

## Musbury Heritage - War Memorial Biographies

It may seem early, but this is the Autumn issue when our thoughts soon turn to those who gave their lives serving in the forces.

Previous articles have spoken about our war dead, but another reminder never goes amiss! In the Summer issue I mentioned that I had thoroughly researched the lives of those listed on our war memorial and, as not everyone has access to the internet, I'm presenting some of their stories and telling a little more about what I've discovered.

In December 1920 a meeting, presided over by Major Soper, a veteran of the Boer War and living at South Cross House, decided that there should be a determined effort to obtain a war memorial for the Musbury Parish. It was resolved that a memorial stone be placed in the churchyard or in the churchyard wall, and a committee was appointed to carry out the recommendation.

Funds were raised and in March 1921 the war memorial tablet was affixed to the wall at the entrance to the churchyard. A dedication ceremony was held on Sunday afternoon, 10 April 1921. Following the Second World War, the memorial's inscription was renewed with a new tablet, which added the names of 4 men who had lost their lives between 1939 and 1945.

Currently we have no details about the replacement memorial or when it was installed. If you know anymore about this, please let me know.

There are some interesting stories about Musbury's fallen and, possibly, a few errors on the memorial. Whilst it would be nice to clear up all these issues, it is, perhaps, part of the charm of how we remember these brave people. There was, no doubt, a lot of confusion after both wars and mistakes are likely to have been made.

The following are just a few examples. For the full, up to date stories please log into [www.musburyheritage.co.uk](http://www.musburyheritage.co.uk) and enter "War Memorial" in the search box on the home page.



**Sargeant Alfred “William” Cearley**, the first named, is a particular anomaly. He was reported “missing, believed killed” in France on 11 July 1918 and on 22 August he was confirmed as “killed”.

Strangely his death was dated 23 May 1918 and attributed to an enemy air strike on St. Omer Military Hospital, where he was being treated for influenza. This is not the end of the story, but as the following is based on some disjointed information it cannot be substantiated as 100% correct. His wife Charlotte (nee Jefford) emigrated to Canada after the war, married a James Minchin in 1926 and shortly after this claimed her husband’s war pension under her new married name. In September 1918 a James Minchin (a UK subject) crossed the border from the U.S.A. into Canada to settle in



the same area that he would later marry Charlotte. After 1926 no trace can be found of a Mr & Mrs Minchin in Ontario, but, after finding many conflicting and convoluted historical records, I found a memorial tablet in the cemetery of Belleville, Ontario, Canada which reads: - “CEARLEY – In Loving Memory – Alfred William Cearley 1894 to 1949 – Charlotte, his wife 1896 to 1968”. Is this just a coincidence?! The full story will be online by the time this magazine is distributed.

**W. Welch** who is listed as “Missing” under WW1 is also a mystery and I'm hoping someone reading this may be able to help. Despite a lot of research, I can only come up with 2 possible men. Firstly - William James Welch (a.k.a. Welch) who was born in Musbury in 1886 and served in the Devonshire Regiment from November 1915 until he was demobilised on 19 April 1919. Secondly - William Walter Welch who was born in 1888, moved to Coventry with his brother to seek employment in the blossoming motor industry and was still living there in 1939. So, unless someone can come up another possible W. Welch, I am stuck for now!

There a couple of servicemen who perhaps should have been shown on Musbury's War Memorial

**Private William Henry Phillips** of the 10th Battalion, the Royal West Kent's (the Queen's Own Regiment.), son of Henry and Emma Phillips. He was born in Whitford in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 1892 and died about late 1918, aged 23. William Henry Phillips was a cowman, like his father, living at Beal's Farmhouse (now Musbury Barton) in Musbury. We know he died as a prisoner of war in September 1918 and does not appear on Axminster, Shute or Kilmington war memorials.



**Private Walter Abbott** of the 4th (Reserve) Battalion, the Devonshire Regiment, son of Charles and Alice Abbott, Spiller's Farm, Seaton Road, Musbury. He was born in Shute in about 1890. He died on 7 July 1917, aged 27. In 1911 he is described as a "Farmer's son, working on farm' with his father at Colhayne Farm, Shute. By September 1916 Charles Abbott had bought a smallholding in Musbury, known as the "Veterinary Infirmary" (now "Spillers Farm"). On Walter Abbott's war records he is shown as living in Musbury. In this case we do know the reason for his omission, as he is listed on the memorial outside St. Michael's Church in Shute. His family probably had close connections with that church.

Finally, it would be wrong to omit the one known Musbury civilian death.

**Leslie Forsey** was born in Marshwood, Dorset on 9 October 1908 and moved to Musbury with his parents when they became tenants of Doatshayne Farm in about 1924. They moved to Keeper's Cottage, Musbury in 1928, presumably shortly after Doatshayne Farm was destroyed by fire in April 1928. By September 1939 Leslie was a travelling salesman, working for Dawkins, the drapery business of Axminster and still living at Keeper's Cottage. He was killed during the first air raid on Yeovil on 7 October 1940 when a bomb made a direct hit on an air raid shelter. Leslie Forsey is reportedly inscribed on an Axminster memorial (not the War Memorial, perhaps inside the Minster) and in Westminster Abbey (also not confirmed).

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