

## New Mill Baptist Chapel Stories

**Albert John Tyler** was a private in the 10<sup>th</sup> Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. He was born in Tring and was the son of Thomas and Clara Jane Tyler of 51 Wingrave Road, New Mill. Before the war Albert was employed by Messrs Glover & Sons, grocers.

Albert enlisted in Watford in November 1916 in the Surrey Regiment but was later transferred to the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry in December 1917. In August 1914 the DCLI consisted of five battalions, 1st and 2nd (Regular), 3rd (Special Reserve) and 4th and 5th (Territorial). Apart from the 2/4th, which spent the war in India, all the newly raised service battalions served in France and Belgium. Two of them, the 1/5th and the 10th, became divisional pioneer battalions.

The German Spring Offensive – designed to separate the French and British Armies and push the British into the sea – commenced on the 21st March 1918. Much of the ground fought over was the wilderness left by the Battle of the Somme in 1916. Although the offensive was at first spectacularly successful, with the Germans penetrating in places up to 40 miles into Allied territory, it eventually ran out of steam and was reversed. Although in retreat, the Battalion on the day of Albert's death were involved in heavy rearguard fighting. This will have been especially difficult for the 10th Albert was killed in action on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1918.

He has no known grave, but is commemorated on the Arras Memorial, France Battalion as they were Pioneers, not trained as Infantry men. His Sergeant, writing on behalf of himself, the N.C.O's and men, said 'I have to break to you, the sad news, that your son was killed in action, while in this big retirement. I did my best for him and stopped with him until his life went. He was by my side, when he got hit by a bullet in his back. I am sorry to have to lose such a good fellow, for he was always willing to do anything in his platoon. He fought well to the last, for his King and Country, and we all wish to express our deepest sympathy with you in the loss of your son.'

**Arthur Henry Rance** was a corporal in the 62<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Corps (formerly London Regiment). He was born in Tring in 1885 and was the son of Henry and Mary Rance (Kent). Before the war he was working as a draper's assistant at Mr E K Fulks draper and outfitter for eight years and he married Alice Bovington of Glenside, Bulbourne, Tring on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1911 at New Mill Baptist Church. He enlisted in the London Regiment in August 1916 but was transferred to the 62<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Corps formed in Grantham. The corps moved to France in March 1917 where it joined the 62 Infantry Brigade of the 21st Division on the 4th March 1916. On the reorganisation of machine gun companies into battalions, on the 24th February 1918 the 21st Machine Gun Battalion was formed from the Machine Gun Companies of the 21st Division. Arthur was killed by a shell on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1918, but if this was so the circumstances appear not to have been known. The Battalion *War Diary* for the 9th June (and preceding days) suggests that the Battalion was undergoing training – indeed the whole of June appears to have been devoid of fighting, which is in sharp contrast to the end of May when the Battalion appears to have been in the thick of action stemming the German Spring Offensive. He is buried in Bienvillers Military Cemetery, France.

**Arthur Wells** was 1<sup>st</sup> Stoker Royal Navy aboard HMS Aboukir. He was born in Tring, Hertfordshire on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1886. He was the son of William and Eliza Wells. His father was born in Scrubwood, Buckinghamshire and his mother was born in Buckland Common.

On 9<sup>th</sup> January 1906 Arthur enlisted in the Royal Navy, stating that he was a labourer at the time. He served on several ships over the coming years including Acheron, Pembroke, Blake, Thetis and Pembroke II. In 1911 he transferred to Chatham before joining HMS Aboukir in July 1914. On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1914 Arthur was lost in action in the North Sea presumed drowned when HMS Aboukir

was sunk by a German submarine. On the morning of 22nd September, *Aboukir* and her sisters, *Cressy* and *Hogue*, were on patrol without any escorting destroyers as they had been forced to seek shelter from bad weather. However, they were soon confronted by German submarine U-9 and *Aboukir* and *Hogue* were sunk.

Arthur had married Rose Annie Gertrude Cross on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1911. She was living at 40 Sheldon Road, Silver Street, Upper Edmonton, London.

**Harry Brackley** was a gunner in the 76<sup>th</sup> Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery. Henry (Harry) was born in Wendover, Buckinghamshire in July 1887. He was the son of James Matthew and Eliza Brackley (Wright). Both his parents were born in Buckinghamshire.

In 1911 Harry was living with his parents, brothers William and Tom and sisters May, Amy and Olive at Marsh Croft, Tring. His father was a farm labourer, and Harry was a grocer's porter.

On 16<sup>th</sup> December 1914 Harry married Annie Eliza Proctor in Berkhamstead. They had a son Thomas Henry born in 1915.

He enlisted in Tring in the 76<sup>th</sup> Royal Garrison Artillery Siege Battery. The 76th Siege Battery, RGA was formed at Harwich in August 1915. Half of its officers and men were drawn from the Essex and Sussex RGA (Territorial) and the other half from individuals serving in the Regular Army, the Special Reserve and the New Army. In December 1915 the battery moved to Lydd for training. On the 15th March 1916 the battery left Lydd to mobilize at Bristol and then moved to Southampton for shipment to France, landing at Le Harve the 29th March. On the 2nd April 1916 the battery moved to Albert where it was assigned to the 25th Heavy Artillery Group (HAG) in the 10th Corps and fought on the Somme from May 1916 to March 1917.

In March 1917 the Battery moved to the Arras sector and took up positions at Maroeuil near the Arras-St. Eloi Road. In this position it came under the command of the 13th HAG under the Canadian Corps. It took part in the battle for Vimy Ridge. On the 17th May it transferred to the 50th HAG and in late May the battery moved to the Ypres Salient where it came under the 70th HAG, and later the 90th HAG. On the 3rd March 1918 the battery was once again on the move, returning to the Somme where it took up positions near Hermies, not far from the main Bapaume-Cambrai Road. On the 22nd March 1918 the battery took part in the retreat caused by the German March Offensive. Harry died of wounds on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1918 and is buried in St Hilaire Cemetery, Frevent, France. His brother Tom also fell.

**James Harrowell** was a Lance Corporal in the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps. He was born in Tring and was the son of Eli and Elizabeth Harrowell. He married Caroline Johnson of 40 Wingrave Road, New Mill, Tring. James had served in the army, only retiring from the force months before the outbreak of World War One to set up a building business with his brother in Chesham. He was formerly a foreman bricklayer in the employ of Mr. Jesse Mead, of Chesham, and was an active member of the Chesham Trade and Labour Council.

He enlisted in the 9<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps in Watford in May 1916. The battalion were formed in Winchester in August 1914 under the 42<sup>nd</sup> Brigade 14<sup>th</sup> Light Division. On the 20th May 1915 the battalion landed at Boulogne. It then took part in various actions on the Western Front including, during 1915, The Action of Hooge and The Second Attack on Bellewaarde; during 1916, The Battle of Delville Wood and The Battle of Flers-Courcelette; during 1917, The German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, The First and Third Battles of the Scarpe, The Battle of

Langemark and The First and Second Battles of Passchendaele; and, in 1918, The Battle of St Quentin and The Battle of the Avre.

In October 1917 during the Battle of Passchendaele James was killed in action on 22<sup>nd</sup> October and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Belgium

His brother Charles of the Bedford Regiment was killed at Hill 60 in April 1916.

**Thomas Walter Roberts** was a private in the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion East Surrey Regiment. Thomas was born in Tring in 1897. He was the son of Walter and Mary Ann Roberts (Hosegood). His parents were both born in Tring.

In 1911 Thomas was living with his parents, brothers John and Newton and sister Dorothy at The Gas Works, Brook Street, Tring. His father was the manager of the gas works.

Records show that Thomas was enlisted in the East Surrey Regiment in 1914, but his obituary notice in his parish magazine show he was with the Manchester Regiment at the time of his death. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the Manchester Regiment had nine battalions committed. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July the 30<sup>th</sup> Division attacked the French village of Guillemont with one battalion from Trones Wood and one from Longueval Alley to the north. The bombardment of the village and the trenches in front of it appeared to have been highly destructive, as was a standing barrage by heavy artillery, but it did not cut all the barbed wire.

Thomas was lost on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1916 and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial. *The Bucks Herald* featured the following story on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1917:

“A missing soldier – For some months past considerable doubt has been felt as to the fate of Pte. Thomas Walter Roberts, son of Mr. W. Roberts, the esteemed manager of the Tring Gas Light & Coke Company, Limited. The young fellow, who was then only 17 years of age, joined the East Surrey Regiment at an early stage in the war, and in June last year was sent to France, being attached to the Manchester Regiment, with which unit he went into action on July 23, 1916. He failed to answer the rollcall after the engagement and was presumed to be ‘missing’ or a prisoner. Enquiries have since been made, but no trace can be found of him, and his parents have been notified by the Army Council that they have been regretfully constrained to conclude that he is dead, and that his death took place on July 23, 1916. Much sympathy has been felt with his parents in the long strain of uncertainty which has hung over his fate for so many months, and that this has been further extended now that the news of a more definite, though regrettable, character has been received.”

The attack on Guillemont was a disaster. The battalion suffered 571 casualties, over two thirds of their strengths, of whom no fewer than 496 men were recorded missing.

**Thomas Brackley** was a private in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards. Tom was born in Tring, Hertfordshire in 1895. He was the son of James Matthew and Eliza Brackley (Wright). Both his parents were born in Buckinghamshire.

In 1911 Tom was living with his parents, brothers William and Harry and sisters May, Amy and Olive at Marsh Croft, Tring. His father was a farm labourer, and Tom was a gardener.

He enlisted in September 1914, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards and served with them on the Western Front. On 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1915 the Battalion relieved the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in the trenches, and came in for a good deal of shelling, during which it had twenty-six casualties. On the 6<sup>th</sup> it was relieved by the 6<sup>th</sup> Buffs, and went into billets at Vermelles, where it lived in cellars.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> October the battalion received orders to direct a bombing attack against the German line towards Slag Alley. The attack was to be undertaken by No. 3 Company under Lieutenant O. Wakeman, and the men went out over the top with the expert bombers leading, but on arrival they found two German machine-guns enfilading the front of the German block. Tom went missing that day and is remembered on the Loos Memorial.

**William Edwin Oakley** was a private in the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment. He was born in King's Norton, Worcestershire in 1895 and was baptised on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1895 at All Saints Church, King's Heath, Worcestershire. He was the son of Edwin and Ruth Oakley (Stratford). His father was a painter, born in Warwick and his mother was born in Hertfordshire.

In 1911, aged sixteen, William was working as a house boy at the Royal Hotel, Tring Station. He was living at the hotel, owned by George and Jane Buckle.

William enlisted in Brighton in the Royal Sussex Regiment on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1915. He was living at 3 Newtown, New Mill, Tring and was working as a waiter. He was sent to France with the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1915.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1916 the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion were in trenches West of Pozieres. An attack was ordered on a German strongpoint to begin at 21.30 hrs. In conjunction with units of the Middlesex Regiment a strong bombing party were to capture and consolidate 50 yards of enemy trench. This appears to have required two separate attempts to achieve and for some time the attacking units were held up by machine gun fire along a straight section of enemy trench. William was reported was killed in action on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1916.



**James Harrowell**



**Harry Brackley**



**Tom Brackley**