



A TOUR OF THATCHAM SOLDIERS

Introduction

One hundred years on from the Armistice and our thoughts remain with those brave soldiers, and their families, who went to war. There are over 100 names on the Thatcham War Memorial of men that gave their lives during the First World War and there were a great many more from our community that took part.

This booklet gives a brief tour around the centre of Thatcham highlighting places where some of the soldiers lived and worked along with details of their families.

1. Hollington Place

Stevens Family

William was a wood turner who was born c.1861 in Highworth, Wiltshire. He married Emily from Woodlands St Mary, Wiltshire. They moved to Thatcham and were living in 1891 in Station Road. They were listed with the surname of "Stephens" the spelling changing from record to record. By 1901 the family had moved to Green Lane and the family name spelt "Stevens". They had 9 children, 3 of which died before 1911. By 1917 William and Emily had moved to Andover.

Petty Officer William Henry Stevens

William was born c.1888 in Thatcham to William and Emily. He lived in Station Road and then Green Lane with his parents. By 1901 he was apprentice to a wood turner, following in his father's footsteps. By 1914 it would appear William was living with his wife, Ruth, in Chatham, Kent.

On his 1912 enrolment form William is described as being 5ft 3in tall with black hair, hazel eyes and a fresh complexion. He served on a number of ships starting with the training ship HMS Ganges and later included the HMS Pembroke and HMS St George before ending up on HMS Hogue. Rank progressions shows him to have radio and signalling specific skills, with his final rank being listed as Petty Officer Telegraphist. On the 22 September 1914, somewhere in the North Sea, HMS Hogue along with other ships was sunk by a German U-Boat. The action saw over 1,400 casualties. William is remembered on Chatham Naval Memorial as well as the Thatcham War Memorial and Roll of Honour.

Private Edwin James Stevens MM

By 1911 Edwin was following his brothers, Thomas and William, into the wood turning trade. It was in October 1915 he enlisted, his enrolment form shows him living in Watford. Placed with the 132nd Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps he became a stretcher bearer. During an action he was wounded and died from a head wound on 27 September 1917 aged 22. Edwin is remembered at Godewaersvelde British Cemetery as well as the Thatcham War Memorial and Roll of Honour.

2. Bath Road

Carter Family

In 1828 the Carter family, having moved from Abingdon, established a rope and sack manufacturing business at Newtown House on the Bath Road. The business was very successful.

John Morton Carter, a grandson of the founder, went on to establish his own business in Kingsclere. The Thatcham business was passed down through the generations. In 1892 they had a telephone installed. This was the first private telephone in Thatcham. At least one of the great-grandsons of the founder, Frank, became a soldier during the World War One. Another, Albert, sought exemption claiming he was running the business single handed at the time. By 1917 the business also had offices in Castle Street, Reading and in 1939 they moved to Caversham.

3. High Street

Howells Family

Thomas Howells, a domestic servant, was born c.1855 in London and Mary was born c.1865 in Kintbury. The couple moved to West Ilsley in the 1880s where they started a family. By 1891 the family had grown and moved to Brimpton and by 1911 the family had moved to Thatcham; they had grown to have 8 children but sadly two had died before 1911.

While in Thatcham the family lived at Glenesk (Model Cottages) described as on the Bath Road. There were several parts of the A4 then described as the Bath Road and these particular houses are today adjacent to Dominos on London Road. The family appear to have moved to the High Street by 1917.

Private William John Howells

On joining the army William was put in the 5th Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. He was killed in action on the Western Front in France and Flanders aged 30 on 30 November 1917. He is remembered on the Cambrai Memorial, Louverval.

Long Family

Arthur and his family were living in Bartholomew Street, Newbury, in 1891 where Arthur's wife had recently died. It is not clear what happened, but the two sons, William and Arthur, appear on the 1901 census as living, as boarders, at Mortimer's Cottage in Park Lane with George and Alice Buckell.

Private William Long

William had enrolled with the Royal Berkshire Regiment by 1911 but did not survive the First World War.

4. Turner Family

Thatcham House is one of the hidden architectural and historical gems in Thatcham. Located in Turners Drive, off Station Road, it was built c.1869 for Reverend Hezekiah Martin, who was vicar of Thatcham from 1866 to 1889.



Thatcham House

The one feature that stands out is the imposing tower, the true use of this is unknown. Interestingly, it is said to be the same height, or close to, as the tower of St Mary's. Reverend Hezekiah and his wife moved into the house, then a 30-roomed property, shortly after construction was finished in 1871. There would have been a long driveway from Station Road along with gardens and an orchard.

Later, in 1902, Thatcham House was owned by the Turner family, two of whom were awarded the Victoria Cross: Alexander Buller Turner (1893–1915) received his posthumously for service in the First World War following a single-handed bombing attack in 1915; his brother Victor Buller Turner (1900–72) was awarded his for gallantry in the Second World War.



VC Stones

Major Charles Turner

Between 1881 and 1902, he had served with the Royal Berkshire Regiment and came to Thatcham on retiring from the army. Here, he continued in public service, being elected a District Councillor for Thatcham in 1907 and serving as a J.P. for Berkshire and as Deputy Lieutenant for the county. Major Turner had been twice married - his first wife, Ella, daughter of Charles James Thornton, had died in 1887. His second wife, Jane Elizabeth, was a member of the famous Redvers Buller family, one of whom had won the V.C. in the Zululand Campaign of 1879 and then earned a national reputation as a General in the Boer War. Major Turner had five children by his second wife, four sons and a daughter, and all of them came to live at Thatcham House. He died on 20 May 1926 and was buried in Thatcham cemetery.

His wife and children stayed on at the house. The youngest son, Mark, was given cricket coaching on the lawn. The house also possessed a tennis court and a squash court (next to the coach-house). The daughter, "Miss Turner" (she was still unmarried) became the local Guide Captain and the girls often met at Thatcham House.

Alexander Buller Turner

The eldest son, born in 1893, was Alexander Buller Turner. He became a Second Lieutenant and served with the First Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. When the First World War broke out in 1914, A. B. Turner went with his regiment to fight on the Western Front.



On 28 September 1915, he made a daring attack on enemy positions at 'Slag Alley', Fosse, near Vermelles in France - throwing bombs incessantly, he drove the Germans back 150 yards, allowing British reserves to advance with very little loss. For this action he won the V.C. but he was wounded in the attack and died on 1 October 1915, aged only twenty-two. A.B. Turner was buried in the military cemetery at Chocque, France, but a wall tablet in dedication to his memory was placed in the parish church of Thatcham.

In 1918, the War Office Trophies Committee offered Thatcham a German Howitzer field gun and carriage that had been captured during the conflict by A.B. Turner's Battalion. A special Parish Council meeting was held on 26 May 1919, at which the offer was discussed. There was some dissent but the offer was eventually accepted and the German gun duly arrived in Thatcham where it was restored and painted.

At that same Parish Council meeting the possibility of creating a memorial to the other hundred men of the village who had laid down their lives in the War was discussed, although precise details were not finalised until later. In the event, a memorial, designed by Sir Charles Nicholson of London and built by an Oxford firm, was erected at the northern end of The Broadway Green, it was moved to the Bath Road in 1966.

The memorial and gun were formally dedicated at a ceremony held on Armistice Day, Thursday 11 November 1920. Both had been draped with large Union Jacks for the ceremony. General E. T. Dickson of the Royal Berkshire Regiment unveiled the War Memorial and Major and Mrs. Turner of Thatcham House unveiled the German gun. (The gun was disposed of as scrap in 1940).

Victor Buller Turner

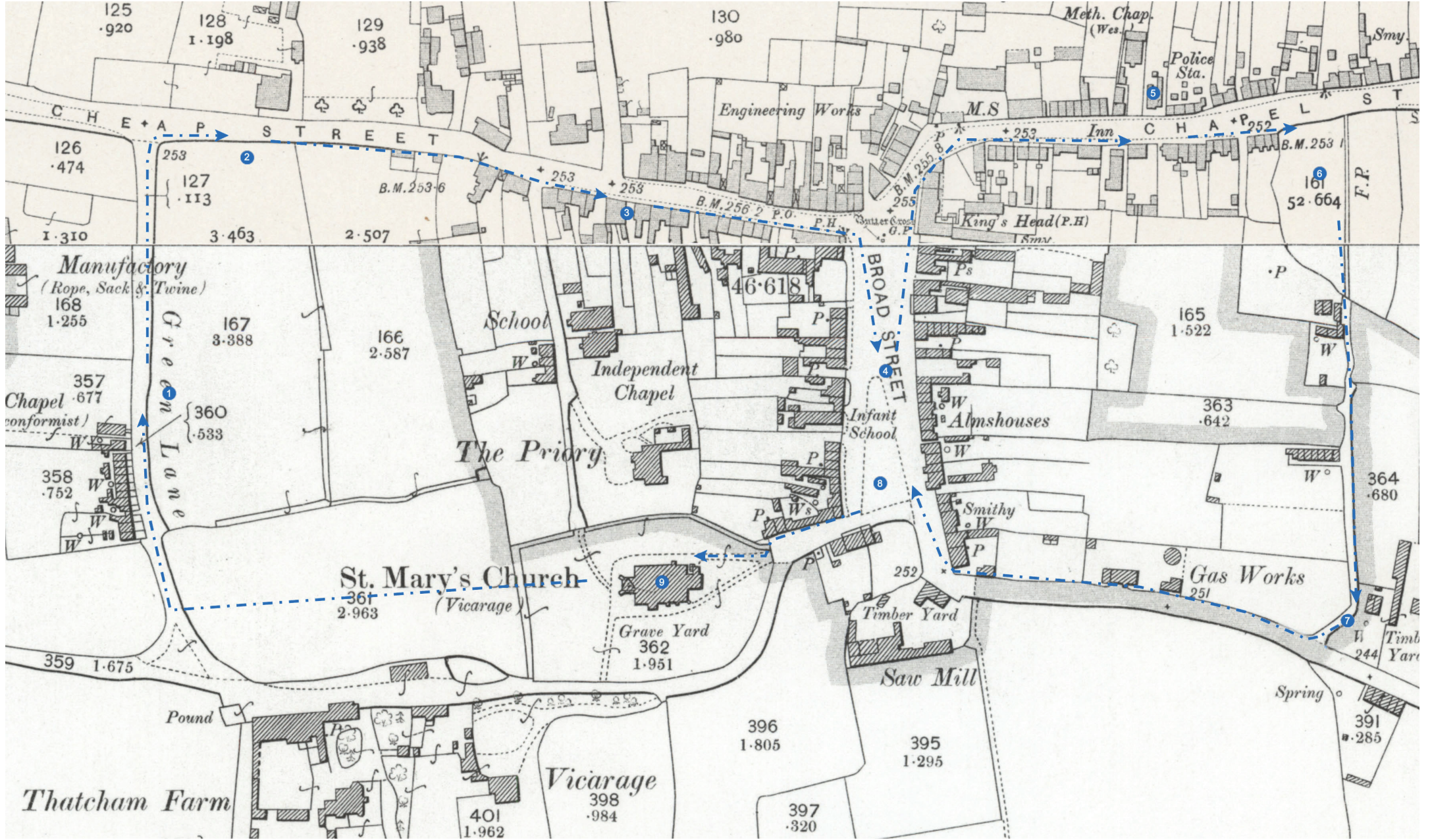
Victor and Cecil, were in the army and navy respectively, and when the Second World War broke out in 1939 both served with distinction. Victor Buller Turner, born in 1900, had been commissioned in 1918 and became a Lieutenant Colonel serving with the Second Battalion of the Rifle Brigade.

V. B. Turner served in the Western Desert of Egypt. On 27 October, 1942, he led his battalion four thousand yards across difficult terrain - under cover of darkness - to capture an enemy position. His men took forty prisoners and held the position for the rest of the day, repeated German attacks were repulsed and 35 enemy tanks destroyed. V. B. Turner was awarded the V. C. for this action and although wounded he survived the War.

Back in England in 1942 the news of Victor's award - coupled with that of his late brother, Alexander - made the Turner family nationally newsworthy.

"A greetings telegram arriving at the back door of a tall red house in the village of Thatcham, near Newbury, tonight said that Victor Buller Turner had won the V.C.", the Daily Express reported. "To Mrs. Charles Buller Turner it meant that she was the mother of two V.C. winners".

The report went on to say that Mrs. Turner was looking forward to the day when Victor would be decorated by the King: her pride may well have been tinged with sadness, however, for hanging in frames above the fireplace at Thatcham House were Alexander's V.C. and the letter from an earlier monarch conveying "sincere regret" that his death deprived him of the same honour.



5. Police Station

An old charity cottage in Chapel Street (number 20) was sold to Berkshire County Council for £150 in 1904. The cottage was demolished in December of that year and the building of the new police station commenced. It was completed the following summer, it had offices and one cell on the ground floor with living accommodation for a sergeant-in-charge above.

The first officer in charge of Thatcham's police station, from the summer of 1905, was Sgt. Daniel Goddard who had a number of men under his control. The value of having a police station, occupied by trained officers, was demonstrated in the spring of 1907, for example, when a motorcyclist met with an "unfortunate accident" in Chapel Street. He was thrown from his machine and badly injured, but Goddard was soon on the spot and "rendered valuable first aid" whilst awaiting the arrival of a doctor.



Thatcham Police Station, c.1905

Sergeant William Gallop succeeded Goddard in November 1911. Followed by many more.

In January, 1969, the first panda cars were introduced in the Newbury area and Thatcham's police station was closed later that same year.

The police station stood empty for some time until, in August, 1976, it became the office for Thatcham Town Council. In 1984 the council moved to new premises and the police moved back in on a part-time basis, but it was still a far cry from what things used to be like.

Private George William Bennett

George was born in 1886 at Bray. In 1911 he was a Police Constable in Thatcham. He went on to serve in the Coldstream Guards. George died 8 September 1917, killed at the Somme and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial in addition to the Thames Valley Police College and Maidenhead War Memorial.

Wallington Family

George and Ada Wallington who between 1901 and 1911 were living in Chapel Street had a number of children including Charles and Arthur.

Private Charles Wallington

Charles was born 1886 and by 1911 he was working in the local tannery. He died 19 May 1917 in Newbury.

Corporal Arthur James Wallington MM

The London Gazette 6 August 1918 identifies Arthur as being awarded the Military Medal whilst serving in the Somerset Light Infantry. He was employed by Brown and Co. as a wood turner but lost his arm due to being shot.

6. Turnfield Recreation Ground

Rutter Family

George Thomas Rutter was born c.1856 in Suffolk. In 1878 he married Sophia Tyrell, born c.1856 in Middlesex. Sometime between 1883 and 1891 they had moved to Thatcham and were living next door to the Queens Head in Chapel Street. Together they had 11 children, three of which did not survive past 1911. George in 1911 was working on the Great Western Railway as a signal man.

Sergeant Percy Harold Rutter

Percy was born c.1883 in Kensington. He came to work at Brown and Sons wood turnery before the war. He became a Sergeant in the 4th Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. On the 8 August 1915 a shell exploded at the entrance of his dug-out, injuring his foot. He was evacuated out; the wounds received in France and Flanders proved fatal and he died on 18 October 1915 in "The Warrens" Red Cross Hospital in Leamington Spa.

For his funeral, they closed the Brown and Sons factory for 2 hours and all turned out to pay their respects. Representatives from the Royal Berkshire Regiment also present.



The late Sergt. P. H. RUTTER,
Chapel Street, Thatcham.—Died of
wounds. Aged 32.

Corporal Gordon Tyrell Rutter

Gordon was born c.1897 in Thatcham. He enrolled with 2nd/4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment, service number 201245. Like his brother Percy, he worked for Brown and sons. Corporal Rutter died at Passchendale on 22 August 1917.

Lance Corporal Cecil Rutter

Cecil was born c.1895 in Thatcham. He died of wounds on 17 February 1917.

Vera Rutter

Vera Rutter born c.1899 in Thatcham. It would appear that she died in a munitions explosion in Newbury at the start of 1919.

Private Charles Albert Rutter

Born c.1885 in Kensington. He moved to Thatcham with his parents. Between 1901 and 1911 he moved to Green Lane and was living with his wife, Lucy Ann, who he had married in 1908. He was described as a wood sawyer, possibly at one of the local wood working yards. During the war he was enlisted in the Royal Berkshire Regiment.

George Donald Rutter

Born c.1880 in London, he moved to Thatcham with the rest of his family and by 1911 was living in Broad Street (The Broadway). In 1905 he married Harriett Anne Rutter from Long Lane (b. 1884). He worked at a local brush manufactory, possibly the Brown and Sons wood turnery as a Japanner.

7. Pets Corner Car Park

Radbourne Family

The family have their origins to the west of Newbury. Records vary with Isaac being born in Stockcross and Speen depending on the record viewed. Isaac, born c.1846 married Mary Ann in 1880 and moved to Harts Hill, Thatcham, between 1887 and 1890. The couple had 8 children with one having died before 1911. He is described as a cowman, working at one of the local dairies. His sons, George and Charles, both still living at home in 1911 were described as paper makers presumably working at Colthrop, both went to serve their country.

Private Charles Radbourne

Charles worked at Colthrop Paper Mill in 1911. He died, as a result of wounds received in action, on 24 August 1916.



8. Broadway Green

Vallis Family

Samuel Vallis was born c.1823 in Headington and moved, by 1856, to Thatcham with his wife Eliza. By 1861 he was the school master of the National School which stood near the car park of the Co-Operative store. By 1871 Samuel had died and the family moved back to Headington where Eliza became the school mistress of the National School there.

Samuel Vallis

Son of the above named Samuel, he was born c.1856 and was following in his parents footsteps, he became a school master himself. He married in 1883 and they had 6 children, sadly their daughter Winifred died in 1904, aged 6. Samuel and the family moved back to Thatcham where in 1910 he became school master of the Bluecoat School.

When war broke out in 1914 Samuel, being a reservist, was called up. He had already served previously, with the Surrey Volunteers and had sons fighting too. On his paperwork he put his age as 10 years younger than he truly was, presumably had he put his real age he might not have been accepted! The school closed when Samuel went to war and never re-opened as an independent school again. He died in July 1944 in Newbury Hospital.

Harold Robert Vallis

Harold was unemployed in 1911 but was in the Army Reserve. When war broke out he was put in the Rifle Brigade.

Francis Samuel Vallis

Francis was born 13 January 1884 in East Hendred. He had started his Royal Navy career in 1902 where he is described as 5 foot 8 inches, brown hair, grey eyes, a fresh complexion and with a scar on his right foot. His first placement was onboard the HMS Pembroke. In 1911 he was a 1st Class Writer in the Royal Navy. The HMS Pembroke II was his final ship that he served on and his last day of service was 1 April 1924. By 1946 he was living in Gillingham, Kent.

Band Sergeant Albert Senior Vallis

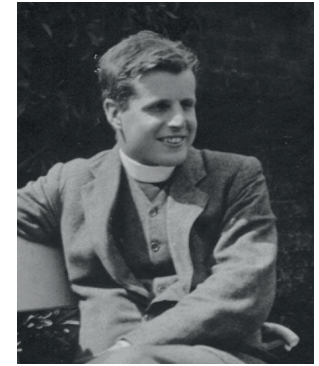
Born c.1889 in Wendover. He was wounded in action with the Royal Scots Fusiliers and was awarded the DCM. By 1941 he was living at Midgham and died in Newbury District Hospital in that same year.



9. St Marys Church

Acting Chaplain Rev. Hatfield Arthur William Back

Born in Norfolk c.1891 to Arthur and Ellen. Hatfield had obtained a BA at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge in 1912 and had gone from there to Leeds Clerical School. He was ordained a deacon in 1914 and came to Thatcham to serve his first curacy, living over Green's shop in the High Street. He became an ordained priest in 1915 and left c.1916 to serve as a naval chaplain. He died following an explosion on board HMS Vanguard in 1917 which was in Scapa Flow at the time.



Acknowledgements

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The research will continue and if you have any information that you would like to contribute to this project then please contact Thatcham Town Council enquiries@thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk or Dr Nick Young nick@nickbits.co.uk.

If you are interested in exploring more of Thatcham's history then please visit the Thatcham Historical Society website www.thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk.

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