

Leonard Ernest BENTON and William Edward BENTON

Henry and Mary Benton lost two of their four sons in the Great War.

Born <i>Leonard</i>	20th August 1896
Killed in Action or Died	28th October 1915 age 19
Buried	Grave I.B.35., .Corbie Communal Cemetery, Somme, France
Unit	1 st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 2654
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

Born <i>William</i>	1890
Killed in Action or Died	14th October 1916 age 26
Buried	Grave X. B. 9, Connaught Cemetery, Thiepval, Somme, France
Unit	1 st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment
Rank	Corporal, Service Number 325011 (formerly 132)
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

The Bentons were an hereditary Ely farming family who lived in Station Road (and prior to that Potters Lane). Henry Benton (1846) and his wife Mary Ann (nee Lyon 1860 Witcham, Ely) had four sons: **William** (1890); Arthur (1891); James (1894); and **Leonard** (1896). Mary Ann was Henry's second wife and with his first wife Susan (nee Lupson 1846 Ely) he had already had four children: Ethel (1879); Henry John (1881); Laura Winifred (1883); and Florence (1884). Susan had died late in November 1885 at the family's then home in Victoria Street

The family attended St Peters Mission Church in Broad Street, where Leonard was part of Harold Arthur's Confirmation Class. After the War Harold Arthur paid for a memorial in the church for the twenty-one young men from his St Peters Class who did not return; the memorial therefore includes Leonard's name but not the name of William.

By 1911 the Bentons' farm of 120 acres was a true family business with three sons (William, James, Leonard) assisting their father on the farm and daughter Florence acting as a dairymaid. Also resident, and working on the farm for many years as a horsekeeper and stockman, was Henry's nephew John Benton (1855 Ely). Leonard and William's brother Arthur had left Ely and was living and working at Stokes' Greengrocers in Folkestone, Kent, as his older half-sister Ethel had married one of the Stokes brothers who owned the store. (This shop was later to become infamous as the site of a German bombing where over 70 people were killed in May of 1917—the second largest number of fatalities in an air raid in the whole of World War One.)

On 6th April 1914 Leonard was employed by Great Eastern Railways as and engine cleaner, working at the Cambridge Depot.

Leonard and William were Ely Territorials and when War was declared they enlisted in the Cambridgeshire Regiment. Leonard is amongst the 73 men listed in the local newspaper on their "Roll of Honour" for answering the call, which he did on 4th September 1914. It is possible William joined up afterwards, feeling that he was looking after his younger brother who was then only eighteen. After training at various camps in East Anglia, the Bentons reached France in February 1915. The Regiment saw action at St Eloi and Ypres until Leonard was wounded in the shoulder by

a stray bullet when returning to his billet from the trenches and was transported back to the 28th casualty clearing station at La Neuville where he died of his wounds the following day, after regaining consciousness sufficiently for a period to ask the chaplain to write and send his love to his family. It transpired that the bullet had entered his right shoulder, passed through his lungs and exited on the left side of his body—he died because the bleeding in his lungs could not be stemmed.

The newspaper report of Leonard's death describes him as "a smart looking young fellow". The news of his death appears to have first reached Ely on a letter from George Sutton of Ely who was in the same regiment—George was also to be a victim of the conflict. Later letters of condolence came from the front, including one from Sergeant B H Balls:

"...he was hit in the shoulder while leaving the trenches after we had been relieved. The bullet, however, must have entered the lung, causing the fatal result... I can assure you he had every attention. He has been with me ever since he joined the 1/1st Cambs and he was in my section in England and afterwards in my platoon in France, and I can honestly say I never had a better man than Len. A good soldier, a clean liver, a willing worker, he was in all respects "a soldier and a man"."

William was promoted to corporal and throughout 1916 was with the battalion on the Ancre, apart from a period when he was invalided home with enteric fever, returning to the Front in July 1916. Almost a year after his brother's death he was killed in action on the Somme in the famous Cambridgeshires' attack on the Schwaben Redoubt which is often said to be one of the most impressive regimental actions of the War. William probably died in the two hours of hard hand to hand fighting which took place in the redoubt. The local newspaper reported: *"Corpl. Benton, eldest son of Mr and Mrs Benton, Station Road, is reported to have been killed in action on October 14th (1916). The corporal, who is 26 years of age, went out to France in February 1915, after which he was stricken with enteric fever, invalided home, and returned to the Front last July. This is the second son Mr and Mrs Benton have lost in the war."*

After the War Henry and Mary requested that on Leonard's headstone should be inscribed : "And in Memory of Cpl. W. Benton Killed in Action on 14.10.16. Brothers Reunited". As well as being commemorated together on the Market Place in Ely, the two brothers appeared on the Roll of Honour of Holy Trinity Church. Only Leonard is commemorated in St Peter's Church. As Leonard was an employee of Great Eastern Railways he is also commemorated on the GER Memorial which is situated in Liverpool Street Station, London.

William's legate was his mother, who was sent his effects of £21 13s 6d with a further £10 10s in 1919.

William Benton



Leonard Benton



Sidney Harold BENTON

Born	1892
Killed in Action or Died	3rd September 1916, age 23
Commemorated	Pier and Face 16B and 16C, Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France
Unit	16 th Battalion Rifle Brigade
Rank	Rifleman, Service Number S/14252
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

Sidney Benton was born in Ely and lived with his parents and three of his siblings in a four roomed house in Newnham Street. His father Mark (1843) was from Littleport and at the time of Sidney's birth was a farm labourer, while his mother Ann Stevens Garner (1851) was from Little Downham. The Bentons first lived in Littleport where Mark worked as a railway carrier (1881) but he later became a farmer at Cawdle Fen Farm (Ely 1891). The children born in Littleport were: William (1874); John (1876); George (1879); Harry (1882); Mark (1883); Martha (1886). A move into Ely then followed, where sons (Arthur) Samuel (1891), Sidney (1892) and Victor (1897) were born. By the time Sidney, his penultimate child, was born Mark had lost the farm and was working as a farm labourer; the family was also splitting up and only the four youngest children ended up living with their parents.

The family attended St Peters Mission Church in Broad Street, and here Sidney was part of Harold Arthur's Confirmation Class. After the War Harold Arthur paid for a memorial in the church for the members of the St Peters Class who did not come home.

The 1911 Census shows that Samuel had followed his father into farm work, but Sidney was working for Mr Tow, one of Ely's fishmongers.

In December 1912 Sidney's mother Ann died.

Sidney moved to London, where he married Jessie Johnson in Croydon in the winter of 1913. Their son, Sidney junior, was born the following summer back in Ely.

Sidney enlisted in Ely with the Rifle Brigade in November 1915. The 16th Battalion of the Rifle Brigade was first formed at St Pancras in April 1915, and Sidney reached France with them on 8th March 1916. Sidney was killed in action on the Somme on 3rd September 1916 when his battalion attacked the enemy lines between Hamel and Beaumont with little success; the Rifle Brigade lost over 300 troops on that day and the bodies of 214 of them, including Sidney, were not recovered or identifiable. It was a full month before Mark Benton even received confirmation that his son was officially deemed missing. Sidney and his fellow riflemen are commemorated together on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing. He is also remembered on the Ely Market Place Memorial and St Peters Memorial.

Jessie was sent Sidney's effects of £4 11d and later £3 in 1919.

Arthur John “Jack” BIDWELL

Born	1894
Killed in Action or Died	21st August 1918 age 24
Buried	Grave A 58. Railway Cutting Cemetery, Courcelles-Le-Comte, Pas de Calais, France
Unit	2 nd Battalion Suffolk Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 16622
Awards	Military Medal, British War Medal and Victory Medal

James Bidwell (1853 Ely) lived first at Springhead Lane then at 50 Waterside, Ely with his wife Annie (nee Roberts, 1861 Norwich) and his large family of eleven children who were all born in Ely: Sarah (1883); Elizabeth (1884); Edith (1886); James (1889); Thomas (1890); Annie (1892); **Arthur** (1894); Emily (1895); Herbert (1897); Ernest (1899); and Albert (1901). James worked for Great Eastern Railways, first as a platelayer then, by the time of Arthur's birth as a shunter, using horses to move stock around, by 1911 he had become a station porter. The family were members of Ely's Wesleyan Methodist Church where Arthur was baptised on 8th April 1894. Arthur was usually known by a variant of his second name, “Jack”.

The family lost their mother at the young age of forty-one in May 1902; Jack was eight years old, and James had six children still under ten at this stage.

Following his call up Jack enlisted at Littleport in the Suffolk Regiment and served with their 11th, 7th and finally their 2nd Battalions. He was wounded on 8th June 1917 in the muscle of his left arm and spent some time back in England recuperating in hospital in Birmingham..

Jack Bidwell was a recipient of the Military Medal which was awarded to other “other ranks” for bravery in the field. Jack's MM was gazetted posthumously, as it appeared in the London Gazette of 18th October 1918, although it was actually awarded a few weeks before he was killed. Jack, and 92 others, died in the taking of Courcelles-le-Comte and the railway near Arras on 21st August 1918; they are buried together in the old railway cutting. Jack had actually been returning to his company's headquarters when he was hit by a bullet. This was the opening of the Battle of Bapaume when the British 3rd and 4th Armies attack north of River Ancre on 10-mile front between Beaucourt-sur-Ancre and Moyenneville; the British Front advanced to the Albert-Arras Railway on this day.



Jack is described as “ a fine soldier, gallant in action and always ready to do his duty”.

Jack is remembered on the Ely Market Place Memorial.

James was sent his son's effects of £4 15s 5d with a further £18 a few months later.

Percy Thomas BIDWELL

Born	10th May 1896
Killed in Action or Died	10th October 1918, age 22
Buried	Grave IV. E.2, Aubers Ridge British Cemetery, Aubers, Nord, France
Unit	15th Battalion Suffolk Regiment
Rank	Corporal, Service Number 50107
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

Percy Thomas Bidwell was the eldest son of Ely journeyman plumber Thomas Bidwell (1874 Ely) and his wife Charlotte Edice Brown (1875 Ely). He had two younger brothers called William (1899) and Reginald (1902). The family lived at Victoria Street in Ely.

Percy first attended the “National School” (i.e. a church school) and was thereafter one of the “free boys” enrolled at Needhams Secondary School on Back Hill; he joined the school on 15th March 1903 and left on 15th September 1911 to work as an errand boy. Needhams accepted the top seven or eight boys from each of the local schools annually as free boys.

The Bidwells attended St Peters Mission Church in Broad Street, and here Percy was part of Harold Arthur's Confirmation Class. After the War Harold Arthur paid for a memorial in the church for the twenty-one young men from the St Peters Class who did not come home.

With the Derby Scheme, nineteen year old Percy attested at Ely late in November 1915 and was placed in one of the early groups to be called up. He served with Suffolk Regiment in the 7th, 8th and 11th Battalions before being transferred into the 15th Battalion. He appeared on the list of wounded in the local newspaper of 22nd November 1917 when he was gassed.

Percy was killed in action just one month before the Armistice, on a day of intense fighting when the British took Le Cateau and Rouvroy (south-east of Lens) and Sallaumines, and Percy's own unit helped secure the village of Aubers where Percy himself is now buried. He was with his unit in a rest hut in the village when the Germans started shelling it—as the corporal in charge he was getting his men out first when he was struck in the head by a shell.

Percy was commemorated on the Memorial at Holy Trinity Church as well as on the main Ely memorial and the St Peter's Class Memorial.

Percy's father Thomas was sent his effects of £17 3s 5d with a further £13 10s in 1919.

David William BIRD

Born	1891
Killed in Action or Died	14th March 1915 age 24
Commemorated	Panels 50 & 52, Menin Gate, Ieper, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Unit	"D Company" (Cycling Section), 1st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 1642
Awards	1914-1915 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

David William Bird's birthplace is given on the 1911 Census as "Srubhill, Norfolk", given that his father was a farm bailiff, this is most probably Shrubhill Farm in Feltwell Fen near Hockwold. David's father Thomas Bird had been born at Isleham in 1862 and his wife Eliza Ann in Isleham Fen. The birthplaces of their four children show how the family had moved between isolated Fenland farms for work: John (1890 Burnt Fen); David (1891 Feltwell Fen, Norfolk); Mary (1895 Burnt Fen) and Sarah (1897 Burnt Fen). The area known as Burnt Fen crosses the Suffolk and Cambridgeshire borders near Mildenhall, and it is clear from the family's census returns that they were not exactly sure which of the two counties three of their children were born in.

David's grandfather was farm bailiff to Mr John Tuck of High Barns, Ely and this later became a post his father Thomas held. As a result the family moved from Burnt Fen into Ely where Thomas became the Tucks' farm foreman aka bailiff and they were given tied accommodation in a large house in New Barns. At the time of the 1901 Census theirs was a very full household with visitors including Thomas' relatives John and Frederick Bird as well as John Halls from Burnt Fen. David attended the Sunday School at Queen Adelaide where he was also a church chorister and Bible Class member.

In the 1911 Census just David and Sarah were left living with their parents in the New Barns house. Thomas was still the local farm bailiff, and nineteen year old David was a horsekeeper, working with his father. John was working as a groom cum gardener and live-in servant in New Barns House, which was the home of the farmer Miss Elizabeth Tuck (John Tuck having died.)

David Bird was one of the keen young men who were members of the Ely Territorials who enlisted for the local Cambridgeshire Regiment in Ely at the outbreak of the War. After training at various locations around East Anglia he arrived in France with the 1st Battalion on 14th February 1915 for what, for him, was to be a very short war. On 16th April 1915 the Ely Standard published some extracts from David's letters written between 20th February and 13th March:

"We have now moved about ten miles nearer the trenches. Last Sunday we spent digging trenches - not a pleasant way of spending Sunday. The weather is very changeable, hot sometimes and then very cold. We can see the flashes from the shells quite plainly at night, but to see the transport waggons on the way to the



firing line is quite a sight, they never cease running day or night. Everywhere here is one mass of water, about three inches deep. There is no drainage whatever. They are behind England here in all sorts of ways, and they have tons of ways to improve in to cope with old England from what I have seen in France. There is no doubt that the Belgians have fought very hard.

"I was glad to hear there were lots of soldiers at ————. They will be wanted before this is done. You can't guess what it is like out here. I like the Belgians, they are a very fine set up people, and the soldiers are quick and smart. They are very kind and will do anything for us. There is a great deal of excitement out here for us, not of living pictures and cinemas, but of pictures in reality and no imagination. We get both Ely Standard and Cambridgeshire Times every week and we see what is going, and hear more of what is going on from them than we do out here."

David's Battalion was stationed at the Front near St Eloi and David appears to have been wounded the day after his last letter, on the first day that the Cambridgeshires came under fire when they were in the line. At this time the Battalion was caught between an artillery barrage and machine gun fire, without sufficient food supplies and water and in some of their trenches casualties, both killed and wounded, were running at about 20%. The Germans were also exploding underground mines near St Eloi. Exactly one month after his arrival in France David Bird died of wounds somewhere on the Front; but his exact burial place was lost, and so he is commemorated on the Menin Gate at Ypres with the other missing. His commanding officer wrote to his parents: "he was shot about midnight on 14th March. He died soon afterwards, indeed before he could reach the dressing station on a stretcher. He was buried by the regiment with whom he was when the casualty occurred. He was a steady reliable man and the platoon is poorer for his loss." David had become temporarily separated from his companions and none of them had seen how he had been wounded.

David Bird was unfortunate enough to be remembered as the first of the Ely Territorials to be killed in the War.

As well as being commemorated on Ely's Market Place memorial, David's name was recorded on the Memorial at Holy Trinity Church. He was also listed on the Roll of Honour in St Etheldreda's Church in Queen Adelaide—this church is now a private dwelling.

David's father Thomas was sent his son's effects of £3 5d and then a further £3 in 1919.

Once Thomas Bird retired from his role of bailiff at High Barns David's parents lost their tied accommodation and moved out of Ely to Horningsea.

Walter BLACK

Born	10th May 1885
Killed in Action or Died	8th May 1915 age 29
Commemorated	Panel 12, Menin Gate, Ieper, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Unit	2nd Battalion Royal Lancaster Regiment (King's Own)
Rank	Company Sergeant Major, Service Number 6712
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

Walter Black was born in Gedney, Lincolnshire, to farmer Frederick Black (1840 Gedney) and his wife Sarah Jane (nee Oldershaw, 1850 Rippingale, Lincolnshire). Walter's siblings included Arthur (1882), Ethel (1884); Harold (1887), Winifred (1889) and Beatrice (1891) who were all born in Gedney. The family then moved to Ely where Frederick (1896) and Reginald (1900) were born. The family lived in Walpole Lane in 1901 and father Frederick worked as a blacksmith at the Gas Works. Walter had begun working in Ely as a page boy, and then worked for the Theological College in Barton Road.

Just before the 1901 Census Walter joined up as a career soldier. On 15th February 1901, aged 15 years and 9 months, Walter attested at Ely in the Royal Lancaster Regiment for a twelve year term of service. His surviving service records tell us that he underwent a medical examination at Bury St Edmunds and was passed fit for service. He was described as precisely 5 feet 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches tall, weighing 92 lbs and with a fresh complexion, brown eyes and dark brown hair. Walter stated his religion as Church of England.



In his first year on Home Service Walter was based at Tournay Barracks in Farnborough, Hampshire where he, achieved his Third, Second, and finally his First Class Certificates of Education. From 19th November 1902 to 7th August 1903 he served in Malta, before another lengthy period on Home Service which included Jersey in the Channel Islands (1908-1912 see 1911 Census). From 13th November 1912 his battalion was in India, until the outbreak of the War caused the recall of all regular troops to make up the British Expeditionary Force in France. Walter had a brief period back in England from 19th November 1914 to 15th January 1915 and then embarked for France. At the time of his death his total service was reckoned as 14 years and 85 days.

Walter had risen up the ranks in the regiment until he reached the highest rank possible as a non-commissioned officer. He officially became a Private in the Regiment when he came of age in May 1903 then steadily worked his way up: Lance Corporal in February 1904; Corporal in September 1905; Sergeant in April 1910; when his twelve years of service came to an end he re-engaged to serve a total of twenty-one years and was confirmed as Sergeant in June 1912; in November 1913 he was made Colour Sergeant; until finally, as the regiment prepared to depart for France, he was made Company

Sergeant Major on 23rd December 1914. The note on his service record reads: "an excellent n.c.o.steady clever & capable; fitted in every way for the position he now holds. Also in possession of an acting schoolmaster's certificate".

On 16th October 1912 Walter married Clara Anna Smith at Bayton in Suffolk, whom he had met when the regiment was stationed at Colchester. Clara accompanied him to India where their daughter Clara Winifred Matilda was born at Lebong near Darjeeling in November 1913. Clara was pregnant on the return journey to England and gave birth to a second daughter, Ivy Elsie, in Marylebone a month after Walter departed for France. Walter and Clara set up their home in Barton Road, Ely, close to Walter's parents who had moved to Silver Street,

Walter was killed in action during the month long battle know as "Second Ypres" when his Division came under heavy bombardment in their trenches along the Frezenberg ridge. The German attack was so ferocious that after the bombardment the shattered British line broke at the third assault and the gap was only later plugged by the brave response of the Canadian Infantry. The bodies of many of the Royal Lancasters were not found after this dreadful day, and they, with Walter, are commemorated on the Menin Gate in Ypres—the town they were trying to protect. He died two days before his thirtieth birthday.

Clara received a weekly pension of £1 6d (aka a "separation allowance") for herself and her children following Walter's death. Her husband's effects came to £29 16s 7d and a final payment of £4 in 1919.

Walter is remembered on the Ely Market Place Memorial.

Bertie BONNETT

Born	1894
Killed in Action or Died	21st April 1918 age 24
Buried	Grave V. D. 11, La Clytte Military Cemetery, Heuvelland, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Unit	352 nd Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery
Rank	Lance Bombardier, Service Number 40381
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

Bertie Bonnett was born in Prickwillow in 1894 to James Bonnett (Ely 1863) and his wife Hannah aka Anna (nee Taylor, 1867 Prickwillow). The family lived in an isolated cottage in Mile End Road, Prickwillow, where, as well as Bertie, children Elizabeth (1886), James (1888), Lily (1889), Ernest (1897) Hannah aka Annie (1899, died at Shippea Hill 1907) and Ada (1903) were also born. James was a farm labourer; by 1901 his fourteen year old son James had followed him on to the farms, and this was probably the route the other boys of the family expected to follow also.

Bertie's mother died in the late summer of 1907 and about eighteen months later his father married Elizabeth Brown (1857 Ely). In the 1911 Census the Bonnetts were still at Mile End with just four children living with their father and stepmother, namely James, Bertie, Ernest and Ada. All three boys were farm labourers like their father. Bertie's father James died at Mile End, Prickwillow, before the War began.

Bertie travelled to Norwich to enlist in the Royal Garrison Artillery. He first spent two years stationed on garrison duty at Hong Kong, before coming home on his first leave in October 1917. The Ely Standard included details of his letter of thanks for his Christmas parcel of 1916 from "his friends at Prickwillow": "...he says he received the parcel quite safely, the contents being as good as the day on which they were packed. He found everything very useful. He enjoyed the "Woodbines" immensely after smoking so many Chinese cigarettes, and the plum pudding was splendid. He was very pleased when he saw whom and where it was from, as it proved to him that although he is so far away that he was not forgotten at home. He has now been nearly two years in China, and he says that his chief desire now is to get home and do a bit in France,"



Bertie got his wish to fight in France as he fought there with the 352nd Siege Battery. This was a mobile unit of six guns (howitzers) made up of just over a hundred men which was redeployed several times in support of other Heavy Artillery Groups including, for a time, the Canadians.

Bertie was killed in action on 21st April 1918 which was a day of great aerial activity and much bombing along the whole of the Western Front. British Siege Batteries would have been prime targets for the German attack at this point. From the fact that he was buried at La Clytte Military Cemetery after the War, we know that Bertie was killed in the area of Dickebusch, and Kemmel. By coincidence, he died on the same day of action that the famous German air ace the Red Baron—Captain von Richthofen—was killed.

Bertie Bonnett is commemorated on both the Prickwillow and Ely memorials. His effects were distributed amongst his siblings who each received £3 17s 8d (or 9d).

George BOWLES

Born	1897
Killed in Action or Died	28th April 1917 age 20
Commemorated	Bay 4, Arras Memorial, Pas de Calais, France
Unit	11th Battalion Suffolk Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 9132
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

James Bowles (1867) of Fulborn married Kate Larkins (1871) of Ely and they settled in Market Street, Ely, with James working as a groom at one of the local inns. (Before his marriage James had worked as the groom at the Three Horseshoes in Coveney and it is possible they were still his employers in 1901.) As well as **George**, who was born in 1897, they had seven more children: Bertram (1892); Maude (1894), Lilian (1900), Frank (1901), Mabel (1904), Harold (1909) and Percy (1910).

On 3rd May 1897 George began his education at the nearby Market Street Infants' School. On finally leaving school he was employed at fourteen years old on the Kings' farm at Downham Market as a yard hand, and boarded on the farm. He then went on to become an ostler at the Club Hotel on Ely's Market Square, once more living with his family at 28 Back Hill.



Like many of Ely's young men, George Bowles enlisted with the 11th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment in August of 1914. The raw recruits spent over a year training at Cherry Hinton, Ripon, and finally Salisbury Plain. They reached Boulogne, bound for the Western Front, on 9th January 1916. This Division was composed of a number of locally raised battalions (the "Pals") especially from the north east of England, and the 11th Battalion of the Suffolks was a Cambridgeshire Pals Battalion, which explains the number of Ely troops that fought and died with George. George's battalion fought in the 1916 battles of the Somme (Albert, Bazentin Ridge, Pozieres Ridge) and the 1917 Battles of the Scarpe. During this time George was wounded at least once, as he is listed amongst the Suffolks' casualties in August 1916 when he was wounded in both the foot and shoulder by a bomb and sent back to hospital in Derby; by this time he had spent a total of thirteen months in France and was still only nineteen years old.

George fell on the opening day of the Battle of Arras when his Battalion took part in an attack on the chemical works at Roeux. In the early morning attack (4.25 a.m.) the Suffolks made no progress but suffered badly in the face of machine gun fire. It was another two months before George's parents received the confirmation that he had been killed. As his body was not recovered George is commemorated with his fellow soldiers on the Arras Memorial to the Missing.

George's father James died in early December 1921 in their Back Hill home. Kate was her son's legatee and received £5 6s 5d with a further £12 10s in 1919.

Matthew BRINKLEY

Born	1887
Killed in Action or Died	8th May 1917 age 29
Buried	Ely Cemetery
Unit	1st Reserve Garrison Battalion, Suffolk Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 47825
Awards	



Matthew Brinkley was born in Swaffham, Norfolk, in 1887. He was the son of Reuben Brinkley (1855 Willingham, Cambridgeshire) and Eliza (nee Clark 1857 Nassington, Northamptonshire). Reuben was a travelling hawker and so his family moved around a great deal, as can be traced through the census records and the births of the surviving Brinkley children. The older children were Mycilla (1884), Abigail (1885), Matthew's younger siblings were Frederick (1889), Annie (1891 Northwold, Norfolk), Eliza (1893 Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire), William (1894 Whittlesey) Sarah (1895 Norfolk). Earlier censuses show the Brinkleys' travelling van parked up in Cambridge and in Ipswich. As the children got older they acquired their own vans and partners and set off on different routes around East Anglia.

In the 1891 Census the family of parents and four children were living in a travelling caravan on Barnham Common, Thetford. The families living with them on the Common were all travellers and hawkers in caravans, including Joseph Brinkley (1836) and his wife Maria (1842) and son George (1876) who *may* have been cousins. Most of the travellers were unable, or unwilling, to confirm their place of birth to the census enumerator.

In the 1901 Census the Brinkley family of five was living in their van on the High Causeway, Whittlesey, and thirteen year old Matthew was working locally as a farm labourer.

In 1908 Matthew and his parents moved to the Ely area and settled, although they were still working as hawkers. Here Matthew met and married Clara Ilett (1887 Ely). The couple lived with Clara's widowed mother Jane Ilett (1852 Great Wilbraham) in Bull Lane, Ely, where their daughter Olive was born in 1909. (This made Matthew a brother-in-law of Albert Ilett who also appears on the Ely Memorial.) Matthew's parents had settled in a small cottage in Waterside, Ely, with Annie and William, from this cottage Reuben and William continued acting as hawkers (Eliza was not with her family on 1911 census night). Matthew was probably still working with his family. Abigail, Annie and Sarah Brinkley all married Ely men, in fact Sarah married Clara's younger brother Alfred Ilett in 1915.

Matthew had a reputation in Ely. In May of 1913 he appeared at Ely Petty Sessions where he pleaded guilty to using indecent language within the hearing of Bull Lane. The newspaper reported that this was the fourth time he had appeared on thus charge. He was fined 10/- with 7/- costs. The fact that Matthew's mother Eliza was summoned at the same time for using obscene language suggests that family life was far from harmonious. Eliza received a fine of 5/-, with 7/- costs.

It is possible that Matthew's main problem was actually drunkenness. After Christmas 1915 Matthew was brought up before the bench, having been charged with assault on a police constable (Ely's P.C. Bush) and using obscene language. He had been discovered causing a drunken disturbance in the street by the constable and instead of taking his warning and going home, Matthew had gone into the pub. P.C. Bush followed him into the pub and escorted him out and took him home. In Bull Lane Matthew used obscene language towards the constable in front of the family and local women and children which is when he was formally arrested. This was the point at which he became violent, hitting and kicking the constable. He was again fined 10 shillings or was sent to gaol for ten days—it must be assumed he was incarcerated, as the newspaper report concludes "Brinkley had no money".

As the record does not include Matthew's occupation this may point to his then being unemployed ,or unwilling to state what he actually did to get his drink money.

Matthew Brinkley enlisted in the Cambridgeshire Regiment at Bury St Edmunds (Service Number 6763) in mid-1916. His service record has been lost, but the fact that he died at Birds-End, Hargrave, Suffolk, while serving with a Reserve Garrison Battalion, and has not been awarded service medals, indicates that he was declared unfit for front line service abroad. The actual cause of Matthew's death was status epilepticus, a dangerous condition in which epileptic fits follow one another without recovery of consciousness between them. It is probable these fits may be related to the reason he was on home service, as the newspaper recorded he was "subject to fits" and this was clearly a condition that pre-dated his call-up. The day before his death he had been working on a local farm (farmers were permitted to ask local army depots to lend them soldiers for farm work at key periods) and had seemed well at bedtime. By the next morning he was dead.

Matthew was buried in Ely Cemetery on 11th May 1917; his funeral procession was followed by wounded soldiers from the local military hospital..

Matthew was commemorated on the main memorial in the Market Place and on the Memorial in Holy Trinity Church.

A few months after his death, in the winter of 1917, Matthew's widow Clara married Esau Williams in Ely, they moved over the Norfolk border to Outwell, where Esau worked the sluice gate after the War. As well as her first husband, Clara lost her youngest brother Albert Ilett on the Western Front in 1918. She was sent Matthew's effects of £2 5s 4d and a final £3 in 1919.

Maurice Victor BROWN

Born	4th February 1897
Killed in Action or Died	27th June 1916 age 19
Commemorated	Pier & Face 1C & 2A Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France.
Unit	8 th Battalion Suffolk Regiment,
Rank	Private, Service Number 14611
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

Maurice's father Arthur Brown (1864 Isleham) was one of the many Great Eastern Railway workers living in Ely, and on the censuses is shown as a shunter (1901). He lived with his wife Fanny (nee Parr, 1862 Isleham) and their children at 80, Archery Cottage, Fieldside, Ely. Maurice was the Browns' fifth child, his older siblings being James (1884), Mary (1890), George (1891) and Harold (1895), while a younger brother, Frank, was born in 1905.

The 1901 Census shows the family at Fieldside with Maurice's older brother James having also begun work with GER as a telegraph messenger. That same year Maurice was enrolled in Market Street Infants School.

By 1911 Arthur had been promoted to a head shunter and his son George had joined him at GER as a goods porter. It is probable that the younger boys would also look for employment on the railways, but at the time of the census they were too young; Harold was working as an errand boy and Maurice as a "milk boy".

In the Great War Maurice Brown fought with the Suffolks: Maurice and the 8th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment reached Boulogne on 25th July 1915. He was killed in action in the enormous exchange of shellfire which took place for a week at the end of June 1916 as a preliminary to a British attack on the German line, as this was when his dugout was struck by a shell and he was buried beneath it.

When his parents received the notification of his death it carried the right regimental number but wrong surname, and it was only when the official casualty lists were published that they were certain Maurice was gone.

Maurice died four days before the commencement of the main Battle of the Somme and is commemorated with other missing soldiers of this battle on the Thiepval Memorial.

Maurice is remembered on the Ely Market Place Memorial and the Memorial in St Mary's Church.

Arthur was sent his son's effects, which amounted to £4 8s 3d with a further £8 in 1919.

Sydney James BUTCHER

Born	1890
Killed in Action or Died	22nd January 1916 age 26
Buried	Grave A. 16. 23, St. Sever Cemetery, Rouen, Seine-Maritime, France
Unit	76th Sanitary Section, Royal Army Medical Corps
Rank	Private, Service Number 54348
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

Sydney James Butcher was one of the youngest children of Jonathan Butcher (1852 Littleport) and his wife Hannah Brewster (1852 Ely). The children were all born in Ely: Florence (1878); Edith (1879); Beatrice (1881); Anne (1882); (Judith) Minnie (1884); (Ernest) Jack (1887); Sydney (1890); and Gladys (1895).

In the 1891 Census Jonathan is shown as a coachman and the family was living on Fore Hill, Ely. Ten years later the family (which then consisted of the parents and four youngest children) can be found living on Waterside; Minnie was working as a shop assistant and Jack as an errand boy, while the two youngest children were of course still at school.

The family scattered, with Jack emigrating to Saskatchewan in Canada, Edith, Beatrice and Annie working in London and Florence in Mansfield. Sydney found employment as a tobacconist's assistant in the Ely shop owned by Mr Brunning for some time, although by 1911 was working in Nottingham as a tobacconist's assistant and boarding with the Stamp family at 68 Waterway Street. Back in Ely Sydney's family continued living in Waterside and his father was still working as a coachman, while Judith was a drapery manageress at the Co-op Stores and Gladys was an apprentice in a "fancy toy shop".

On 27th March 1915 Sydney attested with the Royal Army Medical Corps. His service record is badly damaged, but enough remains for us to know that Sydney was 5 feet 4 inches tall and weighed 102 lbs. After training Sydney sailed from Southampton to Le Havre on 5th October 1915 to join the 76th Sanitary Section of the RAMC which was then attached to the 12th Infantry Brigade. Sydney's own health suffered in France; within a fortnight of his arrival he was hospitalised with diarrhoea, then two days before Christmas he was again admitted to hospital with enteritis and diarrhoea. After a third hospitalisation for the same cause, the decision was made to return Sydney to England, but he died as the result of a epileptic fit early in the morning of the 22nd January 1916 on the hospital ship St George when it was still in Rouen harbour. It was assumed that the fit had been brought on by earlier shell-concussion. He was buried in Rouen.

After Sydney's death his parents moved into "The Limes", Market Place, Ely. They arranged for Sydney to be commemorated on the Memorial in Holy Trinity Church as well as on Ely's Market Place Memorial.

Walter BUTCHER

Born	1892
Killed in Action or Died	16th August 1917 age 26
Buried	Grave XXXIX. A. 8, Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Unit	2 nd Battalion Middlesex Regiment (Duke of Cambridge's Own)
Rank	Private, Service Number TF.203353
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

Walter Butcher was the youngest son of Philip Butcher (1866 Oxlade, Little Downham, Cambridgeshire) and his wife Frances Jane Kemp (1866 Hale Fen, Littleport). Walter was born at One Hundred Foot Bank, Welney, Norfolk in 1892 and his siblings were Frederic (1887 Welney), Nellie (1888 Welney), (Robert) James (1890 Caves Farm, Littleport) and Gladys (1897 Welney). Philip was an agricultural labourer.

In 1901 the Butchers were living in Hale Fen, Littleport, and by this time both Walter and Frederic were working as farm hands. By 1911 the family was living and farming on their own account at "The Limes," Prickwillow Rd., Ely; this was a farm of forty acres. Philip was assisted by Frederic, who was working as the farm's cowman, and Walter who was undertaking general farm work.

Walter was called up in March of 1916. His father took his son's case to the Ely Urban Tribunal three times, arguing that Walter was the farm's milkman, ploughman and yardman and necessary to keep the farm running. After several short term exemptions Walter was finally instructed by the Tribunal to enlist on 7th September 1916.

Walter enlisted on 22nd January 1917 for war service at Bury St Edmunds in the Middlesex Regiment. He reached France with the 8th Battalion on 12th June 1917 and a fortnight later was transferred into the 2nd Battalion. On 16th August they were in the trenches south of Glencorse Wood on a rather quiet day, but by the time they marched back to Dickebusch the following evening Walter was reported as missing. Although the Middlesex Regiment was not in the thick of the fighting, the Allies had attacked along a nine-mile front north of the Ypres-Menin road, crossing the Steenbeek River, and capturing all their objectives. The British forces took Langemarck itself, and established positions half a mile beyond on the high ground north of the Menin Road. However, the Germans succeeded in pressing back the British from the ground won early in the day and by the end of the fighting Walter Butcher of Prickwillow was just one of the many hundreds of British dead. He is commemorated on both the Ely and Prickwillow memorials.

Frances was her son's legatee; she received £1 16s 1d and a final £3 in 1919.

George BUTLER

Born	1894
Killed in Action or Died	1st July 1916 age 22
Commemorated	Pier & Face 1C & 2A, Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France
Unit	11th Battalion Suffolk Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 15948
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

George Butler and his family were farm labourers who were originally from Lakenheath in Suffolk. The family consisted of parents George (1863) and Eliza (nee Peachey 1864) and children Hannah (1882), John (1887), Mary (1889), Sarah (1892), **George** (1894), and Ethel (1906).

In both the 1901 and 1911 Censuses the family appears living and working as farm labourers at Mile End Drove, Shippea Hill near Prickwillow.

On 6th November 1914 a bugle band from the Suffolk Regiment appeared at Ely Fair as part of their recruitment campaign. As a result, with a number of other Ely men, George Butler enlisted in the 11th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment. The Battalion reached the Western Front on 9th January 1916. He was one of several Ely soldiers who died on 1st July 1916 on the attack in the direction of La Boisselle on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, when the Allies attacked along a 25 mile front and lost over 18,700 men. George is commemorated with the other missing of this conflict on the Thiepval Memorial and, back home, on both the Ely and Prickwillow memorials. He was also listed on the Roll of Honour in St Etheldreda's Church in Queen Adelaide—this church is now a private dwelling.

George's mother Eliza died in the County Lunatic Asylum at Fulbourn in September 1916, about ten weeks after the loss of her son. Were the two deaths linked? In fact the family did not receive confirmation that George was killed, rather than missing in action, until the following Spring.

George's father was sent his effects of £6 18s 8d and a final £7 in 1919.