
LAXTON IN WARTIME

A Snapshot in Time:
Laxton in Peace and War, 1900–1920




LAXTON
HISTORY GROUP

ROGER COTTEE

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PREFACE

This booklet has been written to gather together what we know, or have been able to find out, about the First World War and how Laxton and its inhabitants were affected by it.

Finding out about “Laxton at War” has had its difficulties, mainly because there are few people left anywhere who were alive at the time and who experienced life in wartime and none who lived in or had connections with Laxton. When we have talked to Laxton people about their parents’, grandparents’ or relatives’ experiences which they might have been told about as children, we quickly learnt that those who experienced the war were reluctant to speak about it. We are very grateful to those who have been kind enough to share their family stories and memorabilia with us.

The archives of the local press have yielded some information although, again, references to Laxton were few and far between.

Visits to the National Archives at Kew yielded information of a general nature, at national level, about things like recruitment, food production and agricultural labour which must have affected Laxton as it did everywhere else.

We also wanted to find out about those who are commemorated on the war memorial in the church. To discover where they fought and, in some cases died, for their country. Although such records as still exist are available on the internet it has proved to be a more difficult task than we thought mainly because 60% of service records were destroyed by an incendiary bomb in 1940 and much of what remains has suffered badly from fire and water damage.

Finding out about those who died was much easier because the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has comprehensive records of where and when they were buried or commemorated on a memorial.

What we have managed to find out is included in this booklet and, whilst it is not a complete picture of Laxton and the lives of its inhabitants in wartime, we hope it will provide an insight into what life might have been like at the time.

THE CONFLICT
RAPIDLY BECAME
A TRULY WORLD
WAR. THERE WAS
FIGHTING IN THE
BALKANS, FRANCE,
BELGIUM, AFRICA,
ASIA AND THE
PACIFIC REGION AS
WELL AS THE NAVAL
WAR INVOLVING
BOTH SURFACE AND
SUBMARINE VESSELS.



HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Although it is said that the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the nephew of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary and heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was the “cause” of the First World War it was, in reality, the “trigger” which set off a chain of events culminating in the world war.

Austria-Hungary was a union of the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary and was ruled over by the House of Hapsburg. It was the second largest country in Europe and had the third largest population.

Austria-Hungary had for some time been at odds with its near neighbour Serbia and, albeit nearly a month after the assassination, it delivered an ultimatum to the Serbian government on 23rd July implying that they were involved in planning the assassination and supplying arms and explosives to its perpetrators and requiring a response by 25th July, just two days later.

In response to the ultimatum the Serbian government did not accept responsibility for the plot but did agree to most of the terms of the ultimatum.

Austria-Hungary was dissatisfied with the response and declared war on Serbia on 28th July 1914. Russia had a treaty with Serbia so mobilised her forces in her defence. Germany who was allied to Austria-Hungary saw the Russian mobilisation as an act of war and declared war on Russia on 1st August.

France, who had a treaty with Russia, became embroiled in the war with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Germany invaded Belgium, despite her neutrality, in order to march on Paris by the shortest route, on 4th August.

Later that same day Britain, who had a treaty with Belgium which obliged her to defend Belgium in the event of an attack, responded to an appeal by the Belgian King and entered the war to defend Belgium.

With Britain's entry into the war the Commonwealth countries of Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa offered military and financial assistance.

Japan who had a military agreement with Britain declared war on Germany on 23rd August.

Italy avoided joining in despite being allied to both Germany and Austria-Hungary because her obligation was only in the event of a defensive war and in this case they were regarded as attackers. Italy later joined the war against Germany and Austria-Hungary in May 1915.

The United States joined in on 6th April 1917 because submarine war was seriously affecting her merchant shipping.

The conflict rapidly became a truly world war. There was fighting in the Balkans, France, Belgium, Africa, Asia and the Pacific Region as well as the naval war involving both surface and submarine vessels.

The men from Laxton fought in France and Flanders, Gallipoli, Egypt and Mesopotamia.

THE WESTERN FRONT

On the “Western Front” the German invasion of Belgium, which was meant to enable their forces to surround the French Army, was halted jointly by the French army and the British Expeditionary Force on the eastern side of Paris.

Subsequently both sides attempted to out-maneuvre each other resulting in a stalemate which consisted of French and British forces facing a line of trenches from the German border with France to the Belgian coast.

The German trenches were stronger than the Anglo French ones because they were designed to fulfil a defensive function whereas the Anglo French forces saw their trenches as temporary because the intention was to break through the enemy defences. The stalemate proved very difficult to break and, despite attacks and counter attacks, the battle lines changed very little during the ensuing three years.

By 1917 the British naval blockade was having a significant effect on Germany so the German High Command declared unrestricted submarine warfare to try to starve us out of the war. They knew that would inevitably bring the USA into the war but they thought they could achieve success before this happened. This proved not to be the case and the USA declared war with Germany on 6th April 1917.

In the spring of 1918 the German army mounted a concerted offensive which was initially successful and resulted in a significant advance, taking their forces to within 75 miles of Paris. As a result the German supply lines became stretched. Without tanks and with artillery that could not easily be moved they could not make the most of their gains. By the end of July the Germans had been pushed back

eastwards to their starting point. At the same time German industrial output was in decline and this, coupled with the anti war marches in Germany which were occurring more often, was having an adverse effect on the army's morale.

Allied forces continued to advance throughout August and September resulting in the signing of the armistice at 11am on 11th November 1918 in a railway carriage in the forest of Compiègne.

LAXTON'S FIRST WORLD WAR MEMORIAL

The war memorial cross in the churchyard was installed by Sharp & Hoggard, monumental masons of New Street, Retford. A letter to Mr Willis dated May 21st 1919 reads:

"Dear Sir,

We understand the names for the War Memorial as below.

*Yours faithfully,
Sharpe & Hoggard".*

The letter then confirms the inscription and the names to be included as:

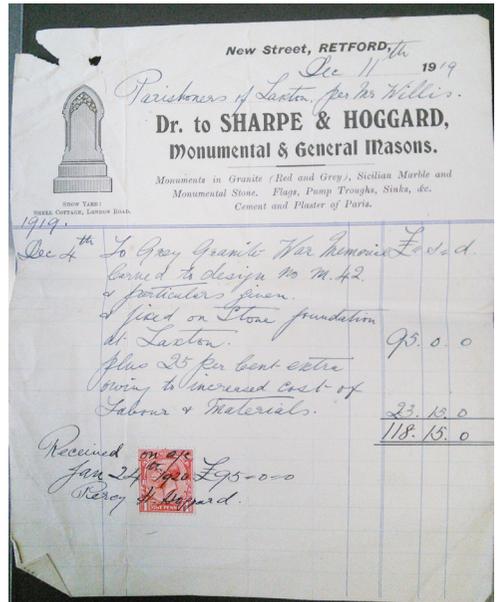
To the Glory of God and in grateful memory of those from this parish who fell in the Great War 1914 – 1918.

Lieut Gerard C Tunbridge, Corpl Charles Whitworth, Corpl Oscar P Willis, Lance Corpl Thomas Dolby, Pte G Reginald Brooks,

Pte Alfred H Chell,
 Pte T Willie Laughton,
 Pte Edward Maddison,
 Pte George W Saxelby.

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

A receipted invoice from Sharpe & Hoggard dated 11th December 1919, to Mr Willis on behalf of the parishioners of Laxton, acknowledges a payment on account of £95 made on 24th December 1919. The actual invoice dated December 4th 1919 reads:



Pictured

*Receipt for the
 war memorial*

"Dec 4th To Grey Granite War Memorial carved to design no m.42. & particulars given & fixed on stone foundation at Laxton. £95 0s. 0d. Plus 25 per cent extra owing to increased cost of labour and materials £23 15s. 0d."

bringing the total to £118 15s. 0d.

The plaque on the wall in the south aisle of the nave of St Michael the Archangel Church commemorates the men who fought and those who died in the First World War. They are included on the memorial because they were connected to Laxton in some way or another; some were residents of Laxton, some were relatives of Laxton residents and others were former residents who lived elsewhere.

The plaque inside the church commemorates those who served in the conflict with the dedication:

*TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN GRATEFUL
REMEMBRANCE OF THOSE FROM THIS
PARISH WHO FELL AND THOSE WHO
SERVED IN THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1918.*

The list of men is divided into two parts, firstly those who died are listed under the heading “Roll of Honour” and secondly under the heading “War Service”. The Roll of Honour commemorates the men who are also listed on the memorial in the churchyard as per the letter from Sharpe & Hoggard. Under War Service the following men are commemorated:

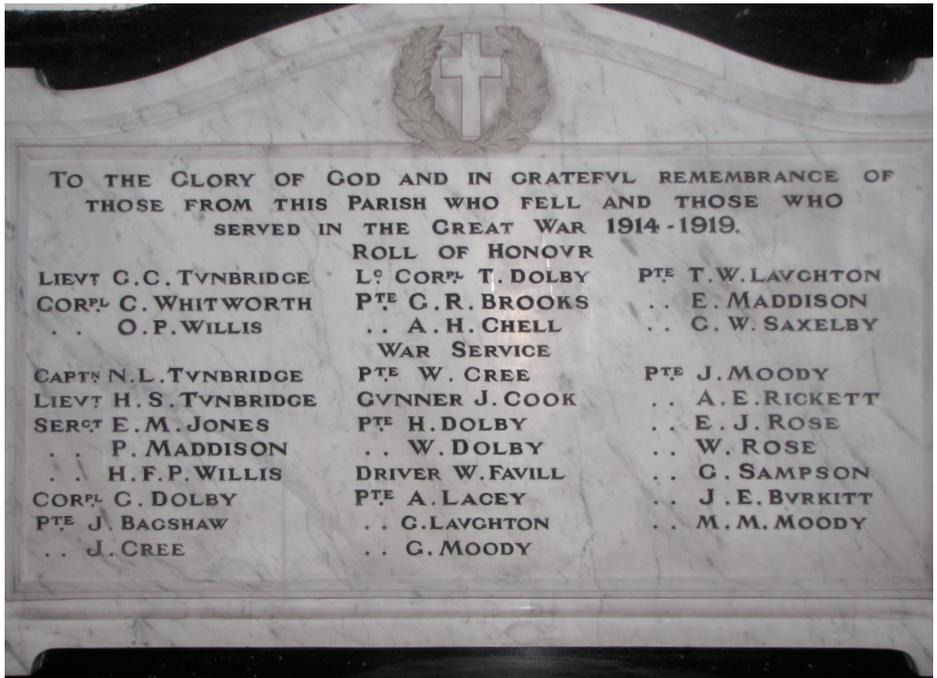
Pictured

*Opposite (Top):
The Memorial Plaque*

*Bottom:
The Memorial Cross*

Captain N. L. Tunbridge	Private W. Dolby
Lieutenant H. S. Tunbridge	Driver W. Favill
Sergeant E. M. Jones	Private A. Lacey
Sergeant P. Maddison	Private G. Laughton
Sergeant H. F. P. Willis	Private G. Moody
Corporal G. Dolby	Private A. E. Rickett
Private J. Bagshaw	Private E. J. Rose
Private J. Cree	Private W. Rose
Private W. Cree	Private G. Sampson
Gunner J. Cook	Private J. E. Burkitt
Private H. Dolby	Private M. M. Moody

The service records of many of these men were destroyed by an incendiary bomb in the Second World War so information about them has depended largely on census returns for 1901 and 1911 and the Inland Revenue survey of 1910.



For those who died, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records have been a great help in enabling us to find out where these men fought and when and where they died.

Because of this the booklet will focus on those for whom records still exist or whose relatives have been able to provide us with relevant information.



...NERLEY
BRIGGS C.
BRINDLEY
BRISTOW F.
BROOKS G. R.
BROWN W.
BROWN F. A.
BROWN J. W.
BROWNE R. H.
BUCKLEY W.
...LL

Pictured

*The G.R. Brooks
memorial*

MEMORIAL

PRIVATE GEORGE REGINALD BROOKS

George was born in 1896 and lived his early life in Derby. He was the son of George Brooks senior and his wife Harriett. His father worked as a locomotive engine driver before his death in 1904 at the age of 35. In 1905 Harriett married John Dewick, a Laxton farmer, whose wife Sarah had died in 1902 and in 1911 George, age 15, was living with his mother and step father and was described as a farm worker.

He joined up with the 2nd/8th battalion Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire regiment of the Sherwood Foresters. He died in action on 26th September 1917 and his name is inscribed on a tablet in the Tyne Cot memorial at Ypres.

The absence of a grave is explained by the following inscription on the memorial:

*"HERE ARE RECORDED NAMES OF BRITISH
OFFICERS AND MEN WHO FELL IN YPRES
SALIENT BUT TO WHOM THE FORTUNE OF WAR
DENIED THE KNOWN AND HONOURED BURIAL
GIVEN TO THEIR COMRADES IN DEATH"*

His date of death and the above inscription indicates that he was in the third battle of Ypres also known as Passchendaele which took place between July and November 1917 to gain control of the ridges to the South and East of Ypres.

Passchendaele was on the last ridge to the East of Ypres and overlooked a railway junction which was a vital part of the supply line of the German army. The battle ended in November when the Canadians captured Passchendaele.

His death was announced in the Newark Advertiser on 5th December 1917 as follows:

“LAXTON – With regret is received the news from the War Office that George Reginald Brooks, 2/8th Sherwoods, only son of Mrs. J. Dewick, of Laxton was killed in action on 26th Sept. last.

Pte Brooks was an old scholar of Laxton Parish School and was also a member of the church choir. He was formerly in the employment of Mr. Sydney Johnson, and enlisted in February 1915.

Before going to France he was with the Sherwoods in Ireland during the Rebellion 1916. The deceased soldier was 26 years of age. Much sympathy is felt in the village for the great loss Mrs Dewick has sustained.”

(Sydney Johnson was at Holme View Farm in the 1911 census. He moved to Knapeney Farm in 1916).

On 11th March 1918 Harriett received George's personal effects which amounted to £6 9s 7d and, on 6th November 1919 she received a further £7 as a war gratuity.

PRIVATE ALFRED HENRY CHELL

Alfred Chell was born in Kneesall in 1887. He was the son of George Russell Chell who was the vicar of Kneesall. In the 1901 census Alfred was at school at Pocklington Grammar School in Pocklington, Yorkshire.

By August 1911 he had taken Brockilow Farm in Laxton. Although the 1911 census return shows him not at home, he was in fact visiting his family in Kneesall on the day of the census. At Brockilow with Alfred were John and Violet Wilson, farm labourer and housekeeper respectively and their two children Annie and Bernard.

He joined the 1/13th (Kensington) Battalion, The London Regiment which was a Territorial unit serving with 4th London Brigade. When war broke out in August 1914 they were at once mobilised and landed at Le Havre on the 4th of November.

They were in action at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle and The Battle of Aubers. In 1916 they were in action on The Somme taking part in the diversionary attack at Gommecourt on the 1st of July.

Also The Battle of Ginchy, The Battle of Flers-Courcelette, The Battle of Morval in which the Division captured Combles and The Battle of the Transloy Ridges.

The Battle of Transloy Ridges was the last offensive of the Fourth Army of the British Expeditionary Force in the Battle of the Somme. It took place between 1st and 18th October 1916 and, since Alfred was killed on 10th October 1916, we can assume that he died in the course of this battle.

He is remembered with honour on face C of pier 9 of the magnificent Thiepval Memorial.



Pictured

Top:
A.H. Chell memorial

Above:
*Inscription at the
entrance to the
Thiepval Memorial*

His entry in the National Probate Calendar for 1917 reads:

*CHELL Alfred Henry of 136 The Grove Ealing
Middlesex private 1/13th London Regiment died
10 October 1916 in France on active service
Administration London 14 May to the reverend
George Russell Chell clerk. Effects £1460 5s.*

The Army Register of Soldiers Effects shows that his father Reverend George R Chell received £3 18s. 3d. on 1st February 1917 and a further £3 war gratuity on 22nd October 1919.

LANCE CORPORAL THOMAS COBB DOLBY

Thomas Cobb Dolby was born in Laxton in 1889. In 1901 he was living at Breck Wong Farm where his father Henry aged 41 was a woodsman.

His mother was Sarah who was born in Wellow whilst his sister Mary and his three younger brothers George, Henry and William were all born in Laxton as was their father.

In 1911 Thomas was working at Norwell Woodhouse Common as a garthman (a yardman or herdsman) on a farm run by Herbert Richardson.

His fellow workers on the farm were 16 year old George Favill the son of a woodman living at Saywood Cottages, a horseman Samuel Whitworth age 22 from what is now Bottom Farm in Laxton and Eliseman Hunt a 29 year old housekeeper.

Thomas joined the 7th Battalion the North Staffordshire Regiment which in February 1916 was sent to Mesopotamia where, in 1917 it fought in several actions including the Battle of Kut al Amara, the capture of the Hai Salient, the capture of Dahra Bend, the passage of the Diyala and the capture of Baghdad.

Thomas was killed on 25th January 1917 and, like George Dolby, there is no grave but he is remembered with honour on panel 34 of the Basra Memorial in Iraq.

Pictured

*Location of the
Basra Memorial*



“MANY OF THE
YOUNG MEN WERE
CALLED UP. ARMY
OFFICERS CAME
ROUND AND
COMMANDEERED
THOSE HORSES
SUITABLE FOR
ARMY DUTIES”



THE HOME FRONT

This transcript of a memoir written by Alice Clark who came to live at Town End Farm in 1913 gives a flavour of what life in Laxton was like at the outbreak of the war.

“1914 War came

“Rev. Tunbridge took over as vicar. Many of the young men were called up. Army officers came round and commandeered those horses suitable for army duties (no payment). Each family had to be more self sufficient e.g.. Growing own veg. Fattening and killing own pig for bacon etc, keeping hens catching rabbits (many did a bit of poaching) pigeons were a delicacy, men used to shoot rooks but only the breast could be eaten

“Most folk made own bread & cakes etc wine and beer. Two bakers did come into village Bartons from Weston & Jacksons from Norwell. They had horse driven Bread Vans. Mr Cragg who came for Jacksons always stopped at Dove Cote Inn until it was up to the horse to take him home”.

BELGIAN REFUGEES

During the war the Thoresby Estate and Laxton villagers provided a home and income for a family of Belgian refugees, Herman van Battenburg and his wife and two children, Herman and Harriet.

There had been an influx of 200,000 Belgian refugees to Britain after the invasion of their country by the German army. Local Committees were set up all over Britain to house them and to find them work.

The Headteacher of Laxton School, Frank Willis, served on the Retford Branch Committee and he arranged with the Thoresby Estate to provide a cottage in the village for the family, partly funded by village donations.

Herman van Battenburg took casual labour on the Estate and on local farms and the two children attended Laxton School. This would have been an enormous cultural change for them as Herman had been a lawyer in the busy Belgian town of Ypres, where George Brooks had lost his life in the great battle which took place there.

Belgians all over the country were keen to preserve their own culture and some set up their own schools. Newspaper reports suggested that they were not prepared to mix with their hosts or to adopt the English way of life; in 1915 Mrs. Collinson, the vicar's wife, mentioned in a letter to Mr Argles that the subscriptions from the village were beginning to diminish.

Eventually the van Battenburgs moved to Tuxford, though the children continued to attend Laxton School. The entry in the school admission register records the children's starting date as 14th December 1914 but no date is given for their leaving, only that they "left returned to Belgium".

CERTIFIED OCCUPATIONS

Farming, amongst other occupations which were considered as essential and required special knowledge or skill to carry them out, was a certified occupation. According to the List of Certified Occupations published by His Majesty's Stationery Office on 7th July 1916, the specific farming tasks which were regarded as essential were:

FARMER (INCLUDING MARKET GARDENER AND FRUIT FARMER)

Provided that farming is his sole occupation and his personal labour or superintendence is indispensable for the proper cultivation of his holding; or, if he is partly occupied in another occupation, his personal labour or superintendence is indispensable for the proper cultivation of his holding and such cultivation is expedient in the national interest.

AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY, STEAM PLOUGH AND THRESHING MACHINES;

Attendant, driver, mechanic.

FARM

Bailiff, Foreman, Grieve*, Steward, Beastman, Byreman, Cattleman, Stockman, Yardman, Carter, Horseman, Ploughman, Teamster, Wagoner, Hind** (if foreman or ploughman), Servant (if foreman or ploughman) Scotland. (* a Grieve was an overseer or head farm worker in Scotland. ** a Hind was a farm servant often living in his employer's house)

SHEPHERD

THATCHER

STALLION MAN

A man who looks after and travels a stallion

STUD GROOM (SCOTLAND)

HOP, FRUIT AND MARKET GARDENS

Foreman.

SEED GROWING INDUSTRY

Head of Department, Seed Expert.

There was an age limit for some of these categories below which certification was not available. The limits could be different for single or married men. In the case of farming, there were only age limits for single men and these only applied to farm workers of which the limit for Bailiffs, Foremen, Grieves, and Stewards was 30 and for the rest it was 25. The other limits were 25 for Hop, Fruit and Market Garden Foremen and 30 for the Seed Growing Industry.

There were inevitably disputes over whether individual cases should or should not be certified and these were dealt with by a Local Tribunal and an Appeal Tribunal. A memorandum from the Board of Agriculture to a Parliamentary Secretary states that the maintenance of agricultural production had been declared ‘...part of our State policy:’ and went on to say that:

‘...so far as the relations between ourselves and the superior staff of the War Office, between Lord Selbourne and Lord Kitchener and the Director of General Recruiting, had been concerned, there had been no controversy as to this question, and our only complaint was that Tribunals had constituted themselves juries as to what national

interests required, and the Military Representatives had in some case allowed their zeal for recruiting to obscure regard to agricultural requirements, and that the administration of the Certified Occupations Schedule implied that the necessary men should be left on farms whatever their age..."

Reading between the lines this would appear to imply that these local Tribunals may not always have seen the needs of agriculture as a major priority.

In July 1916 William Moody writes to Mr Spink the Agent for the Thoresby Estate:

Dear Sir,

George Moody left me, and gone for a soldier, he has gone at a very busy time, and it is a very difficult job to find a man, I should be very glad if you could find a man to take his place, one that could plough, and do all sort of farm work, if you could let me have one, I should be very pleased.

*Yours faithfully
W Moody*

FOOD SHORTAGES

As well as ensuring that skilled men remained on farms to help feed the nation, many jobs which had been previously the preserve of men were increasingly being done by women and the employment of women was seen as a making a significant contribution to the attempt to greatly increase the amount of home produced food which had become of paramount importance as supplies of food from abroad dwindled.

One of the main shortages was in wheat for making bread. In 1914 the Grain Supplies Committee was formed to buy wheat as required to guard against the risk of temporary interruption of supplies. In October 1916 the King approved the appointment of a Royal Commission which was to be entrusted with full powers to take such steps as necessary to ensure adequate and regular supplies of wheat and flour for the United Kingdom.

In March 1917 the Royal Commission sent out instructions to their agents in the sale of maize that the needs of flour millers took priority over any other requirements. The same document impressed upon millers that, in the national interest, they could admix up to 15% of permitted substances in their flour.

They were encouraged to use maize for this admixture and those who did would receive special consideration in the distribution of wheat. The millers were required to let the Commission know if they were prepared to grind 5% or 10% maize and whether they could grind whole maize, maize semolina or flaked maize.

Fears about food shortages escalated in 1917 and in January 1918 the Government introduced rationing. Despite the submarine attacks on supply convoys, food shortages were worse in Germany due to the British Navy's blockade of German ports which began in 1914 and continued throughout the war. Post war studies estimated that over 400,000 people died of starvation and disease in Germany because of the blockade.

As the war continued some foods such as fruit, vegetables and meat got harder to obtain. Bread and flour were particularly hard to get. All sorts of creative ways were found to replace food that was unavailable or hard to get.

To help with this, in 1917 the Ministry of Food published “THE WIN THE WAR COOKERY BOOK” the introduction to which reads as follows:

TO THE WOMEN OF BRITAIN

The British fighting-line shifts and extends; and now you are in it. The struggle is not only on land and sea; it is in your larder, your kitchen, and your dining-room. Every meal you serve is now literally a battle. Every well-cooked meal that saves bread and wastes no food is a victory.

*Our soldiers are beating the Germans on land.
Our sailors are beating the Germans on the sea.
You can beat them in the larder and the kitchen.
Victory in the food-fight will turn the scale. You are fighting for the children.*

The living children are calling you to give them food, safety, and freedom.

*The unborn children are calling to you to give them a world free from the poison of Prussianism.
Will you fail the children?*

This is not an ordinary cookery book. It is a war cookery book; and it is a cookery book to win the war on. Its aim is to show you how to avoid waste in buying food, waste in cooking it, and waste in eating it. Above all, its aim is to show you how to save wheat bread and flour.

– Win the war cookery book

The book concludes with:

THE KING'S MESSAGE TO HIS PEOPLE

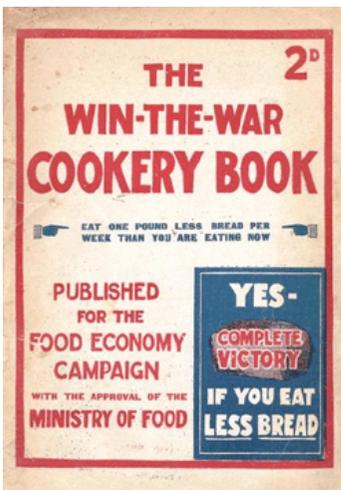
George R.I.

We, being persuaded that the abstention from all unnecessary consumption of grain will furnish the surest and most effectual means of defeating the devices of Our enemies, and thereby of bringing the war to a speedy and successful termination; And out of Our resolve to leave nothing undone which can contribute to these ends or to the welfare of Our people in these times of grave stress and anxiety;

Have thought fit by and with the advice of Our Privy-Council to issue this Our Royal Proclamation, most earnestly exhorting and charging all those of Our loving subjects, the men and women of Our realm who have the means of procuring articles of food other than wheaten

corn, as they tender their own immediate interests and feel for the wants of others, especially to practise the greatest economy and frugality in the use of every species of GRAIN;

And We do for this purpose more particularly exhort and charge all heads of households to reduce the consumption of bread in their respective families by at least one-fourth of the quantity consumed in ordinary times; To abstain from the use of flour in pastry, and moreover carefully



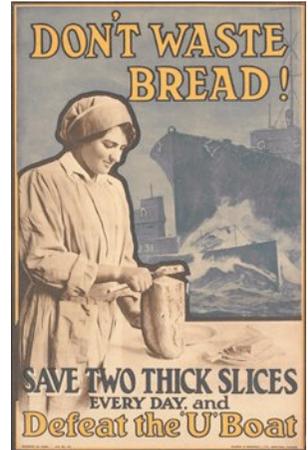
to restrict, or wherever possible to abandon, the use thereof in all other articles than bread;

And we do also in like manner exhort and charge all persons who keep horses to abandon the practice of feeding the same on oats or other grain unless they shall have received from Our Food Controller a license to feed horses on oats or other grain, to be given only in cases where it is necessary to do so with a view to maintain the breed of horses in the national Interest;

And we do hereby further charge and enjoin all ministers of religion in their respective churches and chapels within Our United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland to read or cause to be read this Our Proclamation on the Lord's Day for four successive weeks after the issue thereof.

Given at Our Court at Buckingham Palace, this Second day of May, in the year of our Lord One thousand nine hundred and seventeen, and in the Seventh year of Our Reign.

God Save The King!



INCREASE IN FOOD PRODUCTION

The required increase in production could not be achieved by increasing productivity alone, there was a need to increase the amount of land in agricultural use so farmers and landowners were required to put as much land as they could into productive use. Some common land was ploughed up and even the railways were encouraged to turn the station garden plots over to growing vegetables. A letter to the Chairman of County Agricultural Executive Committees in England and Wales dated 1st May 1917 refers to the fact that:

“The Germans know that their last and only hope of victory is to starve us into submission. If they can succeed in cutting off even half our imported breadstuffs, we should have to accept a disastrous peace. The menace of the submarines increases every month, and no one can foretell its developments in the course of the next few years. It may well be that in subsequent wars it may make the seas impassable, and at any rate, a country which is not self-supporting can never be safe in future. Apart from the immediate peril, therefore, our continued existence depends on a sufficiency of home grown food, and to make us self-supporting is the most urgent measure of national defence to which our energies can be devoted.”

It then goes on to set out the 1918 programme for increasing the amount of arable land available for cultivation. It was decided that the following steps should be taken for the 1918 harvest: 3,000,000 acres of grassland to be broken up, not less than 5,000,000 acres in all to be brought under wheat, 1,000,000

acres to brought under barley and oats and an extra 200,000 acres to be devoted to potatoes. For Nottinghamshire this required an increase of 50,000 acres for corn of which 35,000 acres would be from ploughing up permanent grassland. This brought the percentage of arable land in Nottinghamshire under corn to 65% of the total.

In connection with the ploughing up of grassland the Thoresby Estate received a letter from a Mr Turner, Chairman of the Nottinghamshire Agricultural Executive Committee enclosing a schedule of land required to be ploughed up and asking that Mr Joshua Walker the secretary of the Retford District Agricultural Committee be informed if there were any objections to the land in the tenancy of W. Merrills, W. G. Quibell, S. Peatfield, and J. Taylor being ploughed up.

In the 1910 Inland Revenue Survey William Merrills was at Cross Hill Farm, William George Quibell was at Cophorne Farm, Samuel Peatfield was at Ide Farm and John Taylor was at Laxton Lodge. In his letter to Mr Walker setting out his objections to the ploughing up of this land Mr Spink said:

“...these tenants are only too wishful to do all in their power to assist in increasing the production of Home Grown Corn, but they all feel that with their present difficulty with labour, they have more arable land than they can properly cultivate at present, especially on such isolated farms as those occupied by Quibell and Taylor, where labour is most difficult to retain.

I am of the opinion that if the Tenants were compelled to plough up the land suggested by the Committee, there might be changes of

Tenancy. Anyone who knows Laxton is aware that suitable Tenants for the farms there are not easy to find... If your Committee still think it advisable to recommend the Lands in question be ploughed up, I would ask that they meet Mr. Argles (I could arrange this), with the tenants on the ground, before finally deciding."

The result of this objection seems to have made very little difference since Joshua Walker wrote to Mr Spink to say that he had to inspect the grass fields belonging to Earl Manvers at Laxton in the occupation of Merrills, Quibell and Peatfield which had been scheduled to be ploughed up for the purpose of recording the state and value of the present pasture and asking whether Mr Spink intended to claim compensation. Only J. Taylor had not been required to comply with the order.

Other ways of increasing the amount of grain available for the food supply were more creative! A memo to Agricultural Executive Committees issued on 4th September 1917 entitled "Utilisation of Horse Chestnuts for Industrial Purposes" reads as follows:

"It has been found that horse-chestnuts can be used in substitution for a quantity of grain now being consumed in certain industrial processes that are essential to the prosecution of the War, and at the request of the Ministry of Munitions, the Board of Education have instituted a scheme for enlisting the services of school children for the purpose of collecting the horse-chestnuts, and thus saving the grain for human consumption.

The work is being carried out under the direction of local Committees formed in connection with the various schools.

It is a matter of urgency that this year's crop of horse-chestnuts should be harvested, and the Department therefore appeals to landowners, farmers and others to afford all reasonable facilities for the work to proceed and not to place any unnecessary difficulties in the way of children who may seek in this way to contribute to national efficiency."

The Newark Advertiser on 7th October 1914 published an article informing readers, particularly farmers, of the steps the Board of Agriculture was taking to help with the provision of labour and thereby to maintain the food supply:

*FARMERS AND THE WAR
HOMEGROWN FOOD SUPPLIES*

"In view of the importance at the present time of all questions relating to home grown food supplies, the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries are issuing from time to time certain statements which are reprinted weekly for convenience of reference, and to ensure their wider circulation among the agricultural community.

On Saturday, certain comments were published on the question of farm labour. The Board recommended any farmer who is experiencing difficulty in obtaining farm hands to apply to the local Labour Exchange, the address of which can be obtained at any post office. It is pointed out that the Labour Exchange are making special efforts to furnish farmers with the names of suitable men and women who have had previous experience in farm work, and all applicants will be

SCHOOL CHILDREN WERE RECRUITED TO HELP COMBAT THE REDUCTION IN THE WORKFORCE AND BOOST THE PRODUCTION OF FOOD

interviewed and passed by a farmer of standing before they are put into communication with farmers who are in need of them.

Details are given as to how farmers should set forth their requirements and they are invited to support a movement which has been started for the purpose of assisting them to maintain an adequate supply of labour.”

School children were also recruited to help combat the reduction in the workforce and boost the production of food for the nation. Amongst other things, they were asked to collect blackberries to be sent to jam making factories.

The children were allowed three half-days off normal school lessons to carry out the collection and we know, from the Headteacher’s log book, that Laxton school children were involved. They were paid one penny for every pound of blackberries collected.

The log book also records that:

“In April 1914 a Mr Wallace from Kingston Agricultural College visited school in regard to the boys gardening.” He followed this up with a further visit on the 7th July to inspect what the boys had done. “The boys worked hard in the school gardens, and other underused village gardens, growing potatoes and other vegetables to help to feed the village whilst the war was on.”

Furthermore, in 1917 the Headteacher, Frank Willis, records that *“an unoccupied garden has been taken over by the master and the boys have planted it with potatoes.”* and, a few days later that:

“At the request of the Parish Council the master and the elder boys have planted Mrs Moody’s garden allotment with potatoes. Her husband is in the army and she is unable to get a man to do the work. This is the second plot the boys have planted with potatoes in addition to their ordinary school gardening.”

Six boys even turned out with Frank Willis one weekend in 1918 to clear thistles from the moor. These entries must reflect the situation elsewhere in the country as food supplies were under more and more pressure and the manpower required to produce the food was significantly reduced.

Between 1914 and 1918 approximately 170,000 farm workers aged 18 and over signed up, resulting in a loss of 17.5% of the workforce. To try to make up for this loss of manpower, in 1917 the Government began to employ prisoners of war and by 1918 14,000 were in employment on the land. In addition to these prisoners of war some 66,000 soldiers were also employed. Farmers who failed to make full use of their available land could, under the Defence of the Realm Regulations 1914, be forced to comply or, as in the case of a tenant of the Manvers Estate one Samuel Lacey of Primrose Farm, be evicted.

A document sent to Earl Manvers by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries in July 1917 authorises him to terminate the tenancy within fourteen days of receipt of the order. The order was issued because, in

Potatoes in 1918.

Last year the County of
Nottingham

PRODUCED 42,300 Tons of Potatoes.
CONSUMED 58,200 Tons of Potatoes.
DEFICIT, 15,900 TONS.

LORD RHONDDA and Mr. PROTHERO appeal to every man who has a farm, a garden, or an allotment to plant more potatoes and make the County

SELF-SUPPORTING.

B

Pictured

This advert in the Newark Advertiser of 8th April 1918 encouraged everyone to do what they could.

the Board's opinion "*the land or part thereof was not being so cultivated as to increase as far as practicable the food supply of the country*".

In a letter of 27th July replying to Joshua Walker, secretary of the Retford District Agricultural Committee, Mr Argles, the agent for the Manvers Estate, said that he had gone over the land at Primrose Farm and he described it as being in a disgusting condition.

MR LACEY WAS UNWILLING TO GIVE UP THE FARM EVEN THOUGH HIS LANDLORD WAS WILLING TO TRY AND FIND HIM A COTTAGE ON THE ESTATE

Further correspondence at the end of August and the beginning of September from Mr Argles indicated that Mr Lacey was unwilling to give up the farm even though his landlord was willing to try and find him a cottage on the estate and give him alternative employment. The farm was due to be taken over by a Mr Sampson who was at that time at Gipsy Lodge, Egmanton. The proposed solution was that Mr Sampson should

arrange to cultivate the arable land and Mr Lacey be allowed to remain until the following Lady Day. This would give him time to look out for another place.

On 8th September Mr Argles wrote to Joshua Walker to say that he had received a letter from Mr Morris at the Estate Office, Ossington saying that Mr Lacey had taken a cottage at Moorhouse indicating that he realised he would have to leave Primrose Farm at Michaelmas but that as yet Mr Lacey had declined to send a letter agreeing to leave the farm.

The letter concludes:

“On hearing from you that I may proceed to let the farm from Michaelmas I will get the agreement signed by the incoming tenant (Mr Sampson)”.

On 26th September Mr Walker wrote to Mr Spink at Thoresby Estate Office to say that he had received the official order to terminate the tenancy of Samuel Lacey. On 3rd October 1917 a notice appeared in the Newark Advertiser which read:

PRIMROSE FARM, LAXTON

Mr R G Selby, instructed by Mr S Lacey, who is giving up his farm, will SELL by AUCTION, on THURSDAY, OCT 11th, 1917.

BLACK MARE, aged, 12 GOOD RED BEASTS, 13 SHEEP, 2 GEESE. Collection of IMPLEMENTS and HARNESS, MEY'S SEPARATOR (28galls), and DAIRY UTENSILS.

Sale at One o'clock.

IN 1914, WOMEN
HAD BEGUN TO
FORM VOLUNTARY
ORGANISATIONS
DESIGNED
TO IDENTIFY
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR THEM TO
CONTRIBUTE TO
THE WAR EFFORT

EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN

In 1914, women had begun to form voluntary organisations designed to identify opportunities for them to contribute to the war effort.

The Women's Defence Relief Corps and the Women's Farm and Garden Union formed in 1914, amongst other activities, established agricultural divisions and offered training courses in farming covering areas such as keeping poultry and livestock, dairying and helping with the harvests.

By 1915 the Board of Agriculture developed a scheme for training women to do agricultural work in agricultural colleges across the country. This training focused on milking and 'light' farm work.

The courses lasted for 25 weeks and 218 women signed up, 199 found work afterwards. On top of this many women took it upon themselves to form women's associations to find work in agriculture. In 1916, a report from the Manpower Distribution Board said the following about the employment of women:

"The Board are informed that the Employment Registers show a daily total of about 6,382 women available for employment; of this number an average of about 2,745 find employment, leaving a daily surplus of unemployed women of about 3,537. Under the present voluntary system about 900,000 are still available for employment in industry, 200,000 of whom could be obtained in the next three months if suitable arrangements are made for them".

The Women's Defence Relief Corps was taken over by the Board of Agriculture in 1917. A memo from the Board records that:

"...the experience of farmers during hay-time and harvest, and in connection with the cultivation of roots, had proved to many of them the value of the assistance of women, and would encourage them to make more use of them next year."

Despite the success of this "on the job" training, the Board of Agriculture was keen to establish formal training courses for women across the country stating:

"It is very necessary that suitable instruction should be provided for local women where a

demand has been shown to exist. In many cases farmers are themselves arranging for the training of local women employed on their own farms without any charge falling on public funds, and Lord Selbourne hopes that this practice, which is the best method of training farm workers, will be greatly extended. At the same time he fears that the employment of women on the land is in some cases being restricted owing to the failure of Education Authorities to provide in each parish instruction for the local

women. With a view, therefore, to the more general adoption of schemes on the lines of

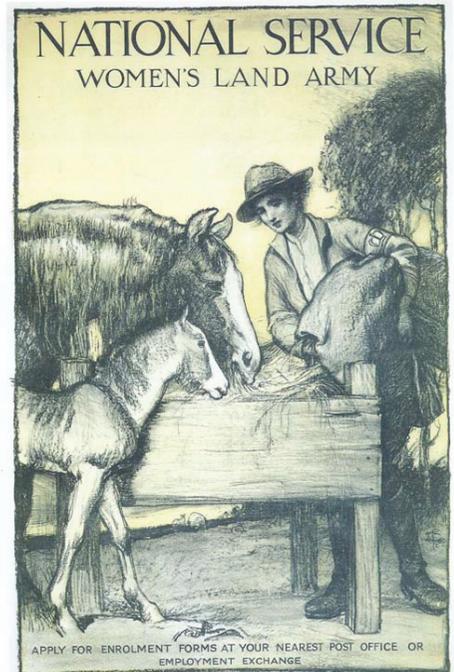
THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE WAS KEEN TO ESTABLISH FORMAL TRAINING COURSES FOR WOMEN ACROSS THE COUNTRY

that which has been worked successfully in Cornwall, his Lordship has obtained the consent of the Treasury to the payment of special grants to defray the whole cost incurred by Education Authorities in providing for locally resident women short course of instruction in milking and other farm work which they are fitted to undertake.”

So the Government was willing to fund the training of women to work on the land.

To help with the recruitment and distribution of women, local organising secretaries were appointed who, for Nottinghamshire, was Mrs George Cartwright of East Bridgford Hall. A document in the Manvers Collection of papers held at the University of Nottingham is an “Instruction Farm Report” dated October 23rd 1917 sent to Mrs Cartwright. It was a report on the training course taken by one H C Edwards between September 25th and October 6th 1917. The form reports as follows:

Milking - good; Stock Work - fair; Carting – very fair; Field Work – good; Remarks – Has milked 3 cows in 35 mins for 2 weeks. Has ploughed for 3 hours 4 times. Has groomed and harnessed 3 horses for 3 weeks. She is a good worker but not very strong therefore gets tired very quickly.



The farmer concludes *“In my opinion she is best suited for work as; milking and general farm work”*.

From the same collection is a letter from Mrs Hobbs to Mr Spink at Thoresby, dated October 2nd 1917:

Dear Mr Spink,

Mrs Cartwright, Organising Secretary has handed your letter to me, which she tells me she answered. At the present moment all our available women are taken up with threshing i.e. except one or two useless creatures whom I should not care to send out to Thoresby or indeed to any work. If you will let me know to what date you can give us, I will endeavour to secure three or four really good women.

I should think that if you had four one had better be made forewoman. That is, I find, the most satisfactory arrangement. Would they have to do for themselves in the cottage as that might make some difference in our selection of forewoman.

I think the best plan would be if I came over and discussed the matter with you. I hope that Mrs Sherbrooke (unreadable) Chairwoman of Notts Co may be able to motor me to several places in the county next week.

*Yours truly
May Elliot Hobbs
Travelling Inspector.*

On October 12th 1917 Mrs Cartwright writes to Mr Spink saying:

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your letter to Mrs Hobbs of the 11th inst. I will send the girls on Monday, but I fear that I cannot send them by the 7-37, as one of the girls has to come from Butterley, and two of them from Bingham, but I will send them by the 1-40 Great Central arriving Edwinstowe 2-39, if you would kindly arrange to meet them. I am sorry to say that one of the girls we intended for your party, refuses to come, in fact has withdrawn from National Service, so at present we have only three girls to send, but I will send the fourth as soon as we can find one who would be suitable.

I do not think they will mind about being in lodgings for the first week or ten days, if you can make such financial arrangements as will give them 4/- or 5/- per week after paying for their lodgings. I shall explain to all the girls exactly what their work will be, and the arrangements for their housing as soon as the cottage is ready, and I hope you will find them of great use. Mrs Hobbs suggests that later on you may like to employ them for tree planting, but of course that will depend on what other work there is for them to do. She also understood from her interview with you that they might be employed in simple carpentering on wet days.

*The names of the girls I am sending you are: -
Miss E Ware, Miss A Billings, Miss B Kilmartin.*

*Yours faithfully,
C Ethel Cartwright
Organising Secretary.*



203127 PRIVATE
W. T. LAUGHTON
LEICESTERSHIRE REGIMENT
21ST APRIL 1917



MEMORIAL

PRIVATE WILLIAM THEOPHILUS LAUGHTON

William Laughton was born in Laxton in 1887. He was the son of James Laughton, a farmer and miller, and his wife Ann. In 1897 at the age of 4 he was living in Laxton with his mother and father, six brothers and a sister. In 1901 at the age of 14 he was working for Richard Clark at Knapeney Farm as a “yard lad” and by 1911 he was working for his next door neighbour William Merrills as a “cowman”.

The 1st/4th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment which he joined embarked for France in 1915 and arrived on the western front on 12th May where they remained throughout the war. He was killed in action on 21st April 1917. The following announcement appeared in the Newark Advertiser on 16th May 1917:

PTE WM T LAUGHTON, LAXTON.

On Wednesday last Mr. James Laughton received the sad news that his son, Pte. Wm. T. Laughton, had been killed in France. He and three others

were in a dug-out when a shell fell and killed all the four. Pte Laughton was in the Leicesters, and enlisted last June. He was formerly in the employment of Mr. Marrison, of Westwood Farm, Laxton, and as a boy was a scholar in the Laxton Parish School.

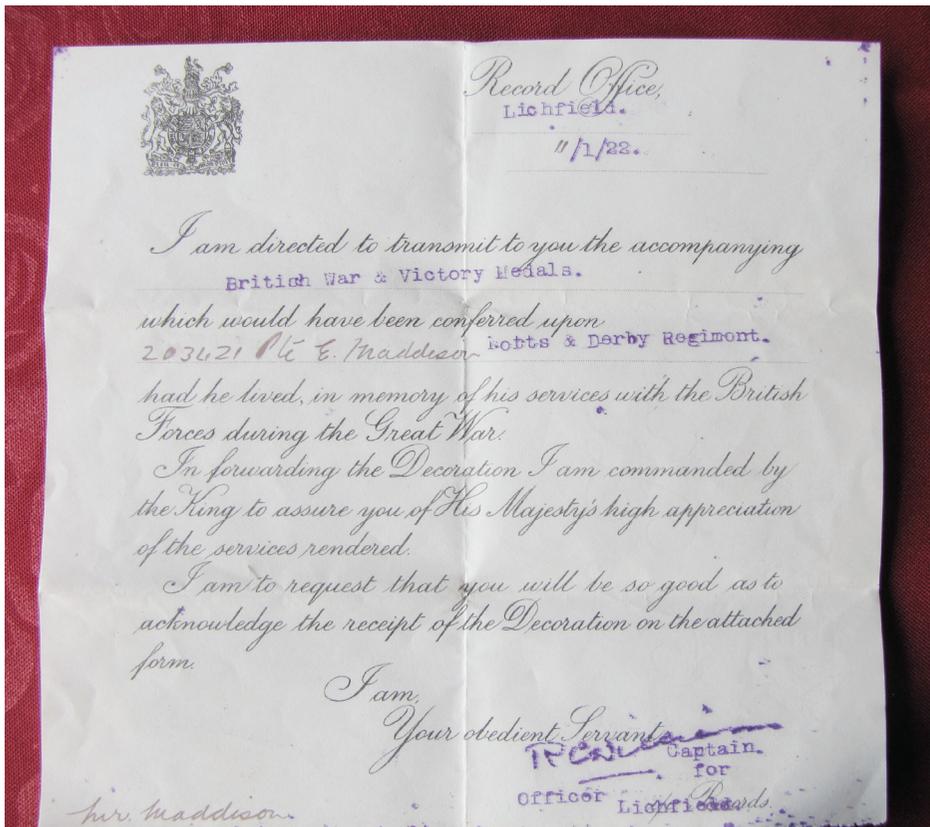
This is the fifth old scholar that has fallen in the war, the others being Corpl. Whitworth, Corpl. O. P. Willis, Pte G. Saxelby, G Bagshaw and T. Cobb has been reported missing in Mesopotamia since January last."

He is recorded as having been awarded the Victory medal and the British War medal and is buried in Marzingarbe Communal Cemetery Extension which is situated between Lens and Bethune in the department called Pas de Calais.

The extension was designed by Sir Edward Lutyens and William Harrison Cowlshaw and contains 248 Commonwealth burials and 2 German graves. His probate record states:

LAUGHTON Theophilus Willie of Laxton Nottinghamshire private died 10 April 1917 in France administration London 12 September to James Laughton farmer. Effects £138 8s. 9d.

It is impossible to find out why the date of death differs from the date on his grave registration. The Army Register of Soldiers Effect shows that on 30th June 1917 his father received his personal effects which amounted to £6 17s. 1d. and on 13th November 1919 an additional war gratuity of £3.



PRIVATE EDWARD MADDISON

Edward Maddison was born in Cromwell in 1886 to Thomas and Francis Maddison who in 1891 were living in Weston where Thomas worked as a farm labourer. In 1901, at the age of 15 Edward was in the parish of St Giles, Ollerton working for a farmer called John Padley as a horseman whilst his family were now living in Laxton where his father was a “horseman on farm”. By 1911 he had moved to Brampton, Chesterfield where he was working “down the pit” as a coal hewer.

Pictured

Letter accompanying the medals posthumously awarded to Edward Maddison



Pictured

*Private Edward
Maddison's gravestone*

He enlisted in Chesterfield with the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment of the Sherwood Foresters and served in the 1st/5th Battalion. His battalion landed in France in February 1915 as part of the 139th (Forester) Brigade. The Brigade remained in France for the remainder of the war and was involved in the Battle of the Somme in July 1916 amongst other actions. Edward died of wounds on 12th June 1917 and is buried in Choques Military Cemetery which is a small cemetery on the edge of a pretty little village about 4 kilometres

from the town of Bethune. From January 1915 to April 1918 a Casualty Clearing Station was there and most of the burials are of casualties, like Edward, who died of their wounds sustained at the Bethune front.

Edward was awarded the Victory Medal and the British War Medal. The Army Register of Soldiers Effect records that Francis Maddison received Edward's personal effects amounting to £7 11s. 10d. on 24th August 1917 and a further £5 War Gratuity on 12th November 1919.

PRIVATE GEORGE WILLIAM SAXELBY

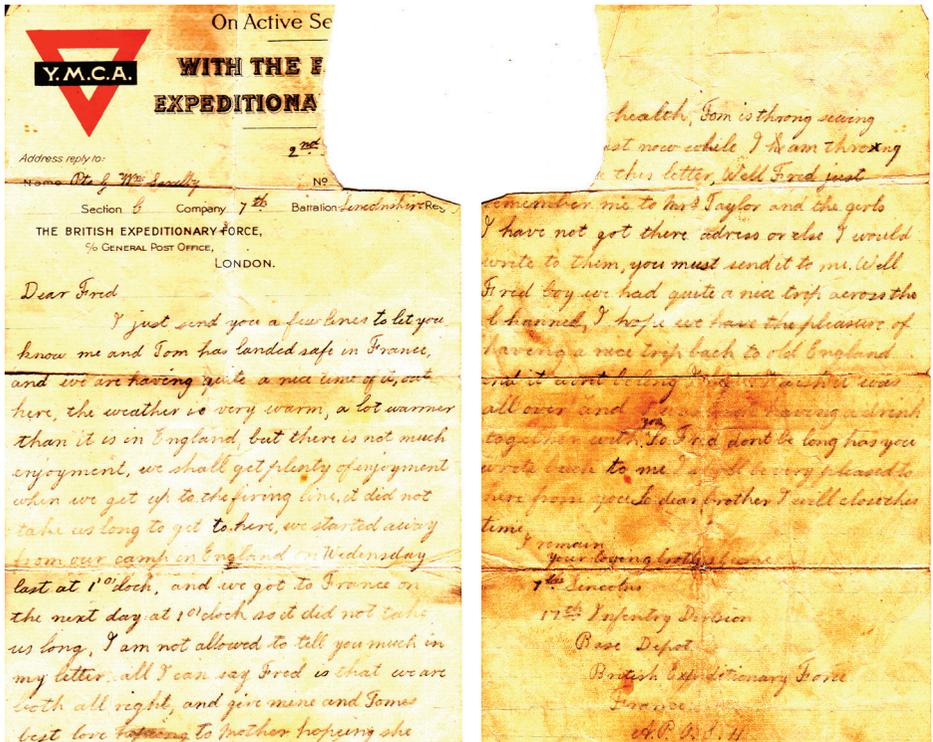
George Saxelby was born in Pleasley in 1892. His parents, George and Elizabeth were married in St Michael's Church, Laxton on 28th April 1892 and George was baptised in the same church on 7th August of that year. By 1901 he was living in Laxton as the adopted child of Thomas and Martha

Bagshaw whilst his parents were living in Mansfield with his three brothers aged 7, 5, and 1 and one sister aged 3. In 1911 he was living with and working for Thomas Marrison at Westwood Farm, Laxton as a “farm servant”. His parents were living in Mansfield Woodhouse with four sons aged 17, 15, 11 and 7 and four daughters aged 13, 4, 2 and 1.

The census return indicates that they had had twelve children altogether of whom three had died and nine were living, eight were living with them and the ninth would have been George William. There is no way of telling why George had been adopted. He was a scholar at Laxton school and news of his death is mentioned in the Headteacher’s log book. It appears that he lived and worked in Laxton until he joined up in January 1915.

Pictured

A letter from George to his brother Fred written on landing in France



He joined the 7th Battalion of the Lincolnshire regiment which was formed in September 1914 and landed in France at Boulogne on 14th July 1915. His brother Tom joined the same regiment and his father George was serving with the Royal Navy.

On his arrival in France he wrote a letter to his brother Fred to say that he and his brother Tom had arrived safely. He was killed in action on 10th December 1915 by a sniper only a few yards away from his brother. His commanding officer wrote the following letter to his mother:

It is with deep regret that I have to report the death of your son, NO 14920, PTE. G. Wm. Saxelby. He was a fine trustworthy soldier, and his loss will be deeply felt by his officers and by the men, who express their heartfelt sympathy with you in your sad bereavement.

Pictured

George William
Saxelby's gravestone



He was killed by a sniper whilst on duty in the front line trench on the morning of December 10th, and I have buried him the following evening in a grave behind the firing line, which we intend to mark with a cross when we go into the trenches again. You have the consolation of knowing that he suffered no pain, death being instantaneous.

His brother I have sent away for a few days rest and quietness. He is bearing up splendidly. Please write me if there is anything further I can do.

George was re-buried in the Menin Road South Military Cemetery which is about 2 kilometres east of Ypres in Belgium.

His grave is on the first row facing the main road and the inscription is difficult to read because it has suffered over time from the effects of pollution from the road. The graves nearer the road but facing away from it are in much better condition as are those further away.

**GEORGE WAS KILLED
IN ACTION ON 10TH
DECEMBER 1915 BY A
SNIPER ONLY A FEW
YARDS AWAY FROM
HIS BROTHER, TOM**

THE YOUNG MEN
MUST HELP BY
JOINING THE FORCES
OF THE EMPIRE,
THE OLDER MEN
MUST DO THEIR
PART BY CARRYING
ON ALL THOSE
INDUSTRIES ON
WHICH THEIR
NATIONAL LIFE
DEPENDDED.

The Newark Advertiser,
27th January 1915



LIFE AT THE FRONT

On 27th January 1915 the Newark Advertiser reported on a meeting at Laxton, presided over by Earl Manvers, which was held to encourage young men to enlist:

“EARL MANVERS’ APPEAL FOR RECRUITS.

Earl Manvers, presiding at a recruiting meeting at Laxton, made a powerful appeal on Saturday evening for men to join the new army. It was necessary for the future happiness, and even for the existence of our country and the empire, he said that the war should be brought to a successful conclusion. There never had been a war of such magnitude in the history of the world, or a war which involved so absolutely the destinies of the British race. But although they might reside in a quiet place, far out of reach of the actual scenes of carnage, yet it was none the less their duty to help in any way they could. The young men must help by joining the forces of the empire, the older men must do their part by carrying on all those industries on which their national life depended.”

There is no doubt that life in the trenches was unimaginably awful. In a place where a lot of men were living together in a confined space there was a problem of what to do with food scraps, empty tins and other waste materials as well as adequate provision for the disposal of human waste.

The presence of decomposing corpses of both men and horses meant that maggots and flies as well as rats and lice presented a real health hazard for the soldiers. Poor weather conditions would make these matters worse with the trenches being flooded in wet weather and frozen when it was cold.

This combination of wet and cold, when men were unable to remove their boots for days on end, caused a crippling disease called trench foot. Apart from the conditions in the trenches there was the ever present fear of enemy bombardments or the sudden order to “go over the top”.

THERE WAS THE EVER PRESENT FEAR OF ENEMY BOMBARDMENTS OR THE SUDDEN ORDER TO “GO OVER THE TOP”.

The majority of soldiers did not, however, serve in the trenches but were employed behind the front line maintaining supply lines and stores for food, ammunition and equipment. Most men would have only served in the trenches for about a quarter of their time overseas and only seen a few days of actual action throughout the war.

The routine for the trenches was normally 4 days in the front line, 4 days in reserve then 4 days of rest.

The routine would however depend on things such as the weather and the availability of troops in reserve. The reserve troops had to be close enough

and always ready to reinforce the front line troops at a moment's notice. The movement of troops from front line to reserve was a risky business as the enemy would be aware of extra noise and activity and could attack with shelling or machine gun fire when the trenches were at their most vulnerable.

When there was no engagement with the enemy there was constant vigilance with one in ten men during the day and one in four at night being deployed to observation posts to watch for any indication of enemy activity. For the rest of the men it was a time of hard work building, repairing and maintaining the trench which required a system

of rotas to achieve the right balance of work, rest and sleep for the men.

Many of the men were still teenagers and away from home for the first time. The official criteria for recruitment was that men should be physically fit, at least 5ft 3ins tall, have a chest measurement of at least 34ins and be between the ages of 19 and 30.

There are many stories of young men lying about their age to join up, some of which are probably true, and, if the height and chest measurement rules were also applied with some flexibility, then some of these recruits could be described as under nourished children by today's standards.

When conscription was introduced in January 1916 all voluntary enlistment came to an end which meant that it was much more difficult for young men to get away with providing false information about their age.

MANY OF THE MEN WERE STILL TEENAGERS AND AWAY FROM HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME



Pictured

The Thiepval Monument

The front line on both sides was virtually static for the majority of the war with minor gains and losses of territory making little difference to the overall position of the trenches. At Thiepval, where the magnificent memorial designed by Edwin Lutyens now stands, the changing fortunes and inconclusive outcome of prolonged fighting is exemplified.

By the end of September 1914 Thiepval was a German stronghold with a dominant position above the river Ancre as part of the line which they held across the Somme. At first they were faced by the French who were replaced by the British in 1915.

On 1st July 1916 a major offensive by the British and French was launched on the Somme. This was the day when the British Army suffered its greatest ever loss of life in a single day but, despite this carnage, the battle continued for 141 days. Eventually, after several attempts, Thiepval was captured in September 1916.

It was retaken by the Germans in March 1918 but retaken by the British in August. For the villagers who returned after the war there was nothing left and it took more than 10 years for the church, the town hall and the school to be rebuilt and by 1932 the village still had only 33 inhabitants.

The following three letters printed in the Newark Advertiser present three different views of life at the front, particularly the experiences of officers compared to those of the men they commanded.

Newark Advertiser 7th October 1914:

LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

An officer in the Irish Guards in a letter to his wife says:- "We had a bad night last night in the trenches, as we are only 800 yards from the Germans, and both sides are jumpy as fleas, loosing off at any moment, and the guns are keeping up a terrific fire on us, but doing little damage. We had two killed and two wounded yesterday. They have a large gun here that was meant for the siege of Paris. It throws a shell 32in long, and makes a hole big enough to bury eighteen men in. This battle has been on for ten days, and we hope for the best.

There is a beautiful chateau here now used as a hospital. The rock and water garden is beautiful, but now all trodden by troops, and looks so sad. We have a farm here that has been taken and retaken, but we have it again at present. It is lovely at night, with hundreds of shells bursting all round, and if it were not for the death they bring they might be fireworks on a large scale. I have lost my servant and all my kit. Please send me out some cigarettes, tobacco and matches".

**SHERWOOD FORESTERS AT THE FRONT:
LETTER FROM AN OFFICER**

An officer of the 2nd Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters, in the course of a letter passed by the Censor, says: "We went in the train a day and a night, then we marched a good deal. It was interesting seeing the country and the people we billeted with. In one part there was much fruit: in another part vines. The harvest in many places is spoiled because of lack of men and horses and the movements of troops.

Sometimes we have fed well, and sometimes badly. At present I have just finished a plate of stew, made with fresh meat (a luxury). At one place we billeted with an old man who had been in Paris at the siege of 1870. It is very sad to see the desolate state of the country, and the inhabitants, what few are left. We came under artillery fire on the 19th September, and had a fierce battle the day after. I must not give details. We know less about what is happening than we did in England. Major Taylor is all right. The weather, on the whole, is favourable. This letter was dated 27th September, 1914 (Sunday)."

**Newark Advertiser 4th November 1914:
SHERWOOD FORESTER LOSSES:
NINE OFFICERS AND 300 MEN IN ONE FIGHT.**

Experiences of the battle of Aisne, in which the Sherwood Foresters suffered severely, are recounted by Private P. Phillips, of the 2nd Battalion, in a letter to his mother, of Fisher Street, Hyson Green. He is now a patient in the Alexandra Hospital at Cosham. He says:

"I cannot tell everything in a letter of what I have seen and have been through for it would fill a newspaper. It is too uneasy for me to write a lot lying as I am partly on my back and right side. You see I am handicapped, my right arm being under me, but still I am doing my best.

I was wounded in the battle of the Aisne on September 21st. We had just had a week of it. The day before I got hit we had a big scrap with a party of Germans. We lost nine officers and 300 men. As for the enemy we nearly wiped the lot out. There were nearly 4,000 of them and there were not 1,000 in our regiment. No doubt you saw an account of it in the papers. They came at us in a solid body.

We blazed into them as fast as we could, and when they got near us we met them with the bayonets. They didn't like them, and those who could run away did so. Others put up their hands. The only thing I got was one through my water bottle, but I was not to escape for long.

We went back into our trenches, and at daybreak the following morning we saw that the ground was strewn with dead. Some of us were told off to dig holes to bury them in and while we were doing so the artillery spotted us and started to shell us with shrapnel. The shell is filled with thick round black bullets.

Before we could all get under cover one dropped right amongst us. I shall never forget it, for I felt as if I was being stabbed by a red-hot poker. Then I could feel my blood running like a tap. All those near were killed or too badly hit to shift. I didn't mean to bleed to death, so I started to drag myself to our trenches so

that someone could bind me up to stop the bleeding. They shouted me to lie still or I might get hit again, but I did not care. I wanted to stop the bleeding for I was sinking very fast, so I rolled and dragged and did anyway I could till I got to our trench.

Then I fell in on top of some of them. They ripped my clothes off and bound me the best way they could, and when the firing eased off a bit I was taken to the ambulance wagon.

I should have been in England before now but my case was too serious to shift far at the time. That is why they have not sent me far into the country now. I am doing well.”

“THEY SHOUTED ME TO LIE STILL OR I MIGHT GET HIT AGAIN, BUT I DID NOT CARE. I WANTED TO STOP THE BLEEDING FOR I WAS SINKING VERY FAST, SO I ROLLED AND DRAGGED AND DID ANYWAY I COULD TILL I GOT TO OUR TRENCH”

AT THE OUTBREAK
OF THE WAR
NORMAN WOULD
HAVE BEEN 22,
GERARD WOULD
HAVE BEEN 19
AND HAROLD 17



MEMORIAL

THE TUNBRIDGE BOYS: CAPTAIN NORMAN LESLIE, LIEUTENANT GERARD CHARLES & LIEUTENANT HAROLD SAGE TUNBRIDGE.

The three boys were the sons of the Reverend James Tunbridge who was vicar of Laxton between November 1916 and his death in March 1919 in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. In the 1901 census James Tunbridge was aged 51 and recorded as a “clergyman church of England” in North Mimms, Hertfordshire. Living with Reverend James were his second wife Marianne aged 41, his first wife Susan having died in India in 1881, a servant Lucy McCulloch and Gerard aged 6 along with his brothers Harold aged 4 and Eric aged 3. Altogether the family consisted of three girls and four boys.

The three boys were born in Punjab, India where their father was working as a missionary, the fourth brother Norman was born in 1892 in Stamford and, at the time of the census, was living in Surrey at a

church missionaries children's home. In the 1911 census James Tunbridge was recorded as a clerk in holy orders living in Melton Mowbray.

Living with him in Melton Mowbray were his wife, a daughter Doris who did not appear on the previous census, Harold, Eric and a servant Elizabeth Hibbitt aged 13.

A FEW MEN REACHED THE GERMAN BARBED WIRE BUT GOT NO FURTHER. MOST WERE CUT DOWN OR TRAPPED IN NO MAN'S LAND

Norman, who was now 19, was living in Rotherham with his uncle and aunt, Charles and Alice Garbutt, and working in a steel works as a trainee engineer.

Gerard, who by now was 16, was at Dean Close Memorial School in Cheltenham. At the outbreak of the war Norman would have been 22, Gerard would have been 19 and Harold 17. Norman joined the Yorks and Lancaster Regiment as a junior officer.

He was posted to Egypt where he became an adjutant, an administrative post, and was later promoted to Captain on the

General Staff. Fortunately for him he was spared the horrors of the Western Front. Gerard and Harold joined the 16th Public Schools Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment together as private soldiers in November 1915. The Middlesex Regiment was serving in France and a private soldier's life was dangerous, unpleasant and often short.

Unfortunately they joined before the terrible destruction of the Battalion in July 1916 when, on the first day of the battle of the Somme, 1st July, they advanced into withering German machine gun fire.

A few men reached the German barbed wire but got no further. Most were cut down or trapped in no man's land. After nightfall those that were pinned down near the German wire were rounded up and made prisoners of war. On 1st July the Public Schools Battalion suffered 522 casualties, 22 officers and 500 other ranks.

Regimental records show however that both brothers gained commissions and transferred to 1st Battalion of the Yorkshire and Lancaster Regiment on 5 August 1916. This was their brother Harold's Regiment and one must assume that being on the staff he was able to pull strings to get his brothers commissions and a transfer. This transfer was fortunate as the 1st Battalion the York and Lancaster Regiment was posted to the Salonika Front, a quiet area on the borders of northern Greece facing the Bulgarian Army. Very little happened here and, apart from suffering the discomforts

of high temperatures and swarms of mosquitoes, the two brothers as junior officers would not have faced much action.

There was some action in 1917 with limited attacks against the Bulgarians. The most the regimental records tell is that in the whole year two enemy trenches and two small villages were attacked and taken. Little major action occurred on the Balkan Front in 1916 or 1917 and during 1917 there was comparatively little activity on the British part of the

AFTER NIGHTFALL THOSE THAT WERE PINNED DOWN NEAR THE GERMAN WIRE WERE ROUNDED UP AND MADE PRISONERS OF WAR

front in Macedonia. The main fighting took place around Lake Dorian, where the line was adjusted several times by each side early in the year. In April 1917, British attacks gained a considerable amount of ground and resisted strong counter-attacks. In May the Bulgarians attacked the British positions but were firmly repulsed.

The Tunbridge brothers seem to have survived this action and from then on into 1918 little further action took place until the very final months of the war when the Bulgarians largely collapsed. Although Harold and Norman Tunbridge were to survive, their brother Gerard was already dead.

In April 1918, an otherwise quiet time, Gerard Tunbridge was engaged in an attack or maybe just a reconnaissance venture and Prisoner of War records show that on 18 April 1918 he was recorded as missing, presumed taken Prisoner by the Bulgarians, and that on 27 April 1918 he died of his wounds. Gerard received posthumously the 1914 - 15 star, the British War Medal and the Allied Victory Medal the record for which gives his mother's address as 14 Albany Road, Sharrow, Sheffield which is possibly where she lived after vacating Laxton vicarage after the death of her husband.

Gerard is buried in Struma Military Cemetery near Kalokastro in Greece, about 80 kilometres from Thessaloniki. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission records him as the son of J and M S Tunbridge of *Eaxton*, (my italics) Newark, Notts. The Army Register of Soldiers Effects entry dated 18th April 1918 simply notes "missing". It then details the value of his possessions as £105.4s.6d offset by Administrative Charges of £30.13s.10d leaving a net payment made on 17 September 1919 to his mother Marianne Tunbridge of £74.10s.8d. A second entry

dated 27th April notes “of wounds” in the Date and Place of Death column with a note to refer to the previous entry for the details.

The probate record states:

*“TUNBRIDGE Gerard
Charles of Lanton
(not Laxton!) Vicarage
Nottinghamshire
lieutenant 1st battalion
York and Lancaster
regiment died 27th
April 1918 in Greece
Administration (with
Will) London 6 August
to Marianne Sophia
Tunbridge (wife of
the reverend James
Tunbridge clerk).
Effects £306 16s. 3d.”*

Of his surviving brothers, we know only a little. His elder brother Norman returned to practice as a Civil Engineer in Sheffield, where he married Nora Johnson in 1922 and raised a family. Harold remained single, and stayed in the Army until 1923 living out his life at The Cottage, Plumtree, and in retirement in Bleasby, Nottinghamshire. He died in 1963 aged 66.

**THE MAIN FIGHTING
TOOK PLACE
AROUND LAKE
DORIAN, WHERE THE
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SEVERAL TIMES BY
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IN THE YEAR. IN
APRIL 1917, BRITISH
ATTACKS GAINED
A CONSIDERABLE
AMOUNT OF
GROUND AND
RESISTED STRONG
COUNTER-ATTACKS**



CORPORAL CHARLES WHITWORTH

Pictured

Green Hill Cemetery

Charles was born in 1886 in Laxton, the eldest son of Samuel and Mary Ellen Whitworth, and was baptised in St Michael's Church on 5th December. In 1891 his father was a groom and his mother a domestic servant. By 1901 Samuel was recorded as a farmer at what is now Bottom Farm.

Charles was working for him on the farm and in 1911 he was a single man still living at home and working on the farm. At the outbreak of the war he enlisted at Welbeck and joined the 1/1st Nottinghamshire Yeomanry the Sherwood Rangers. This was a first line regiment liable for overseas service.

In 1914 the regiment was sent to Egypt as part of the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Mounted Brigade. In 1915 they were sent to Gallipoli and landed at Suvla Bay on 18th August where they served “dismounted” since they had arrived to engage in static trench warfare.

The earlier amphibious landing at Suvla Bay on 6th August was the final attempt by the British to break the stalemate of the battle of Gallipoli. The landing was a disaster since, despite light opposition at the start, the stalemate remained unbroken. On 15th August the British Commander was dismissed.

The Sherwood Rangers arrived amidst what must have been a chaotic situation and went into battle. On 5th September Charles was killed in action and, according to one of his Laxton comrades Elmer Jack Rose in a note written down later by his son Reg, “*it took four attempts to bury him*”. What this actually means is uncertain but it seems likely that his body would have been difficult to retrieve if it lay between the lines of trenches.

He is buried in Green Hill Cemetery which lies on the East side of the Anzac to Suvla road, about 11 miles from Anzac in Turkey. The register of soldiers’ effects shows that Samuel and Mary Ellen received £9 17s. 6d. on 23rd December 1915, a further 10s. 3d. on 22nd March 1916 and a war gratuity of £5 on 5th August 1919. He was awarded the Victory Medal, the British War Medal and the 1915 Star.

**THE LANDING
WAS A
DISASTER SINCE,
DESPITE LIGHT
OPPOSITION
AT THE START,
THE STALEMATE
REMAINED
UNBROKEN**

CORPORAL OSCAR POTTER WILLIS & SERGEANT HAROLD FRANK POTTER WILLIS

Oscar was born in 1887 in Laxton to Frank and Ruth Willis and was baptised in St Michael's Church on 3rd April. His father Frank was the village schoolmaster having come to Laxton to take over the school in 1886. He had two older siblings, a brother Harold Frank who was born in 1883 and a sister Ruth Barbara who was born in 1886. All three children attended Laxton School.

**WILLIS' FATHER
FRANK WAS
THE VILLAGE
SCHOOLMASTER
HAVING COME
TO LAXTON TO
TAKE OVER THE
SCHOOL IN 1886**

At the age of 18 Harold went to train as a teacher in Bristol and subsequently began his teaching career in 1905 at Charnwood Street Council School in Leicester. Harold joined the 2/4th Battalion the Leicestershire Regiment Formed at Leicester in September 1914 as a second line unit. The Regiment served in Ireland in 1916 and landed in France in February 1917 and finally returned to England in May 1918.

Oscar also went into teaching and in 1911 he was living in Birmingham and working as an Elementary School teacher. Oscar joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and landed at Le Havre on 22nd March 1915. Oscar was killed on 1st July 1916, the day on which the British Army suffered its greatest ever loss of life on a single day when over 19,000 men died.

The battle of Albert, in which Oscar was killed, took place in the first two weeks as part of the major offensive known as the Battle of the Somme.

He is buried in Serre Road Cemetery No. 1 which is about 9 miles from the town of Albert.

The register of soldiers effects shows that his father received the sum of £8 6s. 3d. on 7th August 1917 and a further war gratuity of £9 on 21st October 1919. He was posthumously awarded the Victory Medal and the British Army War Medal.

The National Probate Calendar for 24th May 1918 reads as follows:

*“WILLIS Oscar Potter of 36 Clipston Road
Sattley Birmingham corporal 8th battalion Royal
Warwickshire regiment died on or since 1 July
1916 in France Administration Birmingham 24 May
to Frank Willis schoolmaster. Effects £142 9s. 6d.”*

The Newark Advertiser carried the following announcement on 30th August 1916:

ANOTHER MAGNUSIAN KILLED

The deepest sorrow was felt in the village last week, when the sad news was received that Corpl. Oscar Potter Willis, Royal Warwicks. was killed in action. A report from the War Office on July 25th stated that Corporal Willis was ‘wounded and missing’ in the engagement with the British Expeditionary Force on July 1st 1916.

No further communication has been received officially, but a soldier quite unknown to the family, Corpl. Roberts, of the Welsh Guards, has written a letter from the Front dated August 15th, to Miss Willis, in which he says “I am sorry it is very bad news I have to send. Your brother Oscar is killed. I don’t know whether you have had news before, but I found him and I gave his pay book to the

sergeant-major and a photo of a sergt-major and a sergeant. I trust that you will accept my deepest sympathy.”

The photo referred to a picture postcard of the elder brother, Sergt. H Willis, with the Leicesters in Ireland, and had been received from him by Miss Willis, who afterwards sent it to their brother in France, so the soldier was able to get the address from the postcard. Corpl. O P Willis was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Willis, Schoolhouse, Laxton. He was educated in the village school, and afterwards at the Newark Magnus Grammar School.

He served his apprenticeship as a pupil teacher in Lover’s Lane Council School, Newark under Mr. S. A. Hildage B.A. and afterwards served a short time as assistant in the Tuxford Council School. He then entered Sattley Training College with a distinction in mathematics. On leaving college he was at once appointed certificated assistant under the Birmingham City Council, under which he served up to the time of his enlistment in August 1914.

He went across to France at the beginning of March, 1915, and came home on leave last December. We learn from those in the same battalion, in the fight of July 1st that he was carrying ammunition for the machine guns, and that he was wounded immediately on reaching the parapet, and probably fell into a shell hole and died there.

When he was over in December he gave the Laxton schoolchildren a most interesting address on “The Soldier’s Equipment at the Front.”

“MAY IT BE SOME GRAIN OF COMFORT TO YOU TO THINK THAT AS OUR MAKER SEEMS TO BE CALLING THE FLOWER OF OUR MANHOOD UNTO HIMSELF, THEREFORE HE COULD NOT OMIT YOUR BOY.”

A college chum who was with him in France writes:- “Poor old Oscar – a thorough gentleman, a true friend, solid and staunch to the end.”

Another college friend writes as follows to Mrs. Willis:- “May it be some grain of comfort to you to think that as our Maker seems to be calling the flower of our manhood unto Himself, therefore he could not omit your boy. He was a man, take him for all in all I shall not look upon his like again.

On 25th April 1917 the following announcement appeared in the Newark Advertiser:

CORPORAL O. P. WILLIS, LAXTON

Official news has just been received from the War Office of the death of Corpl O. P. Willis of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, which took place on July 1st 1916. Corpl Willis was killed in the great push on July 1st whilst leading an ammunition party in the district of Beaumont-Hamel and was reported last July from the War Office as wounded and missing.



ER
AT WAR
GIMENT

305348 CORPORAL
O. P. WILLIS
ROYAL WARWICKSHIRE REGT.
1ST JULY 1916 AGE 29



GG
YOUNGER SON
OF FRANK & RUTH WILLIS
LAXTON, NOTES
FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Pictured

*Corporal O. P.
Willis' gravestone*

THE SHERWOOD RANGERS

The Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry was originally raised as the Nottinghamshire Yeomanry in 1794 amid fears that the revolutionary fever of recent events in France might spread to this country. It began as a local militia, described as a 'light cavalry regiment', whose role was to prevent crime and preserve public order. It became part of the Royal Yeomanry which is an army reserve regiment of what is known as the Territorial Force. This force was meant to be for home defence in time of war so nobody could be made to serve overseas. At the outbreak of the war in 1914 many of the men chose to enlist and so the Regiment was divided into 1st line battalions which could be sent overseas and 2nd line battalions which were for home defence. In the First World War it was still a cavalry regiment whilst nowadays its role is in armoured reconnaissance.

Locally there were squadrons at Newark, Retford, Mansfield and Worksop. This article in the Newark Advertiser of 25th March 1914 describes an exercise carried out by the Retford and Newark squadrons:

“An interesting scheme was carried out in the Retford district the other day by members of the Retford and Newark squadrons of the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry. The Newark squadron under the command of Lieutenant MacRae, proceeded

AT THE CLOSE OF THE DAY'S MANOEUVRES THE TROOPS ASSEMBLED AT LAXTON, WHERE THE REPORTS WERE CRITICISED BY THE OFFICERS, WHO EXPRESSED SATISFACTION AT THE WAY THE SCHEME HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT

to Kneesall for rendezvous purposes, and then the Retford squadron, under Sergeant Long to Kirton. They then proceeded to take up a line of outposts from Kneesall to Prior's Park (Kirton) facing east, the Newark squadron occupying a line to Westwood Farm, including the Boughton – Laxton road, while the Retford squadron proceeded to Prior's Park Farm, including the Kirton – Tuxford road.

Scouts from both squadrons in charge of Sergeant Moore (Newark) assembled at Weston and tried to locate the outposts without themselves being seen and a written report was subsequently handed in by the commander of patrol leaders stating the result of the reconnaissance.

The march to Kneesall and Kirton was made with full precautions of advance and flank guards, a halt being made at Caunton and Markham Moor where the advance and flank guards were changed.

At the close of the day's manoeuvres the troops assembled at Laxton, where the reports were criticised by the officers, who expressed satisfaction at the way the scheme had been carried out."

Another article in the issue of 21st December 1914 confirms they were a cavalry regiment:

SHERWOOD RANGERS YEOMANRY:

Saddles and Bridles are urgently needed for the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Reserve Regiment. Would anyone who is willing to lend either please communicate with the Headquarters, Retford, or Mr. Geo. Foster, Stodman St., Newark.

The loan will be of great service to the Regiment, and every care will be taken of them.

This case belonged to
Elmer John Rose born 1888
died when he was on a ship
commanded Goemang rough ride
The Destroyer in the 1st 18th was
was torpedoed great loss of men

This case was the only material
he had that survived the sinking
was picked up by a destroyer, went
on to serve over 4 years in middle East
often by force. another man was Harold
that work of Bolton Farm Loxton who pushed
on the 17th 18th it took my foot of the
stump to bury him
Bolton Farm 1953 to 1993 R.E.M. ROSE

Pictured

The brass case given to Stuart Rose by his father Reginald

EGYPT, GALLIPOLI & NORTH AFRICA

Elmar John Rose was born in 1888 in Laxton. In 1901 he was living in Laxton with his parents, three sisters and a cousin. His father John was a farm labourer and they lived in a cottage which was one of eight on the plot now occupied by Westwood House. In 1911 he was working as a waggoner for Henry Helliwell in Anston, Sheffield. He was married in 1920 to Elsie Barlow who in 1911 was living in Tennyson Road, Sheffield and was a sweets packer in a confectionery works. They had two sons, Edmund and Reginald. Reginald had inherited a brass case from his father which he, in turn passed on to his son Stuart. The case contains a note, written by Reginald, recording what he remembered his father having told him about it. The note read:

“This case belonged to Elmer John Rose born 1888 when he was on a ship a Sherwood Yeomanry rough rider the sestrion in the 14-18 war was torpedoed great loss of men and horses. This case was the only material he had that survived the sinking was picked up by a destroyer and went on to serve 4 years middle east Alenby force. Another member was Harold Whitworth of Bottom Farm Laxton who perished in the Dardanells it took my father 4 attempts to bury him. Bottom Farm 1953 to 1993 Reg M Rose”

The events the document is referring to can be matched to the historical records and an interesting account of the 1/1st Battalion of the Sherwood Rangers “Rough Riders” emerges.

The Battalion sailed from Avonmouth in April 1915 for service in Egypt. It was then ordered to Gallipoli and landed at Suvla Bay on 18th August where it served dismounted for three months in an infantry role. It was awarded a King’s Colour in recognition of its gallantry in this role. It was here that Charles, not Harold, was killed and subsequently buried. In December it was evacuated from Gallipoli and returned to Egypt.

In February 1916 it moved to Salonika renamed the 7th Mounted Brigade. Then, in June 1917, the Brigade began to return to Egypt but the ship they were on, called the *Cestrian*, an 8,912 ton Victorian class ocean liner built by Harland & Wolfe in 1896, was torpedoed and the survivors were taken to an island called Mudros which lies between Greece and Turkey. The warship which rescued the men was a River class destroyer called HMS *Ribble*.

A transcript of the Captain’s log of Sunday 24th June 1917 reads:

From Salonika to Alexandria and at Mudros –

9.30

Cestrian torpedoed in starboard side of boiler room.

9.38

went alongside starboard side of Cestrian Took 750 troops aboard

9.40, 9.52, 9.57

fired at objects believed to be submarine



Pictured

The wreck site

10.

*Let go from Cestrian course & speed for signalling
Racoon. Sent dinghy to pick up survivors*

10.25

ceased fire set co. N60W 20 knots

10.40

a/c N4W 22 kts

2.40

Sent troops ashore in motor lighters

The U boat which sank the Cestrian, launched in March 1916, was UB 42 commanded by Kurt Schwarz. It was broken up in Malta in 1920.

On 4th July 1917 the Brigade arrived in Egypt and was placed under the orders of the Desert Mounted Corps. It was subsequently redeployed to Palestine where it played a leading part in General Allenby's cavalry advance against the Turks from Gaza to Aleppo, being mentioned more often than any other unit in the Official History of that campaign.

VERY FEW MILITARY
RECORDS HAVE
SURVIVED, AND SO
THERE IS LITTLE TO
TELL ABOUT THOSE
WHO CAME BACK,
BUT WE ARE ABLE
TO RECORD THE
MEMORIES AND
EXPERIENCES OF
THEIR DESCENDANTS



THE SURVIVORS

As mentioned at the beginning of this booklet, very few military records have survived and so there is little to tell about those who came back. Some information about them, mostly in the years leading up to the war, such as their ages, where they lived in Laxton and the work they did, can be found in the census returns of 1901 and 1911 and in the records of birth, marriages and deaths. In addition to this we are able to record the information we have received from those descendants who have memories of their parents talking about their experiences or memorabilia belonging to their ancestors which they have preserved.

PRIVATE JOHN BAGSHAW

John served in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment of the Sherwood Foresters and was awarded the 1914/15 Star and the Victory Medal.

GUNNER JACK COOK

Jack was born in Worksop in 1894. In 1911 he was working as a farm labourer in Laxton and living with his parents and his sister in a dwelling on the land where Willoughby House now is. His father James was also a farm labourer. He served in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment.

PRIVATES JOHN & WILLIAM CREE

William was born in 1895 and his younger brother John was born in 1900. In 1911 William was working at Top Farm for John Bagshaw. Just prior to signing up in 1917, John was working for Thomas Marrison at Westwood Farm. John Cree married Annie H Moody in 1929. John's son Colin remembers that when he was at Laxton School the children were marched to the war memorial in the churchyard on Armistice Day to remember those who died in the war.

CORPORAL GEORGE, PRIVATES HENRY & WILLIAM COBB DOLBY

The Dolby boys lived at what in 1901 was called Breck Wong Farm and in the 1910 Inland Revenue Survey and the 1911 census was called East Park.

At the beginning of the war George was 23, Henry was 21 and William was 18. The service records for their older brother Thomas and for William exist but they are in such a bad state from fire damage that, apart from the name, they are unreadable.

George served in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment of the Sherwood Foresters and William in the Leicestershire Regiment, no record

of any sort has been found for Henry. William was serving in a prisoner of war camp in 1919 and at home on leave when he was ordered to return to France.

This prompted the following letter from the Manvers Estate written on 29th July 1919 addressed to “The Secretary, The War Office, London”:

Dear Sir

Earl Manvers' North Notts Estate.

*Re No.611744 Pte. W. Dolby (21 years of age)
15, P.O.W. Camp. B.E.F.*

The above man is ordered to return to France on Friday next, but in this very special case I shall be much obliged if you can grant extension of leave owing to the following circumstances:-

Dolby's father died yesterday morning, and the widow will be left entirely alone on a small holding, if the above man must rejoin his Unit after Friday next. One son has been killed in Mesopotamia, two other sons are in hospital, and the widow is entirely dependent on assistance from Pte. W. Dolby. This small holding is isolated, and almost one mile from any other dwelling house.

I shall be much obliged if you will kindly wire to Lord Manvers on the enclosed stamped telegraph form, saying whether this request for extension of leave can be granted.

Yours faithfully,

DRIVER WALTER FAVILL

Walter was born in 1891 in Worksop. In 1901 he was living with his family at Saywood Cottages where his father George was a woodman. In 1911 he was working for his uncle William Favill who was a kennelman at Thoresby Park. Walter was a domestic groom. At the beginning of the war he would have been 23.

SERGEANT ERNEST MORRIS JONES

Ernest was born in Newark towards the end of 1887 and in 1891 at the age of 3 was living with his brother aged 9 and his parents John, a joiner, aged 38 and Mary aged 40, near the Victoria Foundry. In 1910 he had signed up and joined the Royal Engineers where he became a member of their tug of war team. He was shot in the shoulder in 1915 and it seems that that might have ended his army career.

He was the nephew of Thomas Hilton who was the Laxton Blacksmith at what is now Blacksmith's Cottage. Ernest was hoping to come to Laxton to work with his uncle after his army service was completed. Unfortunately in 1915, when Ernest was at the front, Thomas Hilton died aged 60. This prompted some correspondence between Reverend Collinson, the then Vicar of Laxton, and Mr Argles, the Agent for the Manvers Estate. Relevant extracts from Reverend Collinson's letter of 8th January are:

Dear Argles,

A Grundy was Hilton's apprentice but is out of his apprenticeship – and Mrs H wants him I believe to



carry on for a time. Ernest Jones late apprentice (a nephew of the Hiltons) was to have finished his time of service in Royal Engineers and then joined Hilton in the business – he – Jones is now serving at the front – but is attached to Harriet Sampson daughter of Sampson the farmer at the Barr – Laxton and I suppose hoped to marry and settle down in Laxton as a blacksmith ... Further Grundy I think would take on if Jones fails to come back ... Grundy is a very decent young fellow of 20 or 21 – comes from Lincolnshire – I think Mrs H could manage the rent (some £18-10s ?) allright if she could stop and carry on business with Grundy.

A subsequent note from Collinson to Argles written on 15th January reads as follows:

Pictured

Ernest Jones, 2nd from left, back row, in Royal Engineers' Tug of War team

Dear Argles,

Please read the enclosed letter from Sapper Jones and return it. I am writing to say he need not get leave as the best will be done for him under the circumstances.

To which Argles replies on 19th January:

My Dear Collinson,

Many thanks for forwarding me the letter from Sapper Jones, about the blacksmith's shop at Laxton.

I herewith return the letter, as requested, and am glad to see that you have written to Jones, saying that we shall do the best for him under present circumstances.

I am hoping to call and see Mrs Hilton shortly. I understand she wishes to continue the business, and that young Grundy is a good worker, and willing to stay and help with the business.

Ernest married Harriet Sampson the daughter of Samuel Sampson who was the farmer at Bar Farm, in 1916. Sadly Harriet died in 1935 at the age of 46 and is buried with her mother and father in the churchyard. Ernest continued to help on the farm and took over Bar Farm on the death of his father in law in 1939. Ernest died in 1978 at the age of 90 and is also buried in the churchyard.



SERGEANT PERCY MADDISON

Percy was born in Moorhouse in 1896. In 1901 he was living with his family in a cottage which was one of a row of three known as Peck's Row which were on the land just below the Dovecote Inn. The cottages were pulled down in 1910. His father Thomas was a Horseman on a farm. In 1911 he was working for George Newbould as a Farm Servant at what is now Corner Farm. At the beginning of the war he would have been 18.

Pictured

*Sergeant Percy
Maddison*



PRIVATES GEORGE & JOSEPH MOODY

George was born in 1893 in Laxton and his younger brother Joseph was born three years later in 1896. In 1901 they were living with their family in one of the cottages adjacent to the western end of the church. At the time his father Samuel was a shoemaker. In 1911 his father was described as a Farm Labourer as was George who was still living with his parents and sisters Mary and Annie. Joseph however was working as a farm labourer for Thomas

Francis in Tuxford. At the start of the war George would have been 21 and Joseph 18.

On 14th November 1915 Joseph joined the 14th Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. On 29th August 1916 he embarked for France with the 2nd Battalion and on 15th October his left hand was wounded in action in the battle of Transloy Ridge which took place in appalling weather conditions. On 18th October he was returned to England.

He was eventually discharged from hospital on 23rd August 1917 and was posted to the 3rd Battalion The Sherwood Foresters on 21st September 1917. On 23rd October 1917 he embarked from Folkestone for Boulogne where he was transferred to the 9th Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. On 2nd December 1917 he was again wounded in action sustaining gunshot and shrapnel wounds to his left buttock and leg and was once more returned to England. He was discharged from the Kitchener

Pictured

Private Joseph Moody

Hospital in Brighton on 8th March 1918 from where he was posted to various Agricultural Companies finally ending up in the 472nd Company in Nottinghamshire where he served until his discharge from the army on 22nd March 1919. On 15th May 1919 he received a gratuity from the army amounting to £30.

MURIEL MOODY

There was no male resident of Laxton named Moody who would have been at the right age to have served in the war with the initials M M but there was a Muriel Mary who was born in 1896 and lived in Laxton with her parents and younger sister Annie. Her father Walter was a Woodman and they lived at what is now called The Bar. Muriel would have been 18 at the beginning of the war and her niece believes she served in a nursing role. After the war she got married and had four children. She died in January 1948 from lung cancer although she was a non smoker.

PRIVATE W ROSE

The only reference to private Rose was in an entry in the Newark Advertiser dated 18th November 1914 which reads as follows:

Information reached here on Friday that Pte. Holloway and Pte. Rose, Reservists of the Notts. and Derby Regiment, have been captured and are interned in Germany. Corporal Bagshaw, of the Notts. and Derby Regiment is serving in France. Corporal Whitworth and Pte. E Rose are also serving with the Sherwood Rangers, whilst Walter Favill, H Willis, and O Willis have joined Kitchener's new army.

“IN THE FIGHTING
ON THE SOMME
MORE PEOPLE WERE
KILLED THAN IN
THE ENTIRE SECOND
WORLD WAR – WHAT
A MASSACRE.”



CONCLUSION

Two Laxton men, Jack Cook and William Beckitt, who served in the war, recorded their thoughts about the conflict some time afterwards. They wrote:

*Recollections of the First World War
by William Beckitt and Jack Cook.*

As a volunteer of the 1914 – 1918 War I was at school with Joe Moody and his brother George, Jack Cook and Ernest Jones. Joe and his mates are a few who returned from the terror and sheer slaughter of the Western Front. Only these survivors unsung to live out their lives signed up for Laxton at a shilling a day. Joe and company were the men that served Laxton, saved England – the World. They must be very disillusioned with to-day's problems. Who knows what agony the Sherwood Foresters (among others) went through, up to their knees in water and rats for weeks on end. In the fighting on the Somme more people were killed than in the entire Second World War – what a massacre.

To the younger generation I say thank God you may never be called on to face such a hell. The old veterans deserve much better than they got, and even at this late hour I think something should be done for them. Joe Moody who lived near the Church should have been decorated for his bravery. He was wounded seriously enough three times to be brought home on each occasion, and he was saved once by a bullet glancing off his coat button.

Why hasn't today's society properly rewarded the lucky ones who survived?

Life in Laxton during the First World War was no doubt difficult in many respects. A significant number of young men were serving their country leaving their families and loved ones to carry on the work of running the farms and producing food for themselves and the nation.

WHY HASN'T TODAY'S SOCIETY PROPERLY REWARDED THE LUCKY ONES WHO SURVIVED?

It is highly likely that, as an agricultural village, food shortages would not have affected Laxton as it did the towns and cities. Nevertheless, uncertainty about the future and worry about the whereabouts and safe return of those who had gone to war to defend their country must have been difficult for people to live with.

For those who went to war and survived many found it difficult to settle back into the civilian life they had left, some found their jobs no longer existed or were being done by someone else.

In October 1917 a J B Pearson wrote to the Thoresby Estate, the letter does not say exactly to whom it is addressed but it is probably safe to assume that it was written to the agent Mr Spink. It reads:

Sir,

I thank you for your letter to hand a few days ago. I trust the arrangements my wife is making for the removal of the furniture will be satisfactory to you.

Am I entitled to any Bacon money, bag money, and also any money from the Hunt for finds in (unreadable) Grove etc last season? If so will you please forward (unreadable) on to my wife. I am not certain on these points so will leave the matter in your hands.

I quite understand his Lordship's decision not to keep his Gamekeeper's place open but all the same it is hard lines on the men out here fighting not to know what they will have to go back to when the War is over. That is if they are lucky enough to get back to England again, had they only had a home to go to for 12, or even 6 months, it would have given them a chance to look around for something.

They tell us we are out here to protect our homes, but it is hard to believe. My Bttry has been in the thick of all the fighting all this summer, to say the least of it, its been rough.

**FOR THOSE
WHO SURVIVED,
MANY FOUND
IT DIFFICULT TO
SETTLE BACK
INTO THE
CIVILIAN LIFE
THEY HAD LEFT**

Please do not take offence at these few lines, but I take this matter to heart a great deal.

Would you please write out a reference for me and forward it on to my wife, perhaps his Lordship would be good enough to sign it. I thank you very much for your offer to help me at any time, I shall be only too pleased to avail myself of it. Thanking you for any favours done in the past.

*I am
Yours respectfully
J B Pearson.*

Other men, considering the horrors they had experienced, must have suffered from what we now know as post traumatic stress disorder. Women who had kept the country running during the conflict found that their services were no longer required.

The view that women *could* not do men's work had been proven wrong but it was now thought that women *should* not be doing such work. The world had changed and the way of life for many people would never be the same again.



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Pictured

*Location of cemeteries
in France and Flanders*

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