

Lye Lads who lost their lives in the last year of The Great War

In September 2014 a book was published commemorating twenty-nine men who had died in the First World War. Fifteen of them were laid to rest in Commonwealth War Graves in the Lye & Wollescote Cemetery and the remaining fourteen, who were buried abroad, are remembered on family graves. Following publication, however, it was discovered that two young men, Privates Frank Bristow and Samuel Wassell, had unfortunately been omitted from the book. This is the story of those two Lye lads, both of whom were killed in the final year of the war.

In 2014 a memorial plaque was found hidden away beneath the stage at Redhill School listing the names of six men from Lye Valley Road School who had lost their lives in the First World War. Among the names was that of Frank Bristow and, at the dedication of the restored plaque at Redhill School in November 2014, authors Jean Weston and Marlene Price made contact with Frank's nephew, Bernard Shaw of Wollescote, who subsequently provided them with details about his Uncle Frank.

Frank Bristow was born in 1899 the son of William and Mary Ann Bristow who lived at 109 Stourbridge Road. Frank was a pupil at Valley Road School and regularly attended Belmont Mission Church. Before the war he worked for Messrs. Harbach & Young at Lye. Frank enlisted in March of 1917, originally as a Private in the Somerset Light Infantry but was transferred to the 34th Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps and sent to France in May of 1918. Two months later, on the 23rd July, an attack was launched on the village of Tigny with the machine guns providing protective fire. However, the German resistance was strong and there were many casualties among them 19-year old Private Frank Bristow who was fatally wounded during the action.

Back home in Lye Frank's sister, Hilda, received a letter from his pal Private Frew who, in expressing his deepest sympathy, wrote that Frank had been conscious for a short time after he had been hit and had constantly talked about his family and home. Frank was buried in the Raperie British Cemetery at Villemonoire and his name appears on the Lye War Memorial and in Lye Church. Almost a year after Frank was killed his 16-year old sister, Margaret, died on the 12th of July 1919. Both are

commemorated on the family grave in the Lye & Wollescote Cemetery with the poignant words: *'Beloved children of William and Mary Ann Bristow'*



Bristow family grave in Lye Cemetery



Pte. Frank Bristow's grave in France

Samuel Wassell is commemorated on his grandparents' grave and Jean and Marlene came across it while working on an ongoing project to photograph and record all the existing graves in the Lye & Wollescote Cemetery.

Samuel was the only son of William Thomas Wassell, a Bucket Blacksmith, and his wife Ellen Maria. In 1911, when Samuel was 12-years old, the family were living at 56, Chapel Street. Samuel attended Lye Primitive Methodist School and before he went into the army was employed by Messrs. Glaze of Cradley Heath. Samuel enlisted in September of 1917, originally in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment but was transferred to the 8th Battalion of the Berkshires and went to France in April of 1918. The Berkshire Regiment took part in the Advance to Victory which began on 22nd August. The enemy put up a determined fight over the old Somme battlefield but the Berkshires fought back, eventually taking Trones Wood on the 28th of August. The Regiment suffered many casualties, however, and among the wounded was Private Samuel Wassell who was taken to a Casualty Clearing Station where, sadly, he died of his wounds. Like Frank Bristow, Samuel was 19-years old - a mere lad. He was buried in Daours Communal Cemetery Extension and his name also appears on the Lye War Memorial and in Lye Church.

Just a few months after the deaths of these two lads from Lye, the Armistice was signed and the guns went silent but not before the 247 men named on the Lye & Wollescote War Memorial, including Frank Bristow and Samuel Wassell, had made the supreme sacrifice.



Pte. Samuel Wassell remembered on the family grave