

Many of you will have attended the annual Remembrance Day service at St Lawrence Parish Church and heard the names of those on the WW1 memorial read out. In a small village like Bovingdon some of you may have heard the name of one or more relatives. Most of the congregation would not have any obvious connection with them. However, it is inconceivable that you would not have wanted to know who they were or how they came to their end in the service of the country.

With the rise of the internet it has been made easier to obtain a brief description of both the individual's links with Bovingdon, their service career and how they met their end. A project to collect this information and to make it available to anyone interested is well underway.

How the Memorial was created has not yet been discovered. It has thirty names on it. Curiously, it has one name less than the memorial in the Memorial Hall. However, neither of them are comprehensive as six more individuals (with Bovingdon connections) have been identified who fought and died in WW1. All thirty seven names are being investigated.

In this context thirty seven is a surprisingly large number. The 1911 Census shows that Bovingdon had nearly eleven hundred residents. At that time the boundaries extended down Box Lane and encompassed Bourne End. In round terms, ten per cent of those enlisted were killed and a further twenty per cent injured. On the face of it, this implies that three hundred and seventy residents would have seen action and over seventy residents would have returned having been injured. By no means were all the service personnel male but the overwhelmingly majority were. That three hundred and seventy saw service out of a male population of around five hundred and fifty requires some explanation.

The answer lies in the criterion of the inclusion of the names. Whilst most of the names were from solid Bovingdon families (eg Burgin, Ryder et. al) some were from those that came to live in Bovingdon after the War. Thomas Hatfield Evans had emigrated to Australia in 1913 but volunteered at the start of the war. He was recommended for a VC at Gallipoli where he died trying to rescue comrades. He almost certainly did not visit Bovingdon but his widowed mother came to live in Honor Mead after the war and she would naturally have wanted her son to have been remembered. And he is. Major Meyer Griffith spent most of his adult life in Sierra Leone and may never have been to Bovingdon. His is a particularly moving story and his mother, having moved to Bovingdon, would also have wanted his name remembered locally. And he is.

The naming policy was (quite rightly) inclusive and some names have very little direct connection with Bovingdon. None-the-less, all of them had relatives in Bovingdon and it mattered to them that these people were remembered in the Church.

The war had left few families untouched. The Ryder family of Westbrook Hay lost a son as did the vicar (Rev Arthur Brooking) who was married to a Ryder, the Deans and Dodgsons (distant relatives of Lewis Carroll) lost two members of the family and the Marriots lost three.

Most of the people served in the Army but the Royal Navy and the Royal Flying Corp are also represented.

Despite the fact that more than half of the WW1 service records were destroyed by enemy action in WW2 enough remain to provide a meaningful profile of their brief lives. They gave their lives in Palestine, Iraq, Turkey, Sierra Leone, Belgium and France as well as at sea. Their stories deserve to be remembered in this centenary of the outbreak of WW1.

When the results are published, take time to read them and reflect. You should also look out for an opportunity to visit their graves or memorials. It is a rewarding experience.

Dick West