

## “Presentation” – Higher Bebington War Heroes

Today we are remembering those who died while serving their country and in particular we are going to spend a few moments thinking about the Higher Bebington Heroes whose names are carved on the oak tablet here in our church which forms the Higher Bebington Memorial Tablet for the First World War.

There are 29 names carved in wood – but they are not just names - they were all real people – sons, grandsons, brothers, husbands, dads, friends ..... Just over 100 years ago these men lived in roads such as School Lane, Mill Brow and walked our streets. Charles Wilkins, William Fairclough and William Oultram were married here in this church. John Williams, Alfred Royden and James Holding were part of the Church Lads Brigade here. John was also was a choir member. Charles Wilkins, Ernest Smith, John Patten, Joseph Baxter, Thomas Smith and William Oultram all worked at Levers.

Amongst them are 5 sets of brothers, including half-brothers – so imagine the heartache and sadness for those at home.

Grandmother Mary Smith of 20 Mill Brow had 1 son and 10 grandsons all serving by 1916; grandson Walter was the first to die from this Parish – shot through the heart and his brother Frederick was killed in Vimy less than a year later. The Faircloughs lost their sons William, Thomas and Robert all within 1 year.

Charles Wilkins died before the birth of his son as did Jams Corfe who also left another 5 children fatherless. James Holding died 7 weeks after his marriage.

The majority died in action – through gunshot wounds, shell bursts or the effects of gas. Richard Smailes’ boat was torpedoed by a German submarine. Several died through war induced illnesses – such as kidney failure, diabetes and Spanish flu. William Oultram died on his way home after the war ended with broncho pneumonia. Some had made significant recoveries from being invalided only to return to the front line to face imminent deaths.

Exactly one hundred years ago, from July to November 1917, the battle of Battle of Passchendaele, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres, was raging. The allies sought control of the ridges south and east of the Belgian city of Ypres in West Flanders. During these horrendous battles James Davies, Ernest Smith, John Patten, William Fairclough, James Corfe and Charles Brown lost their lives.

Charles and his brother George Brown, who was believed to have been a clergyman, had emigrated before the war from Town Lane to Canada but they both served in the Canadian Infantry and are remembered here; George had died a year before Charles in the Somme.

Two of our heroes – Joseph Baxter and Thomas Fairclough – died in Palestine during the advance on Jerusalem; Joseph Baxter on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1917 and Thomas Fairclough on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1918. They are both buried in the Jerusalem War Cemetery.

So let us give thanks to God for our local heroes – as recall all their names

George Arnot, Joseph Baxter, Ernest Bell, Charles Brown, George Brown, James Corfe, Herbert Davey,

James Davies, Robert Fairclough, Thomas Fairclough, William Fairclough, James Griffiths, James Holding,

William Horne, Charles Lee, S Reginald Lea, Arthur Leay, William Millington, William Oultram,

John Patten, Alfred Royden, Frank Smailes, Richard Smailes, Ernest Smith, Frederick Smith,

Thomas Smith, Walter Smith, Charles Wilkins, John Williams,

From the Second World war we remember –

Dave Appleton, William G Bone, Charles R Canday, Stan Davenport, Tim Davies, Ernie Duckers

Jim Jones, Robert E Leatham, Robert J Norman, Stanley Roberts, Eric P Roden