

The First World War and Goldington,

100 years on – April 1918

Continuing the occasional series of articles to add some detail to the scant information on the First World War memorial in the church porch and to mark one hundred years since each individual soldier fell:

Those of you reading these articles may have noticed a rather large gap since the last one back in August. Nothing odd about that in many regards as the fall of the soldiers on the memorial is by no means evenly distributed during the war and nor would we expect it to be. But it is noticeable in one way which is that during this gap a certain event took place: the battle of Passchendaele between August and November 1917.

Somehow, despite an average of 2,100 casualties every day for 105 days, none of our soldiers fell during that battle. But Goldington was represented, not least by the subject of this month's article.

Private Harold Roy Allen was born on Bedford in 1895 to Henry and Emily Agnes Allen. Henry was a bricklayer, originally from Ravensden, whilst Emily came from Bushmead. Harold was the middle of three boys and the third of six children in all.

Harold was baptised at St Peter's on 8 December 1895 and by 1911 they were living in Goldington where he is shown as occupied in farm work. He is recorded as one of the four bellringers at St Mary's who fell during the First World War.

Harold joined the 9th battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment in September 1916 but was not sent overseas until the following summer when he reached the front line in July 1917, just in time for the battle of Passchendaele which began on 31 July 1917.

Harold experienced and survived some of the worst trench warfare conditions of the entire war. Just days into the battle the area suffered the worst rains in 30 years. Any field drainage systems had long been destroyed by years of intense shelling in the area so that the biggest danger to men of both sides was the quagmire of mud in which many men and horses drowned.

After the battle, the regiment spent the winter and the spring of 1918 in the same area, between Bethune and Lens. For several days from 9 April 1918 they came under gas bombardment as part of the Battle of Cambrai and it would seem that Harold was a casualty of the gas. He did not recover from its effects and consequently died on 24 April 1918, **aged 22**.

In his short service Harold suffered some of the worst that the war had to offer. He is buried in the Etaples Military Cemetery and the inscription on his headstone, supplied by his parents, reads: "Dearly loved, deeply mourned, from loved ones at home". Back at home, the grave of his parents lies in St Mary's churchyard, by the west end of the church and close to the tower where he rang the bells.

Andrew Dennison

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