

LEST WE FORGET

At a militaria fair held at the Copdock Community Centre last year I was offered several old postcards featuring the unveiling of two Great War memorials. The postcards were in very good condition and four of them obviously related to one specific place and occasion, although even with a magnifying glass it was impossible to identify where the memorial was. In fact the memorial did not exhibit a place name at all - only "men of this church and parish" - but the names of the war dead were clearly legible and after ten minutes or so studying the SDGW (Soldiers Died Great War) records the name Creeting occurred most often, and therefore seemed the most likely location.

Now there are two Creetings - Creeting St. Peter and Creeting St. Mary, and the latter being nearest to me I called there first, the church was the obvious place to look - it stands on a knoll overlooking the Gipping Valley and is clearly visible from the busy A14 road. It has been a place of worship since the 9th Century and for hundreds of years two churches stood on the site - All Saints and St Mary's, the former only being demolished in 1901. (There's an interesting information board in the churchyard explaining the history of the site).

The War Memorial is on the west side of the church so is not immediately visible as you walk up the gravel path - so I was not sure that I had the correct location. In fact the dealer who sold me the cards had done a little home work too, had visited the church and told me that it was not there. But it was, and stands by the church porch overlooking the forlorn grave yard and the valley beyond - I could hear the traffic on the busy A14 through the trees.

I compared the postcards with the scene in front of me - the memorial is in remarkably good condition after ninety years but the wider view of the Gipping Valley is almost obscured by tree growth and the thatched threshing barn in the adjacent field is long gone. Around the memorial today are the fallen and untidy graves of the last century where the priest and local dignitaries had once stood at the initial commemoration service. Here also the postcards show the choir and general public; a lady with a pram and most poignantly the returned soldiers clad in their long mackintoshes and coats, cloth caps and trilbies to keep out the cold, standing to attention as the bugler sounds the Last Post. The Army Captain - a Military Cross winner? - stands head bowed before the floral tributes are laid and the lady wipes here eyes with a handkerchief.

There are sixteen names on the memorial, briefly these are as follows:-

PRIVATE PERCY BARKER

1st Battalion Middlesex Regt. Killed in action on 22nd September 1918 during the Battles of the Hindenburg Line and commemorated on the Vis-En-Artois Memorial between Arras and Cambrai. Son of Mrs H. A. Barker of Creeting Hills.

PRIVATE JAMES BRETT

13th Battalion Durham Light Infantry. Son of Harry and Eliza Brett of Harleston Green, he died of wounds on 8th October 1915 after less than two months in France. He

is buried in the Sailly-sur-la-Lys Canadian CWGC Cemetery near Estaires, just south-west of Armentieres, a relatively quiet sector in autumn 1915. Inexplicably he is recorded as Essex Regt on the Memorial - I can find no evidence to support this.

PRIVATE JOHN BROWN

7th Battalion Suffolk Regt. He was killed in action on 28th April 1917 during the Battalion's attack on Bayonet Trench between the River Scarpe at Rouex and the village of Monchy-le-Preux in the Arras sector. All officers, except the colonel and the adjutant were either killed or wounded and the battalion reduced to 190 effectives. His body was never knowingly recovered and he is therefore commemorated on the Faubourg d'Amiens Memorial in Arras. He was born in Creeting St Mary and enlisted at Bury St Edmunds.

PRIVATE EDWARD CHAPLIN

9th Battalion Suffolk Regt. Killed in action on 16th September 1916 during the Battle of the Somme when the battalion, supporting 9th Norfolks, stormed the formidable German strongpoint known as the Quadrilateral, east of Ginchy. During the attack the CO., Lieut- Colonel Mack was also killed. Pte.Chaplin is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.

PRIVATE GEORGE CHAPLIN

2nd Battalion Suffolk Regt. and younger brother of Edward, was killed in action on 1st October 1918 during an attack on the village of Rumilly, south of Cambrai, during the Advance to Victory. The Suffolks sustained 180 casualties including George, who now lies buried in Ribecourt Railway CWGC Cemetery, a short distance behind the front line.

2nd LIEUT. HENRY W. F. COOPER

7th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. This battalion was part of 63rd (Royal Naval) Division and one of it's Brigades was made up of "land-lubber" battalions, including the Royal Fusiliers. They attacked the village of Gavrelle, to the east of Arras on 23rd (2nd Battle of The Scarpe) and again on 28th April (Battle of Arleux) and sometime during this period 2/Lieut. Cooper must have been severely wounded. He was sent to a Casualty Clearing Station at Etrun on the west side of Arras where he died on the 29th April and was subsequently buried in Duisans CWGC British Cemetery, Etrun. He was 36 years old and a graduate of Corpus Christie College, Cambridge.

CORPORAL SYDNEY DAY

Royal Army Medical Corps. He was attached to 1st Battalion Kings Own Royal Lancaster Regt.and was killed in action on 1st July 1916 - the First Day of the Battle of the Somme - when the Battalion was in the third wave of the attack on the German strong point known as the Heidenkopf or Quadrilateral, just south of the village of Serre.

They went forward at 8.46am, sustaining heavy casualties and few men reached the German line. His body was recovered and is now buried at Sucrierie CWGC Military Cemetery, Colincamps, a short distance from the front line. He was a Needham Market lad, son of Ernest and Ellen Day and married to Maud Day of Fen Farm, Fen Lane, Creeting St Mary, which still exists today. He was 27 years old.

SERGEANT GEORGE GROOM

"T" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery. He died of wounds on 25th July 1916 during the course of the Battle of the Somme and is buried in Heilly Station CWGC Cemetery, a few miles south west of Albert.

This is a lovely cemetery in a quiet rural setting and unusual, partly due to the vastly greater number of casualties that arrived here than was ever anticipated. Casualties from the three Casualty Clearing stations established here from July 1916 had to be buried two to a grave - a rare occurrence in a British cemetery. There was not therefore room to engrave the men's regimental badges, and so they are incorporated into the colonnaded wall at the side of the cemetery.

SERGEANT CHARLES WILLIAM LUSHER

9th Battalion Suffolk Regt. "Early in August (1916) the battalion was taken out of the raging inferno of the Salient and thrown into the simmering cauldron of the Somme. Reaching the Albert sector on the 4th of that month under the command of Lieut-Col. Mack, they took over trenches in front of Maily-Maillet Wood....in that sector they were allocated the distressing task of clearing the battlefield of the fallen of the Ulster Division".

William landed in France in October 1914 with the 2nd Battalion, already a veteran of the Boer War. He was reassigned at some stage to the 9th, a War Service battalion, possibly after being wounded, no doubt to bring much needed experience and resolve to the younger, untested soldiers.

He died on 8th August 1916, probably as a result of sniper or artillery fire, as the battalion was not heavily engaged at this time and was buried in Auchonvillers CWGC Military Cemetery, in the adjacent village to Maily-Maillet. His parents lived in Stowmarket, he enlisted in Bury St Edmunds and was 34 years old.

PRIVATE JAMES MAYHEW

2nd Battalion Suffolk Regt. Son of James and Jane Mayhew he is buried in the churchyard with a splendidly ornate (not CWGC) headstone, the inscription reading ..."*Soon, soon to Faithful Warriors comes their rest*". He landed in France with a draft on 27th July 1915 and served with the battalion in the Ypres Salient where they saw fierce action at Bellewaarde, Sanctuary Wood and The Bluff.

Presumably at some point he was severely wounded, for he was returned to hospital in England where he died on 22nd February 1916. He was 22 years old.

PRIVATE FREDERICK MICKLEY

Army Service Corps, attached to 265th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery. He died of wounds on 28th October 1918, tragically just two weeks before the end of the war and is now buried in Awoingt CWGC British Cemetery, near Cambrai. He originally came from London, but was married and lived in Needham Market

PRIVATE ARTHUR WILLIAM MILLER

"B" Coy, 4th Battalion Suffolk Regt. A Territorial soldier, whose parents lived at Red Houses, Creeting St Mary. He died age 19 years on 20th July 1916 and is commemorated on The Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval. One of the first Territorial battalions on the Western Front, the 4th had seen considerable action before drafted to the Somme. On 15th July 1916 they suffered heavily (over 200 casualties) in an attack from the village of Bazentin-le-Petit on the German Switch Line - a heavily fortified front line position. After a brief respite they returned to the front line trenches where they supported an attack on the notorious High Wood "*violent opposition was encountered and little progress made*". It was during this attack that Pte Miller was killed. His body was never knowingly recovered.

He is mentioned on his parents gravestone in the churchyard. His father Cornelius died in 1920 and his mother Elizabeth in 1949, the solitary word "United" below all their names.

PRIVATE HORACE RACE

2nd Battalion Suffolk Regt. Son of Harry and Mary Ann Race from Stonham Aspal (the family later moved to Norwich Road, Creeting St Mary). Another casualty from the Battle of Arleux on 28th April 1917 when the Battalion were in trenches immediately to the east of the village of Monchy-le-Preux. They were apparently "lightly engaged" in Shrapnel and Pick Trenches - but their casualties amounted to 81! He is remembered on the Faubourg d'Amiens Memorial in Arras as his body was never knowingly recovered.

ABLE SEAMAN FREDERICK TAYLOR

Nelson and Hood Battalions, Royal Naval Division. (This army division was formed at the outbreak of the war by Winston Churchill, who was First Lord of the Admiralty at the time and was composed largely of surplus reserves of the Royal Navy who were not required at sea). He died on 23rd April 1918 at the 149th(RN) Field Ambulance as a result of wounds sustained in the opening hours of the German Spring offensive on the Flesquieres Ridge, south-east of Cambrai. He served with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF), probably at Gallipoli but appears to have missed the Battle of the Somme through illness! Later joining 7th Entrenching Battalion he was cross-posted to Hood Battalion just before he died. Once again his body was never knowingly recovered and is commemorated on the Faubourg d'Amiens memorial in Arras.

The presumption is that he died and was buried in France as he is commemorated there by the CWGC but the fact that his parents had erected a gravestone in the churchyard at Creeting St Mary could possibly mean that he was transported home and died in hospital in England.

The headstone, near to Private James Mayhew's reads.... "*Frederick W. A. Taylor RNVR. The dearly loved son of A&S. J. Taylor of Creeting St Mary, who died of wounds received in France July 19th 1918. Age 20 years. Greater love hath no man that he may lay down his life for his friends*".

CAPTAIN CECIL ROBERT TIDSWELL.

19th Squadron Royal Flying Corps and 1st Royal Dragoons. He was shot down and killed whilst flying solo over the enemy lines near Bapaume in France on 16th October 1916, reputedly by the Red Baron. He was buried where he fell in his burnt and wrecked aircraft by the Germans. After the war his father bought the piece of ground where his son lay and erected a memorial, which stands to this day.

Although his family visited it every year, the difficulties of looking after a grave in such a remote spot became apparent and in 1926 Tidswell's sister, Miss A. C. Tidswell wrote from Bosmere Hall, the family home, seeking help. The family resisted pressure for the grave to be concentrated to a military cemetery and finally, in 1930 a suitable financial arrangement was agreed and thereafter the CWGC has looked after it. Further help came from the family, when in 1983 it was further restored and it stands today on a remote hillside, a credit to the commitment of the Tidswell family and the CWGC. The grave is located near the village of Etricourt-Manancourt, a few miles south-east of Bapaume.

Captain Tidswell was a professional soldier serving in the Boer War and India and believing that there was no future in the cavalry he transferred to the RFC in early 1916. He was 36 years old and the family lived at Bosmere Hall, Needham Market.

DRIVER FREDERICK WOOLNOUGH

19th Battery, 9th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. He died age 20 on 28th April 1919 and is buried in the churchyard with a CWGC headstone. He served overseas, most likely on the Western Front and was the son of William and Sabina Woolnough, who lived in the village.

There are three Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) headstones in the churchyard:-

DRIVER FREDERICK WOOLNOUGH as above.

SERGEANT ETHELWYN WAKE

Reserve Field Company, 1st London Division, Royal Engineers who died on 20th December 1915. He appears to have no foreign service and also no local connections, and his residence is recorded as Bristol. I can only assume that he died locally and having no known relatives was buried locally. His headstone, which had become worn, was recently replaced with a new one by the CWGC.

CORPORAL CHARLES BALDRY

A Suffolk Regiment World War Two casualty, he died on 27th September 1943, age 29.

There are also some interesting memorials within the church:-

A brass tablet to **Sergeant George Groom: ..**

. "IN LOVING MEMORY OF SGT. GEORGE A. GROOM RHA,
WHO DIED FOR HIS COUNTRY JULY 25th 1916. BURIED IN FRANCE".

A brass tablet to two brothers, **Lieut. William James** and **2/Lieut. Douglass James:**

"IN LOVING MEMORY OF WILLIAM DOUGLASS JAMES. LIEUT. ROYAL
GARRISON ARTILLERY.
AGED 23 WHO FELL IN ACTION IN THE BATTLE OF LOOS ON SEPT 25TM 1915.
ALSO
DOUGLASS CHARLES JAMES. 2ND LIEUT. SOUTH STAFFORD SHIRE REGT. AGED
20 WHO DIED AT VERSAILLES ON SEPT. 30TM FROM WOUNDS RECEIVED IN
THE SAME ACTION. THIS TABLET IS ERECTED BY THEIR SISTER EVELYN MARY
FLEETWOOD OF CREETING RECTORY".

Their grandfather was Sir James Nicholas Douglass FRS (1826 -1898) a pioneering lighthouse builder and Engineer in Chief of Trinity House. He designed Longships Lighthouse off Land's End.

There is also a hand inscribed "Roll of Honour for the Dead" within a glazed oak frame.

Last November 11th at 11am I laid crosses for my Grandfather and Great Uncle by the War Memorial. Standing alone in the chill wind blowing up the Gipping valley, I read aloud the names of the men on the memorial as they probably would have been read out at that initial commemoration service all those years ago.

I wandered at the collective thoughts of that congregation - of loved ones lost, of friends and pals who never came home. Time has now eradicated those memories and sadness -but we must never forget their sacrifice and always remember and honour those sixteen names on the memorial,

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD.

Derek Pheasant. September2010