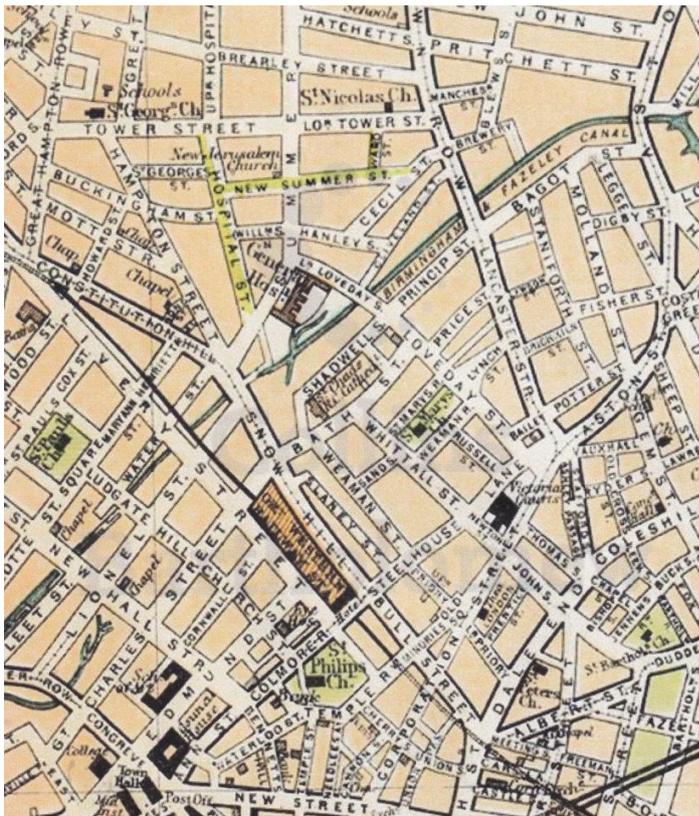


## Second Lieutenant Stanley Thomas Horton

Prelude. Towards the end of February 1917, the Germans began to evacuate the Gommecourt salient on the Somme and retire behind the Hindenburg Line. This necessitated a new plan of action for the Allies. In support of a larger French offensive, the British Third Army, consisting of five corps and three cavalry divisions was now to attack south of the river Scarpe between Arras and Mercatel to draw German reinforcements away from the main attack between Soissons and Reims. The Third Army attack commenced on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1917 and is known as the Battle of Arras.

The Horton family can trace its origins back to early nineteenth century Birmingham where Stanley's great grandfather, Abraham was baptised in the Parish Church of Saint Philip's, now Birmingham Cathedral, on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1806.<sup>i</sup> His parents were Isaac and Sarah Horton.

Abraham became a brass cock founder, someone who made brass fittings, including unions, taps and stopcocks, the wherewithal for heating, water and gas engineering installations. On 20<sup>th</sup> April 1833, he married Harriet Wilkes.<sup>ii</sup>



**Figure 1: Highlighted in yellow are Hospital Street, New Summer Street and Ward Street**

The couple had four sons, Thomas, Henry, Alfred and Samuel.<sup>iii</sup> Their eldest son, Thomas, was born on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1833 and was baptised at the Parish Church of St Philip's on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1834.<sup>iv</sup> The following year, on 26<sup>th</sup> January, a second son, Henry was born. Thomas and Harriet are recorded as living in Ward Street on Henry's birth register.<sup>v</sup> By May, the family had relocated to New Summer Street where Henry sadly died on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1835 aged only four months old.<sup>vi</sup> The 1841 census, taken on 6<sup>th</sup> June, records the family living in Hospital Street, but in the

course of the next few months they had moved back to New Summer Street and lived in 12 Court House, Number 8, where their youngest son, Samuel, died, aged only 7 months old, on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.<sup>vii</sup>

By 1851, Abraham and Harriet's eldest son, Thomas, had become a jeweller. The family were still living in the Court House. Harriet, was working as a 'Japanning stover', someone who oversaw the application of a Japanese style black gloss varnish used in the decoration of furniture and for rust proofing metal objects. Thomas' younger brother, Alfred was also working as a 'Jappanner'.

At the age of 21 years, Thomas, then resident in New John Street, married the nineteen year old, Charlotte Drake, daughter of William Drake, a hatter. The marriage took place at St Thomas' Church, in the parish of Birmingham on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1855.<sup>viii</sup>

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May 1859, while at work at a jeweller's in Great Hampton Street, Thomas was attacked by a fellow worker, James Roberts. The two workers were on bad terms because Thomas had spoken to the father of a girl James kept company with and had suggested that his daughter broke off the acquaintance with James due to his bad temper. At the time of the attack, James became irritated by some banter with other work mates about the girl. As a consequence, James had picked up a small wooden mallet and struck Thomas on the back of the head rendering him insensible and in danger of his life. James was committed for trial charged with Grievous Bodily Harm with bail set at £50.<sup>ix</sup>

**MONDAY.**

*Before Messrs. T. C. S. Kygnersley, W. Middlemore, and W. Lucy.*

**VIOLENT ASSAULT UPON A JEWELLER.**—A jeweller, named James Roberts, twenty years of age, who had lived in Bridge Street West, was charged with violently assaulting a fellow-workman named Thomas Horton, residing in St. Mark's Street. Mr Harding defended the prisoner. It appeared from the evidence of the prosecutor that he had not spoken to the prisoner for about six months, in consequence of his having spoken to the father of a girl the prisoner kept company with to break off their acquaintance in consequence of the prisoner's bad temper. While at work, on Wednesday morning at a jeweller's in Great Hampton Street, the prisoner came behind the prosecutor, and struck him a blow on the back of his head, which felled him to the ground. He was picked up insensible, and has been under medical treatment ever since. Mr. Harding applied for a remand until to day, in order to procure the attendance of Mr. Wilmhurst, who has been attending Mr. Horton, in order to certify that the prosecutor is out of danger, so that he (Mr. Harding) may obtain bail for the prisoner.

Figure 2: One of the account's of the assault on Thomas by James Roberts on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May 1859

Fortunately Thomas recovered in the care of the surgeon Mr Wilshurst and was well enough to give evidence at James' trial on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1859. James was sentenced to one month's imprisonment.<sup>x</sup>

By 1861, Thomas and Charlotte had moved from St Mark's Street to 16, New John Street in the Parish of Birmingham with their two children, Harriet (born 1856) and William Thomas (born 1859).

The 1871 census records Thomas as a 'warehouseman employing 3 men' and living at Holly Terrace, Gerrard Street, Aston with Charlotte and their seven children Harriet, William, Thomas (b 1861), Annie (b 1862), Henry (b 1867) and Frederick (b 1869), together with a domestic servant, Louisa Perry. Another child, Alfred was born in 1870, but does not appear on the 1871 census. By 1881, Thomas was a 'jeweller employing 6 men'. Charlotte, Thomas and their seven children were now resident at 30 Lozells Road, Aston.



**Figure 3: Holy Trinity Church, Birchfield**

Thomas junior followed his father into the jewellery trade, starting as a clerk in the business. On 20<sup>th</sup> January 1887, at the age of twenty-five, Thomas married Amelia Alice Cooke at Trinity Church, Birchfield.<sup>xi</sup> Amelia's father, Joseph, was one of the partners in Cooke Brothers. The firm was established in 1872 in the heart of the Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham, by the sons of William Cooke, a Lancastrian who had much success in the cotton industry. Right from the outset Cooke Brothers concentrated on the production of hinges and other hardware products as well as metal stampings.<sup>xii</sup>

Thomas carried on his occupation as a manufacturing jeweller and in the 1891 census is recorded as living at 31 Roland Road, Handsworth with Amelia, known as Alice in the family, and their two daughters, Alice Mabel (b 1888), Dorothy Hilda (born 1890) with the assistance of a domestic servant Flora Earp.

The couple's third child and only son, Stanley Thomas, was born on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1896 at 12 Salisbury Road, Handsworth, a Victorian terraced house off Birchfield Road, where the family were still resident in 1901. Stanley attended King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys, Bordesley and on leaving, joined his father in his jewellery manufacturing business at 17 Spencer Street, Birmingham.<sup>xiii</sup> By 1911, the family had moved to Moseley and were living at 'Tresco', 65 Cotton Lane.

At the outbreak of war, Thomas enlisted as a private, No PS 2789, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion Royal Fusiliers (known as the 4<sup>th</sup> Public Schools Battalion) in Birmingham on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1914 for 'three years service or the duration of war'. Stanley was 19 years and 3 months old, 5' 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " tall and weighed 119 pounds when he was medically passed 'as fit' on the day of his enlistment. In October, Stanley received his first vaccinations and in February and March the following year his anti-typhoid jabs. The first year and sixty days were spent at home training, but by 26<sup>th</sup> June 1915 the battalion was readied for service abroad and came under the command of 98<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 33<sup>rd</sup> Division. On 14<sup>th</sup> November 1915 Stanley 'proceeded on active service' to France where he remained with his battalion until 18<sup>th</sup> May 1916, when he returned home, having been recommended for a commission a month earlier.



**Figure 4:**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Lt S T Horton

Sydney joined the 10<sup>th</sup> Officer Cadet Battalion at Gales, Ayrshire on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1916, and on completing the course joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Duke of Edinburgh's Wiltshire Regiment four months later on 25<sup>th</sup> September as a Second Lieutenant.<sup>xiv</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Wiltshire War Diary records that, Stanley joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Wiltshire Regiment in France in 'O' sector' at Agny' (2 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles SW of Arras) on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1916. Twelve days after his arrival, Stanley was sent on a course to the Army Trench Mortar School, returning to the battalion in the sub sector trenches at Agny on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1917 and immediately put in command on 'C' Coy.<sup>xv</sup>

In the spring of 1917 the Germans had started to withdraw from the Somme to the Hindenburg Line, a very strong defensive position which included barbed wire belts tens of yards wide, concrete emplacements and underground works.

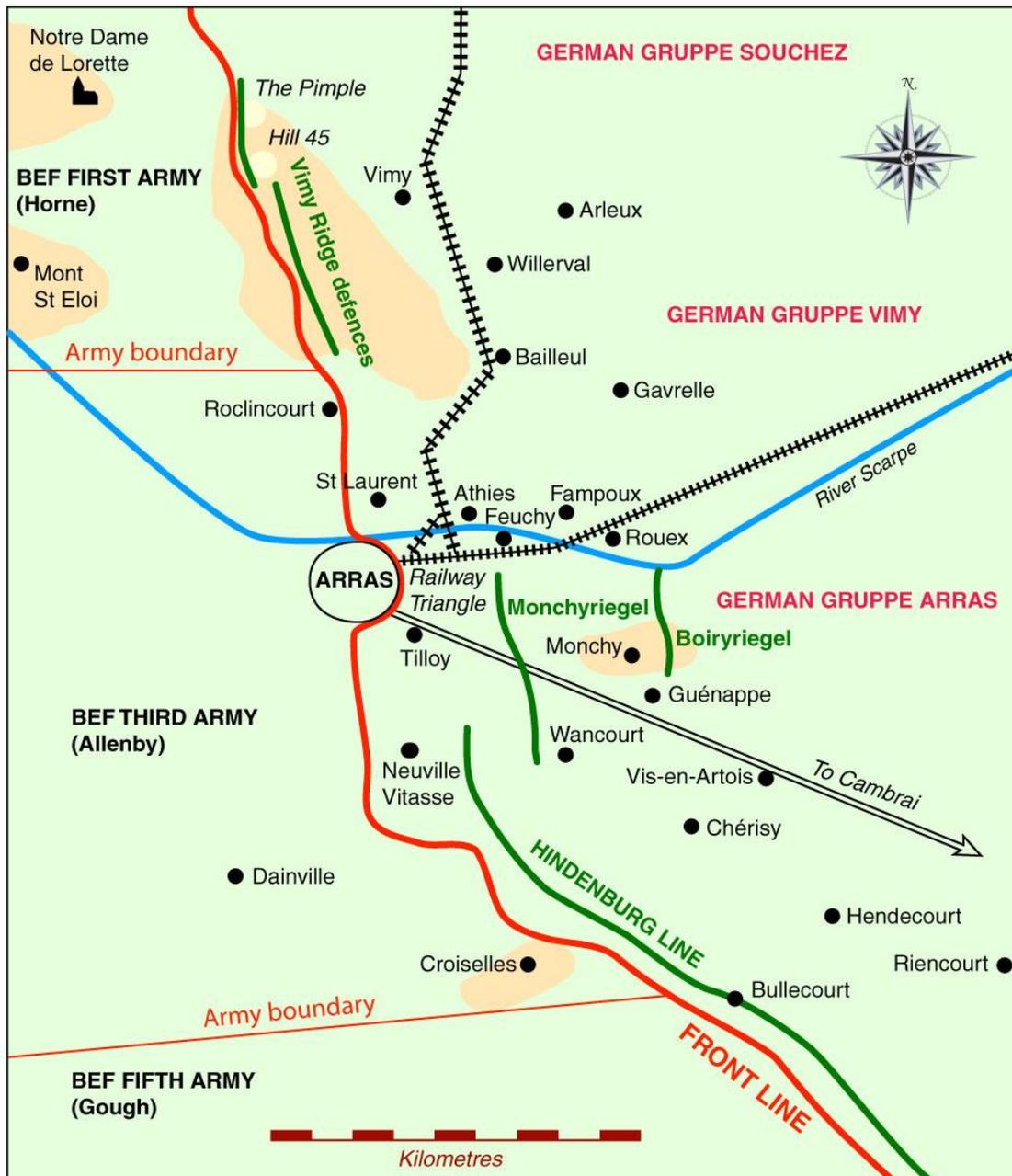
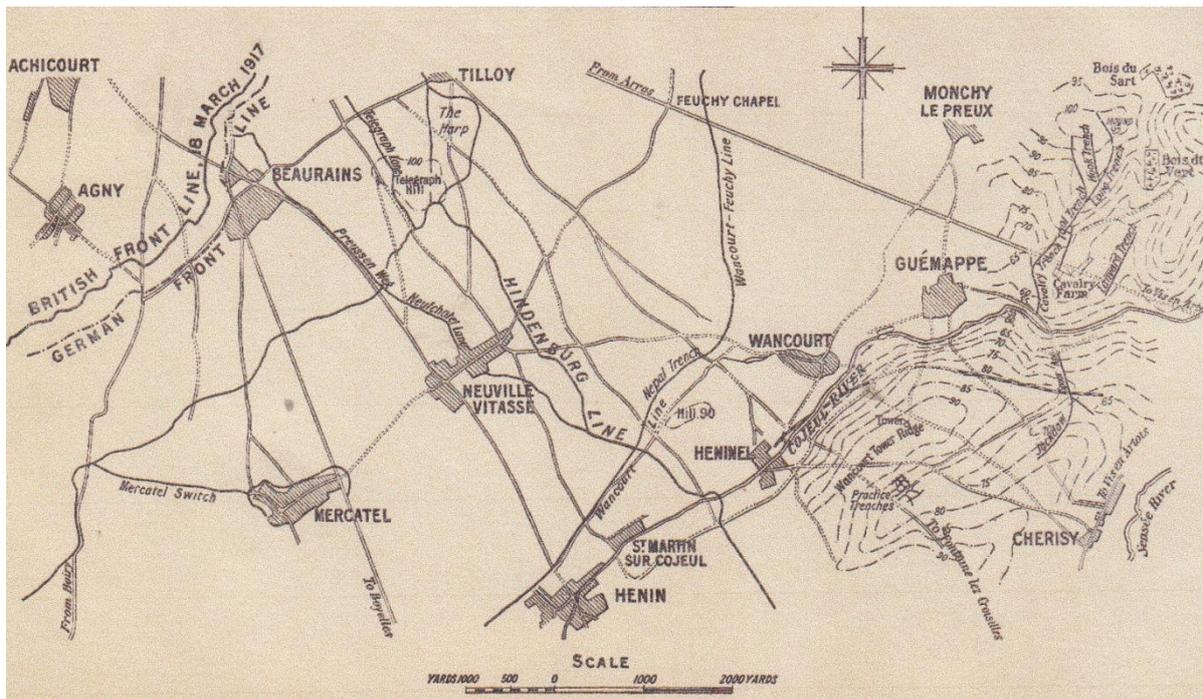


Figure 5: Map showing the Front Line on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1917 and the position of the Hindenburg Line

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Wiltshire Regiment as part of the 30<sup>th</sup> Division, British Third Army were to take part in an attack commencing 9<sup>th</sup> April known as the Battle of Arras, alongside the Canadians in the Vimy Ridge sector, to penetrate the German defences along the Hindenburg Line.



**Figure 6: Map of the Mercatel sector in the Battle of Arras showing the relative positions of Mercatel, Neuville Vitasse, St Martin-sur-Cojeul and the Hindenburg Line**

On 7<sup>th</sup> April 1917, at 1.30 pm the battalion paraded in fighting order and made their way to the trenches to the east of Mercatel. Halting at the Cruxifix en route tea was issued to the men, together with rations, bombs, flares, and entrenching tools before continuing at 7.15 pm. By 10 pm the battalion had taken over the trenches 'A' and 'B' Coy the line of outposts and 'D' Coy and Stanley's 'C' Coy, the rear trenches.

The following day the British artillery bombarded the Hindenburg Line all day. At 5.30 am, 9<sup>th</sup> April, the main attack on the Hindenburg Line commenced. Neuville Vitasse and St Martin-sur-Cojeul, the villages on the battalion's flanks were captured and at 11.38 am the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wiltshire's made ready to move forward. The distance between the assembly positions and the objective ranged from 1000 to 2400 yards. Stanley's 'C' Coy was on the left in the second wave of attack. Considerable hostile shelling was experienced during the advance which became more intense as it proceeded, causing heavy casualties before even sighting the objective. To reach the Hindenburg Line two sunken Roads had to be crossed which was achieved but not without considerable resistance. The advance continued to the enemy's wire but by this time the battalion was severely depleted. The few survivors took cover in any available shell hole before having to retreat back to the sunken road between Neuville Vitasse and

St Martin-sur-Cojeul. The German's began immediately to heavily shell this area with large calibre shells. By this time, only three officers remained and collected any surviving men. They consolidated their position until relieved in the evening. The casualties sustained included 2 Captains, 12 subalterns and 328 O R's. Stanley was one of four 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants killed in the action.<sup>xvi</sup>

Stanley's effects were sent home to his father. They consisted of:

A cigarette case, an identity disc, pipes, a pair of spectacles (damaged), a prismatic compass in case and sling, a wallet, photo wallets containing photos, a letter wallet containing letters, a tobacco pouch, a flask, a clasp knife, a pair of nail nippers, a pocket book, a small torch case, a revolver, an electric torch, a brass bracelet, a franc (souvenir), stamps value 3½d and badges from jackets.<sup>xvii</sup>



Figure 7: Copy of a newspaper report on Stanley's memorial service at St Mary's Church, Moseley on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1917

A memorial service was held at St Mary's Church, Moseley on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> April where Stanley had been a chorister.<sup>xviii</sup>

The family received a kindly letter of sympathy from the Colonel of Sydney's battalion. Colonel Gilson wrote:

It is with the greatest possible regret that I have to write to inform you of the death of your gallant son during the great attack on Easter Monday, April 9<sup>th</sup>. He was killed by a shell while trying to dig out some of his men who had been buried by a previous shell, and throughout the whole action that day he showed the greatest courage and devotion to duty. Although he had not been with the battalion many months, he had gained the complete confidence of his brother officers and men and he had done some excellent work for me on night patrols when his quick thinking and intelligence and courage stood him in good stead. I am very sorry indeed to lose such a cheery, gallant officer, who was always ready for anything and had well earned his great popularity..... The example of those who like your boy had trained and inspired the men was not lost and the battalion gave a magnificent display of courage and devotion and earned the thanks and admiration of their General for their extreme gallantry.<sup>xix</sup>

Stanley was 20 years old when he was killed. He is buried at Neuville Vitesse Road Cemetery, St Martin-sur-Cojeul, south east of Arras. He is also commemorated at King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys and at St Mary's Church, Moseley



**Figure 8: (Top and right) Stanley's gravestone in the second row of Neuville Vitesse Road Cemetery, France  
(Above) Stanley's name on the Camp Hill Boys memorial  
(Right) St Mary's Church WW1 memorial**

**Written and researched by Edwina Rees, Moseley Society History Group**

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### Endnotes

- 
- i England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975  
1841 census gives date of birth as 1806, Birmingham
  - ii 1841 census  
England marriages 1538-1973
  - iii 1841/1851 census  
England & Wales Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers 1567-1970
  - iv England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975
  - v England & Wales Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers 1567-1970
  - vi England, Church of England burials, 1813-1964
  - vii Birmingham, England, Church of England burials, 1813-1964
  - viii Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns 1754- 1937
  - ix *Birmingham Journal*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1959  
*Birmingham Daily Post*, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1859
  - x Supplement to the *Birmingham Journal*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1859
  - xi Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns 1754- 1937
  - xii With thanks to Philip Cooke, Cooke Brothers Ltd  
Cooke Brothers: Background and History  
[http://www.cookebrothers.co.uk/cooke\\_brothers/history.html#](http://www.cookebrothers.co.uk/cooke_brothers/history.html#)

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- xiii National Archives, Officers after 1913, Ref WO 339/63762  
*Birmingham News*, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1917
- xiv See xiii
- xv National Archives, War Diary for 2<sup>nd</sup> Wiltshire, Ref WO 95/2329/1, pp 67, 69, 87
- xvi See xv, pp 92-94
- xvii See xiii
- xviii *Birmingham News*, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1917
- xix See xviii

## Illustrations

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- Figure 2 *Birmingham Journal*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1859
- Figure 3 Postcard attributed to JKC on the Birmingham History Webring Forum.  
<https://billdargue.jimdo.com/placenames-gazetteer-a-to-y/places-b/birchfield/>
- Figure 4 *Birmingham Mail*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1917
- Figure 5 Map of the Battle of Arras  
<http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/the-great-war/great-war-on-land/battlefields/1011-roeux-apr-may-1917.html#sthash.dqSdrj3a.dpbs>
- Figure 6 Map of the Mercatel sector in the Battle of Arras  
<https://andrewparkrunner.wordpress.com/>
- Figure 7 *Birmingham News*, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1917
- Figure 8 Find a Grave  
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King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys WW1 memorial  
<https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/223944>