

Smith
Private John W. Smith
200492 2nd/5th North Staffordshire Regiment killed in action March 6th 1918
Age 22

John W. Smith is remembered on the Biddulph memorials. He may be Private John William Smith, 200492 of the 2nd/5th North Staffordshire Regiment. John was killed in action on March 6th 1918.

John was born in 1896 to John and Elizabeth Smith. His parents had married in 1892 at St. Mary's, Bucknall. The family were living at 19, South Street, Norton-in-the-Moors in 1891 where John Snr. was a coal miner. John William, his parents and two older sisters, all gave their place of birth as Stoke-on-Trent. His two younger sisters had been born at Norton.

Ten years later and the family still resided at the same address in Norton. In the 1911 census John, aged 15, was described as a colliery worker. The family still lived in Norton (15a, North Street) in 1920.

His service records and the census details do not suggest any links to Biddulph and unless further information comes to light it is difficult to say with any certainty that this is the John W. Smith remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Elaine Heathcote.

Duff
Private Henry Duff
G/44441 2nd Batt. London Regiment, Royal Fusiliers
Killed in Action 21st March 1918 Age 35

Henry was one of the many children born to Henry and Jane Duff. He was born in 1883 in Airth, Stirling, Scotland. In 1901, aged 18, he was working as an assistant grocer in Kirkintilloch, Dumbartonshire and living with his parents.

At some time during the early 1900's he must have moved to the Biddulph and Congleton area. He met and married Hannah Jane Dale at St. John's, Buglawton, Congleton in 1911.

According to the British Legion records he enlisted in February 1917, in Hanley. Unfortunately no service records have been traced although a medal card is available. These records also indicate an occupation of him being an agent for Pearl Insurance with a home address of 21 Thomas Street, Biddulph. This, however, is at variance with Alf Beard's records which give an address of Davenshaw Lodge, Buglawton. Maybe this was Hannah's address before she was married, although it has not been possible to definitely trace either of them in 1911.

In February 1917 Henry enlisted at Hanley in the 2nd Battalion Royal Fusiliers. Prior to Henry joining the battalion they had returned to England in December 1914 from service in India. They then sailed to Gallipoli in March 1915 to fight in that terrible

campaign until January 1916 when their division, the 29th, were transferred to the Western Front. They arrived in March 1916 and prepared to fight in the Battle of the Somme and saw major conflicts at Albert and Transloy Ridge.

In mid-1917, although his medal card gives no date of entry, Henry would have joined his battalion in the field. The 2nd battalion had already seen action in the Arras Offensive in the spring, and soon Henry would have his baptism of fire in the oozing slimy mud of the 3rd Battle of Ypres. This was a desolate landscape of water filled shell holes where the only safe passage was by using duckboards. It was a struggle to bring up rations to the troops by horse and waggon, so mules and pack horses were used. 29th Division fought bravely at Langemarck, Broodseinde and Poelcapelle in the dreaded salient whilst pushing toward Passchendaele. Later in November the division were ordered south to fight in the Battle of Cambrai.

After a long slow rail journey the division arrived into a battle not only renowned for the use of tanks but also for the thousands of field guns employing updated firing tactics. On the 20th and 21st November the 29th Division were used in immediate support of these actions and again during the attacks on Bourton Wood where over ninety tanks were in action. The Fusiliers came under a heavy barrage of shelling with many of their men lost and wounded.

After spending a cold and miserable winter holding their trenches on the Flanders battlefield, the Fusiliers were now confronted with the German Spring Offensive in March 1918. In what is believed to have been about this time in the actions at Estaires that Henry was to fall on the field. Private Henry Duff was thirty five when he died in battle on the 21st March 1918. He now rests in the Oxford Road cemetery Ypres and is remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock and Elaine Bryan

Lovelock

Private Walter Charles Ernest Lovelock
200721 'D' Coy., 2nd/6th Bn. North Staffordshire Regiment
Formerly 3490 1st/5th North Staffordshire Regiment
Killed in Action 21st March 1918 Age 25



Born in Newington, London, Walter Charles Ernest Lovelock's birth was registered in the first quarter of 1893 at Lambeth. He was the only son of Charles and Mary Ann Lovelock. In 1891 Charles and Mary Ann had lived in Luton, where Charles was a tailor. Ten years later, the family had moved north to Knypersley and Charles was now an *'Evangelical Preacher, - Church of England'* according to the 1901 census. Home was at Knypersley Gardens and Walter, the baby of the family, had two sisters - Sophia and Ruth.

In 1909 and at the age of 50, Charles Lovelock died and was buried at St. Lawrence. His widow appears in the 1911 census at 123, Chain Row as a dressmaker and Walter, now aged 18, was described as an apprentice grocer with the Co-op Stores. In September 1914 Walter enlisted at Biddulph in the Biddulph Territorials - the 1/5th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. His name appeared in the Chronicle in the list of recruits. He gave his address as Newpool Terrace.

The battalion did their initial training at Butterton Hall Camp before moving to the Luton and Bishops Stortford areas to complete their intensive training. In March 1915, and now attached to 46th North Midland Division, the troops embarked at Southampton for a crossing to France. However Walters's medal card shows he entered France on 29th June 1915 with a regimental number of 3490. July finds Walter and his many Biddulph mates of the same battalion serving in the Ypres salient and seeing their first action at Hooze, a position on the Menin Road overlooking the ruined town of Ypres. In September the division moved to the Lens area to fight in the Battle of Loos. Here on the 13th October 1915, in a murderous battle at the Hohenzollern Redoubt, the 1/5th Battalion lost over 200 brave soldiers. This included eight Biddulph men who fell in battle. Although severely wounded Walter survived this terrible attack and would have been taken to a dressing station for treatment. By December his wounds had proved serious enough to return Walter to England. The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of the 25th December reported that Walter Lovelock, 1st-5th NS, was wounded.

An article in the Weekly Sentinel of January 1916 said Walter was now at home on furlough. It is known that at some time Walter transferred battalions to the 2/6th, and this unit at the time was based in England, so it may well be that as a result of his wounds he joined this new unit with light duties. Should this have been the case Walter would not have returned to France until March 1917 with the 2/6th North Stafford's who were attached to 59th (2nd North Midland) Division 176th Brigade and first saw action at Estree on the old Somme battle ground. Serving in "D company" Walter was to fight on the Hindenburg Line, Havrincourt and Flequieres over the next months, with a rest in June at Barastre in a safer back area.

The next battle for 59th Division, in September, was the 3rd Battle of Ypres. Here they found appalling conditions; shellfire had destroyed the whole area and now the battlefield consisted of deep mud with shell holes full of stagnant water. This was a battlefield that would deteriorate even more as the Stafford's fought on the Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood. In October the battalion were transferred to fight at Cambrai. By now they had lost many men but thankfully were soon to be taken out of line on the 23rd December, so the lads spent Christmas and through January 1918 at rest and recoup at Le Cauroy.

In February the division, now strengthened, was in action again at St Quentin and Bapaume. March saw the German Spring Offensive start along a wide front and many

men were lost or taken prisoner in these attacks. On the 21st March 1918, twenty five year old Private Walter Charles Ernest Lovelock, sadly fell during this offensive. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial. A fellow Biddulph soldier Jesse Wright of the same battalion also fell on this day.

For almost a year his mother must have clung to the possibility that he was still alive as the Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of 15th February 1919 printed a photograph of him and a report:

“Lance Corp. W.C.E.Lovelock, Biddulph, 270271, Gas Section, 2nd – 6th North Staffs Regiment, was reported missing on March 21st 1918. Mrs. Lovelock, 54 High Street, Biddulph, the widowed mother of the missing soldier, will be glad to hear any news of her son from any returned prisoner of war or other soldiers who may have been near him on March 21st.”

Walter is also remembered on all of the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote.

Wright
Private Samuel Jesse Wright
203162 2/6th Battalion North Staffs Regiment
Killed in action 21st March 1918 Age 23

Samuel was born on the 24 June 1894 in Lamberts Lane, Congleton. His parents Francis Wright and Annie Elizabeth nee Cawley had married at St John's Church Smallwood, Cheshire in 1891.

Samuel was baptised on July 6th at St Peters Church in Congleton. He was probably given the middle name of Jesse after his grandfather, Jesse Wright, who was the coachman for the Bateman family. His father's occupation was given as farmer at Samuel's baptism.

By 1901 the family lived at Gillow Heath. Francis (or Frank as he was known) was now 35 and still a farmer. Samuel, then 6 years of age had an older sister, Dora, aged 8 years.

By 1911 the family had expanded with the birth of Alice and they now lived in Well Street Biddulph. Francis was now working as a 'loader' in the coal mine - underground. In this census Samuel Jesse was aged 16 and worked at the colliery. His job was to oil the points on the lines. Dora was working as a shop assistant in a draper's shop.

Sadly in 1911 his mother Annie Elizabeth died aged 40 and in 1913 his father remarried -to Miss Frances Worth.

Samuel enlisted in 1914. He would have been 19. His name was recorded in the Congleton Chronicle with the list of territorials from Biddulph:

Samuel Jesse Wright of Well Street Biddulph

Samuel initially enlisted in the 1/5th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment at Biddulph in September 1914. His medal card shows two additional service numbers - 3298 and 20073. There are only accounts in local newspapers to help with his military history as no service records can be found.

This battalion initially trained at Butterton Hall Camp before moving to the Luton and Bishops Stortford areas to fulfil their intensive training. In March 1915, and now attached to 137th Brigade 46th North Midland Division, the troops embarked at

Southampton for a crossing to France. However, Samuel's medal card shows that he entered France on 29th June 1915 - so he must have entered with a later draft. By July, Samuel and his many Biddulph mates of the same battalion, were serving in the Ypres salient and seeing their first action at Hooge, a position on the Menin Road overlooking the ruined town of Ypres. In September the division moved to the Lens area to fight in the Battle of Loos. It was here on the 13th October 1915, in a murderous battle at the Hohenzollern Redoubt, the 1/5th Battalion lost over 200 brave soldiers that day. This included eight Biddulph men who fell in battle.

At some time later Samuel transferred battalions to the 2/6th North Stafford's, who were attached to 59th (2nd North Midland) Division 176th Brigade, and first saw action at Estree on the old Somme battle ground in the spring of 1917. Serving in "D company" Samuel was to fight on the Hindenburg Line, Havrincourt and Flequieres during the following months. In June they were thankfully out of line and at rest; the battalion were in a safer back area at Barastre.

The next battle for 59th Division came in September 1917- this was the 3rd Battle of Ypres. Here the North Stafford's found appalling conditions. Shellfire had destroyed the whole area and now the battlefield was a sea of deep mud with shell holes full of stagnant slimy water. The battlefield would deteriorate even more as the Stafford's fought on the Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood. A respite from the salient came in October when the battalion were transferred to fight at Cambrai. By now they had lost many men but thankfully were soon to be taken out of line on the 23rd December. This enabled the lads of the 2/6th to spend Christmas and January 1918 at rest and refit at Le Cauroy.

In February 1918 the division, which was by now strengthened, was in action again at St Quentin and Bapaume. March saw the German Spring Offensive commence along the whole front and in these enemy attacks many men were lost or taken prisoner. On the 21st March 1918, twenty three year old Private Samuel Jesse Wright sadly fell during this offensive. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial. A fellow Biddulph soldier Walter Lovelock of the same battalion also fell on this day. His name is also on the St Lawrence memorial as J Wright and Jesse Wright on the Albert Square Memorial.

Kathleen Walton and Michael Turnock

Lees
Private Alfred Robin Martyn Lees
M2/017097 Royal Army Service Corps
attd. 2nd/1st North Midland Field Amb. Royal Army Medical Corps
Died 22nd March 1918 age 34

On the 9th October 1884, Alfred Robin Martyn Lees (known as Robin) was born into a privileged lifestyle. He was baptised in the parish church of Tongue-cum-Alkrington on 22nd November 1884 by the Rector of Melford, Suffolk:

No. 414						
1884. Nov: 22	Alfred Robin	James Arthur	Lees	Alkington Mount	Barrister at Law.	Charles. M. Martyn. Rector of Malvern Suffolk.
Born Oct: 9 th 1884	Martyn Son of	+ Lucy Jane	his' into the Canal by H. Street.		April 5 th 1885.	
No. 415						

His mother's maiden name had been 'Martyn' – hence its inclusion in his name.

Robin had two sisters, Grace Elinor and Lucy Doris. His father, James Arthur Lees was a Justice of the Peace and was able to provide Robin with a private education at Stubbington and Malvern Colleges.

In 1901 as a 16 year old boarder he resided at Malvern College. Ten years later he was included in the census return of the Palace Hotel, Birkdale Southport Lancashire where he was described as a student of mining engineering. His sister Grace was also a guest at the hotel in 1911.

By 1914 the family resided at the Moor House and when war was declared, Robin quickly enlisted at Ashton under Lyme, joining the Army Service Corps. Before the end of the month on the 29th August, he landed in France. He initially served as a driver with the corps in the coastal areas of Le Havre and Rouen where the army had many Base Depots requiring motor transport. It is believed that in 1916 he then attached to the 2nd /1st North Midland Field Ambulance of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

No service records have been found which makes it difficult to establish his military history; however his father, James Arthur, shared many of Robin's letters with the readers of the Chronicle and Sentinel providing a useful source of information. As a driver he would serve in front line areas - always in danger of enemy shelling. Robin's unit as Field Ambulance to 46th North Midlands Division found action from 1916 in the Battle of the Somme. The role of these units relied for their transport on both horse drawn and motor ambulances to take wounded and sick soldiers from the dressing stations in the front line areas, to casualty clearing stations in a safer back area. Many Biddulph soldiers would have served and fallen in this division.

The letters from Robin provide the reader with fascinating details of the conditions and of the events that he was experiencing:

Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel (December 1914):

"The following are extracts from a letter received by Mr. J.A. Lees, J.P., The Moor House, Biddulph, from his only son, Mr. Robin Lees, who joined the Army Service Corps at the outbreak of war, and was at once dispatched to France.

The letter details many incidents of the young soldier's adventurous life at the front, and was dated from Havre, December 1st. (1914). In it he thanked all for letters and for buns etc.; they were a great treat. Though the pastry obtainable there was extraordinarily good, such things as plum cakes or Sultana buns were unknown. At times Mr. Lees wrote the life savours of 'Alice in Wonderland'. He had to drive his officer (Major Walker, R.E.) out to Etre-tal on the coast. This was a little sea-side place with several hotels, all shut up for the winter, very picturesque, with nice cliffs and golf links, which looked rather second-rate. They thought of taking the empty hotels for hospitals, but the car refused to start back again, and they stayed for two nights before they came with another car. He had a most beautiful bedroom in a partly closed hotel, which was a great treat, as he had not seen a

bed for four months. They gave him awfully good food, and all free of charge. Recently he took an officer through Rouen to Forge-les-Gana, a rest camp for tired men and horses. Mr. Lees took some officers to overtake a convoy of siege guns, 26 traction engines, dragging enormous guns and accessories out to Yuetel, stayed the night at Bolbec, back to Yuetel same day and to Havre the next. He was now in better quarters, being able to sleep indoors.

It was very nice to see the troops arriving. Each batch with its own officers marches to its destination with a French interpreter, and a few French children hanging on. All the talk about so many foreigners being able to talk English certainly did not apply anywhere where he had been. They seemed to make not the slightest attempt to learn any English, and have only four words on which to ring the changes, namely: Biscuit, Penny, Souvenir, and Good Night. The latter they used in the middle of the morning, or any other time of day.'

In the Chronicle (February 1915) another 'Newsy Letter from Mr. R. Lees of Biddulph' appeared:

'A very interesting letter was received this week from **Mr. Robin Lees**, the only son of Mr. J.A. Lees, J.P., the Moor House, who has been in France on motor transport service duty, since the early days of the war. The letter, which was dated, Le Havre, February 19th, conveys thanks for buns etc, which, Mr. Lees says, are a great treat. They have had several cold, windy days, and the ground had dried nicely, but now the roads had relapsed into their former state of slush. The same journey was practically taken every day, and they visited most of the huts being erected. These seem to be dotted about on every bit of waste land, and there are numerous houses used as offices. An interpreter generally travels with the car, these men now being served out with English khaki, as they were too conspicuous at the front. Mr Lees mentions that some of the French regiments correspond well with those of the pictures of Napoleon's time. On Thursday last, he saw an aeroplane sniping about, the first he had seen there. Driving about at night was very awkward, very few street lamps being lighted and headlights were not allowed. He says the French drive with the silencer cut out, and the resultant noise was appalling. The people seemed to listen for the cars rather than look for them.

It seemed, Mr. Lees wrote, difficult there to realise what was going on at the front, except for the train loads of troops always going away and the piles of clothing and rifles and things coming back, with sometimes gun carriages, etc. just riddled with holes.

A man at the remount camp told Mr. Lees that it was very awkward there, as they have got so many French and German horses, which do not understand the English language, and when told to do one thing those horses generally did something quite different. Mr. Lees concludes his letter with the following terse sentence: "Please send me some carbolic soap – our sleeping room is not often turned out." Comment is needless!

Robin must have been a very talented young man. Not only was he an engineer but he was also very musical, as the following article suggests:

The Chronicle - April 15th 1916:

'A particular catchy song has just been added to the musical world, entitled 'Coming'. Words are by Mr. J.A. Lees, JP of the Moor House and the music by Mr. Robin M Lees, B.Sc. Tech., at present Private, Motor Transfer, ASC, serving in France since 1914.'

All the words were published in the Chronicle.

The 46th Division in 1917 were in action in the Ancre offensive - fighting at Rehemoy Graban in a particularly bitter struggle, and again on the Hindenburg Line. Through the winter of 1917 into 1918 the conditions for transport was extremely hazardous for the drivers, none of whom carried arms; subsequently the ambulance drivers of the RAMC

suffered many losses and sadly at the age of thirty four on the 22nd March 1918, Private Alfred Robin Martyn Lees was to fall on the battlefield in the Somme district. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Pozeries Memorial. Robin's medal card indicates his 1914 Star was embellished with a clasp.

Robin left a will and probate was granted on January 20th 1919 at London to James Arthur Lees, Gentleman and John George Ritson, solicitor. Effects were valued at £1801 18s 4d.

Private Alfred Robin Martyn Lees is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Elaine Heathcote & Michael Turnock

Stott
L/Telegraphist Frederick Stott
J/19834 (Dev) Royal Navy
HMS Gaillardia
Died 22nd March 1918 Age 21

Frederick Stott was born at Biddulph in August 1896 – the son of William and Annie Susan Stott (nee Nicholson). His father, William, was a grocery manager and at the time of Fred's birth managed the Co-op Stores.

As a manager, William and Annie had moved extensively around the country. William originated from Rochdale and Susan was from Jersey. The places of birth of their ten children shows that they lived for a few years in Worksop, followed by Chester, Biddulph, Lichfield, Canterbury and finally, at Barry Docks in Glamorgan.

The 1911 census finds the family living at 84, Castleland Street, Barry Dock where William was employed as a 'measurer'. William and Annie had been married for 23 years and had raised ten children – all of whom were still alive. Fred was aged 14 and a butcher's apprentice. Presumably it was from South Wales that Fred enlisted in the Royal Navy.

Without service records its unknown on what ships or branch of the Navy he served in throughout the war. However it is known that in 1918 he was a Leading Telegraphist; a highly skilled sailor who would have studied his trade at a Naval Wireless School being taught in coding and decoding, sending messages at speed, setting up and repairing wireless equipment.

At this time Fred served on board HMS Gaillardia - a new ship built on the Clyde in 1917 and so a warship that immediately went into war routine. The Gaillardia was an Aubrietia Class Convoy Sloop Q-Ship of 1250 tons. This class of ship was one of the closely guarded secrets of the war. Q-Ships were crewed and built to deceive the enemy, a ship of mercantile appearance with false bulkheads that opened to reveal heavy guns ready to fire on surfacing enemy U Boats who were expecting to sink an unarmed merchant vessel. A similar class were the Dazzle Ships of the time.

In March 1918 the Gaillardia was operating in the North Sea off Orkney carrying out buoying operations in the newly laid Great Northern Barrage which stretched between Scotland and Norway; a barrage of mines aimed to interrupt enemy U Boats movement. On the 22nd March 1918 whilst carrying out their duty the Gaillardia struck one of the mines, was blown up and sunk with the loss of sixty six sailors out of a crew of ninety two men.

The lost included their Captain Schafer and sadly twenty one year old Fred Stott who died at sea and is remembered on the Plymouth Naval Memorial. Another memorial list kept in the Barry Memorial Hall shows 75 names of men who died from the town, however this is not complete as the full list was accidentally shredded in the 1980s.

Fred is also remembered on the cenotaph in Albert Square.

Michael Turnock and Elaine Heathcote

Bowyer
Private John Bowyer,
21575 Coldstream Guards
Died 27th March 1918 Age 27



Initially we could find only a few details about Private Bowyer which led us to believe that he had died on active service in March 1915. He is commemorated on the war memorials at Biddulph and Brindley Ford but information on his early life and military service has proved difficult to trace. The only clue that we found was in a newspaper cutting from the Chronicle:

Bros. Stockton

“Lance-Corporal H. Stockton (North Staffordshire Regiment), New Buildings, Black Bull, died of gas poisoning on May 22nd, 1918. He enlisted in September, 1914, prior to which he was employed by Messrs. R.Heath and Sons. He was 26 years of age. A brother, Gunner P. Stockton, R.F.A., aged 19, was killed in action on July 30th, 1917; another brother, Private James Stockton, Worcester Regiment, was discharged through wounds. A brother-in-law, Private John Bowyer, Coldstream Guards, aged 27 years, died while on active service on March 27th 1915.”

Believing the Chronicle details to be correct, it would then seem that Private John Bowyer’s sister had married a Stockton and John’s death occurred on March 27th 1915. St. Lawrence marriage register records the marriage of Harry Stockton and Mary Bowyer on 24th January 1918. She gave her father’s name as Edward and his occupation as a lime burner.

From this detail it has been possible to locate John in the 1891, 1901 and 1911 census returns. John was born in 1890 and his birth was registered at Norton. In 1891 he was just 5 months old and with his parents – Edward and Mary living at Brown Edge. Ten

years later, again living at Brown Edge, John was also shown with his sister, Mary. By 1911, the family resided at 30, Ridgway, Norton- in-the Moors. John was now aged 20 and a miner.

As we were unable to trace an entry for John on the CWGC site or to locate a medal card, we included John in those that fell in 1915, especially as a Sentinel report on the death of Harry Stockton provided the same details with regards to the death of John Bowyer.

However, team member Elaine Bryan stumbled across a pension record for a John Bowyer of Brindley Ford and this does seem to relate to our 'John'. His father was named as Edward and his address given as 27, New Buildings, Brindley Ford. It would appear that a printing or transcription error, giving John's date of death as 1915, was the source of our problem. John's pension records indicate that he died on March 27th 1918.

On the 21st February 1916 John enlisted at Tunstall in the 5th Reserve Battalion Coldstream Guards, and trained at Caterham and was later stationed at Windsor. He was 5' 10" tall, unmarried and a collier. He mobilized on the 29th January 1917, undergoing a medical examination on the 31st which he passed as A1. John then fulfilled ordinary military duties until taken ill in August 1917 and was admitted to the Queen Alexandria Millbank Military Hospital London SW1 in September.

The reason given was "*Tubercle of Lung, not the result of but aggravated by ordinary military service*". The condition did not improve and John's illness became very serious. On the 11th October 1917 he was discharged as he was "*no longer physically fit for war service*", and was recommended for treatment at a sanatorium.

At home on the 27th March 1918 John Bowyer died. A note in his records states, "*Liable to be sent a statutory order on 11-10-1918 to present himself for medical re-examination under military service*", sadly his death came before this examination could be carried out. His death was registered at Biddulph.

Private John Bowyer is remembered on the Biddulph memorials and also the Brindley Ford memorial.

Elaine Heathcote, Mike Turnock & Elaine Bryan

Crompton
Private George Crompton
2071 Royal Munster Fusiliers
(Formerly 15044 Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment)
Died 29th March 1918 Age 29



George was born in Kidsgrove in about 1887, the son of Elizabeth Crompton. Elizabeth married William James Moss at St. Lawrence, Biddulph, in 1889. George spent his childhood between his grandparents in Kidsgrove and his mother and step-father in Biddulph. In 1911 he was working as a miner and living with his aunt and uncle in Burslem. In 1914 George married Alice Smith at St. Lawrence in Biddulph. They quickly had three daughters: Rose born 1915, Zena Louise born 1916 and Gabrielle Sylvia born 1917.

It would appear that he went to work in the mines in Yorkshire because it was there that he enlisted within a few weeks of the start of the Great War on 2nd September 1914 at Wath upon Dearne, with regimental number 15044.

He later transferred to the 1st Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers; a battalion that had served in Burma before the war and returned to England in January 1915, then in March the battalion were ordered to sail to Gallipoli. His medal card states that George joined them on 9th July 1915 in a replacement draft. They experienced terrible conditions, constant shelling and disease whilst fighting in the Dardanelles with actions in the battles at Krithia and Achi Baba Heights, until January 1916 when the whole division was withdrawn to Egypt.

In the March of 1916 the battalion sailed back to Marseilles, France and in May transferred to the 47th Brigade 16th Irish Division. This division first went to France in December 1915. The first major action for the 1st Royal Munster Fusiliers was the Battle of the Somme in July 1916, where the 16th Division captured the village of Guillemont following a bitter struggle with the loss of many brave men. Another action took the Fusiliers to Ginchy where again they came up against heavy machine gun fire and shelling with very heavy casualties.

The following year on the 7th June 1917 George and his mates faced the enemy in the terrible battle at Messines Ridge and by July were fighting in the salient in the 3rd Battle of Ypres. Heavy bombardment and rain had left the ground in an appalling condition; the men struggled to gain ground in these squalid conditions and sustained many losses during their attack on Langemark. The division spent the winter holding their position in the salient enduring the cold frozen trenches. In these atrocious conditions the horses suffered as well as the men.

The spring of 1918 saw movement at the front when the enemy started their Spring Offensive on 21st March. The Royal Munster Fusiliers were fighting hard resisting this enemy attack in the Battle of St Quentin from the 21st to the 23rd March. At about the time of these actions George was seriously wounded. Unfortunately, without service records, only a brief account can be told of his treatment. George was taken from the battlefield to one of the military hospitals at Rouen; the army had up to twenty hospitals around this coastal town. Sadly on the 29th March 1918 Private George Crompton at the age of twenty nine died from peritonitis as a result of his wounds. He rests in the St Sever Cemetery Extension, a large cemetery at Rouen which served the many hospitals. He is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of April 20th 1918 reported on his death:

"Official information has been received by Mrs Crompton, 10, Cross Street, Biddulph, that her husband Pte. George Crompton, Royal Munsters, died on March 29th of peritonitis. Pte. Crompton enlisted on September 2nd 1914 from Goldthorpe, Yorkshire, where he worked as a collier. He had seen much active service in the Dardenelles and Salonika. He went to France in 1917. Pte. Crompton, who leaves in addition to a widow, three little girls, was the eldest son of Mr. & Mrs. W.J.Moss, 2, Cromwell Street, Biddulph and is the second of their

sons to sacrifice his life for his country. Mr. & Mrs. Moss have still a son serving in France, Staff Sergt. Myles Moss."

The society has a copy of a photograph of two unknown Biddulph soldiers. From the Sentinel photograph of George along with that of his step brother Jack Moss, it would seem that we have now identified the men as George and his step brother.



Michael Turnock & Elaine Bryan

Cottrell

Private Charles Edward Cottrell

64356, 22nd (Tyneside Scottish) Bn. Northumberland Fusiliers

died April 11th 1918 Age 37

The birth of Charles Edward Cottrell was registered at Congleton in 1882. A family bible for the Cottrell family records his date of birth as December 28th 1881 at Gillow Heath. He was the son of John and Mary Hannah and had five siblings. His father was a bricklayer and from a family of builders who had lived and worked in Gillow Heath for many generations. In 1881 the family lived in Mow Lane, Gillow Heath. Later census returns give the address as just 'Gillow Heath'. Charles and his family would have been well known in this small, rural community.

In 1892 his mother died at the age of 40 and she was buried at St. Lawrence on July 13th. From then, it would seem that his only sister, Edith, took over mother's role of housekeeper. His father died in 1903 aged 58 and by 1911, Edith was described as 'Head' of the household in that census. Charles, aged 29 and single in 1911, was employed as a miner.

We know that Charles enlisted with Ernest Edge, also from Gillow Heath, during the Whitsuntide holidays in 1915. The weather had been exceptionally hot and Charles and Ernest were recruited by Lance Corporal Edgar Wilshaw (who earned himself two extra

days holiday for his efforts). An article in the Weekly Sentinel which appeared on May 29th 1915 sets the scene beautifully; the weather and scenery, the fetes and fun and also the cancellation of cricket matches at Knypersley through lack of players.

Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel 29th May 1915

The Whitsuntide Holidays

“Throughout the Whitsuntide holidays perfect weather was experienced in the Biddulph District. Some slight inconvenience may have been caused by the local heat wave to the crowds of holiday makers, but the powerful rays of the sun were tempered by a refreshing breeze and a remarkable clearness of atmosphere.

“Quite a large number of soldiers were also over for a holiday furlough. Owing to many players having joined the colours, the holidays were without the attraction of the brilliant society function and interesting cricket, invariably a feature of Knypersley Cricket Club’s Whitsuntide programme, and the charming enclosure lying under the shadow of the huge Black Bull works was drawn blank for the first time in the history of the club.

“Lance-Corpl. Edgar Wilshaw, one of the 2nd/5th North Staffords from Harpenden, was smart enough to mix his holiday furlough with a little profitable recruiting. He succeeded in bringing two men to the recruiting station on Tuesday, and as they both passed for Captain John Ward’s Navvies Battalion, he secured a two days extension of his leave. Both recruits, Ernest Edge and Charles Edward Cottrell, were from Gillow Heath.”

At Stoke-on-Trent in May 1915 Charles enlisted in the Middlesex Regiment. The article in the Weekly Sentinel tells of him joining “*Captain John Ward’s Navvies Battalion*”; almost certainly this means the 18th Pioneer battalion of the regiment, which trained at the newly built Clipstone Camp, Mansfield. Here they attached to the 33rd Division. In early August the division moved to Bulford and Tidworth camps on Salisbury Plain for their final intensive preparation for the field.

After an inspection by Queen Mary, the 33rd Division prepared to embark at Southampton, crossing the channel on November 14th 1915 bound for Le Havre, as Charles medal card confirms. Soon the 33rd Division moved inland for their assembly at Bethune. The 18th Middlesex were based in the village of Gorre where they found their billet very dirty and in poor condition. However Charles and his mates were soon at work in La Bassee area making good water-logged front line trenches under a barrage of shells and within days the pioneers had lost six men.

At some point Charles changed regiments. However, no service records have been found so the details remain inconclusive. His new unit was the 22nd Battalion (3rd Tyneside-Scottish) Northumberland Fusiliers, 102th Brigade. This battalion came to France attached to the 34th Division in January 1916. Charles may have joined them soon after this date. Now in an infantry unit, he saw action in July in the Battle of the Somme and actions in the Albert area, Bazentin Ridge and Pozieries Ridge. Their next major action was in March to April 1917 during the Arras Offensive at Scarpe and Arleux, followed by further attacks in August at Hargicourt.

The dreaded Ypres salient was to become the battle ground of the Tyneside-Scottish in October when they transferred to fight in the Third Battle of Ypres. Appalling conditions had to be endured by the gallant troops and on this battlefield of mud they were to lose many men. The division in April 1918 took part in the Battle of Lys, fighting at Bailleul and Kemmel. During these actions on April 11th 1918, sadly Private Charles Edward Cotterell fell in battle. He was 37 and has no known grave and is now remembered on the Ploegstreet Memorial. Of the original contingents of the battalion no one was awarded the 1915 Star. However for his early entry with the Middlesex regiment Charles did receive this medal as his medal card shows.

Private Charles Edward Cottrell is remembered on the Biddulph memorials. The CWGC and *Soldiers Died* all use the spelling "Cotterell". His birth was registered using the variant "Cottrell" and it is this spelling that was used consistently in census returns and is still used today by descendants of the family in Biddulph. However, for some reason, his name appears as "Cotterill" on all of the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Perks
Private Thomas James Perks
142997 25th Bn. Machine Gun Corps (Infantry)
died April 12th 1918 Age 25



Thomas James Perks was born in 1893 and his birth registered at Wolstanton. His father, John, was from south Staffordshire and had moved to the area as a very young

child. John's father was a puddler, who had moved from south Staffordshire to Brindley Ford to work in Heath's iron works. John had married Sarah, a local girl who had been born at Brindley Ford and together they had seven children. According to the census only four of those children had survived by 1911.

In 1901 Thomas and his family lived at 15, Albert Street, Brindley Ford. Ten years later the family still lived at the same address. In this census Thomas and his two brothers were all ironworkers, however, their father John was now employed by the Urban District Council as a stone breaker.

Before enlisting in November 1916 he was employed by Messrs. R. Heath & Sons. He enlisted at Tunstall and joined the South Staffordshire Regiment. Two regimental numbers have been found 32350 and 32396. However no battalion has come to light so his early service is difficult to follow. In March 1918 it is believed Thomas transferred to the Machine Gun Corps (Infantry), serving in the newly formed 25th Battalion, who became part of the divisional troops of the 25th Division.

No service records are available and the date of entry into a theatre of war is not stated on the medal card of Thomas. It can only be assumed that he joined his unit in France early 1918. When the German Spring Offensive started on March 21st 1918, the 25th Division were in the St. Quentin and Bapaume areas serving in a fighting withdrawal, causing the infantry to fall back 30 miles in three days. The division suffered losses of over 3000 men, killed, wounded or taken prisoner, depleting their strength.

On April 9th 1918 they were to entrain to Caestre near Bailleul where fresh recruits joined the division, soon to return to the fight to slow the enemy advance. The Battle of Lys found the Machine Gun Corps bravely fighting in a bitter assault at Estaires and Messines. The MGC had a particularly horrendous time in counter attacks near Ploegstreert Wood and these actions may well have been the time when Thomas was seriously wounded.

He would have been taken to a back area for treatment, but sadly on April 12th 1918 Private Thomas James Perks died from his wounds. He was 25 years old. Thomas is at rest in the Godewaersvelde British Cemetery which is south of Poperinge. There were three Casualty Clearing Stations near this cemetery where Thomas may have been taken after receiving his wounds.

Thomas is also remembered on Brindley Ford memorial.

Michael Turnock and Elaine Heathcote.

Stockton
Lance Corporal Harry Stockton
12244 9th Bn. North Staffordshire Regiment
died of May 22nd 1918 Age 27



Tracing the life of Harry Stockton has proved difficult. There were two births registered in Congleton of a Harry Stockton – one in 1890 and the other in 1891. From his marriage entry in the St. Lawrence marriage register we know that his father was named James who by 1918, when Harry married, was deceased. We also know from the 1901 census that his grandparents were David and Sarah Stockton who lived in Barlow Street, Congleton at that time. By searching earlier census returns, it would seem that Harry's father, James, had joined the 4th Battalion Cheshire Regiment at the age of 18 in 1891 and in 1901 was a soldier on board a vessel in Hampshire. It seems probable that James married in 1891, possibly to Elizabeth Packwood at St. Stephen's in Congleton, and for whatever reason, Harry and his younger brother, Jack, lived with their grandparents in 1901. By 1911, Harry and another brother, Peter, lived at Ridgeway, Norton, with their aunt and uncle, Robert and Sarah Corbishley. Sarah was probably James's sister as a Sarah Stockton had married a Robert Corbishley at Congleton in 1896. In this census, Harry was aged 19 and described as a miner. A report of his death in the Sentinel stated that he had been employed by Messrs. Robert Heath & Sons before enlisting. His brothers also joined the colours. Peter became a gunner in the RFA, James enlisted in the Worcester Regiment and Jack joined the North Staffordshire Regiment.

On January 24th 1918, at St. Lawrence, he married Mary Bowyer. He gave his age as 27, his occupation as 'soldier' and his address as 27, New Buildings.

Harry enlisted at Biddulph in September 1914 joining the 9th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment, an infantry battalion who trained at South Downs, Hasting as part of the 22nd Division. However in April 1915 the battalion converted to divisional

pioneers to the 37th Division and continued their training at Windmill Hill, Salisbury Plain.

A pioneer battalion consisted of partly skilled tradesmen and the rest of the soldiers able to use a pick and shovel. As Harry had previously worked in an iron works this would have been no problem. Others in the battalion were Staffordshire miners. The pioneers earned an extra 2d a day more than the infantry – not much but enough to buy a few extra fags. On June 25th 1915, King George V came to inspect the 37th Division at Sidbury Hill in readiness for their embarking for war. The medal card of Harry shows he crossed the channel, arriving at Le Havre on July 29th 1915, and soon moved to their assembly at Tilques.

In Flanders the pioneers' tasks included building roads for field guns and tracks for the infantry; and there were always trenches to be dug. The year 1916 found the pioneers preparing for the forthcoming Battle of the Somme; the division were in action in the Ancre sector. Here Harry and his mates came under heavy enemy shell fire during their work and casualties mounted. They were not only trained as Pioneers, but also, when required, to down tools and take up their rifles and Lewis guns – as they did whilst following the 13th Rifle Brigade into an attack. Having already connected the many shell holes to form a trench, the 9th North Staffords were then ordered to attack the enemy, and in doing so took about forty German prisoners.

To give a flavour of the pioneers work the following is an extract from the 9th Battalion Pioneers War Diary of 1916. *“Work carried out included new trenches in Becourt Wood and Pozieres areas, at Gordon Dump, and on a new road up Sausage Valley leading to the front line. To Bresle, Fricourt Wood....”*

In the Arras Offensive of April 1917 the 37th Division were ordered into action in the Battle of Scarpe where they captured Monchy le Preux. On a rare occasion, a parade was attended by the North Stafford pioneers and the General Officer Commanding the 37th Division recognised the work carried out by Harry and all his pioneer mates in the Arras area in May. By July, the battlefield of the Ypres Salient was their lot and about this time another Biddulph man, Harold Minshall, joined the 9th Battalion. Both served in 'D' company and in the field Harry received his stripe. The pioneers continued to work throughout the Third Battle of Ypres until November. They bravely worked with the infantry in many actions, including those at Pilkem Ridge, Menin Road Ridge, Polygon Wood and finally Passchendaele.

The brave work of the pioneers was also recognised in the field by the COs of many other battalions that they worked with as shown in the battalion's history where letters, siting their bravery whilst working continually with shells falling round them, can be found. Winter turned into the spring of 1918 and brought the division to the old Somme battlefield. Once again they were in action – from March in the Battle of Ancre and the enemy advance. They worked under a barrage of shrapnel and high explosive shells with gas shells making matters even more dangerous.

Without service records to confirm this, it is believed that soon after this action Lance Corporal Harry Stockton was wounded and gassed. He was taken to a Base hospital at Rouen but at the age of 26 sadly died on May 22nd 1918. He is now at rest in the St.

Sever Extension Cemetery at Rouen. He is remembered on the Biddulph and Brindley Ford memorials.

On June 15th 1918 the Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel reported on the deaths of "Brothers Stockton and Bowyer". *"Official news has reached Mrs. Stockton, 37, New Buildings, Black Bull, that her husband, Lance Corporal Harry Stockton, North Staffs Regiment, died of gas poisoning on May 22nd. He enlisted in September 1914, prior to which he was employed by Messrs. R. Heath & Sons. He was 26 years of age. A brother, Gunner Peter Stockton, RFA aged 19, was killed in action on July 30th 1917, another brother, Private James Stockton, Worcester Regiment, has been discharged through wounds, and a third brother, Private Jack Stockton, North Staffs Regiment, is serving in India."*



Private Jack Stockton



Private James Stockton



Gunner P Stockton

Michael Turnock and Elaine Heathcote.

Stubbs
Private James (Jim) Stubbs
11552 11th Bn. Cheshire Regiment
Killed in Action 26th May 1918 Age 25



James was baptised on November 25th 1894 at St. Lawrence, Biddulph and was the son of Thomas and Ellen of Knowle Style. His father was a collier. In 1901 the family still

lived at Knowle Style. James had many siblings; Martha, John William, Henry, Harriet, Annie, Alice, and Charles. Next door to the Stubbs family at Knowle Style lived the Barnett's. Their son, William was the same age as James and no doubt they played together as children. William Barnett also died in battle in 1917.

The 1911 census records that James was one of ten children born to the couple – and that all were still alive by that date. In that year the family lived at 185 John Street and appear to have remained there throughout the war. James, aged 16 in 1911, was described as a miner. At some point James married – but we have been unable to locate any marriage details. A newspaper article reporting that he was missing in August 1918 mentions his wife, Mrs. J. Stubbs, who was living in Wales at the time. The CWGC states that his widow, Bessie Stubbs was living at 72, Phillip Street, Hoole, Chester. Cheshire BMD records a marriage between James Stubbs and Bessie Evans at Prenton, on the Wirral in 1916 which may well be the marriage for our James.

At the outset of hostilities in 1914 James enlisted in the army at Macclesfield. This was on the 24th August when he joined the 11th Battalion Cheshire Regiment. The basic training was carried out at Codford St Mary and Bournemouth, followed in May 1915 with more intensive instruction at Aldershot and finally Salisbury Plain. With training complete and after an inspection by Lord Kitchener on the 12th August, the soldiers in 25th Division with whom 11th Cheshire's were now attached, were ready for war. The division crossed the channel on the 26th September 1915 and on landing they moved forward to their concentration area at Nieppe. James and his mates settled on the Western Front - holding their positions in Flanders until May 1916 when they took a defensive role at Vimy Ridge during the battle for this important area. The next major assault came in the Battle of the Somme in July. The 25th Division found action at Aveluy Wood, Martinsart, Bazentin and Ovillers where heavy losses were inflicted on the division. At Pozieies on 21st August the 11th Cheshire's made a successful attack using the new "push pipe mine" on the enemy positions.

Early September found the division, to their relief, taken out of line. They travelled by old London buses to a safe back area near Abbeville for a rest period. By late September James and his pals were ordered into battle again to fight in the river Ancre area. By October, conditions here were appalling but the troops successfully captured the "The Mound" in a bitter fight. The Somme Offensive continued until November; deteriorating weather and ground conditions then slowed the war with the next month spent holding the gains made over the Somme battlefield.

Messines in June 1917 brought more inevitable hardship to the battalion fighting on this high ridge. More was to come from July when the division moved to the Ypres Salient to fight in the 3rd Battle of Ypres seeing action at Pilkem, Westhoek and Bellewaarde Ridges - battles that cost the division over 1200 casualties. Fighting in the salient continued until December when the men were loaded into cattle waggons for a rail journey south to Achiet le Grand Bullecourt. Here the men spent another unbelievably cold winter in frozen or water filled trenches.

James was in the Bapaume and St Quentin areas of the old Somme battle ground when in March 1918 the enemy began their major offensive. The whole front was in retreat; the division at one time making a 36 mile march in 36 hours. The men were 'dead on their feet' - with little in the way of food or water. It was a period in which the battalion lost many of its men. Many were taken prisoner. In April the battles of Estaires, Kemmel and the Lys followed. The men fought valiantly but were driven back and the whole division was decimated in these battles and lost 7700 men with the 11th Cheshire Regiment suffering particular badly.

The 25th Division were withdrawn from the battlefield to transfer for recuperation and refit in a safe area in the Soissons and Chemin des Dame District - and so began a long journey by train, arriving on the 9th May 1918. They along with four other divisions of battle exhausted troops took rest in this French Sector of the front. By now James had been at war for four years. We don't know his exact military history as we have not been able to locate his service records - but he must have been one of the longest serving Biddulph men.

This safe area was soon to become the battle field of the 3rd Aisne. On the evening of the 26th/27th May the enemy attacked with an artillery bombardment and this was followed by an infantry attack. In these actions, sadly at the age of twenty five, Private James Stubbs fell on the field. He died on the 27th May 1918 and now rests in the Chambrecy British Cemetery, Marne.

The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of August 3rd 1918 reported that Sergt. J. Stubbs of Biddulph was missing: *"Official news has been received by Mrs. J. Stubbs, School House, Pontfedog, Chirk, Denbeighshire, that her husband, Sergt. J. Stubbs, Cheshire Regiment, was reported missing on May 26th. He is the son of Mr. & Mrs. T Stubbs, 185 John Street and has been in the Army since August 24th 1914. He was previously a miner at Black Bull."* James is remembered on the St. Lawrence churchyard cross and memorial board and the cenotaph in Albert Square.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Slack
2nd Lt. John Barnett Slack
1/5th Bn. Northumberland Fusiliers
Formerly 37869 Leicestershire Regiment
Killed in action 27th May 1918 Age 26



The birth of John Barnett Slack was registered at Congleton in 1891. He was the son of Henry and Sarah Ann Slack. Henry had married Sarah A Barnett at St. John's, Buglawton in 1883. By 1891 the couple lived on Bridge Street, Biddulph with their daughter Elizabeth Alice and son, Henry Brindley Slack. Henry senior was a Pattern maker who had been born in Buglawton. Sarah and their children were all Biddulph born.

Ten years later the family resided at 66, Tunstall Road. Henry's occupation was given as "*mechanical pattern maker*" and eldest son Henry, then aged 14, was a chair maker. The family had increased and now included John and his younger sister, Mary.

By 1911 the family had moved yet again – although only a few doors away to number 90 Tunstall Road. Again Henry was described as a mechanic and 19 year old John Barnett Slack was a "*no. checker – North Staffordshire Railway.*" A year later he was a policeman in Manchester.

Before enlisting in the army, John had served as a policeman at Old Trafford Manchester since 1912. Local sources say he joined the Royal Engineers in November 1915 and after training went to France on the 16th January 1916 serving with this unit in Flanders. Though the medal card of John shows he served in the Leicester Regiment with a service number 37869, his battalion is unknown. In January 1917 he again transferred units when he was seconded to the 28th Battalion Artist Rifles (15th Officer Training Battalion) this may well have been at St Omer in France where the unit had their HQ. John gained his commission and became -2nd Lieutenant J B Slack.

John now returned to the front being posted to the 1/5th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers attached to the 50th Division (the Fighting Fifth). He found his new battalion in the Ypres Salient; they had been fighting in the 3rd Battle of Ypres from July to November 1917. Here the division was decimated during the actions to take the Passchendaele Ridge. John commenced his service with the battalion on 27th November 1917 soon after the battle came to an end. The division spent a cold wet winter holding their front line trenches until the early 1918 when the division was in action again at St Quentin and the Battle of Lys. In March, as part of five divisions of exhausted battle disabled troops, they were ordered south for recoup and refit.

A long slow journey by rail was undertaken travelling in cattle trucks of the French railway. Their destination was an area between Soissons and Rheims; a quiet area in beautiful countryside in the valley of the River Aisne and far from the horrors of Passchendaele. The soldiers were to spend two months at rest in this relatively safe and relaxed French sector of the Western Front. The enemy were aware of this and were to take advantage of the situation, for beyond the high ridge of the Chemin des Dames, the Germans were secretly amassing a large army.

At 1.00am on 27th May the enemy bombardment opened with devastating results on the resting troops. Then at 4.00am the enemy infantry attacked. John's battalion in 50th Division who were in position between Craonne and Pontavent endured a terrible ordeal; most of these men were already battle exhausted. What an awful twist of fate - this supposedly safe area became the Battlefield of the 3rd Aisne. The Northumberland Fusiliers bravely held their lines at first but soon dense waves of enemy troops overwhelmed them; it became a nightmare with many men lost including John.

On the 27th May 1918 at the age of twenty six, 2nd Lt John Barnett Slack sadly fell on the battlefield. Originally he was buried by the Germans in their Cemetery at Pontavent and

later after the armistice he was remembered in the Ville-Aux-Bois British Cemetery. The CWGC have records which state -
Memorial Plot - Kipling Memorial
To the memory of these two British soldiers killed in action on May 27th 1918 and buried at the time in Pontavent German Cemetery, whose graves are now lost. "Their glory shall not be blotted out".



'John is remembered along with a fellow officer, 2nd Lt James MacMeeken of the same regiment, their headstones lie side by side on the wall of the cemetery'.
In this cemetery many of the graves are of 50th Division troops and the cemetery is close to the remains of the WW1 Berry-au-Bois airfield.

The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel reported on the death of 2nd. Lieut. Slack:

**SEC.-LIEUT. J.B.SLACK, BIDDULPH
KILLED IN ACTION**

"The sad news reached Mr. and Mrs. Henry Slack, 90, Tunstall Road, Biddulph, on Saturday that their second son, Sec.-Lieut. J.B.Slack, Northumberland Fusiliers, was killed in action on May 27th. Lieut. Slack, who was in his 27th year, enlisted in November 1915 in the Royal Engineers as a Private. Previously he was for two years with the County Police, Old Trafford, Manchester. In January 1917, he went to the front, but came home in June to take a commission. He joined the Cadet Corps of the Artists Rifles, and was gazetted second-lieutenant in November.

Mr. and Mrs. Slack's eldest son, Private Harry Slack, Niagra Rangers, is on active service, having come over with the Canadians. Previous to enlisting he was engaged in farming in Canada, where he had been since 1913."

John Barnett Slack is remembered on the memorials at St. Lawrence and also the cenotaph in Albert Square, Biddulph.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Machin
2nd Lt. John Egbert Machin
R.A.F 123 Squadron
Killed in an accident 29th May 1918 Age 24



John Egbert was the son of John Thomas and Mary Machin and was born on 16th September 1893 in Biddulph. His birth was registered at Congleton. John Thomas Machin had started as grocery assistant to his father, John, who had started the grocery business in Bridge Street and which is now a vet's surgery. John Thomas took over the running of the business when his father died in 1887.

John Thomas Machin's first wife had been Annie Whitehurst who he had married in 1879 in a civil ceremony in Congleton. By 1891, John Thomas was a widower with a five year old son, Edgar, to care for. Helping him was his housekeeper and sister-in-law Mary Whitehurst. Annie and Mary Whitehurst were the daughters of farmer Thomas Whitehurst, who originated from Biddulph but by 1871 had taken on a 120 acre farm called Ridgway Hall at Norton.

John Thomas married Mary Whitehurst in 1891 at Congleton in a civil ceremony and John Egbert was their first child. By 1901 the family lived at 51, Congleton Road (the same property - Bridge Street was renamed Congleton Road), where John Thomas carried out his business as a grocer, baker and farmer. The family had expanded to include Charles Reginald and Grace Annie. Ten years later, John Egbert was assisting his father in the business. In 1917 he married Elizabeth Sutton at Station Road Methodist Chapel.



Photograph: Lt. John Egbert Machin in 1917 with his plane

It is not certain if John joined the Royal Flying Corps at the start of his military service in August 1917 or if he transferred from another unit, as no service records can be found. In the RFC he trained with 123rd Training Squadron, one of 100 such squadrons in 1918 with 7000 aircraft for their use. John was at Duxford Aerodrome near Cambridge, a facility built during the Great War. John's service record states that he flew both the DH6 and BE2e planes.

New airmen in these training squadrons were taught to fly and know the aircraft parts and functions, keeping formation in the "V" shape to prevent the breakup of the formation by enemy aircraft or "Archie" the anti-aircraft batteries. The observers were taught to use their Lewis Guns and bomb aiming. Courses would take about eleven months to complete for new pilots and included some fifty hours of solo flight, though at times this may be shortened.



Photograph: Lt. J.E. Machin Group Photograph 1917 (second from left back row)

During his time at Duxford a terrible flying accident occurred in which twenty four year old 2nd Lt John Egbert Machin sadly died on the 29th May 1918. He was brought back to Biddulph where his family arranged his burial at St Lawrence Church. He rests in a family grave with a special RFC headstone of unique design and with an inscription that reads “*He gave his life for England, but his soul to God. Gone but not forgotten*”.



The Chronicle reported his death on June 8th:

Biddulph Airman's Sad Death

“The death occurred on Wednesday last week, as the result of an aeroplane accident, of Lieut. J.E.Machin, aged 24 years, son of Mr. and Mrs. J.T.Machin, of Congleton Road, Biddulph. The deceased officer was well known and respected in Biddulph, and that he had gained the high esteem of his comrades at the aerodrome is fully borne out by a letter received from the Captain by his parents. Lieut. Machin joined the R.A.F. in August 1917, and obtained his certificate in March. He leaves a widow and one child. He was at home on the Monday previous to the Wednesday when the fatal accident occurred.

In a letter to his parents Captain Pattison, of the R.A.F., writes: “I wish to express, on behalf of the squadron and myself, our very deep sympathy for you in your sad loss. It is a very great loss to us all here as he (Lieut. Machin) was very popular among the men and officers. As far as I am personally concerned my chief memory of him is his keenness. He was always eager to fly, and was always working or learning something when he was not flying. His instructor had a very high opinion of him, and considered he was on the way to be a very fine pilot, and I share that view. I am sure if he had been spared he would have made a name for himself in the R.A.F.”

The interment took place at Biddulph Church on Monday afternoon and was witnessed by a large number of sympathising friends. Three officers from the R.F.A (including a cousin of the deceased) and three civilian cousins from the village acted as bearers, and the mourners were: Mrs. J.E.Machin (widow), Mr. and Mrs. J.T.Machin (father and mother), Miss Machin (sister), Mr. R. Machin (brother), Mr. and Mrs. E. Machin (brother and sister-in-law), and other relatives and friends from Biddulph. The first portion of the service was conducted at the Primitive Methodist Chapel by the Rev. A.J.Smith and Rev. W. Lawrence, after which the mortal remains were quietly laid to rest in the Biddulph Parish Churchyard.

A large number of beautiful wreaths were laid on the coffin from the deceased's relatives and friends, including a beautiful floral tribute in the form of the R.F.A. Badge, consisting of white carnations , red roses, and forget-me-nots, from the R.F.A. Squadron, to which deceased was attached."

John is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.



Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

With thanks to Roland Machin & Alan Fozard for family details

Hollinshead
Private Clarence George Hollinshead
201337 2/5th Bn. North Staffs Regiment 59th Division
Died 26th June 1918 Age 22



Clarence George Hollinshead was born in 1898 and his birth was registered at Tunstall. His parents were George Henry and Elizabeth (nee Jones). In 1901 the family lived at Childerplay where George was described as a '*steam engine mechanical labourer*'. Clarence, then aged only 2 years, was the couple's only son and the baby of the family. By 1911 family life had changed drastically for Clarence. In 1902 his father died aged 39 and in 1905 his mother married Nathaniel Bourne at St. Matthew's, Etruria. Sadly, this 'new' family also suffered tragedy as Elizabeth died at the age of 42 in 1909. Clarence, aged 12, appears on the 1911 census at 69 New Buildings with his step-father Nathaniel Bourne, his step brothers and his younger brother Silas.

Service records survive for Clarence and show that he enlisted at Biddulph on the 17th of April 1915 – giving his address as 5, Fan Row, Brindley Ford. He enlisted in the 3/5th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment. His number in this second line battalion was 4777 however, by May he had been transferred to the 2/5th Battalion. This was initially a home based unit that trained at Luton and St Albans.

In April 1916 the battalion went to Ireland during the uprising where they stayed until January 1917 when they were recalled to England. They were based at Fovant and received extra training for overseas duties. The 2/5th North Stafford's attached to 59th Division (2nd North Midland) 176th Brigade and were inspected by King George V on 13th February 1917 prior to crossing the channel to Le Havre on the 25th February. They had moved forward to their assembly area at Mericourt by early March and although not fully battle trained, were ordered into action on the old Somme battlefield at Estrees.

April found the battalion on the Hindenburg Line and into May at Havrincourt, Flesquieres area near Cambrai. Out of line in June for a short rest at Barastre; then holding their lines until transferred to the Ypres Salient to join the fighting during September in the 3rd Battle of Ypres. Clarence and his mates fought in Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood actions and endured abysmal conditions on the salient battlefield. The battalion even suffered out of line at their Mersey Rest Camp when an enemy aircraft bombed their billets during the night.

Christmas and into 1918 was spent at rest in the village of Le Cauroy. They were then sent back into battle at Bullecourt in February - with further actions in March at St Quinten and Bapaume. 59th Division were now in action during the enemy offensive at Bailleul and Kemmel Ridge. Many men were taken prisoner, including another Biddulph man in the battalion, Wilfred Whitehurst. About this time Pte Hollinshead became seriously ill. He was taken out of line for treatment in Flanders and on the 20th March transferred back to England.

Although his service records have been found, water damage has made them difficult to read - but they tell of an initial stay in the Queen Mary's Military Hospital at Whalley, Lancashire and then on the 20th May, Clarence was transferred to the 2nd Western General Hospital, Stepping Hill, Hazel Grove. He was suffering from exhaustion and Pulmonary Tuberculosis. His condition deteriorated and at twenty two years of age, Private Clarence George Hollinshead, sadly died in hospital on the 26th June 1918. He was returned to his family at Biddulph and now rests at St Lawrence Church.

Clarence is remembered on the Biddulph memorials and also the Brindley Ford memorial.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcot

Lievesley
Gunner Harry Lievesley
31945, "D" Bty. 115. 2nd Bde, Royal Field Artillery
Died of wounds on 1st August 1918 aged 21



Harry's birth was registered at Congleton in the second quarter of 1897. He was the son of William and Ellen Lievesley. In 1901 he lived with his parents and his brother, Arthur, at Canal Road, Congleton. His father gave his occupation as a carter. By 1911 the family had moved to Biddulph and lived at Euters Hall Farm; his father was described as a farm labourer and 14 year old Harry as a *'pit boy'*.

It is believed that Harry enlisted in the Army at Stoke on Trent in January 1915 aged 17 years. His photograph appeared in the Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of April 24th 1915 where he was described as the youngest son of Mr. William Lievesley of John Street, Biddulph.

The unit that he joined was the Royal Field Artillery and following training as a gunner in "D" Battery 115 2nd Brigade, the medal card shows that Harry embarked on a channel crossing to France on 29th July 1915.

Without the aid of any service records it is difficult to build a picture of Harry's service history. This unit may have originally served with 26th Division - who initially served in France before transferring to Salonika - and then partly returning to France in mid-1918. This would fit in with the facts that are known of Harry Lievesley.

The 18 pounder field guns used by the battery were deadly weapons and after being positioned, the horses were taken a few miles to a safer back area where they had their waggon lines. Each night the drivers would take up supplies and ammunition to the battery by G S waggon and mules; each mule carrying eight 18 pounder shells in special saddles.

From local sources it is known that 'D' battery was in action at the Battle of the Marne in July 1918 - which may have been the actions at Tardenois and Soissonais. At the end of July Gunner Harry Lievesley was seriously wounded and taken to the British 63rd

Casualty Clearing Station at Senlis. Sadly, on the 1st August 1918, he died from his wounds aged twenty one.

The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel reported on Harry's death on August 24th:

'Official intimation has been received by Mr. & Mrs. W. Lievesley of 134, John Street, that their son, Gunner Harry Lievesley, RFA, had died of wounds at a dressing station in France on August 1st. Gunner Lievesley enlisted in January 1915 and had been on active service for about 2 years. Prior to joining the colours he worked in the Black Bull mines. The following letter has been received by his parents which testifies to the high esteem in which he was held by his officers:

Dear Mrs. Lievesley,

I regret to have to inform you that your son, Gunner Lievesley, was wounded in action on the afternoon of July 31st. His wounds are severe, but the best news I had of him from the dressing station was that they were not so bad as they looked, although he has a broken arm and a broken leg. I am very sorry indeed to lose such a useful and valuable member of the battery. He was a really good worker and was rapidly becoming a first class gunner too. Will you please wish him the very best of luck from all of us. We all wish he'd been with us the next day, which was a day of glorious victory.'

Harry is now at rest in the French National Cemetery at Senlis. He is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock and Elaine Heathcote

Rowley
Private Daniel Rowley
42261 East Surrey Regiment
(Formerly 61476 North Staffordshire Regiment)
Died 3rd August 1918 Age 21

Daniel was one of four children born in 1897, in Brindley Ford, to Daniel Rowley and his wife, Mary Louisa, nee Harrison. They had married at St. James', Newchapel in 1890 and lived at 13 Bourne Street. Following his father's early death in 1899, his mother married Michael Flanneghan in 1901. The family continued to live at 13 Bourne Street and three more children were born. Michael died in 1907.

In 1911, still at 13 Bourne Street, 13-year-old Daniel was living with his widowed mother, two siblings and two half-siblings. Still at school he probably went to Brindley Ford School before leaving aged 14.

Daniel enlisted at Tunstall in the North Staffordshire Regiment with a regimental number 61576; no battalion is known as his service records cannot be found. However, Daniel later transferred regiments; his new unit was the East Surrey Regiment from where he was posted to the 1/23rd (County of London) Battalion London Regiment. This battalion mobilised in the St Albans area in preparation to embark for service in France, crossing the English Channel to Le Havre on the 16th March 1915. It is not known if Daniel was with them or joined in the field later as no date of entry is stated on his medal card. The 1915 star was not awarded so it would seem that he did join later.

1/23rd Battalion attached to 142nd Brigade 47th (2nd London) Division and in May 1915 saw action in the Battles of Aubers Ridge and Festubert, and again in September and

October in the Battle of Loos, where the battalion fought in the murderous action at the Hohenzollern Redoubt. Vimy Ridge was the next major action for Daniel and his mates in May 1916 and within the next two months, 47th Division fought in the Battle of the Somme. In the major attacks at Flers-Courcelette and then the bitter fighting which cost many men in the division their lives when they bravely fought hand to hand during the capture of High Wood. This was a major victory for the army. The 1/23rd Battalion also fought in the actions at Transloy Ridge, the capture of Eaucourt and the Butte de Warlencourt.

After spending a miserable winter in the trenches, one of the worst in living memory, the lads were ordered into the attack on the high ground at Messines in the first weeks of May 1917. The 3rd Battle of Ypres was their next battleground in July and August at Pilkem Ridge. They fought in appalling conditions in the Salient where the division continued fighting towards Passchendaele until late September, when they were ordered to leave the Salient and prepare to fight on another battlefield at Cambrai. Here in November the division captured Bourlon Wood and then fought in another bitter action during the enemy counter attack.

March 21st 1918 was the start of the enemies Spring Offensive. Daniel and his mates were in the St Quentin area at this time fighting a controlled withdrawal. During these enemy assaults the division suffered major losses and had many of their soldiers taken prisoner. By August the enemy advance had been reversed - *"the turn of the tide"* and the 2nd Battle of the Somme found the 1/23rd Battalion pushing the enemy back at Albert over the old Somme battlefield and then on to Bapaume. During these actions, on the 30th August 1918, Private Daniel Rowley was sadly lost on the battlefield. He was twenty one years old and has no known grave. He is commemorated on the Vis-En Artois Memorial.

Daniel is also remembered on the Brindley Ford memorial.

Elaine Bryan and Michael Turnock

Roberts
Private Harold Roberts
12946, 3rd Bn., Manchester Regiment
Died of wounds on 15th August 1918 Age 23



Harold Roberts was the son of William, a miner, and his wife, Sarah. He was their youngest son and had been born in 1896. By 1911 the couple had had six children, one of whom had died in childhood. Harold had an older brother – Herbert, and a younger brother, William. He also had three sisters – Elsie, Hilda and Ethel. The 1911 census records Harold as a *'labourer underground'* aged 15.

In 1901 the family resided at 49 Station Road, Biddulph and had moved to 14 Well Street by 1911. At the time of Harold's death, William and Sarah lived at 82 Craig Side.

Harold received numerous mentions in the local press. In the Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of June 12th 1915 it was reported that *'Harold Roberts, youngest son of Mr. Wm. Roberts, Well Street and James Bailey, joined the Manchester Pals last week.'* On July 8th 1916, the Chronicle informed readers that Mrs Roberts, of 23 Tunstall Road had received a letter from her son: *'Private Roberts is a member of the Roberts family, whose fame in the musical world is proverbial in North Staffordshire.'* The Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of June 24th 1916 reported that: *'Harold Roberts, second son of Mr. and Mrs. W Roberts of 23 Tunstall Road is in France. He joined the Manchester Pals on May 21st and had previously worked at Victoria Pits – Black Bull.'*

Harold enlisted at Congleton on the 3rd June 1915, although local newspapers give this date as the 21st May. He joined the Manchester Regiment, to serve in the 19th Battalion (4th City). This battalion had trained at Heaton Park, Belton Park Grantham and then Lark Hill, Salisbury Plain for their final intensive instruction before leaving for France on 6th November 1915. Harold was not with the original unit as he joined the battalion in the field on the 8th April 1916 after crossing the English Channel aboard the SS Princess Victoria and moving to Etaples soon after in a reinforcement draft.

Although his service records have survived- parts are damaged and cannot be easily read. The 19th Battalion was attached to 21st Brigade 30th Division which had already seen action on the Western Front. The first major action after Harold's draft joined was to be the Battle of the Somme. Preparations for the battle kept the troops busy and the seven day artillery barrage was halted for the attack on the 1st July 1916. In the south of the Somme battle line between Maricourt and Montauban, the 19th Manchester's attacked.

After a bitter fight and by 10.00 o'clock, Montauban would be taken from the enemy and the division then went on to attack Trones Wood; but not before Harold had received gunshot wounds in both legs. It soon became apparent that the barrage had not succeeded and the enemy had emerged from their deep strongholds to open up with deadly machine gun fire on the battalion. His wounds were serious and initially treated in a front line dressing post before he was eventually taken back to the No 2 Stationery Military Hospital at Abbeville on the 4th July. Two days later Harold was transferred to Blighty aboard the hospital ship St Denis.

Back in England, Harold was taken to the Stepping Hill Military Hospital at Hazel Grove, Stockport. His detailed service records show that he was to spend over a year in this hospital undergoing surgery and recuperation before being discharged in August 1917. This was followed by a stay in the Military Convalescent Hospital at Eastbourne. A ten day home leave followed. For some reason his furlough form mentions the 21st battalion. Unable to return to active service due to his poor health, on the 20th September 1917 he was transferred to a home base unit, the 3rd Reserve Battalion Manchester Regiment. This was a depot and training unit used for supplying

replacement drafts for overseas battalions. The battalion also took a role in the defence of the Humber and therefore Harold was now based at Cleethorpes.

Harold, on light duties, continued his role in the army with this new battalion, however his condition and health gave further concern at the beginning of 1918. By July he was admitted again to Stepping Hill Military Hospital where he became gravely ill as a result of the wounds he had received in July 1916. He was treated in hospital but on the 15th August 1918, at the age of twenty three, Harold Roberts sadly died in hospital from Pulmonary Tuberculosis. Harold was taken back home to his family in Biddulph to be buried at St Lawrence Church.

His death was reported in the Weekly Sentinel:

"Official news was received by Mr and Mrs Wm. Roberts, Tunstall Road, Biddulph, on Thursday week' of the death of their youngest son, Private Harold Roberts, in hospital at Hazlehurst, following on an illness of nearly two years from the result of wounds received while on active service in France. Private Harold Roberts, whose age was 23 years, enlisted early in 1915, joining the Manchester Pals. He went on active service in March, 1916, and was wounded on the following July 1st. In October 1917, he was again detailed for overseas duty, but his health gave way, and since then he has been in hospital. Prior to enlisting he worked at the Victoria Pit, Black Bull.

The funeral took place at Biddulph Churchyard on Monday afternoon, and was largely attended. The cortege was preceded by the members of the Crown Lodge of Free Gardeners, of which deceased was a member. As the coffin, covered with the Union Jack, was borne into the Wesleyan Chapel, the organist, (Mrs. Copeland) played 'O rest in the Lord.' The service was conducted by by the pastor, the Rev. J.A. Grindell, who gave a touching address, and appropriate hymns were sung. Among the many beautiful floral tributes were the following: From Nurse Davenport; members of the Free Gardeners; teachers and scholars at Wesley Hall; and Station-road Wesleyan Men's Bible Class."



Harold is remembered on all the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Whalley
Private Reginald Whalley
42701 1st Bn. Leicestershire Regiment
Died 24th August 1918 Age 19

Born in 1899 in Biddulph, Reginald was the son of George Reginald and Mary Ann Whalley (nee Pointon). His parents had married at St. Lawrence on May 10th 1899. His grandfather, George Whalley, was a tobacconist in the village.

In 1901 the family lived at Gillow Heath. In this census George was described as a coal miner. By 1911 though, the family had moved to 77 Tunstall Road where George carried out the business of fruiterer. A 1912 directory records George as a fruiterer and tobacconist. By this time the family had increased in size and Reginald had a one year old sister named Mary Hannah.

Reginald enlisted at Burslem although the date is uncertain; local sources mention September 1914, however his medal card is without a 1915 Star which would indicate an early entry. He joined the 1st battalion Leicestershire Regiment, a battalion attached to 16th Brigade 6th Division, who sailed to France in the early weeks of the war being a first line unit already fully trained. So Reginald may have joined his battalion later in the field, though as already said, records are inconclusive.

6th Division in September 1914 first saw action at the 1st Battle of the Aisne followed in 1915 with actions at Hooge in the 1st Battle of Ypres. By 1916 the Battle of the Somme was to open on 1st July. By this time, assuming Reginald did enter the theatre of war later, and again no date of entry is shown on his medal card to give guidance, he may well have been drafted for this battle. Flers and Courcellette were the first major actions for 6th Division; here tanks made an appearance on the battlefield. Later the Leicester's found more action at Morval and Le Transloy. By November, with the enemy retreating to new positions on the Hindenburg Line, the 1st Leicester's spent the winter holding their lines.

In spring 1917, after spending an inevitable cold and wet winter in their trenches and without respite from the shelling or snipers, the next objective came in the Arras Offensive. The division were ordered to attack Hill 70 which was successfully taken under barrage of shells, and many brave men fell in this action. The Battle of Cambrai in October took the division south and to a new battlefield, seeing action through to November and the start of another miserable winter. Without service records or local sources it is always difficult to follow the personal life of an individual soldier - following the story of the battalion we can only assume Reginald's story is the same.

The German Spring Offensive started on the 21st March 1918 and saw the enemy moving forward along the whole of the front. 6th Division were in the St Quentin area at this time, and soon lost ground and men in these attacks. They fell back and took up new positions at Bailleul and Kemmel Ridge for their next offensive, "*The Advance in Flanders*". In early August the "*Turn of the tide*"; the Allied counter offensive began to push the enemy back. Reginald and his mates in the 1st Battalion Leicestershire Regiment were now in bitter fighting. About this time on 24th August 1918 Private Reginald Whalley sadly fell on the battlefield at the age of nineteen. Without a known grave he is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial. His name also appears on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Biddulph (Poyser)
Private William Henry Biddulph
G/72669 1st/24th Bn. London Regiment, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey
Regiment)
Formerley 49433 South Staffordshire Regiment
Died 30th August 1918 Age 21

William was born in Biddulph in 1897, the son of Arthur Poyser and Mary Elizabeth(nee Biddulph). His birth certificate gives his name as William Henry Poyser. Arthur and Mary Elizabeth had married in 1888 at St Luke's Church at Onecote cum Bradnop. In 1891 Mary was working as a servant in Henbury for John Bostock who was a farmer. She was aged 21 and married. Her brother Frederick Walter Biddulph was also a servant on the farm.

Arthur and Mary Poyser had three children: George, William and Minnie. By 1901 Arthur had sadly died and his widow returned to her parent's home at Robin Hill, Biddulph Moor.

The 1901 census lists the household as comprising of William and Ann Biddulph, their daughter Mary E Poyser, aged 30 and a widow, their daughter Dorothy aged 19 and a fustian cutter, their sons Thomas and Herbert, daughter Violet aged 11 and their three grandchildren: George, William and Minnie Poyser, aged 7, 4 and 2 respectively.

By 1911 William's mother had remarried and was now living with her husband, Charles Whittaker, at the Mow Cop Inn where Charles was the publican.

William still lived with his grandfather, also William, who by now was 68 years and widowed. He shared the home with uncles Thomas and Herbert, his brother George 17 and his aunt Dorothy Plant with her husband James and their three children Lizzie, Minnie and Hannah.

William in this census was aged 14 and employed in the coal mines as a horse driver underground. It is believed that he later lived at Mow Cop.

William is believed to have enlisted in 1916 at Tunstall, joining the South Staffordshire Regiment number 49433. Later he transferred to The Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment, maybe this was in the field. The unit he was posted to was the 1/24th Battalion London Regiment attached to 47th (2nd London Division). This division had served in France since March 1915. Although on Williams's medal card it shows no date when he entered France with either regiment.

47th Division had fought in the battles of Aubers Ridge, Festubert and Loos in 1915, and the following years found them in action at Vimy Ridge in April and then in July fighting in the Battle of the Somme, with bitter actions at Fliers- Courcelette, Transloy Ridge and the Butte de Warlencourt. In 1917 William along with another Biddulph soldier Thomas Charlesworth would have been serving with the division and fighting in the battles on the high ridge at Messines.

From July the London Regiment were ordered to the 3rd Battle of Ypres where they found the natural drainage destroyed by shellfire, and heavy rain had filled the shell holes with deep stagnant water. The 1/24th Battalion bravely suffered in the attacks in

these most awful and unbelievably dreadful conditions on the Pilkem Ridge, losing many brave soldiers. By November, William and his mates had left the Ypres salient when the division had been ordered to join the Battle at Cambrai. Again the division suffered heavy losses. A wet cold winter was spent holding their positions in this area.

The enemy offensive in the spring of 1918 brought more heavy losses and many prisoners were taken when the division lost ground. By August this advance had been reversed during the 2nd Somme battles, and then from 21st August the division began to gain the lost ground and was now in action in the St Quentin area. It is believed that it was here on the 30th August 1918, that sadly Private William Henry Biddulph fell on the battlefield. William, who was aged twenty one, has no known grave and is remembered on the Vis-en- Artois Memorial at Haucourt. His pal Thomas Charlesworth is also commemorated here.

Locally, William is remembered on the Biddulph memorials, the memorial at Christ Church, Biddulph Moor and also at St. Thomas, Mow Cop.

Kathleen Walton, Elaine Heathcote and Michael Turnock

Charlesworth
Private Tom Charlesworth
G/772677 Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment) posted to the
1st/24th Battalion - London Regiment
Formerly 49414, South Staffs Regiment
Killed in action 2nd September 1918 Age 22



Tom's birth was registered at Leek in the first quarter of 1897 and he was baptised at St. Lawrence, Biddulph on February 28th 1897. He was the youngest of ten children born to James and Sarah Ann Charlesworth of Brook Street, Brown Lees. His father was a sawyer. By 1911, the couple had been married for 32 years and of their ten children, two had died by 1911. They were to lose another two sons to the war.

The 1911 census records that the family lived at 3 Newpool Terrace. Although aged only 14, Tom's occupation was given as 'miner'. On August 14th 1917 Tom married Annie Elizabeth Green of 38 Albert Street, Biddulph. His brother, Private Charles Morris Charlesworth had been killed in action in January of that year.

Tom formerly served as a soldier with the South Staffordshire Regiment - number 49414. This may have been pre-war service although without records this remains unsure. However a Sentinel report of October 1918 states he had been called to the colours in April 1918, which was believed to have been at Burslem.

A change of regiment occurred when Tom joined the Royal West Surrey Regiment(The Queens) and posted to 1/24th (County of London) Battalion - part of 47th (2nd London) Division. If the Sentinel date is correct this transfer must have taken place in the field as a draft replacement, as this division was already in France fighting in the Battle of St Quentin. This famous division would see more action at Bapaume and the Ancre. A pal from Biddulph Moor, William Biddulph also joined and served in this battalion during this period.

The war was soon to take on a more mobile form away from the static trench warfare of the earlier years. The enemy push had stalled after their March Offensive and the British divisions along the front in their own sectors would move forward. By August 1918 the Battle of Albert was fought on the old battlefield of the Somme; unlike those previous battles in 1916 this time a successful advance had commenced with the enemy falling back. Tom and his mates were again in action bravely fighting a retreating enemy, which continued into the 2nd Battle of Bapaume from the 31st August to the 3rd September. These bitter fights to gain the ground previously lost to the British were costly and sadly twenty one year old Private Tom Charlesworth fell in these actions on the 2nd September 1918. With no known grave he is commemorated on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial at Hancourt.

His death was reported in the Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel of October 26th 1918:

'He was called to the colours in April. Previously he was a miner and worked at Victoria Pit, Black Bull. Much sympathy is felt in this mining village for the widow and parents of the young man, who possessed a charming disposition, which made him very popular. He was musical and spent his spare moments with his violin, and was always willing to give his services to help a good cause.'

He was a member of the Brown Lees Football Club and also of the Mow Cop Male Voice Choir. Early in 1917, Mr. & Mrs. Charlesworth lost their eldest son, Private Charles Charlesworth, who fell at the relief of Amara, Mesopotamia on January 26th. He had seen nine years of service in the Army and had spent eight years on the Indian frontier when war was declared.'

Private Tom Charlesworth is remembered on the Biddulph and Brown Lees memorials.

Michael Turnock and Elaine Heathcote

Kelly
Rifleman Charles Kelly
88573 2nd/6th Bn. The King's Liverpool Regiment
Died 12th September 1918 Age 27

Charles was born at Brindley Ford circa 1891. His parents were William and Bridget Kelly (possibly Bridget Healey – married 1867 in a civil ceremony and registered at Wolstanton). His father had been born in Ireland, probably moving to England as a small child in the late 1840s. In 1851, William lived in Newcastle-under-Lyme with his parents, both Irish, and the family remained in the Newcastle area for many years, living in Pepper Street. By 1891 William, Bridget and their young family were all residing at Brindley Ford and Charles appears in this census return as a baby only one month old.

The 1901 census finds 9 year old Charles as a schoolboy living with his family at 26 Victoria Street, Brindley Ford. His father and some of his older brothers were employed in the ironworks. Ten years later the family still lived at 26 Victoria Street although his mother had by now died. Charles was employed as a miner.

Charles formerly served in the East Surrey Regiment number 203969, enlisting at Biddulph. At some point he transferred to the 2/6th Battalion (Rifles) The Kings Liverpool Regiment. This was a second line battalion which in February 1915 came under 171st Brigade 57th (2nd West Lancashire) Division. Training was at Blackdown and Deepcut camps at Aldershot before they concentrated in Kent in preparation to cross the channel in mid February 1917. On arrival in France the division assembled at Merris on 23rd February. Without service records and without a date of entry on the medal card of Charles it is assumed he was with this initial detachment.

By 26th February 1917 the division had taken over the trenches at Le Tilleloy near Laventie, where they stayed until ordered to fight in the 3rd Battle of Ypres. The 2/6th Rifles joined the action during the terrible fighting in the salient to gain the ruined village of Passchendaele from 26th of October to the 7th November 1917. A salient with ever deteriorating conditions which was made worse by heavier than normal rainfall and the constant bombardment of shells.

The following year Charles and his mates were involved in the 2nd Battle of Arras fighting at Scrape in August 1918. Then in early September the 2/6th Battalion bravely fought in actions during the battle for the Drocourt-Queant Line, an area in the northern part of the enemies Hindenburg Line. The tanks joined the battle dragging grapnel hooks and steel cables to clear a mass of wire to allow the infantry to pass through.

More open warfare developed moving forward at a faster pace. This was in a push to regain ground lost to the enemy in the previous months, although this came at a heavy cost.

Soon after this action on the 12th September 1918 Rifleman Charles Kelly sadly fell on the battlefield. He was twenty seven years old. He now rests in the Moeuvres Communal Cemetery Extension near Cambrai.

He is remembered on the Brindley Ford memorial.

Elaine Heathcote & Michael Turnock

Whitehurst
Private Wilfred Whitehurst
242397 2nd/6th North Staffordshire (Prince of Wales's) Regiment
Formerly 3345 North Staffordshire Regiment
Died 16th September 1918 Age 37

George Henry Whitehurst and Hannah Bailey had married at All Saints, Odd Rode, in 1877. By 1881 they had moved to John Street, Biddulph, and had two children; Minnie followed by Wilfred (born 1881). The family remained at John Street – their family gradually increasing in size. By the time of the 1911 census their address was given as 165 John Street and Hannah states that they have had ten children in total, although only seven were still alive. Up until this census, Wilfred's father had always been employed in the iron industry. However, by 1911 his job description had changed to 'council labourer'.

By the age of twenty Wilfred was employed in the mines – as a hewer underground. With the onset of war, Wilfred was one of the young sportsmen to enlist in the 'Biddulph Company'. His former regimental number of 3345 suggests that he joined at Biddulph alongside Private William Morris (3343) and Lance Corporal John Robert Reeves (3353). Both also died in the war.

In the early months of the Great War, according to local newspapers, Wilfred enlisted at Biddulph joining the 1/5th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment - in the local company. Training was carried out at Butterton Hall and the Harpenden area. The battalion went to France in March 1915 attaching to 137th Brigade 46th North Midland Division. Without service records or a date of entry on his medal card it cannot be assumed Wilfred joined his battalion on this crossing, as his medal card shows no 1915 Star.

The 46th Division saw action in the Ypres salient and in October in the Battle of Loos, where Biddulph lost eight of its soldiers in the battalion on the 13th October 1915 at the Hohenzollern Redoubt. Later in the year the soldiers were on a long train journey to the south of France from where the division sailed from Marseille, crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Egypt. For unknown reasons the troops were ordered to return to France within a short period and arrived back in January 1916.

The Battle of the Somme in July 1916 found the division in a diversional role at Gommecourt on the 1st of the month. At some point during the war Wilfred transferred battalions; whether this happened in the field or back in England is uncertain. The battalion was the 2/6th North Staffordshire Regiment who went to France in February 1917 previously serving in Ireland. In France they attached to 176th Brigade 59th (2nd North Midlands Division) and saw their first major action on the Hindenburg Line from April to June. The 3rd Battle of Ypres was their next big battle - at the Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood in September. These were battles that only offered the inevitable misery in the appalling Ypres Salient.

At rest during Christmas and the whole of January 1918 at Le Cauroy gave the lads of the North Stafford's a welcome respite from the battlefield. Other Biddulph mates in the battalion were Walter Lovelock and Jesse Wright. During the winter the troops held their lines enduring the hazards of shelling and enemy snipers. March 1918 brought a

new danger; on the 21st the German Spring Offensive commenced. The trenches were full of water and a barrage of shrapnel, high explosive and gas shells fell on the British front line. 2/6th Battalion were in the St. Quentin and Bapaume at this time and like many battalions were overwhelmed by the speed of the enemy attack, losing many men and many wounded. Others were taken prisoner and it was more than likely that Wilfred was taken and became a POW during this period.

Men who were taken prisoner were marched in guarded groups from one barbed wire compound to another. Over the days they slowly moved deeper into enemy held territory, with little in the way of food and drink. Wilfred and the other prisoners in his group would be taken to a larger camp with huts and a diet of black bread, soup made of mangle wurzels or horse beans. At some time he was taken by rail to prison of war camps in Germany of which there were many; it was a long way to the Berlin area. It is known that Wilfred did spend time in camps in Germany - no doubt taken from camp to camp where work was required. Conditions in camps varied greatly and the prisoners were in the hands of the staff and commandant. There was much fund raising both locally and nationally for POWs collecting for food and clothing parcels.

For reasons unknown, maybe through illness or poor conditions, on the 16th September 1918 aged thirty seven sadly Private Wilfred Whitehurst died. He was buried in the Berlin Western Cemetery Brandenburg. This cemetery was one of four built after the armistice to take men who died in the many POW camps in Germany.

Private Wilfred Whitehurst is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Private Jonathan Cheetham
44308 9th Bn Royal Fusiliers
died September 21st 1918 Age 32

Jonathan was born in Biddulph in 1886 and his birth was registered at Congleton. He was the son of William Isaac and Sarah Ann Cheetham. Jonathan was baptised at St. Lawrence on July 11th 1886 and the entry records that his father was a grocer of Bradley Green. By 1891 Jonathan's family were at the Swan Inn where William was publican. By 1901 the family had moved to Congleton Road and William had changed his occupation yet again. Jonathan's father was now described as a butcher.

A move to 85, High Street followed, where the butchery business was developed. By 1911 both 24 year old Jonathan and his older brother Joseph were described as butchers. Jonathan had taken over the business from his brother by 1916 and had married the previous year on December 25th at St. Lawrence, to Ethel Harrop. Both were aged 29 years. Ethel was from 11, High Street and Jonathan, still a butcher, of 85, High Street.

Jonathan enlisted at Hanley. It is believed this was early in 1916. He joined the 9th Battalion (City of London), Royal Fusiliers. This battalion trained at Colchester and Aldershot before they went to France in May 1915. This perhaps means that Jonathan

may have joined the battalion in the field with a draft replacement unit later in 1916. However his medal card gives no date of entry.

The 9th Fusiliers were attached to the 36th Brigade, 12th Eastern Division and by 1916 were holding their front line trenches in the La Basse canal area of Flanders where they sustained heavy losses and replacement troops were urgently required. Earlier in 1915, before Jonathan had arrived, the battalion fought in the Armentieres area and later in October they were in action during the Battle of Loos, sadly losing many of their men. In December the Fusiliers were engaged in operations rounding up spies in the Béthune area.

By June 1916 the battalion were in the Somme district based at Flesselles, near Amiens. On July 1st the division were in reserve and not in action until they were needed to fight in the Albert area, then the second attack on Ovillers, followed by more brave actions at Pozieres and Thiepval during the Battle of the Somme. In 1917 Jonathan and his mates were in the Arras Offensive in the spring, with further actions at Arleux and Scarpe. Then, during October, the 12th Division were transferred to fight in the Battle of Cambrai and saw action in November during the tank attacks at Bonaves and Lateau Woods. The 12th Division, in March 1918, fought to hold the enemy advance over the old Somme battlefield at Bapume and Bazentin-le-Grand. The enemy pushed our lines back and with the men suffering from lack of food, water and sleep, sometimes for periods of 24 hours at a time, they were always in danger of capture in this retreat.

By August the tables had turned on the enemy forces and their advance halted. Many losses were inflicted on the battalion during this period and when the 9th Fusiliers joined the battle on the Hindenburg Line, which commenced on September 18th, more tragic news followed. Private Jonathan Cheetham sadly fell in these actions on September 21st during an attack on an enemy stronghold at Malassise Farm and Fishers Keep at Epehy.

Jonathan is now at rest in the Epehy Wood Cemetery, near Peronne. He is remembered on the Biddulph memorials. A plaque has also been placed in the church tower at St. Lawrence: *"This tablet is erected to the memory of Our Brother Ringer, Jonathan Cheetham, who fell in the Great War Sept. 21. 1918. Duty Called. Thy will be Done."*

After her husband's death Ethel continued to run the business but she too died a few years later. Her obituary which appeared in the Chronicle on January 5th 1924 reported, *"The deceased was a war widow, her husband shortly after a brief married happiness, losing his life in the war. From the time of his enlistment, early in the war period, she had successfully carried on the retail butchery business in High Street, that he had established and built up, and was regarded by all who knew her as a capable, hard-working business woman. Deceased was 37."*

Michael Turnock and Elaine Heathcote.

Snee
Private Thomas Snee
38789 North Staffordshire Regiment
Died 1st October 1918 Age 22

Thomas was born in 1896 and baptised on 27 September 1896 at Goldenhill. His parents were Michael Snee who had been born in Boyle in Ireland and Mary Ann nee Raftery. There is a strong Irish ancestry as Mary Ann's father was also from Ireland.

In 1901 the family were living at Stadmoreslow Lane in Newchapel. As head of the family Michael was aged 28 and employed as a puddler ironworker at the forge. His mother, Mary Ann, was also 28 and her birthplace was given as Goldenhill in Staffordshire. In this census Thomas was aged 4 and had two younger brothers; Edward aged 2 and William aged 1 year.

By 1911 Thomas at 15 years of age was working as a colliery horse driver. The family were now residing at Lane Ends, near Newchapel. His younger siblings, Edward and William were still at school.

Thomas served in the 4th Battalion (Extra Reserve) North Staffordshire Regiment, a battalion based at Marske near Redcar in 1916, and then moving to Saltburn in 1917. They initially attached to 56th London Division and crossed to Le Havre in October 1917. In France the 4th North Stafford's transferred to 106th Brigade 35th Division.

The battalion saw their first action in the bitter fighting during a barrage of gas shells to retake the Houthulst Forest near the Poelcapelle road, when the Stafford's fought in the last weeks of the horrors of the 3rd Battle of Ypres. The forest was a German fortress first taken by the enemy in 1914. By October the conditions were unbelievable with shell holes filled with slimy mud.

At the start of the German Spring Offensive in March 1918, the 35th Division were in the Bapaume region until forced to withdraw back to the old Ypres salient. Then in August the tables turned pushing the enemy back during the Final Advance in Flanders. It was whilst fighting here on the 1st October 1918 that Private Thomas Snee sadly fell in the field. He was twenty two years old. He now rests in the Zantvoorde British Cemetery. "Soldiers Died" tells of many brave soldiers in the battalion who died in the final weeks of the war.

Thomas is remembered on the Brindley Ford Memorial.

Kathleen Walton and Michael Turnock

Brammer
Private Frank Brammer
42609 9th Norfolk Regiment
Formerly 61782 North Staffordshire (Prince of Wales) Regiment
Killed in Action 8th October 1918 Age 19



Frank was the son of Jonathan and Annie Brammer of Gillow Heath and was one of eight children born to the couple. Jonathan had married Annie Buckley at St. Mary's, Astbury in 1888. The family moved around the north Staffordshire and south Cheshire area and in 1891 lived at Congleton at the Moss. By 1901 they lived at Badkins Bank, Mow Cop. Jonathan was described as a coal miner and Frank was the baby of the family. He had older siblings James, Hedley, Ernest, Alice, Hannah and Mary to fuss over him. The following year saw the happy event of the new arrival of a son, Thomas, to the couple. Sadly, this was also the year when the family, now living at Gillow Heath, were struck by tragedy.

The event was reported widely in the press – an event of such sadness struck a chord with the population on a national scale. Sylvia Rogers (nee Brammer) recalls the tragedy:

“My mum was born at Gillow Heath and my dad at Falls Cottage. When dad was only a few months old his father and brother were killed by damp in a footrill at the Falls. After this tragedy my father was re-christened. He had been Thomas Brammer but was re-christened Jonathan Thomas after his father.”

On 30th August 1902 the Chronicle reported: *“Biddulph has experienced a singular run of misfortune during the last few weeks, and this last is the saddest and most shocking of all, both in character and extent. A small colliery had for several years been worked on the estate of Mr. T. Cotterill, The Falls, Gillow Heath, and the colliery takes its name from the estate. Instead of the usual shaft dropping straight down into the earth, the coal in the Falls Colliery is reached by the ‘futtril’ method, that is, by going down a decline. As is common with most mines, so here are pits, which for some reason or other, have been put out of use. One of these was on Thursday the scene of a terrible accident. A boy who lived at a cottage near the colliery, James Brammer, aged about 14, with another boy of L. Goodwin, was walking near the entrance to one of these pits. Brammer entered the one which had not been used for a long time and Goodwin watched him go down a few steps into the mine when he appeared to stumble and fall, The boy’s father Jonathan Brammer who happened to be working in his garden close to was soon on the spot, and called to some of the men working at Messrs. Hall and Summerford’s colliery to come and assist, and himself rushed into the mine. They found to their horror that the mine was full of gas, and*

it was impossible to get further into the pit than three yards from the mouth without risking their lives. Bundles of straw were procured from the Falls Farm, and set on fire at the pit's mouth to create a circulation of air, and pipes were obtained and let down to convey air from above. With a strong rope around his body Mr. Hall descended, and after securing Jonathan Brammer, managed to bring him to the surface. A man named John Brown then repeated the experiment and soon had the boy up. To all appearance, there was but little hope of him being restored, but willing hands set to work at once to use all known and available means to restore them to animation. Doctors Craig and Clements, as well as P.S.Hill and P.C.Lycett, made every possible effort to bring both round, but the 'black damp' had too surely done its work, and reluctantly, all were compelled to relinquish their efforts – both were dead."

Jonathan and his son were buried at St. Lawrence on September 1st 1902.

Although only two or three years of age, Frank, must have been aware of the loss of his father and oldest brother and of the difficulties it created for his mother. In 1904 she married again at St. Lawrence, Biddulph, to Thomas Armitt. By 1911 the couple had a daughter, Eliza Ann, and the family still lived at Gillow Heath. In this census, Frank, aged 11, was described as a scholar.

Frank became a soldier in the North Staffordshire Regiment with service number 61782 having enlisted at Burslem. He was later to transfer to the 9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment. This was a battalion with 24th Division that originally landed in France in August 1915 however, without service records or a date of entry on his medal card it is not possible to say when Frank joined the Norfolk's.



On the reverse of the card Frank had written:

"I think this is a bit better, these are some of my mates...how do you like it. Frank"

Whilst in France and by October 1915 the 9th battalion had transferred to the 6th Division; this division had served in Ireland before the war and was then ordered to the Western Front in September 1914 to fight on the Aisne. The following year found them in the 1st Battle of Ypres in action at Hooge. In 1916 during the Battle of the Somme, the 6th Division fought major actions at Flers-Courcelette, Morval and Le Transloy.

In the spring of 1917 Frank and his mates were in action in the Battle of Arras, with a gallant attack fought to secure Hill 70. In November 1917 the division were ordered to

fight in the Battle of Cambrai where greater use was made of the tanks. In March 1918 the enemy spring offensive commenced and this found all the divisions along the front losing their previous hard fought gains with the sad loss of many of their soldiers - falling to a barrage of heavy shelling and the deadly enemy machine guns. The speed of the enemy advance meant the Norfolk's were falling back sometimes for twenty four hour stretches without sleep, food and little water and always in danger of capture. The 6th Division had been in the St Quentin area fighting this advancing enemy, they were also to see action at Bailleul and Kemmel.

When this enemy advance was halted in early August, the 6th Division made up their lost ground in valiant actions on the St Quentin Canal and the old Hindenburg Line. On the 8th and 9th October another attack took place in the St Quentin and Cambrai area and it was sadly here, at the age of nineteen, that Private Frank Brammer was to fall on the 8th October 1918. It was only a month before the end of the Great War. Frank now rests in the Bellicourt British Cemetery near St Quentin.



The inscription reads:

42609 Private F Brammer Norfolk Regiment 8th October 1918 Age 19

Private Frank Brammer is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

With thanks to Sylvia Rogers and Janet Rogers for information and photographs.

Walley
Private Alfred Moss Walley
3294 19th Bn/. Middlesex Regiment
Killed in action 18th October 1918 Age 27



Alfred had been born in Biddulph circa 1891. He was one of nine children and in 1911 was living with his family in Congleton Road. In 1915 he married Alice Knight at St. John's, Buglawton.

His service records survive which show that he enlisted at Congleton on the 31st May 1915. He was a collier weighing 115 lbs and being 5' 2 ½". His address was given as 28 William Street, Buglawton and he gave his age as 24 years and 6 months. Later forms record that he also had a daughter, Mary, who had been born on 9th December 1915.

A Battalion raised in April 1915 by North Staffordshire MP, Lt Col John Ward, was the chosen unit of Alfred when he enlisted in the army, joining the 19th Battalion Middlesex Regiment. The battalion trained at Hornsey and Aldershot. Before his training was complete Alfred was admitted to the Cambridge Hospital, Aldershot, during February 1916 for seven days as he was suffering from influenza. The battalion, now divisional pioneers to the 41st Division, were inspected by King George V and Field Marshal Lord French on 26th April 1916.

41st Division crossed the English Channel on the 1st May 1916 and moved to their assembly point situated between Hazebrouck and Bailleul. The division were to fight their first major action in the Battle of the Somme in July. A pioneer battalion consisting of some skilled tradesmen and the rest able to use a pick and shovel which as a colliery worker would not have been a problem for Alfred. There were others in the battalion who were also Staffordshire miners. The duties of the pioneers who followed the infantry were varied; the building and maintaining of defences, making roadways and tracks and when required, laying down their tools, taking up their rifles and Lewis guns and helping the infantry during attacks. The infantry of the division fought at Flers and Courcellette on the Somme battlefield and later at Transloy Ridge. In January of 1917 the pioneers were in the Kemmel area.

From his service records we know that in March 1917 Alfred was hospitalised again; this time suffering from scabies. He was admitted to 138th Field Ambulance and 50th Casualty Clearing Station. Orders now brought the troops to Messines and fighting a battle there during June aimed to gain this high position from the enemy. By July they

moved into the Salient to fight in the 3rd Battle of Ypres. The pioneers bravely worked through shell and rifle fire carrying out their work, repairing walk and tram ways for the troops in the most appalling conditions at Pilkem Ridge and the Menin Road. Near the end of the battle the division was withdrawn to Bray Plage on the Flanders coast to help deal with the operation there and to recover and retrain.

On the 7th November 1917 orders were received to prepare for a long rail journey; the 41st Division were going to Italy. They left in two trains from Loon Plage near Dunkirk, travelling south through France, away from the shelling before crossing into Italy. It was a long tedious journey with many delays but must have been a welcome relief for Alfred and his mates. Their destination was the ancient town of Mantua where they detrained, arriving on the 20th November 1917. The division then marched to the positions they were to hold on the front line behind the River Piave. The division had been sent to help to prevent the collapse on this front. They then moved on to an area north of Treviso in late November into early December when the first snow fell. Still fighting on the Italian front until February 1918 when the battalion received orders to concentrate in the Camposanpiero area ready for a return to France. After another train journey the battalion arrived in the Doullens and Mondicourt areas. Happily Alfred was amongst the troops in the battalion to receive a 14 day home leave on the 10th February 1918.



Left:
Alfred Moss Walley,
his wife Alice and
their daughter.

After his furlough Alfred returned to the Western Front, and for the small scale offence of "drunkenness" in February was awarded seven days Field Punishment No 2. Now in the St Quentin area the division was met with news of the German Spring Offensive on the 21st March 1918. This enemy attack pushed the division back to the Arras area with many men lost or taken prisoner. In August the enemy advance was halted and the British began retaking the lost ground in the "Hundred Days Offensive". 41st Division fought in the Battle of Lys and *The Advance in Flanders*. As already mentioned the 19th Pioneers were not only trained in their usual role but to support their infantry in these desperate times, using their rifles and Lewis guns.

During these offensives in the old Ypres salient on the 18th October 1918, Private Alfred Moss Walley was to fall on the battlefield. It was so close to the end of the war. He was aged twenty seven and now rests in the Moorseele Military Cemetery. He is also remembered on the Biddulph memorials. In May 1919 a pension of 20/5d per week was awarded to Mrs Walley and her daughter.

His belongings were returned and included: 'mirror, cig case, ring, cap badge, 2 handkerchiefs, 2 combs, papers, cards, reg. envelope'.

Alice remarried in 1919 to George Henry Jones and they moved to 13, King Street, Buglawton.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Henshall
Private Samuel Henshall
50591 2nd Bn. Lincolnshire Regiment
Died 23rd October 1918 Age 19

Samuel's birth was registered at Tunstall in 1899, although he was born at the end of November 1898 and baptised at St. James, Newchapel on 14th December 1898. His parents, John and Melinda (nee Moores) had married in a civil ceremony in Congleton in 1895. His mother was from Congleton and his father from Burslem but Samuel had been born at Newchapel.

In 1901, Samuel and his siblings lived with their parents at 13 Handley Street, Packmoor. Samuel had two older sisters; Mary E and Melinda and his father was described as a coal miner in that year. The family still resided in Handley Street in 1911 but had expanded to include eight children; Mary Ellen, Melinda, Samuel, Grace, Isabella, John, Alice and James Alfred. Samuel was at school and his father John was still a coal miner.

Samuel enlisted in the 2nd Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment; before the war this battalion had served in Bermuda and Nova Scotia, returning to England in October 1914. They left for the Western Front the following month and in February of 1915 transferred to 25th Brigade 8th Division. No service records have been found and the medal card of Samuel does not show a date of entry into a theatre of war.

In the spring of 1915 8th Division fought in the Battles of Aubers Ridge and Neave Chapelle, and later in September the Battle of Loos. July 1916 found Samuel and his mates fighting in the Albert area during the Battle of the Somme. After the enemy withdrew to the Hindenburg Line the division held the trenches in this area. In July

1917 the 8th Division were ordered to fight in the 3rd Battle of Ypres, seeing a major action at Langemarck with all the horrors of this terrible battle.

A transfer of divisions took place in early 1918 for the 2nd Battalion Lincolnshire, when they attached to 21st Division. The German Spring Offensive of March 1918 found the Lincolns in action at St Quentin and Bapaume until ordered to fall back to Messines and Kemmel. Then the infantry entrained to travel south and join the 3rd Battle of the Aisne in June. The actions following the turn of the enemy offensive in August brought Samuel to the St Quentin Canal area and Cambrai, with the fight back in progress the war was moving fast pushing the enemy back, but a heavy loss was inflicted on the division.

In the *"Final Advance in Picardy"* at the Battle of Selle in October, the division met with strong enemy resistance. In the early morning attacks on the 20th which secured the high ground, the division then paused for two days in order to bring up their heavy artillery. Then a renewed attack on the 23rd October began. It was during this bitter fighting that sadly Private Samuel Henshall fell and he would not see the outcome of the attack. On the following day it was a significant victory for 21st Division, taking some 20,000 enemy prisoners. At the age of nineteen Samuel had fallen on the 23rd October 1918. He was never recovered from the battlefield and is now remembered on the Vis – En – Artois Memorial.

He is remembered locally on the Brindley Ford & Tunstall memorials.

Elaine Bryan and Michael Turnock

**Private William Owen
44395 2nd Bn. Suffolk Regiment
killed in action October 23rd 1918 Age 20**



William Owen as a Scout aged about 10.

William was born on January 1st 1898, one of the ten children born to John and Hannah Eliza, née Longshaw, who were married in 1883 at St. James' in Newchapel. Their home at the time of his birth was in the Brewhouse Bank/Whitehill district of Kidsgrove.

Enoch Owen and George Longshaw, respective parents of John and Hannah, were two of the original trustees of Balls Bank Primitive Methodist Church when it opened in 1870. In 1901 William and his brothers and sisters, Albert, Moses, Rebecca, Sarah, John, Mark and George, were living with their parents at 141, High Street, Tunstall, next door to the Longshaw's (probably Hannah's brother). Two other children, Lorraina (1891-1892) and Enoch (1893-1893), had died. In 1911 William was with his parents, his brother George and his sister Sarah, at 1A, Cartlich Street, Sandyford. John and Mark were living at 20, Samuel Street, Packmoor with their married brother, Moses. Albert and Rebecca had married. It is difficult to establish where William went to school and when he left. The 1911 census shows 13-year-old William working as a tile fixer.

The newspaper report of William's death shows that prior to enlistment William had been working at Brown Lees Colliery. It appears that he enlisted at Lichfield but apart from *Soldiers Died in the Great War* no other records appear to exist. He probably enlisted shortly after his 18th birthday in 1916, or maybe even before. Although the details are unknown William initially joined the South Staffordshire Regiment. His number was 49488. Whether or not he served overseas with this unit is not known but at some point he transferred to the 2nd battalion Suffolk Regiment, 76th Brigade, 3rd Division, maybe in the field.

Williams's medal card does not show a 1915 Star or a date of entry into a theatre of war, so it can be assumed he served overseas from 1916. During the second part of that year the 2nd battalion Suffolks were in action in the Battle of the Somme. The following year found them fighting in the Battle of Arras and in July 1917 in the Second Battle of Ypres, seeing bitter action at the Menin Road Ridge and Polygon Wood in the morass of the Salient. By November the division were ordered south to fight in the Battle of Cambrai.

In the spring of 1918 all along the front the German Spring Offensive commenced on March 21st, overwhelming the British line. At this time William and his mates were fighting in the battles at St. Quentin, then Bapaume. They were then to fight a withdrawal action which brought the division to the Arras area, where many of them were taken prisoner. The battles of 1918, unlike the earlier years, were fast moving and by early August the enemy offensive was halted and the infantry of the 3rd Division began to retake the lost ground, pushing the enemy back to Cambrai and the Hindenburg Line.

In October the British offensive known as *The final advance in Picardy*, found the 3rd Division bravely fighting in the Battle of Selle which started on the 17th. The infantry, after a bitter struggle, secured the high ground from the enemy and then took a two day pause whilst bringing up their artillery to support their final push. On October 23rd 1918 the 2nd battalion Suffolks renewed their attack and sadly in this action Private William Owen fell on the battlefield. He was 20 years old. It was on October 23rd that Field Marshall Douglas Haig launched a night attack with all three of his British armies, the First, Second and Fourth. The villages of Romeries and Beaudignies were liberated on October 23rd. At the time of his death William's parents were living at 60, Samuel Street, Packmoor. William now rests in the Romeries Communal Cemetery close to where he fell. He was posthumously awarded the Victory and British medals.

Mr. and Mrs. J. Owen, 60, Samuel street, Packmoor, have received official intimation that their son, Pte. William Owen, Suffolk Regiment, was killed in action on October 23rd.

He was 20 years of age and was formerly employed at Brown Lees Colliery. A brother has served four years in the Army.

From a newspaper clipping.

John and Hannah later moved to 42, Thomas Street, Packmoor. William's father John died in 1936 aged 74, his mother Hannah a year earlier in 1935 aged 69. William is commemorated on his parents' grave in St. James' cemetery in Newchapel, on the Memorial Wall in Tunstall Memorial Gardens, and in Romeries.

The family worshipped at Packmoor Methodist Chapel and a memorial service was held for him there on December 1st 1918. The following words are taken from William's memorial notice:

**No more will he answer the roll
Nor start at the bugle sound;
But, Lord, when Thy roll is called,
May his name in Thy book be found.**

**Some day we hope to meet him,
Some day we know not when,
To clasp his hand in a better land,
Never to part again.**

Elaine Bryan and Michael Turnock



**Foden
Sergeant Fred Foden
31910 24th Bn. Royal Welsh Fusiliers
Died 31st October 1918 Age 23**

Fred was born in Biddulph in 1895. He was the second son of George and Harriet Foden (nee Washington). His father and mother were both Biddulph born and had married in 1892 in a civil ceremony at Congleton.

In 1901 the family resided in John Street. George was employed as a colliery labourer. Living with the family at that time was also Harriet's brother, Thomas Washington. By 1911 the family had expanded and moved. George, Harriet and their children - Ellen (18), William Thomas (16), Fred (15), Harry (13), John (8) and Mary (3) had moved to Brown Lees. They lived at 17, New Pool Terrace and appear to have lived here throughout the war years. Fred, although aged only 15, was employed as a colliery labourer "above ground".

Service records survive for Fred and it appears that he enlisted at Tunstall on the 12th July 1915. He served in the 3rd Training Battalion, "D Coy", a home based unit of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. He joined on the 17th July at their barracks in Wrexham. He was just 19 years and 9 months of age. Weighing 125lbs and 5' 5" tall he had a complexion described as 'fresh' with brown eyes and light brown hair. At the time of enlistment he was employed as a colliery banksman and was a Primitive Methodist.

He later moved to Litherland, Liverpool but was soon transferred to the 12th (Reserve) Battalion stationed at Kinmel Park near Rhyl. His service records confusingly show him in the 53rd (YS) Battalion Cheshire Regiment; this was in fact up to October 1917 the same unit under 62th Training Reserve Battalion. At this time his service number was TR4/20166 and it appears that he was an instructor. The service records of Fred show he qualified in drill, musketry and bombing.

Fred rose through the ranks from Lance Corporal in November 1915 until promoted to Sergeant on the 26th April 1916 - a good soldier; his conduct sheet in his records is completely blank, with no offences or punishments. Once again Fred transferred unit, to the 14th Battalion, when he was posted overseas. He crossed the channel to France on the 29th June 1918 and then on the 7th July joined in the field with another Royal Welsh Fusiliers unit, the 24th Battalion.

The 24th Battalion had only recently arrived on the Western Front; since February 1917 they had been in actions in Egypt and Palestine. Now in France they were to retrain - the battalion received this extra training which was carried out in the Doullen and St Pol areas to acclimatize the troops with warfare tactics more suited to the Western Front rather than the desert warfare most of them were accustomed to. Fred and his new mates were then transferred to 94th Brigade 31st Division, a division held in reserve until late July when orders to hold the line in the area were issued.

In early August 1918 "*The Hundred Days Offensive*" commenced; counter attack operations aimed to push the enemy back and to regain their lost ground. On the 18th August the division bravely fought in bitter actions on the high ground at Vieux Berquin and here they captured an important enemy stronghold. Through the whole of September 1918 the 31st Division would continue in these costly attacks to reverse the enemy advance; they were again bravely fighting the enemy in the offensive known as "*The Final Advance in Flanders*". Heavy fighting on the battlefields of the old Ypres salient in late September caused many casualties in the battalion. These actions continued through until late October which now found the 24th Royal Welsh Fusiliers in a forward area at Tieghem, another hazardous struggle against a now weakening enemy.

In this final advance of the war in the Flanders area many of the Fusiliers became "*the fallen*". Sadly Sergeant Fred Foden was one of these brave men - with less than two weeks before the Great War ended and so close to peace.

He was twenty three years old when he fell on the 31st October 1918. Fred is now at rest in the Harlebeke New British Cemetery. He is remembered on the Biddulph and Brown Lees memorials.

Michael Turnock & Elaine Heathcote

Wiggin
Sarah Ann Wiggin
VAD Nurse in RMC
Died 2nd November 1918 Age 30



Sarah Ann Wiggin was born in December 1887 at 'Brindley Ford, Wedgwood', one of about eight children born to Joseph Wiggin and his wife Lucy Emma, nee Onions. Her parents had married at St. Anne's, Brown Edge in 1871 and in 1881 they were living in Tunstall Road, Brindley Ford. Lucy died, aged 41, when Sarah was not quite 15 months old. The family were still together in 1891.

Sarah could not be traced in 1901 but she could have gone into service although she would only have been about 12 years old. The rest of the family seem to have been scattered throughout Brindley Ford. In 1911 Sarah Ann was working as a domestic servant for Nathan and Harriett Storey at 54 West Bond Street, Macclesfield. Apparently he was the Town Missionary and his wife was the Deaconess. It is possible that they were members of the Salvation Army and that Sarah also became a member. 'Sister' on the War Memorial could refer to a nursing sister or a member of the Salvation Army.

At some time during the course of the War Sarah became a VAD nurse. British Legion records indicate she served with the R.M.C. (Royal Medical Corps?). It is not known if she served abroad. She died on 2nd November 1918 at the Military Auxiliary Hospital, Moor Park, Preston, Lancs. In her will she left the money she had saved to her married sister Hannah, who had married Thomas William Goodwin in 1896. In 1911 Thomas was listed as being a farmer and butcher and they lived at 37 High Street, Brindley Ford next to the Methodist Chapel and Schoolrooms.

WIGGIN Sarah Ann of The Military Auxiliary Hospital Moor Park Preston **Lancashire** spinster died 2 November 1918 Administration **London** 2 March to Hannah Goodwin (wife of Thomas William Goodwin).
Effects £51 14s. 10d.

It is not known where Sarah Ann is buried, probably Preston, but she is remembered on the Brindley Ford War Memorial. Apparently her father Joseph was a poppy seller after the war until his death in December 1921

Elaine Bryan

Additional information on Sarah Ann Wiggin was given to the Society in April 2017 by Rosie Rowley who is the Macclesfield Projects Administrator for the Family History Society of Cheshire presently working on the Macclesfield Reflects WW1 Project

In 1901, 13 year old Sarah was a servant in the household of Jabez Hancock, a baker who lived at 17 King Street, Tunstall. The 1911 census shows that Nathan and Harriet Storey were members of the Manchester City Mission, a branch of which was located in Mill Street, Macclesfield. A war memorial for the Macclesfield Mill Street Mission included Sarah's name, but unfortunately this memorial is now lost. We have obtained the details from a newspaper report of the unveiling in 1919.

Sarah is named on the family gravestone in the churchyard at St James' Church, Newchapel, Staffordshire, not far from the family home in Brindley Ford. It is not known whether she was actually buried there.

An article about Sarah was published in the Macclesfield Independent Newspaper when a memorial plaque from the Mill Street Methodist Church was found in Macclesfield Silk Museum. The plaque can be viewed in the memorial section.

Clay
Private Arthur Henry Clay
52099 1st Bn., Lincolnshire Regiment
Formerly 47283 North Staffordshire Regiment
Died 14th November 1918 Age 26

As the son of a policeman, Arthur's early life was spent moving around from one area of North Staffordshire to another. His father, James, had been born at Maer and the early years of his time in the police force had been spent in the south of the county - which is probably how he came to meet Arthur's mother, Charlotte Barnsley. His older siblings had been born at Brown Hills and Perry Barr. Arthur had been born at Brindley Ford and it was at the police house there that the family resided in 1891. They seemed to do a stint at Fenton before living at Chesterton in 1901. By 1911 Arthur was living with his brother and sister-in-law at Burslem where he was employed as a salesman and collector.

He must have moved to Biddulph by 1913 as in this year, on 15th September, he married Ethel Green at St. Lawrence. In the register his age was given as 22 and he was described as a painter of 43 Newpool Terrace. His bride was the daughter of John Green, a painter and plumber of High Street, Biddulph. Their daughter, Lottie Ethel, was born in 1914.



Arthur enlisted into the Biddulph Company – a battalion in the North Staffordshire Regiment in September 1914, giving his address as 18, Lower John Street. His regimental number was 47283. The battalion he served with could have been the 1/5th although his medal card shows no entry date into a theatre of war and no 1915 Star was awarded.

If Arthur did serve with this battalion he would have entered France in July 1915 and seen action in the Battle of Loos later that year. The following year the 1/5th served at Gommecourt in the Battle of the Somme. 1917 saw them in action on the Hindenburg Line.

Arthur was later transferred to the 1st Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment; however without service records no date can be given or a reason for the move. This change happened in the field, as 1st Lincoln's had been on the Western Front since August 1914. This new battalion had a very similar military service to that of the North Stafford's. They saw action in 1915 at Loos and in 1916 served on the Somme. In 1917 they were on the Hindenburg Line, Arras Offensive and 3rd Ypres.

1st Lincolnshire, who were attached to 62th Brigade 21st Division in 1918, fought in a bitter struggle in the Battles of St Quentin and Bapaume during the enemy's big advance and it could well have been in these actions that Arthur was taken prisoner. He was transferred to a prison camp in Germany and here he may have become ill or had previously received wounds. At the age of twenty six he sadly died on the 14th November 1918. Arthur Henry Clay died after the Armistice, most probably in a nearby POW camp. The British army did not enter Cologne until December 1918 - a month after Arthur had died.

He is now at rest in the Cologne Southern Cemetery. Arthur is remembered on the Biddulph and Brown Lees memorials.

Michael Turnock and Elaine Heathcote

Ratcliffe
Private Harry Ratcliffe
202101 4th Bn. King's Own Royal Lancashire Regiment
Died 5th December 1918 aged 38

Harry Ratcliffe was born in 1880 in Brindley Ford. The date is verified on Staffordshire BMD. At the time he was the youngest of six children born to Amos and Mary, nee Shaw. Amos was a coal miner who later opened a grocers' shop and post office. By 1891 two more children had been born and Amos had branched out to being a grocer as well as and coal miner.

In 1901 the family were living at 27 High Street, Brindley Ford (probably the same premises as in 1891). The shop by then incorporated the Post Office. Harry was working there as a Grocers' Assistant. This was still the case in 1911. Harry had married Mary Ann Worthington in 1908 at St. James', Newchapel and in 1911 they were living next door 25 High Street along with Mary Ann's three siblings: Clement, John and Gwendoline Worthington who was only 7 years old. No children have been found for Harry and Mary Ann. Harry was still working as a Grocers' Assistant for his father when he enlisted or was called up. The few surviving war records show that he had adopted Gwendoline.

Harry enlisted at Burslem on the 21st August 1916. By November he was sent to train under the new army structure training plan; this was at Press Heath TR/3 with the 75th Training (12th Reserve Battalion) East Lancashire Regiment. After training he was sent to the 8th Battalion Depot at Ripon. A confusing set of service numbers appear. On the 6th January 1917 Harry was posted to the 1/4th Battalion, The King's Own Royal Lancashire Regiment, and crossed the channel to join his battalion in the field in Flanders. This battalion was attached to 164th Brigade 55th (West Lancashire) Division and had served in Flanders since May 1915.

In January 1917 the 55th Division were holding their lines in a cold and wet Ypres Salient; though a reasonably quiet time, the troops were still under the threat of enemy shell fire and were surrounded on three sides in the large salient. Harry would have joined his new mates in the Railway Wood area, not far from the Menin Road out of Ypres. Their front spread two miles north to the village of Wieltje.

Ten days before the 3rd Battle of Ypres was to commence on the 31st July, Harry was taken out of the front line and returned to England arriving on the 21st July 1917. The reason for this is uncertain but health problems could very well have been the cause. He spent time attached to a home based unit until 2nd April 1918 when he was discharged from the army.

Nine months later at the age of thirty eight, Harry Ratcliffe sadly died at his home, 27 High Street, Brindley Ford, on the 5th December 1918. He was described as an Army pensioner (Grocers' Assistant). He died of (1) influenza 10 days (2) broncho pneumonia; he was caught by the flu epidemic. No mention of his death appears in the CWGC records. Private Harry Ratcliffe is remembered on the Brindley Ford memorial.

Elaine Bryne and Michael Turnock.