

## The First World War and Goldington, 100 years on – July 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:*

July 1918 brings us to an individual of particular interest to me as beside the name on the war memorial are the letters M.G.C. for the Machine Gun Corps.

I have a personal link to the MGC as my great uncle, Private Bill Dennison, served with the MGC. At the outbreak of war, he was one of a group of lads who left their jobs at the Royal Holloway Sanatorium, Virginia Water, on 1 September 1914 and enlisted. Bill joined the Royal Berkshire Regiment but was transferred to the MGC when it was formed in 1916.

The deployment of the machine gun during WWI had a very significant impact on the way warfare was conducted and it contributed much to create the static trench warfare conditions that characterised the war.

Originally machine guns at the start of the war were just part of the general equipment issued to all regiments but it became clear that specific training and organisation of the teams led to better results. So a separate Machine Gun Corps was created, with companies assigned to work alongside regular infantry regiments.

With such a rapid rate of fire, the machine guns could control large areas of ground. This made the machine gun locations of key strategic importance but also therefore prime targets of the enemy. The MGC was also known as the Suicide Club due to the short life expectancies.

Despite this, my great uncle Bill served through the entire war and returned to his job at the Sanatorium once war was over. Our Goldington soldier this month was not so fortunate – in many ways.

Private William Roffey was born around 1900 to James and Hannah Isabella Roffey. James and Hannah were originally from Epsom, Surrey but presumably moved to Bedford for work with James being a 'viceman' in an iron foundry. The couple had at least five children in Bedford, as well as one from before their move here.

In 1910 Hannah died and by the time of the 1911 census James had lost his job and he and his five children were inmates of the Bedford Union Workhouse (now part of the site of Bedford North Wing Hospital).

Despite being underage, William enlisted with the army in Goldington in May 1916. He was originally assigned to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment but presumably showed accuracy with a rifle and was transferred to the Machine Gun Corps. He would probably still have been serving close to his original regiment.

On 24 July 1918 William was killed in action, during fighting in the area of the Somme, at a pivotal point of the war before the Allies began what would become their final advance. He was just 18 years old. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial.

**Andrew Dennison**

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