

Alderminster War Memorial by Robert Howe.

With Armistice Day approaching this is the right time of year to write about what has come to light about the names on the War Memorial in Alderminster church. The reason why I became particularly involved was because I received a letter from a member of the Western Front Association who asked if I knew anything about W. Lawrence who is the first name and the earliest casualty. I did and he would have been the youngest soldier to die in the Great War.

Further investigation showed that at least half of the men named did not live in Alderminster at the outbreak of war. There is a book called 'The County of Warwickshire Roll of Honour 1914-2005' which is very thorough and shows the details of servicemen who gave their lives and are remembered on monuments in the county. It is interesting to see why some names appear on some monuments but not on others.

The explanation starts with the agricultural depression which really set in in the 1870s. In 1875 Joseph Arch gave a speech to 1500 assembled farmers and labourers in a field 'near the Bell Inn' The recession affected both tenant farmers and employees alike and it lasted up to the Great War. After which the recession set in again.

Also other industries, paying better wages attracted people away from the place of their birth. Some of the persons named had worked in Stratford or Birmingham before they joined up. Two of them had emigrated. Joseph Arch had set up the Agricultural Workers Union to press for better wages for employees but later he suggested emigration as a way to improve their lot. The population of Alderminster fell from 552 in 1851 to 436 in 1901. This explains the regiments to the extent that although Alderminster was then in Worcestershire some of them lived in Warwickshire or Australia or Canada. The Dorsets must have been recruiting locally.

It is possible that even the two from the colonies as well as others with families in the parish visited whilst on embarkation leave but some could have cut their links with Alderminster altogether before they joined up.

As the details become available each of the 16 named on the memorial can be remembered with a piece in 'Village Voices'. Some will have more than others.

As with other parishes the idea of a memorial started in 1919. The accounts run from 1919 to 1922. Collections were made by Miss Unett & Miss Burra, Mrs J H Taylor, Miss E Hutchings and Miss K Baker. A collection was also made at the unveiling ceremony. But the largest amounts were sent to Rev. W. H. Morgan as Treasurer, including £25 from Captain West of Alscot.

On the expenditure side the bronze tablet was made in Bromsgrove and cost £85-0-0. The Roll of Honour cost a total of £1-7-6. The shelf was made by T J Minett, Carpenter, Wheelwright & Undertaker, 46 Alderminster. There was a small surplus which the PCC handed over to the churchyard account in February 1922.

The unveiling ceremony took place at a special service on Sunday 19th December 1920. The church was almost full. The Rev. W. H. Morgan gave an address based on Ecclesiasticus, ch 35 v 7 "The sacrifice of a just man is acceptable, and the memorial thereof shall never be forgotten." The vicar then read the names on the memorial. After prayers Capt. H. C. J. A-R-West RN unveiled the memorial and the Last Post and Reveille were sounded.

And so we come to the names on the memorial which I shall take in alphabetical order.

Stephen Bennett, Pte. 1st Dorsets.

Stephen Bennett had three older brothers and three sisters. Except the eldest brother they were all born in Loxley. His father was born at Bishopton and his mother in Ettington. At some point the family moved to Goldicote and this explains why Stephen Bennett appears on both Alderminster and Loxley memorials. Stephen joined up at the start of the war in Birmingham. All of his brothers were also in the services. He was a signaller and first went to France in 1915, but returned to England later that year with frost-bite. He went back to France in 1916 and was killed in action on Sunday 15th April 1917 aged 22. His name also appears on the Thiepval War Memorial in France.

William Barton Boardman, Pte. 54th Canadian Light Infantry.

William Boardman was born in Birmingham. He had served 8 years in the Royal Artillery before emigrating to Canada. He re-enlisted on 15th September 1915 and died during the Battle of Passchendaele on 11th September 1917 aged 35. Contrary to the tablet he was then a Corporal. He was buried in the Noeux-les-Mines Communal Cemetery in France.

His father was described as a blacksmith in the 1891 census but had died at around the age of 40 in Birmingham. In the 1901 census his mother was described as a tailoress and widow and his elder brother John was described as a tailor. At that time William was described as a bicycle fitter. When he joined up in Canada he had worked as a bricklayer. His elder brother lived at 55 Alderminster at the time of the unveiling and presumably worked for the Baker family tailoring business at 7 Alderminster. His brother John and his wife are buried in Alderminster churchyard.

Jack Brown, Pte. 11th Battalion Royal Warwicks

Jack Brown was the second son of John Brown of Houndshill. His father was huntsman of the Warwickshire hunt and before the war Jack had been second whip to the East Galway in Ireland. Jack was born at Gedling in Nottinghamshire in about 1898 and was one of at least five children. His mother had died before 1901. His father had been the kennel groom at Kineton before they moved to Houndshill. Jack died near Arras on 25 April 1917 aged 19. His elder brother also served in the army in Selonika.

Arthur James Handy, Pte. 2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment

Arthur James Handy was the fourth of the five children of James and Ellen Handy of 50 Alderminster and cousin of Henry Handy. He was born in 1885 and in his married life lived in Birmingham. He died on the Somme on 22nd March 1918 aged 24. At the time of the unveiling Mrs Ellen Handy lived at 17 Alderminster.

Henry Handy, Driver Royal Army Service Corps.

Henry Handy was the fourth of the eight children of Henry and Mary Ann Handy of 6 Alderminster and cousin of Arthur James Handy. The family was not always of Alderminster. Henry (senior) was baptised at Alderminster, but Mary Ann (nee Smith) came from Honington. Their eldest daughter was baptised at Whitchurch, the next four eldest at Preston and the youngest three at Alderminster. Agricultural labourers moved around the estate as the farms changed hands. His sister Joyce had married Thomas George and lived at 2 Park Avenue Stratford and Harry (junior) lived with them after the war where he died on 18th February 1919 aged 32. He is also commemorated on the Stratford memorial.

His brother Percy George Handy 1/5 Battalion Royal Warwicks was the youngest child of Henry Handy. Before the war he worked for the Austin Motor Company and often visited his sister at Park Avenue. He enlisted in 1915 and went to France in 1916 but returned home sick with septic poisoning in 1917. He died in action on 25th August 1917 aged 22. He is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Zonnebeke and at Stratford but not at Alderminster.

Reginald Frank Hicks, Pte. 20th Australian Imperial Force

Reginald Frank was the son of Fred and Harriet Hicks of 3 Alderminster. His parents did not originate in Alderminster. On leaving school he worked on the estate felling timber and sawing. In September 1911, three young men, founder members of the Alderminster football team, Charles Redding, Arthur Gooding and Reginald Hicks left Alderminster and sailed from Tilbury on the s.s. Demosthenes for Australia. Hicks lived at Ipswich, Queensland and worked in the timber trade before joining-up and died on 2nd September 1918 aged 29. He is buried in the Daours Communal Cemetery Extension, Somme France.

Sidney Charles Hicks MM, Corporal 6th Battalion Dorset Regiment

Sidney was one of the (at least 6) children of William and Mary Hicks. The family came from Gloucestershire and Sidney had been living in Stratford before the war. William and Mary Hicks lived at 41 Alderminster at the time of the unveiling. Sidney was sent to France in 1915 and was 'Gazetted' for his Military Medal in 1916. He was wounded in January 1917 and sent home. He returned to France in May 1917 and was awarded his Military Medal in June 1917 and died on 30th March 1918 near Arras in the German offensive aged 24, (The same day as William Henry Sharpe). He must have been home on leave because his parents kept the medal after the war. He was also awarded the 1914/15 Star. Two of his brothers served in Mesopotamia and France and survived the war.

Sidney Hornsey, Lance Corporal 1st Battalion Royal Warwicks

Sidney was born in Alderminster and so was his mother. His father came from Derbyshire and was a police constable. He was born in May 1898 and the family moved to Great Wolford soon after. He served in the Balkans and France and died during one of the battles of Arras on 23rd April 1917 aged 19.

Albert Edward King, Pte. 4th Battalion Coldstream Guards

The Kings lived at Knavenhill Cottages. William and Elizabeth King, the parents had originated at Tysoe and Edward was the fourth of five children and was baptised at Alderminster in 1890. He died on Saturday 7th December 1918 aged 29 and is buried in Charleroi Cemetery, Belgium. At the time of the unveiling Mrs King was also a widow.

William Lawrence, Rifleman, 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps

As I said at the top of these articles I had received a letter from a member of the Western Front Association about William Lawrence and I have been trying to show why the names are on the memorial. With the letter came details of all the other 15 men but there were two shown for Mr Lawrence. I have since met someone who worked on the Warwickshire Roll of Honour book and he explained that in the book the William Lawrence was born and lived at Alderminster before the war but he would have only been 14 at the time of his death and this would have made him the youngest casualty of the first war. An article was to have been published saying this and the Imperial War Museum had taken an interest in the article.

However the truth about William Lawrence born in Alderminster is very different. His father was Joseph Lawrence who was a gamekeeper and lived at Greenhill Cottages. His full name was Arthur William Lawrence, was born on 23rd November 1900 and was the youngest of five children.. When he was about a month old Mr Baker, the Crimscote keeper went missing. He lived at 2 Crimscote. It was a rough night and the river was up. Mrs Baker expected that he was with another Alderminster keeper called Hibberd. However he became disorientated in the dark and fell in the river above Bridge House. His body was found with his gun when the river went down about 60 yards above the White Bridge.

At the inquest held in the Alderminster schools it was stated that the deceased had been to the Bell and also visited Mr Eli Holtom who was a carrier and may have lived at 38 Alderminster for a drink that evening. Police Constable George Ward of 33 Alderminster stated that Mr Baker had been known to have "had more than he should have done". The verdict was "accidentally drowned". Incidentally Pc Ward's son John married Emily Tailor of 1 Crimscote and his name appears on the Whitchurch memorial.

Mr Lawrence was given the Crimscote job and moved to 2 Crimscote. Mrs Baker and 6 children moved to Alderminster. Mr Baker is buried at Whitchurch. When T. R. Canning bought the Crimscote estate in 1920 he moved the Lawrence family to 9 Crimscote (not there now) because A. M. James had bought 1 and 2 Crimscote with Whitchurch Farm. In 1930 Arthur William Lawrence had a son christened at

Whitchurch, he was a bus driver and by then he was married. He attended his mother Bessie's funeral at Whitchurch in 1931 with his brother and two of his sisters. This was not the person named on the Alderminster memorial.

But there was another family living at Alderminster at the time of the unveiling called Lawrence. In 1871 they lived in Herbert Road, Bordesley and their eldest son was called William. One other child was called Charles. He came to live at 53 Alderminster with his widowed mother Emma and was a tailor and probably worked for the Bakers. A William Lawrence moved to London from Birmingham where he married a girl called Zilpah and their eldest son was called William. He would have been the grandson of Emma Lawrence of Alderminster.

The KRRC had two battalions in France at the outset of war, both were in 1 Corps under Sir Douglas Haig and each had a William Lawrence in it. William Harry Lawrence was in the 2nd KRRC and was possibly born at Deptford, in which case his father had the same names and there is no obvious connection with Birmingham or Alderminster. He died on 14th September 1914 aged 18. The other William Lawrence was in the 1st KRRC, his origin is unknown but he died on 20th October 1914 at the height of the fighting near Ypres and is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial.

Although it is still not absolutely proved this must be the grandson of Emma and the nephew of Charles Lawrence. Unfortunately the name Lawrence does not appear in the contributors' books and there are no lists saying who proposed the names on the memorial. It seems the army records of William Lawrence of 1st KRRC are lost. Either of them qualified for the Mons Star.

Arnold John Reason, Pte., 10th Battalion Welsh Regiment

Arnold John was one of the nine children of Henry and Mary Reason. His father was born in Tysoe and his mother at Quinton. The Reason family had lived in Small Heath and at Willicote where Arnold John was born before moving to 1 Alderminster. He was christened at Clifford Chambers in 1889. Some of the Reasons had lived in South Wales and he may have moved to Treforest Glamorgan before the war. He died during the battle of Albert on Wednesday 12th July 1916 aged 27 and is also commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial on the Somme.

William Henry Sharpe, Pte., 2nd Battalion Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment)

William Henry Sharpe was born at Thurlleston, Warwickshire in 1896 or 97. He had at least one sister. His father was born at Moreton in Marsh and was shown as a coachman on the 1901 census. After the war the parents had moved to Parkstone, Dorset but it seems they were still in Alderminster when their son died. William Henry had been a bell ringer and altar server at the church before joining up. He died of wounds on 30th March 1918, the same day as Sidney Hicks, aged 21. He is buried in the Duisans British Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France.

Frank Silvester, Pte., 11th Batallion Royal Warwicks.

The Silvesters were farmers and had Coombe Farm for many years before the war. Before that his father Thomas had farmed at Clifford Chambers where he was born. Frank was born at Coombe Farm in about 1894. He joined up in Stratford and died during the battle of Poellcappelle on 9th October 1917 aged 23. He is buried in Zantvoorde British Cemetery, Belgium.

Ernest Edward Southam,Pte. 2nd Battalion Royal Warwicks

Southam was a common local family name before the first war. Ernest Edward was the eighth eldest of the ten children of John and Sarah Southam who lived at 25 Alderminster in 1891 and brother of William George. He was born and baptised in Alderminster. Before joining up he worked for Flowers brewery in Stratford and lived in Mansell Street. He died at the Battle of Bullecourt on Friday 4th May 1917, having been in the army for only just over one year aged 27. He is also commemorated on the Arras memorial in France and on the Holy Trinity and the Cemetery Memorial in Stratford.

William George Southam, Pte. 6th Dorsets

William George was the fourth eldest of the ten children of John and Sarah Southam of 25 Alderminster and brother of Ernest Edward. He was born in Alderminster and had been living in Stratford before joining up. He was in France between July and November 1915 when he was wounded and sent back to England on the hospital ship Anglia which struck a mine in the channel and sank. He was aged 34 and entitled to the 1914-15 Star. He is also commemorated on the Hollybrook Memorial, Southampton.

Charles Benjamin Waters, Pte., 11th Battalion Royal Warwicks

The Warwickshire Roll of Honour book states correctly that Charles Waters was born in the parish of Aston Cantlow in 1890 and his father probably worked in the Wilmcote quarries. The family moved to Hatton Hill, Warwick at some time after 1901. He married Jane Elizabeth Jones and the book says his wife Jane Elizabeth Waters lived at Ledbury. They got married in Warwick registration district in 1915 but not at St. Paul's Warwick or Hatton. Charles went to France in January 1916.

There does not seem to be any obvious explanation as to why the name Waters appears on the Alderminster or Ettington memorials. Henry Waters and his wife were living in 17 Alderminster in 1891 but they are not related to Charles or his brother Ernest Edward Waters. John Jones and his wife Jane lived at 20 Alderminster at the same time but they had no children and came from Wimpstone and Alderminster respectively.

Charles Benjamin Waters was killed at the battle of Arleux on Sunday 29th April 1917 at the age of 27 and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial in France. He is also remembered on the Ettington Memorial, the Hatton Village Memorial, on a Memorial Board in Hatton church and the St Paul's Church War Memorial at Warwick. But not at Aston Cantlow.

Ernest Edward Waters was in the 8th Kings Royal Rifle Corps and died in France on 22nd August 1916 aged 19. He is buried in the St Sever Cemetery, Rouen and is remembered on three memorials at Hatton.

If anyone reading this should know anything about why William Lawrence or Charles Waters are remembered on Alderminster War Memorial I should be interested in finding out.

The book 'Warwickshire Roll of Honour' is available from Warwickshire Libraries. Some of the military information has been obtained from the Commonwealth War-graves Commission website and with the assistance of Mr Alan Reed. All of the other information has been obtained with the assistance of Warwick and Stratford Records offices and at Stratford library.

Robert Howe, January 2007

MORE ON ALDERMINSTER WAR MEMORIAL

It will be remembered that a few articles on the memorial and the names on it appeared in Village Voices a couple of years ago. Someone who read them and lives in Stratford told me he was related to a person who lived in Alderminster when the Memorial was put up and has a photograph of the Alderminster football team. No doubt Mr W. T. Bates the schoolmaster will be in it. I have never seen the photograph but it would look good on the front of Village Voices.

I was a little surprised to see that about half of the persons remembered on the Alderminster Memorial at the outbreak of the Great War were not living in the parish and some seemed to have no connection with Alderminster on the face of it. But further research reduced this number.

I am interested to see why some people have inscriptions on memorials when others do not. At the end of the last article I asked if anyone reading this article has any information why William Lawrence Kings Royal Rifles or Charles Waters 11th Warwicks are remembered on Alderminster War Memorial. And why Charles Waters is also on the Ettington Memorial?

William Lawrence is almost certainly a native of London which is where the KRR tended to recruit and only a very distant relative of the Lawrences of Alderminster and Crimscote and I doubt if any more will come to light about him. Charles Benjamin Waters, besides Alderminster and Ettington and Arras where he died is also

remembered in Hatton (twice) and at St Paul's church Warwick . Charles had a younger brother called Ernest Edward. Ernest Edward is remembered three times in Hatton besides in France where he died.

A few months after the articles were published I was looking at a microfilm of the 1906 Stratford Heralds in Stratford Library (as I have been known to do) and the words "RICK FIRE SEQUEL.-Ernest Edward Waters (9)" stuck out from the page. It would seem that (according to the Herald article) Ernest Edward and two boys of the same age were "summoned for unlawfully, maliciously, and feloniously setting fire to a rick of hay, the property of John William Lowe of Ettington, on July 14th." There were adult witnesses, one who raised the alarm and another who spoke to Waters. When questioned by Pc Cleaver it would seem the children had some matches in their possession. They all pleaded not guilty. On consideration of the evidence the bench dismissed the case against Waters.

In the Voters List of 1907, 8 & 9 the fathers of the Waters brothers and the two other boys are shown as living in Main Road Ettington. Mr Lowe was shown as the owner of Drybank Farm Ettington in the same years.

Ernest Edward Waters was born in 1896, probably at Wilmcote if not Pathlow and is shown in the 1901 census as son of Albert and Ann Elizabeth Waters. Perhaps the residents of Ettington did not want to remember the younger Waters because of this incident. But more likely as he was still at school when they lived at Ettington whilst his elder brother was remembered because he may have worked in Ettington and/or Alderminster when he left school.

Charles, Ernest and at least two others were the children of George Albert and Ann Elizabeth Waters who lived at Pathlow. The 1891 census shows him as Albert and no mention of George. He was born in Birmingham in 1870. His brother and sister were born in Aston Cantlow parish and they were all adopted by a local family.

Of their younger children Winifred Ellen Waters was born in 1899 and Percy James Waters was born in 1903 but was too young to serve in the Great War.

From 1906 to 1909 Albert Waters is shown on the Voters List as living at Ettington and in the trade directory as "Albert Waters, quarryman". In 1910 he is recorded as living at Hatton Hill and on the 1911 census the brothers were living in Warwick. But from 1910 he became known as George Waters in the trade directory and he reverted to his first name. And the proof was that his daughter Winifred Ellen was living in Hatton and they were the only family called Waters in Hatton parish.

Charles Benjamin Waters married Jane Elizabeth Jones somewhere in Warwick Registration District in the last quarter of 1915. However there is no record in the marriage register of St Pauls Warwick. Indeed there is no apparent reason why Charles Waters should be remembered in that church.

The only Jane Elizabeth Jones of similar age was registered as born at Ledbury in Herefordshire in the last quarter of 1892. And the Roll of Honour book states that Jane Elizabeth Waters was next of kin and living at Ledbury after her husband died.

With this in mind and suspecting that there may be yet another inscription at Ledbury I asked someone who was going to visit a relative at Ledbury to check on the town memorial but the name of Charles Waters was not on it..

Between them the Waters brothers are remembered on a total of 10 memorials and rolls of honour. This may be some kind of record. Both of them gave their lives on active service but because there is no written explanation very often the reason for inscriptions is lost. And so are many stories behind them.

I wish to acknowledge the help with the 1911 census from Stratford Library who also have a copy of the Warwickshire Roll of Honour book to lend out. The next memorial will be Whitchurch.