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Bexley Remembers

1914 - 1918

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Bexley Remembers

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This leaflet has been produced as part of the Bexley Remembers project, funded through an 'Our Heritage' grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. As part of this project, volunteers have researched the lives of those commemorated on Bexley's war memorials and their findings are presented here.

Front cover pic - Erith Christ Church War Memorial

Bexleyheath WM Nov 2017

1918 ... 2018

While researching this article I discovered that as many as a quarter of a million soldiers fighting in WW1 were said to be under the age of 18. After reading this I wished to find out more about the lives of those young men from my local area and to compare their lives with mine. My name is Oliver McKeon and I am 18 years old.

Frank Harvey Trenfield was a private from the 13th Battalion East Surrey Regiment. He was born in Bexley and was baptised at Christ Church in Bexleyheath. He enlisted into the war in 1915 at Bexleyheath and was sent to fight in the trenches in France. He tragically died of wounds on the battlefield on the 17th April 1918. He is commemorated in the Ebblighem Military Cemetery in France and on the Bexleyheath Memorial and the memorial at Christ Church, Bexleyheath. He died at the young age of 18.

Herbert Leonard Overy was born in 1899 and was a local boy living in Elm Road in Slade Green. His father was a locomotive engine fitter on the South Eastern and Chatham Railway and his older brother similarly worked cleaning locomotive engines. At the age of 12 he left school to fulfil the occupation as a grinder and was known amongst his workmates as 'Giant Overy'. He enlisted as a private in the 2nd/5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters. Overy was killed on the 13th April 1918 in France and is commemorated on the Ploegsteert Memorial in Belgium.

Bexley Village War Memorial 2018

Harold Pearce

Herbert Leonard Overy

Crayford Memorial Manor House

He is remembered in the local area on the memorials at St Paulinus Church in Crayford, the Manor House in Crayford, and St Augustine's Church in Slade Green. He died at the young age of 19.

Harold Ernest Mumford Pearce was a local butcher's son who lived in Sidcup. He joined the 3rd Battalion Rifle Brigade as a Rifleman. Pearce died of wounds in France on the 24th April 1918. He is commemorated in the Ligny-St. Flochel British Cemetery in Averdoingt, France, and is further remembered locally on the Sidcup Memorial. He died at the young age of 18.

William Perrett

William ("Willie") Perrett lived in Bourne Road in Bexley and enlisted into the 3rd Battalion Rifle Brigade in Woolwich. He died in action in France on the 11th October 1918. He is commemorated in St Aubert British Cemetery in France and is remembered by locals on the Old Bexley Memorial. He died at the young age of 18.

Unlike Frank Trenfield who enlisted into the army at 15 years old, I am enjoying extra-curricular activities such as swimming and playing in a band. Unlike Herbert Overy who left school at the age of 12 to become a grinder, I am still in full time education and looking forward to going to university. Unlike Harold Pearce and Willie Perrett, I wasn't sent off to France to fight and suffer the trauma of war. Finally, unlike all four of these young men, I am lucky enough to still be alive.

By Oliver McKeon

Lewis Wilberforce Goldsmith

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Captain Lewis Wilberforce Goldsmith was born on 9th July 1895. He attended Merton Court Preparatory school in Sidcup and then gained a scholarship to the King's School Canterbury, which he attended between the ages of 14 and 19.

Goldsmith was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant in the Yorkshire regiment on the 1st of September 1914. He was quickly promoted to Lieutenant on the 19th November 1914 and posted to the 7th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment, then promoted again to Temporary Captain on 5th April 1915. He set off for France with his battalion late on 13th July 1915, arriving at Boulogne at 3:30 the next morning. His battalion saw action on the first day of the Somme, 01st July 1916, and Goldsmith was one of the few officers not to be killed or wounded during that first day. He stayed with his battalion at the Somme throughout the summer of 1916 as Company Commander of A Company.

Foots Cray WM April 2018

During that battle, the battalion received orders to carry out a small attack against an enemy trench. Considering the size of the trench the order was that only A Company would be needed. At 10am, on the 5th November the

British artillery opened fire on the trench. Just after midday, when the enemy was retreating, A Company went into the trenches to attack. However, upon seeing the small size of the British forces running at them the enemy turned around and returned fire on the British. This caused heavy casualties, and Goldsmith was severely injured. Then, as he was being carried away by stretcher-bearers he was hit by machine gun fire, which killed him and three of the stretcher bearers carrying him.

Goldsmith is now commemorated in Thiepval Memorial, France and also locally commemorated on the Sidcup and Footscray memorials as well as at Merton Court Preparatory School, where he was educated.

By Ethan Kett

Sidcup War Memorial Autumn 2016

Belvedere WM Aug 2017

Arthur Reginald Bond

Fosters School c 1900

Arthur Reginald Bond was born on the 2nd January 1893 in Silvertown, Essex to a British father and a New Zealander mother. His father, John Rathbone Bond, was also born in Essex, and spent time living in London and Warwickshire, before travelling to New Zealand, working as a Chief Steward aboard the SS Rangitiki. It is most likely that he met Arthur's mother, Gabriella Charlotte (nee de Longueville Graham), in the port town of Lyttelton, where the couple married in February 1892.

John and Gabriella must have embarked for England shortly after their marriage, as Arthur was born less than a year later in Essex, close to where his father was born. He was around three years old when the family moved to East Wickham, his younger sisters were both born there – Constance Mary (known as Connie) in c1896, and Mabel Worthington in c1897. Sadly, the 1911 census records that Arthur had two other siblings who had died by that point, but no further details are known.

Slade Green St Augustines

Welling War Memorial April 2018

Arthur attended Foster's School when he was a child and lived in The White Horse pub (later known as "Fanny on the Hill") in Hillsgrove. Local legend has it that the pub was used by the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin. John Bond took over as landlord in September 1896 and is believed to have purchased it the following year. He appears to have had a slightly chequered record as a publican and that same year he was fined for serving after hours, but he nonetheless went on to become a local councillor.

Arthur may never have worked in his father's pub; the 1911 census records him as being employed as an agricultural labourer, maybe working on one of the many nurseries in the local area. He enlisted just over a month after the outbreak of war, as a Rifleman with The Prince Consort's Own Rifle Brigade, signing up at Woolwich on the 10th September 1914. His service record states that he was 6ft tall, weighed 141lbs, with blue eyes and light brown hair. The Rifle Bridge was raised at Winchester in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Second New Army and came under the command of the 59th Brigade, 20th (Light) Division.

By December 1914, Arthur had made the rank of Corporal and in February 1915 he was made a Sergeant. His regiment landed in France in July 1915 and fought in the Saint-Omer area. In January 1916, he took eight days' leave to marry Laura Elizabeth Weekes in St Michael's Church, Welling, by special licence. The marriage was reported in the Bexleyheath Observer, under the headline "Councillor's Son Married". Arthur gave Laura a wedding gift of a gold brooch which

she wore pinned to her navy-blue outfit as she walked down the aisle. Laura had taken the place of a postman at the Welling Office and it was reported that she performed her duties "to the complete satisfaction of the authorities".

Arthur returned to the Front and, just six months later, was killed in action on 3rd June 1916 during the Battle of Mount Sorrel in Ypres, he was 23 years old. He is buried at the White House Cemetery, St. Jean-Les-Ypres, Belgium. Arthur's widow Laura was awarded a weekly pension of around 11 shillings from the 18th December 1916. She married Arthur's best man, P.C. Charles Hugh Gilham, in July 1918 at St Michael's Church.

Arthur's father John continued to lead a colourful life, including being fined in December 1919 for selling beer at inflated prices. He sold the pub in 1927, having retired to Nice the previous year. He died there in 1938 and left Arthur's two sisters Connie and Mabel an estate worth £18,771.10s.4d. It appears that he made at least some of his money from property development in East Wickham, as he had filed building and planning applications in 1903 and 1907 for White Horse Estate and New Streets, Hill Grove Estate. Neither sister had married, and they lived together at 24 Upper Bedford Place, London.

It is not known what happened to Arthur's mother Gabriella, she is not listed on the ship's log as travelling to France with his father in 1926 and John's will (dated 25th July 1931) states that after the death of his wife everything would go to his daughters.

Erith St. Johns

This story of Arthur Reginald Bond was submitted as part of the Bexley Remembers 1914-1918 project. Arthur is one of the soldiers listed on the memorial plaque in St Michael's Church, Welling. My research included using the Ancestry website to find various original records related to Arthur and his family; the Commonwealth War Graves Commission; The Long, Long Trail for battle and regiment details; and the local newspapers from the Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre. I also received some information from one of Arthur's mother's relatives in New Zealand (the great granddaughter of Gabriella's sister), who made contact with the project via Facebook.

By Kelly Morgan

Bexley military industry during the First World War

Vickers Crayford-all staff outside factory Armistice Day 1918

The Bexley area has long contributed to British industrial efforts, with great advancements in armaments during war time. There is no greater example of this than in the First World War itself. On the road to the First World War the Maxim gun was the primary machine gun used by the British army. The Maxim gun was invented by Hiram Maxim who was a resident of Bexley and in 1884 Maxim and his company, the Maxim gun Company, approached the Vickers Company to produce the Maxim gun for him. This partnership led to the Vickers factory in Erith mass-producing Maxim guns until the creation of its most famous

machine gun, the Vickers machine gun. In 1912 the British Armies adopted this newer weapon, which could fire an astounding 450-500 rounds per minute with an overall firing range of 4,500 yards.

Vickers Factory

When the First World War broke out, Vickers sold hundreds of Vickers machine guns. Within the first eight weeks there were orders for 1792 guns and the French army ordered a further 50 guns a week. The Erith factory couldn't cope with all the extra work and so the Crayford factory began to mass-produce the weaponry. By the end of 1915 they were producing 40 guns a week. The new Lewis gun was gaining favour, while the Vickers machine gun's massive bullet wastage was seen as heavily outweighing the advantages of the gun, but orders continued flooding in for the Vickers machine gun. By the end of 1916 the factory were producing 321 a week and by the end of 1918 they were producing a massive 1250 guns a week. Vickers continued to mass-produce the machine guns throughout the war alongside the small scale artillery it produced for the front.

James Browning

Of the local Bexley war casualties three had worked and/or had relatives who worked in the factories. James Browning worked at the Vickers Crayford factory before joining the Army and being placed in the 4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment, Charles Fredrick Powles also worked at Vickers before being placed in the 8th Battalion Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment and Clifford Kemp's father Robert worked in the Vickers factory while Clifford served in the Royal Navy on the HMS Surprise.

By Joshua Burton

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