

Lest We Forget

The men of Bean answered the call to defend their country in the First World War. Most of them were farm labourers. Briefly, the following is about the men who did not return, or, as in one case, died a few years later as a result of being gassed in the war.

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Victor Alfred Brett

Victor was born in 1897 in Darenth, the son of Frederick Brett and his wife Bridget Foley, one of their 12 children. His parents had married in Ireland in 1878, when Frederick was stationed there with the 7th Dragoon Guards. During his childhood Victor lived with his family in Green Street Green, but Frederick the father worked for William Borland at the EC Powder Factory, and by at least the 30 December 1915 the family were living at 16 EC Cottages Bean as this is when Victor enlisted in the 10th Battalion, Queen's Own (Royal Kent Regiment). On his enlistment papers it states that Victor was 5ft 11ins, which was quite tall for that time and his trade was given as a 'motor engineer/storekeeper'.

He landed at Le Harve on 15 May 1916. It appears he spent four days in a field hospital from 24 April 1917, reason unknown. Victor was formerly a Lancer (of the Line) and was transferred to the Royal Kent Regiment on 13 August 1917 at Cavalry rate of pay. His Battalion moved to Italy on 14 November 1917 returning to France on 2 March 1918. On the day of his death the Battalion had just come off the front line and were working on trenches around a 'Casualty Clearing Station'. A German shell hit a nearby ammunition dump killing a total of 18 soldiers, injuring another 28. Victor was one of those killed. To add to this sad story, 2 local girls who often served the soldiers egg and chips were also killed along with a baby whose pram was found in the crater left by the explosion.

Victor was buried at Hagle Dump, Belgium.

William Brown



William Brown, son of Charles and Jane Brown, was born in Darenth and baptised at the Parish Church on the 15 December 1872. His father was a labourer. By 1881 the family were living in Grub Street, Darenth, when the family had grown to nine children. In 1891 William was 19 and aboard HMS Pembroke in the Medway area (probably Chatham) when he was a stoker.

On the 26 December 1895 William Brown married Ellen Parks, the daughter of Frederick Parks, at Southfleet Church. In 1901 the couple were living at 13 Charles Street, Greenhithe, with their first-born child William who was then 4 years old. Also living with the couple were William's mother Jane, then widowed, and her youngest daughter Lily. By 1902 William and Jane had moved to 6 Archers Cottages as their next child, Ellen Gladys, was baptised at Stone Church on the 12 June of that year. There would be another daughter Amelia Mabel born 1904 to complete their family. The family would remain at 6 Archers Cottages for the rest of William's life.

William was discharged from the navy in 1902 and he was listed as a nightwatchman on his son's apprentice papers in 1912. He was placed on the reserve list and rejoined the navy at the beginning of WWI. He was listed again as being on the ship HMS Pembroke. He died of Spanish flu in the flu epidemic of 1918, dying at Folkestone, which may well have been a hospital for the naval personnel. His family were still living at 6 Archers Cottages at the time of his death, and he was brought back to Bean for burial at Stone cemetery on the 21 November 1918. His wife Ellen was also buried at Stone Cemetery when she died in 1952.

Of their children, their son William married Avis Violet Brown in 1930 and moved to Australia where he died in 1959. His wife moved to New Zealand where she died in 1999, and where their descendants still live today.

Ellen Grace Brown married Edmund Lee in 1927 and she and her husband both died in the Dartford area and no doubt they have descendants in the area.

Amelia Mabel married Charles Hampshire also during 1927 but in the Guildford, Surrey area where they seem to have remained.

Herbert Henry Harding

Herbert Henry Harding was born during 1893 in the Dartford area, the son of Thomas George Harding and his wife Harriet Hemley Smith. His father had come from Plaxtol; his mother from Northampton and they married in the Gravesend area during 1888. They had five children, Herbert being the third child. His father was a cowman at one time, and then an agricultural labourer, and his children's birthplaces showed how much he moved his young family around searching for work: first Longfield, Stone, Dartford, then Stone again and by 1900 they had moved to Bean. As with his father and his brothers, Herbert was a farm labourer, and by 1911 the family were living at 7 Ightham Cottages, Bean.

Herbert Harding is recorded in The Stone Parish Book of Remembrance as serving in The Army Service Corps. He was with the Army Service Corps at the beginning of the war, landing in France on 20 August 1914. At some stage he transferred to the 2nd Battalion 33rd Division Worcestershire Regiment as a Private.

Herbert was killed in action on the 11 April 1918 aged 25. His body was never recovered, and he is Commemorated on the Ploegstreert Memorial in Belgium. By the time the remembrance records were created his parents had moved to Mercia Cottage, Bean.

Albert Leonard Ledger



Albert Ledger was born in a cottage in Green Street Green called The Slip Cottage, no longer there. He was the youngest child of Thomas and Alice Ledger born in 1898 when his parents were in their late 40's. By this time his eldest sister had moved away and given birth to her own son, who was just a few years younger than Albert and the two were very close. Like the men of his family Albert worked on the land. The family moved to 8 Stanley Cottages where he was living when WWI began and he died there on the 8 March 1921, but at some time he had lived in Bean with his family and he had attended Bean school.

Albert and, two years later his nephew William, both joined the 161st Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery, Albert was a gunner. Alas Albert was caught in one of the lethal gas attacks and could have escaped but he went back to warn his comrades and took into his lungs too much of the substance. He died 8 March 1921, four years after the war ended at home with his saddened parents. They were so grief stricken that they could not go out of the house for two years. He is buried in St Margaret's churchyard near to the door and has 2 headstones. The later one was of traditional Portland stone provided by the war memorial society.

Albert had a fiancée, Jessie Stephens who lived in the same row of cottages. They grew up together and William used to join them on his visits to the country. They both mourned Albert and eventually William asked Jessie to marry him. They were married during 1927.

Robert Julien Ludlow

Robert Julien Ludlow was born in Darenth in 1886, son of Mark Ludlow and his wife Fanny Edwards, one of their 13 children. From 1901, and perhaps earlier, the family were living at 2 Archers Cottages Bean. They had known great sadness in that their first two children died within a short while of their birth, another daughter died aged 19 and then Robert died in the First World War. Robert had married Edith Wood in 1912 and they had two sons, Robert born 1914 and Edward born 1915, but not baptised until 1918 when the records showed that his father was a rifleman, deceased. Perhaps Edith had been waiting for her husband to come home to be at the baptism, but sadly that was not to be.

Robert joined as a rifleman in the 12th Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own). During January of 1917, there were no major engagements taking place. However, trench raids, shelling and sniping would have been the norm. It is not known how Robert was killed but where he is buried there was a casualty clearing station just a couple of miles behind the front line. He died 30 January 1917 aged 34 years, and is buried at Grove Town Meaulte, France

After Robert's death, Edith married Arthur Pankhurst in 1918 and lived at Melbourne Cottage, Bean.

George Elvyn Martin

George Elvin son of George Charles and Ada Frances Martin (nee Ellis) of Stan way House Stan way was baptised at Swanscombe Church on 19 July 1891, having been born on 27 June 1891. George was the eldest of their five children. His father was a coachman and moved between Swanscombe and London, but by at least 1900 the family were living at the Royal Oak Stonewood Bean, as his mother Ada was buried at Swanscombe Cemetery on the 25 March 1900 when she was described as the wife of George Charles Martin, the licenced victualler of the Royal Oak Stonewood. She was 33. Sadly the following year her husband also died and was buried with her at Swanscombe cemetery on the 18 Jan 1901. Their orphaned children then lived on at The Royal Oak with their maternal grandfather Henry Ellis now the publican and there George Elvin lived until he joined the arm. They were cared for by their aunt Winifred Marion Ellis, the daughter of the publican and their mother's sister.

George joined the 5th Battalion and 7th Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment). In the probate records it states that George Elvin Martin of the Royal Oak Stone Wood near Dartford Kent 2nd Lieutenant Royal West Surrey Regiment died 4 April 1918 at or near Cambria in France. In fact the front line was at this time 45 miles to the West at Villars Bretonneau just outside Amiens. This was as far as the Germans got during their Spring offensive. They were stopped here by the British, Australians and French. On the day of his death the Germans launched their last attack to capture Villers Bretenneux. The 18th Division were attacked by German Guards Ersatz Division. It is believed this is when George was killed. He was killed in action 4 April 1918. His body was never recovered, and he is commemorated on The Pozieres Memorial, France

Frederick Sadler

Frederick was baptised at Stone Church on the 16 Nov 1884 son of Henry and Elizabeth Sadler of Stone. Henry was a labourer. By 1891 the family were living at 14 EC Cottages Bean, and in 1901 they were at Foxwood House Bean. 1911 saw them at 9 EC Cottages Bean. Frederick was one of six children of this marriage, but only three survived, Frederick and his two sisters Annie and Lilian. Frederick was a farm labourer.

Frederick originally joined the Queens Own Royal West Kents. He transferred to the Royal Engineers as a Pioneer 5th Battalion Special Brigade. He landed in France on the 29 April 1915 and died on the 16 April 1916 aged 32. He is buried at Calais South, France.

Albert Frank Stevens

One of the 5 children of John Stevens and his wife Mary Ann Acton, Albert was born in the Southfleet area during the beginning of 1890. His father had to move around to get farm work, which is reflected in the birthplaces of his children, Betsham, New Barn, Longfield and Southfleet. By 1901 the family were in Bean. Their young son Ernest died in 1909, and then their son Albert Frank died during World War I.

Albert was a Baker before enlistment and was living in Bedonwell Rd Belvedere. He joined up on 8 February 1916 and is shown as 'home service' with the 19th Reserve Battalion, London Regiment. A year later on 30 March 1917 he joined the Northamptonshire Regiment and was sent to France sailing from Southampton on 26 June 1917. He joined the 1st Battalion on 19 July 1917. The German Spring offensive started, the intention being to drive the British back to the coast and out of the war. Albert died on the first day of this offensive, being killed in action on the 9 April 1918. He is buried at Woburn Abbey Cemetery, Cuinchy, France

Robert Duppa Walter



Robert Duppa, Walter, son of Baldwin and Alice Walter of Bean Stone was baptised at Stone Church on the 12 October 1895, his father's occupation being given as a labourer. One of their six children, he was the younger brother of William Roger Walter, who follows. A farm labourer, he would live with his family in Bean Lane, then Blue House Cottages Stonewood, until sometime after the 1911 census the family moved to 5 Manor Road, Swanscombe.

Robert enlisted into the "V" 8th Heavy Trench Mortar Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery in Gravesend and arrived on the Western Front after the 1 January 1916. Robert was killed in action on the 27 April 1918. He was 22 years old.

William Roger Walter



William Roger son of Baldwin Walter and his wife Alice (nee Smith) was baptised at Stone Church on the 8 July 1893, the fourth of their six children. Baldwin was an agricultural labourer, although his father John was the farmer of Bean Farm, which had been in the family since 1840. In the 1901 and 1911 census the family were living at 4 Blue House Cottage, Stonewood. Baldwin was then listed as a labourer at the Gun Powder Factory. At sometime between 1911 and the time of William's death in 1917 the family had moved to 5 Manor Road, Swanscombe.

However in the 1911 census William Roger was not with his family but was in the Mediterranean on board ship aged 17 listed as a Boy 1st class. He was transferred to HMS Vanguard, a St Vincent class enhanced Dreadnought launched in 1909 on the 27th November 1913 and remained with her until his death. On the 9th July 1917 HMS Vanguard was at anchor at Scapa Flow. During the day, the crew had been practising 'abandon ship' drills. At 23:20hrs, with the ship closed up for the night, a huge explosion ripped through the ship as either P or Q magazine exploded. HMS Vanguard sank almost instantly, taking with her 804 of her 806 crew; William being one of them. The accident is the most catastrophic explosive accident in the history of the UK and one of the worst accidental losses suffered by the Royal Navy. William's body was never recovered, and he is commemorated on the Chatham Docks Memorial.