Archibald Remnant 1892-1917

A Baker’s son from Petworth, Sussex

By Margaret Holloway
Summary

Archibald (Archie) Remnant was born in Petworth, Sussex in 1892. The Remnants owned the bakers and confectioners which was destroyed by a fire in 1898. The family moved to Salfords near Horley in Surrey to live with Archie’s sister-in-law Lillian’s family the Fosters. The Foster men were employees of the Monotype print works. Aged 18 Archie joined the Royal Engineers for two years and then became a reservist. From August 1914 he served in the British Expeditionary Force as a driver until his death in action on 30 April 1917 aged 24. He is buried at Arras.

Introduction

Had he lived Archie would have been my great uncle. A treasured collection of his possessions including his last letter from the Front inspired me to write this study. I hope that the story of his family will interest local Sussex readers. However, their story reflects how the Great War affected so many of the old large Victorian families when they lost their fathers, sons and brothers and changed the Britain they knew forever.

Remnant’s Bakery part of the former Crown Inn on the corner of Church Street and Lombard Street. Photos from the Kevis Collection, West Sussex Record Office.
Background

My mother Dorothy (Dolly to her family) would have been 100 years old on 1 December 2013. Hers was a tough working class childhood and youth typical of the Edwardian era. Like most of her contemporaries she then had to live through another war. As a girl myself growing up in the south London suburbs in the 1950s and 60s I knew that my grandfather Charles Remnant came from Petworth despite now living in Edmonton in North London with my grandmother Lillian. They were in poor health by this time and the house was poorly furnished and very minimal by today’s standards. I was always puzzled that his sister Edith (known as Aunt Edie) lived in America. She and my mother corresponded but my grandparents never spoke of her. My mother was always proud of her Petworth connections and knew that some of her family members had been employed at Petworth House as bakers and gardeners. She took me to Petworth one day to show me a bare wall where the Remnant family bakery had stood. She told me that my grandfather Charles who was a boy of 12 at the time woke up in the night to see the curtains on fire. His prompt action in raising the alarm saved his family’s lives.

My mother’s grandfather also Charles (Remnant) was born in 1860. He was married to Sarah Jane Wadey from Wisborough Green in Sussex. They had four children: Charles, Edith, Mabel and Archie. Mother told me Remnants bakers supplied Petworth House, a fact I was not sure about until later in life as a teacher I took a party of schoolchildren there for a Victorian day. When the guide pointed out the empty space where the bakery had stood I was able to say “well, actually it was my family...” Of the other members of the family: Edith was a nurse at Guildford cottage hospital. At the time of Archie’s service Mabel’s address is listed as in Knightsbridge so I assume she was in service but I know little else about her except for a photo of her grave in America.

The Foster Family outside their house in Dunraven Avenue, Salfords. Lillian is second from the left in the top row.
Photo from author’s collection
Archibald Remnant
Service Record

War Office records and his Soldiers’ Small Book tell us that on 29 November 1910 aged 18yrs 5 months he was enlisted into the Royal Engineers at Guildford and signed up for 12 years- the first two years to be in Army service and the remainder in the Army Reserve. His occupation was recorded as stableman.

His medical record states that he had a fresh complexion, brown eyes and brown hair. His height was 5’5”, and with a chest measurement of 36” and a weight of only 125lb(9stone), it is not surprising that he is recorded to have only fair physical development. Eyesight was good.

Two character references were submitted: one from the licensee of the Prince Albert (his employer for the previous 12 months), and a second from the local rector.

First World War Soldiers Service Records from Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk)

25 October 1912 he was enrolled in Section A of the 1st Class Army Reserve at Storncliffe.
28 November 1912 he transferred to the Army Reserve on the expiration of his period of service. He became an Army Reserve Driver for the Royal Engineers.
29 November 1913 a certificate of Release signed at Chatham records the expiration of his period of service in that section.
5-22 August 1914 he was at home.
23 August 1914 he was mobilised and posted to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) 9th Field Company (9F Co)
30 April 1917 he died of wounds received in action aged 24 years 9 months.
Character References from War Office Records: The pub landlord and the Rector!
First World War Soldiers Service Records from Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk)
This is the pencil-written letter sent home by Archie from the Front followed by a transcript complete with spelling errors.

[in author's collection]

30. 11. 19

Dear Char and Lily

Just a few lines hoping you got my letter safe which I sent a week ago. I sent a card inside I hope you like it. How are Lily and Dolly. I hope they are quite well as I am at present. We are having plenty of snow late. I expect we shall have plenty of it now. Well have you heard from dad and mother late. I have lost their address.

So just drop a line and put it inside if you don’t mind well I haven’t got much to tell you now but hope to have news soon. I hope you will enjoy some rest as I shall make the most of it if all goes well, now I had better close. One more thing could you give me Mr Foster’s address as I can send them a line and if you don’t mind would you send me one or two books each week. I am leaving you 7/- a week you can by them out of that, and a few cigarettes. Well so long give my best love to them all. Don’t forget the old lady upstairs and give her this card will send them all some as soon as the money comes.

Goodbye for a time
Give my love to dolly and lily
From your old brother
Arch xxx

28.08.9 Coy
R E
BEF
The date must have been added later. It may never have been sent but returned with his belongings after his death. A communication signed by his brother Charles on 18 November 1919 corresponds most closely with that date. It records the soldier’s mother, father, sisters as “None”. Charles and Lily’s address is now 34 Selwin Rd Mortlake East Sheen.

Towards the end of the War Charles Senior, his wife and daughters Edie and Mabel decided to Emigrate to America. British nurses with their superior training were in demand in the US and Edie may have initiated the move. Charles Junior, however, never forgave his parents and sisters for leaving his little brother to perish in France and that is why he never spoke to them or saw any of them again.

The cards refer to embroidered silk cards made by Frenchwomen for sweethearts or as Christmas cards. There are some in the collection. 7/- 7 shillings (35p but more like £3.50 allowing for inflation)

Charles Foster of Salfords with eldest son also Charles (Charlie) who was in the Lifeguards and survived the War and brother Arthur. It is said that Charlie and Archie met a few days before he was killed. Archie was cold and hungry and Charlie gave him some bread. I remember telling my own schoolteacher this story once and she dismissed it as sentimental nonsense. Soon afterwards Rolf Harris released the song “Two Little First World War Soldiers Service Records from Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk)
Boys’!

The saddest episode in the story is the way in which his brother Archie was dead. 10 May 1917 not having heard from Archie, Charles Remnant enquiring about him. 1 June 1917 he received a reply to their home now 963 Fulham Rd, Fulham.

There seems to have been some confusion over the service number given for Archie on the letter, which must have given Charles hope that he may still be alive. There follows a series of internal memos inside the War Office confirming that they did have the right man culminating in a very matter-of-fact telegram to Charles.

First World War Soldiers Service Records from Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk)
25 October 1917 the War Office recorded that personal property should be sent to Archie’s father Charles Remnant, Box 202, East Selanket, Long Island, USA
29 December 1919 Archie was awarded the British War Medal, the Victory Medal and the 1914 Star. These medals were sent to America.
Conclusion

17 May 1917 my grandparents Charles and Lillian had a son whom they named Archie.

Grandfather Remnant prospered in America and looks very well in this photo compared with those left behind in England. Archie’s brother Charles worked as a pastry cook in London having been trained by a Swiss confectioner until an accident involving a hit and run motorcycle left him with severe leg injuries. My mother supported the family, her own brother Archie having been weakened by rheumatic fever as a small boy. This was all pre NHS and benefits.

My mother continued to correspond with Aunt Edie. She had been married to a Mr Shutt but by the 1960s was now widowed with no children. During World War II she sent my mother parcels of clothes. In the 1960s she visited us with some friends who were “doing Europe”. They sailed on the SS United States into Southampton and stayed in a London hotel. She was very generous giving me several foreign dolls from places she had visited. The best present of all was an empty Helena Rubenstein box which smelt divine. I remember them all talking about the Kennedys and “Tricky Dicky”. Edie eventually became infirm and went into an expensive nursing home. She had taken a painting of Petworth to America with her which she always said she would leave to my mother but, as people so often fail to do, she did not record it in her will.

Some months after her death, Edie’s friend sent mother a cutting from the local newspaper reporting that an unaddressed, unstamped parcel containing a painting of Petworth in Sussex had been left at the post office and did anyone know who it belonged to. We wrote to the newspaper but never received a reply. We can only assume that the padre who had been visiting Edie in her dying days had left it there as it was too heavy to post or that someone else had claimed it. Thus ended our American connection but I was always fascinated by America and went on to study American History as part of my Bachelor of Education degree. When I became a deputy head I used Archie’s story for Remembrance Day school assemblies. I began the assembly with the words “I’m going to tell you the story of a real soldier” and ended with the lines “and when Lily and Charles had a baby boy they named him Archie. This is how families remember”.
Bibliography

Original Records
First World War Soldiers Records from Ancestry (www.Ancestry.co.uk)
Soldiers’ Small Book, letters and photographs from the Remnant and Foster family collections

Books
Jerome, P. and Newdick, J. Petworth Time out of Mind (Window Press, 1982)

Appendix

Pages from Archie’s Soldiers’ Small Book

[Soldier's small book is in author’s collection]
INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLEANING THE RIFLE AND CARBINE.

Detailed instructions as to cleaning the service arms are given in the "Ministry Regulations." The following general instructions in the case of arms, alone, however, are simply added:

X.B.—The rifle or carbine must be examined and thoroughly cleaned and the barrel wiped out with any denatured alcohol once a day.

As soon as possible after firing the last shot, arms should, whenever practicable, be thoroughly cleaned; if this is not done without loss of time, rust or crooks will rapidly appear, which will expand and be difficult to remove, even if the barrel is not injured. When thorough cleaning before returning to quarters is not possible, arms must, in any event, be wiped out with bismuth-coated boric acid saturated in Russian putoline, immediately after firing, and be thoroughly cleaned as soon afterward as possible.

Although a barrel in which rust has been allowed to form may be cleaned so as to appear as if it had never been set, it may be so painted or treated that it would not be recognized as a barrel, it is necessary that the general arm should be taken to prevent the formation of rust, which can only be done by strictly carrying out the following instructions:

1. The gun stock, barrel, sights, sights, and other parts exposed to rain or snow should be **waxed**
2. All tarnished parts should be **polished** with a clean cloth.
3. The bore should be **washed** with a solution of nitric acid and water.
4. The barrel should be **washed** with a solution of nitric acid and water.
5. The stock should be **waxed** with a solution of nitric acid and water.
6. The sight should be **waxed** with a solution of nitric acid and water.

GUADE FOLDED

When drawing the pull-thru, care should be taken to avoid the gain as shown hereon, as if the end is folded, it is not affected in removing crooks, rust, etc. from the process of the enrolling. It is also necessary, when the gain comes in the line lightly, to insert strip of bismuth, or paper, inside the fold of the gain to make it do its work.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLEANING CLOTHING AND FOR WASHING CLOTH, KNITTED CLOTHING, SOCKS, AND WOOLEN GOODS.

Sweat Clothing.

1. Rattan or Hook Starch—Rub dry paper over the starched part and brush with a clean brush.
2. Oil or Grease Stain—Rub the stain with a small piece of acetate cloth saturated with methyl alcohol and oil. 4. Water dry paper over the part covered with clean blotting paper and press while firm upon paper. Repeat until the stain is removed.
3. Stains from Perspiration or Dirt—Kersey and other brocades and textures: A solution of salt of soda 1 oz. of pure boiling water should be applied over the garment with a clean hard brush. Finish off by spraying well with cold water. 8 oz. of soda solution may be washed in the same water, in which some good yellow soap and a small amount of griss called 2 oz. per gallon have been dissolved. Rinse off well in cold water.
4. Another solution of soda and water should be applied to the part of the garment to be washed.

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Notes on Field Cooking.

Hints for Preparing the Food.

1. Keep yourself as clean as possible.
2. Keep the place tidy where the cooking is done.
3. See that the mess tin, or other vessel in which the food is to be cooked, is clean before using it. Directly after using the mess tin stem it on the outside and inside (if possible by boiling same clean water in it).
4. It is better to use clean vessels with their food cooked than dirty vessels for boiling and stirring the food.

Preparation.

1. Do not chop the wood too small.
2. Do not use straw or similar things for lighting the fire.
3. Keep the fire burning evenly.
4. If wood is not available, dried camel's dung may be used, made fairly efficient substitutes.

Cooking.

1. Do not leave the mess tin or other vessel empty on the fire.
2. Always keep water handy.
3. Stir with a wooden spoon or stick, and not with a metal spoon.
4. As a rule use the lid reversed and keep some water in it.
5. When using preserved vegetables they should be previously soaked in water; this may be done by using the lid of the mess tin when preparing the meal.
6. Dried peas or beans should be soaked and soaked in cold water for twelve hours, if possible, before being cooked.

Stewing.

Stewing is the slow method of cooking meat, etc., under campfire conditions. The officer should understand that boiling is not stewing; rapid boiling makes meat tough, hard and stringy.

On the other hand stewing, i.e., slow cooking just short of boiling heat, makes meat moist tender and succulent. Boiling meat, vegetables, etc., rapidly does not tenderize the cooking; but spoils the food and injures the mess tin.

Rules for Stewing.

1. If sufficient water is available wash the meat and vegetables carefully before commencing to cook.

Register of Rate of Engineer Pay to which No. 20808 D. T. N. R. N. is entitled.

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