

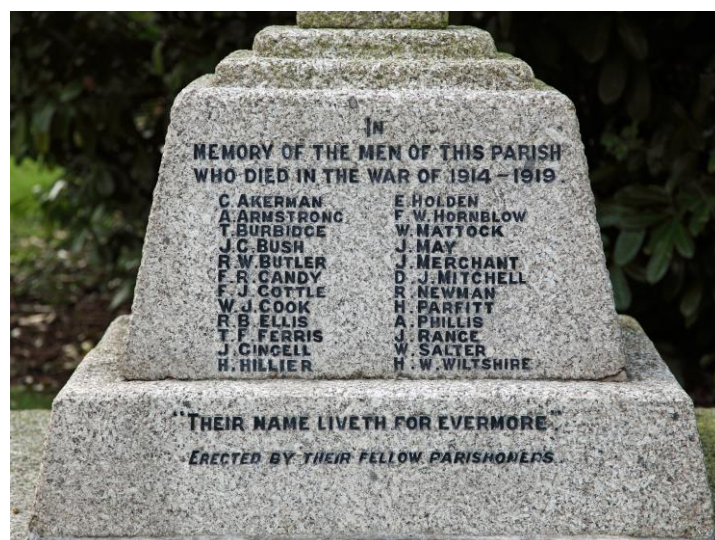
Sons of Seend – World War One

Introduction

During the First World War the wider community of Seend Parish answered the call to arms and sent their sons to fight for King and Country around the world. 24 of them paid the ultimate price and are now commemorated on the War Memorial Cross inside the Holy Cross Church grounds in Seend along with a roll of honour within the church itself.



War Memorial at Holy Cross Church Seend



The names of the WW1 dead



The commemoration plaque in Holy Cross Church Seend

Records show that the Sons of Seend answered the call to arms and fought in all of the major theatres of the war (France Belgium, Gallipoli, Balkans, Middle East, Italy etc), participated in many of the major campaigns and famous battles from Mons in 1914 all the way through to the British 100 day Offensive in 1918 which led to the Armistice. All 24 joined the Army although one made it into the air as part of the Royal Flying Corps. The first two years of the war were kind to the village with no fatalities being recorded in 1914 or 1915, 1916 saw the first 2 deaths on the Somme although neither on the 1 Jul 16 (the bloodiest day in British Army history). As the war ramped up in intensity and both sides became more proficient in their craft so too the casualties mounted with 5 killed in 1917 and no less than 13 in 1918 of which 9 fell during the final three months of the war. A further three died (one each in France, Italy and Macedonia) as a result of the global flu pandemic which struck in 1918/19 and one of general ill health at home in Seend in 1918.

During my research it became clear that in most cases these were just normal men who were caught up in exceptional events; their stories mirror thousands of others whose names can be seen on similar memorials up and down the nation.

In compiling these brief notes, I have searched the available records to identify individuals, a little about their lives before the war, their service and where and how they died. It is unfortunate that many soldiers' records from this period (about 60%) were destroyed by fire in the Blitz during WW2 and a good portion of the remainder await processing to electronic documents and release to open access, therefore in some cases the notes on individuals have holes. Hopefully, over time, some kind soul will update these men's stories so that their selfless deeds do not fade away from our memory.

David A Wiggins
Colonel (Ret'd)
Devizes
October 2020

Private Geoffrey Walter Akerman

Geoffrey was 19 and living in Seend on the Trowbridge Road when he joined the Duke of Edinburgh's (Wiltshire) Regiment on 19 Oct 1915 for a 4-year term of service with the Territorials. He was stationed in the UK until on 10 Sep 1916 but was transferred from the Wiltshire Regt to the Royal Scots Fusiliers and shipped to the Macedonian Theatre to join their 8th Bn.

By 1917 a multinational Allied force under French General Maurice Sarrail numbering 500,000 troops faced the Bulgarian Army and German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish units, totalling 300,000 men. The front line stretched from Albania to the mouth of the River Struma in Greece.

By March 1917 the British Salonika Force (BSF) under General George Milne held 90 miles (144 km) of front, including the key strategic position at Doiran, Geoffrey's unit as part of 26th Division was based in this area.

General Sarrail launched an offensive in April 1917, with French, Italian, Russian and Serbian troops. In support, the BSF attempted to capture Bulgarian positions around Doiran. When this offensive failed, static trench warfare continued until autumn 1918.

Living conditions for soldiers on both sides were harsh. Winter and summer brought extremes of climate and disease - especially malaria - caused many more casualties than the fighting.

On 15 September 1918, Allied forces, directed by French General Louis Franchet d'Esperey, went onto the offensive. The BSF attacked at Doiran, helping French and Serbian troops to break the Bulgarian defences. Unable to stop this advance, the Bulgarian Army was forced into full retreat. On 29 September, Bulgaria signed an armistice and fighting ceased the following day.

At the end of the war Geoffrey was near Strumica 40km N.W. of Lake Doiran, Macedonia. During his time in Macedonia he would have fought in the various battles for Doiran and endured life in the attrition grind of the trenches. There are no records of him being wounded during his service however it appears that his luck finally gave out when he became a victim of the great Spanish flu pandemic which ravaged the world in 1919. Geoffrey died of pneumonia & influenza at Casualty Clearing Station Balgarva on 13 Jan 1919 and was buried at Sofia War Cemetery, the central Sofia cemetery within the Bulgarian capital.

Lieutenant Colonel Allan Armstrong DSO



Allan was born on 11 Feb 1875 in Orissa, India, one of four children of Joseph and Emma Armstrong most of whom were born in either Italy or India. After their father's death in Germany in 1884 the family returned home and were educated in Buckinghamshire.

Allen attended officer training at Sandhurst and was in the same cohort as Sir Winston Churchill. He was commissioned into the Wiltshire Regiment, posted to the 1st Bn and sent with it to India in 1895. He was promoted to Captain in Jun 1900 and served with the Bn in Peshawar until late 1902, when it transferred to Rawalpindi. It was during this time that he met and married Marguerite O'Sullivan who was also born in India.

Allen returned to the UK and after a period with the 2nd Bn retired as a regular Captain on half pay on the 9 Mar 1910 but was held against the 4th Bn based at Trowbridge as a reservist Major. In 1911 he and Marguerite were living with their first son at Bradbury House, Seend.

At the outbreak of WW1 Allan found himself restored to the active list as a Major within the newly titled 1/4th Battalion Territorial Force Wiltshire Regiment. He embarked at Southampton with the Bn arriving at Bombay, India on 9 Oct 1914 and served in Delhi. At some point in 1915/16 Allen left India for the Middle East where he was employed on operations against the Turks across the breath of Egypt, Palestine and Syria for which he is awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) in 1916. In 1917, Allan now a Lt Col, was given command of the 1/4th Bn in May 1917 and then redeployed with it to Egypt in Sept 1917.

Building on his earlier experiences, Allen commanded his men against the Turkish forces during 1917 during the Third Battle of Gaza (1 -2 Nov), the Capture of Junction Station (13 – 14 Nov), and the Battle of Nabi Samweil (17–24 November), and fought during the decisive British victory at the Battle of Jerusalem.

1918 saw the campaign continue with Allan's Bn being involved in the Battle of Tell'Asur (8 - 12 Mar), the Battle of Berukin (9 – 30 Apr) and the Battle of Sharon (19 - 25 Sep) it was during this later battle that Allen was wounded and evacuated to the casualty clearing station at Ramleh just outside Tel Aviv but unfortunately he died of his wounds on 19 Sep 1918 and was buried at the Ramleh War Cemetery.

Private Thomas Burbidge

Thomas was born in Seend on 2 Mar 1895 to John and Alice Burbidge and was living at Stocks with them, his four brothers and two sisters in 1911 at which time he was a farm labourer. He joined the 1st Bn Coldstream Guards as a Regular prior to the outbreak of WW1 and deployed from Aldershot to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) arriving on 14 Aug 1914. The Bn crossed the English Channel, concentrated near le Nouvion and served on the Western Front in France and Belgium for the duration of the War.

During his service with the Coldstream Guards, Thomas would have been involved in a number of actions which in 1914 included the Battle of Mons (23 Aug 1914), the British Army's first action in Europe since Waterloo. Although a British tactical victory, the BEF were forced to retreat and fight a number of delaying battles as they moved westward. He may have been involved in the British element that fought at the Battle of the Marne (6 Sep 1914) and the Battle of Aisne (13 Sep 1914) which stopped the German general advance across France, and the start of the move North to the sea as the Germans and Allies tried to outflank each other before bring an end to mobile war and start of trench warfare. During this phase, the 1st Bn was involved in a number of actions and marches which ended with their participation at the First Battle of Ypres (19 Sep 1914 – 19 Jan 1915).

After the fighting around Ypres in the new year, aside from the grind of the trenches, Thomas was in action again in the limited British offensive at the Battle of Aubers Ridge (9 May 1915) in which his Division suffered 5000 casualties. Later in the year he was involved in the first major British offensive of war the Battle of Loos (26 Sep – 8 Oct 1915) during which the British used poison gas for the first time. The French and British tried to break through the German defences in Artois and Champagne and restore a war of movement. Despite improved methods, more ammunition and better equipment, the Franco-British attacks were contained by the German armies, except for local losses of ground. British casualties at Loos were about twice as high as the Germans.

1916 was much dominated by the Anglo-French Campaign on the Somme which broke down into a series of separate battles as the opposing forces arm wrestled for dominance. Thomas's unit was involved in one such phase The Battle of Flers-Courcelette (15–22 September 1916) a major attack on the 15th September 1916 to destroy German strong points between the villages of Combles and Courcelette. This was the first time that tanks were committed to an attack. Ultimately the British and French attacks failed although some important villages were captured.

Thomas Last Battle – 15 Sep 1916

The 1st Bn Coldstream Guards, as part of the 2nd Guards Brigade were given the objective of capturing the German stronghold of the Triangle south west of the village of Lesbœufs. A creeping barrage began prompt at 6:20 a.m. and the Guards followed 30 yd (27 m) behind but as the right of the 2nd Guards Brigade went over the crest, massed machine-gun fire began from the German Quadrilateral and Straight Trench positions. The Guards kept going but the four battalions, mingled together, pressed on into the north end of the Triangle and Serpentine Trench where the wire had been well cut and the trenches devastated.

Despite many casualties, the brigade overpowered the defenders and occupied part of the first objective by 7:15 a.m. The 2nd Guards Brigade collected bombers and captured the triangle by noon, but a further advance seemed impossible. This is as far as the 2 Guards Bde got on 15 Sep 1916 and by the end of the day the Guards Division had lost 4150 casualties of which the 21-year-old Thomas was one. Originally listed as missing he was subsequently posted as killed in action during the attacks on the 15th. His remains were never identified, and he is commemorated along with 72,338 others on the Thiepval Memorial to the dead without a known grave in the Somme Battlefield.

Lieutenant James Cromwell Bush MC

James was born in Salisbury on the 14 Mar 1891 to Rev Herbert Cromwell Bush of Seend (who later became the Vicar of Seend Church), and his wife Mabel. He was educated at Fritham School Lyndhurst and St Edwards School Oxford. After leaving school at 20 he went to Ceylon and India to help run a tea plantation but was invalided home through illness. When the war broke out, he was learning land agency.

Gazetted 2Lt in the 5th Bn Wiltshire Regt in Sep 1914 James was dispatched with them to the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. He was one of the only survivors from the unit which landed at Sulva Bay as part of the Gallipoli operation. James was invalided home in late 1915 and initially awarded a Mentioned in Despatches which was then upgraded to a Military Cross (MC) for gallant and distinguished service during his time at Gallipoli. On 25 February 1916 he was appointed an aide-de-camp, transferred to the General List and sent to Egypt. On 22 August 1916 he was replaced as ADC and on 18 December 1916 was posted to the Dorset Regiment as a lieutenant.

Eager for adventure James volunteered for the Royal Flying Corps, obtained his pilots wing in May 1917 and was posted to 22 Squadron as a pilot of a two-seater Bristol F.2 Fighter as an acting Captain. During his service with the Squadron he managed to down 6 enemy aircraft which made him an ace. He scored his first two victories on 12 August 1917 setting one Albatross D.V aflame and another down out of control. He went on to score four more kills, the final one coming on 2 October 1917. Five days later, James and his observer fell under the guns of German ace Hans von Hübner. Initially reported missing, he was confirmed as dead by a message dropped from a German aircraft.

James was buried at Neuville-en-Ferrain cemetery, near Lillie in France aged 27.

Private Reginald William Butler

Reginald was born in Apr 1897 in Melksham to William and Matilda Butler of Seend Park Farm, Semington. By 1911 he had left school and was working as a gardener but was still living at home with his parents and four siblings.

He joined the Wiltshire Regiment in about Apr/May 1916 and after completing basic training joined the 2nd Bn as a battlefield casualty replacement. The Bn had been fighting in Europe since Oct 1914 but was then based in the Somme area. It is unlikely that he saw action on the Somme but would have been involved in the Battle of Arras (9 Apr – 16 May 1917) where the 2nd Bn launched an attack, prior to the start of the main battle, on a German stronghold which was repulsed with the loss of 37 men.

As part of 21 Bde the 2nd Bn was moved from Arras to Ypres as part of the forces brought generated for the 3rd Battle of Ypres. On the 31 Jul 1917, the opening day of the battle (also known as The Battle of Passchendaele), General Gough and the British Fifth Army were tasked with securing Pilckem Ridge, the only high ground to the north east of Ypres. A huge artillery bombardment followed by a creeping barrage opened the assault as British infantry advanced towards German lines. Great progress was made in the early hours of the battle but as the day progressed the attack lost momentum, slowed by heavy rain and determined German counter attacks.

With the offensive halted, the British infantry withdrew from their furthest forward positions, consolidated their gains and were able to repulse further enemy counter attacks. Gains included the strategically important Pilckem Ridge, Bellewaarde Ridge and German observation posts on Gheluvelt Plateau, but were less than half of those intended and cost nearly 32,000 casualties during the three days of fighting. The Third Battle of Ypres was to continue until Dec 1917 and cost the allies 240,000 casualties.

It was during this initial attack on the 31 Jul 1917 that Reginald was initially reported missing and then confirmed as being killed in action aged 19. His remains were never identified, and he is commemorated on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, one of 54,603 allied soldiers who died in the Ypres area during the course of war but whose remains were never found.

Private Francis Reginald Candy

Francis was born in Seend on 22 May 1892 to Frank (a licenced victualler) and his wife Jane Candy. Unfortunately, Frank died in Jun 1900 and by 1901 Francis was living with his Mother, sister and Grandmother at the Lock House, Seend. Francis married Maud Turtle in Melksham 15 Feb 1913.

At the outbreak of the war in 1914, Francis initially joined the Wiltshire Regiment at Trowbridge but subsequently transferred to the 7th Bn Somerset Light Infantry. This move was probably to make up the unit numbers as it was forming at Taunton as part of the Second New Army (K2) and initially moved to Woking and Godalming in Sep 1914 then on to Amesbury and then Larkhill prior to mobilisation for war before finally arriving on Boulogne on 24 Jul 1915. The Bn underwent Trench familiarisation and training in Fleurbaix area before moving with its parent formation 61st Brigade of the 20th Division to the Ypres Salient, Belgium in late 1915.

As well as taking his turn in the trenches, Francis would have been engaged in a number of significant battles in 1916, the first was the Battle of Mount Sorrel – this small engagement was fought in the Ypres Salient (2 – 13 Jun 1916). The remainder of the year was spent in the Somme Campaign area where Francis Bn was involved in the Battle of Delville Wood (15 Jul – 3 Sep) where he would have been in action on the 20 Jul when his Bn along with several others were used to break through and support the South Africans, which they achieved. The Battle of Guillemont (3 to 6 Sep), The Battle of Flers-Courcelette (15 to 22 Sep) a battle made famous for the first use of tanks.

The Battle of Morval (25 to 28 Sep) and the final push on the Somme the Battle of Le Transloy (1 – 18 Oct 16).

1917 same Francis and his Bn back in the Ypres sector preparing for the planned attack on the German positions of Langemark which was due to be launched on the 16 Aug 1917. It would appear from the unit records that as Francis was waiting to move up the line with his company in preparation for the assault at 7 p.m. his company was hit by a shrapnel shell which killed 7 men and wounded a further 20; Francis was one of those killed and his body was evacuated to the Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) at Duhallow and was buried at the ADS's Cemetery aged 26.

Driver Fredrick James Cottle

Born in Oct 1889, Fredrick was the family's eldest son and in 1911 lived at Craysmarsh Farm in Seend, with his parents Frederick and Adelaide Cottle, two sisters and three brothers. Aged 21, he was a farm worker on his father's farm.

Fredrick joined the Army in 1914 and after completing training was posted to 108 Battery Royal Field Artillery (RFA) where he was employed as a Driver which was the equivalent of a Private. The rank was designated to the men who drove the teams of horses which pulled the guns. As a Driver, he would have received 1s 2.5d per day or just over 5p in today's money which was slightly more than an Infantry Private

108 Bty RFA was a regular unit, armed with 18lb guns, and as part of 3rd Division sailed to France in Aug 1914 with the BEF. In that year they supported the Division in an array of major battles which include Mons and the subsequent retreat, Battle of the Marne which stopped the German advance on Paris, and the First battle of Ypres.

It is likely that Fredrick arrive in the unit some time in 1915 as a battle casualty replacement for the original regulars. As with most artillery units they were kept busy in the attritional battle to wear down the enemy on a daily basis but it is recorded that in 1915 108 Bty saw action supporting the Second battle of Ypres and a second attack on the Ypres area as part of the Battle of Loos. 1916 saw 108 Bty supporting the major offensive on the Somme from Jun through to Oct. In 1917, 108 Bty was re-designated as part of 21 Army Bde RFA. In 1917 they fought in the Third Battle of Ypres.

In 1918 Fredrick found himself in the path of The Great German Spring Offensive of 1918 known as the "Kaiser's Battle" which started on the 21 Mar and finally ran out of steam by the end of Apr 1918. The offensives primary objective was to defeat the French and British Armies in France and Belgium before the USA could generate sufficient troops to tip the balance of power to the allies' cause. The assault was made possible by releasing additional German troops from the eastern front after the Russians sued for peace in 1917.

It is likely that Fredrick was wounded at the Battle of the Avre (4–5 April 1918), part of the First Battle of Villers-Bretonneux which constituted the final German attack towards Amiens in WW1. The Royal Artillery units of the 4th Army played a key part in stopping the German advance on 4 Apr but at great costs to both men and horses. Fredrick was brought back to either the 5th or 46th Casualty Clearing Stations which had been moved to Picquigny at the end of March to deal with casualties of the German advance on Amiens. Unfortunately, he subsequently dies of his wounds on the 5 Apr 1918 and was buried with 127 others in the Picquigny British Cemetery who died in the local fighting before the end of April.

Private Willian John Cook

John was born in Seend on 15 May 1883 to Edward and Martha Cook, of Seend. In 1911 he was working as a carpenter and living with his parent in the High Street, Seend by which time his 2 sisters and a brother had moved out.

John enlisted in the Army at Trowbridge and his medical data states that he was 5' 2" tall and weighted 138lbs. Having completed basic training, he was posted to 1st/8th Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regiment then based in France. John did however manage to find the time to get married prior to his departure to Selina Grayshon on 2 Oct 1916 at Sunning Hill, Berks. Selina subsequently moved into "Willow Dale," Seend.

The 1/8th Battalion had landed at Le Havre as part of Warwickshire Brigade in the South Midland Division in March 1915 for service on the Western Front. John would probably have arrived in a reinforcement tranche to replace the earlier casualties in the Somme Offensive. His unit was in the vicinity of Albert when he joined. During his time on the Western Front he would have been engaged in periods in the trenches along with rest and retraining. The next major engagement John would have been involved in was the attack on Langemarck/Gheluvelt, near Ypres on the 27 Aug 1917 as part of the Third Battle of Ypres. A second attack made on the 4 Oct was again costly and by the end of the day the Bn had been reduced to about 300 men.

After receiving replacements John's Bn was part of the British and French divisions were sent to Italy In November 1917, to bolster the Italian Army following their massive defeat at Caporetto. The Bn was involved in the defensive Battle of Asiago, (15 Jun 18), where they fought off a major assault by the Austro-Hungarian Army.

Having survived his time in Italy, John's unit moved back to France on 11 September 1918 and joined 75th Brigade, part of the 25th Division which had been destroyed during the German Spring Offensive earlier that year. They fought in the final battles of the Hundred Days Offensive (8 Aug – 11 Nov 1918) including the capture of Beaurevoir on 5–6 October 1918.

John's Death – 2 Nov 1918

In the later part of Oct 1918, John's Bn saw action clearing the Germans from the vicinity of Flaguet Brifaut, this was followed by a period of training and rest commencing 25 Oct during which a batch of 145 Other Ranks were absorbed into the unit to make good loses. On the 31 Oct the Bn then moved up and relieved the 11th Sherwood Foresters on the left sector of the Divisional front. As there was no mention of any action or casualties on the 1st or 2nd Nov within the Bn's war diary, it can be assumed that John was one of the 5 soldiers wounded in the fighting around Flaguet Brifaut and that he died of his wounds whilst being evacuated via the medical system. This would also explain his burial in Blighty Valley Cemetery, Authuille Wood which had been established to bury the dead from the Somme Offensive in 1916 but was at the time of John's death was some 50 miles west of the Bn's location.

Private Reginald Bertram Ellis

Reginald was the oldest child of six, 3 boys and 3 girls all living in Seend with their parents Albert (a gardener) and Jane Ellis. By 1911 Reginald aged 22, was living in West Littleton, Dyrham Rectory, Chippenham where he was employed as a footman to the Blatherwayt family.

Reginald enlisted in Bristol sometime after the start of WW1 and was posted to 1/6th (Cyclist) Battalion Territorial Force (Sussex Yeomanry) Royal Sussex Regiment which in Aug 1914 was stationed at Brighton and then moved to Norfolk as part of the 1st Mounted Division. In July 1916 it moved to St. Leonards as part of the General Reserve. In Mar 1917 the unit moved to Folkestone

and then Wingham, Kent again as part of the 1st Mounted Division and then in early 1918 moved to Tralee, Ireland as part of the 6th Cyclist Brigade before moving get again to Limerick.

We know that Fredrick was serving with the unit in Ireland as he was still in contact with his old employer, the Rector of Dyrham and below is an extract from a letter that Reginald wrote him.

*No G/3092 1/6 Cyclist Corp
Wicklow Hospital, Ireland
Sept 1918*

Dear Sir

I have been conveyed by the Red Cross Ambulance to the local hospital yesterday, suffering from Chronic Rheumatism in my legs, caused from sleeping in wet blankets and damp ground, the rain came through out tent for several nights. The Doctor saw me this morning and of course I am in bed. My food did consist of eggs and milk and the matron and nurses are very kind, also some strange lady brought me a bunch of grapes and some cake. Hospital life seems very strange to me...

I hope the mistress is still keeping well, also that your cold is better. I have plenty of time to think of Dyrham and the past now I am in bed, but this is a poor account of myself.

Yours faithfully

R B Ellis

It would appear that Fredrick's health was failing at this point; he subsequently died at home on the 1 Nov 1918 and was buried at Seend Holy Cross Church.

Private William Thomas Ferris

Born in Seend on 7 Jul 1896 William was the eldest son of Thomas & Elizabeth Ferris living at 18 New Buildings with a younger brother and sister in 1901. By 1911, he had moved to Redstocks, Melksham and was employed as a labourer in rubber manufacturing.

William enlisted in the Army in late 1914 early 1915 and was initially held on strength of the Wiltshire Regiment but later transferred to the 6th (Service) Battalion Leinster Regiment which moved from Ireland to Basingstoke in May 1915. On the 9 Jul 1915, two days after his 18th birthday, William embarked with the Bn at Liverpool bound for Egypt but actually arrived at Mudros which was used as a major British base for the Gallipoli Campaign.

On 6 Aug 1915 William's Bn landed at Anzac Cove attached to the Australian & N.Z. Corps and engaged in various actions against the Turkish Army. He was wounded on 17 Sept 1915 and as a result was awarded a wound strip. The Bn was withdrawn from Anzac Cove to Mudros on 29 Sep 1915 and then redeployed 6 days later to Salonika where it engaged in various actions against the Bulgarians and their allies in the Balkans for the next two years. Eventually on 14 Sep 1917 the Bn embarked for Egypt arriving at Alexandria 19 Sep 1917 where they remain until May 1918.

At some point in this journey, William transferred from the 6th Bn to the 2nd Bn Leinster Regiment which has been fighting on the Western Front since it deployed with the BEF in 1914. William reappears in the official records in 1918, he has been promoted to Corporal and is still only 21. At this phase of WW1 the allies have launched the 100 day offensive in both France and Southern Belgium which would bring about the defeat of the German Army and the final armistice. From the Bn war Diaries life was a mixture of trench duties, small advances, training, parades, carrying parties, visits, lunches, and sporting activities such as football and Tug-of-war but always with the mention of casualties killed and wounded.

On 1 September 1918 William was with the Bn at Ravelsburg preparing for their assault on Hill 63 planned for the 4th. The Bn went over the top at 8 am but had to endure a German artillery bombardment of their pre-assault position for 45 mins before H-hour. The Germans put up stiff opposition to the attack although the Bn achieved its objective of capturing the hill by that evening at a cost 28 killed, 121 wounded and a further 15 missing. The diary remarks "that although casualties were heavy, they were light when considering the importance of the advance gained". It is assumed that William was one of the wounded during this attack and that he died of his wounds on the 6 Sept 1918 at 62nd Medical Clearing Station which was based at Arneke and was buried at Arneke British Cemetery at the age of 22.

Sapper John Gingell

John was born in Seend 1881 and was the third son to Mark and Sarah Gingell then living in Seend Cleeve. Employed as a bricklayer he married Lily Bodman at Keevil on 19 Aug 1905. They had six children and were living at Seend, Cleeve in 1915.

John enlistment into the Army reserve on 11 Dec 1915 at Trowbridge signed on for duration and during his subsequent medical he was measured at 5' 7" and weighing 136 lbs. Interestingly he had previously served 3 yrs in the 1st Bn (Volunteers) Wiltshire Regt a local territorial unit prior to the war. He was mobilised on 2 Jun 1916 and posted to the Royal Engineers (RE) as a bricklayer. He was based in the UK from 11 Dec 1915 to 18 Jun 1917 at which time he was posted from the base to 80th Field Company RE which had originally been raised as part of Kitchener's new Army and attached with two other RE Field Companies to 18 (Eastern) Division which deployed to France in July 1915.

John joined the Company on 3 Aug 1917 and during his time with the unit he would have been engaged in engineering activities within the Divisional area of operations which at this time focussed on the attacks as part of the Third Battle of Ypres (Jul – Dec 1917).

After the battle, the Division including 80 Fd Coy RE were moved to the Amiens area in France on 10 Feb 1918 and in Mar 1918 the company was in the St Quinten area employed on building defences in the Battle Zone and main battle positions in preparations for a major German offensive. Known as the "Kaiser's Battle" the first phase started on the 21 Mar and finally ran out of steam by the end of Apr 1918. When the offensive started the Company was working on defences in the Commenchon area South West of St Quinton but by the 31 Mar the line had been pushed back towards Amiens some 40 miles further west.

On the 31 Mar 1918 John was employed with others preparing defences in the Gentelles area near Amiens when he was hit, in the ensuing chaos he was reported as wounded, then wounded/missing but eventually it was realised that he had in fact been killed. The Army therefore finally classified him as killed in action on 1 Apr 1918 and he is remembered on the Poziers Memorial, which honours the 14,000 casualties who fell in this offensive but like John had no known grave.

Lance Corporal Henry Hillier

Henry was the eldest son of Henry James and Henrietta Hillier of Ivy Cottage, Seend. He lived with his parents, one brother and two sisters in the family home in 1911. Henry, like his father was a carpenter and joiner.

Henry joined Army in 1914 and was subsequently posted after completing basic training to the 1/4th Battalion Territorial Force Wiltshire Regiment in early 1915. At this time the Bn was based in Delhi India having deployed there in late 1914. In Sept 1917 Henry, now a Lcpl, and his unit left India for

Egypt and landed in Suez where they were absorbed into 233rd Brigade of the 75th Division and engaged in various action during the Palestine Campaign against the Turks. At some point he was wounded, possibly during The Third Battle of Gaza 1 – 2 Nov 1917 and died of his wounds at the 69th General Hospital on 14 Nov 1917. He was buried Deir El Belah War Cemetery in Gaza aged 24.

Corporal Ernest Howard Holden

Ernest was the only son of George and Annie Holden. In 1911 he was a 27-year old carter for a coal merchant, lived alone with his mother in Seend Cleeve, his four sisters having moved out.

On 29 Nov 1915 Ernest joined the Reserve Army at Devizes and at his medical that day he was recorded as being 5' 5" high and weighing 138lbs. He was mobilised on 21 Mar 16 and reported to the Wiltshire Regiment Depot for basic training on completion of which he was shipped out to France via Southampton on 10 Jul 16 and joined 1/8 Bn Royal Worcester Regiment in the field just north of Beaumont-Hamel on 20 Jul 16.

At the point that Ernest joined the Bn, they had just finished fighting in the two initial phases of the Somme Campaign including the first bloody day of the offensive. It is likely that he arrived with a tranche of battlefield casualty replacements to make good the Bn losses. He would have fought with the Bn in the remaining Battles of the Somme Campaign. A mature man when he arrived, he obviously acquitted himself well and was promoted, just after the end of the Somme battles, on 8 Dec 1916 to acting Lance Corporal, which was made substantive in Apr 1917.

1917 saw Ernest participate in the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, before moving with his unit to take part in the Third Battle of Ypres where he obviously impressed as well and was promoted to acting Corporal in Oct and made a substantive Corporal on 29 Dec 1917. November saw the Bn moved to Italy in order to strengthen the Italian resistance against the Austro-Hungarian Army and the Division was involved in various actions in 1918 including the fighting on the Asiago Plateau at the Battle of Vittoria Veneto. On 11 Sep 1918, Ernest and his Bn left Italy and returned to France as one of the units selected to rebuild the 25th Division which had been destroyed earlier that year in the German Spring Offensive.

Ernest continued to fight in the allies 100 day offensive until he was wounded at on 6 Oct 1918 whilst supporting the Yorkshire Regiment attack on Belle Ville Farm under heavy German artillery and MG fire (it should be noted that the 1/8 Bn casualties over the period 1 – 19 Oct were 25 killed and 173 wounded). Ernest was given medical treatment then passed back down the medical support network and ended up in one of the eight General Hospitals in Rouen where he died of his wounds on 10 Oct 1918. He was buried in the St Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen at the age of 34.

Private Francis William Hornblow

Francis was born at Calstone Wellington, Wiltshire on 1 Apr 1893 as the second child of Samuel and Emily Hornblow. In 1911 Francis was living with his parents and 4 siblings at 12, Calstone, Calne and working as a farm labourer and carter.

Francis enlisted at Trowbridge and underwent his basic training in the Wiltshire Regiment Depot in Mar 15. On completion he was posted to the 5th (Service) Battalion Wiltshire Regiment arriving on 12 Jul 15 just in time to be embarked for Gallipoli from Avonmouth via the Mediterranean and Mudros. Initially landed at Helles on 30 Jul 15 his Bn subsequently deployed to Anzac and engaged in various action against the Turkish Army including The Battle of Sari Bair, The Battle of Russell's Top and The Battle of Hill 60. In Jan 16, Francis's Bn was withdrawn from Gallipoli to Egypt due to severe casualties from combat, disease and harsh weather. After resting, absorbing new men and

conducting training it deployed to Mesopotamia in Feb 16 and engaged in various actions against the Turkish Army for the remainder of the year.

It was at some time after the withdrawal from Gallipoli that Francis was transferred from the 5th Bn to the 6th Bn which had been fighting on the Western Front since Jul 1915. The reason for the switch and the timeline are not available in the current record however Francis was back with the 6th Bn prior to the Battle of Messines in Belgium (7 – 14 Jun 17) which he participated in. On the night of 13/14 Jul Francis was deployed in the forward trenches of Denys Wood, Messines Ridge, during the night they were heavily bombarded by German artillery which resulted in 2 killed and 18 wounded and unfortunately Francis was one of the two killed. He was buried at Oosttaverne Wood Cemetery aged 24.

Private William Alfred Mattock

William was born in Seend on 27 Apr 1884, one of four children of Alfred and Emmeline Mattock. In 1911 William was living with his parents in Cleeve Seend and was employed as a groom. He married Nellie Kate Froude in Jun 1913 and they lived at Seend View, Seend with their son Cecil who was born 25 Sep 1915.

William was attested in Melksham on 10 Dec 1915 and mobilized to the Wiltshire Regiment on the 31 May 1916. At his medical he was recorded as being 5' 11" tall and weighed 136 lbs. He passed basic training at the Wiltshire Regiment Depot in Devizes and was subsequently posted to the 4th Reserve Bn Wiltshire Regiment which was based in the UK during the war, initially at Hursley Park, then to Bournemouth (Oct 16), Sutton Veny (Feb 17), Larkhill (Oct 17) and finally to Dublin (May 18). However, the Army decided to use William's prior experience as a groom to their advantage and he was transferred to a Reserve Horse Transport Depot in 1917.

Unfortunately for William in Apr 18 he was transferred to 9th Bn. Royal Irish Fusiliers 'for the good of the service' and embarked at Southampton to join the Bn in the field some time after the 18 Apr 1918. The 9th Bn. Royal Irish Fusiliers had been fighting on the Western front since Oct 1915 and had participated in the Somme campaign in 1916, The Battle of Messines, The Third Battle of Ypres, The Cambrai Operations and the capture of Bourlon Wood in 1917. At the point that William joined them they were engaged in fighting the 4th Battle of Ypres (9 – 29 Apr 18) which was part of the defence against the German Spring Offensive of 1918, in which they had been engaged in since its launch in Mar 1918. William would undoubtedly been a battle casualty replacement to make good the Bn's losses.

After the failure of the German Spring Offensive by late Apr 1918 the two sides took breath before the allies started to launch their counter offensive in Aug 1918. This phase of WW1 saw the allies launch the 100-day offensive in both France and Southern Belgium which would defeat the German Army and in part lead to the final armistice. From the Bn war Diaries life was a mixture of trench duties, small advances, training, parades, carrying parties ect but always with the mention of casualties killed and wounded.

On 10 Oct 1918 William, was in the front line at Dadizeele with his Bn which was conducting limited offensive operations. On the evening of the 10th and morning of the 11th both sides were firing heavy artillery concentrations onto likely assault and counter assault positions. It was during one of these exchanges on the 11th that William was probably killed at age 34. His body was never found, and he is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial which has the names of 35,000 allied troops who have no known grave.

Private William James May

William was born in the Union House Semmington in Jan 1898 to Ellen Eliza May. In 1901 he was living at Inmarsh, Seend aged 3 with his grandmother (Rebecca) and mother (Ellen) and by 1911 aged 13 he was working as a farm labourer.

William joined the Army in May 15 at the age of 17 yrs 4 months and after completing basic training at the Wiltshire Regiment Depot in Devizes he was posted to the 3rd Bn Wiltshire Regiment which was a home-based Reserve unit as he was still too young to be deployed on operations. In Sep 16 he was transferred to the 9th Service Bn Gloucester Regiment and joined them on operations in Salonika probably as a casualty replacement for losses sustained at the First Battle of Doiran during which the Bulgarians had beaten off a sequence of allied attacks in mid Aug 16.

William continued to serve in Macedonia throughout 1917 and had been present at the Second Battle of Doiran in Feb 17 which again failed. Although this sector was reasonably quiet with little skirmishing it appears William suffered from bouts of fever and malaria and was in various hospitals in Salonika during the period Nov 17 and Feb 18. At some point in 1918 William was transferred from the 9th Bn to the 1/5th Battalion Territorial Force Gloucester Regiment which at this time had been deployed to Italy to strengthen the Italian resistance against the Austro-Hungarian. In June 1918, the 1/5th Battalion were in action during the Second Battle of the Piave River but in Sep 1918 the Bn was recalled to France and William possibly due to poor health, was again transferred this time to the 1/6th Battalion Territorial Force Gloucester Regiment which was retained in Italy.

The cause of Williams death has not been disclosed in the accessible formal records however deaths from Spanish flu among the military in Italy were high with two distinct peaks, one in October and one in November 1918. He died at 24 Casualty Clearing Station on 14 Nov 1918 and was buried at Montecchio Precalcino Communal Cemetery Extension aged 20.

Private John Merchant

John was born in Apr 1880, one of five children of William and Jane Merchant who lived in Seend in 1891. In 1901 he is a border in a house in Westminster London working as a bricklayer and by 1911 John, then 31 and back living with his parents and a brother in Regent's Rd, Bidminster Bristol.

John enlisted at Newport, Monmouthshire and he was initially mustered into the 2nd Bn Monmouth Regt but at some point, he was posted to the 12th (Service) Battalion (Bristol) Gloucester Regiment. This Bn was not mobilised and despatched to France until Dec 15. In 1916 the Bn fought in the Somme Campaign, in 1917 it was engaged in The Second Battle of Ypres and The Battle for Vimy. In Nov 17 the Bn was dispatched as part of the 5th Division to reinforce the Italians in Italy against the Austro Hungarians.

In Apr 18 the Bn was returned to France as reinforcements against the German Spring Offensive which looked to defeat the British and French before the USA could bring massive forces to the continent. It was then employed in the Allies 100 Day Offensive which drove the German Army back out of much of France and Belgium, paving the way to the eventual armistice in Nov 1918.

John would have been with the Bn through much of this fighting and unfortunately his luck finally ran out on 23 Aug 1918 when he received gunshot wounds to his left thigh (fractured) and forearm. He was evacuated back to the UK and eventually was being nursed in 1st South General Hospital in Birmingham but eventually died of his wounds on 5 Dec 1918 at the age of 38. Because he was long term injured, he was transferred from his Bn to held strength of the Gloucester Regiment Depot during his time in hospital. John was buried close to where he was born at Seend Cleeve Chapel Cemetery.

Driver David Johnathan Mitchell

David was one of seven children of Wilmot and Sarah Mitchell and was born in Bromham in Oct 1888. In 1911 he lived at Nether Street, Bromham with his mother Sarah Mitchell (Wilmot having died) and three brothers and was employed at this time as a Farm labourer.

It is uncertain from the records when David joined the Army, but it is likely that he volunteered for service with the Royal Artillery in late 1914 at the earliest and would have not been deployed to an operational battery until late 1915. We know that he served with D" Battery 295th Brigade Royal Field Artillery which was mobilised in 1914 and fought on the Western Front for the entire war, being engaged on a daily basis in supporting offensive and defensive operations. As a Driver David would have held the equivalent rank of a Private. The rank was designated for the men who drove the teams of horses which pulled the guns. As a Driver, he would have received 1s 2.5d per day or just over 5p in today's money which was slightly more than an Infantry Private.

David managed to survive the war without being hit however he contracted flu, was admitted to hospital on the 20 Nov 1918 and die at 14 General Hospital, based at Wimereu, near Boulogne, on the 25 Nov 1918. He was buried at Terlincthun British Cemetery, Wimille aged 30.

Private Ralph Newman

Ralph was born in Sept 1897, the eldest son of Stephen George and Fanny Kimbra Newman, who were living with six siblings at Rew Farm, Seend in 1911.

He initially joined the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry but subsequently transferred to the Wiltshire Regiment. Unfortunately, his military documents are not available at this time however based on his age he would not have been able to join the Army until 1916 and then would have needed to go through basic training before being allowed to deploy on operations. Therefore, he wouldn't have been able to deploy to France to join the 1st Bn Wiltshire Regiment until late Sep/Oct 16. At this point the Bn would be in the final phases of the Somme Campaign and were in the trenches just South of Thiepval. It is probable that Ralph joined the Bn in one of the tranches of replacement required to make good their losses during the campaign.

At the start of Oct 16 the Bn, along with the remainder of the 25th Division were moved North of the Somme to rest, refit and train on a quieter sector of the front near Gézaincourt, France before moving to Belgium and taking over trenches in the area of Ploegsteert, close to the French/Belgium border on 1 Nov 16. Ralph would have spent much of his time over Xmas and the New Year rotating in and out of the trench systems spending no more than 2 to 4 days in any one place before moving again within the Brigade and Divisional area. On the 25 Feb 1917 Ralph reported sick and was diagnosed with Cerebro-Spinal Meningitis and was evacuated through the medical chain to a base hospital where he was treated and eventually returned to the Bn which went on to fight in the Battle of Messines in Jun 17 and the Battle of Pilkem, part of the Third Battle of Ypres.

By early 1918 Ralph and his Bn found themselves back in France as part of the 25th Division which was unlucky during the 1918 German Spring Offensives, being attacked three times. They were on the northern flank defences during Operation Michael in Mar 18 and were moved north to refit having taken huge casualties. The record is unclear, but it may have been during this period that Ralph was wounded and evacuated home where he died of his wounds on the 21 May 1918. He was buried in Holy Cross Church in Seend at the age of 20.

Gunner Herbert Parfitt

Herbert was born in Devizes to William and Margaret Parfitt in Jun 1895. One of seven children, the family had moved to Seend and William and Margret and three children were living at the Barge Inn in 1911 where William was the publican and Herbert aged 16 was a general labourer.

Herbert enlisted at Trowbridge, volunteered for service with the Royal Artillery and on completion of his basic and specialist training he was posted to D Battery, 157 Brigade RFA at the rank of gunner. The battery, armed with four 18-pounder field guns was initially raised in Aberdeen, placed under command of the 35th Division and went to France with it on 30 January 1916.

It is unlikely that Herbert was with the Brigade at its initial deployment but was posted to it as a replacement some time in mid-1916, probably in time for the Somme Offensive. As a 'gunner' He would have been in almost continual action, supporting the 35th Division offensive and defensive operations during the Somme and Arras Campaigns in 1916, Ep  hy and the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917.

Herbert was still in the Ypres area when he was wounded on the 11 Dec 1917 but returned to the Battery in the Somme area, to counter the German Spring Offensive which launched on 23 Mar 1918. Having held the German offensive, the Allies prepared for their own counter offensive which commenced 8 Aug 1918 but unfortunately Herbert was wounded again was evacuated via the medical support chain but died of his wounds at one of the Casualty Clearing Stations based around Arneke and was buried at Arneke British Cemetery aged 24.

Lance Corporal Arthur Phillis

Arthur was born in Devizes on 11 Jul 1885 of Charles and Ester Phillis. One of five children, they were living 114 Factory Row, Seend in 1891 but by 1901 Arthur was working as a Hall Boy in the house of the Hearn family in Denham, Buckinghamshire; the rest of the Phillis family remained in Seend.

By the start of the war Arthur was living in Walworth, Surrey and enlisted in London opting for the Guards and after completing basic training at the Guards Depot he was posted to the 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards. Originally stationed at Chelsea Barracks, London as part of the 4th (Guards) Brigade of the 2nd Division this regular Army unit was mobilised for war in Apr 14, landed in Havre as part of the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) and engaged in various actions on the Western Front including in 1914 The Battle of Mons and the subsequent retreat, The Battle of the Marne, The Battle of the Aisne, First Battle of Ypres along with Winter Operations 1914-15, The Battle of Festubert, The Battle of Loos in 1915.

No detailed record of Arthur's military service has yet been made available, but it is safe to assume that he would not have been deployed before mid/late 1915 and possibly later. He would most likely have spent a good deal of time in the trenches and been present at the Somme Campaign in 1916 and the Battles of Arras and Cambrai in 1917. Being an older man than many of his comrades Arthur was obviously seen as a steadying influence and had been promoted to LCpl at some point during his time in the Bn.

Arthur would have been present at The Battle of St Quentin fought in March 1918 as part of the allied Defence against the German Spring Offensive. Having survived this battle his Bn was relocated to the Ypres area to assist in stopping the latest phase of the German Spring Offensive from recapturing Ypres and threatening the channel ports. Arthur's Bn moved up to the front line on the night of 11/12 Apr 18 and fought off the Germans, by the end of the day the Bn had lost 14 killed, 81 wounded and 9 missing. Unfortunately, Arthur was probably one of the missing as his body was never recovered and therefore, he is commemorated on the Ploegsteert Memorial along with 11,000 other British and Australian troops who have no known grave. He was aged 33.

Private James Rance

James was one of 13 children of George William and Elizabeth Rance. He was born at Fifield, Bray, Berks in April 1893. In 1911, aged 17 he was living with his parents and several siblings Sturt Green, Holyport, Maidenhead, Berks and was employed as a baker.

In 1914 James was living in the Seend area and enlisted into the Wiltshire Regiment and would have undergone basic training at the Regimental Depot in Devizes in late 1914. On completion it would appear that he was transferred to the 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers who were in the process of leaving for the Gallipoli Campaign. Records show that James entered the operational theatre on 9 August 1915, several days after the initial landings at Suvla Bay. He survived the campaign and in early October 1915 his unit moved via Mudros to Salonika to aid Serbia, in the autumn of 1915, against the combined attack of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria. Shortly after arriving James was wounded on the 14 Oct 15.

It would appear that his wound wasn't too serious and that after treatment he continued to serve with the Bn in Macedonia until Sept 17 when the Bn, along with the remainder of the Division, was withdrawn to Egypt for service in Palestine until 27 April 1918 when they sailed back to France arrived at Marseilles 1 June 1918. On 6 Jun the Bn was broken up and James found himself posted to 2nd Bn Royal Dublin Fusiliers which were shortly re-rolled as Lines of Communication troops away from the front line. Unfortunately, this was short lived and in July 1918 James found himself with his Bn back in a Front-Line Division taking part in the Allied 100-day campaign which was, in part, to drive the Germans to the negotiation table.

The 2nd Bn relieved the 8th East Surrey's in the trenches opposite Malincourt, south of Cambrai, France on the night of 2 Sept 1918 and made plans to continue the assault. At some point on 3 October 1918 James was killed in action on the line aged 25 and his body was never recovered. He is commemorated on the Vis-En-Artois Memorial which bears the names of over 9,000 men who fell in the period from 8 August 1918 to the date of the Armistice in the Advance to Victory in Picardy and Artois, between the Somme and Loos, and who have no known grave.

Gunner Walter Salter

Walter was born at Seend in Jan 1884, one of three children of Walter and Emily Salter. In 1911 the family were living in the High Street, Seend at which time Walter's father was a baker along with one of his sons whilst Walter's occupation is given as farmer – he was 27.

Little is known about Walter's service but we do know that he enlisted at Melksham probably in 1915 into the Royal Artillery with whom he underwent basic and specialist training before his deployment to France sometime after 1 Jan 1916 joining the 81st Siege Bty Royal Garrison Artillery which had deployed to France on 4 Mar 1915.

Siege Batteries RGA were equipped with heavy howitzers, sending large calibre high explosive shells in high trajectory, plunging fire. The usual armaments were 6-inch, 8 inch and 9.2 inch howitzers, although some had huge railway- or road-mounted 12 inch howitzers. As British artillery tactics developed, the Siege Batteries were most often employed in destroying or neutralising the enemy artillery, as well as putting destructive fire down on strongpoints, dumps, store, roads, and railways behind enemy lines.

As a specialist weapon system, the Batteries were kept active moving from sector to sector as the strategic priorities required; as such Walter would undoubtedly have seen a great deal of action in both France and Belgium.

At the time of his death, Walter was in the area of Iwuy a village approximately 8 kilometres north-east of Cambrai in France. His battery would have been participating in the Allied 100-day campaign which was, in part, to drive the Germans to the negotiation table. It is likely, given the nature of their guns, that Walter was killed by counter battery fire on 17 October 1918 and was buried at Niagara Cemetery, Iwuy, aged 34.

Pte Herbert Wiltshire

Herbert was born in Bulkington in Sep 1888 to John and Jane Wiltshire and baptised at Keevil parish church later that year. He was one of 6 children living at 40 Mill Lane, Bulkington in 1901. His elder brother Henry married his wife Rose Drew in Seend Church in 1899 and was living in Seend Cleeve in 1911. He obviously had a strong relationship with Herbert as he named his first son Herbert William Wiltshire after his brother when the child was baptised in Holy Cross Church on 7 May 1916.

Unfortunately, no service record has been uncovered for Herbert, however as he was not the recipient of either the 1914 Star or 1914/15 Star, he wouldn't have entered a theatre of operation until 1916 at the earliest. It is likely that he volunteered for service in 1914/15, enrolling with the Wiltshire Regiment and then was mobilised for training at the Regimental Depot in 1915. On completion he would then have been posted as part of a recruit draft to France to join the 2nd Bn. The 2nd was a Regular Bn which had moved from garrison duties in Gibraltar to France in early Oct 1914 as part of the BEF. It had taken part in most of the major engagements on the Western Front including The First Battle of Ypres in 1914 the battles of Battle of Neuve Chapelle (10–13 Mar 1915), The Second Battle of (9 May–18 Jun 1915) and the Battle of Loos (25 Sept–8 Oct 1915).

When Herbert joined the Bn it was part of 30 Division and would have been preparing for the Allied Summer Offensive in the Somme area. The initial phase of the Somme campaign was the Battle of Albert (1 – 13 Jul 1916) which is best known for its bloody first day which cost the British Army nearly 60,000 casualties. Herbert's Division was in the south of the attack where the German defence mostly collapsed, and the British took Montauban and the majority of its objectives.

Herbert's Bn was not directly involved in the early attacks but was brought forward as a 'fresh Bn' for the assault on Trônes Wood which started on the 8 Jul 16 from Bernafay Wood. It was during this attack that Herbert was hit and brought back to the dressing station at Bernafay Wood where he was pronounced dead. He was buried, aged 28, alongside 80 others British soldiers who fell in the area between July and October 1916 in Bernafay Wood British Cemetery, Montauban, France.