

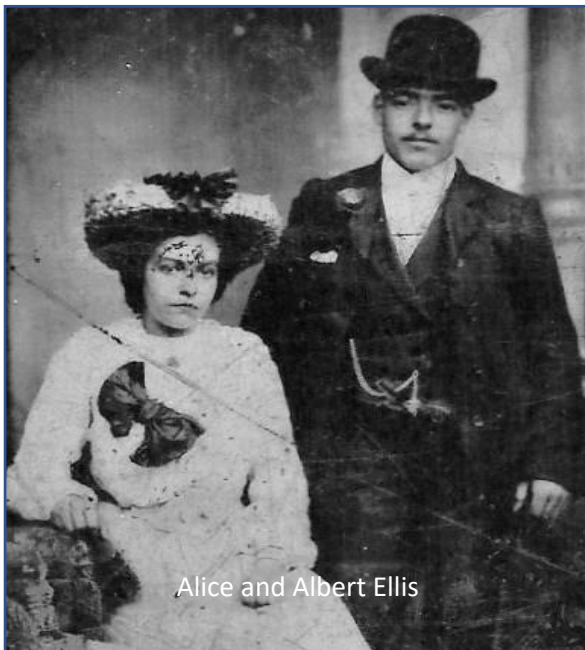
Private 20384 Albert Ellis
11th Battalion Sherwood Foresters
(Notts & Derby Regiment)
(70th Brigade, 23rd Division under
Major General J M Babington)
Born 17.09.1884 Killed in
action 16.09.1917



My Granddad, Albert Ellis, was born in 1884 in Guisborough, Yorkshire and moved to Mansfield with his parents Richard and Sarah Ellis (née Fusedale) where they lived at 1 Fairholme Drive.

He met my Grandma, Alice Maude Bowskill, who was born in Caunton but now lived at 99 Bottle Lane, Mansfield and they married at St. John's Church on 12th November 1904.

He was a coal hewer below ground at Mansfield Colliery and at the start of the First World War they lived at 75 Somersall Street, Mansfield.



Alice and Albert Ellis

He responded to Lord Kitchener's call to "Join Kitchener's Army – Your King and Country Needs You" and together with many of his workmates enlisted with the Sherwood Foresters. When he was sent to France they had five children aged from 6 months to 9 years of age and in March 1917 a sixth child arrived.

My Grandad survived the Battle of the Somme in 1916 (Where my Grandma's brother, Arthur Bowskill, was killed in action on 01st July 1916, the first day of the offensive) and following home leave he was sent to Flanders in Belgium where he

remained until the Passchendaele Offensive started and during which time his daughter Maude was born.

After receiving no letters from him for several weeks my Grandma received the terrible news that he had been killed in action on 16th September 1917, the day before his 33rd birthday. Birthday cards from his family together with photos were amongst the effects he

was carrying when killed and they were returned to my Grandma covered in his blood with a bullet hole through them.

She never remarried and raised six children on a pension of 33 shillings and ninepence per week. She died in 1950 when I was only seven, so I do not have very clear memories of her, but I do know that she was very much loved by all her family.

My Grandad is buried in the Hoge Crater CWGC Cemetery which is on the Menin Road - four kilometres east of Ypres.

The following extract from the memoirs of my Auntie Elsie, their second child and eldest daughter, is a very sad and moving account of what they experienced:

World war one broke out and what sadness it brought us. After a while they were so desperate for men to go into the army there were posters everywhere saying, "Join Kitchener's Army your King and Country need you." My father and a lot of his workmates felt very patriotic and joined the Sherwood Foresters. My poor mother was left to bring us up by herself on a very small pension. She was a very good looking woman and I always felt very proud of her, she was slim and had brown eyes and a mass of black hair. She loved us all very much but she was very strict with us as she had to be mother and father to us all. When dad went to France mum was always worrying about him, then he came home on leave straight from the trenches and he made such a fuss of us all. After he had gone back mum was pregnant with Maud my youngest sister, she was born on March 10th. She was a very lovely baby big brown eyes and fair curls, we were all very fond of her. When she was only six months old my Father was killed in action in France. I will never forget that Sunday morning my mother got the news, she had been worrying because she had not had a letter from him for three weeks, she was getting us ready for Sunday school and she sent me to the shop at the bottom of the street for some shoe polish. I saw the post lady coming up the street, and stopped to see if she turned in our gate, she did and I had a feeling of foreboding although I was only eleven years of age. When I got home my mother was screaming and the house was full of neighbours, each of them took one of us to their homes for our Sunday dinner. Mrs Smith, who lived a few doors away took me, she had four children and her husband was in the army too. I remember she had an apple pie and although I felt as if something had died inside me, I ate it as it was a luxury in those times. After a time they sent my father's personal belongings back. All his birthday cards we had sent

him and photo's of us all. They were stuck together with his blood and a bullet hole through them it made mum very ill for some time, but it was my baby sister who was being breast fed that kept her sane she just lived to look after us all, and keeping the house spick and span. My brother Albert was a very good son to her, he tried to do all the jobs my dad would have done. Digging the garden and setting it and doing all the heavy work mother could not do. Mother started to have a lot of pain and the doctor said she must have an operation for female hernia, she had to leave us all on our own while she had it done, with our neighbors keeping an eye on us, but my mother had to sign a form to come out of hospital before she should have saying that it was at her own risk. Tom was a very delicate child he had double pneumonia six times but mother nursed him until he was well again each time.

Albert started work when he was 13 years old in the mines he wanted to work at the coal face to earn more money for mum but she did not want him to. I started work when I was 14 years old and I went into a local cotton factory. Violet the one next to me also started there when she left school, she three years younger than me, she was always very practical. She would always have her overall and everything ready to go to work in the early mornings, she was very reliable, I am afraid I wasn't I used to leave everything to the last minute we used to have to be at work at six in the morning until five-thirty at night. Long hours for young girls we used to go to bed very early. After two more years Kathleen started at the same factory.

Above: Extracts from Elsie Rabbitt's (née Ellis) memoirs



l to r: Albert with his siblings: Thomas b.1915, Elsie b. 1906, Maude b. 1917, Albert b. 1905, Violet b. 1909, Kathleen (My Mum) b. 1911. A copy of this was carried in his breast pocket when he was killed

During September 2017, together with my two sons and 12-year-old grandson, I travelled to Ypres to place a wreath on my Grandfathers grave on the 16th September which was the 100th anniversary of his death. This was a very special and emotional experience for me.



Above: Roll of Honour St John's Church, Mansfield & Pte Albert Ellis's Grave, Hooge Crater Cemetery, Belgium

The Zonnebeke Tunnels, Ypres

During the trip we visited tunnels at Zonnebeke, east of Ypres, which had been drained after being flooded since the war and were, for a limited period, open to view for the 100th anniversary of the Passchendaele Offensive before being allowed to flood again.



The Zonnebeke Tunnels, Ypres (continued)



EN

From 1917 onward an increasingly number of troops were thrown together in Flanders in an ever more devastated landscape. Suitable accommodation close to the front line was becoming harder to find. Hence, from 1916 on, the British started building what they called deep dugouts.

These underground shelters were carried out by the Tunnelling Companies, special units of miners and tunnelling experts. By the end of the war, the companies had built more than 370 dugouts in the region. These were mostly located about 10m (33ft) below the surface and provided shelter for 50 up to 2,000 men. The soldiers lived like moles. The atmosphere was damp and smelly whereas the corridors were crawling with vermin. Water had to be pumped out continuously because of the amount of groundwater immediately flooding the corridors. Nonetheless the dugout was, above all, a safe place providing a certain degree of comfort.

EN

During the Third Battle of Ypres, the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk (Church of Our Lady) in Zonnebeke was completely destroyed. Between November 1917 and April 1918 the 1st Australian, 1st Canadian and the 171st and 254th British Tunnelling Companies built a deep dugout under the church ruins. This wasn't at all a random decision. The heavy foundations and the rubble offered a better protection against the German shelling. Initially, the Canadians had been looking for the crypt of the church in order to use it for accommodation.

However, during the German spring offensive in April 1918 when the Zonnebeke Church Dugout had been abandoned, it was still unfinished and had presumably only been used as a storage area for equipment. The corridor network was located right under the Romanesque foundations of the 11th century as well as under the foundations of an 18th century further development of the church, which today is represented by pavements in iron sandstone and typical Flemish bricks.

EN

Between 1985 and 1986, archaeological excavations were carried out on Zonnebeke's chateau grounds. Archaeologists were looking for the remains of the Augustine abbey, situated on this spot until the late 18th century. To be able to interpret the archaeological finds, research was undertaken in 1989 next to the new church, which had been rebuilt a little more to the north between 1923 and 1924. During the excavations, a remarkable discovery was made: The Zonnebeke Church Dugout had been left unaltered after the war.

At first, the researchers didn't have a clue about the origin of the corridor network. Therefore, in July 1989, the water was pumped out and the entire system was measured. But, after the fact-finding, the access was anew blocked up with soil. Only in 2011 the corridor network was pumped empty once more. The reason for this was the landscaping of the Abbey Garden where the former abbey premises were evoked with elevated pavements. One of the access stairways to the surface was therefore also reconstructed.



John Walker, The Green, Collingham
16th September 2018

Contribution to 'My Story' added October 2018

