

*This is the Sixty-ninth of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church*

## **DETAILS OF THE FOUR MEN FROM SWANTON MORLEY WHO DIED DURING THE GERMAN SPRING OFFENSIVE**

In my sixty-eighth article (January 2018) I gave details of the German Spring Offensive of 1918, and I ended up by saying that four men from Swanton Morley probably all died in the phase of the battle after the Germans had failed to take Villers-Bretonneux and the allies were engaged in pushing them back to the Hindenburg Line.

**It was on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1918 that Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig issued his famous  
“Backs to the Wall” Order of the Day**

**This was sent to all ranks of the British Army in France and Flanders**

“Three weeks ago today the enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a fifty-mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel Ports and destroy the British Army.

In spite of throwing already 106 Divisions into the battle and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has as yet made little progress towards his goals.

We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops. Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our army under the most trying circumstances.

Many amongst us are now tired. To those I would say that victory will belong to the side which holds out longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our support.

There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind alike depend on the conduct of each one of us at the critical moment.”

While we will never know the exact effect that this order had, we do know that the British line held and prevented the Germans from a decisive victory that could have potentially seen the war end in their favour.

Below I give the details of the battalions in which each of the Swanton Morley men served, and of the Divisions to which each battalion was attached.

### **The men concerned were:**

Private **SYDNEY GEORGE TYE** TF/290872, 13th Bn., Royal Sussex Regiment  
116<sup>th</sup> Brigade                      39<sup>th</sup> Division

This Division was in the Fifth Army under Gough, until he was relieved of his command on 27 March 1918.

Sydney George Tye, died, aged 37, on 16 April 1918.

*He was the son of George & Sarah Tye of the Angel Inn, Swanton Morley,  
His name appears on the Tyne Cot Memorial*

Following near destruction at the Battle of the Lys on 23 May 1918 the 39<sup>th</sup> Division was reduced to cadre strength. (A cadre is a small group of key personnel around which a new unit could be built when required.) It spent the rest of the war training newly-arrived American units. The 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Sussex was reduced to a cadre at the same time.

Private **HERBERT BONE** 36866, 1st Bn., Northumberland Fusiliers  
9<sup>th</sup> Brigade                      3<sup>rd</sup> Division

Let us look next at Herbert Bone, who was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, which formed part of Byng's Third Army. It was one of the Divisions which was involved in the Battle of Estaires, 9-11 April 1918, and it would appear that this is probably where Herbert Bone died on 9 April 1918, aged 30.

*Herbert Bone was the son of Walter & Sarah Bone of Home Farm, Swanton Morley, and the husband of Florence May Bone of 39 Bishopsgate St. Norwich.  
His name appears on the Loos Memorial.*

Finally, we have a couple of Royal Engineers. I shall take Harry George Lincoln first, because he was a member of a Field Company. Now, Field Companies of the Royal Engineers were each attached to a particular Infantry Division, which makes their movements easier to follow. Thus, 209<sup>th</sup> Field Company was attached to the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which was itself part of Plumer's Second Army at the first Battle of Kemmel, 17 – 19 April. This is consistent with Harry George Lincoln dying on 19 April.

Driver **HARRY GEORGE LINCOLN** 851138, 209<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers  
Attached to the 34<sup>th</sup> Division which was in the Third Army under Byng  
Died, aged 32, on 19 April 1918.

*His name appears on the memorial at Mont Huon Military Cemetery, Le Treport. The Grave Registration Report shows him as the son of Henry & Mary Kirk of Swanton Morley, but I cannot explain this.*

Lance Corporal **JAMES HERBERT RIX** 128675, "F" Special Company, Royal Engineers  
Died, aged 27, on 10 April 1918

The other Royal Engineer, Lance Corporal James Herbert Rix, was in "F" Special Company. Now the Special Companies, or Special (Cylinder) Companies were formed to develop a British response to the German use of gas. These companies were not attached to a particular Infantry Division; they were part of G.H.Q. Troops and they were employed in both offensive and defensive roles. The Battle of Messines took place on 10 April 1918, so it is probable that James Rix died at this time.

*Son of James & Sallie Rix of Swanton Morley  
His name appears on the memorial at Trois Arbres Cemetery, Steenwerk*

Next time I shall look at the allied counter-offensive, which ended the war.