

The ten men of Lower Hardres
who died in the
Great War 1914-18.

Compiled by Mark Jopling 2012.

The Sources.

The inscription on the Memorial that stands above Butts Green reads:

IN
PROUD AND
IMMORTAL
MEMORY
OF

L. Bowles Pte. The Buffs.	W.J. Quedstedt GN. 93 RD .BD. RFA.
W.R. Coleman STKR. HMS Pembroke.	C.G.V. Surtees 2 nd Lieut. Border Regt.
A.W. Divers Pte. The Buffs.	W.H. Sutton Pte. East Surrey Regt.
J. Hopkins Pte. Grenadier Guards.	M. Tapley Pte. R. Warwickshire Regt.
S. Hopkins Pte. Grenadier Guards.	A.W. Towner Pte. 11 th Hussars.

“THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE.”

There are four 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 some in incredible detail, tracing a person’s family back to their Great-Great-Grandparents.

Other important and available sources are the Census Records. These started in 1801 as mere headcounts for purposes of taxation and recruitment in the Napoleonic Wars. Since then they have been held every year ending in 1 [except 1941 when the information might have been useful to the enemy], but it is only since 1841 that names, approximate ages and occupations 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 of baptisms, marriages and deaths, but these require a visit to Libraries or archive offices. Very limited information can be found on line in the Birth, Marriage and Death Records.

Occasionally, a service person’s Army or Navy Records may have survived the bombing of London in the Second World War.

1. L. Bowles Pte. The Buffs.

CWGC identifies him as Lewis Frederick Bowles Private G/8648 8th Battalion The Buffs [East Kent Regiment]. He died on 18th August 1916 and is commemorated on the massive Thiepval Memorial to the Missing on the Somme. This means he was killed in the second month of the gruelling and bloody Battle of the Somme, but has no known grave.

[For some reason the F for Frederick is left out on the Lower Hardres Memorial.]

FG agrees and SD does not say as much as this, but does not disagree. RH adds born Cheriton, Folkestone, enlisted Dover and resided in Cheriton, but this last statement may be incorrect. None of the sources gives his age or next-of-kin.

The first census in which he appears is that of 1901. Here he and his parents were living in Broadmead, Folkestone. His father was Frederick Bowles, 35, General Labourer, born in Swingfield and his mother was Sarah E., 29, born in London. His brother was Cyril E., 4, born in Cheriton and he is named as Lewis F., 2, born in Folkestone.

By 1911 Lewis had moved to Lower Hardres. Lewis Frederick Bowles, aged 12 and attending school, was living with his grandmother Emma Tapley. She was a widow of 63, born in Lechlade, Gloucestershire, living at what looks like Coutans Farm, Lower Hardres. [This is most probably what is now called Sunnyside Farm in Pett Bottom which stands at the bottom of what is now called Tapley Hill. Midway up Tapley Hill stands a pair of cottages still called Coutans Cottages.] Also with Emma was her youngest son Raymond Edward, 17, a Bricklayers Labourer, born in Lower Hardres. Emma's husband Charles had been a Farmer and had died in January 1909. Why Lewis was living with her is not clear, but his parents are nowhere to be found in the 1911 census, so, perhaps, they had met with some unexpected fate. The Death Records name a Frederick Bowles who died, aged 37 in Elham in January 1904 and a Sarah Bowles who died in Islington in April 1906, aged 33. These could be Lewis's parents which would explain why he went to his grandmother. If he was still with her when he enlisted, it would explain why he is on the Lower Hardres Memorial, but he would probably have enlisted in Canterbury, not Dover. If, however, RH was correct about him living in Cheriton when he enlisted, he may have got a job back in Cheriton some time after 1911, but, since he had spent much of his life in Lower Hardres, his Grandmother wanted him commemorated where she lived.

One other puzzle with Lewis is his age. Since he was killed in 1916, he could only have been about 17 [since he was 2 in 1901] or maybe 18. This probably means he was under-age when he enlisted. There are plenty of examples of young men lying about their age in order to go to war.

2. W.R. Coleman STKR. HMS Pembroke.

According to CWGC he is Walter Richard Coleman Stoker 2nd Class K/544448 Royal Navy. He died on 20th October 1918 and is buried in All Saints Churchyard, Petham.

FG adds aged 18, son of Charlotte P. Coleman of Chestnut Cottage, Nackington Road, Lower Hardres and the late Walter Coleman. RH is more specific that the ship was HMS Pembroke 11 at Chatham. SD does not include him because he was not a soldier.

It turns out that HMS Pembroke 11 was not a sea-going vessel, but was shore-based at Chatham and served as a shore barracks for sailors waiting to be allocated to a ship. Between mid-1918 and 1921, 242 men died on HMS Pembroke from Spanish influenza which was sweeping through the whole of Europe. If Walter was 18 when he died, he was only just at the youngest age for active service.

In the 1901 census, Walter Coleman, 32, a Waggoner on a Farm, born in Petham and his wife Charlotte Phoebe, 34, born in Thanington were living at Broxhall Cottages, Bossingham. With them were their children, Frances Elsie, 3, born in Lower Hardres and Walter Richard, 6 months, born in Petham.

The census of 1911 records the family at China Court, Petham. Walter, 42, was still a Waggoner and Charlotte Phoebe, 44, stated that they had been married 16 years and had just the two children, Frances Elsie, 13, and Walter Richard, 10 and at School.

When he died in Chatham, almost certainly of Spanish 'flu, his mother, as his next-of-kin, made the decision to have him buried in Petham alongside his father, who had died there in September 1917, aged 48. Since she had moved to Lower Hardres, presumably after her husband died, she wanted her son commemorated where she lived.

3. A.W. Divers Pte. The Buffs.

In CWGC he is recorded as A.W. Divers Private G/4968 The Buffs [East Kent Regiment]. He died on 15th September 1916, aged 21, and is buried in Guillemont Road Cemetery. This means he was killed in the midst of the gruelling Battle of the Somme and was buried behind the British lines in a cemetery just to the east of Albert, the British HQ.

The other sources give his full name as Alfred William Divers. FG adds that he was in the 1st Battalion, son of Henry and Mary Ann Divers of Horseshoe Cottage, Lower Hardres. RH adds born in Upper Hardres in 1895, enlisted Canterbury and resided in Lower Hardres. SD does not say as much as this and makes a strange mistake, as we shall see, in saying he was born in Sevenoaks.

As he was 21 when he died, the first census to include him will be 1901. Here he was living with his parents on Stone Street, Petham. Henry Divers was 39, Agricultural Labourer, born in Petham and Mary A. was 39, born in Herne Bay. Their children were Henry J., 7, born in Upper Hardres and Alfred W., 6, born in Upper Hardres.

By 1911 the family had moved to Highfield Cottages, Street End, Lower Hardres. Henry was 48, still a Farm Labourer and Mary Ann, 49, stated she had been married 20 years and had borne 3 children all of whom were alive and well. The two boys were still at home; Henry John, 17, was a Horseman on Farm, our Alfred William, 15, was also a Horseman on Farm, both born in Upper Hardres. With them was William Morris, 76, a widower, born in Petham, who said he was the father of Henry, but who must have meant father-in-law.

There is no doubt that Alfred was born in Upper Hardres.

4. J. Hopkins Pte. Grenadier Guards.

CWGC records him as John Hopkins Private 13406 Grenadier Guards. He died on 24th December 1914 and is commemorated on Le Touret Memorial in Le Touret Military Cemetery. The early date of his death means he must have been a career soldier, not a wartime volunteer, because the British Expeditionary Force sent to France in 1914 were all well-trained professional troops. The German invasion of Northern France had been halted by the Allies at The Battle of the Marne in September 1914 and pushed back some way. The cemetery lies north of Bethune on land which was, like Bethune, behind the British lines where the two sides had dug themselves in, literally, in their lines of trenches. There was no major offensive going on in December, but small-scale attacks by both sides were constantly being staged in order to gain the most favourable ground for their trenches. There were also continuous casualties from shelling, snipers and trench raids.

RH adds that John was in the 2nd Battalion, born in Lower Hardres, enlisted in Canterbury and reminds us that he was killed on Christmas Eve. SD gives less information than this, but FG has masses of information on his family and says he was Killed in Action.

The census records reveal that John and the next man on the Memorial, Stephen, were brothers, which one might have guessed seeing two men with the same surname and joining the same Regiment.

In 1891 at Pett Bottom, Lower Hardres, we find James Hopkins, 54, Agricultural Labourer, born in Elmsted and his wife Sarah, 42, born in Upper Hardres. Their 5 children were James, 12, born in Postling; Thomas, 10, born in Kingston; Stephen, 6, born in Kingston, all 3 at School; John, 4, born in Lower Hardres; Alfred Couchman, 19, born in Bridge, Agricultural Labourer. We learn from FG that Alfred was, in fact, their son, but born before his parents were married. Couchman was Sarah's maiden name.

In 1901 the two brothers, Stephen Hopkins, 16, born in Northwood, Ramsgate (which turns out to be wrong), Carter on a Farm, and John Hopkins, 14, born in Lower Hardres, Labourer on a Farm, were living in Ramsgate, lodging with Edwin Paramor, 33, Carter on a farm, one assumes the same farm, and his wife Harriett, 27. Their parents were still in Pett Bottom with two of their brothers, Thomas Hopkins, 20, and Alfred Couchman, 29, both Agricultural Labourers.

By 1911 John had got out of farming and was working in the Asylum Service at Canterbury Borough Lunatic Asylum, St. Martin's Hill. He was 24, unmarried and serving as one of 10 Attendants with 17 nurses all under a Matron and Assistant Medical Officer. His father, now a widower, 74, an Old Age Pensioner was living with his son Thomas, 30, a Woodman and his wife Mary and their 3 little children at White Hill Cottages, Lower Hardres. [State Pensions had been introduced in January 1909.]

5. S. Hopkins Pte. Grenadier Guards.

CWGC identifies him as Stephen Hopkins Private 12398 Grenadier Guards. He died on 9th November 1914, aged 30, and is buried in St. Sever Cemetery, Rouen. We know that he must have been a regular soldier, not a war-time volunteer, to have been in action so early on because the army Britain sent over in 1914 were all professional soldiers. The German invasion had swept through Belgium and into Northern France, but had been halted by the Allies at the Battle of the Marne in September 1914 and pushed back some way. There was heavy fighting as both sides tried to out-flank each other to the west and the front lines moved northwards culminating in the 1st Battle of Ypres from mid-October to mid-November. The cemetery near Rouen was far behind British lines, so he must have been badly wounded and sent back to a Base Hospital, but did not make it.

FG, which gives a great deal of information on Stephen and John's family, confirms the theory of how Stephen died by specifying that he "Died of Wounds." It also confirms that he was 30 when he died and states that he had married one Alice Russell in Elham in 1913 and, after the war, she lived at 16, St. Radigund's Place, Canterbury.

SD just gives very basic information, but RH tells us that he was in the 1st Battalion, unlike John in the 2nd, born in Kingston and enlisted in Canterbury.

We have seen the two brothers in the census of 1891 living with their family in Pett Bottom, Lower Hardres, and we have seen them in 1901 working together on a farm near Ramsgate. In 1911, however, Stephen is nowhere to be found. The explanation seems to be that he had, by the age of 26 or 27, enlisted in the Grenadiers and been posted somewhere. Whether he married Alice before or after he enlisted is not known.

6. W.J. Quested GN. 63rd BD. RFA.

CWGC does not give us his first names and simply describes him as W.J. Quested Gunner 3507 Royal Field Artillery. He died on 5th. November 1918, aged 26, and was buried in Brebieres British Cemetery. This cemetery is near Douai to the north-east of Arras. The Allies had commenced what became known as the “Advance to Victory” in August 1918 on a broad front, but the advance from Arras came in the later stages. The end was very near.

The other military sources agree that he was William John Quested. FG agrees on his age and adds that he was in the 63rd Brigade and was the son of William and Ellen Quested of Stone Street, Petham. RH reminds us that he died one week before the end of the war and adds born in Petham, enlisted Canterbury. SD gives only basic information.

The two references to Petham in the military sources seem to be wrong according to the census evidence. In both 1901 and 1911 William’s family were living on Stone Street, Waltham, not Petham, and on both occasions William’s birthplace was given as Waltham as well. The two parishes are, of course, very close together.

In 1901 George W. Quested, 55, Labourer on Road, born in Barham and his wife Ellen, 49, born in Hastingleigh were living on Stone Street, Waltham. With them were two of their children, Herbert H., 10, born in Waltham and William J., 9, also born in Waltham.

In 1911 George William and Ellen were still living on Stone Street, Waltham. George had become a KCC Roadman and Ellen stated that they has been married 38 years and had had 8 children 7 of whom were alive and well. A daughter had joined them, Ada Lily, 26, unmarried, Farm and Road Labourer, born in Stelling, Herbert was 21, unmarried, a Milkman and William was 19, but gave no occupation.

Not surprisingly, given his complete Waltham credentials, William is commemorated on the Waltham Memorial and the reason he is also named in Lower Hardres is most probably that he got a job there and moved over sometime after 1911. He certainly seems not to have had a job in Waltham in that year’s census.

According to CWGC he was Charles Gordon Villiers Surtees Lieutenant the Border Regiment. He died on 26th October 1914, aged 22, and is commemorated on the Ypres [Menin Gate] Memorial to the Missing of the Ypres Salient. This date and place make it certain that he was killed in the 1st Battle of Ypres which lasted from mid-October to mid-November 1914. The German invasion had swept through Belgium, but well to the east of Ypres and had been halted in September and pushed back some way. The Germans were keen to capture the city and then thrust southwards to gain control of the Channel Ports.

SD agrees and so does RH, only adding that Charles was in the 2nd Battalion. FG has a great deal of information on his family and is quite specific that he was Killed in Action. Only the inscription on the Memorial insists he was a 2nd Lieutenant, not a full one.

As he was 22 in 1914, the first census to include him is 1901. Here Charles, aged 9, and his brother John Aubone Villiers, 7, were Boarders at Lake House School, Bexhill. Both boys are said to have been born in Canterbury, but it transpires that this was, more accurately, Lower Hardres. The rest of the family were at The Mansion, High St., Bildeston, Suffolk. Head of the family William Villiers Surtees, 32, living on his "Own Means", born Brighton had, according to FG, married Mary Baker-White in January 1891 in Lower Hardres. This explains the family's connection with Lower Hardres because her family were then, as they still are, the largest landowners in the village, and resided at Street End House. Again, according to FG, the first four children, all boys, were born in Lower Hardres, very probably in Street End House, and all four were given the extra middle name of Villiers.

Continuing with the 1901 census, living with their parents were Allen Villiers Surtees, 6, born in Lower Hardres; Maurice Anthony Villiers, 5, born in Lower Hardres; Betty [or Elizabeth] Joceline, 3, born in Llanidloes, Wales; Barbara Felicia, 1, born in London; Jane Maureen, 4 months, born in Bildeston.

In 1911 Charles, aged 19, is listed as a Gentleman Cadet and Student at the Royal Military College for Training Officers for the Army in Sandhurst, Berkshire. This source wrongly says that he was born in Woodnesborough, Kent. According to FG, this was where he was christened, for some reason, but he was born in Lower Hardres. His next two brothers were christened in Lower Hardres, but the fourth boy, Maurice, was also christened in Woodnesborough. FG also tells us there was an eighth and final child, born in 1904 in Bildeston, but christened in Lower Hardres, Robert Henry William Villiers. Charles would have gone to Sandhurst straight from Public School and would have been commissioned straight from Sandhurst into the Border Regiment.

The rest of the family cannot be found in the 1911 census, probably because their surname has been transcribed as something other than Surtees.

8. W.H. Sutton Pte. East Surrey Regt.

In CWGC he is identified as William Henry Sutton Private 11255 East Surrey Regiment. He died on 29th July 1916 and is commemorated on the massive Thiepval Memorial to the Missing on the Somme. There is no doubt that he was killed at the end of the first month of the gruelling and bloody British offensive, the Battle of the Somme.

RH agrees and adds that he was in the 1st Battalion, born Lower Hardres and enlisted Canterbury. SD gives just basic information, but FG presents masses of information on his family and says of him he enlisted on 24th May 1915 and was 22 when he died.

He is the only one of the 10 men whose Army Service Record has survived. This confirms that he was born in Lower Hardres, and gives the date as 9th April 1894, and says he was a Farm Labourer in Lower Hardres and unmarried when he enlisted on 24th May 1915, aged 21. He signed on for 7 years in the line and 5 years in reserve. His next-of-kin is named as his mother Mrs. Emma Sutton of 9, York Road, Wincheap, Canterbury and his memorial plaque and scroll were sent to her at that address in June 1919. Before she lived there, it appears, she had been at 17, Upper Bridge St., Canterbury because a copy of a letter, sent to her in July 1917 to tell her that there were no personal effects of his to be returned was sent to that address. His 1914-15 Star was sent to his sister Mrs. E. Thorogood on 27th November 1920. [His sister Edith had married Nelson Thorogood in Canterbury in January 1914.]

We find William in the census of 1901 living at Street End, Lower Hardres. George Sutton was 51, Agricultural Labourer, born in Bishopsbourne and his wife, Emma, was 44, born in Canterbury. Their children, all born in Lower Hardres, were Edward, 21, Agricultural Labourer, Walter, 17, Agricultural Labourer, Edith, 14, and William, 7.

By 1911 their father George had died, in 1910 aged 60, and the family had moved into Canterbury to 44, Old Dover Road. Emma, 55, a widow says she had been married 34 years and had borne 7 children of whom 4 were alive and well. She gave her occupation as "Home Industry." With her were her sons Edward, 35, Labourer on a Farm, Walter, 30, also a Farm Labourer and William, 17, Waggoner's Mate on a Farm. The listing of William living with his mother is very odd because in the 1911 census a William Sutton, 17, born Lower Hardres was a Waggoner's Mate lodging on Little Catts Farm, Lower Hardres with the Farmer, George Cotton, and his wife, Mary. Their son Ernest, 23, was the Waggoner. It seems that Emma Sutton made a mistake and included William as living with her when he had, in fact, moved out.

9. M. Tapley Pte. R. Warwickshire Regt.

CWGC identifies him as Malcolm Tapley Private 260331 Royal Warwickshire Regiment. He died on 4th October 1917 and is buried in the Tyne Cot Cemetery in the Ypres Salient. This means he was killed in the awful British offensive the 3rd Battle of Ypres or the Battle of Passchendaele, also known as the “Battle of the Mud”, which ground on from July to November 1917.

RH agrees, but goes further saying he was initially Private 4566 in The Buffs, and transferred to the 6th Battalion Royal Warwicks. It also adds that he was born and resided in Lower Hardres and enlisted in Canterbury. SD only gives the basic outline, but FG has a great deal of information on his family including the fascinating statement that he married one Amy E. Burrows in October 1915 in Birmingham, and she went to live in Oxfordshire after the war. What on earth he was doing in Birmingham is pure conjecture, but it might have something to do with his transfer to the Royal Warwicks. If he never actually served with The Buffs, but was transferred almost immediately, he could have gone to Birmingham to do his training and met her then.

In the 1891 census, living at Greenway Cottages, Lower Hardres were Hammon Tapley, 46, Gamekeeper, born in Lower Hardres and his wife Harriett, 41, born in Canterbury. With them were their six children, all born in Lower Hardres, Ernest, 12, Scholar; Edith, 11, Scholar; Hammon, 9, Scholar; Edward, 6, Scholar; Ellen, 5; and Malcolm, 3.

By 1901 little had changed. Some children had left home, but, still with their parents in Greenway Cottages, were Ernest, 22, who gave no occupation; Edward, 16 and our Malcolm, 13.

In 1911 it was much the same at Greenway. Hammon Tapley, 65, was still a Gamekeeper and Harriett Jane, 61, stated that they had been married 33 years and she had borne 7 children of whom 5 were alive and well. Edward, 26, unmarried, was a Footman, and Malcolm, 23, unmarried, was an Odd Man on a Farm.

The last word on Malcolm Tapley is that, since he was born in about 1888, he would have been about 29 when he was killed in 1917.

10. A.W. Towner Pte. 11th Hussars.

CWGC records him simply as A.W. Towner Private 4/4120 11th Hussars [Prince Albert's Own]. He died on 24th February 1915 and was buried in Bailleul Communal Cemetery. Bailleul lay behind British lines at Ypres, east of the base at Poperingue. He was killed before the big German offensive called the 2nd Battle of Ypres when both sides were regularly launching small-scale attacks to secure the most favourable ground to dig their trenches and there were constant casualties from shelling, snipers, wiring parties in No-Man's-Land and trench raids.

FG and SD agree and they and RH all give his full name as Arthur William Towner. RH also adds born in Pembury, Tunbridge Wells, resided and enlisted in Canterbury.

Arthur first appears with his family in the census of 1901. Here, living in Boughton Aluph were Charles Towner, 48, Groom/Gardener, born in Pembury and his wife Julia, 34, born in Burwash, Sussex. They had five children: Charles, 14, Horse Boy on a Farm, born in Hythe; Harry, 12, born in Pembury; our Arthur, 9, born in Pembury; Dorothy, 4, born in Rolvenden; Florence, 2, born in Rolvenden.

By 1911 their connection with Lower Hardres was clearly established. In that census Julia Ellen Towner, 44, was bringing up five daughters, all of them at school: Dorothy Kate, 14, and Florence Eva, 12, both born in Rolvenden; Freda Ellen, 9, born in Boughton Aluph; Hilda Alice, 7, and Winnifred Kathleen, 5, both born in Upper Hardres. Their address was Catts Farm Cottages, Lower Hardres. Her three sons had left home and of her husband there was no sign. She did not state that she was a widow in the census, but, unfortunately, the Death Records name a Charles William Towner who died in Bridge District in October 1909, aged 57. This could well be him.

Our Arthur, meanwhile, had joined up. In the 1911 census he is listed with dozens of others at Shorncliffe Camp. He is named as Arthur William Towner, unmarried, 20, Private in the 11th Hussars, born in Tunbridge Wells. The barracks contained men from a whole range of different units like Hussars, Dragoons, various Infantry regiments, Medical Corps and others. Given that his age was said to be 20 in 1911, he would have been about 23 or 24 when he was killed.