

### **Alderbury Men who died in the Battle of the Somme**

On 1 July 1916 the Battle of the Somme opened. On that day just under 20,000 British troops were killed. One of them is commemorated in the Alderbury & Whaddon Local History Group's publication *Alderbury War Memorials*. However, he is not mentioned on either of the village's war memorials. His name was Thomas Charles Pearman and his family hailed from Middlesex, prior to that they had lived in Alton in Hampshire. When they moved to Alderbury is unclear, they do not appear in the village in the 1911 Census nor is the family name found on the electors' lists for 1915 or 1918. Thomas' sister Edith died in 1921 aged 15 and he is commemorated on her gravestone in Alderbury churchyard along with their parents Rosalind and Thomas who died in 1934 and 1936 respectively. This leads us to the conclusion that the family must have moved to the village after Thomas' death in action and quite possibly after the end of the war. The move might well have been because of family connections as one of the young men from the village who died in the First World War (also on the Somme) was Thomas Pearman Bundy whose mother Ellen was also from Alton and had lived in Alderbury for many years with her husband and children. An 'in memoriam' notice in the *Salisbury Times* dated 22 July 1921 states that the family was living in Whaddon at that time. By 1925 they were living in Junction Road in a house called 'Somme', the house has since been rebuilt but retains the name.

Thomas was serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment at the time of his death aged just 18. The battalion was part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division and five minutes after zero hour advanced in waves towards Pozières to be caught in crossfire from the German machine guns in the strong points of Ovillers and La Boisselle. Many of the men became casualties including Thomas Pearman who was killed in action. He is buried at Ovillers Military Cemetery.

The second man with Alderbury connections to die on the Somme was Edward Hatcher of the Welsh Guards who died on 10 September 1916 at Ginchy. He was the eldest son (of three) of Edward and Annie Hatcher. His father was a retired police sergeant, probably from the Hampshire force, who had been born in Alderbury about 1854 and had returned to the village with his family prior to 1901. The family lived at Pines Cottage in Whaddon and the years 1913 to 1916 must have been tragic for them: in 1913 the youngest son Willie died aged 23, then Edward was killed in action aged 28 just over five weeks after having married Elizabeth Mary Williams at the parish church of Llyswen in Brecon, finally John Phillip was killed – also on the Somme – on 20 December 1916 aged 27. Only their daughter Annie was left to her parents.

Edward, who like his father was a policeman, enlisted in the Welsh Guards in Brecon, aged 27. Presumably he was one of the first recruits to the regiment as it was only founded in 1915. From 1 May 1915 he underwent three months of training at the Guards depot in Catherham in Surrey before being posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reserve Battalion stationed at the Tower of London. Four days after his wedding he joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Welsh Guards (part of the Guards Division) at Ypres before going to the Somme early in September. At 7am on 10 September 1916 it was very misty and there was little light and the enemy launched a strong attack. The Welsh Guards, who had been ordered to relieve the British troops north and east of the village of Ginchy, were forced to fall back to a wood which was one in name only, being a mass of deep shell holes, demolished houses and felled trees. Fighting was fierce and hand-to-hand until the enemy were forced to withdraw but just before noon the Germans launched another attack and the battle continued all day. The British eventually

captured the village but their losses were heavy and amongst them was Edward Hatcher. He is commemorated on the gravestone in Alderbury churchyard with his two brothers, next to that of his parents. His grave is in Longueval Cemetery, Plot 9, Row E, Grave 21.

Five days after Edward Hatcher's death Arthur Cecil Bundy was killed in action at Mouquet Farm, close to where Thomas Pearman had died two and a half months earlier. Arthur had lived at 37 Silver Street with his parents Edward and Eveline, two brothers and four sisters and in the 1911 Census he was described as a carter. He later emigrated to Canada as did his two brothers Ernest and William, all three serving in the war with the Canadian Corps. He joined up at Brandon in Manitoba on 24 November 1915 and was described as an unmarried farmer, 5'6" tall with dark brown hair and blue eyes. He was initially attached to the 79<sup>th</sup> Battalion but by the time he landed in France on 7 June 1916 he was a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles (Saskatchewan Regiment) which formed part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division. He joined his unit in the field two days later, shortly after his younger brother Ernest had been killed whilst serving with the same unit at Ypres. In late August 1916 the whole of the Canadian Corps moved to the Somme. On 15 September the Canadians attempted to capture Mouquet Farm (known to the British as 'Mucky Farm' and to the Australians as 'Moo-Cow Farm') which had previously been attacked nine times by the Australians without success. Arthur's unit was ordered to carry out a raid as part of this attack, which took place at 6.30am and was described as 'successful' despite suffering 8 dead and 16 wounded and returning at 7.30am with only one prisoner. Arthur Bundy was initially reported as missing but was later confirmed to have been killed on that day. He and his brother Ernest are commemorated on their parents' gravestone in Alderbury churchyard and he is also commemorated in Serre Road Cemetery No 1, V11, E10 in the Pas de Calais. He was 23 years old at the time of his death.

Although the Battle of the Somme officially ended on 19 November 1916 men continued to die on that sector and two of them were from Alderbury. The first of them was Thomas Pearman Bundy who died on 18 December 1916, probably of wounds sustained three weeks earlier. He was aged 28. His father Robert was a railwayman for well over twenty years, certainly a signaller for at least some of that time, and when Thomas was young the family lived in the High Street, later moving to 'Littleton' in Junction Road. In the 1911 Census he was described as a ship's steward. Thomas married Winifred Anne Bundy of Lynwood Cottage, Laverstock. He enlisted in the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment on 30 August 1915. This was a holding battalion based at Wareham. He subsequently transferred to the Machine Gun Corps early in 1916 and was sent to Grantham for training and then to the Corps depot at Camiers in France. His unit at the time of his death was No2 Machine Gun Company and in the autumn and early winter it was active around Mametz Wood, Bazentin-le-Grand and High Wood. During the whole of November and December his unit's war diary records only one casualty: a man wounded on 28 November when a gun took a direct hit, this man may have been Thomas. He is buried in the Bazentin-le-Petit Military Cemetery, C3. His younger brother Robert died sixteen months later near Bethune. Both are commemorated on their parents' gravestone in Alderbury churchyard.

The last victim in 1916 of the Somme from Alderbury was Edward Hatcher's brother John Phillip. He was domiciled in Salisbury when he enlisted in the Hampshire Regiment in Birmingham. He was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, which formed part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. It had previously taken part in the assault towards Le Transloy on 23 October. From 2 November to 7 December 1916 the unit was billeted at Abbeville spending the time training and marching, on exercises and divisional and

brigade competitions. The battalion then moved to Bray-sur-Somme, nearer to the front line and then a week later to the front at Priez Farm near Combles, where it spent four days in brigade reserve. It then relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the East Lancashires in some muddy shell holes and was subject to 'decidedly active' enemy artillery fire. During this time John Hatcher was killed, aged 27. He is buried in the Saily-Saillisel British Cemetery, V1, H3.

All the men remembered here were awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal and all were private soldiers. At least three of them had only been at the front a matter of weeks before they were killed and all five were under thirty when they died. Unfortunately, we do not have photographs of any of them.

There were three additional war deaths of men from the village in 1916 but surprisingly it was not the worst year, at least in terms of numbers. That dubious distinction goes to 1918, the year of ultimate victory, when ten servicemen lost their lives. The number lost in 1917 - the year of Passchendaele where one man from Alderbury lost his life - was nine. Prior to 1916 only one man from the village had lost his life in the war, at Gallipoli in 1915.