for his first child, Edward Charles was born to Frances on the 11th April 1917. It is not clear when he returned to France but we do know that on the 2nd May he was admitted to the Beaufort Hospital in Bristol with "enlarged tonsils". When the Bristol Hospitals could not cope with the influx of war casualties the Bristol Lunatic Asylum had been converted into a Military Hospital. Some of the male patients stayed and worked in the gardens. In 1915, the artist Stanley Spencer spent a year there as an orderly, and incorporated scenes from the hospital in the panels of the Sandham Memorial Chapel in Hampshire. Thomas's tonsils were extracted and he was declared "cured". He was a patient for 35 days, leaving on the 5th June 1917.

On the 12th August 1917 he was again in France, at the 39th Infantry Base Depot, which, like many of them, was at Étaples. From there he was posted to the 8th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. They were in camp at Dicklebusch as part of the Divisional Reserve and the Battalion was, as usual, having spells in the Front Line and in Reserve. They were in the Front Line near Zillebeke, an area that would have been familiar to Thomas and his unit. The routine continued after the move to Beaulincourt and Vendelles.

On the 8th October 1917, he was sent to the "55th Trench Mortar Battery School" in the field. As the 55th Trench Mortar Battery was in the same Brigade as the 8th East Surreys, he would have still retained his Regiment and number. The 3-inch Stokes Mortar and its larger brothers were simple but potent weapons designed to match the German "minenwerfer". In the hands of a well-drilled crew, it could deliver mortar bombs at a very fast rate, taking out a machine gun or sniper post, or deliver a coordinated barrage. It appears that soon after his training he returned to England on leave on the 19th December 1917.

It may be that he served with the 13th Battalion as this is shown on his records but it was probably brief because he was with the 8th Battalion when, on the 11th April 1918, he was first reported as missing. On the 6th May he was "presumed dead" and his wife Frances, living in Carlow Street, was recorded as his widow.

A List of Prisoners-of-War was received from the International Committee of the Red Cross and Thomas was on the list. It shows that he had been captured at Fort Vendeuil, south of St Quentin in France, on the 22nd March 1918. This was in the chaos of the Allied retreat in the face of the Michael Offensive, Germany's last big throw of the dice before the Americans came into the war in force. The Germans largely destroyed the fort when they had to abandon it as they withdrew before the later, decisive, Allied counter-attack.

We cannot be sure when Frances received the news that her husband was alive but the page from the Red Cross form was stamped (in France) 22nd August 1918. POWs were not supposed to be used for work directly connected to the enemy's war effort but this was not always adhered to, and Thomas was one of the men who were used for labouring work behind the lines.

In the last months of the war, the Germans were almost on starvation rations as the Allies' net tightened, and their POWs suffered badly. On the Imperial War Museum website are transcribed conversations with WW1 soldiers, including the POWs. Private H Turner, a POW, who laboured for the Germans near the Front Line recorded:

> *We worked from early morning 'til dusk and were then marched back to the compound and given our daily ration of bread. A small loaf, but this was for three men. The bread we thought was made from potato meal and probably a little flour added. We prisoners used to say it was 90% sawdust. Daily, we became weaker and weaker. By this time, we were seeking other sources of food supplies than that issued to us by the Germans and which appeared to be getting less and less. We found in the early morning a snail-like creature, stuck to the bark on the willow trees. We gathered these, and also some nettle leaves. On getting back to the camp at night, we would boil the snails and chop them up with boiled nettle leaves, making a sort of paste to spread on our bread. I can't say that the snails had any particular taste, but they did at least supplement our scanty rations in some small way.*

When Thomas was finally liberated, he recorded similar treatment, which had been the cause of his dysentery.

> *Semi starvation. Bad food and treatment while working behind the German lines.*

He had had some treatment in a German hospital. His military records show that he had been nineteen months in the line and nine months a prisoner-of-war. We see that it was not for some time after the Armistice that he was liberated. On the 23rd December 1918 he arrived back in Dover and was posted to the Regimental Depot. The records are not clear but he would have been treated for the dysentery that he had contracted as a result of his bad treatment and also had some convalescence time.

He was finally discharged on the 28th March 1919. On the 3rd August 1919 he was assessed, at the 5th Northern General Hospital in Leicester, for an army disability pension and he was stated to still have:

. . . post dysenteric diarrhoea at intervals of about three weeks.

He had "some debility and anaemia" and was assessed for a 20% disability pension. He was also entitled to the British War and Victory Medals.

He returned home but, either immediately or soon after his return, "home" was Asfordby not Ringstead. His children Kenneth (1919) and Doreen (1922) were born there. They were first living at 3 Church Lane but by 1930 had moved to Ivy Villas in Main Street. Thomas became the Sub Postmaster for the village. Their eldest son, Edward attended Melton Grammar School and in 1935 was admitted to St Mark's, a religious college, in Chelsea. By 1939 he had gained an B.Sc., having studied at University College and the London School of Economics. His cousin Margaret Hilda Roberts, daughter of another shopkeeper, graduated in Chemistry in 1947.

In the 1939 *Register of England and Wales*, Edward was a student and telephonist, Kenneth was a clerk and telephonist and Doreen was a shorthand typist. Thomas was still a Sub Postmaster and one suspects that his wife, Frances, also helped in the business, as well as carrying out her "Unpaid Domestic Duties".

Frances died in 1964 and Thomas followed on the 11th March 1970. At the time of his death he was living at 87 Thorpe Street in Melton Mowbray.

George Thomas Green (? - ?)

George Thomas Green is in this account of the men of Ringstead who served in WW1 but I am not certain that he ever lived in the village. He was an "Absent Voter", with his army unit and number given in the 1918 and 1919 Lists. I think that he may be included because his wife, who came from the village, and their child were living there while he was serving.

On the 23rd June 1917 in the Wellingborough Register Office, he married Jail (Jael) May Bull, the daughter of William Samuel (deceased) and Emma Bull. Jael was an unusual name but came from the Old Testament and refers to a woman who killed an enemy of the Israelites by inviting him into her tent and, when asleep, she drove a tent peg through his skull with a mallet. I wonder if her mother Emma (nee Titman) chose the name. She was William Bull's second wife after the death of his first wife, Susannah. The first marriage appears to have been childless but Emma had six children, five of whom survived infancy. It was not a happy marriage, however, and in 1896 William was accused of assaulting his wife. He had kicked her and she alleged:

I have been married eight years and he has ill-treated me on and off all the time.

William in his defence replied that:

. . . he had led a married life for thirty-five 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.

Did Emma choose Jael as a name, and did William sleep easy at night? William, who had taken over his father, Isaac's, tinplate business, also worked as a pub landlord and had an off licence and grocery shop, at the bottom of Chapel Road, which Emma probably ran. When William died in 1913 the licence had been transferred to Emma and, when she died in 1917, her daughter, Annie, took over the business.

In 1911 May who, unsurprisingly, seems to have used her second name was fourteen years old and still living at home but working as a domestic servant.

If we return to George Thomas Green, we know that he joined the Bedfordshire Regiment with Regimental Number 21470. Few of his records remain but he would first have been sent to a Bedfordshire training battalion before being posted abroad, This was to the 1/5th Battalion and we know this partly because men with similar numbers died while with the unit but also because he contracted malaria and the 1/5th were the only Bedfordshire Battalion who fought in a region where malaria was endemic.

The 5th (Territorial) Battalion had left Devonport on 26 July 1915, bound for 'somewhere out East' and, after a brief stop-over in Egypt, disembarked at Gallipoli, serving there between 10 August and 4 December. The online history of the Battalion tells that:

During their assault against the Kiretch Tepe Sirt on 15 August 1915, an observing Staff Officer observed their progress through his binoculars and saw the battalion's metal flashes glinting yellow in the sun as they doggedly advanced. He remarked "By Jove! If only we had one or two more battalions of those yellow devils we should be across the peninsular by tomorrow". With that, the battalion's nickname - the 'Yellow Devils' - was born. A pitifully small number of them remained by December 1915 and they were moved back to Egypt to be rebuilt between January and March 1916.

It may have been that during this "rebuilding" in Egypt that George joined the Battalion. The *War Diary* for the 12th February 1916 records:

Draft of 1 Officer Capt Miskin & 420 O.R.s arrived from ENGLAND. Men not very fit, suffering from old wounds etc. Mostly 1st & 2nd Battn Bedford Regmnt. Men.

For the next year the Battalion regrouped and guarded the Suez Canal. In March 1917 they, as part of the British and Commonwealth forces, were involved in the advance through Gaza and into Palestine. By the end of the war they were stationed in Beirut. This was not a soft posting. As we have seen in the biography of William Warren Weekley, intense heat, sandstorms, disease and lack of good drinking water made it an unpleasant and dangerous experience for most of the soldiers, even without the occasional bouts of fighting. Many more men were lost to disease, to which the men had little immunity, than enemy fire.

It was in October to December 1918, when the Battalion was in Palestine, that many soldiers were struck down with Pneumonia, but more often with Malaria, and it may be that

it was then that George contacted the disease. We cannot be sure when this occurred and it is possible that it was in 1917 and he returned to England for treatment and it was after this that George had home leave during which he married in June 1917. Certainly, his address when he married was Oxford Street in Wellingborough, but he was a Private in the Bedfordshire Regiment.

Among the uncertainty we do know that, on recovery, he was posted to the 804 Area Employment Company (AEC), a unit of the Labour Corps based in Cairo and given Service Number 622668. The AECs were formed to do salvage work and any general duties assigned to them.

George was not discharged until the 24th April 1920. He was assessed as having disablement because of his Malaria and received a pension of 16 shilling with an additional seven shillings for his wife and possibly one shilling for a child (although this is not clear).

There is, somewhere, at least one twist in this story that I have been unable to find. At the marriage of George and Jail on the 23rd June 1917 there were two witnesses, William and Samuel Barratt. On the 7th August 1917, at the Thrapston Divisional Sessions, shoe operative William Barratt, was accused of stealing on July 23rd, money, gold rings and a purse from May Green. He was lodging with May and her sister Miss Bull in Ringstead. He was caught trying to pawn one of the rings in Northampton and had already pawned another. May is referred to as Miss Green. Was this the same William Barratt and should May have been referred to as Mrs Green? What happened to Thomas and Jail May Green after the war?

We must leave his story there because I have been unable to positively locate George's background before the war, although there are a number of possibilities, or for the couple after the war. A later member of the family believes that she visited her aunt, May Green, and her husband had the Christian name Donald. There are again a few possible explanations and it may be that others will unravel the puzzle.

It is with this unsatisfactory final biography that we must finish our stories of the men of Ringstead in the Great War.

REFERENCES

General

There are a number of sources which have been used in many of the biographies. These are set out below.

Ringstead Roll of Honour. *Published Thrapston June 1919. Copy of original from Jon Abbott.*
Ringstead Absent Voters' *Lists. Northamptonshire Record Office.*

Websites

www.ancestry.co.uk *(and sometimes ancestry.com). Censuses (1841-1911); Parish Registers (Baptisms, Marriages and Burials); England & Wales Civil Registration of Births, Marriages and*

Deaths; England & Wales National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administration) 1858-1995; UK, Burial and Cremation Index 1576-2014; Register of Cremations Kettering Corporation; UK, Railway Employment Records 1833-1956; 1939 Register of England & Wales; WW1 British Army Medal Index Cards; British Army WW1 Pension Records 1914-1920; WW1 Pension Ledgers and Index Cards (Fold3); British Army WW1 Soldiers' Records; UK, Royal Navy Registers of Seamen's Services; Dependant's UK, WW1 Pension Ledgers and Index Cards 1914-23 (Fold 3);UK, Army Register of Soldiers' Effects 1901-1929; UK Commonwealth War Graves 1914-21; UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-19; UK, Royal Hospital Chelsea Pensioner Admissions and Discharges 1715-1925 and Soldier Service Records 1760-1920; (original via Fold3); Ireland Casualties of WW1 1914-22
New York Passenger Lists. Border Crossings from Mexico to U.S. 1895-1964; USA Death Certificates (www.fold3.com); UK and Ireland Incoming Passenger List 1878-1960; New York Passenger and Crew List 1820-1957; US Border Crossings from Canada to U.S. 1895-1960; Canada WW1 CEF Personnel Files 1914-18; Federal Censuses for Buffalo 1910, 1920 & 1930; New York State Census 1905,1925; NY Abstract of WW1 Military Service 1917-19; US WW1 Draft Registration Cards; 1917-18 US Passport Applications 1795-1925; New York Marriage License Indexes 1907-2018; U.S. Social Security Death Index 1935-2014.

www.bbc.co.uk.

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

www.findmypast.co.uk. *Silver War Badge Roll 1914-1920; British Armed Forces First World War Soldiers' Medical Records; British Trade Union Membership Registers; Northamptonshire Military Tribunals 1916-1918; Electoral Registers 1920-1932: Britain: Soldiers Died in The Great War 1914-1919; Trade Union Membership Registers; Soldiers Died in The Great War 1914-1919; British Campaign, Gallantry & Long Service Medals & Awards: British Armed Forces, First World War Soldiers' Medical Records; England & Wales Electoral Registers 1920-1932. Passenger Lists Leaving UK 1890-1960; War Memorials Register; British Royal Air Force Officers' Service Records 1912-1920; Passenger Lists Leaving UK 1890-1960; Gro Consular Marriages (1849-1965); Gro Consular Birth Indices (1849-1965).*

www.forces-war-records.co.uk.

www.greatwarforum.co.uk.

www.longlongtrail.co.uk.

www.raundswarmemorials.org.

www.ringsteadheritage.co.uk.

www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.

www.wartimememories.co.uk.

www.wikipedia.com.

Books

1918 A Very British Victory*. Peter Hart. Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2008.*

A Western Front Companion 1914-18. *John Laffin. Sutton Publishing 1994.*

History of the King's Regiment (Liverpool) 1914-1919 *Volume III; Everard Wyrall. Andrews 2012.*

History of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment*. Colonel H.C. Wylly. Gale & Polden 1925; Endeavour Media Ltd 2018.*

Life Went On. Volume 2 1917-1918*. Steve Bence & Andrew Dace. Raunds War Memorials Research Group Pubs.*

Machine Gunner 1914-1918*. Personal Experiences of the Machine Gun Corps. C.E. Crutchley. Pen and Sword 2013. First published by author for MGC Old Comrades Association.*

Mud, Blood and Bullets*. Edward Rowbotham. Ed. Janet Tucker. Spellmount 2014.*

Old Northamptonshire in Photographs. *R. L. Greenall. Northamptonshire Libraries 1976.*

Raunds: Picturing the Past*. David Hall, Ruth Harding, Cyril Putt. F.W. March & Co. 1988*

***Ringstead People 1 and 2**. David Ball. Self-Published.*
***Ringstead Baptist Church; A Brief History**. Evelyn M. Bull. Updated Agnes Burton. Ringstead Baptist Church 2014.*
***The Art of Boot and Shoemaking, A Practical Handbook.** John Bedford Leno. Crosby, Lockwood & Co. 1885. Kessinger Publishing's Legacy Reprints.*
***The British Army in Italy 1917-18.** John & Eileen Wilks. Pen & Sword 2013.*
***The British Army in the Western Front 1916**. Bruce Gudmundsson. Bloomsbury Publishing 2013.*
***The Great War: A Combat History**. Peter Hart (O.U.P. 2013).*
***The History of the 15th The King's Hussars 1914-1922**. Lord Carnock. Reprint: The Naval and Military Press.*
***The Mobbs Own 1914-18**. David Woodall. Northamptonshire Regiment Association 1994; 2000.*
***The Northamptonshire Regiment 1914-1918**. Regimental History Committee. Naval and Military Press Ltd. Reprint 2005.*
***The Third Afghan War 1919:** Official Account. Compiled in the General Staff Branch, Army Headquarters, India. (Government of India 1926). Reprinted Naval-Military Press.*
***Under the Devil's Eye**. The British Military Experience in Macedonia 1915-1918. Simon Moody & Alan Wakefield. Pen & Sword Reprint 2017*
***Yeomen of England.** Tales of the Northamptonshire Yeomanry from 1794 Ken Tout. The History Press 2012.*

Book 1: A-M: Extra Chapter References

Chapter 1 The Abbott Family

***George Abbott**. My thanks to Jon Abbott for information on some aspects of the Abbott family tree and for his tireless research which has helped to show the people behind the records.*
Edward and George Abbott. www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
9th (Service) Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment 39th Brigade, 13th Division from The Story of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment by C.L. Kingsford Chapter XXV. Posted by "brindlerp" on 19th November 2006 on www.greatwarforum.org.
***Ted Abbott (1890-1963).** My thanks to Jon Abbott, Ted's grandson and Alan Clipston George's son-in-law for many of the photographs and family information. Also, Steve (Stebie9173) on the Great War Forum website, for his help with interpreting Ted's army records.*
The Charles Laughton Pages www.huntscycles.co.uk.
7th(S) Battalion Northamptonshire regiment 1914-18 by H.B. King M.C. Late Captain 7th Northamptonshire Regiment (Aldershot 1919). www.lib.militaryarchive.co.uk/library.
Infantry Depots in France 1914-18 www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
Sheffield Independent Nov/Dec 1930. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

William Henry Abbott (1889-1978)

7th(S) Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment 1914-18 by H.B. King M.C. Late Captain 7th Northamptonshire Regiment (Aldershot 1919). www.lib.militaryarchive.co.uk/library.
hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk.
Northampton Mercury and Chronicle & Echo (various dates)
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

Chapter 2 John Francis Agutter (1895-1975)

My thanks to Karen J. Dennis and members of the Committee of the Essex Branch of the Western Front Association for permission to use, Men of Essex Volume 11 written by their late chairman, Bill Fulton, as a source for the story of the 11th Battalion's time in France.
11th Battalion Essex Regiment. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
11th Battalion Essex Regiment. www.wartimememoriesproject.com.
11th Battalion Old Comrades Association 1920 www.essexregiment.co.uk.
Chapter 22 The Railway Children. Ringstead People. David Ball. 2011.
Coventry Evening Telegraph 20th May 1937; 2nd October 1975.
www.britishnewspaaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 3 The Archer Family

Fred Archer (1884-1941)
Northampton Mercury 29th March 1913; Northampton Chronicle & Echo 18th September 1916 & 21st September 1918. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Royal Garrison Artillery www.wikipedia.com.
Medical Records Catterick Camp. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
John Herbert Archer (1896-1917)
The Argus 2nd March 1917 transcribed by Kay Collins. www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
Northampton Mercury 30th March 1917. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
The Royal Fusiliers in the Great War. H.C. O'Neill. https//archive.org.
Royal Fusiliers (City of London) Regiment. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
Joseph Archer (1880 - 1966) and George Horace Archer (1881-1962)
Northampton Mercury 23rd May 1913; 18th July 1913. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 4 Henry William Attley (1896-1977)

My thanks to Henry's grandson, Mark Attley and Henry's son, David Attley for their help with this brief biography and for all but the last photograph.
Regular Army Emergency Commissions 1940,1942, 1943, 1944, 1945. www.Fold3.com.
The London Gazette 30th Sept 1921. www.thegazette.co.uk.
Chronicle & Echo 8th Feb 1975. Northampton Central Library.
Norfolk Yeomanry (The Kings Own Royal Regiment); 3rd (Reserve) Battalion Norfolk Regiment. 31st Division, 94th Brigade. www.thelonglongtrail.co.uk.
12th (Norfolk Yeomanry Battalion, Norfolk Regiment www.wartimememoriesproject.com.
12th (Norfolk Yeomanry) Battalion Territorial Force. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
Iraqi Revolt against the British; 89th Punjabis. www.wikipedia.com.
Re Protests Against Delayed Demobilisation. 1918-9 www.kenthistoryforum.co.uk.
Post on 5th July 2013 from "grendav2001" on www.ancestry.co.uk message boards.

Chapter 5 The Baker Family including Frank Robinson

My thanks to Kay Collins and the Rushden & District History Society for the photographs and other help. My thanks also to Val Baker for providing me with some of the reminiscences of her father-in-law, Derek Baker.
Postcard from Frank Horace Robinson and "Patriotic Rushden Family" newspaper cutting. www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers War Diary for 1st April. My thanks to Graeme Clarke for this.

My thanks to Steve (Stebie9173) for providing detailed information on the probable course of Walter's early army career by comparing it with others. www.greatwarforum.co.uk.
History of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps. Army Medical Service. www.army-museum.org.
Trench Fever. Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine. November 2006. www.ncbi.nih.gov.
History of Red Cross Nurses and Hospitals. www.redcross.org.uk.
Account of Corporal Golding of 8th Battalion Leicester Regiment of Langensalza told in piece on Private Berty Tucker. www.worcestershireregiment.com.
7th Battalion of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regimental War Diary www.queensroyalsurreys,org,uk.
UK Silver War Badge Records 1914 – 1920. http://interactive.ancestry.co.uk.
Letter giving some details on Frank Robinson's prisoner-of-war dates. Surrey History Centre.
Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. OUP 2004.

Chapter 6 The Ball Family

Royal Artillery depots, training and home defence units: The Final Advance in Flanders www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
Old Northamptonshire in Photographs. R. L. Greenall. (Northamptonshire Libraries 1976).
Royal Artillery depots, training and home defence units: The Final Advance in Flanders www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
Rance Re-viewed Magazine. (especially articles by Paul Roberts).

England & Wales Crime, Prisons & Punishment 1770 -1935: Habitual Criminals Register 1914; A Calendar of Prisoners Tried at the General Quarter sessions July 1914: Naval Casualties 1914-1919; Northampton Mercury 12th April 1912. www.findmypast.co.uk.
The Rushden Echo Friday 4th January 1918; Absent Voters Lists 1918 & 1919; 1925 Electoral Roll. www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
Admiralty: Royal Navy Registers of Seamen's Services (ADM188/1121) National Archives
UK, Royal Navy and Royal Marine War Graves Roll 1914 -1919. www.ancestry.co.uk.
Roll of Honour- Northamptonshire – Rushden. www.roll-of-honour.com.
HMS Torrent (www.wrecksite.eu).

Chapter 7 Sons of Henry and Rhoda Bannister

Northampton Mercury 2nd December 1882;19th March 1897; 22nd July 1904: Chronicle and Echo 29th November 1882. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Wellingborough News 2nd December 1882. Transcribed by Kay Collins; Ringstead Roll of Honour (1919) www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
1st Battalion Rifle Brigade during the Great War. www.wartimememoriesproject.com.
Thomas Warren (in Warren Family) www.www.ringsteadpeople.com.

Chapter 8 Arthur Frank Barnard and Ronald Barnard

Arthur Frank Barnard (1889-1949)
6th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment Wartime Diaries WW1. National Archives WO95/2044/2.
Battle of Ancre Heights; Armenian Genocide. www.wikipedia.com.
Northamptonshire Regiment in the Great War. www.northantstelegraph.co.uk.
Egyptian Expeditionary Force by James E Kitchen. https://encyclopedia1914-1918-online.net.

Ronald Barnard (1896-1917)

Battles 1/4th Battalion Suffolk Regiment in 1916/1917; Military Hospitals Admissions and Discharge Registers WW1. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.

The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918 Suffolk Regiment www.longlongtrail.co.uk.

Northampton Mercury Friday 23rd November 1917. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 9 Sons of John and Edith Bates

James (Jim) Bates (1895-1952)

The piece from the 7th Battalion History by H.B. King was quoted by "Stebie9173" on www.greatwarforum.org *on 4th May 2010.*

Northampton Mercury 17th November 1908; 12th April 1918; 14th August 1936. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Trench Fever: the British Medical Response in the Great War. R.L. Alenstaedt. Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine. November 2006. www.ncbi.nlm.n.h.gov.

Obituary of Muriel Rose Bates Foose. Quincy Herald-Whig, www.legacy.com.

William Baden Powell Bates (1900-1969)

The Original British Army of the Rhine Richard A. Rinaldi 2006 www.orbat.info.

7th Battalion Middlesex regiment www.wartimememoriesproject.co.uk.

Record Details for WBR Bates www.forces-war-records.co.uk.

Northampton Mercury 23rd June 1933;19th March 1937. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 10 Stuart Dimbleby Bates (1891-1971)

Northampton Mercury: 13th December 1929; 16th September 1932; 3rd February 1833; 24th August 1951. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

History of the Royal Army Medical Corps WW1; https://museumofmilitarymedicine.org.uk.

Medal Roll Theatre Codes. www.thelonglongtrail.co.uk.

Army Horse Care in the First World War. National Army Museum. www.nam.ac.uk.

Salonika Campaign Society, 1915-1918 The Campaign.

Salonika Expedition Overview. www.cjmorton.org.

https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk . (On malaria in Salonika).

Janet Farr Obituary www.funeralzone.co.uk.

Chapter 11 Sons of Arthur and Louisa Baxter

Soldier Obituaries from Rushden Argus. www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.

Commonwealth Graves Commission www.cwgc.co.ok.

Operation Michael. www.wikipedia.com.

Chapter 12 Cecil Bellamy (1888-1968)

War Diary of the Second Battalion of Norfolk Regiment. National Archives

Mesopotamian Campaign; Battle of Sheik Sa'ad. www.wikipedia.com.

Norfolk Regiment. www.thelonglongtrail.co.uk.

Norfolk Regimental History: Mesopotamia. Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum.

Leonard Ball – the Soldier. www.jb2011.co.uk.

National Army Museum website. www.nam.ac.uk/explore/mesopotamia-campaign.

Chapter13 William Thomas Billing (1879-1918)

UK Royal Hospital Chelsea Pensioner Soldier Service Records 1760 – 1920. Fold 3 via www.ancestry.co.uk.
Record Details for William Thomas Billing. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
Northampton Mercury 20th May 1915; 16th August 1918; Northampton Chronicle & Echo 7th July 1915; 6th August 1915; www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Kettering Roll of Honour. http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Northamptonshire/Kettering.html
The Royal Military Police Great Britain; www.home.mweb.co.za.
Royal Military Museum website. www.rhqrmp.org.

Chapter 14 Herbert John William Braybrook & Sydney Edward Braybrook

Herbert John William Braybrook (1892-1917)

First World War Daily Reports (Missing, Wounded and POW): Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914 – 1919. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
War Memorials Project: Leicestershire. www.leicestershirewarmemorials.co.uk.
Northampton Mercury 6th July 1917; Leicester Journal 25th August 1916 & 20th July 1917. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Leicestershire Regiment. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
War Diary 4th Battalion Leicester Regiment. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
Letter from John Braybrook to George Capron. My thanks to the Capron Estate.

Sydney Edward Braybrook (1897-1976)

The Battle of Arras: An Eyewitness Account posted on April 7, 2017 at 10:43 am. by Michael Page, Surrey Heritage. www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk.
Facebook Post on L/Corporal Sayer by the late David Baker in The Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment 8th Battalion 1914 to 1918. February 12th 2017. www.facebook.com.
National Index of all service personnel serving in a theatre of war 1914-1919; Military Hospitals Admissions and Discharge Registers WW1; Discharge Document SWB/3047. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment www.longlongtrail,co,uk.
8th Battalion West Surrey Regiment (Queens) during the Great War. www.wartimememoriesproject.com.
1st World War Diaries: The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment. www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk.

Chapter 15 The Bull Family

Joseph Ashley Bull (1893-1982)

Piece on Ash Bull by Jon Abbott on www.ringsteadheritage.com. My thanks to Jon for allowing me to use some of his story.
Northampton Mercury 1st September 1877; 23rd December 1892; 28th March 1913; 10th November 1916. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
RAF Formations List. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
The Royal Flying Corps. www.wikipedia.org.
https://britainfromabove.org.uk.
www.netweather.tv.

William Isaac Bull (1889-1962)

Territorial Force; 1914 Star. www.wikipedia.com.

John Alfred Bull (1892-1977)

Various articles. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.

Chapter 16 John Wilfred Reginald Cave (1898-1916)

Northampton Mercury 2nd August 1912; 22nd September 1916. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Rushden Argus Newspaper. www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
Burton Latimer Heritage Society. www.burtonlatimer.info.
Pozieres British Cemetery: Burial Returns; Graves Registration Report Form. www.cwgc.org.
44th Company, Machine Gun Corps. www.wartimememoriesproject.com.

Chapter 17 Cyril Cottingham (1898-1981)

My thanks to Justine Pearson of the Surrey History Centre for her help with this biography.
The War Diaries of the 1st Battalion of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment. The National Archives Ref. WO 95/2430/1-7.
Independent Wesleyan Church Marriages 1924-1930. www.rushdenheritage.com.

Chapter 18 The Dainty Family

Walter Dainty (1889-1965)
Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer 8th May 1911; Sheffield Daily Telegraph 10th May 1911; Northampton Mercury 1st January 1915; Northampton Chronicle & Echo 16th September 1916; Weekly Casualty List – War Office & Air Ministry 3rd December 1918.
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Battles of the Western Front 1914-1918; Field Punishment. www.wikipedia.com.
www.tunnellersmemorial.com.
Northumberland War Hospital. https://heatonhistorygroup.org.
War Diary of the 2nd Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
Shell Shock during World War One. Professor Joanna Bourke. 10th March 2011 (Archived).
www.bbc.co.uk.

Chapter 19 William Davis (1897-?)

www.westernfrontassociation.co.uk.
Royal Army Ordnance Corps. www.wikipedia.org.
Royal Army Ordnance Corps. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
www.rlcarchive.org/ContentRAOC.

Chapter20 The Dicks Family

Albert Dicks (1885 - ?)
Material including: Extract from Organization, Strategy and Tactics of The Army Medical Services in War. Lt/Col T.B. Nichols R.A.M.C. [quoted in The Chain of Evacuation of The Royal Army Medical Corps]. www.ramc-ww1.com.
The Wartime Memories Project – The Great War Hospitals. www.wartimememories.co.uk.
www.firsteasterngeneralhospital.co.uk.
Fred Dicks (1894-1977).
Egyptian Expeditionary Force. James E, Kitchen. International Encyclopaedia of the Great War.
https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/.
The Mountain Batteries of the Royal Garrison Artillery www.longlongtrail.com.

Royal Garrison Artillery. www.wikipedia.com.
Archibald William Dicks (1889-1917). *I am indebted to Brenda Hazel for alerting me to Archibald Dicks and for providing her own research as well as an e-mail from Jean Rowland, Secretary of the Irthlingborough Historical Society, with their research. Also for copies of Archibald's Death Certificate and William Reginald's Birth Certificate.*
www.roll-of-honour/Northamptonshire/Irthlingborough.html.
Soldiers who Died in the First World War; Prisoner of War Lists. www.thegenealogist.co.uk.
Jeremy Banning on his website www.jeremybanning.co.uk has a detailed account of the battle and the 1st Battalion of the Essex Regiment's part in it.
Northampton Mercury 6th June1917; 31st August 1917. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Essex Regiment 1st Battalion. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
Essex Regiment 1st Battalion. www.wartimememoriesproject.com.
Essex Regiment 1st Battalion. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
Battles of the Western Front. www.wikipedia.org.
There is also a simple but clear animation of the battle from the Canadian viewpoint.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=wH9MO7ifSKw.

Chapter 21 The Dickens Family

My thanks to Jon Abbott for the photograph of Arthur Dickens and to Caroline Dickens for the photographs and information from her father.
www.waltersilaswhite.wordpress.com.
Northampton Mercury 19th October 1928. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 22 Hubert Archibald Edwards (1889 – 1931)

Étaples Mutiny https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89taples_mutiny.
Seven Facts about the Battle of PIlckhem Ridge. www.cwgc.org

Chapter 23 The Farr Family

Christopher John Farr (1886-1968) *My thanks to Craig (ss002d6252) on the Great War Forum.*
www.greatwarforum.co.uk.
Mercury & Herald 31st May 1939. With thanks to Jon Abbott.
Marriage Certificate of John Farr & Mary Ann Dicks. With thanks to Breda Hazell.
David Farr (1894-1968)
Soldiers' Record Details (Casualty Clearing Forms etc); Suffolk Regiment; Cambridgeshire Regiment.
www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
My thanks to Craig (ss0026252) for advice on David Farr's numbering. www.greatwarforum.org.
Locations of British Casualty Clearing Stations. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
Discovering Anzacs. https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au.
Battles of the Western Front. www.wikipedia.com.
Northampton Mercury 16th May 1919. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk .
Percy Thomas Farr (1898-1969)
The Army Service Corps in the First World War; The Army Service Corps Remounts Service.
www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
On Romsey Remounts Centre. https://comestepbackintime.wordpress.com.
A Short History of the 6th Division. Major-Gen. T.D. Marden. London 1920 (Hugh Rees).
https://archive.org.

9th Battalion Suffolk Regiment. www.wartimesmemoryproject.com.
9th Battalion Suffolk Regiment 1917. Topic 2011. www.greatwarforum.com.

Chapter 24 George Robert Feary (1884-1969)

14th Field Ambulance Admission. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
History of the Norfolk Regiment Volume II 4th August 1914 to 31st December 1818 by Francis Lorraine Petre. 1924.
Battle of Caporetto. https://en.wikipedia.org.

Chapter 25 Albert Ambrose Fensome (1883-1969)

My thanks to Steve (Stebie173) on the Great War Forum whose detailed research gave the approximate dates of Albert's service. www.greatwarforum.org.
Unit Histories – Bedfordshire, Gloucestershire and Northamptonshire Regiments. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
The Bedfordshire Regiment in the Great War. www.bedfordregiment.org.uk.
Islip Furnaces, http://www.islip-parish.co.uk/links/history/.

Chapter 26 Arthur James Fox (1900-1970)

1918 &1919 Absent Voters' Lists. Northamptonshire Record Office.
Northampton Mercury 19th April and 3rd May 1907. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Royal Sussex Regiment. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
Evening Telegraph 19th July 1939. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 27 The Hackney Family

My thanks to Samuel's grandson, Reg Hackney for the family photographs and for talking to me on 23rd May 2019. Also, to Jon Abbott for arranging the meeting.
Chronicle & Echo 25th April 1917; Weekly Casualty List Tuesday 20th November 1917; Chronicle & Echo 19th March 1925; Northampton Mercury 26th March 1926, www.Britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Woodford War Memorial. www.roll-of-honour.com .
30th Machine Gun Corps War Diary 1918-19. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
www.forces-war-records.co.uk/units/4982/machine-gun-corps.
Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Fusiliers.
The Royal Fusiliers in the Great War. H.C. O'Neill. Naval and Military Press; New ed of 1922 edition (13 Feb. 2009).
The Royal Fusiliers WW1 War Diary https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
8th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. www.wartimememoriesproject.co.uk.

Chapter 28 James Hathaway (1863-1940)

Vickers Limited. www.wikipedia.com.
Hornsey Baths and Laundry. https://hornseyroadbathsandlaundry.wordpress.com/victorian-times/why-build-baths-and-washhouses/.

Chapter 29 Arthur Haxley (1892-1974)

My thanks to Ken (kenf48) on the Great War Forum.
Rushden Echo 6th February 1939. www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
Battle of the Lys (1918); St Crispin's Hospital. www.wikipedia.com.
www.spink.com.

Chapter 30 Sidney William Hunt (1893-1962)

Abington Park Museum, Northampton, has displays on Northamptonshire Yeomanry and Northamptonshire Regiment and is well worth a visit.
My thanks to Chris (clk) and Steve (Stebie9173) on The Great War Forum
Renumbering of the Territorial Force Yeomanry in 1917; Northamptonshire Yeomanry; *www.longlongtrail.co.uk*.
Northamptonshire *Yeomanry; VI Corps (United Kingdom); British Yeomanry during the First World War; Squadron (army). www.wikipedia.org.*
Tommy at War: The Cavalry Charge at Monchy le Preux, quotes the Northampton Independent piece I have used (in an article by Stephen and Susan Cocks) https://gbt01,wordpress.com.

Chapter 31 William Henry Jackson (1891-1919)

Northampton Mercury 22nd September 1916; Northampton Mercury 3rd May 1918.
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
5th Battalion Inniskilling Fusiliers. www.wartimememoriesproject.com.
Rushden War Memorial. www.roll-of-honour.com.
Irthlingborough Roll of Honour. www.roll-of-honour.com/Northamptonshire/Irthlingborough.html
In Memoriam. http://www.martinsworld.f9.co.uk/Erdiburn/War.htm.
1918, Spring 1919, Autumn 1919 Absent Voters' Lists. Northamptonshire Record Office.
Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers www.wikipedia.org.
Henry Lamb MC 1883-1960. www.inniskillingmuseum.com/newsletter-feed/page/2/.

Chapter 32 The Major Family

Charles Major (1896-1982) *The Great War Forum has been an important source for many of the biographies but, for this one, the research done and shared by members has been invaluable. I have tried to credit them in the text.*
First World War – On this day… 22nd October 1918. www.lynsted-society.co.uk.
Buffs (East Kent Regiment). www.longlongtrail.co.uk.

Charles Arthur Major (1897-1917)

6th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment War Diary (At time of writing was wrongly filed under 12th Middlesex). www.ancestry.co.uk.
www.greatwarforum.co.uk. Including help from Acknown and old posts on the 6th Northamptonshires by Stebie9173.
www.leicestershirewarmemorials.co.uk.
Infantry Base Depots in France 1914-18 www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
Northamptonshire Mercury 8th June 1917. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
James Henry Major (1884-1951)
Northampton Mercury 1st December 1916; www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Buffs (The East Kent Regiment); The Army Service Corps Remounts Service. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.

Chapter 33 Ernest Robert Manley (1896-1946)

Soldiers' Records; Norfolk Regiment during WW1. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
1st Battalion Norfolk Regiment; 15th Field Ambulance RAMC. www.wartimememories.co.uk.
15th Essex A Brief History. www.essexregiment.co.uk.
Trench Fever and Lice in WW1. Judi Brown. https://owlcation.com.
Trench Fever – the British Medical Response in the Great War. R.L. Atenstaedt. Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine November 2006. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gar.
Northampton Mercury 19th October1928. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 34 Albert James Manning (1892-1919)

As most of Albert's military records have been destroyed the obituary for Albert in the Rushden Argus on 14th February 1919, transcribed by Kay Collins, on the Rushden Heritage website has been very valuable.
Technological adaption in a global conflict. The British Army and communications beyond the Western Front 1914-1918. Brian Hall. University of Salford. https://usir.salford.uk.
Malaria Parasite impairs immune system cells. April 16th 2006. Science Daily. www.sciencedaily.com.
Unit History Royal Engineers. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.

Chapter 35 William Edward Mason (1887-1964)

Deaths Certificates for Louisa Cope and Coral Lucretia Mason. War Diary of the 20th Battalion Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment); War Diary of the 13th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment). www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
The Royal Fusiliers in the Great War. H.C. O'Neill. (Heineman 1922). https://archive.org.
Soldiers' Records and Military Medal Award: Unit History: Royal Fusiliers (London Regiment). www.forces-war-records.co.uk
From Agricultural worker to shoe maker. Neil Busby & Helena Meadows. www.thrapstonheritage.org.uk
Northampton Mercury 17th March 1877; Northampton Daily Echo 27th February 1918; www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Heckington Cemetery www.parishes.lincolnshire.gov.uk.

Chapter 36 Ralph Mayes (1881-1918)

My thanks to Alan Maye for the photographs and for talking to me at his home. Also to Jon Abbott.
Soldiers' Records; Unit History; Royal Garrison Artillery. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
164th Siege Battery East Riding Royal Garrison Artillery. https://en.wikipedia.org.
Gunner Thomas Henry Chillmaid. https://bifhsgo.ca.
The Siege Batteries of the Royal Garrison Artillery. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
Post by Terry Reeves 17th June 2013 on www.greatwarforum.co.uk.

Chapter 37 The Other Mayes Family

Stanley's biography is based almost entirely on the story of her grandfather by Vivienne Marshall who also helped with the story of his brother Irving and cousin Albert and I am grateful to her for allowing me to use her text and photographs. The biography of Harry Irving Mayes owes much to help from his granddaughter Amanda Spenman. Albert's biography has been improved by information from Tim Farr.
Mayes, Stanley Service Number R/762. (ADM339/1/24249). www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

History of the Royal Naval Division. www.royal-naval-association.co.uk.
63rd (Royal Naval) Division) www.treasurebunker.com.
63rd (Royal Naval) Division). www.longlongrail.co.uk.
Bedfordshire Advertiser and Luton Times. 3rd September1915; Derby Daily Telegraph 11th September 1931; 30th May 1934; 15th September 1938; 8th May 1940; 28th January 1943. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
We were here - remember us! www.wiltshireatwar.org.uk.

Chapter 38 William Meadows (1888-1976)

The Great War Forum has been invaluable in helping me sort out William's wartime service and I would like to thank all the contributors especially Charlie962 and PRC (Peter). www.greatwarforum.co.uk.
William's "Wounded Records. Record Details for W Meadows (Royal Engineers); Record details for Mr William Meadows, London Gazette 12/06/1947. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
Air 76/343/38. Ref. 446. www.nationalarchives.org.uk.
Stamford Mercury 13th September 1878; Northampton Mercury 19th October 1878; Dundee Courier 18th January 1913; Army & Navy Gazette 11th January 1913; Surrey Mirror 28th May 1926. www.britishnewspaperarchives.co.uk.
15th The King's Hussars. No.5 Squadron RAF; Driller (oil). www.wikipedia.com.
The De Tessiers of Woodcote Park. www.epsomandewellhisytoryexplorer.org.uk.
www.rafmuseum.org.uk.

Chapter 39 Victor Marshall Moon (1896-1916)

Rushden War Memorial. www.roll-of-honour.com.
South End School Infant Admissions 1910-24; Private Victor M Moon and Street Memorials WW1 - transcriptions of local newspapers by Nicky Bates. www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
National School Admission Registers & Log Books for Old School. www.findmypast.co.uk .
Record Details for V Moon. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
Northampton Mercury 6th January 1905; Northampton Chronicle & Echo 22nd March 1913. www.britishnewspaaperarchive.co.uk.
Northamptonshire Regiment's First World War Involvement. www.northantstelegraph.co.uk.

Book 2: N-Z: Extra Chapter References

Chapter 1 George Herbert Newell (1888-1970)

Note: A George Herbert Newell (27875) served with the 1st Northamptonshire Regiment but as he has a different demobilization date (4th April 1919) I believe that he is not our man in an earlier Regiment.
Belton Park, Lincolnshire: Machine Gun Corps. www.bbc.co.uk.
War Diaries of 62nd Machine Gun Corps; 21st Battalion Machine Gun Corps.
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
21st Battalion Machine Gun Corps during the Great War www.wartimememoriesproject.com.
Thomas Rowlands Machine Gun Corps; Holyhead War Memorial 1914-1918. www.sites.google.com/site/holyheadwarmemorial19141918/home/army/thomas-rowlands-machine-gun-corps.
Order of Free Gardeners. https://en.wikipedia.org.

Northampton Mercury 29th January 1926; 22nd January 1927; 31st January 1930; 27th January 1933; 1st February 1946; 5th April 1946; 2nd February 1951; Northampton Chronicle & Echo 27th January 1930. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 2 Joseph Arthur Norris (1889-1931)

5th (Pioneer) Battalion Great War Diary. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
Northampton Mercury 26/04/1918; 27/02/1931; 13/03/1931; 27/03/1931; Chronicle & Echo 24/02/1931. www.britishnewspaperarhive.co.uk.

Chapter 3 The Peacock Family

My thanks to Kevin Varty for allowing me to copy the letters and other documents of Raymond Peacock and to Janice Morris for alerting me to their existence and acting as the agent in this process. My thanks also to Jim Parker from the www.blueyonder.co.uk website, for his many helpful information sheets and his individual help with the research.
Northampton Mercury 31st March 1916. 21st April 1916, 31st March 1931.
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Texas Deaths. familysearch.org.
War Office Daily List No. 5721; Unit History Buffs (East Kent Regiment).www.findmypast.co.uk .
Trench Fever. www.wikipedia.com.
Record details of Arthur's "Missing" status and death. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
.

Chapter 4 John William Pearson (1895-1944)

50th (Northumbrian) Division. Wikipedia
50th (Northumbrian) Division www.longlongtrail.com

Chapter 5 The Pentelow Family

The Royal Defence Corps of 1916-1918. www.longlongtrail.co.uk .Royal Fusiliers; Royal Defence Corps, www.wikipedia.org.
Northampton Mercury of 30th April 1909; Chronicle and Echo of 10th September 1915.
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
The Royal Defence Corps of 1916-1918. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
www.group4news.co.uk.

Chapter 6 Charles William Pettitt (1890-1954)

Ammunition Column; 75th Division (United Kingdom). www.wikipedia.com.
Great War Forum. (especially MaxD). www.greatwarforum.org.
Virtual War Memorial Australia. www.vwma.org.au.
Egypt and Palestine Campaign. National Army Museum. www.nam.ac.uk.

Chapter 7 The Phillips Family

My thanks to Sarah Hayes for her help with the Phillips family.
Northampton Mercury 16th February 1905; Northampton Chronicle & Echo 3rd April 1950.
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
War Diaries for: C Squadron Northamptonshire Yeomanry; Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.
Gas Attack 1916. www.eyewitnesshistory.com.

Battles of the Western Front 1914-1918; A British Troop soldier wearing Small Box Respirator. The Battle of Albert. www.wikipedia.org.

Chapter 8 Walter Shedrick Pitts (1890-1966)

Northampton Mercury 22nd January 1926; 22nd October 1943; www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk. Great War Forum. www.greatwarforum.co.uk.

Chapter 9 Oliver John Pothecary (1897-1923)

My thanks to "alf mcm" on the Great War Forum. www.greatwarforum.co.uk.
RAMC in the Great War. www.ramc-ww1.com.
War Diary of 38th Field Ambulance. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
38th Ambulance, RAMC. www.wartimememories.com.
Field Ambulances in the First World War. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
12th (Eastern) Division. www.wikipedia.com.

Chapter 10 The Roberts Family

My thanks to the Great War Forum especially Charlie962 and jay dubaya.
Eddie's Roll of Honour www.sites,rootsweb,com.
International Encyclopedia of the First World War. www.encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net.
Stamford Mercury 7th April 1905; Grantham Journal 2nd June 1917; Northampton Mercury 14th March 1913; 5th March 1915; Northants Evening Telegraph 17th May 1939; 17th May 1957; www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Salonika; a stranger sideshow to the First World War. Clive Aslet. The Irish Times 16th June 2016. www.royalarmouries.org.
The day the German navy surrendered in the Forth. 21st November 2018. www.bbc.co.uk.

Chapter 11 The Ruff Family

My thanks to Martyn J. Wheeldon for the photographs and family information (including a copy of Harvey's Demobilisation Certificate).
My thanks to the members of the Great War Forum, especially Charlie962 and Stebie9173 for their help and advice. www.greatwarforum.org.
War Diaries 139 Brigade (includes 266 Siege Battery) WO-95-391-3; XV Corps Cyclist Battalion. W0-95-930-2. www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
Medium Mark "A" Whippet. David Fletcher. Bloomsbury 2014.
Mercury & Herald 4th January 1935; Northamptonshire Evening Telegraph 16th November 1939. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
67th (2nd Home Counties) Division; XV Corps (United Kingdom); www.wikipedia.com.
67th (2nd Home Counties) Division. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
War on Two Wheels; British army cyclists 1914-1918. Chris Baker. www.thegazette.co.uk.

Chapter 12 The Sawford Family

War Diary 16 Infantry Brigade: 1 Battalion Buffs (East Kent Regiment). WO 95/1608/3 National Archives.

HHMS Dover Castle; HMS Glory (1899); HMS Caledon (D53); HMS Cardiff (1917); HMS Fisgard (shore establishment); HMS Iron Duke; HMS Dolphin (shore establishment); HMS Venerable; Third Anglo-Afghan War. en.wikipedia.org .
The Army Service Corps in the First World War; 22nd Division; Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
Hampshire Telegraph 22nd May 1931; Evening Telegraph 11th & 15th February 1937; 6th March 1937; Northampton Mercury 8th June 1917; 10th July 1903; 10th March 1939.
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
www.scarletfinders.co.uk.
www.awayfromthewesternfront.org.
www.livesofthefirstworldwar.iwm.org.uk.
https://royalhistsoc.org.
www.landfonline.com (North-West frontier in the first World War).

Chapter 13 Alfred Edward Shaw (1897-1917)

My thanks to members of the Great War Forum for helping sort out Alfred's early army career.
32nd Battalion Royal Fusiliers War Diary www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk .
Battles- The Battle of Messines 1917. www.firstworldwar.com.
The Battle of Messines; 8 Facts about the Battle of Menin Road Bridge. www.cwgc.org
London Fusiliers in the Great War – Battle of Messines. https://1918armistice.co.uk.
Royal Fusiliers (City of London) Regiment. www.britishempire.co.uk.
The People 28th October 1917; Mercury & Herald 7th September 1934;
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 14 William Sibley (1894-1917)

My thanks to Fay Hardwick, a descendant of the Sibley family, for her information and photograph.
Canadian Government: Library and Archives Canada. www.bac-lac.gc.ca.
William Sibley. www.cardstonhistoricalsociety.org.
8th Battalion CEF. www.canadiansoldiers.com.
Canadian Virtual War Memorial Index 1900-2014. www.veterans.gc.ca.
Carrying Canadian Troops; The Story of RMS Olympic as a First World War Troopship, David R. Gray. https://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh.
Canadian Immigration – Early 1900s. www.british.immigration-in-montreal.com.
Military Service Act. www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca.
Private William Sibley. Rushden Argus 10th August 1917. www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
Ghost Towns in Mary's Genealogy Treasures. www.telusplanet.net.
En Route to Flanders Fields. The Canadians in Shorncliffe during the Great War. Diana Beaupré.
Canterbury Christchurch University. www.saltwoodkent.co.uk.
Northampton Mercury 3rd February 1911; 10th August 1917; 2nd September 1932.
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 15 George Slack (1870-1942)

Royal-Engineers-Units-in-the-British-Salonika-Force.pdf.www.alonikacampaignsociety.org.uk.
Salonika Campaign. www.nam.ac.uk.
Salonika Campaign. www.nam.ac.uk.

www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
Northampton Mercury 1st January 1915; Leeds Mercury 7th February 1916; Bath Chronicle & Weekly Gazette 29th September 1917. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 16 George Stanley Smart (1884-1917)

In this biography I have been also been fortunate to have had detailed research assistance by e-mail from Graham Sacker of the www.machine-gun-corps-database.couk website. He also included relevant pages from the 8th Company MGC War Diary. I have had great assistance from the Great War Forum website members Craig, Ken and John.
www.findagrave.com.
The Proceedings of the Old Bailey 1674-1913. www.oldbaileyonline.org.
Weekly Casualty Lists: Bell's Weekly Messenger Saturday 25th October 1862; Northampton Mercury 24th June 1892 www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 17 Sydney William Smith (1897-1947)

My thanks to Craig (ss002d6252) for his Regimental numbering advice on the Great War Forum. www.greatwarforum.co.uk.
The Tale of a Village Bumpkin 1931-1947. Sydney William Smith.
Denis Percy Frederick Tall's War. www.grahamtall.co.uk.

Chapter 18 The Other Smith Families

1st Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment. https://web.archive.org.
Tirah Expedition. www.britishempire.co.uk.
www.armyservicenumbers.blogspot.com.
WW1 War Diaries. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
www.armyservicenumbers.blogspot.com.
www.britishempire.co.uk.
The Royal Fusiliers in the Great War H. C. O'Neill O.B. Heinemann; 23rd (Service) Battalion Royal Fusiliers (First Sportsman's) Fred W. Wood Sidgewick & Jackson 1920. www.archive.org.
The Bedfordshire Regiment in the Great War. www.bedfordregiment.org.uk.
Northampton Mercury 12th & 19th November 1897; Luton Reporter 28th June 1921. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Chapter 19 Frederick Sykes (1887-1914)

Militia (United Kingdom); Northamptonshire Regiment. www.wikipedia.com

Chapter 20 Harry Tilley (1895-1915) and Horace Edwin Tilley (1899-1969)

My thanks to PRC (Peter) and Frogsmile on the Great War Forum
London Gazette 21st December 1984. www.Thegazette.co.uk.
Northampton Mercury 28th March 1913;10th April 1914; 13th August 1915; Northampton Chronicle & Echo 19th July 1925. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
History of Ireland 1919-1921. www.wesleyjohnston.com.

Chapter 21 Thomas Alfred Tomlin (1884-1968)

My thanks to Charlie (Charlie962), Peter (PRC) and George Rayner for their help and for coping with my confusions. www.greatwarforum.co.uk.
www.thewardrobe.org. Royal Berkshires.
The tragedy of Kut. Ross Davies. Guardian 20th November 2002. www.theguardian.com.
Dartford in the Great War. Stephen Wynn. Pen and Sword Military 2016.
Norfolk Regiment Second Battalion War Diary; The Mesopotamia Campaign.
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
www.purley.eu . On the Biscuit Boys – the Royal Berkshires 7th Battalion.
www.wjgrummettphotosandhistroyww1.blog published by John Snell.

Chapter 22 The Walker Families

My thanks to Charlie (Charlie962) and Peter (PRC) on the Great War Forum and to Graham Sackler for his expert advice on Hugh Lancelot Walkers' Machine Gun Corps service on www.machine-gun-corps-database.co.uk. Also, to Robin Braysher of the Salonika Campaign Society for clearing up where the elusive Chungusi was. As he pointed out, the place names could be Anglicised in different ways and were then "Hellenised" after the war when populations were exchanged. It is a fascinating website for anyone interested in this neglected warzone of WW1.
Dudley Chronicle 22nd November 1919. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
A Short History of the Salonika Campaign. Alan Wakefield. www.iwm.org.uk/history/a-short-history-of-the-salonika-campaign.
The Chinese Labour Corps. Mark O'Neill (Penguin Specials).
www.gerryco23.wordpress.com.
First World War's forgotten Chinese Labour Troops to get recognition at last. Maev Kennedy. Guardian 14th August 2014.
57th Machine Gun Battalion War Diary. National Archives. www.national archives.gov.uk
www.lancashireinfantrymusseum.org.uk.
Mid-Sussex Times 19th October 1915. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Alfred Walker newspaper obituary and copy of Death Certificate for Alfred Walker from rosspenni family tree on Ancestry.co.uk.
Army Signals in World War One and the Role of the Royal Engineers. Stuart Dixon. 30th October 2018.
www.reasignals.net.
The Royal Engineers Signal Service www.royalsignalsmuseum.co.uk.

Chapter 23 John Thomas Watts (1887-1917)

My thanks again to Steve (Stebie9173) and Craig (ss002d6252) of the Great War Forum www.greatwarforum.co.uk .
Commonwealth War Graves Commission. www.cwgc.org.
War Diary 6th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment. (WO 95/2044/2) www.na.gov.uk.
The Group System (Derby Scheme) *www.longlongtrail.co.uk.*

Chapter 24 The Weekley Families

My thanks to Dave (Heritage Plus), Simon (mancpal). M. (Marilyne), Craig (ss002d6252), Alf McM, and TEW, all members of the Great War Forum for their help and suggestions.
Voices of the First World War: Gunners. www.iwm.org.uk.

With the Royal Army Medical Corps in Egypt 1914-18. Sergeant Major R.A.M.C. Cassell & Co. 1918. www.archive.org.
History of the Royal Army Medical Corps. www.iwm.ork.uk.
For the biography of Herbert Weekley my thanks to Graham Sacker for his expert knowledge and generous help. https://www.machine-gun-corps-database.co.uk.
For the biography of Leonard Weekley my thanks to Craig (ss002d6252) and Tim (8055Bell) and others on the Great War Forum but particularly Ken (kenf48) who really wrote this piece. His detailed knowledge and research made this story possible. There are a few additions of my own and any mistakes are my responsibility. www.greatwarforum.co.uk.
War Diaries of: 41st Battalion MGC; 25th Battalion King's (Liverpool Regiment); 2/6th Battalion Manchester Regiment. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
Lancing College War Memorial. www.hambo.org.
Northampton Mercury 27th February 1864, 14th September 1906; 24th May 1912; Northampton Chronicle & Echo 17th July 1912. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
44th Brigade Machine Gun Company. www.vickersmg.blog.
Genealogy Report: Descendants of James Turley. www.genealogy.com.
Family of William Edward Weekley and Sarah Povey; Family of John Mary de L'Horme de L'Ile and Rebecca Smith. http://rtpovey.homeip.net/familytree/fam534.html
William George Weekley Obituary. https://nyti.ms29yB2XI.
Leonard Woolf; Lytton Strachey. www.spartacus-educational.com.
Leonard Woolf; A Biography. Victoria Glendinning. Free Press 2006.
South of the Mountains 1984.01 Vol. 28. No.1 Historical Society of Rockland County.

Chapter 25 Percy Reginald Wilson (1897-1918)

The Chronicles of the 3rd Battalion M.G.C. Arras; William Cranston. 3rd Battalion MGC Journal. www.ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk.
The Companies and Battalions of the Machine Gun Corps: Territorial Force Depots; The History of the Third Division. www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
War Diary of the 3rd Battalion MGC. www.discovery.NationalArchives.gov.uk.

Chapter 26 Evelyn Wood (1886-1918)

My thanks to "ajsmith" on Great War Forum for the suggestion of a mix-up in the military records.
Account of Harry Cope by Jon Abbott. www.ringsteadheritage.co.uk & www.rushdenheritage.co.uk.
War Diary of the 12th Battalion East Surrey Regiment (transcript). www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk.

Chapter 27 A Few Other Men that the Roll of Honour Missed

Memories of Mrs M Childs. www.thrapstonheritage.org.uk.
Wounded List from Ludlow Advertiser (K.S.L.I.) 10th June 1918.
www.facebook.com>KSLIBattlefieldstours>posts.
www.northamptongeneral.co.uk (on Creaton Sanitorium).
Soldiers' Records. www.forces-war-records.co.uk.
www.longlongtrail.co.uk.
War Diaries of the 8th and 9th East Surrey Regiment. www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk .Archive
Beaufort First World War Hospital. www.glensidemuseum.org.uk .My thanks to Nigel Lutt of the Bedfordshire Historical Society - www.bedfordshirehrs.org.uk for his help with the Bedfordshire Regimental numbers.
Marriage Certificate of George Thomas Green and Jail Bull 23rd June 1917 (own copy).

Northampton Mercury 24th January 1896, 26th February 1915, 15th June 1917, 8th August 1917; Northampton Chronicle & Echo 26th March 1913; Westminster Gazette 10th May 1924; Grantham Journal 12th October 1935; 6th June 1936; 15th January 1938; Leicester Daily Mercury 8th August 1939. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
Past Owners of Chapel Street old sweet shop. www.ringsteadheritage.com.
The 5th Battalion Great War Service and War Diary. www.bedfordregiment.org.uk.