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## The Lost Boys of Wellingborough: Remembering Those Who Fell in The Great War

STEPHEN SWAILES

Despite the long military history of England, relatively few memorials recall wars fought before the turn of the twentieth century. In Northamptonshire, the Naseby obelisk commemorates the decisive engagement of the English Civil War, although it was erected almost 200 years after the battle. There are a few memorials to individual soldiers dating from the Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny located in churches across the county, as well as memorials to those who died in the South African Wars.<sup>1</sup>

While memorials to collective sacrifice before 1900 are rare, this was to change after the First World War when, moved by the losses felt in every parish, communities across Britain created lasting monuments to their dead. The *UK National Inventory of War Memorials* lists 575 memorials to the First World War in Northamptonshire, including town and village memorials, memorials to individual soldiers and others situated in churches, schools and elsewhere. This total seems likely to understate the true number, given that there are upwards of 380 Anglican parishes to which can be added non-conformist churches and chapels, clubs, societies and workplaces, many of which would have erected some sort of memorial to their fallen comrades.

British fatalities in the Great War totalled almost one million, and yet understanding the social significance of war memorials is a relatively recent phenomenon,<sup>2</sup> perhaps because the people they remember were embraced by living memory until relatively recently. In this county there have been a variety of projects to discover more about the names that appear on memorials with the Rushden Heritage project being perhaps the most comprehensive and accessible so far.<sup>3</sup> The memorial at Broad Green, Wellingborough, records 677 names from the Great War, and this article attempts to understand more about the people of the town who gave their lives in a war which, following an armistice in November 1918, finally ended through the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919. Each name on the memorial has been researched and brief biographies of every person identified have been developed. These biographies have been analysed to reveal a demographic profile of those who died and to provide insights into the events surrounding some of the casualties. The paper begins, however, by looking at the different memorials placed in the town after the war had ended.

### *Wellingborough's memorials*

The first public memorial was a temporary wooden structure erected in November 1919 in Market Street at the bottom of Market Place. At its unveiling it was immediately surrounded by wreaths and a large crowd, and about 1,000 former servicemen marched past to salute their fallen comrades, many deeply moved by the experience.<sup>4</sup> That evening, 900 former soldiers were entertained in the town, and 900 another night. Subscriptions to fund the dinners came from individuals and companies: Mr Hedger Edwards gave £100, Ideal Clothiers gave £52/10s, W.S. Gilbert & Sons and Whitworths each gave £50. Many other contributions of £10 to £30 were received.<sup>5</sup> **(Figure 1)**

1 UK National Inventory of War Memorials.

2 N. Mansfield, 'Class conflict in village war memorials', *Rural History* (1995), 6(1) 67-87.

3 [www.rushdenheritage.co.uk](http://www.rushdenheritage.co.uk)

4 *Kettering Leader*, 7 November 1919.

5 *Wellingborough News*, 31 October 1919.

In addition to the temporary memorial, many groups and societies in Wellingborough placed memorials to their fallen colleagues. These include 141 names in gold lettering centred around a figure of St George on a wooden memorial placed in All Saints church,<sup>6</sup> 93 names carved onto slate in the entrance to the Congregational Church in the High Street,<sup>7</sup> 84 names on a stone memorial now inside St Barnabas church, 69 names in gold lettering on oak panelling inside St Mary's church, 33 names were recorded on a brass tablet mounted on oak in the Wesleyan chapel, 27 names are on a wooden memorial in the ancient parish church of All Hallows, 15 names are carved into the stone pulpit in the Catholic church and 11 names are on a white marble tablet placed inside the Primitive Methodist chapel.

The Ancient Order of Foresters erected a memorial of fumed oak listing 55 names in the Medical Hall in Herriott's Lane.<sup>8</sup> The Independent Order of Oddfellows erected a memorial on Japanese oak in the Masonic Hall to 31 members of the Loyal Trafalgar Lodge. The Church Lads' Brigade erected a brass memorial listing 22 names in their meeting hall and this is now in All Saints church.<sup>9</sup> The Victoria Congregational Chapel in Palk Road erected a brass memorial listing 21 names which is now in Wellingborough museum. The Independent Order of Rechabites erected a memorial commemorating 21 fallen members in the school in Alma Street. The Salvation Army placed a brass memorial to six members of the Wellingborough Corps,<sup>10</sup> which is now in the Citadel in Salem Lane, and three names are listed on the Post Office memorial,<sup>11</sup> which is now in the new Post Office in Midland Road. In addition, there are a few memorials to individual soldiers in All Hallows and All Saints and in churches in other counties. One hundred and seventy seven 'old boys' and four masters appear on the memorial in the chapel at Wellingborough School, although most of these names do not appear on the Broad Green memorial.

A stone memorial cross was erected outside St Barnabas church after the war<sup>12</sup> but that church was destroyed by fire in 1949 and the memorial tablet was placed in the new church built soon afterwards. A stone cross 23-feet high and mounted on an octagonal base stands in the churchyard of All Hallows. The calvary was donated by a Mrs Sotheby but a public appeal was needed to fund the addition of two gates, the laying of paths and planting.<sup>13</sup> It



**Figure 1. The temporary memorial in Market Street, 1919.**  
(Reproduced with the permission of Northamptonshire Record Office)

6 *Wellingborough News*, 8 November 1920.

7 *Wellingborough News*, 6 April 1920.

8 *Wellingborough News*, 8 November 1920.

9 *Wellingborough News*, 14 April 1922.

10 *Wellingborough News*, 6 May 1921.

11 *Wellingborough News*, 2 September 1921.

12 *Wellingborough News*, 20 February 1920.

13 *The Monthly Record*, Number 58, October 1919.



**Figure 2. The memorial at Broad Green.** (*Photograph by the author*)

does not list individual names but carries the inscription, ‘Pray for the gallant men who from this town gave their lives for truth and freedom in the Great War 1914. Invictus Pax’ (peace to the unconquered). A movement to erect a cross in the churchyard of St Mary’s was abandoned due to an inadequate response to a public appeal.<sup>14</sup> Church authorities decided instead to place a roundel of coloured glass within a circular wreath of palm. St George is shown on a white horse transfixing a green dragon with the inscription, ‘Dedicated by the people of this parish to the memory of the men who laid down their lives in the war 1914–1918 whose names are inscribed below.’

Two other forms of memorial exist. Although the bodies of fallen soldiers were not repatriated and were buried near where they fell, there are several cases where names were added to a family memorial inscription in the London Road and Doddington Road cemeteries which also hold 34 Commonwealth war graves from the First World War.<sup>15</sup> The other form of memorial adopts a utilitarian or living memorial form, and this was seen at Wellingborough when over £4,000 was raised in memory of those who lost their lives to build an extra children’s ward on the site of the Cottage Hospital.<sup>16</sup> The memorial in the Wesleyan chapel, as well as listing the names of its members who died in the war, also records that a memorial cot had been placed in the National Children’s Home and Orphanage.

The site of a permanent memorial for the town was the subject of a Council sub-committee and several locations were put forward, including the Market Square, Gloucester Place and for some time the favoured location was in Swanspool gardens. The form of the memorial was debated and there was at one time support among some committee members to create

<sup>14</sup> *The Monthly Record*, Number 59, November 1919.

<sup>15</sup> ‘War Graves of the British Empire – Northamptonshire and Rutland’ (1930).

<sup>16</sup> *Wellingborough News*, 30 May, 6 June and 14 November 1924.

a separate memorial to Major Edward Mannoek.<sup>17</sup> The singular attention being given to Major Mannoek, who had moved to the town shortly before the war, caused enough resentment to make some townsfolk refuse to attend a meeting about the best way to honour the war dead. The view was that many other gallant officers and regular soldiers had died and that no soldier should be singled-out for special recognition. In the end, the War Memorial Committee chaired by Mr Hedger Edwards decided that the permanent memorial should be erected at the bottom of Broad Green, perhaps a more fitting location with a commanding presence at the top of the High Street looking down over the ancient heart of the town. This prominent location on the town's main street ensured that the memorial would remain a much more visible reminder compared to the more tranquil setting of Swanspool gardens.

Building the memorial was delayed because of the high price of materials and it was not unveiled until 1924. Designed by Mr W. Talbot Brown, it was executed by stonemasons, White & Company, with Messrs Reynolds & Son of Northampton responsible for the carving. The eventual cost was over £800 and the local paper described it as follows:<sup>18</sup>

The Memorial which is designed in a classic manner relies for its beauty upon its proportion and outline rather than any excess of ornamental features, and is executed in Weldon and Clipsham stone. It consists of a central composition rising from a base of Derbyshire grit stone, and is surmounted by a pediment enclosing a cartouche carved and decorated in gold and colours with the county rose, differentiated with the initial letter 'W' in gold for the town. The setting of the principal feature is greatly enhanced by the wall and piers at back, which are approached by steps and a paved area. The wall is built semi-circular and upon the Portland stone panels is inscribed the names of all those known to have fallen. The simple inscription: 'In remembrance, 1914-1918' is carved on the stonework immediately above the names.

**(Figure 2)**

*Identifying the Dead*

The processes undertaken to identify names of the dead are unclear. A search of the committee minutes of Wellingborough Town Council has not revealed any information about the processes or anything about the casualties who would be listed. What is clear, however, is that there is very little overlap between the names listed at Wellingborough and those listed in nearby towns and villages. Given that there must have been extended family members in most surrounding towns, the lack of overlap on memorials suggests considerable coordination by the organizing committees.

With six years elapsing before the memorial was built there was considerable time to ensure that nobody was overlooked and also to check the eligibility of names put forward. Nevertheless, 25 names were added later at the end of the main listing. All names appear simply as initials and surname; no rank, regiment or year of death is shown to separate them. The inscriptions on which this analysis is based were re-cut in 2000 to replace the originals which were deteriorating. While the Council's minutes are silent about who would be remembered, a list of 'The Immortal Dead' was printed in the *Wellingborough News*<sup>19</sup> and there is a very close but not exact match between this list and the names on the memorial. The 25 names added at the end appear to have been added since 1924 as they do not appear in the Roll of Honour printed in the newspaper.

17 *Kettering Leader*, 1 August 1919.

18 *Wellingborough News*, 14 November 1924.

19 *Wellingborough News*, 31 October 1919.



The first step in identifying each name for this research was to look for a matching casualty in the *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* database, which for some casualties gives an address and names of parents or spouse. Further information was taken from the *Soldiers Died in the Great War* database which gives basic biographic information and service history. British Army service records were also searched but a large proportion of records from the Great War have not survived. Australian and Canadian records available on line were also searched. However, the richest source of information about each person was usually the *Wellingborough News*, published during the war, which provided confirmatory evidence for most, but not all, casualties, and normally gives an address, parents and/or spouse, age, service unit, date and place of death. Census searches were then undertaken to locate the person across time and to cross-check and clarify other details. Additional information on each casualty's marital status and relationships to other casualties was noted where found. Other sources of information included direct contact with family descendents where possible and memorial inscriptions in London Road and Doddington Road cemeteries. The *Monthly Record* covering the three parishes of All Hallows, St Mary's and St Barnabas published during the war years carried brief notices about some men, in particular those from the parish of St Barnabas. A short biography of each person was produced from the data obtained although, despite the exhaustive search undertaken, 39 casualties remain to be identified.<sup>20</sup> **(Figure 3)**

#### *Service Units and Losses*

Of the 638 casualties who can be identified, most were killed in action or died of wounds. Behind the names lie stories of heroism, of lives ended in an instant by shrapnel or bullet, of death by accident or illness and, sometimes, death brought about by plain bad luck. Of those who could be identified, 581 were British Army, 20 were Royal Navy, 7 were Royal Flying Corps or Royal Air Force, 20 were serving with Canadian forces, 8 were serving with Australian forces and 2 were nurses. Thirty nine were officers. The rate of losses increased as the war progressed; 3.9% fell in 1914, 15.5% in 1915, 20.0% in 1916, 30.8% in 1917 and 26.5% in 1918 with the remaining 3.4% dying in 1919 or later. Most casualties occurred in France and Flanders (79%). Forty nine men died on home soil of wounds received abroad, illness or by accident. Contemporary newspaper reports of casualties often gave brief details of the circumstances and where this could be ascertained; 374 (67%) were killed in action, 118 (21.1%) died of wounds, 52 (9.7%) died of illness, although in some cases this was probably related to wounds received, and 13 (2.3%) met their death by accident.

Thirty seven men fell in the Middle East and 23 were lost at sea. Men were also lost in the Balkans, Malta, Kenya, Tanzania, India and one in Ireland. Across the entire war they died at the rate of three per week. The *Absent Voters List* for Wellingborough in 1918 identifies about 2,000 names of men who were serving with the armed forces. Adding to this the number already dead (about 500) and allowing for men who had served and been discharged and some who were not registered voters, the total number of men from the town who served in some capacity in the Great War must have been around 3,000.<sup>21</sup> It appears therefore that the chance of Wellingborough men being killed in the war was about one in five. However, given that not all of those who enlisted saw action, the actual death rate of soldiers at the front was probably nearer one in four. This is similar to the loss rate for Bozeat where 39 out of the 210 men who served (18.6%) never returned.<sup>22</sup>

20 It is hoped to publish the collection of biographies in some form. Individual biographies can be obtained from the author.

21 *Wellingborough News*, 14 November 1924, reports that over 3,000 men from the town joined-up.

22 P. Bligh, *Bozeat 2000* (W.D. Wharton, Wellingborough, 2003), p.25.



**Figure 3. Soldiers recovering in the VAD hospital at Wellingborough.**  
*(Reproduced with the permission of Northamptonshire Record Office)*

Of the seven men known to have taken to the air, only two, Major Edward Mannock and Lt Humphrey Thompson, were killed in action. Lt Harry Goosey, Lt Carey Pinnock, Lt Charles Platt and Lt Cyril Ravine were all killed in flying accidents. The fate of Lt Arthur Hill is unclear. Of those who died at sea, Torpedo-Lieutenant Frederick Cook and Able Seaman Edwin Walden were lost when *HMS Hampshire*, the ship carrying Lord Kitchener to a peace conference in Russia, was sunk near the Orkneys in 1916. Other sailors were lost at the Battle of Jutland or when their ships were sunk by mines or torpedoes. William Thomas was lost when his ship collided with another in bad weather in the North Sea. Harold Jones died when the magazine of *HMS Bulwark* exploded while she was moored in Sheerness harbour, killing almost the entire ship's company.

Twenty men on the memorial enlisted in Canada and were killed serving with Canadian forces. Seven soldiers returned from Australia only to be killed in France and Flanders; most had been born in the town. Another Australian, Charles Wright, whose parents had at some time lived in Wellingborough, was lost with all hands on the Royal Australian Navy submarine AE1 which disappeared near Papua New Guinea in September 1914. She had been built in Barrow to support British naval actions against German forces, and the circumstances surrounding her disappearance and location remain a mystery.<sup>23</sup> In total, Australian service records identify 27 soldiers born in Wellingborough who boarded the troop ships to fight in France and Flanders.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Demographics*

The average age of those who died was 26 years. The youngest to fall appears to be Private Frederick Rixon of the Northamptonshire Regiment who died a few days short of his 17th birthday<sup>25</sup>. Four men died aged 17 and 22 died aged 18. The oldest person on the memorial

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.submarineae1.org.au>

<sup>24</sup> See National Archives of Australia, [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au)

<sup>25</sup> Pte Arthur Maycock, Northants Regiment, was also 16 and may be on the memorial.

is Nursing Sister Elizabeth Adams who was 53 or 54. The overall age profile shows that 4.6% were 18 or under, 28.8% were aged 19 to 21, 38.8% were aged 22 to 29, 21.3% were 30 to 39, and 3.6% were aged 40 or over.

About two thirds were born in or near Wellingborough and most (82%) were born in Northamptonshire. Of those who lived in the town, many came from the new developments of mid to late Victorian terraces built in the new parishes of St Mary's, All Saints and St Barnabas. Alexander Road, Mill Road, Knox Road, Winstanley Road and Newcomen Road occur repeatedly in the addresses of casualties, although few streets in the town were spared. Although it was not possible to confirm the marital status of each casualty, and many were so young they were unlikely to have married, at least 146 were married, some for a very short time. Private Bertie Willows married on 22 January 1918 and was reported killed on 21 February. Private Frank Arnold was married for only six weeks.

There are about 50 cases of two brothers being killed and possibly a few more will be found when every name is finally identified. In a few cases, one of the brothers is not remembered on the memorial. Lieutenant Edmund Beck who died in January 1916 from injuries received while giving warning of a gas attack is named, but his brother Percy who died at Ypres in 1915 is not. Lieutenant Beck had previously had the honour of being chosen by his regiment to dine with the King and Queen. Reginald Campkin who was born in Wellingborough and who served with Canadian Infantry is remembered, but his brother Sidney who was also born in Wellingborough and served with the Canadians is not recorded.

In addition, there are at least six cases of three brothers being killed. George and Jane Aldridge lost their sons Thomas, Cyril and Leonard, all in 1917. James and Hannah Pack lost their sons William, Arthur and Frank. James and Mary Bailey lost Alfred, Austin and Walter, who are remembered on the memorial in the Catholic Church. William and Sarah Hughes lost Fred, killed in action, Harry, died of wounds and Herbert, who died of gas poisoning. Elizabeth Bird lost her sons Bernard and Samuel, and by a previous marriage her son Eric Brown. Three entries on the memorial are identified in All Saints church as Alexander, Charles and Leslie Robertson. These three brothers, all born in Peterhead near Aberdeen, sons of Robert and Penelope Robertson, were killed in 1916, 1918 and 1917 respectively. Alexander had served as a Captain in the Gordon Highlanders in the Boer War but enlisted as a Lance Corporal to fight in the Great War. Charles and Leslie were both officers in the Gordon Highlanders, Leslie winning the Military Cross for bravery at Bullecourt. Their father was at some time the Colonel commanding the 3rd Volunteer Brigade Gordon Highlanders. This family's connection to Wellingborough is unclear, although their mother lived at 19 Castle Street and died there in 1917. **(Figure 3)**

### *Casualties*

The first man from Wellingborough to die after Britain declared war with Germany on 4 August 1914 was Private Walter Luck who died of sickness on 12 August, just a few days after he married. He was quickly followed by Private Alfred Robinson who also died of sickness on home soil on 17 August, aged 18. The first casualty from fighting was 2nd Lieutenant Edward Myddleton who died from shrapnel wounds at Le Cateau on 21 August. Another early casualty was John Arthur Hincks, Sergeant in the 1st Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment who was killed in action in September 1914. News of his death came from a German officer who sent a postcard of Hincks with his wife and two children taken outside his home which had been found on his body. On the back was written:

I am sending back this photograph, which has been found by one of my men near the body of the brave sergeant. I suppose that his wife may have already received the news of his death, but nevertheless I feel obliged to return this card. S. Fink, Captain in the German Army.



This considerate gesture by the enemy was perhaps only possible at the outset of the war before both sides became accustomed to the killing on an industrial scale that was soon to follow. Sergeant Hincks had three brothers serving, including Harold who had enlisted in Australia.

The last casualty from the town to die during hostilities in France and Flanders was Private Frank Thompson who died at 10.45 on the morning of Armistice Day.<sup>26</sup> His brother Frederick had been killed the previous August. For some families the war continued to take its toll as men who had returned from the front died of wounds. The memorial identifies several men who died in the early 1920s, including brothers Albert and Arthur Trolley and the memorial in St Mary's church records Edward Capon, brother of Percy, who died in 1930. He had served in the Northamptonshire Regiment and died from complications arising from the effects of gas poisoning.

The criteria for inclusion on the memorial were wide-ranging as not all were killed in action or died of wounds. Private Ralph Day died in a motorcycle accident on a bend in the road from Wellingborough to his home village of Hardwick. Private Edward Horn died after falling down the stairs at his lodging house in Old Fletton. Many others died as a result of accident or illness while on active service. Tom James joined the Northamptonshire Regiment three weeks before he died of illness.<sup>27</sup> Leonard Sandever, whose parents lived in Oxford Street and who was a Constable in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, died in hospital in Canada of typhoid in November 1914. Private William Hendry was captured at the Battle of the Dunes in July 1917, but after his release found himself guarding German prisoners in Suffolk. He was accidentally killed in June 1919 when his rifle, which should have been empty, was discharged by a 12-year-old boy.<sup>28</sup>

Two holders of the Victoria Cross are commemorated along with several holders of other decorations. The Reverend Lt Col. Bernard William Vann of the Sherwood Foresters was killed by a sniper in October 1918 aged 31 just a few days after being awarded the VC. Originally from Rushden, he was an Assistant Master and Chaplain at Wellingborough School when he joined the Army. While there were many priests in service he was unique for being a soldier-priest who led his battalion in battle. His brother, Captain Arthur Vann was killed in 1915 but is not on the memorial. The other Victoria Cross, 'ace of aces' Edward Mannock, moved to Wellingborough in 1911 to work for the National Telephone Company and lodged with James Eyles and his wife in Mill Road. He was a good local sportsman who later went to Turkey to work, only to be interned at the outbreak of the war. He was repatriated to England in 1915 due to illness as the Turks assumed he would never be fit enough to fight. He later joined the RAMC and then the Royal Engineers, joining the Royal Flying Corps in 1916. Flying the SE5a fighter aircraft he was effective against the enemy by getting very close to targets before firing. Due to British secrecy during the war, and unlike the German aces who enjoyed publicity, he was not named and was referred to in the newspapers that described his exploits as 'Captain X'. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross in 1919.

At least two women are on the memorial. Nursing Sister Olive Rowlett was serving on the hospital ship *Drina* anchored in Cromarty harbour in 1915. The captain of the battle cruiser *HMS Natal*, also moored at Cromarty, authorised a party on board and Olive Rowlett was one of several nurses from the *Drina* to be invited. A fire broke out on the *Natal* and within five minutes the ship's magazine exploded killing 421 people. Sister

26 [www.wellingborough.gov.uk](http://www.wellingborough.gov.uk)

27 *Wellingborough News*, 3 March 1916.

28 *Kettering Leader*, 13 June 1919.

Elizabeth Adelaide Adams, who ran the Voluntary Aid Detachment hospital at Wellingborough, died of influenza in November 1918 and was buried in Doddington Road cemetery. Thousands lined the route of her funeral procession.<sup>29</sup>

### *Letters Home*

Soldiers sent letters and cards back home regularly as a way of keeping family informed that they were still alive. They sometimes reveal the conditions in which men lived and died, and when letters stopped it was often a sign that a man had been captured or killed. Most letters stayed in private hands but some made their way into the local paper, often when a death was announced. A letter reporting the death of Arthur Creighton in 1915 says that on the day he went up to the trenches he met his brother Horace whom he had not seen for eight years. Horace was to die just a few weeks later. Alf Mayes wrote home to his sister in 1915 saying that he had found the body of their brother Frank when he was crawling wounded back to his lines. Mercifully, news was received a week later that Frank was alive and that in his confusion Alf had mistakenly identified the dead body of another soldier.

Private Percy Capon was in France for just two weeks when he wrote home to say that he was going up to the trenches the next day. That next day was his last as he died in the Battle of Aubers Ridge along with 20 others in the Northamptonshire Regiment who are named on the memorial. Private William Church of the Northamptonshires was killed in 1916, but in May 1915 he wrote home saying:

I expect you will see in the papers in a day or two about the big 'do' we were in the other day. Our poor fellows had a terrible time of it. It was enough to break anyone's heart to see the poor fellows crawling back wounded. I think we who got out of it safe are lucky. I was amongst a lot of those who lay as near to the German trench as we could get, and lay there from about 6 o'clock in the morning until about 9 o'clock at night, and then the rest of us managed to crawl back to our trench. Then the Germans kept on firing at us as we crept along, and I say good luck to all who got out of it, but I cannot help thinking of all the poor fellows that got hit. It was like hell let loose – shells and bullets flying all around and amongst us. And some of us lay there from early morning till late at night waiting for it to get dark, so that we could creep away from the front of their trench back to our own. I have never had such a shaking up like it in all my life. I ache all over through lying in one position so many hours, because we had to lie still, or else they would have us in a second.

The date of this letter and his regiment suggest that the 'big do' he mentions was the Battle of Aubers Ridge.

Lieutenant Stephen Coales, a solicitor and town councillor, wrote home:

In the little dugout under the parapet of a trench where I am writing the rats run about the roof. There are 1000s out here.

Stephen Coales was killed by shellfire not long afterwards. On the day Private Oliver Fossey died he wrote home:

Dear Mother, just a line you know I am still alive and kicking. It is rather cold and rainy at present, but I hope that will soon clear off. Please write to me as soon as you can, as I am looking for a line from you.

<sup>29</sup> *Wellingborough News*, 15 November 1918.

Men would also write home with news about their friends from the town. Lance Corporal F. Gent wrote to say:

I am grieved to tell you Jack Brown<sup>30</sup> was shot during our stay in the trenches. Altogether we have had two officers killed, one wounded and several men, but I don't know how many. Poor Jack Brown was hit whilst we were walking down the trench. There were two or three very bad corners in this trench and the Germans marked them.

Trooper W. Papworth of Grendon wrote saying:

I was with him at the time. He was shot through the head and fell without a word. We are very sorry to lose him, as he was a great favourite with everybody, being always so cheerful and bright. We are awfully sorry for you in this great trouble.

Private A. Cowper of the Northamptonshires wrote to his comrade's parents in Pebble Lane to say:

I am very sorry to tell you that my poor mate, Tom Cope, has been killed. That was his last wish before he died 'Be sure and let Mrs Cope know' because Tom and I gave each other our addresses and said if either of us got killed the other should write home.

Private Cope was one of the many who fell at Aubers Ridge.

Frederick Ulyatt, who was a stoker on the battle cruiser *Queen Mary* and whose two brothers lived in the town sent a letter home<sup>31</sup> which was presumably written shortly after a recent action by his battle group.

We were not in at the death of some of the baby-killers, but it's my squadron and we were not far away. You can take it from me that we shall be in the thick of it very soon now, and something is going to get shifted. ...Expressing the hope to hear from home soon. It's wonderful how a few lines cheer a bloke up after a month's hard work in times like these. We are not in harbour often, and never know when we go out if it is our turn to join the 'Roll of Honour'. The British Navy will live on and act up to its reputation to friend and foe in peace or war and none of us will have lived in vain. I don't wish for a better death myself but I want to live to see all the fleet of Kaiser Bill at the bottom of the North Sea.

Stoker Ulyatt died after 16 years service in the Navy along with over 1,250 other crewmen when the *Queen Mary* exploded at the Battle of Jutland in May 1916.

#### *Final Resting Places*

Over 100,000 bodies lying in the cemeteries now maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission are marked simply as 'Known unto God'. In addition, the bodies of over 165,000 Commonwealth soldiers who died on the Western Front remain missing<sup>32</sup> and 40% of the names identified on Wellingborough's memorial have no known grave.<sup>33</sup> How is this high proportion explained? When a soldier was removed to hospital and died of wounds he would usually be buried in a cemetery away from the fighting and his grave

30 Private John Edwin Brown, *Wellingborough News*, 19 March 1915.

31 *Wellingborough News*, 5 February 1915.

32 [www.cwgc.org/fromelles](http://www.cwgc.org/fromelles)

33 The CWGC database identifies where a person is buried if known, or the memorial on which they are listed if they have no known grave.

likely to be known. However, some of the battlefield cemeteries created during the war were later shelled in renewed fighting over the same ground such that grave markers were lost. Bodies buried by enemy forces in large grave pits went unidentified. For those who died on the battlefield, some bodies were beyond recognition or were simply never found after being hastily consumed by a heavily bombarded landscape. Corporal Walter Ruff was buried by bursting German shells<sup>34</sup> and Private Harry Cowper was killed by a shell burst overhead;<sup>35</sup> both lie where they fell. Private Horace Lilley was asleep in a shelter when it was hit by a shell. His comrades were unable to remove his body due to the tangled mess left behind and he is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial. Aged 18, he had been in France for only three weeks.<sup>36</sup> **(Figure 4)**

#### *Omissions and Mistakes*

Although 677 names appear on the memorial, the total number with some connection to the town who died is certainly much higher. Records were found of men born in Wellingborough but whose families had moved away in their early years. James Woolston, son of the postmaster, lived in Wellingborough for 20 years before going up to Cambridge and later becoming a professor of mathematics in South Africa. Serving with South African forces, he died of wounds in 1918. Wreaths placed by factory workers to their fallen colleagues identify 16 names that are not on the memorial, although some appear on memorials nearby, including Bozeat, Rushden and Kettering. 'H. Child (nurse)' is listed on the Wellingborough Wesleyan memorial but not on the town's memorial; s/he has not been traced. Private Fred Massey who lived in the town for 25 years is omitted. Sidney Cobb, whose mother lived in Knox Road, enlisted in Ontario and his name appears on the United Reform memorial along with Horace Jones, whose parents lived in North Street. The United Reform church memorial lists several other names that are not on the town memorial. In addition, Private Frank Hilton of Knox Road, who was shot in 1914 and who lay for seven days on the battlefield before being picked-up by German forces, died in 1924 after 21 operations for his wounds.<sup>37</sup> Driver Frederick Alderman is buried in Doddington Road cemetery and may have died at the Voluntary Aid Hospital. He certainly lived in Wellingborough during the war as he appears on the Absent Voters List for 1918. Although 'W. Bailey' is listed on the memorial there are two matches; Walter Bailey was killed in 1918 and William in 1917, whose brothers Austin and Alfred are listed. Both were born in Wellingborough, suggesting that either Walter or William is omitted. Likewise, 'H. Jones' is listed but this could be Private Horace Jones or Able Seaman Harold Jones who are both listed on church memorials in the town. There are three candidates for 'A. Jones'; Arthur 1915, Albert 1917 and Alfred 1918. All three casualties were reported in the local paper. Although more detailed research is needed into this aspect of the memorial it does appear that several more names deserve to be listed at Broad Green.

The current listing at Broad Green also has some mistakes. Three names appear with no initial (Daintith, Noble and Wright<sup>38</sup>) and over 30 carry certain or very likely mistakes. 'Cos' should be 'Cox', 'Clays' should be Clayson, 'Fardent' should be Farden, 'Jenking' should be Jenkins and 'Leaton' should be Lenton. Some names have minor spelling variations but most errors are with initials and appear to have come from mistakes made from the reading of handwritten or typed lists when they were originally compiled. Initial letters C and G are sometimes interchanged, as are F and E.

34 *Wellingborough News*, 29 September 1916.

35 *Wellingborough News*, 6 July 1917.

36 *Evening Telegraph*, 7 February 1918.

37 *Wellingborough News*, 8 February 1924.

38 This is 2nd Lt James Daintith, Royal Engineers, of Warrington, who was an engineer at the town's waterworks. Probably Pte George Henry Wright, Lincolnshire Regt, died 21 July 1917.

### *The Unidentified*

Of the names that remain to be identified, 20 are very close matches to others that are listed. 'F. Ealey' is listed twice but only one match can be found. The same applies to 'L. H. Stebbings'; there is one match to a man born in Wellingborough and who died in 1917 and the probability of two 'L. H. Stebbings' from the town being killed seems very low. 'W. Eales' is unknown but could be 'W.J. Eales' who is identified. Other identified names are, 'F. Dix', 'E. Glover', 'H. Hill', 'H. Moore' and 'F. Wallis', but 'F.J. Dix', 'E.T. Glover', 'A.H. Hill', 'E.H. Moore' and 'F.W. Wallis' are known. It must be a possibility that some of these close matches represent the same person whose name was perhaps put forward by different family members after the war.

Another problem is that where a surname is relatively common it is extremely difficult to make a positive identification unless there is a clear link to Wellingborough in surviving records. Even so, some relatively uncommon names continue to defy identification. 'M. T. Lomath', for instance, has not been traced and, given that there are some definite errors on the memorial, it must be a possibility that the initials of some of those who remain unidentified are incomplete or wrong. The unidentified soldiers were not mentioned in the local paper and some may not have been local; perhaps being billeted in the town at some time during the war. However, the converse also applies. Private Jacob Knight, who lived with his wife and children in the town before the war, and whose family stayed there afterwards, does not appear to be mentioned in the newspaper.

### *After the War*

In the summer of 1919, celebrations were held in local towns and villages to mark the signing of the peace treaty, and in Wellingborough a procession led the way to a 'great service' in Bassett's Close. Former prisoners of war were supported by collections in the town and in response to a call by Mr Henson, 132 former prisoners came forward. The British Legion did what it could to support the families of those who were lost. As well as organizing 'Poppy Days', a tea and concert party was arranged after which the fatherless children were given sweets, a threepenny piece, a bun and an orange. Their puzzled faces gazed into the camera for the local paper.<sup>39</sup>

With the war over, memorials to glorious and noble sacrifice helped to assuage feelings of waste and loss. They helped to give some meaning and significance to the suffering that those who fell and the communities they came from had endured. The memorial tells us more than just the names of the men from Wellingborough who lost their lives facing the enemy. It tells us of a wider group of people who contributed to war service in some way and who died while in the service of the war effort. The memorial commemorates the lost boys of Wellingborough who were born and schooled in the town, who played in the streets only to someday enlist and die fighting for their country. It also remembers those who had



**Figure 4. The grave of Pte Stephen Horsley in Jerusalem pictured shortly after the war.**

*(Reproduced with the permission of Mr N. Horsley)*

<sup>39</sup> *Wellingborough News*, 11 January 1924



moved away, some to the other side of the world, but who came back to be lost in the killing fields of France and Flanders. It remembers also the men and women who had moved to the town to find work and who were remembered by their friends and workmates when peace had returned. Memorials invite us to remember the dead, yet we should not forget the wounded who were pained for the rest of their lives. Nor should we forget the parents who lost their sons and daughters, the grieving fiancées, the widows and their children. From Wellingborough alone there were thousands.

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