

WALMLEY VILLAGE WAR MEMORIAL



Photo by Eileen Donohoe 1

Who were these men and where are they buried?

by Jackie Sheppard

WALMLEY VILLAGE WAR MEMORIAL

How many times do we walk past war memorials without even seeing them? How often have the residents of Walmley ever paused by their own war memorial and thought about the sacrifice made by the men named on it or to wonder how their loss impacted on their families, friends and the village itself?

A short time spent online soon unearths a wealth of information that makes these men a little more real and helps to put the current restrictions placed on us by the coronavirus into a little more perspective. The men who are named were aged between 18 and 34 and the average age of death in conflicts was just under 25. Their families were left behind with only memories to sustain them, often in full knowledge that their son/husband/brother had suffered greatly before he lost his life; one unlucky family lost two sons in the First World War. The impact of the community can't be underestimated, a fact underlined by the knowledge that a number of those listed were old boys from Bishop Vesey Grammar School which meant that the losses would clearly have been felt across the whole of Sutton Coldfield. The following timelines shows when the deaths occurred, often appearing in clusters.

World War One – Walmley fatalities	
Month	Casualties
May-15	William Powis
Jun-15	John Brown
Jul-15	
Aug-15	
Sep-15	
Oct-15	
Nov-15	
Dec-15	
Jan-16	
Feb-16	
Mar-16	
Apr-16	
May-16	
Jun-16	
Jul-16	Bertie Teasdale
Aug-16	George Eagles
Sep-16	George Reynolds
Oct-16	
Nov-16	
Dec-16	
Jan-17	
Feb-17	
Mar-17	
Apr-17	Percy Inchley
May-17	Christopher Bowers, Richard Angell and Edwin Knight
Jun-17	
Jul-17	Victor Kelley and Harry Powis
Aug-17	
Sep-17	James Adcock
Oct-17	
Nov-17	Henry Forge
Dec-17	
Jan-18	
Feb-18	
Mar-18	William Johnson
Apr-18	Zachariah Dale
May-18	Bernard Colyer
Jun-18	
Jul-18	James Slater
Aug-18	
Sep-18	
Oct-18	Ernest Havell
Nov-18	Alfred Bower and Raymond Woodward
1920	Frank Warwood

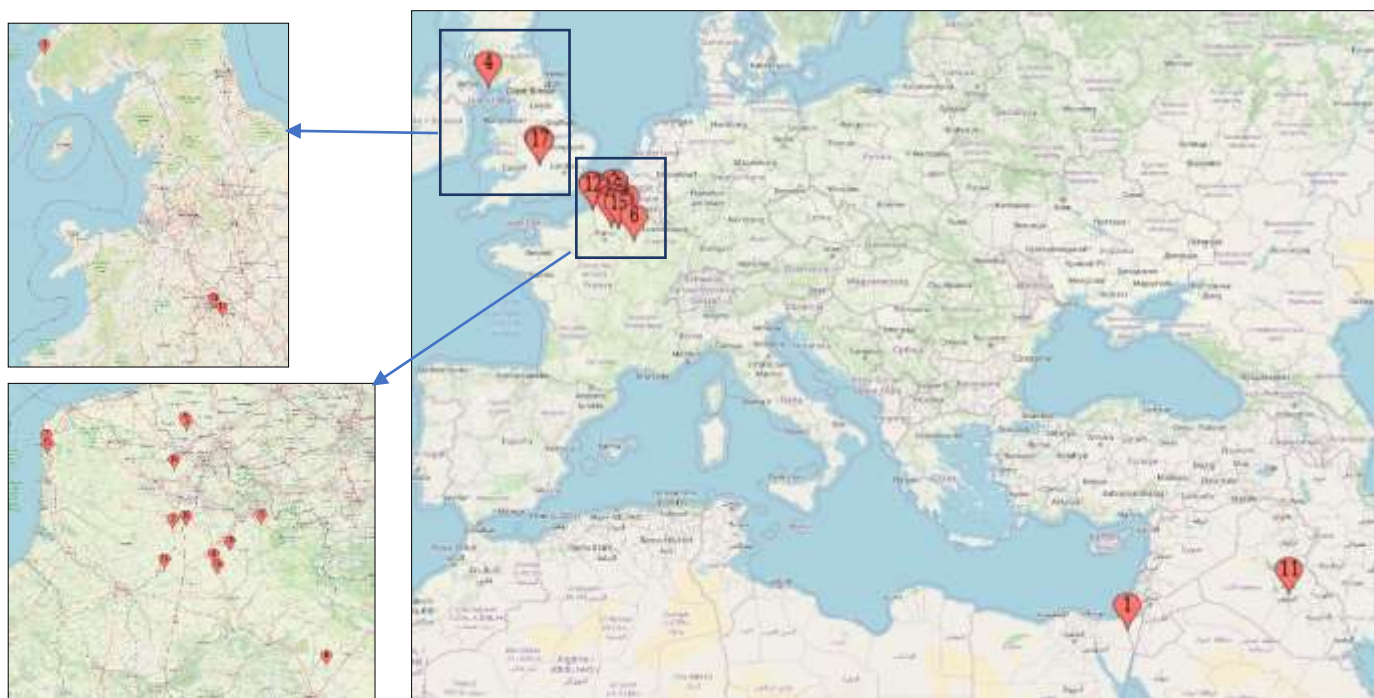
World War Two – Walmley fatalities	
Month	Casualties
Sep-39	Sydney John Gibbins
Oct-39	
Nov-39	
Dec-39	
Jan-40	
Feb-40	
Mar-40	
Apr-40	
May-40	
Jun-40	
Jul-40	
Aug-40	
Sep-40	
Oct-40	
Nov-40	
Dec-40	
Jan-41	
Feb-41	
Mar-41	
Apr-41	Edmund James Green
May-41	
Jun-41	
Jul-41	
Aug-41	
Sep-41	Frederick Teasdale
Oct-41	
Nov-41	
Dec-41	
Jan-42	
Feb-42	
Mar-42	
Apr-42	Norman Henry Timmis
May-42	
Jun-42	
Jul-42	
Aug-42	
Sep-42	
Oct-42	
Nov-42	
Dec-42	
Jan-43	
Feb-43	
Mar-43	
Apr-43	
May-43	Patrick Loftus Hunter Lawley
Jun-43	
Jul-43	John Platt
Aug-43	
Sep-43	Alfred Leslie King and Joseph Busby
Oct-43	
Nov-43	
Dec-43	
Jan-44	
Feb-44	Walter Harold Beere
Mar-44	Cyril Alfred Weeks

The impact on Walmley of losing so many sons in the summer of 1917 and spring of 1918 would have been huge – everyone would surely have known at least one of the casualties. For the families of the men who lost their lives in October and November 1918, when it was already evident that the Allies had won the war but before the armistice was signed, the loss must have seemed even more poignant. Two families were particularly unfortunate: Powis family lost two sons in WWI while the Teasdale family lost Bertie in WWI and his nephew Thomas in WWII.

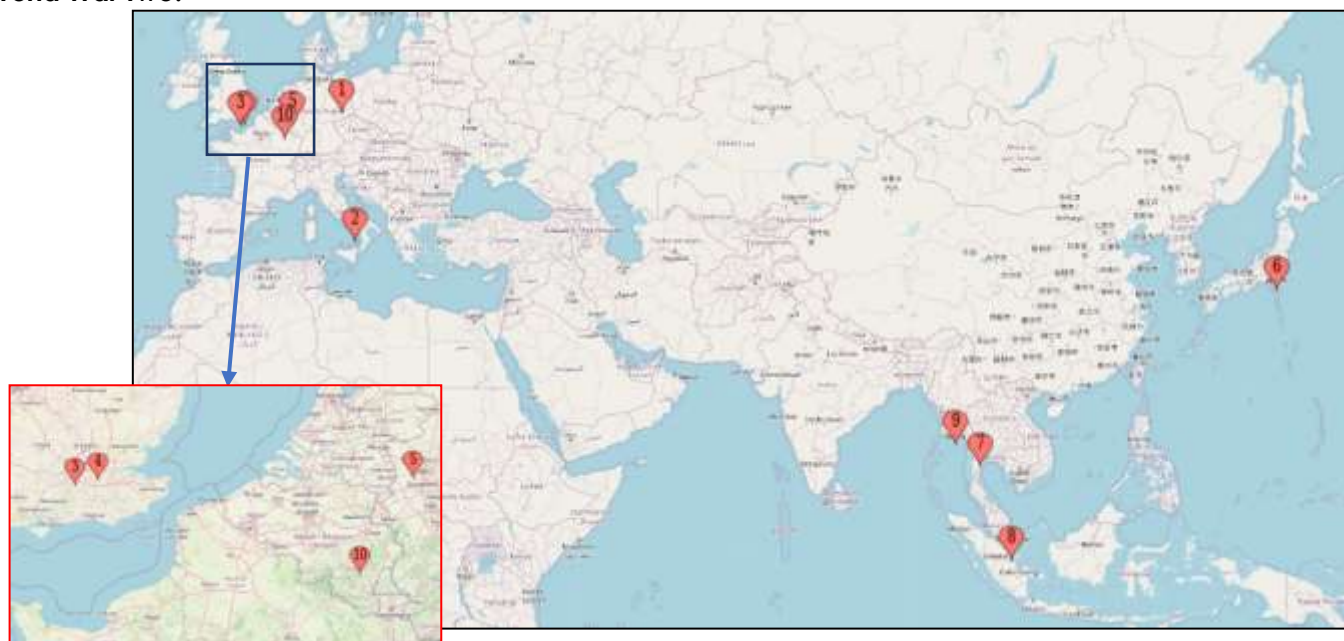
With only a few exceptions the bodies of the men listed on the Walmley Memorial never made it home and were instead interred in Commonwealth War Cemeteries around the world. In some instances their bodies weren't identified and those men have no known grave but are commemorated by name on memorials which are also maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Should anyone wish to visit the graves of the men listed on the memorial they need to plan a lengthy trip. Of the identified graves/memorials you would need to visit 26 sites to see all the graves as only three sites commemorate more than one of the men from Walmley. The graves are scattered around the world and while those from WWI are limited to Europe and the Middle East the casualties from WWII have a global reach. The maps that follow show the locations of the graves and are followed by a list of the men and their resting places.

World War One:



World War Two:



WORLD WAR ONE					
Casualty	Served with	Died	Age	Location of grave/memorial	Map reference for grave
James Owen Adcock	Norfolk Regiment	27 September 1917	40	Gaza War Cemetery	1
Richard Sidney Angell	Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry	3 May 1917	21	Arras Memorial	2
Alfred Percy Bower	Somerset Light Infantry	1 November 1918	25	Preseau Communal Cemetery Extension, France	3
Christopher William Henry Bowers	Royal Flying Corps	1 May 1917	23	Girvan (Douane) Cemetery, Ayrshire	4
John Raymond Brown	Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry	22 June 1915	20	Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium	5
Bernard Charles Colyer	Royal Garrison Artillery	12 May 1918	23	Aire Communal Cemetery France	6
Zachariah Dale	Royal Field Artillery	15 April 1918	31	Wimereux Communal Cemetery, France	7
George Hubert Eagles	Rifle Brigade	8 August 1916	24	Essex Farm Cemetery, Belgium	8
Henry Noel Francis Forge	Bedfordshire Regiment	20 November 1917	19	Villers-Plouich Communal Cemetery, France	9
Ernest Hubert Havell	Royal Berkshire Regiment	6 October 1918	18	Brown's Copse Cemetery, Rouex, France	10
Percy Clifford Inchley	Royal Marine Light Infantry	28 April 1917	27	Arras Memorial, France	2
William Herbert M Johnson	Army Service Corps	14 March 1918	31	Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery, Iraq	11
Edwin Dennis Knight	Royal Field Artillery	4 May 1917	20	Boulogne Eastern Cemetery, France	12
Victor James Kelley	The King's (Liverpool Regiment) 10 th Battalion	8 July 1917	19	St John Churchyard Walmley	13
William Henry Powis	9 th (Queen's Royal) Lancers	24 May 1915	34	Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium	5
Harry Powis	Lincolnshire Regiment	29 July 1917	22	Essex Farm Cemetery, Belgium	8
George Henry Reynolds	Coldstream Guards	25 September 1916	27	Thiepval Memorial, France	14
James Henry Slater	Worcestershire Regiment	29 September 1918	unknown	Pigeon Ravine Cemetery, Epehy, France	15
Bertie Leonard Teasdale	Royal Warwickshire Regiment	19 July 1916	21	Royal Irish Rifles Graveyard, Laventie, France	16
Frank Warwood		1920	24	Died Meriden, Warwickshire	17
Raymond Woodward	Northamptonshire Regiment	5 November 1918	28	Awolingt British Cemetery, France	18

WORLD WAR TWO					
Casualty	Served with	Died	Age	Location of grave/memorial	Map reference for grave
Walter Harold Beere	RAF Volunteer Reserve	15 February 1944	23	Berlin War Cemetery	1
Joseph William Busby	Hampshire Regiment	17 September 1943	33	Salerno War Cemetery, Italy	2
Sydney John Gibbins	RAF	17 September 1939	26	Runnymede Memorial	3
Edmund James Green	Merchant Navy	20 May 1941	20	Tower Hill Memorial	4
Alfred Leslie King	RAF Volunteer Reserve	6 September 1943	21	Rheinberg War Cemetery, Germany	5
Patrick Loftus Hunter Lawley	RAF	2 May 1943	22	Yokohama War Cemetery, Japan	6
G McLean	Not established	Not established		Not established	n/a
John Platt	Royal Artillery, Anti-Tank Regiment	22 July 1943	30	Chungkai War Cemetery, Thailand	7
Frederick Teasdale	RAF	20 September 1941	20	Singapore Memorial, Singapore	8
Norman Henry Timmis	Royal Armoured Corps Warwickshire Yeomanry	16 April 1942	25	Rangoon Memorial, Myanmar	9
Cyril Alfred Weeks	RAF Volunteer Reserve	27 March 1944	21	Hotton War Cemetery, Belgium	10
OTHER CONFLICTS					
Casualty	Served with	Died	Age	Location of grave/memorial	
David John Bald	Royal Logistics Corps	14 May 1996	24	Died in Bosnia, buried in Coleshill	

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission commemorates war casualties who died after the end of conflict (the official war periods for the two world wars are: 4 August 1914 to 31 August 1921 and 3 September 1939 to 31 December 1947). These apparent 'extensions' to the war allowed men like Frank Warwood to be named despite his death not occurring until 1920 because his death was attributed to his war service.

Frank Warwood was awarded the Silver War Badge following his discharge from the army on 16 July 1918 owing to tuberculosis. While his death occurred in Meriden, it is believed that this was in some sort of military hospital and he had previously lived in Walmley with his family which was listed at Emily Cottages, Walmley Ash on the 1911 census.

Clearly, while the men listed must have had a link with Walmley it isn't always easy to identify what their relationship with the village was and while "G McLean" is named on the Memorial efforts to identify which of the many G McLean/MacLeans listed on the CWGC records is him and to link him to Walmley has proved very difficult.

Comprehensive additional information about the men of Walmley who died in the First World War can be located online on the Royal Sutton Coldfield Great War Project at <http://www.sutton-coldfield.net/memorial/war%20memorial.html> and a visit is highly recommended.

George Eagles died in action in France in WWI at just 24. His life does not appear to have been a settled one, with his family moving around the country and his father being less than a regular presence. He is known to have attended Bishop Vesey Grammar School but was compelled to leave when his mother could no longer pay the fees, writing to the school, 'My Husband deserted me shortly before Xmas, and I was forced at short notice to come and make my home in London, with my eldest son. I am quite unable to pay the fees and I think it would be better for you to try and find my Husband and apply to him.' [History of Bishop Vesey School by Kerry Osbourne].

One particularly horrifying case from Second World War is that of **Edmund Green** who died aged just 20. At time of the 1939 Register of England and Wales his parents were living at 321 Eachelhurst Road so we can only wonder what inspired a man from the Midlands to join the Merchant Navy, but that is what Edmund did. On 20 May 1941 Edmund was aboard the MV Darlington Court, a British cargo vessel en route from New York to Liverpool via Halifax, Nova Scotia. The ship was travelling in Convoy HX-126 and carrying a cargo of wheat and aircraft. The Darlington Court was torpedoed by a German submarine 126 miles off the coast of Greenland and 22 crew, three gunners and three passengers were killed. The Commanding Officer of the escorting Aurania reported: "There were several tremendous explosions, sheets of flame and black smoke, which went up at least 500 feet... The men on the wreckage from the Darlington Court floated into this burning hell, their cries were ghastly and now I wish I had put my machine gun on them".

Sydney Gibbins served with the RAF and was on board HMS Courageous when it was sunk by a U-boat off Ireland in 1939 becoming the first British warship to be sunk by German forces in WW2. HMS Courageous departed Plymouth on the evening of 3 September 1939 for an anti-submarine patrol in the Western Approaches, escorted by four destroyers. On 17 September 1939, she was on patrol off the coast of Ireland when two of her four escorting destroyers were sent to help a merchant ship under attack and all her aircraft had returned from patrols. HMS Courageous was stalked for over two hours by a U-boat but the Germans couldn't get a clear enough target to fire a torpedo but when the carrier turned into the wind to launch her aircraft it was right across the bow of the submarine, which fired three torpedoes. Two of the torpedoes struck the ship on her port side before any aircraft took off, knocking out all electrical power. The ship capsized and sank in 20 minutes with the loss of 519 of her crew, including her captain. The two escorting destroyers counterattacked for four hours, but the submarine escaped. An earlier unsuccessful attack on Ark Royal by U-39 on 14 September, followed by the sinking of Courageous, prompted the Royal Navy to withdraw its carriers from anti-submarine patrols.

Alfred King was onboard a Lancaster Bomber on a night raid when the plane went down with seven men onboard. The cause of the crash was not established. While Alfred's grave is in Rheinberg War Cemetery he is also named on the family memorial in St Johns Churchyard in Walmley.

Frederick Teasdale died aged 20 when his aircraft failed to return from an operational flight near the Chagos Islands (south of the Maldives) in the Pacific on 20 September 1941, leaving him and a further eight men unaccounted for. Frederick is commemorated on column 410 of the Singapore Memorial.

Patrick Lawley had been serving with the RAF's 151 Maintenance Unit when he was captured and died aged 22 in Japanese captivity while being held in a camp near Hakodate, Japan.

Walter Beere was killed when the Halifax bomber he was flying in came down at Buskow during a raid on Berlin.

As we reflect on the sacrifice of the men of Walmley who lost their lives in conflict it is worth remembering the words of Laurence Binyon and perhaps taking a pause by the memorial when we are next in Walmley:

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission not only oversees the recognised war cemeteries but also records graves in churchyards and cemeteries. For those who are interested a visit to the cemetery on Rectory Road is recommended as it houses almost fifty graves recognised by the Commission, each with a fascinating story behind it.