

The First World War and Goldington, 100 years on (plus a bit – Part II)

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 (although these two soldiers have been identified a little late...)

Last month I explained that there are two names which are listed only on the Goldington Green memorial and not on the board in the church porch, which has made the identification a little more tricky. The names are given as “A Johnson” and “H V Oglee”. I believe I now have answers as to who these two men were:

Private Arthur Johnson served with the 7th Bedfordshires. He sailed from Folkestone to France on 26 July 1915 with his battalion. Arthur went missing in action, presumed killed, aged 24 on **1 July 1916** – the first day of the Battle of the Somme – during an attack on the Pommiers Redoubt. He served in the same regiment and died on the same day as Sergeant George Laughton who is listed on the church memorial.

Arthur was the brother of Private James Johnson who was covered in the article for February 1917. This is only identifiable in the records from the fact that they share the same next of kin – their elder sister, Mrs Jane Cunnington of Keysoe.

But if Arthur was the brother of James, why does he not appear on the church memorial? Perhaps it was because he had no links to Goldington – he was born in Bedford but orphaned before the age of ten and grew up as a foster child in Bolnhurst before enlisting. Or perhaps it was because he had gone missing in action and at the time of the original wooden memorial the family refused to believe that he had been killed. Who can say at this point, but I believe this is the “A Johnson” on the memorial.

Private Harold Vernon Ocle served with the 1st Bedford-shires. During October 1916 his battalion were holding trenches in the Bethune sector. On the night of **31 October 1916** they took part in a bombing raid on the opposing German trenches. (‘bombing raid’ at this time referring to the use of Mills bombs and other hand held grenades rather than the later term for an aircraft released bombardment)

Under a moonless sky, the raiding party left their trenches at 7pm and advanced towards the German lines whilst a diversion was being acted out by colleagues to draw the Germans’ attention. The raid was successful and subsequently several medals for gallantry were awarded as a result. However, once the soldiers were back in their own trenches, including many wounded, it became clear that four soldiers had been killed – among them was Harold Vernon Ocle, aged 22.

Harold was born in Bedford in 1894, the only child of Herbert William Ocle and his wife Emily Sarah. Herbert was a schoolmaster, like his father before him, and on the 1911 census the family lived at “2 Putnoe Park Estate, Kimbolton Road”. It would appear that this Herbert was also a footballer and captained the Bedford football team in 1891 to a 6-1 victory over Luton Town. He then signed for Luton Town the following season.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission does not list any casualties with the surname of “Oglee” and I therefore believe that Harold above is the soldier referred to, despite the difference in spelling.

Andrew Dennison

Next real instalment: July 1918