



## **ASH REMEMBERS 100 YEARS ON**

**A TRIBUTE TO THE MEN  
ON THE ROLL OF HONOUR  
OF THE VILLAGE OF ASH IN SOMERSET**

**Derek Groves**

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# Introduction

I have lived within three miles of Ash for the past twenty one years, the last nine of which have been in Ash itself. However, it was only quite recently that I was surprised to learn that 100 years ago, the people of Ash came together in a unique way to mark the end of the First World War. They decided to add the bell tower to Holy Trinity Church as their lasting memorial to the men of the village and all the others who perished during the war. This was also their thanksgiving for the peace they and the whole country were then experiencing. I, like many others I am sure, had seen the village Roll of Honour in the church but the names of the five local men who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the defence of their country in both world wars were just that, names, but I knew nothing about these men.

When I was at school back in the 1950s we were never taught anything about the First World War. Maybe this was because it was considered too recent to be included in our modern history curriculum, or was it simply too soon for society to dwell on the catastrophic events of two world wars that had affected the lives of so many people? I therefore grew up knowing little about what was sometimes referred to as the Great War or the War To End All Wars.

In 2014, on the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War, I finally decided it was time to learn more and so I became a student of the War. This is a slight exaggeration but I do now have a much better understanding having read much about the War and having visited some of the battlefield sites and military cemeteries and war memorials that can be found all over Belgium and Northern France.

In 2018, the centenary year of the ending of the First World War, I put together a small tribute to honour the memory of the men from Ash who paid the ultimate sacrifice. It was also a tribute to all those who served in the Armed Forces, survived and returned home. Their lives and those of their families were changed for ever in so many ways by what they all experienced during those dark years.

As I discovered more about the two men on our village Roll of Honour from the First World War, I decided I also had to find out more about the three who died during the Second World War. This was part of a wider recognition of the debt we owe to all past and present members of this country's Armed Forces for the sacrifices they have and continue to make on our behalf.

This booklet is based on the tribute I prepared that was displayed in Holy Trinity Church, Ash on Remembrance Day, 11th November 2018. It now contains more than the original material following additional research I undertook. It begins with the building of the war memorial church tower and the local men and families involved in it's construction. It goes on to tell the stories of the five men named on the Ash Roll of Honour and ends with a look at how, 100 years later, the village of Ash came together to remember people and events of those earlier times.

**Derek Groves**

*February 2019, Ash, Somerset*

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## **ASH REMEMBERS 100 YEARS ON**

The people of Ash chose a unique way to commemorate  
The End of World War One  
They built the bell tower on Holy Trinity Church as a  
Memorial and Thanksgiving for Peace.

**JOIN US 100 YEARS TO THE DAY AFTER THE END OF WW1**

for

**Remembrance Day Service at Holy Trinity Church  
and Re-dedication of the Church Tower  
Sunday 11th November 2018 - Service starts at 10.50am**

Immediately followed by

An opportunity to come together to view a display in the church that tells the story of:-

- those on the Ash Roll of Honour who served their country but never returned - Arthur Beckey and Robert Hodges in WW1 and William Womer, Leonard Bush and Frederick Stacey in WW2
- those from Ash that served in WW1 and returned
- the building of the memorial church tower and the local people involved in its construction.

Everyone is welcome especially family members connected to the events and people mentioned above, former members of the Armed Services and members of today's Armed Forces Community.

**For more information call 01935 825020.**



*Poster announcing "Ash Remembers 100 Years On"*

# **Chapter 1**

## **A Brief History Of Holy Trinity Church, Ash**

There was no church in Ash until 1840. Before then, Ash, Witcombe and Milton were all within the Parish of Martock and it was to Martock that people had to walk or ride to attend church services. This was never easy given the distance and the state of the roads and byways, especially in bad weather, and for older people and the infirm it was often impossible.

It was particularly difficult for the people of Milton. Not only did they have the furthest to travel, they often had to overcome winter flooding. Recognising this seven hundred years ago in 1278, the lord of the manor applied for and was granted permission to build a chapel of ease in Milton. A chapel of ease was a church building, other than a parish church, built within the bounds of a parish for the attendance of those who could not reach the parish church conveniently. The chapel in Milton would have had it's own chaplain but he could only conduct certain services. Marriages, christenings and burials still had to take place in Martock Parish Church. The Milton chapel has long since ceased to exist.

As the population grew in the mid nineteenth century, the Vicar of Martock in 1840 suggested the building of a chapel of ease in Ash. This was enthusiastically supported by the local population and plans for a hamstone building were drawn up with a total cost of £800. Of this, £150 was given by the Bath and Wells diocesan church building association and local fund-raising events were held to raise the rest. Transporting hamstone to site was one of the major building costs at the time and so a group of volunteers, organised and led by a Mr George Slade, helped keep the costs down by moving stones from Ham Hill using their own horses and carts.

The site chosen for the chapel was at the top end of Main Street where the church stands today. This was symbolic as it was the meeting point of the boundaries of the old tythings of Ash, Milton and Witcombe. The foundation stone was laid on 13th May 1840 and it was decreed that the chapel should be known as The Chapel of the Holy, Eternal and Undivided Trinity. Four acres of land were set aside for a burial ground, a vicarage for the resident minister, outbuildings and offices.

The contract to build the chapel was awarded to a very young man named Joseph Rodford, the twenty two year old son of a Martock mason. It was in Ash that Joseph met Elizabeth Palmer who was then living with her widowed mother at Church Farm in Ash. They were married in Martock Church in December 1845 and since then many of their descendants have contributed to the life of the village.

The first Minister was the Reverend W. H. Braund, Curate of Martock and Headmaster of Martock Grammar School. In December 1845, within just five years of the chapel's foundation stone being laid, it became a full parish church in its own right when the new Parish of Ash (which includes Ash, Highway, Milton and Witcombe) was carved out of Martock Parish. The Reverend Braund became it's first

vicar and from that point on, residents of the new parish have been christened, married and buried in Ash.

In its original form, the church consisted only of the present day nave. The vicarage was built between 1841 and 1851. In 1891 the chancel was added and a vestry was added between 1902 and 1903. A porch was built at the west end of the nave in 1913 and it was this that became the base of the memorial bell tower built immediately after the First World War between 1919 and 1920.



*Holy Trinity Church, Ash, Somerset*

## Chapter 2

### Building Of The Church Tower - A Fitting Memorial

After four years of unprecedented carnage and destruction, the guns of the First World War finally fell silent at the eleventh hour, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918. This was Armistice Day, 11th November 1918. Hardly a community in the land, however small, had escaped without the loss of one or more of its sons. They paid the ultimate sacrifice fighting for their country and many more suffered injuries that were to change their lives forever. Ash was no exception and two of its young men never returned, Arthur Beckey and Robert Gundry Hodges. They are remembered on the village Roll of Honour in Holy Trinity Church.

The village considered what type of memorial it should have to remember these men and the millions of other soldiers and civilians from so many countries who lost their lives in the conflict. Holy Trinity was still without a bell tower at this time and so it was decided that a tower would be added as the village's memorial and thank-offering for the peace that Ash and the rest of the country were then enjoying thanks to the sacrifices of men such as Arthur Beckey and Robert Hodges. The building of Ash church tower was seen as a unique response to the feelings experienced by many at the time, unique certainly in Somerset and possibly throughout the country.

The first plans drawn up for the tower were considered too elaborate and the cost excessive. They were revised and the decision finally taken to build a hamstone bell tower on top of the porch which had been added to the west end of the nave just before the outbreak of war. The contract was awarded to the local building firm of F. J. T. England and a dozen or so local men from the parish, mainly farmers, guaranteed the £600 cost to the extent of £50 each. The total cost was soon raised with the help of a series of fund raising events which included fetes, whist drives and even horse racing in a field near the church. We know exactly when the work started, it was between *"3.30 and 6 o'clock on 3rd September 1919"* as this was written on the front page of a family bible belonging to a Mr D Vickery. This was just 10 months after the guns had finally fell silent.

The tower was dedicated on 6th April 1920 and according to a newspaper report at the time, a large congregation assembled in the church where the ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Bath and Wells. The first three bells costing £401 were installed in 1921 and more were added later. The whole enterprise was considered a fine achievement for such a small country parish.



*The memorial bell tower of Holy Trinity Church, Ash  
built 1919 - 1920*

## Chapter 3

### Local Men Who Built The Church Tower

#### Fred England and His Brothers Earle, Adolphus and Archibald

The contract to build the tower in 1919 was awarded to the local family building firm of F. J. T. England & Sons. Frederick James Trivett England, to give him his full name, was part of the England family that has lived in Ash for many years. Fred was born in Ash in May 1881 and was baptised in Holy Trinity Church in July that same year. He was the first child of John England (1851 - 1917) and Charlotte England (nee Trivett 1855 -1930) and they all lived in Highway. Fred's father John was a general haulier who later became a farmer.

Fred grew up in Ash along with his three brothers and six sisters. By the time Fred was 19 he was working as a stone mason and by his mid twenties he was running his own building contracting business. He married Bessie Tavener from Tintinhull in 1907 and they went on to have six children. Fred's building business had been at a low ebb during the 1914-1918 war and so the contract to build the tower came as a great boost. Fred's eldest daughter Joyce (full name Hilda Joyce) later claimed it was the long hours their mother Bessie spent working in the cottage gloving industry that made her the mainstay of the family throughout the War.

Fred and his three brothers were all engaged in the construction of the church tower. We know more about the building of the tower from Fred's eldest son, Aubrey (1910 - 2003). Aubrey was to recall that *"The tower is built of hamstone, 64 feet in height with 8 feet deep foundations. Walls that are 3 feet thick at the foot and 18 inches at the top. The work force included my Dad's three brothers; Earle was the mason, Adolphus the carpenter (full name Smeaton Adolphus England, he had served as a Pioneer in the Somerset Light Infantry during the War), Archibald as second mason, with Jack Rice, William Carter and father. John Rodford, the village carpenter, made the pierced elm screens to the bell chamber openings. Pole scaffolding tied with ropes was used on the work for almost the last time before the introduction of tubular scaffolding. When the flag pole was hoisted, it kept hitching on the stone projections and Earle England stood on the parapet to guide the rope, to the horror of the onlookers."*

Fred England was very proud to have built the church tower. An entry in the belfry register expresses his pride at having realised his father John's wish, told to him as a boy, to see a tower at the church with bells pealing in the belfry. There had always been a close connection between the England family and the church. John England had been the church clerk and sexton of Holy Trinity Church for forty seven years, and before him, Fred's grandfather Robert England (1816 - 1890), had been the first





*Fred England (on right) was rarely seen without his trilby hat*



*F. J. T. England & Sons' workforce in 1932  
Front Row - Archie England 1st from left, Fred England 2nd from left  
Back Row - William Carter 2nd from left*

to carry out these duties when Ash chapel was built in 1840. Sadly, Fred's father never saw the bell tower as he died in 1917, just two years before construction began.

A number of Fred England's descendants and those of his brothers and sisters still live in and around Ash. Fred's grandson, Richard England (son of Aubrey), and great grandson, Zak England (son of Richard), quarry, cut and supply hamstone from Ham Hill through their company, Ham and Doultong Stone. It was Zak England who a few years ago presented the impressive Welcome Stone to Ash Parish Council that today stands at the entrance to the village at the lower end of Main Street.



## **John Palmer Rodford (1849 - 1936)**

A striking feature of Holy Trinity Church tower is the pierced elm screens fitted to the bell chamber openings. These were made by John Palmer Rodford at the age of 70.

John Palmer Rodford was born in Ash in 1849, the eldest son of Joseph Rodford (1818 - 1863) and Elizabeth Rodford (nee Palmer 1823 - 1899). He was baptised in Holy Trinity Ash that same year.

John's father Joseph was the master stone mason from Martock who at the remarkably young age of 22 was awarded the contract to build the chapel in Ash in 1840. It was when Joseph was building the chapel that he probably met Elizabeth Palmer who was then living with her widowed mother at Church Farm in Back Street. They were married in Martock Church in December 1845 and lived at Church Farm for the rest of their lives where they brought up their seven children.

John Palmer Rodford grew up in Ash with his four sisters and two brothers. His father died when John was only 14 and his mother Elizabeth continued to bring the family up at Church Farm. After leaving school John became a carpenter and at the age of 32 he married Mary Redwood (1846 - 1923) from Taunton and soon after their only child, Arthur Reginald Rodford was born.

John had many important roles in the village. As the village carpenter he made and repaired carts, wheels and tool handles and his woodworking skills were called upon by the people of Ash to make additions, alterations and repairs to their homes. He also found time to be the village undertaker and between them, John and his wife Mary ran the Post Office in Ash for some 25 years from a room in their home in Back Street. He also found time to transport people's luggage to and from the railway station in Martock. John was still working as a carpenter late in life and was 70 when he built the elm screens for the church tower. Mary Rodford died in 1923 and John in 1936 at the age of 87. Their son Arthur had married Lilly Marks from Montacute in 1910 and they took over the running of Church Farm. Many of their descendants still live in Ash today.

*John Palmer Rodford and Mary Rodford (nee Redwood)*



*One of the pierced elm screens fitted to the bell chamber openings of Holy Trinity Church, made by John Palmer Rodford in 1919 when he was 70*



## **William Henry Carter (1884 - 1960)**

William Henry Carter was part of the F. J.T. England & Sons workforce that built the tower of Holy Trinity, Ash. He was born in Ash in September 1884 and was baptised in Holy Trinity Church in November that year. He was the eldest son of Charles Carter (born 1857) and Ellen Carter (nee Tucker 1861 - 1905). He had two sisters, Alice born 1886 and Flossie born 1890 and a younger brother Robert born 1892.

On leaving school William became a stone mason. He married Harriett Trask in 1912. Harriett was originally from East Chinnock but was working in domestic service for Mr T. S. Bradford at Highlands on Main Street, Ash which is probably how they met. They had three children, Henry James Carter (known as Jim) born in 1915, Iris in 1919 and Flossie in 1922.

William was 30 years old when the First World War started and he and his brother Robert both enlisted. We know William served as a Private in the Army but we have no other details of his army record although it is possible he served with the Somerset Light Infantry as did so many men from around these parts. We know he served in France because of the postcards he sent Harriett from there.

Both William and Robert survived the war and returning to Ash, William went back to being a stone mason. It was at this time that he was employed by F. J. T. England and Sons and was part of the workforce that built the bell tower of Holy Trinity Church. William played an active part in the life of the village. For many years he was a member of the Ash Band where he played the big bass drum. He was also a bell ringer at Holy Trinity Church and became Captain of the Bell Tower he had helped to build.

The country-wide survey taken at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 shows that William was then 55 and working as a walling mason. His son Jim was an aircraft fitter and daughter Flossie worked as a gloving machinist. William and Harriett continued to live in Main Street, Ash for the rest of their lives. William died in 1960 at the age of 75 and Harriett died the following year. Their granddaughter Mrs. Sandra Parrott lives in Ash today and other descendants live locally.



*William Carter and Harriett Carter  
nee Trask)*



*William Carter played the big drum in the Ash Band. Photo taken around 1937*



One of the colourful, embroidered silk postcards William Carter sent Harriett from France during the First World War. It is typical of a type of postcard very popular with British soldiers who sent them home to their loved ones. Hand embroidered in silk and assembled in France, these cards were fragile and expensive and so they were usually posted with letters.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Roll of Honour - First World War**

#### **ARTHUR BECKEY (1891 - 1916)**

Arthur Beckey was born in Ash in 1891 and was baptised in Holy Trinity Church on 28th May that year. He was the seventh child of John Beckey (1860-1925) and Alice Beckey (nee Newbery 1857-1938). Arthur was killed in action serving his country on the Western Front in Belgium in May 1916. He was 25 years old.

Arthur's father, John, was originally from Muchelney where he grew up and worked as a blacksmith. He married Arthur's mother Alice from Axminster in 1881 and sometime around 1884 the family moved from Muchelney to Ash where John continued to work as a blacksmith. They raised 11 children in all in Ash and Arthur, his five brothers and five sisters all attended the village school.

By the time of the 1911 Census when John was 50 their 11 children ranged in age from 28 to 12. To have such a large number of children was not uncommon in those days but it was more unusual for all of them to have survived their childhood. Six of the children were still living at home with their parents at the time of the Census. These included Arthur who was now 20 and his brother James aged 22 and like most lads in rural Somerset in those days they were working as agricultural labourers on local farms. Arthur's three younger sisters were also still at home and Louisa aged 18, Olive 16 and Emmie 14 were all working as gloving machinists which was what many women and girls in Ash did at that time. Arthur's youngest brother, Stanley, was 12 and at school but probably not for much longer.

Britain declared war on Germany on 4th August 1914 and at some point, Arthur, responded to the famous "Your Country Needs You" recruitment poster and volunteered to join the Army. Along with many other local men he enlisted in the Somerset Light Infantry and joined the Regiment's newly formed 7th Battalion as Private 16898 Arthur Beckey.

The 7th Somerset Light Infantry became part of the 61st Infantry Brigade in Kitchener's Second Army. The Regiment spent several months training and equipping at camps in Surrey before moving to Salisbury Plain in March 1915. On 24th June that year, Arthur's battalion along with the rest of the 61st Brigade were inspected by His Majesty King George V. A month later, on 24th July, the battalion crossed the Channel from Southampton to Boulogne and by the end of the month they had made their way inland to Steenwerck in Northern France near Armentieres, close to the Belgium boarder. Here, not far from the front, they continued their training whilst listening to the heavy guns in the distance and wondering when their turn would come to be in the thick of it. They did not have to wait long.

On 10th August 1915 the battalion moved even closer to the front line at Armentieres for instruction in trench warfare and over a period of four days all four Companies of the 7th Somersets spent time in front line trenches. It was here they suffered their first casualty of the war when one man was shot by a sniper whilst on sentry duty. There would be many more casualties to follow.

After a week they returned the short distance to their old billets in Steenwerck where they stayed until 5th September before returning to the front near Fleurbaix, about 5 miles south east of Armentieres. On 12th September the battalion relieved the 12th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and A and B Companies moved into the front line trenches with C in support and D in reserve. The opposing front line trenches were quite close together at this point and the dangers of active trench warfare were to become immediately apparent when, at around 5.30 a.m. the following morning, the ground beneath the trench held by B Company suddenly shook and with a deafening roar, sand bags, earth, equipment and men all shot up into the air. The enemy had exploded two mines under the Somersets, killing five and wounding twelve. The Germans then immediately opened fire on the craters formed by the explosion with shells and machine-gun fire killing another two and wounding five. The enemy continued to shell the 7th Somersets' trenches for the next three days hurling trench-mortar bombs into the craters killing two more men before the battalion was relieved on 19th September.

Just three days later and they were back in the front line, this time with orders to go over the top in the event of the enemy showing any signs of withdrawing. Far from retreating, the enemy continued to shell the 7th Somersets' trenches for five days before they were next relieved on 26th September.



*Arthur Beckey spent a lot of time in and out of trenches, not always as dry as this one*

From the end of September until the end of 1915, Arthur's battalion was in and out of front line trenches in this same part of Northern France with only occasional rests away from the front. They were in a relatively quiet sector and their casualties were comparatively small, but even so, they were losing on average one man killed or wounded each day when they were in the line. Early in the new year, on 10th January 1916, the battalion was taken out of the line and moved once again to Fleuxbaix where they set about refitting and training. By now, Private Arthur Beckey had been promoted to Corporal Beckey.



*Infantrymen grabbing some rest anywhere they could after coming out of the front line where they may not have slept for days. Fresh troops stand at the back waiting to go into the line.*

The 7th Somersets had just begun to settle down in Fleuxbaix when news arrived that they and the whole 61st Brigade were to be moved into the Ypres Salient in Belgium, a precarious bulge in the Allied front line out into enemy territory which from the start of the War had seen much fierce fighting and bloodshed. On 23rd January the whole brigade began a series of marches north and a month later they arrived in Ypres. Here, on 23rd February the 61st Brigade relieved the 60th Brigade in the front line along the Ypres Canal, just two miles north of the centre of the town. B and D Companies immediately went into the front line on the eastern side of the canal which here consisted only of a series of shell-hole posts. C Company was in support posts on the western side of the canal and A, the reserve Company, was also on west bank of the canal. The first four days here cost the 7th Somersets three killed



and 16 wounded. The trenches were water-logged and there were no dug-outs of any description for officers or men. Only the Company Headquarters had some shelter from the weather, the rest had to put up with sitting on the fire-steps up to their knees in water. Tours in the front line trenches lasted four days followed by four days in the support trenches. This pattern continued along with the wet weather throughout March and into early April with just two short periods when the battalion spent a week away from the canal and the front line. The enemy made no concerted attempts to attack this stretch of the front during this time and the Somersets suffered no casualties until an officer was shot and wounded on 10th April whilst overseeing the digging of a new trench. The weather had begun to improve and the ground dried out enough for the 7th Somersets to replace the series of shell-hole posts along their stretch of the front line with this new trench.

The following day on 11th April the fighting intensified considerably when the Germans mounted a major attack along this stretch of the front. It started around 1.00 pm in the afternoon when the enemy began to violently shell the canal bank. At 5.00 pm they started to bombard the British front line trenches and the 7th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry defending the Somersets' left flank had a bad time of it. To add to this, the enemy then began heavy shelling of the right flank and all the support lines in this sector. It was now obvious that a night attack would follow and in anticipation of this the 7th Somersets were "stood to" on the canal bank. At 7.00 pm that evening the Germans commenced a full frontal attack as their infantry came out of their trenches in force and moved across no-mans land towards the British front line trenches on the eastern side of the canal. It was now dark and almost impossible for anyone to actually see what was going on. The Battalion Diary states that when the S. O. S. flare went up from the front line at 7.05 pm, the 7th Somersets were immediately ordered to cross to the eastern side of the canal using the temporary bridges that were still intact despite all the heavy shelling still taking place. At the same time, the 7th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry asked the Somersets to re-supply them with ammunition. D Company was ordered to take as many boxes of ammunition as they could and an officer in D Company divided his platoon into two parties, taking one himself and his platoon sergeant the other. These two parties passed through the enemy's barrage and delivered the ammunition but suffered four casualties. They then gave a hand in repelling the Germans who had succeeded in reaching the wire in front of the Cornwalls where they were trying to break through a gap between the two battalions. At 8.00 pm the Cornwalls asked for more reinforcements and another platoon from D Company was sent up and succeeded in reporting to the Cornwalls without suffering a single casualty. The attack was eventually repelled and by 10.00 pm the situation was again "normal" but the Cornwalls' front line trenches had been badly knocked about and they had lost between 50 and 60 men killed or wounded.

Following this action the 60th Brigade relieved the 61st and the 7th Somersets went out of the line on 16th April to rest in the Calais area for ten days and did not return to front line duties until 19th May. It was during this time, on 8th May 1916, that Corporal Arthur Beckey died. As was so often the case during the confusion of this bloody conflict, it is not exactly clear how Arthur died. The Somerset Light Infantry's War Diary shows that during all the time Arthur's battalion was away from the front lines, including 8th May, they suffered no casualties. One possible explanation is

that Arthur had been wounded shortly before the Battalion was taken out of the line on 16th April and later died of those wounds on 8th May. It is possible, but it must be stressed this is just speculation, that Arthur was one of the four men from D Company wounded when taking up the ammunition boxes through heavy shelling to relieve the front line trenches during the height of the German attack on the night of the 11 April along the Ypres Canal.

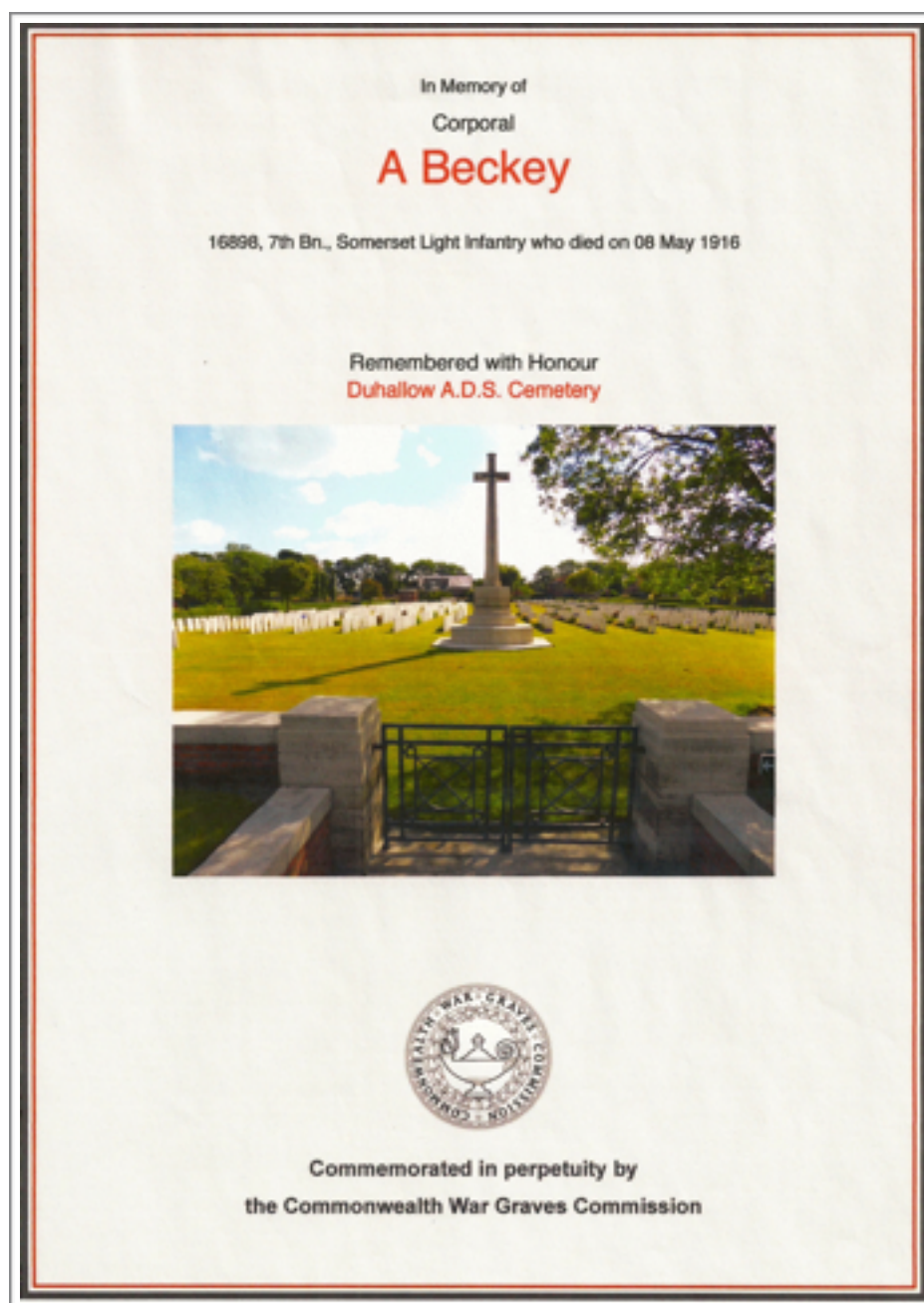


*A temporary crossing over the Ypres Canal*



*At times, the mud in Flanders was everyone's enemy*

Arthur is buried in the Duhallo Advanced Dressing Station Cemetery beside the Ypres Canal less than 2 miles north of Ypres. His headstone can be found in Plot 7, Row D, Grave No. 14. The records show that Arthur was originally buried close to where he died but after the War he was subsequently exhumed and reburied at Duhallo Cemetery on 26th August 1919. Those originally buried in smaller or more isolated cemeteries were often reburied in larger established war cemeteries where the Commonwealth War Graves Commission could ensure a proper commemoration as at Duhallo. The Duhallo Cemetery records show that Arthur's was one of 33 British graves of men who died between April 1915 and July 1917 that were moved from the small, nearby Malakoff Farm Cemetery in Brielen which is less than a mile from both the Ypres Canal bank where the action took place on the night of 11th April 1916 and the Duhallo Advanced Dressing Station.







*Corporal Arthur Beckey's headstone in Duhallow Advanced Dressing Station Cemetery*

All the surviving Army records except one agree that Arthur died on 8th May 1916. The only exception is the UK Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1918 online database which gives the date as 12th August 1917. This is probably an administrative error as it is highly unlikely all the other military records are wrong. For example, Arthur Beckey's entry in the Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects records his death as 8th May 1916. This database contains records of the financial compensation paid to the families of soldiers of the British Army who died in service between 1901 and 1929. Arthur's father John Beckey was paid £4. 6s. 9d. (£4.34) on 1st August 1916 and £6. 10s. 0d. (£6.50) a year later. The first of these payments would not have been made when it was if Arthur had not died until 12th August 1917 as the one rogue record suggests.

Arthur is remembered on the Roll of Honour in Holy Trinity Church. He is also remembered in an inscription on the grave of his parents John and Alice Beckey who are buried in Ash churchyard. He was posthumously awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal for his service in France and Belgium during the First World War.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
BECKLEY.	Low L1	Cpl	16898
Arthur			
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	C/2/102 Bz	146.	
Service	do		
Bras			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry service			
K. 1889			

Corporal Arthur Beckey's British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Card



Arthur Beckey's actual Victory Medal (on left) and the British War Medal (on right)

Arthur's loss was not the only tragedy to befall the Beckey family during the war. Arthur's younger sister, Louisa, was married in April 1915 in Holy Trinity Church in Ash to Anthony Scriven, a garden labourer from Huish Episcopi. The following year on 16th September 1916, only four months after Arthur died, Anthony Scriven was killed in action during the Battle of the Somme. Louisa was married at 22 and widowed at 23. In the space of four months, the War had taken her husband and her brother Arthur. Anthony Scriven's name appears on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme in Picardie in Northern France along with the names of 72,000 others who died in that area and have no known grave.

Arthur's oldest brother William and youngest brother Stanley both served in the Army during the war and both survived. William was 31 at the outbreak of war and served in the 1st Somerset Light Infantry which suggests he was or had been a regular soldier in the Regiment. By 1939 he was the 56 year old head of a large family living in Muchelney and working as a cowman. He died in 1949 aged 66.

Arthur's youngest brother Stanley was 17 when war started and he served with the 2nd, 3rd and 8th Battalions of the Devonshire Regiment, the 1/7th Royal Warwickshire Regiment and the 22nd Manchester Regiment. By 1939 he was 42, married with children and living in Ash and working as a fur cutter in a gloving factory. Stanley died in 1955 aged 56 and was living at Cosy Cottage in Martock Lane, Ash at the time.

# **Roll of Honour - First World War**

## **Robert Gundry Hodges (1880 - 1918)**

Robert Gundry Hodges was born in Ash in early 1880. He was born into a farming family, the eldest son of George Hodges (1842-1909) and Eliza Hodges (nee Pursey 1849-1943). Robert was baptised in St Margaret's Church in Tintinhull on 21st March 1880. In the church baptism records, Robert's father George is described as a "Yeoman", a term sometimes used at the time to describe a farmer who cultivated his own land. A year later in the Census of 1881, George Hodges described himself as a farmer with 135 acres in Ash employing two men and two boys.

Robert's father George had been born in Seavington St. Mary in 1842, the son of Semion and Prudence Hodges who were also farmers. By the time George was 29 he was working as a bailiff on Dillington Farm in nearby Whitelackington. By the age of 38, when his son Robert was born, George was working his own farm which was almost certainly Ash Farm in Burrough Street, Ash which was to be the Hodges' family home for decades to come. When George died in 1909, his widow Eliza continued to work the farm. George and Eliza Hodges are both buried in Ash churchyard.

Robert Hodges grew up at Ash Farm along with his seven sisters and one brother. He went to Ash village school and would have helped out on the farm as soon as he was old enough. His three older sisters were Ada born 1875, Eva in 1878 and Nance in 1879. The four younger sisters were Prudence born 1881, Charlotte in 1884, Ella in 1888 and Pearl in 1890. His younger brother George Matravers Hodges was born in 1885.

Somewhere along the way, Robert decided he did not want to follow in his father's and grandfather's footsteps by working on the land. By the age of 21 he had left home and was living in Devonport, Plymouth and working as an assistant draper. His address was 29 - 31 Catherine Street, Devonport where he boarded with 27 other single men and women aged between 18 and 34. Of these, 24 were recorded in the 1901 Census as draper's shopworkers or assistant drapers, two were housemaids and one a cook. They probably all worked for H.J and E.A. Boulds Limited, a large and well known drapers and haberdashers in the town and they were all living in staff accommodation provided by their employer.

In 1910, at the age of 30, Robert married Ellen Lyne Bradley who had been born in Shipston on Stour in Worcestershire. They were married in the Aston area of Birmingham and we know from Census records that Ellen was a milliner. Is it possible that Robert, the man from Ash in Somerset, met Ellen from Worcestershire whilst they both worked at H. J. and E. A. Boulds in Devonport? By the time of the 1911 Census a year later they were living in Hampshire at Quomp Road, Ringwood where Robert was now working as a clothier's assistant. Before the outbreak of war they moved to College Road in Ringwood where their daughter Mary was born.

Robert enlisted in the Army around May 1916 and became Private 202876 in the 2/4th Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment. The war was to take him a long way from home. On 12th December 1914 the newly formed 2/4th Battalion consisting of 30 officers and 736 other ranks sailed from Southampton to India. They disembarked on 11th January 1915 in Karachi which was then part of British India but is today in Pakistan. From Karachi the battalion moved to Quetta up near the Afghanistan boarder and here they continued their training. The 2/4th Battalion stayed in India for two and half years during which time it acted as a feeder unit for it's sister battalion the 1/4th Hampshire Battalion who were fighting the Turks in Mesopotamia (today's Iraq) . During this time over 700 men transferred from the 2/4th to the 1/4th, their places being taken by fresh drafts from home.



*Men of the Hampshire Regiment training*

It is not clear exactly when Robert Gundry Hodges joined the battalion. There is only a 40% chance of finding the service record of any First World War serviceman and Robert's is not one of them. The other 60% were destroyed in a German bombing raid on London in September 1940. However, the records of the Royal Hampshire Regiment show that a soldier with a service number very close to Robert's enlisted in 2/4th Battalion in May 1916 and it follows from this that Robert probably enlisted around the same time. After some basic training in England he most likely joined the battalion in India sometime in the second half of 1916 and would have moved with them to Egypt and Palestine the following year.

The 2/4th Hampshire Battalion left India on 29th April 1917 and sailed from Karachi to Suez in Egypt. They were now part of the British Army's Egyptian Expeditionary Force which was being assembled to drive the Turks out of Palestine. When the time came, Robert Hodges and his comrades moved into Palestine where they



fought in a series of battles under very difficult conditions that resulted in the Armies of the Turkish Ottoman Empire being driven out of Gaza and Jerusalem. It was during this Palestinian Campaign that the battalion first proved itself as a fighting unit and the experience and self-confidence gained there were to contribute significantly to the successes the battalion was to have next on the Western Front.



*British Infantry on the march in Palestine*

On the 26th May 1918, Robert's battalion sailed across the Mediterranean from Egypt to France where they disembarked in Marseilles. They travelled immediately to the Western Front in Northern France where they became part of the 186th Brigade of the 62nd Division. The Hampshire Regiment's War Diary comments on how men of the other units in the 62nd Division were encouraged by the arrival of these new reinforcements recently arrived from the fighting in Palestine. *"The men were of good physique and as they marched in with tanned faces, brown bare knees and a carriage that stamped them as soldiers, it was felt that added strength had come to the Division"*. This was at a pivotal time in the war on the Western Front.

After years of static trench warfare the tide was beginning to turn in the Allies' favour as the German Army's supply lines and manpower became increasingly overstretched whilst the Allies became stronger and better organised. By mid June 1918 the Hampshires had their first experience of front line trench warfare when they moved to Bucquoy just south of Arras. Here there was an ever present threat of a German offensive designed to break the deadlock in this sector in a final attempt to capture Paris. Fortunately, the Hampshire's incurred few casualties at this time while they gained valuable experience of warfare on the Western Front.

In July the battalion was moved further along the line in support of other Allied troops countering what was to be the last big German offensive of the war. It took place along a 35 mile wide front where the Germans broke through and advanced towards

the city of Reims which, if successful, would open their way to Paris. It was here that the 2/4th Hampshires took part in what became known as the Second Battle of the Marne. During nine days of intensive fighting they played an important role in the successful counter-attack that took place on the Tardenois Plain which was to drive the enemy back to their original positions. Unlike the static trench warfare that had become the norm on the Western Front, this was now fast moving, mobile fighting across open countryside through villages such as Marfaux and Bligny that were set in a wide river valley with steep, thickly wooded forests on either side. There were very heavy casualties on both sides as the defending German army, using constant shelling and machine-guns concealed in abandoned buildings, woods and disused vehicles, tried to stop this determined Allied counter attack. By the end of the battle the men of the Hampshires were *"shaken by heavy shelling, weakened to an alarming degree by casualties, exhausted by successive advances and nights without shelter but the battalion hung on till its objectives were taken and its reputation as a fighting unit was established"*. It was the battalion's first major fight on the Western Front. They were awarded a considerable number of honours but it cost them many of their best men killed or wounded. Little did they know at the time but their actions in the Battle of Tardenois were to be a significant tipping point in the war. After this battle there were to be no more major advances for the German Army, only a hard fought retreat.



*Infantry men of the 62nd Division during The Battle of Tardenois*

After the battle the battalion was able to take a few days well earned time out of the line in comfortable billets not far from the front near the town of Epernay. Here, the rest and the famous wine of the district (they were now in the centre of Champagne country) helped restore the spirits and health of the men after their recent hardships. On 4th August the battalion was moved north by train to Authie-St Leger, 38 miles west of Arras, where they stayed for two weeks. Here, leave was granted more liberally to all ranks and maybe Robert was one of the lucky men who were to return home on leave for the first time since the battalion's departure for India in December 1914.

On 19th August they started a series of marches that took them back to the front line at Achiet-le-Grand, some 23 miles south of Arras. A week later they were in the very thick of it once again having been given orders to attack and take a line of enemy trenches near the Beuganatre - Vraucourt Road. It was a very wet and dark night and the battalion was spread over quite a large area. After some initial confusion the men emerged from a sunken road and began their advance under an artillery barrage. The enemy put down a counter barrage including some gas and it was necessary to attack with gas masks on. Their first objective was accomplished quite quickly but the second and final objectives proved much more of a problem owing to heavy machine-gun fire coming from a nearby road and higher ground behind the final objective. Their objectives were finally taken but only after the loss of 6 men killed and 26 wounded. Over the next few days more hard fighting took place to extend and secure their positions from German counter-attacks. This was another real test of endurance for the men as they lived and took whatever rest they could in shallow trenches open to artillery barrages during which they were constantly gassed. In all, the battalion lost 20 men killed and 123 wounded from heavy machine-gun fire, shelling, snipers and gas before being relieved on the night of 30th August.

By this stage of the War Private Robert Hodges had been promoted to Acting Corporal Hodges and the War was entering its final months although no one at the time knew this. The German Army had been pushed back to the infamous Hindenburg Line, once thought to be an impregnable line of strong defensive positions that had been under constructing by the Germans since 1916. In the next two weeks Robert and his comrades were to show that the Hindenburg Line was indeed pregnable. In what was seen by many as an almost impossible task, the battalion was given the job of driving the enemy out of their strongly defended positions in the small but strategically important village of Havrincourt. The Battle of Havrincourt was to be significant because it was here that for the first time the Hindenburg Line was breached by the Allies. However, the Hampshires paid a great price for their victory and it was to cost Robert his life.



*British troops dug in on the outskirts of Havrincourt before the battle*

On the eve of the Battle of Havrincourt on 10th September the battalion took up positions in Havrincourt Wood on the outskirts of the heavily fortified village not far from the Canal du Nord. Their seemingly impossible task was to capture the village square which was already at the centre of a tremendous Allied artillery barrage. The troops would have to crawl through this barrage, over open ground, between the wood and the canal. Zero hour was 5.25 on the morning of 12th September and the battalion took several casualties from incoming enemy shelling even before they left their assembly point. A, C and D Companies started their attack on the south west edge of the village, slowly moving forward against machine-gun fire towards the centre of the village. By 7.25 am, with shells still falling all around them from both their own and the enemy's artillery, D Company made it to the square but suffered heavy casualties. A Company captured the village Chateau with much difficulty but they then came under attack from more heavy machine-gun fire. This threat was dealt with but only at the cost of one officer and several men killed.

At around 8.30 am the barrage was lifted and A, C and D Companies were all able to advance further through the village clearing cellars and dugouts but they still faced stiff opposition. Some prisoners were taken and after much more fighting the first objective was finally reached. B Company should have passed through them at this point to take the final objective but were unable to do so having suffered significant



losses in the first stage of their advance which included the loss of all its officers. They had come under heavy machine-gun fire from a chapel, the cemetery and a small wood making it impossible to advance beyond the eastern edge of the village. It was not until early evening that the battalion was able to firmly establish itself along the whole line of the first objective.

Around dusk the enemy was seen to be massing in the small wood from where the machine-gun fire had come. At around 7.00 pm the Germans counter-attacked assisted by a number of low flying aircraft. This attack was broken up by rifle and Lewis-gun fire and the enemy was finally repelled by an 18 pounder barrage. So was to end one of the most memorable days in the battalion's history. It had been an extremely hard fought and costly action but the Hindenburg Line had been breached and Havrincourt was still in their hands.



*Photo taken during the Battle of Havrincourt on 12th September 1918*

That night the battalion was relieved by the 5th Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry but this was made more difficult by a pitch black night and torrential rainfall. At about 3.00 am on the morning of 13th September, most of the Hampshires withdrew into a reserve trench known as Shropshire Trench. However, it was discovered that in the confusion A company had not been relieved and 50 men had been left behind. During the night the enemy managed to re-enter the village and almost surrounded the men of A Company. They managed to hold on gallantly but suffered many casualties, fighting on at one post until every man was killed. Later that night the remnants of A Company were reinforced by other elements of the battalion and together they held off a series of heavy counter-attacks before finally dislodging the enemy from Havrincourt once and for all. These men were eventually relieved by the 2/4th Duke of Wellingtons and were able to join the rest of Battalion in the shelter of Shropshire Trench. However, later that day, several bursts of heavy shelling landed directly on Shropshire Trench and two shells in particular caused very many severe casualties.

Two days later on the 15th the battalion marched out of the line for a well earned rest. There was much sadness at the many vacant places in their ranks but there was also pride in what had been achieved at Havrincourt. The 12th and 13th September 1918 had been the costliest two days in the entire war for the battalion during which they lost 38 men killed, 214 wounded and 38 missing. Sadly, one of those killed was Acting Corporal Robert Gundry Hodges.

The records show that Robert was killed in action on 13th September 1918. He has no known grave which suggests his body was destroyed by shell fire. Was he possibly one of the men killed by the barrage that landed on Shropshire Trench? Maybe he died or was wounded during the earlier action that day and his body destroyed by the shelling that took place later. He may possibly have been killed in the early hours of 13th September as a member of A Company holding out against the German counter-attack or maybe going to support the men of A Company. We will never know for sure how Robert died but we do know that he served gallantly in a front-line fighting force both in Palestine and Northern France before, at the age of 38, he was killed in action at The Battle of Havrincourt, just two months before the War ended.

Robert is remembered on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial in Harcourt in Picardie which is situated just thirteen miles from Havrincourt. Here he is remembered along with over 9,000 other British and South African troops who also have no known grave but who died in this area between 8th August 1918 and 11th November 1918.

Back home, Robert is remembered on the Roll of Honour in Holy Trinity Church, Ash. Robert's widow Ellen also placed a plaque in their parish church in Ringwood, Hampshire, which reads *"To the dear memory of Robert, beloved husband of Ellen Lyne Hodges. He was killed in France Sept. 12th 1918 aged 38. This tablet is erected by his wife to a loving unselfish husband and father and to a brave life given for others. He was a worker in this parish for 16 years"*.

Robert was posthumously awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal for serving his country in the First World War in India, Egypt, Palestine and France.

In Memory of  
Corporal

## Robert Gundry Hodges

202876, 2nd/4th Bn., Hampshire Regiment who died on 13 September 1918 Age 38

Son of George and Eliza Hodges, of Ash, Martock, Somerset; husband of Ellen Lyne Hodges, of "Merton,"  
College Rd., Ringwood, Hants.

Remembered with Honour  
**Vis-En-Artois Memorial**



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

*Robert Gundry Hodges has no known grave.  
His name appears on the Vis-En-Artois Memorial in Picardie in Northern France*

## Chapter 5

### Men Of Ash Who Served In The First World War 1914 - 1918

Name	Rank	Regiment
John <b>Baillie</b>	Private	
Arthur <b>Beckey</b>	Corporal	Somerset Light Infantry
Stanley <b>Beckey</b>	Private	Devonshire
William <b>Beckey</b>	Private	Somerset Light Infantry
Reginald <b>Brake</b>	Private	Somerset Light Infantry
Robert <b>Carter</b>	Private	
William Henry <b>Carter</b>	Private	
F <b>Delamont</b>	2nd Lt	Somerset Light Infantry
John <b>Dyer</b>	Driver	
Sealey Edmond <b>Dyer</b>	Driver	Royal Engineers
Adolphus <b>England</b>	Pioneer	Somerset Light Infantry
Frederick <b>Frampton</b>	Private	Somerset Light Infantry
W F <b>Gerrish</b>	L / Seaman	Royal Navy
A J <b>Hamblin</b>	Driver	Royal Army Service Corps
Robert Gundry <b>Hodges</b>	Corporal	Hampshire Regiment
Jack <b>Jetten</b>	Seaman	Royal Navy
Henry <b>Lock</b>	Private	Somerset Light Infantry
William Tucker <b>Margery</b>	Private	Royal Garrison Artillery
John <b>Oram</b>	Private	
Walter H <b>Peach</b>	Trooper	King Edward's Horse
Frank R <b>Peach</b>	Corporal	Royal Army Service Corps
W F <b>Roles</b>	Private	
Lewis <b>Saunders</b>	Private	
Henry <b>Tucker</b>	Private	
Sidney F <b>Tucker</b>	Private	West Somerset Yeomanry
S. <b>Tucker</b>	Private	
W <b>Tucker</b>	Private	Royal Army Service Corps
Bertram <b>White</b>	Private	West Somerset Yeomanry
Daniel <b>White</b>	Private	West Somerset Yeomanry
John Worner <b>Williams</b>	Private	West Somerset Yeomanry
P M <b>Wilson</b>	2nd Lt	Royal Garrison Artillery
I Parry <b>Wilson</b>	2nd Lt	Indian Army
Spencer <b>Wilson</b> MC	Major	

All the above men returned home except Arthur Beckey and Robert Gundry Hodges who were both killed in action.

After so long we cannot vouch for the entire accuracy of this information and it is also possible that omissions have been made.



## Chapter 6

### Roll of Honour - Second World War

#### Leonard Thomas Bush (1919 - 1944)



*Gunner 943808 Leonard Thomas Bush  
8th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery*

Leonard Thomas Bush was born in Ash in 1919, the youngest son of Thomas Henry Bush (1885-1972) and Beatrice Mary Bush (nee Wilkinson 1881-1974). His father Thomas was a carpenter who lived in Ash all his life. His grandparents were Ephraim Bush (1856-1945), a builder and mason and Sarah Ann Bush (nee Tucker 1855-1898) who were also from Ash. Leonard had one brother and three sisters.

In Memory of  
Gunner

## Leonard Thomas Bush

943808, 8 Field Regt., Royal Artillery who died on 12 July 1944 Age 25

Son of Thomas Henry and Beatrice Mary Bush, of Ash, Somerset.

Remembered with Honour  
Taukkyan War Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



At the start of the Second World War Leonard was 20 years old and living in Ash with his parents. He joined the Army as Gunner 943808 and served with the 8th Field Regiment of the Royal Artillery. He took part in the Burma Campaign fighting the Japanese Imperial Army in Northern Burma (now known as Myanmar). These British troops in Burma became known as the "Chindits".



*Chindits of the British Army travelling through the jungle behind Japanese lines in Burma*



*Chindits crossing a river in Northern Burma*



The "Chindits" were special operations units of the British Army formed for long-range raiding operations attacking Japanese troops, facilities and lines of communication, deep behind Japanese lines. Their operations were marked by prolonged marches through extremely difficult terrain against a ruthless enemy. The troops were often weakened by malaria and dysentery.

Leonard died of fever on 12th July 1944 aged 25 when engaged in operations behind Japanese lines where he had been dropped by parachute. He was buried in the Sahmaw War Cemetery in Northern Burma. This was an original "Chindit" cemetery containing many of those who died in the battle for Myitkina.

The Sahmaw Cemetery was difficult to access and could not be maintained and so Leonard, and all those buried there, were later exhumed and reburied in the Taukkyan War Cemetery situated in the township of Mingaladon, 21 miles north of the centre of Rangoon (now known as Yangon). Taukkyan War Cemetery contains a total of 6,347 burials from the Second World War. Leonard's final resting place can be found in Plot 6, Row E, Grave 22.



*Leonard Bush's final resting place  
Taukkyan War Cemetery near Rangoon in Burma*

Leonard T Bush was posthumously awarded (left to right in previous photo) the 1939-1945 Star, Burma Star, Defence Medal and War Medal 1939 - 1945.

The inscription on his headstone in Burma reads "*I heard the word of Jesus - Come unto me and rest*". Leonard is also remembered on a plaque placed in Holy Trinity Church, Ash which reads "*In dear and loving memory of Leonard Thomas Bush, Gunner, Royal Artillery who died in Northern Burma of fever, 12th July 1944, aged 25, dearly beloved son of Beatrice Mary and Thomas Henry Bush. He heard the voice of Jesus say come unto me and rest*"



## Roll of Honour - Second World War

### Frederick Stacey (1904 - 1943)



*Gunner 5720898 Frederick Stacey  
135th Hertfordshire Yeomanry Field Regiment  
Royal Artillery*

Frederick Stacey was born in Knole, Long Sutton on 26th April 1904. He was the son of Frederick Stacey (1883-1928), a general labourer and ex-regular soldier and Annie Stacey (nee Lavis born 1882). Shortly after Fred was born the family moved to Pibsbury, a small hamlet on the road between Long Sutton and Huish Episcopi. It was here that Fred's two brothers were born; Arthur in 1906 and Reginald in 1912.

In 1935, at the age of 30, Fred married Eveline Winifred Derrick in Long Sutton and they moved to Ash where they had two children, Donald and Doreen.

Fred's son Don has lived in Ash all his life and remembers his mother telling him that as a young man his father, like his father before him, had been in the regular Army serving with the Somerset Light Infantry in hot countries, possibly India and Egypt. At one point he contracted malaria which affected him on and off for the rest of his life. During these inter-war years the Somersets had two battalions. It is not known which Fred served in but the 1st Battalion had been stationed in Egypt (1926 - 1928) and Hong Kong (1928 - 1930) and the 2nd Battalion was in India (1920 - 1926) and Sudan in 1926. Fred left the Army before the start of the Second World War but remained in the Reserves.

At the outbreak of the War in 1939, Fred was 35 and he and Eveline and their two young children were living in Witcombe Lane, Ash. Fred was working as a general labourer at the time. He was immediately recalled and attached to the Royal Artillery in the 135th Hertfordshire Yeomanry Field Regiment as Gunner 5720898. In 1941 the regiment was sent to India before being deployed to defend Singapore, the major British base in South East Asia. The Japanese Army advanced down the Malayan peninsular finally reaching the outskirts of Singapore in February 1942. The Battle of Singapore lasted a week and resulted in a decisive Japanese victory. Fred was taken prisoner on 15th February 1942.



*Allied troops firing on Japanese forces on the outskirts of Singapore in 1942*

In total, about 80,000 British, Indian and Australian troops became prisoners of war, joining the 50,000 already taken by the Japanese in the earlier Malayan Campaign. It was these prisoners that the Japanese forced to build the notorious Burma-Siam

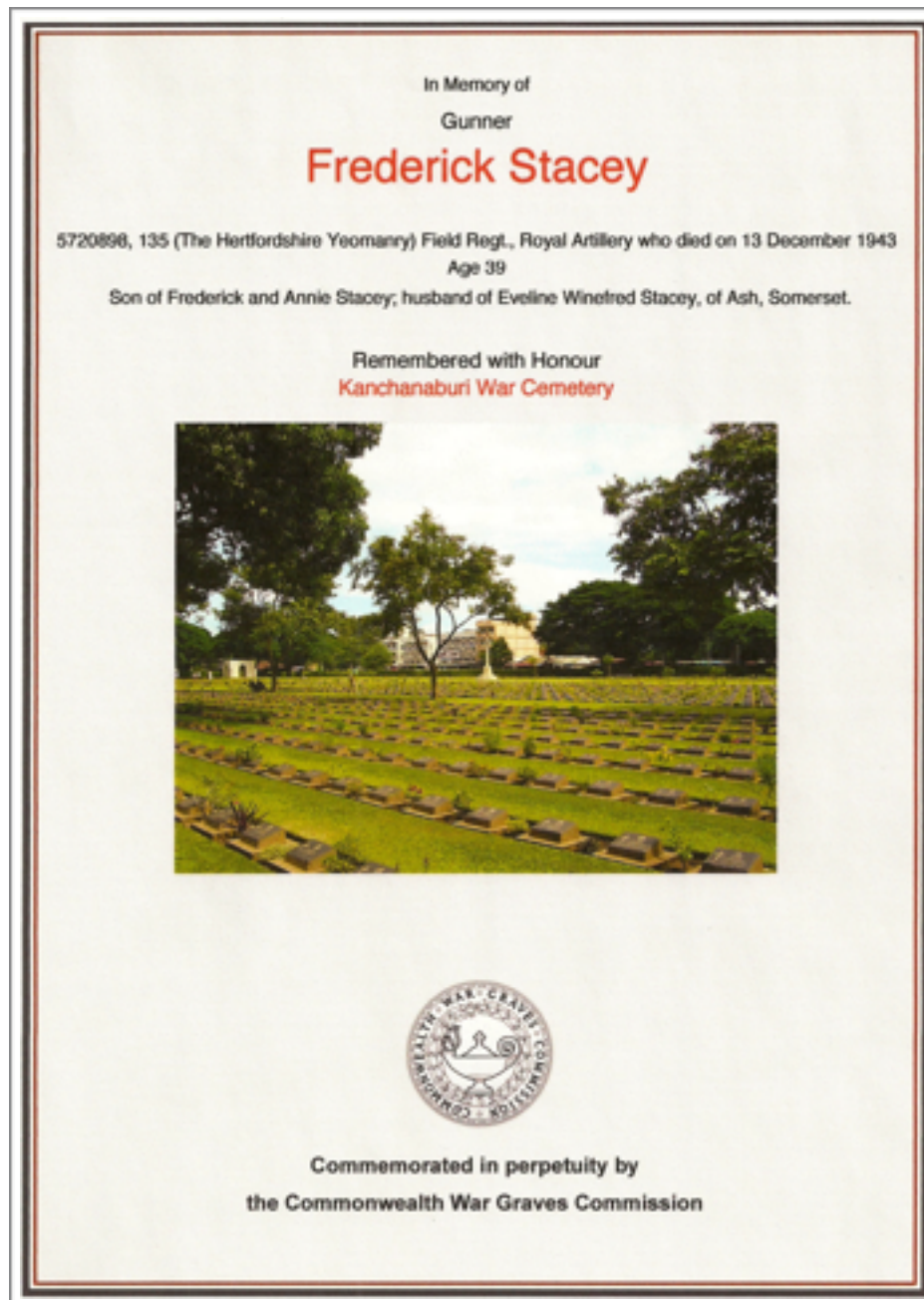
Death Railway and the bridge over the River Kwai. Approximately 13,000 prisoners of war died during the construction of the Death Railway and sadly Fred Stacey was one of them. Fred died in a prisoner of war camp in Thailand on 13th December 1943, twenty two months after his capture. His cause of death is unclear but a recurrence of malaria during the harsh conditions he endured may have been a contributing factor. Fred was buried in the Kanburi Base Hospital Cemetery in Kamburi, close to the base camp through which most prisoners passed on their way to other camps along the railway.



*British and Australian POW's working on the Thai - Burma Railway during WW2*

After the war in 1946, Fred was reburied at the Kanchanaburi Military Cemetery just a short distance from the former Kanburi camp. All the earlier graves along the southern section of the railway were transferred to Kanchanaburi where 5,085 Commonwealth casualties of the Second World War are now buried.

Fred Stacey was posthumously awarded the 1939 - 1945 Star and the War Medal 1939 - 1945 and is remembered on the Roll of Honour in Holy Trinity Church, Ash.



*Frederick Stacey's final resting place  
Kanchanaburi War Cemetery in Thailand*



## Roll of Honour - Second World War

### William Ernest Worner (1923 - 1944)

William Ernest Worner was born in Ash around the end of December 1923, the only son of William Edward Worner (1890-1956), a farm worker and Gladys Irene Worner (nee Frampton 1897-1959). His grandparents were William Worner (1846-1915), a farmer in Witcombe and Ann Marie Worner (nee Cribb 1849-1915).

William was 16 at the outbreak of the Second World War and was living with his mother at The Bell Inn in Ash where she was the licensee. He joined the Army two years later when he was 18 and served as Trooper 14353647 in the Royal Armoured Corps with the 7th Battalion of the Queen's Own Hussars.

The 7th Queen's Own Hussars and their tanks took part in the invasion of Italy in 1943 fighting alongside the 2nd Polish Corps. Allied forces initially made rapid progress through southern Italy despite stiff resistance from the Germans but their advance was checked later that year as they faced German winter defensive positions.



*British armoured troops advancing in Northern Italy in summer of 1944*



In June and July 1944 William's regiment took part in the Battle of Ancona, a successful action to capture the city of Ancona in order to gain access to a strategic seaport closer to the fighting. Sadly, William did not survive this action and died on 5th July 1944, he was only 20 years old.



*Allied troops capturing Ancona in Italy, July 1944*

William was originally buried close to where he died but on 6th November 1944 he was reburied in the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery. Maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, it contains 1,615 Commonwealth graves of the Second World War and is situated on high ground near Ortona on the Adriatic coast in the Province of Chieti, 140 miles east of Rome.

He was posthumously awarded the 1939 - 1945 Star and the War Medal 1939 -1945.

The inscription on Trooper William Ernest Worner's headstone reads "*To the world you were only one, to your mother you were all the world*". William is also remembered on a plaque his mother Gladys placed in Holy Trinity Church, Ash which reads "*In proud memory of my dear and only son*".

In Memory of  
Trooper

## William Ernest Worner

14353647, 7th Queen's Own Hussars, Royal Armoured Corps who died on 05 July 1944 Age 20

Son of William Edward and Gladys Irene Worner, of Ash, Somerset, England.

Remembered with Honour  
Moro River Canadian War Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

*William Worner's final resting place  
Moro River Canadian War Cemetery, Ortona, Italy*

## CHAPTER 7

### ASH REMEMBERS 100 YEARS ON

The year 2018 saw the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. Like so many communities throughout the U.K., the people of Ash were determined to commemorate this important milestone and in so doing honour the memory of all the men from the village who sacrificed so much that we might all have a better tomorrow. It was also time to remember the unique way in which the people of Ash came together after the First World War to add the bell tower to Holy Trinity Church in Ash as a thanksgiving for peace and a lasting memorial to all those who died in that terrible conflict.



One of the first signs of remembrance in the village was the appearance of a silhouette of a returning soldier that appeared at the entrance to the village at the bottom end of Main Street. The silhouette was placed there by the Ash in Bloom Community Group who had tidied this patch of land beside the roadway and planted it with red poppies.



As part of their entry in the 2018 Britain in Bloom campaign, the same group also made a life-sized "Tommy" made of poppies and placed him on the seat next to the notice board at the junction of Main Street and Martock Lane. He was to sit there for months watching the world go by accompanied by small "Lest We Forget" banners.



The Ash Bloomers also incorporated red poppies into their installation of large flowers made from recycled hub caps which decorated the fence of the children's playground.



A poppy cascade appeared at the entrance to the recreation ground. Knitters in the village had been invited to knit as many poppies as they could and these all came together to form a poppy cascade put together by members of the Craft Club and the Purple Patchers.





Ash Church of England Primary School also remembered the events of one hundred years ago.

A display was erected in the school's reception area to commemorate the centenary and pupils placed their own poppies across the road in the churchyard of Holy Trinity, many of which were inscribed with personal prayers.



Ash Parish Council made a successful bid to The Armed Forces Trust Fund for perspex silhouettes which enabled the village to participate in the national "There But Not There" remembrance project, the aim of which was to return the fallen to the spaces they had left behind. One silhouette was installed in Ash Primary School, one in The Bell Inn and others in Holy Trinity Church.

The silhouette at the The Bell was a particularly poignant remembrance of William Ernest Worner who is named on the Second World War Roll of Honour and who had lived at The Bell where his mother was the licensee.





The annual Remembrance Day Service at Holy Trinity was always going to be special in 2018 and on Sunday 11th November, the church was full to overflowing with more than 150 local people in attendance. At 11.00 am, exactly one hundred years to the day and minute after the First World War ended, the congregation observed the two minutes silence. The Service was conducted by the Reverend Mike MacCormack who also rededicated the tower as the village War Memorial during the service. Julian Stapleton laid the wreath on behalf of the Parish and led the reading of the Roll of Honour.



After the service people were invited to stay for tea and coffee and to view the "Ash Remembers 100 Year On" display that had been set up in the church. This was a tribute to the fallen of both World Wars and told the stories of the five men named on the village Roll of Honour and the building of the war memorial bell tower and the local people involved in it's construction.

As people viewed and discussed the displays, a recording was played of children from Ash Primary School singing "In Flanders Fields", the song based on one of the most quoted poems from the First World War written by Canadian physician Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae.





The Reverend Mike MacCormack summed it all up when he wrote in the December 2018 issue of the Ash Newsletter ... *"It was a humbling privilege to lead the Remembrance service at Holy Trinity Ash to commemorate the centennial of the Armistice Day on the Western Front. The whole community engaged with that moment from the past, not just at the stroke of eleven, but also in the weeks leading up to the haunting emotional pause of silence. The church was full to standing and they stood, sang and remembered together, young and old, drawn by the weight of the past, the cascade of poppies in the village, the naming of names and to mark our debt to those who gave their today for our tomorrow .... Arthur Beckey, Robert Hodges, Leonard Bush, Frederick Stacey and William Worner.*

*Through some tears and high emotions we prayed for those who had died in the hundred years subsequently in the service of their country, but most of all we prayed for peace, healing and reconciliation. I'd like to thank all those who attended the service and all those who made Ash a place of remembrance in the days before Sunday as a community and church came together by the sharing of stories of those we named and thanking all those we don't know, but who God knows by name.*



*Over coffee we read the extraordinary researched stories of the fallen five from both wars and listened to Ash schoolchildren singing In Flanders Fields."*

Ash will always have a special connection with the writing of John McCrae's war poem. McCrae was inspired to write it after presiding over the funeral of friend and fellow soldier Lieutenant Alexis Helmer who died in the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium. McCrae was an army surgeon serving at the Essex Farm Advanced Dressing Station next to the canal that marked the front line on the northern outskirts of Ypres when his friend Alexis Hemel was killed on 2nd May 1915. McCrae performed the burial service himself, at which time he noted how poppies quickly grew around the graves of those who died there. The very next day, he composed the poem while sitting in the back of an ambulance.

Almost exactly a year later, Arthur Beckey from Ash in Somerset died fighting for his country just along the canal from where McCrae wrote his famous poem. Arthur is buried in a military cemetery in a Flanders field just a short walk from where the poem was written.

# ASH REMEMBERS 100 YEARS ON

## Sources and Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all those who contributed to my research into the events and people contained in this tribute

The background information on these individuals came mainly from my own research using publicly available information on the Internet. In addition, some information and photos were generously shared by family members of those featured and I thank them all for their support and encouragement with this project.

*"The Ash Log, A Record of a Somerset Village"* written by the late Ken Gould and published in 1989 provided the starting point for the chapters on the building of the church tower and the men involved in it's construction.

In writing the more detailed description of the military service of Arthur Beckey and Robert Gundry Hodges I was greatly assisted by the official War Diaries of their Regiments. The originals of these diaries are accessible online and make fascinating reading for anyone interested in the history of the First World War. They offer a detailed first hand insight into the trials, tribulations and gallantry of those who served during the war, often described in the very matter of fact and dispassionate language of those days.

Edward Wyrall's book, *"The History of the Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's) 1914 - 1919"* written by him in 1927, first published by Methuen that same year and more recently by Sharpe Books Ltd in 2018, was also a useful source of information when writing about Arthur Beckey and his time in the 7th Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. Wyrall's book is based on the Regiment's Official War Diaries plus the private diaries of those present during the action's described.

When writing about Robert Gundry Hodge's wartime experiences I was helped by a "brochure" titled *"2/4th Battalion Hampshire Regiment 1914 - 1919"* written after the War as a result of the collaboration of officers who served in the Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel F. Brook, D.S.O., M.C., Major B. E. T. Parsons, D.S.O., Captain R. P. Fenn, M. C., Lieutenant H. P. B. Hoare and others. Their brochure is based on Official War Diaries and the personal recollections of the men who collaborated in it's writing. It is currently held by the Public Library of Victoria in Australia and can be accessed online.

The list of men from Ash who served in the armed forces during the First World War has been reproduced by kind permission of Mary and Ivan Childs of Martock from their booklet, *"The Great War and Martock"*. The booklet is based on their recompilation of records previously published by the Reverend G W Saunders, vicar of Martock from 1917 to 1952, Anthea Cousins and Martock Parish Church documents and added to following their own research.

I must also thank Nicola Roberts, Head Teacher of Ash Church of England Primary School for the recording the school made of the children in Year 6 singing "In Flanders Fields" that we played following the Remembrance Day Service. I also want to thank the school for the loan of display boards on which the original version of this tribute was displayed in Holy Trinity Church.

On behalf of Ash Parish Council, I wish to thank The Armed Forces Trust Fund for donating to the Council the "*There But Not There*" perspex silhouettes, part of a national remembrance project to return the fallen to the spaces they left behind.

My thanks also go to Ken Witcombe for his time proof reading my early drafts and his suggested corrections.

Finally, whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the facts in this tribute, it is impossible to rule out possible errors and omissions one hundred years after these events took place.

**Derek Groves**  
February 2019





## In Flanders Fields

by

John McCrae

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt down, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The Torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us we die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.*