

We Will Remember Them



“Fear not that ye have died for naught;
We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought”

Lines from a poem by Moina Michaels, November 1918

A soft copy of this booklet is available from
andy.odell@sky.com

WEST DOWN WAR MEMORIAL

The Great War

1914 – 1919

St Calixtus Church



Updated Version 4, September 2021

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Verses from 'For The Fallen'

Written in Sept 1914, by Laurence Binyon



With special thanks to:

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They shall not grow old— Laurence Binyon Sept 1914

Causes of the War

Since 1815 the balance of power in Europe was maintained by a series of treaties. In 1888 Wilhelm II was crowned 'German Emperor and King of Prussia' and moved from a policy of maintaining the status quo to a more aggressive position. He did not renew a treaty with Russia; aligned Germany with the declining Austro-Hungarian Empire and started to build a Navy to rival that of Britain. These actions greatly concerned Germany's neighbours, who quickly forged new treaties and alliances in the event of war.

On 28th June 1914 Franz Ferdinand (the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne) was assassinated by the Bosnian-Serb nationalist group Young Bosnia who wanted pan-Serbian independence. Franz Joseph the Austro-Hungarian Emperor (with the backing of Germany) responded aggressively, presenting Serbia with an intentionally unacceptable ultimatum, to provoke Serbia into war. Serbia agreed 8 out of the 10 terms and on the 28th July 1914 the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia, producing a cascade effect across Europe.

Russia, bound by treaty to Serbia, declared war with Austro-Hungary; Germany declared war with Russia; and France declared war with Germany. Germany's army crossed into neutral Belgium in order to reach Paris, forcing Britain to declare war with Germany (due to the treaty of London (1839) whereby Britain agreed to defend Belgium in the event of invasion).

By the 4th August 1914 Britain and much of Europe were pulled into a war which would last 1,566 days, cost 8,528,831 lives and cause 28,938,073 casualties or missing on both sides.

William John TUCKER

Born in Llantrisant, Wales

Son of Kentley and Mary Tucker of Pontyclun, Glamorgan who formerly lived at Bradwell Mills.

Corporal Tucker Service No 33004

8th Battalion Border Regiment

Glamorgan Yeomanry.

Died 14th July 1917. Aged 22 years.

Buried Lijssehoek Military Cemetery

Poperinge, Belgium XV1 B 13A



FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT—WW1

Stanley Wood Adams

Thomas Adams

Edward Anderton

Nelson Birch

Frederick James Chugg

James Harris

George Kiff

William Kiff

George Lamerton Phillips

Robert Phillips

Trevor Llewellyn Phillips

Walter Edward Phillips

Frederick 'Frank' Thomas Pile

Mervyn Roach

John Robbins

Sydney James Stanbury

William Frederick Thomas

Edward John Tucker

William Henry Tucker

Richard White

James Williams

Reginald James Williams

WW2

Robert William Davis

Although not named on West Down's War Memorial the following 4 men, also lost their lives in WW1 and are duly gratefully remembered.

HENRY JAMES HUXTABLE

Born in West Down, Henry was the son of Henry & Mary, later of Woolacombe, Husband of Anita, of Ayes Lane, Barnstaple.

Henry enlisted in Barnstaple as a Private of Devonshire Regiment 9th (Service) Battalion Service No 25079.

Killed in Action 26th October 1917, aged 36.

Listed at Tyne Cot, Zonebeke, Belgium.

Commemorated on the Barnstaple Memorial.

MERVYN THOMAS KING

Son of John & Alice, formerly of West Down before moving to Hanwell.

Cousin of Mervyn Roach.

Having emigrated to Canada 3 years previously Mervyn joined the 1st Bde Canadian Field Artillery

Bomb. 42156 4Bty.

He died of wounds on 23rd June 1915, aged 26. He is remembered at the Etretat Churchyard Seine Maritime, France.

SIDNEY PHILLIPS

Son of James and Sarah Ann Phillips

Husband of Beatrice of Taunton

Private in the 1st / 8th Durham Light Infantry

Service No 276352

Died in France

On the 23rd March 1918, aged 33 years

Pozières Memorial, Somme. Panel 68 - 72



Prominently situated in St Calixtus' churchyard,
a Memorial was erected in 1920 by the Parishioners of
West Down in memory of the Men of the Parish who
gave

their lives in the Great War

1914 – 1919

This booklet was researched and was produced to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War 1 and to acknowledge the ultimate sacrifice made by these brave men in the conflict that claimed the lives of 908,371 on behalf of the British Empire.

It has been updated for the 100th anniversary of the erection of the memorial which was delayed by a year due to COVID-19



World War 1 (WW1) also known as:-

The Great War

The War of the Nations

The War to End all Wars

OLD REMEMBRANCE PHOTO (undated)



JOHN 'JAMES' WILLIAMS

Son of Mrs Mary Williams, Snowdrop Cottage, West Down, who received 1914 ribbon on his behalf.

Private James Williams, Service No 7343
of the Devonshire Regiment.

Killed in action 29th October 1914, aged 30 yrs.

Commemorated at Le Touret Memorial,
Rue du Bois, 62136 Richebourg, France.



REGINALD JAMES WILLIAMS

Reginald lived in West Down

He enlisted as a rifleman Service No 50161 in The King's
Royal Rifle Corps.

Rifleman Williams served in France and Flanders.

He died of wounds on 9th August 1918 and
was buried in Beacon Cemetery Sailly-Laurette, France.



The King's Royal Rifle Corps was a British Army infantry regiment, originally raised in North America in 1755 as the Royal Americans and recruited from North American colonists. Later ranked as the 60th Regiment of Foot, the regiment served for more than 200 years throughout the British Empire. The Regiment raised 22 Battalions in total during the course of WW1 and saw action on the Western Front, Macedonia and Italy – losing 12,840 men who were killed during the course of the war, In 1966 the Regiment became the Royal Green Jackets.



WAR ANNOUNCEMENT

The majority of the British population had Britain's declaration of war confirmed for them in the early editions of national newspapers on the 5th August 1914.



The following report appeared in The Guardian:-

'Great Britain declared war on Germany at 11 o'clock last night.

The Cabinet yesterday delivered an ultimatum to Germany. Announcing the fact to the House of Commons, the Prime Minister said: "We have repeated the request made last week to the German Government that they should give us the same assurance in regard to Belgian neutrality that was given to us and Belgium by France last week. We have asked that it should be given before midnight."

Last evening a reply was received from Germany. This being unsatisfactory the King held at once a Council which had been called for midnight. The declaration of war was then signed.

The Foreign Office issued the following official statement:-

Owing to the summary rejection by the German Government of the request made by his Majesty's Government for assurances that the neutrality of Belgium will be respected, his Majesty's Ambassador to Berlin has received his passports and his Majesty's Government declared to the German Government that a state of war exists between Great Britain and Germany as from 11 pm on August 4 1914.

THOMAS ADAMS

Birth town Barnstaple, Buried in Combe Martin

A private in the Devonshire Regiment

Service No 11967

Served in France & Flanders

Killed in Action

29th September 1915



The Devonshire Regiment

Was an infantry regiment of the British Army
which served under various titles
from 1685 to 1958.

Its lineage is continued today by The Rifles.

During WW1, the Regiment raised a total of
25 battalions and fought on the Western Front,
in Italy, in Macedonia, Egypt, Palestine
and Mesopotamia.

WILLIAM HENRY TUCKER

Born in West Down.

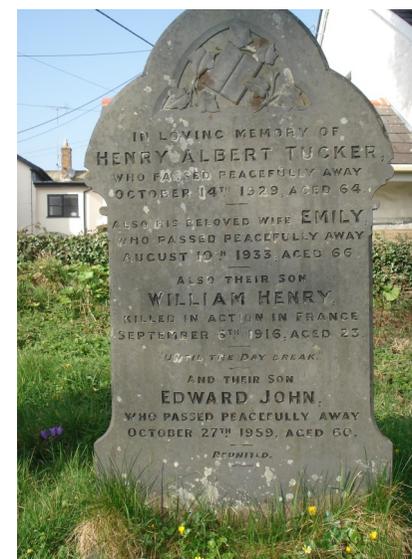
Son of Henry Albert & Emily Tucker who lived in north
Devon locations.

A Private in the Devonshire Regiment

Service No 16815.

Served in France and Flanders.

Killed in Action in Flanders on
6th September 1916, aged 23yrs (although the actual
date might have been two days earlier)



Remembered with Honour on the Thiepval Memorial

RICHARD WHITE

Richard was the son of Ellen & John White
of West Down and had 2 brothers & 2 sisters.

Private Richard White, Service No G/92857,
of the Devonshire Regiment, died for his country
on 21st February 1919, aged 43



STANLEY WOOD ADAMS

The son of Henry & Jane of Stocklands
Private SW Adams, Service N 202694,
of the British Army's Devonshire Regiment,
died on 24th November 1917, aged 20
Remembered with Honour at Basra War Cemetery
Also remembered at St Brannocks, Braunton
Mentioned in "Braunton Boys Who Went to War"
book by Frank Raymond Copper

Stanley's duty location was Mesopotamia (Iraq)



History books call the land now called Iraq "Mesopotamia".

The word does not refer to one specific ancient country, but an area that included various, changing nations in the ancient world.

NELSON BIRCH

Lived at Dennis Cottage, West Down.

Only son of Jim & Fiance.

Brother of Fiance & Polly.

Died 2nd April 1919, aged 20 yrs.

Buried in West Down.

Private in 4th Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry.

Discharged through sickness Sept 1917.

Possibly connected to Birch family of travellers, who lived in horse drawn caravans and peddled their wares in and around the area of West Down.



WILLIAM FREDERICK THOMAS

Born in West Down.

Son of Frederick & Alice Thomas of Bradwell Mills.

Left behind his wife Helena and one child.

A Private in the Devonshire Regiment Service No 345913.

Duty Location: Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

Killed in Action 3rd December 1917, aged 22 yrs.

Remembered with Honour at the Jerusalem War Cemetery.

The **Egyptian Expeditionary Force** (EEF)

was formed on 10 March 1916

to guard the Suez Canal and Egypt and

to provide reinforcements for

the Western Front.

The treasured last letter from Will to his mother has been printed in this booklet courtesy of his granddaughter, Gwen Chugg.

EDWARD JOHN TUCKER

Prior to joining the Royal Army Service Corp on 13th August 1915 (Service No 14943) he lived at Little Comfort before going to Exeter then Cornwall where he worked in the clay industry.

At the end of the war it appears he caught the Spanish Flu and was sent home. He died in West Down on 12th December 1918, aged 44. He is buried in the Churchyard.



He is in the same grave as his father and other family members. Military records show that he was awarded the 1914–1915 star, British War Medal and Victory Medal for his service.

EDWARD ANDERTON

Edward, son of Edward & Edith Anderton, was born in Trimstone Manor in 1874. He joined the British Army and became a Lieutenant in the East African Forces Regiment (The King's African Rifles).

He died, aged 44yrs, on 30th Nov 1918 19 days after the war officially ended and was buried in Tanga European Cemetery.



Edward would have inherited Trimstone Manor. However, on the death of his father, The Squire, in 1923, the estate was sold by his 3 sisters.

THE GREAT WAR

– EAST AFRICAN FORCES / THE KING'S AFRICAN RIFLES

The 1914-18 war was fought in German East Africa, now Tanzania, and the enemy did not lay down their arms until November, 1918. By the end of the war the strength of the King's African Rifles had risen to 22 Battalions. The total troops involved were 114,000, with casualties of 62,000. There were also between 400,000 and 500,000 native porters – The Carrier Corps - of whom 40,000 were unaccounted for at the end of the campaign.

JAMES HARRIS

Born in Tiverton, James was the son of Mr & Mrs Eli Harris, Porch Dairy, North Molton.

James, a bread baker, worked and lived in West Down with his 'Roach' relatives.

Private in the Devonshire Regiment

Service No 203270.

Served in France & Flanders.

Died en route to the field hospital
of shell wounds in his back

10th November 1917.

Buried in Pont d'achelles
near Armentieres, across the French border.

Also remembered in the churchyard of
All Saints church, North Molton.

A cutting from a hebe plant at the grave was brought back to West Down. It still grows on the right hand side of the drive of Pullen's House, where it was planted by his cousin Richard Roach, who ran the original village stores assisted by his cousin Beattie Harris, who lived in Eaton Place and was James' sister.

JOHN ROBBINS

Lived at Bradwell Mills

With his wife Blanch & nine children.

North Devon Hussars (Cavalry & Camel Corps)

Service No 1080.

Invalided out from Dardanelles with dysentery.

Died in a Southampton hospital

5th November 1915, aged 43 yrs.

He loved honour more than he feared death.



SYDNEY JAMES STANBURY

Although spelt Sydney, his name in both the 1901 census & the Stanbury Family Tree is spelt Sidney.

Born in Bickington in 1892, he was the 2nd son of Adam & Amelia of Buttercombe Farm, West Down.

Sidney went to live in Canada aged 17yrs, then to America where he married Lula of Sterling.

Sidney's parents Adam & Amelia, his brother Frederick and his Uncle William Stanbury are among his family members buried in West Down churchyard.

Sidney, a Private in the Manitoba Regiment of The Canadian Infantry. Service No 700327, He died in France 9th October 1916 Aged 24 years.

He is buried at Achiet-le-Grand communal cemetery, Pas de Calais



FREDERICK JAMES CHUGG

Son of James & Julia Chugg of Stowford Frederick worked on his father's farm, before joining the N.D. Hussars of the Devonshire Regiment.

Lance Sergeant Frederick Chugg, Service No 345651 served in Palestine before being sent to the trenches of France & Flanders.

He died of wounds and pneumonia on 26th June 1918. Aged 25yrs.

He is buried in St Hilaire Cemetery



WILLIAM HENRY KIFF

Born in West Down. Buried North of WD Church tower.
Son of Alfred & Annie Kiff of 2, Rosalie Terrace,
Woolacombe.

Gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA)
Service No 62548.

Who died in his country's service 8th March 1919 Aged 21.
"Not in Vain"



The RGA developed from fortress-based artillery located on British coasts. From 1914, when the army possessed very little heavy artillery, it grew into a very large component of the British forces. It was armed with heavy, large calibre, guns and howitzers that were positioned some way behind the front line and had immense destructive power.

FRANK THOMAS PILE

Frank was born in West Down and lived in West Down with wife Annie and 5 children.

Recorded as Frederick Thomas Pile in Army records, he was a Private in the Devonshire Regiment Service No 14986.

Frank returned from Salonika to Netley hospital where he died of bronchitis and complications on 4th October 1916 Aged 33 yrs

Buried in West Down churchyard.



MERVYN ROACH

Brother of Alfred Roach (West Down Grocer) Lance Corporal Mervyn Roach Civil Service Rifles British Army – London Regiment

Service No 1191.

Wounded when leading a bayonet charge on the night of 20th Dec '15 and died in France 23rd Dec '15, Age 25.

Buried in Bethune Town Cemetery, France.

With a memorial stone also in West Down churchyard



Battalions of the Territorial Force

The London Regiment was unusual because not only were all of its battalions of the Territorial Force but each battalion was regarded as a Corps in its own right.

GEORGE KIFF

George lived at Bradwell Mill and was a railway worker.

He married Mabel (nee Cole) of 5 Cowthorpe Rd., Lambeth, London and had one child

He joined the Devonshire Regiment Service No 7695

Served in France & Flanders

Killed in action 21st September 1914 at the battle of Aisne Aged 28 yrs

Buried in Vailly British Cemetery

Also commemorated on the headstone of a family grave in West Down Churchyard



ROBERT PHILLIPS

Son of Mr & Mrs Robert E Phillips
who emigrated with their family
from West Down to Auckland, NZ.

Robert joined the 1st Battalion Auckland Regiment NZEF
as a Private Service No 12/2821.

He died on 28th September 1916.

He is remembered on the Caterpillar Valley (NZ) Memorial
in the Somme.



TREVOR 'LLEWELLYN' PHILLIPS

A Private in the 28th Battalion of the Australian Infantry
(A.I.F.) Service No 2429.

Killed in action, 3rd Nov '16, age 23 yrs.

Llewellyn was the youngest son of John & Frances, of
Smith's Cottage. His Australian connection was through
his mother's sister, Charity - who emigrated and mar-
ried Australian farmer George Peters. Every year, Char-
ity sent a whole salted sheep to her family in West Down
by sea which arrived in time for Christmas.

Llewellyn is remembered on the Somme's Villers
Bretonneux Memorial, and also on John Phillips' head-
stone in West Down churchyard; as is his brother
George Lamerton Phillips, who also fell in WW1.

The AIF was raised within a fortnight of the declaration
of war and was the main expeditionary force of
the Australian Army during WWI. Australia and South
Africa were the only countries in the war which did not
resort to conscription. It remained a volunteer force
and, as such, all units were demobilized at the end of the
war. Of the 290,000 volunteers, approximately 46,000
were either killed in action or died of their wounds.

WALTER EDWARD PHILLIPS

Son of Isaac & Mary Phillips
of 2 Rock Cottages (now Rock House)



Although blessed with 5 daughters,
Isaac & Mary lost all their 3 sons - 2 in infancy

Walter White, was a carpenter before joining up Service
No 1681.

In India with 6th Devonshire Regiment In the Persian Gulf
with 2nd Dorsets.

Taken prisoner at The Siege of the KUT.

Died of dysentery in Bagtohe Turkey 24th July 1916. Aged
21 yrs.

Buried in Baghdad War Cemetery.

Named on family grave to North of West Down church
tower.

GEORGE LAMERTON PHILLIPS RE

Son of John & Frances Phillips of Smith's Cot
(now Smithcote below)



Husband of Ida, living in Sholing.

A Sergeant of The British Army's Royal Engineers. Ser-
vice No 9221. Served in France & Flanders.

Died of wounds at Abbeville on 2nd January 1917. Age
39.



Memories of the trenches in WW1

"Whilst asleep during the night, we were frequently awakened by rats running over us. When this happened too often for my liking, I would lie on my back and wait for a rat to linger on my legs; then violently heave my legs upwards, throwing the rat into the air. Occasionally, I would hear a grunt when the rat landed on a fellow victim."

Trench foot -" your feet swell to two to three times their normal size and go completely dead. You can stick a bayonet into them and not feel a thing. If you are lucky enough not to lose your feet and the swelling starts to go down, it is then that the most indescribable agony begins. I have heard men cry and scream with pain and many have had to have their feet and legs amputated."

"The water in the trenches through which we waded was alive with a multitude of swimming frogs. Red slugs crawled up the side of the trenches and strange beetles with dangerous looking horns wriggled along dry ledges and invaded the dugouts, in search of the lice that infested them."

Memories of the trenches in WW1

"To get a 'cushy' one was all the old hands thought about.

One wanted a 'cushy' bad! Fed up and far from home he was.

He put his finger over the top of the trench and his trigger finger and 2 more were shot off. 'I'm going home!' he says laughing.

But on the way down to the dressing station, he forgot to stoop low and was shot in the head and killed by a sniper."

Nurses on the front line slept in their clothes and cut their hair short so that it would tuck inside their caps. Dressing simply meant putting on their boots. There were times when they had to scrape the lice off with the blunt edge of a knife and their under-clothes stuck to them.

A Private was tried on the following charges:

"Misbehaving in such a manner as to show cowardice".

The accused, when proceeding with a party for work in the trenches, ran away owing to the bursting of a shell and did not rejoin the party. The sentence of the court was to suffer death by being shot."

"We must look out for our bread. The rats have become much more numerous lately because the trenches are no longer in good condition. The rats here are particularly repulsive, they are so fat - the kind we call corpse-rats. They have shocking, evil, naked faces & it is nauseating to see their long, nude tails."

Christmas 1915 World War One

Legend has it that on Christmas Day 1915, soldiers from both sides of the trenches in World War One met up in No-Man's-Land for a game of football. Nothing official was kept of this brief meeting between the enemy on Christmas Day, so knowledge of what took place has always been somewhat patchy. However, Bertie Felstead, of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who died in July '01 aged 106 yrs, remembered the following:

On Christmas Eve, he was stationed with his colleagues in northern France when they heard the Germans in a trench 100 metres away singing "Silent Night". In reply, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers sang "Good King Wenceslas".

On Christmas Day, after some shouting between both trenches, he and his colleagues got out of their icy trench and greeted the Germans. Bertie claimed that nothing was planned but a football was produced from somewhere and what happened was entirely spontaneous.

"It was not a game as such – more of a kick-around and a free-for-all. There could have been 50 on each side for all I know. I played because I really liked football. I don't know how long it lasted, probably half-an-hour, and no-one was keeping score."

The truce ended when a British major ordered the British soldiers back to their trench with a reminder that "they were there to kill the Hun not to make friends with him." The mood of Christmas friendliness was shortly broken by firing again. Bertie Felstead described the Germans as "all right"



FLANDERS FIELDS

Flanders Fields is the generic name of the WW1 battlefields, situated in the Northern part of Belgium, in the medieval county of Flanders.

Homes and fields were turned into a battlefield in 1914 and for 4 long years Flanders Fields was the scene of the war.

A million soldiers were wounded, missing or killed in action.

Entire cities and villages were destroyed and tens of thousands of citizens became refugees.

The landscape of the region still tells the story of the war as it contains hundreds of monuments and cemeteries.



There are many museums depicting all aspects of the conflict – the battles, daily life, etc

Since 1928, The Last Post has taken place daily at Minin Gate, Ypres. This mark of respect for the fallen shows that memories don't fade away - on the contrary the burning desire for peace stays alive.



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 dawn, saw sunset glow
Loved and were loved, and now we lie

In Flanders Fields

Take up the 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 who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow

In Flanders Fields

~~~~~

Written in 1915

by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae who was totally disillusioned by the ravaging war all around him.

## CAMPAIGN MEDALS

Like many service personnel of World War 1, all the brave men acknowledged in this booklet were entitled to the following medals:

**Victory Medal**, also called Inter Allied Victory medal and either the **1914 Star** or the **1914-15 Star** and the **British War Medal**.

The Victory Medal was never awarded alone but to all who received the 1914 Star, or 1914-15 Star, and the British War Medal. These 3 medals were nicknamed Pip, Squeak and Wilfred.

Eligibility for this award consisted of having been mobilised, fighting, serving in any of the theatres of operations, or at sea, between midnight 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Aug '14 and midnight 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> Nov '18.

The **British Empire Campaign Medal** was issued for services between 5<sup>th</sup> Aug 1914 and 11<sup>th</sup> Nov 1918, but was automatically awarded in the event of death on active service before the completion of this period.

PIP



SQUEAK



WILFRED



## THE SOLDIER



If I should die, think only this of me  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England. There shall be,  
In that rich earth, a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam  
A body of England's, breathing English air.  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.



Rupert Brooke, 1914

## A Survivor's Tale

Frederick James White, was found semi-conscious and seriously injured, buried beneath the dead bodies of his comrades in a crater where he had lain bleeding heavily and in agony for many hours. He was carried by stretcher to the field hospital, where, in basic conditions, and with little anaesthetic, his leg was roughly amputated.

When his family were informed that he was not expected to live, his brother Jack, also serving in the Devonshire Regiment but home on leave at the time the news came through, requested and was granted permission to visit Fred before returning to the front line.

When asked if there was anything he would like brought to him 'from home', Fred, in his delirium, replied "A jar of mother's pickled onions'.

Subsequently, Jack arrived and although his brother was obviously at 'death's door', he cradled Fred's head in his arms and, against the advice of medics and common sense, proceeded to feed him the onions.

Defying all odds, Fred's miraculous recovery was always attributed to a secret ingredient that his Mother had put in the jar of pickled onions! On returning to West Down, Fred set up a cobbler's workshop at the side of Leigh Cottage and a small village shop in the front garden.

He was Captain of West Down Bell Ringers until he retired; when listening to peels from the comfort of his home, he was able to identify which ringer was ringing which bell – and was always proved right!

Although in constant discomfort and pain from gangrene, which led to further operations leaving him with just a stump, he never complained – always considering himself to be one of the 'lucky ones'.

## The Last Letter

Written by William Frederick Thomas on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

*Dear Mother,*

*Just a line to say that I am quite well, trusting this will find you all well at Bradwell Mills & West Down. I have not heard from you for over a week or received your parcel yet.*

*We have been tracking for 70 miles. We have to chase the Turks, they are still going back, so I will tell you more next letter.*

*We are in the hills of Judea, and I tell you it is hills! Have just passed a village named Ash-Dol. I must say if we have not been killed we shall see the Holy City tomorrow. We have nearly been in Jaffa but had to change course; to where we are most needed.*

*I cannot tell you more at present as we are in the wrong place.*

*But trust the Lord will bring me through this time and bring me safely back to you. If not we will meet in the Lord's house above.*

*These hills are terrible. Stones as big as houses, little ones as big as us. I am sorry I can't tell you any more now.*

*I have just a little water left from dinner and am going to have a shave, haven't had one for over a week.*

*Well Mother will tell you more when I come home.*

*Happy Christmas to you all, with love from your son, Will*

Three days later, on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1917, 22 yr old William was killed in Palestine, 6 miles from Jerusalem.

He was walking between his two brothers-in-law when he was shot dead. They were both unharmed.

William was buried in Foka.

## Diary Entries – France 1916/1917

23yr old John French left the tin mines of Cornwall for an even deadlier job .digging tunnels deep under German positions on the Western Front. His log, charting horrors of life in trenches, were found 90 yrs later and displayed at Redruth Old Cornwall Society Museum Excerpts as follows:-

May 22 1916 *One of the worst night I've experienced. Regular nightmare*

May 23 *Scores of men lying dead. You can see arms and legs sticking up everywhere. These grenades are murderous things*

June 1 *Found a lot of water-cress growing in a stream – had some for tea. It went all right with the bread and cheese*

June 21 *Had mouse in a cage with us in gallery so we would be warned if gas got very bad. We got just enough gas to make us sick but mouse was still alive and kicking*

June 22 *The got in our trenches but very few got back again. Enemy carried hand grenades and daggers beside rifle and bayonet. Party of our chaps got around and cut their retreat off.*

*There was a German officer lying dead just over the back of our trench with a grenade still in his hand. Saw our chaps dressing wounds of a prisoner. Only a scratch but he was making a lot of fuss. Big chap too, over six feet,*

Aug 10 *Heard laughing and saw German leaning over parapet and shouting to our men who were also leaning over. One of our men shouted "Come on over Fritz". Fritz shouted back in perfect*

*English "No bloomin' fear." This went on for half an hour and then heads were down and the war went on the same as usual. Instant death for first to put his head above the parapet.*

Aug 13 *Orders today that any German looking over the parapet is to be shot and any man found talking to them to be arrested.*

Oct 29 *Last one of our best officers, Capt Bayley, struck in the head with a planter. Casualties in company today: One officer and two men killed and seven wounded.*

*Wont be many of us left soon at this rate.*

Nov 5 *Took stroll around foot of Abraham Heights. Scores of our chaps dead.*

Nov 6 *Another "push". Barrage was like a great fireworks display.*

### 1917, Ypres

Oct 24 *Had a nasty day of it today. We were marching single file when a shell burst in. The scene that followed was awful. Five were killed outright and seven wounded. Wounded were shouting*

Oct 28 *Saw a very gallant deed today. Fritz dropped a shell on the road seriously injuring a rider.*

*All the rest of the men bolted with the exception of one man who got the wounded man on his shoulders.*

Nov 2 *Heavy bombarding from Fritz this morning. Artillery men call it "morning hate". One man sitting eating his lunch on a pile of wood killed by a sniper. Bullet went straight through him.*

Messines Ridge, Ypres Photo taken soon after the end of WW1 – barbed wire and mud



Explosions during battles could be heard as far away as London

A peaceful pond remains today of the craters at Messines Ridge

