

Hellingly Hospital Stories



Albert John Woodhams was a private in the 2nd Battalion Suffolk Regiment. He was born in Hellingly in 1895. He was the son of Albert Edward and Anne Woodhams (Rogers). Both his parents were born in Sussex. His father in Hellingly and his mother in Buxted.

In 1911 Albert was living with his parents, brother Thomas and sisters Edith and Florence at Rosemount, Harebeating, Hailsham. His father was a farmer's son working at the farm. At 13, Albert was a milkman on the farm.



In World War One Albert enlisted in the 2nd Battalion Suffolk Regiment. This is an account of the action which took place on 26th September 1918. 'After dark on the 26th September the battalion moved to assembly positions west of the canal (Du Nord), arriving shortly before midnight. The bed of the canal was dry, with steep bricked sides, which could only be negotiated with the help of ladders, and during the night it was decided that this obstacle should be crossed before zero hour. Accordingly, the battalion began moving off just before 4a.m. Two companies got over comfortably, but as the third, under Capt. Lummiss, was about to cross, the barrage began to drop, machine-gun fire being followed by shellfire. Albert was possibly wounded during this action and died the following day.'

Ebenezer Nicholls was a private in the 3rd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment. He was born in Warbleton, East Sussex in 1886. He was the son of James and Ellen Nicholls (Beeney). His father was a general labourer.

In 1911 Ebenezer was working at the Horsebridge Flour Mill as a cow man. Before the war began, he was working in the Hellingly Hospital grounds.

On 24th December 1914 he married Mary Margaret Cornford from Hailsham, Sussex in Eastbourne. A few months later they had a son Sydney. Having previously been in the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment Ebenezer was transferred to the 3rd Battalion. While stationed in Dover he and another man were charged with desertion, leaving the camp to return home after being refused leave. Ebenezer felt that he was entitled to leave as his wife was unwell and their son was only a few weeks old. He had been on the Western Front and was wounded in the head, arm and foot at the Marne. Both men were remanded in custody and escorted back to Dover.

On 17th August 1916, the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment was a home-service and training unit based in Brighton or Newhaven, England, rather than an active fighting unit on the front lines. However individual officers and men originally trained by or listed on the rolls of the 3rd Battalion were often attached to active battalions on the Western Front (which, in mid-August 1916, was heavily engaged in the ongoing Battle of the Somme). Ebenezer was one of these and was killed in action on the Somme on 17th August 1916 and is buried in Combles Communal Extension Cemetery.

Edward John Highsted was a Corporal in the 7th Battalion Royal West Surrey Regiment. He was born in Stockbury, Kent in 1886. He was the son of Edward and Elizabeth Highsted (Beaumont). Both his parents were born in Hollingbourne, Kent. His mother died in 1896.

In 1901 Edward was living with his father, his sisters Lilian and Olive at Gorton Green, Stockbury. His father was waggoner on a farm and Edward at fourteen was working as a waggoner's mate.

In 1911 Edward was working as an asylum attendant at the East Sussex County Asylum.

Edward initially enlisted as a private in the East Kent Regiment (L/7935) before transferring to the Royal West Surrey Regiment.

On 18th November 1916, the 7th Battalion, Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment) marked the final day of the Battle of the Somme, during which some of its members were killed in action and later laid to rest at Stump Road Cemetery in Grandcourt, France. Edward was killed in action on 18th November 1916 and is buried in Stump Road Cemetery.

Ernest William Maryan was a private in the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment. He was born in Hailsham, Sussex in 1883 and was baptised on 1st April 1883 in Hailsham. He was the son of Thomas Samson and Ellen Elizabeth Maryan (Honeysett). His father was a twine maker, and both his parents were born in Hailsham.

In 1911 Ernest was living with his parents and brothers Albert and Redvers at 23 Garfield Road, Hailsham. His nephew Charlie also lived with them. His father was a twine maker, and Ernest was already in the army. He had enlisted in Eastbourne in the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment.

In late October, early November 1914 the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment were fighting on the Western Front around Ypres, Belgium, during the intense early phases of trench warfare.

Ernest was initially reported missing ten assumed killed in action on 1st November 1914 and is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres.

Ernest Victor Message was a guardsman in the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards. He was born in Polegate, Sussex in 1885. He was the son of Stephen and Harriett Message. His father and mother were born in Ashburnham, Sussex. His father was a brickyard foreman.

In 1911 Ernest was living at East Sussex County Asylum, Hellingly Hospital. He was working as an asylum attendant. He had previously been a machine hand.

He married Alice Louisa Whybrow on 17th July 1912 at Hailsham, Sussex and they had two sons Leslie and Thomas. The couple lived at 22 Junction Street, Polegate. Sadly, Alice died on 22nd November 1914 one week after Thomas was born.

Ernest enlisted in the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards at the outbreak of the war. The 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards was recovering and holding trenches in the Fleurbaix sector in France around 17th

March 1915, having just finished heavy fighting at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle a few days prior. Ernest died of wounds on 17th March 1915 Boulogne Eastern Cemetery, Pas de Calais.

Frederick Walter Coleman was a gunner in the 175th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery. He was born in Hellingly, Hailsham, Sussex in 1888. He was the son of Edwin and Mary Ann Coleman (Burchett). His father was born in Arlington, Sussex and his mother was born in Herstmonceux, Sussex.

In 1911 Frederick was living with his parents at 24 Hawks Town, Hailsham. His father was a poultry man, and Frederick was a scaffolder's labourer. His father died in 1912.

He enlisted in the Royal Garrison on 26th November 1915. He was a farm labourer at the time. He arrived in France on 5th October 1916.

Frederick died from accidental multiple burns on 7th January 1918 and is buried in Mendinghem Military Cemetery, Belgium. The accident occurred when Frederick was manning a forward telephone exchange in a wood lined pill box when a fire broke out and could not be extinguished. Frederick and another man were taken to Pheasant Farm dressing station.

Henry George Bridger – currently no information.

Louis Howard Boniface was a private in the 3rd Division 2nd Battalion Suffolk Regiment. He was born in Hailsham in 1883 and baptised on 29th April 1894 in the parish of Hailsham. He was the son of Samuel and Mary Jane Boniface (Saunders). His father was a warehouseman born in Hailsham, and his mother was born in Herstmonceux.

In 1891 Louis was living with his parents, brothers Thomas, Albert and Martin and sister Ada at 195 Stony Lane, Hailsham. His father was a hemp spinner.

In 1901 Louis was living with his parents and brothers Thomas, Albert and Martin at 11 South Road, Hailsham. His father was a rope spinner. Louis was working as a bricklayer's labourer.

In 1911 Louis was living at 20 Hawks Town, Hailsham. This house was owned by Agnes Sherlock and Louis is shown on the census as a lodger and is working as a general porter at the East Sussex County Asylum. Agnes is a widow. On 29th August 1911 Louis married Agnes Sherlock.

Robert Hugh Roberts was a Sergeant in the 11th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment.



He was born in Bettws Garmon, Caernarfonshire, Wales in 1881. He was the son of Robert and Elizabeth Roberts (Parry). His father was a farmer.

In 1890 Robert was employed as a gamekeeper at Carnarvon Castle, Wales. In 1900 his mother died.

Robert worked as an asylum attendant at Hellingly Hospital. He married Beatrice Hoad a cook at the asylum in 1911. They had three daughters Margaret Ellen, Elizabeth Jane and Kathleen Doris.

On 11th July 1911 Robert married Jane Beatrice Hedges at Hailsham Registry Office. Their daughter Margaret Ellen was born on 16th October that year. They had another daughter Jean on 19th November 1912.

He enlisted in Eastbourne in 1914 in the 11th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment gaining promotion to corporal then to sergeant. The battalion landed at Le Havre, France, in March 1916 as part of the 116th Brigade in the 39th Division.

In April 1916, the men were gaining their first practical experience of trench warfare in relatively quiet areas near places like Fleurbaix and Givenchy before moving toward heavier engagements.

On 22nd April 1916, the 11th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment (the 1st South Down Battalion, also known as "Lowther's Lambs") was stationed in northern France occupying quiet frontline sectors after having arrived in the country the previous month. Robert died on 22nd April 1916 and is buried in the Guards Cemetery, Windy Corner, Cuinchy.