

# DOWN MEMORY LANE

## The Final Stewkley Lad Fallen in the Great War

4 June marks the 100th anniversary of the death of the final Stewkley soldier to have been recognised as a victim of the Great War, having served in the armed forces between 4 August 1914 and 31 August 1921, the date the war was officially declared over.

**Pte 56253 William Harold Syrett, 23rd (Service) Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers (4th Tyneside Scottish) died at home in Stewkley on 4 June 1920.**

He was born in Stewkley on 30 October 1893. Before his war service, he was groom to the Earl of Orkney at Tythe House.

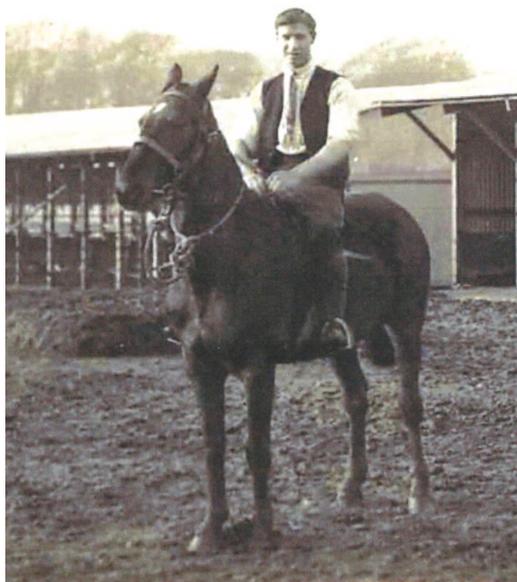
He first went to France on 23 April 1915, and was transferred to the Northumberland Fusiliers on 27 September 1917. He was officially declared 'missing in action' on 1 May 1918, after

being wounded by German machine gun fire during the *Kaiserschlacht*, the German Spring Offensive of 1918.

Willie Syrett was held as a Prisoner-of-War at Werden POW Camp near Hanover, where he contracted tuberculosis. He was sent for treatment to Switzerland, and returned to hospital in Chelsea after the Armistice, being discharged from the army with a disability pension on 6 March 1919.

Willie married Polly Mead in the High Street Methodist Church on 10 September 1919. Aged just 27 when he passed away, Willie is buried alongside his brother George in St Michael's churchyard in what are now Commonwealth War Graves, the last of the *Stewkley Lads* to die as a result of the Great War.

**Stewkley Royal British Legion will honour Pte Willie Syrett at 9am on the morning of Thursday 4 June when any villagers will be welcome to attend a final Stewkley commemoration of the Great War centenary at the War Memorial (socially distanced naturally).**



## A Letter from the Crimean War—a Stewkley Lad in a much earlier conflict

165 years ago this month, **Pte John Moxom (7th Company, 3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards)** had just enlisted from the Royal Bucks Militia. He was in action at Balaklava, where the British Army lay siege with its allies to Sevastopol in an attempt to capture Russia's principal naval base on the Black Sea. His letter sent home to Stewkley reads:

"Balaklava 2 June 1855, My dear Mother and Father, I now take the opportunity of writing to you, hoping to find you in good health, as, please God, it leaves me at the present time. I had a very pleasant voyage over. When I landed, I thought it was a very strange place indeed, for there is nothing but mountains 1,000 feet high. The war is going on in the same old style. We are lying at Balaklava; we can hear the crack of the guns. The Turks, French and ourselves scour out the Russians from the hills but very seldom lose any men. It is very warm indeed here. The war is no more like being over than it was the first day it began. We have a railway to get our shot and shell, and all other things that the army needs. We live in huts—25 men in a hut. The war goes on very slowly. I hope I shall be able to tell you more about it the next time I write."



## A WWII Stewkley Lad Missing from the War Memorial?

Recent correspondence with a Canadian author researching a WWII RAF Lancaster bomber crew shot down over Germany on 7 March 1945, revealed that the mid-upper air gunner in the aircraft, 'missing, believed killed in action' that night, was a Flt Sergeant Eric Raymond Robinson, RAFVR. His parents were known to be George and Nellie Robinson of Stewkley, Buckinghamshire, but there the trail goes cold.

Does anyone recall anything about this family's time in Stewkley? If so please contact the Grapevine heritage editor, [team@stewkleygrapevine.co.uk](mailto:team@stewkleygrapevine.co.uk) or call 240398.

## FROM THE GRAPEVINE 10 YEARS AGO...

From June 2010, Stewkley U-10s soccer team went undefeated throughout the whole 2009/10 season...in such a contrast to the current lockdown desert, so many outdoor happenings were on offer: School Fête, Open Gardens Weekend, Scouts' Barbecue, Swan Beer Festival...the clandestine visit from the Best Kept Village judges was eagerly anticipated...Arthur Lyttle was re-elected Chair at the Annual Parish Council Meeting...Stewkley Films scooped an international home video award for the *Over Our Dead Bodies* DVD of the Third London Airport campaign...and for its new book, Stewkley Local History Group was appealing for information about the Stewkley Lads Fallen in WWII.



## FROM THE GRAPEVINE 20 YEARS AGO...

From June 2000, Stonhill Garage, the village garage and petrol station on High Street North closed, when proprietor, jovial George Graham and family retired to live in Switzerland after 26 years service to the village...St Michael's annual May Plant Sale and Coffee Morning raised over £970...Barbara O'Neil from Australia visited Stewkley tracing her ancestors dating back to her great, great grandfather Charles Mead who emigrated with his family in 1852...and the Open Gardens weekend for the St Michael's Bells Restoration appeal fund, was to close with a summer Evensong service in the church.

