

BAKER A.J

APPROVED 25th APRIL 2006



Ashford War Memorial



Ashford (St Mary's) Plaque



Sergeant Major Alfred (Alf) John BAKER DCM. Army Remount Service (A.R.S). Assistant Superintendent, Pluckley Remount Depot. Formerly (22 years) (55) 2nd battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Died 17th February 1915 aged 51 years. Born New Romney, Kent. Husband of Mercy Elizabeth E Baker (nee BEAN). Alf married Mercy at Ashford June 1903 (West Ashford 2A 1808). Alfred and Mercy resided at 204 Godinton Road, Ashford, Kent. Killed when he was thrown from his horse at the Pluckley railway station en route to the "Remount Depot". Reported in the Kentish Express on 27th February 1915. He fell in the road fracturing the case of his skull. Alfred was actually on duty when he had the accident. Alfred's service records do not appear to now exist. Extensive searches at the National Archives have been made. The situation is made even more difficult by the fact that Alfred did not serve overseas and was therefore not entitled to any Great War medals. Because of this his name will not be on the medal index cards. There is however overwhelming evidence to support a case for belated commemoration. Alfred was a serving soldier and died when on duty. Buried Ashford Cemetery, Canterbury Road, Ashford, Kent. Grave reference – 3165.

Alfred's wife Mercy died 15 November 1922 and her remains were interred in Alf's grave.

Alf was a lifelong Freemason -

Mooltan Lodge, Mooltan, India

Passed for membership on 1 May 1889 and raised 31 August 1889. At this time Alf was 26 years of age and he gave his occupation as a British Soldier.

St George Lodge, Colombo, Ceylon (2170)

Joined lodge 6 November 1893. His home address was given as Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand. His occupation was given as Sergeant Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

Lord Charles Beresford Lodge, Chatham, Kent (2404)

Joined 23 June 1896. Resigned 31 March 1899.

United Lodge, Colchester, Essex (697)

Joined Lodge 14 March 1900. Resigned December 1902. Occupation given Colour Sergeant, Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

Stour Lodge, Ashford, Kent (2305)

Joined 15 January 1914. His final entry states – Killed in Action 17 February 1915.

On 25th April 2006 the Ministry of Defence (Army) finally APPROVED commemoration. Alf is soon to get a new military pattern headstone!

Alfred's death Certificate reference is – Western Ashford/CH15/415.

An inquest was held into Alfred's death 18th February 1915 by the Coroner of Kent C Duncan Murton. These records at Maidstone were destroyed in the 1950's.

Alfred was born in New Romney before coming to Ashford and working for Mr Finn (the grocer). Alfred served 22 years in the 2nd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment 17 of which were spent in India. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) by Lord Roberts in South Africa. He won the DCM during the Battle of Belfast (Boer war 1900-1902). It is recorded that he won this bravery award for rescuing an injured soldier whilst under heavy fire. In 1913 Alf was Drill Instructor for the Ashford Company, Kent National Reserve. When the Great War commenced Alfred volunteered for service overseas but was turned down due to his age. Instead he was enlisted into the Army Remount Service (A.R.S). Alfred was almost immediately appointed Assistant Superintendent of the Remount Depot at Pluckley. The Superintendent and Alf's boss was Colonel Birdwood also of the Army Remount Service.

His DCM was gazetted in the London Gazette on 27th September 1901 (Army Order 15/02). The award was made for a deed during the Battle of Belfast action on the 27th August 1900. It is also recorded that Alfred was wounded in action on 24th August 1900. The 2nd Warwickshire Regiment sailed on the SS Gaul on 26th November 1899 bound for the South African Boer War. It arrived in the Cape on 16th December 1899. Upon reaching South Africa the battalion was placed in the 5th Division command by Sir Charles Warren. The Battle of Belfast was the last set piece battle of the war.

Alfred's death is not recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as a war casualty. His death should have been recorded as a war casualty because he was a serving soldier at the time of his death. The Army Remount Service was manned by experienced but elderly soldiers who were too old to serve overseas. It was custom for these men to use their former army ranks. The Army Remount Service had its own designated cap badge. The photo of Alfred shows him wearing a cap with this badge on it. The Remount Depots were run by the A.R.S but the vast majority of manpower was supplied by Army Service Corps (A.S.C) soldiers attached to the Army Remount Service. The Army Eastern area of command (which included Kent) had 6 Remount Depots staffed and run by the Army Remount Service in conjunction with the Army Service Corps (ASC). The personnel operating the Remount Depots were fulltime soldiers who in the main wore the badge of the Army Service Corps and

to a lesser extent the Army Remount Service. Alfred Baker was a member of the Army Remount Service. These remount Depots looked after the horses that were used by the British army throughout Europe and the Middle East. Pluckley was chosen because it was in close proximity to Dover. Pluckley's depot was located close to the railway line possibly near or at the site of the old brickworks. The horses were transported by train to Dover and then put on ferries for the sea crossing. Once in France or Belgium they were taken to a forward remount depot for field deployment.

UK REMOUNT DEPOT'S

Pluckley, Kent (from 4th August 1914)

Brentwood, Essex

Luton, Bedfordshire

Market Harborough

Kettering, Northamptonshire

Redhill, Surrey.

The Superintendent of the Pluckley Remount Depot was Colonel Birdwood.

Members of the Remount Depot who attended Alf's funeral

Colonel Birdwood

Major Fagfan

Captain Littledale (Veterinary Officer)

Farrier Major Pierce

Sergeant Bell

Sergeant Griffin

Sergeant Matthews

Corporal Hemsley

Corporal Kemp

Corporal Packham

Corporal Shorter

Canteen Orderly Wood

Private Homewood

Private Buss

Private Gibson

Private Russell