

Cheetham
E.R.A. Arthur Bateman Cheetham
M/1219 Engine Room Artificer 2nd Class
Lost At Sea 19th Jan 1917 Age 31



Arthur was the son of Joseph and Elizabeth Cheetham nee Bateman. He was born on 7th July 1885 in Biddulph. His parents had married at St Lawrence Biddulph in 1884. Arthur was baptised here on the 20 July 1885. Although Joseph was from Bradley Green, Elizabeth had been born in Langley Cheshire, possibly at the Dunstan Inn in Sutton as her father was Edward Bateman, a victualler. Edward later became innkeeper at The Talbot Inn in Biddulph.

In 1891 Joseph was described as a hotel keeper in Church Street, Chesterton possibly the Black Lion. Arthur is 5 and a scholar with brother Joseph 4.

By 1901 the family were still living in Chesterton on Church Street but are now next door to the Black Lion.

His father was now 40 and a draper. His mother is also aged 40. Arthur is the eldest child and is now employed at a foundry as a fitter with his birthplace given as Bradley Green. He has two younger brothers: Joseph Edward and Thomas William.

On 7th September 1909 he joined the Navy for 12 years. The initial form includes a brief physical description as follows:

His height was 5 foot 5 inches. Chest size 36 inches. Hair Dark Brown Eyes Dark Grey Complexion Dark He had blue marks near right eye, scars on left knee, near right ankle and top of head.

On the 1911 census Arthur is in China and the East Indies:

Arthur B Cheetham age 25 single Engine Room Artificer Birthplace Congleton Stafford

After his training, Arthur served in an E class submarine HMS/ME 33 with the rank of Engine Room Artificer 2nd Class.

From his naval records he served on:

Rank	Ship	From	To
Acting ERA 4 th Class	Victory II	7 th Sept 1909	7 th Dec 1909
	Hector	8 th Dec 1909	30 th May 1910
	Blenheim	31 st May 1910	21 st Aug 1910
	St George	22 nd August 1910	10 th Oct 1910
	Victory II	11 th Oct 1910	11 th Oct 1910
	Albemarle	12 th Oct 1910	
ERA 4 th Class			
	Prince of Wales	15 th Dec 1910	13 th May 1912
	Vernon	14 th May 1912	
ERA 3 rd Class		6 th Sept 1912	30 th Nov 1913
	Victory II	1 st Dec 1913	9 th Mar 1914
	Iron Duke	10 th March 1914	10 th July 1916
	Dolphin	11 th Jul 1914	27 th July 1916
	Maidstone	28 th Jul 1916	
ERA 2 nd Class		5 th Sept 1916	2 nd Nov 1916
	Dolphin	3 rd Nov 1916	17 th Dec 1916
	Maidstone	18 th Dec 1916	19 th Jan 1917

Above: From his naval records.

His character throughout was given as VG : Very Good.

On the 19th January 1917 his submarine, along with another similar vessel the HMS/E 43, left Harwich harbour for patrols in the North Sea. On a rough sea at about 7.00 pm that day the E 43 was in collision with Arthur's vessel causing it to sink. The E 36 sank with all hands including Arthur Bateman Cheetham.

Its exact location remains a mystery. There were no survivors and his body was not recovered for burial.

The War Graves Roll for the Royal Navy and Royal Marine states that Arthur was killed or died by means other than disease, accident or enemy action.

Arthur was aged 31 and had served for over 8 years. His father died in the following year aged 57.

The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of 28th April 1917 reported on his death:

"Engine room Artificer Arthur Bateman Cheetham, son of Mr & Mrs J.E.Cheetham, 29 Clive Street, Shelton, lost his life while on duty in one of his Majesty's ships on war service. He was 31 years of age. A memorial service was held on Sunday week at Shelton church where there was a large gathering of relatives and friends and an appropriate service was delivered by the Rector, the Rev. P.Gordon.

Arthur had spent his early life at Chesterton, was educated at the National School and Secondary School, Hanley. He served time in engineering with the Apedale Coal and Iron Company and was a favourite with his fellow workers.

He joined the Royal Navy.....He served on a number of ships, and in the last two years was a considerable time on the 'Iron Duke'..... He was a most enthusiastic sportsman and about ten years ago was one of the most ardent members of the Newcastle Cycling Club."

His name is recorded on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial and he is remembered on the family gravestone in St. Lawrence churchyard and also on the memorial in Albert Square, Biddulph.

Michael Turnock & Kathleen Walton

Hambleton
Acting Bombardier James Hambleton
26190 16th Bty. 41st Bde. Royal Field Artillery
Died 20th January 1917 Age 34



James Edwin Hambleton was born in 1883; his birth was registered at Wolstanton. He was the son of William and Elizabeth (nee Sutton) and was one of at least eight children. His father was a miner who appears to have been born at Biddulph Moor – indeed his mother and father married at Christ Church, Biddulph Moor on the 19th July 1874. The children were brought up in the Tunstall area; in 1881 at Pits Hill, 1891 at Furlong Lane, Tunstall and by 1901 James and his parents lived at 3, Chapel Street. In this census James was described as a coal carter.

Service records for James state that he enlisted on 29th January 1901. He joined the 3rd Battalion North Staffords and became Private 5632. He gave his address as Chapel Street, Golden Hill and stated that he was employed by Mr. Wood of High Street, Tunstall, as a carter. The record provides details of his height – 5'4 ½" and that he had a fresh complexion, blue eyes and light brown hair. However, his service record also states that he was discharged as permanently unfit on 10th February 1902.

In 1910 James married Jane Smith at Horton and although Jane Hambleton is recorded on the 1911 census with her parents at Troughstones, the Hurst, James cannot be located. If he was still employed as a carter he may have been working out of the area. It is also possible that he had at some point transferred to the Royal Field Artillery 98th Battery, a unit attached to 5th Division. As this unit served in India and South Africa, James may well have been serving in 1911 and out of the country.

Although his service records from 1914 do not survive there are a number of newspaper articles which allow a picture of his military service to be constructed. On the 31st July 1914 James signed up and it is believed he joined his unit in the Royal Field Artillery at Athlone Ireland. This is where the artillery had their No 5 Depot. His medal card records that James went to France on the 11th September 1914 although newspaper articles report that he left England on August 6th. He must have therefore already been a trained gunner.

James crossed the channel with an early serving division as part of the British Expeditionary Force. He was attached to 16th Battery 41st XLI, a regular Artillery Brigade who were divisional artillery to 2nd Division. For unknown reasons a second battery, the 12th is also recorded on his medal card. The division's first actions in August were at the Battle of Mons and the Retreat from Mons.

The artillery did not join until mid- September when they were fighting in the battles on the Aisne and Marne - actions not without casualties, nevertheless for James and his mates in the 16th battery their baptism of fire was over. Soon after this they were to transfer to the Ypres area of Belgium to support their infantry fighting in the 1st Battle of Ypres. At the end of October, the 2nd Division comprised of many famous regiments; the Coldstream and Grenadier Guards, Royal Fusiliers and the Highland Light Infantry all of whom fought valiantly at Ypres.

On January 30th 1915 the Weekly Sentinel reported on a letter received by Councillor Shaw from Gunner James Hambleton, Congleton Road: *"He says his battery has been in action, but owing to wintery weather stopping them from getting about, they are not at present doing much fighting. They, however, keep on giving the Germans a few rounds to let them know the English soldiers are not down hearted. They hope in the spring to make things "hum". They are bothered a lot with aeroplanes, but Hambleton thinks their guns have knocked out the 'Jack Johnsons'. He says the trenches are flooded and the gun pits full of water. He is in the best of health, and with a British soldiers' optimism, he says they must not grumble as they are well off for food and clothes. Hambleton concluded by saying how pleased he is to see that they keep on getting a few recruits from the old town."*

1915 found the artillery in action at Festubert and Loos. As skilled artillery men they were handling 18 pounder field guns and driving the horses and limbers. After completing twelve months in France, James was interviewed by the Chronicle and an article appeared in August 1915: *"The loyal and patriotic example of Gunner James Hambleton, 16th Battery, 41st Brigade, RFA, a reservist who has returned home on a month's furlough after 12 months' fighting through the thick of the campaign in France and Belgium, if it does not stir the senile pulse of our stay at home laggards, should at any rate show them that even the terrible experience our brave men have gone through have not prevented them from again risking their lives for King and Country. Gunner Hambleton is a married man with a young family (the youngest was born while he was at the front), and worked at Messrs' Heath's Brown Lees Colliery at Black Bull previous to being called up last August. His battery was the 98th, but as this was stationed in South Africa at the outbreak of the war, Hambleton joined the 16th Battery at Athlone, Ireland, from where they left for the front on August 6th 1914, with the 3rd Army Corps. Hambleton's patriotism and devotion to his country lies in the fact that though his time expired as a reservist on September 16th, he signed on again on 31st July for the duration of the war."*

The Weekly Sentinel also interviewed Gunner Hambleton and printed an article on 21st August 1915 and reported that: *"signing on again is a fine example for laggards who are 'waiting to be fetched."* The article continued: *"He looks well, but appears to have lost weight since going out. He has been very lucky, almost exceptionally so considering the number of fierce engagements in which his battery has been engaged, but beyond a touch of rheumatism he has been neither 'sick nor sorry' since leaving England on August 6th 1914. It was generally recognised, he told our Biddulph representative, that the 16th Battery was the luckiest in the Division and altogether they had lost only about 50 men, the majority through sickness. Hambleton's first encounter with the Germans was during the retreat on the Aisne and the Marne. They were merely artillery duels but at Ypres they had to withstand a terrific onslaught by the Prussian Guard estimated at 20,000 strong. These men, he declared, were the first body of soldiers he had ever seen.*

Twice they broke through the British lines, but our Guards drove them back and Hambleton's Battery from an orchard, dealt out death and destruction at a range of 90 yards. It was awful to see the way the Germans were mown down. They came steadily on from a range of 1400 yards down to 90 yards, and the shells were bursting almost on the muzzle of the cannon."

The next major action was in the Battle of the Somme when they participated in the seven day bombardment prior to the opening on 1st July 1916. Then the Battery gave artillery support

to their infantry at Delville Wood and on the Ancre. There were many losses but the mates fought bravely on through until November when the Somme offensive ceased.

The deteriorating conditions over the winter months proved a miserable time for the artillery men - who had to live and fight in a frozen terrain. New Year brought more sadness; whilst still in the Somme district and at the age of 34 years, James Edward Hambleton fell on the field. This was on the 20th January 1917; Gunner Hambleton now rests in the Ovillers Military Cemetery near Albert.

He is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Charlesworth
Private Charles Morris Charlesworth
8947 Prince of Wales's (North Staffordshire Regiment) 7th Battalion
Killed in action 26th Jan 1917 Age 31



Charles was born in Biddulph in 1886, the eldest son of James Charlesworth and Sarah Ann nee Mould. His parents had married in 1878 at St Peter's Church in Congleton, his father originating from Congleton but mother Sarah coming from Mow Cop. At first the young family lived at Mow Cop near the Wesleyan Chapel and in 1881, James and Sarah Ann being just 20 with baby Ada age 1 and a boarder.

In 1891 the family are living at Brook Street in Brown Lees. Father is 36, and employed as a wood sawyer. The children include Ada 11, Sarah 9, Ethel 7, Charles Morris 6, Emma 3, Martha 2 and James Bruce just 5 months.

There is an entry for the baptism of Charles at Biddulph on 30th July 1893.

By the turn of the century in 1901 James is still working as a sawyer and Charles is now 16 and employed as a driver in the coal mine. Sister Ethel, Martha Ellen and brothers James and Tom the youngest at age 4. Tom Charlesworth would also enlist in the army and sadly died on September 2nd 1918.

Charles had been a regular soldier since 14th January 1905. His earlier service records show he served in the 4th Battalion B Coy North Staffordshire Regiment. This was a home based unit and his regimental number was 6362, however from another source, it is almost certain that he re-engaged again on 18th July 1908 when he joined at Tunstall, transferring to the 2nd Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. This battalion served in India and did so throughout the Great War. His medal card shows code "5F" meaning Charles served in the Asiatic Theatre Tochi Valley; a campaign of 1897-98 which is on the North West frontier, India.

In the 1911 census he is listed as Charles Charlesworth, private, age 26, unmarried of The North Staffordshire Regiment with his birthplace given as Staffordshire, Congleton. His family were living at 3 New Pool Terrace.

Without his Great War service records we cannot know the details of his re-engagement in the army at that time. However during the Great War it is known that Charles served in the 7th battalion North Stafford's. A battalion that trained at Tidworth in 1914 and then, in January 1915, they went by train to Basingstoke where the battalion had billets in the town and schools. A route march to Aldershot and Blackdown followed in March and as an already trained soldier he would have known the ropes. Training complete, and now attached to 39th Brigade 13th Western Division, orders were received to embark for war. A final leave and on return, Wolseley sun helmets were issued - so the lads guessed a hot destination was on the cards.

The division sailed from Avonmouth Bristol on the 20th June 1915, through the Bay of Biscay and into a hot Mediterranean. There was a stop off in Malta and with the threat of mines it was a dangerous journey. Their destination was Alexandria in Egypt. The division then sailed on to the Dardanelles landing at Mudros in July and then forward to the Gallipoli Peninsula. 13th Division was there to relieve the 29th Division at Cape Helles. On the 11th July, Charles and his friends were met by an immediate baptism of fire - being shelled on landing.

Actions at Achi Baba saw the 7th North Staffs with many casualties. The battalion moved on to Anzac Cove in early August with the costly battles at Sari Bar, Russell Top and Hill 60 at the end of the month. The terrain was very hilly and inhospitable and the war in Gallipoli had been raging since April. Now with deteriorating and abysmal conditions, torrential storms caused rivers from the surrounding hills to flood and destroy many of the trenches. This left many brave soldiers to drown or die from exposure.

Early September and the battalion moved to Suvla Bay and it was here that another Biddulph soldier, Tom Lancaster, arrived in a replacement draft. Reconstruction of the defences was carried out before the 19th December when the lads were withdrawn for seven days rest in the Helles area.

By this time the battalion was reduced to 300 men before a draft arrived to strengthen their ranks. At the start of 1916 there were terrible blizzard conditions and on the 7th January the enemy made their last attack of the campaign. It is believed that fellow Biddulphian Thomas Lancaster received serious wounds in this action. A few days later the 13th Division were evacuated from Helles and by 21st January had left Gallipoli and sailed aboard *HMT Varova* to Port Said in Egypt. The battalion now enjoyed bathing and good food to restore their vigour and morale. Then for a short period the battalion were used in the defence of the Suez Canal until orders came to transfer the division to Mesopotamia.

February 12th 1916 found the division on a sea journey to the Persian Gulf aboard *HMT Marathon*. Then Charles and his mates were in the torrid desert as part of an army being assembled to relieve the garrison at Kut al Amara. On 27th March this action came under orders of the Tigris Corps who were based, as one soldier put it "*at the bearable Sheikh Saad camp*" and after months of bitter fighting the action failed and Kut al Amara fell to the enemy. The Tigris Corps spend the rest of the year rebuilding their army. With boiling hot days and bitter cold nights the men only wore light drill, without greatcoats.

Then a ten day route march, with mules pulling their G S waggons loaded with ammunition, supplies and water tanks. By the 13th December 1916 they prepared for battle - the Corps was now ready for further attacks on the Hai salient and Kut al Amara. These actions were to be successful but before its conclusion, the 7th North Stafford's had lost many valiant soldiers, sadly Charles was one of the fallen. On the 26th January 1917 aged thirty-one, Pte Charles Charlesworth, fell in battle. He now rests in the Amara War Cemetery Iraq. His name appears on the Biddulph memorials and the Brown Lees memorial tablet.

Michael Turnock and Kathleen Walton

Griffin
Private George Ernest Griffin
200664 1/5 North Staffs Regiment
Killed in action 13th February 1917 Age 21

Private Griffin is remembered on the local memorials as Ernest Griffin and George Ernest Griffin. After much research another soldier by the name of Ernest Griffin has been located who was born in Longton. As the Longton soldier has no apparent links to Biddulph, it has been concluded that George Ernest and Ernest Griffin are the same man. Perhaps his friends in Biddulph and Brindley Ford knew him as Ernest while the folks of Brown Lees decided to honour him with his full name: George Ernest.

Staffordshire BMD record a birth for George Ernest Griffin in 1895 in Biddulph. His parents George and Mary Jane, nee Capewell, had married earlier the same year in Walsall before moving to north Staffordshire. George worked for the Biddulph Valley ironworks and lived in the Office House for the works. The 1901 and 1911 censii show them living at that address. George Ernest would seem to have been their only child and in 1911, aged 15, he was working as a forge worker at the Ironworks.

Whilst working at the Robert Heaths Works, Ernest Griffin enlisted on the 11th September 1914 at Biddulph - joining the North Staffordshire regiment. It appears he originally served in 2/5th or 3/5th battalion with a regimental number 3352 as shown on his medal card and service records, before transferring to the 1/5th Battalion. Basic training commenced at Butterton Hall camp and after six weeks the new recruits were ready for further instruction. Headed by a pipe and drums band the men proudly marched from Butterton to Newcastle railway station to begin a journey to Luton.

More intensive training was carried out in the Luton, Harpenden and Bishops Stortford area. On completion of training the soldiers had their medical for field service on the 25th June and then the 1/5th North Stafford's prepared to embark at Southampton. They crossed the English Channel on the 18th August 1915 and on arrival at Le Havre, Ernest and his mates travelled inland for assembly with 137th Brigade 46th North Midlands Division on 26th September. This division served in the Ypres and Hooge area until October when they were ordered to the Loos area of the Western Front.

The Battle of Loos was being fought north of the mining town of Lens. On the afternoon of the 13th October battalions of 137th Brigade 46 Div. were ordered to retake at the Hohenzollern Redoubt, the trenches of Big Willie and Fosse Alley. It was disastrous; exposed to machine gun fire and shelling from the redoubt many of Ernest's pals soon fell. This was indeed a Black day for Biddulph and Staffordshire with the loss of over 200 men.

Ernest survived unwounded from this attack, but sadly eight of his Biddulph pals were lost that day. The division was soon to be withdrawn from the Loos battlefield to recover. On the

4th December 1915 he was not so fortunate, for he was shot in the right arm and legs. However a report in the Chronicle of 3rd March 1917 said he suffered from frost bite. He was initially treated at the 1st Field Ambulance before being taken the following day to 32 Casualty Clearing Station. On the 9th December 1915 Ernest was transferred to the large 1000 bed 2nd Canadian Hospital at Le Treport on the French coast where he underwent surgery.

Ernest's mates in the 1/5th battalion were en-route to Egypt on the 22nd December. For Ernest a journey of a different sort began as he returned to Blighty; for England was his destination for six months of further medical care, rest and recuperation. It is unclear where in England he stayed, however, by 11th July 1916 he was fit for duty again on the Western Front. Crossing from Folkestone to Boulogne on the 21st July, Ernest re-joined D company of his battalion who were now serving on the Somme. The men of 1/5 North Stafford's continued to fight bravely and the New Year found them in the Arras area when on the 2nd January 1917 Ernest was again hospitalised. This time he had contracted diphtheria and trench fever; he spent a month in the No 12 Stationary hospital at St Pol.

He was discharged from hospital on the 7th February with light duties, but sadly within a week of returning to duty with his battalion twenty one year old Private Ernest George Griffin became one of the fallen. On the 13th February 1917 he died on the battlefield.

The Chronicle in an article dated March 3rd 1917 reported on the death of Private Griffin of Office House, the only son of George and Mary Griffin. The following details were included in the article: that he enlisted soon after the outbreak of war and trained at Butterton and Harpenden before volunteering for active service. He was invalided home in December 1915 suffering from frostbite in the legs and feet and after recovery stayed in England until July 11th 1916 when he returned to France. The report also stated that: '*Pte Griffin had only left hospital after suffering with trench fever a few days previous to being killed in action on February 13th 1917.*'

George Ernest Griffin is at rest in the Bienwillers Military Cemetery near to Arras. He is also remembered on all of the Biddulph memorials and also the Brindley Ford and Brown Lees memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Bryan

Mellor
Private Charles Thomas Mellor
38037 C Company 9th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment
Formerly 18084 North Staffordshire Regiment
Killed in action February 25th 1917 Age 43

Charles Thomas Mellor was born in 1875 in Congleton, Cheshire and was the son of Charles and Ann Mellor, nee Williams. They had married in 1871.

Charles was baptised at Mossley Church near Congleton on the 7th November 1875. Ann was his father's second wife. His first wife Hannah Brindley, whom he had married at Astbury in 1853, had died in 1863 leaving Charles with four children. Ann and Charles had three children; Charles Thomas was their only son.

In 1881 he was age 5 living at 63 Willow Street, Congleton with his parents aged 54 and 41. His father had been occupied in the silk industry but later was employed as a farm labourer.

By 1891 the family were residing in Failsworth, Lancashire. They had probably moved to gain employment and the family now comprised of father Charles, mother Ann (retired silk spinner), sisters Eliza 19 and younger sister Frances age 12. Charles at 15 is an apprentice jacquard maker. The family appear to have been separated following the death of Charles Mellor senior around 1891.

In 1903 Charles married Fanny Hancock at St Peter's Church in Congleton. Fanny was born in Mow Cop the daughter of Luke and Mary Hancock.

By 1911 the couple had been married for eight years and had one child, daughter Frances age seven. Charles now 35 was a worker in sheet iron at the local rolling mill. The family were living at 62 High Street in HARRISEAHEAD.

At the time of the Great War Charles was living at HARRISEAHEAD with his young family. He initially served in a battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment; his regimental number being 18084. A family member has informed us that Charles originally enlisted at Tunstall and at some point transferred to the 9th battalion Worcestershire Regiment. This battalion had earlier embarked for the Dardanelles on the 13th July 1915, so Charles must have gone out with a draft replacement joining the battalion at a later date.

After training at Blackdown the draft sailed through the Mediterranean to Egypt before sailing on to the Dardanelles, arriving on the 21st September 1915. From here the new troops would join their battalion who as part of 13th Western Division had served on the Gallipoli Peninsula since July. Charles (or Tom as he was also known) is believed to have met the battalion at Suvla Bay. Reconstruction of the defences was carried out in the area and on the 19th December the lads were withdrawn for seven days rest in the Helles area.

At the start of 1916 there were terrible blizzard conditions and on the 7th January the enemy made their last attack of the campaign. A few days later the 13th Division were evacuated from Helles and by the 21st January had left Gallipoli and sailed aboard *HMT Varova* to Port Said in Egypt - the war was now over in the Dardanelles. The battalion now enjoyed bathing and good food to restore their vigour and morale. Then for a short period the troops were used in the defence of the Suez Canal until orders came to transfer the division to Mesopotamia.

February 12th 1916 found the division on a sea journey to the Persian Gulf aboard *HMT Marathon*. Charles and his mates were in the harsh desert as part of an army being assembled to relieve the garrison at Kut al Amara on 27th March. This action came under orders of the Tigris Corps who were based at Sheikh Saad camp. Months of bitter fighting followed but the action failed and Kut al Amara fell to the enemy. The Tigris Corps spent the rest of the year rebuilding their army. With boiling hot days and bitter cold nights the battalion only wore light desert drill without their greatcoats. The 7th North Staffs were also in the same division and Charles could very well have met up with other Biddulph men.

Next a ten day route march, with mules pulling their waggons loaded with ammunition, food supplies and water tanks. By 13th December 1916 the soldiers prepared again for battle and the Corps was now ready for further attacks in the Hai salient and Kut al Amara. These actions went on into the New Year and were to be successful, but before its conclusion, the 9th Worcestershire battalion lost many brave soldiers. The first week of 1917 found the battalion at rest in the "Worcester City Camp", through January new trenches named Kings, Queens and Emperors were prepared under shelling and close enemy fire, to protect the troops.

The division were now ready for the next offensive; a brave joint assault with the 9th Worcestershire and 7th North Staffordshire battalions attacking side by side at the Dahra Bend, Shumran Peninsular and Diyala. It was hoped that this action that would clear the road to Baghdad for the final push to the city. Nearing the end of this offensive sadness again came to the battalion when on the 25th February 1917, at the age of forty three Private Charles Thomas Mellor fell on the Mesopotamian battlefield.

A report in the Congleton Chronicle stated that he "*joined the colours in July 1915 and after about 2 months training in this country was sent to the Dardanelles From there to Mesopotamia, where he saw serious fighting being killed on February 25 1917.*"

A memorial service was held by the Brown Lees Welcome Committee for Private Mellor.

Charles has no known grave and is commemorated on the Basra Memorial in Iraq, the St Lawrence memorials and the Albert Square Memorial in Biddulph.

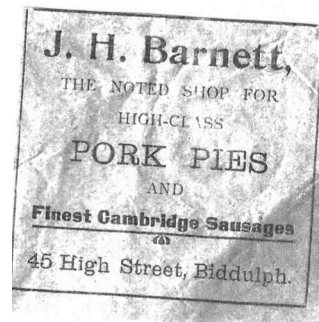
Kathleen Walton & Michael Turnock

Barnett
Gunner James Henry Barnett
213770 8th Reserve Bty., Royal Field Artillery
Died on 7th March 1917 Age 28

James Henry Barnett was the eldest son of Alfred and Harriet (nee Patchett). His birth was registered in Tunstall in 1888 and on the census returns his place of birth was recorded as Kidsgrove. His father was an iron moulderer who had married Harriet Patchett in 1885 at St. Thomas, Kidsgrove. It was likely that Alfred's job in the iron industry led to the family moving to Biddulph and to Heath's iron works. The family were living at Childerplay in 1891 and had moved to Newpool Terrace by 1901.

The 1911 census records the family resident at 45 High Street, Biddulph, where James Henry had started a business and was a pork butcher. It would seem that by now James was the only son as his younger brother, Alfred, had died in November 1891 aged 11 months. Two of his sisters, Florence and Elizabeth helped in the shop. Later that year James married Mary E Hughes at a civil ceremony at Leek.

Advertisement from the parish magazine dated 1910:



James was called to the colours on February 7th 1917 and went to Lancashire to commence training. Exactly one month after enlisting, James died at the Military Hospital in Preston. The Chronicle, on March 24th, reported on his '*Impressive Funeral Service*' and stated that:

'He had been stricken with a serious illness due to an abscess on the jaw which kept him in bed for several weeks. He had not thoroughly recovered his normal health when he was called up on February 7th. While training he contracted a severe cold and fever supervened. Although his family were sent for as soon as the symptoms became dangerous, he was not conscious when they arrived and he died without recognising any of them.'

James was aged 28 and left three young children under the age of 5 years.

Sadly the story does not end with his death. In November 1917 the Chronicle reported on '*Sequel to a Biddulph Tradesman's death*'. A court case, which revolved around a financial dispute with the shop and between James's parents and his widow, was sadly aired in the papers. No doubt the war caused much family turmoil and disharmony when a business was involved – another local impact of the war.

His widow continued to run the business with the help of her brother who was according to the Chronicle, a '*rejected man*'. Directories record that the business was still in the name of Mrs. Elizabeth Barnett, pork butcher, in 1921 but by 1928 the business was in the hands of Frederick Russell.

James Henry Barnett is buried at St. Lawrence and is remembered on the Biddulph war memorials.



Elaine Heathcote & Michael Turnock

Pointon
Private Charles Pointon
200675 (formerly 3373) 1st/5th North Staffordshire Regiment
Killed in action 14th March 1917 Age 22



Charles Pointon was born c.1895/6 in Congleton and was the son of Charles and Eleanor (nee Oakes) who had married at St. Peters, Congleton in 1886. In 1891 Charles and his wife resided at West Terrace, Fegg Hayes, with two of their children. By 1901 the family had re-located to

Congleton and had expanded to include: Lucy, Esther, Thomas, Charles, Bertie, Ellenor and baby Grace. Charles senior was a collier who had been born in Biddulph. In 1905 tragedy struck the Pointon family; mother Eleanor died and four years later, Charles senior, aged only 43, also died. Young Charles would only have been 8 years old when he lost his mother - and by the age of 13 he was orphaned.

It would seem that their eldest sister, Esther, was by this time married to Arthur Whatmore. The Pointon siblings - Thomas, Charles, Bertie and Grace all moved in with their sister and brother-in-law and can be found on the 1911 census at 38, Samuel Street, Packmoor. The three brothers all worked as colliers.

With the outbreak of war Charles enlisted at Biddulph on the 14th September, joining the specially formed 'Biddulph Company' - the 2/5th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment, regimental number 3373 serving in D company. He gave his address as 21 Shepherd Street, Biddulph and his age as 19 years and 3 months. His occupation was recorded as a collier at the Chatterley Whitfield Colliery. His brother Tom also enlisted and joined the 1st Scottish Rifles.

After training, his service records suggest that on the 28th June 1915 he crossed the channel from Southampton to Le Havre. Disembarking, he moved to the assembly area at St Omer. Charles may have been in a reinforcement draft as 2/5th battalion didn't go to France until 1917.

In Flanders there was a change of battalion for Charles when he was posted to the 1/5th Battalion on the 22nd August. This battalion was attached to 137th Brigade 46th North Midlands Division. As a further complication, his new regimental number on CWGC is given as 300675 and on his medal card and service records as 200675, the latter being correct.

The 46th Division served in the Ypres and Hooze area until early October when they were ordered to the Loos area of the Western Front. The Battle of Loos was being fought amid the mining villages of Flanders, an area similar to the North Staffordshire coalfields. On the afternoon of the 13th October battalions of 137th Brigade 46 Div. were to retake at the Hohenzollern Redoubt, the trenches of Big Willie and Fosse Alley. It was disastrous, exposed to machine gun fire from the redoubt many of the battalion soon fell. This was to become a Black day for Biddulph and Staffordshire. Sadly eight of his Biddulph pals were lost that day.

The division was soon to be withdrawn from the Loos battlefield to recuperate and refit after so many men were lost. Mid-December saw rather unusual orders issued to the 46th Division, they were to entrain for a long and slow journey south through the length of France; their destination was Marseilles docks. Their simple Christmas dinner could well have been taken in a truck of the French Railways; at least it was warm and dry and without any fear of shelling.

On the 5th January 1916 at Marseilles the soldiers boarded a troopship. Our Biddulph lads were to sail through the Mediterranean to Alexandria in Egypt; they'd had an awful time of it and well deserved a pleasant change. Hopefully they were able to enjoy the journey. They arrived on the 12th January 1916; however within a month their orders were changed, the division for an unknown reason were to return to France. So now the journey was reversed and the 1/5th North Stafford's were going back to the mud and trenches; the division arrived back in Marseilles on the 11th February.

Back in Flanders, the 1/5th Battalion defended their lines with the normal front line life of infantry soldiers until summer of 1916, when the whole division prepared for the Battle of the Somme in which they were used in a diversionary attack in the north of the battle front at Gommecourt. In this action one of the Biddulph pals John Bowers fell on 1st July. The Somme

offensive lasted from July until November when the winter weather brought the battlefield to stalemate.

In March 1917 the battalion bravely fought in actions at Ancre, Retternoy Graban and the Hindenburg Line losing many men. It was sadly in this action - on the 14th March 1917 at the age of twenty-two that Private Charles Pointon fell on the field. He now rests in the Rossignol Wood Cemetery at Hebuterne in the Somme district.

Pte. Charles Pointon is remembered locally on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Hales
Pte. George Henry Hales
16919 Boy 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards 7th Division 20th Brigade
Killed in action 21st March 1917 Age 22

George Henry Hales was born in 1896 in Harriseahead (Staffs. B.M.D.and censii), son of George Hales, a miner, and his wife Fanny, nee Hodgkinson, although War records seem to indicate that he was born in Tipton, Staffs. In 1901 the family were living at 17 High Street, Newchapel and in 1911 they, along with 14-year-old George Henry, were at 6 Clare Street, Chapel Lane, Harriseahead. He was one of 10 children, two of whom died young: seven girls and three boys. The British Legion gave George's home address as 3 Albert (re-named as Terence) Street, Brindley Ford and added the information that George had attended Brindley Ford Schools.

It is not known when George Henry enlisted, in Stoke-on-Trent, although it is unlikely that he was already on the army reserve in view of his age. The regiment in which he served went to Flanders in the early months of the War. He served in the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, a unit who attached to 7th Division 20th Brigade and embarked in the first week of October 1914 to cross the English Channel, landing at Zeebrugge. If he was with them, George would have been only 17 years of age. He could, of course, have given a false age in order to enlist.

The division was initially used to help the Belgium army to evacuate from the enemy assault in the east of the country. They were then transferred to fight in the 1st Battle of Ypres, an action in which the Guards suffered heavy losses. The following year found the 7th Division in action in the battles of Neave Chapelle, Aubers Ridge and Festubert.

From August 1915 the 1st Grenadier Guards transferred to the newly formed Guards Division and saw action during October in the Battle of Loos. 1916 found George and his mates bravely fighting in the Battle of the Somme with action at Flers, Courelette, Morval and the capture of Lesboeuifs.

The German retreat to the Hindenburg Line commenced on the 14th March 1917, it was during this action George was wounded and at the aged of twenty two sadly died from his wounds on the 21st March 1917.

George Henry Hales is at rest in the Grove Town Cemetery Meaulte. He is also commemorated on the Brindley Ford Memorial.

Elaine Bryan and Michael Turnock

Gallimore
Private William Gallimore
6444, 111 Corps Cyclist Bn., Army Cyclist Corps
Formerly 14090 8th Bn. North Staffs Regiment
Killed in Action 22nd March 1917 Age 20



William was the eldest son of William Gallimore and Alice. William and Alice had married in 1888 at St Lawrence Church in Biddulph. In 1891 the family are living in John Street Biddulph. Their son William was born around 1897 according to the 1901 census. He is found living at Childerplay, Brown Lees; the street is described as The Huts. William is a blast furnace filler age 35, born at Black Bull with wife Alice nee Moss age 31 from Biddulph. The family included daughters Betsy 11, Minnie 8, Sarah 7, Annie 5 with William age 4 and James just 1 month old. A boarder John Burton age 62 is also living with the family.

By 1911 the census states that William and Alice have been married for 22 years and of their 12 children 9 are still alive. The home is at 124 Brown Lees Road near Black Bull. William is now the eldest child in the family and having left school is employed as an iron-worker at the Robert Heath Iron Works. His age of 14 seems to contradict the age he must have given on enlistment; he must have been closer to age 17 rather than 19. His birthplace is given as Mow Cop but the younger children are born at Black Bull.

On September 2nd 1914 William joined the army. He enlisted in the 8th Battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment. William's medal card gives his regimental number as 14090, different from the number shown when he transferred on January 18th 1915 to the newly formed Army Cyclist Corps. On enlistment William is described as 19 years 2 months of age, with a height of 5' 4 ½", chest size of 35 ½" expanded. He had 2 vaccination marks on his left arm. After completing training, home leave followed and William had the opportunity to say goodbye to his family. For William and his mates a new adventure was to unfold and like most

of his friends, William would be going overseas for the first time. It is quite possible that William had never seen the sea before they crossed the English Channel on 18th July 1915. Attached to III Corps Cyclist Battalion, William's duties would have included courier work, taking messages, communications, reconnaissance and scouting. In areas vulnerable to sabotage the cyclist mounted security patrols. All this was in support of the various battalions of the corps. William would serve in Flanders during the Battle of the Somme; at times the Cyclist Battalion was engaged in trench holding duties. The battle was to last from July to November 1916 and the following year found William serving in the Hindenburg Line offensive.

In March 1917 the enemy commenced a controlled retreat falling back to the Hindenburg Line to ground that was more advantageous to them. Sadly it was at this time that William, whilst carrying out his duties with the Cyclist Corps, lost his life in an area between Peronne and St Quentin. This happened on the 22nd March 1917, he was twenty years old, and Private William Gallimore was buried at the Hancourt British Cemetery. It is believed that he was initially buried at Bernes which is situated near to where he fell. At home the sad news was reported in the Chronicle along with his photograph in uniform.

The ancestry website does have some of the original documents for William. One details his possessions that were returned to his father Mr William Gallimore senior. They included 5 letters, 16 photographs, 1 memorial card, 1 pocket wallet, 1 comb, 1 pocket-handkerchief.

Another form asked for the names of his relatives alive at the time of his death. These are recorded as William Gallimore father, Alice Gallimore mother, brothers Henry age 13, John Thomas 9, sisters Betsy Ellen 32 and Mabel 11.

William is remembered on his parents' grave-stone in Biddulph church yard and his name is to be found on the St Lawrence memorials and the memorial in the town centre of Biddulph.

Kathleen Walton & Michael Turnock

Note Photograph kindly submitted by Mr A Pickin & family descendants of Mr W Gallimore.

Hancock
Lance Sergeant Joseph Hancock
15619 9th Bn (Pioneers) North Staffordshire Regiment
killed in action April 9th 1917 Age 26



Joseph Hancock was born in Brown Edge in 1890, one of the 12 children born to Joseph and Sarah Ann (two of whom had died by 1911). In 1901 he was living with the family in 31, South Street, Norton-le-Moors with his parents and six of his siblings. In 1911 his parents had moved to 7, Thomas Street, Packmoor.

Joseph married Harriet Owen in 1909. In 1911 they were living at 3, Turnhurst Road, with two daughters, Alice born 1909 and Doris May born 1910. They had two more daughters, Lily born in 1910 and Olive born in 1915. At the time of his death the family were living at 23, James (Carr) Street, Packmoor.

None of Joseph's military service records have survived and so it is not known exactly when he enlisted but it is recorded that he enlisted at Tunstall. Before enlistment Joseph was a coal miner, like his father before him. Many miners were allocated to the Pioneer Corps where their skills could be utilised. At some point Joseph joined the 9th Service Battalion (Pioneers), 37th Division of the North Staffordshire Regiment. His medal record has survived and seems to indicate that he also saw service in the Balkans.

At times research doesn't always go as expected and the story of this soldier is one such time. A soldier whose service records haven't survived deprives us of vital details. A soldier whose military service appears to be shared over two active battalions of the same regiment, but how and why the changeover took place remains a mystery. Unless a newspaper article or family letter is found to throw light on the story we may never know for certain and can at this stage only offer our opinion as to the reason.

The medal card of Joseph shows he went to war in Gallipoli with the North Staffordshire Regiment. The only battalion of the regiment to do so was the 7th battalion, who served throughout the war in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia, but never served on the Western Front. However CWGC and *Soldiers Died* both show he died whilst serving near Arras France in the 9th battalion. A mystery!

So what are the known facts? Neither battalion served in both Gallipoli and the Western Front. William we know went to Gallipoli and he died in the Arras area in 1917. This mirrors the story told by the family.

The following is the story that we believe may well have taken place.

Joseph enlisted at Tunstall in 1914. He joined the 7th battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. This battalion trained at Tidworth in 1914 and then in January 1915 went by train to Basingstoke where the battalion had their billets in the town. A route march to Aldershot followed, and then later in March going to Blackdown, Salisbury Plain. Training complete and now attached to the 39th Brigade, 13th Western Division, orders were received to embark for war.

The division sailed from Avonmouth Bristol on June 20th 1915, through the Bay of Biscay and into a hot Mediterranean, with a stop off in Malta, the threat of mines making it a dangerous journey. Their destination was Alexandria in Egypt. The division then sailed on to the Dardanelles landing at Mudros in July and then forward to the Gallipoli Peninsula. The 13th Division was there to relieve the 29th Division at Cape Helles on July 11th where Joseph and his mates were met by an immediate baptism of fire being shelled on landing.

Actions at Achi Baba saw the 7th North Staffords suffer many casualties, then sailing on a short sea trip that brought the battalion to Anzac Cove in early August and the costly battles at Sari Bar, Russell Top and Hill 60 at the end of the month. The terrain was very hilly and inhospitable. The war in Gallipoli had now been raging since April with deteriorating and abysmal conditions, torrential storms causing rivers from the surrounding hills to flood and destroy many of the trenches. This left many brave soldiers to drown or die from exposure.

Early September found a move to Suvla Bay and whilst here a Biddulph soldier, Tom Lancaster, arrived in a replacement draft. Reconstruction of the defences were carried out before December 19th 1915. The lads were then withdrawn for a seven day well deserved rest in the Helles area.

By this time the battalion was reduced to 300 men before a further draft arrived to strengthen their ranks. At the start of 1916 there were terrible blizzard conditions and on January 7th 1916 the enemy made their last attack of the campaign. A few days later the 13th Division were evacuated from Helles and by January 21st had left Gallipoli and sailed aboard HMT

Varova to Port Said in Egypt. The battalion now enjoyed bathing and good food to restore their vigour and morale. For a short period the battalion were then used in the defence of the Suez Canal until orders came to transfer the division to Mesopotamia.

We know Joseph did not stay with the 7th battalion on their move to Mesopotamia. Had he been wounded or taken seriously ill and after treatment in the military hospitals of Malta returned to England for further treatment and recuperation? On recovery was he then transferred to the 9th battalion Pioneers, North Staffordshire Regiment attached to the 37th Division, joining this new unit in the field? We believe this may have happened and the dates the family story tells tallies with this move.

In Flanders the pioneers' tasks included building roads for field guns and tracks for the infantry and there were always trenches to be dug. In 1916 the pioneers were preparing for the forthcoming Battle of the Somme. The division were in action in the Ancre sector. Here Joe and his mates came under heavy enemy shell fire and bravely carried on with their work although the casualties mounted. They were not only trained as Pioneers, but when required they put down their tools and took up their rifles and Lewis guns, as they did whilst following the 13th Rifle Brigade into an attack, having already connected the many shell holes to form a trench. The 9th North Staffords were then ordered to attack the enemy and in doing so took about 40 German prisoners.

To give a flavour of the pioneers work the following is an extract from the 9th battalion Pioneers War Diary:

"Work carried out included new trenches in Becourt Wood and Pozeries areas, at Gordon Dump, and on a new road up Sausage Valley leading to the front line. To Bresle, Fricourt Wood....."

In the Arras Offensive of April 1917 the 37th Division were ordered into action in the Battle of Scarpe where they captured Monchy-le-Preux. On April 9th 1917 the Pioneers were carrying out repairs on the Arras to Cambrai road working under heavy enemy shellfire. Joseph and one other man, who came from Oakamoor, were sadly killed and seven were wounded. The British Legion document states that he was killed between 3.45 and 4.30. It is not known if this was morning or evening. Private Joseph Hancock was 26 years old and now rests in the Tilloy British Cemetery, Tilloy-les-Mofflaines, situated on the outskirts of Arras.

The British Legion citation says that Joseph is remembered on the Newchapel Methodist Chapel memorial but this is erroneous. At the end of the war a memorial service was held at St. James', Newchapel and the families given a ribbon in remembrance. Joseph's family received his medals, Victory, British and 15 Star.

Joseph is not commemorated on any of the Biddulph area memorials.

Elaine Bryan and Michael Turnock.

Mansell
Private William Mansell
10353 8th Ba. Royal Fusiliers
Died 3rd May 1917 Age 24



Private William Mansell was born in 1893 at 87 Bank Street, Tunstall. He was one of eight children born to Thomas and Mary, nee Taylor – six of whom (according to the 1911 census) had died by 1911 when Thomas, who was an ironworker, was a widower. In 1901 the family were living at 16 Union Street, Chell moving to 16 Turnhurst Road, Chell by 1911. William was then 17 years old and working as a pit boy underground. The date when William moved to Brindley Ford is unknown, although British Legion records show that his home address was African House, Brindley Ford.

William enlisted at Tunstall on the 2nd December 1914 joining the 8th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. This battalion initially trained at Colchester with their final intensive instruction being at Aldershot. With his training complete Williams's medal card shows he went to France on the 1st September 1915. He presumably went out with a replacement draft joining the 8th battalion in the field; this unit had been in France since May 1915 attached to 36th Brigade 12th Eastern Division.

Within a month of Williams's arrival in Flanders the 8th Battalion were ordered into battle at Loos on the 29th September. It was here the division sustained heavy losses in their brave actions at Hohenzollern Redoubt. The beginning of 1916 found them in a quiet area until the Fusiliers were ordered to prepare for the Battle of the Somme in July. From the 7th they went into action at Mash Valley, Ovillers and Pozieres, actions which resulted in many casualties. The battle continued until November 1916. Local newspapers reported that William was twice wounded, however no details have been found.

Throughout the winter the 12th Division held their positions with little progress until April 1917 when William and his mates would see further action in the Arras Offensive fighting in the Third Battle of Scarpe. On the 3rd May 1917 during attacks to capture Roeux and Pelves sadly Private William Mansell fell in battle. His medal card records "Death Pres. 3-5-17". He was never found and with no known grave is commemorated on the Arras Memorial.

Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel Saturday October 6th 1917

"Pte. W Mansell, Royal Fusiliers of Brindley Ford enlisted December 2nd 1914 has been twice wounded. He has been reported wounded and missing since May 3rd last."

William is remembered on the Arras Memorial in France and in his home village of Brindley Ford.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Bryan

Chalstrey
Private Herbert Chalstrey
7994 8th Bn. North Staffordshire Regiment
Killed in action 24th May 1917 Age 27



Herbert was the son of ironworker Richard Chalstrey and his wife Emma (nee Herbert). Herbert's birth was registered in Sandbach in 1890 using the surname spelling of 'Calstrey'. His mother was from Tipton and on some census returns his father was also described as being born in the West Midlands - while on others he gave Sandbach as his place of birth. In 1871 the young couple lived with her parents in Tipton and Richard described himself as a puddler. The family had moved to Union Street, Sandbach, by the time of the 1891 census and it is on this census return that Herbert first appeared aged 1 and born in Sandbach. By 1901 the family resided at 23 Bourne Street, Brindley Ford. Oddly, Herbert was recorded as Abraham H Chalstrey on this return. No doubt Robert Heath's iron works had been the reason for the family to move to the area - as had many other ironworkers from the West Midlands. By 1911 Emma was widowed and she and Herbert had moved into the home of her married daughter, Elizabeth Meakin. Isaac and Elizabeth Meakin and their young family also lived at Brindley Ford, at 15 Bourne Street.

In April 1914 Herbert enlisted at Stoke on Trent, presumably at Shelton barracks. Without service records details are uncertain, however, an article in the Sentinel records that he served in the 7th battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. This battalion trained at Tidworth in 1914 and in January 1915 went by train to Basingstoke where the battalion had their billets. Following a route march to Aldershot and Blackdown in March and with their training complete, the battalion attached to 39th Brigade 13th Western Division and received orders to embark for war.

The division sailed from Avonmouth Bristol on the 20th June 1915, through the Bay of Biscay and into a pleasant Mediterranean with a stop off in Malta; their destination was Alexandria in Egypt. The division then sailed on to the Dardanelles landing at Mudros, the British naval base, in July and then forward to the Gallipoli Peninsula. 13th Division were there to relieve the 29th Division at Cape Helles on the 11th July and it was here that Herbert and his mates were met by an immediate baptism of fire, being shelled on disembarking.

Actions at Achi Baba saw the brave 7th North Staffs suffer many casualties. In early August the battalion sailed to Anzac Cove and the costly battles at Sari Bar, Russell Top and Hill 60 followed at the end of the month. The terrain was very hilly and inhospitable; the war in Gallipoli had been raging since April. Now with deteriorating and abysmal conditions, torrential storms caused rivers from the surrounding hills to flood and destroy many of the trenches. This left many brave soldiers to drown or die from exposure.

Early September found a further move to Suvla Bay. Here a Biddulph soldier, Tom Lancaster, arrived in a replacement draft. In November Herbert was wounded although no details are available. Reconstruction of the defences was carried out and on the 19th December the lads were withdrawn for seven days rest in the Helles area.

By this time the battalion was reduced to 300 men before a draft arrived to strengthen their ranks. At the start of 1916 there were terrible blizzard conditions and on the 7th January the enemy made their last attack of the campaign. Frost bite caused Herbert serious problems and in April 1916 he was invalided home to England for treatment. The 13th Division had been evacuated on the 21st January 1916 from Gallipoli sailing aboard *HMT Varova* to Port Said in Egypt. It is not known if Herbert went with them or was already being treated for frost bite in a base hospital in the Mediterranean area.

Following his treatment and recoupment in England, Herbert was fit for duty again and returned to the battlefield - this time the Western Front was his destination. A transfer of battalion for Herbert followed to the 8th North Stafford's; a battalion who had served in Flanders since July 1915. He joined the new battalion in January 1917 in a quiet area of the Somme district. Spring of 1917 found the division still holding the front line until early summer when the 8th Battalion were ordered north into the Ypres salient. The 19th Division were south of the ruined town of Ypres and fighting on high ground in the Messines area. Here the troops were preparing for the Battle of Messines.

It was during this time that Private Herbert Chalstrey, on the 24th May 1917, fell on the battle field at the age of 27. He now rests in the Railway Dugout Burial Ground Transport Farm near Zillebeke in Belgium.

On July 14th 1917 the Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel reported on the death of Private H Chalstrey of Brindley Ford which included the following details:

"He joined the colours in April 1914. He was invalided home from the Dardanelles with frost bite in April 1916 and was drafted to France in January 1917. Private Chalstrey was formerly employed as an ironworker at Messrs. Robert Heath & Sons, Black Bull works. He was 27 years of age."

Pte. Herbert Chalstrey is remembered locally on the Brindley Ford memorial.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Dale
Private George William Dale
28318 6th Bn. King's Own Scottish Borderers
died of wounds June 6th 1917 Age 29

George William Dale was one of five children born to Frank and Alice, née Berry, three of whom died in infancy. He was born in Biddulph in about 1889. Frank had married Alice Berry at a civil ceremony in Congleton in 1888 and the couple began their married life in John Street. In fact Frank had lived all of his life in John Street. In 1891, Frank, who was a blacksmith, along with his wife, father-in-law and two sons, George and James, still lived in this street. Ten years later, the family were still resident in John Street and George William, although only twelve was employed although his occupation is difficult to read (possibly an assistant book keeper). By 1911, at 151, John Street, George was still at home with his parents and brother. He was described as a *waggon sheeter* at the ironworks and colliery, probably Robert Heath's, where his younger brother James was a boiler maker and his father Frank was a blacksmith.

At some point after 1911 George made a move north, to Glasgow. It is not known if all the family moved or if it was just George. It was at Glasgow that George enlisted, giving his place of residence as Glasgow and his place of birth as Biddulph.

George served in the 6th Scottish Borderers, a battalion who were attached to the 9th Scottish Division and trained at Bordon and Bramshott. This division went to France on May 12th 1915 crossing the channel and landing at Boulogne. However, the medal card for George shows no entry date.

The division saw action in October 1915 at the Battle of Loos then in July 1916 they fought bravely in the Battle of the Somme with actions at Albert and at Bazentin where they captured the village of Longueval. These actions were followed by the bitter struggle at Delville Wood and Transloy. In the spring of 1917 the 6th Battalion Scottish Borderers were again ordered into action in the Battle of Scarpe and the Arras Offensive.

Following these actions George was wounded and taken to the 8th Casualty Clearing Station at Duisans, where on June 6th 1917 he succumbed to his wounds and sadly died.

George William Dale is now at rest in the nearby Duisans British Cemetery Etrun near Arras.

George is not commemorated on any of the local memorials. Perhaps this suggests that all of the family moved to Glasgow before the onset of war.

Michael Turnock, Elaine Bryan and Elaine Heathcote.

Roberts
Private William Percy Roberts
3/4879 14th Battalion York and Lancashire Regiment
Killed in action 30th June 1917 Age 28

William was born in 1889 in Wain Lee, an area between Harriseahead and Brown Lees. He was the second son of John Roberts and Sarah Jane Oakes. His mother was from Buglawton in Cheshire. Father John was born in Hanley but in 1881 is living in Brindley Ford with his widowed father. John married Sarah Jane in 1884 at St Paul's church in Burslem.

In the 1891 census the young family are living at Brindley Ford, near to the New Vine Inn, with sons Ernest and William aged 2 also with 3 of Sarah's brothers and sisters Isaiah Oakes 11, Jemima 18 and Emma 20. Father John is 37 and working as an ironworker shingler. By 1901 the family has grown to include two more brothers David 9, Tom 6 and young sister Betsy, just 4. Maternal grandmother Harriet Oakes, age 52 is also living with the family. She had been a widow since 1880 following the death of her husband Josiah. William Percy is now 12 and still at school.

In the 1911 census William Percy is listed as Percy Roberts age 22 is employed as a labourer in the iron trade. He is still living with parents John and Sarah. The family include David 19, Thomas Leadbeater 16, Betsy 14, Alfred Edward 9, Frank 4, Nellie 4 and Sam 1. The family are now living at the High Street in Brindley Ford.

On the 12 August 1912 William Percy Roberts age 23 bachelor miner of Brindley Ford marries Alice Webster, age 17, also of Brindley Ford, at St Bartholomew's Church in the parish of Norton in the Moors. She is the daughter of William Thomas Webster and the witnesses are William's brother David and Mary Jane Mansell.

The couple have two children; daughter Marion born in 1913 and son Harold born on July 26th in 1914.

With the outbreak of war on the 4th August 1914, William is one of the first men to enlist on the 8th September at Tunstall, with the 3rd Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. His service number was 9921. This was a home based unit stationed at Lichfield-Crownhill-Davenport. He gained promotion to Lance Sergeant on 23rd February 1915 and further promotion to Sergeant in March. On the 29th April, William was transferred to the York and Lancaster Regiment- initially in the 3rd battalion, another home based unit. A few days later he reverted to Lance Sergeant and was posted to the 1st Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment.

William embarked for a channel crossing, landing in France on the 4th May 1915 where he joined his new battalion who were attached to 83th Brigade 28th Division; this division had been in France since January 1915. They had fought in the 2nd battle of Ypres in April and were to see their next major action in the Battle of Loos in September. In October 1915 the 1st York and Lancaster were ordered with their division to Salonika arriving in January 1916. However the service records of William, although a little confusing state he was posted to the 2nd

Battalion attached to 6th Division who were also serving in France and so William remained in France.

William continued his duties with 2nd Battalion in the Ypres salient seeing actions at Hooge through the wet cold winter into 1916. On the 23rd February he became ill with NVD (vomiting and diarrhoea) and was taken out of line and treated initially in the 2nd Field Ambulance before being transferred to the 167th Field Ambulance and then being admitted to the 1st Canadian General Hospital, at Etaples on the coast. Within days William was moved again to the No 9 Stationary Hospital at Le Havre. By 25th May 1916, although not completely fit, he had recovered enough to return to the front with his battalion who were still in the Ypres Salient.

The 6th Division were soon to fight in the battle of the Somme but not until September, when the men of 2nd Battalion were involved in heavy fighting at Flers-Courcelette. However, before this William again became ill on the 19th August 1916 and was treated at 16th Field Ambulance, on the 24th he was taken to the 44th Casualty Clearing Station and then passed on to the 3rd Canadian Stationary Hospital at Boulogne. His condition this time was PUO, which becomes trench fever, a more serious condition. So on the 2nd of September William was transferred by the Hospital Ship "Newhaven" to England for more intensive treatment.

Part of his stay was at the Northampton War Hospital Dunston and with care his condition improved and he was no doubt allowed home leave. Whilst in England bizarrely, William, deserted his duty on the 26th December 1916 - no reason or account has been found. It was Christmas time which may have had some bearing on the incident. However he was demoted to private and no doubt served time for the way he behaved. It appears from correspondence in his service records that the COs of various battalions of York and Lancaster Regiment were themselves unaware of the circumstance of this incident.

In February 1917 William returned to the battlefield; he was posted to 14th Battalion and sailed from Folkestone crossing to Boulogne on 13th February and the following day he joined his unit in the field. The 14th Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment, known as 2nd Barnsley Pals were attached to 94th Brigade 31st Division. In April the pals were ordered to fight in the Arras Offensive, with a major action in May, the 3rd Battle of Scarpe their objective and in late June they captured Oppy Wood. This area was full of enemy machine gun and mortar posts, with many observation lookouts and despite heavy enemy shelling the attack was a complete success, although the action resulted in the sad loss of thirty brave men including Private William Percy Roberts on the 30th June 1918 at the age of twenty eight.

Following his death on the 30 June 1917 among various papers is a list of his possessions which included:

"Disc, letters, photos, postcards, prayer card, new testament, gold ring (broken)."

Another form requests details of living relatives. These included mother Jane Roberts of 6 Victoria Street, Brindley Ford, wife Alice Roberts of The Schoolhouse, Brindley Ford with children Marion and Harold, brothers Ernest, David, Thomas, Edward, Frank and Samuel and sisters Betsy 22 and Nellie. Also two nephews - John Raymond Roberts aged 3 and Percy Roberts aged 1 of Bourne Street, Brindley Ford.

William has no known grave and is remembered on the Arras Memorial in Pas-de-Calais, France. Also his name is found on the Brindley Ford Memorial as Percy Roberts.

His widow Alice Roberts remarried in 1920.

Michael Turnock and Kathleen Walton

Barnett
Lance Corporal William Barnett Baddiley / Baddeley
200638 (formerly 3314) 1st/5th North Staffordshire Regiment
Killed in Action 1st July 1917 Age 23



Pvt. W. BARNETT.

Discovering the background of William Barnett has proved difficult. Although William is remembered on the Biddulph Memorials and by the Commonwealth War Grave Commission as William Barnett, technically his surname was 'Barnett- Baddiley'. It is this surname that is used frequently in census returns and also on the family grave in St. Lawrence churchyard. As there was another William Barnett in Biddulph at that time, it has been important to identify the correct young man.

William Barnett-Baddeley's birth was registered in 1893 at Norton. He was the son of John Baddeley and Emily (nee Leighton). In 1881 John was living with his widowed grandmother, Lois Barnett, at Knowle Stile. The following year he married the girl who lived next-door-but-one in a civil ceremony at Congleton. Emily was the daughter of Benjamin and Hannah; her father in the 1881 census was described as a 'tea-dealer'. By 1891 John and Emily were living with her parents at Knowle Stile along with their three children: Benjamin, Lois and George. Ten years later the family had increased to include William (aged 7) and Selina (aged 2). However, this census (1901) creates many questions. To begin with the head of the family is named as William Barnett (not John Baddeley) and it is tempting to think that maybe John had died and Emily had remarried. This is not the case as by 1911 William Barnett now becomes known as William Barnett- Baddeley and indeed signs the document with the initial 'J' before the William. So perhaps although he was called 'John' –he was known as 'William'. Whatever the 'whys and wherefores' of this family and there inexplicable interchange of Christian and surnames, it is in the 1911 census entry that we have further evidence of our fallen soldier: William. He is recorded as an 18 year old miner sharing the family home of 'Holly Mount', Knowle Stile, with his siblings; Lois, George and Selina.

The most crucial piece of evidence as to the family background of Lance Corporal William Barnett comes from the inscription on the family gravestone which is transcribed in full below:

"In loving memory of John, beloved husband of Emily Baddiley of Knowle Style died July 9th 1926 aged 70 years. Also the above Emily Baddiley, died April 27th 1944 aged 90 years. Also Benjamin Leighton died December 6th 1892 aged 69 years. Also Hannah, his beloved wife died August 16th

1899 aged 76 years. Also L. Copl. Wm. Barnett Baddiley their beloved son who gave his life for his Country July 1st 1917 aged 23 years. Also John William, Jonah & Thomas died in infancy."

One of Biddulph's early recruits William or Will as he was called enlisted in September 1914 at Biddulph, joining the North Staffordshire Regiment. William's medal card refers to number 3314 - so it appears he may have served in the 2/5th battalion before being transferred to the 1/5th North Staffordshire battalion.

This battalion's basic training commenced at Butterton Hall camp and after six weeks the new recruits were ready for further instruction. Headed by a pipe and drums band the men proudly marched from Butterton to Newcastle railway station to begin their journey to Luton. The more intensive training was carried out at Luton and Bishops Stortford; it is believed Will trained in the Machine Gun Section of the battalion. On completing their training the soldiers of the 1/5th North Stafford's prepared to embark on crossing the English Channel; however Will's medal card states this was on the 28th June 1915. This almost certainly means that he was in a replacement draft as the main body went to war in March.

Arriving at Le Havre the troops travelled inland for assembly with 137th Brigade 46th North Midlands Division. This division served in the Ypres and Hooge area until October, when they were ordered to the Loos area of the Western Front. The Battle of Loos was being fought north of the mining town of Lens. On the afternoon of the 13th October battalions of 137th Brigade 46 Div. were to retake at the Hohenzollern Redoubt the trenches of Big Willie and Fosse Alley. It was disastrous; exposed to machine gun fire and shelling from the redoubt many of William's pals soon fell. This was indeed a Black day for Biddulph and Staffordshire.

Although wounded in this attack Will survived, but sadly eight of his Biddulph pals were lost that day. The division was soon to be withdrawn from the Loos battlefield to recover. Mid December saw unusual orders issued to the 46th Division that they were to entrain for a long and slow journey south through the whole of France - their destination was Marseilles docks. Christmas dinner may have been taken on the French Railway, sharing it with Charles Pointon and John Bowers from Biddulph; at least it was warm and dry without any shelling.

Arriving at Marseilles on the 5th January 1916 the soldiers boarded a troopship. Our Biddulph lads were to sail through the Mediterranean Sea to Egypt; they'd had a rough time recently and deserved a pleasant change. Arriving at Alexandria on the 12th January 1916 they hardly had time to settle for within a month their orders were changed and the division was to return to France.

So with the journey in reverse the 1/5th North Stafford's were going back to the mud and trenches of Flanders. At some point William gained a stripe becoming Lance Corporal Barnett. Twelve months previous Will had been wounded and he was wounded again in June 1916 whilst preparing for the Battle of the Somme when the division were used in a diversionary attack at Gommercourt. A pal from Biddulph, John Bowers, fell in this action.

From March 1917 the battalion bravely fought through actions at Ancre, Rehemoy Graban and the Hindenburg Line, losing many men and sadly on the 1st July 1917 L/Cpl William Barnett was to fall on the battlefield in the Lieven sector. His medal card states "*Pres. Dead*". William died at the age of twenty three and has no known grave and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial to the Missing.

At home at Holly Mount, Tunstall Road, Williams's father had often invited the Biddulph Band to come to their home to play and provided a barrel of beer afterwards. The Chronicle reports "*Sadly postcards lay unsend in the house after the family heard the news of William's death;*" one said "*No doubt you will know where this is too*" a message only understood by the family.

William is remembered on all of the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Lancaster
Private Charles Lancaster
44429 11th South Wales Borderers
(Formerly 179372 Royal Engineers)
Killed in action 31st July 1917 Age 25



Charles was the eldest son of William and Maria and was born in c.1892. His father was a builder and contractor in the Biddulph area. In 1901 the family resided at 8 Station Road. Ten years later, in 1911, they were at 83 John Street where Charles was described as a builder's bricklayer – no doubt working for his father.

On the 6th February 1915 he married Clara Cotterill of Whitemore Village. Charles was 23 years of age and described as a builder of 83 Lower John Street. He had a brother who enlisted in April 1915 with the Royal Engineers. On 14th January 1916 Charles also enlisted with the Royal Engineers, no doubt training with this unit for a while. At some point he transferred to the 11th Battalion South Wales Borderers (2nd Gwent) and was attached to this battalion when drafted out to France.

This battalion trained at Colwyn Bay and Hursley Park Winchester with marching, musketry, discipline and trench work. For their final intensive instruction the battalion moved to Hazeley Down on Salisbury Plain. 11th Battalion were now attached to 115th Brigade 38th Welsh Division and made ready for embarkation at the channel ports, crossing to Le Havre, on the 4th December 1915.

The division spent the winter and into spring 1916 defending their lines in Flanders where Charles and his mates became accustomed to trench life. Normally five days in the front line then four or five days in a back area, still with the constant threat of shelling and if lucky a short period further back in a safe area away from enemy bombardment.

In June the 11th South Wales Borderers, who wore an emblem of a light blue tower on a dark blue rectangle on their shoulder, were found preparing for the forthcoming Battle of the Somme. Their role in the battle saw the battalion in action at Albert on 3rd July, followed on the 7th to the 14th with bitter fighting at Mametz Wood; a battle that caused many casualties in their ranks. The gallant soldiers fought machine guns and overwhelming enemy forces to capture the wood.

So decimated were 38th Division after this battle that they were taken out of line for over a year to recuperate and refit. Without service records it is assumed that Charles came through the battle unscathed. This action ranks as one of the bitterest of the Somme offensives and today a stunning Red Dragon Memorial over looks Mametz Wood in remembrance of 38th Welsh Division.

It was 1917 before Charles and his mates were in action again. An account taken from the war diary says *"After an uneventful winter in the trenches the Welsh Division found itself attacking the Pilckem Ridge on 31st July 1917, the opening day of the Third Battle of Ypres. The two leading Brigades were to capture as their three objectives the German line east of the Ypres Canal, the German second line on the Pilckem Ridge, and a further ridge east of Pilckem known as Iron Cross Ridge. The 115th Brigade was then to pass through, push forward another 700 yards to the Steenbeeke and secure crossings over that stream"*. The war diary went on to say *"The attack started at 3.50am.the first two objectives were taken up to time but there was hard fighting at Iron Cross, and the 11th Battalion reached that area about 9am. To pass through they came under machine gun fire from some still untaken pillboxes"*. In the dreaded Ypres salient at Pilkem Ridge this appalling battle took place in abysmal mud. The brave South Wales Borderers successfully captured the ridge but again a costly price was paid, losing many of their soldiers and sadly Private Charles Lancaster was amongst those that fell in the action at Pilkem Ridge on the 31st July 1917. Charles is now at rest in the Bard Cottage Cemetery Boezinge near Ypres.

On the 1st September 1917 the Chronicle reported his death under the headline: *'Biddulph Soldier Falls in Action': 'It is our sorrowful duty to record the passing of yet another local hero in the person of Private Charles Lancaster, South Wales Borderers, son of Mr William Lancaster, builder, of Whitemore Village, Biddulph. Each week one hears that another of our heroic lads has given his all so that we and our children's children may be spared the horrors of Belgium, and the news of the death of each one causes poignant grief among the soldier's erstwhile friends and associates.'*

The Chronicle went on describe Private Lancaster: *'his devotion to duty, his earnestness, and his sangfroid in times of danger, won for him the commendation of his officers, while his genial nature was a sure passport to friendship among the rank and file.'*

'The news of his death in action was received by his friends in sorrowful silence – which is perhaps the best tribute that could be paid to one who had died for them – but the name of the dead soldier, who had no pretensions to rank, will ever remain green in the memory of the good folk of Whitemore Village; indeed, the name will go down to posterity, for the manner of his passing entitles him to be classed among the Immortals.'

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Meir
Private Thomas Meir
9706 11th Bn. Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment)
Killed in action 10th August 1917

Soldiers died and the CWGC state that Thomas was born and had lived and enlisted at Tunstall. No service records can be found for Thomas and we do not have an age at death. From census records it would seem that there were three men named "Thomas Meir" born in the North Staffordshire area between 1890 – 1895. The most likely Thomas was the son of William and Harriet (nee Price). In 1891 they were living at Union Street in Tunstall. By 1911 the family resided at 58 Sun Street, Tunstall and in this census Thomas was described as a pottery placer born in Tunstall. Connections to Brindley Ford remain undiscovered.

His medal card shows that he served in the 2nd battalion Royal Fusiliers. This battalion arrived in England in December 1914 after seeing service in India. It is unknown when Thomas joined

the battalion however his medal card records that he served in Gallipoli from the 3rd August 1915. This was when the 2nd Royal Fusiliers were attached to 86th Brigade 29th Division.

The division served in the Dardanelles until evacuated to Egypt in January 1916 following the end of hostilities. The following month the division sailed through the Mediterranean and arrived at Marseilles in March 1916. The division then travelled north through France to their Flanders assembly area at Pont Remy – which they reached by the 29th.

At some point Thomas transferred to the 11th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, 18th Division. Without service records the date is unknown, nevertheless, both battalions have a similar military record and served in the Battle of the Somme from July 1916. The battalion were in action at Albert, Transley, Delville Wood and Thiepval Ridge. The following year the brave Fusiliers saw further action on the Hindenburg Line, and in the Arras Offensive.

From July 1917 the 3rd Battle of Ypres was their battleground and the abysmal conditions of the Salient. Inevitably the battalion sustained heavy losses during the capture of Westhoek Ridge when on the 10th August 1917 Thomas sadly fell in battle. Private Thomas Meir has no known grave and is commemorated on the Menin Gate at Ypres. Back home he is remembered on the Brindley Ford and Tunstall memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Minshall
Private Harold Minshall
40629 9th Prince of Wales' North Staffordshire Regiment
Died 10th August 1917 Age 21

Harold's birth was registered in 1895 as William Harold Minshall but it appears that was usually known as Harold or Harry. Born in Brook Street, Brown Lees, by 1911 he was the only surviving child of the four born to his parents Joseph and Ann Selina, nee Brookes. In 1911 he was working as a Plate Sweeper at the ironworks.

An article in the Chronicle stated that before his enlistment on 1st November 1914 he had worked at Victoria Pit, Biddulph Valley Works. Harold enlisted at Biddulph and was another local soldier to join the 1/5th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment, number 3787. He commenced his basic training at Butterton Hall Camp before transferring to the Harpenden area for more intensive training. The battalion went to France on 28th July 1915 landing at Le Havre and attached to 137th Brigade 46th North Midlands Division.

The 46th Division served in the Ypres and Hooze area until October when they were ordered to the Loos area of the Western Front. The Battle of Loos was being fought in an area near the mining town of Lens. On the afternoon of the 13th October battalions of 137th Brigade 46 Div. were to retake at the Hohenzollern Redoubt, the trenches of Big Willie and Fosse Alley. From the outset it was disastrous, exposed to machine gun fire and shelling from the redoubt many of Harold's pals soon fell. This was indeed a black day for Biddulph and north Staffordshire.

Harold survived, but sadly eight of his brave Biddulph pals were lost that day. The division was soon to be withdrawn from the Loos battlefield to recover and refit. Then in Mid-December orders were issued, the 46th Division were to entrain for a long and slow journey south through France, their destination was Marseilles docks. Most probably their Christmas dinner would be taken in a French Railway truck; at least it was warm and dry away from the shelling.

At Marseilles the soldiers boarded a troopship and our Biddulph lads were to sail through a pleasant Mediterranean sea to Egypt; they'd had a rough time recently and deserved this

change. They arrived on the 13th January 1916 and within a few days their orders were changed and the division were to return to France.

So with the journey in reverse the 1/5th North Stafford's went back to the mud and trenches of Flanders. In June 1916 the division prepared for the Battle of the Somme; the troops were used in a diversionary attack at Gommercourt. In this action Harold was wounded twice in a bayonet charge and a pal from Biddulph, John Bowers, fell in battle. More brave Biddulph men were to fall before the battle ended in late November 1916.

About spring of 1917 Harold then transferred battalions moving to the 9th North Stafford's, a unit that had in April 1915 converted from army troops to pioneers. His new regimental number was 40629. Harold's new battalion was attached to 37th Division. As divisional pioneers, most of their work was carried out under shell fire and many times under machine gun and rifle fire and often caught the attention of enemy snipers. The pioneers would have to continue their work repairing or making defences, trenches, roads and trolley ways, building machine gun dug-outs or laying wire in No Man's Land.

Harold, being a miner, would have been ideal for this work -as were many other Staffordshire miners in the battalion. Only during sudden attacks did the pioneers down tools and take up their rifles or Lewis guns in support of their infantry, which they did on many occasions. Harold and his pals, one of whom could have been Harry Stockton of Biddulph, now served in "D" Coy. An account tells of a Sergeant Carmichael of 9th North Staffs Pioneers: whilst working in the front line he placed a steel helmet over a grenade thrown by the enemy at his men. He stood on the helmet when the grenade exploded. It saved the work party but broke the ankle of Sergeant Carmichael who was later awarded the Victoria Cross for this gallant action.

Without service records to hand various detailed accounts in the Biddulph Chronicle have given substance to the story:

The Chronicle - January 13th 1917: Brown Lees: 'News of Brown Lees Soldier' -

'Mr and Mrs Minshull 30 Brooke St, Brown Lees, have received news from their son, Pte Harry Minshull, N.S.Regiment, BEF, France, in which he informs his parents that he has fully recovered from his wounds received in a bayonet charge, July 1st, 1916, and that he is now at duty again. This was the third bayonet charge that Pte. Minshull had been engaged in, the two previous charges he came through without a scar. Pte. Minshull enlisted November 1st 1914, joining the North Staffs Regiment, then stationed at Butterton Hall. From here the regiment went to Harpenden, staying here about 4 months, when Pte Minshull, with others, volunteered for active service, and was sent to France July, 1915.'

'Pte Minshull has seen heavy fighting, having been in many engagements, the first being October 13th 1915 when the North Staffords had their baptism of fighting, many North Staffordshire men, including some of Pte Minshull's mates from his own locality paid the supreme sacrifice. Mr & Mrs Minshull have had a trying time, due to the fact that none of their letters sent to their son have been received by him, neither have his parents received any letters from him for four months. Pte Minshull is expecting a few days leave, when he will be welcomed home by his parents and the Brown Lees Soldiers Committee.'

The Arras offensive in the spring of 1917 was the next action for the division. They fought at Scarpe and at the capture of Monchy Le Preux and Arleux; with the pioneers continuing their work throughout. Harold suffered from septic poisoning and was invalided home; not returning to France until June 1917. In July the division were ordered to Belgium and the Ypres salient where unbelievable conditions faced the pioneers who tried to carry out their duties in the morass of mud in the Pilkem Ridge and Menin Road Ridge areas.

In early August Harold was seriously wounded whilst carrying out his duties in the salient. It would appear that he was taken over the border to the French town of Bailleul; at that time it was a safe refuge from enemy shelling and where the army had various Casualty Clearing Stations. Sadly on the 10th August 1917, Private Harold W Minshall at the age of twenty-two

died of his wounds. He was buried in the nearby Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension. According to Harold's medal card after the war his mother applied for his medals.

The Chronicle reported his death in an article on 1st September 1917:

Death of Private H. Minshall, Brown Lees

'He had taken part in some sanguinary engagements, and fought in the Battle of the Somme, being twice wounded. After a few months he was transferred to the 9th Bn NSR when septic poisoning set in and he was invalided home. During this visit the Brown Lees Welcoming Committee entertained him, and he was presented with a framed address in oak at a public meeting. Pte Minshall returned to France in June 1917, and according to the official notification, died from wounds received in action.

Though only 22 years of age, he was a 'typical British Tommy' and his jovial and affable dispensation, no less than the enthusiasm when on duty, had attracted many friends to him in that land of bloodshed and death, who, like the friends he had left at home, mourned his loss with genuine and profound sorrow.'

On 29th September 1917 the Chronicle printed a letter sent to the parents of Pte. Minshall by Lieutenant H. Meadow:

'I have just heard that your son, who was wounded some time ago, has died from the effect of his wounds. Although I knew the seriousness of his wound, I had hoped he would recover in time, but it was not to be. I was very grieved at the news, as your son was in the platoon I commanded in the 9th North Staffords at the time, and although he had not been with us long he had proved himself to be a very good soldier and a willing worker. He was well liked by his chums, and thought much of by his officers, who wish me to convey their sympathy with you. Perhaps it will be some consolation to you to know that the work he was engaged on contributed much to the success of subsequent military operations and in doing the work he was doing along with his company, he helped to save the lives of a great many others.'

Harold (Harry) is remembered on the Brown Lees Memorial as well as on the Biddulph and St. Lawrence Memorials, where a *W* appears as a second Christian name. He is also commemorated on the memorial in Bailleul Communal Cemetery extension in France.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Bryan

Pemberton

Private Allen Pemberton

40993, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 1st Battalion

Formerly 33254 North Staffs Regiment

Died of wounds 11th Aug 1917 Age 23



Allen was baptised on 23 Feb 1894 at Astbury Church and spent his childhood growing up in Newbold Astbury. His parents were John and Jane Pemberton. John was a collier and in 1901 the family include Allen 7, Ethel 5, John 4 and Mary just 1 all born in Astbury. His Sunday school prize book from 1904 shows that he attended the Wesleyan Chapel on Congleton Edge. By 1911 Allen is employed on the farm of Mr Frank Brindley, on Mow Lane Gillow Heath. Mr Brindley was from Biddulph and lived with his wife Alice and their eight children. Allen was the only employee listed on the census.

Enlisting at Biddulph recruiting office, Allen joined the North Staffordshire Regiment; his regimental number was 33254 although the battalion is unknown as no service records have been found. However at some stage Allen transferred to the 1st Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Training of this battalion took place at Nuneaton Warwickshire. After their training the battalion was due to embark for France but orders were countermanded and they attached to 29th Division 86th Brigade and ordered to the Dardanelles.

They sailed from Avonmouth on 25th March 1915 and passed through a rough Atlantic into a much warmer Mediterranean Sea on their journey to Alexandria in Egypt. They travelled on to Mudras on the Island of Imbros - the deep water naval base, completing their journey at Cape Helles on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The battalion fought in this most inhospitable terrain with many casualties from the enemy shelling until they were relieved by the 7th North Stafford's in July.

The autumn brought more tragic news when heavy storms caused flooding of the trenches with many loses. Allen and his friends no doubt welcomed the orders to evacuate Gallipoli on 7th January 1916; the 29th Division where now returning to Egypt. The men spent the next two months guarding the Suez Canal and on the 13th March 1916 they embarked at Port Said for a sea journey to Marseilles, their destination the Western Front.

By the end of March the division was at Pont Remy a British base near Abbeville, and in July they saw action in the Battle of the Somme where they were used in offensives at Albert and Transley Ridge. The winter was spent defending their lines in a cold Flanders and when out of line in billets the troops passed their time letter writing, reading, playing nap or to "crumb up" :that was picking the lice from their shirts. There was always a chance to get drunk, and afterwards going to a safe bed with a thick head and their lice of course! At least there would be bacon, bread and tea for breakfast in the morning.

April 1917 found the Dublin Fusiliers fighting in the Arras offensive in the Battles of Scarpe until ordered north to the Ypres salient for the 3rd Battle of Ypres. With the inevitable appalling conditions the brave men were again in action at Langemarck, Broodseinde and Poelcapelle. Fighting in the Ypres salient during July and August brought more casualties in the battalion.

During these battles Allen was seriously wounded but without any service records it is unknown where treatment was sought. Sadly, on the 11th August 1917, Private Allen Pemberton died from his wounds and he now rests in the Dozingham Military Cemetery Poperinge.

He is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Kathleen Walton



Private Allen Pemberton's medals and his gravestone.
Photographs submitted by L.Owens

Moss
Private Jack Moss
12537 North Staffordshire Regiment (8th Battalion)
Killed in action 20th September 1917 Age 23



Jack Moss was born on the 20 Sep 1894 at Biddulph. He was the son of William James Moss and Elizabeth nee Crompton. In the 1901 census the family are living at 2 Cromwell Street in Biddulph. Father William is 38 and a coal miner, born in Bosley and his mother Elizabeth is from Kidsgrove. There are 6 children at home; George 14, Sarah 11, James 10, Myles 9, Jack 6 and Emma just 10 months. All the children have been born in Biddulph.

The 1911 census reveals that William and Elizabeth have been married for 21 years and have had 7 children, 6 of whom are still alive. Jack and his older brothers are all employed as colliers and the family are still living at 2 Cromwell Street.

Jack was a keen footballer playing for both Mossley and Congleton clubs. He enlisted at Biddulph in September 1914, joining the 8th battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. His name is recorded in the Congleton Chronicle as Jack Moss of 37 Station Road. He would have been aged 20 at enlistment.

As one of the early recruits Jack would have travelled by bus from Biddulph to Stoke Town Hall where, according to the Chronicle (September 1914) *"they were given a civic reception and then billeted at a local hotel (the Talbot, Wheatsheaf or Glebe) until the Wednesday when they went by train to Lichfield to join the North Staffs Battalion"*.

This battalion trained on Salisbury Plain before moving to their winter billets at Bristol. February 1915 saw a move to Weston super Mare then to Perham Down Camp, Andover and Tidworth for their final preparation and attachment to 57th Brigade 19th Division in April.

King George V inspected the division on the 23rd June, and soon after on the 17th July the division were ordered to ready for embarking to France. However Jack's medal card records his date of entry as 25th August 1915, so for some reason there was a delay of over a month. The first action involving 8th North Stafford's was in October at Pietie whilst used in a supporting role during the Battle of Loos.

Through the winter and into spring 1916 the 19th Division defended their lines in the area, until ordered to the Somme district. During the coming battle in July the battalion were in action in the Albert offensive where they successfully captured La Boisselle in a bitter fight

with the loss of many brave soldiers. Pushing forward they again came up against heavy enemy resistance whilst attacking High Wood. The Somme battle continued into August with actions on Pozieres Ridge and the Ancre Heights.

The Battle of the Somme continued until late November, by then Jack had lost many of his good pals from Biddulph; Jonathan Barlow, Joseph Evenson, Harry Bailey, Arthur Lacey and Harold Simpson all brave men who had fallen in the past months. During the winter of 1916-17 the ground and weather deteriorated bringing the war to a slow pace. The men had to endure unbelievable living, sleeping and fighting conditions on a frozen and wet battlefield that winter. Nevertheless always looking forward to their breakfast being brought up, a bread ration of four men to a loaf and hopefully a Dixie of stew to warm them.

The spring of 1917 found the division still defending the front line until early summer when the 8th Battalion were ordered north into the Ypres salient, the 19th Division were south of the ruined town of Ypres fighting on high ground in the Messines area, where 19 enormous deep mines were detonated prior to the successful battle at Messines. The division were again in action in September on the Menin Road Ridge. A bombardment had preceded the attack on the morning of the 20th when a heavy mist had covered an eight mile front, it was here that another gallant local soldier died, Private Jack Moss on his twenty-third birthday fell on the field of battle. This was the 20th September 1917.

In a letter to his parents, an officer wrote: *"Your son, Jack, was very popular in the company and is very much missed. He always did his duty and was a splendid soldier"*

Jack has no known grave and is remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial.

He is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock and Kathleen Walton

Smith

Private Herbert Wilfred Smith

202526 2nd/6th Bn. Sherwood Foresters Notts & Derby Regiment

Killed in action 28th September 1917 Age 28

Herbert Wilfred Smith was born in 1889 - his birth was registered at Congleton. His mother was Sarah J and his father, William James Smith. William was a farmer and in 1891 he and Sarah farmed at Park Farm, Biddulph Park. They still lived in the Biddulph Park area in 1901 when Herbert first appeared on the census of that year. The Smith family was large; the 1911 census records that his mother had given birth to ten children and that all were still alive. By 1911 Herbert had moved out of the family home (which had become Wrights Farm) and was a farm servant for Thomas Cotterill at Hunt House, Horton.

At some time after the 1911 census, Herbert married Mary (maiden name unknown) and the couple moved to Sudbury in Derbyshire. At Uttoxeter on the 25th July 1916 Herbert enlisted, joining the 2/5th Battalion Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Sherwood Foresters, a second line battalion, his regimental number was 5906. He was described as 26 years of age, 5'4" tall, 129 lbs and a farmer.

Although in poor condition his service records have survived and show that from the end of December 1916, Herbert spent two months in the 4th Northern General Hospital in Lincoln. Once recovered, his training continued until he was posted with a reinforcement draft to France.

Herbert crossed to Boulogne on the 19th July 1917 and transferred to the 2/6th Battalion which was attached to 176th Brigade 59th Division (2nd North Midlands). He joined C coy on the 14th August in the field. This battalion had trained in Watford and Dunstable and had been in France since February. The division was then ordered to Belgium to fight in what was to be the 3rd Battle of Ypres.

They travelled by train in the usual cattle trucks from Acheux near Albert to Winnezele arriving on 1st September 1917. After assembly they marched into the salient where they then went into action in the battle at Menin Road on the 23rd September. The Sherwood Foresters lost many of their brave men here. The battalion were soon in battle again on the 26th September at Polygon Wood. Both British and Australian troops followed a creeping artillery barrage to attack the wood, there were many enemy pillboxes untouched by our artillery fire. Herbert and his mates fought gallantly in the most appalling conditions in the mud of the salient. The action was successful in capturing the pill boxes, of which many still remain in the wood today.

Their actions sadly resulted in a high casualty rate. Private Herbert William Smith, on the 28th September 1917 was lost aged twenty eight. He is buried at the Tyne Cot Cemetery. The day after Herbert died the Sherwood Foresters were taken out of line and relieved by the New Zealand Division.

The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel on November 24th 1917 reported on a joint memorial service held at Biddulph Moor for Pte. Herbert Smith and Gunner Nixon:

“Long before the appointed hour for evensong practically all the available seating accommodation was taken up and a large number of people were unable to gain admittance. The mourners included Mr. Jonathan Nixon (Relieving Officer for Biddulph & District) and Mrs Nixon, the parents of Gunner Nixon, Mrs. Wilfred Herbert Smith (widow) and Mr. and the Misses Smith, Wrights Farm (father and sisters of Pte. Smith).

The service which was of a most impressive and appropriate character, was conducted by the rector, the Rev. E. Wheeldon. At the conclusion of the service the ‘Last Post’ was sounded by Mr. John Biddulph, followed by the Dead March from ‘Saul’, when the flag was unfurled and the National Anthem closed a memorable service.”

Pte. Smith is remembered locally on the Christ Church, Biddulph Moor memorial and on the cenotaph in Albert Square.

Elaine Heathcote & Michael Turnock.

Nixon
Gunner William Henry Nixon
204057 Royal Horse Artillery and Royal Field Artillery
Died from wounds sustained at Ypres 13th October 1917 Age 20



William Henry was born in Biddulph in 1897. He was the eldest son of Jonathan and Mary Nixon who had married on 20th April 1896 at Rushton Parish church. His mother, Mary Bailey, originated from Rushton James and his father could trace his ancestry back to 1743 - with the birth of his great, great, grand-father, William Nixon of Greenway Moor. Jonathan was the relieving officer for Biddulph Moor and was also responsible for the registration of births and deaths.

William Henry Nixon was baptised on the 9th Jan 1898 at Christ Church, Biddulph Moor. An additional note with the entry records that he was born on the 19th August 1897.

In 1901 William Henry was just 3 years old. His maternal grandmother, Hannah Bailey, lived with the family. She was 71 years of age and described as a retired farmer.

By 1911 the family home was at the Troughstones and comprised of Jonathan, Mary, eldest daughter Florrie, eldest son William Henry (now aged 13), son Jonathan 11 and youngest daughter Elizabeth aged 10.

William's mother went to the tribunal at Biddulph to appeal against her son being enlisted in the army. However her pleas were in vain. The case was recorded in the Congleton Chronicle.

William Henry went to the barracks at Newcastle on Tyne to join the army. Although his service records have not been found this is believed to have been in December 1916 or January 1917. Information has been gleaned from the publication "Soldiers Died". He joined the Royal Field Artillery; his training was in the Sheffield area and Newcastle on Tyne. Coming from country stock William Henry would have been used to handling horses and soon learnt that an artillery man always put the needs of the horses first. Feeding, watering, grooming and bedding down morning and night - "stables" took priority. The 18 pounder field guns were powerful weapons and took great skill to operate. He would have had to learn the various parts, gun drill, cleaning and firing and was also taught to drive and ride a six horse team and gun limber.

By May 1917 Gunner Nixon was attached to "B" Battery 51st LI Artillery Brigade as part of a replacement draft; with so many fallen in the artillery these reinforcements were ongoing. This brigade as part of 9th Scottish Division, were now ready to embark for a channel crossing. On arrival in France the men entrained for their journey to the assembly at Arras where the new artillery men met up with the divisional troops who had served on the Western Front since 1915. William Henry had a mate from Biddulph Moor in his Battery who almost certainly joined RFA at the same time, he was William Bailey who survived the war but was badly wounded; years later he gave his personnel recall of this story.

The new draft after further preparation spent a while in the quiet area of the Canal du Nord until orders were received by the division in early September to move north into the Ypres salient. Here the 3rd Battle of Ypres was being fought. On arrival the battery took up positions on the Frezenburg Ridge between St Jan and Zonnebeke - this was no quiet area. After setting up they almost immediately went into action. After months of training this was the real thing and they were now to give artillery support to their attacking infantry. After this action the division was withdrawn to Cassel for a short rest.

Rest over and back into line, this time the 51st Artillery Brigade held their positions between Lekkerboterbeke and Adler Farm near Poelkapelle in the most awful conditions. The brave artillery men now made preparations for attacks on Passchendaele. The rain in the summer of 1917 was the worst for forty years making the whole battlefield a morass. The attack on Passchendaele on the 12th October was to fail with heavy losses and sadly Gunner Nixon was severely wounded in both arms and legs. Just before being taken to the 18th Corps Advanced Dressing Station at Duhallow he was seen lying in a place "like Stanners (Stanways) Lane Biddulph Moor" as recalled by his pal William Bailey. According to a report of 10th November

1917 in the Biddulph Chronicle *"there was very little hope from the outset"*. In a letter sent to William Henry's parents, the Chaplain wrote *"The doctors did all they could for him, but held out little hope"* adding *"He begged for a drink of tea, but could not swallow it"*. The letter then went on to say *"He then sent his love to all at home, and asked that the blankets might be placed over his head so that he could sleep"*.

On the evening of the 13th October 1917 Gunner William Henry Nixon sadly passed away, he had only been in Flanders for six months. William now lies in the beautiful Duhallow ADS Cemetery near Ypres, the Commonwealth War Graves record – 'In Memory of Gunner WILLIAM HENRY NIXON 204057, "B" Bty. 51st Bde., Royal Field Artillery who died aged 20 on 13 October 1917. Son of Jonathan and Mary Nixon, of Birch Tree's Farm, Biddulph Moor, Congleton, Cheshire. Remembered with honour DUHALLOW A.D.S. CEMETERY'.

His name is recorded on the memorial inside Christ Church Biddulph Moor and outside in the churchyard on the family memorial: *"also William H Nixon R F A their beloved son died in France Oct 13 1917 aged 20 years"*.

He is also remembered on the war memorials at St Lawrence Church and the town memorial.

Kathleen Walton & Michael Turnock

Copeland
Private George Albert Copeland
40964 8th Leicestershire Regiment
Killed in action 28th October 1917 Age 20



Private George Albert Copeland was born in Astbury, Congleton in 1898 (Cheshire BMD) and it was there that he was living in 1911 with his parents George and Harriett, nee Hancock. Their address was given as *'cottage near lime works, Astbury'*. He was one of fourteen children, only six of whom were alive in 1911. His father, George, was a coal miner who had been born in Biddulph. Following the death of Harriet in 1913 it would seem that George returned to Biddulph where he married a widow, Ethel Cooper, nee Holland. When George Albert enlisted

at the age of 18 years 5 months the family were living at 12 Sheppard Street, Biddulph and were still at that address in 1917 as correspondence sent from the war office confirms. The surviving war records show that before his enlistment George was working in the colliery.

George enlisted at Biddulph on the 12th December 1915. His service records have survived, however, the quality is very poor due to fire and water damage. With records inconclusive, George appears initially to have served with the 3rd battalion North Staffordshire regiment. This was a training unit based at Wallsend. At some point in 1917 he transferred to the 8th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment. This battalion was attached to 110th Brigade 37th Division. The 37th Division had been in France since the 28th April 1915 and so the reinforcement draft in which George attached joined the 8th Leicestershire regiment in the field in June 1917. About this time the battle of Scarpe was taking place and the division were in action here, an offensive which resulted in the capture of Monchy-le-Preux an important enemy stronghold, followed by actions at Arleux in the Arras Offensive.

Transferred to Belgium the division were to serve in the Ypres salient in July and it was here that the 3rd Battle of Ypres opened. The battlefield became a morass of mud - where men and horses had to fight, live and sleep; this mud was so deep it could easily drown both. The 8th Leicestershire would find these appalling conditions a nightmare when ordered to attack on the 31st July at Pilkem Ridge, followed shortly after with actions at the Menin Road Ridge.

Thirty days of rain, the worst summer for many years compounded the miserable time in the salient for George and his pals. Even bringing up the tea became unbelievably difficult and marching out of line to a back area proved a challenge. The division bravely continued with battles at Polygon Wood, Broodseinde and Poelcapelle -all with minimal gains and terrible losses through until October 1917. The final goal of the 3rd Ypres was in sight on the 26th when the fight for Passchendaele began. Now almost to the top of the ridge and on looking back with the ruins of Ypres in the far distance was a sea of mud.

George would never see the final push, for on the 28th October 1917, Private George Albert Copeland fell on the field at Ypres. Another Biddulph family would receive the dreaded Form 104-82 informing them of their sad loss. Without any known grave George is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial.

He is remembered on the St. Lawrence board and cross as well as on the Biddulph town memorial.

Elaine Bryan & Michael Turnock

Rhodes
Lance Sergeant John Harold Rhodes
V.C. D.C.M. & Bar
15122, 3rd Bn., Grenadier Guards
Died on 27th November 1917 Age 26



John Harold Rhodes was born on the 17th May 1891 in the small mining village of Packmoor. He was the first child of Ernest and Sarah (nee Hanford); the couple went on to have a total of ten children. The Rhodes' lived in a small cottage in Mellor Street and Ernest worked in the local mines. John and his siblings attended the local church school in nearby Newchapel. After leaving school John followed his father into the coal mines at Chatterley Whitfield. He was a keen sportsman and played with the local football team. Like his father, who in his younger days had served in the Royal Scott Fusiliers, John wanted to join the army and on the 16th February 1911 and at the age of twenty, he enlisted at Stoke on Trent in the Grenadier Guards. He was to serve for three years in the 3rd Battalion and then returned to civilian life and employment in the local mines.

With the outbreak of war in August 1914, John was recalled from the reserve and transferred this time into the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards. In a very short time the Guards were posted to France. They arrived in mid-August and went into battle at Mons on the 23rd. In a letter home Guardsman Rhodes wrote:

"When we got to the base of the bank we were met with a deadly Maxim and rifle fire. It was lucky for us we were underneath the bank or else I don't think many of us would have lived to do much fighting. It was our first taste of war; all we could do was to lie low, as an advance would have been suicide."

John survived the Retreat from Mons and the fighting at Landrecies and Villes Cotterets on the way. Their next action was in September 1914 at the First Battle of the Aisne. He wrote about the time he had a '*narrow squeak; a chap behind me stepped into my place and got shot in the heart.*' They then moved north into Flanders to the First battle of Ypres where his battalion lost many. In January 1915 John was promoted to Lance Corporal and was making a name for him-self as a daring patrol leader. During an action on 18th May at Rue du Bois, near Armentiertes, John undertook a reconnaissance returning with valuable information. On two other occasions he went out under heavy fire to bring back wounded men. For his bravery, John was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

He wrote home saying that he had received the ribbon for his DCM but the medal was kept at Buckingham Palace until the end of the war or the end of him. He returned home on leave to receive a marvellous reception from the locals; crowds of people wanted to meet him wherever he went. After a procession through the villages he was presented with a '*purse of gold*' and a marble time piece.

Leave over, John returned to the front near Givenchy, where he re-joined his pals. On the 6th August 1915 the Germans were shelling their position which caused a number of guardsmen to be buried in a forward sap. Acting Corporal Rhodes and Guardsman Barton ran from their trench to dig the men out but during the successful rescue both men were wounded. John received a shoulder wound. For their gallant deed Barton was awarded the DCM and John a Bar to his DCM.

After treatment John was invalided to England where he spent four months recuperating from his shoulder wound. He was then transferred to a home based unit as an instructor in the 5th (Reserve) Battalion, Grenadier Guards. He was also promoted to Lance Sergeant, spending sixteen months in England as an instructor before making a complete recovery.

On the 11th December 1916 he married his sweetheart, Elizabeth Meir, at Packmoor Methodist Chapel. They made their home at New Street, Pitts Hill. John spent that Christmas at home but on 19th January 1917 he joined the 3rd battalion in France.

The Guards fought at Arras, Bullecourt and Messines. In May 1917 he received the welcome news that Lizzie had given birth to their first child – a son 'John'.

By August the Guards Division had moved north just beyond the Ypres Salient to an area close to the Houthulst Forest. In this area the enemy had particularly strong defences with many machine gun nests and pillboxes. On the 9th October 1917 the 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards and the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards attacked across open ground and were racked by fire.

The Battalion history records *“there seemed every prospect of desperate fighting,”* the Coldstreamers used out-flanking tactics, whilst the Grenadiers attacked the pillbox direct. Lance Sergeant Rhodes, who was in line commanding a Lewis Gun section went through machine gun and shell fire towards a pillbox, accounting for several enemies on the way. Seeing three Germans leave the entrance, John still unscathed, entered the pillbox. Nine enemy soldiers surrendered to him including an artillery observation officer with vital documents. For this conspicuous bravery John was recommended for the Victoria Cross and the Croix de Guerre.

John’s battalion was posted south into France and they were ordered into action on the morning of the 27th November 1917; attacking at Fontaine Notre Dame, near Cambria.

Here, on the mist covered battlefield, John’s luck ran out. During the attack he was hit and very seriously wounded. He was taken to No. 48 Casualty Clearing Station. A 3rd Battalion Officer, Carroll Carstairs saw him being carried from the battlefield and recorded:

“He was a fine big man, but lying deep in the stretcher and covered with a blanket, he seems immeasurably to have shrunk.....all his great strength and courage is ebbing fast.”

Back in the Potteries, news was just coming through that the Victoria Cross had been confirmed both for John and also another local soldier, Corporal E.A.Egerton from Longton. On Tuesday 27th November John’s wife, family and people from the area were celebrating their hero, unaware of the tragedy that was to unfold – for on arrival at the Casualty Clearing Station, John succumbed to his wounds.

The Matron of the station wrote to Mrs. Rhodes:

“It is with the greatest regret that I have to tell you your husband died on admission to this hospital today. He was brought in this afternoon with a badly smashed thigh and breathed his last as we got him on the bed.

I am afraid this will be a terrible shock to you. Little I can say can give you comfort, but you would like to know that his body was reverently handled, and that he will be buried close by in the military cemetery by the chaplain of the unit. With very sincere sympathy.”

John was buried at Rocquigny-Equancourt Road British Cemetery, Manancourt. The Commanding Officer of 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards, Lt. Col. Andrew Thorne, DSO wrote to Elizabeth Rhodes:

“...I am afraid he never knew that he had got his VC. He was wounded on the morning of the 27th November and died as he reached the casualty clearing station. We called there to tell him but it was too late.”



The most poignant tribute to John Rhodes VC, DCM and Bar, comes from a letter to Elizabeth from the Chaplain of 3rd Battalion Grenadier Guards. Writing on the 8th December 1917 he said:

“...the other day I passed the grave of your husband on the side of a hill facing the sun, and as we passed by we thought of you, of the tremendous loss we have suffered. It is one of the cruellest things of this war that just at the moment of great things the best is taken away. Your husband won it over and over again, yet he was always the same, quiet in his manner, never boastful, always doing his duty, a pattern to soldiers a pattern to us all.”

At home following the great shock, a memorial service was held at the Primitive Methodist Chapel, Packmoor, on the 23rd December 1917. A service was also held at the Pittshill Primitive Methodist Chapel on 30th December 1917. The Sentinel reported that *“there was deepest regret throughout the district.”*

Due to domestic difficulties, Elizabeth was unable to attend a Buckingham Palace investiture and John’s medals were presented to her at her home on 15th July 1918. Elizabeth Rhodes never re-married and died on 1st March 1988 at the age of 97 years.

John Harold Rhodes is remembered on a memorial that stands close to his birth place at Mellor Street, Packmoor. His name appears on the Biddulph cenotaph, the Tunstall war memorial and a memorial plaque was erected at the Chatterley Whitfield Mining Museum in 1984.

Michael Turnock

Taylor
Shoeing Smith John Herbert Taylor
681009, 277th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery
Died 30th November 1917 Age 23

“Uncle Herb” was born in 1896, the younger of twin boys (the other being christened William). There were two older sisters, Florrie and Hilda, and one younger – Laura. After giving birth, their mother was soon returned to work in the family shop which was the local ironmongers. The family story is that both boys were placed inside an open drawer whilst mother continued to serve the customers.

On leaving school Herb started to work with the pit ponies at Victoria Colliery. Bill, his brother, started work with his father as a blacksmith at the Red Cross Smithy. Some-time later Herb left the colliery, joining the rest of the family at the smithy, where all three worked together.



Red Cross Smithy c. 1916

In 1916 both of the twins wanted to join up, as had so many of their friends before them. Being a blacksmith meant that you were in a reserved occupation and had to attend a tribunal, not to be excused but to be allowed to volunteer. At a family meeting it was decided that the younger of the twins would have his way and be allowed to join up.

Just in case minds were changed, Herb awoke early next morning - walking to Burslem at five o'clock to be at the front of the queue for his shilling.

John Herbert Taylor



Herb became shoeing-smith J.H. Taylor 681009 of the 277th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, attached as a territorial to the 55th West Lancashire Division. In 1917, after serving in the Ypres area the Brigade were stationed in the Loos area. On November 11th orders came that they were to move southwards forty miles to support the upcoming attack on Cambrai. They were to march over the space of four nights to the village of Bussu, close to Peronne.

The following week the wagon lines were moved up to the hamlet of Beauchamp, about five miles south-west of Cambrai. They were to support the 1/5th South Lancashire Regiment.

At 7 a.m. on November 30th the Germans started their counter-attack with a fierce artillery bombardment, targeting not only the surrounding roads but the wagon lines at Beauchamp as well. Eight ORs (other ranks) were wounded and twelve horses killed. Later in the day, in order to protect the village of Gouzeaucourt, the Brigade was withdrawn to the village of Fins.

Herb was wounded that morning, probably by shellfire, and taken back to one of the casualty clearing stations near to the village of Ytres (21st or 48th CCS). Later that evening he died. He is buried in Manancourt cemetery close to the Rocquigny – Equancourt road. By a strange coincidence the soldier in the adjoining grave carries the same name as his twin brother- W. Taylor.

Right: Original cross marking the grave of John Herbert Taylor.



His parents, Herbert and Elizabeth, received two telegrams in the weeks that followed. The first was to say that he had been wounded and the dreaded one, informing of his death, a few days later. His mother, a staunch 'Station Road Methodist', never went to Chapel again.

The Chronicle reported on his death:

'Mr. and Mrs. Taylor, High -street, Biddulph, have received official news this week of the death from wounds of their twin son, Sergt. John Herbert Taylor, shoeing smith, R.F.A. A few days ago Mr. and Mrs. Taylor received a telegram, informing them that their son was wounded on November 30th, on which day Sergt. Taylor had written home to say he was quite well, but very busy and might not be able to write again for a few days, as they were moving. Sergt. Taylor, previous to being called to the colours, was a smith employed by his father, along with his twin brother, at the Red Cross Smithy, Knypersley. At a meeting of the Tribunal early in 1916 it was decided that one of Mr. Taylor's sons should answer the call, and as Sergt. Taylor had not worked at the Smithy as long as his brother had, he volunteered, and had been on active service since February. He was 23 years of age.'

Right: John Herbert Taylor



Three weeks later his sister Hilda gave birth to a girl. I am sure that had she had a boy then he would have been called John Herbert. As it was, the baby was christened 'Flora', the name of Herb's fiancée. For the next twenty years Flora visited the family regularly.

Over the years his death must have affected his twin brother. As children we were frequently told not to upset Uncle Bill as he was a *'funny-so and-so'*! With age it is easy to understand why this should be so: there but for the grace of God go I.



Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

Evan Sherratt

John Fleming
Killed 1917

The above name and date appears on the Brindley Ford memorial and appears to have been added at a later date above the original engraved WW1 names.

The British Legion, (in their folder on WW1 soldiers from Brindley Ford - which is deposited at the Methodist Chapel) suggests that this soldier was known as Gunner Jack Fleming, Royal Artillery who was killed in action on the Somme. His home address was Victoria Row and he had attended Brindley Ford day School and the Brindley Ford Methodist Church.

The following citation has been found:

FLEMMING,	Gunner 19892 16/10/1917	Royal Field Artillery	United Kingdom	II. VRAUCOURT COPSE A. CEMETERY, VAULX- 10. VRAUCOURT
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This, however, is no means certain, as a James Fleming was killed on 16th October 1917 and it would appear that the above citation refers to him. James Fleming was of Banteer, Cork and had no connections to North Staffordshire that we can discover.

The census of 1911 only shows one John Fleming living in the area - at 143 Brown Lees Road. However, this John was only 10 years old in 1911, maybe rising 11, but this would have made him only 16 or 17 in 1917 and born in about 1900. No birth is registered 1889-1901 on Staffordshire or Cheshire BMD for John Fleming/Fleming. In 1901 there were two John Flemmings in Tunstall, (one of whom was killed in action), both born in Tunstall and seemingly to have had no connection with Brindley Ford.

John Fleming	Tunstall, Staffs	14 Jan 1918	Bufs (East Kent Regiment)	Western European Theatre
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This John Fleming was Lance Corporal G/20207. He is remembered on the Tunstall War Memorial and in Abbeville Communal Cemetery.

There was a birth for a John Flemming registered in Leek in 1894 (LE/49/029) but this John's war records are available and it appears he survived the conflict.

Therefore, possibly, 'our' John was the son of Charles Flemming and his first wife Mary, nee Edwards. They had married in St. James', Newchapel in 1888. Records indicate that Mary died in 1901, a date which seems to coincide with the birth of John so she could have died in childbirth. In 1901 the Flemming family were living at 'The Huts', Dirty Lane, Brown Lees. This included Charles' father Ralph, a widower, his brother Ralph, sister Hannah (baptised St. Lawrence 4th March 1896) as well as his wife Mary and children Charles Edward, Fanny, Ralph and John (another daughter Jane had died before her second birthday in 1899). There was a Charles Edward baptised in St. Lawrence on 23rd July 1893 as son of Giles and Mary Fleming. (*Ought this 'Giles' to have been recorded as 'Charles' in the parish register as nothing at all has been found for a Giles?*) In 1911 father Ralph was living at 124 Brown Lees Road and grandson Ralph was with him. In 1903, Charles married his second wife Hannah Barlow, nee Wright, at St. Thomas', Mow Cop.

Without any evidence it would appear that John enlisted when under age. The surname seems to undergo various spellings: Fleming(s), Flemming(s). No war records have been located for John. He is remembered on the Brindley Ford Memorial and, if he was Private 19892 Royal Field Artillery, in Vraicourt Copse Cemetery, Vaulx-Vraicourt, Pas de Calais, France. If not, then I can find no other memorial.

Elaine Bryan