

Synopsis of WW1 Men

For many years I have read out the names of those listed on our War Memorial, but doubt whether any of us knew much about the background of each individual. Now my wife, Jane, has researched these men, and we would like to tell you a few details about each one.

07 Apr 1916 Petty Officer ROBERT LARCOMBE, aged 36, was the first of the men on the Otterton War Memorial to die. A career sailor in the Royal Navy, he was the son of John Larcombe, the station master at East Budleigh Station, and his wife Matilda, In 1910 Robert had married Minnie in Wakefield. He was killed by a battery explosion on his submarine, and was buried in Blyth Cemetery, Northumberland.

12 Feb 1917 Sapper GILBERT FOLLETT aged 32, of the Royal Engineers. The son of carpenter, William Follett and his wife Kate who lived in 16 Ottery Street. Gilbert also had been a carpenter. In June 1914 he had married Louie Till of Otterton. Gilbert died at Netley Hospital, Hampshire, having been wounded "somewhere in France". Buried in Otterton Churchyard.

3 May 1917 Private ERNEST BERRY aged 32, originally with the Somerset Light Infantry, but attached to the Middlesex Regiment. Son of widowed, Mrs Ann Berry, who lived in The King's Arms with her daughter, Ellen, and son in law, William Coate, who ran the pub. 190 soldiers of the Middlesex Regt were missing or dead on the same day that Ernest lost his life. He has no known grave but is commemorated on the Arras Memorial in France.

7 May 1917 Private JOHN GORMAN aged 32, of the Canadian Infantry. John was an orphan by the age of 12, but his elder married brother lived in Otterton at Spinning Wheel Cottage, and at an early age John was working for and living with farmer George Bishop near where the Old Post Office is. He married Mary Ann Yates in 1908 at Salem Chapel, and they emigrated to Canada. In 1915 he enlisted, and in 1916 he was sent with his unit to England, en route

for Europe. His family followed him home. The Canadian Corps were engaged in the Battle of Arras at the time John died. He has no known grave but is commemorated at the Canadian Memorial on Vimy Ridge.

19 June 1917 Private HUBERT VINNICOMBE aged 29, was with Royal Warwickshire Regt when he died, but originally joined the Royal Field Artillery. He was the son of William, a waggoner, and Emma, a lacemaker. They lived in a house, now demolished, near the Chapel on the Green. By the age of 13 Hubert was a farm labourer, but later became a baker's assistant in Exmouth. He is buried in Belgium in the Oostaverne Wood Cemetery, near where he died.

28 June 1917 HUBERT PAYNE aged 32, Government Works. Son of Stephen and Emily Payne who lived in Roper's Farm. Hubert was a bricklayer, and in 1911 he married Pollie from Exmouth. They had a daughter, Phyllis. Hubert failed the Army medical, but volunteered for National Service and was sent to Redbourn Works near Scunthorpe where iron ore was being produced for munitions. He died in an accident following blasting operations, and is buried in Otterton Churchyard.

13 August 1917 Petty Officer WALLACE HARDING, RN, aged 39, The son of a single woman, Emily Harding. They lived with his grandparents in one of the thatched cottages on The Green. Wallace was a career sailor, having enlisted at the age of 18. He went down with his ship following an attack by a German submarine. He has no known grave, but is commemorated on the Naval War Memorial on Plymouth Hoe.

16 August 1917 Private FRANK WHITE aged 21, originally in the Devonshire Regiment but attached to the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Son of Albert and Sarah White who farmed at Passaford, on the Northmostown road. Frank died during the 3rd Battle of Ypres, probably at the Battle of Langemarck. He is buried in Dochy Farm Cemetery, Belgium.

4th October 1917 Pte PERCY HAROLD PLEASE, aged 22. Son of Percy and Ada Please of Cross Trees Farm where his father farmed a few acres, as well as running the brickworks up Ladram Road. He sang in the Church Choir and

there is a memorial plaque to him in the Nave. Percy died during the Battle of Passchendaele, probably at Polygon Wood. He is buried at Tyne Cot Cemetery.

6th November 1917 Gunner ERNEST HART aged 21 (known as GOLDNEY), was the son of Louis, a wheelwright, and Emily Hart. They lived in a house (now demolished) opposite the Old Post Office. He enlisted aged 17 years 11 months in September 1914, but didn't see action till 1916. Goldney died in the Third Battle of Gaza and is buried in the Gaza War Cemetery.

22 March 1918 Private HARRY BAKER aged 20, Son of Herbie and Elizabeth Baker of Bramley Cottage, Ottery Street. His grandfather, father and brother were carpenters. Harry enlisted in the Devonshire Regiment, but was with a Pioneer Battalion of the Hampshire Regt, when he was killed on the Somme. Harry has no known grave, but is commemorated on Pozieres Memorial.

12 April 1918 Private WILLIAM GEORGE MARCHANT, known as George, died aged 18, the youngest man on the Otterton War Memorial. Son of farm labourer, William of Northmostown. Enlisted in the Devons, but was with Ox & Bucks Light Infantry when he died, probably at the Battle of the Lys. Buried in St Venant-Robecq British Cemetery

24 August 1918 Pte WILLIAM CARTER , aged 24. Bill Carter was the youngest of 9 children of Sydenham and Susan Carter of The Barton, Otterton, where Sydenham farmed till he died aged 80. Bill was killed in action with the Royal Berkshire Regiment, very likely during the 2nd Battle of Bapaume. He has no known grave but is commemorated on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial between Arras and Cambrai.

8 October 1918 Pte THOMAS SMITH, son of William Smith, a gardener, and his wife Emmeline. Born in Otterton, he was 19 when he died. The family lived in Streamside, on the East side of Ottery Street. Thomas was with the Kings

Royal Rifle Corps when he died, although he had first served with the Dorset Regiment. He is buried in the Cemetery at Rumilly-en-Cambrensis, near where he died, probably in the 2nd Battle of Cambrai.

3 November 1918 Driver CECIL TILL aged 27, of the Royal Engineers, was the last man on the war memorial to die. Son of Edward, a carpenter and wheelwright, and Emma, they lived in the cottage next to Spinning Wheel Cottage at Cross Trees.. In 1917 he had married Alma Payne, a dressmaker, of Roper's Farm. Wounded in France in March, Cecil was sent back to a military hospital in Brighton, but died of flu (probably the Spanish flu).

There is a 16th man on the War Memorial, Thomas Larcombe, brother of Robert and son of the stationmaster. But he should not in fact be on the War Memorial as he was not dead then. He had been serving for some years in India with the Royal Garrison Artillery when in 1910 he was discharged having served the 12 years he had signed up for. He must have stayed out there as by 1919 he was working for the Indian Railways when he married a local girl. There the trail went cold until I found him on the 1939 Register back in England. To be continued (read the book in the Church).