

# Fivehead's Military Men



**A Brief History of the  
Men of Fivehead Village who went to  
Fight in the Two World Wars**

By Pip Brett

## Table of Contents

### **Chapter 1** Introduction

Fivehead War Memorial and its renovation.....	2
The Village war effort.....	8

### **Chapter 2** Notes on those who died in the First World War 1914-18

Henry Miller.....	14
Clement Adams.....	16
William Louch.....	18
Jack Sawtell.....	21
Harold Colville.....	24
Alfred Miller.....	28
William Salway.....	30
Reginald Meade.....	33
Ernest Adams.....	35
Joseph Amor.....	38
Frank Male.....	41
George Chorley.....	44

### **Chapter 3** Notes on those who died in the Second World War 1939-45

Kenneth Merritt.....	47
William Vickery.....	50

### **Chapter 4** Notes on others who served

Others who served.....	51
Military Service Tribunals.....	83
Sources and Acknowledgements.....	90

## **Introduction**

One hundred years ago, over sixty men from Fivehead, a small village on the Somerset Levels with a population of about 450, went to fight in the First World War; twelve men did not come home and many more were injured. Nearly 80 years ago, two more men from the Village were killed in the Second World War.

The purpose of this booklet is to record the part played by the men of Fivehead in two World Wars and to ensure their sacrifice is never forgotten.

Every effort has been made to ensure their stories are accurately and fully recorded, but much detail has been lost over the years. This book is also published on the Fivehead Village website ([www.fivehead-village.org.uk](http://www.fivehead-village.org.uk)).

## **Fivehead War Memorial**

In years gone by, Fivehead's Village Green would attract visitors from far and wide to come and see the Spring flowers that once surrounded the War Memorial. Quite possibly the smallest village green in the County, it sits nestled against the 13<sup>th</sup> century St Martins Church, in the heart of the village.

In the 1920s communities across the Country formed committees to decide how they would honour the men and women who gave their lives in the first industrialised war, especially as there was a ban on repatriation due to the numbers of dead. The numbers killed from virtually every community necessitated a new Government Department to oversee the construction of memorials, and The Royal Academy War Memorials Committee held an exhibition of suitable designs in 1919-1920.

The Imperial War Graves Commission, now called the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) was established in 1917. Their principal function is to mark, record and maintain the graves and places of commemoration of Commonwealth military service members who died in the two World Wars.

They care for graves in war cemeteries and other burial grounds, many of which lie on the former battlefields. The names of those with no known grave are listed on the Memorials to the Missing, including the Menin Gate in Ypres and the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme.



Unfortunately, Fivehead's War Memorial Committee records no longer exist, but we do know that in May 1919, the Parish Council proposed the construction of a memorial. We don't know exactly when it was built, but in 1922 there was an article in the Western Times marking the dedication ceremony.

### **Village Cross Memorial**

On the village green adjoining the ancient parish church of St. Martin, Fivehead, Somerset, there has been erected a graceful cross of Doulton (sp) stone, in memory of the twelve men of Fivehead and Swell, who fell in the war. The dedication ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Taunton, and the unveiling by Captain C. A. K. Matterson (late Cheshire Regiment), of Langford Manor, Fivehead, whose brother, Mr W. A. Key Matterson, was chairman of the Memorial Committee.

THE WESTERN TIMES. FRIDAY, MAY 5TH, 1922

Its construction is unusual in that it's made of Doulting Stone, quarried in the Mendip Hills; the decision to have bronze name plaques may have been taken to reduce costs.

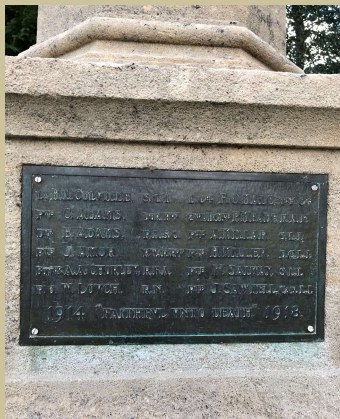
We don't know who constructed the Memorial, but it is likely that the Matterson family would have been key contributors as Mr W. A. Key Matterson was the Chairman of the Memorial Committee and Parish Council, and his brother Capt. Cuthbert Matterson, who had been a Prisoner of War, unveiled the Memorial. There is mention in the Parish Council records thanking Mr Matterson for his 'kind donation'. Could it be the Mattersons funded the project?

In 1923 the Parish Council agreed to take on the responsibility for cleaning and maintaining the Memorial. Over the years various groups have assisted including the Girl Guides, Women's Institute and Parish Council.

The plaque listing Kenneth Merrett who died in World War II was added to the Memorial in 1949. In 1959 the British Legion erected the posts and chain linked fence around the Green. In 1972 the cross was vandalised and later repaired and in April 2004 a stolen lorry was driven over the Green, demolishing the posts and hitting the Church wall.

Every year in November, Villagers gather at the Memorial to pay their respects during the Remembrance Service.

William Vickery who died on active service in 1941, is buried in Fivehead Cemetery, his grave being registered by the CWGC in 1959.



***Faithful unto death  
1914-1918***



***1939 - 1945***

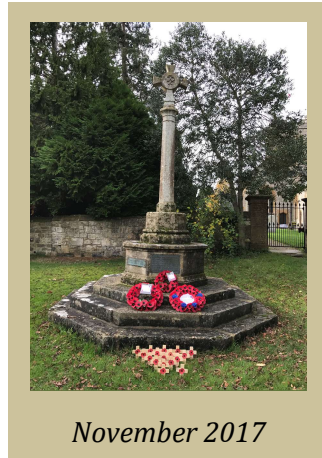


*Fivehead War Memorial & St Martins Church*

## Memorial Renovation

In 2017 it was decided to apply to the War Memorials Trust (WMT) for a grant to renovate the Memorial as it was covered in moss, cracked and in quite a sorry state.

Luckily the WMT were running a campaign in conjunction with the Dept. for Culture, Media and Sport. Their First World War Memorials Programme, promotes the renovation of Memorials as part of the centenary commemorations.



*November 2017*



*February 2018*

A pleasing aspect of this is that it is financed by the fines paid by the banking sector.

In December we were awarded a grant with additional funds from the Parish Council to complete the renovation and RBG Stonemasons were given the contract, under the expert guidance of Master Stonemason Rod Baillie-Grohman.

The Memorial was cleaned using a specialised steam process and a new step was cut in using Doulling stone. The pointing was redone using lime mortar and the bronze plaques have been cleaned and reaffixed using non-rust fixings. The plaques have been marked with Smartwater, a uniquely identifying chemical that will help to recover them should they ever be stolen.



*Fivehead War Memorial*

We hope you agree, the results are quite remarkable, returning the Memorial to its rightful splendour.

To mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the First World War and the renovation of the Memorial, the Village will be holding a rededication ceremony. Where possible, relatives of the men have been traced and invited to mark this special day with the Village.



## **Village war effort**

### *Belgian Refugees*

In November 1914, all Parish Councils were asked to report on their ability to house refugees from Belgium in their communities. Fivehead formed a committee.....

#### **FIVEHEAD.**

**BELGIAN REFUGEES.** – On Friday of last week a parish meeting was held in the schoolroom for the purpose of discussing the question of the accommodation and support of a Belgian refugee family in the village. The chairman of the Parish Council, Mr. John Wilcox presided, and was supported by the vicar, the Rev. J. Rigbye, Messrs. W. A. K. Matterson, Harcombe and others. After an outline of the purpose of the meeting had been given by the Chairman, a sympathetic discussion followed. It was decided to try to obtain Hillside Farm (its present occupants, Mr. and Mrs. G. Rowsell, most kindly offering to vacate it at very short notice if required) and to canvass the village for the purpose of ascertaining whether the amount required for the weekly support of a family could be raised. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the chairman.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

14<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 1914

#### **FIVEHEAD.**

**BELGIAN REFUGEES.** –Great excitement has been going on in this village since Monday last, preparing, and getting furniture, and other useful articles, in readiness for a family of Belgians which, were welcomed late on Thursday evening. The very great kindness of everybody in their response to help the committee will long be remembered in Fivehead.

SOMERSET COUNTY GAZETTE

12<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 1914

### *Belgian Relief Committee Meeting Notes*

- 11<sup>th</sup> Nov 1914 Parish Council appointed the committee and asked it to canvass for subscriptions, WA Key Matterson agreed to ask if Hill Farm House could be used for accommodation.
- 13<sup>th</sup> Nov 1914 Committee canvassing results – 27 shillings promised in subs, Hill Farm House was promised until Lady Day 1915 (25<sup>th</sup> March)
- 14<sup>th</sup> Dec 1914 Miss Rigbye was appointed to either buy provisions or tickets for use by the refugees, but in shops in the Village only. A ton of coal was to be ordered from Langport.
- 21<sup>st</sup> Dec 1914 Mr Matterson reported that Mrs Matterson would continue to pay the rent for Hill Farm House until Midsummer at 5 shillings a week, Mrs Cuthbert Matterson has also donated £5.
- 13<sup>th</sup> Jan 1915 Mr Brice had agreed to continue to rent his house until Midsummer. The Committee agreed to write to the Central Belgian Relief Committee for boots for the women and Mr J. Louch agreed to shave the men.
- 15<sup>th</sup> Feb 1915 Expenses reviewed, it was agreed to write to the Refugees to ask them to economise on their use of coal.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Mar 1915 Madam De Clerq and Madam Dupont had been seen and agreed to economise on use of coal. The Chair of the committee, Mr Wilcox offered to sell a tree for felling to the Committee for the refugees, this was agreed. Discussion took place regarding the accounts and Mr Rigbye reported that Miss Rigbye would be resigning as treasurer as a result of things that had been said. It was agreed to give each family 10 shillings per week as the men had not found work.

22nd Mar 1915 Special meeting. It was agreed to ask Miss Rigbye to continue being treasurer.

10th May 1915 Mrs Matterson agreed to continue paying the rent for another three months. Rev. Rigbye asked the Committee to place on record its horror at the callous inhumanity employed by Germany in sinking the Lusitania. Agreed.

16th May 1915 Special meeting called due to house being destroyed by fire. Mrs Matterson would still honour the payment of rent. The Duponts and De Clerqs had been housed in temporary accommodation

17th May 1915 It was reported that 15 shillings and 6 pence had been collected. A vote took place on whether the Belgians should stay, 5 votes were received for the De Clerq family, but none for the Duponts. Mr Wilcox stated there were houses available in Curry Mallet and he would give the Duponts 15 shillings per week.

10th June 1915 Mrs Miller agreed to house the De Clerqs for 2 shillings per week. Mr Wilcox confirmed he had secured a cottage in Curry Mallet for the Duponts. It was agreed the Committee would continue to pay both rents but write to the Central Committee to ask for a grant.

16th July 1915 A final meeting was held, and it was agreed the remaining balance would be given to the Sports Committee and furniture would be distributed by Rev. Rigbye.



### **FIVEHEAD**

**FIRE.** -In the early hours of Tuesday morning a house occupied by two Belgian families was found to be on fire. The alarm was raised, and all the inmates were safely got outside. Great energies were then put forth to save the contents, which belonged to the parishioners, and in this the people were fairly successful. Practically all was salvaged except a few bedsteads.

The fire is supposed to have originated in a room occupied by the young members of the family, and the mother had been in the habit of burning a lamp all through the night. This having been done during many consecutive nights, and the ceiling being low and of matchboard, it probably ignited. The house was a thatched one, and the fire having gained a hold no efforts could prevent its spread, therefore the entire place entirely gutted.

Much sympathy is felt for Mr. B. Brice, of Isle Brewers, the owner, as the house was a good one, and of special interest to him owing to its antiquity. It is said to be partly covered by insurance.

The Langport Fire Brigade was immediately sent for, but owing to some difficulties was unable to come over. A large crowd collected, and willingly set to work to save the adjoining out-premises, in which they were successful. The Belgian refugees are now boarded out with the villagers until other means can be provided for their shelter and comfort.

**LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD**  
**15TH MAY 1915**

## *Second World War*

On 8<sup>th</sup> April 1938, Captain C A Hayes came to speak to the Parish Council about the Parish's obligations with regard to air raid precautions. There was to be a First Aid Party, Rescue Party, 6 men in each and 3 wardens. Volunteers were asked for; 3 women and 1 man came forward, he was Frank Miller (Voakes Farm) who had served in the 1<sup>st</sup> WW. It was agreed that names would have to be put forward.

In 1940 the Village set up a Vegetable Marketing Scheme, organised by the Women's Institute. Mr F. Budgett was appointed as organiser for the collection of scrap metal, and Messrs F. Miller and H. Male were appointed ARP wardens to liaise with the County ARP Controller on measures to be taken to prevent the landing of enemy aircraft.

While no bombs actually landed in our Parish, there was a search light positioned in Swell and bombs did fall on Hambridge and Wrantage where the school was destroyed.

20<sup>th</sup> April 1945 a Welcome Home fund was established to fund the following celebrations: a celebration for all children under 16, a religious service, refreshments, sports.

It was also agreed that should there be a shortfall in funding, that the rates would be used to make up the difference.

## Chapter 2

### Notes on those Who Died in the First World War

#### FIVEHEAD

RECRUITING. – On Wednesday evening of last week the Vicar, the Rev. J. Rigbye, presided over a well-attended and enthusiastic meeting, convened for the purpose of encouraging recruiting. He was supported by Major Barrett, Messrs. W.A.K. Matterson, W.W. Goode and others. The Curry Rivel Band was present and before the meeting played patriotic airs. Opening the meeting the Chairman said that although he was essentially a man of peace, he felt justified in taking part in such a meeting, for he regarded the present war as not only a just war, but a holy war. He hoped the young men of Fivehead would step forward and do their part in the cause of justice for which their country was fighting. -Major Barrett explained the reasons we were at war. He felt that when the men of the district realised why we were fighting they would step forward gladly, and join one of His Majesty's forces. – Mr Matterson thanked the speakers for the kind references they had made to his brother, Lieutenant C. Matterson, Cheshire Regiment, who was reported as missing. He (the speaker) called on the men of Fivehead to come forward and serve their King and country, and help to stem the tide of German brutality and arrogance. -Mr Goode endorsed the remarks of the previous speakers about the justice of the war, and explained some technical points in connection with recruiting. He hoped some of those present would join the 5<sup>th</sup> Somerset and give him the pleasure of meeting them on Salisbury Plain shortly. At the close of the meeting eleven volunteers handed in their names to Major Barrett.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD  
26<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1914



**Private Henry Miller.  
1st Battalion, Duke of Cornwall's Light  
Infantry**

Henry William Miller was born in early 1885 and grew up living in Angel Row, Fivehead with his father John, a farm worker, his mother Miriam, a shirt maker and his younger brothers Walter and Herbert who would also become farm workers. Miriam died in 1898 and John then married Eva Shepherd from Muchelney. They had three further children; Myra, Alice and William. By 1901, at the age of sixteen, Henry was living and working at Stowey Farm, Fivehead as a cattleman.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1902, Henry went to Taunton and enlisted in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Bn), Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI). At that time, the minimum length of service would have been twelve years, however most soldiers only served a few years and then became a reservist for the remainder of their service. The Boer War was being fought at this time in South Africa, but the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was sent to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to guard South African Prisoners of War.

In 1910 Henry married (Gertrude) Mary Salway from Isle Abbots and by 1911, Henry and Mary had moved to Pennant Street, Ebbw Vale where he ran his own milk vending business. His brother Walter was also living with them but was unemployed. Henry then bought his own farm, The Hendre Farm, Newtown, Ebbw Vale.



Ebbw Vale

When war broke out in August 1914, Henry re-joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion DCLI and was soon landing at Le Havre as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). The 1st Bn were among the first to engage the Germans at Mons but were unable

to halt their advance. The BEF managed a controlled retreat and entered a race to the sea to stop the Germans gaining access to France.

Unfortunately, Henry became ill with dysentery on 22nd September 1914 and spent 2 days in a Field Hospital. By October, during the Battle of La Bassée, the 1st Bn were at Violaines, near Lille when the Germans broke through, forcing them from the Town. Henry was killed during this battle on 22nd October 1914, but his body was never found.

His name is recorded on the Commonwealth War Graves Memorial at Le Touret, Pas de Calais along with 13,500 British soldiers. Henry was posthumously awarded the Victory Medal and British War Medal and left his farm (valued at £1076 13s 9d) to his wife Mary in his will.

Henry's stepmother, Eva remained living in the Muchelney area until her death in 1952 at the age of 89. It's thought she requested for Henry to be included on our War Memorial.



**Private Clement Adams.  
1st Battalion, Dorsetshire Regiment**

(Charles) Clement Adams was born in Swell in 1893 and lived in Fivehead with his mother Annie and siblings William, Alice, Herbert and Clarence. By 1911 Annie had married Henry Grinter and they all lived at Moortown Farm, Swell together with Henry's seven children. Clement worked as an 'under carter' on the farm, which was a job requiring some skill in driving horses and balancing a load, usually on a two-wheeled cart.



Clement enlisted at the end of 1914 in at Porth, Glamorgan, it's not known why he travelled to Wales to enlist, but his stepbrother, Charlie Grinter was living in LLangeinor at that time. Clement gave his current address as North Curry. He was posted to 1st Battalion, Dorsetshire Regiment and joined them in Belgium on 27th January 1915. The First Battle of Ypres had ended in November and Clement's Battalion was tasked with holding the line on the Ypres Salient at Wulverghem.

On 14th March 1915 Clement was killed in action at the age of 22 and having been in theatre for just 46 days. His body was never found. He is listed on the Menin Gate at Ypres along with 54,000 names of allied soldiers who died on the Ypres Salient but have no known grave.

In 1919, Clement's medals (Victory medal, the British War medal and the 1915 Star) and £3 war pension were collected by his mother Annie.

It's likely that Clement's seven brothers and step brothers would have all served too, but many records from World War I were destroyed during the Blitz in the Second World War. The only records discovered so far relate to Clarence Adams and Herbert Grinter.

Clarence joined the Navy in September 1917, with his current occupation given as a tin worker. Clarence was posted to HMS Tiger, the most heavily armoured battlecruiser in the Fleet and took part in the Second Battle of Heligoland Bight on 17th November 1917. Clarence served until April 1919.

Herbert signed up in December 1915, but according to his service record did not get assigned a regiment until May 1918 when he joined the Welsh Guards. It's likely Herbert's occupation as a coal miner, a reserved occupation, kept him at home until the need for reinforcements became acute.

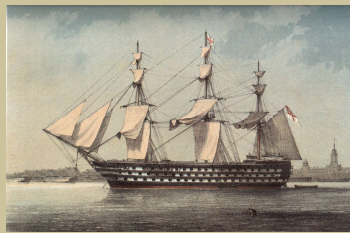




### **Petty Officer William Louch, Royal Navy**

(Clement) William Louch was born and raised in Fivehead along with his 9 siblings, 4 of whom died under the age of 5. His father was an agricultural labourer and the whole family lived in one of the small cottages in Angel Row.

William joined the Navy as a Domestic Boy Rating, 3<sup>rd</sup> Class in October 1900, aged 16, giving his previous occupation as a baker. He was initially posted to HMS Wellington, a receiving or training ship based at Portsmouth.



HMS Wellington

William then served on two more training ships and in 1904 was posted to HMS Vivid II, a barracks at Devonport and then to HMS Monmouth, a newly built armoured cruiser in the Channel Fleet. In 1906, William was promoted to Stoker 1<sup>st</sup> Class and served on HMS Hogue, another armoured cruiser in the Channel Fleet and then HMS Gossamer, a sharpshooter torpedo gunboat. In 1913, William was posted to the newly built battlecruiser HMS Indefatigable.





HMS Indefatigable

When the First World War began, Indefatigable was serving with the 2nd Battlecruiser Squadron (BCS) in the Mediterranean, where she unsuccessfully pursued the battlecruiser Goeben

and the light cruiser Breslau of the German Imperial Navy as they fled towards the Ottoman Empire. The ship bombarded Ottoman fortifications defending the Dardanelles on 3 November 1914. She returned to the United Kingdom in February where she re-joined the 2nd BCS. The ship conducted patrols of the North Sea for the next year and a half. In April 1915, William was promoted to Petty Officer Stoker.

By 1916, the British were able to decode German radio messages and could leave their bases before the Germans even put to sea. On 31<sup>st</sup> May, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> BCS prepared to ambush a fleet of German minesweepers in the North Sea, but the British fleet was spotted which prompted the "Run to the South", the opening phase of the battlecruiser action in the Battle of Jutland. Indefatigable was the first ship to be hit; the German battlecruiser Von der Tann hit her several times, causing an explosion ripping a hole in her hull, and a second explosion hurled large pieces of the ship 200 feet in the air. Only three of the crew of 1,019 survived. William's body was never found. He is commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial.

The only records discovered of William's brothers serving relate to Lewis and Charles. Lewis joined up in 1914 and was posted to the 5th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry. However, after four months he was discharged, medically unfit. William's older brother, Charles served in the Navy as a cook and in 1912 emigrated to Canada where in February 1916 he joined the 143rd Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (failing to declare his previous service in the Royal Navy) and went to France in March 1917. Charles returned to Canada after the War, on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1919, he sailed from Liverpool to Nova Scotia for demobilisation. He lived and worked at the Coldstream Ranch, Vernon in rural British Columbia, which is still a cattle ranch today.



**Lance Corporal Jack Sawtell.  
8th Battalion Canadian Light Infantry**

Edward John Sawtell, known as Jack, was born in 1895 to James, a lime burner and Edith, a shirt maker who were living with James' mother in Fivehead. James was later a labourer at Cathanger Farm and they had 8 children in total.

In 1906, at the age of 20, Jack's older brother William emigrated to Canada and started a farm in rural Saskatchewan. Over the next 7 years, the remaining Sawtells apart from Charles and Alice, joined William on the farm in Manitou Lake. Jack's eldest brother, Charles had joined the 18th Hussars in 1898 and fought in the 2nd Boer War, enduring the Siege of Ladysmith. In 1907 he emigrated to live in Marcellus, New York, joining his Uncle George, ex of Fivehead. In 1910 Alice married William Chipling, a greengrocer from Stoke

Newington. It's believed she never visited her family in Canada, but her parents returned for a visit in 1928.



**Jack Sawtell**  
*courtesy of  
Vicki Sawtell  
Canada*

Jack emigrated in 1911 and in December 1914, he travelled 630 miles to Winnipeg to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force, being assigned to the 8th Battalion Canadian Light Infantry (Winnipeg Rifles). They first travelled to Salisbury Plain for training, and then in April 1915 saw their first action at Ypres.

At 0400 hrs on the morning of Saturday, 24 April 1915, a blue-green-yellowish cloud was seen rolling over No Man's Land towards the battalion trenches. It was the second known enemy gas attack of the War. Half the battalion succumbed to the poisonous fumes. The battalion on the left was obliged to retire and Colonel Lipsett's 8th Battalion found itself in danger of being surrounded. But it held on. While supporting battalions were preparing new defences in the rear, the men of the Regiment kept up a withering fire on the enemy, drove off an attack on its front and withstood fearful enfilade fire from left and right, and this from an enemy force five times its size. Thus, began a tradition for the Battalion of never losing a trench to the enemy, a tradition never to be broken throughout the war's duration.

**FIVEHEAD.**

**KILLED IN ACTION.** - Pte. Jack Sawtell, of the Canadians was reported last week to have been killed in action. Much sympathy is expressed with his relations.

**LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD**

**22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 1916**

The 8th Bn also fought at Festubert in May 1915; Givenchy in June and Mount Sorrel the following June, where Jack was killed on the 14th. The Brigadier General of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade had written to Headquarters prior to the Battle, pointing out his concerns over the plans for attack, which proved accurate as many casualties occurred due to friendly fire. The Battalion was under continuous bombardment for 48 hours with no water or rations; the extreme strain was too much for some soldiers who were seen to walk to their deaths in No Man's Land, in a confused state. The Battalion lost 1 officer and 195 other ranks, including Jack whose body was not recovered.

The Battle of Mount Sorrel lasted for almost two weeks and cost the Canadians over 8,000 casualties. Having lost the first two phases of the battle, the Canadians achieved victory in the final operation.

Jack is commemorated on the Menin Gate, Ypres and the Peace Tower in Ottawa, Canada. Jack's younger brother Herbert also served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, returning to Canada at the end of the War. The Sawtells remained in Saskatchewan, making a success of their farm at Manitou Lake.



**Lt. Harold Linklater Colville.**  
**1st Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry**

Harold was born in 1894 in Edmonton, Middlesex. His father, George was a Russian merchant and married to Mary Rigbye whose brother James, later a vicar of Fivehead, performed Harold's baptism. Harold had an older brother and sister, Cecil and Vera.

By 1911, Cecil had married and was living in Clewer, Berkshire, employed by his father as a Russian merchant. Harold was living with his brother and at the age of 16, gave his occupation as an oil companies clerk.

Before the outbreak of war, Harold had been at Durham University, training to be ordained. He regularly stayed with his Uncle, James Rigbye, Vicar of Fivehead. In December 1915, at the age of 21, Harold went to France, initially with the 9th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry and later transferred on promotion to the 1st Battalion which was deployed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1st July 1916, well known as the bloodiest day in the history of the British Army. 60,000 casualties and 20,000 dead on the first day alone. The Battle would last until November and claim 1,000,000 casualties.

It's reported that on 2nd July, Lieutenant Colville was shot in the head, fracturing the base of his skull. He was taken to a large clearing hospital near Rouen but died of his wounds on 6th July 1916. He was just 22 years old. He is buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at St Sever.

### **FIVEHEAD.**

VICAR'S NEPHEW SERIOUSLY WOUNDED. – Much sympathy was expressed in the parish when it became known on Tuesday that the Vicar's nephew had been seriously wounded in the recent fighting. The Vicar, the Rev. J. Rigbye, received a message from the War Office to the effect that Sec.-Lieut. H. L. Colville, Somerset L.I., had been admitted to hospital with a gunshot wound in the head and fractured skull and was seriously ill. Sec.-Lieut. Harold Linklater Colville was a student at Durham and looking forward to his ordination next year. On coming down for the long vacation last year he obtained a commission in the Somersets and at the end of the year went out to the front. Lieut. Colville had short leave since that time and paid a flying visit to his uncle at Fivehead. His many friends in the parish and neighbourhood express their sincere hopes for Lieut. Colville's complete recovery.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

8<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1916

In 1921 Harold's brother Cecil claimed his medals from the War Office, the Victory medal, the British War medal and the 1915 Star. He also applied to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to have the following inscription on his headstone;

"THOU LORD HIS CAPTAIN IN THE WELL FOUGHT FIGHT"

**FIVEHEAD.**

THE ROLL OF HONOUR. -We regret to state that Lieut. Colville, of the Somerset L.I., nephew of the Vicar, whom we announced last week was seriously wounded, has succumbed to his injuries, death taking place on Friday of last week.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD  
15<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1916

**FIVEHEAD.**

OFFICER'S REMARKABLE PREMONITION. -Lieut. Harold L. Colville, 1<sup>st</sup> Somt. L.I., nephew of the vicar, the Rev. J. Rigbye, had a remarkable premonition. When he had been a soldier only a short time he told his friends "I shall be wounded three times and shall then be killed." It happened exactly as he predicted. This fourth wound, the fracture of the base of the skull, was received on July 2. He was carried down to Rouen, where he died a few days later. Even before he put on the King's uniform young Colville - he was barely 20 - had a feeling that he would never come out of the war alive. In spite of this deeply-rooted impression he relinquished his life's ambition which was to become a clergyman, and cheerfully buried his hopes of material prospects. He was assistant master of the Choir School of All Saints', Margaret Street, W., with the help of the clergy of which church he was studying for Holy Orders.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD  
19<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 1916



## NEWSPAPERS ON THE BATTLEFIELD

### SINGULAR COINCIDENCE.

#### RELATED BY A FIVEHEAD SOLDIER.

A remarkable coincidence is related by Corpl. W. Pester, of the Royal Engineers, whose home is at Fivehead, Somerset. Recently on a Flanders battlefield Corpl. Pester picked up a scrap of the "Daily Sketch" in which was recorded an account of the premonition of death concerning the late Lieut. Colville, nephew of the Vicar of Fivehead. This he sent home for careful preservation. Corpl. Pester fought throughout the South African War and on another occasion, strange to relate, on one of the battlefields of action he picked up a portion of the *Langport & Somerton Herald*, which contained a full report of the Fivehead Friendly Society annual dinner, in which he was naturally keenly interested. Corpl. Pester during war is particularly fortunate in obtaining news of his native village from scraps of newspapers lost on the battle grounds on which, gallant soldier, he upholds the honour of his country.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD  
2<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER 1916



**Corporal Alfred Miller.  
8th Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry**

Alfred was born in Angel Row, Fivehead in 1891; his father, James was an agricultural labourer and married to Elizabeth, who between them had 11 children. There were 5 girls and 6 boys, 1 of whom died in infancy. 2 of Alfred's brothers, Ambrose and Silas also joined the Somerset Light Infantry; Ambrose was discharged after just 28 days having been diagnosed with a heart murmur and Silas would also serve in the West Somerset Yeomanry.

At the turn of the century, the Millers moved to Western Farm, Swell and by 1911 they were living in Goathurst near Bridgwater. Alfred was employed as a waggoner on a farm. It's not known when Alfred joined the Army, but his younger brother Ambrose joined in October 1914, so it's likely Alfred joined then.

The 8th (Service) Battalion was raised at Taunton in October 1914 as part of Kitchener's Third Army, they were attached to 63rd Brigade, 21st Division, which initially concentrated in the Tring area, with troops spending some time in camp, under canvas at Halton Park before winter necessitated a move to local



billets. In May 1915 the infantry moved to huts at Halton Park and on the 9th of August they moved to Witley Camp.

They went to France on the 10th September 1915 and landed at Le Havre. The Division embarked on lengthy marches and went into action in the British assault at Loos on 26 September, where the Division suffered over 3800 casualties. In 1916 they were in action in The Battle of the Somme and on 8th July 1916 the Battalion transferred with 63rd Brigade to 37th Division.

In November 1916, the Division took part in the Battle of the Ancre, the final phase of the Battle of the Somme. On 12th November, the Battalion was billeted at Lealvillers, West of Beaumont Hamel.

On 14th November, they continued the attack at Engelbelmer; as Alfred was a corporal and not an officer, his death was not recorded in the Regimental diary. His body was never recovered, and he is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial along with 72,000 soldiers who were never found. He died a single man, with his father collecting his personal effects.



*CWGC Thiepval Memorial, The*



**Private William Salway.  
1st Battalion Somerset Light Infantry.**

The Salway family lived in Hill View House, Fivehead and were thatchers by trade. Heman and Harriett had 10 children, 5 of whom were boys who are believed to have all fought in The Great War, apart from Charles who died at the age of 12.

William was 16 when war broke out, it's not known when he joined up, but he would have become eligible for service in early 1916, just as conscription came in. He enlisted in Taunton with the 1st Battalion Somerset Light Infantry, joining his older brother Sidney in the Battalion. The Battalion participated in the following battles:

- ❖ The Battle of Albert(Somme) 1 – 13 July 1916,
- ❖ The Battle of Le Transloy 1 – 18 Oct 1916
- ❖ Battle of the Scarpe 9 April – 4 May 1917
- ❖ The Battle of Polygon Wood 26 Sept – 3 Oct 1917

The Langport Herald reported that William was wounded in the abdomen on 28th September 1917 and died in hospital that evening. However, according to his Regiment, he died of wounds on 5th October 1917.

The Regimental War Diary confirms the Battalion was training on 28<sup>th</sup> Sept and engaged in battle overnight on 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> October. William's brother Sidney was also

wounded that week, his parents receiving notice of their injuries at the same time.

**FIVEHEAD.**

DIED OF WOUNDS. -The greatest sympathy is expressed with Mr. & Mrs. Heman Salway in the sad loss they have sustained through the death of their son, Pte. Wm. Salway, of the Somersets. He was dangerously wounded in the abdomen during the fighting on September 28<sup>th</sup> and was removed to a base hospital where the unfortunate sufferer passed away the same evening. The sorrow of the bereaved parents has been much added to by the fact that on Sunday morning they received the news that another son, Pte. Sidney Salway, of the Somersets, had been wounded and was lying in a base hospital. His friends sincerely hope he is not seriously wounded and will make a complete recovery.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD  
20<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 1917

The catastrophic losses at the Battle of the Somme resulted in a change in policy, thereby avoiding having siblings or family members serve in the same battalion.

William was just 19 when he died. It was also reported in the Battalion War Diary that, 'a satisfactory feature of the day was the way in which the last draft of 200 behaved. Though for the most part only 19 years of age, and never having been under fire before, they showed the greatest keenness and determination and behaved excellently'. He is buried in Dozinghem Cemetery, near Ypres in Belgium.

William's older brothers, Leonard, Samuel and Sidney all survived.





## **2nd Air Mechanic Reginald Meade. Royal Flying Corps**

Reginald's father, Philip like his father before him, was a butcher living at Hill House, Butchers Hill when Reginald was born in 1896. His mother was Selina Maria Thomas from Cornwall and he had an older brother, Maurice and two younger sisters, Irene and Winifred. When Reginald was 15 he moved to live with his Aunt's family in Updown, Devon together with his twelve cousins and worked on their farm. By 1911, Reginald's family had moved to Bishops Lydeard where his father was a farm bailiff.

Reginald would have been eligible to join the Army at the start of the War in 1914. He became a mechanic in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) formed in 1912 which had



just 113 aircraft when War broke out. In April 1918, the RFC merged with the Royal Naval Air Service to become the RAF.

He was posted to Egypt where the RFC were supporting the infantry in their advance through Palestine. On 30 December 1917, Reginald was killed when his troop ship was near Alexandria. HT "Aragon" was torpedoed and sunk on entering the port of Alexandria, with the loss of 380 officers and men of the Commonwealth forces. HMS Attack sailed to their rescue, but she too was sunk by the



same U boat. Reginald was 21 when he died and was unmarried.

Reginald's elder brother Maurice first served with the West Somerset Yeomanry and then the Somerset Light Infantry. He fought in the Balkans, Egypt and France and was demobilised April 1919. Many of Reginald's cousins also fought in both the Boer War and First World War.

Reginald's initial on our War Memorial is 'P' rather than 'R'. His father's name was Philip, so he may have used this name. He is also commemorated on the Chatby Memorial in Egypt.



Commonwealth War Graves  
Chatby Memorial, Alexandria, Egypt





**Dvr Ernest Adams.**  
**Army Service Corps (Horse Transport)**

Ernest came from quite austere beginnings; he was one of seven children with both parents working, his father was an agricultural labourer and his mother was a collar worker. Ernest's grandmother lived with the family and would have cared for the children. In 1885, when Ernest was ten years old, his father died and by 1891 Ernest was also working as an agricultural labourer, his mother was a laundress and his grandmother classed as a 'pauper'. Ernest's grandmother died later that year and he lost his mother in 1894.

Ernest had already had a career in the Army prior to the outbreak of the First World War. He joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry and transferred to the Devonshire Regiment in 1893, at the age of eighteen. He served on the Punjab in 1897/98 during the Tirah Expedition. The Afridi tribe attempted to seize control of the Khyber Pass on the India/Pakistan border, after a series of battles through the Winter months, the British resumed control.

The Devons then went immediately to South Africa at the start of the Boer War, having lost half their Regiment to sickness. Ernest's Regiment were engaged in battles at Elandslaagte, Waggon Hill and the relief of Ladysmith in March 1900. It's not known when Ernest returned home and left the Army, but by 1909 Ernest married Hannah

Sansom Burt and moved to Swell, where in 1910 they had a baby boy, Bertie.

At the start of the First World War, Ernest joined the Army Service Corps (Horse Transport) and was posted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Base Depot Salonika, Greece. It's not known when he joined, but his Army number (T2/SR/03929) confirms he was in the first wave of recruits at the start of the War, at the age of 39.

On 19<sup>th</sup> August 1917 he was admitted to hospital in Greece, suffering with malaria. He returned to his unit just 10 days later. Malaria was endemic in Salonika, in fact the logo of the Salonika Campaign Society is a mosquito. The men also suffered from dysentery and the campaign followed the pattern of earlier wars where there were more losses to sickness and disease than to enemy action, unlike the Western Front.

Ernest died on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1918 at the 63<sup>rd</sup> General Hospital, Salonika. There are no details of the circumstances of his death, but it is likely to have been due to illness, rather than enemy action.

Ernest was one of seven children, his eldest sister Sarah married John Miller of Fivehead; their eldest son Henry, Ernest's nephew, also appears on our Memorial, having been killed in 1914 at the start of the War.

In May 1919, Ernest's wife, Hannah collected his medals, the Victory medal, the British War medal and the 1915 Star and applied for the following inscription on his headstone;

UNTIL THE DAYBREAK AND SHADOWS FLEE AWAY

## **Pip, Squeak and Wilfred**

Pip, Squeak and Wilfred are the affectionate names given to the three WWI campaign medals — The 1914 Star or 1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal respectively. These medals were primarily awarded to the Old Contemptibles (B.E.F.) and by convention all three medals are worn together and in the same order from left to right when viewed from the front. The set of three medals or at least the British War Medal and the Victory Medal are the most likely medals to be found among family heirlooms.

When the WWI medals were issued in the 1920's it coincided with a popular comic strip published by the Daily Mirror newspaper. It was written by Bertram J. Lamb (Uncle Dick) and drawn by the cartoonist Austin Bowen Payne (A.B. Payne). Pip was the dog, Squeak the penguin and Wilfred the young rabbit. It is believed that A. B. Payne's batman during the war had been nicknamed "Pip-squeak" and this is where the idea for the names of the dog and penguin came from. For some reason the three names of the characters became associated with the three campaign medals being issued at that time to many thousands of returning servicemen, and they stuck.





**Private Joseph Henry Amor.  
2/6th Royal Warwickshire Regiment**

The Amor family lived and worked at Western Farm, Swell when Joseph was born in 1898. He had seven siblings in total, but his younger brother Walter Stanley died in infancy. He also had a step brother, Albert Charles Amor. Joseph's father Charles had been married to Eliza Crossman, but she died at the age of 26 when their son Albert was just three years old. Joseph's father married Emily two years later and moved from Curry Mallet to Swell. He was an agricultural labourer/shepherd and Joseph attended Fivehead School with his brothers and sisters until he was thirteen years old, when he left to join his father and brothers on the farm.

It's not known when Joseph joined the Army, but he was initially posted to the 4th Battalion Kings Shropshire Light Infantry and was later transferred to 2/6th Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Conscription was introduced just as Joseph turned 18 on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1916 and the fact that he did not join a local Regiment, suggests he may have been conscripted.

The 2/6<sup>th</sup> was a home defence Battalion until March 1916 when it transferred to Salisbury Plain and became part of the 61<sup>st</sup> Division. Here they were issued with .303 SMLE service rifles and Lewis guns in place of the Japanese rifles, dummy guns and antique Maxim guns they had used while serving in England. Final leave was granted in April and May and the division entrained for France.

The 2/6th Bn's first action was the Battle of Fromelles on 19 July 1916, a diversionary attack in support of the Somme Offensive. The attack was badly handled, and casualties were heavy. The 61st Division was so badly mauled that it was not used offensively again in 1916.

Thereafter, the battalion was involved in the following operations:

- ❖ Operations on the Ancre, 11–15 January 1917
- ❖ German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line, 14 March–5 April 1917
- ❖ Battle of Langemarck, 16–18 August 1917
- ❖ Battle of Cambrai, German counter-attacks, 1–3 December 1917.
- ❖ Battle of Estaires, 11 April 1918
- ❖ Battle of Hazebrouck, 12–15 April 1918
- ❖ Battle of Béthune, 18 April 1918

By May 1918, Joseph's Battalion was serving at the front on the Haverskerque/Les Amusoires line, near Merville on the France/Belgium border. On the evening of 11th/12th May his unit moved from their rest area at Hamet Billet to the front, and this is possibly when Joseph was killed. We know from his nephew, Derek Amor, that Joseph was a dispatch rider and was killed by a sniper on 11th May 1918. Joseph was just 20 years old.

Joseph's half-brother, Albert Charles Amor joined the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1916 in Taunton and we know from Joseph's nephew, Derek that Joseph's brother, George Knight Amor served with the West Somerset Yeomanry and the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry. He was severely wounded at Ypres having lost a lung and was medically discharged on 26 January

1918 and spent 2 years in hospital recovering. Despite this injury, he lived on to the ripe old age of 90.

In July 1918, Joseph's father collected Joseph's War gratuity of £8 14s 6d. Joseph is buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Etaples. It's believed his oldest brother George requested the following inscription;

'SLEEP ON BELOVED, SLEEP ON AND TAKE THY REST'



*Private Joseph Amor  
Courtesy of nephew Derek Amor*



**Lance Corporal Francis Charles Male.  
10th Battalion Tank Corps & Welch  
Regiment**

Frank Male came from a large family living in Fivehead and Swell, where his descendants are still to be found today. His father Henry and two of his older brothers were agricultural labourers when Frank was born in 1884. In 1911 Frank had moved to Cardiff with 3 of his 9 siblings and he worked as a car conductor, possibly on the trams in Cardiff. His older brother John was a police constable in Cardiff and would have been deployed to the Rhondda riots in 1910/1911. His brother Herbert was a fish monger and his sister, Edith was a housekeeper.



*Queen Street, Cardiff 1912 Courtesy of Wales Online*

Frank first joined the Welch Regiment and then transferred to the Tank Corps after it was established in 1916.



In April 1915, Frank married Isabel Davies in Cardiff and in September 1916 they had a baby girl (Isabel) Joan. It is not known if Frank ever saw his daughter as after the Somme offensive, very few soldiers made it home on leave from Europe.

Tanks were first deployed at the front in 1916 and by 1918 were being used to greater effect in an offensive rather than defensive role. They were now deploying Mark V tanks; the Renault FT light tank was the first tank in history with a "modern" configuration: a revolving turret on top and an engine compartment at the rear. The first tank-on-tank battle took place in April 1918 at the second battle of Villers-Bretonneux, but there were no clear winners.

According to the War Diary for the 10<sup>th</sup> Bn, it's likely that Frank was in 'B' Company and possibly in tank number 6009. On 21<sup>st</sup> May 1918, the Battalion's tanks were inspected by Major Green who commented, 'All were in a remarkably clean state and apparently in good mechanical condition.'



Mk 1 Tank

Two tanks in particular in B Coy, Commanders Shott and Wassel, sic Comdr Capt Kemp-Robinson, were a credit to the corps in all respects.'

Frank was killed in action on 26th May 1918, the diary entry reads; 'On afternoon of 26 inst, the advanced section of B Coy were heavily shelled causing considerable loss to the personnel. Ref K.9.a.8.5. (near Gommecourt, The Somme) Casualties:- Killed 7, wounded 12.

Frank is buried in the Gommecourt British Cemetery No.2, Hebuterne, France. This cemetery was created when other smaller cemeteries were brought together.

Frank's wife Isabel, now living in Cheriton, Reynoldston, Swansea, received a relief war gratuity in October 1918 and Frank's full gratuity of £14 in 1919. She requested the following inscription on his headstone:

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE, WE ARE IN DEATH



**Lance Bombardier George Chorley.  
8th Div Ammunition Column, Royal Field  
Artillery**

(Albert) George was just 2 months old when his mother, Ruth died leaving his father, James to look after their eight children, all under the age of 10. George was raised by his Grandmother, Phyllis Marsh of Angel Row, Fivehead and his siblings remained with their father in Fivehead who remarried and moved to Curry Rivel a few years later.

George became a baker (working for Mr Hillard at what is now The Old Bakery) and was a prominent member of the Baptist Chapel in the Village. He remained in Fivehead until he enlisted at Bristol and joined the Royal Field Artillery, he would have been 35 at the start of the War in 1914.

**FIVEHEAD.**

HOME ON LEAVE. -During the past four weeks three Fivehead men serving in H.M. Forces have been home. Frank Miller, of the R.H.A., has had ten days' sick leave after leaving the hospital at Chatham, where he was sent from France after being severely gassed. He is now quite recovered. T. Harvey had six days' leave from camp, and Bombardier George Chorley has had ten days' leave from France, and all his old friends were glad to see him looking so well. Mr Talbot had one of his sons home for a few days. He is serving with the Australians.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD  
29<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1917

It's likely that George would have seen service throughout the War; the 8<sup>th</sup> Divisional Ammunition Column, RFA served with 8<sup>th</sup> Division; it was formed at Hursley Park, Winchester during October 1914 from regular army units returning from around the British Empire therefore it's possible that George fought in the Boer War, but no records have been found.

We know George was serving in September 1917 as it was reported in the Langport and Somerton Herald that he had been home on leave for ten days and his friends were pleased to see him 'looking so well'.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Division proceeded to France in November 1914, a much-needed reinforcement to the BEF and remained on the Western Front throughout the War. In 1915 they were in action at The Battle of Neuve Chapelle, The Battle of Aubers and the action of Bois Grenier. In 1916 they were involved in the Battle of the Somme, in 1917 they fought in the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line and then moved to Flanders and were in action in The Battle of Pilkem Ridge and The Battle of Langemarck. In 1918 they saw action during The Battle of St Quentin, the actions at the Somme crossings, The Battle of Rosiers, The actions of Villers-Bretonneux and The Battle of the Aisne.

At the end of April 1918, five divisions of Commonwealth forces (IX Corps) were posted to the French 6th Army near the River Aisne to rest and refit following the German offensives on the Somme and Lys. Here, at the end of May, they found themselves facing the overwhelming German attack which, despite fierce opposition, pushed the Allies back across the Aisne to the Marne. They suffered 15,000 fatal casualties.

On 26th May 1918, George's unit were ordered to position their heavy guns around the River Aisne area near Reims in Northern France. It was reported that George died of wounds, but he has no known grave and is commemorated on the Commonwealth War Graves Memorial at Soissons on the banks of the Aisne.

**FIVEHEAD.**

**LOCAL SOLDIER'S DEATH.** –Much regret is felt in the parish at the sad news that Bombardier Albert George Chorley died of wounds in France on May 27<sup>th</sup>. Deceased, who was 39 years of age, had lived in the village all his life, and before joining up was working in the baking business of Mr. Hillard. He was a member and prominent helper in the Baptist church at Fivehead for many years.

**LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD**

**29<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1918**

## Chapter 3

### Notes on those who Died in the Second World War



#### **Sergeant Air Gunner Kenneth Merritt. 150 Squadron, Royal Air Force**

Kenneth's birth was registered in Langport in 1925, his parents Tom Merritt and Dorothy Burge were from Kingsbury Episcopi and Isle Brewers respectively. His father was a farm labourer, but he died when Kenneth was just 4 years old. Kenneth's family were farmers living in Swell before the War and later lived in Dyers Road, Curry Rivel.



*Lancaster Bomber  
1944*

In 1944, when Kenneth was 19 years old, he was serving in the RAF. He was an Air Gunner, flying in Lancasters from RAF Hemswell, near Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. As an Air Gunner, his life expectancy would have been just 5 sorties. He had wanted to be a pilot, but it was discovered he was colour blind, so couldn't qualify.

On 31 December 1944, Kenneth left RAF Hemswell on a mission to Osterfeld, Nr Leipzig, Germany. It was an industrial town with oil tanks and therefore a key target. 149 Lancasters and 17 Mosquitos were sent to attack the railway yards at Osterfeld. The only details available are Bomber Command's estimates that the railway sidings

were 35 per cent damaged and the 'facilities' 20 per cent damaged. 2 Lancasters were lost.



There were 5 other crew members in Kenneth's Lancaster bomber, serial number NG164. All are listed on the Commonwealth War Grave Memorial at Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, near the Dutch border at Nijmegen. Reichswald was created after the Second World War when burials were brought in from all over western Germany and is the largest Commonwealth cemetery in the country. His grave has a Cross with 'RIP' inscription.

According to a 'Graves Concentration' report dated 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1947, Kenneth and his crew were previously buried in Eschenbrueck (Eschenbruch), a small Village with just 450 inhabitants, near the City of Blomberg in North Rhine-Westphalia. This Village is on the flight path for their mission, so it's likely their plane came down in this location.





*Sgt Air Gnr Kenneth Merritt*  
*Courtesy of Jean Burge*



**Driver William James Vickery.  
Royal Army Service Corps**

William was born in 1915 in Wiveliscombe to Amos and Alice and had an older sister Evelyn. His father was killed in July 1917 when William was just two years old. Amos was in the Army Service corps with the Remount Service, Shirehampton. He would have worked with the horses being shipped out of Avonmouth Docks, Bristol.

The family later moved to Fitzhead, near Taunton, where in 1936 William married Gwendoline Phyllis Salway of Langport. William joined the Royal Army Service Corps during the Second World War but was killed on 16th March 1941 at Brentford in an accident on active service.

He is buried in a Commonwealth War Grave in the Cemetery in Fivehead. William's connection to Fivehead is not clear; it is thought that his wife Gwendoline was connected to the area.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Notes on Others Who Served**

The service records for all personnel who served in the First World War were kept in the War Office Repository in London, which was bombed in September 1940, destroying over half the records. Most men aged between 18 and 56 will have served, but we can only tell half of their stories. The following is just a small collection of Fivehead men who fought.

The 1916 Representation of the People Act ruled that members of the armed forces should be listed in separate registers under the constituencies in which they normally lived. The Absent Voter Lists enabled servicemen and women to vote by proxy or by postal application, when away from home on active service. Many of the following men appeared on the list for 1918 – 1925, so are likely to have returned some time after the end of the War

**Private John (Jack) Steven Adams**, 1897 – 1957 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Somerset Light Infantry (SLI). Nephew of Ernest Adams, injured sometime in September 1918. Appears on the absent voter list.

**Private Thomas John(Jack) Fox** 1894-1959  
Lived in Stowey Rd in 1911. Served with 8th Bn SLI.  
Absent voter. After the War was a beer retailer living at Southview Farm, Fivehead.

### **FIVEHEAD.**

**HOME ON SICK LEAVE.** –Jack Fox has been home for ten days' sick leave from hospital, having made recovery from his wounds received in action in France. He sustained severe shrapnel wounds in the right leg, side, and left arm. All were glad to welcome him, and to see him making favourable progress. Mr. and Mrs. George Adams have had their son Jack home on leave, after spending some time in hospital.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD  
21<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER 1918

### **Gunner Percy Brunt 1895 – 1960**

Farmer living in Stowey Rd. Dec 1915 joined 173<sup>rd</sup> Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). Oct. 1916 went to France, saw action during the Battle of the Somme, the Battle of Arras, Vimy Ridge and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres. Nov 1917, invalided out.

### **Private Henry Samuel Chedzoy, 1885 – 1928**

Lived and worked at Higher Langford Farm. Joined 1/5 SLI and transferred to Army Service Corps. Became a reserve on 19/4/1919. Absent voter. Went to tribunal in 1916, (see page 83) Later owned Underhill Farm, Swell.

### **Gunner Clifford Henry Dare 1889 – 1955**

Farmer lived at Sedgemoor Drove, Fivehead, then Isle Abbotts. 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov.1916, Clifford's stepfather went to Tribunal in Taunton to appeal for him not to serve. (See page 83) Served with 521 (Household) Siege battery RGA. Formed in November 1917 and was based at Borden until they proceeded to France, minus their guns, on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1918. They were equipped in France with six BL 6inch Mk XIX guns.

**Private Sydney William Day** Lived at The Manse, Fivehead. Joined the Hampshire Regiment and later transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps and was based at a hospital in Italy. Absent voter.

**Private Walter Tom Derrick 1885 – 1952**

Lived at Paynes, Fivehead and was a baker and teasel worker. Oct. 1915 joined the 7<sup>th</sup> (Cyclists) Bn. Devonshire Regiment and later the Durham Light Infantry. In January 1917 underwent a medical examination for a hernia he would suffer with the entire War. Also noted he had no teeth.

Received a medical pension and retired in Sept. 1919. Absent voter.



**Private John Gridley 1885 – 1948**

In 1911 was a mason's assistant and postman in Fivehead. Served with 2/5 SLI and was 'demobbed' on 17/12/1919. Qualified stonemason. Absent voter.

**Gunner Hugh Cuff Harcombe 1896 – 1955**

Lived at Cathanger. Joined the Army in April 1916 and in October was posted to 152 Heavy Battery (Hackney Gunners) RGA in France/Belgium. On 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 1917 diagnosed with Flu at the Divisional Rest Station, 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Ambulance, situated on The Somme. Died in 1955 at South Yeo, Fairy Cross, Bideford, Devon leaving £1895 10s 6d to his widow Marjory Grace Harcombe. Absent voter.

***The Royal Garrison Artillery: developed from fortress-based artillery located on British coasts. From 1914 when the army possessed very little heavy artillery it grew into a very large component of the British forces. It was armed with heavy, large calibre guns and howitzers that were positioned some way behind the front line and had immense destructive power.***

**Private Eli Hardwill 1889 – 1973**

Farm labourer living Wests Cottage with wife Beatrice and daughter Mary Rosina. Joined 2/5<sup>th</sup> Bn. SLI. Formed at Taunton in September 1914 as a Second Line battalion. Became part of 135th Brigade, 2nd Wessex Division. 12 December 1914, landed in India. The Division was broken up on arrival. Became divisional troops to Burma Division, then in January 1916 joined part of Rangoon Brigade in same Division. Demobbed 19/12/19. Absent voter.

**Private Samuel George Harvey 1892 – 1968**

Lived and worked with his uncle at The Crown Inn. Joined the SLI and went to France on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1915. Later transferred to the Labour Corps. Suffered an attack of 'trench fever' in July 1916. Married Matilda Roberts in 1919.

**FIVEHEAD.**

ATTACK OF FEVER. –Corpl. Sam Harvey of the Somersets, has been invalided home from the Front suffering with an attack of "trench" fever. He is at present in Reading Hospital, and is understood to be progressing favourably.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

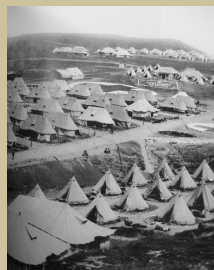
22<sup>ND</sup> JULY 1916



**Colour Sergeant Major Clement Samuel Hillard** 1888 – 1975 From a long line of bakers from Fivehead, lived in London just before the War. Joined the Royal Army Service Corps on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1916 and was posted to the National Army Catering Board at Buckingham Palace as a baker/confectioner. Transferred to France in February 1917. Demobbed 19<sup>th</sup> Dec 1919 as Colour Sergeant Major. Died in 1975 in Lambeth. Absent voter.

**Gunner Robert William Hillard** 1894 - 1947  
Cousin of Clement Hillard, Robert's family lived and worked in what is now The Old Bakery. On 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov 1916, Robert's father, also called Robert went to the Appeals Tribunal in Taunton to ask that his son be excused military service as he was needed to run the bakery and shop. (See page 83) Robert served as a gunner in the royal Field Artillery and was listed as an absent voter in 1919. He married Ina Louch in 1927 and is on the census as a grocer in Fivehead in 1939.

**Private Norris Sidney Charles Hubbard** 1894 – 1960  
Born in Knapp, and lived at 'Listock', Fivehead before the War. Married Rose Davey in 1919 and then Ethel Saunders in 1948. Joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn. (Pioneers) Royal Irish Regiment at the start of the War in Sept. 1914 and sailed for Gallipoli in July 1915. On arrival, spent a month digging trenches, laying roads and recovering bodies. He spent a week in hospital at Salonika in April 1916, suffering with bronchitis. Absent voter.



*21st Stationary  
Hospital  
in Salonika*



**Sapper Gordon Hooper Lenton 1885 -?**

Unfortunately, limited information is available. Lived at 'Corps', Fivehead and joined D Company, Reserve Battalion, Royal Engineers, a training Battalion based at Chatham. Absent voter.

**Private Edward Alexander Louch 1867 -?**

Lived at Manor Farm, Swell. Joined Army Service Corps on 3 Sept 1889, giving his occupation as a butcher. Served in the Boer War September 1899 – August 1902.

**Private Joseph Louch 1876 – 1946**

Lived at Langford Cottage, Swell with his wife Eliza Amor, whom he married in 1903. He had two daughters, Eva and Ina who married Robert Hillard. Joseph was a Coachman (domestic) Joined 15<sup>th</sup> Mobile Veterinary Section, Army Veterinary Corps in July 1915. On 23/4/16 attended No. 4 Canadian Hospital (Saint-Cloud, near Paris) with the highly contagious skin complaint of scabies. The 15<sup>th</sup> Section was present at most key battles throughout the War in Northern France. At some point it's believed Joseph also served as a Gunner in 'A' Battery, 82<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, RFA, but the dates are not known. Absent voter

**FIVEHEAD.**

HOME ON LEAVE. -Pte. J Louch, of the A.V.C., has been home on leave for a few days.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

21<sup>ST</sup> JULY 1917

**Private Walter John Louch 1899 – 1980**

Lived at Bridge House, Fivehead. Became eligible for service in June 1917, joined E company, 8<sup>th</sup> Bn SLI part of the 37<sup>th</sup> Division based in Northern France until the end of the War. Absent voter. Married Edith Didcot in 1920 and died at Hambridge.

**Private Lewis Edward Louch 1899 – 1964**

The youngest of 11 children and brother of William Louch who was killed at The Battle of Jutland. Joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn SLI on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1914, 2 months before the start of the War. He served just four months before he was discharged for being medically unfit. Married Elizabeth Genge of Chard in 1925.

**Howard Turner Maddick 1900 – 1987**

Howard's parents ran the Foxhound Inn where he lived with his 5 siblings. He became eligible for service in May 1918 and joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry taking part in the final advance through Picardy. In 1928 he married Lily Spencer of Wincanton and he died in Taunton.

**Driver Herbert James Male 1887 – 1963**

His father was a stonemason living in Fivehead, but Herbert and his brother Frederick did not follow in this trade but became house painters. In 1912 Herbert married Jessie Burt of Curry Mallet and lived at 'Stodgell' in Fivehead. He served with the 559<sup>th</sup> Hampshire Army Troop Company of the Royal Engineers. They were responsible for building bridges and water works behind the lines. Absent voter. Herbert later lived at Back Lane, Curry Rivel.

### **Captain Cuthbert Alban Key Matterson 1883 – 1968**

Born in Blackheath, Kent. His father, William Key Matterson was a Captain in the Cheshire Regiment and Cuthbert would follow in his footsteps. His father passed away when Cuthbert was 16 when the family were living in Drayton Court. Cuthbert attended Henley House School in Sussex and joined the Cheshire Regt. in 1902; he served with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn just as they returned from the Boer War.

On 9<sup>th</sup> August 1907, he was promoted to Lieutenant and in 1913 Cuthbert married Judith Robinson in Chester. He transferred to 1<sup>st</sup> Bn (B Coy) at the start of the War and landed at Le Havre on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1914 as part of the BEF, having travelled from Londonderry. 24<sup>th</sup> August 1914, he fought at the Battle of Elouges at Audregnies and was taken prisoner.

### ***War Diary of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Cheshire Regt.***

*24<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – Elouges,*

*'On hearing of stragglers wanting help, the Senior officer of the Battalion asked permission of a staff officer for leave to take back what men he had to help them in this, permission was refused. The remainder of B Coy and A Coy were on the commencement of the action about 200 yards to the North of the road. They were lying in the open on the 2<sup>nd</sup> ridge from the road with a wire fence in front of them and there was a hot rifle fire then machine gun and shell fire. Capt. Jolliffe was arranging with Lt. Matterson for charging the German Infantry to which was only 200 yards away where I am informed Major Stapleton gave the order for the retirement of part of B, all of A and some of C retired into the sunken road. Here the shell fire was very heavy and Major Stapleton gave the order to retire through the Bois*

*d'Audregnies. Between the road and this wood were 6 wire fences which the men got caught up in under a heavy rifle fire and machine gun fire and shell fire. They were heavily shelled in the wood and in retiring from it in the direction of others.*

*At roll call in bivouac at Bavay there were 6 officers, warrant officers and 199 men. The strength marching out at 7.30am on the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> inst. was 27 officers, warrant officers and 933 men – a loss of 78% most of which was caused in the withdrawal.'*

*Capt. J L Shore, Commanding Cheshire Regt.*

It is reported in the history of Audregnies that 'the Germans fell on the last fighters. Matterson cared for the wounded and buried the dead. On 25<sup>th</sup> August, the Germans gathered the survivors, near the Church, and then after 3 days of walking, the prisoners have reached Halle, then another 3 days, but by train, the town of Torgau, Germany.'

#### **FIVEHEAD.**

Lieut. C. A. K. Matterson, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cheshire Regiment, who was reported as missing, has, it is now stated been taken prisoner of war. He served in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Batt. When it was under the adjutancy of Major Chetwynd-Stapylton, who has also been taken prisoner.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

2<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER 1914

### **FIVEHEAD.**

**CAPTAIN C. A. K. MATTERSON.** –We learnt with great pleasure that Captain C. A. K. Matterson, of the Cheshire Regiment, after several years' experience of German prisoner camps, has left Hun territory for Holland. Capt. Matterson writing home states they had a grand welcome at the Frontier Station and a most wonderful and brilliant reception at Scheveningen. Every possible kindness and attention was shown them. After the long years of captivity in Germany this, needless to say, was deeply appreciated. The only regret and that a very real one, is for those left behind in Germany.

**LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD**  
**26<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 1918**

On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1918 it was reported in the Langport and Somerton Herald that Capt. Matterson had arrived in Holland from Germany. Unfortunately, there are no details on how he came to be there, it is assumed he escaped as he was mentioned in dispatches for 'gallant conduct and determination displayed in escaping or attempting to escape from captivity' as reported in the London Gazette on 5th May 1919.

Cuthbert returned to the UK on 13 November 1918 and retired from the Army on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1920. On 6 July 1945 he was elected as a Somerset County Councillor and remarried in 1947 to Audrey V B Deshon, living at Standerwick House, Fivehead until 1968 when he died aged 85.



**Captain Rowland Burden Key Matterson** 1879 – 1921  
Born in Mallow, Ireland. Brother of Cuthbert and lived with the family at Heale House, Curry Rivel, followed by Langford Manor. Joined the Royal Army Service Corps, 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Train, delivering equipment, horses and transport to the front. He went to France on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1915 and helped to supply forces at virtually every major battle until the end of the War. He was promoted to Captain on Christmas Day 1917 and he too was mentioned in dispatches on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1919 as reported in the London Gazette (31446). According to his service record, Rowland died in an accident on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1921.

#### **CURRY RIVEL AND THE WAR – ENTHUSIASTIC PUBLIC MEETING**

A well attended public meeting convened for the purpose of obtaining recruits for service in His Majesty's Forces took place in the schoolyard at Curry Rivel on Thursday evening. ....the Chairman called upon Mr W A Key Matterson to address the meeting and in doing so said how deeply they all sympathised with him, his mother and family in the anxiety under which they were at that time. He hoped that the news that the Cheshire Regiment was missing was temporary news only, and their hopes were that before long their grave anxiety might come to an end and they would hear that the Cheshire Regiment had found its unit and were fighting against the Germans afresh (Hear, hear).

Mr Matterson said that he thanked Mr Alford from the bottom of his heart for his mother and himself for what he had said about his brother. They hoped and they prayed that they might soon hear that he was safe and right (Hear, hear). He would ask them to think that he was speaking for a soldier that evening and on behalf of a soldier. He knew the District very well and he knew his hearers and he also knew that certain young men would go away from home, but they did not like to leave their mothers. (That's right).



..... He was going to give them three reasons why they asked them to come out in defence of their country and their Fatherland.....

He put it to them that the blood of murdered women and children in Belgium was crying to the living God that day, and it was for them to see that those wrongs should not be extended to the women and children of this country. (Hear, hear).

The German Kaiser had what he called a god; an extraordinary individual, he would almost be inclined to say an extraordinary villain. Whatever the German Emperor said he might do, he did, and whatever disgraceful act he did this god condoned, and he would put it to them that they would go out like the Crusaders of old and for that reason alone it would be a just and righteous war. They were trustees of a great and glorious trust and that trust should be defended. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century a great statesman said England should save Europe by her example. Should England save Europe by her example in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? It was for his hearers to answer and if he knew them as he thought he did their answer would be 'yes' a thousand times 'yes'. (Cheers).

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

5<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1914

**Lieutenant William Arthur Key Matterson 1875 – 1953**

Born in Dringhouses, Yorkshire, lived with the family at Langford Manor and would later become Chair of the Parish Council. Appears on the Army list as a Lieutenant, Territorial Force Reserve, having been promoted on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1916. On 6<sup>th</sup> August 1916 received the Silver War Badge which was issued to service personnel who had been honourably discharged due to wounds or sickness from military service in World War I.

**Private Maurice Alexander Meade 1895 – 1987**

Brother of Reginald Meade who was drowned off the Coast of Egypt. Maurice initially lived at Hill House, Fivehead and then moved with the family to Bishops Lydeard in 1911 and worked as a farm labourer. Maurice joined the 1/1<sup>st</sup> West Somerset Yeomanry and in October 1915 landed at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli. By December 1915 the Battalion was evacuated to Imbros, Turkey then to Western Frontier Force (Egypt Expedition Force). In January 1917, came under 74<sup>th</sup> Yeomanry Division as 12<sup>th</sup> (West Somerset Yeomanry) Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry and fought at Gaza and Jerusalem. On 7<sup>th</sup> May 1918 the Division arrived in Marseilles and made their way North to provide much needed reinforcements following the German Spring offensive. Maurice left the Army or was 'disembodied' on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1919. In 1931 Maurice married Gladys Short and he died, still living in Bishops Lydeard.

**Private Ambrose Miller 1897 – 1944**

Brother of Alfred Miller, who was killed at the end of the Battle of the Somme. Ambrose lived in Swell, and moved with the family in 1910 to Goathurst, near Bridgwater, working as a farm labourer. He joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Bn. SLI, probably with his brother on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1914 at Bridgwater, at the age of 18 and 3 months, but gave his age as 19. He was later examined and found to have a heart murmur. He was medically discharged on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1914.

**Gunner Francis (Frank) Miller 1891 – 1976**

Cousin of Henry Miller, who was killed during the Battle of La Bassee. Frank lived at Voakes Farm, Fivehead and worked as a farm labourer/horseman/hauling contractor. On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1916 he went to Taunton and joined Royal

Regiment of Artillery (RFA) On 6<sup>th</sup> August 1916 travelled to France, but on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1916 contracted dysentery and was hospitalised in the UK. On returning to the Front with the 95<sup>th</sup> Brigade Frank was gassed twice, in July 1917 and August 1918, returning to the UK for treatment on each occasion. He left the Army on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1919 and lived at Dermil House, Fivehead.

#### **FIVEHEAD.**

IN HOSPITAL. –Gunner Frank Miller of the R.F.A. has been ill with dysentery in France. He is now making good progress and his parents hope that he will be home for a few days before he returns to active service.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

14<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 1916

#### **Pioneer Frederick Miller 1879 – 1973**

Brother of Frank Miller, Frederick was a farm labourer/cowman living at Bridge House Fivehead with his large family. He married Sarah Jones on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1905 in Cardiff and according to the 1911 census, Frederick was by then living by himself in Fivehead with his 7-year-old niece, Esther Jones, born in Wales. It's not known what happened to Sarah. Frederick went to Tribunal on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1916. (See page 83)

On 10<sup>th</sup> December 1915 he enlisted and on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1916 joined the Royal Army Veterinary Corps and travelled to France on the 14<sup>th</sup>. On 17<sup>th</sup> February 1917 he transferred to the Royal Engineers, 314 Road Construction Company and spent time in hospital having been injured in September 1917. He left the Army on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1919 to live at Bridge House, Fivehead. There were seven Miller boys in total, but to date we have yet to locate all their records.

Frederick Miller, a single man, aged 37, applied for exemption on the ground that he was indispensable on his father's farm at Fivehead. He has three brothers in the Army. He was granted exemption until Saturday, July 1<sup>st</sup>. -Appellant: I cannot do duty on a Saturday – from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset- because I am a Seventh Day Advenist. -The Chairman: We cannot take that into consideration. You will probably have to do something on a Saturday. No conscientious objection can be considered, because you have attested.

BATH AND WELLS JOURNAL  
16<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1916

### **Private Sydney Miller 1895 - ?**

Brother of Frank and Frederick Miller. He joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn West Somerset Yeomanry with Maurice Meade and served in Gallipoli, Gaza and Jerusalem. In May 1918 they went to France for the rest of the War. Sydney married Hilda Milton in 1923 having left the Army on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1919 and returning to Voakes Farm.

### **Private George Thomas Milton 1864 – 1955**

A farmer living at Brakelands, Fivehead with his wife Mary Rosina Louch, and seven children. Enlisted in the Somerset Light Infantry on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1914, a month into the War. Being 50 years old, he was signed up to home service only, but was discharged on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1914 due to sickness. George was awarded the Silver War Badge in 1917.



*Silver War Badge*

**Private Herbert Charles Mitchem 1899 – 1973**

In 1911, Herbert was living in Fivehead with his Grandmother, Elizabeth Thyer, a collar worker. He joined the 1/5<sup>th</sup> Devonshire Regiment and served in India and Egypt. He was living in Crewkerne Road, Chard when he died.

**Private Edmund George Oaten 1893 – 1916**

Edmund lived with his brother Walter Oaten in Swell in 1911 and was a farm labourer. Their parents lived in Stoke St Mary with their six other siblings. Edmund joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Somerset Light Infantry and left for France on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1914. On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1915, Edmund was admitted to hospital having been gassed. He was killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916. His medals were sent to his mother, who was then living on East Reach, Taunton. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

**Driver Walter Edward Oaten 1883 – 1975**

In 1911 Walter lived and farmed in Swell with his wife Edith, daughter Caroline and brother Edmund. Walter joined the Royal Field Artillery on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1914, he fought in Greek Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria. On 8<sup>th</sup> March 1919, he was discharged from the Army due to sickness and lived in East Reach, Taunton.

**Corporal William 'Bill' Pester 1878 – 1952**

At the age of 12, William was working as a general servant in a house at Rock Hill. His father had been a lime burner, living in Curry Mallet. In 1906, William married Aguila Mary Jane Harvey and they lived in Fivehead with William working as a farm labourer. They would have eight children in total. We know from a news article on 2<sup>nd</sup>

September 1916, that William served in the Boer War, but these records have not been found. He joined the Royal Engineers for WWI and left for France on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1915. He was an absent voter in 1919.

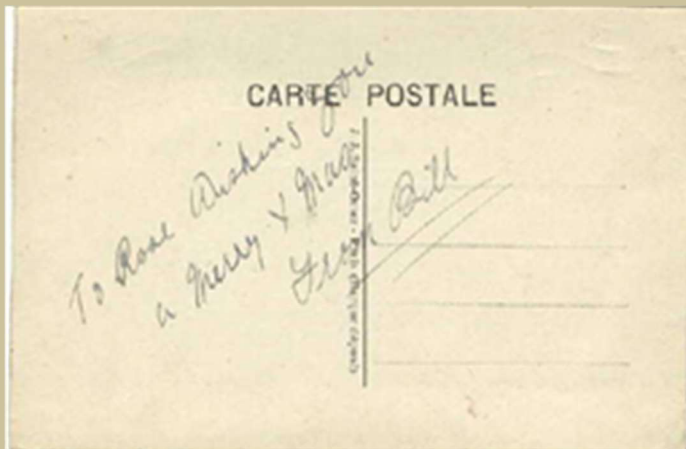
### **FIVEHEAD**

**HOME ON LEAVE.** –Lance-Corporal William Pester has obtained a few days leave, after being in France a year. He has seen a good deal of fighting, but appears none the worse for his experiences. On Wednesday he attended his father's funeral.

**LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD**  
**4<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 1915**



*Private Bill Pester – Boer War  
(Photo courtesy of John Williams)*



*Christmas card from the Front –  
courtesy of Bill's Great Grandson, John Williams*



### **Sapper Edward William Priddle 1896 – 1970**

Edward was one of eight children and by the age of 15 was working as a farm hand. He was a porter when he signed up in 1915 and was posted to the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Railway Operating Company, Royal Engineers as a shunter on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1917.

The formation of the RE Light Railway Companies in early 1917 was innovation that was one of the factors that transformed the operational abilities of the army. Goods and men could now make

the last leg of the journey to the front by light rail. Until that time, ammunition supply in particular had been subject to delays and required vast numbers of men and horses, and the light railways helped overcome both problems. Traffic and wear on the roads and tracks leading up to the front was eased, and fewer men were required to repair them.

On 12<sup>th</sup> January 1917, Edward went to France, but was hospitalised for a month in October suffering with neurasthenia. He suffered the effects of gas on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1917 and went to the Casualty Clearing Station



*Sapper Edward William  
Priddle  
(Courtesy of Granddaughter  
Sally Parkes)*

at Haringhe (Ypres), otherwise known as 'Bandaghem', to go with the other Stations of 'Mendighem' and Dozinghem based near Ypres.

Edward left the Army in 1919, initially living at Park Cottage. He then worked as a porter for GWR in Warminster and married a local girl, Violet Lilian Bush. They had a son, Douglas in 1924 and Edward retired in 1958 as a British Rail Chief Inspector at Weymouth. Edward's Granddaughter, Sally Parkes explained that he was a strong socialist and a kind-hearted man, which served him well during his Mayoral duties in Weymouth in the '50's. He died at Dorchester in 1970 at the age of 74.

**Sergeant Jospeph (Joe) George Priddle 1892 – 1971**

Joseph was the brother of Edward Priddle (above) and he too was a farm worker from an early age. He joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Bn SLI and went to France on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1915.

The Battalion was involved in the Battles of the Somme; on the fateful first day (1<sup>st</sup> July) they were ordered to attack the Village of Fricourt. It was a hard-fought battle as described in their war diary;

'When the artillery barrage lifted, our men advanced in quick time. They were met by very heavy machine gun fire and although officers and men were being hit and falling everywhere, the advance went steadily on, and was reported to by a brigade major who witnessed it to have been magnificent.



### **FIVEHEAD.**

**WOUNDED.** –Pte. Joseph Priddle of the Somersets is at present lying in a Bristol Hospital, having been wounded in the recent severe fighting.

**LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD**

**15<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1916**

Joseph married Alice Sibley in 1918 and had two children, but sadly his daughter Kathleen died in infancy. Joseph remained in Somerset until he died aged 78.

### **Private Jabez Priddle 1879 – 1948**

Born in Hatch

Beauchamp, Jabez had moved to Fivehead by 1911 with his wife, Elsie and their nine children; he was a carter working at Stowey Farm. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1914, Jabez joined up in Taunton and was initially posted to the Dorsetshire

Regiment. On 12<sup>th</sup> December 1914 he transferred to 259 Battery, Royal Field Artillery (later to become the 83<sup>rd</sup> Brigade) and went to Flesselles, France on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1915. The Brigade were involved in many of the main battles on the Western Front, but on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1917 Jabez was transferred to 18 Brigade as a driver, just in time for the Third Battle of Ypres. On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1917, Jabez was on the move again to 917 Labour Corps.



*Labour Corps, France 1917*

Formed in January 1917, the Corps grew to some 389,900 men (more than 10% of the total size of the Army) by the Armistice. Of this total, around 175,000 were working in the United Kingdom and the rest in the theatres of war. The Corps was manned by officers and other ranks who had been medically rated below the "A1" condition needed for front line service. Many were returned wounded. Labour Corps units were often deployed for work within range of the enemy guns, sometimes for lengthy periods. In April 1917, a number of infantry battalions were transferred to the Corps. Labour Corps Area Employment Companies were formed in 1917 for salvage work, absorbing the Divisional Salvage Companies.

In the crises of March and April 1918 on the Western Front, Labour Corps units were used as emergency infantry. The Corps always suffered from its treatment as something of a second-class organisation: for example, the men who died are commemorated under their original regiment, with Labour Corps being secondary. Researching men of the Corps is made extra difficult by this, as is the fact that few records remain of the daily activities and locations of Corps units.

In 1918 Jabez was hospitalised twice in Chester suffering from myalgia, where muscle pain arises due to injury or overexertion, infections of the soft tissues, or inflammatory conditions. He was transferred to the Army Reserve on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1919 and returned to Stowey Farm.

**Private Herbert James Rowsell 1897 – ?**

Bert was born and raised in Fivehead with his brother Christopher. Their father worked on a farm and the family lived at Elm Cottage. He joined the Army in the second wave of recruiting in 1916. He joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. Middlesex Regiment, part of the 37<sup>th</sup> Division, and would take part in most of the key battles on the Western Front until the end of the War. Bert was listed as an absent voter. It's not known when Bert passed away.

**FIVEHEAD.**

HOME FROM THE FRONT. –Signaller Bert Rowsell, of the Manchester Regiment, has been home from the front on ten days' leave. He was in the best of health. Signaller Rowsell has taken part in the thick of the fighting in France, where he has been for the past twelve months. He enlisted just prior to the outbreak of the war. Recently he came across other lads from the village who are serving in the Somersets, including an old schoolfellow. Signaller Rowsell returned to the front with the good wishes of his many friends.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

10<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 1917

Unfortunately, the Langport and Somerset Herald were not always accurate in their reporting in those days, mistaking Manchester for Middlesex.

**Private Edward Salway 1882 – 1968**

Cousin of William Salway who was killed in action at the Battle of Polygon Wood. Edward was born in Curry Rivel and was a groom before he married Bella Webber in 1908 and moved to Mount Pleasant, Fivehead where he was a gardener/domestic and they had four children.

Little is known of Edward's military service other than he joined the Royal Army Service Corps and served after 1915 at the Western Front. We know this because he was

**FIVEHEAD.**

HOME FROM THE FRONT. –Pte. E. Salway, of the A.S.C. has been home on fourteen days' leave from the Western front. He was in excellent health.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

16<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 1918

awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal, but not the 1914-1915 Star. He was an absent voter.

**Private Sidney Salway 1886 – 1973**

In 1911, Sidney was living with his parents and three of his nine siblings at Hill View House; he married Elizabeth Caddy from Middlesborough a year later. They had two daughters, Hazel and Gwendoline.

He was the brother of William Salway (see above) and believed to have joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn SLI in early 1916 with William. They would have served in the Battalion with Lt. Harold Colville and Private Edmund Oaten, both of whom were killed in July 1916. Sidney was injured in September 1917, just as his brother was fatally wounded at the Front. Sidney left the Army on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1919 and returned to live at Foxhound Cottage.

**Private Herbert James Sawtell 1897 – 1978**

Brother of Jack Sawtell who was killed at Ypres in 1916 serving with the Canadians. Herbert emigrated in 1912, joining his brothers farming in Saskatchewan. On 30<sup>th</sup> November 1915, Herbert joined the Canadian Army at the

age of 18; he was first posted to North Battleford Unit, 188<sup>th</sup> Bn, Canadian Expeditionary Force.

On 19<sup>th</sup> October 1916 the Battalion set sail for England on the SS Olympic. On the 20<sup>th</sup> November 1916, Herbert joined the 46<sup>th</sup> Bn Saskatchewan Dragoons, CEF. The unit has come to be known as "The Suicide Battalion". The 46<sup>th</sup> lost 1,433 killed and 3,484 wounded – a casualty rate of 91.5 percent in 27 months.



*Vimy Ridge Canadian Memorial*

On 12<sup>th</sup> May 1917 Herbert was admitted to the Military Hospital Eastleigh having suffered a gunshot wound to his left leg (scrotal cleft) sustained during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. He would spend just two months in England before being returned to the Front.

Herbert was awarded the good conduct badge on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1918 and returned to England on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1919. The



Battalion set sail from Liverpool to Quebec on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1919.

In 1929 Herbert married Idell Leda Scott from New Brunswick and went on to have 4 children.



*Herbert James Sawtell  
(Courtesy of FindaGrave)*

**Private Charles Lionel Thyer 1899 – 1982**

Lived in Fivehead with his parents, a postman and a shirt maker and his sister Vera. He joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn SLI and served on the Western Front, however this would have been after 1915. On 5<sup>th</sup> March 1919, Charles transferred to the Army Reserve and lived at Jessamine Cottage, Fivehead, marrying Hilda Chorley in 1929.

**Private Clifford John Hooper West 1882 –**

Born in Bristol, Clifford was 3 when the family moved to Fivehead. He was the oldest of eight children and whose father John was an agricultural labourer. It's not known what Clifford did when he left home, but he joined the

Army Service Corps and went to France on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1915. Unfortunately, no further records have been located, other than Clifford was transferred to the Army Reserve on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1919.

**Corporal William Fred West 1886 – 1918**

William was the brother of Clifford (above) and born in Fivehead. At the age of 15, he had started a six-year apprenticeship as a blacksmith, living in North Curry. On 27<sup>th</sup> March 1906, William joined the Royal Engineers as a blacksmith. He would later qualify as an engine driver but suffered a leg injury on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1908 turning the starting handle on a Thorneycroft Tractor while based at Gosport. In July 1909, he was serving in Sierra Leone and contracted malaria, hospitalising him for a month.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1911 William married Hettie Burton in Falmouth and they had a son William Arthur John on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1914.

It's not known if William stayed in the Army throughout, but he served with the 20<sup>th</sup> Army Troop, Light Railway Operating Company, Royal Engineers. His company went to France on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1917 and just over a year later, on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1918, he was killed in action near Poperinge, Belgium. William is buried at the Gwalia Military Cemetery nearby, alongside three of his fellow 20<sup>th</sup> Army Troop members who died the same day.



*Cpl William West  
(courtesy of Granddaughter, Judy West)*

**Lance Corporal William White 1897 – 1917**

Born and raised in Fivehead at the bakers/grocers with his parents, Thomas and Mary Jane and his brothers Thomas and Amos. By 1911, Thomas had left, and the family had moved to Wrangway, Wellington where William worked as a gardener's assistant.

In March 1916, William became eligible for service. He joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn., Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and went to France, taking part in many of the key battles including the Cambrai Operations starting on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1917. A British attack, originally conceived as a very large-scale raid, that employed new artillery techniques and massed tanks. Initially very successful with large gains of ground being made, but German reserves brought the advance to a halt. Ten days later, a counter-attack regained much of the ground. Ultimately a disappointing and costly outcome, but Cambrai is now seen by historians as the blueprint for the successful "Hundred Days" offensives of 1918.

William was killed in action on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1917; he is commemorated on the Cambrai Memorial.

### **FIVEHEAD.**

THE ARMISTICE. -The Taunton siren and the sounds like gunfire set the expectant people agog, and when the news was confirmed the church bells thrilled the message abroad. The vicar and the Baptist minister, with one or two helpers, joined in ringing a chime until the usual band could be got together, and the Union Jack was hoisted on the tower. In the evening a thanksgiving service, conducted by the Rev. Joseph Day, was held in the Baptist Church. The Doxology was sung, and later the hymn, "For all the saints who from their labours rest," in memory of fallen heroes. The service closed with the National Anthem. The vicar kindly put the schoolroom at the disposal of the parishioners in the evening, and music and dancing was indulged in until a late hour. In an address Mr. W. A. K. Matterson paid tribute to the bravery of our soldiers, and pointed out how well Fivehead had responded to the call to arms, several families having sent three of their sons to help win the war.

LANGPORT & SOMERTON HERALD

23<sup>RD</sup> NOVEMBER 1918

## **Military Service Tribunals**

Military Service Tribunals were bodies formed by borough, urban district and rural district councils to hear applications for exemption from conscription into the British Army during World War I. Although not strictly recruiting bodies, they played an important part in the process of conscription.

Tribunals were established as part of the Derby Scheme in 1915, almost a first step towards conscription, using a ballot system to draft men into service. Men were encouraged to sign up on the understanding they would not be called to fight unless necessary and then they would be subject to a ballot system. Most men of fighting age went ahead and joined up and attested, not believing they would be called to fight as the expectation was the War would be over soon.

Tribunals were continued on a statutory basis by the Military Service Act, bringing in conscription in January 1916. The Act went through several changes during the War, but by the end, any man between the age of 18 and 51, including married men, could be conscripted.

Tribunals were notoriously harsh towards conscientious objectors (which only accounted for 2% of tribunals), reflecting widespread public opinion that they were lazy, degenerate, ungrateful 'shirkers' seeking to benefit from the sacrifices of others. Most of the tribunals' work dealt with domestic and business matters. Men could apply on the grounds of their doing work of national importance, business or domestic hardship, medical unfitness, and conscientious objection.



A very large number of men applied: by the end of June 1916, 748,587 men had applied to tribunals. Over the same period around 770,000 men joined the army. Most men were given some kind of exemption, usually temporary (between a few weeks and six months) or conditional on their situation at work or home remaining serious enough to warrant their retention at home.

In October 1.12 million men nationally held tribunal exemption or had cases pending, by May 1917 this had fallen to 780,000 exempt and 110,000 pending. At this point there were also 1.8 million men with exemptions granted by the government (for example, those working in war industries); combined these exemptions covered more men than were serving overseas with the British Army.

## Pioneer Frederick Miller, Royal Engineers

A SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST. -Fredk. Miller, of Bridge House, Fivehead, who said he could not undertake military duty on a Saturday, sought conditional exemption as a ploughman in the employ of his father, Mr Henry Miller. In April the local military representative reported that if the application was lodged on industrial instead of on conscientious grounds, he would assent to it. The local tribunal refused the application on the 14<sup>th</sup> May, and pointed out that conscientious objection could not be made in the case of a voluntarily attested man. -Mr Henry Miller, the father, stated, in support of the appeal, that before the war he had four sons at home. Two enlisted before the Derby scheme started, and the other two subsequently attested. One of them had been called up making three sons on service, and Frederick was the only one left to help work the farm. -Exemption to July 1<sup>st</sup>.

THE COURIER 14<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1916

*The following letter was discovered in Frederick Miller's service record.*

Langford Manor  
Fivehead  
Taunton  
July 21<sup>st</sup> 1916

*Dear Captain Doune*

*I am writing a line about a man named Frederick Miller of Fivehead. You may remember the case – it came before us some short time ago. He said in his appeal that he was a 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist and could not take life. This might well have been left out as we were prepared to give him exemption on account of his being the last son*



*left at home to help his father who is a small farmer. His 3 brothers went voluntarily – two of them before the Derby Scheme came into force. The Tribunal would not give him exemption and the Appeal Tribunal gave him until July 1<sup>st</sup>. He has now been called up on Aug 1<sup>st</sup>.*

*The reasons for which I am writing are two.*

*(1) He came to me and asked me whether he ought to attest. I never knew that he had any religious objections and I advised him to do so, so that I am, in a way responsible for his having attested at all.*

*(2) He is a genuine sort of man and is not one of these beasts who say that they will not tie up a chap's wounds if he gets hurt and so forth.*

*He wants to get into the RAMC and does not bunk going to the Front or anything of that sort. Would there be any chance of his getting into that Corps or is there anything else you would advise?*

*I have got past apologising for bothering you, as I am always doing it.*

*Yours very truly  
W A Key Matterson*

### **SOMERSET APPEAL TRIBUNAL**

**FIVEHEAD APPEAL DISMISSED.** –Henry S. Chedzoy (31), grocer of Fivehead, claimed on the grounds of domestic and financial hardship and as the proprietor of a “one-man business”, which would have to be closed down if he was taken away. -The application was refused on July 6<sup>th</sup>, the local tribunal stating “that appellant is one of four brothers, neither of whom are serving.” -By the Chairman: His brothers were farmers. -Appeal dismissed.

**THE COURIER  
23<sup>RD</sup> AUGUST 1916**

## **TUESDAY.**

### **MORE LANGPORT APPEALS**

LANGPORT COUNCIL'S ROAD CONTRACTOR. -Wm. Bowey (29), married, carter, was appealed for by his employer, Mr Giles, farmer and road contractor to the Langport Rural District Council. -Mr. Giles said his farm was very scattered, being partly in Curry Mallet, Isle Abbots, and Fivehead. Before the war he employed four men and a boy; now he had only two, one of whom was aged 63. Appellant was 73 years of age, had lost one eye, and suffered greatly from gout. He assisted his neighbours and small-holders by letting out horses and implements on hire, and Bowey worked the horses. This enabled a great deal of land to be cultivated in the absence of men on service. -Mr. Vernon supported the appeal, and three months' exemption was granted.

THE COURIER 6<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 1916

## THE SOMERSET TRIBUNAL TUESDAY

The Somerset Appeal Tribunal, at the Shirehall, Taunton, on Tuesday, dealt with applications chiefly from the Langport rural district. -Mr. H. H. Shepherd presided, and Mr. F. S. Copleston attended as military representative, while Lord St. Audries was present for the Board of Agriculture.

**Clifford Henry Dare** (28), single, carter and ploughman, was appealed for by his step-father, John Robert Dare, of Two Bridges Farm, Isle Abbots. -Adjourned for a fortnight for medical examination.

**Edward Hugh Male** (22) single, a small-holder, of Tanyard Farm, Fivehead, sought conditional exemption, stating that he had been passed in Class Ciii. He farmed 32 acres of pasture land and five acres of teasels. -Mr. F. W. Bishop, for appellant, said that when before the Langport Tribunal it was suggested by the Board of Agriculture representative that it was a case for conditional exemption. -Six months' exemption.

**Robert Wm. Hillard**, baker and farmer, of The Bakery, Fivehead, appealed on behalf of his son, Robert Wm. Hillard, (23) single, farm bailiff on a farm of 86 acres (23 arable), and also an assistant in the bakehouse since two men have joined the Forces. -In reply to the Chairman, the appellant said he was not a horse dealer but a horse breeder. He had one man and his son on the farm. Appellant and his step-uncle worked in the bakehouse and delivered, and his wife looked after the shop and kept the books. There were no other bakers in Fivehead.....

A girl of 16 could not deliver the bread because she could not manage the horse, which was what they called "moody". A girl could not stand the strain of getting up and down the cart. -The Chairman observed that it was a most extraordinary thing that in the opinion of most people coming there that girls could not stand anything. He (the Chairman) saw them in all sorts of places, even doing the work of railway porters and sweeping roads. -Dismissed.

THE COURIER  
22<sup>ND</sup> NOVEMBER 1916

## **Sources and Acknowledgments**

A great deal of information is accessible online via various websites such as Ancestry.co.uk, Forces-War-Records.co.uk, Longlongtrail.co.uk, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Canadian National Archive and many more. Any documentation or photographs used in this booklet have been reproduced with the kind permission of the originator for the item.

Another invaluable source has been the Somerset Heritage Centre who hold all Parish records and local newspapers. These items are reproduced with their kind permission.

The War Memorials Trust and Fivehead Parish Council for providing the funding to renovate our Village Memorial in this centenary year.

It's also been my pleasure to speak first hand with many relatives of the men, who have helped to build a picture of the lives that in some cases were cut tragically short.

I would also like to thank Mike Evans from Hambridge who helped us through the dark art of writing grant applications.

Last but in no way least, to the men who went to war; who suffered unimaginable horrors and still 'went over the top' on our behalf, an eternal debt of gratitude is owed that can never be paid.

Pip Brett 2018  
pipbrett@me.com

