

# St Michael's, Woburn Sands



## Servicemen's Graves and Memorials

*Please leave this booklet in church after using it. Thank you!*

I am very grateful to Paul Cox, whose website has provided some of the information included here on individual soldiers and their families. Much more is available, at <http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/wsc/docs/War%20Casualties%20Root.html>

Other information I have found myself, from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website and other sources. Unfortunately, a bombing raid on the War Office building during World War II destroyed 60% of the British Army service records for World War I and badly damaged the remainder; so it is difficult to obtain further details in many cases.

Please let me know if you believe I have made any errors or omissions! (Note: Paul Cox has kindly pointed out that a number of servicemen who are remembered on gravestones at St Michael's are not mentioned in the route described in this booklet. Apologies for these omissions, which I may be able to correct in a future revision!)

Simon Young, October 2019



“There but Not There”

“Tommy”, the silhouette memorial obtained by Aspley Heath Parish Council and installed by the church for the centenary of the Armistice, 2018.

## **Servicemen's Graves and Memorials in the churchyard at St Michael's, Woburn Sands**

We have four graves in the churchyard which are recognised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. However, numerous other memorial stones also relate to servicemen and one civilian who died abroad or at sea, during the two world wars; and we have two graves of servicemen who died more recently.

The notes and photos on pages 4 to 7 are intended to help you find these graves and memorials, and to provide brief details of the men who are commemorated.

### **The War Graves**

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) honours the 1.7 million men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the First and Second World Wars, and ensures they will never be forgotten. Specifically, the CWGC is responsible for the commemoration of personnel who died between 4 August 1914 and 31 August 1921; and of personnel and civilians who died between 3 September 1939 and 31 December 1947 – or later if their death was caused by their wartime service.

The Commission's website <sup>1</sup> lists four graves at St Michael's:

Private HARWOOD, FREDERICK WALTERS                      Died 24/08/1947  
Service Number 7368923                                      Aged 29  
Royal Army Medical Corps  
Son of Frederick Walter and Agnes Harwood; husband of Josephine I. A. Harwood, of Aspley Guise.  
Grave reference: NW corner of churchyard

Lance Corporal PEACOCK, ALEC ARTHUR                      Died 30/03/1941  
Service Number 855064                                      Aged 22  
Corps of Military Police  
Son of Ellen Clare, of Bletchley, Buckinghamshire.  
Grave reference: Near West boundary of churchyard

Private GRIFFIN, J    Died 01/11/1918  
Service Number 3766                                        Aged 29  
5th Bn. Bedfordshire Regiment  
Husband of Violet May Seamark (formerly Griffin), of 10, Duckmill Lane, Bedford.  
Grave reference: NW of church

Private WILSON, W B    Died 05/02/1919  
Service Number 149756  
39th Bn. Machine Gun Corps (Infantry)  
Grave reference: East of church

Two of these graves are next to each other, with headstones in the standard official format; while the other two are family graves and are less obviously recognisable. All four graves, and the men buried in them, will be covered in the notes on the following pages, along with the other graves and memorials.



<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead/results/?cemetery=WOBURN%20SANDS%20\(ST.%20MICHAEL\)%20CHURCHYARD](https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-war-dead/results/?cemetery=WOBURN%20SANDS%20(ST.%20MICHAEL)%20CHURCHYARD)

## A circular route through the churchyard

Leaving the church by the main door, turn right from the porch. Instead of following the path when it turns right again, continue ahead across the grass to see two of the graves shown in this picture, near to Bishop's Walk.



On the left, under the giant redwood tree, is the grave of Guardsman A.C. Butcher. The Roll of Honour of the Coldstream Guards states that he died on 13 July 1962, in a tragic road accident in Norfolk. He was 20.

To the right of Guardsman Butcher is the grave of several members of the Peacock family. This is one of the graves recognised by the CWGC (see page 3). One side of the headstone is inscribed in loving memory of Corporal Alec Arthur Peacock of the Military Police, who also died in a road accident. His death certificate recorded that while riding his motor cycle on 30 March 1941, he was accidentally killed by running into a motor car at the Blackmires crossroads, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire. He was 22.



Nearby, and just two rows back towards the path, you will see the stone which commemorates Second Lieutenant Thomas Bowler of the Royal Garrison Artillery (i.e. heavy artillery), 6<sup>th</sup> Siege Battery, killed at Messines in Belgium on 30 June 1917.

Thomas Bowler was 25 when he died. He was buried in Belgium, and he is commemorated here on the gravestone of his sister Lillian who had died in 1890, aged 6. Also remembered is his brother-in-law Herbert Richardson who was killed in 1918, also while serving in the Royal Garrison Artillery.

The family lived at "Rushmere" in Theydon Avenue. Thomas had been apprenticed to a grocer in Woburn Sands, and later lived in Watford. He was in training to be a Methodist minister when he enlisted in the army in 1915.



Thomas Bowler



A little further to the right, in the same row, is the stone remembering Walter Price of the Rifle Brigade, who died on 20 August 1918. He was not local.

And slightly further, a deliberately broken column was used to signify someone who had died prematurely. In this case, the memorial is to Arthur George Cox who died aged 34 at Mowbray, South Africa, on 21 August 1901, i.e. during the Boer War.

Arthur Cox's death certificate shows that he was a clerk in a military supply store, rather than a serviceman; and he died of "phthisis" – i.e. tuberculosis – at the Valkenburg Asylum, which still exists as a psychiatric hospital in a suburb of Cape Town. A reminder that the call of Empire separated families in many different ways.



Continue along the path and at the T-junction, continue straight ahead onto the grass. On your right, almost under the low tree, is the grave of General Sir Henry John Thoroton Hildyard, GCB. Born in 1846 and the son of an MP, he served in the Army from 1867 to 1911.

After active service in Egypt, he commanded the 2nd Brigade under General Buller in the Boer War. Winston Churchill's contemporary account in his book "London to Ladysmith via Pretoria" describes the role of Hildyard's brigade in prolonged fighting from January to March 1900, at Colenso and other battles.

His portrait was in a set of cigarette cards of Boer War generals. He was later appointed Director-General of Military Education. He retired to Aspley Heath, and died here in 1916.



Continue across the grass. On the left, after the area for cremated ashes, are two of our CWGC graves (see page 3). On the left is the grave of Private Joseph Griffin of the Bedfordshire Regiment, who lived at 2 Hardwick Place. He volunteered August 1914 and was drafted to Mesopotamia the next year. He fought in several battles, before being invalided home with severe dysentery and discharged as unfit for duty in September 1916. He then worked on munitions until he died on 1 November 1918, aged 29.

His death certificate described him as "Army Pensioner. General Labourer." and gave the causes of death as Acute Pulmonary Tuberculosis and Heart Failure. He was buried with full military honours at St. Michael's and left a widow, Violet May, and one child living in Hardwick Cottages.

Joseph Griffin is not to be confused with Private John Griffin, who was killed in action on 30 September 1918 and is remembered on the brass memorial in church.



Next to Joseph Griffin's grave is that of Private Frederick Harwood of the Royal Army Medical Corps (198 Field Ambulance), who was held as a Prisoner of War by the Japanese in World War II, from 1942 to 1945. He came home, but sadly died in 1947 at Bedford County Hospital, as a result of the conditions under which he had been held as a prisoner.

Private Harwood's death was registered by his mother-in-law E E Griffin – perhaps a relative of Joseph? At the time, he was living at 32 Duke Street, Aspley Guise, and his occupation was given as Brickyard worker.

The inscription on his gravestone reads:

Home at last, thy labour done  
Safe and blest  
The victory won  
"Good night."



Turn round and cross this part of the churchyard, in the direction of the compost heap, to find this memorial to Lieutenant Ernest Hebbes, who joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Suffolk Regiment in 1915 and was attached to the Nigeria Regiment, West African Frontier Force in 1916.

They served in Cameroon, a German colony with important agricultural produce; and later in East Africa, where Tanganyika was also a German colony.

He was returning on the SS Apapa for leave, after being in Africa for a year, when it was torpedoed by U-boat U-96. The Apapa was sunk 3 miles northeast of Lynas Point, Anglesey, at 4am on 28 November 1917. No warning was given and 77 lives were lost.

Ernest's father Henry Hebbes was Sexton here at St Michael's church for 28 years, from 1893 to 1921.



"FOR HIS COUNTRY"  
– on the Union Flag pennant, now fading.

To your left and in the same row, but under the holly tree, is a stone in memory of Private Percy Arthur Heady, who died in France on 10 June 1917, aged 23.

His parents were buried here later, and probably this inscription in Percy's memory dates from then.

He was serving as a stretcher-bearer on the battlefield at the time of his death. His Sergeant-Major wrote, *"His devotion to his duty was most marked & helped him carry out his work from which many would shrink. For a stretcher bearer's work is not always pleasant. I was frequently in his company & I looked upon him as a staunch friend & I shall miss him very much indeed. I lost my brother recently & I know what this loss will mean to you, his parents. Great sacrifices are daily being made. We must hope that some day the full meaning of all this will be shown us & in the meantime we must remember that he has given his life in carrying out what we all believe to be right & just."*



Turning round, with your back to Pte Heady's memorial, you will see the grave of Private Graham Circuitt of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the Parachute Regiment. This is in the standard military format, though it is not covered by the CWGC as it is later than the two world wars.

Private Circuitt was accidentally killed in a jungle training exercise in Belize on 10 February 1988, aged 19. He had been an Army Colts rugby player, and was described as an enthusiastic and popular member of his platoon and company.

Although we've dried our tears  
Our heartaches will remain  
For the precious son we loved and lost  
But pray we'll meet again



Returning towards the church, you will pass near the gravestone of Albert Hardy, on which is also remembered his son Stanley Hardy, Captain in the Merchant Navy. Stanley was Master of the SS Balmaha when it was sunk by a torpedo in the Mediterranean, on 17 October 1941, killing all 23 crew. Stanley was aged 28.

(see Paul Cox's article in "The Hogsty End Handbook," November 2017.)

Returning to the path, continue to the East end of the church and turn left. The grave with the small white pyramids at each corner is for Private Bertie William Wilson. Private Wilson had served in the Royal Sussex Regiment and in the 39<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Machine Gun Corps. He died at home in Aspley Guise on 5 February 1919, of pneumonia, aged 30. This recognised by CWGC as a war grave.

His widow Dorothy died in 1944 and is also buried here.



Finally, returning to the main path round the Church and turning left to go out through the main entrance gate, turn left again and go a short distance down Church Road. Private Josiah Septimus Barker is remembered on a memorial stone which is clearly visible above the churchyard wall, on the left.

He was the seventh (hence the name Septimus) and youngest son of Josiah Barker senior, and he was killed in action in Greece on 22 September 1917, aged 29. Josiah Septimus enlisted in Oxford in December 1916 and would have joined the 7th Ox. and Bucks in Salonika, Greece shortly afterwards. British troops were fighting with the Greeks against Turkey, who had joined the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The 7th Battalion were in "L" sector of the front, in the area known as Smol Hill, where "C" company suffered three casualties from artillery fire.



The family lived in Weathercock Lane. Josiah senior and his second wife Ann are buried in the grave next to this stone. The notice in the North Bucks Times said that Josiah Septimus had previously been employed at Franklins Coal Wharf in Bedford. The stone had been placed here earlier, in memory of Lance Corporal Fred Frank Barker, his half-brother, who died while serving in the Army in India in 1905, aged 20.



The memorial plate inside St Michael's, in the South aisle, commemorates the dead of the First World War: 46 servicemen, and also the Revd Edward H Mosse, who had been vicar of this parish from 1884 to 1899 and who was killed in an air raid in his London parish – St Paul's, Covent Garden – on the night of 28/29 January 1918

*Requiescant in pace – May they rest in peace*

