

Maidstone Unitarian Church

Remembering the fallen from Maidstone Unitarian Church
during World War I

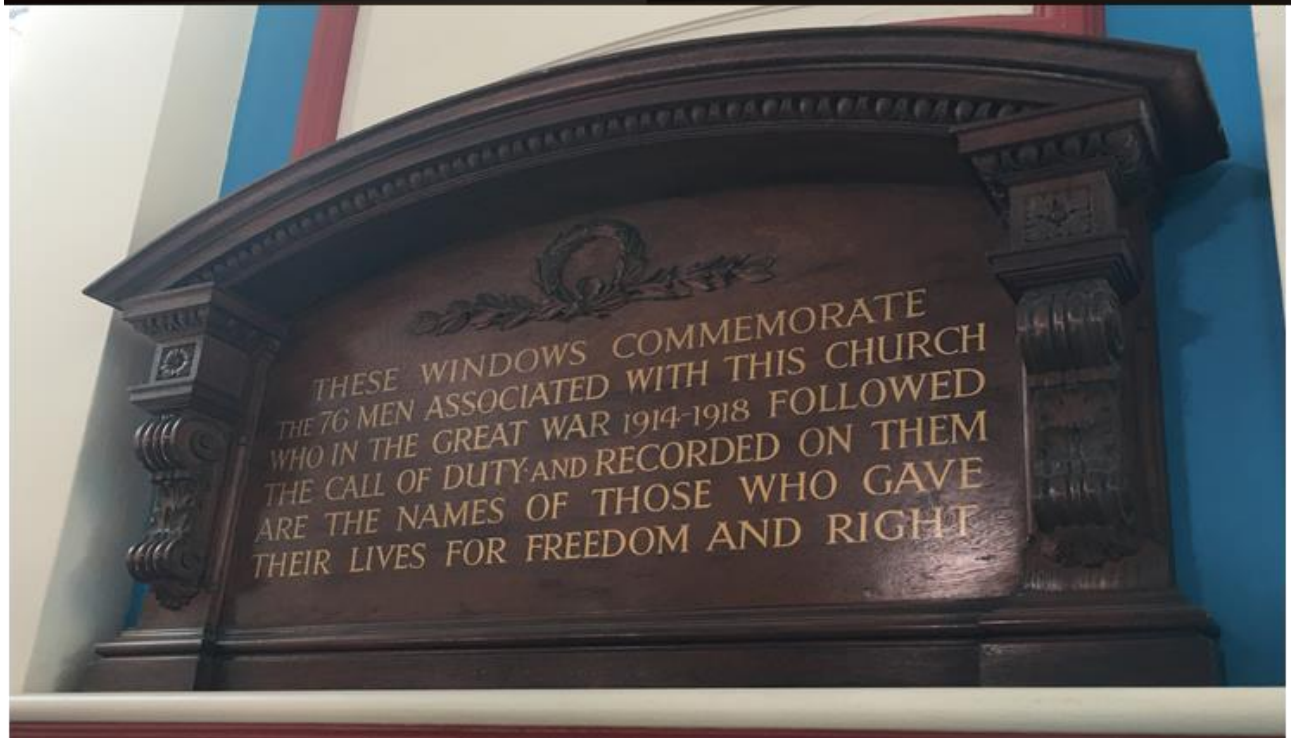


The War Memorial Stained Glass Windows unveiled on 11th November 1921

Researched and Written by Pat Preece

Photography Pat Preece and Family

On the 11th November 1921, on Armistice Day, the congregation met in this church and the War Memorial Windows were unveiled. The Reverend Gordon Cooper, President of the Provincial Assembly, led the service, the sermon was preached by the Rev Dr Mellone, the Secretary of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and our minister, Reverend Alexander Farquharson, unveiled the memorial windows. Tea was provided after the service in the Church Parlour by members of the Ladies Work Party.



On the windows are the names of nine men associated with the Church who served in the Armed Services in the First World War and gave up their lives.

This record is an account of the lives of each of the nine men commemorated on our windows. If we know about their lives, then perhaps the reality of who they were will resonate and we will truly 'remember' them. I speak of each man in alphabetical order as in death we, and they, are all equal, so no one person has precedence over another.

L Shaw Farquharson

Captain,
Mentioned in Dispatches,
Died on 12th May 1915, aged 31



Lewis Shaw Farquharson was the only son of our minister Rev Alexander Farquharson and his wife Mary Walker Farquharson. Lewis was born in Chesterfield in April 1884 and educated in Cottesmore, Charterhouse and Sandhurst.

He became a Lieutenant on 10th October 1903 in the 1st Battalion, Royal Scots. He was promoted to Lieutenant in 1906 and Captain in August 1914. He served in India and became ADC to General Keir and was Adjutant from August 1911 to August 1914. Plus, he was one of the ADCs to the King in Calcutta during the Dunbar tour. When World War I broke out Lewis was in India but in early 1915 he went with his battalion to the Front in Belgium. There he fought in the varying phases of the Second Battle of Ypres. On the 11st May 1915, when the British line had been broken and a trench captured, on his own initiative Lewis led his company, from the reverse line, drove back the enemy, and regained and held the lost ground. For his 'gallant and distinguished service in the field' Captain Farquharson was mentioned in dispatches to the Secretary of State for War by the Field Marshall Commanding-in-Chief of the British Army in France.

Captain L Shaw Farquharson is buried in the Vlamertinghe Military Cemetery, And on his gravestone is carved –

'OUT OF THE STRESS OF THE DOING INTO THE PEACE OF THE DONE.'

This is a Belgian province of West Flanders and is a borough of the city of Ypres. In November 2021 my daughters and granddaughter visited his grave and laid a wreath in remembrance.

As Captain L Shaw Farquharson was a career soldier with the Royal Scots and joined them in 1903, I do not know if he ever visited Maidstone Unitarian Church. However, his father, Reverend Alexander Farquharson was the minister here from 1905 until his death in 1924. Along with others in the congregation family members were commemorated on our windows, whether or not they ever attended here. This seems fair as, after all, it will be the family of those killed in action that will remember them.

Wilfred Henry Hayes

Company Quartermaster Serjeant,
Service No. WR/252000,
Died on 24th February 1919, aged 43



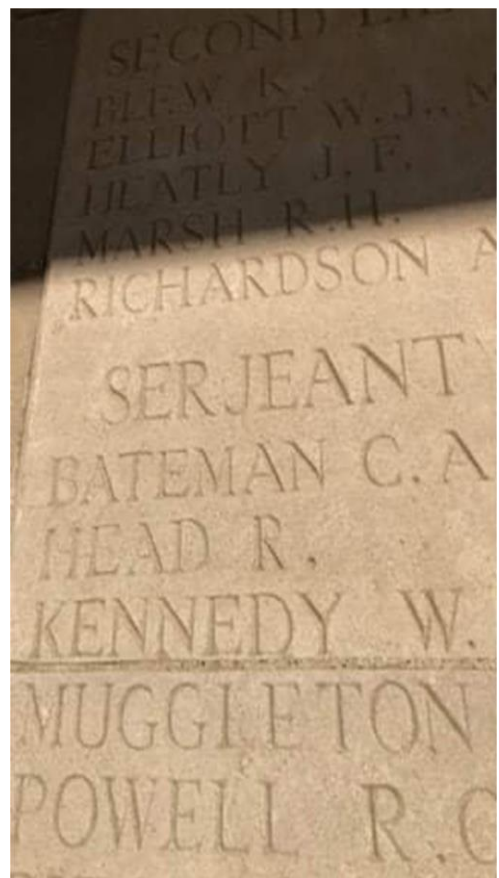
Wilfred was born in 1874 or 1876 in Maidstone. In 1899 he married Florence and by 1911 they had two children, Harold, aged 7, and Noel, aged 5. His occupation in 1901 was given as Railway Engine Stoker and by 1911 he was a locomotive engine driver. As I write these notes I wonder if he ever drove the trains that may have brought Rev Alexander Farquharson down to Maidstone from his London home for the Sunday services?

In the First World War Wilfred rose to the rank of Company Quartermaster Serjeant in the 12th Broad Gauge Operating Company of the Royal Engineers - no doubt his training on the railways equipped him to work in the Engineers.

The typed record of the Church AGM for 1919 records commiseration to Mr and Mrs Hayes as Wilfred had died of disease contracted on active service in France. He died on 24th February 1919 and is buried in Maidstone Cemetery. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has graves there from both World Wars. Those of the First World War, approximately 55, are scattered around the graveyard. Those of the Second World War are grouped together with the Cross of Sacrifice. I visited the cemetery on the 2nd of November 2021 and found Wilfred's grave. I had gone there the day before and could not find it. I contacted the Cemetery Office and found they had his grave recorded under William Henry Hayes - I will be contacting them again to ask them to record his first name correctly.

Robert Head

Serjeant,
Service No. 265006,
Died 21st March 1918, aged 29



From Census records Robert appears to have lived in Maidstone all his life and was born there in 1888. In the 1911 Census Robert was a builder's son and was working as a carpenter and joiner. Records show he married Edith Elizabeth Wood in 1913 and he was then a Carpenter (journeyman). He followed his father, Horace, in his profession as Horace was recorded as a carpenter in the 1881 Census. As an aside some of you may remember Bernard Omar as a stalwart of Maidstone Unitarian Church in the 1960s. He and his wife, Dorothy, moved to Bristol and remained as trustees of the church until their deaths. In later years Bernard visited Maidstone once a year to see

relatives and attend our trustees meetings. Dorothy's father was Harold Stanford and Harold was Robert Head's nephew.

In 1911 the Church held a Grand Bazaar in order to raise money to build a new church as the Meeting House in Market Buildings was too small for the large congregations that Rev Farquharson drew every Sunday - there were 200+ in the mornings and 350+ in the evenings and 90 children in the Sunday School. The catalogue for the Grand Bazaar states that one of the side shows, a 'Shooting Gallery' was presided over by Mr R Head and Mr B Hayes - and it cost 2 shots for 1 penny. The whole Bazaar raised around £200 which was deemed to be a great success. They had estimated that the cost of the new church building would be £4,000. One of the other attractions was a stall for electrocution for people who wanted to experience electric shocks.

Robert joined the 7th Bn of the Royal West Kent Regiment, known later as the Queen's Own. He died on the 21st March 1918 aged 29. There is no known grave for Robert and he is commemorated on a wall plaque at the Pozieres Memorial in the Somme, France. On the 3rd November 2021 my son in law visited and laid a wreath by the wall where Robert's name is carved.

W R Hooper

Private,
Service No. 19363,
Died 1st June 1916, aged 35



William Rowland Hooper was born in Marylebone around 1881. His sister, Edith Elizabeth Hooper was born in Marylebone in 1877 and in 1891 was a 14-year-old pupil teacher. By 1901 She was living in Hampstead and was a Board

School Teacher. In 1917 a 'Letter of Administration' was recorded in London for William of 5 Bower Mount Road, Maidstone who had left his effects, namely £138 to Edith Elizabeth Hooper, a spinster.

William had joined the 26th (Bankers) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers. It was raised in July 1915 by the Lord Mayor and City of London, from volunteers who were mainly bank clerks and accountants. William had been resident in St. John's Wood and enlisted in St. Paul's Churchyard as a Private. He was killed in action on the 1st June 1916 and is buried in Hyde Park Corner (Royal Berks) Cemetery in Belgium. In November I was going to visit Hyde Park to try and find the grave but realised in time that the Cemetery was not in London at all. My family visited his grave in November 2021.

Frederick John Moseley

Corporal,
Military Medal,
Service No. G/23850
Died 1st July 1918, aged 20



Frederick was born in 1898 in Maidstone. In 1911 the Census shows that Frederick's father, Robert James Moseley, was a writer and grainer, although that may be a misspelling as in 1881 his occupation was given as a painter. Frederick joined the 6th Bn Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment) and was killed on the 1st July 1918 aged just 20 years old, and even at that young age he had achieved the rank of corporal. He won the Military Medal. All I can find about that was a Gazette record, issue 30172, recorded 'MM. His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to award the Military Medal for bravery

in the field to the undermentioned Non-Commissioned Officer and Men. At present I cannot find anything else about the circumstances of the awarding of this medal. My family visited his grave in November 2021 in Bouzincourt Ridge Cemetery in the Somme, France.

R G Moseley

Private,
Service No. 437,
Died 24th April 1915, aged 30



Robert George Moseley was born in 1884 in Maidstone. In 1907 he married Nellie Cox in Sevenoaks and in the 1911 Census it is recorded that they lived at 495 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone and had two children, Constance, 3 years, and Robert, 1 year. In 1911 Robert's occupation is given as writer and trainer. This is similar to Frederick's father, Robert James Moseley, who was a writer and 'grainer.' Robert's father is Mr R Moseley, so Frederick and Robert are likely to have been brothers - both killed in the war, Frederick aged 20 years and Robert aged 30 years. Robert joined the 1st Bn, Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment) and died on 24 April 1915. He is buried in Poperinghe Old Military Cemetery in Belgium and was visited in November 2021 by my family.

F E Pearce

Sapper,
Service No. 490321,
Died 8 November 1918, aged 28



Frank Edwin Pearce was born in 1890 and lived with his parents at 14 Melville Road, Maidstone. By 1911 Frank is still living with his parents and his occupation is carpenter and joiner, his father Frederick was also a joiner. In 1914 Frank married Hannah Clark and they had a son, Peter James Frederick Pearce and they lived at 87 Kingsley Road, Maidstone.

Frank was a Sapper with 422nd Field Coy, Royal Engineers and died on the 8th November 1918, 10 days before the end of the war. Frank is buried in Chercq Churchyard in Belgium. My family visited the grave in November 2021.

J A Ruck

Second Lieutenant,
Died on 25th May 1916, aged 20



John Arthur Ruck was born in 1896 in Maidstone. In the Census of 1901 his father, Morris A Ruck, was an Ironmonger and they lived at Oakfield House, Hollingbourne, Kent.

In May 1916 John died in Thetford, Norfolk. He had been a Second Lieutenant with the Royal Flying Corps and was only 20 years old when he died. He is buried in Maidstone Cemetery, in Section E2. In the autumn of 2021 I visited the cemetery three times and could not find John's grave. On the 10th November 2022 I arranged with staff at the cemetery to visit Grave 114 in Section E2. At last I looked down on the resting place of John Arthur Ruck. A large stone cross had been placed on his grave by his family. That had nothing on it to indicate who was within. But at the foot of the grave was a plaque. This was so covered in algae that it is almost impossible to read. In the top left-hand corner of the plaque a cross is carved. I took a photo of it. When the photo is enlarged the following information is clearly seen under the algae

I have done further research on John's short life. From various sources I have found out that he was a medical student at the London Hospital in 1914. His name figures on the University of London OTC Roll of the Fallen.

Another item says that John was a Second Lieutenant Special Lists attached to the Royal Flying Corps, London Hospital and was the son of Mr M A Ruck of Maidstone. Also that John was accidentally killed near Thetford (Norfolk) on

the 25th May 1916 when his machine descended into a field, turned somersault and caught fire.

Further, John's name is on the Artists Rifles Regiment Roll of Honour and War Record for 1914 - 1919 (p7 and 165). He was gazetted to the Royal Flying Corp on the 17th March 1916 and was accidentally killed on the 25th May 1916.

In the Casualty Cards it is written that a Court of Enquiry found that John, whilst on a solo flight, attempted to force land but got into difficulties and was too inexperienced to recover in time.

Finally, in his war record there is a Medal Index Card and an entry in the Medal Award Rolls says that J A Ruck was a Dresser with the British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John's Unit No. 5 at Boulogne from 28/10/1914 to 1/1/1915. At that point the Dressers were recalled.

I was surprised to find that John had ambitions to be a doctor and had started the war as a Dresser assisting medical staff with the wounded. How he came to be seconded to the Royal Flying Corps I do not know, but perhaps they had need of someone with medical training there too. I had wondered initially if John had been killed in training to fly and never got to France and the battle fields. But as an 18- or 19-year-old he was in Boulogne in France dealing with the wounded. Death and suffering would not have been strangers to him.

I am so glad that I found John's grave. His was the last one of the nine on our memorial windows. He has not precisely come home but now he is no longer lost.

Frederick James Wood

Sapper,
Service No. 2117,
Died 12 July 1916, aged 26



Frederick James Wood was born in 1890 and lived with his parents, Frederick Stephen and Eliza Catherine Wood at 8 Allen Street, Maidstone. Eliza died in 1893 when Frederick was 3 years old. By 1901 Frederick was living with his father and a step mother, Alice, and a half-brother, Herbert. In 1906 when Frederick was 16 years old his father died. By 1911 the Census records that Frederick was a gas fitter's apprentice and was living with his uncle and aunt, William and Fanny Clinch at 67 Melville Road in Maidstone.

Given his trade of Gas fitter it is no surprise that Frederick joined the 1st/3rd Field Coy, Royal Engineers. He was killed in action on the 12th July 1916 somewhere on the Somme in France, With no known grave his name is inscribed in commemoration at the Thiepval Memorial.

On the 11th November 2021 my grandsons, Luke and Scott, took commemorative crosses to Thiepval for each of the nine men from Maidstone Unitarian Church. The memorial is being renovated so the actual area where Frederick's name is recorded could not be reached.

These crosses are to be placed in the church.

Epilogue

I have been coming to this church since 1993 and have looked at these windows every time I visited. I understood that the nine men recorded were linked with the church but now I can tell you who they were. One was a career soldier with the Royal Scots. One was a young man who joined the Royal Flying Corps. Another, also twenty years old, won a Military Medal whilst on active service with the local Kent regiment in Belgium. Two others were carpenters and joiners, another worked in a bank, one was a writer and trainer, and another was a gas fitter's apprentice. Finally, there was a locomotive driver. They left behind families and friends. These nine men gave their lives, and we remember them.

A Short History of the Church with regards to the Creation of the War Memorial Windows and Roll of Honour.

The relatives of the men we have commemorated were active in church affairs and our records show that they took on duties, attended regular meetings, and gave gifts to the church prior to, and in the 1900s. The Ruck, Head, Moseley, Hooper and Hayes families all feature prominently as leading members of the committees and were regular subscribers to church funds. For instance, Mrs. M A Ruck (John's mother) was the president of the Sewing circle in 1901 and Mr F W Ruck was the secretary to the Committee, and the architect, free of charge, for building work in 1921. Mr and Mrs. M A Ruck often invited members of the congregation to their home at Oakfield in Hollingbourne for Summer Treats or other get togethers.

During WW1 the committee meeting notes make interesting reading. In 1915 a decision was made to insure the church against damage by aircraft. Also, that year a collection was taken in aid of the Belgium Hospital fund. In December 1915 it was decided that a Roll of Honour should be compiled of all the young men connected with the church now serving the country.

The AGM report for 1915 gives a flavour of life in Maidstone during those early years of the war - 'a large number of our young men and other regular worshippers are away on Active Service, and many of our people have often been kept at home with soldiers billeted on them, and the streets at night are now almost in total darkness, which prevents some of the older people venturing out....' The War touched the lives of everyone.

By the 7th January 1917 the Roll of Honour had still not been written, apparently due to a 'misunderstanding'. Mr Ruck promised to write it out and Mr Head was to frame it. The roll was to include the names of all those from

the congregation who had, since the war began, enlisted in the Army or Navy. A temporary list was compiled in March 1917 and by 1918 it contained 78 names - including those wounded and killed in action. In June 1921 the list of those killed was sent to Essex Hall so they could be included in the national Roll of Honour for Unitarians.

On 21st November 1920 it was suggested, in committee, that the War Memorial could take the form of new stained-glass windows in place of those that were behind the pulpit. These windows were to be put in when the building was being altered when the new schoolroom was erected.

Building work went ahead in 1921 and the church was closed for 13 Sundays with nine services being held in the Town Hall and four Sundays having no services. The church reopened on Friday 11th November 1921 and the Memorial Windows were unveiled by our then Minister the Reverend Alexander Farquharson. The windows were to be insured against fire and accident at a cost of £200. The oak table where I take services is still here in front of the pulpit (see cover photo) was commissioned in 1921 and was to cost no more than £10.

Rev Farquharson died after a short illness in January 1924 and a memorial plaque was dedicated to him in December 1924. Therefore, he and his only son are commemorated in our building. With the death of this popular and charismatic minister the congregation never regained its short-lived vigour where hundreds of people attended services twice on Sundays and the Sunday School and clubs were immensely popular. Great efforts were made to keep Unitarianism viable in Maidstone and those efforts continue to this day.

We possess one copy of the Essex Hall Hymnal that was printed in 1914. Apparently when new hymn books were bought the old ones would be sold. The men commemorated in our windows may have held this book, their friends and family may have held it. I give you the words of Hymn No 257 from the Essex Hall Hymnal. This was written by H W Longfellow. If the words rang true in 1914, I believe they still run true now.

*Tell me not in mournful numbers,
‘Life is but an empty dream!’
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.*

*Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
‘Dust thou art, to dust returnest’
Was not spoken of the soul.*

*Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act that each tomorrow
Finds us further than today.*

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time:-*

*Footprints, that perhaps another
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.*

*Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait.*

I do not enter into the debate of whether war is right or wrong. I just wish to remember those, in this article, who gave their lives for others, be that in war, or in sacrifice of any type. If, in our time here on earth, we try to make each today the best we can then it is a good start for our families, our communities and the world. If we leave 'footprints on the sands of time' by our deeds, we, too, may give heart to someone who feels lost or hopeless.

Pat Preece
Chair to the Committee of Maidstone Unitarian Church
30th November 2021

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