

### David Pannett's History of Bicton part 43

In some foreign field a part of Bicton lies.

Each year in November we remember the fallen in past wars, starting with World War One, 1914-18. However, with passing years, the actual details of those named on our war memorial have often been forgotten as their families have come and gone in the neighbourhood. The list on the Bicton Memorial inside the church, is as follows (together with some additional information from records)

Arthur Bason	K.S.L.I.	2.5.18	21
John Brown	K.S.L.I.	17.10.17	21
Joseph Brown	K.S.L.I.	18.8.17	
Henry Davies	K.S.L.I.	18.8.16	21
Thomas Henry Edge	K.S.L.I.	22.4.15	24
James Morris	K.S.L.I.	10.5.15	
Richard Morris	K.S.L.I.	21.8.18	27
Frederick Newitt	K.S.L.I.	16.6.15	20
Edward Tipton	Canadian Horse	9.10.18	38
Henry Yewbery	South Staffs	13.10.16	21
Denis Blakemore	North Staffs	9.7.17	28

Most of these young men came from families employed on local farms and the call to arms would have been an adventurous escape from such low paid work and the small crowded cottages in the Isle Lane (Newitt), Shepherds Lane (Davies) and Bicton (Yewbery). Families of tradesmen also contributed. Walter Brown, bricklayer, of Isle Cottages had at least three sons including John, while Henry Edge, plumber, of Calcott raised seven children including Thomas. At the schoolhouse, headteacher since 1880, George Blakemore also had seven, of which Denis was the fifth. Elder daughter Florence became an assistant teacher and, between them they must have taught all the others before the war. By joining the local Shropshire Light Infantry they mainly served with fellow salopians; if not actual 'pals'.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, the German army advanced across Belgium towards the Channel ports, but was blocked by the British Expeditionary Force at Ypres, leading to stalemate and trench warfare, which was to

characterise the next four years. After a winter lull, in the spring of 1915, the Germans renewed the offensive, forcing a British withdrawal towards the town, which they retained as a salient in the general line. In these circumstances many casualties were simply lost in collapsed trenches and shell holes in the soft Flanders clay and are only recorded on the Menen Gate Memorial at Ypres, including James Morris and Frederick Newitt. Thomas Henry Edge may have been wounded at this time, leading to eventual death nearer home, and burial at Bicton.

After these battles, the 'Ypres Salient' remained relatively quiet, while action hotted up elsewhere along the front, which now stretched from here to the Swiss border. In particular, the French came under increasing pressure at Verdun and begged the British to do more along their sector by way of diversion. Thus, in the summer of 1916, an assault took place in the Somme area astride the Bapaume, Albert, Amiens Road. Troops advanced in good order after a whole week of artillery bombardment designed to destroy the German defences. However, this rolling chalk landscape had provided ideal conditions for the excavation of shell-proof dug-outs from which defenders could emerge with their machine guns and mow their attackers down 'like corn'. In the end, only a few miles were gained after several months and the loss of thousands of lives on both sides.

Once again, casualties, including Henry Davies could simply disappear into the disturbed ground, so that they were only recorded on the many memorials, such as that at Thiepval. That August, units of the K.S.L.I. were known to be fighting in the Longueval-Delville Wood area and his actual remains may still be there.

Perhaps as a further diversion to all this, some action also took place in the Arras-Vimy Ridge area, which claimed the life of Henry Yewbery, who was then buried in a small cemetery nearby at Aix-Noulette.

Meanwhile, in the 'Ypres salient', the British had time to prepare carefully for an assault on the German lines along the Messines (Mesen) Ridge, starting in June 1917 with the detonation of hugh mines.

Later, the Shrewsbury Chronicle listed Denis Blakemore as 'missing' and then in August reported that he was in fact no longer so, thus hiding the truth that, by this time, he had already been 'shot at dawn' for desertion. Such actions have been controversial regarding what was a punishable offence or

mental breakdown under stress of battle. Significantly his name appears last, as if added as an afterthought. On the other hand, he may not have been considered as belonging to Bicton, since his parents had just retired to Mountfields in Shrewsbury.

By complete contrast, at the very same time, Edward Tipton was earning a 'military medal' in a localised action further south. The 'Canadian Horse' to which he was attached, provided dispatch riders and general communications around the front line and in this particular action he endured six days manning his telephone line in a forward trench while shells rained down all around.

Meanwhile, back at the 'Ypres Salient' fighting dragged on into the Autumn. John Brown was but one of the many who died of wounds, while Joseph Brown just disappeared into the churned up Flanders mud.

After a quiet winter, the Germans then launched their final spring offensive, starting on March 21<sup>st</sup>. They overran many of the allies' hard-won gains, and perhaps, Arthur Bason, a Yewbery grandson, was one of the prisoners which they took. He died in captivity and lies in a special military cemetery near Kassel.

As this advance was checked with the help of the newly arrived Americans and then rolled back, Edward Tipton's luck finally ran out only a few weeks before the armistice. He was buried in the Busigny village cemetery near Cateau. Richard Morris had also just died by this time.

Altogether these deaths reflect the whole story of the 'Western Front', in all its varied aspects. Others survived to return with their own memories, some of which they may have preferred to forget.

*This has been brought together with help from Rob Lopez and also Roger Hall and Sue Coates of the Family History Society. They would be glad of any further information from family sources, concerning deaths in both wars. Sue can be contacted on 01948 841074 or COATES193@BTINTERNET.COM*

The website contains past copies of Bicton News and more photos of events will appear soon.

**[www.bictonvillage.co.uk](http://www.bictonvillage.co.uk)**