

William “Billy” (Owen) SMITH

Born	1877
Killed in Action or Died	28th March 1918, age 41
Buried	Grave IV. A. 21., Anzin-St Aubin British Cemetery Pas de Calais, France
Unit	1st/1st (Highland) Heavy Battery., Royal Garrison Artillery
Rank	Gunner, Service Number 163881
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

William Smith's father was Owen Smith (1848 Wistow, Huntingdonshire) and his mother Sarah Ann Godfrey; William (1877 Ramsey, Huntingdonshire) was the only boy in the family and he had two younger sisters Kate (1879 Ramsey) and Alice (1882 Ramsey). For a reason now unknown, William was buried under the name “Owen William Smith” although on all other records he is clearly shown as William and was known by the family as “Billy”..

Billy's father was the publican of the Black Horse in Great Whyte, Ramsey, Huntingdonshire, with a sideline dealing in turf, and it is here that the family can be found in the 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911 Censuses. In the 1911 Census Owen also describes himself as a small farmer.

Billy remained living with his family in Ramsey until he married Gertrude Annie Sawyer (1887 Ramsey) in 1910, after which he and his wife settled at 10 Lynfield Terrace in Ely. In the 1901 Census Billy described himself as a corn merchants clerk and when he married he was working as a commercial traveller in the corn trade. The newspaper report of his death contains a summary of his employment and career:

“Gunner W. Smith R.G.A., has been killed in action, official notification being received by his widow, who resides at Lynfield Terrace, Ely. Mr Smith, who was highly esteemed, was a prominent member of the Volunteers and the Ely Constitutional Club. He was a native of Ramsey, Hunts. and was with the late Mr Alfred Fuller, the well known corn and seed merchant of that place, and then for a brief period with Messers Boyce and Son, of Ely. He entered the service of Mr W. P. Marshall, of the Mill, Sutton, in 1912. Mr Smith was very well known on Mark Lane and local markets. He was 41 years of age.” (Note: Mark Lane was the London Corn Exchange)

On enlistment Billy had been placed with the Royal Garrison Artillery. The Heavy Batteries of the RGA were equipped with heavy guns (usually 60 pounders) which were capable of sending large calibre high explosive shells in fairly flat trajectory fire. The Heavy Batteries were most often employed in destroying or neutralising the enemy artillery, as well as putting destructive fire down on important sites such as ammunition dumps, stores, roads and railways behind enemy lines— obviously they themselves were also the target of the opposing artillery. Billy was killed on the opening day of the 1918 Battle of Arras; he may have survived his injuries for a short time as he is buried in the graveyard of the 30th and 57th Casualty Clearing Stations on the outskirts of Arras.

Gertrude moved away from Ely, following Billy's death, to Wood Hall, Hemel Hempstead. Billy's name was placed on the Ely Market Place Memorial and the Holy Trinity Memorial, as well as on the Ramsey Memorial. The message Gertrude had placed on his gravestone read “ Peace Perfect Peace”.

Edward Leslie Johnson STOCKDALE

Born	1893
Killed in Action or Died	7th July 1916, age 22
Commemorated	Pier and Face 3 C and 3 D, Thiepval Memorial, Somme, France
Unit	"B" Company, 10 th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers
Rank	Lieutenant
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

Edward Leslie Johnson Stockdale (1893 Little Downham) was the eldest of the two sons of William Edward Stockdale (1865 Leverington, Cambridgeshire) and his wife Rose Ellen Granger (1866 Ely). His younger brother was Francis Holland G. Stockdale (1896 Little Downham).

William Stockdale farmed Tower Farm in Little Downham, where his sons were born, although later he moved the family's home into a house he called "Tower View" on Cambridge Road, Ely. William Stockdale was well known in the area as a breeder of horses and in 1910 exhibited his horse "Ludboro Royal" at the annual shire and hackney stallions parade at Ely. He was also an important local figure as he was an elected member of the Isle of Ely County Council representing Little Downham, as well as being on Ely Board of Guardians (overseeing the Union workhouse and local poor relief), on Ely Rural Council (especially for local sanitation and drainage), and on the Isle of Ely Education Committee. He was also Ely's lay representative on the Ely Diocesan Conference (now known as Diocesan Synod).

The young Stockdales were first taught at home by a governess who was Miss Cicely Shelton (1879 Worcester). Edward was then sent to a public school, namely Bedford County School in Amptill Road, Bedford (The school closed permanently in 1916 when its buildings were requisitioned for use as a military college.) Edward did not spend his whole school career in Bedfordshire as he was later moved to the King's School in Ely.

From King's School Edward went on to King's College in the University of London, where he achieved a B.Sc. (Hons) in Chemistry in 1914. While at King's College he was also a member of the University of London Officers' Training Corps. On completing his degree he was employed as an assistant in the laboratories of London County Council in the Public Health Department. He was for a short time in the Headquarters' Laboratory at 2 Savoy Hill, and was afterwards engaged on the chemical and bacteriological examination of the water of the River Thames at the Southern Outfall Laboratory, Crossness.

At the outbreak of war, having fully qualified for a commission after two years' service with the University of London O.T.C., Edward promptly offered his services, and early in September 1914 he received a commission as Second Lieutenant and was posted to a new service battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers. He was promoted to Lieutenant in July 1915 and went to the Front with his regiment the same month. At about the same time he wrote to his family about how he had his puttees blown off his legs by a shell.

Edward's family was also involved in war work; his father, beside his normal committee duties, was on the Tribunal for Ely Rural District and the Tribunal for Ely Urban which heard the appeals for exemption from National Service from 1916 onwards, while his mother was on the Ely Urban Food Control Committee. Edward's younger brother Francis was commissioned into the Cambridgeshire Regiment and at the time Edward went to the Front was actually part of a recruiting team touring Cambridgeshire and holding "smoking concerts" to attract volunteers.

After a year at the Front Edward was reported as missing in action and for some time his family hoped that he had been captured and was a prisoner of war. It was six weeks before his parents received the telegram confirming his death, which is now known to have occurred in the Battle of the

Somme at the Quadrangle Support Trench, Contalmaison. A letter received from a brother officer stated: *"After leading his company in two charges on the morning of Friday, 7th July, it was necessary for him to order a withdrawal of 100 yards. He remained till the last in the position gained and alone was covering the retirement of his men with his revolver against the assaulting enemy when he was seen to fall wounded."* Another correspondent wrote: *"I gather from the men he was last seen most gallantly holding back a mass of the enemy to allow his men to gain apposition of safety. A bullet then hit him and he fell, and was last seen crawling into a crump hole. (i.e. a bomb crater),"*

The London County Council Staff Gazette marked his passing with the words: *'He has sacrificed a life full of promise, and his supreme act of devotion will be cherished as a lasting memory.'*

Edward's body was not recovered and so he is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. In Ely he is commemorated on the Market Place Memorial, the memorial in St Mary's Church and in the King's School, as well as on the nearby Little Downham Memorial. In addition he appears on the Bedford County School Memorial (now in Elstow Church), the Memorial in King's College Chapel in London, and on the University of London's Officers Training Corps Roll of War Service. He is also included in the memorial book known as the "London County Council Record of Service in the Great War 1914–18".



Edward left £441 1s 8d in his will; probate was granted to his mother Rose.

Frank LeFevre STRAPPS

Born	8th November 1888
Killed in Action or Died	28th March 1917, age 28
Buried	Grave XI. C. 16A., Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Poperinge, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Unit	1 st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 326498
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

John Strapps (1856) was originally from Bicker in Lincolnshire and his wife Maria Jane LeFevre (1866) from Canterbury in Kent, but they met and married in Yarmouth, Norfolk, and then settled in Ely, where John had been working as a telegraph clerk before their marriage. In Ely five children were born, of whom **Frank Lefevre Strapps** (1888) was the eldest. The rest of the family were Edgar Frederick (1891), Harold Marshall (1897-1903), Kartherine Dorothea (1898) and Phyllis Marjorie (1905).

Frank was born in the family home in Chapel Street, Ely, in 1888; in the following 1891 Census his father describes himself as working for the "Civil Service Postal Telegraph". On 3rd July 1893 Frank began his education at Ely's Market Street Infants School.

On 29th September 1897 the Strapps returned to St Nicholas Church, Great Yarmouth, where they had originally married, to celebrate Frank's baptism; unusually, they had waited until Frank was eight years old, rather than baptising him as an infant.

By 1901 the family were in Clare Terrace off Nutholt Lane and in the 1911 Census they were in Cambridge Road. Despite the fact that he was then only fifty-four, John Strapps described himself as "retired" in the latter census.

Frank entered Needhams School in Ely in 1895 and 1905-1907 was a pupil teacher. After taking the required examinations he went to teach at St Peter's School in Wisbech as an uncertified assistant teacher. In 1911 Frank he was lodging in the boarding house run by Miss Elizabeth Grimmer at 15 Lower Hill Street, Wisbech. His brother Edgar had followed his father into the service of the Post Office and was working in Sudbury in Suffolk.

On 7th September 1914 Frank returned to Ely to teach at Needhams School once more. It was recorded that as a teacher he "always took a great interest in his scholars". During this time he became a prominent member of the local Liberal Club and won the club's billiards handicap cup.

Frank volunteered for the Cambridgeshire Regiment (3rd Battalion), originally with the service number 3871. His enlistment appears in the local news column of the Ely Standard of 4th June 1915. Although a number of former Needhams pupils were already in the Forces, Frank appears to be the first of the teaching staff to have volunteered.



Frank fought with the 1st Battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment and was seriously wounded on the Ypres Salient. He was working the field telephone in a signals office which had been set up in a ruined building which was shelled—several men were in and around the building when the shell came through the roof, but Frank was the only one seriously hurt with shrapnel in the left shoulder (which also broke his collar bone) and right knee. He remained conscious. He was carried back behind the lines to the casualty clearing station at Poperinge where he died of his wounds the following day.

One of his fellow soldiers wrote to Frank's parents "he was very popular

with us all". The letter also contained the information that in the army Frank was called "Felix" by his fellow soldiers.

Frank's effects were sent to his father John and amounted to £2 1s 6d with a further £8 10s in 1919.

Frank's tombstone bears the simple message chosen by his mother, "Not Forgotten". He is commemorated on the Ely Market Place Memorial and in St Mary's Church.

Sidney STRAWSON

Born	1895
Killed in Action or Died	31st July 1917, age 22
Buried	Grave XIII. F. 20., New Irish Farm Cemetery, Ieper, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Unit	"D" Company, 1 st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 326369
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

The Strawsons were an Ely family consisting of father William (1854) and mother Rachel (nee Cross 1856) with children Herbert (1876), Beatrice (1881), Clara (1884), George (1885), Abel (1888), **Sidney** (1895) and Harry (1899).

William was at various times a farm worker or a general labourer, and the family can be found living in Fieldside, Ely, in the Censuses of 1891, 1901 and 1911. Once William was too old to work he and Rachel were fortunate enough to be given a place in the Thomas Parson Almshouses in St Mary's Street.

Most of the Strawson young people gradually left Ely, but Sidney himself became a local farm worker at Orwell Pits. In the 1911 Census Sidney was living with his parents in Fieldside, as was Harry, who was still at school. Herbert was in Kensington, London, working as a carman and raising a family. George was a gardener at Woodhouse Hall, Holbeck, Nottinghamshire. Abel had enlisted in the Suffolk Regiment and in 1911 was serving in Egypt. Clara was in service in Cambridge, while Beatrice had married farm worker George Seeley and was living in Bury St Edmunds.

Sidney enlisted at Cambridge in April 1915, alongside his name in the local newspaper's Roll of Honour are several other Ely men, including Harry Knowles who also did not survive the conflict. Sidney's original service number was 3653. Sidney and his fellow volunteers reached France on 28th September 1915.



The Cambridge Daily News 31st August 1917 summarises Sidney's war: *"Pte. S. Strawson, Cambs. Regt., son of Mrs Strawson, Fieldside, Ely, was killed in action on July 31st, official notification to this effect reaching Ely last week. He joined in May, 1915, and had only been out at the front a few months when he was invalided home with trench fever and concussion of the brain. He was in hospital at Cardiff, and subsequently went to Tring. Later he returned to Ely, working for Mr Chambers of Orwell Pits, for a few weeks during harvest. He returned to France in September. Mrs Strawson has two other sons in the Army—Pte. Abel Strawson, now doing duty in Ireland, who was in the battle and retreat from Mons, and another son in the Flying corps."*

Sidney's death occurred as the Cambridgeshires attacked the German front line at Mouse Trap Farm at Hill 19. Visibility was hampered by fog and the battalion advanced in a hail of shrapnel and bullets with very little support from their own artillery. When they withdrew at the end of the day the battalion had lost, killed or wounded, 16 of its 19 officers and 286 of 451 men—including Sidney. Alfred Wayman of Ely died in the same action.

Sidney's younger brother Harry was working for Mr Chambers of Orwell Pits, as Sidney had been before he enlisted. Just before Sidney was killed Mr Chambers attempted to have Harry exempted from war service, but was only given a deferral. Harry would have had to attest just a couple of days after he heard of Sidney's death.

The brother mentioned in the newspaper article as being in the Royal Flying Corps was Herbert who was invalided out in May 1916.

Sidney's effects were sent to his mother Rachel and consisted of £4 1s 2d with a further £10 in 1919.

He is commemorated on the Ely Market Place Memorial and the Memorial in St Mary's Church.

George SUTTON

Born	1884
Killed in Action or Died	3rd December 1916, age 32
Buried	Grave VII. D. 18., Duhallow Advanced Dressing Station Cemetery, Ieper, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium
Unit	1 st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment
Rank	Private, Service Number 2633
Awards	1914-15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal

The Sutton family lived at Queen Adelaide. The father of the family, Alfred Sutton (1844) was a signalman for Great Eastern Railways and they lived at Thistle Corner near Adelaide Bridge in 1891, so it is possible that Alfred actually worked in the Adelaide signal box. The mother of the family was Elizabeth Ann Cross (1846 Clayway) and the children were Sarah Ann (1868), Margaret (1872), Alice (1876), Alfred (1878), Hannah (1881), **George** (1885) and Florence (1887).

By the 1901 Census Alfred and Elizabeth had moved to Mill Road, Ely, and Alfred was working as a carpenter; only the two youngest children, George himself and "Florrie", were with their parents. Although George was then sixteen and had left school, he does not appear to have been in work at this point. The following year (1902) George's mother Elizabeth died, and father Alfred died in October 1909 in the family's then home in Silver Street.

George continued to live in the family home at 7 the Range, Silver Street, Ely with his sister Hannah and her husband James Brown (1885 Ely) who was a GER signalman. James and Hannah had a young family, consisting of Arthur (1907), Florence (1910) and Maurice (1916).

George worked as a carter in a flour mill, although he later found what was probably a rather cleaner job working for the Lamb Hotel as the conductor on their bus.

George was one of the very first men to volunteer (perhaps even the first) at a meeting in Ely Public Room. He fought with the 1st Battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment. In October 1915 it was George who wrote back to Ely with news of the death of his comrade Leonard Benton, who also appears on the Ely Memorial. George would have been part of the Battle of St Eloi and the various engagements along the Ancre, however, when the end came, in the Elverdinghe area near Ypres, it was not in battle, as the newspaper report which follows shows.

Cambridge Independent Press 15th December 1916:

"Pte. G. Sutton, Cambs. Regiment, is reported to have been killed in action. According to a letter from one of his comrades, Pte. T. Oakman, Parade Lane, he and three others were killed by a shell whilst on duty in the officers' cook house. Pte. Sutton enlisted soon after the outbreak of war, and had been out in France for about two years. He was formerly conductor of the Lamb bus, residing with his sister, Mrs Brown, in the Range, Silver Street, Ely." George also had a "young lady" (fiancée?) waiting for him in Cambridge.

George's effects were divided amongst his sisters Hannah, Alice (Mrs Benton), Florence (Mrs Newman) and his brother Alfred, who each received 17s 1d. Alfred later received £9 10s in 1919.



George is remembered on the Ely Market Place Memorial and the Holy Trinity Memorial. He was also listed on the Roll of Honour in St Etheldreda's Church in Queen Adelaide—this church is now a private dwelling.

Edward Henry SYKES and Fred SYKES

The Sykes brothers both died at Arras, just two months apart

Born <i>Edward</i>	1891
Killed in Action or Died	16th April 1917, age 28
Buried	Grave I. A. 17 ., Heninel-Croisilles Road Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France
Unit	20 th Battalion Royal Fusiliers
Rank	Private, Service Number G/35375
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

Born <i>Fred</i>	1889
Killed in Action or Died	18th June 1917, age 28
Commemorated	Bay 4, Arras Memorial, Pas de Calais, France
Unit	2 nd Battalion Suffolk Regiment
Rank	Lance Corporal, Service Number 9236
Awards	British War Medal and Victory Medal

Edward Henry Sykes (1866 Ely) and his wife Catherine Nora Hill (1865 Ely) had four sons and lost two of them in the War. The children of the family were all born in Ely, namely **Fred** (1889), **Edward Henry** (1891), Alfred Richard (1894), Annie Ethel (1896) and Nathan Seymour (1900). Edward senior had a poultry business. In 1901 the family lived in Gaol Lane in Ely and by 1911 were at 2 Barton Road.

At the time of the 1911 Census Edward was still living with his family in Barton Road and working as a grocer's assistant for Mr Ernest Dingle of Market Street. Ernest's brother Alfred was then working as a grocer's warehouseman and this may have been in the same establishment. Fred was working with his father in the poultry business, but he had married Rose Long (1890 Ely) and the couple had their own home at 10 Parade Lane. Fred and Rose's only child, Evelyn, was born in late 1911.

In 1915 Edward volunteered to serve with the Royal Fusiliers and then a few weeks later married his sweetheart, Sophia Seymour (1890 Terrington St Clement, Norfolk), before he went away to the War. He had only been at the Front for a few weeks when he was hit in the right side by a sniper in November 1916. He served with the 1st Battalion and then the 20th Battalion and would have been part of the First Battle of the Scarpe, and the Second Battle of the Scarpe, before being killed in action on the Hindenburg Line.

Cambridge Daily News 14th May 1917:

"Mrs Sykes, Lynn Road, Ely, has received news that her husband, Pte. E.H. Sykes, of the Royal Fusiliers, is reported to be missing.Pte. Sykes, who was employed at Mr E. Dingle's establishment for several years, was highly esteemed. He joined the Army in April 1915, and had been in France for about ten months. News was also received on Monday from the War Office that a brother of Mrs Sykes—Pte. R.L. Seymour, of the Norfolks, serving in Egypt—was wounded in action on April 19th."

Like many of the families whose menfolk were reported as missing, for a period Sophia hoped that Edward had been captured and imprisoned by the Germans, but it was a false hope.

Edward's friend, Private Partridge wrote to Sophia: "*He was always cheerful in whatever danger we might be and it has hurt me to lose him. We were together two hours before the attack going up the line with rations. The attack came on the Monday morning at three o'clock.*"

Fred Sykes enlisted in August 1914 and was wounded twice, the first time on 1st October when he was buried as result of shell fire and sustained injuries to his back, chest and head, and the second time on November 16th 1916 when he had a gunshot wound to his left hand. The third time Fred was not so lucky—he was killed in action near Arras just over two months after his brother. At this point he was in the Suffolks' Machine Gun Corps and was hit by a shell when helping to remove a badly injured fellow gunner from behind the guns. His officer called him "*about the best sergeant in the battery*". At the time of his death the Germans were attempting to retake Hook Trench on Infantry Hill which the Suffolks had taken a few days before.

Edward's effects amounted to £1 5s 9d which was granted to Sophia, with a further £3 10s in 1919. Rose was sent Fred's effects of £2 7s 9d with £13 10s in 1919.

In 1919 Edward's widow Sophia married Percy Murfitt.

Edward and Fred are remembered together on the Ely Market Place Memorial and the Memorial in St Mary's Church.



Fred Sykes