

The Sources.

The names of the six Patrixbourne men who were victims of “The war to end wars” are carved on the memorial in St. Mary’s churchyard.

“TO THE
GLORY OF GOD
AND IN GRATEFUL
MEMORY
OF THE MEN
OF THIS PARISH
WHO FELL IN THE
GREAT WAR
1914-1918”.

Capt. J. McB. Ronald The Buffs.
Lieut. 5th Marquis Conyngham South Irish Horse
C.S.M. D. Alexander The Buffs
Sapper F.S. Brickenden R.E.
Pte. C.H. Stevens K.R.R.C. {very faded}
Pte. A.E. Stevens 3rd Dragoon Guards.

There are 4 main sources available on the internet for tracing “The Fallen”:

1. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission [CWGC] which takes immaculate care of all British and Commonwealth cemeteries and memorials overseas and holds all the records;
2. Soldiers Died in the Great War (oddly, not Soldiers Who Died), designated here as [SD] first published in book form on behalf of the War Office in 1921;
3. Roll of Honour [RH] which is in the process of being compiled by the Ministry of Defence and the British Legion. They hope, in the end, to have dealt with the men and women named on every headstone and memorial in the UK;
4. Faded Genes [FG]. A group of enthusiasts are compiling this and intend to cover every town and village in Kent. They have done several, some, like Kingston, in incredible detail, tracing a person’s family back to their Great-Great-Grandparents. Unfortunately, they have not got to Patrixbourne yet.

Other important and available sources are the Census Records. These started in 1801 as mere headcounts for purposes of recruitment and taxation in the Napoleonic Wars. Since then, they have been held in every year ending in 1 (except 1941 when the information might have been of use to the enemy), but it is only since 1841 that people’s names, approximate ages and occupation are recorded. For people of the right age to have been caught up in the Great War, the relevant ones are 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911. The rest are not yet released.

Also very useful are Parish Registers, particularly those for Christenings and Marriages, but these require a visit to a Library or archive offices. Very limited information can be found on line in the Birth, Marriage and Death Records.

Occasionally a serviceman’s Naval or Army Service Record may have survived the bombing of London in the Second World War.

Captain J. McB. Ronald. The Buffs.

According to CWGC and RH, he was Captain James McBain Ronald of the 2nd. Battalion East Kent Regiment (The Buffs) who died on 23rd. April 1915 aged 39 years. He has no known grave and is, therefore, commemorated on the Ypres [Menin Gate] Memorial to the Missing of the Ypres Salient. We can deduce from his age that he was born in c1876, and the date and location of his death mean that he was probably killed in the early stages of the big German offensive to try to eliminate the Salient and capture, not just Ypres, but the Channel ports beyond [2nd. Battle of Ypres.] SD only adds that he was Killed in Action.

I am grateful to Laurence Boyle of Patricxbourne for sending me a copy of his obituary in The Times from which we learn a great deal more about his military career. He was indeed born in April 1876, educated at Harrow and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, and was gazetted 2nd. Lieutenant East Kent Regiment in September 1896. His promotion to Lieutenant came in April 1899 and to Captain in July 1900. He served with great distinction in the South African War [2nd. Boer War] 1899-1902 being slightly wounded twice, Mentioned in Despatches in 1901, awarded the Queen's medal with 4 clasps and the King's medal with 2 clasps, serving in the latter part of that war as Railway Staff Officer. He retired in 1912, but, on the outbreak of the Great War, resumed service as a Railway Transport Officer and rejoined his old regiment in March 1915. He was killed in action near Saint Julien during the second Battle of Ypres on 23rd. April 1915.

Captain Ronald married Evelyn Mary Crosthwaite in Bagenalstown, County Carlow, in October 1903, and they had one daughter, Patience Mary, born in November 1908. At the time of his death, his wife and daughter lived in Bifrons Cottage, Patricxbourne.

Turning to the evidence of the census returns, in 1881 his father, Robert Bruce Ronald, 49, born in Liverpool, was Head of the Household at The Grange, Tunbridge Wells, and gave his occupation as Sheep farmer in New South Wales. His mother, Fanny, 44, had been born in London, but his 5 sisters and older brother were all born in Australia: Fanny, 23; Isabel, 21; Margaret, 19; Janet, 14; Mary, 11; Douglas, 6. James makes his first appearance, aged 4, with his younger brother Alan, aged 2, in 1891, both boys born in Sutton-at-Hone, near Bromley, Kent.

In 1891, all 8 children were still at home, though the name of the house was given as Pembury Grange and their father gave as his occupation "Living on own means".

In 1901, still at Pembury Grange, only Isabel, 42, and Mary, 31, both unmarried, and Alan, 22, a Theology Student, were at home with their parents. James is nowhere to be found. We know from his obituary that he was a career soldier serving in South Africa, and that after that war he was almost certainly posted to Ireland where he met and married Evelyn.

The census of 1911 shows James and Evelyn, both 34, as Visitors in a house in Hawkhurst. James gave his occupation as Army Captain, and Evelyn said they had been married 7 years and had one child. We find that child, Patience Ronald, aged 2, living at "Ranmore", Canterbury, which turns out to have been in what was then Barton Fields, being looked after by Evelyn's sister, Eileen, over on a visit from Ireland, and various servants. No birthplace is given for Patience, but it is reasonable to assume it was in Ireland because she is not to be found in the birth records for England and Wales.

At some time after 1911 and before his death in 1915, James and his family moved to Bifrons Cottage, and my guess is that it was when he retired from the army in 1912. Patience Mary, by the way, was still living in Bifrons Cottage with her mother when her forthcoming marriage to Walter Kennedy Wigham of Highland Court was announced in June 1943.

Lieutenant 5th. Marquis Conyngham. South Irish Horse.

CWGC gives his full name as Victor George Henry Francis Conyngham, aged 35, of the Royal Irish Regiment. His death is dated 9th November 1918 and his place of burial given as Slane (St. Patrick) Church of Ireland Churchyard. RH reminds us that 9th November was only 2 days before the war ended and points out that the South Irish Horse were, at that time, the 7th Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment. This regiment is an infantry one, and it is puzzling that cavalry, such as the South Irish Horse, should be included in it, but when one investigates the South Irish Horse, the explanation is that 1st and 2nd South Irish Horse were dismounted in 1917 as, indeed, were several other cavalry units, and fought from then as infantry since infantry were what was needed, not cavalry. SD only adds that he “Died” rather than being killed or mortally wounded. This probably explains why he was buried in Ireland if he, in fact, never went to a war-zone. Another website, “British Army World War One Medal Rolls Index Cards” confirms this, stating that, for him, there is no record of “any service in a theatre of war during the Great War.” The 5th Marquis had joined up, but was never posted abroad, possibly because Ireland was still volatile after the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin.

The Conynghams’ connection with Patricbourne is well known. Henry, the 1st Marquis, had risen through the ranks of the peerage due to his services in Ireland and it was the Prince Regent who promoted him to Marquis in 1816 thanks largely to the Regent’s “special relationship” with his wife, the Marchioness. The 1st Marquis bought Bifrons in 1830 to give the family a firm footing in England since the Conynghams’ family seat was, and still is, Slane Castle in County Meath and they also had extensive estates in Donegal at Mount Charles. When the 4th Marquis inherited the lands and title he decided not to live at Bifrons at all and, after 1882, it was let to tenants. This explains why the 5th Marquis is buried in Slane and commemorated in Patricbourne where he still owned Bifrons. As he was not married and had no heir, the title of 6th Marquis [or Marquess] and the family estates in England and

and went to his brother.

CSM D. Alexander. The Buffs.

CWGC gives his full name as Company Sergeant-Major David Alexander L/8907 The Buffs (East Kent Regiment). He died on 29th September 1918 and is named on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial, which means that he has no known grave. The Memorial bears nearly 10,000 names of Allied soldiers who fell in the “Advance to Victory” which began on 8th August and ended with the Armistice. The village of Vis-en-Artois was captured by the Allies on 27th August and most of the men on the Memorial and in the cemetery were killed in late September and October 1918.

RH and SD give further information on David Alexander such as his battalion in The Buffs, the 6th, and his decoration for valour, the Military Medal. He was born in London, resided in Patricxbourne and enlisted in Canterbury. SD also specifically states that he was killed-in-action.

It is a stroke of luck that he is one of the two Patricxbourne men whose Army Service Records survived the bombing of the Second World War, so we have a lot of detailed information about him. He was a career soldier who joined The Buffs in July 1908, just after he was 18. He served in Reserve Battalions until he was posted, when the war started, to 6th Battalion in August 1914. He was clearly a respected soldier, rising through the ranks of Lance-Corporal, Corporal and Sergeant and reaching CSM [or WO2, Warrant Officer 2] in September 1918, just three weeks before he was killed in action. He was also awarded a bar to his Military Medal.

His Army Records say he was born in 1890 in London and give his occupation when he enlisted as Surgical Instrument Maker. In April 1912 he married Winifred Ruby Drapper, a Bishopsbourne girl whose only brother Sidney was to be killed at the Battle of Loos in 1915 with the 8th Battalion The Buffs. They very promptly had a daughter Ellen Gertrude, born in that same April 1912 at Shorncliffe and two further children, Duncan Scott, born in April 1914 in Elham, and Marjorie Adelaide born in July 1917 in Canterbury. Unfortunately, the Army Records inform us that little Duncan Scott Alexander died in March 1915 and Marjorie Adelaide Alexander died in February 1918. On both occasions the Army paid the father 2/7d for the death certificate. Certainly, by the time Duncan Scott died, the family home was in Patricxbourne and the Army recorded the address as Lower Bifrons Lodge.

CSM Alexander's widow was still living in Lower Bifrons Lodge when she was sent his commemorative plaque and scroll in December 1919 and her children are named as Ellen Gertrude, born in 1912 and his posthumous son David, born in January 1919.

Turning to the evidence of the census, in 1891 our David's parents were living in Kensington. His father, also David, but David S. Alexander, born in Scotland, aged 26, gave his occupation as Carpenter, and his mother Adelaide A. Alexander, also 26, said she was born in London St. George's. He had an older brother George W. who was 3, born in Marylebone, and David himself was only 1, born in Kensington.

By 1901 Adelaide, now a widow, had gone with her two boys, aged 13 and 11, plus a third called Duncan aged 9, born in Kensington, to live with her step-father and her mother William and Adelaide Little in another part of Kensington. Checking the Death Records, we find that her husband had died in 1892 at the ridiculously young age of 27. To finish the story of this luckless family, our David's older brother George died in Kensington in October 1901 and his death certificate records his full name as George William. He could only have been about 14.

The 1911 census is a real disappointment. Our David is not to be found because he was in the Army by then, but neither his mother nor his younger brother Duncan can be found either. His mother Adelaide had re-married in December 1902. The Marriage Records contain the details of her wedding, aged 37, in Notting Hill to her new husband Charles John Cuerton, a coal merchant three years younger than her. One of the witnesses was her step-sister Elizabeth Jane Little and we learn that the A of her middle name stood for Alexandra. The couple went to live at 106, Wornington Road, Notting Hill, but they cannot be found in the 1911 census, probably because the unusual surname has been wrongly transcribed.

Sapper F.S. Brickenden R.E.

CWGC identifies him as Frederick Charles Brickenden No. 63140 in the Royal Engineers where "Sapper" was the designation for a Private. He was 38 when he died on the 30th October 1915 and is buried in the Alexandria (Chatby) Military and War Memorial Cemetery. RH adds that he was in the 88th Field Company of the Royal Engineers and died in Gallipoli, Turkey, but does not mention Alexandria. It also tells us he was born in Elham and enlisted in Canterbury. If it is correct that he died in Gallipoli, it could mean he was struck down by disease or was badly wounded there and died on a hospital ship taking him to Alexandria, or after arrival there. SD seems to indicate this since it just said he died, though it makes no mention of wounds.

The first census in which our Frederick makes his appearance is in 1881. His father, Charles, aged 34 and born in Shepherdswell, gave his occupation as Licensed Victualler living in a place called simply "Magpie" next door to Vernon Holme in Lower Harbledown. Presumably it was some sort of inn. His mother, Maria Louisa, aged 25, had come from Buckinghamshire. Their eldest child was Maud T. L., aged 3, and born in Patricxbourne; next was our Frederick C., aged 2, born in Elham; third was John J., aged 1, born in Canterbury. If Frederick was 2, he would have been born in about 1879 which would make him nearer to 36 when he died rather than the 38 given by CWGC.

Ten years later we find the family in the parish of Patricxbourne where the father Charles was licensee at "The Sign of the Gate" at the top of the Old Dover Road. Maud, Frederick and John are listed whilst 5 more children had been added; Charles E. aged 8, Arthur W., aged 6, George O., aged 4, all 3 born in Canterbury (ie Lower Harbledown); Herbert W., aged 3 and Sarah K., aged 1 born in Patricxbourne (ie at "The Gate".) The 4 eldest boys were listed as Scholars (ie attending school) including our Frederick, aged 12.

In 1901 the Brickendens were still at "The Gate Inn", but parish boundary changes meant it was now in St. Paul's, Canterbury and the census enumerator has added, in case of any confusion, "formerly in Patricxbourne". The parish boundary stone that still stands on Watling Street mid-way between "The Gate" and Hode Lane, on "The Gate" side of the road, has Patricxbourne on one side and St. Paul on the other and was erected there at that time. The site of the Inn was correctly named Gutteridge Gate which may have been the name of the tollgate that stood there on the edge of the city boundary. Certainly the nearby bridge over the Elham Valley Railway was called Gutteridge Bridge. Frederick was 22 and a Carpenter by trade as was his younger brother Arthur, aged 16, whilst John, 21, was a Builder and Charles, 18, described himself as a "Worker in wood". 4 more children have been added to the family all born in Canterbury (ie at "The Gate"); Gertrude, aged 7, Nelly B., aged 4, Edith E., aged 2, and Cyril B., aged 6 months.

The 1911 census still shows the family living at Gutteridge "The Gate", Canterbury. There were 2 more children in the family, Lillian K., aged 8 and Reginald A., aged 5. Mrs Brickenden stated that they had been married 34 years and she had borne 17 children of whom 14, all the ones we have found named in the census records, were living. She also says she was now the accountant for her husband's business. Four of the older children had left home by then including Frederick. He was still working as a carpenter and in 1909 had married Lillian Emma, aged 28 and born in St. Gregory's, Canterbury. They had a baby Lillian N., aged 1, born in St. Gregory's and they were living at 73, Military Road, Canterbury, in the parish of St. Gregory's, Northgate.

Frederick Charles Brickenden is named on the Canterbury War Memorial in the Buttermarket simply as F. Brickenden and the reason he is also included in Patricxbourne may well be his parents' long association with "The Gate" which had always been, up until about 1887, in Patricxbourne. He is probably also named in St. Gregory's Church, but the building is now used by the University of Christ Church Music department so access is difficult.

Private C. H. Stevens K.R.R.C. (this is very faded)

CWGC records him as Rifleman Charles Henry Stevens No. 54093 King's Royal Rifle Corps. He died on 25th September 1918 aged 27 and is buried in Brie British Cemetery. This means he was killed in the Allies' "Advance to Victory" which had started in August 1918 and continued until the Armistice. RH and SD differ from this. They both say his Service No. was 54003 and that he was born in Sandwich, enlisted in Canterbury and lived in Sevenoaks. The 1911 census has 3 Charles Henry Stevens in Kent, but none of them was born in Sandwich or lived in Sevenoaks. It is mistakes like this that make one wonder how accurate the other information is that these two give. They agree that this same man in K.R.R.C. was formerly No. 2543 Royal Army Medical Corps and formerly (ie after that) No. T4/238984 Army Service Corps. This is not impossible if, for example, it turned out that, having signed up with RAMC, he could not put up with the sight of blood so was transferred to ASC. There are plenty of other examples where, when the Army's demand for more infantry expanded, non-combatant men like ASC were transferred to fighting regiments. In addition, neither of them can decide whether he was killed in 1918 or 1915. SD insists that he died of wounds. There may be confusion in all this. There was another C.H. Stevens who was in ASC and was killed in 1916, but he lived in Kensington and was Charles Herbert Stevens. His ASC Service number was also different from the one given by SD and RH. There is also another C.H. Stevens in the RAMC who was killed in 1918, but he had lived all his civilian life in Grimsby and his RAMC Service number was different from the one given by these two sources.

Looking at the census records for a Charles Henry Stevens with any connection at all with Patrixbourne, a prime candidate emerges and, what is more, he is certainly linked to the last man named on the Patrixbourne Memorial, A.E. Stevens. In the 1901 census we find Charles H. Stevens, aged 9, born in Wickhambreaux, living in one of the six Renville Cottages in Patrixbourne. He has, moreover, a younger brother called Albert E. Stevens. This Charles would have been born in 1891 or 92 which fits with the age of the K.R.R.C. man at 27 in 1918. Head of the household was John W. Stevens "Ordinary Agricultural Labourer", aged 46 and born on Lyminge. His wife Frances was 44 and born in Bishopsbourne. Their children were Alice, 21, unmarried and helping mother at home, born in Barham; John W., 19 and a Milkman on the farm, born in Ash; Walter J., 16, Carter on the farm, born in Ash; Charles H., 9, born in Wickhambreaux; Mabel E., 8, born in Wickhambreaux; Albert E., 2, born in Patrixbourne.

In 1911 the family were still in Renville Cottages, but father John William has moved up slightly to be a Horseman on the farm. His wife Frances said she had borne 6 children, all of whom were living, and they had been married 31 years. Three of the children were still at home: Alice, who now says her birthplace was Denton rather than Barham; Charles Henry, now a Horseman on the farm like his dad; Albert Edward, 12 and still at school.

Private A. E. Stevens 3rd Dragoon Guards.

Rather annoyingly, CWGC just gives his name as A.E. Stevens, Private No. D/11037 3rd Dragoon Guards [Prince of Wales Own]. He died on 30th May 1917 and is buried in St. Souplet British Cemetery. RH and SD agree on this, give his full name as Albert Edward and add that he was born and bred in Patricxbourne and enlisted in Canterbury. He is the second Patricxbourne man whose Army Service Record has survived so we know his name, birth in November 1899 and residence are correct. He enlisted in November 1916 just after his 17th Birthday which means that, at the time of his death in May 1917, he was not yet 18 and should, legally, not have been on active service at all. Before he enlisted he had been a Horseman on a farm which may explain why he joined a cavalry regiment. His parents are named as his next-of-kin since he did not marry, but, oddly, letters sent to them after the war were sent to different addresses. A copy of a letter to the cavalry in February 1918 ordering his Service Medal and personal property to be sent to his father at Renville Cottages was sent to Renville Cottages, but a copy of a similar letter to the infantry in November 1919 was sent to his father at Stable Cottage, Nackington House, Canterbury and that is the address to which items should be sent. Perhaps his father had simply changed jobs. The fact that these instructions were sent to both cavalry and infantry may mean that he had been dismounted and was fighting as an infantryman which often happened to cavalry unit in a war where the need for infantry vastly outweighed the need for cavalry.

A letter to his father from the Imperial War Graves Commission (predecessor of the Commonwealth Commission) in August 1924, announcing the exhumation of British dead from Premont Communal Cemetery (there were only 5 of them) and their re-burial in St. Souplet British Cemetery, was sent to Mr. J.W.Stevens at Stable Cottage, Nackington House. The explanation of this removal is that the villages of Premont and St. Souplet were behind the German lines for almost the whole war and were only captured by the Allies in October 1918. Another letter in Albert's Service papers says that he had died "in German hands" on 30th May 1917 which means he was a POW and was buried, along with the 4 others, in a Communal Cemetery for French civilians and Germans. The Commission clearly thought it more appropriate that his final resting place should be with other Allied dead from the fighting of 1918.

We have the census material for Albert alongside the information on his brother Charles. All we need add is that Albert Edward Stevens is the only one of the six men on the Patricxbourne Memorial to be born there, brought up there and be living there as a Horseman, presumably on the same Renville Farm as his father and elder brother, when he enlisted.

