

REMEMBRANCE DAY 2014 - FREDERICK VACHER

You will no doubt have seen on the news or read in the papers that there are 888,246 poppies around the Tower of London. Each represents a British or Colonial soldier who died in WW1. The names of 16 of these fallen are commemorated on the memorial outside. Six of them died at Gallipoli, one in Mesopotamia or Iraq as we now know it, seven died in France and two of illness whilst on active duty. You can see more information on each of these men on the village website, but today I thought we would look closer at only one of them, to try and get more of a feel for what he went through, what could have been his thoughts as he joined up, went to France and eventually died there.

Private Frederick Vacher was born in Milton Abbas in 1884, he was one of four children of William and Rebecca. Rebecca died in 1888 aged 32 when Frederick was only 4, his younger sibling Emily was just over one year old. Unfortunately by 1891 Frederick and his sister Emily were living together in a workhouse in Blandford - Fred would have been 7 and his sister 4. His father was still living in Milton Abbas in 'the back of number 8', and working as a brewer's labourer.

So Fred has been in this church, he would have been at his mother's funeral - she is buried in the churchyard - and he would no doubt have attended other services here. When war was declared Fred would have been 30. I would have thought that it was likely that he had never been outside Dorset, never been on a train or a bus let alone a ship, so what would he have been thinking when he enlisted in Blandford in the 2nd/4th Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry. Could he really have envisaged what it was really going to be like at the front, I doubt it, and if he could would it have made any difference. maybe he was called up or Like many he may have done it because everyone else was, or maybe he believed that it would all be over by Christmas, or fancied a change from whatever routine he was then involved with, and a chance to do a bit of travelling. But whatever the reason it would surely have been accompanied by a sense of duty, and no doubt some apprehension as to what lay ahead.

So some recruiting sergeant in Blandford persuaded our Fred that the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry were the regiment to join. He is the only one of our 16 who were in this regiment - of the other fifteen 11 were unsurprisingly in the Dorsetshire battalion, 2 were in the Hants regiment, 1 in the Australian Infantry and 1 in the Machine Gun Corps.

2/4th Battalion Territorial Force

Fred's battalion were formed in Sept 1914 at Oxford. After training in Northampton, Chelmsford and the Salisbury Plain they eventually mobilised for war on 26.05.1916 and landed at Le Havre. From then on their war consisted of various actions on the Western Front and by October 1918, no doubt by then very battle hardened Fred and his fellow soldiers became involved in the Battle of the Selle. The attack started at 5.20am on Thursday 17th October and was to last a week

culminating with the Germans in full retreat. Sadly this was where Fred's luck ran out, at some stage he was injured and he died of his wounds on 27 October 1918, just two weeks before the armistice was signed. He is buried in St Aubert cemetery in Northern France.

For those of you who have driven south from Calais on the autoroute down to Rheims, you will have unknowingly passed within ten miles of the site of this battle near Cambrai, and also of St Aubert where Fred is buried in a military cemetery.

If you are familiar with Google Earth, you can quite easily find the St Aubert cemetery, and zoom in on the well kept plot of land, and even see the rows of headstones. Somewhere in that photograph is Frederick Vacher's grave, next time you are passing why don't you go and see him and offer up a prayer of thanks for his courage, perhaps you might even take a handful of Dorset earth to sprinkle on his grave.