



The Bluntisham-cum-Earith War Memorial and Military Service in WWI.

Author - Marian Land . Photographs Marian Land, unless otherwise credited



My husband and I moved to Bluntisham in 1976. My interest in family history led me to join the Huntingdonshire Family History Society where I served as MI Co-ordinator at the time of the IWM National Inventory of War Memorials. Experiencing a lack of interest amongst members I decided to do the research myself so between 1988-1991 I travelled around the old county photographing and recording all the war memorials and rolls of honour I could find. Thus began a life-long interest in war memorials and the lives of those named on them.

On June 12 1919 at a Special Parish Meeting held in Earith Day School it was proposed by Rev. B.G. Collins, "That a memorial or memorials be put up in memory of the brave ones who have fallen in the Great War". A committee was formed which reported back at a public meeting held on 19 December 1919 in the Church Room, Bluntisham. The committee recommended, "That we erect as a War Memorial a cross, copies of which were on view, and that the site be the small green at the crossroads near the church". It was decided that the carving on the cross would be on both sides, the cross resting on a concrete foundation 18" high, the earth tapering to the height of the foundation. Further that the cross be 12' high.



Photo - Peter Searle

Printed slips were to be distributed, the forms giving particulars re the Memorial, its approximate cost etc. and that small copies of the proposed memorial accompany the forms in small envelopes to be called for later. Mr. L.R. Edwards and Mr. G. Moore agreed to act as collectors for Earith and Mr. Duggins, Mr. C. Godfrey for Bluntisham. It was suggested that Mr. Headley be asked to draw two plans to be exhibited in each village. It was further suggested that the lettering names should be alphabetical and the lettering should be leaded. The Hunts Post dated 3 February 1921 carried a report of the unveiling ceremony by Col. Tebbutt. The report described the memorial as being of Cornish Granite, surmounted by a Celtic ornamental cross. The report goes on to list the committee members and the platform party which included the Rev. Henry Sayers who returned for the unveiling since he had known most of the men named on the memorial.

However, the Memorial had to be moved in 1976 when a car crashed into it. The Police insisted that it be dismantled since it was dangerous. It was taken to David Searle's Yard, 12 Hollidays Road.



Photograph - Marian Land

The Minute Book of the local branch of the Royal British Legion has two entries relating to the siting of the memorial:

06.04.1976 General Committee Meeting to discuss the future position of the war memorial after the damage and subsequent removal from the highway.

A general discussion took place on the best possible position to resite the memorial and a proposal was put by Mr. S.J. Ketteringham, seconded by Mr. W.C. Edwards that taking all factors into consideration the memorial would best be sited in a public place and this was considered to be on the amenity area in front of the old peoples' bungalows, Rectory Road. This was put to the meeting and agreed.

29.10.1976 At the General Committee Meeting it was reported that the memorial had since been erected in its new position in front of the old people's bungalows on Rectory Road, Bluntisham. The secretary said the insurance claim for damage to the memorial had been fully settled. Thanks was expressed to the secretary for the part he had paid in the settlement of the claim.

For many years I listened to the names of the men from Bluntisham-cum-Earith as they were read out at the Remembrance Day Service. Then, as the centenary of the start of WW1 approached, I began to ask myself who these men were and I decided to research the 35 names on the village memorial.

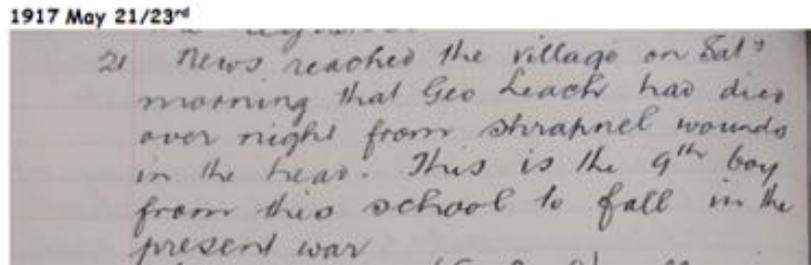
I wanted to find out about their family background as well as their military service. I used a variety of sources including census returns, parish registers, Baptist Chapel records, school log books, local newspapers, Commonwealth War Graves Commission web site, service records, pension records, medal rolls, War Diaries, National Roll of the Great War, Kelly's directories, local history books etc.



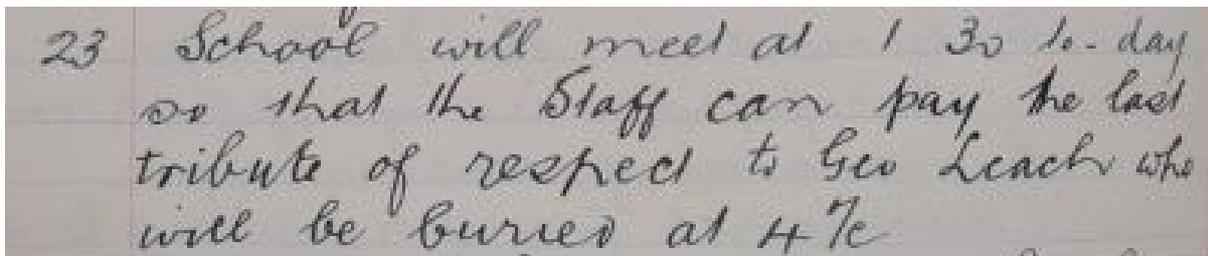
There are two Commonwealth War Graves from WW1 in St. Mary's Churchyard.

Archie Jim Fox, Essex Regiment, died on 16 February 1917 aged 28. He died of pneumonia only one month after joining up. He was given a military funeral, the service being taken by the Rev. Henry Sayers who said that although the young man had not witnessed the horrors of battle, nor the glory of victory, yet he had died for his country and should be treated as one who had worn the King's uniform, and who, had he lived, would have acted as gallantly as many of the young men who had left these villages and seen more active service.

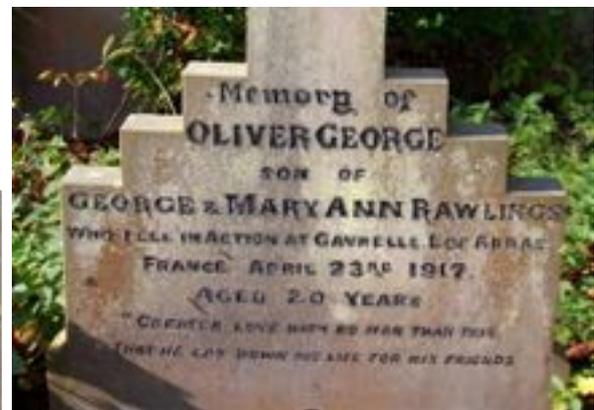
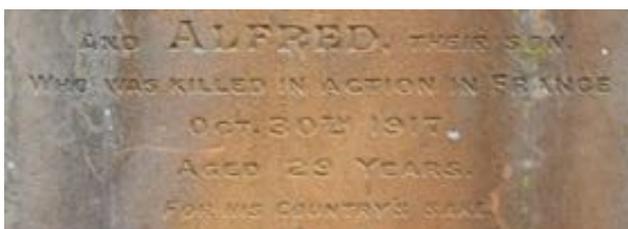
George Ernest Leach, Royal Fusiliers, died of wounds on 18 May 1917. In addition to a report of the funeral in the Hunts Post, Mr. E. Duggins, the headmaster of Bluntisham School made a note in the school logbook.



Photographs above & below - Cambridgeshire Archives



Some men are remembered on the headstones of family members in both St. Mary's Churchyard and the Baptist Chapel Burial Ground.



Local newspapers are a wonderful source of information. In 1915 the Hunts Post regularly listed the names of those serving from each parish. Sometimes information is given about a brave action eg. award of the Military Medal, the death of a soldier, a funeral report or the unveiling of a memorial with details of family members present. From 1916 the reports of the St. Ives Rural Tribunal show which men appealed against their call up and if they were successful. Mr. Duggins listed the old boys from Bluntisham School who died on the inside cover of the school logbook as well as noting when news reached the school of a death.

The Parish Magazine of November 1916 listed all the men serving. The Baptist Chapel Minute Book recorded special services held for those who had died.

I have made extensive use of the two major family history websites to find Service Records, Pension Records, Medal Rolls, War Diaries in addition to Census returns and Family Histories posted by fellow researchers.



With the help of John and Sue Morgan I put together an exhibition for the “Bluntisham-cum-Earith Remembers” event in 2014 based on the men who died.

However, during my research I became very interested in the men who came home again, often physically or psychologically damaged. I determined to find out all I could about these men. I used the same sources as before and I talked to relatives who still live in the villages today

I produced a folder for each man to include some family history and information on his military service. The basic data was entered on a spreadsheet which now has over 200 names. I have included all the men I have found who were either born in Bluntisham-cum-Earith or who lived in the villages at some point during their lives. This means I have found men who were born in Bluntisham but who are remembered on other war memorials eg. the Gentle brothers who are remembered on the seafront memorial at Hunstanton.



On 1 July 2016 I organised a service at the war memorial to commemorate the first day of the battle of the Somme when Frank Hewitt was killed



Tea was then served in my garden opposite and my research was on display



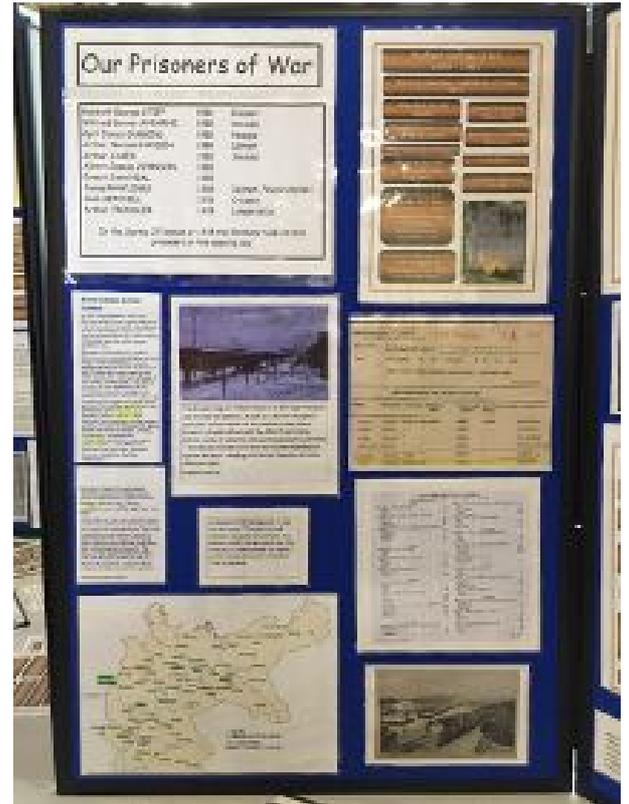
Liz Eddy invited me to display some of my research at the Sayers Festival in 2017. The Rev. Henry Sayers was involved in parish affairs in many guises. Whilst parish priest he served as: -

- poor law guardian
- member of the St. Ives Rural Military Service Tribunal
- school manager, trustee and occasional teacher
- member of Hunts Education Committee
- member of committee supporting Belgian refugees in the village
- president and vice-captain of the village cricket club
- honorary treasurer of the Bluntisham, Earith and Colne Horticultural Society.

Thus he knew most of the men commemorated on the war memorial.



To commemorate the signing of peace in 1919 I did a display in the Baptist Chapel Peace Café on our Prisoners of War and some of those who returned home. I concentrated on those who still had family in the village today



More recently I have been trying to find out about the village women who served in the Red Cross or Scottish Women's Hospital. Alice Mary Tebbutt of the Walnut Trees served in Serbia. In February 1916 Alice gave an interview to the Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette in which she described her duties with the 2nd Scottish Women's Hospitals Unit under the heading, "A BATH LADY IN SERBIA NURSED WOUNDED AUSTRALIANS IN MALTA INTERNED BY THE AUSTRIANS" Photographs from the IWM bring Alice's experience to life.



There are two other war memorials in Bluntisham.

The memorial in the Baptist Chapel was unveiled by John Alfred Searle and Holley Ashmore on 21 August 1921. It commemorates the young men who were associated with the Church. It consists of a plate of brass inscribed with their names and mounted on oak carved by Percy Humphreys.

The memorial inside St. Mary's Church was cleaned and repainted in 1981 when the names of those who died in WW2 were added. There are 32 names from WW1 on the wooden panel. Alfred Chapman, Cornelius Fox and Ernest Symonds were not included. All three had left the parish and were living elsewhere with their spouses.



Albert Ernest Jarvis built the bungalow where I live. I have included a link to use his file as an example and it can be accessed through [this link](#)

A list of the people whom I have researched can be found here on the Bluntisham Heritage Project website [here](#). I have a file on every person on this list and if you would like to know more about any person named on the list please contact via the contact link on the website.