

Albert Thomas Richardson

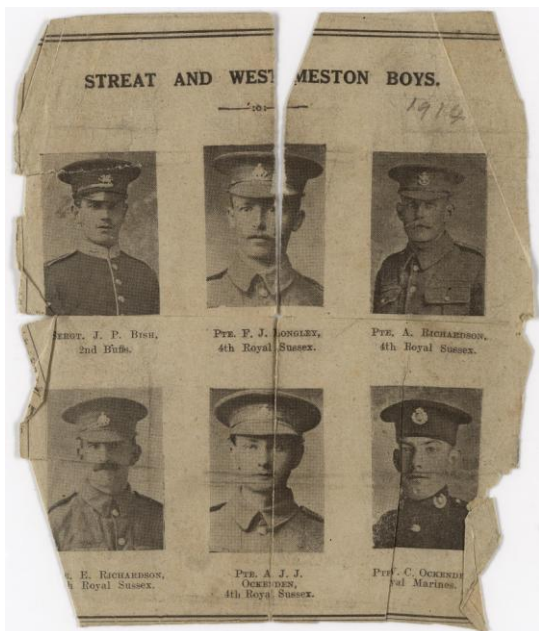


**Private Albert Thomas Richardson, pictured in 1914.
(Source: RSR MS 5/88)**

By Jaqui Ball

Summary

A tattered newspaper article found in the West Sussex County Archives carries the heading "Streat and Westmeston Boys" above photographs of six young men from the two villages who, in 1914, signed up to serve their country at the very beginning of the First World War.



Two of the men are brothers – Ernest George Richardson and Albert Thomas Richardson. One of the brothers – Albert – survived the "War to end all wars", the other – Ernest – lies in an unknown grave in France. This is Albert's story.

Newspaper article dated 1914 (ref: RSR MS 4/57)

Background

Albert and Ernest were the sons of George and Louisa Richardson (nee Barber). George worked as a farm labourer for the Fitzhugh family, at Marchants House and Streat Place, the "big house" of the village. He married Louisa, who was born in Frome in Somerset, in 1888 and they had four children, two of whom died in infancy.

Albert, the elder son, was born on 19 September 1889 and christened in the Parish Church at Streat on 10 November 1889.

The 1911 Census shows the family living in four rooms in Brocks Cottage. Elder son, Albert, is 21 and working as a domestic gardener, while Ernest, then 18, is described as a waggoner on a farm.

Even today, Streat is a peaceful place. It is hard to imagine the contrast for the brothers as they headed off to battle in foreign fields. At the same time it is easy



Streat Parish Church where Albert was christened (Author's own photograph)

to understand why their letters home reflect often on what is happening at home, how their father is coping with the workload, whether the harvest has been a good one, what is going on at the "big house". There is a clear sense of a close-knit and loving family.

Detail

In 1914, at the outbreak of war, Albert joined "C" Company, 5th Cinque Ports Battalion, of the Royal Sussex Regiment. The 5th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment (Cinque Ports) had been formed on 1st April 1908 as part of the newly constituted Territorial Force (TF). At that time the battalion had eight locally recruited companies, all of whom had their own Drill Halls.

When the war broke out in August 1914 the battalion was assembled and became Army Troops in the Home Counties Division TF. From 1914 until 1917, the 5th battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel F.G.Langham VD. In early 1915 it was posted for duty at the Tower of London. About this time several composite battalions of the Cinque Ports were formed. The original battalion was thereafter known as the 1/5th, with two reserve units formed later - the 2/5th and 3/5th. These supplied drafts to the 1/5th Battalion in France, and later personnel to several battalions of the regiment. In February 1915, the Battalion embarked for France on the SS Pancras, landing in Boulogne on 18 February 1915.¹

On 21st February it was posted to the 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, in which the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment was also serving. On 20th August 1915 it became the Pioneer Battalion of the 48th (South Midland) Division and joined them on the Somme at Hebuterne. As pioneers each man wore a brass badge on each collar in the form of a crossed rifle and pick.²

In July 1916, Albert was serving with his battalion in France. Among his papers lodged in West Sussex County Record Office is a printed message from Lieutenant-General Sir Aylmer Hunter Weston K.C.B. D.S.O to all officers, NCOs and men of the VIII Army Corps, dated 4th July 1916. This reads: "Following attack on BEAUMONT-HAMEL-SERRE on 1st July 1916, waves of men issued from their trenches and moved forward at the appointed time in perfect order, undismayed by the heavy artillery fire and deadly machine gun fire. There were no cowards or waverers and not a man fell out. It was a magnificent display of disciplined courage worthy of the best traditions of the British race."³

The report in the War Diary for 1 July 1916, written by Lt Colonel F (Fred).G. Langham, commanding 5th Royal Sussex Regt (Pioneers) is rather more prosaic. Lt Colonel Langham writes: "The Battalion and transport marched to Bivouac in wood SW of MAILLY-MAILLET as part of Corps reserve. The first time the whole Battalion and transport had been on parade together since 23/8/1915. 9.30 pm. Fell in to march to the

SUCRERIE (E of COLINCAMPS) to consolidate behind 31st Division but the move was cancelled just after the leading Company had marched away.

"2nd 7.30 p.m. Paraded to join in attack on German trenches between BEAUMONT and the River ANCRE which the 29th Division had failed to take yesterday. Attack to be made by 144 and 145 Brigades, each in waves on a 2 Battalion frontage. Was ordered to detail a Company to attack with each attack Battalion. As the front was too wide to cover and my whole command was out of my hand, I decided to form a forward dump at HYDE PARK CORNER and feed it as required by limbers from the R.E. dump at ENGELBELMER where I left my second in command Capt THOMAS. The attack was countermanded at the last moment ."

In November 1917, Albert's battalion was posted to Italy. The following month, December 1917, Albert was granted leave to visit his family Streat. His brother, Ernest, serving in Egypt, was pleased for him while bewailing the fact that there seemed to be no hope of leave for him: "I am so glad to hear that Bert has been home on leave. He had a nice long time with you. Not much hopes of me getting home yet awhile but of course we must live in hopes and look on the bright side of things."⁴

On 26 January 1918, Albert's Battalion moved to S. AMROGIO where the men remained in billets while carrying out road works on the road from S. AMROGIO to PIAMBINO. The Battalion (minus A Company which had marched to TREVISO), remained at S. Ambrogio and continued training, according to the War Diary entry made by Major G.F. EBERLE now the commanding officer of the 5th. Entries in the War Diary report on the work which was carried out, being mainly construction of roads, concreted dugouts and general improvements to camps occupied by the battalion.

Brother Ernest wrote to Albert on 7 February 1918: "How do you like the new part of the world you are in? Is it better than France. I expect you will find it very rough country it was a good job you got your leave before you went."

Only a few of Albert's letters home to his parents survive among his papers in the County Archives but they offer glimpses of a man who took a real interest in the country where he was serving and its people.

In a letter to his "Dearest Mother" written on February 3 1918 he writes:

"Many thanks for your welcome letter received safe yesterday 2.2.18. I trust dear Mother you and dad are both keeping well and getting on alright. Glad to say I am alright....

"The weather here has been a little bit cloudy and inclined to rain. I think the rainy season is expected now soon. We are now on the hills close to the line, things have been fairly quiet so far, the primroses are just coming out, also snowdrops and several kinds of rock plants. I enclose a few.... "⁵



Pressed flowers which Albert sent home to his mother Louisa in an Active Service envelope (author's photograph of contents of envelope in RSR MS 5/88)

Amazingly the shape of the leaves and ferns and the colour of some of the flowers are still clear and vivid, almost a hundred years since Albert picked and pressed them to send home to his mother.

It is poignant to realise that Albert was able to see beauty in the midst of war – once a gardener, always a gardener.

He was interested in the local people as well as the plants. In the same letter, he writes:

"Many thanks for the post cards. I was going to give one of them to a family I got to know at one of the villages we were in, but we have left there now but may see them again sometime. It use to pass an evening away when we were back, to call at a farmhouse and have a

coffee and try to talk to the people, one learns the lingo a bit in that way. The people here are mostly small farmers in a very poor way. They used to sit in the cow stalls of an evening all the people do, have never seen them use any coal. They have plenty of food, they live chiefly on maize pudding, and eggs, and plenty of wine which they call vino. The country people do not seem short of much except sugar. The people use oxen chiefly on the land also donkeys which they have no mercy on have seen sometimes 4 oxen and 1 donkey in front on a plough, once saw one cow and a horse together on a plough. Ask dad how he would like that."⁶

Thoughts of home – and interest in the comings and goings of village life – are evident in the final lines of this letter: "Sorry to hear about Mrs Gladman, does Bessie keep house now? Who is Mrs L marrying? Have you heard anything about Morton lately. Have just had a line from Bert Hawkins he was quite well. What are they going to sow in Well field. Hope Bishes are quite well also Bransden. Remember me to all about there..."

Sometime in early 1918, Albert was promoted to Lance Corporal. In a letter home dated 14 March 1918 he explains: "I am right up on the mountain at present, in charge of a party I have 3 men with me of another regt. So my address will be L/Corp ...GHQ Sniping School BEF Italy. This week has been lovely there are a lot of primroses and snowdrops in bloom. I have got a decent billette in a house so am quite alright."

In July 1918 Albert found himself in hospital with a sprained ankle. During his recovery, he found time to visit the local family he befriended as he explained later in this letter to his parents dated 5 September 1918.

"I am quite alright again. I had a decent time in hospital it was only the night of 26.7.18 that I sprain my ankle. It was dark and had been raining, very slippery on the mossy rocks, I slipped down and of course that finish my operations for that night. Next morning I went to the Field Dressing Station then on down the mountain to a rest station for 2 days, then down to the CCG.

"After hospital I had 5 days at a reinforcement camp in the district where I was on that job, so I went up to see the people there, they were pleased to see me, had some good feeds and plenty of wine. It was very hot at midday and the ground very dry, the grapes were just beginning to get ripe. I came back to the batt on 31/8/18 managed to ride up the mountain on a lorry. It is a very long way up, about 5000 feet above sea level, one gets splendid views of the plains on the way up, and, of course, when one gets further things are so pleasant, most of the mountains here are covered with pine trees on the top, and great rock and boulders it is in and under there that we like, like the old hill tribes. It is getting chilly up here early morning and nights now, the country here is much more difficult than France, for any advance either side, though Fritz had a good try last June, our people keep worrying him now."

By the time of this letter, Albert's brother Ernest is missing and Albert is keen to keep his parents' spirits up and to provide ideas of how they might find out more news of his younger brother.

"I trust dearest Mother this will find you both quite well and that you have had news of Ern by now. As you say it is wicked that they did not have leave before going into that lot in France. We must hope for the best dearest Mother and trust all will come right in the end. Joe ought to be able to give you more news as to what happened and where and when as surely there were a few of the platoon left who might tell something, or you might write to the Platoon or Coy Commander, who should be able to tell you something, let me know what Joe tells you, of course he will have gone back before you get this but you will get the log officers or the platoon officers name from him. I should keep on at some of them till you get some more definite news, which I trust will be soon." He closes this letter: "Well dearest Mother I trust this will find you in the best of health also Dad. Try not to worry too much and trust we shall soon have the best news. With fond love to you both from your loving son Bert R." His signature is surrounded by scrawled kisses.

As the case study on Ernest George Richardson sadly shows, the information Louisa was able to gather was not encouraging. The "best news" would never come.

Albert's Battalion stayed on in Italy after the war ended. Christmas 1918 was spent in Arzignano and Albert sent his parents a post card showing a panorama of Arzignano and marking with a cross Castello de Arzignano: "C" Company billeted here Xmas 1918."



Postcard showing panorama of Arzignano, with an X marking the spot where "C" Company was based over Christmas 1918 (Source: RSR MS 5/88)

The Battalion returned to England in 1919.

Conclusion

In 1920 the war was over and Albert was living in Chealsfield Cottage, Streat – where on 4th February 1920 he received a letter from the No 2 Infantry Record Office in Hounslow enclosing preliminary issue of the Allied Victory Medal Riband which he was entitled to wear. The letter explains that the medal will be sent to him as soon as it is issued "which cannot however be for some considerable time." The letter also says "It must be understood that the issuing of the Riband is no guarantee that the award of the Medal has been approved."

Albert's mother Louisa died in 1926 at the age of 60 and later the same year, on 9 October 1926, Albert married Dorothy Ellen Green at Streat Parish Church. He was 37 years old and still working as a gardener though now living in

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| 1926. Marriage solemnized at <u>St. Peter's Church</u> in the Parish of <u>Streat</u> in the County of <u>Devon</u> | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------------------------|------|------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| No. | When Married. | Name and Surname. | Age. | Condition. | Rank or Profession. | Residence at the time of Marriage. | Father's Name and Surname. |
| 97 | Oct. 9. | Albert Thomas Richardson | 37 | Single | Gardener | Streat | George Richardson |
| | 1926. | Dorothy Ellen Green | 24 | Single | Domestic | Streat | Frederick William Green |
| Married in the presence of the Minister of the Gospel, by me, <u>Charles Long</u> Rector. | | | | | | | |
| This Marriage was solemnized between us, <u>Albert Thomas Richardson</u> and <u>Dorothy Ellen Green</u> in the presence of us, <u>George Richardson</u> and <u>Frederick William Green</u> | | | | | | | |

Marriage certificate of Albert Richardson and Dorothy Green (Source: General Register Office)

Westmeston, Dorothy was 24 and a domestic servant, living in Streat at the time of their marriage. Dorothy was the daughter of Frederick William Green.

At some time the couple moved to Eastbourne where Albert's father, George, joined them in 1932. It has not been possible to trace any children from Albert and Dorothy's marriage, and the fact that none were mentioned in the newspaper report of George's death on 25 October 1939, which gave details of the chief mourners, suggests that the couple may not have had children.

It seems Albert kept in touch with old comrades and a newspaper cutting among his papers shows a Cinque Ports Old Comrades annual reunion dinner held in October 1960.



**Annual Reunion Dinner of Cinque Ports Old Comrades Association
held in October 1960 (Source: RSR MS 5/88)**

Although his name is not one of those recorded, it seems likely that Albert is among the eighty old comrades of the Cinque Ports reunited at the dinner, held in the Drill Hall in Mountfield Road, Lewes. Before the meal was served, Sergeant W.A. Whimhurst and Corporal V.S. Thornton of the 4th / 5th Battalion (TA) Royal Sussex Regiment, sounded the Last Post and Reveille and "two minutes of silence was observed in memory of fallen comrades." Colonel E. A. C. Fazan, the President and Chairman of the Association, then welcomed members and guests before proposing a toast to the guests, the 4th / 5th Battalions and the Royal Sussex Regiment.



Grave of Albert and Doreen Richardson in the churchyard of Streat Parish Church (author's own photograph)

Albert died on 1 January 1970, aged 80 years and is buried with his wife, Dorothy Ellen, in the peaceful churchyard of the Streat Parish Church. Dorothy lived for a further 24 years, dying on 25 November 1994 aged 92.

Their grave is just a short distance from that of Albert's parents which also bears a poignant inscription to his lost brother.

In death, at least, this close-knit family, torn apart by war, were together again in the village they knew as home.

References and Bibliography

Original Records:

RSR MS 5/88 Personal papers of Albert Thomas Richardson
 RSR MS 4/57 Personal papers of Ernest George Richardson
 RSR MS 4/64 War Diary of 5th Battalion from 16 February 1915 – 17 March 1919
 Census Records 1901 and 1911 for the Richardson Family (Ancestry.com)
 Marriage Certificate for Albert Richardson and Dorothy Green (General Register Office)

¹ Information from <http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/>

² Information from <http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/>

³ RSR MS 5/88 Personal papers of Albert Thomas Richardson

⁴ RSR MS 4/64 War Diary of 5th Battalion from 16 February 1915 – 17 March 1919

⁵ RSR MS 5/88 Personal papers of Albert Thomas Richardson

⁶ RSR MS 5/88 Personal papers of Albert Thomas Richardson