

his younger sister Florence was born here. He was one of eight children, all of whom had survived, and by 1911 he was working as a farm labourer.

His military record does not show when he enlisted and although he was serving with the 8th Battalion of the Glosters when he was killed, the record which shows that he was awarded the Victory and British War Medals shows that he had also served with 10th Battalion. Both battalions landed in France in the summer of 1915 and remained on the Western Front throughout the war and, whichever one he was in, Arthur would have seen action in numerous battles. In February 1918, the 10th battalion was disbanded and the survivors were transferred to other battalions including the 8th.

The 8th battalion's War Diary gives some idea of the horrors of the last week of Arthur's life. On 22nd March 1918, they were in the line near Doignies, one of a string of villages fortified by the Germans to screen their retirement to the Hindenburg Line. That day "the enemy made three separate attempts to counter attack and was

beaten back with heavy loss by machine gun fire and rifle fire but they continued to shell the trench system with well-directed fire. Our artillery

did not respond to our SOS at all, and enemy aeroplanes were flying low over our trenches using machine guns with impunity all day. Casualties 7 officers and 200 other ranks." The following day, they had to fight a rearguard action and only narrowly escaped capture, having to leave their wounded to be taken prisoner. This action continued for another three days and on 27th March they were in support of the ANZACS at Fonquevillers (nicknamed Funky Villas) where the enemy were apparently kept at bay by the fresh troops. The following day a brief entry in the War Diary states that the battalion withdrew to Doullens with 39 other ranks killed, 169 wounded and 140 missing. Arthur is listed as being killed in action that day although another record gives the date as between 21st and 28th March - understandable confusion in the circumstances.

Arthur's name is on the Arras Memorial, alongside those of 34,785 soldiers of the UK, South Africa and New Zealand who died in this area and have no known graves.



The Arras Memorial

For further copies of this leaflet or if you have any information to add, please contact Di Landon on 01452 760531

Westbury Remembers - Part 20

Alfred Bennett and Arthur Barclay

Written by Di Landon

and sponsored by

Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



Alfred Bennett was born in Westbury on 8th Feb 1895 and was baptised at St Luke's Chapel at Chaxhill. The family lived at Hartlands Hill and this chapel had been opened in 1894 to make it easier for parishioners on the outskirts of this large parish to attend services. Alfred's family was truly local, his parents, William and Alice, and all his siblings having been born in Westbury. On Alfred's baptismal record, his father was described as a bailiff but was later listed as a farmer. Alfred was one of eight children of whom, in 1911, only five still survived. At this time his two older brothers

were working as carters and Alfred, by now sixteen, was described as an assistant on the farm.

Alfred's father, William, died at the age of 57 years in April 1914, but as Alfred's service record has not survived, there is no record of when he joined the army. However, we do know that he "entered the theatre of

war" on 17th October 1915. Initially he served with the Glosters but he also appears to have served with the 3rd Dragoon Guards before being selected for the 6th Squadron of the Machine Gun Corps (Cavalry). Other regiments were combed for their fit-

test men to be specially trained for this role, and machine gunners gained a reputation for heroism, as they accompanied the first wave of every assault and covered every retreat.

The 6th Machine Gun Squadron was formed in France in February 1916 and if Alfred was with them from the start, he would have spent the first few months on pre-

liminary training. In June they moved to the coast, where they continued their training in the sand dunes and lived under canvas. The Squadron's War Diary paints a cheerful picture of leisure time spent on various sports and mounted games.

In July 1916, things got more serious when they were ordered to construct



Men of the Machine Gun Corps with a Vickers Machine Gun

and garrison machine gun posts near Mametz Wood during the Battle of the Somme. The squadron came under continuous heavy fire but sustained very few casualties and remained on the Somme until December. Their new billets needed a lot of work as they were in a terrible state and were split between two villages, and had very little stabling for the horses. Unable to celebrate Christmas in such conditions, a dinner was held instead to celebrate the New Year .

By the end of January they were back in action on the Vimy Ridge near Arras and most of 1917 consisted of spells in the front line interspersed with training and recovery time. During one attack in April, they encountered the worst weather of the war with snow storms and a biting cold wind. Three of their men were killed and by the time they found their way back to their billet through the blizzard, the men were falling asleep in their saddles. They were constantly on the move, sometimes marching as much as 50 miles from billet to billet, but there was occasional relaxation in the form of sports and horse shows. In August they were stationed in Auchel and every man with 18 months or more service in France was



Pozieres Memorial and British Cemetery

given home leave.

In November 1917, the German High Command decided that the following Spring would be the prime time for an all out attack which would completely destroy the British Army. They believed (rightly) that the British were exhausted after the major battles of 1917, and with many German Divisions having been moved to France from the collapsed Eastern front, they had a manpower advantage that might not last once American forces had built up to their full strength. The German plan involved a vast attack in the Somme sector, an area of complete devastation since 1916. The German tactics were to start their attack with an intense barrage concentrated not on the front line infantry but deeper, on the artillery and machine-gun positions, headquarters, telephone exchanges, railways and other important centres of communications. The German infantry would then attack in small groups, exploiting gaps and for the British, unused to these tactics, it would spell chaos, uncertainty and disaster. The plan very nearly worked.

In March 1918, the 6th Squadron were back in the area of the

Somme and had just won the Brigade Inter-Squadron Football competition. On 21st March they moved to Beaumont and then to the trenches near Viry, where they were ready to take up their positions in the reserve line early the next morning. There they were subjected to severe shelling, in the midst of which four guns were ordered to support the infantry on the left flank. They took up their positions in spite of the shells falling around them and heavy machine gun and rifle fire, but were then isolated when the French and British infantry retired. Two gunners were killed and one wounded and Alfred Bennett was one of these men. He died on 24th March 1918 and is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial along with over 14,000 other UK soldiers who have no known grave.

Arthur Barclay

The fourth name listed on our war memorial is Arthur Barclay but my early searches for A. Barclay found nine men of that name who were killed in the Great War but none of them seemed to have any connection to Westbury. However, I soon realised that my faith in the accuracy of record keeping in the early 20th century was somewhat misplaced and when I broadened my search, I found the military record of Arthur Bartley, whose

residence was recorded as Westbury-on-Severn. The confusion did not end there, as there is no record of any Bartley family living in Westbury at that time, but a Charles Bartley was listed as a Railway Crossing Keeper in 1901, and was living with his family, including a 4 year old son called Arthur, in Church Lane. This could, of course, be coincidence, but when Arthur was killed in March 1918, there is a record that his effects were collected by his father, Charles. The family's census records from 1901 and 1911, handwritten of course, show the surname spelt as

	1.	2.
1	Charles Bartley.	Head.
2	Annie Bartley.	Wife
3	Amelia Bartley.	Daughter.
4	Arthur Bartley	Son
5	Florence Bartley	Daughter
6	Fredrick Bartley	Son
7		

Name of Head of Family or Separate Occupier. *Mr Charles Barclay*

Postal Address. *Church Lane Crossing Westbury*

Bartley, Bartley, Bartly and Barclay and I have been unable to trace any other records of the family, so it is anyone's guess what their proper surname was.

Arthur B, as I will call him, was born in Birmingham in 1896 and the family appear to have moved to Westbury soon afterwards, as