

Jean Wilkins continues her tributes to WW1 heroes from the village with the story of:

SERGEANT WALTER HENRY MEARS (1892 - 1916)

Sergeant Walter Henry Mears was born in the December quarter of 1892, the eldest of the seven children of William and Thurza Mears of Lower Burrowcombe Farm, Cheriton Fitzpaine. Sometime soon after 1911 the Mears family moved to Venny Cleave later settling at Northridge. His grandparents were George and Elizabeth Mears of Venny Cleave and his father William had been brought up on the 30 acre farm. His mother Thurza Farley was born in Cheriton Bishop and was later a domestic servant to a family in Blackboy Road Exeter. By 1891 she was housekeeper to Tom Batting, farmer, of Woodley. This farm was about half a mile along the lane from Venny Cleave. By 1901 William and Thurza were married with five children, Walter, followed by four girls. Two more boys were born later. Grandparents George and Elizabeth and their remaining family had, in the meantime, moved to Hare St Farm Morchard Bishop. This was next door to Scotland Farm, where Fred Mears was working with his sister and her husband Peter Wright.

In 1911 and at the age of 18 years Walter was working alongside his uncle Frederick Mears on Rolestone Farm, Morchard Bishop, as a farm waggoner. The farm was the home of his uncle and aunt, William and Agnes Rodd.

The family were Episcopalian and after moving to Newton St Cyres attended the Methodist Chapel at Sweetham.

By 1914 Walter Mears was an apprentice gardener (a three year agreement) to the Duke of Argyll at Inverary on the West coast of Scotland. He signed to join the Eighth Battalion, a Territorial Force of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, for a period of four years on the first day of April 1914. He was a fit young man, twenty one years old, five feet seven inches tall with a chest



measurement of thirty eight and a half inches. INVERARY CASTLE AND LOCH FYNNE

Initially the Battalion was stationed at Dunoon but they were quickly mobilised and by early September 1914 had moved to Bedford. In the spring of 1915 they were transferred to the 1st Highland Brigade and in May 1915 mobilised for war and landed in France where they became the 152nd Brigade of the 51st Division engaging in various actions on the Western Front. In 1915 they fought at the Battle of Festubert and the Second Action of Givenchy. In 1916 they were involved in the latter part of the Somme Offensive with attacks on High Wood during July, August and September where casualties were excessively high, and later in November helped in the capture of high



ground during the Battle of the Ancre, where 7,000 German prisoners were taken.

Walter Mears was promoted to Corporal in November 1915 and to Sergeant the following July 1916. Sergeant Walter Henry Mears (service no. 1727) died of wounds to the face, shoulder, arm and leg on the 15th November 1916 at the age of twenty four years.

He is buried in the Warlincourt Halte British Cemetery, Saulty, France. (This cemetery was used by several casualty clearing stations during 1916 and 17.) Walter Mears is commemorated on the Memorial Tablet and in the Memorial Window of the Church in Newton St Cyres.



I was helped in the research by Rosemary Chambers and Eileen James(nee Mears). The article could be introduced by a reference to the anomaly of a local lad being an Argyll and Sutherland Highlander. The family have no idea how Walter came to go gardening in Scotland. The Duke of Argyll was an avid planter of exotic species as were the originally Scottish family of Veitch several of whom went abroad hunting such species and ran a nursery in Exeter. I attempted to hunt for any old lists of Veitch employees unsuccessfully. Scotland farm in Morchard Bishop according to locals owes its name to the fact it is so far from the village and nothing to do with the country.



The last picture is William Mears, father of Walter and farmer of Venny Cleave in his trap. It is from a pencil drawing the family have from an old postcard.