

Easebourne – The Men and Times Remembered



[Photograph by the author]

By Christine Deadman

Summary

This case study has two themes:

- 1) To provide an overview of Easebourne and some the people and notable institutions connected with it during the period of the First World War.
- 2) To provide a narrative about some of the men listed on the war memorial in the churchyard of St Mary, Easebourne; who they were, where they served and where they died.

Introduction

My interest to research this case study stems from wanting to achieve a better understanding of the local history of the parish and its people and how the First World War might have affected it. The parish has a long history with some notable buildings and people associated with it.

Easebourne Parish and Community

The parish of Easebourne lies to the north and east of Midhurst from which it is separated by the River Rother. It is a large parish of 4213 acres. It has a long history and amongst it its oldest buildings are the Parish church of St Mary and the remains of the adjoining Priory. The south eastern part of the parish is occupied by the 600 acre Cowdray Park containing what are now the Cowdray Ruins. In its day the house at Cowdray was considered one of the most magnificent in England and was visited by Kings Henry VIII and Edward VI.¹

In 1911 the population of the parish was 1641 persons including approximately 90 “inmates” and staff at the Midhurst Union Workhouse.

Polo was first started at Cowdray in 1910 by the Hon. Harold Pearson, eldest son of Sir Weetman Pearson. He had played whilst studying at Oxford, captaining the team in 1905. The army was a rich source for polo players. It was encouraged by Sir Douglas Haig who “attached great importance to young officers being encouraged to hunt and play polo”.²

The Cowdray Park Challenge Cup polo tournament was played between 27 July and 1 August 1914 on the grounds near Cowdray Ruins. Crowds of people were attracted to the tournament each day. Ten teams competed in the tournament. The Capron House team led by the Hon. Harold Pearson was beaten in the final by the Cowley Manor team led by Mr H de Trafford. Three days later Great Britain declared war and this was the last provincial polo match played. It wasn't until December, 1918 that the club was able to commence getting grounds ready for the coming season and drawing up schedules for future tournaments.³

The Cowdray family appeared to have enjoyed a reputation amongst both employees and community at large for liberal attitudes and care for the individual. Lady Cowdray would invite the entire village to the polo

matches and provide tea, buns and oranges for the children. Fathers would also be invited when polo finals were played.⁴

August 1914 saw some lovely summer weather which enabled the parishioners to enjoy themselves before the commencement of war. At the local flower show for cottagers' gardens on the Cowdray Estate, Lady Cowdray was handing out Special Prize awards.⁵

On the weekend of 22 and 23 August, 1914 Cowdray House and grounds were open to visitors in the afternoon. On the Sunday, "many hundreds passed through". Also open was The Parish Room (the old Refectory at the Priory) which had already been "fitted out as a temporary hospital containing 16 beds with complete equipment; the ground floor being arranged for kitchen, stores and nurses' rooms".⁶

The parish of Easebourne and the surrounding area is dominated by the 17,000 acre Cowdray estate. From 1908/9 it was owned by Sir Weetman Pearson; appointed the Lord Cowdray in 1910. He was a successful British engineer and oil industrialist who consolidated and expanded his father's construction firm, S Pearson and Son. At the turn of the century the company employed 20,000 men building railways, docks, harbours, and waterworks and drainage systems in Britain, Ireland, Mexico and China. The company was responsible for several very large projects including Dover Harbour and Blackwall Tunnel.

In November 1915, the Pearson company began general supervision of the construction of His Majesty's Factory, Gretna on behalf of the Ministry of Munitions. It was the largest cordite factory in the UK during the war and was built as a direct consequence of the shortage of shells in 1915. Production of munitions started in April 1916 and by 1917 women were the largest proportion of its workforce by two to one.

Pursuing political and business interests Sir Weetman Pearson probably did not spend as much time in the parish as his wife and family did, but he certainly took an active interest. His successful business enabled him to be a substantial benefactor to the community; notably to the relatively newly opened King Edward VII sanatorium, and also to other smaller causes, including a gift of land to the church of St Mary for a new path.⁷

One month after Lord Kitchener commenced his "Your County needs YOU" poster campaign on 11 August 1914, Lord Cowdray lent his support to enlistment by "causing a circular letter to be addressed" to his employees, "calling attention to the urgent need for all men who are physically capable to join Lord Kitchener's Army and promising all who enlist that their posts shall be kept open to them. Those having dependents are assured that the amount received from the Government will be made up to the total of their usual wages".⁸

Located in the north-west corner of the parish, is the King Edward VII Sanatorium which was officially opened by the King and Queen in June 1906. With tuberculosis being widespread in Britain the King was keen to

use a charitable endowment to fund the provision of a new form of “open air” sanatorium treatment that was being practised on the continent.

From its opening in June 1906, the King Edward VII Sanatorium struggled financially. Its original Advisory Committee consisted solely of medical men, but in 1912 the King approved a new Executive Committee and Institution to “inject a measure of urgency” into its work.⁹ This new Executive Committee had the responsibility for the Sanatorium’s general administration and financial affairs. Lord Cowdray and Lord Leconfield (owner of the Petworth Estate) were both Executive Committee members.

At the outbreak of war, the financial future of the Sanatorium looked grave and it considered closing temporarily. Several days later, Lord Cowdray offered to underwrite its expenses for the duration of the war and which would continue until one month after peace was declared.¹⁰

The Sanatorium’s role was the treatment of tuberculosis in professional people with limited means but in November, 1914 there was an offer from the War Office to use it for the treatment of sick and wounded soldiers. Shortly after this, the War Office made further proposals to use it for service personnel with tuberculosis. These proposals were not deemed viable and use by the War Office ceased. From May 1915 and for the rest of the war the Sanatorium attracted sufficient patients to occupy all its beds and even had to introduce a waiting list.¹¹

By and large the running of the Sanatorium was largely untroubled by the war, with over half of the members of staff being ineligible for armed service and a couple who were exempt, being deemed essential for maintenance of services.

Easebourne and the surrounding area found itself directly supporting the war effort with the billeting of Gordon Highlanders in the last months of 1914. Easebourne saw the largest influx but some were also billeted in neighbouring Fernhurst and the Public Hall in Midhurst was commandeered to handle those unable to obtain quarters in Easebourne.

The parish magazine for Fernhurst in December, 1914 mentions 107 men from the 9th Battalion being billeted and comments “we are an armed camp”. We did not know we had so much room to spare.....”.

It was reported in the West Sussex Gazette, that “about 1000 officers and men of the Gordon Highlanders and the Bedfordshire Regiment are billeted on Easebourne for three weeks”. Where possible they were quartered in houses, but owing to “insufficient housing accommodation” the Village Hall, Cowdray Saw Mill and the workhouse were also used. Lady Cowdray was a benefactor, providing 500 bedsteads complete with bedding at a cost of over £1200.¹²

The Midhurst Union Workhouse situated in Easebourne supported the poor and impoverished from surrounding parishes. In November 1914, nearly 100 Gordon Highlanders from the 10th Battalion were billeted at the

Workhouse.¹³ In some quarters it was felt that the presence of the Highlanders would “raise the few eligible young men who are still left in the town to a sense of their duty”.¹⁴

During the war the finances of the Workhouse were tested to the limit. Whilst the army would have paid towards its use of the Workhouse, they would have created considerable additional work and probably would not have offset the additional costs involved; the rates were escalating, and the cost of coal was rising sharply as was the price of basic foodstuffs, e.g. tea, sugar, milk. There was little or no maintenance on the building itself unless absolutely necessary and supplies of basic items such as sheets became quite critical.¹⁵

Only four staff from the Workhouse served in the war, as most of them were considered to be doing work of national importance and were therefore, exempt.

In October 1918, the War Office sought to place 100 German prisoners of war in the Workhouse but was sent a stiff reply refusing the request.¹⁶

At a meeting of the Board of Guardians of the Workhouse, at the beginning of December, 1918 it was proposed that they should allow the inmates “extra Christmas fare” and in “commemoration of victory” they should each have 2 pints of beer.¹⁷

Easebourne and Fernhurst housed battalions of Highlanders until March and February 1915 respectively when they were moved to their holding camps and mobilised for war, landing in Boulogne in July 1915. They engaged in various actions on the western front including the Battle of Loos before being amalgamated after suffering heavy casualties.

The men of Easebourne had responded well to the calls to arms. By February 1915 it was being cited as one of the most patriotic villages in West Sussex.¹⁸ To reach this position Easebourne had used the Window Order of Patriotism, promoted by the West Sussex Gazette. It was a specially designed card for exhibition in the window of any home from which a soldier or sailor had left to serve his King. Local recruiting officers spoke highly of the Window Cards as being very effective recruiting aids. In Easebourne there would be quite a few houses with more than one card in the window.¹⁹

An election for the local County Council representative took place in June 1915 due to the retirement of Lt-Colonel Hollist. There were 670 registered electors on the roll of which 486 cast their vote; this 72% turnout was substantial given the large number of men on active service and the fact that women did not yet have the vote.²⁰

Lord Cowdray was a close friend of the new Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, and he granted him the title Viscount Cowdray in January 1917. In the same month Lloyd George also appointed him President of the Air Board. In this role Lord Cowdray was to consider how the air forces could

be brought within a single ministry and determine what was needed to enable the increased supply of aircraft.

At the start of the war, there was very little in the way of equipment or trained aircrew to go to war. General Haig was initially dismissive of the value of aircraft, preferring to rely on the cavalry for information, but as the war became bogged down in trench warfare reconnaissance from the air proved invaluable for the planning of campaigns. By 1916 General Haig was requesting more squadrons for the western front and it became obvious that the organisation of the Royal Flying Corps with its military and naval wings was not keeping pace with the demand.

Although in the summer of 1917 the Royal Flying Corps remained under-resourced and civilians in London were being killed and injured in German bombing raids, the work of Lord Cowdray was instrumental in the establishment of the Royal Air Force. The increased supply of aircraft during 1917 came about by the Air Board giving responsibility to the Ministry of Munitions instead of the separate Service ministries. During 1917 the numbers of squadrons were increased on all fronts and there was a considerable replacement of aircraft and engines especially of the older types.²¹

Viscount Cowdray resigned in November 1917 amid criticism of not doing enough to prevent the German bombing raids on Britain, and London in particular. There was also some controversy about not being appointed the first Air Minister. However, in spite of this he contributed substantial sums for the endowment of the Royal Air Force Club and later to the Royal Air Force memorial fund.

Whilst Lord Cowdray was prominent nationally in his support for the war effort, his wife's work had a more social dimension. In October, 1915 she organised a farm yard display, complete with live cow and hay-cart, on the terrace of her house in Carlton House Terrace!²²

At Christmas Lady Cowdray would distribute gifts to school children. Girls who had 90% attendance or above at the Institute would be given materials to make a dress, blouse or pinafore. Boys with the same attendance rate were given boots and stockings. Girls and boys with above 85% attendance were given a jersey and muffler. Smaller articles were also given and every child received something.²³

The Cowdray Ruins were the setting for charity concerts in June 1916 provided by Canadian soldiers billeted at Bramshott. The concerts were in aid of the Star and Garter Home for disabled and incurable soldiers and sailors which had been opened in Richmond in January 1916.²⁴ Lord and Lady Cowdray were present and although the weather was poor for June, attendance was excellent.

Wounded sailors were also entertained to tea at Cowdray Ruins, in the spacious kitchen of the old tower, at the end of August 1917. Arriving by char-a-banc, the men enjoyed a programme provided by a detachment of

the Royal Marines Light Infantry. Various competitions were arranged and those not so severely wounded enjoyed dancing on the lawn.²⁵

The residents of Easebourne appear to have been both generous with their time, organising and attending various fund-raising activities, and also with their donations. In May 1915 Easebourne residents raised £18. 5s. 0d. in the national penny house-to house collection for the St John's Ambulance and the local British Red Cross Society.²⁶

A Red Cross Farmers' Sale in November 1916 raised £1,476. 14s. 3d. for the Society, with Lord Cowdray contributing £150 to the total.²⁷ Another "Farmers' gift sale" in November 1918 organised by the members of the local farmers union with help from the ladies of the district, raised over £500. Significant contributions were received from Hon Harold Pearson MP of £100, and the Reverend and Mrs Lascelles of £12.10s.0d. each.²⁸

Reverend Hoyle, of the parish church St Mary, expressed thanks to the parishioners in April 1917 for their generosity at Easter. The offertory totalled £73. 2s.0d. The Sick and Needy Fund showed a balance of £12. 7s.0d. and the Altar Fund balance of £6. 15s. 7½d.²⁹

Entertainment to raise funds for the Belgian Repatriation Fund took place in March 1916, to help provide housing for interned soldiers' families. One of the principal fundraisers was Mrs Edwin Lascelles of Rotherfield House who reached the target £100 for a house which would be named "West Sussex House".³⁰

In Britain the mental image of the First World War, brings to mind trench warfare fought on the Western Front. Certainly the majority (80%) of the men commemorated on the war memorial in Easebourne fought in this particular arena. However, some were involved in other areas of action, for example, the Gallipoli campaign, Gaza, Port Said and with the Navy.

About some of the commemorated men

Appendix 1 – contains a picture of the internal plaque in the parish Church of St Mary, Easebourne.

Appendix 2 – contains a list of the men in the same order as the War Memorial and internal plaque, with details of their name, Regiment, Rank and where else they are commemorated.

Forty seven men are commemorated on the war memorial situated in the parish churchyard of St Mary in Easebourne. The memorial itself was designed by Sir Aston Webb, an eminent British architect and member of the Royal Academy, who also designed the War Memorial to London Troops (1919-1920) sited in front of the Royal Exchange in the City of London. Sir Aston Webb was known to Sir Weetman Pearson, through being employed to remodel his Paddockhurst residence in 1897 and also for the restoration of the Cowdray ruins shortly after he bought the estate.

The names on the memorial are listed in date order, on four sides of the memorial, so it takes the viewer some time to realise that several surnames appear more than once. In fact, just seven surnames names account for 17 of the fatalities. Of the 47 men who died, 21 of them were born in Easebourne, a further 14 were born in neighbouring parishes and half of the remaining 12, had parents living in the parish.

The Honourable Francis Geoffrey Pearson, the youngest son of Lord Cowdray, is the first man listed on the memorial. Enlisting just four days after Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, Francis joined the Army Service Corps, Motor Transport Division of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) as a motorcycle courier. Just one month later on 6 September 1914, aged 23 years, he was captured as the Allied Armies were rolled back toward the Marne during the German drive on Paris. It was reported in the West Sussex Gazette that he was "shot dead in the act of escaping" by Uhlans near the town of Varreddes.³¹ The next week, a friend of Francis wrote "Mr Pearson's grave lies in the middle of a great smiling plain, the battlefield of the Marne. He is the only Englishman buried in this part of the battlefield. His is a noble burying place".³²

Walter William Murrant was the youngest man listed as killed in action, aged just 18 years. Living in Wheelbarrow Castle in Easebourne at the time of the 1911 census, he noted that his occupation was a gardener. Like many other young men at the outbreak of war, Walter was too young to have been formally allowed to serve overseas, but he must have been able to convince enlisting officers in Chichester otherwise!

Walter served as a Rifleman with the Kings Royal Rifle Corp, 1st Battalion, B Company and he died on 14 September 1914; the same day as Alvah Trussler, another local man whose name is listed next.

Walter and Alvah are both commemorated on the La Ferté-sous-Jouarre Memorial, which commemorates 3,740 officers and men of the BEF who fell at the battles of Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne and the Aisne between the end of August and early October 1914.

Walter and Alvah were the first serving men in this conflict from Easebourne to have no known graves. This applies to fourteen further soldiers listed on the memorial.

Alvah 's younger brother, George, was a Gunner with the Royal Garrison Artillery, 13th Siege Battery. He died of wounds on 29 June 1917. Previously wounded in 1916, George had only recently recovered from trench fever. He is commemorated on the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension (together with Ralph Claudian Willis-Harris). Bailleul is near the Belgian Border and on the main road from St Omer to Lille. It had been taken by the allies in October 1914 and it became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. It was also a Corp headquarters until July 1917 when it was severely bombed and shelled.

Another young fatality was Herbert Rudolf Gates, who had enlisted in Easebourne. A Gunner with the Royal Field Artillery, 144th Siege Battery, Herbert was just 19 years old when he died of his wounds on 9 September 1918. The letter from his Captain to his mother stated that Herbert was actually serving his gun when he was hit. His father was fighting in the war and his brother was in the Royal Air Force. Herbert is buried in the Barastre Communal Cemetery which is located 6 kilometres south-east of Bapaume. This town was occupied by the German army for almost four years, not being liberated by the Allies until August 1918.

George Edwin and James Henry Chevis were the eldest sons of George and Emily Chevis of 29 Easebourne Street. James was the first Cowdray Estate employee to volunteer his service in the war. They both enlisted into the Royal Sussex Regiment, although not through the same enlisting office.

George was wounded in both thighs at Ovillers on 7 July 1916 in what is known as the Battle of the Somme. He was found by his brother James, lying in No Man's Land. George was transferred to a base hospital in Etaples where he died of his wounds on 12 July 1916. He is commemorated at the Etaples Military Cemetery.

James, his younger brother by two years, was fighting in the same battalion close by. This proximity enabled James to help get his brother back behind British lines, from where George was transferred to base hospital. It was noted in The West Sussex Gazette in August 1916 that his parent's were notified that James had been officially missing since July 31 (the date of his death). "The deepest sympathy is felt for the parents in their double bereavement".

James is commemorated on The Thiepval Memorial, the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme which bears the names of more than 72,000 officers and men of the UK and South African forces who died in the Somme sector before March 1918 and have no known grave.

Another soldier commemorated on The Thiepval Memorial is Private James Carver, 13th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment. Prior to his enlistment James was a gardener who had been employed by Goldring and Son for fifteen years. The Goldrings were a noted family of Horticulturalists and landscape gardeners based around West Dean and Midhurst. It was reported that he was killed on 5 October 1916, age 36 years, by a shell in a reserve dug out.³³

Percy James Chevis was the eldest son of James and Amelia Chevis. Percy was a first cousin of George and James Chevis. In 1911 he was already the head of his own household, age 22 years, living at North Mill Cottage on the border of the parish with Midhurst. He also served with the Royal Sussex Regiment, and was wounded in operations following the landing at Suvla Bay but recovered and re-joined his regiment. Percy died, age 29, of disease in Port Said on 11 March 1917 and is commemorated at the Port Said War Memorial Cemetery.

James and Amelia Chevis, had two other sons, Henry and Charles who also served in the war and who both survived. Henry had been mentioned by Sir John French for distinguished service. He was wounded in October 1914, gassed in October 1916, was wounded a second time, and was taken prisoner by the Germans in August 1917.

In a letter from Sergeant Henry Chevis to his parents in September 1915, Henry writes "We are having good weather here and people behind the lines are harvesting. I have seen Jack Carver, Fred Collins, Charlie Lassiter (he does look well) and a chap named Wellin, from Midhurst. They all look well. We relieved them from the trenches".³⁴

Charles "Charlie" Lassister died only days after the above letter was received on 25 Sept 1915. Serving with the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment he was involved with the diversionary attacks around the La Basse canal in which there were heavy casualties. He is commemorated at St Mary's Advanced Dressing Station Cemetery, Haisnes, which was established during the Battle of Loos.

John and Harriet Dudman of Upper Vinings, Easebourne had ten children of which nine were boys. Five of their sons served in the army and three were killed in action on the Western Front.

Frank and Charles Dudman, both with the Royal Sussex Regiment, died within three days of each other near Ypres on 22 and 25 September 1917 respectively.

Mrs Dudman received letters from Frank Dudman's Commanding Officer and from the Captain of his company, both speaking in the highest possible terms as to his popularity amongst the men and to his devotion to duty. He was killed by a shell and death was instantaneous. Prior to the war he was an under keeper on the Cowdray Estate. Frank had joined up in September 1914, age 22 and was the youngest of five serving brothers. Frank died on 22 September, 1917 and he is commemorated on the memorial at Dulhallow Advanced Dressing Station, a medical post 1.6 km north of Ypres. In the UK, a memorial service was held in St Mary in October 1917 after the usual morning service.

Charles Dudman, serving with the 12th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment, died on 25 September, 1917 and is commemorated in the Hoge Crater Cemetery. The Hoge Chateau and its stables were part of the divisional headquarters for the Ypres sector. It was the scene of fierce fighting throughout the War passing hands between the Allies and Germans three times.

Ernest Dudman, a Lance Corporal with the Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment had been decorated with the Military Medal in 1917. He died on 27 September 1918 in the battle of Cambrai.

Albert James Trussler, was a Private in 1st Hampshire Regiment at the time of the 1911 Census. Serving with the 29th Division he died on 26 April 1915 during the Allied landings at Cape Helles in the south of the

Gallipoli peninsula on 25-26 April. A memorial service was held for Albert at St Mary.

The eight month campaign in Gallipoli was fought by Commonwealth and French forces in an attempt to force Turkey out of the war, to relieve the deadlock of the Western Front in France and Belgium, and to open a supply route to Russia through the Dardanelles and the Black Sea. Albert is commemorated on The Helles Memorial which serves the dual function of a Commonwealth battle memorial for the whole Gallipoli campaign and a place of commemoration for many of those Commonwealth servicemen who died there and have no known grave.

Another serviceman to be commemorated on the Helles Memorial is Percy Harper who died on 24 August 1915. He served with 4th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment and was involved in the further landings that took place on the Gallipoli peninsula in August 1915. Percy became injured, died of his wounds on a hospital ship and was buried at sea. Percy left a young widow, Amelia age 21 years.

Percy's brother, Albert Harper died on 31 July 1918, age 21. Albert also served with 4th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment but was with the 34th Division fighting in the Aisne-Marne counter offensive. Harry Barber was an employee at Cowdray Park in 1911. The Census noting that he was a Servant and "useful man"! He enlisted in Chichester in the Royal Sussex Regiment but subsequently served as a Private in the 1st Battalion, Royal Middlesex Regiment. He died on 24 September 1917 at the age of 38 in what is called the 3rd Battle of Ypres. Harry is one of some thirty five thousand soldiers commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing.

Percy Crawford Pateman was born at Todham Moor in Easebourne and was 16 years old in 1911. This Census records he was a domestic gardener. Percy was a Corporal of Horse, in the Household Cavalry Battalion and like Harry Barber, he also fought in 3rd Battle of Ypres. Harry died aged 23 on 7 October 1917 and is also commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial.

Ralph Norman was also in the Household Cavalry, the 10th (Prince of Wales Own) Royal Hussars; the same regiment as Philip Hardwick. Ralph was born in Easebourne and joined the army for his job. At the time of the 1911 Census Ralph was serving in Lucknow, India with the 10th Hussars. He was a Shoeing Smith in the Cavalry. This trade was very much in evidence in cavalry and artillery ranks until the phasing out of horse transport after the Great War.

Ralph was killed on 11 April 1917, at the beginning of the Arras offensive in somewhat wintry conditions, when Commonwealth troops were engaged in re-taking a number of villages including Tilloy-Les-Mofflaines. He is buried in Tilloy British Cemetery.

Ernest Stringer, modestly wrote to his parents about his gallant conduct on the first day of the Somme offensive on 1 July 1916, "You will be pleased to hear that I have been awarded the Military Medal".³⁵ Just over two months later in mid September, Corporal Stringer was again commended for his gallantry in the field during severe fighting.

Ernest was well-known in the parish and had joined up immediately on outbreak of war. He had been a former employee at both Capron and Cowdray Houses but was working in Horsham at the time of enlistment. His father, Frederick, was a long-standing employee of the Cowdray estate. Sergeant Ernest Stringer, of 8th Battalion (Pioneer) Royal Sussex Regiment was 31 years old when he died on 14 May 1918. He is commemorated on the Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension.

Jesse Cayley was a Waggoner prior to enlisting as a Private in The Queen's Own Royal Surrey Regiment. According to the Fernhurst parish magazine of December 1915, Jesse fought at Loos where he was wounded. He died on 1 August 1918 in the Allied counter attack in the area around Soissons. He is remembered on The Soissons Memorial which commemorates almost 4,000 men who died during the Battles of the Aisne and the Marne in 1918 and who have no known grave.

The Commemorated - Canadian Connection

Three of the names on the memorial were emigrants from the UK to Canada. In the late 19th Century Canada was a British Colony wanting to gain independence and economic stature. The Canadian Minister of the Interior, Sir Clifton Sifton, initiated a vigorous immigration policy designed to populate the west, particularly with people who would be willing to conform to a farming-type lifestyle. Two of the three emigrants certainly fit the life-style bill requirement as far as can be evidenced.

The Canadian government provided many incentives such as free passage, 160 acres of free farmland, and free supplies to new immigrants upon their arrival. Many immigrants were attracted to Canada's political liberties and saw emigration as a chance to start over.

Most notable of these emigrants was Robert Onebye Leach, who was awarded the Military Cross. He was also the last of those commemorated to die in action. Born in Pinner Middlesex, Robert emigrated to Canada after the UK 1911 census. In this census his occupation was listed as Horticultural student and on the Canadian Army form this became Rancher. He enlisted in the Canadian Infantry - Saskatchewan Regiment 1 Battalion 5 Division, on 24 September, 1914 and had served four years in France.

The London Gazette records his honour as follows: "For conspicuous, gallantry and able leadership of a small party against enemy machinegun posts east of Heudicourt Les Cagnicourt—Dury roads on September 1st, 1918. His judgment and resource in approaching and outflanking these posts resulted in the capture of a number of machine guns, and eased

the advance of the infantry. The disregard which he showed for his own safety had a great influence on his men".³⁶

Robert married Marjorie Alice Farrant, in Easebourne on 2 April 1918. Marjorie who lived at Dodsley Gate, became a widow on 29 September, 1918 when Robert was killed in the assault on the Marcoing Line as part of the Battle of the Canal du Nord. Robert is commemorated at the Haynecourt British Cemetery, north west of Cambrai.

Another emigrant was Francis John Tallant, born in Midhurst in 1886. He emigrated in 1903, aged 17 years. The Canadian Census in 1916 notes his occupation as a Farmer. He enlisted as a Private on 1 March 1916 in the Canadian Infantry, Saskatchewan Regiment. Just over one year later he was killed on 9 March 1917 and is commemorated on the Villers Station Cemetery, Villers au Bois, north west of Arras.

Ralph Claudian Willis-Harris : also emigrated after the 1911 UK census, where it was noted he was a bank clerk. Ralph enlisted on 23 October 1914 into the Canadian Infantry, Quebec Regiment. Ralph's mother, Mrs Ada Popplewell, received a letter from a friend of her son informing her that Ralph had been shot in the thigh on 8 November, 1915 while helping two other men carry a wounded comrade from the trenches. Ralph died on 9 November 1915; one day after his mother received the letter.³⁷

The Commemorated - Naval connections

Two of the commemorated were in the Navy; Henry John Lock and Walter Cayley; both of whom were lost at sea.

Lieutenant Henry Lock was in the Royal Marine Light Infantry on board HMS Bulwark on the fateful night of the explosion on 26 November 1914.

HMS Bulwark was a pre-dreadnought battleship of the London class which was attached to the Channel fleet following the outbreak of the war conducting patrols of the English Channel. On 26 November 1914, while anchored near Sheerness, HMS Bulwark was destroyed by a large internal explosion. The court of enquiry into the disaster found that the most likely cause of the explosion was due to the overheating of cordite charge stored alongside a boiler room bulkhead.

Out of a complement of 750 men, only 14 survived. The ship was torn apart so violently by the explosion that only 2 large portions of wreckage of the ship were later found. The wreck site of HMS Bulwark is designated as a controlled site under the Protection of Military Remains Act. Men who perished on HMS Bulwark are also commemorated on the Naval War Memorial, in Southsea, the Dockyard churchyard in Sheerness and at the Chatham Naval Memorial.

Walter Cayley, was one of three sons of Frederick and Jane Cayley of Small Profits, Henley Common, who fought in the war. Walter joined the Navy in 1907 becoming a Stoker First Class. He joined the battle-cruiser HMS Queen Mary in 1915.

HMS Queen Mary put to sea on 31 May 1916 with the rest of the Battlecruiser Fleet to intercept the German High Seas Fleet in the North Sea. The ensuing engagement became known as the Battle of Jutland, which was the largest fleet action of the war. HMS Queen Mary had a reputation of being the best gunnery ship of the Navy, largely due to being fitted with the most advanced fire control equipment.

The ship was hit twice by the German battle-cruiser, Derfflinger, during the early part of the battle and her magazines exploded shortly afterwards, sinking the ship. The wreck was discovered in 1991 and rests in pieces, on the floor of the North Sea. Like HMS Bulwark, the Queen Mary is also designated as a protected place, being the grave of 1266 officers and men.

Walter Cayley, and his previously mentioned brother Jesse, are also remembered on the memorial in the neighbouring parish of Fernhurst.

The Commemorated – the Postal Connection

Three of those listed on the war memorial were employed by the Post Office: Harold Frederick Newenham Hamilton was the sub-postmaster; Thomas Collins and Thomas Merritt were postmen.

At the start of the war huge numbers of men clamoured to enlist, including 11,000 Post Office workers. Like every other male employee, Harold and both Thomas' s would have received a letter from the Post Office encouraging enlistment.

When Harold enlisted, his wife Catherine would have continued supporting postal services in Easebourne as she was the Assistant sub-post mistress.

The General Post Office was used by the government to distribute recruitment forms throughout the country and later this was extended to ration books in 1917. By the end of the war the Post Office had released 73,000 staff for war services.

Although in different regiments, Harold Hamilton and Thomas Merritt were both involved in the Allies diversionary offensive at Arras, which started in April 1917.

Private Thomas Merritt of the Royal Fusiliers died on 24 April 1917. However, it wasn't until March 1918 that his widow Mary and their four children, were officially notified that it was "beyond doubt" that he was dead. He is commemorated on the Arras Memorial. Thomas had been a postman for 15 years.³⁸

Harold Hamilton, Private of the 7 Battalion Queen's Own Royal West Kent, died on 3 May 1917 age 38. Both Harold and Thomas Merritt are commemorated on the Arras Memorial.

The last to die

It is interesting to note that the last three men commemorated from the parish were also the oldest; being in their forties. This perhaps confirms the vision many have of young men enlisting in the early phase of the war by responding to Kitchener's "Your Country Needs You" campaign.

Of the 17 fatalities endured in the war up to the end of 1916, 13 of these men were in their twenties and 4 in their thirties. Most fatalities were experienced in the 1917-1918 campaigns. Of the 27 men who died in this period, 12 were in their twenties and 15 in their thirties.

Robert Bonner died at the age of 42 at home of malaria on 3 April 1919. A jobbing gardener by trade he became a Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery. Robert is buried in the parish churchyard.

Philip Edward Hardwick, age 44, was the oldest commemorated soldier, the penultimate to die and also the most decorated, being awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

Philip was born in 1875, to wealthy parents living in St George's Hanover Square, London. His father Philip Charles Hardwick, was a notable architect, as was his grandfather and great grandfather before him. Their architectural work spanned over 100 years, making them one of the most successful architectural families in British history.

His father's best known work was the Great Hall of the Euston Railway station (opened in 1849, and demolished in 1969) but he also worked in the City of London where he was architect to the Bank of England for over 25 years. More locally his father was the architect of the Sompting Abbots building in the parish of Adur, West Sussex and the main school buildings at Charterhouse in Godalming, Surrey.

Philip was a career soldier, joining the 1st Royal Dragoons in 1897 at the age of 22. He served in the Boer War, (being awarded the Queens medal with 5 clasps & King's Medal with 2 clasps. These were hard won medals given the nature of the fighting that took place). His only brother, Stephen, who also served in the Boer war did not survive.

Three years after his father died in 1892, Philip's mother, Helen Hardwick, married the Reverend Edwin Lascelles. Philip himself married Guina Pawson in 1904 and their son, Vincent Philip was born three years later. In the 1911 census, Vincent is recorded as staying with his grandmother in the parish.

Philip's connection with the parish appears to derive from his mother living at Rotherfield House, Easebourne. It is possible that Helen knew Lady Caroline Lascelles (no apparent connection to Edwin), who lived in Woolbeding House, as both could have been neighbours in Hanover Square in the early 1880's.

In the First World War Philip commanded the 10th (Prince of Wales's Own Royal) Hussars in France. He was wounded twice and won the Distinguished Service Order. On 11 April 1917, Philip commanded the 10th Hussars of the 8th Cavalry Brigade in the battle to retake the village of Monchy-le –Preux as part of the Arras offensive. During 1918 his Battalion was involved in the Battles of Amiens, Cambrai and the Final Advance in Flanders. As a result of wounds incurred, he died on 9 June 1919 and is buried in Wandsworth (Putney Vale) Cemetery and Crematorium.

Harvey Terry is the last man commemorated on the War Memorial and appropriately is also buried in the parish churchyard. A bricklayer by trade he lived in Upper Easebourne with his wife Emily. Harvey initially served in the Royal Sussex Regiment, but was later transferred to the Agricultural Company Labour Corps and promoted to Sergeant.

In May 1918 whilst at home on leave, Harvey received official notification that he had been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal. He had volunteered to take badly needed water to men on the front line, through heavy fire. It took him 12 hours to achieve this mission but he returned safely. Harvey died at home age 42 on 26 October, 1919.

Conclusion

At the outbreak of the First World War, Easebourne was a large rural parish. It had, and still has, a large country estate situated within it which plays a significant part in the life of the community. Naturally the parish has modernised over the century, but in essence the fundamentals e.g. its rural nature, the Cowdray estate and its properties, the village centre, and the church, remain the same. Cowdray Park, has become recognised as the home of British polo, hosting the British Open Championships.

The Midhurst Union Workhouse buildings, and the King Edward VII Hospital previously known as the Sanatorium have both become Grade II listed. The Workhouse has become a modern development of 39 apartments, which still bears original features. The Sanatorium buildings will similarly be developed into new homes.

Easebourne responded patriotically to the call for arms. It housed large numbers of billeted men, seemingly with good grace, and its residents contributed generously in support of those in need and the war effort.

Appendix 1 – The internal plaque in the parish church of St Mary, Easebourne



[Photograph by the author – Christine Deadman]

Appendix 2 –A list of the names appearing on the War Memorial, in the church of St Mary, Easebourne

Date	Year	Name	2nd Name	Surname	Regiment	Rank	Died/Buried/ Commemorated
Sept 05	1914	Francis	Geoffrey	Pearson (The Hon)	Army Service Corps	Staff Sergeant Mechanic MS/2921	Montreuil Aux Lions British Cemetery
Sept 14	1914	Walter	William	Murrant	The Kings Royal Rifle Corps	Rifleman 11245	La-Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial
Sept 14	1914	Alvah		Trussler	Royal Sussex	Private L/7446	La Ferte-sous-Jouarre Memorial
Oct 08	1914	Percy	George	Botting	East Surrey	Private 71	Loos Memorial
Nov 26	1914	Henry	John	Lock	HMS Bulwark - Royal Marine Light Infantry	Lieutenant	Chatham Naval Memorial
April 26	1915	Albert	James	Trussler	Hampshire	Private 8084	Helles Memorial
May 09	1915	James		Steer	Nottingham & Derbyshire Sherwood Forresters	Private 18682	Ploegsteert Memorial, Comines-Warneton, Hainaut
Aug 24	1915	Percy		Harper	Royal Sussex	Sergeant TF/482	Helles Memorial
Sept 25	1915	Charles	Ernest	Lassiter	Royal Sussex	Private G/4614	St Mary's A.D.S. Cemetery, Haisnes

Nov 09	1915	Ralph	Claudian	Willis-Harris	Canadian Infantry - Quebec	Private 65418	Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord
May 31	1916	Walter		Cayley	Royal Navy	Stoker First class 311839/PO	Portsmouth Naval Memorial
July 12	1916	George	Edwin	Chevis	Royal Sussex	Lance Corporal G/583	Etaples Military Cemetery
July 19	1916	William	Thomas	Tipper	Royal Warwickshire	Private 6136	Aubers Ridge British Cemetery
July 31	1916	James	Henry	Chevis	Royal Sussex	Corporal G/655	Thiepval Memorial
July 31	1916	Thomas		Stubbs	Royal Sussex	Private G/8329	Ovillers Military Cemetery
Oct 05	1916	James		Carver	Royal Sussex	Private SD/4209	Thiepval Memorial
Nov 22	1916	Frank	George	Chamberlain	Cameron Highlanders	Sergeant S/43007	Warlencourt British Cemetery
Mar 09	1917	Francis	John	Tallant	Canadian Infantry - Saskatchewan	Private 887169	Villers Station Cemetery, Villers au Bois
Mar 11	1917	Percy	James	Chevis	Royal Sussex	Sergeant TF/200125	Port Said War Memorial Cemetery
April 11	1917	Ralph		Norman	Household Cavalry & Cavalry of the Line	Shoeing Smith Corporal 5542	Tilloy British Cemetery, Tilloy-Les-Mofflaines

April 24	1917	Thomas		Merritt	Royal Fusiliers	Private G/41309	Arras Memorial
May 03	1917	Harold	Frederick Newenham	Hamilton	Royal West Kent	Private G/18620	Arras Memorial
June 29	1917	George		Trussler	Royal Garrison Artillery	Gunner 45504	Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord
July 25	1917	Ernest	Richard	Mills	Royal Sussex	Private G/16670	Monchy British Cemetery
Sept 24	1917	Harry		Barber	The Middlesex	Private G/50456	Tyne Cot Cemetery
Sept 22	1917	Frank		Dudman	Royal Sussex (Pioneers)	Corporal G/2738	Duhallow A.D.S. Cemetery
Sept 25	1917	Charles	Robert	Dudman	Royal Sussex	Private G/15927	Hooge Crater Cemetery
Oct 05	1917	Henry	Moran	Smith	Royal Garrison Artillery	Bombardier TF/340198	Klein-Vierstraat British Cemetery
Oct 07	1917	Percy	Crawford	Pateman	Household Cavalry and Cavalry of the Line	Corporal of Horse 2245	Tyne Cot Cemetery
Nov 06	1917	Ralph		Dummer	Royal Sussex	Private TF/200643	Jerusalem Memorial
Mar 21	1918	Frederick	George	Stevens	Royal Sussex	Corporal G/5019	The Pozieres Memorial
Mar 21	1918	William		Dummer	Machine Gun Corp Infantry	Corporal 20677	The Pozieres Memorial

Mar 21	1918	Ernest		Robinson	Royal Warwickshire	Private TF/241864	The Pozieres Memorial
April 13	1918	Ernest		Stringer	Royal Sussex (Pioneers)	Sergeant G/1834	Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extention
April 14	1918	Felix	Leopold	Knight	Lancashire Fusiliers	Private 32088	Trois Arbes Cemetery, Steenwerck
April 20	1918	Thomas		Collins	Machine Gun Corp Infantry	Private 45685	Tannay British Cemetery; Thiennes
June 29	1918	Edward		Steer	Essex	Private 40798	Taken prisoner - died in captivity
July 31	1918	Albert		Harper	Royal Sussex	Private TF/201223	Raparie British Cemetery, Villemontoire
Aug 01	1918	Jesse		Cayley	Queen's Royal West Surrey	Private TF/202174	Soissons Memorial
Aug 30	1918	George		Challen	Gloucestershire	Private 22214	Bagneux British Cemetery, Gezaincourt
Sept 09	1918	Herbert	Rudolph	Gates	Royal Garrison Artillery	Gunner 45345	Barastre Communal Cemetery
Sept 27	1918	Ernest		Dudman	Queen's Own Royal West Kent	Lance Corporal G/31017	Gouzeaucourt New British Cemetery
Sept 29	1918	Robert	Onebye	Leach	Canadian Infantry - Saskatchewan	Lieutenant	Haynecourt British Cemetery - NW Cambrai

Sept 29	1918	William	Henry	Chamberlain	Hampshire	Private 12888	Birr Cross Roads Cemetery
April 03	1919	Robert		Bonner	Royal Field Artillery	Gunner 48963	Easebourne St Mary churchyard
June 09	1919	Philip	Edward	Hardwick	Household Cavalry and Cavalry of the Line	Lieutenant Colonel	Wandsworth (Putney Vale) Cemetery & Crematorium
Oct 26	1919	Harvey		Terry	The Labour Corps	Sergeant 668574	Easebourne St Mary churchyard

Endnotes and Acknowledgements

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