

# World War I

## Centenary 1914 - 2014



TO THE GLORY OF GOD  
AND IN REMEMBRANCE  
OF THE NEW & OLD PARISH  
WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR  
1914 - 1918  
ABBOTT L. E. ROWLEY A. C. DEVALLE G. H.  
BRAN E. H. ROWSON F. COORALL J. H.  
CHAMP J. W. ROWLEY T. MILL M. J.  
CURRIE H. TALBOT J. KEY T.  
DEACON J. TURNER L. MIDDLETON J.  
WRIGHT J. YATES E.

1939-1945  
DEVALLE H.



# We Will Remember Them



Colton's men who gave their lives



TO THE GLORY OF GOD  
AND IN HONOURED MEMORY  
OF THE MEN OF THIS PARISH  
WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR  
1914 - 1918

ABBOTT L.F.	ROWLEY A.G.	DEVALLE C.H.
BRAIN E.H.	ROBSON F.	GOODALL J.H.
CHAMP J.W.E.	ROWLEY T.	HILL H.J.
CURRIN H.	TALBOT J.	KEY T.
DEACON J.	TURNER L.	MIDDLETON J.
WRIGHT J.	YATES E.	

1939-1945  
DEVALLE H.



World War I 1914 -1918  
Centenary 2014

**"I saw a man this morning  
Who did not wish to die:  
I ask, and cannot answer,  
If otherwise wish I."**

*Patrick Shaw Stewart K.I.A. Galipoli 1917*



**This booklet reproduces excerpts from the book  
'Of Those Who Lie In Foreign Fields'**

**Researched and written by Squadron Leader R L Stanley MBE  
and his daughter Joy Bratherton.**

**Published by Anne Loader Publications.**

**Squadron Leader R L Stanley sadly passed away in July 2013.**

**I am grateful to Joy Bratherton for giving permission to  
reproduce much of their research and writings and Anne  
Loader for her permission to produce this booklet at the time  
of the Centenary of the First World War.**

**Produced by Bill Brown**

**for members of Colton History Society and Parishioners of Colton.     June 2014**

# Extracts from St Mary's School Log Books

**15. 1. 1915**

The elder children are now leaving as soon as they can get away. There is a great demand for domestic servants and the girls are spoken for long before they are 13 years of age. The boys are wanted on the farms as many men have enlisted for the war.

**22.3.1916**

Children are allowed outside to see a regiment of soldiers march past.

**8.9.1916**

Children have brought 4 dozen bottles to school. These will be sent to Rugeley to be sold; the proceeds will be devoted to helping 16 prisoners of war.

**19. 10.1917**

The children have subscribed 16 shillings towards comforts for the wounded soldiers at Ravenhill Hospital, Rugeley. More than a ton of chestnuts have also been gathered for the war effort. (It is believed that at these were dried and the shells were used in the manufacturing of gas mask filters)

**21.8. 1918**

The children were allowed out this afternoon to collect blackberries to be made into jam for the troops. (During the black-berrying season 4 hundredweights were collected by the children)





# **The men of Colton who gave their lives**

**Trooper 283**

**Henry George Hill**

**300819 Trooper**

**L Turner**

**1736 Private**

**William Edgar Yates**

**53319 Private**

**George Henry Devall**

**8113 Private**

**Harold Currin**

**J E Goodall**

**1871 Private**

**Thomas Rowley**

**45865 Private**

**William John Wright**

**22191 Private**

**Thomas Key**

**Second Lieutenant**

**Albert George Rowley**

**22551 Private**

**Joseph Talbot**

**203086 Private**

**Ernest Albert Brain**

**18184 Lance Corporal**

**Frederick Robson**

**52211 Private**

**John William Champ**

**203398 Private**

**Leonard Earnest Abbott**

**88317 Corporal**

**John Deacon**

IN  
REMEMBRANCE





## Second Lieutenant Albert George Rowley



Albert Rowley, the son of Thomas and Annie, was baptised in Colton church on 19th August 1894. After completing his junior education at Colton he attended Rugeley Grammar School and later Bede College in Durham, where in 1913/14 he acted as a student teacher. During his time at college he joined the Bede Company of the local Territorial Army battalion of the 8th Durham Light Infantry. It was with this unit that he first went to France in April 1915 as part of 151 Brigade of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division.

The Bede Company was to suffer heavily during April and May of 1915 when they saw action on the Ypres Salient in Belgium, a period we now call "Second Ypres". The photograph, so poignantly titled "All that was left", shows just twenty-one survivors of the company. Albert George Rowley is fourth from the left on the back row. He remained with the 8th Battalion progressing to the rank of sergeant until mid-1917 when he left them to attend an Officer Training Unit. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on 28th November 1917.

On 21st April 1918 Albert returned to France and joined the 22nd (County Pioneers) Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry, part of the 8th Division, in the Arnien sector of Picardy. The Battalion took up reserve position in the Aubigny line. On 24th April Albert was wounded but remained on duty as the Battalion moved forward to a position close to the village of Villers-Bretonneux. It was on this morning that the Germans captured Villers-Bretonneux, using gas-flame throwers and, for the first time, tanks. Two brigades of Australians were the only fresh troops available so to them fell the responsibility of retaking the village that night.

The Battalion History records that the 22nd Battalion D.L.I. was to "mop up" from the north west with the 2nd Northhamptons doing similar work from the south side. It was a bright moonlight night and the men of the 22nd were enfiladed by enemy machine gun fire as they made their way up the bare slope of land that was their route into the village. The first attempt failed but finally small groups were able to get forward up the railway line. C Company accounting for two German machine guns. On the morning of the 25th the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment came up on the left and entered the village and began to rout out the enemy before being recalled at 10am. The 22nd Battalion DLI however stuck at the job until only a few Germans remained in the south eastern corner of the village. According to the records "The 22nd Battalion took six officers and 80 men prisoner as well as many machine guns". Sadly though 2nd Lieut. A.G. Rowley was killed. He was 23 years old. The Trent Valley Magazine reported that "he had been killed leading an attack on a German stronghold." 2nd Lieutenant Albert George Rowley lies alongside other casualties of this action in Grave 3, Row E, Plot I Adelaide Cemetery close to the village of Villers-Bretonneux.

The cemetery is approximately on the line that the Germans reached in their 24th April attack. In front of the Cross of Sacrifice, a symbol found in all British military cemeteries, there is a strangely empty space that some think may have been where five Australian units and the 22nd Durham Light Infantry erected wooden memorials. Plot 1 is the original cemetery containing both Australian and British casualties.





## 203398 Private Leonard Earnest Abbott



Leonard Abbott was baptised in the Parish of Hugglescote and Donnington in Leicestershire on 22nd December 1895. Together with his mother, Eliza, father. Charles and sister Edith Clarissa , Leonard lived at 335 Forest Road, Hugglescote.

Charles Abbott worked on the railway as a goods guard. It is not known when the family moved to Colton but both father and son worked for the L.N.W.R. at Rugeley prior to the outbreak of war. Leonard enlisted in the army and joined the 2nd/4th Battalion The Royal Berkshire Regiment. They sailed for France on 26th May 1916 as part of 184 Brigade, 61st (South Midland) Division and saw action on the Somme and the Ypres Salient before heading south for Cambrai.

The Battle of Cambrai took place in November 1917 and so many gains were made in the first few days that celebratory church bells were rung throughout England. At the end of November however the Germans launched a large-scale counter offensive and between 30th November and 7th December they recaptured much of the lost ground. This offensive was the reason the 61st Division was rushed into the area on 1st December to relieve the exhausted troops of the 12th and 20th Divisions. The Royal Berkshires took over the defence of the village of La Vacquerie and the Bonavis Ridge.

For the next seven days the Battalion was under constant attack and it was during one such attack on 6th December that Leonard was killed he was 22 years old. Like so many others the war denied Leonard an identified grave, for the land was fought over again and again and graves were often lost. Leonard is commemorated on the Cambrai Memorial to the Missing, Panel 8, which is located near the village of Louverval midway between the towns of Cambrai and Bapaume.

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## J E Goodall



The inscription on the War Memorial and the memorial plaque in the church gave us little help in tracing J E Goodall. The plaque stated that he served on HMS Pomerania.

A search of Naval Archives at the Imperial War Museum in London revealed that a ship, HMS Pomeranian, was a converted liner of 4244 tons belonging to the Allen Line, she was built in 1882. On 15th April 1918 whilst on a journey from London to St. Johns, Newfoundland she was torpedoed by a "U" Boat 12 nautical miles S.W. of Portland Bill. The crew consisted of three officers and 53 seamen. There was just one survivor.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission holds records of all Royal Navy seaman lost during the war but they have no record of J E Goodall. The archives of the National Maritime Museum related that SS (not HMS) Pomeranian was originally the SS Grecian Monarch of the Allen Line. This line was taken over by the Canaruan Pacific, along with other lines, in 1915 as a war time control measure for British and Canaruan supply ships. The museum's records confirmed the details of the sinking given by the Imperial War Museum and also stated that a 27-year-old Donkey Man named Edward Goodall serving in the Canaruan Merchant Navy was killed as a result of the "U" Boat attack. He is commemorated on Panel 3 of the Halifax (Nova Scotia) memorial. His next of kin, Mr William Goodall lived at Stockwell Heath, Colton.



## 203086 Private Ernest Albert Brain



Ernest Brain was baptised in Colton Church on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1898. According to the 1891 census the Brain family. Father William aged 32, mother Hannah aged 25 and son William aged two, lived on the High Street, Colton. Both parents were born in Hixon, Staffs but as a farm labourer the search for work had brought William senior to Colton. Ernest enlisted in the army and served as a private in the North Staffordshire Regiment. In 1918 he was in the 1st/6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, part of 137 Brigade of the 46th North Midland Division.

During September 1918 his unit was engaged in the battles to breach the German defences known as the Hindenburg Line. The 46th Division area included the St. Quentin canal, its associated tunnels and bridges. At dawn on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September 1918 the British 4<sup>th</sup> Army under Sir Henry Rawlinson, strengthened by two United States Divisions and assisted by the French 1<sup>st</sup> Army swung into battle north of St Quentin. For two days since the morning of September 27<sup>th</sup> General Rawlinson's gunners had maintained heavy incessant gun fire upon the German forces in front of them. 137 Brigade was tasked with capturing the bridge at Riqueval, which crossed a deep gorge making it a very difficult position to attack. Screened by thick fog the leading Midland Brigade crept to the canal carrying life belts, scaling ladders, lead lines, and ropes in addition to rifles, ammunition. bombs and entrenching tools. Against a machine gun barrage and curtain shell fire the men swam the canal or hauled themselves across on ropes, and made good the German bank.

Ernest Brain was a member of 'A' Company, 1st/6<sup>th</sup> North Staffs Regiment who were in the second attacking wave crossing the canal at 6.48am. The Battalion war diary lists Pte. Brain amongst the many men who lost their lives in this gallant action. He was 20 years old. He now lies with his comrades in Bellicourt British Cemetery (14 Km North of St. Quentin) Plot 3, Row G, Grave L Bellicourt British Cemetery contains the graves of over 1,200 casualties mainly from 1918 battles and reflects the nature of the British army by this time in the war. Men still young in years, but many highly decorated, reflecting their breadth of military service and experience.



## 52211 Private John William Champ



Olive Bently was born and lived with her parents William and Sarah at Hadley Gate, Blithbury. When she was 22 she married James Arblaster and moved to the High Street, Colton. They had three sons between 1889 and 1892 when James sadly died. Left alone with three young boys to raise, things must have been hard for Olive but in 1895 she married John William Champ (Snr).

The baptismal records show no children of their union being baptised until four years later when John William (jnr) was born in 1899. Over the next seven years three further children were baptised, a girl and two boys and so with a family of six sons and one daughter one can only imagine the daily comings and goings in this busy household.

John William joined the army and served as a Private in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment, part of 64 Brigade, 21<sup>st</sup> Division. In October 1918 with the war rushing to its close the Division was engaged in the battles around the town of Cambrai which was finally taken by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian and the British 57<sup>th</sup> Divisions. The East Yorks were operating north east of Cambrai at the time of John Champ's death on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1918. He was just 19 years old, exactly one month to the day and the war would end. John Champ lies in Naves Communal Cemetery Extension, four miles east of Cambrai Plot 4, Row D, Grave 19. John's half brother Eustace also served in the First War with the Royal Artillery. He returned only to die in a rail accident in October 1919. He is buried in Dilhorne cemetery, a village near Stoke on Trent to which the family moved from Colton.





## 8113 Private Harold Currin



As the troopship sailed from Avonmouth in June 1915 bound for Gallipoli few of the young men aboard could have had any idea of the hell they were entering, after all few, if any, would ever have ventured further than the nearest large town let alone travelled abroad.

Private Harold Currin, the 17-year-old son of railway points man Abraham Currin and his wife Lucy was one of those men. (He would not be 18, the statutory age for service overseas, until July). A member of the 7th Battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment he would land on the beaches of the Dardanelles Peninsular at Cape Helles on 11th July 1915. His battalion was part of 39 Brigade of 13th Division and was to take part in some of the fiercest fighting around Sari Bair, Russell's Top and Hill 60.

By October the Division was in the Suvla Bay area near the village of Salajik. Harold was seriously wounded during this action and was evacuated from the line to the medical centre on board the troopship S.S. Dongola. On 6<sup>th</sup> November Harold unfortunately succumbed to his wounds.

He was buried at sea and is commemorated on Panel 170/ 171 of the Helles Memorial. His death was reported in the Lichfield and Rugeley Mercury on 19th November 1915. Giving his next of kin as Mr and Mrs Currin of Blithbury Rd. Rugeley.



## 18184 Lance Corporal Frederick Robson



On the evening of February 23rd 1917 the German Army commenced its withdrawal from that area of Northern France which would be known forever in British Military History as "The Somme". Although withdrawing the Germans left behind them many heavily defended villages, farms and woods in an attempt to delay the British and Empire troops following them. One of these positions was Loupart Wood about two miles south west of the town of Bapaume.

Frederick Robson was serving with the 2nd Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment who were part of 6 Brigade of 2nd Division. During March 1917 the Battalion was operating in the area close to Loupart Wood and on the 15th March a patrol was sent out to the wood. As this is the only action the Battalion was engaged in on the 15<sup>th</sup> March it is assumed that Frederick Robson could have been a member of this patrol and lost his life during this operation, but this cannot be confirmed.

Lance Corporal Frederick Robson is buried in Grave 15 Row K Plot 4 in Adanac Military Cemetery, MiraumontPys on the Somme. He was 38 years old. The cemetery is located about two miles from Loupart Wood, it contains over 3,000 graves a third of which are Canadian casualties, hence its name Adanac - "Canada" spelt backwards.

At the time of the 1891 Census Frederick was six years old. He lived with his family at Hamley, Colton. Nr Rugeley, Staffs. He was the third of four children, James (23), Jane (10), and Lucy (5).



## Trooper 283 Henry George Hill



Most people who have read about the battles that took place on Gallipoli will agree that heroism abounded among the forces who vainly sought victory during those terrible days from April to December 1915.

In the early morning of 7th August 1915 an attack took place involving the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade at the Nek. North east of Anzac Cove. This attack was one of great bravery against hopeless odds. Initial orders for the attack came from Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood and Lieutenant Colonel el Skeen, his chief of staff.

They passed down the line of command to Brigadier General F G Hughes, a militia officer of fifty eight years who was commander of the 3rd Brigade. He was told that his troops were to charge from trenches at Russell's Top, a distance of about fifty metres along the Nek, a ridge less than a hundred metres wide with cliffs falling away on either side, to take the strongly held Turkish trench system in that area. The assault was to be made in four lines. The 8th Light Horse Regiment would make up the first two lines followed by the 10th Light Horse Regiment. As a member of the 10th Light Horse Trooper Henry George Hill was thrown into this melting pot, under a burning sun, on a stretch of land hundreds of miles from home. This attack was to be a part of a larger operation involving many hundreds of men. During the afternoon of 6<sup>th</sup> August the troops on Russell's Top could see the 1<sup>st</sup>

Infantry Brigade attacking at Lone Pine to the south of their position. During the night they had no way of knowing how much success their comrades had had. In fact as the hour approached for their attack none of the hoped-for objectives had been achieved especially the Turkish machine gun positions that enfiladed the Nek. Nevertheless, Birdwood ordered that the attack should proceed.

Some say the artillery support was at fault but, whatever the reason, the charge failed. The first two lines of the 8th Light Horse were massacred. The war diary read:

" ... owing to a deadly machine gun fire the attack failed. ... "

The diary of the 10th Light Horse gave a much fuller account:

"First and second lines ... sprang forward to the assault and were mown down. Before allowing the third and fourth lines to assault, position was discussed with Brigade H.Q. but the 10th were ordered to immediately carry out orders to push on and carry the enemy's trenches. Our third line was then ordered to assault and was mown down in a similar manner. Before launching the fourth line the position was again brought before Brigade H. Q. but again the line was ordered..., carry out orders ... it was impossible for men to move forward a yard and live under such a hail of well-aimed and distributed rifle and machine gun fire ... "

Several reports of the attack were issued, none telling the true story. Henry Hill was wounded during the attack made by the 10th Light Horse and died as a result of his wounds on 11th August 1915. One of eleven children (possibly the result of two marriages), Henry lived on the High Street, Colton. His baptism was held in St Mary's church on 5th February 1888. His father died in 1897 aged 54, and his mother Georgina , who was still only 28 at the time of her husband's death , later remarried Alfred Upton and the family moved to High House, Colton. Henry had emigrated to Australia and at the time war broke out was farming in Western Australia. The Lichfield and Rugeley Mercury of 10th September 1915 reported his death giving the date of his enlistment as 5th December 1914. The Trent Valley Magazine of the time states:

" first Colton man ' killed in action... wounded at Dardanelles ... died on board ship and buried at sea ... "





## 22191 Private Thomas Key



Thomas Key was baptised in St Mary's church on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1887, the son of Thomas and Fanny, who were living on the High Street, Colton. By the time the 1891 Census was taken the family had increased by Henry George, aged one year, and four month old baby Samuel. Thomas was now three years old and, according to the census, was living with his grandparents, Samuel and Ann Bull of Browns Row, Colton. It is known that two further children, Leonard and William, were born to Thomas and Fanny after 1891.

Thomas enlisted in the army and served in the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment part of 57 Brigade, 19th Division.

During 1916 the 8th Battalion was engaged in the Battle of the Somme from July to November, seeing action in most of the engagements throughout this period. Thomas however must have been given leave to return to England as he is recorded attending the wedding of his younger brother Leonard in September 1916, signing the register as a witness to the marriage. In October and November the 8th Battalion North Staffs were operating in the vicinity of the village of Aveluy which stands on the banks of the river Ancre about two miles north of the town of Albert and Thomas had by this time re-joined his unit .

It is not recorded when Thomas actually received his wounds but he was evacuated to the Casualty Clearance Station at Warloy - Baillon. France where he died on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1916, aged 30. He is buried in the communal cemetery extension in Warloy - Baillon, seven miles west of Albert, Row C, Plot 8, Grave 24. This large cemetery reflects the fact that it is on the site of an Advanced Operating Centre. With casualties from the 1916 and 1918 battles buried here the extension totals 1,349 First World War graves.



## 53319 Private George Henry Devall



George Devall was born in Colton and baptised in St Mary's church on the 23rd November 1880. The 1891 Census lists a large family, comprising father George, mother Emily and three sons and three daughters all living in Brook Street (now Bellamour Way), Colton.

For some years George was employed by Major Wood of Bishton Hall. With the outbreak of war in 1914 George enlisted in the army at Lichfield and joined the Royal Army Medical Corps. He embarked for France in June 1915 and was attached to the Royal Engineers 104 Telegraph Construction Service. Little is known of the circumstances of his death, the military records merely state that George Devall died of illness on 31st January 1918. He was 38 years old.

Pte Devall lies at rest in Aire Communal Cemetery, Plot 1 Row G Grave 10, in the Pas De Calais Region of northern France. There are 894 British graves of the First World War and further twenty-one British graves from May 1940



## 1871 Private Thomas Rowley



Thomas Rowley was born in Colton and was baptised in St Mary's church on 5th December 1886. The 1891 Census records the Rowley family, father Henry, mother Jane and five sons as residing on the High Street, Colton.

Thomas, the third son, was a regular soldier before the First World War, serving in India for seven years with the North Staffordshire Regiment. On leaving the army he was employed at the Rugeley tannery, however as a reservist he was quickly recalled to the colours on the outbreak of war.

Thomas re-joined his old Regiment and went to France in September 1914 as part of the British Expeditionary Force (The Old Contemptibles). In 1916 the 1st Battalion North Staffs Regiment was part of 72 Brigade of the 24th Division. 72 Brigade was made up of four battalions, two from Surrey, one from Kent and the North Staffs. One can only imagine the banter that took place between these men as north met south. Any differences paled into insignificance in their daily fight for survival. The invasion was moved south to the Somme sector of Picardy in late July 1916 and quickly saw action on this front.

On the 30th August the Battalion moved to Delville Wood, close to the village of Longueval, south east of the Albert Bapaume road. C and D companies were heavily engaged on the 31st. The fighting was particularly fierce and part of their position, Edge Trench, was lost. The Battalion's historian noted that rotting corpses filled the wood. In six days of fighting the Battalion suffered 221 casualties.

Thomas Rowley was killed on the 31st August, he was 28 years old. Like so many casualties of this war he has no known grave and is commemorated on the impressive memorial to the missing, designed by Lutyens at Thiepval on the Somme, Pillar 14B Face 14C.

This enormous structure records the names of more than 73,300 soldiers who between 1915 and 1917 lost their lives on the Somme but who have no known grave, but these are not all the missing - the Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Newfoundlanders and the Indians are commemorated on other memorials. Inaugurated in 1932 it is sited on an open ridge and can be seen for miles across the battlefields: a clear reminder to all what the real cost of such a conflict is.







## 22551 Private Joseph Talbot



Joseph Talbot was forty years old when he died on a sun baked piece of land we now know as Iraq.

The war in Mesopotamia (Iraq) where British and Indian forces fought a desert campaign against a tenacious Turkish army lasted from 1914 to 1918. One can only imagine the reaction of the average British soldier to the sights and sounds of these far-flung countries: many would never have heard of such lands except perhaps in a Biblical context, later many would wish they had never seen them.

Little is known of Joseph's life before he joined the army. the only record of his family is found on the 1891 Census which shows Joseph and Alice Talbot residing at Oldham Cottage, Colton with their fourteen -year-old son, also named Joseph.

Joseph Talbot served originally in the 4th Battalion and later, at the time of his death, in the 7th Battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment. The 7th Battalion was part of 39 Brigade. 13<sup>th</sup> Division and had seen action at Gallipoli in 1915. After the allies' withdrawal the Battalion moved to Egypt and then to Mesopotamia arriving at Basra in January 1917.

During the period from December 1916 to February 1917, when Baghdad was captured from the Turks, the fighting took place along the line of the river Tigres. In the latter part of January 1917 Indo-British troops were engaged in fierce fighting to the south of the town of Kut along the river Hai. The 7th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment took part in the attack on the Turkish position on the side of the river Hai known as Lunette, a battle that lasted for two days and three nights with the result hanging in the balance throughout. The Lunette was finally occupied on the 28th January 1917.

The 7th Battalion War Diary records that on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1917 30 men were killed in the attack on the west bank of the river Hai. Having no known grave, Joseph, together with many of his comrades is commemorated on panel 34 of the impressive Basra Memorial. This memorial stood on the banks of the Shat El Arab river in the grounds of what was RAF Station Margil Unfortunately the memorial was damaged during the Gulf War.





## **300819 Trooper L Turner**



The only record of an individual called Turner in Colton is on the 1918 electoral register for the Parish which showed a Frederick Turner living at Railway Cottages. There are no Turners in the Baptismal Records or on the 1891 Census.

There is however a record of a Trooper Turner serving with the 1st Battalion Staffordshire Yeomanry. This unit was part of the Yeomanry force operating in Palestine and in particular the engagements leading to the capture of Jerusalem from the Turkish Army. Many of these engagements were fiercely contested and casualties on both sides were at times heavy.

December 1917 saw the Staffordshire Yeomanry in action in the Judean Hills north of Jerusalem. On 27th December they were moving forward to assist the Berkshire Yeomanry by attacking a ridge north of Ei Kereina (El Tahta). During this move the unit came under heavy and accurate Turkish shell fire. The unit history records that later in the day the Transport (mule wagons), were hit by a large shell. Trooper Johnson, a transport driver, saw another driver having difficulty controlling his mules. Johnson returned into the area of shelling and saw that the driver, Trooper Turner, was wounded and blinded. Johnson stayed with Turner until it was safe enough to move him. Johnson was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his gallant action. Turner was evacuated but died of his wounds in hospital on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1918. Trooper Turner is buried in Kantara Military Cemetery, Row F Grave 92. Kantara is in Northern Egypt on the side of the Suez Canal.



## **45865 Private William John Wright**



William Wright was born in Hill Ridware and was baptised in Colton church on 3rd July 1898. The son of William and Mary, the family lived at Hadley Gate, Blithbury. William junior was a popular member of St Mary's church choir. William originally served in the North Staffordshire Regiment but was later transferred to the 7th Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment, part of 110 Brigade, 21st Division. During August 1918 the unit was operating in the Somme sector along the banks of the river Ancre, near the villages of Hamel and Thiepval.

On 25th August the Battalion was ordered forward to a position near to the Butte De Walencourt, a large hillock south west of the town of Bapaume. The Battalion war diary states that as the Battalion approached its position the enemy attacked. The 7th took up a defensive line along the road from the village of Le Sars to Eaucourt L'Abbaye. The enemy attack was repulsed but for several days the Battalion was subjected to continual artillery and machine gun fire.

The 29th/30th August saw the Battalion advance to the road between Ligny Thillois and Beaulencourt. On 1<sup>st</sup> September orders were received to attack a large sugar factory on the Le Tranloy road. Although the attack was postponed the Battalion was subjected to enemy fire throughout the day. On 2nd September the sugar factory was taken, lost and eventually retaken before the Battalion withdrew into reserve. Casualties in this action exceeded 300; sadly it was during this action that William was killed, aged 20. He is buried in Bancourt British Cemetery, near Bapaume, Plot 2 Row G Grave 8. Bancourt Cemetery lies 3 miles east of Bapaume. It contains the graves of over 2,000 soldiers from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Newfoundland.





## 1736 Private William Edgar Yates



William Yates enlisted in the 1st Battalion Kings Shropshire Light Infantry and in September 1915 the battalion was part of 16 Brigade of the 6th Division serving in the Ypres area of Belgium. The Salient, as this part of Flanders was known, had been the scene of continuous fighting since late 1914 when the German advance in this area was finally stopped. The K.S.L.I., like other units, rotated on a regular basis between the front line trenches and rest areas behind the lines. The battalion records for September 1915 state:

"September 1915 was spent either resting in the town of Poperinghe or in the trenches between the villages of Wieltje and Potijze."

The K.S.L.I. War Diary does not record any specific action having taken place on 30th September, the day William Yates was killed, but as the front line was subjected to daily shelling and machine gun fire his death could so easily have been the result of such activity. The 1st Battalion K.S.L.I. suffered nine men killed and 63 wounded during September 1915.

The 1891 Census lists the Yates family as father William (butcher), mother Agnes and daughter Gladys, aged two years. Other siblings are recorded in the Church records. A son, Walter Guy, was born in 1895, another son, William John, was born in 1898, whilst William Edgar Yates is recorded as having been baptised in Colton Church in December 1897. The family lived at Bank House, Colton.

William Yates was just 17 years 8 months when he fell in action and now rests with several of his comrades in La Brique Military Cemetery No 2, St. Jan. Grave 37 Row 0 Plot 1. His next of kin at the time of his death was his mother, Mrs Agnes Fryer (formerly Yates) of Lady Pool Rd. Sparkbrook, Birmingham.

La Brique Military Cemetery No 2, together with its partner No 1, is to be found in the village of St. Jan straddling one of the many main roads that lead into the Belgian town of Ypres. They derive their names from the brickworks that used to stand there. No 2 is the larger of the two cemeteries containing the graves of over 1,200 soldiers.





## 88317 Corporal John Deacon



John Deacon, the son of Thomas and Mary, was baptised at St Mary's church on the 18th June 1899. The family lived in Martlin Cottages, Colton. At the outbreak of war John was employed as a labourer in a local tanner's yard.

During the war John originally served as a private soldier in the North Staffordshire Regiment., later he was transferred to the West Yorkshire Regiment as a Corporal Instructor with the 53rd (Young Soldier) Battalion stationed on Cannock Chase. The Battalion moved to Clips tone Camp m Nottinghamshire in 1918. Later in that year the whole of the U.K. was subjected to a severe Influenza epidemic which would become worldwide in months. It was particularly severe in the numerous army camps where men were living in such close proximity and the spread of the 'flu was virtually unstoppable. Corporal John Deacon contracted the disease and died in the military hospital at Clipstone on 9th November 1918, just two days before the Armistice was signed.

He was buried with full military honours in Colton village cemetery aged 19 years. Following his death the Trent Valley Magazine stated that the officer in charge of the burial party had informed the Deacon family that their son was due for promotion to Sergeant because of good service abroad.

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### Recognition of Service Given

Four campaign medals were struck for British servicemen at the end of the First World War. The 1914 Star (the Mons Star) was, as the name suggests, a bronze star with the year 1914 in its centre on a scroll over crossed swords. It was awarded to all men who had been on the strength of a unit serving in France or Belgium between 5th August and midnight on 22nd November 1914. A clasp inscribed with the appropriate dates was worn on the ribbon. All officers, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the British and Indian forces were to receive this award. Civilian medical staff and anyone else employed in military hospitals would also be eligible as would personnel of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines who had served in France or Belgium during this time.

Soon after the 1914 Star was issued, another version, the 1914-15 Star, was produced. This was for those who had been on active service between 23rd November 1914 and 1st January 1916, no matter which theatre of war they had served in. This bronze star had the dates 1914-15 in the centre and no date clasp was worn. So whilst the former Star was exclusively for people such as the 'Old Contemptibles', the latter was awarded to people who had served in France, Belgium or even Gallipoli.

The British War Medal was produced at Woolwich and at the Calcutta Mint. It was made from standard silver (although some medals were made from bronze and issued to members of the labour units, many of whom were recruited from China). On one side is the portrait of King George V whilst the other side carries the likeness of a man mounted on a horse. The dates 1914-1918 appear around the rim of the medal. To qualify for the British War Medal naval personnel had to have completed 28 days of mobilised service whilst soldiers had to have served in a theatre of war or else at an approved overseas station.

The third member of the trio was the Victory Medal. This gold coloured medal has a winged figure symbolising Victory on one side and on the other the words The Great War of Civilisation. These were translated into many different languages to satisfy the many countries who were allies in the war against Germany. The medal was distributed as far as possible to those who in one way or another had been associated with the fighting.

It was within these guidelines that the men who died and are commemorated on the Colton War Memorial were awarded their medals:



## **1914 THE BEGINNING**



August 1914 saw the Regular Forces, their Reserves and the Territorial Force mobilising for war which culminated in the despatch of an Expeditionary Force to France on 17th.

On the 22nd August the Force engaged the advancing German Army at the Belgian town of Mons, from where, after fierce fighting, they were forced to retreat southwards to the River Marne. Later in the year the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was redeployed to the Northern Sector. 1914 ended with the British and Empire forces fighting against the German Army in Belgium and France, in the Middle East & Mesopotamia against forces of the Turkish Empire.

## **1915 The Struggle Extends**

1915 saw the beginning of static trench warfare that for four years was to stretch from the Belgian coast to the Swiss border .

At home hundreds of thousands of volunteers who flocked to the colours in 1914 were training and deploying to the various theatres of war. The year was to feature major land battles in France at Neuve Chapelle, Festubert and Loos, and in Belgium at 2nd Ypres. In Turkey the battle for the Dardanelles would centre on Gallipoli, whilst fierce fighting continued in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia.

The Royal Navy was also to engage the enemy in home and Middle Eastern waters. 1915 was also the year in which people at home began to realise the high price in human life that was to be exacted in these engagements.

## **1916 Stalemate & Slaughter**

Conscription was introduced in February but 1916 was to be the year in which a generation of British, Empire, French and German youth was lost.

Major battles were to be fought throughout the year; Verdun, where from February to the autumn several hundred thousand men were killed, and on the British front, the Battle of the Somme opened on 1st July and is considered to have drawn to a close in November. During this five-month period the greater part of Kitchener's Army, many in action for the first time, was decimated.

At sea the Battle of Jutland was fought off the North East coast on 31st May at a cost of 6,443 British lives. Costly action against the Turkish Army also continued throughout the year.

## **1917 Year of Attrition**

A year of major battles with, in the end, little of lasting value to show for their success. A year when winning depended on which side killed more of the enemy than he killed of yours.

The year of Arras, Bullecourt, Vimy Ridge, the muddy horror of Passchendaele and the tank led battle of Cambrai in France and Flanders, whereas in the Middle East, Jerusalem and Baghdad were finally captured.

## **1918 The Final Curtain**

In March the Germans launched what was to have been their final offensive, and within days recovered virtually all the territory they had lost in 1916- 1917 only to be halted short of Paris having caused grievous losses in men and equipment. The Allied counter attacks, after much hand to hand fighting, were however to carry them forward to the Armistice. The American forces organised as fully American Armies under General Pershing took to the field, in addition to their colleagues operating alongside British and Empire Divisions.



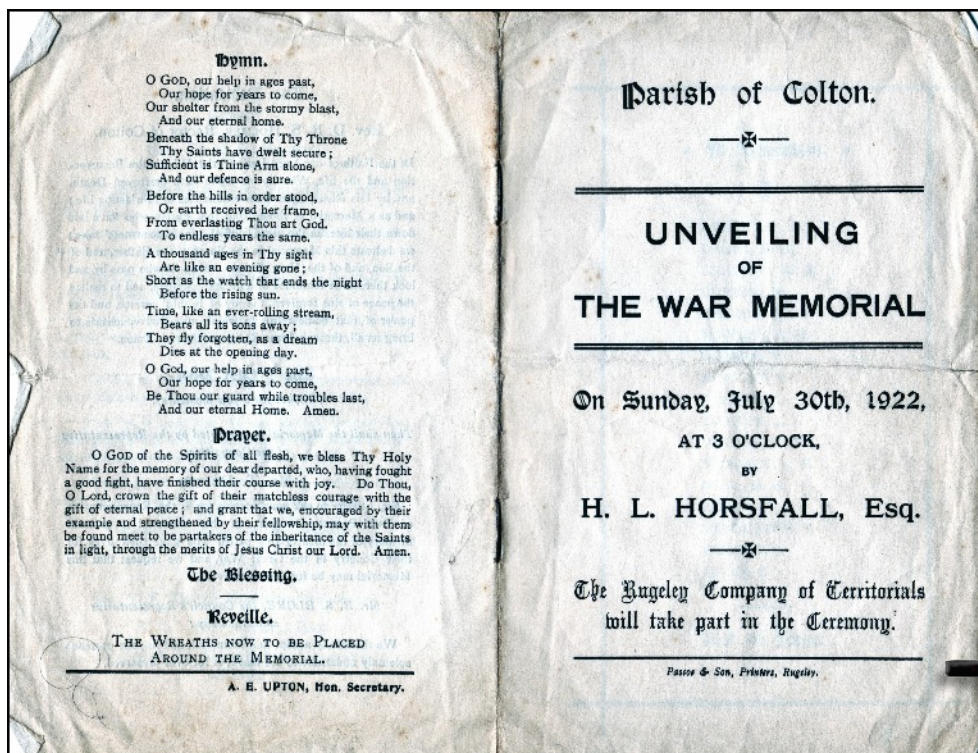
# Epilogue



So the war came to an end and those who had survived returned to the village. Had life changed?  
Well, it would never be quite the same for anyone again.

A memorial commemorating those who had made the supreme sacrifice was erected in the village and a dedication service was held on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1922 with a service of remembrance held, even to the present, every November.

The village today has still retained much of its Edwardian character despite a large amount of new building taking place but, sadly there are few people still resident in the village who have any family connection with the men on the memorial. For this reason, if for no other, it is hoped that this booklet will serve as a record so that future generations will be aware of the importance of and reason for remembering.









World War I 1914 -1918  
Centenary 2014  
Colton's men who gave their lives

