

Manningtree, Mistley & Lawford memorials: The first month of the War

Despite prominent positions war memorials often go un-noticed by busy locals and visitors passing by. Car drivers rarely give more than a passing glance even when the edifice stands guard in the centre of a traffic island. They have been though part of our landscape for many years and the centenary has provoked interest in these ancient monuments, with people looking more closely at the names carved as witness to the sacrifice of a distant generation. The attention of local parish councils over the years means most names can still be read, but often the people are long forgotten. So the Manningtree Museum & Local History Group along with Manningtree and District Royal British Legion set out to find these lost stories to ensure they are recorded as part of our local history, assisted by those families who have passed on memories down the generations.

It was some while after the end of the war before the movement to set up local 'memorials' came about. There were often long debates as to who should take the lead and what form they should take. One typical discussion was whether to go for a new Memorial Village Hall, playing field or other 'useful' notion, rather than a monument. The aim was to remember for all time both the 'War' and the men that died, a plan that has clearly worked.

There are three main memorials in Manningtree, Mistley and Lawford, with other Church plaques, including one in the old Mistley Primitive Methodist Church where seven names were unveiled on the 9th April 1920. The old Xylonite factory in Brantham listed over 400 employees who went to war, with thirteen from the Manningtree & Mistley area never destined to return to work. EDME's maltings gave £100 to help fund the Mistley Memorial, with at least eleven local men lost from the Malting trade.

On the Manningtree memorial 47 names are listed, Mistley 60, including two men returning home only to die after hostilities ceased. Lawford lists 79 men who served and 8 lost. A loss of this magnitude, even spread over four years, would have had a real impact, bringing the war home to those living locally. Everyone would have known someone who died, encountering relatives on a daily basis; Mothers at the shops who had lost sons, bereaved fathers encountered at the factory or pub. By the end of the war there were thirteen widows, dependent on a government pension to support often very young families. At local schools, the children may not have understood the cause but would have felt the emotions surrounding their 18 school mates whose lives changed forever. The last paternal memory was going to be the day they kissed their fathers goodbye.

For Ever England. Whilst it has become usual during the recent Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts for fallen personnel to be brought home for burial, during the First World War this was only rarely done. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission was set up to record and care for locally constructed cemeteries, both in France and other theatres of war. By 1918 it had identified 587,000 graves with a further 559,000 casualties having no known burial place, including many of the local men. This left families with no grave to focus their emotions around, receiving just a letter and perhaps after the war some small effects returned to them. Some families

lost more than one son, one local family shop keepers and lost twins within weeks of each other.

'If I should die, think only this of me; That there's some corner of a foreign field That is for ever England' (Rupert Brooke. 1887–1915).

August 1914. Having had a good deal of coverage, the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the war has now passed. On television it seems distant, but in early August 1914 Manningtree Town would have been buzzing with military activity as men were hastily called up, kitted out and waved off to France to stop the German invasion of Belgium and northern France. Two of these local men never came back, killed in the first month of the war; here is their family's story.

The middle of August would have been one of mixed emotions for Walter Garrad, and his large family living in Brook Street, a well known incline, formally called 'Back Hill'. Having lost his wife Elizabeth a few years before, he was now bringing up the four children still at home with support from a live-in housekeeper, Minnie, allowing him to keep his job as a labourer at Free's maltings. The family had moved to the town from nearby Little Bromley with his son Amos still working on the land as a stockman. His next son Fredrick Garrad worked at the bakers shop, delivering bread around the town.

Fredrick had already served time in the army, signing up just after his 18th birthday in April 1913 with the Essex Regiment, before being transferred to the Cheshire's in December. At the outbreak of war he was attached to a territorial regiment, the 6th (Cyclist) Suffolk, but was quickly called back to the Cheshire colours. His older brother Walter, named after his father, joined the same regiment. After being called up on the 15th August Fredrick only had a short time to say goodbye to his father and the rest of the family as he was quickly on his way, crossing the channel and arriving at Le Havre the next day. He may well have travelled and served alongside Walter. Their regiment moved up to the French border to take part in the Battle of Mons on the 23rd August. At this point in the war the situation was still fast moving, with German forces sweeping through Belgium, heading toward Paris.

Only 20 years of age, Fredrick was killed in action on the 24th August whilst the British army was withdrawing to new positions to keep in line with French forces. To begin with his fate was not known and he was not formally declared missing until the 19th September, his body was later recovered and buried in Auberchicourt British Cemetery. Later his other brother Amos Garrad sailed off to the Mediterranean with the Essex Regiment's 1st Battalion, dying in Gallipoli. Brother Walter survived the war and returned to father and family in Manningtree.

Arthur Alexander Sage worked as a labourer grinding malt at a local 'grist' mill, whilst living in Mistley High Street with his brothers, two sisters and father James, Mill foreman. As well as his three older brothers, Arthur may well have already done service, the reason he was called up so quickly by the Suffolk Regiment, which landed at French port of Le Havre on the 17th August. As part of the British Expeditionary force, the 2nd Suffolk battalion moved swiftly inland to a position along the canal, alongside Fredrick Garrad, at the Battle of Mons,.

After checking the larger German forces at Mons, the British established another line around Le Cateau, the scene of their second major engagement on the 26th August, with Arthur Sage and the Suffolk regiment very much in the thick of the fighting. The stand of the regiment saw them subject to infantry attack, machine gun and shell fire,

being nearly surrounded and cut off as the day progressed. Along with young Arthur Sage, then only 20 years of age, more than 700 men from the Suffolk regiment were killed, wounded or taken prisoner, before the survivors managed to slip away. Total British casualties at Le Cateau amounted to 7,812 of all ranks, killed, wounded and missing. Arthur's body was never found and his family must have prayed he was one of those taken prisoner, before finally giving up hope when no word came from the International Red Cross. The first list of 128 prisoners only emerged in November 1914, so a time of great uncertainty, with the army usually waiting six months to a year before assuming a 'Missing' soldier was 'presumed dead'. Arthur has no known grave and is commemorated on the La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial. 'Son of James and Alice Sage, of High Street, Mistley'. A memorial to the last stand of the 2nd Battalion was placed on the hill where they fought and died, maintained on behalf of the Suffolk regiment by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

If you have any information on the three memorials please contact Philip Cunningham by email: enquiries@manningtree-museum.org.uk
Thanks to Andy Baker for his research on the Mistley Memorial and those who worked over the years on the various Regimental Histories. Next month the war at sea.