

# More than a name



**Memorial tablet at Christ Church, Gentleshaw**



There are nine young men commemorated on the tablet in the north wall of Christ Church, Gentleshaw. They all lost their lives directly due to the First World War.

Walter Bayley	age 22
Alfred E Hickman	age 37
James T Neville	age 24
Charlie W Rogers	age 24
Henry Jarvis	age 35
Reginald Lees	age 20
Herbert Derry	age 27
Bertram T Hurlock	age 31
Lt Col Thomas R Evans	age 34

Remembrance of the lives sacrificed can be more meaningful by understanding more about those men, and their experiences before and during the war. The commemoration of each is then more than just a name.

The research was carried out by for Cannock Wood and Gentleshaw local history group by Liz Whiteley, with the help of Jean Greenfield and Teri Dicken, and with thanks to Rev. Lynn McKeon and Church Warden Marion Tait for permission and access to photograph in the church.

We are delighted and very fortunate that a local artist, I.J. Hunt, has prepared two original pencil drawings for this project, one of the school and the other of the schoolmaster's house around the time of the First World War.

## Walter Bayley

Walter was born on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1895 in Burton on Trent, the son of Samuel Bayley, and his wife Alice. When he was baptised on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1895 at St Modwen the family were living at 50 King Street in Burton and his father was a brewery labourer; he was still working as brewery labourer at the time of the 1901 census. Walter was admitted to school on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1898 but also withdrawn from the school register the same day, with the annotation 'not 5'.

At the time of the 1911 census, 15-year-old Walter was unemployed and living in Cannock Wood with his father, a colliery sawyer, his mother and sister Eva, but the two other children of the marriage had died. Prior to enlisting Walter had been employed by the Cannock Wood and Rugeley Colliery Co.

Walter was an early volunteer, enlisting in the 9<sup>th</sup> battalion the Royal Welsh Fusiliers on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1914 at Hednesford and given service number 13712. He was sent to France in July 1915 and was there for two years, eight months.



He was killed in action during the great German advance in the Somme on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1918 and is commemorated on the Arras memorial. The Arras memorial commemorates almost 35,000 servicemen from the United Kingdom, South Africa and New Zealand who died in the Arras sector and have no known grave, including Walter and 44 others from his battalion who died on the same day.

According to the Lichfield Mercury, 'a memorial service was held at Christ Church, Gentleshaw in April 1918 when touching reference was made by the vicar, Rev. Dr. Evans, to Walter's bravery and devotion to duty'.

He was posthumously awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.



## Alfred Edgar Hickman

Alfred was born in Cannock Wood in 1881, the son of James Hickman and his wife Margaret. He was baptised on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1881 at Christ Church, Gentleshaw.

At the time of the 1891 census the family were living on Cumberledge Hill. Alfred's father and older brother were working as coal miners, and also in the household were four other siblings, his mother and grandmother. In 1901 Alfred was working for the Cannock and Rugeley Collieries as an engine plane man, keeping in repair and working order roads or planes along which wagons or trams were hauled by ponies.

At the time of the 1911 census Alfred was single and living in Cannock Wood with his widowed mother and three younger siblings and working as a coal miner (hewer).

Alfred enlisted in Hednesford in April 1916 and was private 202648 in the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

The battalion's war diary reports that in the first week of November 1916 Alfred's battalion was billeted at Steenvoorde, to the west of Ypres, where there was daily training but also a brigade football tournament.

Then the battalion moved forward, to relieve other units at Anzac Ridge on 17<sup>th</sup> November with heavy shelling, including attacks with gas shells.



'A dismal scene on the Zonnebeke slope of Anzac Ridge, in the Ypres sector, in Belgium, on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1917. Blasted landscape showing flooded shell craters and trenches, heavy artillery.'  
Photo taken by Captain G Wilkins, an Anzac photographer.

Alfred was killed in action on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1917 in Belgium, whilst discharging his duties as a driver in the Transport Section.

A memorial service for him was held at Christ Church, Gentleshaw in early December 1917, with the vicar Rev. J.A. Evans officiating. It was reported in the Lichfield Mercury that letters of sympathy had been received from his officers commenting on his high moral character and cheerful disposition. It is likely that he never married, as his mother was the sole legatee for his personal effects.

His death is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial, Passchendaele, in Belgium.



He was posthumously awarded the British War medal and the Victory medal.

## James Thomas Neville

James was born on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1893 in Hednesford, the son of Samuel Neville and his wife Ellen.

His father, Samuel, had been born in Cannock Wood, but in 1881 was living in Green Heath, Hednesford, and at age 14 was listed as a grocer. Samuel was listed as a tea merchant's assistant in Yardley in 1889, and as a grocer in Yardley in 1891, but at the time of James' birth, his father was working as a coalminer back in Hednesford.

In 1901 James was living in Hednesford with his grandfather, James Neville who was born in Gentleshaw and was a coal miner (hewer). His grandfather died in 1905, when young James would have been 12 or 13 years old. At that time, school leaving age was usually between 12 and 14 years of age.

By the time of the 1911 census, James was 18, living at The Stables, Chestall and employed as a gamekeeper's assistant.

He volunteered to sign up and was enlisted in Lichfield, and given service number 19639 in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, South Staffs Regiment.

James first served in the theatre of war on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1915 and during 1916 would have been involved in several of the actions in the Somme valley, with some successes. The successes were at a terrible cost though - the regiment lost 88 officers and men just on the first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916.

By late March 1917 the battalion was amongst the most experienced and battle-hardened British regular army units. During March 1917, the Germans carried out a deep strategic withdrawal from the 1916 battlefield of the Somme, taking up a new position in the formidable, prepared defences of the Hindenburg Line. Once British patrols had detected that the Germans were on the move, a general advance took place until the outer defences were reached. In late March and early April, a number of attacks probed the enemy's new line. The 1<sup>st</sup> South Staffs were now facing the Hindenburg Line in the area of Croisilles, southeast of Arras. On 26th March orders were issued for an attack on Croisilles at dawn on 28th March. The infantry was to advance close behind a creeping artillery barrage, moving forward at a rate of 100 yards per 4 minutes. For the 1st South Staffs, this was a demanding objective - they would have to advance some 1500 yards across open ground and capture a 1500-yard line.

*28th March was a showery day.*

In accordance with orders, by 30 minutes before zero the lead platoons were assembled 200 yards northeast of Saint-Léger wood, and in that final half an hour they closed up to their attack position.

At 5.45am, the infantry began to advance just 200 yards behind their own creeping barrage. They were hit by heavy machine gun fire and could not progress beyond the enemy's barbed wire. Eventually pressure mounted, and they were ordered to withdraw.



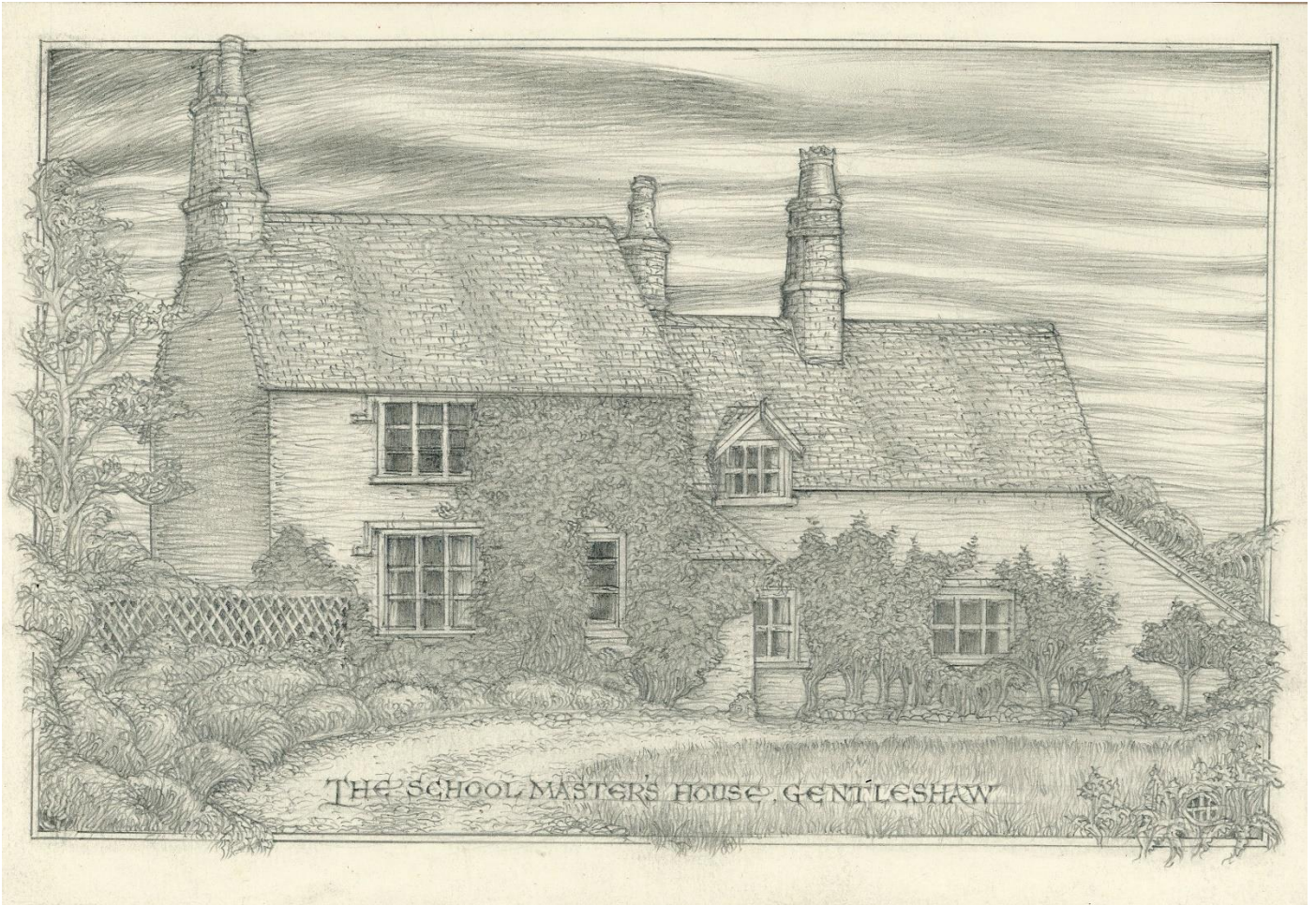
Nineteen men from the South Staffordshire regiment were killed in action on that day, including James Thomas Neville. His next of kin were in Hednesford, according to the official casualty list published in the Birmingham News almost a month later. The South Staffs regiment had a further 59 men wounded on that day and a similar number were taken prisoner.



James is buried at Saint-Léger British Cemetery.

He was posthumously awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

## Charles Wilfred Rogers



*The original drawing above by I.J. Hunt is an interpretation of a postcard photo from 1905-1913 held by Staffordshire Archives donor ref Roy Lewis-644 (240/48184).*



Charlie was born in Holmer, just at the northern edge of Hereford, in 1894. His parents were Charles Rogers, a school master, and his wife Sarah Rose.

At the time of the 1901 census Charlie and family were living at Foleshill, Coventry and his parents gave their son's name as Charlie on that census and again on the census ten years later.

By the time of the 1911 census the family were living at School House, Gentleshaw. Charlie was a draper's apprentice, his father was the headmaster of Gentleshaw Church School and his mother was a clerk in the Cannock & Rugeley Colliery office. Charlie's parents had 13 children born alive, of whom 3 had died before 1911.



*The original drawing above by I.J. Hunt is an interpretation of a postcard photo from 1930 held by Staffordshire Archives donor ref Roy Lewis--650 (240/47851).*

Charlie enlisted in Northampton and was given the service number 16248 (16289 also noted as his regimental number) in the Northamptonshire Regiment. Later in the war, Charlie's battalion became part of the Bedfordshire Regiment's 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion and he had the new service number 43382.

Charlie's qualifying date for medals was 15<sup>th</sup> April 1915, the date he first entered the theatre of war in France. He was severely wounded within his first three months and by late June he was being treated at the Glen Hospital at Southend-on-Sea. After his return to active service, Charlie was badly wounded a second time. Then on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1918 he was reported missing, wounded at Saby, near St Quentin, when surrounded by the enemy. He was officially reported killed in action on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1918 at the Somme crossing, along with five others from his battalion who died that day.

He is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial, Somme, France:

*'In memory of the officers and men of the fifth and fourth armies who fought on the Somme battlefield 21<sup>st</sup> March to 7<sup>th</sup> August 1918 and of those of their dead who have no known graves.'*

He had volunteered and was posthumously awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

## **Henry Thomas Jarvis**

Henry was born in Chorley to parents William Jarvis, a coal miner (hewer, below ground) and his wife Eliza. He was baptised on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1877 at St Bartholomew, Farewell, and at the time of the 1881 census the family were living at Shute Hill, in Chorley. At the time of the 1891 census the family were living at Goosemoor Green.

At the time of the 1901 census Henry was a coal miner (loader, above ground) and living with his parents at The Laurels, between Tithe Barn Lane and Coldwell.

Henry married in 1905 and by the time of the 1911 census he was living in Gentleshaw (Coldwell) with his wife Nellie and their five-year-old daughters, Florence Nellie and Gladys May, and Henry was a coal miner fireman working below ground.

He served in the South Staffordshire Regiment, 7th Service Battalion, which was formed in Lichfield in August 1914. This was before conscription, so Henry was a volunteer with service number 15293.

The first theatre of war he served in was 2B/Balkan (Gallipoli) from 21<sup>st</sup> July 1915, and Henry was dead within five weeks of that.



The battalion had sailed from Liverpool on H.M.T. 'Empress of Britain' on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1915, arriving in Alexandria on 12<sup>th</sup> July and then on to the island of Mudros arriving on 16<sup>th</sup> July.



They landed near Lala Baba at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula on 7<sup>th</sup> August. In the following two days as they attempted to advance they were subjected to very heavy gunfire and shelling and sustained heavy losses. The names of soldiers of Other Ranks killed are not noted in the war diary; there were heavy losses of officers too.

Before his death Henry had been an Acting Corporal. He was posthumously awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

He died of wounds, possibly at sea, and his death was recorded in Alexandria on 24<sup>TH</sup> August 1915. He was buried at East Mudros Military Cemetery on the Greek island of Limnos.





## Reginald Lees

Reginald was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1894 at East Gate Street, Chase Terrace to parents Enoch Lees, an engine fitter, and his wife Mary.

At the time of the 1901 census the family were living in Cannock Road, Chase Terrace and at the time of the 1911 census Reginald, his older brother and his father were all working as colliery engine fitters.

On enlistment in Lichfield in 1914 Reginald gave his father's address as Malvern House, Chase Terrace, and his own occupation as a mechanical turner and fitter.

He was assigned to the Army Service Corps (Mechanical transport) with the service number M2/020331. His reckonable service started on 24th November 1914, and he joined the Expeditionary Force in France on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1915. He died just 58 days after that.

Reginald died on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1915 at '14<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital', an isolation hospital at Wimereux, near Boulogne. This was based around a hotel with row after row of large wooden huts as wards. He died of enteric fever.

This fever may have been what the troops had been calling Trench Fever from early on, and eventually the name was adopted officially. It is closely related to epidemic typhus and was transmitted by the scratching of the skin that forced the faeces of an infected body louse into the lesions caused by lice bites. There were hundreds of thousands of cases of Trench Fever during the war and usually two or three months away from the unhygienic conditions of warfare allowed the infection to subside. Fatalities from Trench Fever were very rare.

It is possible that the enteric fever was caused by bacillary dysentery which was the primary diarrhoeal disease of the First World War. Another young man, Private Ernest Cable, was brought to No 14 Stationary Hospital in early 1915 where he was diagnosed with dysentery and died on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1915. A bacteriologist working in the laboratory there succeeded in isolating the bacterium which had infected Private Cable, and this was the first bacterial isolate deposited in the UK National Collection of Type Cultures and has now even been DNA profiled for the benefit of medical science.

Another potential cause of Reginald's enteric fever was paratyphoid fever, a form of blood poisoning. This was a less severe infection than true typhoid and had a lesser morbidity, though could still lead to death from pneumonia or toxemia. By the end of the war nearly 97% of all British servicemen had been vaccinated

against typhoid and paratyphoid using a vaccine that had been developed during the war.

The First World War was a major breaking point in the history of medicine as it led to the understanding that infectious diseases are caused by microorganisms and that contributed to the development of preventive treatment such as vaccines and antimicrobial drugs. The later discovery of antibiotics changed the prognosis for many diseases. Alexander Fleming himself worked as a bacteriologist studying wound infections in a laboratory in another of the military hospitals in Boulogne, but it wasn't until 10 years after the end of the war that he discovered penicillin.

But all too late for Reginald who was buried at Wimereux Communal Cemetery, Pas-du-Calais. The personal inscription the family chose was 'Until the day break and the shadows flee away'.



He was posthumously awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

## Herbert Derry

Herbert was born on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1888 at Goosemoor Green, Gentleshaw. His parents were Herbert Derry, a coal miner, and his wife Jane.

During the 1890s the family moved into Cannock Wood. Herbert had seven siblings, one of whom had died before 1911, and his father died on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1903.

Herbert features large in a Lichfield Mercury newspaper article about a football match in October 1909 between his team, Beaudesert Vics. and Cannock Amateurs. The match was played at the Park Gate ground and the homesters, having won the toss, elected to kick off with the wind in their favour. From the kick-off Beaudesert pressed and forced several fruitless corners. After about 15 minutes, one of the visiting backs handled inside the penalty area. Herbert Derry, who played as a forward, took the kick and scored, adding a second goal soon after. In the second half he scored four more goals, and the home team won the match 11-1.

In 1911 Herbert was living in Normanton, West Yorkshire and working as a coal miner (hewer). He is recorded as a boarder along with his younger brother Albert Edward. They were boarding with his sister, Annie, and family, and one of his sisters Margaret Winifred was there also, working as a servant. Herbert's mother, Jane, was still in Cannock Wood, working as a seamstress, with just her youngest son with her; Jane re-married in 1912, becoming Mrs Kent.

Herbert enlisted in Normanton in the first weeks of the war, and served in the 7<sup>th</sup> battalion, Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry with service number 15527 and they landed at Boulogne in late July 1915. The battalion spent most of the next three years from then in the trenches around Ypres and the Somme, but Herbert was severely wounded on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1916 by shrapnel which became embedded in his spine.

Herbert died of his wounds at King George's Hospital, Lambeth, London on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1916. This was a hospital in the H.M Stationery Office building in Stamford Street which was used as a military hospital during the war.

He was buried at Christ Church, Gentleshaw on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1916. The Lichfield Mercury carried an account of the funeral.



# GENTLESHAW SOLDIER'S DEATH FROM WOUNDS.

## Military Funeral.

Several hundreds of people attended the funeral, which took place at Gentleshaw, on Sunday afternoon, with military honours, of Pte. Herbert Derry, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, who died in King George's Hospital, London, on the Tuesday previous from wounds received in action. Pte. Derry, who was the son of Mrs. C. Kent, 15, Street, Chasetown, was shot in the spine and little hope of his recovery was entertained from the first. He enlisted in the first week of the war, having previously worked as a miner at Normanton.

Continues:

Private Derry went out to the front in March 1915 and was wounded on April 2<sup>nd</sup> last (2<sup>nd</sup> April 1916) by shrapnel, portions of which were firmly embedded in the spine. His was a hopeless case from the first. From hospital in Boulogne where he remained three weeks, he was transferred to the King George Hospital, London, where he died on the 11<sup>th</sup> inst. During the whole of this time he had every comfort hospitals and friends could give. His mother and other relatives were allowed to be present with him for a large portion of the time he lay ill, which afforded him much solace, and they speak in very unstinted terms of the tender care with which he was treated. It was a gratifying coincidence that Nurse K. O'Connell, late district nurse at Chase Terrace, was one of the nurses in charge of Private Derry's ward while he lay at King George's Hospital.

As showing the solicitude of Private Derry's nurses, his mother's travelling comforts were not overlooked, and this was still further emphasised by a little discovery she made when making her homeward journey after her son's decease. Nor was this brave son – brave in battle and brave, very brave, in suffering – forgotten by his 'pals', who often wrote to him little knowing he was never to return to them, nor by his solicitous Colonel through (in his absence) his devoted wife, who frequently wrote cheerful letters to him with the kindest messages from her gallant husband while sending him fruit and delicacies, on one occasion visiting him this showing the very real true bond of union there exists between really good officers and consequently responsive men.

Continues:

## The Funeral

The body was conveyed to Chase Terrace from London on Thursday night, for interment on Sunday, but two hours prior to this a large concourse of people had gathered in the vicinity while a large number also awaited the arrival of the cortege at the church.

The ceremony was conducted by the Rev. J. Davis (in the absence of the Vicar, the Rev. Dr. Arthur Evans who was away from home) and was a most impressive one. A firing party from the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry attended as well as a number of wounded soldiers from Hammerwich Hospital. Three volleys were fired over the grave and a bugler sounded the "Last Post".

The mourners were Mr. and Mrs. C. Kent (step-father and mother), Mrs Hodgkins (sister), Master Albert Derry (brother), Mrs Wright, Miss Olive Derry, Miss Winifred Derry, Master M. Derry, Mrs Hancox, Miss Brindley, Mr. and Mrs. I. Wright, Mr. Egerton, Mr. and Mrs. Banks. There were a number of beautiful floral tributes, including those from the members of the family, and one from his old schoolfellows.



His is the only Commonwealth War Grave in the Christ Church, Gentleshaw cemetery. 'He died that we might live.'

Herbert was posthumously awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

## **Bertram Thomas Hurlock**

Bertram was born on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1885 at Old Kent Road, London. His parents were Thomas Hurlock, a fireman, and his wife Mary Ann Matilda. He was baptised on 1 Nov 1885 at All Saints, Walworth in Southwark.

At the time Bertram started school in April 1890 the family were living at the Fire Station in Lambeth, but by 1901 Bertram was living with his grandmother in Lambeth and was working as a telegraph messenger. In October 1902 he was appointed as a temporary assistant postman in London and the following September he became a postman.

In 1911 Bertram was working as a postman and boarding in Mile End, London; two policemen were also boarders with the same household.

The local link to Gentleshaw and Staffordshire is hard to establish for certain although it seems that Bertram's two younger sisters, Dorothy Lilian and Phyllis Rose, were amongst the children and wives of employees invited by the Marchioness of Anglesey to Beaudesert in January 1914. The large group (50 mothers and 101 children) were escorted to the great hall where a magnificent and picturesque 30-foot-high Christmas tree stood. A present for each child had been fixed to the Christmas tree and, after being cut down by the head gardener, the presents were personally presented by the Marchioness to each child when their name was called. There was a meat tea provided at 4pm in the kitchen and two crackers for each child. The Lichfield Mercury reports that the mothers and children afterwards praised the Marchioness for her exceeding kindness and that the happy smile of gratification was present on every countenance.

The only British record perhaps linking Bertram to the area is a newspaper report from January 1914. A Mr Hurlock of Upper Longdon won a second prize in a Whist Drive and Dance held at the school. His prize was a couple of chickens, but Mr Hall of Rawnsley won a brace of pheasants as the first Gents' prize. The first ladies' prize was won by Miss Praill of Hednesford – a pair of dress shoes – and the second prize by Miss Hall of Rawnsley – a box of handkerchiefs. After the whist drive, the hall was cleared and a most enjoyable dance indulged in. Music was provided by Mr Fairbankes on the piano and Mr Chetwynd on the violin. The evening raised £70 towards the Church Restoration fund, as nearly £300 was required to clear its debt. The Marquis of Anglesey had promised to contribute £150 as matched funding, when the first £150 had been raised.



Bertram enlisted in Stepney, London, in 1916 and was a private, a rifleman, service number 34004, in the 16<sup>th</sup> battalion of the Kings Royal Rifle Corps, B company. This was known as the 'Church Lads Brigade' battalion, but by 1916 new recruits were allocated to make up for previous losses and Bertram may well not have been a former Church Lad. New recruits were badly needed to make up the numbers as from July to September 1916 the 16<sup>th</sup> battalion had been part of the 'Big Push' on the Somme. This was their first action and in those two months more than half the 16<sup>th</sup> battalion became casualties (550 men, including 220 dead).

After he had completed 6 months of service, about 14 weeks training and just 2 months with the force in the field from September or October 2016, Bertram was admitted to hospital on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1916. In the same sick convoy were two others from the same regiment and company, also with Inflamed Connective Tissue. Inflamed connective tissue arose due to all the marching done and then the poor weather conditions experienced for long periods in the trenches. Bertram died at 9am on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1916 in No. 3 Stationary Hospital, Rouen, in Normandy, France, with the cause of death given as Trench Hands and Feet.



He was buried at St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, with the personal inscription 'Till We Meet At Jesu's Feet'. His French death certificate gives his address as Horsley Lane, Upper Longdon.

Bertram was posthumously awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal. He

was not awarded either the 1914- or 1914/15-Star medals which were awarded only to those who had served up to the end of 1915. Conscription came into force on 2 March 1916.

## Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Richard Evans

Thomas Richard Evans was born on 27th January 1884 in Llanwddyn, Montgomeryshire, in Wales, the son of Hugh Llewellyn Evans, a stone cutter, and his wife Mary. At the time of the 1891 census, the family were living at Trefor, on the north coast of the Llŷn peninsula about 20 miles from Caernarfon. The parents spoke Welsh and English, but the children only Welsh at that time. Thomas was the eldest of nine children of the marriage and he was 14 when his mother died in childbirth, aged 34, in 1898.



His father remarried the following year and had five more children from the second marriage.



At the time of the 1901 census Thomas was living in Hackney, London, as a boarder, and working as a 'boy copyist' in the G.P.O.

In the first quarter of 1907, Thomas married Hirell Catherine Douglas Young at Romford in Essex. They had three children, one of whom died in infancy, leaving two children alive in 1911, daughter Olwen then aged 3 and son Eivion then aged 5 months.

At the time of the 1911 census, the couple were living in Dagenham, Essex with their two children. Thomas was then working in the civil service as an assistant clerk with H.M. Customs.

In 1916, Thomas graduated with a B.A. degree from Birkbeck College, University of London; it has been estimated that one in four of the staff and students from Birkbeck who served in the Great War did not survive it.

On 25<sup>th</sup> September 1918 Thomas wrote to his wife: *"I wish I could tell you all that's happening, but I can't. But perhaps there's no harm in telling you – seeing that you haven't any idea where I am – that I'm on the threshold of the greatest adventure of all just now. If the Fates are kind and we do what we're asked to do, I shall be happy, whether I survive or not. If the Fates are not kind – well, I shall have some good memories to relieve the gloom of the long sleep."*

The letter is in the possession of family members but has been shared on Ancestry.

The battalion under Thomas' command took part in the storming of the St Quentin Canal, part of the Hindenburg Line. There is a citation describing the action:

'Lieut.-col. Thomas Richard Evans, R.W.F., attached 1/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, North Staffordshire Regiment. (T.F.).

Near Bellenglise, on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1918, his battalion stormed a most difficult section of the Hindenburg Line, after crossing a wide canal with banks 30ft. in height, and captured over 300 prisoners, with few casualties.



By his personal gallantry and energy whilst holding the line and during the attack he was to a large extent responsible for the success which his battalion achieved.'

During the following days there were further forward pushes and, by 2<sup>nd</sup> October, the attack had resulted in a 17 km breach in the Hindenburg Line, but had not been able to seize the high ground further on. Thomas was killed in action on 3rd October 1918 as described in a hand-written letter (shared on Ancestry) with the embossed heading 'Gentleshaw Vicarage, Rugeley' dated 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1918:

*"My Dear Mr Williams*

*Thank you very much for your kind letter about poor Tom. It was a sad event! A man came here to tell me that he saw him dying. He was walking with three officers to inspect new trenches that had been made and a shell burst close to them, three were killed and one wounded. Tom was hit in the side of his head and died instantaneously. I hear that William his brother was not far off and when he heard of his death, he went to see his grave and sang a Welsh hymn there. ....*

*Yours sincerely*

*J. Arthur Evans."*

The Lichfield Mercury carried an obituary for Thomas on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1918.

#### Killed

Lieut.-Col. T. R. Evans, commanding a battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment, has been killed in action. The deceased officer was a nephew of the Rev. J. Arthur Evans, D.D., vicar of Gentleshaw, and he was exceedingly popular alike with officers and men. A graduate of London Universities and an Honoursman, he was before the war engaged as a statistician in the Customs House in London. He held a commission in the Territorials, and upon the outbreak of war he rendered valuable service in raising a battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers amongst the Welshmen resident in London. Later he went with his men on a recruiting tour through Anglesey and Carnarvonshire, where he spoke at innumerable meetings, and was largely instrumental in raising three battalions of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

He went out to the front two and a half years ago, and after being the trenches about five weeks he was appointed to be second-in-

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command of a Senior Officers' School, where he proved a most valuable lecturer. Later, he was given command of a School for Junior Officers and here again he was conspicuously successful.

At the commencement of the offensive about the beginning of this year he was transferred to a battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment. About two months ago he was in England on leave and had intended to pay a week's visit to Dr. and Mrs. Evans at Gentleshaw Vicarage. Before this promised visit could be carried out, however, a telegram was received from headquarters in France ordering him to return. Upon reaching his battalion Major Evans (as he then was) found that his Colonel had been wounded, and he himself appointed to the command of the battalion. An able speaker, Lieut.-Col. Evans had been approached with a view to his standing as a Parliamentary candidate. He was also a poet of no mean ability and has held about five or six Bardic chairs.

**T. R. Evans.**—T. R. Evans (Acting-Lieut-Colonel, 6th North Staffs, and Major, Welsh Fusiliers), who has just died in action, was an intrepid soldier and a high-hearted and skilful leader. He was never so merry as when he was fighting, and often in a tight corner he kept up the spirits of his men with jests and snatches of song. So good a soldier was he that on one occasion he was taken out of the line to command an officers' training college. He would have made a good general, but he belonged to the new army.

**A Poet, Too.**—Before the war Evans was a junior Civil Service clerk, studying hard of an evening for academic honours at the London University. He won them before he went out. He was a poet, too, and gained the chair for Welsh poetry at the eisteddfod. As a member of the New Bohemians, he was the friend of many well-known journalists and writers. I can still see his eager boyish face high up in the clash of the argument. Who could have imagined then that he would become a great leader and die a soldier's death?

A second obituary gives more information about the way the Thomas lived his life; unknown publication.

He is buried at Bellicourt British Cemetery CWGC Cemetery, Aisne in France.

Thomas was posthumously awarded the 1914/15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. In 1919, he was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). He is also commemorated on a war memorial at Llanaelhaearn, LLŷn Peninsula.



No records have been found which link Thomas himself to Gentleshaw and Cannock Wood, except as the nephew of the vicar, Rev. John Arthur Evans. The family's origins were in Caernarfonshire and included many stone cutters, producing slate in the Llanberis and Caernarfon area and granite setts at Trefor, LLŷn Peninsula.



*Lichfield Mercury, Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1919*

## **Gentleshaw**

### **War memorial**

*On November 27<sup>th</sup> the Bishop of Stafford attended at Christ Church Gentleshaw, to dedicate a table in memory of the soldiers of the parish who gave their lives in the Great War. The tablet, presented by Mrs. Chetwynd, Chestall House, is of white marble and is the work of Messrs. Bridgeman and Sons, Lichfield. It has been placed on the north wall and contains the names of all those who gave their lives in the war. There was a crowded congregation, returned soldiers in uniform forming a conspicuous proportion.*

*The service opened with the hymn, "Jesus stand among is in Thy risen power, "followed by sentences from the Burial Service, Psalm xc., and the Nunc Dimittis. Other hymns were "Jesus lives! No longer now can thy terrors death appal us", "Let saints on earth in concert sing", and "Through the night of doubt and sorrow".*

*The Bishop gave an eloquent and touching address from the words, "A great multitude which no man could number – and white robes were given to every one of them". Reference was made to the great number of men who had fallen in a just cause, which individual mention was made of those of this parish who had joined "the great multitude". The Bishop said these men had laid down their lives that we might live, and it was out bounden duty as well as a service of love to perpetuate their memory. The tablet would serve for all time as a reminder of the brave men who had departed this life.*