

MAYFIELD AND THE GREAT WAR - NO. 42 - SEPTEMBER 2017

Despite the unseasonal heavy rainfall during much of August, which had disrupted the British offensive, a drier period into September witnessed some success around the Ypres salient. A change in British leadership of this offensive, together with fresh tactics and partial relief from the wet weather, led to British success at the Battle of Menin Road Ridge (20th Sept) and the Battle of Polygon Wood (26th Sept) where much high ground around Ypres was gained. However, the coastal landings further along the Belgian coast had been abandoned as there was little prospect of breaking through the German defences from Ypres to secure the Belgian coastline. The Germans used mustard gas for the first time during this phase of the offensive.

Elsewhere, on the Eastern Front the Germans, recognising the turmoil caused by the Russian revolution, launched an offensive against the port of Riga. This assault proved to be highly successful, largely owing to the feeble resistance of the Russian Army, whose morale and fighting spirit had been seriously damaged by the ongoing political events. The potential collapse of the entire Russian resistance was looming large in the contingency plans of the Western Allies.

In Mesopotamia the British Commonwealth forces advanced along the Euphrates River, defeated the Turkish Army at the Battle of Ramadi and followed up by striking deep into central Mesopotamia. The intention was to secure the latter and then advance north along the River Tigris in the direction of Mosul, an important centre of the oil producing region.

The men of the 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment spent the month of September building roads in Belgium, north of Ypres. Mid month several of the companies had to move accommodations due to continued bombing at their old camp. Mid month "C" company also had to be relieved by "A" company because of the great reduction in "C" company due to casualties. Lt. Col. Langha noted in the battalion diaries that very few reinforcements were received during the month and casualties were heavy. Companies in temporary rest were trained in drill and musketry.

There are 7 men whose names appear on the war memorial in the month of September 1917.

Frederick Alfred E. (Ernest) Smith, First Engineer, Merchant Navy. Frederick died on the 9th September 1917 aged 41 when the S.S. Tuscarora, en route to/from the UK, was torpedoed by U Boat UC17 in the western approaches to the English Channel. The ship was damaged but not sunk and was eventually towed to safety in Plymouth. Three crew members were listed as missing after this attack and it is assumed that Frederick's body was never recovered.

Frederick was born in Ramsgate, Kent in 1876 to parents Richard Smith (born Poplar 1831), a licensed victualer, and Emily Smith (born Milton Gravesend Kent 1841). In 1881 the family, with Frederick, aged 5, were living at 213, Upper Kennington Lane, Lambeth together with three servants working at the premises. By 1891 the family were living at The Prince of Wales, Naval Row, Poplar. Frederick aged 15 was recorded as an apprentice. His older brothers, Edward 27 an assistant and another brother, Thomas, aged 24, also an assistant, still living at home. By 1901 Emily was a widow and had moved the family back to Milton (62, Milton Road) where she was living with Thomas, aged 34 an insurance agent and Frederick, aged 24, a marine engineer.

Frederick married Emily Winifred Smith in 1902 in or around the district of Yarmouth. No trace of Frederick in the 1911 census has been found although Emily W his wife is to be found at Oxford Lodge, Shoreham where she is described as living on own means. The date of moving to Rosewarne, Five Ashes is unknown. No further details of Emily have been found.

The Tuscarora was a 7,000 ton tanker that was operated by Anglo-American Oil Co. Its cargo and its destination are not yet established although the fate of the U Boat Captain is documented. He ((Ulrich Pilzecker) went on to command two further U Boats the last being U Boat UB 113 which went missing with all hands in September 1918.

Frederick is also commemorated on the Tower Hill, London Memorial, for Merchant Seamen.

Benjamin Baldock, Service no 48615, 8th Bn Welsh Regiment, died 10th September 1917 aged 24. He is buried at the Amara War Cemetery , Iraq.

Benjamin was born in Ticehurst in 1893, to parents George W. Baldock (a brick maker, aged 35, born Rotherfield) and Emma (aged 30, born Crowborough). In 1901 the family were living at Scotsfords Hill, Mayfield. At that time Benjamin was one of six children: Percy (1), William (3), Benjamin (7), Nelson (9), Alfred (12) and Alice (13). By 1911 there was only Benjamin living at home with his parents and they were living at Scotsford, an 8 room house. At that stage Benjamin was aged 17 and was listed as a carter by profession.

In the K&SC 28.11.1913, listed under the Mark Cross Petty Sessions "*Benjamin Baldock was summoned for riding a cycle without a light at Rotherfield on 8th November and was fined 1s 5d costs.*"

Benjamin was a former Mayfield schoolboy, who prior to the war was in the employment of Mr. Knight, a Mayfield dairyman.

He enlisted in Eastbourne in September 1914 and was part of the 8th Bn Welsh Regiment. This regiment was deployed to Mesopotamia in Feb 1916, and eventually captured Baghdad. He was wounded in September 1916.

The newspaper reports of his death (K&SC 9th Nov 1917) say that he died of fever in Mesopotamia, six days before his 25th birthday. He is buried at the Amara War Cemetery, Iraq.

He had two brothers who were also serving with the colours at that time. He is also commemorated on the Heathfield War Memorial.

Herbert J. Bateup, service no. 372966, 1st/8th Bn London Regiment Post Office Rifles, died 12th September 1917 aged 27.

Herbert was born in Mayfield around 1890 to parents James Hook Bateup (domestic gardener, aged 43 in 1901, born in Mayfield) and Louisa (aged 35 in 1901, born in Seaford). In 1901 Herbert, aged 11, was one of four children living with parents and paternal grandfather at Sharndon Lodge, Mayfield. After leaving school he joined the Mayfield postal staff as a telegraph messenger. He served there for some time, before being sent to the General Post Office, Tunbridge Wells. Subsequently he moved to Margate, and in 1911 was living at 63 Ethelbert Road, Cliftonville, Margate, as a single boarder working as a town postman. In 1913 a marriage took place between Herbert J Bateup and Ethel M Mirams in the registration district of Thanet, Kent. In Q4 1915 the birth of Phyllis I F Bateup was registered in Thanet, Kent. At the time of his enlistment he was working as a town postman, and at that time was living with his wife and one child at 59 Beatrice Road, Margate.

Herbert enlisted at Margate in April 1916 and joined the 1st/8th Bn London Regiment Post Office Rifles. (The London Regiment was a territorial army regiment, first formed in 1908, and whilst most other volunteer units lost their unique identity the London Corps were a notable exception, forming their own regiment). Herbert moved to France with the Regiment four months later, where he had been serving ever since. He had been hoping to come home on leave in November, having not been home since he left for the Western Front.

Herbert was killed in action, being hit and killed by a shell whilst delivering a message to one of the forward battalions. He is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, Belgium.

Herbert's only brother was killed in action on the 28th December 1915

Nelson Soane. Lance Corporal, 6th Battalion Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment. Service No G/16696 LC Soane is recorded incorrectly on the Mayfield War Memorial as Sloane. He was killed in action near Arras on the 17th September 1917 aged 38 and is buried at the Windmill British cemetery Monchy-Le-Preux. France.

Nelson was awarded the Military Medal *'for acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire or for individual or associated acts of bravery which were insufficient to merit the Distinguished Conduct Medal.'* A slightly backhanded citation by today's way of thinking and there is no record of how his family reacted to this posthumous award. Conferment of the medal was announced in the London Gazette, 29 Sept 1917 Issue No 30312 Page 10036, by which Nelson earned the right to add the letters MM to his name.

Nelson was born in Buxted in 1881 to parents Richard Brooks James Thomas (known as Thomas, Ag Lab and Milkman) and Mary Ann (nee Simmons) where the family lived at Bailey Petts, Buxted. The Soane family were successively resident at Pinstaws, Rotherfield and later at Town Row Green, Rotherfield during which time Thomas lost 2 wives (3 marriages in total) and Nelson gained 2 Stepmothers. He is recorded in successive census returns as being employed as a Bricklayer Lab and later as a Gardener Domestic being employed by Mr Williams at Broadwater Down .

At the time of this latter occupation Nelson had married Elizabeth Harriet (nee Hall) in 1906 and by 1911 the couple were living at Sharnden Lodge, Mayfield. He enlisted in the Royal West Kent Regiment at Tunbridge Wells, date unknown as his service records are missing. The circumstances of his death near to Arras are unknown as records of his Battalion's whereabouts are unclear for the period in question.

There were no children from his marriage and his wife Elizabeth subsequently lived in the Tunbridge Wells/Sevenoaks/Tonbridge area for the rest of her life and did not remarry. In the late 1910s/early 1920s 'In Memorium' commemorations were inserted in the K&SC at the appropriate date by Elizabeth; she died in 1955 near to Tonbridge.

Alexander Humphrey. Private 12th Battalion East Surrey Regiment. Service No 204572 (formerly No 6368 London Regiment). It is believed that Alexander Humphrey was mistakenly added to the Mayfield War Memorial instead of Albert Humphrey who in turn is correctly recorded on the Five Ashes War Memorial. See below.

Albert George Humphrey Private 8th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment, Service No G/6412, killed in action 5th September 1917 aged 18 and is buried at Duhallow ADS (Advanced Dressing Station) West-Vlaanderen Belgium. Plot No I.C.2.

Albert was born in Mayfield 1896 to parents Jabez (Farm Labourer/Farm Bailiff) and Mary Jane (nee Sands); the family (14 children, of whom 12 survived) were living at Summerhill Cottage, Hadlow Down, Five Ashes. The family lived at this address for 20+ years and by 1911 Albert's occupation was recorded as Horseman on farm. He enlisted with the Royal Sussex Regiment at Eastbourne and although his service records are missing other sources suggest he enlisted in 1915.

The SAE 21/9/17 P3 reported that he *'enlisted at the beginning of the War when he was just over 18 years of age. He went abroad in February 1916 and in the following July he sustained a remarkable injury, being hit by a bullet which entered his head by his left ear and passed out of his right cheek without damaging a tooth. After his recovery he returned to the Front where he served for another eleven months before he met his death. At one time he was on duty with his brother Lance Corporal Henry Humphrey, RSR, who after being wounded went abroad again a week ago in the hope of rejoining deceased. Another brother John Humphrey is serving in the Royal Garrison Artillery.'*

The same newspaper carried the following details of his death: *'Mr Jabez Humphrey, Summerhill Lodge , Five Ashes has received an intimation that his son Private Albert Humphrey, RSR, a brother of P.S. Humphrey, Lewes (the initials may refer to Police Sergeant??) has been killed by a shell. It appears that deceased was taking shelter with some comrades in a dug-out during some rather heavy shelling, when a shell hit the dug-out , four of the men being killed and one wounded , while another is missing.'*

'The News was conveyed to the father of deceased by his Commanding Officer who wrote " It is very difficult to try and comfort those to whom such a loss is so affectionately near, but, if it will help you at all to bear your grief I can tell you that Albert died at his post in the fulfilment of his duty , and that he was a good soldier, beloved by those around him. He is surely now receiving the reward of those who fall in the highest of all service - that for God, King and Country. These tragic events are inseparable from our task over here, and I can only ask you to bear your loss in the patriotic bravery of duty well done."

A further letter from the Officer Commanding the Battalion in which the deceased served sent the following message. *" Please accept my deepest sympathy at the loss of your boy. His death is a great loss to his Company, to which he was always such a good example of cheerfulness, and a hard willing worker. The only consolation I can offer you is that he died the death of a hero while fighting for his country and the sake of civilisation."*

Frederick James Tinker - Private with 12th Bn Suffolk Regiment, service no 33526, died 26th September . 1917, aged 38. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

Frederick was born in 1882 in Westbury, Wiltshire to parents Tom Tinker (general labourer, born Stert Wiltshire, aged 55 in 1901) and Emily (born Trowbridge, aged 56 in 1901). In 1901 Frederick was aged 19 and was an agricultural labourer, together with an older (Tom, 24) and younger brother (Herbert, 16), also a lab, and a younger sister (Emily, aged 14) who was a dress maker. The family were living at Stourton Bushes, Dilton Marsh, Westbury, Wilts. By 1911 Frederick was 30 and had moved and was living at 3, South Street, Mayfield, as a lodger with James Kemp, widower, farm lab, his daughter Winifred, housekeeper aged 38, and his son Alfred, 37, general cowman. Frederick was employed as an engine cleaner for E.S.C.C. In 1914 Frederick married Winifred Kemp - no records of any children born.

Frederick was initially reported as missing, but his lieutenant wrote to Winifred Tinker (wife) to say that he was last seen wounded in a trench, and after a shell exploded nearby he was seen no more.

CWGC record that Frederick was the son of Thomas and Emily Tinker of Vine Cottage, Westbury, Wilts and the husband of Winifred Tinker of 8, Landsdowne Rd, Tonbridge Kent.

Horace George Cornford, Private with the Australian Infantry, A.I.F., service no. 3528, died 29th September 1917, aged 23. He is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial.



Horace was the older brother of Elam Cornford, who died on the 10th July 1915.

Horace was born in 1894 in Mayfield to parents Horace Cornford (Farmer employer, aged 37 in 1901, born in Mayfield) and Ruth (aged 36 in 1901, born in Rotherfield). In 1901 Horace was aged 7 and was one of six children living at Freemans Farm, Five Ashes. By 1911 the family were living at Meres Farm, Five Ashes and there had been 4 more siblings born. By that time Horace was 17 and living as a boarder in High St, Rotherfield working as a grocers assistant living with Effie Wickens (working housekeeper).

In 1913 Horace emigrated to Australia. He departed from Liverpool on the 20th March 1913, and travelled to Sydney on a ship bound for Melbourne. His occupation on outbound passenger list was recorded as farm labourer.

Image 1: SAE 17th November 1916, p.7

The National Archives of Australia was a great source of information, and his service records were available to find for free.

Horace joined on the 17th January 1916 and formerly enlisted on the 14th February 1916. Whether his enlistment had anything to do with his brother's death in July 1915 is hard to say - but he certainly enlisted after that sad death.

On his enlistment papers it says that he was working as a grocer's assistant, an apprenticeship of two years, living at 33A, Pittwater Rd, Manly, NSW.

On his certificate of medical exam he is described as being 5ft 5 inches, 132 lbs, fair complexion, blue eyes, brown hair and a methodist.

On the 5th August 1916 Horace travelled from Sydney to Plymouth (arriving 30th September 1916) on board the "Ballarat". On the 5th December 1916 he travelled to France on the "Princess Victoria" .

Sussex Express, Friday Oct 19th 1917 p.8 says:

"Many people in Uckfield and Mayfield will learn with regret of the death in action of Private Horace George Cornford, of the Australian Forces, and second son of Mr. & Mrs. Horace Cornford, of Harland's Farm, Uckfield, and formerly of Meers Farm, Mayfield. No actual details of his death have been received, but it is understood that it was caused by a shell.

He left for Australia some years back, but joined the army there soon after the outbreak of War. His death is believed to have occurred about the 29th of September. He was 23 years of age and unmarried.

Mr & Mrs Cornford lost another son in July, 1915 when Driver Elam Cornford died in Egypt as the result of pneumonia. A third son, Private Eli Cornford, is on his way to India."

There is an article in the Sussex Express, Friday March 27th 1936, with details of Horace's parents' Golden wedding anniversary. Horace's father was a member of the Mayfield Parish Council for about 20 years and was a special constable. Eli survived the war.

Horace is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial and is also commemorated on the Uckfield war memorial.

Image 1: SAE 17th November 1916, p.7

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