

EAST ILSLEY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER

EDITOR: ERIC SAXTON

EDITORIAL

In this time of national crisis, we have had to cancel meetings and other planned activities. However, we can still make contact through other means, hence our usual newsletter.

The percentage of the population who will have memories of the war, blackouts, rationing, not to mention danger, are now in the group of those 'most at risk' and advised to isolate themselves. They must secretly wonder what drives people to panic and clear supermarket shelves of certain products. These people would have found it impossible to 'bulk buy' during the wartime period of rationing, simply because the goods were not there!

We still are able to receive enquiries from all over the world. Recently a lady from Australia requested information about her ancestors, ahead of a planned visit to the UK this summer. We were able not only to add to her knowledge but advise on where to best do research when in this area. Sadly, unless the present situation alters she may arrive to find local record offices and libraries will be closed. She may even have to postpone or cancel the trip altogether.

It is good to know there is a fine community spirit in East Ilsley, with an organised group of volunteers, ready to help those in need, shopping, picking up prescriptions, etc. The village, which is always quiet, is now eerily so, only the occasional dog walker and those taking their daily exercise around the Millennium Green, to be seen.

NEWS

The village of East Ilsley is no stranger to plagues and epidemics of infectious diseases. **This is nothing new**

There are stories of plague burials having taken place on the western side of the churchyard. The solitary memorial to Frogley Cox is all that breaks the emptiness of that area. The ground has remained undisturbed and no burials have taken place on that side in recent times. Hewett writes in his book 'The Compton Hundreds', *'It is commonly reported that the great plague reached Ilsley, and cut off half the inhabitants, who were buried in a pit at the west end of the churchyard. We cannot expect to find all of the deaths recorded during such an awful visitation, but the following entry corroborates the tradition: "1664, William Huet buried January 18th, att night".'*

In the front of the burial register 1813-1868, there appears a list of, “regulations [that] must be agreed previous to the Rector’s consent to any persons being buried in the Parish Church or Chancel”, but there is no visual evidence of such burials that late. These regulations included the following, “ *The Corpse to be enclosed in a Leaden Coffin & the Vault or Grave to be built of Brick or Stone arched over with brick – at least 2 feet and a half below the level of the Floor from the Top & the Earth well rammed upon it. Persons dying of Small Pox or any other infectious disorder will not be permitted on any Terms to be interred in the Church or Chancel*”. A fee had to be paid before the ground was broken, and damage during excavation to a vault or grave had also to be paid for. No vault was to be opened without a fee.

There was a smallpox epidemic in 1753 which was the subject of a fascinating article by Sue Burnay in the 2012 Spring Issue of our newsletter some extracts from that article follow

Smallpox epidemic in East Ilsley in 1753:

The first mention of smallpox in the Overseer’s accounts occurs in April 1753, when the costs of Joseph Whiteing’s illness are listed. For the rest of 1753 and into the first half of 1754, the accounts continue to list the details of expenditure during the smallpox for many different people in the village. It is clear that this was a major epidemic, with at least 7 poor families being mentioned. Of course the poor were not the only people affected. Many of the other burials in that year were also likely to be due to the epidemic, and may even have included that of the rector Rev. Joseph Barnes. Although at 79 years of age, it may have been the strain of visiting the sick and carrying out so many burial services that finished him.

The total of smallpox deaths for 1753 is estimated to be about 20 of the 27 burials, making the assumption that the deaths of elderly residents, infants and mothers shortly after childbirth are probably from other causes. This implies that probably 50 to 60 people in the village were infected during the year, a major drain on the resources of a small community.

Over the period April 1753 to Jul 1754, a total of £45 was spent by the overseers in support of poor families affected by smallpox. This represents about the same amount as was normally spent in total on poor relief in a year, supporting poor widows and orphans in the village.

So what happened in the longer term in East Ilsley? Smallpox continued to crop up intermittently, as mentioned in the overseers’ accounts, but there were no major epidemics for the rest of the 18th century. This may possibly be due to the overseers providing premises where smallpox victims could be quarantined away from their families and most of the village. In 1755, the first mention is made of somewhere called “the Lodge”, whose upkeep appears in the accounts periodically over the next decades. Although it’s not specifically stated, this may have been the quarantine house. In the early part of the 19th century, a map and terrier of the village compiled by the Rev. Thomas lists two cottages on the eastern edge of the village as being the Lodge. By 1831 these cottages were definitely owned by the parish but by then they appear to be no longer in use as quarantine premises.

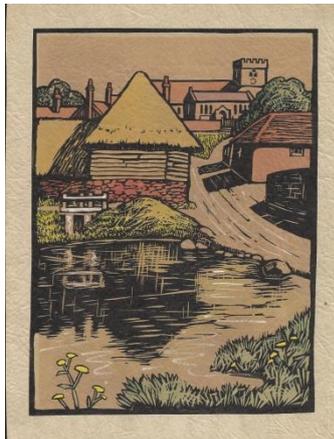
Two recent acquisitions

Kathleen Marriott has recently sent these two charming pictures of East Ilsley, to the Society and has kindly allowed us to reproduce them here.

One is a painting of Greenhill Cottage E.I. Berks – signed by M. J. – 1889. The cottage was situated on Abingdon Lane. At some time after 1871 until 1919 it came into the ownership of the Woodhouse family. The Field family lived there twice in two different periods of time, and this painting once hung on a wall there. The cottage was sold in 1919 to a Mr. Webb. At that time it was occupied by Mrs Edith Field. It is clearly the work of an unknown amateur artist.



At some stage after this the cottage was renamed ‘Hillside’. In 1962 Mr Eacott did some repairs at the cottage. He and his wife lived there until 1991. Hillside cottage was later demolished about 1992(?).



This woodcut or linocut print was obviously made by someone with artistic training. It is undated, but is on the reverse of a calendar for 1939. Being a print there were certainly other copies made, but the artist remains a mystery.

CONTACTS

Chairman: Sue Burnay

Secretary & Newsletter Editor: Eric Saxton 01635 281388

e-mail the Society at info@eastilsleyhistory.com

And don't forget our website www.eastilsleyhistory.com, which members can access using the current password.

Now read on

FEATURE ARTICLE

Next month is the 80th Anniversary of the wartime rescue from the beaches at Dunkirk. Here is the story of a soldier who went to school in East Ilsley, and who was caught up in the retreat of the Allied Forces.

Bandsman, John Charles Harvey 1914-1940

When John Harvey senior and his wife and three small children arrived in East Ilsley in 1916/7, for his wife, Lillian, it was a homecoming.

When the parents of Lillian Harvey (née Walker) moved to Gloucestershire they left their eldest daughter to be brought up by her grandparents, George and Mary Ann Tuson, who kept the White Hart public house on the High Street. Lillian later moved to London where she eventually met John Harvey. They had one son, George, before they married in 1906, and later had five more children in London, two of whom had died in infancy, before moving to East Ilsley. Therefore, when they arrived they had with them Walter (5), John Charles (3), and a baby Alfred. Sadly Alfred died aged 22 months in November 1917 and is buried in East Ilsley churchyard. In February 1919 Lillian had another son, Frederick. At his baptism his father's occupation was recorded as 'soldier'.

The family lived at various locations around East Ilsley, including Compton Road and Broad Street. From their cottage in Broad Street, Lillian would have been able to see the White Hart, a hundred yards away, where she spent her teenage years, and where her initials, and those of her grandparents were carved into the brickwork in the front gable in 1889.



Broad Street as it would have looked when Lillian lived at the White Hart, just visible at the end of the Street. Hall Cottages to the right of the picture in the foreground.

Lillian's husband left around 1920, and, after a brief return, eventually abandoned the family and went back to London permanently.

Walter (Walt), John Charles (Charlie), and Frederick (Freddy), all attended school in East Ilsley. Walter left school in 1926 and John Charles in 1928, when he enlisted in the Army aged 14.



In order to support her family, Lillian worked for the Post Office, delivering letters to surrounding villages. When they had to move out of their home in Broad Street, she took her youngest son to live, for a while, in Beedon, but still walked to work each day in East Ilsley.

Walter, with cricket bat and ball, Frederick, holding a toy, and John Charles with a wheelbarrow

Later Freddy returned to East Ilsley, where he temporarily lodged with a family friend, and returned to the village school. After four months, however, both mother and son moved to Shaw near Newbury where Freddy continued his education, and Lillian worked in a laundry.

John Charles Harvey was the second youngest surviving child of John and Lillian Harvey and was always known to his family as Charles or Charlie. Having left school at 14 in 1928, he trained as a musician, passing examinations at the Royal Military College of Music before joining the Regimental Band of the Royal Berkshire Regiment, in which he played the French Horn, and accompanied the regiment on its various deployments overseas.



Strong family likeness. Charlie and his mother.

This must have been taken soon after enlistment.

It is reasonable to suppose that Charles corresponded regularly with his mother and brothers during his time overseas, but we have just five surviving letters to his elder brother Walter (Walt) from which to work out where he was at any one time. The story of his army service can be sketched from these letters but is largely conjecture.

The first letter suggests that Charles had been in Germany and was on leave, prior to leaving for India the following February. The letter is undated, but it is fair to assume that it was written in the last months of 1931, (or possibly 1930) as he mentions Christmas is coming and that his leave ends on 1st January. The address on the letter is Hawkridge Farm, Bucklebury, where his mother and younger brother were staying at the time, *'until they find a better place'*.

The next letter dated 22nd November 1932 from 1st Royal Berks Regt. Victoria Bks. Dinapore, (sic) India, mentions his height of 5ft. 3½ins. He teases his brother that he will be able to look down at him the next time he is home..

The following year, 1933, on October 14th, Charlie says he is very busy, with much to do playing in the band. He mentions leaving on 16th October, *'only 7 more years to go in the army'*, moving to Sudan on 10th January 1934.

In a letter dated 26th May 1934, from South Barracks, Khartoum, Sudan, he records



the temperature at 120° in the shade. *'I suppose I shall be home some time before I finish my time which is 1940 but still think I shall purchase my discharge soon after I get home'*. He says he is fed up with nothing to see but sand for weeks on end. In the same letter he says *'Only 6 months to do here'*. He seems to suggest that he will be leaving within six months and sailing for England. It is not known whether he returned to Sudan after a period of leave or whether he did not return to England until much later. On a lighter note in this letter Charles mentions a forthcoming boxing match between Max Baer and Primo Carnera, he is backing Baer for victory. This bout did in fact take place on June 14th 1935, with Baer winning and taking the world title.

Charlie in tropical bandsman uniform, possibly taken in Khartoum, Sudan.

His final undated letter, from HQ 1st Royal Berkshires, British Expeditionary Force, suggests that he has been home on leave recently and seems to think he will be home again soon, when he hopes to visit his brother in person.

'I hope if I do get time I'll be over to see you. Of course, anything may happen between now and then, but still we are hoping for the best.....'

Well, I suppose its Au Revoir and don't let the war get you down. There's plenty worse off than you out here. Au Revoir.

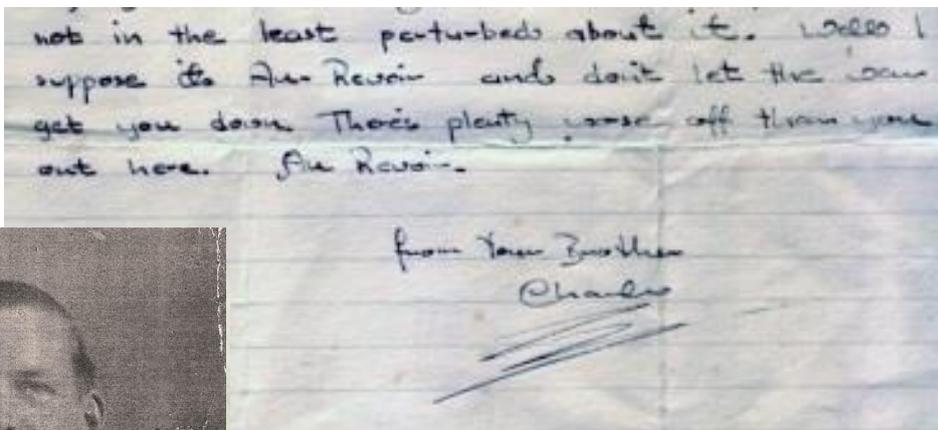
From your Brother

Charles

The Royal Berkshire Regiment had been in France since September 1939, and by May 1940 had taken up positions along the river Dyle. On 13th May they made their first contact with the German forces and for two days held their ground. Later they were given the order to withdraw and make their retreat to Dunkirk.

Among those retreating soldiers was bandsman, **John Charles Harvey**. On 16th May whilst carrying a wounded soldier on a stretcher, he was killed by a hand-grenade. A witness reported to his family some years later that there was no time to do a proper burial but they dug a shallow grave in a hedgerow and placed him there in France on the way to Dunkirk. His body was never recovered.

A search has found that his name does not appear on any local war memorials, though he is recorded on the Dunkirk Memorial which stands at the entrance to the Commonwealth War Graves section of Dunkirk Town cemetery. It commemorates more than 4,500 casualties of the British Expeditionary Force who died in the campaign of 1939-40.



The end of his last letter home

John Charles Harvey 1940