

ERNEST PETTY

Killed in action on Saturday 16th September 1916, Age 36
Lance-Corporal, 43rd Company, Machine Gun Corps (Infantry)

Born in Ettington in 1879 Ernest Petty was the seventh of the eight children of Henry Petty and Jane Overs, themselves both natives of the village. Henry and Jane had eight children in all, 4 girls followed by 4 boys. but 2 of them his siblings died before 1911.

By 1895 when he was 16, Ernest had left home and gone to Birmingham where he found employment as a milkman. It was there in December that year that he enlisted in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment stating his age as aged 18 years and 2 months. He attested as a militiaman for a period of six years. The enlistment record gives a brief physical description: "height 5'4'", weight 11st.7½ lbs., fresh complexion, grey eyes and brown hair; a scar on the outside of his left leg and numerous moles on his face. His parents were none too pleased when they discovered he was in the army and had to raise the money to buy him out. He was discharged in May 1896 after only 49 days of drill.

However he was determined to serve his country and in March 1898, again in Birmingham, he enlisted again, this time in the Royal Artillery for a period of 12 years, 7 years to be spent in the Colours and 5 in the Reserves. He had no need this time to lie about his age, but he did deem it necessary to use an alias, enlisting as Ernest Gardner. In October 1899 he was posted to South Africa where he fought in the Boer War for three years, and was awarded the South African Medal and the Kings Medal, both with clasps. At the end of the war he was posted to India where he spent three years and was discharged to the Reserve in November 1905.

He was married in 1907 to Florence Matilda Waddoup who was from another old Ettington family. By 1911 they had two children, John Henry and Vincent Ernest. They were living with Florence's mother in a house close to the Chequers Inn. Ernest was working as a quarryman at the limestone works. They had two more sons, Sidney and Edgar before his departure for France. At the start of the war he was among the first to volunteer and re-enlisted in Warwick on 8th September 1914.

After such distinguished service it was especially sad that he lost his life on the battlefield on the Somme. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial. He was posthumously awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal, which are proudly held by a surviving descendant alongside the medals from South Africa.

(Many thanks to Mrs. Ann Gardner for her kind help in compiling this report about her grandfather)

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