

In central and eastern Europe, the fall of the Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian Empires led to the birth of new states, often with conflicting interests, and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire resulted in the redrawing of the map of the Middle East. With the wonderful gift of hindsight, we can now see that this was done by the British and French victors with little consideration for the ethnic, sectarian and tribal differences that existed. This clearly has had a bearing on the fact that these states are still not at peace with each other, and that over ½ million people have died as the result of conflict in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Iran, Yemen and Saudi Arabia within the last decade. And of course, many consider that the punishing terms of the Treaty of Versailles led to the rise of Hitler and the start of the Second World War, in which 60 million more people died.

A year after the armistice, King George V requested a two minute silence for meditation at 11am on 11th November in commemoration of the armistice, so that everyone's thoughts could be focused on those whose lives had been lost. Each community examined the various ways in which the fallen could be

honoured and remembered, and in January 1919, a meeting was held in Westbury to discuss what form the village's memorial should take. Ideas ranged from building a Memorial Hall to endowing prizes at the school, but the Calvary memorial that we know so well, together with two new church bells, were soon chosen and money began to be collected.

And so we continue to remember those forty men, but unfortunately



there is still one soldier who we can only remember by his name. Cyril Heywood is the one soldier listed on our war memorial for whom I have been unable to find any record. There is no trace of a Heywood family living in this area at that time and no

dead soldier of that name that has any recorded connection to this village. The many possible spellings of his name make the search more difficult. So Cyril Heywood is Westbury's own Unknown Soldier, a man who sacrificed a life of which we now, sadly, know nothing.

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

Westbury Remembers

Part 27 - Alfred Arthur Trott

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and sponsored by

Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



By December 1918, the armistice celebrations were over and the warring nations were starting on the difficult task of getting back to 'normal'. In Britain, bereaved families were often helped by the feeling that their loved ones had given their lives in a fight against evil and had died that we all may live. Wartime propaganda had, of course, promoted this view but before long the counter view, that the war had been a massive waste of young lives, began to take hold. For the surviving soldiers too, the 'land



Alfred Trott's grave in Westbury Churchyard

fit for heroes' that they had been promised, turned out to be a land where employment was hard to come by and poverty was widespread. But for all, the feeling that those who died deserve to be honoured and remembered remains to this day.

For the wounded and traumatised, the suffering continued, and the armistice did not bring an end to the death toll.

Many died from their injuries after the war was over. Alfred Trott, the last of Westbury's soldiers to perish, died on 13th December 1918. He was

buried in our churchyard four days later, the inscription on his gravestone describing him as "A dear husband and father."

Alfred had been born in March 1881 in Crewkerne in Somerset. His parents, George and Alice, had already had four children, and went on to have five more. Alfred's father, as a farm labourer, clearly found it very hard to support his large family. By 1887, they had

moved to Dorset, perhaps to find work, but their son Jesse, was born in the Poor House at Stoke Abbott in Dorset in 1889, where the family had presumably been placed because they were destitute. Alfred's older brother, Ernest, died in 1890 at the age of 13 years.

There seems to be no trace of Alfred or his mother on the 1901 census. His

father, George, is listed as living with his 80 year old mother in Crewkerne and seems to have died 10 years later in a workhouse in Bristol. Alfred's mother died in 1928 in Frome.

In 1904, Alfred married Florence Phillips and by 1911, they were living in Aberavon and Alfred was employed as a bricklayer. By then they had three children, Alfred aged 6, Edith aged 4 and baby Herbert, aged 8 months. Alfred seems to have enlisted in Newport although it

is not clear exactly when. As a married man with children, he would not have been expected to answer Kitchener's call in the early days

of the war, but later in 1916 conscription had been extended to married men.

The records say that he initially served with the Cheshire Regiment but at some point he transferred to the 12th Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. His service record has not survived but he is listed in the Roll of Individuals entitled to the Victory Medal and British War Medal as having served in Egypt and in France and Flanders.

The 12th Battalion was formed in



Fighting in Gaza in 1917

Ismailia in Egypt in January 1917, when Britain seemed on the verge of knocking Turkey out of the war. The Egyptian Expeditionary Force, led by General Sir Archibald Murray, was originally raised to guard the Suez Canal and Egypt, but soon evolved into a force whose mission was to invade Palestine. This involved crossing the Sinai Desert, which required thousands of camels and drivers to keep the thirsty soldiers supplied with water. Murray then launched an attack on Gaza, which was the gateway to Palestine, but which was held by Ottoman forces.

The attempt to take Gaza failed, as did a second attempt a few weeks later, and this led to Murray being replaced by General Sir Edmund Allenby. In October, Allenby led a large force, including many from India, Australia and New Zealand, and broke through the Gaza-Beersheba Front. After a difficult advance across the Judean hills, he entered Jerusalem through the Jaffa Gate on 11 December 1917.

Alfred's Battalion seems to have fought in the 2nd and 3rd Battles of Gaza and took part in the capture

of Jerusalem. Soon after this, they embarked from Alexandria on the troopship Leasowe Castle, landing in Marseilles on 7th May 1918. Just weeks later, this ship was ferrying 3,000 more troops from Alexandria to Marseilles when she was hit by a German torpedo and sank with the loss of 85 lives.

From Marseilles, Alfred and his battalion travelled by train straight to the area of the Somme, where they were billeted. After a few weeks of bayonet training, gas drills and physical training, they moved north to the Pas de Calais region in June.

From then on, Alfred's story becomes unclear. His battalion were in and out of the front line until the armistice in November. Their war diary shows that on a dozen occasions men were killed or wounded as they advanced or came under attack from artillery, heavy machine gun fire or gas. What caused Alfred's death is unclear, the record just states that he died "of disease," but by that time he had been brought back to England. It is possible that he was a victim of the flu epidemic



HMTS Leasowe Castle

which was then at its height. Malnourished soldiers, who had been living in overcrowded conditions and who had been treated in medical camps and hospitals

with flu victims were particularly vulnerable, and for many the virus led to a "bacterial superinfection" that killed many of the victims after a prolonged illness. We do not know what brought Alfred to Westbury on his return from the war, but the burial register states that he lived at The Strand. His widow, Florence, was authorised to collect his effects, as was a Sidney Watkins, but whether this was the Sidney Watkins whose son, Maurice Sidney Watkins, established M.S. Watkins Funeral Directors is also unclear. Florence re-married in 1920 and lived in Yeovil.

So it will soon be a century since Alfred Trott was laid to rest in Westbury's churchyard — a time, certainly, to remember all those who suffered and died as a result of the fighting, but also a time to think about all those who are still suffering today from the outcomes and unintended consequences of that terrible war.