

The WWI Memorial in St Peter's Church with Margaret Taylor

TFS member Margaret began by explaining that she did not intend to speak about all those commemorated on the WWI Memorial in St Peter's Church but had selected those with particularly interesting stories, or whose connection with Farnborough was particularly strong.

Margaret said she was aided in her research by the fact that those who gave their lives are listed by year. This was significant because no Christian names are provided for the 40 men listed, 30 of whom were in the Army (in 18 different regiments), 6 in the Royal Navy and 4 in the fledgling Royal Flying Corps. Their ages when they died ranged from 16 to 45, with an average age of 26.5.

She began with Richard George Crossman, a sergeant in the Military Mounted Police, who was the first person to die of wounds from the war, at Fort Pitt Hospital in Chatham. Crossman was born in Islington, enlisted when he was 18 and served in South Africa and Egypt before embarking for France on 15th August 1914, leaving his wife Alice and baby daughter living in Union Street. He was injured at the Battle of Mons on 15th September and developed tetanus, dying on 23rd September with his wife at his bedside; the Army had arranged for her to be taken to him. Following his death, Alice (nee Fry) was awarded 16/- per week widow's pension, plus her husband's backpay.

By contrast, Lieutenant Reginald Nigel Gipps came from a very privileged background. Born in 1891, he grew up in Belgravia in a household with seven servants. The family moved to Sycamore House, now The Sycamores, in Farnborough, and when Reginald's father, Sir Reginald Ramsey Gipps, died in 1908, the town turned out en masse for his spectacular funeral procession. Lady Gibbs died in the South of France in 1914, leaving a substantial estate to Reginald's elder brother George. But he was killed in a flying accident later in 1914. Thus, by the time Reginald Gipps embarked for France with the Scots Guards, having previously served in Egypt, he was now, as the only surviving son, the head of the household. He fought at Mons and Marne before meeting his end at Ypres. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Menin Gate as well as in the Victoria Road funeral chapel in Farnborough.

At 45, Frederick James Andrewartha is the oldest man listed on the memorial. Born in London, his family moved to Farnborough when he was 10. He worked as a painter and decorator in his father's business and lived in Farnborough Street with his wife Margaret (nee Bartlett) the daughter of a local blacksmith. Frederick served in militias before enlisting in the Berkshire Regiment, where he served for 22 years and reached the rank of Company Quartermaster Sergeant. Frederick did not see action during WWI, however, dying before going to France in a meningitis epidemic that swept through Chelmsford, where he was based. His two daughters, Florence and Daisy, both became teachers, though in Daisy's case not for very long, and the family lived in Elm Tree Cottage for at least 40 years.

Ernest Bernard Ames is one of those from the Royal Navy to be commemorated—an air mechanic in the Royal Flying Corps. Born in 1892 in Overton, he was living in Farnborough

by the age of eight, at 3 Spring Villas, which was opposite The Ship public house. He joined the Royal Navy in 1910 at the age of 18 and the Naval Air Service in 1914. By all accounts a model sailor, Ernest met his end when his airship went down in the sea off the coast of Kent with the loss of all but one of those on board. None of their bodies were ever recovered. His sister, a teacher, spent many years investigating the accident, because Ernest had shared his concern that the vessel carried insufficient fuel. Eventually, the Air Ministry told her that the lone survivor, a non-swimmer, was the only crew member to stay with the stricken airship, while the others attempted to swim ashore. Ernest's name also appears on the Chatham war memorial.

Alan Travers Chubb, whose name also appears on the Theipval memorial, was a Second Lieutenant in the Hampshire Regiment who lost his life at the Somme. Born in Sandgate, his father was a doctor who provided his son with a good private education, after which Alan went to Canada to grow fruit for several years. Meanwhile, his parents moved to Farnborough. In 1914, he enlisted in the University and Public Schools Brigade of the Royal Fusiliers and won a commission in the Special Reserve, which he cancelled so that he could join the Regulars. He went to France in February 1916 and was killed leading a charge at the Somme. Although Alan was a Roman Catholic convert, his parents were members of St Peter's Church.

Cruger Stanley Peach, a Lieutenant in the 15th Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, was killed in a flying accident on Clapham Common. Born in Putney, his father was an architect who in fact designed Centre Court at Wimbledon. The family moved to Queensmead, a large house later demolished when the Farnborough shopping centre was developed. Having seen active service, Cruger returned to the UK to train as a pilot and was killed when his two-seater biplane, of a type disliked by pilots, crashed. According to a report by the Metropolitan Police, a resident was digging on his allotment when a boy brought him the remains of human feet. It was found that they belonged to the pilot whose body had been removed from the site of the crash, apparently without anyone noting that the feet were missing, a fact subsequently established at an inquest. The foot remains had by then been buried by the resident in his allotment and he was unable to find them, so they were never reunited with Cruger's body, which lies in Brookwood Cemetery.

Leading Seaman William Finch died in a very unfortunate incident that was kept secret for the duration of the war because of fears that it would badly affect morale. Born in Ash Vale, William was living in Rectory Road when he joined the Royal Navy at the age of 18. He became a submariner in 1917 and his submarine was part of a battle group of 40 vessels that gathered, in thick fog, in the North Sea on 31st January 1918. Two submarines collided on the surface. Had visibility been good, this might have been little more than an inconvenience. However, in attempting to come to the aid of the stricken vessels, the group brought about a succession of further collisions, each more devastating than the last. One of the casualties was William's submarine, which was hit by HMS Fearless and sent to the bottom. Although most of her crew managed to get off, many were killed by the other vessels milling around; some 270 men, including William, were killed in just 90 minutes, with only nine survivors. William is also commemorated on Portsmouth Naval Memorial.

Unlike the other men commemorated in St Peter's Church, Captain Spencer Franks does not appear on the Rushmoor Roll of Honour because he was not listed as resident at the family home, Pinewood in High View Road, in the 1911 census, having been away at school at that time. But it is precisely that census information that makes his family interesting. His mother, Helen Louise, is listed as head of the household, even though she had a husband living. This is believed to reflect her staunch support for the suffragette movement. And it was Spencer's mother who took probate of the estate following her son's death. Nor was his death entirely straightforward. On 22nd March 1918 a witness reported having seen Spencer dead and the British Red Cross reported the fact, with no burial place known. It was in 1919, while the battlefields were still being searched, that information came to light that Spencer had in fact been removed from the battlefield and hospitalised by the Germans. He died six days later and was buried in a German cemetery. His id tags and a signet ring were returned to his family in 1920, and his remains subsequently disinterred and reburied at the British Cemetery in France.

The youngest person named on the memorial is Alfred Edward Ferris, aged 16. He was born in Cove in 1903, the son of a cab driver, and joined the Royal Navy as a Boy 2nd Class when he was 15. He went to join the training ship, HMS Impregnable, but died suddenly of lung disease. Alfred's grave is in Victoria Road Cemetery.

Showing us a splendid photo of St Peter's decorated for a service of celebration of the peace, Margaret told us that everyone who is named on the memorial has now been identified and that the WWII memorial was relocated above the WWI memorial during the recent reordering of St Peters.

Although the WWI memorial records terrible tragedy, Margaret's talk was very interesting and often amusing. Her research has revealed some fascinating stories about the people behind the names.