

# FORGET ME NOT

## EDWIN & ALICE JAMES SUE WARNER'S GREAT GRAND PARENTS

Edwin and Alice James lived at The Elms, Thrussington Road, Hoby and farmed the surrounding land. They had five daughters, Ethel, Margaret, my grandmother Winifred, Ruth and Daisy. Many people in Hoby still remember Margaret and Daisy; they lived at The Water House for many years and in later life moved to Mill House on Main Street. Margaret was still riding her bike into Melton well into her 80's and only stopped when she got knocked off it on the top road one day; Daisy was regularly seen up a ladder pruning the trees in the Church yard or mowing the grass, cigarette balanced on her bottom lip.

The James family story during the First World War is an interesting case study into how those left at home contributed to the war effort. The family did not keep an account of their war but the following account has been pieced together from letters and photographs in the family archive and from articles that appeared in the Melton Mowbray Times.

Edwin was too old to volunteer for the army when war broke out and in any case he was a farmer and would have been deemed to be in a reserve occupation but he was very active in the local farming community. Increasing the level of food production was of the utmost importance and various committees were formed around the country to ensure this happened. Edwin was a member of the Leicestershire War Agricultural Committee and in February 1917 was appointed to its Executive Committee which was given extensive powers under The Defence of the Realm Regulations to ensure that the land in the county was utilised to the fullest extent for the production of food.

As well as farming at the Elms, Edwin managed Admiral Beatty's farming interests at Brooksby Hall and the family archive has letters from David Beatty to Edwin written during the war years. The letters mainly concern the business of keeping the Brooksby Estate running smoothly but also contain particular requests, for instance, to send 56 turkeys to the Navy for Christmas dinner, an event that was reported in The Melton Mowbray Times, instructions to sell various horses and requests to school others so that they may be ready for when Beatty returned from the war.

Edwin was able to support the drive to recruit men into the forces; a recruitment fair that came through Hoby camped out at The Elms. Officers were billeted in the house (despite the five daughters) and other ranks in the barns. We believe this happened in December 1915 as the service record of Tom Jeffs, a recruit from Hoby, records that he joined up at Hoby on 10th December 1915.



Alice was not idle either. She was a volunteer organiser of a War Hospital Supply Depot registered at Hoby. In the days before the NHS the bandages, nightshirts, gowns and bed-jackets for soldiers in hospital were almost all hand-made by groups and individuals often paying for the materials out of their own pockets. You can imagine that Alice rallied the ladies of the village to get knitting and sewing for the cause. We don't know where everything was sent, possibly Wicklow Lodge in Melton, or more likely down to the convalescent hospital at Brooksby Hall. In February 1917, Alice helped to organise a fund raising event for the Lord Mayor of Leicester's £100,000 fund. The entertainment was reported in The Melton Mowbray Times and from the description it sounds very much like a precursor of Christmas Delights. One of the girls, which one we don't know, was amongst the cast of the playlets "Mechanical Jam" and "A Pretty Bequest".

The younger James daughters were probably away at school during the war but Ethel was at home and did her bit too. Every month Wicklow Lodge Hospital supplied an article to The Melton Mowbray Times that listed and thanked all the people who had donated food and clothing to them in the previous month and Miss James, Hoby, appeared on the list on many occasions and possibly Ethel was recruited by Alice into the knitting and sewing effort for the Supply Depot. There are no family stories about what else Ethel did during the war but looking through the family papers for this tribute we found a photograph in an album of her in a nurse's uniform. The album dates from around 1916, but we don't know where the photograph was taken. It is amongst pictures of injured sailors that were clearly taken at Brooksby Hall and at The Elms so she could have nursed at Brooksby and given the close relationship between the Beattys' and the James's this seems a reasonable assumption to make, or possibly at Wicklow Lodge.

