

THE CUBITT CHAPEL, ST. BARNABAS CHURCH, RANMORE

The story of the 'Cubitt Chapel' is remarkable and full of interest. In 2000 Keith Grieves, Reader in History Kingston University, published an article 'Commemorating the Fallen' in Surrey History, the Journal of the Surrey Local History Council. This is a fascinating article, very thoroughly researched with many quotations from contemporary sources. By editing parts of Keith's work, I have attempted to give some idea of the early memorial services which took place in this church when this moving memorial chapel was created.

"On 25 September 1916 a memorial service was held at St Barnabas Church for Capt. Cubitt [Coldstream Guards]. The Surrey Mirror and County Post noted that its simplicity "emphasised the poignant grief of those among whom the young gallant officer, 'Master Harry' as he was known by humble parishioners, had passed his all too brief life". He was 24 years old. The decision of the government not to repatriate the bodies of the fallen led to memorial services which contained elements of the burial service, including hymns, address, catafalque and the Last Post at estate churches.

It was a measure of the community of mourning at Ranmore that the memorial service for this eldest son, for whom a letter of condolence had been received from the King and Queen, was shared with the bereaved relatives of five men who had left the estate to enlist in service battalions of nearby county regiments. The service included the much used hymns 'Onward Christian Soldiers', 'Fight the good fight' and 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow'. A muffled peal of bells preceded the service and the Last Post was sounded by six buglers from the Coldstream Guards.

In 1917 Henry Cubitt, now 2nd Lord Ashcombe, petitioned the Bishop of Winchester to grant permission for the conversion of the south transept into a memorial chapel in 'proud and grateful memory of Henry Archibald Cubitt'. The vestry meeting proposed substantial alterations (which resulted in the chapel as we know it today). Progress was made on the building of the chapel, but by the end of the year Lord Ashcombe received news of the death of his second son, Lt. Alick Cubitt of the 15th The King's Hussars, aged 23.

On 20 December 1917 a large congregation of the household and estate workers gathered at St Barnabas Church for a memorial service. Four months later, on 24 March 1918, 2nd Lt. William Hugh Cubitt of the 1st Royal Dragoons died of wounds received in action during the German spring offensive on the Western Front. He was 21.

In 1919 exhibitions of designs for war memorials were held by traditional arbiters of taste in the decorative arts, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Royal Academy. The exhibitions were intended to remind the public that war memorials in past epochs were usually commissioned by individual patrons which generally ensured that messages were effectively communicated to future generations. Examples of aesthetically appropriate memorials were presented to educate public sensibilities and some were commended in art publications. The Studio [Magazine] devoted space to Frampton's mural painting at Ranmore and observed, 'The war has laid a very heavy toll on the noble families of England, but few of them have suffered so severely as the owner of "Denbies", on the hill overlooking Dorking, in Surrey.'

On 10 June 1919 the memorial chapel was dedicated by the Bishop of Winchester [the Diocese of Guildford was not created until 1927]. At the service the Bishop was attended by the rectors of Ranmore, Mickleham, Little Bookham, Great Bookham and Wotton and Lord Ashcombe (Rector's Warden) and Mr. Dobinson (People's Warden). After the divine blessing Sir John Arkwright's hymn 'O Valiant Hearts', written in the war, was sung. It offered comforting images of Christian chivalry. It was noted at the time that the final three stanzas were very appropriate.

At St Barnabas Church it is clear that a reverent regard for the chapel has long survived the generation which called it into being. If its expression of the idea of sacrifice is unduly sentimental, it needs to be recalled that the dedication service, as a whole, expressed an ardent romanticism and drew on images of nature and nobility to present a tolerable meaning of war." Let us hope that this reverent regard can be maintained for many years to come.

At our Remembrance Service, traditionally on the first Sunday in November, we read out the names of the Ranmore men who “went forth from this parish and fell in the Great War 1914 –1918” Their names are inscribed on the plaque in the nave.

Albert Ansell	William Hugh Cubitt
Benjamin Barnes	George Dawe
Ernest Bradley	Edward Gale
Frederick Buckland	Charles Hull
Percy Caton	Nathaniel Rice
Henry Archibald Cubitt	William Thomas
Alick George Cubitt	Frank Woodman

From World War II we remember Edward George Baker, Pilot Officer RAF, and Kenneth Henry Butcher, CPL RAF, whose grave in the churchyard is an official war grave. He died in an accident in 1944 at the age of 24.

It is a rather sad and sobering thought that now, 90 years on from that dreadful time, we know very little about the men whose memory we honour today. The military careers of the three Cubitt brothers are well documented but we know little of the five men who had left the estate to enlist in service battalions of nearby county regiments. Possibly they served together in what were known as the ‘pals’ battalions.

It is, perhaps, a sad comment on life that so little is recorded about everyday life, possibly for the very reason that life is so ‘everyday’. One wonders about the parts played by the families of these men in the life of the estate and it is also a reality that many of the volunteers were very young and may well not have had time to establish themselves in any sort of trade or profession. If anyone can tell us something about these men it would be good to record it somewhere in the church archives.

We will remember the men who died but we should also remember those who survived the carnage and returned, their lives changed forever.

Some years ago Mr. Ernest Jones who has been researching records of his family (Douse and Bradley) showed me a letter he received in 1981 after advertising for people with memories of the family. Passages from this letter from Mr Ernest R Baker give us an insight into life at Denbies during World War I.

“I did not know her [the late Edith Douse] well but I knew her sisters very well, they were nearer my age. I became rather fond of Ethel, but that came to nothing when she left Ranmore to go into service at Busbridge, a little village outside Godalming, as a nursemaid.

.....I first came to Ranmore with my parents, brothers and sisters in 1910. My father had taken up a post as estate bailiff with the Hon. Henry Cubitt and I became an estate labourer at 15 years of age. We took up residence at West Cottage, the first house at the top of the hill. It was not long before I became a member of the bell ringers and also became a member of the choir. Mr Douse was a regular member of the bell ringers and we were taught how to ring and control a bell. I took great pride in the art and thoroughly enjoyed it.

After about two years I was taken into the stable yard at Denbies. They were changing from horses to motors at the time and I was made bicycle boy and third chauffeur, did the house shopping in Dorking and general runabout. The war came along and there was a big demand for motor drivers. [His second application was successful and he was] sent to take the place of a sick driver in 4th Army Signals. After embarkation leave we hurried off to France..... and I was finally discharged on Wimbledon Common in February 1919. I then went into service with the Hon. Roland Cubitt and stayed with him until 1933.”

Mr. Baker’s anxiety to join up and not be left at home must have been very typical at the time.

Dick Gover – Churchwarden 1997-2005

LEST WE FORGET

Ranmore church is a living reminder of the impact on a small community of the First World War, with the Cubitt Chapel in the South Transept and the memorial plaque in the South Nave bearing poignant testimony to the sacrifices of those years. I have worshipped here for more than sixty years, only yards away from the memorials to my three uncles who were killed in France in 1916, 1917 and 1918.

But, to appreciate fully the horrors of that conflict, it is necessary to visit the battlefields themselves. So, in September, Linda and I travelled to northern France to seek out their graves, having prepared the ground by a good deal of reading of history and family papers.

The War Graves Commission was most efficient in providing us with details from their records and the first shock was to realise that only two of the brothers actually had graves, Alick having simply his name on the mass memorial at Cambrai, he having been killed in 1917 in the battle for Bourlon Wood, which we visited and found eerily reminiscent of Ranmore Common.

Harry's death was most clearly documented and we were able to stand on virtually the exact spot at which he had been shot while "going over the top" in advance of the Guards' Division on 15th September 1916, the first day of the battle of the Somme, where his Colonel (John Campbell), to whom he was Adjutant, won a VC for rallying his troops with a hunting horn. Harry's grave is in a delightfully secluded military cemetery at Carnoy, near Albert, which is maintained to an impeccable standard, as are all the British cemeteries.

Hugh, who died of wounds received in a cavalry charge at Villeselve, near Ham, in the closing months of the war in 1918, is buried in one of a number of British military cemeteries at Noyon, which we also visited. Poignant as these discoveries were, however, the one that affected us most was that my grandfather (Cholmeley not Cubitt) who was killed in 1914 in the Grenadier Guards, has no grave and his name is but one of 13,337 such, inscribed on a massive memorial outside Bethune.

These were all young lives, and it added poignancy to our visit that it should have taken place the very week following the national mourning for another young life [Diana, Princess of Wales]. The Act of Remembrance which is observed in this and other Churches each year at this time reminds us of the sacrifices of those at the front eighty years ago, and of the anguish of those who waited, often in vain, for them at home. Remembrance Sunday will, since that week, never again be quite the same for my wife and me.

Hugh Cubitt, November 1997

If you have attended any of our Remembrance services you may have noticed the silver cross and candlesticks put out in the Cubitt Chapel to mark the occasion. The names "Harry, Alick and Hugh" are inscribed on the branches of the cross but a few years ago the Dorking Decorative & Fine Arts Society church recorders asked for an explanation of the inscription round the base of the cross — "from Pearl, Rolie, Archie and Guy". The names of the three younger Cubitt brothers who survived the war are obvious but who was Pearl? Sir Hugh very kindly furnished the answer.

"Pearl, elder daughter of Major Edward Barrington Crake, was engaged to be married to Captain Henry Archibald Cubitt, eldest son of 3rd Baron Ashcombe, who was killed in action on the Somme on 15 September 1916. She was much beloved in the Cubitt family, especially by Lady Ashcombe, who looked upon her very much as the daughter that she had never had. She married 2nd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu in 1920. He died in 1929 and, in 1936, she married Captain the Hon. Edward Pleydell-Bouverie MVO, RN. She died in 1996 at the age of 101."

Note: In 2007 a member of our congregation, Margaret Maynard, researched the names of the men on the war memorial. This information is available and will be incorporated into another leaflet in due course. Contact:

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NAMES ON THE WAR MEMORIAL

The new leaflet about the Cubitt Memorial Chapel poses an intriguing question: "although the military careers of the three Cubitt brothers are well documented, we know little of the other men we honour today." I thought to try to glean something of the brief lives of these "Other Names", using the Commonwealth War Graves and other military websites, various censuses, and the St Barnabas church registers.

Unsurprisingly, many were the sons of families working on the estate, and served in local regiments, mostly the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) and the East Surrey. Some had been christened at St Barnabas, such as Albert Ansell, a gardener at Denbies mansion, and son of a gardener (John who lived with his wife Jane Priscilla at No 2 Fox Cottages). Ernest Bradley, another gardener, became a private in the Queen's Regiment: he was the youngest child of George the cowman and his wife Ann of Pigden Farm. Ernest married Edith Hurrell in 1912, and left three young children (Ethel, Ernest and Elizabeth) when, aged 36, he was killed on 18 Nov 1916, the last day of the Battle of the Somme.

Frederick Buckland, also in the Queen's, was killed aged 24 on the catastrophic first day of the Battle of the Somme (1 July 1916) when nearly 20,000 British soldiers died. His parents (stockman James and his wife Annie Adelaide) lived in Stoney Rock Cottages. Percy Caton's father was George the house porter. Percy, who fought with the Essex Regiment, was the youngest of seven; his mother Eliza died three months after he was killed in France on 26 April 1918 aged 23. Like Ernest Bradley, Percy has no known grave, but their names are inscribed on memorials to the Missing of the Somme: Ernest among the 72,089 on the Thiepval Memorial, Percy on the Pozieres Memorial (14,647 names).

Edward Gale's parents were Henrietta and Charles (the wheelwright) who lived near Pigden Farm. Edward, a farm labourer, served in the Royal Fusiliers and left a widow Mary Elizabeth when he died near Arras on 27 April 1917 aged 32.

Other soldiers do not seem to have been born on Ranmore; probably they or their parents moved to the estate for work. Frank Woodman, son of gardener Charles and his wife Rose, became a sergeant in the Queen's Regiment. He married Jessie Egan in Dorking Register Office in September 1914, a month after the outbreak of war, and died on 31 July 1918 in France aged 24, leaving a small daughter Margaret.

George Dawe from Hailsham, Sussex, son of Esther and Jabez (carpenter), died in France one week before the Armistice, on 4th November 1918. Nathaniel Rice from Crawley was the youngest son of Eliza and John (a carter), and served in the Hampshire Regiment. He married Lilian Hunt at St Martin's, Dorking, just four months before he was killed on 6 August 1915 during the landings at Suvla north of Anzac. He was only 20. His son John was born posthumously. Nathaniel has no known grave, but his name is among the 20,834 on the Helles Memorial to the Missing of Gallipoli, a tall obelisk that can be seen from ships passing through the Dardanelles. Two others on this memorial are Ranmore names, both with parents living in Peckham: Charles Hull died on the same day as Nathaniel aged 22; Benjamin Barnes, aged 24, died a month earlier on 3 July. Benjamin, Charles and Nathaniel have consecutive service numbers in the Hampshire Regiment, clearly following the tradition of friends enlisting at the same time in a battalion of "pals".

Ernest George Baker, the Second World War casualty, was the son of the estate bailiff and christened in this church in 1910. In 1940 his daughter Christine was also christened here, when Ernest was described as a farmer. He was a pilot officer in the Royal Air Force Volunteers, and died on 11 Jan 1942 aged 32. His name is on the RAF Memorial at Runnymede.

William Thomas has so far eluded me: 73 British men named William Thomas died in the First World War, and an additional 36 are listed as just "W. Thomas"! If you know anything about William, or about any of the other soldiers and their families, Dick Gover or I will be very glad to hear from you.

Like most people here, I have always found it very poignant when the names of the Ranmore dead are

read out during the Remembrance Service; after this exercise, they have become so much more than mere names to me, and I hope that others will feel the same.

Margaret Maynard