

IN MEMORY OF ALFRED WILLIAM ALLEN

DIED IN ACTION 23 AUGUST 1915

Unknown Harbury address
NO PLAQUE

Alfred was born in Wheatley, Oxfordshire in either 1895 or 1896, one of nine children. By the 1901 census he lived at 1 The Kennels, Stoneleigh in Warwickshire. As the family appeared to have kept moving for work, they were in Baynards Green, Stoke on Lyne, Bicester by 1911.

Alfred, at 15 or 16-years-old, became a farm worker like his father. It seems to have been an itinerant life. His connection to Harbury comes when his parents moved here between 1911 and 1914.

Alfred joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in December 1914, and went to France with the 2nd Battalion. By February 1915, the man so used to travelling had travelled further than he ever had before, leaving the country where he was born.

That year his battalion fought in The Second Battle of Ypres, a major battle where regimental losses between May and September 1915 averaged 300 a day, from snipers and sporadic shellfire. On 23 August 1915 Alfred Allen was killed.

He left his mother £8.6.2. She received it along with £3 - not much compensation for the loss of a son, but a gesture nonetheless. His death was recorded in the Coventry Herald of September 1916. The newspaper notes that his parents received news of his death. They knew he had been killed in action on 23 August, but were only told it was 'somewhere in France'.

The newspaper and his parents mourn him as a 'poor young man'. There is a tangible grief even in those few, sparse words, lost in a newspaper sodden with the taste of war.

He has a grave in Le Touret Military Cemetery, Richebourg L'Avou.

His death has an equality not experienced in his life. Though as a farm labourer he joined at the lowest rank of Private, he is buried in a cemetery of uniformity. Despite protests, the Imperial War Graves Commission resisted the urgings of those families who wished to commission their own headstones for their fallen families. The commission saw that this would only lead to a visible, vast discrepancy between the rich and the poor. When Lord Tyrell, the British Ambassador to France, unveiled the memorial he spoke movingly that here were 'men of every class, every rank from General to Private - all in graves marked, without distinction, by a simple headstone.' It is a monument not only to the fallen dead, but, in its very sparsely, to all those whose lives are not recorded by the history books. Though divided in life, they are equal in death.



Harbury World War 1 Memorial Trail

Remembering the men of Harbury parish who fell during the first world war in service of their country.

