

Thomas Vaughan was killed in action on that day, the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1916. He is commemorated on the Loos Memorial along with 20,000 other officers and men who died in this area and who



*Part of the Loos Memorial*

have no known grave. He was 35 years old.

The Army Register of Soldiers Effects records that the sum of £9. 8s 6d was due to his widow, Sarah L Bishop and children. However, I can find no trace of a Sarah Bishop either marrying a Mr Vaughan or having any children in Westbury or anywhere else in Gloucestershire at around that time. So what T.A.Vaughan's connection is to Westbury is still unclear. In my notes, begun in a very haphazard way, many years ago, I have written 'of Adsett' after T.A.Vaughan's name, but I now haven't a clue where that information came from. So if anyone knows anything about this man, I would be very interested to hear from them.

Maynard Colchester-Wemyss, in a

letter written at around this time recorded that Westbury had a total of 143 men serving in the armed forces on land and sea, all over the world. Back at home, women had taken the place of men in many occupations—in the munitions factories, in agriculture, in offices, as gardeners, as drivers of cars and buses, and delivering the mail. For many women the war gave the freedom and the wages previously only enjoyed by men and approximately 1,600,000 women joined the workforce during the war years. MCW wrote "It will be very curious to see after the war to what extent they will stick to their new occupations."

He described a munitions factory which he had visited, which consisted of wooden sheds covering 400 acres of land 4 miles from Gloucester. Two hundred women were employed there filling shells and fitting the fuses. It was dangerous work, for as well as the ever-present risk of explosion, the women were constantly exposed to dangerous chemicals with little in the way of protective clothing. Their pay for this work was just half the rate paid to the men and, of course, in 1918 their jobs and those of most other female employees, turned out to be temporary.

For further copies of this leaflet or if you have any information to add, please contact Di Landon on 01452 760531 or [diana.landon@tesco.net](mailto:diana.landon@tesco.net)

## Westbury Remembers—Part 9

**T.A.Vaughan**

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**Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council**



My research into the life and death of T.A Vaughan has yielded no clear story. He is the only man on our war memorial who is not listed by his full name and, what is more, his initials on the Roll of Honour within the church, are reversed and he is listed as A.T Vaughan. Even with a soldier's full name, it is sometimes hard to be certain that you are looking at the right man, but with only the initials, the results are even more doubtful.



*Houses on Blakeney Hill*

Some of the various pieces of information I have been able to discover don't quite seem to match up with each other so I just hope that by sharing what I have found, other facts may perhaps come to light.

The birth of a Thomas Vaughan was registered in Westbury-on-Severn between April and June 1881 and the

baptism of a Thomas Vaughan was recorded in Blakeney Hill on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1881. At first I thought these records might not relate to the same child, but registration districts were based on the Poor Law Unions, of which Westbury was one, and it covered a wide area including Blakeney

Hill. The registration of births had only been made compulsory in 1875 and the registrars seem to have been quite flexible about the 42 days that parents were given in which to register the birth, and so the baby could have

been baptised in March

but not registered until April. I could find no other likely record so I think that this baby may well have grown up to be the T.A.Vaughan on our memorial.

On the 1881 census, Thomas is shown as living on Blakeney Hill with his parents, James and Anne

and his three older brothers and two older sisters. His father and his 14 year old brother were coal miners and his mother was a dressmaker. By 1891, Thomas had another younger brother and sister and the family were living at No 10, Small Chapel of Ease on Blakeney Hill. Ten years later, two more of his brothers had joined their father working in the mines and Thomas, now aged 20, was a signman with the Great Western Railway. But by the time that the 1911 census was

taken, he was no longer living at home and the only Thomas Vaughan that I could find with any connection to this area was living in



The Forest of Dean Pioneers in training at Malvern

Darfield in Yorkshire. He gave his place of birth as Blakeney but his date of birth was 1885 so there is some doubt as to whether this was the same man.

Investigating from another angle, out of 54 T. or A. Vaughans who served and died in the First World War, there only seems to be one from this area. Thomas Vaughan enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment on 8<sup>th</sup> Feb 1915, and although he gave his place of birth as Gloucester, he had enlisted in the

13<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was also known as the Forest of Dean Pioneers. It was a battalion raised in Cinderford Town Hall in December 1914 by the Forest of Dean MP Sir Harry Webb, and miners, labourers, transport workers and those used to hard manual work were recruited for jobs such as trench digging and building encampments as well as ordinary infantry work. They were paid an extra twopence a day. The Thomas Vaughan who was born on

Blakeney Hill to a mining family seems a likely candidate and as he is not listed on the Blakeney or Viney Hill war memorials, it would seem that he must have made his home elsewhere.

So I am assuming that this could have been in Westbury.

If this was 'our' T.A. Vaughan, he would have had a period of training at Malvern, and then moved to Winchester in August 1915 where the battalion was attached to the 39<sup>th</sup> Division. They then moved again to Aldershot before landing in France in March 1916. They were initially assigned to a quiet sector near Blaringham, where

they were to build and repair roads and trenches while serving their apprenticeship on the front.

The Allies were by this time planning a major offensive on the Somme. Hiding such a large scale operation from the German army was not a simple task but British high command was keen to try and draw away as many of the German defenders as possible by launching diversionary attacks elsewhere along the front. One such attack was in the area between



The Boar's Head Salient

Bethune and Armentieres in the Pas de Calais and it was hoped that this would prevent the Germans from moving troops to the area of the Somme. On the night of 29<sup>th</sup> June, an attack, led by men of the Southdown Battalions, was launched on enemy trenches that formed a salient known as the 'Boar's Head'. In spite of a bombardment for the week preceding the attack, the operation was a disaster. As successive waves of advancing troops went over the top, they were caught in the enemy bombardment. The Forest of Dean Pioneers sent four parties in support, two to dig communication trenches

between the front lines and two to construct breast works on each flank of the attack. The assaulting infantry were being shelled and machine gunned as they attempted to cross a wide dyke in No Man's Land, which had not been taken into consideration in the battle plan. They

could not be reinforced and soon ran out of ammunition. The Pioneers tried to dig whilst fighting off squads of Germans armed with grenades. Of the nine officers and 285 men of the

Forest of Dean Pioneers, twenty were killed and nearly sixty wounded. The three Southdown Battalions suffered 366 killed and over 1000 wounded or taken prisoner and the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1916 has become known locally as 'The Day that Sussex Died'.

Although the attack failed, the work of the Pioneers was appreciated by the Brigade staff and a parade of men who took part in the action were read a congratulatory message from the General. However, in the view of one member of the 13<sup>th</sup> Gloucesters, his battalion was 'sacrificed'.