

St Mellion WW1 Soldiers Killed in Action 30.10.17



Morley BALSDON (service no. 58786) was one of eight children born to father George (an agricultural labourer born in Halwill, Devon) and mother Dorothy Elizabeth (nee Barrable, born in Poughill, Cornwall). His parents were married on 18.1.1881 in Poughill and Morley was born in 1896 in Landulph. His birth was registered between July and September of that year in the district of St Germans.

In 1901, Morley is recorded as living at Stockadon, Landulph, with his parents and older siblings Cephas (17, carpenter's apprentice), Eunice (15, dressmaker), and Hedley (13) (all born in Landulph). Ten years later, he was still at Stockadon, the last of four surviving children still living with his parents.

Morley joined the Corps of Royal Engineers and served as a Sapper in the 154th Field Company. He was killed in action on the Western Front on 1.7.1916 (the first day of the Battle of the Somme) aged 19. He is buried in Bienvillers Military Cemetery in Pas de Calais, France.

No record has been found for a marriage or children, and his parents were named as next of kin (George and Dorothy E Balsdon of Mount Tamar, Burraton, Saltash).

He is commemorated on Landulph War Memorial.

From the National Army Museum

During the Battle of the Somme the Royal Engineers carried out a whole range of duties. They were responsible for the transport system behind the front line, operated vital communications equipment, constructed trenches and fortifications and surveyed the enemy's lines. The engineers were also responsible for gas warfare and the underground mining operations beneath the German lines.

(Walter) Thomas MARTIN (service no. 441661) was the second of six children born to father Thomas (a farm labourer born in Black Torrington, Devon) and mother Mary Jane (nee Sanders, born in Milton Damerel, Devon). Walter was born in Broadwoodwidge, Devon and his birth registered in the district of Launceston between April and June 1891. This ties in with ages given in UK censuses although his service record says he was born on 25.3.1890.

In 1891, Walter was living at Thorndon Cottage, Broadwoodwidge with his parents and sister Mabel (age 1, born in Ashwater, Devon). By 1901, the family had moved to Crocadon, St Mellion, and now had four more children: Maud (8), Ethel (6), William (4) and Eber (2). Their father was said to be an agricultural labourer in charge of horses.

By 1911, the Martin family had moved again and were living at Haye Farm, Landulph, Hatt. Father Thomas was a cowman and Walter was a gardener.

Between 1911 and 1915, Walter emigrated to Canada and lived at Shell Lake, Saskatchewan.

On 18.9.1915, he attested to the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force and served as a Private in the Canadian Infantry (53rd then 42nd Battalion, Quebec Regiment). His service record says he was 5' 9", had dark brown hair, blue eyes, and was hospitalised with measles in Winnipeg in February 1916.

Walter left Halifax, Canada for England on 29.3.1916, sailing on the SS Empress of Britain. He arrived at Liverpool on 9.4.1916 and left for France on 8.6.1916. He was recorded as missing presumed dead on or after 16.9.1916. He has no known grave.

No record has been found for Walter marrying or having children. His service record says he was single and his next of kin were parents Thomas and Mary Jane. Walter's Will (dated 6.6.1916) states: *'In the event of my death, I give the whole of my property and effects to my Father (Thomas Martin, Ramsicombe, Botusfleming, Hatt, Cornwall, England)'*.

The District Probate Registry at Bodmin recorded an affidavit with the following entry: *'BE IT KNOWN that Walter Thomas Martin of Ramsicombe in the Parish of Botusfleming in the County of Cornwall Private in the 53rd Battalion Canadian Infantry who at the time of this had a fixed place of abode at Ramsicombe aforesaid within the District of the County of Cornwall and who died on the 16th day of September 1916 in France while on active service made and duly executed his last Will and Testament and did not therein namey [sic] any Executor.'* The gross value of Walter's estate was £27, 19 shillings and 5 pence.

He is commemorated on St Mellion War Memorial and the Vimy Memorial in France.

Service records sourced from Library and Archives Canada.

Charles Guy PEARCE (service no. 9287) was born on 18.9.1895 in St Ive to parents John (a shoemaker born in St Ive) and Alice Ada (nee Parker, born in Guernsey). Charles' father signed up for 'General Service' himself in 1873, became a Sergeant Major (WO) in the Royal Irish Rifles (3rd Battalion), then was discharged in 1887 with Bright's Disease.

By 1901, John Pearce had passed away and his widow, Alice, was living in St Mellion village with children Osmond (10), Susan (7) and Charles (5), along with boarder Arthur Truscott, a 25 year old Police Constable (2nd Class) born in Truro. Alice's occupation was said to be an Assistant Shopkeeper (Grocer).

Records show that Charles was educated at the Royal Military Asylum in Chelsea, an institution for orphans of British Army soldiers. He was admitted on 21.9.1906, discharged on 7.10.1909 and enlisted in the army in Dover some time after that.

In 1911, he was a Boy in the 1st Battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI) and living in barracks in Gravesend, Kent. He rose to become an Acting Sergeant in the DCLI (6th Battalion) and was killed in action on the Western Front on 18.8.1916, aged 20. He has no known grave.

No record has been found for Charles marrying or having children, and his mother was named as next of kin (Alice Ada Pearce, of Burraton, Saltash, Cornwall).

He is commemorated on St Mellion War Memorial and on the Thiepval Memorial in the Somme.

William John SMITH (service no. 11148) was the oldest of six children born to father John (an agricultural labourer born in Pillaton) and mother Ellen (nee Crabb, born in Landulph). His parents married in St Mellion on 22.11.1894 and William was born in the parish shortly after (his birth was registered between January and March 1895 in the district of St Germans).

In 1901, William and his parents were living in St Mellion village with three new children: Harriet Amelia (4), Mary Elizabeth (3) (both born in St Mellion), and Laura Ellen (1) (born in Pillaton). Ten years later, the family had moved to Crocadon, St Mellion and now had two more sons: Charles Henry (7) and Edwin George (2) (both born in St Mellion). William (known as John) was recorded as a cowman on the farm.

William enlisted in the King's Royal Rifle Corps in Devonport and served as a Rifleman in the 1st Battalion. He was killed in action on the Western Front on 14.9.1914, aged 19, and has no known grave.

No record has been found for William marrying or having children, and his parents were named as next of kin (John and Ellen Smith, of Heathfield Cottages, Modbury, Devon).

He is commemorated on St Mellion War Memorial and on La Ferté-sous-Jouarre Memorial in France.



From the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Military Cemeteries and War Memorials

1. Bienvillers Military Cemetery, France

Bienvillers Military Cemetery was begun in September 1915 by the 37th Division, carried on by other Divisions in the line until March 1917, reopened from March to September 1918, when the village was again near the front line, and completed in 1922-24 when a number of graves, mainly of 1916, were brought in from the battlefields of the Ancre. Its twenty-one plots show a remarkable alternation of original burials in regimental or divisional groups, and groups of concentrated graves. The cemetery now contains 1,605 Commonwealth burials and commemorations of the First World War. 425 of the burials are unidentified but there are special memorials to two casualties known or believed to be buried among them. The 16 Second World War burials all date from the early months of the war, before the German invasion in May 1940 forced the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from France.

2. Vimy Memorial, France

On the opening day of the Battle of Arras, 9 April 1917, the four divisions of the Canadian Corps, fighting side by side for the first time, scored a huge tactical victory in the capture of the 60 metre high Vimy Ridge. After the war, the highest point of the ridge was chosen as the site of the great memorial to all Canadians who served their country in battle during the First World War, and particularly to the 60,000 who gave their lives in France. It also bears the names of 11,000 Canadian servicemen who died in France - many of them in the fight for Vimy Ridge - who have no known grave. The memorial was designed by W.S. Allward. It was unveiled by King Edward VIII on 26 July 1936.

3. Thiepval Memorial, France

The Thiepval Memorial, the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, bears the names of more than 72,000 officers and men of the United Kingdom and South African forces who died in the Somme sector before 20 March 1918 and have no known grave. Over 90% of those commemorated died between July and November 1916. The memorial also serves as an Anglo-French Battle Memorial in recognition of the joint nature of the 1916 offensive and a small cemetery containing equal numbers of Commonwealth and French graves lies at the foot of the memorial. The memorial, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, was built between 1928 and 1932 and unveiled by the Prince of Wales, in the presence of the President of France, on 1 August 1932 (originally scheduled for 16 May but due to the death of French President Doumer the ceremony was postponed until August).

4. La Ferté-sous-Jouarre Memorial, France

The La Ferté-sous-Jouarre Memorial commemorates 3,740 officers and men of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) who fell at the battles of Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne and the Aisne between the end of August and early October 1914 and have no known graves. The monument is constructed of white Massangis stone and surmounted by a sarcophagus onto which military trophies are laid. At the four corners of the pavement on which the monument stands are stone columns supporting urns which bear the coats of arms of the four constituent nations of the United Kingdom. The memorial was designed by George H. Goldsmith, a decorated veteran of the Western Front, and unveiled by Sir William Pulteney, who had commanded the III Corps of the BEF in 1914, on 4 November 1928.