

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

At the outbreak of war, no-one expected the scale of the casualties that would follow. Indeed, we're all familiar with the early expectation that it would 'all be over by Christmas'.

Amidst the swell of patriotism and support for the troops at the start of the war, the idea was hatched to publish a collection of biographies of all the fallen soldiers. This quickly proved to be an impossible task as the casualty rates escalated but it was still pursued by some parties, largely via voluntary submissions from relatives.

The most significant of such endeavours was 'De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour' which featured biographies of 26,768 Army, Navy and Air Force men killed in the Great War.

**Private Herbert Victor Gray** on the Goldington war memorial is one of these soldiers and it gives us a fair bit of information, in addition to what we can gather from other sources.

Herbert Victor Gray was born on 1 August 1897 in Sawston, Cambridgeshire to James Gray and his wife Sophia Elizabeth (daughter of Isaac Farrington). Herbert was the youngest of seven children.

Both of Herbert's parents are referred to as having pre-deceased Herbert – we know Sophia died in early 1901 and James presumably died a few years later as by 1911 Herbert, aged 12, was living with his elder sister Miralda and her husband John Sargent in Caldecote. Miralda was 17 years older than Herbert. Herbert worked as a farm labourer.

Herbert enlisted with the 11<sup>th</sup> Suffolk Regiment on 28 July 1915, just days before his eighteenth birthday. After training he landed in France on 3 June 1916, just in time to join his battalion in its part on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916.

After two years of service Herbert died in a military hospital in Aire-sur-la-Lys on **10 September 1918** from wounds received in action. He was aged 21.

Herbert is buried in the Aire Communal Cemetery, France. It is likely that he never lived in Goldington, and may never have even visited, but his link to the village is through his sister Miralda who was his next of kin and who supplied the inscription for his grave. By this time she was living in one of the East End cottages in Goldington.

Herbert's brother, William J Gray, also fell in action on 16 August 1917 whilst serving with the Essex Regiment. He had not moved with their sister Miralda but had gone to live with an Aunt after the death of their parents. He is not therefore listed on the war memorial board in church.

**Andrew Dennison**

Next instalment: October 1918