

IN MEMORY OF REUBEN BARFOOT

DIED IN ACTION 22 MAY 1917

Lived at Bendigo Cottage, Bendigo Mitchell Crossroads, Fosse Way (no longer standing)

PLAQUE No. 14

Reuben was born in 1895, to Luke and Mary Anne Barrfoot of Blakendon Nob, a house that stood at the crossing of the Fosse Way below Chesterton Windmill.

A sepia portrait of the couple shows the man with close cropped, stark, prematurely white hair, contrasting with his thick bush of dark moustache. Luke and Mary seem entirely of the Victorian Era, Luke standing stiffly upright, and Mary with looped and coiled hair, wearing a dark, high necked gown. She retained that mane of locks her entire life, though in later age it was bleached as pure as her husband's.

They had two sons, Charles and Reuben, both of whom signed up to fight - Reuben travelling to France on 18 July 1915. An image of the two brothers in uniform highlights both their similarities (dark eyes, dark hair, long faces) and a distinct contrast. Charles has a wider, younger face, eyebrows soft and thick, giving him an almost puppyish look. He seems more innocent than Reuben, whose sharp face, though handsome, suggests a melancholic bent.

Reuben had been a jockey before the war, and signed up in Rugby to the Royal Field Artillery (which later joined the 108 Brigade) to work with horses. His role, as Gunner and Driver, meant that not only did he operate the huge guns the Brigade dragged into battle, but also that he was in control of steering the six horses needed to pull the guns. Horses were vitally important in the war, transporting weaponry, supplies, and soldiers. His family today still have one of his riding crops from the period.

The first casualty the Brigade suffered, during September near Loos, was the loss of its commanding officer, Colonel H T Butcher, who bravely lost his life trying to save some of his wounded men. When the Brigade emerged from the action on 4 October 1915, it was as soldiers who had been involved in one of the most intense military battles of the war so far, veterans used to bloodshed.

Their next notable conflict was their involvement in the battle of the Somme, after which the number of guns per battery were increased from four to six. Reuben lived through, fought in, and witnessed all these conflicts. The 3rd battle of Ypres was his last. This bloody, violent conflict saw the Brigade undertake a series of retreats. On 25 March 1917, a team of horses was hit - and the soldiers had to extract the bodies of three dead horses from the horse team, to free the other three. Casualties mounted as the Brigade fought whilst retreating, until, on 22 May, they were withdrawn. This was the day Reuben died, wounded and dying of his wounds away from the battlefield. He was 23 years old.

He is buried at Querrieu British Cemetery. His family had these words carved into his headstone:

*"In Ever Loving Remembrance from All At Home.
Peace. Perfect Peace."*

Reuben's surname was spelt 'Barfoot' (as on the village war memorials) and 'Barrfoot' (as on his grave, and some papers). His family today use 'Barfoot'.



Harbury World War 1 Memorial Trail

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

