

ABSENT VOTERS

When the 1918 electoral register was compiled, a note was made of those men who were still away from home on active service in the armed forces. There were 26 of these from Dorney, and 20 of these had still not returned by the time of the 1919 electoral register. These numbers illustrate that the impact of the First World War in Dorney was not limited to those households that lost members to the conflict. In such a small village, the absence of so many men for such long periods would have been keenly felt. In November 1918, many mothers, wives, children and sweethearts were still waiting for their loved ones to return.

The men came from a variety of backgrounds and occupations and served in different ranks in a wide range of units. Many were farm workers and the Army made good use of their familiarity with horses, which were an important motive power on the battlefield just as in agriculture. Those men who had been regular soldiers or the Territorials before the war, or those who enlisted in the autumn of 1914, were absent for a particularly lengthy time.



Seven of the men were registered in Lake End. Vine Cottage in Ashford Lane was home to Mary Blackford. Her husband Edward was born near Wantage and as a young man served in the Royal Berks Regiment as a regular soldier. It was perhaps in South Africa during the Boer War that he met Mary's brother Richard Newell, a regular soldier in the East Surrey Regiment. After that conflict, Richard returned to his home village of Dorney where he worked as a gardener's labourer, and

Edward too came to Dorney, doing similar work. He married Mary in 1908 and they had two daughters before the war began. Although Edward was by then 50 years old, his previous military experience must have been valuable and the 1918 register shows him in the Army Service Corps. Meanwhile Mary's son by an earlier relationship, Frederick Newell, was only 17 when he enlisted as a gunner in the Royal Artillery in 1913. In the Royal Field Artillery, he found himself immediately involved in the war, sent to fight in France in August 1914. Wounded in 1915 and again in 1918, he like Edward had not returned home by 1919. The war years must have been a particularly worrying time for Mary with both her husband and son away in the army. Thankfully both returned home safely to Lake End.

Another anxious mother nearby was Lois Shirley, whose parents lived at End Cottage. Her son John had trained as an instrument maker before joining the Royal Navy as an electrician in 1910 at the age of 22. For much of the war, he was assigned to HMS St George. This ship was a cruiser that had been converted to a supply ship and during the later years of the war was used to supply submarines. John would have been in the Aegean with the 2nd Submarine Flotilla in 1918-19. He too came home safely but continued in naval service, absent more often than not from his mother's cottage in Lake End.

Robert Blake came from Eton Wick but in August 1915, when he joined the Royal Engineers, he was working at Lake End Farm. Aged 22, he was "*very anxious to be doing something*", like many young men who were keen to play their part in the war effort. By the end of the month he had landed in France where he worked as a pioneer. As the war dragged on, army service perhaps became less attractive, and Robert was punished a few times for minor incidences of absence without leave - including overstaying home leave by one day in October 1918 - and insolence to an NCO. He was finally demobilised in April 1919.

In Wheeler's Cottage in Lake End lived Percy Holdway from Slough. He was living with his sister Emily who married William Shrimpton, the wheelwright who had followed his father in business at the cottage. Percy had various jobs including working on farms before the war, when he then became a private in the Middx Regiment. He was safely back in Lake End by 1919 and resumed farm work.

Three of the eleven houses in Dorney Reach were waiting for men to return in 1918. Essex and Leonard, the two sons of Arthur and Annie Birch at Rippledene, had both joined the Royal Navy. Their ships were still actively involved in the war effort, one in the Mediterranean and the other the English Channel. Soon after their return, the family moved to the new Taplow Station Estate. Like many other returning veterans, Essex and Leonard had difficulty finding work in their previous occupations of fitter/turner and motor repairer, and both were unemployed in 1921.

Herbert Cope was an engineer who was probably in the Territorials before the war. By the end of it he was a captain in the Royal Engineers. His unit was involved in installing searchlights to defend the coast and to detect enemy attack on the front in France. Herbert and his wife Maud moved to rent The Mead during the war and, when that house was sold in November 1918, they rented Island Close. Herbert was away throughout this time, so the responsibility of moving must have fallen largely on Maud.

The third family was the Wordleys at Dorney Reach House. Henry Wordley's daughter Winifred married Frank Garraway, a lieutenant in the London Regiment, in May 1914. After he was sent to France, his wife and baby son lived with her parents and sisters. By the end of the war Frank had been promoted to major and awarded the Military Cross.

Fifteen of the absent men were recorded in Dorney village or the common. The most senior ranking of all was Major Piers North at Northfield. A career officer, he served in the Royal Berkshire Regiment during the Boer War and later became a King's Messenger. In 1915, he was appointed to the Royal Marines and fought in France and in Gallipoli where he was wounded. The following year he was given command of the 20th Battalion Durham Light Infantry as acting lieutenant-colonel. During the battle of Ypres in August 1917, he was severely wounded again, in the chest and back, and was awarded the DSO for the way he led the attack under heavy fire.

Daniel Pusey from Lent Rise was a gardener like his father. He was 27 when he enlisted in December 1914, married for 5 years to Annie and with 4 small children. He rose to sergeant in the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry and spent much of the war in the Balkans. At least from 1918, the family was living on Dorney Common, where Daniel returned in March 1919. But the war had left him in poor health. As well as having had malaria, he was 100% disabled by TB. By May 1922, the Army awarded him a disability pension and he was in a sanatorium, where he died in June 1924.

The Quarterman household in Vine Cottage on the common was awaiting the return of three members. Daughter Alice, a laundress like her mother, had married George Austin in 1917. One-time groom to Captain Palmer, he was a corporal in the Lancers, awarded the Military Medal for service in France in 1918. Alice's two younger brothers were also away. Arthur had enlisted at Taplow in September 1914 as a driver in the Army Service Corps, serving in France and Italy. Frederick was a private in the Gloucestershire Regiment, also in France. All three men returned home, though Arthur was still suffering the effects of being kicked by a horse while on duty and received a disability payment. His leave records

show that his mother would have seen him only twice, briefly, in the four years he was abroad.



In the village, it must have seemed as though every other cottage was waiting for a soldier or sailor to return. At the post office, Emma Grove's eldest son William was serving with the Durham Light Infantry. Arthur Tugwood, son of George gatekeeper to Dorney Common, was in the Army Service Corps. Arthur had married neighbour Florence Jacobs in 1916; her younger brother Bert was invalided out of the army the previous year after being wounded. At 3 Woodbine Cottages, the Bampton family was missing son Arthur. Their older son James had been invalided out in May 1915 after service in the Royal Fusiliers left him with a pronounced limp (battle of Mons) and an amputated index finger (Ypres). Agnes Cox in Walter's Cottage with four children was waiting for her husband Albert, on HMS Lucia, a captured German ship converted into a depot ship supplying submarines off the Tees.

Emma, the daughter of James Watson, coachman at Dorney Court Lodge, had married Frank Ford, a corporal-of-horse in the Life Guards, in July 1915. As a regular soldier, he had been sent to France in August 1914 and was wounded at Ypres in May 1915. He returned in 1919 to start a family.

Village blacksmiths Albert and Thomas Climo were both away serving as farrier sergeants. Aged 50 by 1919, Albert was already married with a family; Thomas married around the time he was released from the army in March 1919.

One family suffered not just the prolonged absence of their men but the pain that some of them were never coming home. This was the Poolmans. Albert and Percy, two of the sons of shepherd William Poolman and his wife Mary, lost their lives in 1918 and are commemorated on the memorial in Dorney church. Meanwhile, their older brother George and his stepson John Webb were still away, leaving wife and mother Annie Poolman with four children to look after. John was only 16 when he enlisted in November 1914. As a driver in the Royal Field Artillery, he suffered two bouts of malaria in Salonika.

These are just some illustrations of the effects of the war on Dorney families. There were others who likewise left our village to serve their country but whose stories remain to be told. Thankfully, the men recorded as absent voters in 1918 and 1919 did eventually come back and most resumed their pre-war occupations. This year on Remembrance Day, let us remember the sacrifice of these soldiers and sailors who played their part in fighting to protect their country for future generations.

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