

The Fallen of the World Wars

By Amy Myers

There are memorials to the fallen of both world wars both inside the church and on the huge stone outside by the porch, which was originally positioned by the magnificent white cross on the downs. It was unveiled in 1922 which is where this photo (PHOTO) was probably taken. Some of those named on the memorials came from families that had lived in the parish of Lenham for centuries, and some have living memorials in the village as their descendants are still living here.



On the first world war memorial in the church the name of Fred Cox is squeezed in at the foot of it as he had only recently died in Lenham of his war wounds. The plaque was unveiled in 1921 by his little sister Bessie, and she became the mother of Norbury Colbran who was very well known in Lenham and only left us a year or two ago. Fred had been seriously wounded in July 1915 after taking a trench near Ypres. It had taken 19 hours to rescue him and he remained paralysed from the waist down. He was brought home to the new VAD hospital in Stanfield House, next to the Dog and Bear organised by the then Lenham doctor,

Dr Temperley Grey whose surgery and home it had been. Fred¹ became a familiar figure in the village as an appeal in the *Kent Messenger* brought forth a carriage, a donkey called Ginny and - thanks to a whip-round by his friends – the necessary harness etc. Thereafter Fred therefore sallied forth in style and I think that that's his sister little Bessie sitting in the carriage with him. His funeral took place in 1921 with full military honours, with flags at half mast and buglers sounding the last post.



¹ Thank you to Mike Cockett for providing the image

On the memorial for the second world war is the name of Francis Woolley. He died in



Normandy after D-Day in 1944, and his sister Barbara only died a year ago. She was very well known in Lenham both for her skill at bowls, and for being the secretary of the primary school for many years. When you walk up Maidstone Road give a thought to the whole Woolley family, who once lived behind the Red Lion. Francis and Barbara's father Harry Woolley survived service in the first world war as did another of Barbara's brothers, Thomas. He too died in the second world war having survived his navy service in the first war during which his ship HMS *Bulldog* went to the Dardanelles to take part under heavy fire in the ill-fated Gallipoli troop landings. I play a miniscule part in Thomas's story as during the second war he was living in Welling in North Kent in a road only a stone's throw from where I was



born. When I was a very young child, my parents heard a dreaded Doodlebug flying bomb cut out overhead – its silence meant it was falling. Caught unawares my parents flung themselves on the floor saying their goodbyes to each other – and I had probably either been thrust into

a cupboard or under the iron contraption air raid shelter in our living room. The bomb missed us however and my parents were able to sheepishly scramble to their feet again. But Rosebery Avenue where Thomas Woolley was living was utterly demolished and Thomas lost his life.

Amazingly no less than 17 Clarks from Lenham served in the First World War, not of course all from the same family. Their descendants are still very active in Lenham today. There were several Clark families here in 1914 but links between them are not known. Of the 17 only one died – Edwin Jesse Clark, who lived in The Limes with his wife Daisy and son Ivan, died at the Somme in 1918. The Gurrs, the Chambers, the Chapmans, the Obbards all lost family members in the first war and all of them still have descendants locally. Bertie Chapman died of wounds at the Somme in 1917, Percy Gurr died of wounds in January 1917, Charles Chambers aged 21 was killed in action in 1918, George Chambers wrote in his last letter home ‘You never know your luck till the ball has done rolling’ and he too died in 1917.. And there were many others.

For some of the fallen little information remains. Charles Baldock is one example – his links to the long established Baldock family in Lenham must surely have existed but they could not be traced. On the church floor near the chancel there is a memorial stone to a Baldock family from way back. During the first war there was a Freddie Baldock working on the Andrew Barr farm in East Lenham. It was he who dug out the white memorial cross on the downs. Perhaps because he remembered Charles.

Just one more story. On the memorial stone is the name of Charles Bryant, who died on New Year’s Day 1915. He was the cook aboard the battleship *Formidable* which was anchored off Start Point in Portland when out of the blue it was torpedoed by a U-Boat that had amazingly travelled undetected into such close waters. Charles Bryant died, leaving his wife Rosalie who became a stalwart helper at St Mary’s church in her widowhood. There is one tale however that makes today. The dead and dying were The publican’s dog, a collie, took apparent corpse giving him the odds, the man revived – his forever to be remembered. His His name was Lassie.



Charles’s death so memorable carried to a pub in Lyme Regis. it upon himself to lie down by an warmth and licking him. Against story spread – and the dog was actions inspired the film world.

Lenham and the Great War: Those who served in war and peace

By Amy Myers is available at the Community Centre

