

## ***The Hopkins Brothers.***

The Hopkins family had lived in the village of Wellesbourne from at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century, their name appearing on the first page of the parish records which commenced in 1560. The family were ostensibly farmers but it was Abram (Abraham) Hopkins, born in 1802 that was last of his line to work the land. The Census of 1841 records that he worked Waterloo Farm, located where the airfield is currently situated. It is believed that he had to sell the farm to pay off a mortgage.

Abraham's eldest son, Richard became an apprentice to John Cottrill, a master butcher of High Street, Stratford upon Avon<sup>i</sup> and subsequently opened his own butchers shop in what is now 35, Warwick Road, Wellesbourne<sup>ii</sup>. Around the same time Richard's younger brother Edward worked as a slaughterman for Mr. John Humphries, a Butcher in Evesham. When Richard died prematurely in 1869, as had his wife Maria two years earlier, Edward took over not only his business, but also the care of his brother's children.

Edward was 43 when, on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1881, he married Emma Day aged 28 from Stretton under Fosse, Warwickshire, at Bordesley Holy Trinity Church. They produced seven children of which George and Mary Ellen died in infancy. The family business appears to have been successful. Edward was able to employ servants and after completing their formal education sent his sons to the Leamington Spa Municipal School, later to become Leamington Spa (Grammar) school for boys. Sons Robert and William both became Butchers and joined their fathers business.

During the Great War Edward's youngest surviving sons, William and Ernest, both served their country.

## ***William Hopkins.***

***Private, No. 42279, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire Regiment), formerly served as T4/214270 Army Service Corps.***

William Hopkins was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1888 in Wellesbourne and privately baptised in St. Peter's church on the 14<sup>th</sup> August.

William attended both the infants and junior levels of the village school before leaving in April 1903<sup>iii</sup> at the age of almost 15, but continued to further his education at the Municipal school in Leamington Spa. He subsequently trained to be a Butcher and joined the family firm.

In the early days of the war William offered himself for military service, but was turned down on medical grounds.

Ernest, his younger brother was already serving at the front when in March 1916 his

elder brother Robert Banwell Hopkins appeared before a War tribunal. He appealed against 'call-up' on the grounds that he ran the family butchery business on behalf of his 80 year old father. The case of William's rejection, on account of his having 'a hammer toe', was raised and the military representative intimated that one of the brothers should go.<sup>iv</sup>

This was to be William who, in the latter part of 1916, joined the Auxiliary Horse transport section of the Army Service Corps<sup>v</sup>.

William became engaged to Kathleen, the sister of Charles Bacon-Forster who was to die in the Ypres Salient during January 1917 and whose name also appears on the Wellesbourne War Memorial.

William's service record unfortunately no longer exists, but we know from a newspaper report<sup>vi</sup> that he arrived in France around the middle of 1917 having been transferred to the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment, part of the 50<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 17<sup>th</sup> (Northern) division. In July the battalion was in Western Flanders where the battle for the control of the ridges to the east and south of the city of Ypres was about to begin. A battle, the final phase of which was to become known as 'Passchendaele', a name that encapsulated the true horrors of the mud, blood and loss of human life in trench warfare.



In early March 1918 William returned to Wellesbourne, on leave for the last time<sup>vii</sup>. At the end of that month his Battalion was in the Somme sector and took part in the Battles of St. Quentin on the 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> and the First Battle of Bapaume on the 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>.

During April he wrote his last letter home:

*April 17/18  
 Somewhere in France*

*Dear Mother*

*Just a line to answer your small but welcome letter, one thing it was full of good news. I expect you were pleased to get my letter hope you have received another one by now also a postcard. I am just snatching this chance to send you a few lines before we go up and have a look at them. I am saving a field card to let you have when we get out, so that you will know right off and save you a lot of worrying. Do not know how long it will be coming but it might not be long. You look like being busy in the little village if they start a hospital there that is where I shall come when I get my Blightly. I expect Maggie and Mabel W. will be excited about it. I was glad to hear that Lizzie and son still progressing alright. So they think he is like Uncle Bill, well, I hope he will not have his trial and troubles to put up with, but I think it will just about be over by the time his group is called up.*

*What have they done by the Home Defence are they going to swab them up, well I hope they will leave you Bob whatever else happens, so that you will have one son left out of us. Well, I am keeping in the pink, and hope you are doing the same at the shop, just carry on, and keep on smiling. Never worry, we shall get it over all in good time,*

*and be with you again before you know where you are. Now remember me to all at Wellesbourne and District and of course don't get upset if it happens to be a time before you hear from me again, as of course we never know how long we are going to be in, or where we might get landed.*

*Now Ta Ta with heaps of love and God bless you all, From Will*

From the 9<sup>th</sup> May 1918 William and his Battalion were located near the village of Aqueves on the Somme. 'A quiet time, with no apparent action', before moving to Acheux Wood on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The War Diaries record that later that day: 'The Battalion moved up from Acheux Wood at 10p.m. and relieved the 10th Essex Regiment in the Right Sub Sector. Relief completed by 2 a.m'. The Diary continues for the 27<sup>th</sup>: 'Day quiet. Usual Artillery fire'.



*Acheux British Cemetery, Somme*

At some time, probably during the relief operation, when artillery bombardment from the enemy was to be most expected, three men of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment were seeking cover in a dug out. A shell landed and all three were killed<sup>viii</sup>.

In the Acheux British Cemetery, Somme, Plot 1, Row D, Grave Numbers 11, 12, and 13, side by side, lay the bodies of Privates

Albert Fellows, William Hopkins, both aged 30 and Joseph Dickison, aged 21, the only soldiers from the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion to die on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1918.

William received the Victory and British War medals and is commemorated on the Wellesbourne School Roll of Honour (offered services but was rejected)<sup>ix</sup>. His name also appears on the Wellesbourne Roll of Honour for the Dead (St. Peter's Church) and on the village War Memorial. On the gravestone of his parents (Plot 421, Row 9) in the village churchyard is also inscribed: Private W. Hopkins, Yorkshire Regiment, killed in action in France 27<sup>th</sup> May 1918, aged 30. Interred Acheux Cemetery<sup>x</sup>.

Following his death sisters Elizabeth and Margaret had rings made, engraved inside with the date on which William died.

## ***Ernest Wincott Hopkins.***

### ***Sapper, No. 528573, Royal Engineers.***

Ernest Wincott Hopkins was born in Wellesbourne on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1891. and baptised on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1892. He was the youngest of Edward and Emma's sons. He attended the local Church of England school and left in early May 1904 and like his brother William attended the Municipal School in Leamington Spa.

Two years earlier, when aged only 10, he was the subject of an entry in a local newspaper. *On the Saturday afternoon of the 5<sup>th</sup> April 1902 Ernest was 'playing' with*

*a chaf cutter. His hand became caught in the knives which resulted in the loss of the second finger of his right hand and serious damage to the first.*<sup>xi</sup>

Whether this experience had an effect on his choice of career we do not know but he certainly didn't enter the family butchery business. Instead, he chose the Postal Service, becoming a clerk in the Wellesbourne Post Office before transferring, in 1914, to Oundle, Northamptonshire.

At the outbreak of war he joined the Royal Engineers and disembarked on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 1915 in Egypt before taking part in the early landings in the Dardanelles. Following the withdrawal of Allied troops in December 1915 after a disastrous campaign, Ernest was invalided home the following month<sup>xii</sup>. Unfortunately there are no further details of his military service other than knowing that he served throughout the whole war<sup>xiii</sup>, being discharged in 1919, returning to his home in Oundle. He was transferred in February 1920 to Kenilworth, taking up his duties as a sorting clerk and telegraphist.

In 1921 Ernest married Ethel May Broughton in North Walsham, Norfolk.

He was very active in the Kenilworth community serving both as treasurer and honorary secretary of St. John's cricket club, a member of the local tennis club and the Earl of Clarendon Lodge of Druids. He was involved in many charitable projects and was considered by friends to be 'a great sportsman and gentleman'. He died suddenly, aged 51 years at his home, Wychford, Barrow Road, Kenilworth, Warwickshire on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1943<sup>xiv</sup>.

Ernest received the 1914-15 Star together with the Victory and British medals for his military services. His name appears on the Wellesbourne, Church of England School Roll of Honour.

Following his tribunal appeal in March 1916 brother, **Robert** continued to work in the family business up until, and also following, the death of his father on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1917. Although he did not see full military service he was requested, at the appeals tribunal, to join the local Volunteer Training Corps.

*Researched by Grev Hudson (March 2015)(grev.hudson@tinyworld.co.uk)*

<sup>i</sup> Census 1851.

<sup>ii</sup> Census 1861

<sup>iii</sup> Wellesbourne School Records CR371/1, CR371/2, CR371/3, CR371/4. (Warwick RO)

<sup>iv</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 17/3/1916 Appeals tribunal for brother Robert and Wellesbourne school Roll of Honour

<sup>v</sup> T4 of his service number indicates Auxiliary Horse transport.

<sup>vi</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 14/6/1918

<sup>vii</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 15/3/1918

<sup>viii</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 14/6/1918

<sup>ix</sup> The Wellesbourne School Roll of Honour can be dated to around Nov 1915. As William was not accepted into the army until 1916 his name only appears in the section that records that he did offer to serve prior to Nov. 1915 but was rejected.

<sup>x</sup> Note: William should not be confused with the William (Francis) Hopkins whose name appears a few miles away on the Moreton Morrell War Memorial. Before the war he worked as a Groom for Mr. Emmett at Moreton Hall and served in the 15<sup>th</sup> Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regiment No. 16087. He died on the 7th Sept 1916 aged 20 yrs, son of William Hopkins, who worked as a butler for Mr. Emmett.

<sup>xi</sup> Leamington Spa Courier 11<sup>th</sup> April 1902

<sup>xii</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 21/1/1916

<sup>xiii</sup> Stratford upon Avon Herald 15/3/1918 records his return on leave from the front.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Leamington Spa Courier 12/3/1943 (Obituary)*

*Other Sources:*

*Thanks to Louise Gathercole, great granddaughter of Elizabeth, sister of Edward Hopkins, for family memories and William's letter last letter.*

*Jenny Chamberlain, Granddaughter of Harry and Lucy Anderton. (Lucy's first husband was Charles Bacon Forster whose sister, Kathleen was engaged to William Hopkins.)*

*Other sources:*

*Battalion War Diaries 10<sup>th</sup> Bn. West Yorkshire Regiment (NA95/2004)*

*The Long, Long Trail(www1914-1918.net.)*

*WW1 Centenary – Oxford University.*



*Signifies that he died during or as the result of the Great War.*