

## Remembrance Sunday

‘We will remember them’ is not a trite claim, it’s an imperative. On average, Britain has been in major war at least two times each and every century. We – the lucky ones - merely happen to be in a long peace.

The names of our fallen came from a generation of men, aged between just 18 and 29, whose young lives in rural Hankerton were fated to coincide with global conflict. They were like us: they sang in the church, they went to the school, they worked the farms, and I’m sure they enjoyed an ale at the Horse & Groom, or perhaps The Plough at Crudwell. They were fathers, sons, and brothers and had mothers, daughters and sisters. So, for just a few minutes, let’s bring them back to life.

In 1914, **Albert Painter** was a 19-year-old farmworker who lived at Cherrybrook Cottage, in Oxlease Lane. A fellow farmworker was **Fred Law**, who lived in Dolmans Cottage. That year, they never made the harvest, but joined the Wiltshire Regt on the same day, they have consecutive service numbers. How fitting that the regimental quick march was called *The Farmer’s Boy*. As best friends, they died together in Gallipoli on 15th Aug 1915 and are commemorated on the tip of the peninsula overlooking the Dardanelles, with 21,000 others.

Fred’s younger brother was **Edgar Law**. Exactly a year later, he too was killed in action, in the second month of the Battle of the Somme. With no known grave, he is commemorated at the biggest memorial of them all at Thiepval, with 72,000 others.

**Alfred Hayes** lived at Hankerton Field Farm. He enlisted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Wiltshires, who landed in France in Aug 14, just 10 days after Britain had declared war on Germany. He fought at Mons, he fought at Ypres, he was promoted to LCpl, but at Loos it is thought he was blown to smithereens and is now commemorated on the Menin Gate.

**Thomas Smith** also lived at Hankerton Field Farm, where he was the cowman. He enlisted at Tetbury with the Worcestershire Regt. At 3.15am, he went over the top on what was the third day of the Somme offensive, was wounded and then shipped back to Blighty and died in a military hospital. He is the only Serviceman to have made it back here to be buried in the village. The inscription on his grave in front of us has the words of his parents William and Elizabeth, “*if only we could have clasped his hand and just have said goodbye*”.

**Reginald Loder** lived at Murcott. He survived Gallipoli, but the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Wiltshires was sent on to fight the Turks in Mesopotamia where, in Jan 1917, he was wounded and died 3 days later. His grave is at the Amara war cemetery overlooking the River Tigris in modern day Iraq.

As an aside, I wonder whether any of our farm boys knew the local landlord from Charlton, the 19<sup>th</sup> Earl of Suffolk. He was in the same Mesopotamia campaign just downriver, commanding the Wiltshire battery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Wessex Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. Major Henry Howard was killed by shrapnel through the heart and is buried in Basra War Cemetery. At the age of 11, his son became the 20<sup>th</sup> Earl. He became known as 'mad' Jack Howard and would go in 1941, defusing bombs in the East End.

The fourth Hankerton man in the eastern campaign was **Arthur Woodward**. He survived it all, including Gallipoli, the fall of Bagdad, and when Turkey signed an Armistice on 31<sup>st</sup> Oct 1918, there must have been hope. He died of an illness the following month and never came home. We can only imagine the scene in the Post Office when the telegram came through. His mother Fanny was the post mistress.

**Frank Gardner** lived at Church Farm and worked for the Great Western Railway at Swindon as an engine cleaner and fireman. Whilst all the farm labourers were drafted to the Infantry, Frank's skills saw him drafted to the Artillery. He was killed in Flanders in June 1917.

At 29, **George Pennell** was the oldest of our lads, his parents lived in Rossley Cottage in Chapel Lane. Married with two children, a tall lad, he joined the Grenadier Guards. As a LCpl, he went at Cambrai on 27 Nov 17, a day when British Army deaths numbered 1,147.

Do you remember the first name I mentioned, Albert Painter? Well, Albert had a younger sister called Rosa, who married locally and lived in a cottage at Elm Farm. They had children, the youngest of whom was called **Arthur John Tugwell**, or Jack to his friends. Like his uncle, Jack joined up at the age of 19, only it was now the Second World War. He was posted to Singapore, which fell to the Japanese in Feb 1942. Postcards home confirm that Jack worked on the infamous Burma railway. At dawn on 12<sup>th</sup> Sep 1944, he was one of 1300 prisoners of war onboard a ship bound for Japan when it was sunk. Jack's grave is the sea just south of Taiwan.

This year, let us remember **Bunny Lees-Smith** who in 1945 was 13, a childhood shaped by war. On reaching 18, in 1950, he joined the RAF as a flight engineer and found himself serving with 24 Squadron, participating in casualty evacuations from the Korean War. Bunny though was a survivor, and in later years a much-cherished resident of this village, passing only this summer, aged 93.

For every person killed in the world wars, three more were injured physically and many more mentally. Hankerton did its duty.

**They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, not the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning...we will remember them.**