

The First World War and Goldington, 100 years on – October 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:

By the end of September 1918 the war was beginning to draw to a close. The Germans in France had retreated to the Hindenberg Line and behind the scenes negotiations towards an armistice were being initiated. However, for the British soldiers it was just the close of another summer of fighting. The location may have moved to the new Hindenberg Line but in early October the Germans were entrenched in their new positions and large offensives were once again the order of the day. Goldington lost another four soldiers this month (three within two days) each with a story to tell:

Private Herbert Newnham was born on Christmas Day 1897. He was called up on 10 April 1917 just five days before his brother (**Private Walter Newnham**) was killed when the troopship he was on was torpedoed. Herbert landed in France on 21 June 1917.

Herbert had an unlucky war. He was wounded during fighting on 1 August 1917 at Passchendaele and invalided back to 'Blighty'. On 15 January 1918 he returned to France before being wounded again during the night of 21 March 1918, this time he convalesced at a number of military hospitals within France.

Herbert rejoined his battalion on 12 August 1918. On **16 October 1918**, during preparations for an advance on the Selle River the following day, his luck finally ran out and he was killed in action. He was aged 20. Herbert is buried in the Romieres Communal Cemetery Extension, East of Arras.

Sapper David Bennett, known as Dave, was born in Bedford, near St Cuthbert's, in late 1891 to Alfred and Elizabeth Bennett. By 1911 the family were living at 2 Queen Alexandra Road in Goldington where Alfred was a bricklayer and Dave was an apprentice in an upholstery business.

Dave is the only soldier on the Goldington memorial board to have died on English soil. His grave stands in Bedford cemetery – a standard issue white headstone at his head, with another family gravestone laid on the ground.

The casualty records show him in the Cheshire Regiment but the family gravestone is keen to record him as a Sapper with the East Anglian Royal Engineers.

We can surmise that Dave was originally with the Royal Engineers, possibly even prior to the outbreak of war, and may well have served in the Middle East. At some point during the conflict Dave was probably wounded and returned to England where he died on **17 October 1918** at a military hospital in Tarporley, Cheshire. He was aged 27. It may well be that he was transferred to the Cheshire Regiment whilst in hospital in anticipation of returning to service after recovery.

In contrast to the vagaries in Dave's military service, the records for **Private Frederick East** are much more detailed and he is the longest serving Goldington soldier of which we are certain - but tantalising his story both starts and ends in mystery...

Frederick was born on 10 March 1883 in Leicester to Emily East, a domestic servant, but no known father. For reasons unknown, Frederick was adopted as the son of John and Sarah Ann Denton in Goldington.

Just days after his eighteenth birthday, Frederick enlisted with the Leicestershire Regiment on 19 March 1901 and served in Venice, Alexandria, the Channel Islands and India. He was still serving, having already extended his service twice, when war broke out.

Frederick landed in France on 9 September 1914 and, apart from periods of leave, he served continuously in France for almost the entire war. He was wounded once in 1915 before eventually being killed in action on **17 October 1918** aged 35.

After his death, the London Gazette in November 1918 records that Frederick had been awarded the French "Croix de Guerre", a military honour given for acts of heroism involving combat with the enemy, but tantalisingly we have no records of when or why Frederick was awarded this medal. This makes Frederick the only decorated soldier on the war memorial board.

Lastly this month we come to the name given on the memorial as 'George Newnham' of the Royal Fusiliers. In fact this would appear to be **Private George Newman** from Bedford and therefore no relation to Herbert above.

George initially landed with the 5th Bedfordshire's at Gallipoli on 5 August 1915 but attrition rates through injury or illness were very high there and it seems it prompted a series of transfers between other regiments. He went on to serve with the London Regiment and the Labour Corps before he was killed in France on **28 October 1918** aged 45 whilst serving with the Royal Fusiliers.