

MISSING IN ACTION

BACK TO THE FRONT

Between 2014 and 2018 “Back to the Front” Project successfully researched the stories of the men and women from Abbots Langley and Bedmond that served during the Great War, over one hundred years ago. By 2018 a total of 667 soldiers, sailors and airmen had been identified and their stories were published in a book entitled “Not Just a List of Names” as part of Abbots Langley’s commemoration of the centenary of the end of the Great War.

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Following publication of the book additional information has come to light. Six new men have been discovered – Arthur Grover, Stanley Kingham, Harry Lasenby, Leonard Lovett, Angus McNab and Charles Travers. From information received after publication of “Not Just a List of names”, the story of Frederick Sharp has been updated, and the stories of Cecil Collins and R.A Smith have been corrected.

LEAVESDEN & LANGLEYBURY SOLDIERS

The “Back to the Front” Project continues to complete the research and write the stories of the men and women from the villages of Leavesden, Langleybury and Hunton Bridge. So far another 600 individuals have been discovered. That number is far more than originally anticipated and these new stories will be published in due course.

“BACK TO THE FRONT” ARCHIVE NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

At the end of the Great War Centenary commemoration in 2018 the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) appointed Queens University Belfast (QUB) to assemble a digital archive containing the records of all HLF funded Great War projects for the benefit of future generations. All of the records of the “Back to the Front” Project have been deposited with QUB and are progressively being added to the University’s WW1 Community Platform at <http://ww1digitalportal.org.uk/>.

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Project Leader
Back to the Front Project

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Cecil William Collings
Private
7th Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment
#266649
Killed in Action

Cecil Collins was listed in the Absent Voter Records for Abbots Langley in Autumn 1918, Spring 1919 and Autumn 1919. He was initially identified from the Absent Voter Records and was not recorded elsewhere in the Abbots Langley Parish records. In the Absent Voter Records Alfred was listed serving with the 7th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment, and his address was given at Nash Mills, Abbots Langley. No further information was identified for this man, and the conclusion was that Cecil Collins survived the War, and he was recorded as Cecil William Collins.

However, an enquiry from the Herts at War Project showed that their research had discovered a soldier from Nash Mills, Hemel Hempstead named Cecil Williams Collings (with a "g") that had the same service details, and asked if this was the same man? They added that Collings was not included on any of the War Memorials in Hemel Hempstead.

Collins and Collings were the same man, and although Cecil Collins had been reported surviving the War, Cecil Collings was Killed in Action on 24 April 1918, and was recorded in the CWGC and Soldiers Died in the Great War records.

Cecil Collings was born in 1899 at Wheathampstead, and at the time of the 1901 Census he was living with his father (John) mother (Florence) and brother at Nash Mills. Cecil enlisted at Hertford, and the Soldiers Died in the Great War database shows that at the time of enlistment was living in Hemel Hempstead.

After a period behind the lines in billets the 7th Bedfordshire's were in action at Villers Bretonneux, to the east of Amiens on the Somme battlefield. Together with the Royal West Kent's and Australian troops the battalion was ordered to counter attack at 10pm. After a period of fierce fighting the Bedfordshire's were relieved twenty-four hours later, having taken 200 prisoners, but had lost 13 men killed, 105 wounded and 70 missing. It is presumed that Cecil was one of those "missing", as he continued to be recorded in the Absent Voter Records for Abbots Langley through to Autumn 1919, and this may have been because this death had not been confirmed.

The Register of Soldiers' Effects indicated that his effects were not authorised to be transferred to his mother Florence until 6th December 1919, with a pencilled note "Death accepted". This information would suggest that he had been missing and was eventually presumed dead, and by December 1919 the local War Memorials had largely been constructed, hence he was not remembered on the Hemel Hempstead Memorial.

Cecil Collins or Collings is not recorded in any other Abbots Langley records, but was recorded three times in the Absent Voter records for Abbots Langley, and hence qualifies for inclusion in the local records.

Cecil Collings is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial on the Somme battlefield.

Arthur Henry Grover
Lance Corporal
#1507
Herts Yeomanry
Lieutenant
RAF
Survived

Arthur Henry Grover, also known as Henry Arthur Grover, was discovered in 2019 during further research into the Barnes family. His mother, Kate Barnes married Henry Grover, a Scaffold Builder's Labourer and at the time of the 1901 Census the family lived at 25 Acme Road, Watford. Arthur was born on 4th February 1892 at Abbots Langley. He was the eldest of five children born to Henry and Kate between 1892 and 1901. Sadly two of his brothers and his sister all died in childhood.

In the 1911 Census the family was recorded living at the same address in Watford. Arthur worked as a Box Maker, whilst his mother, Kate, was not recorded living at the family home, having taken up a job as a Nurse for Edward Challis, a Grocer, and his wife Kate at 88 Leavesden Road, Watford.

Unfortunately Arthur's Service Record has not survived, but his Medal Card showed that he was a Territorial soldier, serving with the Hertfordshire Yeomanry when war broke out in August 1914. He sailed to Egypt with the Herts Yeomanry on 5th November 1914.

At some point Arthur joined the Royal Flying Corps and by the end of the War had achieved the rank of Lieutenant with the RAF.

Arthur Grover survived the War.

Stanley Percy Kingham

Private

#36588 & 52074

9th Battalion Norfolk Regiment & 4th Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment

Survived

Although recorded as Percy Stanley Kingham, Stanley or "Stan" as he became to be known was discovered as an Abbots Langley soldier in June 2020 from family records found in the extensive online archives of the Bedfordshire Regiment at www.bedfordshireregiment.org.uk.

Stanley was born in Abbots Langley on 11th November 1899. He was the fourth of five children born to William and Elizabeth Kingham. At the time of the 1901 Census the family lived at Railway Terrace, Abbots Langley, and William worked as a Card Edge Gilder at a Paper Factory. By 1911 the family had moved to Rucklers Lane in Kings Langley. William continued to work as a Card Edge Gilder., and Stanley's two elder brothers and his elder sister all worked for a Paper manufacturer, which is presumed to be John Dickinson's.

The family records indicate that Stanley reached conscription age in November 1917 and started training in December of that year, and served with the rank of Private with the Norfolk Regiment. The British Army suffered heavy losses during the German Spring Offensive in March 1918 and Stanley was drafted to the Front in May 1918 and was posted to the 4th Bedfordshire's on arrival. He served with the 4th Bedfordshire's through the final intensive battles of the War. The entry for Stanley, in the National Roll of the Great War 1914-18, noted that he fought at the Somme and Ypres, and was gassed. After the Armistice, in November 1918 Stanley served with the Army of Occupation in Germany, and spent time at Cologne. When the British Army of the Rhine was disbanded, Stan was demobilised in April 1920 and returned to Kings Langley to work with the family business W.G Kingham.

Harry Lasenby
Driver
#4106
Royal Engineers
Survived

Harry Lasenby was discovered in 2019 during further research into the Barnes family. His mother, Mary Elizabeth Barnes married Harry Lasenby, a Carman from Hemel Hempstead. Harry (junior) was born in 1882 at Abbots Langley, and was the first of eight children born to Harry (senior) and Mary Elizabeth. At the time of the 1891 Census the family lived at 78 Lotherton Road, Watford, but by 1901 had moved to Brighton, where Harry (senior) was employed as an Electrical Engineer. Harry was living at the family home and worked as a Carman, following in his father's foot-steps. In the 1911 Census the family was registered at 22 Robert Street, Brighton. Harry (senior) worked as an Electric Light Engineer and was assisted by his son Jack, whilst Harry (junior) who was still living at the family home plied his trade as a Cab Driver.

When War broke out Harry (junior) was serving as a Territorial soldier. On 12th September 1915, when he was living at 60 Jubilee Street, Brighton, and still working as a Cab Driver, he signed up for Overseas Service with the Territorials, and was embodied as a Driver with the Royal Engineers. When Territorial soldiers enlisted they were not committed to serve overseas, and for War Service they were asked to voluntarily sign up to serve overseas.

Harry's Service Record noted that he was assigned to the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, but does not indicate if he was sent to that theatre of war. On 5th May 1916 he was appointed Paid Lance Corporal, and on 28th April 1917 appointed to the rank of Corporal. His Record continues to show that he was sent to France on 3rd December 1918, but does not give any further details about his service there.

He was demobilised at Crystal Palace on 25th June 1919 and returned to 84 Trafalgar Street, Brighton, from the France and Flanders.

Harry Lasenby survived the War. His brother James (Jim) enlisted in February 1917 with the Royal Sussex Regiment and served In the Field from December 1917 until he was also demobilised to 84 Trafalgar Street almost a year later in March 1920. James does not qualify to be included in the Abbots Langley "Back to the Front" Project, having been born, and lived in Brighton.

Angus MacNab M.B., Ch.B., F.R.C.S.

Captain

**Royal Army Medical Corps (attached to 1/14th (County of London) Battalion,
London Regiment (London Scottish))**

Aged 39

Killed in Action

1st November 1914

Angus MacNab was identified when the Leavesden Hospital War Memorial was discovered at the Watford Museum in 2019, and for that reason is included in the Back to the Front Project records for soldiers with a local connection that served in the Great War. It is not known what association he had had with the Hospital either before or during the Great War, or any other connection to the area.

The 14th (County of London) London Scottish battalion marched from their London HQ in early August 1914, and camped at Garston Manor, close to the Asylum. MacNab joined them on 15th September. The London Scottish remained at Garston until 16th September when they were sent to France, and disembarked on 16th September 1914. The battalion was the first Territorial unit to see action in the War and arrived at Ypres on 29th October having been transported by a fleet of thirty-four London buses. Soon the battalion was urgently called into the Front Line near Messines to stem the German advance near Hun's farm. Facing overwhelming numbers the Scots took heavy casualties and eventually withdrew, having lost 394 of their 700 officers and men. During this action Angus MacNab was killed in action. An eye-witness stated that "Dr MacNab was bayoneted in the neck whilst bending down attending two wounded men. The two wounded men were also bayoneted. It was bright moonlight and he had a white badge and a Red Cross on his arm, and was unarmed".

Angus MacNab was born on 31 August 1875 at Invercargill, New Zealand and later graduated in medicine at both Otago and Edinburgh universities, between 1895 and 1901. After graduating, he studied ophthalmology at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London. After a period in Freiberg and Vienna he became the Clinical Assistant in the Ophthalmic Department of Charing Cross Hospital, and Ophthalmic Surgeon at the King Edward VII Hospital Windsor. He was also in practice in Harley Street. When War was declared MacNab was a Territorial soldier serving as a Medical Officer attached to the London Scottish.

He married Evelyn Calder on 27th January 1904 and the couple had two children, and in the 1911 Census the family lived in West London. It is not known what association he had with the Leavesden Hospital. It is most likely that he had not practiced there prior to the War, but maybe he had friends or colleagues from earlier periods in his medical training who were working as doctors at the Asylum. Whilst he was camped at Garston Manor he could easily visit the Hospital, which was about half a mile away. MacNab was based at Garston Manor for only four weeks before the London Scottish left for France, but must have had made enough of an impression to be remembered and added to the Hospital War Memorial at the end of the War.

Angus MacNab's body was not recovered from the battlefield, and he was commemorated on the Menin Gate at Ypres.

Frederick Sharp
Private
49th Labour Company, Labour Corps
#387621
Survived

Frederick Sharp was not recorded in the Abbots Langley Parish records. He was discovered from a photograph in the Watford Illustrated newspaper on 4th September 1915, which showed five men from Gallows Hill Cottages. Frederick was pictured alongside his brother James.

Frederick was born in the winter of 1897 at Leighton Buzzard. He was one of eight children (four sons and four daughters) born to Thomas and Eliza Sharp. His brother James also served in the Great War.

At the time of the 1891 Census the family lived at Plantation Road, Leighton Buzzard, and Thomas worked as a Plate Layer on the railways. The family was recorded in the 1901 Census living at Breakspeare Terrace, Breakspeare Road, Abbots Langley, and Thomas continued to work on the railways as a Plate Layer.

Frederick was mentioned in the Langleybury Parish Magazine in June 1916 and February 1917. At the end of the War when the Langleybury Roll of Honour was compiled, he was included, and shown serving with the rank of Private with a Labour Battalion.

Frederick was listed in the Absent Voter Records for Langleybury for Autumn 1918 and Spring 1919. On both occasions he was shown serving with the rank of Private, with the 49th Labour Company, Labour Corps, and his address was given at Gallows Hill.

Frederick Sharp survived the War, as did his brother James.

Reginald Smith
Private
5th Battalion Oxford & Bucks Light Infantry
#33614
Killed in Action 23rd March 1918

Reginald was born in 1898 at Wokingham and was baptised on 27th November 1898 at St James, Barkham, Berkshire. His parents Jesse and Ellen had married at Barkham on 27th October 1894. The family was recorded in the 1901 and 1911 Census still living at Barkham. Ellen died in 1911 and Jesse remarried on 25th January 1913 (Fanny Skittles).

When he enlisted, his Medal Roll indicated that he joined the Royal Berkshire Regiment, but aged 19 he was Killed in Action on 23rd March 1918 whilst serving with the 5th Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. He was recorded "Killed in Action" in the Leavesden Parish Magazine in June 1918, where it was noted that he had worked as a Labourer at the Leavesden Asylum.

The German Army mounted a massive Spring Offensive on 21st March 1918, and under cover of thick fog and a tremendous artillery barrage of high explosive and gas shells made significant inroads into the British defences around the town of St Quentin in France. Many British units were caught in the onslaught and on that day the 5th Ox & Bucks took around 180 casualties trying to hold the line near the village of Flavy le Martel, to the south west of St Quentin. In the face of the German advance the 5th Ox & Bucks fell back and suffered further casualties in the next few days as they retreated. Robert was Killed in Action during this retreat on 23rd March when the Battalion was near the village of Guiscard.

He was not included on the Abbots Langley or Leavesden War Memorials, however he was commemorated on the Leavesden Hospital War Memorial. Reginald was buried at the Grand Seraucourt British Cemetery to the south-west of St Quentin in France.

Correction

This man was previously incorrectly named Robert A Smith in the Back to the Front Project records. When the long lost Leavesden Hospital War Memorial was discovered by the Leavesden Hospital History Association in 2019 it was confirmed that this man's name was Reginald Smith. This is a corrected version of Reginald's story which had previously appeared in the Abbots Langley & Bedmond volume of "Not Just a List of Names" listed as Robert A Smith.

Charles Batson Travers
Sergeant
Transport Section
49th Battalion (Edmonton) Alberta Regiment
432973
Survived



Charles Travers was born on 5th February 1882 at Notley Croft, Bedmond. He was the sixth child born to John and Susan Travers. The couple eventually had fourteen children including ten sons and four daughters. John Travers was employed by Thomas Mercer of St Albans and worked as a Chronometer Finisher. Between 1892 and 1893 the family moved to Islington, London. In 1903 Charles emigrated to Canada along with his brother Alfred. He moved to the Westaskiwin area of Alberta, where he met up with two other brothers, Oliver and Sidney, and eventually two more brothers and a sister arrived from England. In 1906 Charles filed for land at High Prairie, Alberta, and was employed as a Forest Ranger.

After War was declared Charles and his older brother Oliver enlisted with the 49th Battalion (Edmonton) Alberta Regiment and departed from Edmonton on 29th May 1915. The 49th arrived on the Western Front in October 1915 after a short spell of training in England, and served at Mount Sorrell (Ypres) in 1915; at the Battles of Flers/Courcelette and the Ancre Heights on the Somme in 1916; at Third Ypres and Passchendaele in 1917; and at the Battle of Amiens and in many engagements during the Last Hundred Days campaign in 1918.

Oliver Travers, who had previous military experience from serving in the Boer War had risen to the rank of Captain Quarter Master, and was killed in action on 29th October 1917 during the Battle of Passchendaele. Charles gained the rank of Sergeant in the Transport Section of the 49th Battalion and survived the War. He returned to High Prairie, and in 1926 married his widowed sister in law, Anna (Oliver's wife). During the War Anna had moved to High Prairie to secure a better education for her children. When Charles returned he continued in employment with the Department of Forestry.