

## Alderbury War Fatalities in 1917

Prior to 1917 nine men with Alderbury connections had died in the First World War: one at Gallipoli in 1915, the remainder in 1916 – including five on the Somme and one at sea, short articles on some of these men can be found elsewhere on the AWLHRG web-site. In 1917 nine more men from the village died in the war. Passchendaele is probably the battle most people would associate with that year but only one man from Alderbury died there; somewhat unusually, five died in campaigns other than on the Western Front. The stories of all nine are set out below, in order of the date they died.

The first was **Charles Beaven** (incorrectly spelt on the original memorials as Bevan). He was born in West Harnham but moved to Ladies Cottages in Whaddon with his wife Mabel Etta. He enlisted in Salisbury and was posted to the Royal Engineers. His unit was Number 2 Section of the General Base Depot in Salonika (now Thessaloniki) in Greece, then a neutral country. The city had only been Greek for a short time, having been ceded by Turkey in May 1913 as a result of the First Balkan War. Ominously, the Greeks had only narrowly beaten the Bulgarians to the prize, the latter having regarded it as their number one target during the war.

Allied policy regarding Salonika see-sawed throughout the war. At the beginning of 1915 it was proposed to the French government by General Gallieni that troops should be sent Salonika to march on Constantinople (now Istanbul), knock Turkey out of the war, encourage Greece and Bulgaria to join the Allies and thence attack Austria-Hungary. The suggestion was rejected. Early in February it became known that Bulgaria was contemplating joining the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey) and Lord Kitchener offered to send the 29<sup>th</sup> Division, the last regular division the British had uncommitted, to Salonika to help Serbia but the War Council declined the offer. By September it was obvious that Bulgaria was about to declare war on Serbia and on the twenty-fifth of that month Kitchener told Hamilton, in charge of the Gallipoli campaign, to send two British and one French division from Gallipoli to Salonika to join the French troops already there, although in the end only the British 10<sup>th</sup> Division was sent. However, the British 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Divisions, originally intended to reinforce Gallipoli, were diverted to Salonika, replacing the two or three worn-out divisions from Gallipoli originally intended to be sent there. Serbia had held out against the Austro-Hungarians for over a year but now faced invasion by German and Bulgarian forces as well. In the end the Serbs were overwhelmed and were forced to escape into the mountains of Albania before being evacuated by Allied ships to Corfu.

By November 1915 the British were proposing to withdraw the troops from Salonika to renew the offensive at Gallipoli and by the beginning of the following month had persuaded the French to agree but the Russians formally requested that the British not withdraw and that ended the matter for the time being. Allied troops remained at Salonika but apart from one abortive offensive in December 1915 they remained mostly on the defensive, the German commander Falkenhayn calling the city 'an enormous internment camp.' In May 1917 the British withdrew the 60<sup>th</sup> Division, along with two mounted brigades and some artillery to reinforce the Palestine campaign, followed two months later by the 10<sup>th</sup> Division. But by March 1918 there were still four British divisions and one brigade left at Salonika. It was only in September 1918 that the front here came to life and after an offensive lasting only about a fortnight the Bulgarian forces asked for an armistice whilst the Allied army advanced to the Danube. Lloyd George, always an advocate of the campaign, called it the

'most important of the side-shows' but the numbers of men lost to sickness and disease would dispute this.

One of them was Charles Beaven. His duties as a driver were to receive drafts of men and equipment and despatch them to units in the field. Although his occupation before joining up is unknown it is reasonable to assume that he was a driver in civilian life. Four days after his unit was formed he died of lobar pneumonia on 1 February 1917 aged 26. He was survived by his widow and a daughter born only seven weeks before his death. He is buried in Lembet Military Cemetery, Thessaloniki, Grave number 793

The second Alderbury man to die in action in 1917 was **William Ingram** and like five others before him and four after he died on the Somme. Officially, the Battle of the Somme ended on 19 November 1916 (this date was only assigned to it in 1920 and some historians consider that February 1917 is a more appropriate date). William was the son of George and Anna Ingram of Fort's (now Alderbury) Farm on the Witherington Road. In 1901 the family (both parents, plus children Bertie, Florence, William, Daisy, Dora and Freda) was living at Whaddon Cottage, by 1911 they had moved to Fort's Farm, although by that time both William and Daisy seem to have moved away for they do not appear in the Census. On both occasions George was described as a carter on a farm.

William joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) on 14 December 1914 aged 21 and described himself as a farmer employed by a Mr Barnard of Beckenham in Kent. He was initially attached to the Benbow Battalion but on 12 June 1915 he was transferred to the Drake Battalion, serving in the Gallipoli campaign. In October of that year he contracted jaundice and was evacuated to the Canadian hospital on the island of Mudros before being sent back to Haslar Hospital three months later on the hospital ship **Aquitania**. For this service he was subsequently awarded the 1914-15 Star. Having recovered from his illness he returned to his battalion on 21 December 1916. The Royal Naval Division of which it formed a part was at that time in a rest camp having suffered heavy casualties during the Battle of the Ancre, the last phase of the Battle of the Somme.

The division returned to the front on the night of 18/19 January 1917 and the weather was so cold that it was impossible to dig trenches in the frozen ground, shell-holes having to be used for cover instead. The men were subjected to continuous shelling and movement was only possible at night. On 1 February the Drake Battalion moved up to the front, where it remained for two days before going into reserve. Even so, two companies were deployed at the front, one at the casualty clearing station and the second deployed as carrying parties. On the morning of 4 February the battalion was sent forward as an attack by companies of the Hawke and Hood battalions had encountered serious resistance and it was on this day that Able Seaman William Ingram died, possibly as a result of wounds sustained during this action. He was aged 24 and is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, Pier and Face 1A.

Just over seven weeks after William Ingram's death the third man from the village to die on active service that year was killed in action north of Baghdad in Mesopotamia (now Iraq). His name was **Harry Prewett** and he was 23 years old. Harry was the son of Henry James and Louisa Prewett. There had been Prewetts living in the village since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century and in the 1841 Census there are 35 with that surname noted. Henry first appears in the Census in 1851 when he was three years old and living with his parents and three brothers 'near the Chapel' (the Wesleyan Chapel on Folly Lane). Ten years later the family was 'near Old Road'. By 1871 Henry and his elder brother William

were agricultural labourers lodging in Clarendon Road with the England family although their parents and younger siblings were still living 'near Old Road'. A decade later Henry was a general labourer and had married Louisa; they had three sons and two daughters and were living close to his parents 'near Old Road'. In 1891 three sons and a daughter were living at home but only two of the sons had been there a decade before. When Harry makes his first appearance in the Census (in 1901) his mother had died and two of his sisters and three brothers lived with their father 'near the steps' whilst his uncle Charles and aunt Ellen lived next door with their family (the cottages are now known as 25 and 26 Southampton Road). His father's occupation was now as a groom. Both families were still there ten years later. By this time the number of Prewetts noted in the Census had dropped to 16 and Henry was now an estate labourer.

Harry enlisted on 17 August 1914 with the 5<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires at Devizes and served with them in Gallipoli where the battalion arrived in July 1915, initially at Cape Helles before moving to Anzac Cove to support the landings at Suvla Bay in August. It fought at Sari Bair and was taken by complete surprise by the Turks and shot down or scattered, two companies being almost completely wiped out. Harry survived this action and following the evacuation of Allied forces from that theatre the unit was transferred to Mesopotamia. For his service at Gallipoli he was awarded the 1914-15 Star.

In April 1916 a British force besieged in Kut had been forced to surrender after the failure of the relief force and the 5<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires, reduced to just 426 men, remained near Amara. By the end of the year the British were once more advancing and Kut fell to them late in February 1917. Harry's battalion, part of the 40<sup>th</sup> Brigade, was part of the force and saw action on several occasions. It was said to be the first unit to enter Baghdad on 10 March as the advance continued, although other sources give that honour to the 1/5<sup>th</sup> Buffs (the East Kent Regiment). By 29 March the 5<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires were positioned along the Narwhan Canal, 35 miles north of Baghdad and at the 'Battle of the Marl Plain' at Sindiya, about halfway between Baghdad and Samarra, they suffered heavily in what was described as stiff fighting incurring casualties of 28 dead and 139 wounded. Amongst the dead was Harry Prewett and he is commemorated on the Basra Memorial in Iraq. His father continued to live in the village until at least 1927.

The next two men with Alderbury connections to die in the war were both serving with the Canadian army. The first was **Wilfred Moulard**, son of John and Emma Moulard. He had five brothers (one of whom, Edgar, was killed fighting at Gallipoli in the Australian army) and five sisters. His father was the blacksmith at the forge in Alderbury from at least 1889 until his death in June 1913 and if the local directory is correct his mother continued running the business until 1915, later moving to Nether Wallop. Wilfred emigrated to Canada, continuing the family tradition of blacksmithing. He did not marry.

On 13 November 1915 he enlisted at Brandon in Manitoba in the Canadian army. He said he was 5ft 5ins tall with grey hairs and dark brown hair and lived at 338 1<sup>st</sup> Street in Brandon. He sailed for England on the **SS Lapland**, arriving on 5 May 1916. He underwent training at the grenade school at East Sandling and in June was attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles, joining his unit at Ypres on 9 June. On 3 September the Canadian Corps arrived on the Somme and took part in the major assault on the fifteenth of that month, successfully storming the village of Courcelles. On 17 October it moved to the Vimy front. In the early months of 1917 the Corps conducted a number of large-scale raids, in fact from 20 March up to the launch of the main offensive on 9 April they launched raids

every night to gather intelligence on the German positions. The sector was not affected by the enemy's withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line and the German positions on Vimy Ridge were not as impregnable as is sometimes supposed.

Planning for the capture of the whole of the main crest by the Canadian Corps began in mid-January 1917 and was completed by 5 March, being little changed before the attack began. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, of which Wilfred was a member, launched its attack at 5.30am on 9 April and had taken its portion of the German forward defence zone by 6.25am aided by a bombardment which had lasted during daylight for nearly three weeks. It is not known for certain when Wilfred was killed but it seems likely to have been during the first two days of the assault (although *Alderbury War Memorials* gives the date as between 7 and 10 of April so it is possible he was killed in a raid on the German lines or by sniper or artillery fire before the attack) and is buried in Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery, Souchez, Pas de Calais XIV.M.2. Along with his brother Edgar (see above) he is commemorated on his father's headstone in the graveyard of Alderbury Church. He was aged 23 when he died.

The second Canadian soldier with connections to Alderbury was **Walter Joshua Bundy**. He was the son of Samuel and Charlotte Bundy of Church House (now Court House) and was born in 1892. Although Bundy was quite a common name in the village from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards there seems to be no trace of his parents in the Census records either immediately before or after his birth; however, both appear to have been born in the village (if the information in the 1911 Census is correct), Samuel in 1851 and his wife ten years later.

Walter's attestation papers were signed in Ottawa on 28 July 1915 and he was described as a fireman, 22 years 10 months old, 5ft 7ins tall, with brown hair and grey eyes and unmarried. He sailed from Canada to England in June 1916, arriving the following month in Liverpool. He was assigned to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Battalion at Bramshott and then embarked for Le Havre on 11 August. Two months later he was promoted to lance corporal and in December he underwent training in the use of grenades, following which – in March 1917 – he was again promoted, this time to sergeant. His unit was part of the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division.

His battalion was given the task of taking the summit of Hill 145, one of the most difficult objectives of the assault on Vimy Ridge and in this it eventually succeeded despite other units encountering difficulties, not least of which was a snowstorm which hit the battlefield. Walter Bundy survived this battle and a few days later was transferred to the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division. On 3 May together with his new unit Walter took part in a battle around the hamlet of Fresnoy, which was taken after fierce fighting but then lost again after the division went into reserve. On 1 June the battalion went into the front line again at Thelus Mill Cave. At first the sector was relatively quiet but in the early morning hours of 5 June the enemy shelled a nearby railway and enemy aircraft dropped 30 – 40m bombs on and around the divisional HQ, causing many casualties. On the front line Walter was hit by a shell splinter in his left groin, he was evacuated – dangerously wounded – to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Casualty Clearing Station but died from his wounds soon afterwards. He is buried at Lapugnoy Military Cemetery, Pas de Calais, Plot IV.C.9, six miles west of Bethune.

The next Alderbury man to die – and the only one killed at Passchendaele – was **Francis (Frank) George Harper**. He was born in Amesbury and in the 1911 Census he was living in Alderbury in Lower Lane, probably one of the cottages at the bottom of Alward House drive, with his wife Mary

and sons Percy and Frank; at this time he was aged 31 and employed as a domestic gardener. He originally enlisted in the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry but was transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment in July 1916.

On 18 July 1917 Frank and his unit moved to the Steenvorde area via St Omer to Abele. Early in the morning of 28 July they moved into the trenches, where the enemy bombarded them with gas shells until the evening of 30 July. At 3.40am the following day Frank and the other members of B Company launched its attack, they obtained their objective taking 40 prisoners despite the enemy laying down an artillery barrage and heavy machine gun fire. However, in the course of the action Frank Harper was reported missing and he was later reported as having been killed in action. He is buried in Hooze Crater Cemetery, Ypres XIII.F.13. The cemetery was created in October 1917 on the site of a crater created by the explosion of a mine in 1915.

The last three Alderbury men to die in action in 1917 all died within three weeks of each other and in places which are all too familiar to us today. The first two died in Gaza a day apart: on 2 November Charles Ernest Albery of the 1<sup>st</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment and the next day Ernest Henry Hatcher of the 2<sup>nd</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Dorsetshire Regiment.

**Charles Albery's** father, Charles senior, moved with his family from New Brompton in Kent to Alderbury, between 1911 and 1915. Charles junior was married to Hannah Dummer of Cockington in Sussex and was the only brother of Dorothy, Win, Flo, Edith, and the twins Amy and Maisie. The family lived in 'Tanglin' in Firs Road and kept their own cows, with Maisie delivering milk around the village on her bicycle.

In September 1917 Charles and his unit sailed from Bombay to join the Egypt Expeditionary Force which was preparing to invade Palestine, arriving at Port Suez on 15 September and joining the newly formed 75<sup>th</sup> Division.. The attack had originally been planned to begin in September but General Allenby, the new British commander in the theatre, had been obliged to postpone the offensive for a variety of reasons and in mid-October it was decided that it should begin on the last day of the month. After landing in Egypt the 4<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires undertook a journey of five hours across the desert to the large camp at Qantara on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal. Here they spent three weeks in intensive training before moving on 14 October to the front at Lees Hill, a seven-mile march across the desert. On 27 October the British heavy artillery opened a bombardment of Gaza, followed two days later by warships stationed off the coast; on the night of 30 October the attacking columns set off and the attack commenced at 5.55am on the following day. The objective for the 4<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires was the imposing hill of Ali Muntar. By 1pm the battle had been won, although Gaza itself was not captured until 7 November. Amongst the British casualties was Charles Albery who was killed on 2 November and is commemorated at the Gaza War Cemetery. He was 24 years old. By 6 December his father had been informed of his death because on that date Charles senior informed the committee of the Alderbury Allotment and Smallholding Association that he wished to give up the smallholding he rented in Lights Lane owing to his son's death in action.

A day after Charles Albery's death **Ernest Hatcher** was killed in the same battle. He was the son of Samuel and Althea Hatcher and brother to Clara, Alice, Edith and Olive. His father had been born in Laverstock but had lived in Alderbury for much of his life – in 1871 he is recorded as living in Silver Street, in 1881 at Shootend and from 1891 at the latest in Folly Lane (then called New Road near Church and later Church Road) where he lived with his wife and family. The family home was of the

three cottages known as Mount Pleasant on the bank opposite the cottage currently called 'Totterdown'. The three cottages no longer exist but their remains can still be seen in the woods. In his younger days Samuel was a labourer but he later worked in Hickman's shop in the High Street. He also played in the village band. Like Charles Albery senior he was a member of then Allotment and Smallholding Association but unlike him he did not give up his plot following his son's death, maintaining his membership up until February 1933.

Ernest married Ellen Cook and had a son named Ernest Edward and lived at 29 Milford Hill in Salisbury. Ellen worked as a domestic servant at Godolphin School, a job she returned to following Ernest's death. Ernest went to Alderbury School and later seems to have been a Reservist in the Wiltshire Territorials. He enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> Dorsets in Salisbury and served in India before being sent to Suez, arriving on 29 August 1917. The battalion entrained for Qantara before moving north to Belah to prepare for the attack on Gaza (note the similarities with the case of Charles Albery detailed above). At 8.40pm on 3 November one of the companies was attacked by 300 – 400 Turks supported by artillery fire whilst patrolling the wadis and acting as listening posts. The enemy was driven off but kept up the artillery fire and attacked again about three hours later. The Dorsets sent out patrols to repair the wire, which had been cut in many places; during this action four men were killed and five were wounded. Amongst these was Ernest Hatcher, who was shot in the legs and subsequently died of his wounds. The family later learned that he had died as a result of 'friendly fire' – unusually the battalion war diary did not record the circumstances of the accident. Ernest is commemorated at the Gaza War Cemetery, XXXII.E.9. He was aged 28.

The final Alderbury man to die on active service in 1917 was **Hugh Henry Tozer**. He was born in Salisbury, the son of Thomas William and Annie Meaby Tozer who lived (subsequent to the 1911 Census) at Matrons' College Farm (Whaddon Farm was a completely different place, inhabited by the Harding family). Hugh enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> / 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment in Salisbury. The battalion was a Territorial Force unit formed in Barnstaple in September 1914 and until July 1917 it served in Bombay on garrison duties, later seeing service in the hills of Chakrata and at Peshawar, where Hugh Tozer joined it. The battalion was ordered to leave India for Palestine but the destination was later changed to Mesopotamia (now Iraq), it arrived at Camp Magil, Basra. In September it continued to Amara and thence to a tented camp at Sheikh Sa'ad on the banks of the River Tigris. On 22 November Hugh died aged 20 of disease, possibly a casualty of the influenza epidemic. He is buried at Amara War Cemetery 1 XII H.10. The Tozer family continued to farm Matrons' College Farm until the end of the 1950s and the property was commonly known as Tozer's Farm. Older residents of the village can still remember the family, although not from Hugh's time.

All the men mentioned above were awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.