

# FORGET ME NOT

## ELIZABETH BUTLER

### DIANE RICHARDS' GREAT GRANDMOTHER



My name is Diane Richards and I've lived in Hoby for 18 years. On clearing out our study recently I happened upon a newspaper article which reminded me that my great grandmother Mrs Elizabeth Butler unveiled the war memorial on Victoria Park in Leicester.

My mum lives in Rearsby now and it was her father's mother to whom the newspaper article reproduced below relates. Mum tells me that originally the unveiling was due to be performed by Lord Beatty of Brooksby - another local connection. He was made the First Sea Lord in 1919 and was created 1st Earl Beatty, Viscount Borodale and Baron Beatty of the North Sea and Brooksby, also in 1919. Apparently he was 'indisposed' at the time and it was decided to ask these two local ladies who lost seven sons between them. Elizabeth lost four sons, Arthur who served with the Northumberland Fusiliers was killed in France in November 1916, six months after he enlisted; Bert was also killed in France, he was 20 years old; Jack was discharged from the army with consumption which he caught in France and died in January 1918 and Ephraim was killed in France in September 1918. Her four other sons also served but fortunately returned. After the ceremony my great grandmother and grandfather were invited back to Brooksby and made to feel most welcome. My grandfather had a protected job on the trains.

My grandfather on my father's side, Ernest Billings, also served in the First World War in the Royal Artillery in Mesopotamia (now Iraq). My grandmother, May Victoris, did the embroidery of the Royal Artillery cap badge that is pictured here.

### Elizabeth and Annie waved their 11 sons off to war. Only four came back

**W**hen war veterans solemnly turn their eyes to Leicester's imposing Arch of Remembrance this weekend, they will be recalling their own experiences of the horrors of conflict. But even the sum of those vivid memories pales beside the sheer volume of stories behind the arch that stands stark against the city's skyline. The magnificent white stone monument was built 75 years ago to tell a full 12,000 stories - one for each of the Leicestershire soldiers who lost their lives in the First World War. Few of those tales can be more poignant than those of Elizabeth Butler and Annie Glover, two ordinary women forced to endure extraordinary heartbreak in the Great War. Both were mothers and, like many thousands of others across the country, they watched their sons go off to war. And both, like many thousands of others, had to come to terms with the burning pain when they did not return. Elizabeth, who lived in Harrison Road, Belgrave, had eight sons serving in the army. Four did not come home. Arthur, who served with the Northumberland Fusiliers, was killed in France in November 1916, six months after he enlisted. Bert was also killed in France, in May 1917. He was 20. Jack was discharged from the army with consumption after suffering exposure in France and died in January 1918, and Ephraim was killed in France, in September 1918.



**SUFFERING** Annie, who lived in Wolsey Street, Leicester, had three sons who were killed in action, all under the age of 25. Henry died at Arras, in 1916, at the age of 24; Arthur was killed at Ephy, in March 1918, at the age of 23 and Frank was killed during the Battle of the Somme in July 1918. He was 21. It was like *Sonny Private Ryan* - without the rescue. The immense suffering endured by the two mothers symbolised that of most families after the Great War. With that in mind, the chairman of the War Memorial Committee, Sir Jonathan North, decided that Elizabeth Butler and Annie Glover should perform the official unveiling of the Arch of Remembrance in 1926. A crowd of 30,000 ordinary men and women gathered for the ceremony on Saturday, July 4, intense emotions and pride mingled with still-fresh memories of Ypres and the Somme. The front page report in the *Leicester Mercury* that evening noted the solemn music and deafening 17-gun salutes signalling the arrival of dignitaries at the monument. The bishop of Peterborough conducted a short service. Capturing the sense of occasion, *Mercury* reporter Monica Brendon described the scene as Elizabeth - wearing the medals of her dead sons - stepped forward to unveil the memorial, accompanied by Annie. She wrote: *'As the bowed heads are lifted, a simple figure in black is seen against the white Arch of Remembrance. It is the figure of a woman upon whom falls the honour of the day.'* *'Her name is not written in the book of fame. She is just a mother, one of the many bereaved by the heroic sacrifice.'* *'The heart of every bereaved relative is at one with the heart of this mother. Every hand is in hers as, trembling a little, she draws the cord and the national emblems, the same that covered the Cenotaph, fall aside to reveal the Memorial in all its noble strength and beauty.'* The two mothers' poignant role in Leicester's history was uncovered by Annie's relative, Philip Scott, when he set out to trace his family history. The discovery has changed the views of Mr Scott, whose grandmother was a cousin of Annie's sons, Arthur, Henry and Frank. Mr Scott, 38, from Mountsorrel, said: *'It is very interesting. I think back to a few years ago to when I was younger and I wouldn't acknowledge that people should go to war because I thought there were alternatives.'*



**POIGNANT:** Above, Annie Glover (left of picture) and Elizabeth Butler wear their dead sons' medals to the unveiling of the Victoria Park memorial in 1925. The event was watched by thousands, left



Ernest is on the right



**CEREMONY:** Mrs Elizabeth Butler, who lost four sons in the war, with her husband, Ephraim.

## PERCY WILLIAM COOPER ANN KELL'S GRANDDAD

My Granddad was killed in action on 30 September 1917. My father, Henry George Cooper, was born on 15 November 1914 and had no recollection of his father.

However, I have recently discovered that my father was taken to Great Malvern in Worcestershire when he was about 5 years of age to visit his grandmother and other family members and that their family name was Bartram. Unfortunately I do not have any letters or photographs.

My Granddad was born in 1882. He was a private in the 3/10th Bn, The Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment), 10th Brigade, 4th Division, B.E.F. He was killed in action at Flanders and buried at Duhallow Advanced Dressing Station Cemetery, Ypres, Belgium

This cemetery is believed to have been named after a southern Irish hunt, and was a medical post one mile north of Ypres (now Ieper). The cemetery was begun in July 1917 and in October and November 1918, it was used by the 11th, 36th and 44th Casualty Clearing

Stations. The cemetery contains many graves of the artillery and engineers and 41 men of the 13th Company Labour Corps, killed when a German aircraft dropped a bomb on an ammunition truck in January 1918, are buried in Plot II.

After the Armistice, the cemetery was enlarged when graves were brought into this cemetery from isolated sites and a number of small cemeteries on the battlefields around Ypres. Special memorials commemorate a number of casualties known to have been buried in two of these cemeteries, Malakoff Farm Cemetery, Brielen, and Fusilier Wood Cemetery, Hollebeke, whose graves were destroyed by shellfire.

There are now 1,544 Commonwealth casualties of the First World War buried or commemorated in this cemetery, 231 of the burials unidentified. There are also 57 war graves of other nationalities, mostly German, and one Commonwealth burial of the Second World War, which dates from the Allied withdrawal ahead of the German advance of May 1940. The cemetery was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield. I obtained the above information from Malvern's Roll of Honour.

I intend to visit Great Malvern to see the WW1 Memorial, which is located on the wall of the north aisle of Christchurch Parish Church and to continue my search for more information about my Granddad.

