

aircraft development and led to planes being designed for specific roles. The fighters and bombers used by the RAF when it was formed in 1918 to replace the RFC were in total contrast to those that had flown in August 1914.

However, Ernest did not remain with the RFC

but transferred to the Royal Tank Corps, probably

in February 1918. Although the record shows that he was in No. 4 Supply Company "A" Section, this information has not proved to be much help in finding out where he fought.

Tanks were used for the first time in action on the Somme battlefield in Sept 1916 but wet weather and boggy conditions proved their undoing at Arras and Ypres. However, in Nov. 1917, at Cambrai, ground conditions were more favourable, and 378 tanks smashed through the Hindenburg Line positions, but the break in the German lines could not be sustained. In July and August 1918 tanks were successfully used again at Le Hamel and Amiens where they could crush the wire, over run machine gun posts and strong points and help the infantry through the streets of destroyed



British Mark I tank on the Somme September 1916 Picture by Ernest Brooks - Q 2486 from the collections of the Imperial War Museums

villages. However tank losses were significant and it was not until late Sept 1918 that a large enough force had been assembled again ready for further assaults on the Hindenburg line. Between 21/8/18 and 11/11/18 some 2,400 men and officers of the Tank Corps became casualties.

alties.

Ernest was killed in action on 27th September 1918 and is listed in the Tank Corps Book of Honour. He is buried at the Unicorn Cemetery in Vend'huile. His widow, Winifred, does not seem to ever have remarried and she died in Gloucester aged 92 years in 1984.



Unicorn Cemetery in Picardie, France

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

Westbury Remembers

Part 24 - George Mills and Ernest Cripps

Written by Di Landon
and sponsored by

Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



George Mills was born in July 1891. His parents, Frederick and Clara Mills, were at that time living at Back Lane in Newnham, although they later moved to Broadoak. George had two older sisters and by the time of the 1901 census, he also had two younger brothers and a sister but sadly, Herbert, the baby of the family, died at just 3 years old. This was by no means the only tragic loss that the family had to endure as, by 1911, six of their eleven children had died, including twins Alfred and Margaret, who had been born in May 1896.

Frederick was a railway plate layer and by 1911, George had followed him into this line of work, while his two older sisters went into service. One of them, Mabel, was a servant at The Haie in Newnham and I was interested to find that she had married a man called Arthur Young in 1920 who was the brother of Percy Young (see Westbury Remembers 22).

It is possible that it was his work on the railways that took him away from Gloucestershire because by the time he enlisted on 4th September 1914 he was living in lodgings in Havelock Street in Kettering and joined the Northamptonshire Regiment. Three days later, he was described as "sunburnt" with brown eyes and black hair and was pronounced fit for service. He was 6'2½" tall and weighed just over 10 stone. The following month he was discharged as medically unfit owing to tuberculosis of the lungs.

Whether he was able to return to his job on the railways is unclear but, although the military record describes his tuberculosis as "cured", it seems that this optimism may have been misplaced. We know that he moved back to Westbury because it was here that he died and was buried in July 1918 at the age of 27 years.

Tuberculosis was the dominant chronic infectious disease of that time



Havelock Street in Kettering as it is today

and nearly everyone was exposed to it although most people developed a primary infection which healed spontaneously, usually without symptoms.

However, many infections progressed to secondary TB which often led to relentless lung destruction. The simple screening available at the time

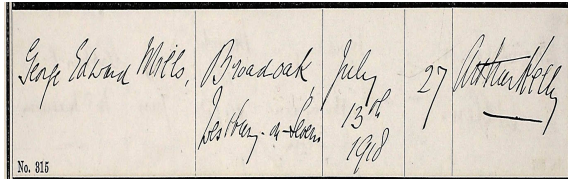
merely indicated exposure to TB and was therefore positive more often than not.

Chest x-rays were generally only taken after symptoms had developed and the person was then usually institutionalized to prevent the infection spreading. There was no drug treatment for the disease and even under the best sanatorium conditions, 50% of those admitted were dead within five years.

Recruits had medical examinations and were screened for tuberculosis by physical examination of the chest but chest x-rays were rarely carried out. It is estimated that at least 10,000 men were accepted for military service who would have been rejected if chest x-rays had been employed, and half of this number were later diagnosed with tuberculosis while serving. We will never know how many soldiers, living in unhygienic close quarters, often cold and wet, exhausted from con-

tinuous combat and lack of sleep, were infected with tuberculosis or went from a healed primary infection to an active secondary infection while in military service.

Although George's service was short and he was never involved in the fighting, he had volunteered when it mattered, and one hopes



The record of George's burial at Westbury

that the fact that his name was on the list of men honoured on the war memorial was some small

comfort to his parents who had suffered so much. His mother died in 1923, but his father, Frederick, continued to live in Broadoak until he died at the age of 80 in 1942.

[My apologies that George's story was not told in July, but his death was listed in the September death registrations and it wasn't until I checked the burial record that I found that he had actually died two months earlier than I thought.]

Ernest Cripps was the son of Charles and Annie Cripps who, in 1891 when Ernest was born, were living at Denmark Villas. They already had one son, William, who was under 2 years old and Charles worked as a labourer. Ten years later, the 1901 census showed that Charles was now a farm bailiff and the couple had three more

children, Agnes, aged 8, Gerty aged 3 and Sidney aged 2 years. The census just gives Stantway Lane as the

family's address, but I learned from Hilda Sankey that their home was Cherry Tree Cottage, which must have been fairly crowded by modern



Cherry Tree Cottage today

standards, as a home for a family of seven who also had two boarders, George White, an agricultural labourer and Wallace Whiting, a groom for the doctor, possibly Dr Wright, who lived at Stantway Court.

Sadly in 1902, Charles died at the age of 40 years, and it is hard to imagine how Annie coped with supporting the family. No doubt the children had to work as soon as they could and by 1911 Ernest was living in the household of Thomas Davis in Hasfield, near Tewkesbury, where he was employed as a groom. His older brother, William, was married and working as a farm labourer, Agnes was 'in service' in Stonehouse and Gerty, aged 13 years, was living in as a "young help" at Ardens Farm.

Their mother, Annie, had remar-

ried three years earlier and now, as well as 12 year old Sidney and another daughter, Elizabeth Cripps aged 8, she also had a son, Al-

fred, by her new husband. His name was Charles Arnold and he had also grown up in Stantway.

In September 1913, Ernest married Winifred Arnold, (no relation to his step-father, as far as I can see) who came

from Hasfield, where her father was a groom/gardener. By this time Ernest was employed as a coachman.

Unfortunately, Ernest's service record has not survived. One record says that he enlisted in Chelsea but I have not been able to find out when. His older brother, William, enlisted in Lydney in December 1915 and joined the Royal Garrison Artillery but as for Ernest, we only know that he was originally in the Royal Flying Corps.

The Royal Flying Corps was created in 1912 and during the war it became the eyes of the British Army directing artillery gunfire, taking photographs for intelligence analysis and taking part in dogfights with the German Air Service. Flying was still very much in its infancy so the first aeroplanes used by the RFC were crude, but the war hastened