

# THE FALLEN 1914 - 1918



part one  
alkerton

by Alistair Cook  
for The Shenington Green

## How “The Fallen” came to be

The author of *The Fallen* is Alistair Cook of Tysoe Hill Cottage in Shenington. When former Shenington Green editor Carole Young appealed for information on the eight men named on the Alkerton war memorial, Alistair, a confirmed 'non-historian,' decided to pursue a fascination cultivated over long dog walks: namely, the lost stories behind the many names engraved on the large chunks of stone that take pride of place in our local villages.

*The Fallen* follows a template developed for the stories of Epwell's soldiers killed in the wars, compiled by local historian Eric Kaye, who also wrote the story of the Edgehill airfield.

In tracing 'our' men, the first task was to find their respective regimental details and where they are buried. From that, Alistair was able to find out what they had done, where they lived and the actions that took place on or around the dates they fell. This was all achieved with the help of the internet and a visit to the National Records Office in Kew where Alistair was allowed access to all records, free of charge (and where a helpful librarian was rather chuffed at his transformation into an historian!).

After going on his own personal journey, tracing the conclusions to the short lives of Alkerton's fallen soldiers, Alistair reflects: "I feel that the article is still not finished. Each man's story could fill the pages of a book and I haven't done them justice. But I hope this reminds the younger amongst us of the futility of war; that the terrible, incomprehensible things that took place 100 years ago happened again a few years later, and are still happening."

This is Part One, Alkerton. Part Two, Shenington will be published in the next edition. If you have stories to tell about these men or about those who survived and returned please contact us at [sheningtongreen@gmail.com](mailto:sheningtongreen@gmail.com).

**The Shenington Green, December 2015**



PRIVATE JAMES BENJAMIN BOLTON PETTY OFFICER FIRST  
CLASS OLIVER A.N. SIMMONDS DAVID E POWELL  
SECOND LIEUTENANT GUY CRAWFORD-WOOD LANCE  
CORPORAL PERCY EDWARD PERKINS DRIVER WILLIAM  
HENRY BUTLER PROBATIONARY FLIGHT OFFICER JAMES  
PETER CRAWFORD-WOOD PRIVATE HARRY GARDNER

# THE FALLEN 1914-1918

“They went with songs to the battle,  
they were young”

*from For the Fallen, a poem by Robert Laurence Binyon*

Tuesday 28th July 1914 was a most extraordinary day in terms of world history but, I suspect, just another day in the lives of the villagers of Shenington and Alkerton. On that momentous day one thousand five hundred miles to the south east, the House of Hapsburg invaded the Kingdom of Serbia. This act of aggression, caused by one man's death in Sarajevo, invoked a series of entangled international alliances that led to a world at war, the 'Great War'.



Within months World War One would claim the lives of two residents of Alkerton and sadly, over the course of the war, a further thirteen Alkerton and Shenington men would pay the ultimate price defending our freedoms in a war they said would end all wars. During those turbulent years the men of Shenington and Alkerton fought in many of the major battles of the conflict, they sailed the seas and flew in the skies. Their lives, like so many others tragically cut short, today lie or are remembered in far off fields, only one returning home to rest amongst us.

The stories, with the passing of time naturally begin to fade from collective village memory, eight names carved into a small piece of Hornton stone our only reminder of their time in our community. Simply tying together census details with the regimental movements and actions on the day the men fell in no way chronicles their bravery and sacrifice sufficiently, but what it does allow is a tiny ray of light to shine on the whereabouts of a few of the 'ordinary men' of Alkerton and Shenington during an extraordinary time in the history of our country. It is important that their sacrifice is not forgotten and in the words of Laurence Binyon:

*“at the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them”*

# November 1914



## **Private James Benjamin Bolton Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry Service No 7088**

Born in a house named 'Harrisville' in Steeple Aston, 'Ben' Bolton moved to Alkerton to become a 'horse man' on a farm, Brook Farm. He was married to Jessie and at the start of the war he was 31 years old. In early August 1914 Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, began the highly successful "Your Country Needs You" recruitment campaign. It appears that Ben, like many others in the village, was swept up in this frenzy of patriotism and duty, signing up with the local regiment, the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, affectionately known as the "Obbly Gobbies," at the first opportunity. The national recruitment campaign aimed at recruiting men between the ages of 19 and 30 to join up was highly successful. Within the first few months thousands of men had signed up to fight in a war they were told would be "over by Christmas!" Unfortunately for Ben his war, and his life, would be over in three months.

Ben joined up with the newly formed 2nd Battalion of the Ox & Bucks. This unit was one of the very first Territorial Army units, the 'weekend warriors' as Lord Kitchener often called them. The Territorials were soon to prove themselves immensely capable earning the full respect of Field Marshal French, Officer Commanding Allied Forces, during the first months of the war. After initial basic training in England the 2nd Battalion landed at Boulogne in late August and was quickly deployed as a member of the British Expeditionary Force, the BEF. BEF units were involved in many battles during the initial weeks of the war. During this phase, each side was trying to outflank the other, constantly moving north and west in a 'race to the sea'. Eventually this tactic led to the beginning of static trench warfare which stretched from the English Channel to the Swiss border along the whole of the Western Front.

A picture by William Barnes Wollen, *'The Defeat of the Prussian Guard'*, currently hanging in the Royal Green Jackets Regimental Museum, depicts the 2nd Battalion Ox & Bucks regiment around the time Ben was with them. The painting clearly shows the fluid and fast moving nature of battle during these first weeks of the war. Sadly, although likely to have been involved in similar actions, Ben did not witness the fighting captured in the painting, (the Battle of 'Nonne Bosschen, 11th November), because, wounded in an earlier action, he died on the 3rd November in the first major battle of the war; the 1st battle of Ypres, 19th Oct – 22nd November.

During Ben's short time in Northern France he would have witnessed the start of a dark period of European industrial warfare. During this early phase of fierce hand to hand fighting and artillery bombardment, the German army suffered 80,000 casualties and the BEF had 89,000 dead or wounded of which 54,105 were at Ypres alone. The Belgian Army was reduced to half its strength and the French would lose 385,000 soldiers by September.

Christmas 1914 came and went; the war raged on with no likelihood that it would be over soon. The men of the Alkerton and Shenington continued the fight and in the spring of 1915 more sad news reached the village.....



*Defeat of the Prussian Guard, Ypres, 1914, by William Barnes Wollen is displayed at the Royal Green Jackets Regimental Museum in Winchester*



*Private James Benjamin Bolton today lies in Ypres Town Cemetery extension, Belgium. Plot 2, Row A, No 6.*





**Petty Officer First Class**  
**Oliver A.N. Simmonds, Royal Navy**  
**Service Number 19001**

Oliver Arnold N. Simmonds was born in 1881. During his school years he lived with his grandparents Alfred and Ann Compton in West Street Shutford. Living and growing up in Shutford it appears that he 'ran away to sea'. Joining the Royal Navy as a Rating, eventually rising to the rank of Petty Officer 1st Class, Oliver was stationed in Portsmouth and during this period he married Pattie and they had a daughter named Gladys. Confusion surrounds Oliver's exact association with Alkerton. It is possible that a family member, perhaps his mother or father, lived and worked for a time in Alkerton. At the outbreak of the war Oliver was posted to HMS Bulwark, a pre-Dreadnought battleship, launched in 1899 and the former Flagship of the Home Fleet. HMS Bulwark was assigned to the 5th Battle Squadron, Channel Fleet. In early November of 1914 the squadron sailed to Sheerness in Kent to guard against the possible invasion of England. Whilst the ship was moored to 17 Buoy Kethole Reach in the estuary of the River Medway, an accident occurred which resulted that afternoon in a statement being made to the House of Commons by the First Lord of the Admiralty, a certain young Winston Spencer Churchill. *"I regret to say I have some bad news for the House. The Bulwark Battleship which was lying in Sheerness this morning blew up at 07:35 o'clock. The Vice and Rear Admiral, who were present, have reported their conviction that it was an internal magazine explosion which rent the ship asunder. There was apparently no upheaval in the water, and the ship had entirely disappeared when the smoke had cleared away. An enquiry will be held tomorrow which may possibly throw more light on the occurrence. The loss of the ship does not sensibly affect the military position, but I regret to have to say the loss of life is very severe. Only 12 men are saved. All the officers and the rest of the crew, who I suppose, amounted to between 700 and 800, have perished. I think the House would wish me to express on their behalf the deep sorrow with which the House heard the news, and their sympathy with those who have lost their relatives and friends."*

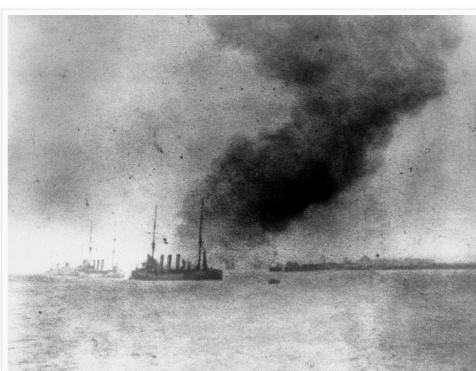
The Admiralty enquiry that Churchill mentioned reported that out of her complement of 750 only 14 sailors survived, two subsequently dying of their injuries whilst in hospital in Chatham. Clearly one of the luckiest sailors that day was Able Seaman Stephen Marshall who was blown out of an open hatch. He stated to the inquiry, that during the explosion he felt

*"a colossal draught drawing him irresistibly upwards."* As he rose in the air he clearly saw the ship's mast shaking violently. When Stephen surfaced from the cold Medway River, dazed from the explosion, HMS Bulwark, all 15,000 tons of battleship, was gone. Nothing remained apart from two small pieces of the ship's bow which divers discovered 50 feet away from where they were moored. The naval enquiry concluded that the most likely cause of the disaster was overheating of the Cordite charges stored alongside the boiler room bulkhead (!!) and the incorrect manner that live shells for the ships six 6 inch guns were stored.

Sadly Oliver, in the mess having breakfast, or going about his duties preparing the ship for war, was killed instantly in a violent explosion that rocked the whole area. A sailor serving on HMS Implacable, the next ship in line at the mooring, who witnessed the event, stated; *"from the depths a column of flame appeared followed by a thunderous roar. Then came a series of lesser detonations, and finally on vast explosion that shook the Implacable from mast head to keel."*

Oliver was 33 years old when he died.

Petty Officer 1st Class Oliver Simmonds and the crew of HMS Bulwark are remembered today at the Naval War Memorial in Southsea, the Dockyard Church in Sheerness and the Woodlands Road Cemetery in Gillingham, Kent.



A photograph of the smoke column rising from the destruction of the Bulwark in the River Medway

*The Royal Naval War Memorial, Southsea, Hampshire and a picture taken moments after the explosion of HMS Bulwark 26th November 1914.*

# April 1915



## David E Powell 1st Warwickshire Yeomanry Service No 2696

David's widowed mother, Mrs Jane Powell, lived in Well Lane in Alkerton and is believed to have worked in service at 'Hillesden,' Oxford Road, Banbury. David was good with horses; his knowledge and skill as a horseman would soon lead him to become involved in one of the most horrendous and brutal campaigns of the First World War - Gallipoli.

David joined the 1st Warwickshire Yeomanry. The Yeomanry regiment served as a cavalry and dismounted infantry regiment during the First World War. The Regiment mobilised in August 1914 but remained in England until 1915 when it sailed for Egypt with the 2nd Mounted Division. During the move the ship transporting the horses, the 'Wayfarer', was torpedoed by a German U boat on 11th April having just left Avonmouth. Although the ship did not sink, volunteers from the regiment, including presumably David, rescued 763 horses from drowning that day. David arrived in Egypt on 24th April before being transported out to the beaches of Gallipoli. On 18th August David would have taken part in one of the first 'D-Day' type amphibious landings on the beach at Sulva Bay in preparation for the Battle of Scimitar Hill. This battle was to become the largest single day attack ever mounted by the Allied forces during the Gallipoli campaign. During the 18th David was wounded and was transferred to a hospital ship lying off the Dardanelles coast. On the morning of 19th August David died and was buried at sea, just one of the 252,000 Allied casualties of the Gallipoli campaign. In his letters home, Geoffrey Middleton, of Hill Farm in Shenington, had reported that "*poor David died of his injuries.*"

He was 23 years old.



*Private David Powell is remembered to this day on the Helles Memorial in Turkey*



# July 1916



## Second Lieutenant Guy Crawford-Wood 1st Battalion Welsh Guards

One day in July a telegram was delivered to Alkerton House, the home of James Crawford-Wood, a Justice of the Peace, informing him of the death of his son Guy. Guy had joined the 1st Battalion of the Welsh Guards as a Second Lieutenant. In mid August 1915 the Welsh Guards were mobilised for war and landed at Le Havre, Northern France. The 1st Battalion Welsh Guards formed a section of the Guards Division and in June 1916 the division was preparing for the Somme offensive which started an all out attack on the morning of 1st July. The 1st of July 1916 is remembered as the darkest day in the history of the British Army. On a seven mile front, from Albert to Gommecourt, the distance from Alkerton to Banbury, 60,000 British soldiers were killed or wounded. The day saw the first use of a tank in battle and by the end of the day's fighting the Allied forces had penetrated only six miles into German territory. However, Guy was not on the Somme that day, he was further to the north around the Ypres salient. Confusion surrounds his unit's actual location but it seems that the German High Command, having noticed the Allied build up preceding the Somme offensive and planned diversionary attacks to the North. The Battle of 'Mount Sorrel' was a German attempt to capture the high ground to the north of the Somme around Ypres. General Haig, unwilling to divert forces from the Somme build up, offered limited artillery units and a Brigade from the 20th Light Division in support of hard pressed Canadian divisions. Guy was likely to have been in one of the supporting units and during the day was killed in action near Ypres, on the first day of the Somme offensive 1916.

He was 21 years old.



*Guy lies in the Brandhoek Military Cemetery in Belgium. Plot 11, Row J, No. 21.*

*“Pour vous aider a donné sa vie: aider lui maintenant par vos prières pour son âme “*

# August 1916



## Lance Corporal Percy Edward Perkins Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry Service No 10088

Percy was the son of James and Clara Ann Perkins of Alkerton. James had a job as a 'confectionary Sugar Boiler' and along with Percy had three daughters named Gertrude, Violet and Sarah. Percy worked as a groom in Alkerton and joined the 5th Battalion of the Ox & Bucks light infantry. He quickly rose to the rank of Lance Corporal. Units of the 'Ox & Bucks' were heavily involved in the war in early 1916. The 2nd Battalion was moved to the area of a major battle, Vimy Ridge, in relief for the French troops required for the defence of Verdun. In preparation for the Battle of the Somme (1st July – 18th November) the regiment was moved south to an area around Longueval and Delville Wood. It is possible that in early July, in support of the newly arrived South African Infantry Brigade, Percy and his unit attacked Delville Wood, a small area of woodland held by the Germans, finally taking the area on 19th July and continuing to hold it until 3rd September. However, due to shortages of ammunition and the weather turning the battlefield in to a 'slough of mud' the attacks stopped. It is interesting to note that the wood, originally planted with beech and hornbeam, has been recently replanted with oak and birch by the South African government in memory of the men who fought during the Battle of Delville Wood (15th July – 3rd September).

Percy was wounded during this action near Albert in northern France. Removed from the front line he was taken to a military dressing station which the regiment had named as 'Edgehill station'. Sadly he died of his wounds on 25th August 1916.

Percy was 20 years old.



*Percy lies in the Dernancourt Communal Cemetery extension in France. Plot I, Row A, no. 17*

# April 1917



**Driver William Henry Butler**  
**Royal Field Artillery**  
**Service No 226681**

William Butler was married to Harriet Ann Butler (née French) of The Brook House in Alkerton. In 1911 they lived there together with their son, also named William, and Harriet's mother. Bill, as he was known, was a member of the Royal Field Artillery and worked as a carter waggoner on the farm at Brook House. His skill with horses is a possible reason for being directed into the Artillery Regiment. Before signing up he and his family moved to Riverside Cottage in Alkerton. It appears that Bill was wounded during the fighting and was transported back to 'Blighty' to be treated in a military hospital. Sadly he died on 29 April 1917 of the wounds he received in France.

He was 33 years old.



*William Butler is buried in Durrington Cemetery in Wiltshire, Grave Ref. 239*

Driver was a rank used by the Royal Artillery, the British Army and other Commonwealth countries for those who rode and cared for the horses used to pull heavy artillery. The rank was equivalent to private and was gradually phased out and merged with the rank of gunner.



# October 1917



## **Probationary Flight Officer James Peter Crawford-Wood Royal Naval Air Service**

The Eastbourne Gazette, 31 October 1917, announces the tragic news to the world that Probationary Flight Officer James Peter Crawford-Wood and Probationary Observation Officer Kenneth Oxley flying an Avro 504G, (some reports say a BE2c) from Eastchurch Flying School died as a result of an aeroplane crash near Eastbourne. The accident occurred on 23 October 1917.

The Royal Naval Air Service was the air arm of the Royal Navy. It formed in 1910 initially outside the formal Royal Navy training, the first recruits being trained by the Royal Aero Club on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. It is questionable whether the Admiralty had any faith in the new venture, stipulating that all new recruits must be unmarried. Pre World War One flying was dangerous and fatalities amongst trainee pilots high.

However as technology developed the idea of the Royal Navy with another, larger, offensive capability led to the formation of the Naval Air Service in 1913. This subsequently became the Royal Naval Air Service in July 1914 until April 1918 when it was merged with the Army's Royal Flying Corps to form the Royal Air Force. During the time James was a serving officer with the RNAS its main role was one of reconnaissance, patrolling coasts for enemy ships and U boats, and he would have undergone training, along with his observer, in all forms of aerial warfare, which would have included (at RNAS Eastchurch) newly introduced and highly skilled techniques for blind flying and night landings.

James signed on for the RNAS at Crystal Palace on 5th August 1917 at the age of 18. It appears that the previous year was spent working as an engineer for the aircraft manufacturer Vickers. No doubt his time there sparked an interest in flying and led to him signing up for the '*brave new world of aerial combat*.' This must have been of great concern for his poor parents at home in Alkerton, still grieving the loss of their first son, Guy, the previous summer. They would have likely known that due to the arrival of the 'Red Baron' and the great air battles of the Somme in 1916 life expectancy for pilots and observers in frontline units was less than two weeks. The official Royal Navy report into James and Ken Oxley's accident no longer exists. Reported as a training accident in a time of war a full and thorough investigation would not have been carried out. However, what remains is a confidential instructor report by an Eastbourne flying instructor noting on 27th October 1917 that James was an "exceptionally good, enterprising and safe pilot."

James was 18 years old when he died.



*James Crawford-Wood RNAS lies in the church yard of St Michael's Alkerton*



*Observation Officer Kenneth Oxley is remembered at former RNAS in Eastchurch, Kent*



*BE2c  
Serial No. 9465*



*Avro 504G  
Serial No. N5310*



# May 1918



## Private Harry Gardner Royal Warwickshire Regiment Service No 17787

Harry, pictured on the next page, was the son of John and Ellen Gardner of Alkerton, living at Gardner's Cottage in Well Lane. In 1911 Harry had two sisters, Winifred and Ida, and a brother, Alwin, living at home with him. The family kept growing as the years went by with Harry eventually becoming one of seven children. Harry's father John was a stone mason. Harry, before signing up, had a job in and around the village as a paper hanger. He met and married a girl from Oxford and they had a son who was two years old in the summer of 1918. By early summer that year the morale of the nation was under great strain; along with many in the country seven village families were mourning the loss of sons, brothers and husbands. The war in France was approaching stalemate. Out in Eastern Europe it was all change, the Russian Revolution of October 1917 massively affected the military balance on the Eastern Front. In France the German High Command was keen to make gains in the west and on 27th May, between the towns of Soissons and Reims the battle of Aisne opened up and engulfed units of the Royal Warwickshire including Harry Gardner. The British battalions were supporting the French 6th Army in trying to repel the German thrust but were unable to halt the attack. On the morning of the 31st Harry was killed during a battle that would continue until 6th June and succeed in pushing the Allies back close to the outskirts of Paris itself.

Harry has no known grave. He was 28 years old when he died. In a little over five months, the eleventh hour of the eleventh month, the First World War would be over. Peace would return and the men would come home to a country "fit for heroes."



*Private Harry Gardner, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, is remembered at the Military Cemetery at Soissons in France*

The Campaign Medals, 'Pip', the 1914-15 Star, 'Squeak', the British War Medal, and 'Wilfred', the Victory Medal, would adorn the uniforms of the surviving soldiers, sailors and airmen and be awarded posthumously to the families of the fallen.

It is interesting to note that one medal was not claimed by a family from Alkerton; The British War Medal, 'Squeak,' named after a popular comic strip in the Daily Mirror; was left unclaimed by Mr and Mrs Crawford-Wood in respect of their son James. Whether the reason was the anguish caused by the loss of two sons or a simple bureaucratic mixup we will never know. How fitting would it be, 100 years on, as a remembrance, to have the medal issued and presented to the surviving family in honour of...

## THE FALLEN



With special thanks to the following for their help with this article: The War Graves Photographic Project; National Archives, Kew; Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Fleet Air Arm Museum, Yeovilton; Wikipedia; the 1911 census; Mary Gibbins for the loan of the photograph of Harry Gardner and additional information; and Ken Powell of Shenington.

**Alistair Cook, Tysoe Hill Cottage, October 2015**

# For the Fallen

by Robert Laurence Binyon (1869-1943)

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,  
England mourns for her dead across the sea.  
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,  
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal  
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.  
There is music in the midst of desolation  
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

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.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;  
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;  
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;  
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,  
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,  
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known  
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,  
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,  
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,  
To the end, to the end, they remain.



*World War II veterans, Brian from Wroxton and Neil from Shenington, attend the Armistice Day service every year with other veterans, residents of Shenington with Alkerton and descendants of the men whose names appear on the memorial.*



*Shenington primary school's years 5 & 6 walk to the memorial with their teachers and the head teacher to lay crosses and to perhaps recite poetry or to read letters they have written to the soldiers for the service.*



*The memorial in Alkerton today with Reverend Dr John Reader preparing for the annual Armistice Day service*