

Harry Hobday.

Private, No 1970, 2nd Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

On the 21st November 1914 the Parishes of Wellesbourne and Walton suffered their first fatality of the Great War – **Harry Hobday** aged 21 years.

Harry's father, George Hobday came from Pillerton Hersey, Warwickshire where, in the census taken on Sunday, 3rd April 1881, he was living with his parents in a cottage within the village. Next door, at the local Vicarage, lived Sarah Jane Rabin. She originated from Clavedon and was employed by the Vicar of the Parish as a Domestic Servant. The following month, on the 14th May, George and Sarah Jane, familiarly known as Jane, were married in the Parish Church of St. Mary's.

Shortly after their wedding the couple left Pillerton and moved the 3 or 4 miles to Friz Hill Lodge close to the hamlet of Walton before moving to Fosse Cottage. George worked as a gardener. He and Sarah Jane had 10 children during their marriage but by the Census of 1911, three had already died.

Harry was born on the 14th June 1893 and on the 13th August baptised in the Walton church of St. James. He was educated at the school in Combroke which he left in 1906.

In September 1910 the local 'bobby', P.C. Tolley, charged Harry with 'Riding a bicycle without a headlight', a not too infrequent offence at the time. Harry didn't appear at the County Police Courts to answer the charge, but with the case proven, his pockets were left 5 shillings lighterⁱ.

The Census of 1911 records that he worked as a Motor Cleaner at Moreton Hall, Moreton Morrell, the home of millionaire, Mr. Bernard Puckle Steinmanⁱⁱ, who also perished in the Great War.

From the service number, 1970, allocated to him on joining the 2nd. Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, the year was late 1911 or possibly January of 1912ⁱⁱⁱ. The U.K. Army Effects list confirms that he actually enlisted in Stratford upon Avon on the 11th January 1912.

At the outbreak of war the battalion was based in Malta and two letters written to his parents, one undated and the other sent in the early days of 1914 indicate that he was based at both Imtarfa and Verdala Barracks in the north of the island.

The 2nd Battalion returned to England on the 19th August 1914 and then sailed on board the SS Cymric^{iv} arriving in Zeebrugge, Belgium on the 6th October.

By the 21st, Harry and his comrades were entrenched on the outskirts of Zonnebeke to the north east of Ypres. This is the date recorded as the first day of the Battle of

Zonnebeke. Over the coming days, as the greater first Battle of Ypres took its course, the Battalion was subject to frequent enemy attacks suffering extremely heavy losses. Of the 2nd Warwicks only one combatant officer remained and it's presumably for this reason that no entries were made in the war diary between 28th October and 9th November.

On the 11th and 12th November, 400 replacement troops arrived. Following a reorganisation of the Battalion and a few days in the trenches south of Fleurbaix, approximately 8 miles to the south of Ypres, the 2nd Warwicks were to be relieved on the 20th by the 2nd Queen's Battalion. The Warwicks would then proceed to billets in the Rue de Bataille in Fleurbaix^v.

The exchange of troops in the trenches was always a difficult time. The noise and activity of one group of men moving out to be simultaneously replaced by another could alert the enemy to respond with shelling or possible attacks. The operation therefore was often carried out under the cover of darkness. The likely scenario is that the 2nd Warwicks started to move out of their positions in the evening of the 20th, a process that continued into the early morning of the following day.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission lists the deaths of four men from the 2nd Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment that died on the 21st November 1914, a list which includes the name of Harry Hobday^{vi}. As they moved from the trenches to the welcoming rest of their billets it is most likely they became the victims of intensive enemy shelling.

Harry was 21 years of age and has no known grave. He is therefore commemorated on the Ploegstreert Memorial for the Missing (Panel 2 and 3), Hainaut, Belgium^{vii}. His name also appears on the Combroom School Roll of Honour, the Roll of Honour in St. James's Church, Walton and on the Walton War Memorial.



The medals awarded to Harry were the British War and Victory Medals as well as the 1914 Star. In addition to the latter he also received the 1914 clasp signifying that he had served under fire at some time between the 5th August and the 22nd November 1914.

In the Churchyard of St. James's, Walton stands a headstone on which are inscribed the words: In Loving memory of Harry Hobday 2nd Batt. R. Warwickshire Reg. The beloved son of George and Jane Hobday Born June 14th 1893. He was killed in action Dec 1. 1914 in France and interred there. Also To the Memory of his Brothers and Sister. George Born April 8 1886 Died April 20 1886. Louisa Born June 21 1887 Died Mar 6 1893. Randolph Born Sept 12 1895. Died Feb 23 1897. Sleep on Beloved and take Thy rest. We loved thee well, God loved them best.

(The date of Harry's death is recorded differently to that of the official records.)

Researched by Grev Hudson (Sept. 2014- Rev Oct 2014) (grev.hudson@tinyworld.co.uk)

ⁱ *Leamington Spa Courier. 30th Sept. 1910*

ⁱⁱ *Census 1911. George Puckle Steinman was a millionaire with homes in England and the U.S.A. In 1914 he rejoined his regiment, the East Kent Regiment (The Buffs) and was killed in action in June 1916. (Mention is made on the Moreton Morrell pages of this site.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Army Service numbers 1881 - 1918 armyservicenumbers.blogspot.com/royal-warwickshire-regiment*

^{iv} *SS Cymric was formerly a ship of the White Star Line which sank on 8th May 1916 after being torpedoed by the same U-boat that sank the RMS Lusitania a year before.*

^v *On current road maps of the area, a Rue Bataille is situated approx. three quarters of a mile to the west of the main village of Fleurbaix.*

^{vi} *In carrying out research for 'War in the Villages' there are numerous reports in various Battalion war diaries of trench replacements being carried during the hours of darkness. After the death of the C.O., Lt. Col. Loris the diaries for the 2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment were not completed between 28th Oct and 9th Nov. 1914. When Major Brewis took over as acting C.O. the diaries were conspicuous for their brevity and as such no records were made of casualties for the 20th or 21st Nov. 1914. In 2009 an internet discussion took place concerning the circumstances of the death of Private Albert Brain of the same Battalion, one of the four that died on the same day as Harry Hobday. The conclusions reached mirror those that have been reached here. (www.1914-1918.net / 2nd Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment.*

^{vii} *In Addition to Harry Hobday listed on Panel 2 and 3. of the Ploegsteert Memorial are the names of Privates Albert Brain from Banbury and Alfred Thompson from Coventry both of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment who died on the 21st Nov. The fourth soldier of the Battalion to die on that date, Private N. McLeod Easton is buried in the White House cemetery, St Jean-les-Ypres.*