

Woodley in WWI 1

St John's Church Memorial

Woodley's memorial listing the men who died in the 1914 -18 war is on display in St John's Church, where the names of those who fell in the Second World War are also listed.

At the beginning of the 20th century the church would have been attended by people living in and around what was then Woodley and Sandford parish. As well as those who lived in the parish, the list includes men from families in Twyford, Hurst, Wokingham and Reading and it seems membership of the church congregation and parents living locally were also reasons for the names being included. Lewis Edgar Lee, who is listed on the memorial, is buried in the churchyard with a Commonwealth war grave headstone.



Woodley Memorial Recreation Ground

Another lasting memorial to the men lost in the Great War was being planned by August 1918, just as the war was drawing to an end. When it looked as if the Woodley Jubilee Recreation Field, which had been rented to the parish council by Mr Palmer for £4 a year since 1887, was to be sold for building purposes, the village got together and decided to purchase the land so that the Woodley Memorial Recreation Ground would be 'saved to the parish for all time'. In the Sonning and Woodley Parish magazine of August 1918, it was reported that the parishioners believed that 'It would make a splendid and lasting memorial, for use even more than for ornament'.

Many donated to the sum of £400 required to buy the land; house to house collections were made and the scholars of Woodley School made weekly collections. The subscribers included relatives of the men who fought, as well as local people such as the Misses Players who donated £150. The parish magazine congratulated Woodley on 'the acquisition of the old ground for the playing of games for all time. Future generations will refer in appreciative terms to the generosity of those who are giving the necessary funds, not always for their own benefit, but for the good of others.' The Woodley Memorial Recreation Ground was officially opened on Easter Monday 1919. A committee, which later became a charity, was set up to manage the ground and in 1939 the parish council became the trustee of the Woodley Memorial Recreation Ground Charity.

Oakwood Centre's stained glass memorial

When the Oakwood Centre was built in 2004, the Council very much wished to show that it understood the importance of the history and intention of the land as a memorial and commissioned a stained glass memorial to be installed at the front of the building. The window was designed to commemorate all those who have served their country on land, at sea and in the air.



New Memorial

Woodley also now has a new war memorial. Installed in 2014 on the Woodley Memorial Recreation Ground it is set in a civic space designed to be a place where people can sit and enjoy the park and where there can be gatherings to commemorate those who have given their lives for their country. The Woodley War Memorial Project Committee was launched in 2011, with the aim of providing a public focal point for such commemorations and its members worked hard to raise the funds for the memorial. Once again local people, schools and businesses contributed generously. Woodley Town Council, as trustee of the Woodley Memorial Recreation Ground Charity, provided the site for the new memorial and will maintain it in the future. Developers' contributions funding was allocated by Wokingham Borough Council to provide the civic space in which the memorial sits.



We hope you find our history of WWI in Woodley interesting. We have had a great deal of help in putting the information together from David Bilton, a former teacher at Bulmershe School, and his contacts and initially from Gerry Westall, who sadly died in 2014. Our thanks go to them for sharing their knowledge and information. Thanks also to Woodley residents Ann Keenan and Mark Rozzier and to Betty Simmonds for their local knowledge - and to the families who contacted us with new information about their relatives in World War I. We have incorporated their recollections and information into the WWI display panels.

If you think you are related to any of the men we have included in our panels and have more information about them please get in touch - 0118 9690356 or email townclerk@woodley.gov.uk



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Woodley in WWI 2

Western Avenue

Woodley was a much smaller place in 1914 - there were small areas of settlement, several farms, country houses and a few inns and shops. The population was around 950 in 1911 and was probably not much higher by the start of the war.

One area of settlement - of relatively new properties - was Western Avenue. There were around 26 houses on the avenue, most with names rather than numbers. From the memorial at St John's Church and from records and local newspapers of the time, we know that several young men who fought in the war lived in the avenue - and there were probably more whose details we haven't been able to find.

Arthur Tubb's family lived at The Limes in the run up to the war. Arthur had two brothers and a sister and was a bricklayer by trade. His father was a farm labourer. Arthur served in the Princess Charlotte of Wales's Royal Berkshire Regiment and was killed in action on 3 July 1916. His name is listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme - those who died and have no known grave.

Edwin Farr is reported as living at The Limes. He survived the war, although spent time in hospital as a result of an accident.

Arthur Norcutt's father and sisters lived at Cranleigh. Arthur served in the London Scottish, attached to the Gordon Highlanders, and is reported as dying of his wounds on 26 October 1917. He is buried at Hooze Crater Cemetery in Belgium and listed on the memorial at St John's Church.



Pte. EDWIN G. FARR, The Limes, Western Avenue, Woodley.—In hospital through an accident.



The late Lce.-Corpl. A. H. NORCUTT, London Scottish, attached Gordon Highlanders, "Cranleigh," Western Avenue, Woodley.—Killed in action.



Pte. E. PHILPS, The Shamrock, Western Avenue, Woodley.—Wounded.

Private E. Philps of The Shamrock was reported to have been wounded but survived the war.

James Sammons of Messina had been a law clerk before joining up. His sister was a school teacher and his mother had been recently widowed. Sergeant Sammons served in the Berkshire Yeomanry and fought at Gallipoli. He was 26 when he was killed in action in Palestine on 29 November 1917. He is buried in the Jerusalem War Cemetery and listed on the memorial at St John's Church. His sister was one of the subscribers to the purchase of the Memorial Ground in 1918.

Charles Miles served in a Lewis Gun Section and, although reported as severely wounded in the local newspaper, he survived the war even though he probably went back to the front once he'd recovered.



Pte. C. H. MILES, Lewis Gun Section, Western Avenue, Woodley.—Severely wounded.

Archie Sydney Miles, Charles' older brother, had been a carpenter before joining the Royal Navy in 1912. He served on HMS Ramillies towards the end of the war and was part of the occupation force kept in Turkey for a few years after the war had ended. He is described in the records as having a 'very good character'. At the time of his death (on 16 May 1920) he was a Regulating Petty Officer, part of the Royal Navy's police force. He is recorded as having died of heart failure whilst bathing. He left a wife, Kate, and is buried at Chanak Consular Cemetery in Turkey. His name isn't on the memorial at St John's Church and it's likely that he died after the memorial was completed.

Records at the Town Council show that Charles and Archie's mother - Laura Elma Miles - was one of the subscribers to the purchase of the Memorial Ground. She also served on the committee overseeing the ground from the early 1920s until 1930.

Harold Edward Stewart (listed on the church memorial) was conscripted after 1916 and was a Gunner in the "B" Bty 312th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. He died of disease in No. 8 General Hospital in Rouen on 25 July 1918, aged 29. Although born in Chingford, his parents lived at Pine Villa on the avenue. He is buried at Bois-Guillaume Communal Cemetery in France.

The **Rackley** family had five sons who fought in the Great War - Alfred, Ernest, Frank, Albert and Herbert. Three returned home but Alfred and Frank died - see the panel on families for more information about the Rackleys.



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Woodley in WWI 3

Cobblers City, Sandford Mill, Wheelers Green and Norris Green

The area known as Cobblers City or just 'The City' in 1914 (and earlier) was a group of cottages and other buildings in the land that is now boarded by Headley Road East and Tippings Lane. It was this area that provided space for newcomers to the village and where workers on the land and other trades set up their businesses. Also in the east and south of Woodley and Sandford Parish were Sandford Mill and Wheelers and Norris Greens. We know from the records that several young men from these parts of Woodley fought in the Great War.

Joseph Nash, of Headley Cottages, was a Private in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry before the war and went with the original draft to France, landing on 14 August 1914. His battalion fought at the Battle of Mons and the retreat and at other battles on to Ypres. It is likely that Joseph was stationed in trenches near Gheluvelt and was on an attack, raid or reconnaissance mission when he died on 1 November 1914. He is listed on the Ypres Memorial and in St John's Church. **Percy Tom Nash**, Joseph's younger brother, survived the war and reached the rank of Company Quartermaster Sergeant, in charge of supplies. The local paper reports him as being wounded after four years' service.



Pte. JOSEPH JOHN NASH, Headley Cottages, Woodley. — Wounded and missing.



C.O.M.S. T. NASH, Headley Cottages, Woodley.—Wounded, after four years' service.

Henry Saunders of Denmark Cottages, and a former baker, is remembered on the memorial in St John's Church and at the Vis-en-Artois Memorial in France. This memorial lists the 10,000 soldiers with no known grave who were killed during the Advance to Victory from August to 11 November 1918.



The late Sergt. CLAUDE HEARN, Woodley.—Killed in action.

Claude Hearn from Wheelers Green served as a Sergeant in the Berkshire Regiment, 6th Battalion. He was killed in action in France on 3 October 1916 and is buried at the Bray Vale British cemetery at Bray sur Somme. This photo shows the Woodley Town Football Club 1909/10 team. Of all of the team members who went to war, Claude was the only one who didn't return home. He is remembered on the memorial at St John's Church.



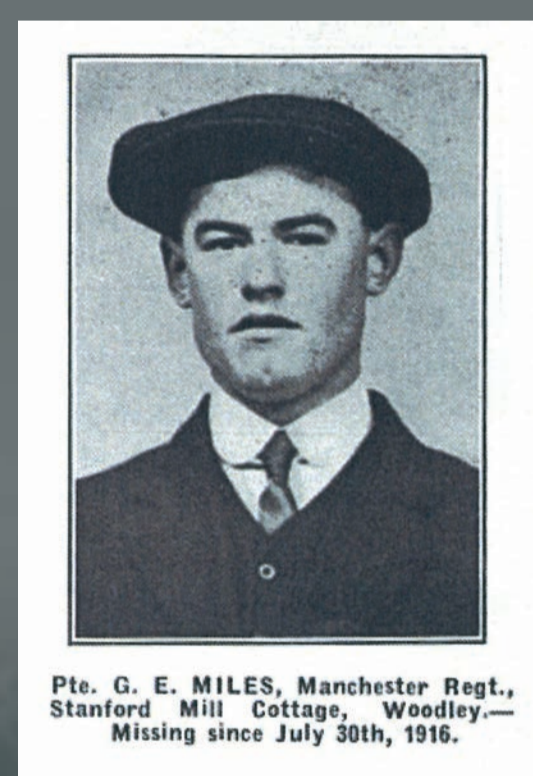
WOODLEY F. C.
League Champions: Wiltshire and District League
1909-10
E. New W. White T. Wheeler W. Dames A. White E. Smith B. Halsey A. Lasky J. Herridge S. Woodgar C. Pettinger
L. Hearn T. West E. Smith W. Wapley (Captain) F. Heston A. West T. Clarke
F. Wheeler
C. Hearn (Hon. Secretary)

Reginald Hearn, also from Wheelers Green and Claude's cousin, died of wounds on 19 December 1917 while serving with the Machine Gun Corps of the Royal Berkshire Regiment in Mesopotamia. He is buried at Ramleh War Cemetery in Israel and listed on the memorial at St John's Church.

Members from the Hearn family were involved in the running of the Woodley Memorial Recreation Ground Committee and donated towards the purchase of the land.

Brothers **Walter** and **William Oakley** of 'The City' both served during the war - William was already a soldier when the war started. They were both discharged because of sickness; William in 1915 and Walter in 1917.

We know that **Harry Johnson**, married to Ellen, lived in 'The City' and is listed on the memorial at St John's Church but there are no detailed records of his service. Similarly, it has been difficult to find information about **Christopher Barrett** who is listed in the Church.



Pte. G. E. MILES, Manchester Regt., Sandford Mill Cottage, Woodley.—Missing since July 30th, 1916.

Private George Edwin Miles of Sandford Mill cottages served in the 5th Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment which arrived in France in 1916. George was reported missing as of 30 July 1916 and then declared dead. He is listed on the memorial at St John's Church and on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme.



Pte. W. E. OAKLEY, Woodley.—Invalidated from the front with rheumatic fever.



Pte. W. H. OAKLEY, Woodley.—Invalidated from the front unfit for further service.



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Families

We can only imagine how parents must have felt watching their children go off to war and an uncertain fate. Consider the experiences of these three Woodley families, most of whose sons were of the generation called upon to fight.

Elizabeth and Abraham Edgington of Bulmershe Park had six sons and two daughters. We know that at least five of their sons served in the war. Ernest, a gamekeeper, joined the Royal Garrison Artillery in 1911 and, although reported wounded in the paper, survived. William joined the Royal Berkshire Regiment in July 1915 but, after being wounded, transferred to the Labour Corps in 1916 and was eventually discharged in 1919. Charles, the oldest of the brothers, joined the Royal Army Service Corps and served in the 240th (Horse Transport) Company as a driver and returned home in 1919. Harry became a Lance Corporal in the Military Police after joining as a Private in December 1914 and serving both at home and abroad with the Berkshire Yeomanry. Arthur may have served in the Labour Corps but the records are unclear on this. Stanley, the youngest and a pilot with the Royal Flying Corps, perished in the Great War.

Sons of Mr. and Mrs. A. EDGINGTON, Bulmershe Park, Woodley.



Bdr. E. EDGINGTON, R.G.A.—Wounded.



Sergt. S. EDGINGTON, Royal Flying Corps.



L.-Cpl. H. EDGINGTON, Military Mounted Police.



Pte. W. EDGINGTON, Royal Berks Regt.

William and Emily Brind of Eleven Elms saw at least three of their six sons go to war. William was a milkman before the war. He joined the 1st Royal Berkshire Regiment and arrived in France in early 1916. He was reported wounded in the newspaper - it is not known if he died of his wounds or if he recovered and then went back but he was killed in action on 29 April 1917 in France. His name is listed on the Arras Memorial. His brother John was a farm labourer before joining the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, 5th Battalion. He was killed in action in France and his name is listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. Their younger brother Charles joined the 5th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment and was reported in the local newspaper to be sick. He survived the war. Both William and John are listed on the memorial at St John's Church and William is commemorated on the Sonning memorial.



Pte. WM. BRIND, 11, Elms, Woodley. Wounded.



The late Corp. JOHN BRIND, Oxford and Bucks L.I., 11, Elms, Woodley.—Killed in action. Aged 23.



Pte. C. BRIND, 5th Batt. Royal Berks Regt., 11, Elms, Woodley.—Sick.

Mrs Mary Rackley of Western Avenue, the mother of seven sons and two daughters, also had to endure the absence of five of her sons who all served during the 1914-18 war. Ernest, a gardener before the war, fought in the 5th Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. Albert was in the King's Royal Rifle Corps and Herbert, who had been a coach and motor painter before the war, served as a Private in the Royal Marine Light Infantry. Frank enlisted in the 1st 4th Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment and was killed in action in France on 14 August 1916. His older brother, Lance Corporal Alfred Rackley, serving in the same battalion and having received the Military Medal, died in Italy. Both Frank and Alfred are remembered on the memorial in St John's Church and in Sonning where they were born.

In his book 'Reading in the Great War', published by Pen and Sword, David Bilton recounts a family's story with an eventual happy ending. In 1918 **Mr and Mrs Deadman**, of Lund's Farm in Woodley, received a notice from the War Office that their son, Private Sydney Deadman of the Wiltshire Regiment, had been killed in action on 24 March. The family went into mourning and a memorial service was held in Woodley Church on 21 April. Shortly afterwards they received a request for cigarettes from Sydney writing from a POW camp in Germany where he was recovering from wounds in both legs.

Sons of Mrs. A. RACKLEY, Western Avenue, Woodley.



The late Lieut. ALFRED RACKLEY, M.M., 1/4th Batt. Royal Berks Regt.—Killed in Italy.



Pte. ERNEST RACKLEY, 5th Batt. Royal Berks Regiment.



The late Pte. FRANK RACKLEY, 1/4th Royal Berks Regt.—Killed in France.



Pte. ALBERT RACKLEY, K.R.R.



Pte. HERBERT RACKLEY, R.M.L.I.



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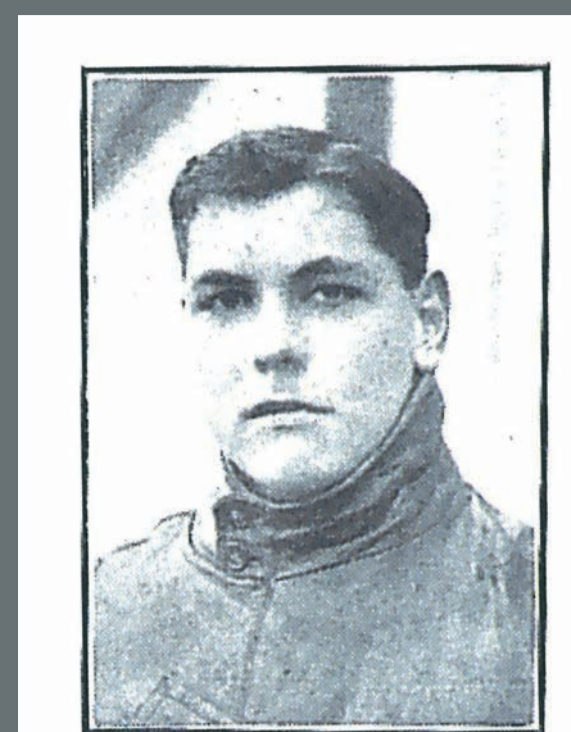
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Sergeant Stanley Edgington (d. 11 September 1917)

At the start of the First World War, the Royal Flying Corps is reported to have had just 179 flying machines, less than half of which were capable of flying the Channel. Certainly the use of planes as weapons of war was in its infancy, with planes being used for observation at first. According to James J. Hudson in his book on American airmen in WWI, aerial combat grew from pilots taking shots at each other and dropping objects from above to the development by Anthony Fokker, a Dutch aeronautical engineer, of a forward firing system that synchronised with the propellers. The advances over the four years of the war both in aviation and aerial weaponry by both sides were huge and it must have been an incredibly exciting time for those who were interested in flight.

Stanley Edgington, who served with the Royal Flying Corps, is probably the first of Woodley's links with this new age of flight. He was the youngest of six sons of Abraham and Elizabeth who lived on the Bulmershe Park estate and worked as a chauffeur when he enlisted at Farnborough on 10 August 1914, just days after the start of the war. His interest and knowledge of engines would certainly have made him a perfect candidate for the RFC. Stanley made steady progress through the ranks - he was promoted to Corporal in 1915 and Sergeant in January 1916, serving for a period as Flight Sergeant. On 7 July 1917 he was graded 'First Class Pilot' and joined 57 Squadron, which had been formed the year before. When Stanley joined, the squadron had just been equipped with Airco DH4s (De Havilland 4). These planes were able to undertake long range bombing, flying deep penetration missions over Germany for several hours. They were also used for reconnaissance operations, particularly important when conditions were bad on the ground and the cavalry could not be used. The DH4 was said to have been nicknamed the 'Flying Coffin', referring to the placement of the fuel tank between the pilot and the gunner and the possibility of a grim fate in a crash.



The late Sgt. S. EDGINGTON, R.A.F., sixth son of Mrs. A. Edgington, of Woodley, who was reported killed after previously being reported missing.

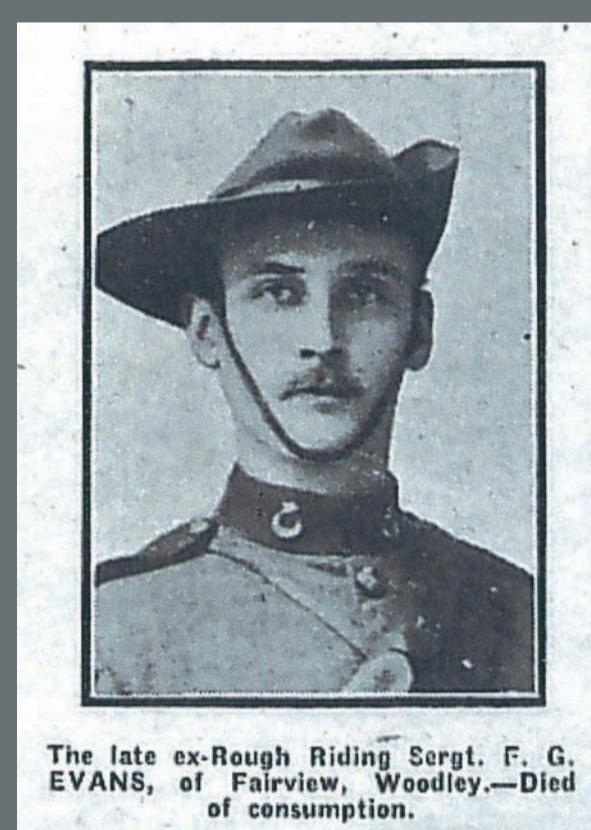


On 11 September 1917, Stanley Edgington and Edward Hearn took off in DH4 A7439 from their base at Boisdingham in France and were engaged in a bombing raid at the railway sidings at Courtrai. They never returned and the entry dated 18th September 1917 in Stanley Edgington's service record says "officially accepted as died 11 September 1917". He is buried at Harlebeke New British Cemetery in Belgium and is listed on the memorial at St John's Church. He was 24 years old.

Frederick George Evans (d. 30 July 1918)

Ex Rough Riding Sergeant Frederick George Evans was pictured in the local paper on his death in 1918 and was listed as living in Woodley, his name also appears on the memorial in St John's Church. His final story is a sad one, but one that also shows the compassion and understanding of others in those times.

Frederick was born in Peckham in 1873 and grew up in Aldermaston. His father was a brewery agent and he had a younger brother and an older sister. In 1890 he joined the 4th Hussars, from which he paid to be discharged almost immediately. In January 1900 he enlisted to fight in the Boer War in South Africa and saw a great deal of action. We know this because of letters he sent home that were published in the local paper describing chases and 'skirmishes' with the Boers during his 16-month campaign with the 39th Company, 10th Battalion of the Imperial Yeomanry. From these we get an impression of someone positive and willing to put up with the hardships of no tents and dry biscuits in place of bread. Rough Riders were termed such after a body of volunteer horsemen who served under Colonel Theodore Roosevelt in the Spanish American War of 1898. This perfectly describes the kinds of conditions they endured and the sort of war they were fighting. He then appears to have served as a Lance Corporal with the Berkshire Yeomanry to 1905 and then joined the Berkshire Royal Horse Artillery in 1908 where he was promoted to the rank of Sergeant.



The late ex-Rough Riding Sgt. F. G. EVANS, of Fairview, Woodley.—Died of consumption.

The photograph of Frederick Evans shows him in his Berkshire Yeomanry uniform, and the reason for it not being a later picture became clear from his 1914 service records. These describe in some detail his suffering from mental instability but also show some understanding from the medical personnel who were assessing his fitness to serve. Frederick was discharged as permanently unfit for service on 31 December 1914; his character was recorded as 'good' and it was also attested that his disability was not the result of military service. We think that he spent his last years at the County Asylum in Moulsoford. It was reported in the newspaper that Frederick Evans died of consumption (TB) on 30 July 1918. It is probable that his brother, who lived at the Bull and Chequers at the time, ensured he was listed in the newspaper (also likely to have been a kindness on the part of the paper, given his military service) and on the memorial at St John's Church - this was Frederick's connection with this area.

His death notice appeared in the Reading Mercury, Oxford Gazette, Newbury Herald and Berks County papers Saturday 10 August 1918:

" DEATH OF AN ARMY VETERAN - Frederick George Evans, ex-rough riding sergeant of the Berks R.H.A. late Royal Berks Yeomanry and 4th Hussars, and late of Rose Farm, Aldermaston, brother of Sergt - Major Instr S. C. H. Evans, passed away in his sleep following consumption on Monday last week. Deceased had travelled a great deal, was a man of considerable ability, very clever with horses and a fine rider. He fought in the Foreign Legion for the Greeks against the Turks in 1897, being wounded and mentioned in dispatches for bravery. He was one of the first to volunteer for the South African War, and served through it with the 39th Imperial Yeomanry, under Major Ricardo. He joined the 4th Royal Berks at the beginning of the present war, but was discharged as physically unfit. The funeral took place at Woodley Church on Friday last week. A squad of soldiers from the Berks Regiment, under Sergt. Plumer, followed, and the "Last Post" was sounded. The service was taken by the Rev. F. F. Penruddock, Mr J. Nelson carried out the funeral arrangements."



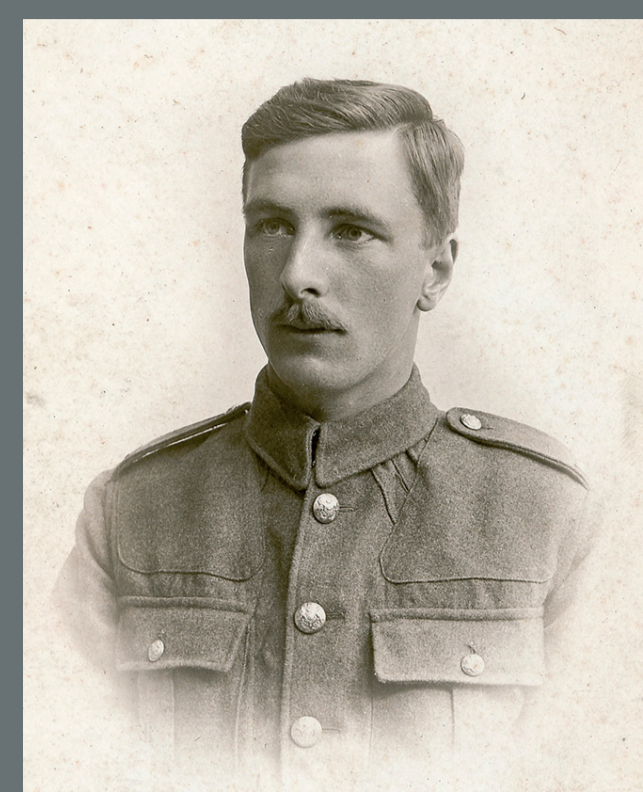
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Since the original 2014 display, several families have been in touch with Woodley Town Council to provide more information about their relatives' part in World War I and to let us know about other Woodley residents who had served their country or to provide more information about their relatives.

Pauline Miller told us more about **Thomas Swain**, her relative who is listed on the church memorial, and his life before the war. He was born in 1894 at 481 Kentwood Hill, Tilehurst. When his father died just weeks after his birth Tom was taken in by his aunt and uncle who lived in Crockhamwell Road and had moved to Elm Cottage in Bulmershe Park Farm by the time Tom was 16. Tom joined the Royal Berkshire Regiment as a Private and at the time of his death, on 17 July 1918, he was a member of the 34th Battalion Machine Gun Corps (Infantry). Tom is buried at the Pont Du Hem Military Cemetery. His family received a "Death Penny" (sometimes called Widow's Penny) - a memorial plaque and scroll that the government decided should be given to the next of kin of all those who died in the war.



George Pottinger of Garfield Cottages, The City, whose occupation was labelling biscuit tins, was awarded the Military Medal (MM) for his actions in carrying wounded men across a shell-swept bridge while serving as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps. His grandson, Ken Pottinger, provided more information about his grandfather's life in Woodley. George was born in Lambourne but moved to Woodley, firstly to 'The City' and then around 1920 to Headley Road when he and his wife, Lily, became the first occupants of number 32, one of the new council houses. George lived there until his death in 1970, after which his son took over the tenancy. In all, the house was occupied by the same family for more than 80 years. Ken and his family hadn't known about the Military Medal awarded to George for an act of 'bravery in the field' until after his death - he had never mentioned it to anyone. In the Second World War, George served in the Woodley Civil Defence.



After the initial WWI display in 2014, Roger Lee provided us with more information about his grandfather, **Lewis Edgar Lee**, who is buried at St John's Church, in a family grave headed with a Commonwealth gravestone, and is also listed on the memorial there - as Edgar Lee - which his grandson believes to be a mistake and that he was, in fact, known as Lewis. On being conscripted, Lewis was placed in a Devonshire Regiment Labour Battalion serving on the Western Front mending roads, digging trenches and providing other labour behind the lines. He was transferred to a Labour Corps in 1917 and was working as a farm labourer in Kirtlington, Oxfordshire where he contracted influenza. He died on 20 November 1918 aged 36 with his wife, Ellen Mary Lee, at his side - just 9 days after the Armistice. The family received a War Grant of £5 and 5 shillings, with a total of £10 19s 9p being paid to the family. Pictured are Lewis Edgar Lee and his brothers, Cornelius and Charles, in their Devonshire Regiment uniforms.



The late Pte. L. LEE, Devon Labour Batt., of The Pitts, Woodley—Died of pneumonia. Aged 37.



SGT. W. T. WHITE, Royal Berks, The Pitts, Woodley, awarded D.C.M. He also holds the Italian Medal.

Roger Lee also told us about Ellen's brother and Lewis's brother-in-law, **William Thomas White** of The Pitts, who served as a Sergeant in the Royal Berks Regiment and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Italian Croce di Guerra for distinguished services rendered during the course of the campaign in Italy in 1918. The platoon carried out a raid on an Austrian garrison, led by Sgt White. The citation in the London Gazette read as follows: "He attacked a large party of the enemy, captured seventeen prisoners, cleared several dug-outs, and then disposed his men to cover the withdrawal of the leading company. Throughout he showed great courage and initiative." The notice of the award was published just five days before Ellen's husband died. It's hard to imagine Ellen's thoughts at that time, relief of her brother's survival and terrible grief at the loss of her husband and father of her children.

Sydney James Smith, one of the members of Woodley FC League Champions of 1909-1910, also fought during the war. Ivor Smith, his grandson, told us about his grandfather's experiences. During the battle of the Somme Sydney lost his left leg after going up over the trenches and being shot by a German machine gunner. He had a tin leg fitted and was in recovery from his wounds for two years. He and his wife, Emily (nee Chapman), lived at Heath Cottage on Crockhamwell Road where they ran a dairy. Ivor said that his grandfather always used to say that he bore no malice towards the Germans, it had been an act of war, and that later in his life Sydney regularly met up for a drink with Frederick Kraus, a German builder who lived in Woodley. Footballers Sydney and his brother Ern (of Denmark Avenue) were both members of the football team displayed on panel 3. Sydney and Emily are pictured on holiday in Brixham. Sydney died in 1953.

