The Way We Were

The Villages on the Eve of War

On the eve of war

The 1912 Kelly's Directory gives the population of the four villages – Grimston, Roydon, Pott Row and Congham – as around sixteen hundred. This population was not much smaller than the present day but the demography was very different. There were four schools – one in each of the villages – and the total average attendance was three hundred. Conversely there were relatively few people over the age of sixty. There was a large population of young adults – those aged between eighteen and thirty – and despite the absence of motor vehicles the villages were noisy and bustling places.

The railway station at Roydon provided employment and carried goods and people into and out of the village. It ran to King's Lynn in one direction and towards Fakenham and Cromer in the other giving access to the surrounding villages. As Gayton did not have a station at this time it was a less accessible place than Grimston and considerably smaller.

There were two grocers in Grimston and another in Pott Row and in addition there were butchers and a "stationery and fancy goods store". Congham and Pott Row had sub post offices whilst the main post office was in Grimston. Coal and fish were delivered around the villages. There were six pubs around the villages and the Working Men's Club in what is now the Village Hall. Thus the villages provided most of what people needed and it is likely that for most people a trip to Lynn (or to the coast) was an "event" rather than part of a regular routine. There would have been a lot of people around the village at all times of day and our predecessors would have been surprised at how quiet the villages have become.

Life at Home

When philanthropists such as Rowntree made a study of rural life early in the century they were surprised to discover that poverty was just as prevalent in the country as in the towns and that poverty was found in all counties including Norfolk.

Agricultural labourers faced two big problems. Firstly there was the uncertainty of wages which could vary immensely from season to season according to the availability of work and no work meant no pay. Secondly there was the problem of the "tied cottage". This housing-with-job might be seen as a workers bonus but it could be taken to be worth about 1s/6d a week and wages lowered accordingly. Furthermore it was of variable quality and, most importantly, it was the cause of constant insecurity. Moving or losing your job meant moving or losing your home and many families moved house between the 1901 and 1911 census, probably because the earner changed employer.

The majority of the labourer's cottages were four rooms, traditional "two-up-two-down" - well over half of the men killed in the war lived in houses with four rooms or less. The problem of living in a small house with only an outside toilet and possibly a shared tap was compounded by the large size of many families. There was a lower infant mortality rate in rural communities than in the cities and this was cited in the poverty reports as both a blessing and a curse. Amongst the war memorial families there were fourteen families with six children or more and five was about average. Thus eating, sleeping and day-to-day living was of necessity "cheek by jowl" and, as people have not changed, there must have been friction which was probably exacerbated as children grew into young adults. In such families it was no wonder that Mum and Dad sometimes had to rule with a rod of iron or the copper stick and it is also no wonder that men chose to spend evenings in the village pubs.

Mother was the linchpin of any family. A woman who could budget efficiently, cook well and was good with her needle was indeed worth a price above rubies as her skills could ensure the well-being and happiness of the family. It was genuinely true that, at this time "a woman's work was never done". It was the role of women to try and make the family budget stretch to cover expenditure and to provide a good diet although this was actually impossible and every family had a diet deficient to some extent usually in protein. Throughout the summer women were vigilant for anything they could preserve for the long hard months of winter and they made jam, jellies, and pickles and sometimes even wine. Almost all clothes were hand me downs or make do and mend. Some families were lucky enough to have a contact in one of the big houses or a family member who was better off and would hand down their clothes; some mothers may have found the odd 6d to contribute to a clothing club. In addition to shopping, cooking, cleaning, childcare and trying to keep clothes serviceable and mended women often took on work outside of the home, charring being a last resort. Mothers were the least well-fed in any family; many women rarely ate meat the bulk of which was reserved for the wage earner.

Fathers were busy outside the home. At some times of the year such as harvest they would work from dawn till dusk and often the older children would join them. Men whose work involved tending the livestock worked seven days a week and having finished work at dusk, the horsemen would be expected to return to the farm to settle the horses around 8p.m. Leisure time was minimal .Many families had large gardens in which they grew vegetables, kept chickens or maybe even a pig. These gardens and allotments could be the families' sole source of food during hard times and it was in everyone's interest to help in growing the maximum amount of nutrition.

Children no doubt made the best of life. There was a freedom which cannot be imagined by today's children. With no cars, no large expanse of water nearby and a community in which most people knew each other if only by sight it was comparatively safe for children to run free once schooling and chores were over. However, girls were always expected to help their mothers in the home with washing, cleaning or caring for smaller siblings and with money scarce boys were expected to find paid work whenever and wherever they could. They might work for a local shop keeper or butcher before school or at weekends and although the pay was very little – probably about 9d (4p) a week – it made a big difference to the family budget. In most families work took precedence over school for purely economic reasons and any boy would take a day off school if a day's paid employment was on offer. Life became a little easier when more money started to come in i.e. when children began to earn and contribute to the family budget. Grown children working away - girls in service, boys in the army – would try and send money home whenever they could and this was especially welcome as it did not come with an extra mouth to feed. All families strove to avoid debt. On such a small income debt once incurred was extremely difficult if not impossible to repay.

Although there were probably some in the village who felt that "life isn't living it's just dragging along" [1] there were many others who found real happiness in their families, their gardens and the special days in the year. Others who were devout Christians would have found solace and comfort in their faith. The majority probably accepted their lot with stoicism and worked hard to make life as pleasant as possible.

[1] Rowntree, Beerbohm. "How the Labourer Lives", Thomas Nelson, 1917.

Going to work

The main activity of the community was agriculture. There are thirteen farmers listed in Kelly's Directory and these were supported by three blacksmiths (including Miss Mary Taylor) two vermin catchers and a mole catcher, a wheelwright, two harness makers, a threshing machine contractor, a sheep dipping contractor and Mr John Dodman Smith the vet. Most of the young men worked on the farms, others were employed in construction or on the railway. The average national wages before the war was 16/9 (approx. 87p) for a fifty-eight hour week. For agricultural workers it was around 13/- (65p) for uncertain hours; long "light until dusk" days in the summer and cold hard work in winter if enough work was available

Of those who lost their lives in the war the majority worked on the farms. Opportunities to do anything else would have been very limited. During the years leading up to the war the school records show that several boys earned a "certificate to work" showing that they had achieved level 5 (the highest level of achievement at Grimston School) but only one secured a place at Lynn Technical School presumably to study engineering or something similar. Opportunities for young men were limited but they were worse for young women. On the 1911 census a number of young women are listed with no occupation or "at home." One or two young women did escape the drudgery of domestic service (either in their own home or someone else's) by becoming apprentice teachers, in the pre-war years no boys were taken on in this role.

The Victorian class structure still held sway; it was easy to "know one's place". The local gentry were the village aristocracy. Mrs Elwes, a widow, lived with her children at Congham Hall whilst her sister-in-law Miss Violet Elwes resided at the other end of the village at Elder Farm. The elderly Everard siblings, Misses Geraldine and Constance and their brother Raoul, a JP, lived at Roydon Lodge. All of these people were living on their own means and they employed about a dozen domestic servants between them, none of whom originated from the village.

There is little evidence of "the middling sort" in the villages. One hundred pounds a year, often perceived by the Victorians as a middle class wage, was beyond the wildest dreams of most villagers who would think themselves extremely fortunate to earn half that money. In a community in which agriculture and manual labour prevailed there was little use for the clerks, retail assistants and supervisors who aspired to middle class status in the town. Certainly there were residents who probably thought themselves "a cut above" and these may have included those who owned and ran businesses as well as the professionals. Mr and Mrs Hammond were teachers at Grimston School for many years and raised a large family in the school house. It is certain that they were viewed as of the better sort and were loved and respected in the village but teaching wasn't a well-paid job and in 1912 Mr Hammond was supplementing their income by taking on the role of Registrar for Births and Deaths; Mr Tuddenham the Station Master lived with his wife and two little girls in the six-roomed cottage at the station and would surely have regarded himself as a little better than the farmworkers as did Mr Balding and Mr Grey the grocers and the lady post mistresses. The carters, publicans and tradesmen made a great deal more money than the average but their status in the village was probably defined more by roots than finances.

As everyone in the village knew their betters there was a considerable amount of cap doffing or tipping and a great deal of deference, this was accepted as the norm. If there was talk in the village pubs of challenging the status quo most men would have been careful to avoid becoming too closely associated

with such sentiments as it was dangerous to come to the landowner's attention as a trouble causer. Farming unions existed before the war – George Edwards started the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers Union in 1907 – but we have no way of knowing if workers in Grimston belonged to any such organisation or were interested in such things.

Whilst work for most of the men meant labouring on the farm, for women, who became wives and mothers, work probably was never ending and the burden of responsibility heavy. Women had to do the household chores, keep their families fed and reasonably clothed and in addition they also faced the enduring problem - and attached anxiety - of eking the family finances out to avoid debt, poverty and the workhouse. Poor nutrition, hard work and multiple pregnancies meant that wives and mothers often experienced poor health.

The men who died early in the war in 1914 and 1915 were all regular soldiers or sailors and most families in the village had a son with the colours. The army seemed to offer an escape and a more exciting life to those who could cope with the brutality and discipline. The stories these soldiers brought home with them and the respect they inspired must have impressed many boys in the village. For most of the wartime volunteers and conscripts work at home had been tedious, hard and poorly paid and probably life sometimes seemed a dull and wearying daily grind. It is not surprising that the chance to wear a uniform, travel and experience new things might have seemed like an adventure and a short-term escape.

Going to School

The 1880 Education Act made school attendance compulsory between the ages of five and ten; further legislation in 1893 extended the age of compulsory attendance to 11, and in 1899 to 12.

Before the war there were four schools – one in each of the villages – and the total on school rolls was over three hundred. Mr and Mrs Hammond were teachers at Church Hill School for many years. Assisted by one or sometimes two apprentices they managed a school population of over one hundred ranging in age from five to twelve although some children did stay on longer. School entry as well as school leaving appears to have been a somewhat random event with children arriving and going throughout the year. As there were no school dinners children went home for lunch. The school day consisted of a morning and an afternoon session with a two hour break allowing time for children to walk home, eat and walk back. In rare cases where children lived too far away to walk home they were allowed to eat a packed lunch at school and play outside afterwards on the understanding that teachers were not responsible for them during that time. With all this trekking to and fro, the school day must have been very long especially for the smallest children and it is likely that many were reluctant to return in the afternoon

The number of pupils on roll at Church Hill between 1880 and 1910 was always over one hundred but attendance was usually well below that number. Children were absent for a range of reasons – the harvest, the Sandringham Flower Show, illness, bad weather (without cagoules or wellingtons small children walking to school would have quickly become soaked) and exclusion. Illness was a constant worry and any household suspected of having scarlet fever or measles would be quarantined, the parents told to keep all children at home. These measures were often applied to the neighbouring cottages too. Despite these precautions the school was closed in January 1914 due an outbreak of scarlet fever and in April of the same year a small girl called Bertha Collison died from the illness. During the thirty years 1880 – 1910 at least four children on the Grimston roll died as a result of complications of measles.

Another reason for absence was what we would call exclusion. Behaviour in school was not always good. The boys were guilty of stealing, bullying and being what Mr Hammond described in the school log as “insolent” “disobedient” and “a bad influence”. The use of the cane didn’t always improve this behaviour and one pupil attacked and kicked Mr Hammond requiring the intervention of the local policeman and the magistrates. In cases of bad behaviour the student was sent home with instructions to return with his father. When parent and child turned up there had to be a public apology and a pledge from the boy to do better although this wasn’t always complied with. Thus there is evidence of troublesome boys being shuffled between Grimston and Pott Row in an attempt to finish their schooling and avoid the Attendance Officer.

Assessment – monitored by the annual visit of the School Inspector and of the Diocesan Inspector – was at six levels. Most Grimston students achieved level 4 on leaving. Consulting the level descriptors, we can see that level 4 means only that most of our soldiers would have been literate or numerate. Those who failed to reach level 4 (or even levels 1, 2, or 3) simply remained illiterate and/or innumerate and went out into the world lacking those skills. Some boys gained a scholarship to Lynn Technical School and some girls went on to become apprentice teachers, these students had achieved level 5 or possibly even level 6. Boys could also gain a “Certificate to Work” and these boys also achieved level 5.

The school log book has references to some of the Fallen by name. **Lloyd Francklin** attended the school for just a year in between his mother’s marriages; **William Bird** was also a short term pupil. **Samuel Smith** and his brother were often late (and were sent home as a consequence of this) whilst **Walter Hammond** was the model pupil. The **Mayes** family were plagued by ill health between 1893 and 1895 and **William**

Boldero had to return to school in Pott Row after only a term at Grimston because the walk was too taxing for a child in such delicate health. Interestingly the army found him fit for service in 1916.

It is impossible to ascertain how parents and children viewed education. Whilst it was perceived as "necessary" to go to school and gain basic skills it is probable that for most people aspiration meant the hope of wages, home and a healthy family with the chance of a skilled job such as blacksmith, carpenter or saddler for the more fortunate or "clever".

Going to the Pub

In the early years of the twentieth century the Temperance Movement was strong. There were temperance hotels in King's Lynn but there is no evidence that the movement had any influence in the village. There was an alternative to the pub – the Working Men's Club which was attached to the village hall and was given to the village by a benefactor. We cannot be sure how much it was used or what kind of atmosphere there was, it is possible that it was a temperance establishment in which case some of the men who were teetotal – often those involved with the Methodist chapel – would go there instead of the pub. Women did not go to the club or to the pub. The pub – usually a working-class establishment – was perceived as a male domain and to be seen in the pub would tarnish a woman's reputation beyond repair. During the war young women from the working and middle classes did begin to frequent pubs but this would not have happened in rural communities like Grimston where new ideas were slow to take root

The village had several pubs. Licencing laws before the war allowed children into pubs at the age of 14 which was the start of working life. Thus we might presume that once boys became "working men" they would go to the pub with their fathers although this would have depended upon Dad's willingness to take them. The pub was an escape for men; a place away from the children and the overcrowding that existed in most family homes. Men would have had a local, a pub in which they were a regular and it's probable that they rarely ventured into any of the other pubs**.** A pint of beer cost around 1.75 old pence in 1910. Although this sounds very little, family budgets were stretched and most men would have made a pint of beer last a considerable length of time. There may have been pub games in the pub – darts, dominoes or even cards although landlords were supposed to be strict about gambling on the premises – and there was conversation that would have been thought unsuitable for women's ears. We cannot know what exactly was discussed but there is no evidence that Grimston was a politically active community. Once the war started there would have been talk about events at the front and any news from men fighting would be passed on. In a society in which men were discouraged from showing emotion the pub was somewhere where bereaved fathers and brothers could grieve in their own way amongst their mates.

Only four of the pubs remain: The Three Horseshoes, The Anvil (Congham), The Union Jack (Roydon) and the Bell (Grimston).

The Bell, which has been a pub since the end of the eighteenth century, looked very different in 1911; the landlord was Mr William Smith who had been established there since 1904. At the crossroads where the Bell stands there were two other pubs .The New Inn (now the Clock House) and the Bushell which was part of the brewery behind the shop.

The Old Bell

The Bushell was run by Mr Robert Case. In 1912 he was fined for opening after hours when Sergeant Webb found Charles Phillippo drinking spirits at 11.30pm. Mr Case and Charles attempted to put the policeman off by claiming that Charles was staying the night but unfortunately for Mr Case the police waited outside the pub until Charles left at 1.20am Mr Case was fined £1.00 with costs. This didn't put him off running the pub; he stayed until 1916 when

Charles Cobb, who was steward at the working men's club, took over. The New Inn landlord was Alfred Harrowing who also ran a butchery business.

The Chequers Inn no longer exists; it was demolished in 1960 after a lightning strike. Before the war William Bird the landlord lived there with his son, also called William, and daughter in-law. William had been a publican for most of his working life, his wife Matilda had died shortly after he took over the Chequers so his son and daughter-in-law were there to help him although William Jnr also worked as a game dealer. When his son joined up in 1916 William gave up the pub; he was in his seventies and without his son's support it's probable that he found it difficult to manage. Sadly William Jnr was killed in 1917.

The Three Horseshoes was the biggest pub in the villages – the 1911 census lists it as having twelve rooms. It was run by Mr and Mrs Braybrooke who took over from elderly Mrs Dunham in 1912. The old lady continued to live in the pub presumably as a paying guest. Roydon also had the Plough Inn which still stands in Low Road, Congham. This was run by Mr Turner; Robert Twaite took over in 1916. The pub now called the Union Jack was formerly The Blacksmiths Arms. At the time of the war it was situated at the station so would be the first pub people saw when alighting from the train. This must have made it popular with both visitors and those returning to the villages.

Pott Row had three pubs listed on the pubs of Norfolk site, two of which are still standing. At the time of the war Pott Row was the most densely populated part of the villages and these pubs would have been crowded and busy. The Tumble Down Dick and The Carpenters Arms were close together but each man had his favourite. The landlord at the Carpenters had a prosecution for "gaming on the premises". It seems that the gambling in question was somethings called "spinning" in which there were various prizes to be won. The cost was 6d which would have been far beyond most working men (if they were prudent) and the authorities took a very dim view of this and fined the landlord £2.16s and 6d - a substantial sum. In 1910 the pub caught fire and was rebuilt by Mr Spragg the builder of the village war memorial. There were similar problems with gambling in The Jolly Farmers. The Lynn Advertiser of 5th February 1909 records that licensee Thomas George Mann was summoned before the magistrates for allowing a guessing competition for prizes – guessing the numbers of seeds in a pumpkin. There were three prizes of four gallons of beer, two bottles of gin and twelve cigars all of which would have been very extravagant prizes for the villagers. Entry conditions or costs are not recorded. Mr Mann was fined 2s 6d with 11s 6d costs despite claiming that he was unaware these actions were wrong. It seems that the Tumbledown Dick has a less colourful past.

The Anvil at Congham was called the Elwes Arms although locals often referred to it as the "Snake and Arrow" a reference to the Elwes family crest. The Rennett family, who like several others, combined inn keeping with butchery, ran the pub for sixty years.

The village pubs did not welcome women or children although dogs were probably accepted. They sold only drink although there may have been pickled onions or eggs on the bar. All of the men who died in the war would have been regulars at one or the other of the pubs or at the Working Men's Club – every establishment would been missing regulars by 1919.

When Things Went Wrong

Edwardian working class families lived life on a financial knife edge. The material well-being of the family depended upon the bread winner and the woman of the house. The former was under pressure to bring in enough money to at least feed and house the family whilst the latter had the responsibility of making that money stretch to cover the family's needs.

In the years preceding the war the government brought in measures to reform social welfare. Pensions were introduced in 1909 although they were far from universal. In 1911 the National Insurance Act was introduced to provide sick and unemployment benefit but this was restricted to certain industries and to the worker only

The agricultural worker always had an insecure career path. By its very nature agriculture is seasonal and the need for labour fluid; there was not always work and no work meant no pay. It has been estimated that on average, men would be paid for around forty-four weeks out of fifty-two.[2] In "off weeks" men would usually work hard on their gardens or allotments as these provided as much as 30% of a family's nutrition. However, it was probably at these times that families were more likely to get into debt and it is certain that Messrs Balding, Grey and Blake, the village grocers, each had a book in which credit was written, some of which was unlikely to ever be paid off. In 1913 Rowntree suggested that once debt rose above one pound it would prove to be impossible to clear without some kind of extra income in the household. It is more than possible that some village women owed money in all the village shops which must have added to their burden of anxiety.

Grocery debt was bad enough but even more worrying was medical debt. Even in families where men could claim money under the 1911 act there was no provision for families and it was often women who required medical help. In most cases babies were delivered without medical intervention although the mother would be attended and assisted by friends, relations and/or the local midwife. The 1902 Midwifery Act had ushered in training and supervision for midwives and thus, officially, untrained midwives were to be phased out. This did not happen immediately and in rural areas there was often no trained midwife to call upon. Therefore, in cases where there were serious complications the local doctor – Dr Woodwark – would be called. Rowntree estimates the cost of medical attendance in a confinement as between 9s (80p) and 1gn (£1.05). Should any member of the family require more prolonged medical treatment the cost could escalate to between 3gn (£3.15) and 10gn (£10.50). This bill would have to be paid off weekly or monthly and could make a big difference to the lives of families already living hand to mouth.

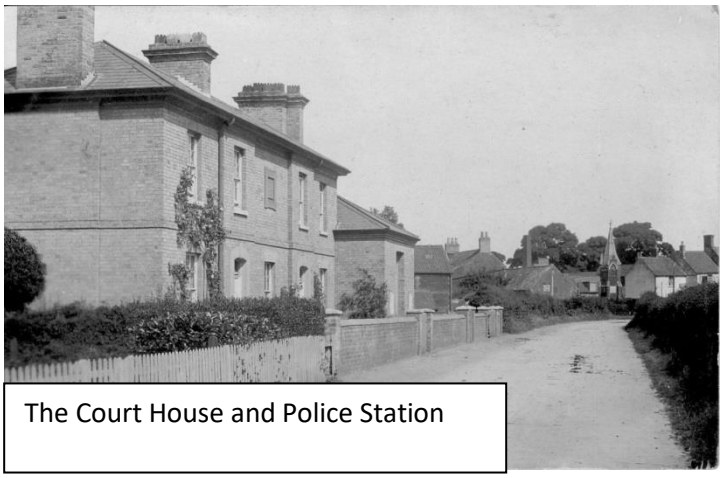
The death of a spouse was financially cataclysmic. If it was the wife who died the children would most often be rehomed with relatives as in the case of Frederick Brinkley and his sisters. If one of the girls was old enough to leave school she may take on the role of house keeper for father and siblings. If it was the husband who died the family instantly became dependent upon the kindness and help of others. Firstly from the land owner or farmer in whose cottage they lived, secondly from family and neighbours, who might donate food, clothing and may mind the children. Women, as in the case of Frederick's Spooner's mother, had to take work usually as a charwoman or a laundress.

[2] David Mitch, "Agriculture as a Career", Institute of Social History. www.llsg.nl/publications

The workhouse remained a location to be viewed with dread. Mr and Mrs Warnes were master and matron; they had worked all their adult lives in the workhouse system. The workhouse population was larger in 1911 than it had been in 1881 although for most people a stay in the workhouse was temporary. The workhouse census shows that people were in the workhouse for predictable reasons - pensioners, unmarried mothers, widows and those unable to work. There were more octogenarians in 1911 than in 1881 and more children. Only the names Smith and Boldero appear on both the workhouse roll of 1911 and the war memorial and it is more than likely, especially in the case of Smith, that these were not direct relatives of the fallen.

Social problems were probably as prevalent as they are today. Marriages may have been brought on by an ill-timed pregnancy although a surprising number of women in the village gave birth to a child or children out of wedlock which were apparently welcomed into the family. Once married divorce was unheard of, the cost would have been prohibitive; marriage truly was "for better or worse". We cannot know what went on behind the cottage doors in the village (although the neighbours undoubtedly did) but some historians have suggested that, for some women, having a husband away in the army represented an improvement in their quality of life giving more money, more food and respite from a difficult or abusive husband.

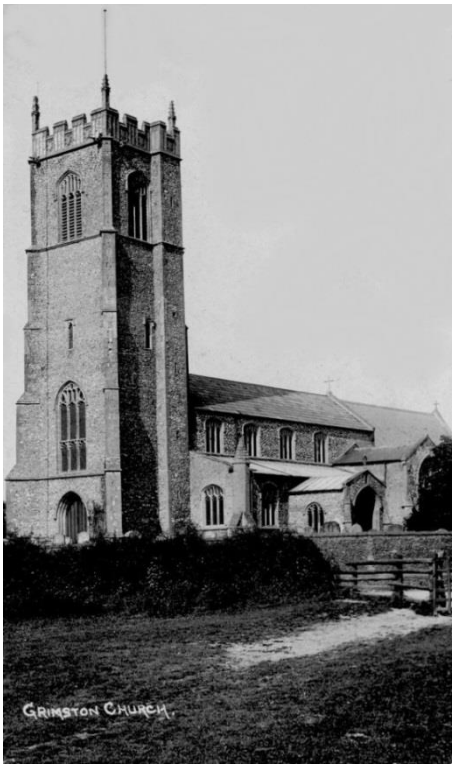
Some kind of crime – domestic abuse for example – was rarely prosecuted in Edwardian villages although it's likely that the perpetrators were known to many of their neighbours and probably the local policeman. Other crimes such as vandalism, anti-social behaviour and fighting were dealt with by the traditional "clip round the ear", the intervention of the local constabulary with a warning or with a sullen resolution between the parties involved. There was a court house in Grimston which included housing for one inspector (in 1911 there was Sergeant Webb but no superior officer) and one constable. Court sessions were held twice a week and the offenders came from a very large area including West Bilney, Sandringham and the Woottons. Sadly the court records for the war years have been lost but the Lynn News for 1914 reported crimes in Grimston and most were what we would probably call petty theft. Examples are Alfred Loades who stole wheat and barley meal from a Mr Clarke and Charles Skerry who stole barley meal and some fertiliser. Some more serious cases originate in different villages and generally it seems that our village's had low crimes rates and were safe and settled communities. Almost everyone was "in the same boat" and whatever their differences generally neighbours helped each other out when they could. They would need this community spirit in the dark days of the war when everyone lived in fear of the arrival of the dreaded telegram and every pre-war worry suddenly became insignificant.



The Court House and Police Station

Spiritual Matters

Although the church is often perceived as central to village life it is not possible to say what percentage of the population were regular attenders. The only survey of church attendance was carried out in 1851 some sixty years before the war and surprisingly it found that only a third of the population attended an Anglican church with the same number being non-conformists. In the years following the report Anglican churches, including Grimston, had undergone extensive restoration whether this had any effect on attendance in the village is unknown. It is most likely that whilst many villagers were non-receptive to religious doctrine they were attached to the church as a village institution.



There were four churches in the village's – St Botolph's at Grimston, St Luke's Chapel at Pott Row, All Saints at Roydon and St Andrews at Congham. There were also two non-conformist chapels – one Wesleyan, one Methodist - at Grimston and Pott Row. The Reverends Alfred Ellaby, Herbert Thursby and Stewart Kirsley had the job of tending to the spiritual well-being of the parishes. Like many Edwardian clergymen they were all the sons of clergymen raised in comfortable upper middle class homes, alumni of Oxford or Cambridge, and whilst not quite upper classes were able to happily socialise and mix with them. Alfred Hall Ellaby lived at the old rectory (on Massingham Road) with his wife, two housemaids and two of his eight children; the older ones having moved out. The living of Grimston was worth £300 a year. The rector of Congham, Stuart Roper Kersey, followed his father into the job. He was granted the living worth £340 a year through his late mother. Rev Kersey lived very quietly in the large rectory with only one housemaid and his elderly governess who lived in his house until she died. The parish of Roydon was in the gift of Captain Howard of Castle Rising and the rector of Roydon, Rev Herbert Thursby, lived at Castle Rising. He also followed his father into the church although not into the parish. Despite this class gap there is some evidence that the rectors strove to understand the everyday lives of their flock and empathise with them.

At the beginning of the war the rector of Grimston played a lead role in Colonel Everard's recruitment meetings. The Lynn News (December 1914) quotes: "He (Rev Ellaby) spoke of the splendid spirit of those at the front and hoped in the years to come many of them would have the honour of being among those who had served their king and country in the hour of need". A Roll of Honour was regularly displayed at the church showing the names of the young men in the forces, but it also listed those who wanted to go but were medically unfit to do so. Throughout the war Rev Ellaby corresponded with many of the young men who had heeded the call and his notes on the fallen show that he felt a responsibility for all of his parishioners. No doubt the bond between rector and villagers was strengthened when the rector's own son Cecil was killed at Gallipoli.

Several of the fallen were well-known to the rector. **George Mayes** was "a regular attender at evensong"; **James Smith** was a "St Luke's boy" whilst **William Stebbings** was a faithful member of the church choir. During 1917 when the village suffered some of its worst losses there were regular memorial services at St

Botolph's and St Luke's for those who had been killed. Rev Ellaby left the parish in 1918 before the end of the war to move to Thornham but returned for the unveiling of the war memorial on which his son's name was written.

Of the two hundred serving men of the parishes some would have been non-conformist and would have worshipped at one of the chapels in Pott Row or Grimston. **Gunner Jonathan Twite** who was killed in 1917 was a Sunday School teacher and honorary secretary of the Sunday School at Pott Row and was by all accounts much mourned by his young students as well as the chapel congregation

Sunday School

Sunday School was an important part of village life. The opportunity to send the children out for an hour or two on the one day of the week when there was no work gave parents a small amount of peace, quiet and private time. This was a blessing for couples living in the very tiny cottages usually filled with large families.

For the children it was worth attending Sunday School – we know it was held at both St Luke's and St Botolph's as well as at the Methodist chapel – in order to access the "treats" and prizes. Treats were funded by the local gentry and included an afternoon tea with games in the winter and an outing, sometimes to Hunstanton, in the summer. Prizes were handed out once or twice a year and these would have been awarded not only for Bible knowledge and work but also for regular attendance. Whatever these prizes were they would have been welcomed by children who rarely if ever, received a gift of any kind. As most children attended Sunday School, the war memorial men would have had a knowledge of the Bible which was far better than most modern people and we know that several of them took a Bible with them to the war.

During the War

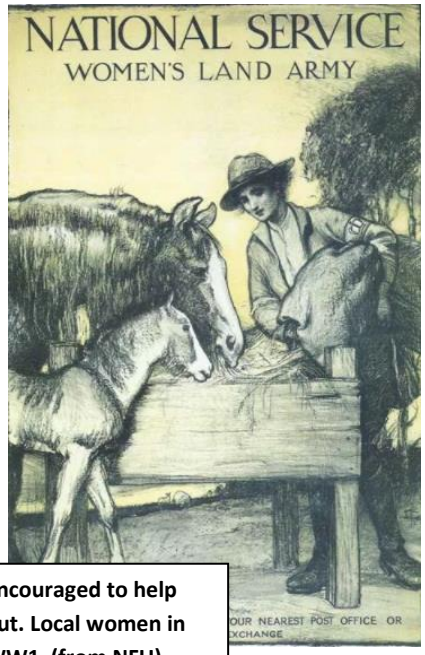
Life in the villages in wartime

Statistics show that in Norfolk there was not a rush to volunteer in 1914 but this was possibly due to the fact that the war began in the middle of the harvest when all hands would be needed on the farm. In December 1914, in an attempt to encourage men to join the colours, Colonel Everard of Congham Hall hosted a Recruitment Meeting in the club room (now the Village Hall) at Pott Row and about thirty men turned up. Captain Wilkin addressed the meeting and gave a stirring speech; Mr Birch spoke about the duty to volunteer. Despite all this rhetoric no-one volunteered at the meeting although there was a steady stream of men joining the colours throughout 1915. In August 1915 the Rev Ellaby posted a list in the church porch of those serving ,they numbered seventy and there were twelve men who were considered unfit for service. Sadly this list has been lost. Most of the men who had volunteered worked on the farms and this undoubtedly caused labour shortages and necessitated men covering for serving comrades. Things would however get worse for farmers and the decision to introduce conscription in 1916 was worrying.

Before the war Britain imported around 60% of the nation's food. Most importantly the nation was dependent upon grain from USA and Canada .With a poor American harvest and the U-boats sinking British merchant shipping, in 1916 Britain was down to six weeks of grain and between 25% and 33% of the agricultural work force had left for the forces. The farmers could not afford to lose men from the workforce especially not those who had valuable skills. Unfortunately those same skills – especially equine ones – were just as useful to the army and the farming industry and the War Office were locked in a continual struggle to satisfy the demands of Front and Farm. Furthermore men were attracted to the army for financial and social reasons. Agricultural pay was around 15shillings (75p) a week. There was no minimum wage and money was variable – in harsh winters when the men couldn't work there was less pay. Whilst the newly recruited Tommy earned just over 1 shilling a day the pay was regular and he was clothed and fed. If he had a family they would receive money from his pay (automatically deducted) which would be "topped up" so families usually received around 12s per week. This was less than when the man was at home but it was regular money and as the man took the biggest share of any food there was often more for everyone with him away. Some soldiers such as drivers in the artillery earned extra money and some men like Ernest Mayes volunteered to do hard or dangerous work to earn more. In the later years of the war agricultural wages went up as the skills needed were scarce and much in demand. The men born in 1900, most of whom did not serve, would have earned up to £5 a year more than their older counterparts.

Some men were keen to stay at home or were prompted to do so by their employer who needed their skilled labour. Anyone claiming exemption had to apply for an exemption certificate through a local tribunal. Farmers themselves e.g. men who owned and worked farms were always granted exemption and there was a certain amount of rumour mongering that farmers "wangled "exemption for their sons by calling them "farm managers" or claiming that they were taking over from an ailing parent. There is no hard evidence to support this. Certified occupations early on might be foremen, bailiffs, horsemen and teamsters and skilled seedsmen. On the list of the Home Front army for our villages we have three waggoners, three horsemen, two blacksmiths and a wheelwright all men; without whose skills the local economy could not survive. Life was hard for the men at home, they had to work very long hours to keep up with demand and probably had to learn new skills quickly.

As the population in general was vigilant for men who were deemed to be skiving off service in the army the government gave the men at home a badge to wear to show that they were contributing to the war effort as much as the men at the front. The government wanted 2.5million extra acres ploughed and in 1917 they realised that the farming industry simply could not achieve these levels without assistance so they took action. They began to send men from the army back to the farms. Men who were considered unfit to fight but still fit to work were allocated to home service or the Labour Corps; the need to produce food was so great that some men were allocated to the Labour corps when joining up. The government also started recruiting women onto the land, encouraging local women to help out (although many did not have the time) and in 1917 starting The Women's Land Army.

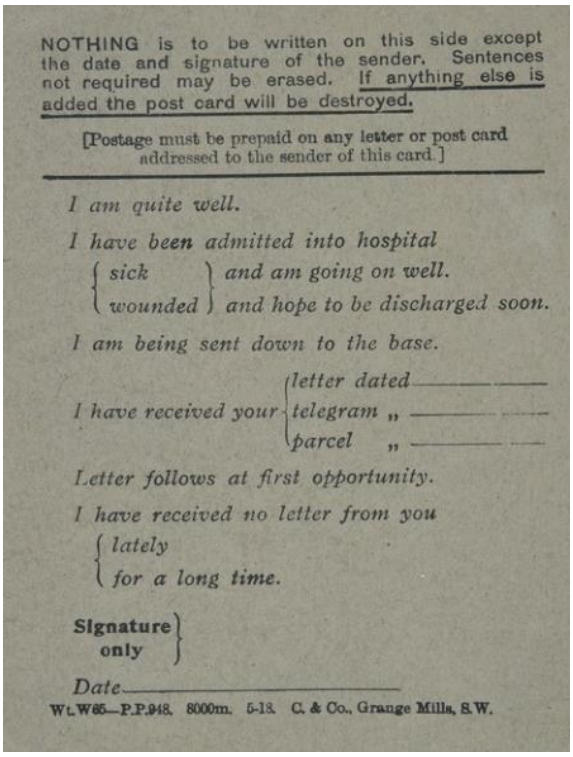


Encouraged to help out. Local women in WW1 (from NFU)

Initially many farmers were against the use of women. The reason for this reluctance may have been that taking on women as an alternative labour supply would make it less likely that any appeals to tribunals to prevent men being conscripted after 1916 would be accepted. There may also have been a simple reluctance and anxiety about such a big change; farmers in many rural areas retained traditional views and this upturning of gender roles seemed bewildering. In an effort to resolve things the board of trade sent agricultural organisers to speak with farmers to encourage them to accept women's work on the farms. We don't know if they visited our area and there is no evidence of whether women worked on the farms in our villages but one Norfolk farmer, Mr Thistleton-Smith reported "They (the women) have given me no trouble"[3] and the reality is, without the women, Britain would have starved.

[3] "The Landswoman" April 1918, page 18

There was change for the families who had men at the Front. Whilst, as we have said, financially they may not have been a great deal worse off there was the absence of a breadwinner and "head of the household". The normality of family life in many households in 1914 would appear to modern day observers as unequal and abusive. Although some women would have felt very lost without the presence and strength of a husband for some this was a liberating experience. Some women felt free from the fear of a husband's quick temper (and of another pregnancy) some, who had always harboured a spirit of independence were freed from their traditional subservient role and maybe some just relished the space and peace of a house without a man. They and the children had to work harder as there was no-one to dig the garden, chop the wood and carry out the jobs which husbands had regarded as theirs but families managed, and faced with many months of waiting for the end of the conflict they got on with life. For the children Scouts continued to meet despite the fact that the scout leader Mr Youngman had been called up early in the war. Miss Ellaby and Mr Birch filled the breach and the boys met at the rectory. Sunday school continued throughout the war and the Mothers Union met on the first Thursday in the month. People continued to shop and meet in the village shops and news would be exchanged. The pubs were a little quieter and men home on leave would have been afforded a warm welcome and possibly a free drink. It is unlikely that they told their fellow drinkers the true picture of life in the trenches. Men wrote letters home and wives and mothers would have swapped stories with their neighbours. The village post offices knew who wrote and probably to whom although they were sworn to professional secrecy. Sometimes wounded soldiers sent postcards such as the ones shown, the telegram almost always conveyed more upsetting news – a soldier killed or missing in action. The latter category sometimes leading to many weeks or even months filled with false hope.



NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

I am quite well.

I have been admitted into hospital
{ sick / wounded } and am going on well.
{ sick / wounded } and hope to be discharged soon.

I am being sent down to the base.

I have received your { letter dated ____ / telegram „ ____ / parcel „ ____ }

Letter follows at first opportunity.

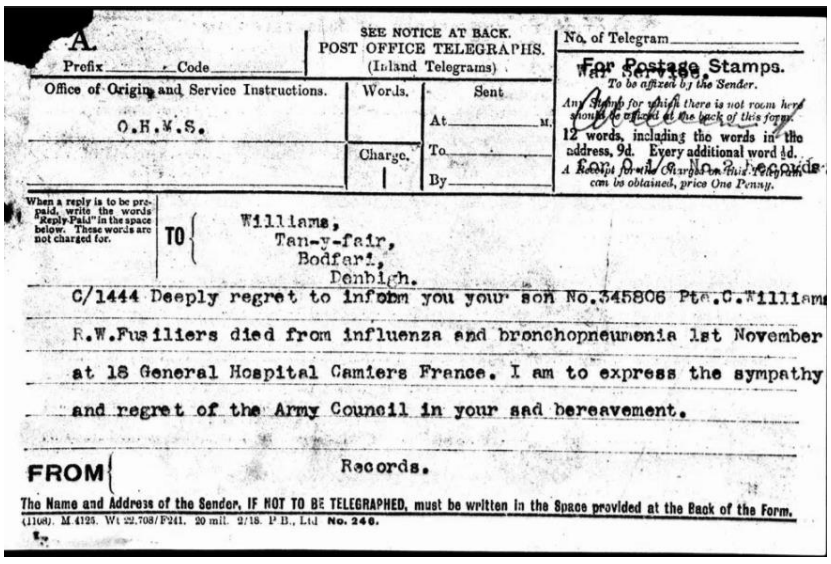
I have received no letter from you { lately / for a long time.

Signature only

Date

Wt.W65—P.P.948. 8000m. 5-18. C. & Co., Grange Mills, S.W.

The end of the war, when it finally came, found the villages tired and uncertain. Everyone knew that life could not return to the way it used to be and no-one was sure about the future ahead.



A.

Prefix _____ Code _____ | SEE NOTICE AT BACK. POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS. (Inland Telegrams) | No. of Telegram _____

Office of Origin and Service Instructions. O.H.M.S. | Words. | Charge. | Sent At ____ M. To ____ By ____

War Service. For Postage Stamps. To be affixed by the Sender.

Any Words for which there is not room here should be written at the back of this form. 12 words, including the words in the address, 9d. Every additional word 1d. A Receipt for the Charge on this Telegram can be obtained, price One Penny.

When a reply is to be pre-paid, write the words "Reply Paid" in the space below. These words are not charged for.

TO { Williams, Tan-y-fair, Bodfari, Denbigh.

C/1444 Deeply regret to inform you your son No.345806 Pte.C.Williams R.W.Fusiliers died from influenza and bronchopneumonia 1st November at 18 General Hospital Camiers France. I am to express the sympathy and regret of the Army Council in your sad bereavement.

FROM { Records.

The Name and Address of the Sender, IF NOT TO BE TELEGRAPHED, must be written in the Space provided at the Back of the Form.

(1168). M 4123. Wt 22,708/F241. 20 mil. 2/18. P.B., Ltd. No. 248.

Men of Grimston & Pott Row

1914

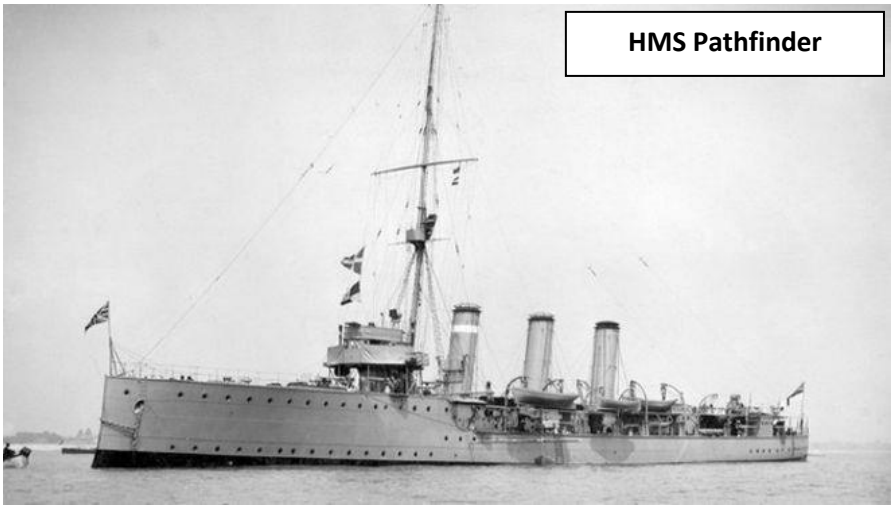
Alfred Rumbles – died Saturday 5th September 1914

FIRST-CLASS STOKER
ALFRED RUMBLES,
a Grimston man who lost his life in the disaster to H.M.S. Pathfinder in September.

Alfred was born in West Newton in 1885. When he was a small boy the family lived at Gayton in what must have been a very crowded cottage; Mr and Mrs Rumbles had five children of their own and in addition Alfred's step brother and sister lived with them and also his sister's baby son. These conditions were quite common in the villages at this time and no doubt the overcrowding and the accompanying restrictions, made a life in the army or navy seem attractive to village lads.

Alfred signed up in 1902 when he was just seventeen. He trained on the "Ganges" at Harwich and rose to be a Stoker First Class, sailing finally on the unfortunate "Pathfinder". Alfred was always good to his parents and returned home on leave whenever he could although at that time this may have been infrequent. Mr and Mrs Rumbles last saw Alfred at Easter 1914 as did his fiancée, Edith Holland. At the time of his death The Lynn News stated that "Alfred Rumbles gained the esteem and respect of all with whom he came in contact, by his sober, steady and manly bearing. No doubt he commanded more than a little respect amongst the village boys as someone who had escaped, joined the forces and seen the world.

It must have been a great shock for the family to lose Alfred so soon in the war. The news of Pathfinder's destruction reached Grimston the day after the attack and on the following day, a Monday, a telegram arrived to inform the family of Alfred's death. He was definitely not amongst the eighteen survivors (from a crew of two hundred and sixty-eight) as his body had been found and was buried at Dalmeny, Scotland. Sadly this fatality was only the first of many losses our villages would suffer over the ensuing four years.



HMS Pathfinder

1915

Lloyd Franklin - died Wednesday 21st April 1915

Lloyd Franklin was not a village boy. His mother however, was born and lived in Grimston as a girl; her name was Fanny Green and until he enlisted Lloyd went by the name of Green. Fanny was a servant to Mr Lloyd Fairfax Franklin, a commercial traveller in jewellery who lived in Portland Street, King's Lynn. During the 1890s she had two children with him– Lloyd and a sister – but they didn't marry until early 1899, Lloyd's father sadly died in August of the same year. Maybe he married Fanny so she could inherit from him as he left her a very considerable sum of money. Just a couple of months later Fanny married George Terrey, a house painter. Lloyd lived with them and their young family at 5 Hockham Street and his name therefore appears on both the Grimston and the King's Lynn War memorials as well as in both St Michael's and All Saints Church.

Having worked for Baron Brothers Printers, Lloyd joined the army in 1912; he signed up on 5th May at Norwich and was thus a regular in the Norfolk Regiment when the war started. He was in the same battalion as another village lad, George Mayes, but we have no way of knowing whether they knew each other. As a regular Lloyd was involved in the fighting from the very start of the war and he served at Mons, Aisne and on the Marne. He was killed when the 5th Division including the 1st Norfolk was fighting on Hill 60 in April 1915.

Hill 60 is an artificially created low ridge outside of Ypres. The battle to retake it from the Germans started on 17th April when mines were blown under the hill. By the time Lloyd and the Norfolk Regiment arrived in the line on 19th – to relieve the King's Own Yorkshire – the hill had been won, lost and retaken again and Lloyd was killed defending the hill against another German onslaught. Fanny first heard that Lloyd was missing and only after a considerable length of time was he assumed dead. This wait would have been agonising enough but the end was made worse by the knowledge that, despite initial reports that he was buried at Vebranden Molen, Lloyd's body was "lost" (he is commemorated on the Menin Gate) and there would never be a grave to visit. Sadly this tragic wait and loss awaited seventeen more Grimston families in the coming years.

Hill 60 in 1915. The hill maintained this appearance and a fearsome reputation throughout the war.

George Mayes – died Monday 12th July 1915

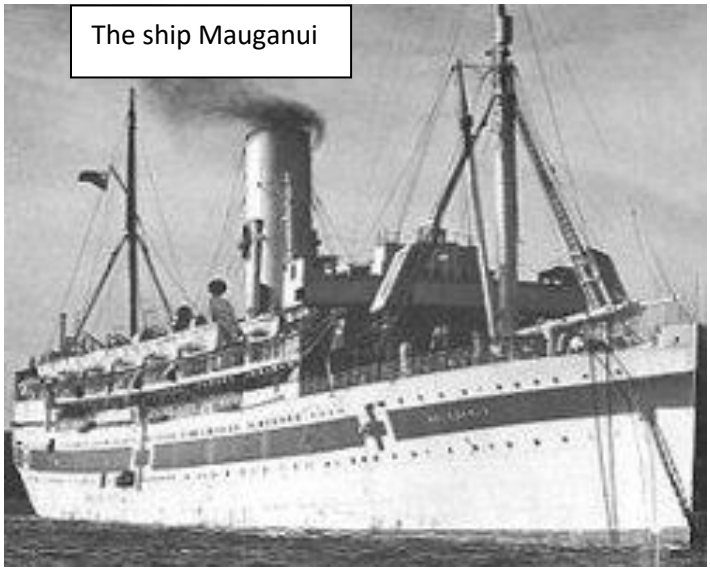
In the early months of the war the army was made up of regulars and the territorials. The pre -war British army drew its "rankers" from the urban and rural poor and although life in the army was tough it could appeal to young men wanting to escape poverty. Like Alfred Rumbles and Lloyd Franklin, George Mayes joined the forces several years before the war. George was in the same battalion as Lloyd Franklin but we have no way of knowing whether they served together.

George had already been wounded and returned to duty once before his death in July 1915. From the war diaries it seems that, following the savage battle for Hill 60 in the spring, the Norfolk Regiment was in trenches around Verbranden Molen for all of June and some of July and it was during these routine trench duties that George was killed. Mr and Mrs Mayes received the news of his death quite quickly; it was reported in the Lynn News on the 30th and the village had already commemorated him in a church service. Rev Ellaby told the congregation that George was "a quiet and steady lad, kind to his parents and an example to others." The fact that his parents thanked villagers for the letters and presents sent to George at the front bears witness to his popularity.

George was buried in a battlefield grave in a small cemetery called "Trench Railway Cemetery" with twelve comrades; Walter Hammond who was a village lad the same age as George and who was also serving in France, wrote to the rector to inform him that George had been "buried by his comrades" and in this at least Mr and Mrs Mayes could take some comfort. At the end of the war, when many battlefield burials were brought in to larger cemeteries, George was finally laid to rest in Perth Cemetery, Zillebeke.

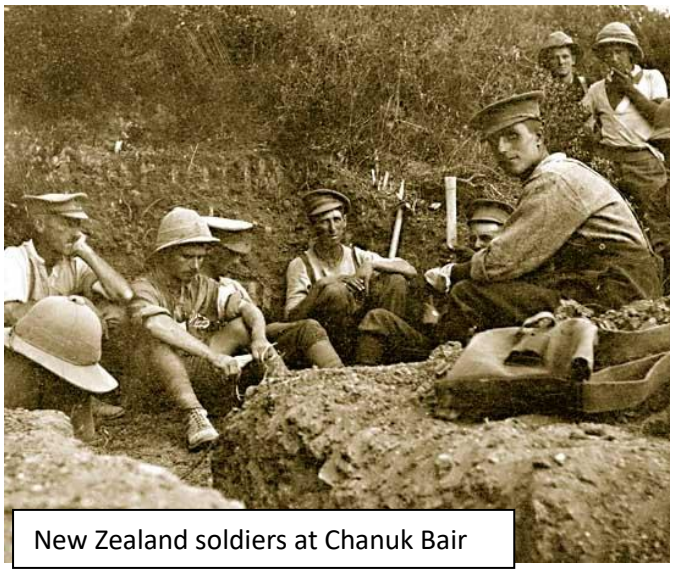
Cecil Ellaby – died Sunday 8th August 1915

Cecil Ellaby was the son of the rector of Grimston, Rev Alfred Ellaby. He was born in Hales, Staffordshire and had two sisters and two brothers. Cecil was sent to school at St John's School in Leatherhead which was then a school for the sons of clergymen; he was there in 1901 when he was twelve. By 1911 Cecil was a bank clerk living in Sheffield lodging in the house of Joseph Rodgers. It seems banking didn't work out for Cecil as on 25th May 1912 he boarded the ship "Drayton Grange" in Liverpool bound for Auckland New Zealand. In the same year another of his brothers Francis, set sail for Canada.



The ship Mauganui

On the outbreak of war Cecil joined the New Zealand Army in Holmbush, Gisborne and he was soon on board a ship again, this time the "Mauganui" carrying the Wellington Infantry Battalion to Gallipoli via Suez. The Wellington Battalion took the summit of Chanuk Bair before dawn on 8th August 1915; it was the greatest achievement of the Gallipoli Campaign for the ANZAC forces. However, with daylight the Turks mounted a furious counter attack and Cecil was killed sometime during this day long battle. He was not alone. When reinforcements finally arrived in the evening the Wellingtons had had seven hundred and eleven men killed or injured out of seven hundred and sixty. Cecil Ellaby has no known grave and is commemorated on the Chanuk Bair Memorial.



New Zealand soldiers at Chanuk Bair

William Padgett and Frederick Cooper – died Wednesday 15th October 1915

William Padgett and Frederick Cooper volunteered in 1914. The 7th Norfolk and 7th Suffolk were part of 35th Brigade; they arrived in France – in Boulogne – on 31st May 1915 and on 13th October 1915 were lined up side by side in front of the Quarries at Loos. The picture shows what an impossible objective this was.

At 1300 hours Haig ordered a gas attack which lasted until 1350. There was also a smoke screen and bombardment of the German positions, all of these proved inadequate and the attackers were thrown back by the defenders with a large number of casualties. Both William Padgett and Frederick Cooper died in this attack. Both are commemorated on the Loos Memorial as they have no known grave.

William Padgett lived in a two up two down cottage in Long Row, Pott Row. Life in this cottage must have been crowded as the Padgetts had four sons who, by the outbreak of war, were all young men. William was the Padgett's' third son. His father and one of his brothers worked as bricklayers and in 1911 William, aged sixteen, was already at work as a labourer. He joined up on 13th November 1914 and became part of the 7th Norfolk Battalion. Upon hearing of William's death the rector recalled that he was an amiable boy with a kindly and cheerful disposition and was particularly kind to and fond of children. He also made reference to the fact that Mr and Mrs Padgett had two other sons serving in the army (their youngest would join in 1916). William had served less than a year when he died. His body was not found and he is commemorated on the Loos memorial.

Frederick Cooper was born in Grimston. His father died before Frederick's second birthday and Frederick's mother Emma took work as a charlady. She then married George Lake who was thirteen years her junior and the landlord of the "Jolly Farmers" as well as a fish dealer. Frederick joined the 7th Suffolk and arrived in France in May 1915. He was reported to be a quiet man and a devoted son and he wrote to his mother regularly from the front telling her that he and his comrades were "giving it to the Hun as hot as he does to us." Initially Frederick was reported as missing and Emma hoped that he had been taken prisoner but some nine weeks after the battle, the week before Christmas, she received the news that he had been killed in action "somewhere in France". Frederick's body was not found and like William Padgett, he is commemorated on the Loos Memorial.

Arthur Symonds (Simmons) – died 7th November 1915

Arthur Symonds was the son of the village mole catcher, John Symonds who died in 1913. John and his wife Mary had eleven surviving children but as there was twenty years between the eldest and youngest, at no time did all eleven live at home with their parents. However with a grandson, Mary's elderly father and Mr Smith the lodger all living with the family at various times their house on Back Lane must have been a crowded and bustling home. Whilst nothing could prepare Arthur for the horrors of the war he was at least well used to living cheek by jowl with others.

Arthur worked first as an agricultural labourer and later on the railways. He enlisted in Norwich on December 9th 1914 and joined the 3rd Norfolk which was a training battalion. His military service got off to an unpropitious start when in March 1915 he contracted measles and was hospitalised for almost three weeks; he was not posted to the 2nd Norfolk until the 29th September 1915 and very soon afterwards he, along with eight officers and three hundred and eighty-eight other men, were sent to join the 6th Dublin Fusiliers . The Dublin Fusiliers, having fought and taken a great many casualties at Gallipoli, were on their way to Salonika. Initially this was intended to support the Serbs in their fight against the German's Balkan ally Bulgaria but by the time the allies arrived the Serbs had already been defeated. However, it was decided to retain a British/French force in place for possible future operations. There were immense logistical problems and the task of fortifying positions was tedious and tiring. The weather was always a problem changing swiftly from stifling heat to snow, sleet and wind. The battles, although nowhere near the size of those on other fronts, were always hampered by poor equipment and often by confused orders; many of the Dublin Fusiliers, possibly including Arthur died when caught between their own and the enemy artillery.

Arthur died of wounds on 7th November 1915. Rev Ellaby mentioned that Arthur was always a good son and expressed his own sympathy to Arthur's widowed mother. As Arthur was the youngest of his mother's eleven living children, it is more than possible that he held a special place in her heart. Having no known grave Arthur is commemorated on the Doiran Memorial in present day Greece.

James T Smith – died Sunday 28th November 1915

James lived in Pott Row in a row of cottages called Golston which we believe stood next door to the chapel. His father John was a farm labourer and as he and his wife had only two living children – James and his sister Clara – life was probably a little easier for them than for many families in the village. James followed his father into farm work, he was devoted to his family and a regular at St Luke's chapel. As he was fighting in 1915 he must have enlisted very soon after war broke out or may have been in the territorials before the war. These men were called up upon the outbreak of the conflict.

James joined the 3rd Norfolk in January 1915 but was transferred to the 1st battalion of the Essex Regiment. They were part of the 29th Division and were sent to fight in Gallipoli. They landed at Cape Helles on 25th April 1916 and immediately came under fire. By the afternoon they had managed to get a foothold on a hill but already they had had eighteen killed and ninety-five injured. It was an unsettling start for James and his comrades. James however, continued to send his parents cheerful letters telling them not to worry.

1st battalion landing at Gallipoli 25 April 1915

Photo from the Essex regiment Vol 5 by John Wm Burrows

Over the next two months the 1st Essex continued to make small advances but the casualties were many including their commanding officer. On 6th August two hundred and forty-one men were killed. As no real progress had been made it was decided to move forces to Suvla Bay. James and 1st Essex embarked on Gully Beach at 10pm on August 29th and just four hours later they arrived at Suvla Bay. In the first hour they were already taking casualties from shrapnel – it did not augur well for the coming weeks. The months of September and October were spent attempting to construct trenches and to consolidate small gains. There was no major advance. Casualties from illness were more common that from wounds and the colonel was amongst those hospitalised. At the end of October the battalion adjutant was killed by a sniper, it seems that the Turkish snipers were generally very skilful and this was a constant source of anxiety for the men. In November the weather changed. There were rainstorms almost daily, the trenches flooded and the men had no winter clothing. Conditions must have been very difficult. A further drop in temperature and a blizzard exacerbated things and two hundred and eighty men froze to death at the end of November.

James died of wounds on 28th. It is possible that he was a victim of the accurate Turkish snipers. There were approximately 44,000 British soldiers killed in the Gallipoli campaign and James is amongst the 19,000 who have no known grave and are commemorated on the Helles Memorial.

William Rudd – died Saturday 4th December 1915

William was born in Bawsey. Although his parents – Abdel Abner and Eliza – were both born in Grimston the family lived first in Setchey and then in Wormegay where Abdel and later his sons worked as agricultural labourers.

William was in the 2nd South Wales Borderers. He must have enlisted early in the war as he was fighting in 1915 and went with the battalion to Gallipoli as part of the 29th Division. The troops embarked in mid-March and landed at Cape Helles on 25th April 1915. They landed in broad daylight on open beaches defended by barbed wire and covered by rifles and machine guns. Three companies landed and despite the problems they lost only 2 officers and 18 men some of whom drowned. The Battalion served throughout the rest of the Gallipoli campaign. It fought with great determination in the attempt to advance from Cape Helles but in August the division moved to Suvla Bay where a landing and attempted advance by five new divisions from England had ground to a standstill. On 21st August the battalion fought in a particularly fierce battle at Scimitar Hill where almost 300 men were lost.

Throughout the autumn the weather deteriorated. On 26th November the men were hit by torrential rain. Trenches had water in the bottom and clothing became soaked. All were extremely cold. The next morning the rain eased, it was sunny. However in the late afternoon snow began to fall. Temperatures dropped below freezing. Clothing which had been wet the previous day now froze and overcoats could stand upright on their own – frozen stiff. The troops tried desperately to get and keep warm. Men huddled together against the walls of the trench with their blankets and ground sheets over their heads. In the morning these "covers" were frozen like corrugated iron. Feet were frozen into the water in the bottom of the trench and it was rumoured that some sentries had literally frozen stiff and fallen over when touched. Many men had frostbite and had to struggle, often crawling, to the beach to seek help. The borderers were at this time in rest camp having been relived on the 25th. Thus although they were hit by the weather conditions were somewhat better than in the front line trenches. Rest camp however, still involved the men working in the biting cold. Recreation seems to have been limited to a series of lectures on "Trench Discipline".

On 2nd December the battalion went back into the line and, according to the regimental diary, found the trenches very wet and conditions very cold. Work began immediately on constructing shelters and a new cook house. There was continual sniping from both sides and an enemy plane flew over and dropped bombs. Casualties were however light and on the 3rd and 4th only two men were killed one of whom was presumably William although he may have been wounded earlier and died at the dressing station.

William is one of the 19,000 British soldiers who served in Gallipoli and having no known grave is on the Helles Memorial. When the army came to send his effects home it came to light that he was sometimes known as William Harris. Furthermore there was some confusion over who to send his effects to as he had named Mrs Lily Rudd as widow (we can find no evidence of a marriage) and also named Alice Rudd who was presumably his eldest sister. Why he might have had an alias remains a mystery.

1916

Stephen Rudd - died Thursday 27th April 1916

Stephen Rudd was born in Grimston the son of Mary Ann and Samuel. He was one of seven children. Samuel worked as a bricklayer but by 1901 two of his sons, Fred aged 17 and Stephen just 14, were working on a farm as cattlemen. In 1905, aged 19 Stephen signed an attestation to join the 3rd Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. He became part of the special reserves; he would have received six months initial training and three or four weeks each year thereafter. The men of the special reserve knew they would be called up immediately should a war break out. Following his experience with the reserves Stephen joined the regular army on 7th December 1908 and became a soldier in the Norfolk Regiment. 1914 found Stephen in India. It would appear, from a postcard he sent home that the climate and atmosphere of India wasn't particularly to Stephen's liking so it would not have been much of a relief to hear that the regiment was moving to Mesopotamia where they arrived on 15th November 1914.

Having captured Basra in 1914 and won a long hard battle at Shut the division was ordered to advance to Bagdad or Kut. At the end of 1915 the force was besieged in Kut for four months and surrendered to the Turks on 29th April 1916 when over 13,000 men were taken prisoner. Stephen had died just two days before. Although listed as killed in action Stephen probably died of sickness rather than wounds as fever and cholera were rife in the starving garrison. Stephen is buried in Kut Cemetery in present day Iraq.

British troops marching in Mesopotamia in 1915.

Our thanks to Mandy Waters for information and pictures of Stephen

1917

Ernest Mayes – died 16th January 1917

Ernest was the third of six boys in the Mayes Family. When war broke out he was already married – he had married Clara Rudd in 1913 – and by 1915 they had a new baby daughter. Ernest's younger brother George who was a regular with the 1st Norfolk had been killed in July 1915 and Ernest joined up in the spring of the following year. Conscription had begun for unmarried men in March 1916 and was extended to married men in May. It seems that Ernest joined up before he was conscripted. Ernest enlisted in King's Lynn and he initially joined the Norfolk Regiment. Having arrived on the Western Front in the autumn of 1916 he was transferred to the 1st Cambridgeshire Regiment and sometime thereafter he joined an attachment to a tunnelling company of Royal Engineers. The tunnellers were men recruited for their knowledge of mining or quarrying and they joined up because the army offered much better pay than the home coal fields. However, alongside these skilled men the engineers needed almost twice that number of "attached infantry" working permanently alongside the trained miners acting as 'beasts of burden'. These men, including Ernest, would have been fetching and carrying the many essential elements of mining paraphernalia, pumping air and water and removing spoil – the earth produced by the digging of the tunnels. It is not clear whether these men were volunteers or were "chosen", they may have received extra pay for this job.

January 1917 the 1st Cambridge was in various sectors of the front line or in the Canal Bank dugouts. The cold and damp weather was a constant. In January 1917, General Sir Herbert Plumer, gave orders for a series of mines to be placed under the German lines in preparation for the Battle of Messines so the tunnellers and their labourers would have been busy. It seems that Ernest died from some kind of chest or heart problem. This may have been brought on by the strain of the work or indeed from the cold and damp conditions; respiratory diseases such as influenza, tuberculosis, pleurisy and pneumonia were all rife in the trenches.

The 1st Cambridgeshire base camp at this time was Brandhoek which was in a relatively safe place and where there were always ambulances posted. There was a Casualty Clearing Station at Lijssenthoek, just five miles from Branhoek, and as this is where Ernest is buried it seems likely that he was heading for or had arrived here before he died. Clara received a letter from one of his officers explaining this "we were returning to a rest camp when your husband complained of difficulty in getting his breath. On reaching camp he received medical attention but he passed away during the night, it may well be some comfort to you to know that he was well spoken of by his comrades and NCOs."

Ernest is buried in the cemetery at Lijssenthoek which is the second largest in Belgium.

Albert Sayer – died Saturday 27th January 1917

Albert Sayer was the son of Thomas, an agricultural labourer, and Sarah. Thomas and Sarah had ten children but three died in childhood leaving three boys and four girls. Albert was their eldest son and the only one old enough to serve in the war, he joined the army in 1916. Conscription had begun in May of that year and Albert would have been conscripted after his nineteenth birthday. In his short career Albert moved regiments three times; thus he had three service numbers and is listed in the Royal Field Artillery, the King's Liverpool Regiment and finally the Border Regiment.

At the start of 1917 the long Battle of the Somme was finally coming to a close. On 27th January 1917 the 29th Division were ordered to attack two trenches called Lanwehr and Antelope which were south of Le Transloy where there had already been heavy fighting. In the early morning there were two huge artillery barrages. If Albert hadn't been in an attack before this in itself must have been very frightening. The men, who had got up at 3.30am began the attack at 5.30am. The 1st Borders were on the left of the attack (i.e. south) with the 1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers on their right. The winter of 1916- 1917 was biting cold and on 27th January it was frosty so the mud, which slowed down so many advances, was frozen hard and the attackers could move quickly towards the enemy in a surprise attack. The fighting went well and by 7.45am the first objective had been reached. Around lunchtime the advance was slowed as the men crossed a sunken road but by 2.00pm all objectives had been reached and over three hundred prisoners taken along with five machine guns. The 1st Borders had paid a heavy price. They had twelve men killed and thirty-three missing; eighty-eight were wounded. In addition four of their young junior officers were killed leading their men. On 29th January the 1st Borders received a visit from the Corps Commander and the Divisional Commander to congratulate them on their success.

The chaplain and Albert's officer both wrote to Albert's mother. The chaplain wrote that "You will be proud to know that your son took part in a brilliant victory and behaved with great courage and zeal. He will be greatly missed as he was well liked by all." The lieutenant wrote "I was near him when he was killed which was instantaneous. He was buried near our headquarters and has a very nice cross with a suitable inscription." Sadly the grave and nice cross must have been lost in later fighting as Albert is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial as one with no known grave.

William Stebbings – died Thursday March 15th 1917

William Stebbings was the only son of William, an agricultural labourer and Julia. He had five sisters and the family lived at Church Hill. William's mother Julia died in 1889 leaving William Snr with the family to raise – William Jnr would have been around 4 years old – the youngest of whom was little Caroline aged only 1. No doubt friends and relations rallied round but William Snr still faced a difficult time acting as both father and mother. William Jnr did not follow his father onto the farm but got a job as a groom firstly with Mr Raoul Everard at Roydon Lodge and after his death with Colonel Everard at Congham Hall. He was a reliable and faithful servant to both masters and by all accounts William was a good and steady man. He cared deeply for his elderly father and his sister with whom he lived, he was always willing to help others and he was a respected member of the church who sang in the choir.

William initially joined the Bedfordshire Regiment but was transferred to the 11th Royal Sussex (the battalion in which the war poet Edward Blunden served) and was given leave before embarkation for France in August 1916. As it seems he was the mainstay and breadwinner of the household he was keen to reassure his father and sister. This is endorsed by the fact that he wrote to them very regularly but apparently never told them if he was going into the front line.

On 14th March 1917 the 11th Royal Sussex went into the front line to relieve the 13th Herts at a site called Observatory Ridge. It was a very wet day but in the morning the brigadier braved the elements to visit the men. On the 15th visibility was very poor but it stopped raining in late morning. The battalion war diary reported that there was intermittent shelling all day and this presumably was when William became a casualty. He may have been wounded and taken to one of the Advanced Dressing Stations at a place called Transport Farm. He was buried in Railway Dugouts (at the farm) just west of Zillebeke. Mr and Miss Stebbings received the news at the end of April and on the following Sunday the rector spoke of William in his sermon. Rev Ellaby knew William well and, having lost a son himself, he knew what a terrible loss this would be for Mr Stebbings.

Jonathan Twite - died 12th April 1917

Jonathan Twite was the eldest son of Jonathan William and Clara Twite. He had four brothers and two sisters. The family lived at Manor Farm where Jonathan Snr was a farmer and carrier and they were probably one of the more prosperous families in the village. Jonathan worked for his father as a horseman. He was a member of the Methodist church at Pott Row and as well as a teacher and helper there he was the secretary of the Sunday school. Jonathan married Clara Collison on 2nd February 1916. Clara lived in Pott Row where her father Horace was a bricklayer. Just three months after the marriage, on 24th May 1916, Jonathan was called up to fight and by August of the same year he had been posted to the Royal Garrison Artillery attached to the 4th Army. The RGA were equipped with much larger weapons than the RFA. These weapons became the first to be hauled by motor tractors rather than horse power; some of the guns were so large that they could only be deployed on railway tracks.

Jonathan was attached to 40 Company of the RGA. He may have been involved with firing guns and howitzers employed in destroying or neutralising the enemy artillery, as well as putting destructive fire down on strongpoints such as roads, railways and ammunition dumps behind the enemy lines.

On 12th April 1917 with the battle for Vimy Ridge being fought, Jonathan was injured by a shell burst. We do not know if it was an enemy shell (presumably from one of their heavy guns trying to take out the British artillery) or a British shell which was faulty. Jonathan was put into a field ambulance from 74th Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps but sadly he died on the way to the Casualty Clearing Station. Jonathan was buried in the cemetery at Sains en Gohelle which was used principally by field ambulances from 1916 until the end of the war.

An unidentified British soldier standing with a 9.2 inch howitzer Mk I

The news of Jonathan's death caused his mother great distress and she was apparently ill from shock. Jonathan was her eldest son, the next two – Godfrey and Anthony - were also serving in the army. The army sent Jonathan's things home to his wife Clara; as well as the usual personal things such as pipe, watch and wallet there was Jonathan's Methodist Hymn Book. Clara was granted an army pension of 13/9 a week.

John Blake – died April 19th 1917

At the beginning of the century the Blake family lived next door to the Twite family in Pott Row. The Blakes had six children and as the Twites had a large family of the same age no doubt the children played together. Charles Blake, John's father, was then a vermin catcher. By 1911 however the Blakes had moved to Queens Corner and Charles had changed his job to work as an agricultural labourer.

John was in the Lynn Territorials so he was called up on 5th August 1914 into 1st/5th Battalion Norfolk Regiment. The regiment was sent to the Dardanelles arriving on 9th August 1915. Following the unsuccessful campaign they were evacuated to Alexandria on 19th December 1915 but John had already been sent home in November with dysentery. The battalion remained in the Middle East and the next information we have on John is that he was sent to Egypt to join them on 11th January 1917. In April of that year the battalion was part of the Eastern Division involved in the 2nd Battle of Gaza. The Gaza Ridge was the only route into Palestine and so had to be taken. A full frontal assault was order despite the fact that the Turks were well-prepared with strong defences. The 1/5ths advanced behind a tank and entered a redoubt capturing twenty prisoners and killing other enemy forces. However, the enemy artillery was then concentrated on the redoubt destroying the tank and killing many of the men so that the force was unable to resist a counter attack. It is during this battle that John was killed. On that day the 1/5th Norfolk had 113 men dead or missing, 87 killed in action and 4 died of wounds. This was in in addition to their many wounded. The battalion is estimated to have lost up to 75% of its men.

Gaza Ridge, Spring 1917

Initially the family were told that he was missing – there were quite a large number of men taken prisoner in the redoubt – and they had to wait until January 1918 to be told that he was dead. John was buried in the Gaza Cemetery in what was then Palestine. His widowed father decided to have an inscription upon the stone which *read "Some day we hope to meet him in a better place"*. For this the government charged him 10/9 which was probably half a week's pay.

Reginald King - died Saturday 5th May 1917

Reginald King was, according to the census, born in Gamblingay, Cambridgeshire. He did not live with his parents and their names are unknown to us. On the 1901 census he was living in Grimston with Sarah Ann Howard, a "monthly nurse" and her son Robert an agricultural labourer. Reginald is listed as a "nurse child" and another child, one year younger, is similarly listed. The 1911 census reveals that Mrs Howard was in fact Reginald's grandmother.

Reginald enlisted at Guildford in Surrey. He was living in Walton-on-Thames at that time residing with an aunt, Mrs Ellen Howard. He signed up initially with the Royal Field Artillery but was drafted to the 5th Battalion of the Shropshire Light Infantry. It's not clear when Reginald arrived at the front but he was certainly not an experienced soldier.

The Shropshire Light Infantry were part of 42nd Brigade; their neighbours in the line were the Ox and Bucks. 42nd Brigade had fought bravely in the first Battle of Arras in April, and May found them back in action. On 3rd May the 5th Battalion, along with the rest of the brigade were to go into action near Mancourt their target trenches being codenamed "Ape" and "Boar". Initially the attack went well and the trenches seemed secured. However a counter attack began around 10am and the units became mixed up as officers were killed along with their men. It would appear, from the battalion diaries, that due to some confusion, the British Artillery began a barrage which was falling on the occupied trenches and endangering the men. An officer was sent at "top speed" back to HQ to halt this and calm returned around 7.45pm. During the hours of darkness the stretcher bearers went out to collect the wounded and Lt Colonel Smith stated in the war diary that they were "indefatigable" in their efforts. It is possible that Reginald was one of those brought in during the night of the 3rd or on the 4th before the Shropshire was relieved by the 6th Somerset on the night of the 4th.

The Shelling at Mancourt 1917

Reginald must have been taken to the dressing station, and thence on down the line. We don't know where he died as there were several clearing stations in Rouen - only that he died of wounds and was buried in St Sever Cemetery, Rouen. His sole relative was listed as his aunt, Mrs Howard, and his effects went to her.

William Bird – died Saturday 14th July 1917

William Herbert Bird was born in Great Cressingham near Swaffham in 1882 to parents William and Matilda. He was one of seven children. In 1891 the family lived at Foulden where William Snr worked as a butcher. He changed his trade and in 1901, William Snr, his wife Matilda and William's older brother Arthur were running the King's Head at Southburgh. William meanwhile had left Norfolk and moved to London where he was living in Chapel Street, Clerkenwell and working as a barman. William had not however, forgotten home or his roots. On 20th April 1910 he married Alice Constance Alderton at St Thomas Church Islington. Matilda was a domestic servant living and working in Dulwich but she was, like William, born in Great Cressingham, so it is likely they were childhood sweethearts. In 1908 William Snr had moved to The Chequers Inn in Grimston with his wife Matilda. Sadly Matilda died the following year so, following their marriage, William and Alice moved to Grimston to help William's father in the pub although the 1911 census lists William as game dealer.

William enlisted in Norwich in June 1916. He would have been 34 at the time, he and Alice had two little girls, Dorothy aged 5 and Margery aged just 2. Conscription had initially been introduced for single men only but it was changed in May 1916 to cover married men as well. William joined the 13th Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment. This battalion was formed in June 1915 in Wandsworth and had already seen action when William joined. William embarked for France on 13th October 1916. He would have been at a training camp and likely living in tents through the winter.

In July 1917 the battalion were in the area of Villiers Plouich. As this was close to the Hindenburg line the area had already seen heavy fighting and it is quite likely that it looked like the picture when William was there.

On the evening of 13th July the 13th East Surreys went into the line to relieve the King's Own Royal Lancashires. The Lynn News claimed that William was injured behind the line by an exploding (British) shell but it seems from the Regimental War Diaries that his battalion was in the support trenches when William was hit by enemy shelling. His officer and comrades apparently tried to help him but he was unconcscious and did not regain consciousness.

William was buried in the New British Cemetery just outside the village of Fins. It had been open only one month.

Charles Bunting - died Friday 3rd August 1917

Charles was born in Grimston to William and Edith. Charles had two brothers and a step brother and sister. William was a coal dealer and the family lived in Pott Row Road. Like most of the young men in the village Charles went to work on the land. In 1911 he lived with his mother, his brother and his step-brother in Grimston.

Charles enlisted as soon as war broke out. He signed up in Dereham on 7th September 1914 in the 5th Norfolk. The 5th were a territorial battalion and Charles signed up for four years. Despite this Charles - or Charlie as he was usually called - was not ideally suited to soldiering. On 28th August 1915 he was reported missing but turned up alive on 22nd October. On January 28th 1916 he was given 28 days of Field Punishment No 1 for neglect of duty whilst on sentry duty. During that time he lost seven days' pay for losing some of his kit including his mess tin.

The 5th Norfolks were part of 163rd Brigade, 54th (East Anglian) Division. Having fought at Gallipoli, the Division moved to the Middle East. Two attempts on the difficult and positions at Gaza narrowly failed, but unfortunately alerted the Ottoman command, which ordered a strengthening of the front for the third battle. The 54th Division was involved in all three battles for Gaza.

Fighting in the heat of the Middle East was hazardous; it was hot and dirty. Charlie was wounded in early July. On 9th July he was admitted to the 19th General Hospital with infected wounds on his arms, buttocks and one leg. These were apparently gunshot wounds. There was probably little hope of recovering from infection in those conditions and Charlie died in the hospital on Friday 3rd August. He is commemorated on the Alexandria (HADRA) War Memorial, D164. He is also mentioned on a head stone with his brother Edward in St Botolph's Churchyard.

Alfred Barnes – died Thursday 16th August 1917

Alfred Barnes was born in Grimston to Lorenzo Jasper and Sarah Barnes in 1889. He was one of their six surviving children – they had two who died in infancy. Lorenzo worked as a gardener and the family lived in Low Row. Alfred went to work as a general labourer at Glebe Farm, working for Mr Proctor. Alfred joined up in November 1915 and went to France in spring 1916. The 8th Norfolks were involved in the attack on the first day of the Somme.

Alfred's first battle - The First Day of the Somme At the end of June the 8th were billeted in Carnoy in preparation for the attack on Montauban. The assembly trenches were in a quiet position and the men drank tea at 5.30am as they stood waiting to move forward. At 7.20am the heavy bombardment started and the Germans instantly replied. The attack started at 7.30am, it is impossible to imagine the fear that Alfred and his comrades must have felt as they left the trench to move out across no man's land. The attack initially went well and at 8.40am the first enemy trenches had been captured without difficulty or too much loss and a halt was called. No doubt the men breathed a sigh of relief and maybe had time for a celebratory cigarette. However, what came next was quite different. As the men left Bund Trench they came under heavy machine gun fire and men and officers fell in large numbers. Fighting continued all day and only when a bombing party gained ground on the left was it possible to take Montauban Alley where the 8th Norfolks met up with the Royal Berkshires. At 6.00pm. as consolidation began, Alfred and his remaining colleagues must have thought of the high cost of their first big battle. Three hundred and thirty four of their number, as well as eleven officers were casualties on that day. Two months later Alfred was fortunate enough to get six days home and he returned home to visit his parents.

In 1917 the 8th Norfolks were back on the Western Front. During the first half of August the battalion was involved in fighting around Inverness Copse and Observatory Ridge. On 14th / 15th August the enemy exploded gas shells over the area in the late afternoon of 15th the Battalion was order to take up accommodation in Crab Crawl, a long oval tunnel with recesses for troops. However, on arrival the Norfolks discovered that the tunnel was already occupied by a great many men. The pumps had been damaged by shell fire so the tunnels were ankle deep in water and filth and in places were only one foot wide. It was impossible to keep men in these intolerable conditions so word was sent back to HQ and several companies of other regiments were moved back to Railway Dugouts. The next morning an attack began on the North West corner of Inverness Copse.

Despite hard fighting in which two companies of the 8th Norfolks had to move along the line to support other regiments, the attack was not successful and the 8th Norfolks finally regrouped at Dickesbuch Camp on 17th August. Seventeen men were wounded during the day's actions. Alfred had been wounded near Inverness Copse.; he had chest and shoulder wounds caused by a shell exploding. He was taken to the Casualty Clearing Statin at Brandhoek but died without regaining consciousness. Alfred was buried in Brandhoek, New Cemetery. Alfred's parents, Lorenzo and Sarah, received letters of comfort from both the chaplain and a sister at the hospital. It was probably comforting for them to know that Alfred had a known grave and would be able to rest peacefully there.

Frederick Spooner – died Friday 17th August

Frederick was one of eight children; there had been a ninth who had died in infancy. By the time he was at school his mother, Mary Ann, was raising the family alone by working as a laundress. She later married Frederick Smith, a forty year old bachelor, who moved in with the family near the church. Frederick probably joined up in 1915. He went to France in September 1916 but was involved in a motor accident and sent home for hospital treatment. It was not until February 1917 that he was considered fit enough for service and he joined the 1/8th battalion of the Middlesex Regiment (also called the "Duke of Cambridge's Own Regiment") and was sent to Southampton from where he was sent back to France in time to join the 1/8th Battalion at the Battle of Langemark.

Langemark is also called the Third Battle of Ypres and can be seen as a "phase" in this lengthy battle of attrition which began on 31st July. However, the exceptionally wet August weather frustrated hopes for a speedy resumption. On 14th August 18mm of rain fell; on 15th 7mm fell. For men living in muddy trenches or at best in tents this must have been dreadful. There was no way to keep anything dry and it was easy for despondency and fear to creep in. As the rain fell on Flanders clay, already wet and marked with shell holes, it turned the battlefield into a quagmire and the main attack could only be renewed on 16 August. Thursday 16th August was a dull misty morning. Around 4.45am Frederick and his friends began to move forward across the treacherous terrain. The British bombardment had failed to destroy the German defences and thus devastating enemy shelling and relentless machine-gun fire exacted a terrible toll on the attackers. Mid-morning saw all progress in the centre and south halted, by early evening exhausted remnants of units were back or near their start lines. The end of the day saw no breakthrough; an advance of around 1,500 yards was made in the north; virtually no progress elsewhere. British casualties were estimated at 15,000. On the next day fighting went to and fro. Sadly on that day, a Friday, Frederick was killed, we do not know how.

Langemark in the summer of 1917

His body was never found so whilst he may have taken a direct hit from a shell he could equally have been shot and "lost" in the deep mud of no man's land. Some soldiers were even buried by their comrades but later shelling destroyed graves. Frederick is one of the many commemorated on the Tyne Cott Memorial near Ypres.

Frederick had been a good soldier. His platoon officer wrote to Mary Anne that he was "a good and willing soldier and his loss to the company is indeed very great." Good soldiering clearly ran in the family as Frederick had an older brother, Charles, who was a regular in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders - and a younger brother Arthur still serving. Fortunately both Charles and Arthur survived the war.

George Henry Hardy - Wednesday 26th September 1917

George Hardy was born in 1879; he was the middle son of three boys born to Rose and John Hardy, an agricultural labourer who worked around Gaywood and South Wootton. When George was born the family were living at Folly Lane, Gaywood. In his early twenties George formed a relationship with Hannah Barwood (Hammond) who in 1901 and 1904 bore him two children. She was living with her sister at Pott Row during this time but when in 1905 her marriage to George took place the newlyweds moved into a cottage in Pott Row near to Hannah's family. By 1911 George was working as a horseman on a farm in Grimston. He and Hannah had five children – three girls and two boys; and were living in a four roomed cottage.

We don't know when George enlisted or why. Possibly he was conscripted in 1916. In January 1916 conscription had been planned for only single men aged 18 – 41 in just a few months it was extended to married men - in June 1916 over 130,000 men were conscripted. It must have been difficult for George and Hannah to accept as by then they had seven children and probably thought George would not be called upon to fight but the call came and George was put into the 1st Cambridgeshire. Although George joined that Cambridgeshire Regiment he was at some time in his military service attached to the 255th Company of Royal Engineers. This was a tunnelling unit. It isn't clear why a man of George's age (approaching forty) having apparently had no relevant experience (e.g. mining) would join the tunnellers but it is possible it was extra money that he could send home to Hannah and the children. It seems most likely that George's was a temporary attachment, probably during the early part of 1917, when the 255th was engaged in digging of subways to the Vimy front and in constructing two 50,000-gallon underground water reservoirs, for the supply of forward troops .Between 20th and 26th September the 1st Cambridgeshire took part in the successful Battle for Menin Road Ridge They were involved in fighting at a point called "Tower Hamlets" so called because of the large German Pill Boxes and concrete dugouts there. At some time during the battle, probably during the latter stages, George was "lost". He may have taken a direct shell hit or, as he was reported "injured" by one of his comrades, he may have died on the battlefield and his body not recovered in the chaos and destruction.

Menin Road Ridge, September 1917

Hannah received news that George was "missing". In many ways this was worse than news of a death as it gave families long months of anxiety and also fuelled hope that was rarely fulfilled. George was not officially "presumed dead" until 1918. As he has no known grave, George's name is recorded on the monument at Tyne Cott.

Walter Hammond – died Monday 22nd October

Walter was born in Grimston, he was baptised at St Botolph's on 8th May 1892. Walter's mother, Sarah was aged about nineteen and unmarried at the time and there is no father named on his baptism certificate. In 1896 Sarah married William Todd. William was the same age as Sarah and lived just three houses down in Common Lane. The Todd family lived in Common Lane for all of Walter's life and eventually they had seven children. In 1911 Walter, the eldest, was working as a bricklayer's labourer.

Walter joined the 8th Norfolk Battalion in 1914 and he arrived on the Western Front in July 1915. Prior to his death he was twice wounded in action. We do not know where this occurred but the battalion was on the Somme in the summer of 1916 and Walter may well have been wounded during the course of this battle. By 1917 the battalion had moved to Flanders to take part in the third battle of Ypres. Initially this battle had been quite successful but pertinently, the fighting had taken place during a dry spell of weather. However, early in October rainy weather returned and on 7th October 25mm fell over two days onto already saturated ground where constant fighting had destroyed any drainage system. It must have been unbearably miserable for Corporal Walter Hammond and his comrades. In a letter to Mr and Mrs Todd, Walter's lieutenant praised Walter's "cheerful manner with his comrades"; an NCO with such cheeriness must have been a great support to the men in such depressing circumstances.

On 20th October 1917 the 8th Norfolk moved off towards the forming up area from which they would move to the front line. By noon on 21st all battle supplies were issued and plans were completed and at 9.15pm the men set off in darkness. Much work and movement on the Western Front was carried out under cover of dark so it is likely that Walter would have been used to this. Apparently the battalion sustained "remarkably few" casualties in moving to the area and forming up. On arriving at the assembly area all was not well. The ground was, in the words of the Battalion Commanding Officer, "a muddy desolation of shell holes" and to make things worse it began to rain again. However, a message was sent back to HQ that the men were in the correct place – or as close as the ground allowed.

Zero hour on 22nd was 5.35am and five minutes before this the barrage began. It was still dusk and an Autumn mist rose off the wet ground so that the men were unable to see far in front of them. Unfortunately there was a failure to stop the preliminary barrage at the agreed time so that one company of the 8th Norfolk was compelled to advance in peril of being hit by their own artillery. As there were many casualties it may well have been there that Walter was killed. By 3.00pm the battalion had completed the advance but the afternoon did not end peacefully as the soldiers were then bombed by howitzers and more men were killed or wounded. Relief in the form of the Middlesex Regiment arrived as darkness fell. The battalion had over seventy men dead or missing and one hundred and thirty nine wounded.

Given the state of the battlefield it is not surprising that Walter's body was never found and he is commemorated on the Tyne Cott Memorial. Along with their grief William and Sarah must have been extremely anxious about their younger son Arthur serving with the 9th Norfolk in the same sector.

Frederick Brinkley MM - died Tuesday 30th October 1917

Frederick Brinkley was born in Norwich in 1892 to Sidney and Kate; both were born into families of "hawkers" and thus led itinerant lifestyles. Kate and Sidney married at Thetford in 1879 and over the next fourteen years they had eight living children – seven daughters and Frederick. The family was constantly moving – none of the children have the same place of birth – and Sidney hawked a variety of goods ranging from umbrellas to fowl. In 1893 Kate died. This would have been the same year in which her youngest daughter Maud died and it is quite likely that her death was a result of childbirth. The 1901 census shows that Frederick was living with his father and three of his sisters in Mileham. In 1911 Sidney, along with Frederick lived at Setch. Frederick was working as a farm labourer, his youngest sister Maud kept house for the two men. When Sidney died in 1912 Frederick moved to Grimston to live with his sister Nelly Rudd at Walnut Farm. He was, according to all who knew him, a quiet and amiable man who was liked and respected in the village despite being a recent arrival.

Frederick joined up in February 1916. He joined the 7th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London) Regiment. The 7th Battalion joined the 63rd Royal Naval Division (naval in name only) and took part in the Battle of the Ancre. In February 1917 they took part in more fighting planned to gain observation over Miraumont. This was an extremely hazardous battle in mud, fog and darkness and Frederick was wounded in the leg and spent some time in a hospital in France. It was not until October however that he finally got leave and he was able to enjoy time at home with his sisters and his friends.

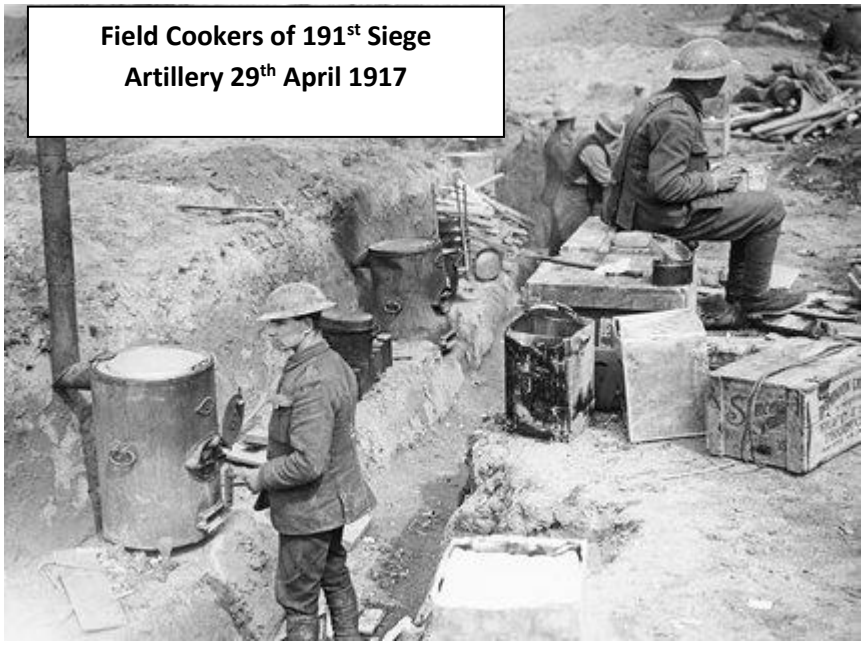
Frederick arrived back on the Western Front in time to take part in the 2nd Battle of Passchendaele. His division arrived in Ypres on 26th October 1917 for a final assault on the village of Passchendaele. The battle started at 5.40am on the 26th, it was dark and raining and the battlefield was already a quagmire. It was virtually impossible to discern our own lines or those or the Germans as all structure had collapsed into the mud. On the first day Varlet Farm was taken and over the next three days every metre had to be fought over in mud which could clog guns and render them useless.

On 30th October stage two of the battle began. Frederick's division was caught by German artillery fire at their jumping-off line, they made only slight progress in deep mud against constant German fire and were unable to reach their rendezvous with the Canadians. At the end of the day they were left stranded in precarious positions. Sometime during that day Frederick was wounded and died on the battlefield. Mrs Rudd received a letter from Frederick's friend Alfred Harvey who wrote to her that says "He went into action in good spirits and very game. I was not quite near him when he was hit, but when I got to him he was unconscious and died immediately, and I think you may take it he did not suffer any pain." Frederick's friend had no hope of bringing his body in. Like so many it disappeared in the sea of mud that was Passchendaele so Frederick is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial. We know from the Commonwealth War Grave Commission that Frederick was awarded the Military Medal but have not been able to find the citation for this. Frederick left his effects and back pay to be divided between all of his sisters.

Arthur Padgett – died Wednesday 13th October 1917

Arthur was the youngest son of Robert and Emma Padgett. He had three older brothers. Robert worked as a bricklayer and by 1911 three of the four boys were working with him learning the trade. The family lived first at Long Row then at Lower Road; as their cottage had just four rooms it must have been very crowded with these four young men plus their parents.

Arthur attested in March 1916 when he was eighteen but he did not actually join until 21st August 1916 in Norwich; he was unusually tall for the time being six feet three inches - the accepted height of an average recruit is usually quoted as five feet six inches. Arthur joined the Royal Garrison Artillery and on 18th March 1917 he was sent to France with the 191st Siege Battery.



Field Cookers of 191st Siege Artillery 29th April 1917

Siege batteries were equipped with heavy howitzers which fired large shells intending to neutralise enemy artillery. They operated from behind the lines, some guns were able to fire six miles.

On 1st October 1917 Arthur received a gunshot wound in his leg. He would have been sent down the line to the Casualty Clearing Station and from there onto a hospital away from the front. Arthur arrived at the General Hospital in Etaples on 14th October where he was found to be "seriously ill but improving". Emma and Robert heard that he was wounded and that he had had to have his left leg amputated but it seemed that this outlook was positive. As the decision to amputate Arthur's leg was taken some time after the initial injury it is very possible that the wound developed gangrene and this was almost always a fatal condition. Arthur died on 30th October and the news arrived in the village a few days later. Arthur was listed as "died of wounds. As he died in hospital at Etaples, Arthur was buried in the Etaples Military Cemetery which is a huge cemetery with over ten thousand graves. It served fifteen hospitals so sadly was always in use.

1918

Albert Seaman – died Wednesday 20th March

Albert[4] was the son of the village blacksmith, John and Elizabeth Seaman had six children. The family lived next door to Albert's paternal grandparents (blacksmith John Snr and Eliza) and his auntie Lizzie who was a teacher. His maternal grandparents - Edmund and Sarah Warner – lived next-door but one. When the children grew up and their grandad Edmund died John went to live with his grandmother perhaps to keep her company or to simply alleviate the overcrowding in the four room Seaman house. Neither Albert nor his brother Walter took up blacksmithing but both went to work on the land.

In 1916 Albert married Rose Thurston and just three months later she gave birth to a little girl whom they called Agnes. By the time of Agnes was born conscription had come into force and being married would not have eliminated Albert from being called up. Albert was sent to the 11th Rifle Brigade. This was a service battalion; a battalion raised at the start of the war, in this case in Winchester. The battalion had been in France since 1915 so had taken part in many battles by the time the 1916 conscripts arrived. Albert was one of many soldiers who managed to "get through" the muddy killing fields of 1917 only to be killed a few months into 1918. The battalion had been in the front line in February and were then in camp at Scottish (Scotch) Wood Camp for the latter part of the month. Training took part there. Unfortunately the battalion war diary is missing for March; this may be because of Operation Michael the large attack which began the German Spring Offensive in March 1918. It is probably that Albert was killed during the final preparation for the defence of the British line in the face of a German attack.

The following battles – of St Quentin and Bapaume and the action at the Somme Crossings – were hard and exhausting as men struggled to move themselves and their equipment over wet ground which had been ruined in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. It is possible that as Albert died just before the attack he was buried somewhere behind the English line but in the ensuing chaos graves were lost and Albert has no known resting place. He is commemorated on the Thiepval memorial.

[4] Photo courtesy of a relative

William Boldero – died Sunday 24th March 1918

William was part of a large family; his parents Abraham and Georgina had ten living children. On the 1901 census the family lived at Golston (presumed to be near to Pott Row chapel) and Abraham worked as a coal carter. By 1911 he was working on the land with two of his sons and the family had moved to Grimston. It seems that as a child William may have been subject to ill health. Despite living at Pott Row his parents wanted him to go to school at Church Hill in Grimston but after a term there he had to return to Pott Row School as Mr Hammond at Grimston deemed the walk to and from school "too much for a child in such fragile health".

When war broke out William was 27 and unmarried so he would have been amongst the first called up when conscription began. He entered into the reserve in February 1916 and having possibly expressed a preference for the navy, joined the Hood Battalion in 1917. In the autumn of the same year William married Susannah Emma Blake who had been in service first with Miss Hollis at Castle Rising and then at the Limes in Grimston.

William's first real experience of battle was the fighting at Welch Ridge on 30th December 1917. This was part of the lengthy battle for Cambrai. The weather was not good; snow had fallen and living in the trenches under those conditions would have been extremely difficult. It was a localised trench battle, which claimed many casualties and Hood Battalion had to be withdrawn from the frontline on New Year's Day 1918. On 21st March 1918, in the early hours of the morning, troops being relieved on the right of the line reported a lot of activity in the German trenches and an enemy plane flew low over the whole line. There was however, nothing to suggest an attack was imminent. At 4.35am a heavy bombardment of high explosive and gas shells began and the men were ordered to stand to, some of the machine guns were moved up from the rear to the front line trenches. At around 7.00am a strange mist came over the trenches. This must have been very frightening for the men who were unsure about what this was and what was happening. The cloud was made up of smoke mixed with chlorine and phosgene gas and its arrival was immediately followed by an infantry attack. After some confusion in which contact with the frontline troops was lost, it was established that the enemy was in the the frontline trenches; a tactical withdrawal was ordered and the Hood Battalion which had been in the reserve trenches, began to move back on wooden tracks. A momentous day drew to a close and William and his comrades waited for the morning with anxiety , the war diary states that even the commanding officer was "distinctly unnerved". Next morning the day dawned misty and the Germans seemed slow to pursue their advantage until heavy shelling began – the Hood's CO was taken from the field injured later to die. Next morning there began therefore a further withdrawal. The 24th March began with a huge barrage of smoke and shrapnel at 5.00am which was followed by yet another infantry attack. The division was ordered to withdraw to Rocquigny and this was later "extended" to a withdrawl of a further five or six miles. It was during this manoevre, no doubt somewhat chaotic, that William went missing.

By the end of the day the whole battalion had retreated to the Thiepval heights leaving behind land which had taken many weeks to capture and had claimed many lives. We must presume that William was killed on that land as he has no known grave and is commemorated on the memorial at Arras.

Samuel Smith – died Monday 15th April 1918

Samuel[5] was born in Congham in 1886 to parents George and Frances. He was baptised on 1st August 1886 and was named Frederick William Samuel. Clearly the family always called him Samuel as he appears on every census with that name. The 1891 census shows that the family lived at Field Barn Cottages and George worked as an agricultural labourer. Ten years later the Smiths had moved to Water Lane Grimston and Samuel was aged 14. It's not clear from the census but it's likely that he was already working on the land like his father. Very sadly for the family Frances died just a year later in 1902 – she was aged around 50. Samuel married Annie Elizabeth Church at Narborough in December 1910. Annie was a Swaffham girl and the newlyweds settled there. The couple had a son called Samuel Charles in September 1911 and a second son, Jacob Frederick, in 1913. By the time of Jacob's birth Samuel and Annie were back in Grimston and the Lynn News stated that Samuel was working as a gardener for Major Birch.

Samuel signed his attestation document on 7th December 1915, he signed up for the duration of the war. Thomas, Samuel's youngest son was born on 19th June 1916 and on 12th October 1916 Samuel embarked at Folkestone to sail for Boulogne; on 18th October he arrived at the huge training camp at Etaples. It's not clear whether it was at this point that Samuel trained as a Lewis gunner.

On 21st February 1917 Samuel was wounded in the shoulder, an injury sustained during shelling or random fire from the enemy. He was treated at the hospital at Hulluch and returned to his unit just eight days later. In October Samuel was sent back to the medical station as he had severe dental problems. His records show that he did not return to his unit until January 1918 and on 17th of that month he was given two weeks leave,

Samuel re-joined the regiment at Fremicourt. Most of March 1918 was spent in the trenches at Lagincourt and on 1st April the battalion relieved the Duke of Wellington's Regiment near Polygon Wood. Once again the trenches were extremely muddy and despite the best efforts to strengthen them, pouring rain made the task impossible. On the morning of 15thApril the men prepared for an attack but the enemy did not attack until 2.30pm However, by 3.00pm the Germans had a foothold in the front line trenches on one side of the line. Furious fighting ensured with the advantage moving to and fro as the enemy threw in more men and then heavy machine guns. At 10.30pm an order was received for a strategic withdrawal and the formation of a new front line and this was carried out successfully. Early in the morning of 16th the enemy began shelling again. The battalion was finally relieved by French troops on 19th.

Sometime during the fighting Samuel disappeared. A Lewis machine gun crew, of which he was a part, was made up of five men. They were extremely important to the defence of trench and no

[5] Photo courtesy of Ash Pearce his relation

doubt on 15th April Samuel and his colleagues were in the thick of the fighting trying to halt the enemy. When the roll call was made Samuel was not present but as he had not been seen to die he was reported as “missing” and in due course he was considered killed in action. Samuel has no known grave and is commemorated at Tyne Cott along with Arthur Todd, another Grimston man in the 9th Norfolk, who died on the same day.

William Arthur Todd – died Monday 15th April, 1918

William Arthur – listed as Arthur W on the memorial - was born in Roydon in 1895 to parents William and Sarah. In 1901 the family lived in Common Lane and William worked as an agricultural labourer. By 1911 Arthur had joined his father working on the land. The family still lived in Grimston in a two up two down cottage and as Arthur was one of seven children there can have been little space.

William and his elder brother Walter arrived in France in summer 1915 having joined up at the start of the war in 1914. It is quite likely that they joined up together. Walter was wounded twice during his service and William once but there is no reference to either of them receiving a "blighty" and coming home for treatment. William and Sarah had clearly raised reliable and brave men as both their sons were promoted to corporal and after their deaths both were praised for their cheerfulness and stoicism.

October 1917 found Corporal Todd in the line south east of Loos. This was not an easy section of the line and on 19th October a particularly heavy bombardment left the 9th Suffolk, beside the 9th Norfolk, with over fifty casualties. William's brother, Walter was also serving in the front line and on 22nd October he was killed in an attack in an area known as Cane Trench. The conditions along the front were now awful. The ground was a collection of muddy shell holes and it was raining and misty. On the very day that his brother was killed William was awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery in these difficult conditions during the fighting around Poelcappelle

William had leave at Christmas 1917. Sarah, William and the family must have been delighted to have him home and after the loss of Walter, it was comforting to be together at Christmas. William returned to the battalion at Courcelles. The weather was extremely cold and frozen mud made the roads so slippery that it was very difficult for men to march and in some areas, impossible for the artillery and transport to move. The cold and wet of the winter months made the day to day tedium of trench life even more difficult and tiring; the men looked forward to spring.

The spring brought a new and potentially devastating attack from the Germans which marked the deepest advantages made by either side since 1914. William and the 9th Norfolk were in the thick of this. On 21st March, the opening day of the attack, they were heavily bombarded in the line at Lagnicourt. The war diary reports that the men "fought heroically" but the enemy still penetrated the front line and the support trenches with an overwhelming number of men. The battalion launched a brave counter attack but were eventually forced to retire. On that day the battalion lost fifty killed, on hundred and fifty wounded and one hundred and sixty nine missing presumed dead. It was a sad day for William and his comrades.

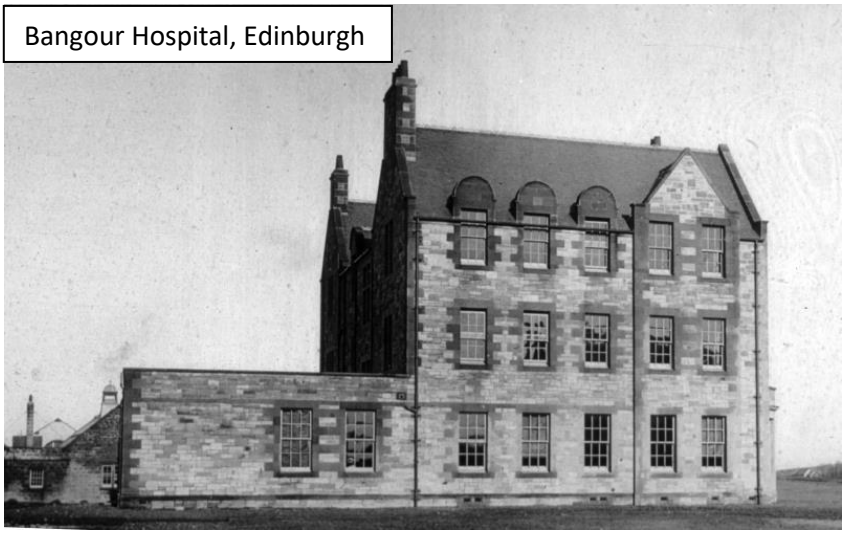
On 14th April the battalion was at Dranoutre where detailed plans were made for defending the frontline in the event of an attack. The attack came at 2.30pm on 15th April and the fighting went on all afternoon and evening. The Germans brought up heavy machine guns to fire on the vulnerable flank of the British and at 10.30pm orders came that there would be a new front line and forces should withdraw to Kemmel. At some time during this day William went missing. His family back home received the news at the beginning of May and in due course he was confirmed as dead. Samuel Smith, another Grimston man, also went missing on 15th April 1918. Like Walter – and like Samuel Smith - William was "lost" somewhere in the Passchendaele mud and has no known grave. He is commemorated on the same panel as his brother at Tyne Cot.

Thomas E. Turvey – died Friday 3rd May 1918

In 1901 Thomas Turvey[6] was living in Water Lane with his mother Alice Lake who was working as a laundress. Alice had two younger children – Frederick Lake aged 3 and Violet Lake aged 2. The father of the children was Elijah Lake who was a regular soldier. Elijah and Alice had married on Christmas Day 1894 in St Botolph's when Thomas was just nine months old. Elijah returned to the army and remained in the Norfolk Regiment until 1902 when the Boer War finished. He had served twelve years with the colours and retired as a sergeant,

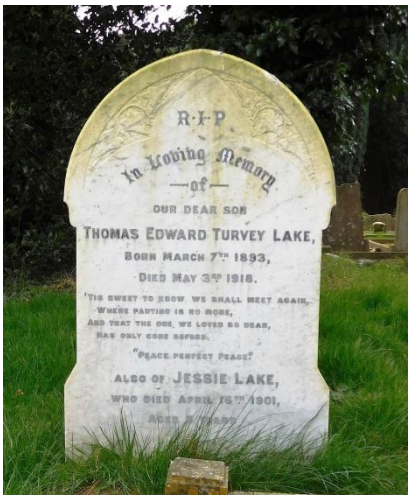
By 1911 Elijah was out of the army (temporarily) and working as a road worker for the council. He and Alice had seven children, they were living in just four rooms in Grimston and Thomas was working on the farm. When war broke out Elijah enlisted again and although he was 46 he was trained to work in the army service corps working on what we would now call logistics. No doubt the old warrior was a settling influence to the younger soldiers. Thomas attested on 11th December 1915 and was mobilised in March 1916 joining the Royal Garrison Artillery. Unlike Elijah, Thomas wasn't a lucky soldier. During 1917 he was twice wounded, one of these wounds was a "blighty" requiring Thomas to be sent home to England. He returned to the western front and on 9th April he received a gunshot wound in his left lower leg which was serious enough to require an amputation. This was apparently successful and once again Thomas was sent home. He arrived on 18th April at the Bangour War Hospital in Edinburgh via Wimereux (32nd Stationary) Hospital in France. Bangour had been a lunatic asylum before the war and was taken over by the war office in 1915. It is not clear why Thomas was sent so very far from his home we can only assume it was pressure on beds or perhaps Bangour had success with amputations. Sadly there was no success for Thomas. Although the Lynn News optimistically reported the he was "progressing as well as can be expected" he developed septicaemia and died on 3rd May.

Bangour Hospital, Edinburgh



[6] Photo courtesy of Tony Giles his relation

His body was brought home, on the train, to Grimston where a motor vehicle met the train and brought the body to the church. There was a large funeral with many flowers and the girl guides forming a guard of honour. Sadly Elijah was not present as he was still serving in France. The old soldier survived the war and lived into his nineties.



Robert Samuel Smith – died Saturday 21st September 1918

Robert Smith has presented as a puzzle which it's been impossible to resolve with complete success so a great deal of his life has had to be surmised and we would be very pleased if anyone could confirm the few facts or give the correct story! Research hasn't been helped by Robert having the name "Smith".

The known facts are that Robert was number 44058 in the Essex Regiment and died in September 1918. The army sent his effects to John Smith his father and the Lynn News stated that Robert's father was John. The only John Smith living in Grimston at that time was father to James Smith who died in Gallipoli in 1915 and there is no evidence of James having a brother called Robert. However, there is a Robert Samuel Smith born in Grimston on both the 1901 and 1911 census and his parents are Samuel and Rhoda. There is no evidence of Samuel or Rhoda in Robert's military records; they aren't mentioned on his stone. It may be possible that with his father Samuel off the scene, John Smith undertook to care for the teenage Robert and his sister and thus acted like a father.

Robert was in 10th Battalion Essex Regiment. The battalion was one of "Kitchener's Army" and by the time Robert joined had proved itself in battle many times. Robert must have only just joined the battalion; he had apparently been in France just five months when he was killed. After the capture of Trones Wood in August 1918, the 10th Essex had 10 days' rest in the Favieres Wood area, moving in buses on 16th September to Gurlu Wood, where they spent two nights, one of which was memorial because of a terrific thunderstorm. On the 18th they were in support in an attack on Ronssoy, and then spent two days waiting in the area. The war diary then reports:

"However, on September 20th, someone at Brigade HQ remembered us, and, perhaps with some idea that we might feel hurt by the seeming neglect, promptly booked us for an attack on Tombois Farm and the Knoll beyond. It was a pretty good idea - at any rate, from an armchair in a rear headquarters - but the knowledge that The Knoll had defied repeated attacks in 1917, and the paucity of supporting troops, and, above all, the lack of co-ordination which characterised the hurried scheme, stamped the enterprise from the outset as a hazardous one. And the forebodings, proved to be justified only too well."

Attacking with an exposed flank, the battalion hardly survived the initial attack ; small parties made it to the farm, only to be mown down ruthlessly before the attack was brought to a standstill and very little ground was gained. Robert, still an inexperienced soldier, was killed in this attack. The battalion lost 65 men and 1 officer on 21st September 1918. No doubt others died of wounds in the following days.

Robert's family had not heard of his death nor even heard that he was a casualty until a letter written by his sister was returned marked "killed or missing". Clearly this was an administrative mix up, the officer who returned the letter had no idea that the family had not yet been notified. Naturally it caused Robert's sister and his "father" John huge distress and they applied to the army for clarification. In November they heard that Robert had been killed on 21st September.

Robert is buried in the Unicorn Cemetery, Aisne. There are almost six hundred men buried there and most of them were killed in September 1918 with the end of the war just weeks away.

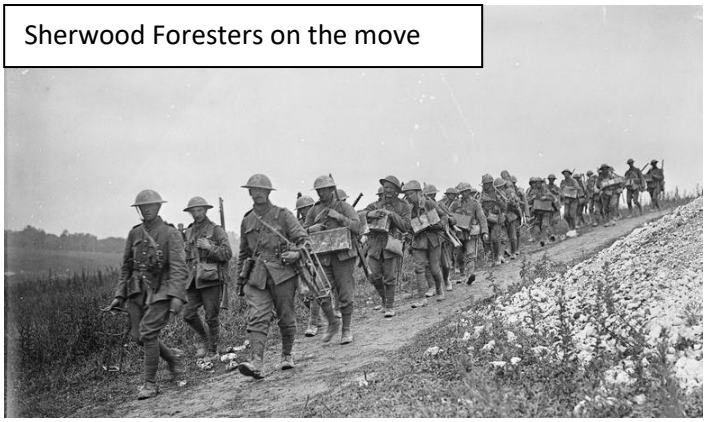
Arthur Matsell - died Thursday 3rd October 1918

Arthur was born in Grimston the son of Eliza. Eliza worked as a housekeeper and although Arthur's memorial states that his father was called William Matsell there's no evidence of this. His grandfather was called John and was a blacksmith in Snettisham where Arthur spent his early childhood and where he and his sister Nellie were baptised; the family is shown as living with John on the 1891 census. In 1901 Eliza Matsell and her children lived at Pott Row Road; In 1911 Eliza and three of her children were living with the Wilkinson brothers – John and Samuel described as "donkey dealers" – who had been her neighbours ten years earlier. Eliza was working as a housekeeper and the children described as "boarders". Arthur's middle name was Wilkinson so there is a chance that John Wilkinson was the father of Arthur and possibly the other children. Eliza apparently lived all her life as a single mother supporting her children by working as a housekeeper, she was an extremely brave woman.

We don't know when Arthur signed up. It is likely that he was conscripted in 1916. For some reason he was in the Notts and Derby Regiment also known as the Sherwood Foresters. Arthur was initially in the 17th Battalion which was a service battalion formed in Nottingham in June 1915. He later was transferred to the 9th also a service battalion formed much earlier in the war. The 9th had served in Gallipoli before arriving in France but we don't know if Arthur enlisted in time to do service in the Dardenelles.

It appears now that October 1918 was the tail end of the war but there was still a great deal of fighting to do and many lives would be lost. On 1st October the 17th were at a base called the Buissy Switch near the Canal du Nord. At 10pm on the 1st they received orders to prepare to move (along with the 6th Lincolnshire and the 7th South Staffs) and they moved off at 1.00am. This would not have been unusual as a great deal of the work and movement on the western front took place under cover of darkness. The soldiers crossed the canal and reached Marquion and at 3.00pm they moved off again to relieve the Canadians at Sancourt. Remembering the previous years' fighting, in which the weather had had a huge effect upon the fighting, the general staff was keen to move as quickly as possible beyond the areas of destruction and emptiness left by the German retreat. Unfortunately October 1st had been a very wet day and this hampered the movement of the supply wagons and the guns and generally lowered the spirits of Arthur and his comrades. When the enemy began shelling intermittently on the morning of 3rd October Arthur was an unlucky casualty as were several comrades and six horses.

Sherwood Foresters on the move



It isn't known if Arthur died on the battlefield or at 2nd or at the 57th casualty clearing station. He was buried at Queant Road Cemetery where casualties from these stations were buried.

Stanley Blake – died Wednesday November 6th 1918

Stanley was the third of the four Blake brothers. When he was born his father Charles and his wife Sarah already had four daughters and two sons and were living in Long Row which was a row of two up-two down cottages. Charlie was the village vermin catcher. By 1911, when Charlie was listed as a labourer, two more children had been born a girl called Mary and a boy called Albert. It was fortunate that the older girls - Eliza, Rose and Annie – had left home although this still left eight people to fit into four rooms. Eliza, having been a domestic servant, was resident in the Freebridge Workhouse just outside the village along with two little daughters – Sarah Elizabeth aged 6 and Gladys Mary aged 3; Eliza's sisters Rosetta and Annie worked as domestic servants.

Johnnie (John) Stanley's eldest brother was in the territorials so when war was declared he was called up immediately into the 5th Battalion Norfolk Regiment. He was killed in April 1917 at Gaza although the family did not get official confirmation of his death until January 1918 so had many months of false hope. Meanwhile young Stanley had grown up and he enlisted at Worcester in 53rd (Young Soldier) Battalion. Up to 27th October 1917, this was known as 35th Young Soldier Battalion and had no regimental affiliation but it then became the 53rd Devonshire. It was a basic recruit training unit based at Sutton Mandeville part of 8th Reserve Brigade. In January 1918 the battalion moved to Rollestone Camp on Salisbury Plain. Although Salisbury Plain is a bleak place the camp had undergone many "improvements" and the accommodation was Spartan (and may well have harboured bugs) but Stanley probably lived in a basic barrack hut and was adequately fed.

Stanley was one of the many soldiers who died as result of illness not injury. It is most likely that when he was taken ill he was transported to Fargo Military Hospital which had over one thousand beds and catered for all the army camps in the Amesbury area. Stanley contracted pneumonia and died in hospital on 6th November 1918 without having fired a shot in anger. For Charlie this must have been a devastating blow as Stanley's mother Sarah had died just two months earlier. Stanley's body was brought home and the Queen's Regiment provided bearers and a firing party at the funeral. The Rector conducted the service and Miss Coe played the organ in the absence of Mrs Hammond. Stanley is buried at home in St Botolph's churchyard, his father had *"Gone but not forgotten"* on the stone.

Fortunately for Charlie his youngest son, Albert was too young to fight in the war and we can find no evidence of William/Vincent serving with the colours – possibly he was one of the several in the village who were refused on physical grounds or granted exemption as vital to agriculture.

Walter Humphrey – died Wednesday 23rd October 1918

Walter was born in October 1899 the son of George and Rebecca (nee Twaite). He was baptised at St Botolph's on 13th December of that year. The family lived in Long Row, a row of small cottages lived in by agricultural workers and their families. It isn't clear whether the family still lived there in 1911. Rebecca and George had ten children, one of whom died. By 1911, when they lived in a five room cottage, there were only six of the children at home; it was probably still quite crowded.

We don't know when or where Walter enlisted. Unless he put his age up to join – not uncommon – he could not have been serving in France for long as he was only eighteen at the time of his death. By the end of October 1918, with the end of the war in sight, it probably seemed more important than ever to all soldiers to keep going and stay alive. The Hindenburg line was under attack and Walter was in the King's Royal Rifle Corps, 13th battalion who were heavily involved in this fighting. The Battalion had already fought on the river Ancre and at Arras but it is possible that for very young soldiers such as Walter this was a first real battle experience. On 21st October the 13th battalion moved up to Briastre having been in billets at Ligny involved in training. During that time they won the Divisional Football Championship beating the 8th Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment 3-2. This was a great morale boost for the men and a short term distraction from the fighting. However, orders for the battle for received on 22nd and officers were told to brief the men.

The objectives for the brigade were the villages of Neuville, Viterlan and Salesches. The 13th Battalion Kings Royal Riffles (KRR) would be on the far right of the assault (i.e. in the south). The attack would take place under a rolling barrage moving forward at 100 yards every four minutes. It was very important to maintain the momentum in order to ensure cover from the artillery. Zero hour was 2.00am. However, at 1.30am the Germans put a heavy barrage over the British front lines lasting for 30 mins. Then at 2.00am the British artillery barrage began and at 4.30am the KRRs moved off. Initially the attack did not go well; some regiments became confused and lost (not surprising as it would still have been dark and was apparently misty) so after three hours of waiting behind an embankment Walter and his comrades moved off again at about 9.00am. It was 3.45pm before Neuville was secured and the battalion diary reports that nearly all casualties had been caused by machine gun fire. The 13th KRRS were finally relieved late on 24th October.

The records state that Walter was killed in action. He is buried in the small cemetery of Beaurain which was set up immediately after this attack. Perhaps Walter's body was brought in for burial or he may have died at the battalion dressing station. The cemetery is particularly lovely; it is situated amongst field and orchards and is a quiet and peaceful place for a country lad to rest in.

Beaurain Cemetery

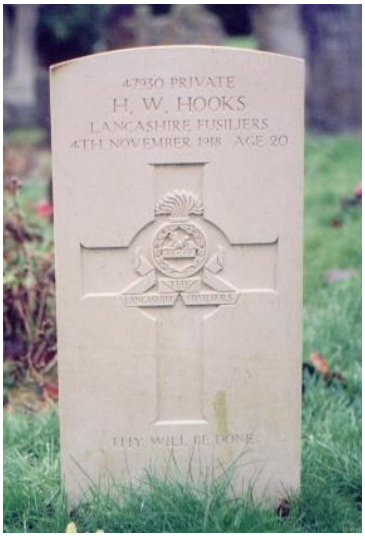
William Henry Hooks – died Monday 4th November 1918

William Henry Hooks – known in most records as Henry – was born in Grimston in 1899. He was the son of William and Mary. William worked as a bricklayer and the family lived in Common Lane, Pott Row next door to Mr Rudd the baker. William and Mary had twelve children nine of whom survived. This was a high mortality rate for the village at that time and the loss was made sadder because it would appear that the three little boys – Sidney, James and Cedric - were born and died one after another between 1904 and 1907. By 1911 there were eight of the children at home (the eldest daughter Grace had left home to be a servant to Mr Coe at College Farm, Roydon) and parents living in just four rooms. Only William was working so life must have been hard for the Hooks family.

We don't know when Henry joined up; his records show that he had moved battalions two or three times during his service so presumably he had been in for a while. Similarly, we have no idea how he died. Unfortunately Henry's records were amongst the "burned records" so the only information available that he died in hospital in Retford, Nottingham and was brought home to Grimston to be buried. Presumably he had been in hospital having received a "blighty" wound but his Soldier's Effects Record states that he died on leave. There were no big military hospitals in Retford but a local family the Huntsmans, had set up a small Red Cross Hospital in a large house in Lime Tree Avenue, Retford which was the HQ of the Sherwood Foresters. The hospital was planned to be especially for that regiment so it's not clear how Henry, a Norfolk man in the Lancashire Fusiliers came to be there.

If Henry had been sent home wounded it probably happened at the end of October during the last "mopping up" fighting. On 25th October the Lancashire Fusiliers attacked a factory at Froidmont which was a German stronghold. Although they won it and took three prisoners, the Germans counterattacked later the same day. They had one hundred men and they re-took the factory leaving the Lancashire Fusiliers cut off and needing to fight their way back to their own lines. During this operation there were fifteen men wounded, possibly one of them was Henry.

Henry was brought home and the Parish Magazine reported that there was an "impressive funeral attended by many relatives and friends as well as by detachments of soldiers from Lynn"[7]. Henry has a stone in St Botolph's churchyard cared for by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



[7] Grimston Parish Magazine, December 1918

Frederick Cobb – died 1st November 1918 (CWG has 18th)

Frederick Cobb was born in 1888 the son of Charles Cobb and Jane Cobb (nee Armes) one of four boys. Frederick was born in King's Lynn and the 1891 census showed that family living in Brick Yard, King's Lynn which was listed as North Lynn and near the Bentinck Arms and Sir Lewis Street. Charles was described as a "harness maker" and on later censuses he would be described as a saddler. By 1901 the family had moved to Grimston where they lived in Long Row, Mrs Phillippo the hide merchant lived just two doors down. Fred was 13 so he was just young enough to be still in school probably at Pott Row or maybe Church Hill. He was still living at home in 1911 but he was working as a commercial traveller. In the next year he married Eveline Alice Bate at the Wesleyan church in Walsall on 3rd April 1912 and they settled down to married life a pleasant leafy street in Sutton Coldfield. Fred didn't enlist when the war began; in 1915 he and Eveline had a baby son whom they called William - Fred had a good reason to stay at home. Conscription however intervened. In May 1916 conscription was extended to married men, in anticipation of this Fred joined up on 24th April 1916.

Fred gave his trade as tailor and outfitter. He expressed a preference to join the Royal Flying Corps or the Machine Gun Corps, perhaps as a more mature entrant he felt his skills and experience would be better used there. His request was refused. He was sent initially to the Army Service Corps (probably because he was able to drive) and afterwards to the Durham Light Infantry. The following year, 1917, Fred applied to become an officer. He was turned down but did get promoted to corporal – not what he had planned. In early 1918 Fred arrived in France. It was not an easy time for a first experience of the Western Front as the German army was pursuing a last push and the Allies were finding it difficult to defend their lines. On 27th May Fred and his comrades were in the line south of the Aisne. At 1.00am there was a very heavy bombardment followed by an attack at 4am. The battalion diary records the "majority of the men and officers are missing". Frederick was amongst the missing.

Frederick was ultimately taken to Quedlinburg, a prisoner of war camp deep inside Germany. He lived in very cramped conditions are there were over 15,000 prisoners. Food was scarce in Germany and the prisoners of war suffered along with the population. Approximately seven hundred prisoners died at Quedlinburg and whilst some may have died of the wounds they received before being captured, many men fell victim to the increasingly uncomfortable conditions. Illness and disease became common and it is said that there was an outbreak of typhus. Finally Eveline received a letter from Fred, explaining that he was a prisoner of war. In October he was, it seems, alive and if not well, at least able to write to his wife. However, soon afterwards the camp Commandant advised the local registrar that Fred died at 8.00am on the morning of 1st November and was buried in the nearby cemetery on the 5th. The cause of his death is unknown, but as he died five months after going missing it is perhaps more likely that he died of disease rather than as a result of any injuries that he may have sustained. For some reason the Commonwealth War Graves have Fred's date of death as 18th.

Eveline was granted a pension of 21s/8d per week for herself and her young son.

1919 and 1920

Edward Bunting – died Friday 7th February 1919

Edward Bunting was born to parents William and Edith; he had a younger brother called Charlie. William and Edith had both been married before so in addition to their own two boys William's son Sidney and Edith's children Edith and Robert also lived with the family. William had previously worked as a wheelwright but by 1901 he was a coal dealer and the family lived in Pott Row Road. In 1911 Like most of the young men in the village the Bunting brothers went to work on the land.

As soon as the war broke out Charlie and Edward joined up in Dereham, Edward was nineteen, his brother Charlie just eighteen. Edward joined the 9th Norfolk whilst his brother was in the 5th battalion. Despite their enthusiasm in enlisting, it would seem that neither of the Bunting brothers were cut out for military life with its strict discipline. Charlie was in trouble for various misdemeanours throughout 1915 and 1916 whilst Edward was guilty of being absent from duty, overstaying leave and, most seriously "truculence to an officer". He was docked pay for all of these offences. Whilst the 5th battalion was in Gallipoli the 9th was fighting on the Western Front and in December 1915 Edith received a notification from the Front to tell her that Edward had been severely wounded and was in hospital in Boulogne. He had been shot in the chest on December 20th. Edward was very lucky that the RAMC doctor was able to remove the bullet allowing him to recover. This wound was a definite "blighty" and on Boxing Day Edward arrived at Bagthorpe Military Hospital in Nottingham. It is quite likely that Edward and his parents believed that this wound was serious enough to end his military career or at least render him unfit to return to the front line but in February 1916 the doctors reported that he was "quite recovered". He found his comrades in much the same place as he had left them – in the area around Poperinge. In 1917, Charlie died in hospital in Gaza. This must have been a hard blow for Edward and of course for the family at home.

In March 1918 the German Army launched the Spring Offensive and on 21st March at 5.00am a heavy bombardment began and the 9th battalion was subjected to a whole day of shelling with heavy artillery and gas shells. The battalion was forced to retire and over the course of the next day the enemy advanced further into Allied territory. During this time Edward was taken prisoner, he was taken on a two-day train journey to a German POW camp at Fredrichsfield. Edward survived the remaining months of the war and was repatriated on 29th December 1918 which must have been a huge relief for Edith. Edward was however very ill. On his arrival in England he was sent straight to the Military Hospital at Lewisham for assessment. After a week there he was sent closer to home to the East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital. He was admitted there on 6th January 1919 and his admission note stated that he was breathless with a cough, that he was coughing up blood and that he had "crepitations and rhonchi" the terms for crackling lungs; Edward had tuberculosis. TB was very prevalent in the war exacerbated or caused by the wet, cold and difficult conditions. Edward died of cardiac failure on 6th January at 6.10am in the morning with Edith at his side.

The Lynn Advertiser reported Edward's death stating that his death was "accelerated by his treatment in German hands." The body was brought back to Grimston where there was a funeral with military honours, bearers and a firing squad being provided by soldiers stationed in King's Lynn. Edward was laid to rest in the churchyard where Edith, his sister and his brother could visit. Edward's headstone has his brother Charles's name along with his.

Reginald Sheppard MM – died Thursday 13th February 1919

Reginald Sheppard[8] was not a native of Grimston. His father Ambrose was a butcher who was born in Ireland and Reginald's mother was born in London. The family lived in Ipswich but in common with many children of that time Reginald never knew his mother Emily as she died very soon after he was born. Initially Ambrose's mother and his sisters took the two youngest children – Reginald and his brother Archibald – to live with them but by 1901 the boys were reunited with Ambrose and living in Ipswich. At the age of eighteen Reginald took a job as a porter on the railway and was sent to Terrington station. Here he met Alice Seymour a Terrington girl and they were married in 1908. Reginald was then sent to East Rudham, in 1911 they were living in Pockthorpe where their eldest son Edward was born in 1913. Reginald was then made a signalman and the family must have moved to Grimston as their next child, Reginald, was born in April 1914 there.

Reginald joined up on 2nd November 1914; he served in the ASC – the Army Service Corps. The ASC provided vital services to the front line troops. It's possible that Reginald was sent to the ASC because he was a railwayman by trade. Reginald did not however have an easy war. He was sent to France in 1915 and served for the duration of the war. During this time his brother Horace was fatally injured on the Somme and died on 5th August 1916. His brother Archibald enlisted in 1916 and later in the war was admitted long term to hospital in Ashurst War Hospital, a hospital for soldiers with shell shock. Archibald was discharged from the army on health grounds but refused a pension.

The Lynn News reported the news of Reginald receiving the **Military Medal** in August 1917.

He (Reginald) was close up to the firing lines with two horses and a wagon in a convoy of material. After unloading and when on the return journey the convoy was heavily shelled. They had, however, passed all dangerous points but one, and here a large shell burst at the side of driver Shepherd's wagon riddling it with holes and badly wounding a private sitting beside and slightly injuring another private inside the vehicle. The horses, being frightened by the explosion and the showers of splinters and earth, bolted. Though the wagon was still under heavy shellfire Driver Shepherd held the badly wounded and unconscious private on the front of the wagon until he was able to stop the horses when he lost no time in taking him to the dressing station where unfortunately he

[8] Photos courtesy of Granddaughter

soon afterwards died. Had he not been held on the wagon he must have fallen on the road and been trampled on by a string of horses following the wagon up. Fragments of shell passed by Driver Shepherd's head, shoulder and legs and it was a terrible experience.

The Lynn News reported that Reginald's officer, who recommended him for the medal, said he had displayed great presence of mind and the Colonel said how pleased he was that the driver had done so well. He was the first man in this company to receive such an honour. It is sad that Reginald, who had been such a brave soldier, apparently died immediately after his discharge on 13th February 1919. He was in hospital in Manchester, the cause of death was not reported, it could perhaps have been influenza or an illness such as TB contracted in the combat zone.

Reginald's body was brought home and he was buried in Terrington Wesleyan churchyard.

Frederick Hunter – died 17th June 1920

Frederick[9] was a Grimston boy; he was born in the village to parents Alfred and Emma (who were in service) he attended Church Hill School and sang in the church choir. However, in 1911 Fred was living away from home lodging with the Cooper family in Thetford and working as an engineer.

Fred joined up on 23rd November 1914 in Norwich. During his service he served with the Norfolk Regiment, the Essex Regiment and finally, when his health limited what he could do, with the Labour Corps. He served at Gallipoli and on the western front. He must have been a good soldier as despite his health problems he was promoted to sergeant by July 1916.

Fred was first hospitalised when serving in Gallipoli in August 1915 when he had gastro enteritis. This was not uncommon in that hot, infection ridden place but it seems that Fred, although seeming to recover, would be dogged by this problem for the rest of his short life. He was again hospitalised in November of that year returning to England to a hospital in Cambridge. In March Fred was hospitalised in France for over a week and later that year he suffered a groin strain which was put down to excessive marching. The following year he was transferred to the Labour Corps but retained an infantry NCO rate of pay serving as a drill instructor.

In 1919 Fred married Olive Skerry. The war had ended and demobilisation was happening although not as quickly as the men had hoped. Upon discharge Fred was transferred to the Z reserve. This meant that should there be a resumption of hostilities, he would be called upon to go back to the army; the Z reserve was abolished in March 1920. In April 1919 Fred attended a medical board to claim a pension. Despite the fact that it had never been mentioned before one of the doctors stated that he had "irregular heart sounds and VDH (valvular disease of the heart)". Fred complained of dizziness and shortage of breath as well as his ongoing groin and gastric problem. It was decided that he deserved a 30% pension initially for one year.

Fred lived to see the war memorial unveiled in Grimston in February 1920. We do not know if he was fit enough to attend the service or join the parade. He was hospitalised again in 1920 and died in June of that year. The parish magazine stated that *"his health was undermined and sometime past he had been in hospital. It was hoped however, that before long he would be able to return to Grimston; but that was not to be"*[10]. His death had come as a shock to all who knew him. Fred was laid to rest in St Botolph's churchyard and, thanks to Grimston Parish Council, will take his place on the war memorial with his fallen comrades.

[9] Photo courtesy of a relation

[10] Grimston Parish Magazine July 1920

After the war

A community changed

Victory celebrations took place everywhere, there was universal relief that the long conflict was over. There was also however, a feeling of uneasiness created by the certain knowledge that nothing would ever be the same again. Of the two hundred plus men serving with the colours in 1916 over fifty would not be returning to the villages. Some of those who were returning would not be able to resume their old way of life. Sidney Stapleton had had his leg amputated, Charles Phillipo suffered the effects of a head injury, Sam Barlow was blinded; a surprising number of men were discharged from the army as "unfit for service", some of these were, we know, wounded; for others the reason in unspecified. It is, however, reasonable to assume that if the army medics deemed them unfit for service they had a life affecting condition of some kind.

Some families had been almost destroyed by the war. The Padgetts, who in 1914 had four sons working on the land, had William and Arthur killed, Robert discharged with severe rheumatism and James with shellshock. Mr Blake, whose wife died during the war, had lost two out of four of his sons, young Stanley who was buried in the churchyard having died of illness without firing a shot in anger. The Mayes, the Buntings and Mr and Mrs Todd were all parents who lost two boys. Long Row was hit hard; the row of tiny cottages in Pott Row had the highest loss in the villages, five of the boys who grew up there were killed. Some men left young widows. Clara Twite, widow of Jonathan had scarcely had time to be a wife before becoming a widow whilst Alice Bird (widow of William) and Clara Mayes (widow of Ernest) were both left with families to raise alone on an army pension. At least three families – the families of Frederick Brinkley, Charles Eggleton and William Stebbings – lost a much loved brother mourned by sisters as much as parents. The death toll was seemingly random. There was apparently no reason why some families came through the war intact and relatively unscathed whereas others paid such a terrible price. Although men like Ernest Mayes had taken on a dangerous job (tunnelling) for most men life or death was very much a matter of chance and this made it even harder for bereaved families to come to terms with. It mattered not how kind and sympathetic neighbours were, if they had their sons home safely they were ill placed to comprehend the grief of those bereaved once or even twice. Some of those lost died after the Armistice; November 1918 was a dark month for the villages – four men died either just before or just after the ceasefire

It was very difficult for the families to accept that they had no grave to visit. The villagers were accustomed to the loss of a child - it was not entirely unknown to lose a child through illness or accident – but the lost one was always safe in the churchyard and could be visited and cared for. This was not the case in the war. Those who had notification of a grave would never be able to visit (although their descendants would) and then there were those with no known grave. The "no known grave" tag forced families to accept the true horror of the war; it was impossible to protect relatives if they were given this information. The despair of loss was compounded by the certain knowledge that husband or child had lain unburied and by nagging thoughts about his final condition.

On 11th November 1918 the rector called for a service at 4.00pm in St Botolph's. Although it was arranged at short notice word spread and the service was, according the Lynn News, very well attended. All the parish churches held a service of Thanksgiving on Sunday 17th November. On the last Sunday of the year there was a memorial service for the fallen and a collection was taken as a start to raising a memorial. £3 1s 8d (£3.07) was collected and whilst this may now seem a paltry

sum it should be born in mind that most village families struggled to make ends meet on weekly incomes of around 15s (75p).

On June 28th 1919 the peace treaty was signed and the church bells pealed out. The village magazine reported that villagers spontaneously gathered at the church and a "joyful service" followed. There was an official national service on Sunday July 6th and on Saturday 19th the villages held a day of celebration all three parishes joining together. Mr Hammond, the head teacher, was called upon to form a committee to organise the day. The children - over four hundred of them – had sports and games in a field lent by Mr Taylor's; the day was presided over by the Elwes family. Mrs Elwes handed out the prizes and her son Godfrey presided over a veteran's dinner in the evening which was attended by over one hundred servicemen. It was a valiant attempt to try and rekindle the spirit of the villages as it had been before the war.

Feelings about the nature and placing of the war memorial in Grimston ran high and these were emotionally expressed at a meeting in June 1919. One suggestion was a memorial hall with the names of the fallen on a tablet inside, the cost of this - £1000 – was thought by the rector to be beyond the means of the village. Another idea was a memorial playing field but as the rector, now Rev Goodall, said that it was likely that a new large continuation school would be built at Grimston (which it wasn't) that was not agreed. Mr Boldero, of the few bereaved relations to attend, wanted the memorial in church and Major Birch agreed with this. Other ideas were a memorial cross and a book of honour. Finally however, it was agreed to hold a referendum in the village to decide what should happen. The village decided, by a substantial majority, that the cross would be most appropriate and a committee was formed to carry out the wishes of the community. It was Miss Elwes who suggested the position as being visible to all who passed by. The day of unveiling in February 1920 was a very big event planned by the rector and a committee. There was an eighty-strong choir, a parade by ex-servicemen and a tea hosted by Mr and Mrs Goodall to which the great and good were invited.

Rev Ellaby whose son Cecil is listed on the memorial, came from his new parish of Thornham to give the sermon The words, coming from their "old" rector, who had been their support throughout most of the war, who had corresponded with and encouraged the men, who had comforted many of the bereaved in their loss and who had given his own son were well-received.

"The men whose names that are inscribed here I knew well……. I can say (they) were my very good friends..... Thirty-eight young men, in the pride and glory of their life, taken from their friends who loved them and the homes they loved…….. As one who shares in your sorrow I offer my true sympathy to all who are thinking of those who have passed over to the other side……we should be proud of those who fought and upheld the glory of the English race. That our country lads, who before the war had never fired a shot, should have faced the enemy and driven them back is indeed a source of pride to us as a nation. ….There is cause for thankfulness, too, that they were found to be worthy of that supreme test of unselfishness "that they laid down their lives for their friends". Our sure hope is that now they rest from their toils and enjoy the blessed reward of those who had "fought the good fight" and have entered into life eternal…as only heroes can ".

The memorial, constructed by Mr Spragg of Pott Row, having been covered with two union flags, was unveiled and there was, for the bereaved and the village in general, a closure of sorts. Sadly however the deaths were not over. Frederick Hunter died in hospital in 1920 having never recovered from his illness and wounds.

Their names liveth forever more