

ST MARY MAGDALENE

BAUNTON

**BAUNTON MEMORIALS
WW1 AND WW2**



PAUL COLLINS

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BAUNTON MEMORIALS WW1 AND WW2

Introduction

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori
(Wilfred Owen)

Around twelve years ago I responded to a call for volunteers to assist with a project designed to commemorate all those old boys from my school who died as servicemen in the First World War. The plan was to research their individual involvement in that War and to publish written tributes in their memory on the centennial anniversaries of their deaths between 2014 and 2018. More than 300 lives needed to be investigated and I offered to research some of those whose deaths occurred in the UK and who were buried reasonably close to where I lived. I found it a fascinating and humbling experience, to the extent that I ended up covering more than sixty servicemen in total, at home and around the world, all of whom honourably served their country and paid the ultimate price.

Here, in Baunton, there are three soldiers who lost their lives in WW1 and whose deaths are acknowledged on their headstones in the churchyard of St Mary Magdalene church. Every year, at the Remembrance Day service in the church, we solemnly read out their names as we reflect on their dutiful sacrifice in that horrific conflict. There is also one victim from WW2 and he is similarly remembered at the same time.

Last year my interest in the people behind the names was stimulated to the point where I decided to research their lives and their backgrounds in more depth in order to understand the part they may each have played, however small and insignificant that might seem in the context of the Wars overall. None of them turned out to be heroes but the stories that follow are nevertheless worth telling.

Private Reginald Shave (26th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers)

Killed in action on 15th September 1916

Reginald William Shave was born in 1891 and baptised in Stratton Parish Church on 6th May that year. He was the first child of John and Emily Shave who lived at the time at No. 2 Trafalgar Cottages, Cheltenham Road, Stratton, almost next door to a baker's shop near the Gloucester Road junction. John came from the village of Houghton in Dorset and was an Inspector of Cruelty to Animals. His wife was a more local lass, having been brought up in Uley, near Stroud, and they were married there on 26th October 1889. Over the next twelve years following Reginald's birth, they were blessed with a further six children, four boys and two girls.

With such an increase in the size of the family, it is not surprising that the Shaves had to find a larger property, and subsequent census returns indicate that they moved to Baunton (or Stratton) Hill – both descriptions are given in various documents of the period – on the Cheltenham Road near the current junction with Baunton Lane and the entrance into the heart of Baunton village. The River Churn represented the Baunton parish boundary up until 1935, and every property to the west of the river (including Baunton Mill and the houses on the Cheltenham Road) was therefore located within the parish of Stratton at the time. Bearing in mind the fact that Nos. 1, 3 and 4 Baunton Hill remain as current postal addresses, it may well be that the Shave family lived in the house my wife and I currently occupy. Back in 1901 John Shave acted as Enumerator for both Stratton and Baunton parishes, and was therefore responsible for supplying (and subsequently collecting) the census returns for each property. In that year there were 109 inhabited houses in Stratton and 22 in Baunton covering populations of 837 and 100 respectively.

Little is known of Reginald's childhood, although he would have gone to one of the local schools, and the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard for 9th August 1902 records that he won third prize for his display of wild flowers for children at Stratton and Baunton schools. In 1911 he was working as a Solicitor's Clerk, while the older of his

two sisters, Florence, was employed as an Assistant Teacher at the comparatively tender age of 14 years!

Following the outbreak of WW1 on 28th July 1914, Reginald was neither obliged to, nor volunteered to, offer his immediate services to the country as the Regiment to which he was subsequently assigned was not created until the middle of the following year. The 26th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment) was formed in London on 17th July 1915 by the Lord Mayor from volunteers who were mainly bank clerks and accountants, and for that reason was colloquially known as the Bankers Battalion. How Reginald came to be associated with his fellow volunteers is not clear but his profession was undoubtedly of a comparable nature. Might he perhaps have moved from rural Gloucestershire sometime after 1911, even as far as London, so as to progress his career as a solicitor?



(New recruits in the 26th Bankers Battalion. Royal Fusiliers 1915)

The Royal Fusiliers was a line infantry regiment of the British Army which maintained a continuous existence from its foundation in 1685 right through to 1968. After enlisting in Hendon, Reginald moved to Aldershot in November 1915 where the Regiment spent

the next six months training for action in France as part of the 124th Brigade, 41st Division. On 4th May 1916 the Division set out from Southampton and landed at Le Havre the following day. Further training ensued for several months prior to the Regiment's involvement in the Battle of the Somme. This battle, fought in several phases between July and November 1916, was one of the defining events in the War, with more than a million casualties on all sides during the extended conflict. In the initial six weeks of the allied Somme offensive, repeated attacks against the enemy lines failed to achieve any significant progress and, in order to try and break the deadlock, a further major attack was planned for the middle of September with the intention of destroying German strongholds between the villages of Combles and Courcellette.

The 26th (Bankers) Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers was one of the units engaged in this assault which started with the Battle of Flers-Courcellette as planned on 15th September 1916. Fierce fighting ensued, which resulted in almost 30,000 casualties over the next week, but yet again the allies failed to achieve the strategic objective of a decisive victory and were forced to withdraw on 22nd September.

The Battle of Flers-Courcellette was notable for the historic and controversial decision taken by the Army's senior command to introduce Britain's secret weapon and to commit tanks to the combat for the first time. However, the potential effectiveness of these tanks was unknown and untested. In theory they provided many advantages – they had the ability to cross trenches and to crush barbed wire, they could protect the advancing infantry, and they were capable of destroying German positions with their cannon and machine gun fire. Each vehicle had a crew of six, was heavily armoured against similar rifle and machine gun fire, and operated on tracks that could easily cope with uneven ground. In practice the tanks were not up to the task required. Conditions for the crew were difficult and uncomfortable to say the least, with an exposed engine and totally inadequate ventilation. The tanks themselves were slow and cumbersome, they became bogged down in the wet and muddy terrain, they proved slow and mechanically unreliable, the crews lacked experience, and training alongside the infantry had not been

given sufficient priority or emphasis. Moreover, there were fewer than fifty tanks available overall, a quantity which was in the event simply insufficient. More pertinently, the number of tanks that were actually able to join the attack on the morning of 15th September was only around a quarter of the total, as many of them had already broken down.



(A WWI tank in operation)

Private Reginald Shave was involved in the attack that morning. Progress in WWI battles was invariably slow, frequently measured in yards rather than in miles, and any territorial advantage gained one day was often lost or hard to maintain the next. The Battle of Flers-Courcelette was no different. On the opening day, the Brigade under which the 26th Royal Fusiliers Regiment operated was given a single objective – to overcome and hold three German trenches which stretched a distance of no more than a few hundred yards ahead of the advancing troops. However, even that proved a trench too far for Reginald's Battalion. The banality and futility of so many of the battles throughout WWI are characteristically reflected in the Battalion's official diary of what happened at the Battle of Flers-Courcelertte, and the following record of events for the period between 14th and 30th September 1916 provides a graphic and detailed description of what the troops on the battlefield had to endure and suffer on a daily basis, sometimes chaotically, whenever they were called into action. It makes for painful reading.

***Extract from the War Diaries of the 26th Battalion, Royal
Fusiliers
for 14th to 30th September 1916***

Battle of Flers-Courcelette

14th September : 5.10pm

At this hour the Battalion left the last named camp and marched up into the line. The journey was very tiring owing to continual stoppages on the road on account of heavy traffic. At about 9pm we arrived at the Brigade camp east of MONTAUBAN where, after having received ammunitions, we proceeded via FLARE LANE up to our point of assembly in front of DELVILLE WOOD, the Companies taking up their positions for the attack which was timed to commence at 6.20am. The Battalion arrived & took up their position about 10 mins. only before the attack commenced. They had been on the march from 5.15pm the previous evening & went into attack on the morning of the 15th without a rest or sleep.

15th September : 6.20am

The order of battle of our Brigade (the 124th Infantry Bgde) was as follows : Front Line 21st K.R.R.C. - (Kings Royal Rifle Corps) - & 10th Queen's W S Regt. - (Queen's West Surrey Regiment). The 26th Battalion Royal Fusiliers were in support of the 21st K.R.R.C. and the 32nd Royal Fusiliers in support of the 10th Queen's.

Map reference. Trench map, FRANCE Sheet 57 S.W. Edition 3A

The 21st K.R.R.C. were in position for attack on SWITCH trench supported by 26th R.F. (two companies on Edge Trench & two companies on Green Trench). Attack commenced at 6.20am.

6.30am

26th R.F. were within 80 yards of 1st objective (SWITCH trench) & found that 1st six waves were advancing through our own artillery

barrage in a half right direction, the left flank being about 300 yards East of FLERS village. The position of our left flank should have been on FLERS road. A halt was ordered & mistake was as far as possible rectified.

6.50am

The left sector of 1st objective was taken with very little opposition. Our barrage advanced & infantry followed & took up position in front of 2nd objective – FLERS trench. At this point men from various Battalions struggled back through our barrage on the right – 2nd LIEUT. GAUTHERN (26th RF) did excellent work in bringing men out of the barrage at great personal risk.

7.45am

Our barrage lifted from 2nd objective & the infantry moved forward & took the trench. Casualties were suffered here from hostile rifle & M.G. – machine gun – fire. A number of prisoners were taken. Our D company took something like 150 prisoners. The 2nd objective FLERS TRENCH had been severely damaged by our Artillery fire.

The infantry remained in this trench until the 122 I.B. on our left commenced to clear the village of FLERS. In the attack on the first two objectives the infantry was assisted by TANKS of the Heavy Machine Gun Coy but, by the time the 2nd objective was taken, there was only 1 tank on our sector which had not been put out of action.

This tank was sent forward along the right of FLERS village to assist the 122nd Brigade & to cover their right flank. A small party under 2/Lt Astwood followed the tank to keep in touch with the troops clearing the village. The Battalion was re-organised as our barrage moved forward & advanced in two waves.

10.15am

The tank moved forward in front of our waves to the 3rd objective – HOGSHEAD & FLERS TRENCH. Our first wave was advancing

but, when about 200 yards from the HOGSHEAD, Lt. Col. Oakley of the 10th Queen's ordered a withdrawal to FLERS TRENCH, the reason being that the troops that had taken the village of FLERS had lost all their officers and had retired. We proceeded to consolidate FLERS TRENCH.

3pm

An advance was ordered and, under heavy machine-gun & rifle fire, they occupied the line of the 3rd objective. Shortly afterwards the line again moved forward on the signal of Lieut. Colonel the Earl of Faversham, commanding 21st K.R.R.C. We advanced towards GIRD trench under heavy and increasing fire, but at a point about 150 yards away from our objective, when our left flank was held up by a part of the enemy who had advanced in front of their trench & lay concealed in a cornfield.

5pm

An order was passed down to retire. We could not find out where this order originated & movement backwards was as far as possible prevented, but men on our right flank commenced to double back, and the right flank was quickly broken. The enemy immediately opened heavy artillery fire along the whole front & we were forced to withdraw to an old trench situated about N.32 1.5 which we found occupied by 20 to 30 men & 2 "Mekers(?)" Guns. We could not find anybody on either flank with whom to get into touch & therefore the men were ordered to "stand to" until dusk. At dusk we retired to a new line which was being consolidated between the 2nd and 3rd objectives. We remained here and proceeded with consolidation.

11pm

The Brigade was relieved by the 123rd Brigade and proceeded into the support line with the exception of a company under Capt. Etchells which was in front of the line & was unable to reach the remainder of the Battalion.

16th September

The Battalion remained in the support lines & was subject to heavy artillery fire throughout the whole day. We were not called upon during the day by the Brigade in front. Capt. Etchells and his Company were relieved on Saturday evening and, in view of the heavy fighting they had done, they were ordered to remain at the Brigade camp during Saturday night, & on Sunday morning they were ordered to proceed back to the Transport lines. The rest of the Battalion remained in support during Sunday (17th September) & although subject to heavy artillery fire suffered no casualties.

18th September

During the early hours of the morning we were relieved by the North Lancashire Regt. and the Battalion proceeded back to the Transport lines & after a meal and a rest returned to Camp at E9.

Our casualties during the action were as follows : Officers Lts. M. J. Shaw, A. S. Wright (killed), Lts. E. W. Havelock, E. L. Astwood (died of wounds) & Lts. Sir W. A. Blount, Bart, J. K. Patterson, R. I. W. Francis & C. F. Fields (wounded). Other ranks 33 (killed), 58 (missing) & 140 wounded.

Prisoners taken by the Battalion – 2 Officers, 158 other ranks.

19th to 30th September

The Battalion remained in Camp at E9 where training was proceeded with. On the 27th Lieut. Colonel Ian W.F. North relinquished command of the Battalion & Lieut. Colonel Gwyn Thomas took over from him. Otherwise there is nothing of importance to report between these dates.

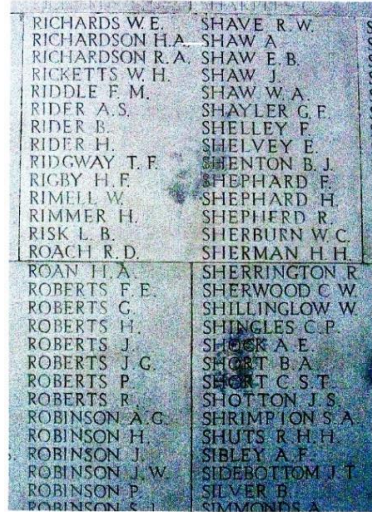
Gwyn Thomas

Lieut. Col. Commanding 26th Royal Fusiliers

Reginald Shave was one of those who died on Friday 15th September 1916. He was officially listed as “death presumed” and his body was never recovered; he has no known burial place. His death represented a double tragedy for his mother, Emily, whose husband had also died only a few days earlier on 8th September as a result of exhaustion following his own battle with tuberculosis over the previous three years. It is unlikely that Reginald would have been aware of his father’s death before his own untimely passing. He was not forgotten, however, and his name is inscribed on the Thiepval Memorial. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and built between 1928 and 1932, the Thiepval Memorial is the largest Commonwealth Memorial to the missing in the world. It commemorates the names of over 72,000 officers and men who fell on the Somme battlefields and were denied the known and honoured burial given to their fellow comrades. More than 90% of those who are remembered on the Memorial died in the first Battle of the Somme.



(Thiepval Memorial for the Missing of the Somme)



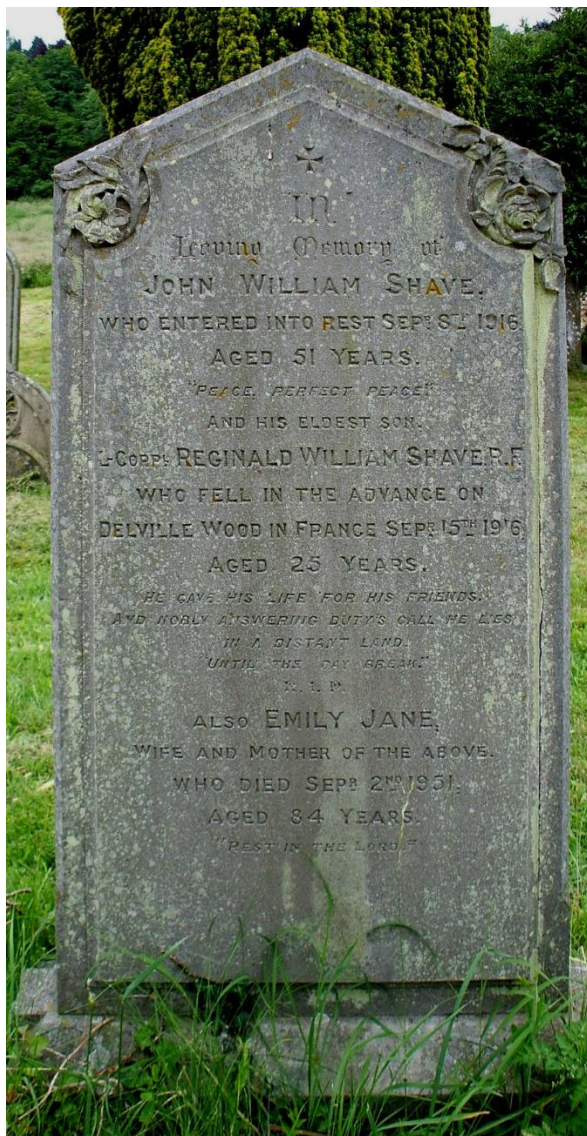
(Detailed selection of names (left) – around 1200 - as subsequently inscribed on the Thiepval Memorial, almost all of whom were from the Royal Fusiliers and from which Reginald Shave's name (right) was engraved on the Memorial itself)

Back home Reginald's name was inscribed after his father's on the family headstone in Baunton churchyard with the following description :

L.Corpl. Reginald William Shave
 Who fell in the advance on
 Delville Wood in France Sept. 15th 1916
 Aged 25 years.

*He gave his life for his friends
 and nobly answering duty's call he lives
 in a distant land.*

*Until the day break
 RIP*



Strangely, and for no apparent reason, the inscription on the Baunton headstone describes Reginald as a Lance Corporal (L/Corpl). However, there is no evidence to support the possibility that he was

ever promoted to this rank. His army records consistently (and only) refer to him as Private Reginald Shave, and this how he is also remembered on the Thiepval Memorial.

In view of the fact that John and Emily Shave had five sons, it is perhaps not surprising that all of Reginald's brothers sought to emulate his example and also served their country in some capacity during WW1. Unlike Reginald, however, they all survived, which must have been a great relief and comfort to their mother. **Wilfred** (born in 1892) signed up in Hereford on 5th January 1915 – possibly, in fact, earlier than Reginald – as a Driver with the 3rd Shropshire King's Light Infantry, transferred to the Royal Engineers in January 1916, and was posted to the Wireless Signal Company as a Driver in northern France. Subsequently he transferred again to the Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery. At no stage was Wilfred seemingly involved in action on the front lines, and he remained a Private throughout the war. He married Gertrude Myerscough in Preston, Lancashire in June 1916 and died in Oxford on 24th May 1946. He is buried in Wolvercote Cemetery, Oxford.

The next son, **Alan** (born on 1st July 1893), chose to serve his country on water rather than on land. In fact he had already embarked on a naval career long before the Great War began, having enrolled as a Boy Rating on the training ship *HMS Impregnable* in February 1908 when he was not yet 15 years old. On 1st May 1910 he signed up as an Ordinary Seaman for a period of twelve years and served on various ships over the next four years. Most of his war years were then spent on board *HMS Erin* which had a minor role in the crucial Battle of Jutland (May / June 1916) but was otherwise mostly engaged in routine patrols and training operations. Alan was promoted to Petty Officer while on duty with *HMS Erin* and remained in the Navy, mostly in training roles, until his retirement from the service as a Chief Petty Officer. In August 1919 he married Margaret Borland in Leith, Scotland but was granted a decree nisi in 1932 on the grounds of her adultery. They had two sons. In 1935 he re-married a local lady from Stratton, Edith Chandler, became a Gym and Sports Instructor in Cirencester and died on 4th June 1961. Alan is buried in Chesterton Cemetery along with his second wife.



(Headstone of Alan Shave in Chesterton Cemetery)

Like his immediate older brother, **Harold** (born in July 1894) opted for a military career from the outset, and the 1911 census records him as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers at the age of 18 years. Thereafter, he steadily rose up the ranks within the Royal Engineers and the Royal Signals until he was promoted to the post of Lieutenant (Quartermaster) in the Royal Corps of Signals on 5th August 1932. On 1st January 1943 he was further honoured by the award of an OBE within the Military Division of the Order as a Major (Inspector of Permanent Communications) in the Royal Signals. Harold married Ethel Motley in Stratton on 4th June 1920, and they had a daughter (Alice) and a son (John). Harold died on 4th March 1957 in Rochester and is buried locally in Kent.

Not to be outdone, the youngest Shave son – **Donald** (born in 1901) – was determined to play his part, although he had to resort to falsifying his date of birth to do so. This was not a particularly unusual practice in those days for young men who wanted to assist the war effort. In his Attestation, Donald's age is shown as "17 years 364 days" with a birth date of 2nd February 1898. Subsequently, a note was added on to this same document confirming that his date of birth was 19th May 1901 as evidenced by his actual birth certificate. Age was not the only questionable fact as Donald was variously described on separate occasions as a "Solicitor's Clerk" and a "Dairy Farmer". Despite his enthusiastic approach, however, I doubt that Donald enjoyed his wartime experience after being posted into the 12th Regiment of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars (Cyclists Division). He was never in the front lines and was mostly engaged in training programmes. His health proved his undoing as he suffered extensively from boils over much of his body which he reckoned arose from "being under canvas in cold and wet weather". Donald was initially treated in hospital in Clacton at the end of 1917 but the boils "kept coming and going" which forced him back into Curragh Military Hospital in Ireland in February 1918 where his Regiment was based at the time and when he was serving as a Drill Instructor between January and April that year.

At this point the authorities decided enough was enough. It was recommended that Donald be invalided out of the service and discharged on account of his being "unfit and underage". The boils from which he suffered so extensively were attributed to the "strain of military service on a boy of 16". Donald was therefore discharged on 16th April 1918, having served for a period of precisely 1 year and 75 days. His military character was described as "good", and he was reckoned to have been "a sober, honest and reliable man". He was awarded a £5 gratuity payment but no military pension.

Donald married Ellen Jolliffe in Weymouth in October 1921, became a Theatre and Cinema Manager, and died in Poole in 1971. He is buried in the graveyard of St Nicholas Church in the Dorset village of Winterborne Clenston, which is very close to where his father was born.

Emily Shave, the matriarch of this extended family, survived both wars; she moved house several times locally but remained in the area. She died on 2nd September 1951, aged 84, and is remembered at the foot of the gravestone of her husband and eldest son in Baunton churchyard.

**Gunner Frank Teal (Royal Garrison Artillery)
Died on 12th June 1917**

**Private Henry Teal (Army Service Corps)
Killed in action 19th August 1917**

The family of George and Elizabeth Teal was much smaller than that of John and Emily Shave but their loss was far greater. They had three children, the eldest being their daughter, Florence (born in 1890), followed by Henry (b. 1893) and Frank (b. 1898). All three children were baptised in Baunton Parish Church. George was a farm worker, a cattleman in 1901 and a groom in 1911. They lived in Wiggold, a small hamlet on the east side of the current Fosse Way (A429) which comprised a series of cottages (numbered 62 to 66) supporting the local farm. The Teals occupied No. 63, and they were later joined at No. 62 by Elizabeth's father (Henry Blowing), his second wife, and their five children from the two marriages. By 1911 Florence Teal had become a school teacher, Henry was a farm worker like his father, while Frank remained at school.

Information on the wartime experiences of both Henry and Frank Teal is limited in the extreme. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that millions of military records relating to WW1 were destroyed by fire when the War Office building in London in which they were housed was hit by an incendiary bomb in September 1940. Frank

was not legally able to join the Army until he was 18 years old in 1916 but there is some evidence to support his brief military career. There is nothing, however, to confirm when Henry decided to sign up, although this is unlikely to have been earlier than the Summer of 1915, and there is no documentary evidence relating to his own wartime service. What follows, therefore, is very much based on the movements of the units in which they were both enrolled when they signed up. The dates of their deaths are known and well recorded but the precise nature of the circumstances that led to their demise has inevitably had to be the subject of conjecture to a large extent. That said, the reality of what might have happened to them both might not be that far from the truth.

As soon as he was 18 years old **Frank Teal** joined the Gloucestershire Regiment as a Reservist, although this was not officially approved until the end of June 1916. He described himself as an Under Carter (ie. an assistant engaged in moving and transporting goods) and was living at Scrubditch Cottage in North Cerney. On 18th May 1916 he was passed fit for general service and formally enlisted in the Army.

Following a transfer to Army Reserve (Class W) at the end of September that year, Frank was instructed to report as a Gunner to No. 3 Depot of the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) in Plymouth on 2nd October 1916. The duties of the RGA were focussed primarily on providing fixed installations on land with large artillery equipment that did not need, and was not able, to be moved. It was armed with heavy large-calibre guns and howitzers which could be positioned at some distance behind the front line and had immense destructive power. In addition to establishing units of heavy and siege artillery as required in the various theatres of war, the RGA also manned a large number of coastal defence units all around the UK and abroad. These Siege Batteries played an increasingly important part in the War, either destroying and neutralising enemy artillery, or offering cover for advancing troops, or protecting potential targets at home such as ports and other naval facilities.



(Siege Battery howitzer)

Frank spent only a few days in Plymouth, probably devoted to a programme of training, before being posted to Queenstown in County Cork on 14th October. During WW1 Queenstown Harbour formed part of the South Irish Coast Defence and was used as a base for Royal Navy destroyers engaged in seeking out and destroying German u-boats operating in the Atlantic Ocean and the English Channel. 43 Coy. RGA to which Frank was assigned was stationed at Fort Carlisle (now known as Fort Davis) and given the responsibility of defending the harbour. In addition to these offensive operations, Queenstown Harbour also provided the facilities for converting merchant ships into armed vessels which were designed and equipped to deceive German submarines and were therefore capable of engaging with them in support of the Royal Navy. In an earlier tragic incident, it was to Queenstown Harbour that the survivors and the dead were brought after the ocean liner, RMS Lusitania, was torpedoed by a German u-boat and sank in May 1915.

On 1st February 1917 Frank was posted to the Irish Command Siege Depot based at Ballyvonare Camp in Buttevant, County Cork. Early on in the War concern was expressed at the lack of beds for casualties in UK hospitals, and in 1916 it was decided to refine the existing convalescent system by creating Command Depots for the rehabilitative training of soldiers who were too fit for the traditional convalescent camp but not yet fit enough to return to their units for active duty. Ballyvonare was one such camp and could accommodate up to 2,000 men. In addition to the fundamental facilities that would be expected in such an establishment, Ballyvonare also offered a gymnasium, a bowling alley, a library, and a post office, all of which would undoubtedly have added some glamour to the soldiers' recovery programmes. Whether Frank was in Ballyvonare in an operational capacity or possibly as a patient is unknown but he was back with the "A" Siege Battery in April 1917 and then the 386 Siege Battery a month later. Sadly, however, he was taken ill shortly afterwards and died on 12th June 1917 in a military hospital at 15-16 Lewes Crescent, Brighton, a magnificent early 19th century property and one of several buildings that had been converted for medical purposes in the town during the War to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers of wounded soldiers, mostly arriving from France and Belgium. The cause of his death was Tubercular Meningitis, a severe disease affecting the body's central nervous system characterised by inflamed membranes around the brain and the spinal cord.

Gunner Frank Teal's military service was short, his life was short, but he played his part in the defence of his country. He was buried in Baunton churchyard on 16th June 1917.

Henry Teal was also living at Scrubditch Cottage in North Cerney when he decided to enlist and join the Army Service Corps (ASC) as a Private. He was assigned to the 406th Mechanical Transport Company which had been formed in July 1915. The officers and men of the Army Service Corps were often described as the unsung heroes of WW1. While the main focus of attention is generally centred on those involved in the fighting, it is easy to forget the enormous support and contribution made by those behind the lines. Soldiers cannot fight effectively without food (and its preparation) or equipment or ammunition. They were unable to advance without a constant supply of vehicles and horses. Throughout the war the vast majority of these supplies had to be brought from the UK, and the logistical demands of assembling what was needed, transporting it across the Channel, and then distributing it across a vast area of northern France and Belgium represented an immense daily challenge. Using every available approach, including railways and waterways, the ASC performed and maintained prestigious feats of logistics in an attempt to ensure that the Army always received what it required at any given time. It was a remarkable achievement bearing in mind that the roads were often subject to aerial bombardment from the opposing forces or suffering from the effects of previous shelling. To offer a sense of scale for this operation, at the start of the war in August 1914 around 120,000 men and 53,000 horses needed to be supported on the Western Front; by the end of the war these numbers had increased to around three million and 500,000 respectively.

The Army Service Corps was divided into units known as Companies, each of which fulfilled specific roles, namely Horse Transport, Remounts (the provision of horses), Labour, Supply (eg. bakeries and butcheries) and Mechanical Transport. The 406th Mechanical Transport Company was under direct orders from senior military authorities, and its duties would have included the constant supply of ammunition from behind the lines, the movement of troops, acting as ambulances to transport the injured, or assisting in the construction of bridges and pontoons where required. It was attached to the II Corps Heavy Artillery, and Henry would therefore

most likely have been occupied in the supply of ammunition and other equipment for the troops and the guns at the battlefield.

During the Summer of 1917 the 406th Mechanical Transport Company was operating as an Ammunition Column in support of the Flanders Offensive which the allied forces undertook between June and November that year. This Offensive began on 7th June with the Battle of Messines and continued with the Third Battle of Ypres



(Transporting shells on the motor-driven light railway during the Battle of Langemarck, August 1917)

from the end of July to the beginning of November. Buoyed by their success at Messines, the British commanders believed that the German army was weakening and would not be capable of standing up to a sustained assault. It did not turn out that way! The Third Battle of Ypres covered eight phases, culminating with the two Battles of Passchendaele which were fought in horrendous weather conditions and in which the British army incurred more than 300,000 casualties. The opening Battle of Pilckem Ridge on 31st July was less successful than planned and fell short of the objectives

set. The advance by II Corps Heavy Artillery was contained and some of the ground gained was subsequently recaptured by a German counter-attack. The Battle of Langemarck soon followed from 16th to 18th August, at which members of the new Tank Corps were expected to prove their worth. However, the Autumn rains had already arrived in earnest and the fighting had to contend with unseasonal adverse weather for weeks on end. The constant rain produced conditions that were totally unsuitable for the essential movement of men, animals and heavy equipment. The tanks suffered in particular and were rarely able to fulfil their role and support the infantry.

Not surprisingly in these circumstances, the British troops again made only limited progress during this second confrontation, and the German garrisons, entrenched within four specific blockhouses or pillboxes, were able to withstand the attack with sustained artillery fire. II Corps Heavy Artillery was again repulsed without fully achieving its objective. A new approach was needed if these formidable obstacles were to be overcome, integrated as they were into the ruins of farmhouses and protected by networks of machine gun positions. The largest of these pillboxes was known as The Cockroft and featured walls up to eight feet thick; it could also house up to 100 soldiers.

An attack on The Cockroft was therefore planned for the morning of 19th August 1917. Instead of relying on the infantry to destroy these buildings, which might well have resulted in a host of unnecessary casualties, it was agreed that the 1st Tank Brigade would be used. Two tanks were assigned to take out each of the four pillboxes, with a further four held in reserve or available for any “mopping up” operation. The terrain generally remained impassable, so the plan was for each tank to travel by road around the pillboxes under cover of darkness and to attack them from the rear. The infantry (from the Royal Warwickshire Regiment) would then advance to complete their destruction. The assault began at 4.45am without any preparatory bombardment. Four of the tanks ended up ditched, two broke down and a further two were knocked out. Nevertheless, the attack overall was successful, and all four pillboxes were captured

by 7am. The outcome, however, represented an advance of no more than 400 yards along a reasonably extended front. British casualties amongst the infantry and the tank crews were remarkably few in the circumstances.

Where, or more likely if, Private Henry Teal fits into this scenario is not clear. I have deliberately provided a brief description of the fighting that took place in the first few weeks of August that year to illustrate the sort of work Army Service Corps personnel would have been undertaking to support the troops directly engaged in battle. The confirmed date of Henry's death was 19th August 1917, and there is no other recorded military action on that day. But there is no way of knowing for certain whether he was involved in the action, or whether he was even there. It has proved impossible to ascertain the circumstances of his death. On the other hand, while he would normally have been working behind the front lines, Henry was nevertheless operating in a war zone and would have had to occasionally acknowledge similar dangers to those faced by the infantry, not least the possibility of heavy gun fire deliberately or accidentally directed by the German army over the top of the advancing British forces.

What is known, however, is that Henry died that day with three of his Private colleagues from the 406th Mechanical Transport Company together with a Gunner from the Royal Garrison Artillery, and all five soldiers are buried in the same row alongside each other in Reninghelst New Military Cemetery, approximately six miles south-west of Ypres (now Ieper) in Belgium. This suggests that perhaps they may well have been operating as a small unit, or part of a larger unit, during the action, probably behind the front lines, and somehow became victims of isolated gunfire from the German defensive positions. In the end, it is probably not worth speculating. The War Ministry's Pension Records indicate that Henry was "killed in action", the Commonwealth War Graves Commission confirms that he died on 19th August 1917 aged 24 years, while yet another reference states that he "died of wounds".

The village of Reninghelst was occupied by Commonwealth forces for most of the war and was sufficiently far from the front lines to provide a suitable station for field ambulances. The New Military Cemetery was opened in November 1915 and houses the graves of around 800 victims. A copy of Henry's CWGC certificate is reproduced below.

In Memory Of

Private

H T TEAL

Service Number: M2/190042

406th Mechanical Transport Coy., Army Service Corps who died on 19 August 1917 Age 24

Son of George and Elizabeth A Teal, of 10, Cheltenham Rd., Stratton, Cirencester, Glos.

Remembered with Honour

RENINGHELST NEW MILITARY CEMETERY

III. A 2.



|||||
COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES
|||||

COMMEMORATED IN PERPETUITY BY THE COMMONWEALTH
WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

What is not in doubt is that in the space of just two months George and Elizabeth Teal had lost a second son. Having barely recovered from the news that Frank had died through illness, they now had to come to terms with the death of their other son in even more unimaginable circumstances. It cannot have been easy for them. Florence, their daughter, had been married for more than three years by this time and had left the family home. There will have been little joy at No. 10 Cheltenham Road where the parents were now living.

Henry's body remains in Belgium but he is also commemorated on the headstone in Baunton churchyard where his brother, Frank, is buried.



The inscription reads :

In
Loving Memory of
FRANK GEORGE TEAL
who died, whilst serving his country,
June 12th 1917, aged 19 years.

Also his brother
HENRY THOMAS TEAL
Killed in action in France
August 19th 1917, aged 24 years.

“With Christ, which is far better”.
R.I.P.

Following her marriage to Charles Nichols in January 1914, Florence gave birth to at least four children over the next fifteen years, including a son, Norman, and the family continued to live in North Cerney. Given the proximity of where her parents were living, therefore, it is to be hoped that the grandchildren at least brought some comfort to George and Elizabeth Teal to offset against the pain of their sons' deaths. They remained in Stratton for the rest of their lives: George died in February 1941 and Elizabeth in December 1954.

Lance Corporal Alfred Sharp (Corps of Military Police)

Died on 11th March 1941

There was a mystery surrounding the burial of Alfred Sharp who was born in Birmingham, lived in Middlesex, injured in Somerset, and died in Dorset. His wife came from London, so why was he buried in the churchyard of St Mary Magdalene, Baunton, a village in rural Gloucestershire?

Alfred Edwin Sharp came from a large family. He was the eighth of nine children born to George and Elizabeth Sharp between 1890 and 1910. He had five sisters and three brothers, and the oldest sibling was 17 years old when Alfred was born in 1907. The family lived in Balsall Heath, Birmingham, where Alfred's father worked as a Foreman in a wheel-making factory. The census for 1911 also records that the four oldest children were in some form of employment at the time.

Alfred became a Commercial Artist and married Eva Olive Price on 3rd June 1935 in Christchurch, The Quinton, in Birmingham. Eva was originally from London, having been baptised in Islington, but was then living in Warley nearby, while Alfred was in Shirley, another suburb of Birmingham. He was 28 years old and Eva 21. They returned to the London suburbs and in 1939 were living at 116 St Margarets Road, Edgware; Eva had a job as a Shop Assistant. Interestingly, the census return for that year reveals that Eva's surname was subsequently amended to "GILL" on 27th July 1945. Might she have re-married after Alfred's death? There were no children from Alfred and Eva's marriage.

With the advent of WW2 Alfred decided to enlist in the Corps of Military Police. The existence of a provost or policing service within the British Army is almost as old as the British Army itself, although the Corps of Military Police was only formed in 1926. A Staff Corps of Cavalry was created at the beginning of the 19th century and, following its ultimate disbandment in 1817, was

subsequently superseded briefly by a Mounted Staff Corps and then by the formation of the Military Mounted Police in 1855. With a significant increase in numbers towards the end of the century, the Military Mounted Police were joined by a new corps of Military Foot Police in 1885. Both organisations continued to operate as separate units throughout the First World War and thereafter until their amalgamation in 1926 to form the Corps of Military Police (CMP). During the Second World War the CMP grew from around 4,000 personnel across all ranks to a total in excess of 50,000. Almost all of the Companies in the CMP operated within the UK but there were also detachments based overseas. Their roles encompassed a number of specialist areas :

- (a) Special Investigation Branch – devoted principally to criminal and other comparable activities.
- (b) Provost Wing – responsible for general policing. Provost Companies were included in the order of battle of Home Commands, Armoured, Infantry and Airborne Divisions.
- (c) Traffic Control Wing – these Companies were deployed throughout the UK and later operated in the Middle East as well as Europe.
- (d) Wings for Field Security, Ports Provost (policing harbours), and Vulnerable Points (guarding key installations) were also created.

Members of the CMP were recognisable by the crimson covers on their service caps and were therefore known colloquially as “The Redcaps”.

Officers in the CMP were generally seconded from other regiments, usually for a two-year posting, but Alfred joined as an NCO. Following a period of training he was posted to the 50th (Northumbrian) Division Provost Company. His duties would probably have included discipline patrols, route signing, dealing with German prisoners-of-war, and various security issues. The principal mode of transport would have been the motorcycle. His CMP Company represented the police unit for the 50th Northumbrian Infantry Division which was involved in the 1940 British

Expeditionary Force and was subsequently one of the two British Divisions to land in Normandy on D-Day, 6th June 1944.

It was a motorcycle that caused the untimely death of Lance Corporal Alfred Sharp. He was no doubt on patrol with several colleagues in Somerset when he was involved in a road accident on 9th March 1941 near Wincanton. He was transferred to Shaftesbury Military Hospital in Dorset but died from his injuries two days later. The Western Gazette published a report on the inquest into Alfred's death in its edition for the 21st March as follows :

MILITARY POLICEMAN KILLED

VAN LIGHT QUESTION AT SHAFTESBURY INQUEST

Suggestions that there was no offside light on a motor van with which a motor-cyclist collided head-on near Wincanton Racecourse entrance were denied at the inquest of the motor-cyclist on Thursday. The motor-cyclist – Lance Corporal Alfred Sharp (33), of the Military Police - was riding from Wincanton to Bruton when the accident happened, at about 10.45pm, and the van was going the opposite way.

At the inquest, conducted by Mr. W. H. Creech (North Dorset Coroner), Lance-Corporal John Ford, who was riding ahead of Sharp, said that about a mile the Bruton side of the racecourse he met a motor-van on which the only light that he could see was a near-side front head-lamp. He saw no other vehicle on the road. The van involved in the accident was similar to the one that he had passed, and it had only one headlamp – Lance Corporals Goodall and Dixon corroborated.

The driver of the van, Private Reginald Bedford, said that when he left Bruton, the front lights of the van were operating, and he would know if a light went out. When about twenty yards from the van, the motor-cyclist appeared to swing over the crown of the road into the

van's offside front wing. The van's off wheels were on the white line. Similar evidence was given by Sergeant F. Constable.

Major Colin Somerville-Large said death was due to shock and hemorrhage (sic) resulting from injuries – Lieutenant R. A. Westray identified the body, and P.C. Hucker also gave evidence.

A verdict of “Accidental death” was recorded.

It has taken quite a lot of investigative research to uncover the reason why Alfred Sharp was buried in the churchyard of St Mary Magdalene in Baunton on 15th March 1941, just four days after his death. The Church's own Burial Register records his abode as Shaftesbury but that clearly reflects the town where he actually died rather than his more permanent residence. The Grave Registration Report Form issued by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and dated 20th September 1957, considerably later than the date of his death, states that the grave would be maintained “By Relation”, which suggests therefore that there must have been some family connection, however tenuous. Furthermore, while the official Government Probate Death Index records Alfred's address as 116 St Margarets Road, Edgware, Middlesex, it significantly notes that the administration of his estate was granted through the Gloucester Registry Office, further strengthening the likelihood of a more local family involvement.

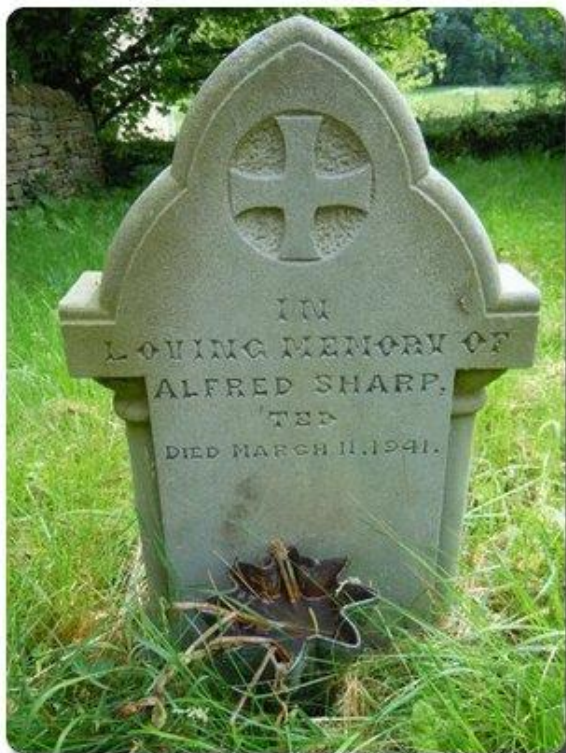
The headstone in the churchyard offers another interesting aspect of this mystery. When it was erected in the churchyard is unknown but the wording is significant. There is no reference to any other member of his family nor is there any mention of the fact that Alfred was serving as a Lance Corporal in the CMP at the time of his death. Indeed, the headstone provides all the appearance of a civilian death. The inscription also includes the abbreviated name “TED”, which is the only time the use of such a familiar term appears to have been recorded.

The mystery was finally resolved through the discovery that Alfred died intestate without making a valid Will. His lawful widow, Eva, together with his father, George, were therefore required to seek Letters of Administration in relation to his estate which they successfully obtained on 27th March 1941 at the District Probate Office in Gloucester. Crucially, as far as the mystery of Alfred's burial is concerned, the Letters of Administration revealed that Eva was residing at 129 Cheltenham Road, Stratton at the time. Subsequent research into Eva's background then confirmed that her maternal grandfather (Edwin Gardner) was born in Preston near Cirencester and her maternal grandmother (Olive) in Stratton. In 1911 the Gardner family was resident in Islington where Eva's mother, Jane, lived with her parents and three older siblings. Edwin Gardner's occupation was recorded as a retired policeman. In September 1911 Jane married William Price in St Jude's Church, Islington, and their daughter, Eva, was born in October 1913.

At some point thereafter Edwin and Olive Gardner moved back to their childhood roots in Gloucestershire. Edwin died in 1930 but the 1939 Register reveals that Olive, now 85 years old and "incapacitated", is living at 129 Cheltenham Road, Stratton together with her eldest son, George, his wife and their two daughters. For eight months up to May 1941 London was subject to the intense German bombing campaign known as The Blitz, and many people were evacuated from London to the countryside throughout the War. How sensible and practical it would have been, therefore, while Alfred was serving with the CMP, for Eva to decide to escape from the ordeal faced daily by those who lived in the suburbs, to seek some relief from the horrors inflicted on the capital over such a long period, and to move from Edgware down to the rural Cotswolds where she could stay with her grandmother and one of her uncles for as long as circumstances dictated.

In the light of this possible scenario it is reasonable to suppose that Eva was already living in Stratton at the time of Alfred's death, and the process of arranging for his burial and subsequently being granted the Letters of Administration for his estate follow naturally. In the minutes of the Baunton Church Vestry meeting on 27th April

1941 “the Vicar referred to the churchyard and the question of fees for burying non-parishioners.” These minutes go on to record that “He [the Vicar] announced that from now onwards a fee would be charged for all burials in the churchyard according to the scale laid down by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.” These entries imply that in March 1941 the churchyard was still being made available for the burial of non-parishioners and at no cost, which would help to explain how Eva was able to organise Alfred’s burial so soon after his death. It surely also confirms that Eva must have been the only person who used the familiar name “TED” which is why it is inscribed on the headstone.



(Alfred Sharp's headstone in Baunton churchyard)

Epilogue

There is little to add to the individual stories of Privates Shave and Teal, Gunner Teal and Lance Corporal Sharp but collectively they remind us of their own personal response to the national cause when it was needed most. They deserve to be remembered and to be honoured for their wartime contribution, and not just as names on a churchyard headstone.

In addition to their specific recognition in St Mary Magdalene churchyard, the three WW1 soldiers are also commemorated on the Stratton Cross memorial located in Ermin Way, Stratton at the southern end of the graveyard of the parish church, alongside the other seventeen Stratton parishioners who also fell in that War.



(Stratton Cross Memorial)



There is, however, no reference to Alfred Sharp amongst the five WW2 victims listed on the memorial, although his omission here may well reflect the fact that, despite being buried in Baunton, he was never a parishioner in the area, nor does his headstone acknowledge the fact that his death incurred while on military duty during the war.

Paul Collins
May 2024