The Short Life of
Harry Francis Hall

1891 – 1918

By Amanda Hall
Harry Francis Hall was born on 22 October 1891 in Portfield, Chichester. His father Harry William Hall was a painter born in Chichester and his mother Ellen Hall (nee Jackson) was born in West Dean, near Chichester.

In 1901 Harry Francis was nine years of age and was living with his parents and four siblings at 106 Oving Road, Chichester.

By 1911 Harry Francis Hall was 19 years of age, living with his parents and five siblings at 6 St James Road, Chichester. He worked at Shippams of Chichester and his occupation was recorded as factory potted meats. His younger brother Frederick William, my grandfather was also working at Shippams, his occupation is recorded as labelling.

Shippams was a family run business founded in 1786 by Charles Shippam who opened a grocery business in Westgate, Chichester which later moved to 48 East Street. As the reputation of Shippams sausages grew and they supplied an increasing market, they built their first factory in 1892 at 48 East Street. In the 1890’s they began making potted meats and pastes which were cooked and minced before being put into earthenware jars.
This above picture shows Harry William Hall, his wife Ellen and their children. Harry Francis Hall is standing at the back between his two older sisters. Alfred John Hall is standing at the back on the right; served in the 4th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment during World War 1. My grandfather Frederick William Hall is at the front on the left leaning on his father, served in the Royal Engineers during World War 1. Both Alfred and Frederick survived the War.

There are no surviving photographs of Harry Francis Hall in uniform, although in the letters later detailed in this Short life of Harry Francis Hall, Harry writes about sending photos home. I am aware that Harry did indeed send a photo of himself to his mother Ellen Hall; unfortunately this photo no longer survives within the Hall family.
On 4 August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany. Harry Francis enlisted into the 7th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment on 30 August 1914, for three years or the duration of the War. He signed up with a group of work friends, including George Farndale (spelt as Farndell by Harry) who he later mentions in his letters, from Shippams. They went to the Barracks in Broyle Road in Chichester. Their recruitment was recorded in The Chichester Observer and West Sussex Recorder on Wednesday 2 September 1914.

Harry Francis's service record survives at The National Archives confirming his enlistment date as 30 November 1914.
Harry Francis Hall and a number of his work colleagues from Shippams wrote back to Alfred Ernest Cooper Shippam one of the Directors of Shippams during World War 1. This collection of letters has been deposited in the West Sussex Records Office Ref Add Mss 1606.

Add Mss 1606 West Sussex Records Office

452 D Company
7th Royal Sussex Reg
St Martin Plain
Shorncliff
Kent
8 October 1914

Dear Sir
I thank you very much for your letter that you wrote to mother which was send to me this morning. Sir I have asked the other chaps to send their photo on to you as soon has they has they can has you would like to have them. Sir I am please to say that I am in the best of health and that I am enjoying myself alright. Sir I think we are settled for a time now. The canvas life suits us very much for it is much healthy, but the food is not quite so good as we had at Colchester, but still I expect it will get better as soon as we get settled down. The drills we have now is much more stiffer now than they have been for it is so hilly. We hath to walk about two miles for we starts on drills and by the time we gets there we are nearly worn out, for the hills are very steep. Sir the place where our camp is very pretty, the sea is only about three miles from us so we hath not far to go for a bath. Sir while we were drilling last Tuesday there was eight airplanes passed over our heads. We are having night attacks now about twice a week, and then the fun begins for Farndell and myself are put out scouting, so I think I will try to pass as one. Sir all the other chaps wishes to be remember to you and all the other men and boys. Well Sir I think that is all this time, so I must close now.
I remain
Your Obedient Servant
H F Hall
Private H Hall  
452 D Company  
7th Batt Royal Sx BEF  
24 November 1915

Dear Sir

Just a few lines to let you know that I am in the best of health. I thank you very much for the parcel that I received last week. I am glad to say that I had a very nice time of it at Christmas. I think I had a better time of it than the others did, as I was away at a school going through a course of Trench Mortars, while the others were in the trenches. Sir I believe it was the worst time they ever had by what the chaps tells me, so I can think myself lucky for being away. Well Sir I think that is all this time so I must close now with best wishes for a Happy New year to all at the Factory.

I remain  
Yours sincerely  
L/C Hall

Lance Corporal H F Hall  
452 D Company  
7th Batt Royal Sx BEF  
2 January 1916

Dear Sir

Just a few lines to thank you for the potted meats that I received from you last week. I am glad to say that I am in the best of health. Sir the box was brought to me as L/C Farndell was in the hospital. I am glad to say that we are out of the trenches now to have a rest which I think all the chaps are glad of for I think we have earned one. The weather out here is very cold but it is fine. Well Sir I think that is all this time so I must close now.

I remain  
Yours sincerely  
H Hall
In the autumn of 1916 Harry’s mother Ellen Hall wrote to Mr Shippam asking for help to find out if Harry was still well. In a letter she wrote to Shippams she mentions why she is worried. She says "a soldier had come to their door and said that Harry was either dead or wounded".

Included in the collection of letters in Add Mss 1606 is a letter that was sent to Harry’s commanding officer by Shippams.

O C A 36 Light Mortar Battery
36 Infantry Brigade
BEF
France

Parents of 452 H F Hall
understand he is either killed or wounded can you give me any information.

Shippam
Chichester

And on the 15 November 1916 Shippam received a reply:

Ernest Shippam Esq.
Chichester

15 November 1916

Dear Sir
I am in receipt of your telegram of the 12th inst and have pleasure to inform you that No 452 Pte Hall H F is still at duty with the battery under my command and has been neither wounded nor killed. The address contained in your telegram was insufficient for a telegraphic reply.

Yours faithfully

Capt
OC 36th T. M. B.
Harry’s mother Ellen Hall wrote to Alfred Shippam to thank him for helping to find out about Harry’s wellbeing:

6 St James Road
Portfield
22 November 1916
To Mr A E C Shippam

Dear Sir
Mr and Mrs Hall wishes to thank Mr Shippam for kindly writing to let them know the latest news of Harry also wishes to say I received a letter from Harry today saying he was quite well and safe.
I am enclosing Harry letter and as Mr Shippam will see Harry had been told of it by his Officers but I had not written to them as I should not have known who to write too but Harry seems to have been upset over it but very thankful it was a sad mistake.
We are grateful to Mr Shippam for his kindness and trouble in sending to let us know and hope you will be soon restored to health again.
I am your sincerely
Mrs Hall

Alfred Shippam also wrote to ask if the other men that had enlisted from Shippam’s knew anything about Harry. This is the reply that Thomas Budd sent back:

Friday 24 November 1916
Private T Budd no778
B Coy Lewis Gun Section
7 Royal Sussex Regt BEF

Dear Sir
Having received the cigarettes you kindly sent out to me by last night’s mail I am now writing you these few lines to thank you for the same also for your letter which I received a few days ago. I was very pleased to hear from you. Now you asked me about Hall in your letter but I heard the same out here he is quite well I saw him only a few days ago it rather surprised me I can tell you. I asked him who it was that set the rumour about I should like to know. Well we are faring pretty well out here find it cold the weather holds out fine proper November it is a lot better than what we have been having. Well now Sir I think I must draw to a close this time have not got much to talk about once again thanking you for the cigs.
I remain
Yours sincerely
Tom Budd

Note Thomas Budd was killed in action on 1 October 1917, buried Monchy British Cemetery, Monchy Le Preux France and is also on The Shippams War Memorial.

On 23 May 1918 Harry’s parents received the telegram every parent dreaded. He had been admitted to 1st Australian General Hospital in
Rouen after having been gassed. They were advised he was dangerously ill and permission was not granted to visit.

On 25 May 1918 they received a further telegram informing them that Harry had died from gas poisoning on 24 May 1918.

Harry’s death was reported in the Chichester Observer and West Sussex Reporter on 29 May 1918.

On the 19 June 1918 there was a longer report of Harry’s death detailing that he had died from gas poisoning and that he had been in France for three years of his service.

The report also mentions that Harry worked for Shippams. Private A. Richardson is reported to have written to Harry’s parents ‘expressing on behalf of many comrades their deepest sympathy, he could truthfully say that Harry was the best man they had in the battery, and it was the opinion of them all’.

Lieutenant Neale also wrote ‘that deceased was one of the most cheerful and coolest men I have met out here, and was loved by every man in the battery’.
George Farndale also worked for Shippams, he joined up at the same time as Harry. He wrote to Alfred Ernest Shippam after learning of Harry’s death on 8 June 1918.

“I am very very sorry to hear of the death of Harry Hall, for he was a great chum of mine, and living so close together, too for so many years, will you express my sincere sympathy to his parents if you so meet them.

He must must suffered terribly, because I happen to be a gas specialist, and knowing the symptoms of gas, stages when it takes effect, I am certain, it must have been, an awfully hard time for him. Surely nothing can be more terrible than gas, I have no doubt, people often wonder, how when all the precautions are taken, as we have done, how it is fellows still get gas. It is certainly amazing the number that do get gassed, during a tour in the trenches. But then gas, is an easy thing to placed about, in a little piece of time.

Picture at night time, shells are going over your head and bursting perhaps a mile away, you wouldn't take any notice of it for sure. But they are gas shells, although you cannot possibly say so, until the gas cloud as been formed behind, and the wind drifts it back to you. Then before you know theres gas you must smell it, that is the only way to detect it, some sniff to long, some think it is a little which won't hurt, and the trouble is caused. Other times we have no chance, the shell pitched close to you, you duck, the gas forms at once, you are caught napping. So the war go on.”

Harry is remembered on four War memorials in Chichester. The Chichester War Memorial in Litten Gardens, St Pancras, in The Memorial Chapel of The Royal Sussex Regiment in Chichester Cathedral.

The Shippams War Memorial, now in the Basil Shippam Centre in Tozer Way, Chichester. The memorial was moved after the closure of the Shippam factory and offices in East Street, Chichester.

The Portfield War Memorial, now located in the porch of St George’s Church Rumboldswyke in Cleveland Road, Chichester, after the closure of Portfield Church, Church Lane, Chichester circa 1980.
Harry is buried in St Sever Cemetery Rouen, France. On visiting Harry’s grave for the first time, I saw there was a discrepancy between the date of death on Harry’s headstone, compared to the dates on the telegrams sent to Harry’s parents and the reports in the Chichester Observer and West Sussex Report.

The date on Harry’s grave in St Sever Cemetery Rouen, France, is 22 May 1918 although his actual date of death is 24 May 1918.

Harry is also recorded on his paternal Grandmother’s gravestone in Portfield Cemetery, Chichester which states the correct date of death as 24 May 1918.

After some correspondence with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and sending supporting evidence from his service file and his death certificate also confirming the 24 May 1918 as his date of death, they agreed to amend his date of death on the roll of honour database and in due course to replace his headstone.
References

Newspapers

Chichester Observer and West Sussex Reporter, West Sussex Records Office

Websites

Ancestry  www.ancestry.co.uk
Commonwealth War Graves Commission  www.cwgc.org
The Great War Forum  www.1914-1918.invisionzone.com
The National Archives  www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
Oxford DNB  www.oxforddnb.com

Original Records:

Five volumes of letters written by employees to Mr A E C Shippam during World War 1, Add Mss 1606 at West Sussex Records Office

Acknowledgements:

With thanks to West Sussex Records Office.