

Their Story

Edward William Mason - The Battle of Mons 1914

Edward **lived with his parents**, Edward and Rosa Mason, before joining the army as a regular soldier.

He arrived in France on the 14th August and on the **23rd August at Nimy**, southeast of Mons, his regiment were ordered to hold a canal bridge at Obourg.

The next day, a party of Royal Engineers arrived to demolish the bridges. However, they arrived late and were unable to proceed with the original plan of demolition.

At 9am on the 23rd, German forces attacked the Middlesex trenches with infantry and artillery fire at the **Battle of Mons**. Calls for British reinforcements never materialised and with only rifles to defend themselves, Edward's unit were driven from their position and forced to retreat to Mons.

After the battle, **Edward was reported missing** and Rosa appealed to the Red Cross for further information. Sadly, his parents were informed their son had been **killed in action** on the 23rd August during the defence of the bridges near Nimy, Belgium.

Edward had been in France **just 7 days before his death**.

He's buried in Plot III, Grave A33 in St Symphorien Military Cemetery, Belgium.



Edward William Mason

Age: 20

From: London

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: Middlesex



Their Story

Edward Collingwood-Thompson – Battle of Marne 1914

“The street below was full of men...” Private Frank Richards, from ‘Old Soldiers Never Die’

Edward was an only son and **lived with his Mum and Dad**, Edward & Annie Collingwood-Thompson of Cavendish Square, London.

And on 8th September, he was with the B & C Companies of the 2nd Fusiliers on the south bank of the river Marne in the town of La Ferte Sous-Jouarre.

It wasn’t long before Allied forces came under fire from the north bank.

“Young Thompson was brought in seriously wounded...”, Captain J Dunn, from ‘The War the Infantry Knew’

Edward was **part of the war for less than a month** before he **died in the Battle of Marne**.

Originally buried in the grounds of the Chateau, his body was exhumed after the war’s end and reburied in Perreuse Chateau Franco British National Cemetery plot 1, grave D46.

Lt Thompson’s grave bears the inscription **“Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori”**, which translates to **“It is sweet and fitting to die for the homeland”**.

Today in La Ferte Sous-Jouarre, next to a supermarket car park near the Meaux to Chateau-Thierry Road is a **metal plaque and stone memorial** near a small house commemorating Edward James Vibart Collingwood Thompson.



**Edward James Vibart
Collingwood-Thompson**

Age: 20

From: London

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: Royal Welsh
Fusiliers

“The street below was full of men when suddenly a machine-gun opened up from across the river, sweeping the street. 2nd Lt Thompson of my battalion was badly wounded...Two men, Jackson and Edwards rushed forward and carried him to safety”

Private Frank Richards.

Their Story

Albert Golder – Battle of Aisne 1914

Albert enlisted with the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in 1907. **His Mum and Dad** were Sydney and Lydia Golder. Leaving by 1911, he worked on his **family's farm** and subsequently as a porter with the Great Western Railway in Llanelly, South Wales.

Just one year before Britain's war declaration on Germany, **Albert married Florence Plester** at St Mary's Church, Upper Heyford. He was also promoted to shunter driver within the Great Western and transferred to Oak Common, London.

And only one month after the start of the First World War, **Albert and Florence's son Kenneth Albert was born.**

By many accounts, Albert was at the start of his life – with everything to look forward to.

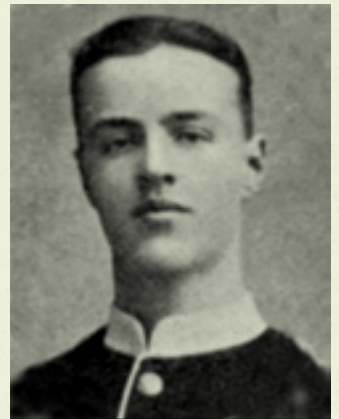
Because of his military service **Albert was a reservist** at the outbreak of WWI, so arrived in France on the 17th August.

However, on the 16th September 1914 near **Soupir at La Cour de La Soupir**, which is south of Chemin des Dames (Road of the Ladies), Albert was killed by a large German shell. The same shell killed three officers and seven other soldiers. **He was only 25 years old.**

Albert never met his only son, Kenneth.

Initially buried near Soupir, Albert and the other soldier's bodies were exhumed after the war as further fighting in 1914 destroyed their grave markers.

They were reburied in Vailly British Cemetery, plot 1, grave H5 with the words '**Buried Near This Spot**' on their gravestones.



Albert Godler

Age: 25

From: Upper Heyford

Marital Status: Married

Children: 1

Regiment: Oxfordshire
& Buckingham
Light Infantry

Their Story

Arthur Leslie Blakeman – First Battle of Ypres 1914

“It was pure hell, and we could do nothing...” Cpl Matheson of the 1st Cameron Highlanders in a letter to his father

Arthur Leslie Blakeman was born in Cheddar but lived in Bath, Somerset with his **mother Clara and brother Ernest**.

However, records suggest he lived in Edinburgh for a time – with him enlisting as a private in the Cameron Highlanders in 1910.

And in 1914 in Edinburgh, **Arthur married Marion Willins**.

“They shelled our trenches for two hours...as soon as a man showed himself over [the top], he went”, Cpl Matheson

The Highlanders were in the 1st Battle of Ypres, with Blakeman a part of their valiant action. **Arthur was wounded** but survived initial German attacks on the 25th September, but bravely fought on.

And then, on the 11th November, 18,000 Prussian Guards of the Kaiser’s army massed for attack. With French forces retreating, the 1st Camerons and **Arthur Leslie Blakeman defended the line**.

“This is pure murder” Cpl Matheson

Because of the chaos, **Arthur’s family couldn’t find out what happened to him** during the First World War.

After research around 2007, he was discovered commemorated on the Menin Gate. However, his name had been spelt A. L. Blackmac.

Arthur’s **daughter Clara Monica** was born on the 29th October 1914 – just 13 days before his death.

Arthur Leslie Blakeman would never meet his daughter. And with Clara’s death in 2001, she never knew where her father fell.



Arthur Leslie Blakeman

Age: 21/22

From: Cheddar

Marital Status: Married

Children: 1

Regiment: Cameron Highlanders

“After this was all over, we started to look for one another and D company was missing; and I’m afraid they have been done in...you may know that out of 1100 officers and men that came out at the start we have Major Yeadon and about 80 men left”

Cpl Matheson

Their Story

Henry Gage Morris – Second Battle of Ypres 1915

“He came past me with a very cheerful face and laughing...and sang out to me ‘Shall I push on?’ and I answered ‘Go on, laddie, as hard as you can’ Poor lad, I did not see him again”

Henry’s Commanding Officer wrote

Henry was **the only surviving child of his parents**, Colonel Henry & Mary Morris.

Part of the 2nd Battle of Ypres, the Dukes and Henry supported the left of the Canadian Division on Wielike, St. Julian Road, northeast of Ypres on the 23rd April.

And suffering from heavy shell and enemy machine gun fire, they sustained considerable casualties.

“From the earliest days in the school in A House, his company was a real pleasure. Always bright and full of fun, and merry talk, he had from the first great personal charm...” A writer in his school magazine wrote.

Henry was killed in action and buried where he fell, with his grave lost from further fighting.

He’s remembered today on Addenda Panel 58 on the Ypres Menin Gate Memorial, **the path is the way he would have left before his death.**

“You must be proud to know your son was a brave man as anyone could meet...The men in the platoon loved him. And would do anything for him...I was not with him when he got hit, but I heard he wanted to go on, and refused to be bandaged, as he said there were more men who were more badly hit than himself”

Private W.Board



Henry Gage Morris

Age: 17

From: Bodmin, Cornwall

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry

Their Story

William Picton – Battle of Loos 1915

"We saw the men go climbing over the ridge and out of sight" 2nd Battalion Welsh Regiment War Diary.

Adopted by Charles and Elizabeth Picton of Cartlett, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire – William was born with the surname Davies.

His stepmother died when he was young and **at 14 he worked as a servant on a farm.**

Volunteering for service soon after, he joined after the outbreak of the war.

"We saw a great many of our wounded and an astonishing number of men suffering from our own gas"

2nd Battalion Welsh Regiment War Diary

On 25th September the 2nd Welsh and were ordered to move forward to Le Rutoire Farm, where they saw the effects of Britain's ill-planned gas attack.

William and his unit crossed 2 empty Kaiser trenches but came under heavy fire when passing into the 3rd line. Sustaining an increasingly severe barrage from all directions, the 2nd was surprised when a white flag of surrender appeared from their enemies' trench.

Sadly, **17-year-old William died during the attack.** Today, he's remembered on Panel 77 and 78 of Loos Memorial.

"We never for a moment thought that they would use gas and about 7.30 the show started. By now clouds and clouds of white and brown smoke rose in the air, but apparently these clouds remained stationary and seemed to drift back instead of forwards [and] at about 8.30am the smoke and gas cleared a little and we saw the men go climbing over the ridge and out of sight..."

2nd Battalion Welsh Regiment War Diary



William Picton

Age: 17

From: Cartlett, Pembrokeshire

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: Welsh Regiment

The Pigeon of Verdun Fort De Vaux, France

"We are holding on..." Major Sylvain Eugene Raynal

Fort Vaux's defence is remembered with heroism and endurance, with those qualities embodied in **Major Sylvain Eugene Raynal and his pigeons**. Raynal led the besieged garrison which repelled repeated German assaults, including underground fighting.

On 4th June French radio contacts were severed and Raynal sent his last carrier pigeon requesting reinforcements. His message read:

*"...but we are under attack from gas and shells.
Very dangerous. Urgent we get away from all this...
This is my last pigeon"*

Major Sylvain Eugene Raynal

Succeeding in its mission, the poisoned and dying pigeon delivered its message to French relief forces. Unfortunately, those soldiers were unable to relieve Fort De Vaux.

The Pigeon of Verdun Fort De Vaux **commemorates the flight of the last messenger pigeon** of Commandant Raynal, which departed from the fort during the battle on the 4th June 1916.

"In spite of enormous difficulties...[this pigeon] accomplished the mission...As a unique means of communication from the heroic defenders of Fort du Vaux, it transmitted the last order which was received from this officer. Severely poisoned, the pigeon arrived dying."

Major Sylvain Eugene Raynal



The Pigeon of Verdun

Age: Unknown

From: France

Marital Status: Single

Regiment:

Their Story

Edwin Riley Whitman – Battle of Somme 1916

"I deeply regret to inform you..." Captain P. Lawrence's letter to Edwin's parents.

Most called him Riley, but his registered first name was Edwin and at only 17 he enlisted.

And on 5th July 1916 the Wiltshire's arrived at the Leipzig Salient (a bubble-like military position), southwest of Thiepval at the Somme.

"I am very sorry to say there was no hope for him..." Lance Corporal Miles's letter to Whitman's parents.

The day after, Edwin's position suffered heavy German grenades, mortars and shelling throughout the day. During this bombardment, 18-year-old Riley was killed.

Buried where he fell, **his grave was lost** in subsequent fighting and he's now remembered on panel 13A of Thiepval Memorial.

Showing how much Riley meant to him, Sergeant E.C Fletcher wrote to Edwin's parents:

"I am writing a few lines to let you know that I was with your son, Pte E. R. Whitman...and that he died in my arms. He asked me one day that if anything happened to him would I send this wristwatch home to his sister, and this I have done. I can't tell you how it upset me. I could not have felt it more if it had been my own brother. He died a British hero."



Edwin Riley Whitman

Age: 18

From: Swindon

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: Wiltshire
Regiment

Their Story

Ernest Missen MM – Battle of Arras 1917

“It is with great regret...” Second Lieutenant Wood in a letter to Ernest’s parents.

Eldest son of William and Ellen Missen, Ernest was a painter with T. Scott and Son.

Volunteering for service, by 1916, he was fighting at the Somme. Due to valiant action in reporting his unit’s cut-off position to HQ, all whilst under constant enemy fire, he was awarded the **Military Medal for Bravery**.

Wounded, he recovered and returned to his regiment.

“I can hardly express the words of sorrow...” Second Lieutenant Wood

On 9th April 1917 at the **Battle of Arras**, the main offensive on the Hindenburg Line went ahead. The Allied forces, including Ernest’s Wiltshire’s, advanced under intense hostile shelling.

Ernest died during this attack and is remembered on Bay 7 of the Arras Memorial. His grave site is lost.



Ernest Missen MM

Age: 24

From: Melksham,
Wiltshire

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: Wiltshire
Regiment

“It is with great regret that I am writing to inform you of the death of your son...He was killed in action on 9 April 1917...I can hardly express the words of sorrow that I feel at his loss, as he was a splendid soldier and always did his duty thoroughly without fear. I wish to offer you my most heartfelt sympathy in your great loss...”

“He will be greatly missed by the officers, N.C.O’s and men of his company, by all whom he was loved and respected.”

Second Lieutenant Wood

Their Story

Tom Stone – Battle of Vimy Ridge 1917

"...we were always proud of him." Lance Corporal J. Munnoch in a letter to Thomas's mother.

Known **by most as Tom**, Thomas Stone was born in East Woodlands near Frome, Somerset on 9th February 1893 to Amelia Tarrant.

Moving to Bury, Quebec he worked as a labourer before volunteering to join the Canadian Army. Tom left Montreal, Canada 15th July and joined his company in October 1917 in France.

Wounded by shrapnel in the right bum-cheek near Albert at the Somme **he recovered** and re-joined his unit on 12th December.

"We have lived together and gone through so much together that I feel as if I had lost a brother." Lance Corporal J. Munnoch.

Crossing German trench lines at the **Battle of Vimy Ridge**, complete sections of the 12th Company were obliterated – with Lance Corporal Munnoch the **only man left**.

Killed during that advance, **Tom is remembered** on the Vimy Memorial to Canada's Missing as T-Stone 447398. However, the number is incorrect and should read 417398.



Tom Stone

Age: 24

From: Frome, Somerset

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: Canadian
Machine Gun
Depot

"What is your loss is also ours, and his death is mourned by the whole company. Private Stone was one of the best men in the section and he was always devoted to duty and cheerful under the most trying conditions. He died as a true British soldier"

Lieutenant Hall wrote to Tom's mother.

Their Story

George Crook – Battle of Messines 1917

“Your son was one of these, one of the fine fellows...” the regimental chaplain in a letter to George’s parents.

The fifth **son of Joseph and Mary Crook**, gardener George emigrated to Australia prior to the First World War.

He volunteered for service with the 37th Battalion Australian Army on 16th February 1916, arriving in France by 22nd November of that same year.

“...is often the case the finest fellows are often those who go down..” the regimental chaplain.

In the early hours of Thursday 7th June 1917, the 37th prepared to take part in the attack on Messines Ridge. Facing a three-mile march through Ploegstreet Wood under German shelling and gas attacks, it was slow progress which **sustained casualties**.

The mine detonation in the **Battle of Messines** was the signal to attack.

George, a runner who delivered messages, was initially reported to have been killed between 7th and 9th June. The regiments chaplain confirmed the date in a letter to George’s parents:

“Pte. Crook was killed on the 8th June, it was in the great battle of Messines a splendid victory but only one, as all such are, at the sacrifice of life, and is often the case the finest fellows are often those who go down, just because they are brave and dauntless. Your son was one of those, one of the fine fellows that make victory possible”

The **grave of George was later lost** and today he is remembered on the Yrpes Menin Gate Memorial on panels 7, 17, 23, 25, 27, 29 and 31.



George Crook

Age: 25

From: Melksham,
Wiltshire

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: 37th Battalion
Australian
Army

Their Story

Ernest Duck – Third Battle of Ypres 1917

“The first strong point encountered was Pond Farm.” 2/4th Royal Berkshires War Diary, reprinted in extracts in ‘Messines to Passchendaele 1917’ by Richard Broadhead.

Frederick, known as **Ernest**, was the **eldest son of Frederick and Mary Duck**.

He volunteered for service and on 22nd August the Berkshires were split into 13 platoons and tasked with attacking several German strong points in what is also called the **Battle of Passchendaele**.

“The next strong point encountered on the left was Hindu, 2/Lt F. Exler was wounded as soon as the infantry advanced, but the platoon carried on and owing to the marshy state of the ground were unable to enter the farm.”

2/4th Royal Berkshires War Diary.

There was mixed success with their objectives.

Ernest was **reported missing** during the attack on one of Germany’s strong points. Later, his parents received official information that he was presumed to have been killed on the day he was reported missing.

Ernest’s parents **never knew where their son’s grave was** – and to this day it remains a mystery.

“Casualties for the 22nd/23rd were as follows:-

- **7 officers** – 2nd lieuts F.A.N. Wilmot, G.A.F. Gilmor, F.Exler, C.L.B. Kirkland, A.K. Glover, A.H. Robinson and A.E. Saw – wounded.
- **2 officers** – 2nd Lieuts H.S. Griffin and D Mackinon, wounded and missing.
- **32 other ranks** killed.
- **111 other ranks** wounded.
- **25 other ranks** wounded and missing.
- **54 other ranks** missing.” 2/4th Royal Berkshires War Diary.

Ernest is remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial panel 105 to 106 and 162.



Ernest Duck

Age: 23

From: Swindon

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: Royal
Berkshire
Regiment

Their Story

John Smith – Third Battle of Cambrai 1917

“It is sweet to breathe thy name.” Edith Reynolds.

25 year-old John, referred to as Jack, was the second **son of James and Jane Smith** of Bexhill, Sussex.

He enlisted with the artillery on 25th April 1911 at Eastbourne and was later posted to H Battery in Trowbridge. It's here he met **his sweetheart, Edith Reynolds**.

Arriving in France on 15th August 1914, Jack fought at Nery. After, he was sent to Gallipoli in October 1915 and left for Egypt in November 1915.

“No one knows the silent heartache...” Edith Reynolds.

Transferred to L Battery at the start of the war, John was with them by 30th November 1917 where they were overrun during the German counterattack southeast of the **Battle of Cambrai**.

Jack was reported wounded and missing.

On 16th October 1918 **he was presumed to have died** on or since the date he was declared missing. In November Edith inserted the following memoriam in a local paper:

*“Peaceful be thy rest, dear Jack,
it is sweet to breathe thy name.
In life I loved you dearly,
In death I’ll do the same.
No one knows the silent heartache,
Only those can tell
Who have lost their best and dearest,
Without saying farewell.*

From his devoted sweetheart, Edith”



John Smith

Age: 25

From: Bexhill, Sussex

Marital Status: Sweetheart

Regiment: H & L Battery
Artillery

No known grave, **Jack is remembered** on Panel 1 of the Cambrai Memorial, Louverval.

Their Story

Robert Bickersteth – The Battle of Amiens 1918

“He was proud of being a soldier...” Robert’s school magazine.

The eldest son of **Rev. Henry and August Bickersteth of Ripon**, Robert was educated at Mr Roscoe’s Boys Preparatory School at Harrogate. After, he attended schools in Surrey and Winchester.

By 1905 **he was in Australia** and in July 1915, he volunteered for service. He arrived in Egypt on 4th November later that year. He joined the 52nd Battalion and was promoted to Lance Corporal by the end of April 1916.

““We very much regret...”

In France by 12th June, **Bickersteth suffered a gunshot ankle wound** on 9th August. Evacuated to England, he lost his Lance Corporal position due to absence, recovered and returned to the front on 4th December 1917. Transferred to the 70th Battalion, Robert was injured again in the back on 25th April 1918.

After recovery, he returned to France and on the 12th August the 42nd advanced on Proyart. In the following exchange, **German machine gun fire** killed then Private Robert Bickersteth.

Robert’s sister wrote to the Red Cross concerning his death and received a reply:

“We very much regret that he was killed on 12-08-1918, and we are making enquires for all details about his death and his burial.”

His burial place remains a mystery and he is today remembered on the Villers Bretonneux Memorial.



Robert Bickersteth

Age: 34

From: Ripon

Marital Status: Single

Regiment: Australian
Imperial Force