

A study of members of the
Knowles family of Sullington, West
Sussex
Or who married into that family
Who fought in the Great War

By Brenda Forrester

Introduction

My interest in the Great War Project stems from curiosity about my Maternal Grandfather's military service. This quickly spread to encompass his eldest son, his younger brother and a young soldier who would eventually become his son-in-law.

My Mother, Olive Richardson, told me stories of her father **John Knowles** and it was compelling to try to link those stories with historical facts.

Her eldest of three brothers, **Frank Knowles**, had emigrated to Australia before the outbreak of War, but joined the Australian Army to return to Europe to fight for his mother country.

John Knowles was one of fourteen children and his much younger brother **Ernest Knowles**, also fought.

After the War, **Donovan Horace Arnold** married Elsie Knowles, the eldest daughter of **John Knowles** and sister of **Frank Knowles**.

JOHN KNOWLES

John Knowles was baptised at Washington Church, West Sussex on 28 July 1861. He was the fifth child of Henry Knowles (occupation carter) and Elizabeth Ockenden. They had married in 1853 and went on to have fourteen children. Obviously that was a very large number of children to bring up in Waterfall Cottage, Sullington, their family home. John was taken to live with his father's sister, Jane Bax, in Hove; Aunt Jane had a son (Charles) of the same age as Jack. That is how the family always referred to "John", throughout his life he was called Jack. In the 1871 Census, Jack is described as "Visitor" under the column "relationship to head of household".

On 16 October 1895, Jack married Eliza Parker, at Findon Village Church. It is believed they met at Findon Sheep Fair while Eliza was recovering from typhoid, which she had caught when working in the centre of Worthing during the Worthing typhoid epidemic in 1893. She avoided death by her mother travelling to Worthing and taking her home to Findon to nurse.

John and Eliza had five children :

Frank on 17 September 1896
Elsie on 12 August 1898
Ernest on 12 January 1901
Edwin (Ted) on 10 November 1903
Olive on 20 September 1910.

I am the middle child of Olive.

Jack Knowles was a bricklayer when he enlisted in the Army Service Corps on 14 September 1915. On his enlistment papers he gives his home address as 35 The Drive, Heene, Worthing.



He lied about his age, 54 at that time, by stating he was born in about 1869.

After initially being based in the U.K. he sailed from Devonport for the Dardanelles and the battle of Gallipoli. Troops were eventually evacuated in late 1915 and Jack sailed from Mudross Bay (a distant island used as Headquarters by General Hamilton) on 7 February 1916. He sailed to Egypt and then left Alexandria for Marseilles on 25 March, arriving in Boulogne.

[Image from the collection of Olive Richardson]

Whilst in France he was hospitalised for “continually getting so wet”. Family legend is that the Field Doctor knew the body of the man in front of him did not fit the age on his papers. He sent to Somerset House for Jack’s birth certificate. This showed his date of birth as 1 June 1861, he had been celebrating his birthday one day out all of his life! He was now aged 55.

Jack was discharged from the army at Catterick Bridge Camp on 28 June 1916 as “Unfit for further service, aggravated by active service with the Expeditionary Force, signed Colonel Allied Service Corps Records”.



Photo of Jack with his wife Eliza and my mother Olive standing between them. The children in the back row are Ernest, Elsie and Ted.

[Image from the collection of Olive Richardson]

Jack returned home to Worthing and lived a full life, dying on 25 April 1948 aged 86.

FRANK KNOWLES

Frank Knowles was born on 17 September 1896 in Worthing, the eldest son of John and Eliza Knowles. (see entry for John Knowles)

Frank took the huge step of emigrating to Australia with a school friend under the Government scheme. His employment there was as a farm labourer in the Toowoomba District.

He enlisted in the Australian Army on 5 November 1917 in the 26th Battalion, 21st Reinforcement. His regimental number was 7079. He gave his address as Blanchview Helidon, Queensland and listed his next of kin as his father, John Knowles at 35 The Drive, Worthing, Sussex.

The unit embarked from Sydney, New South Wales on board RMS Ormonde on 2 March 1918. He served in France, where he joined the 49th Battalion.



[Image from the collection of Olive Richardson]

During his service in France he was allowed to take his leave back home in Worthing. This is the only time my Mother, Olive, remembers seeing her eldest brother (he was fourteen years older than her). She remembers him carrying her on his shoulder and she had her hand on the sun emblem on the side of his Australian army hat.



[Postcards from the collection of Olive Richardson]

Whilst in France, Frank sent home one of the beautiful embroidered postcards. The small card inside the embroidered "pocket" says "To my dear sister". On the back of the card is the date 10 August 1918. "Somewhere in France. Dear Olive, Just a line to let you know that I am well and having a goodtime. I will write later. In haste Your ever loving Brother Frank". Presumably the words were chosen not to frighten a young girl.

He returned to Australia on 12 July 1919, where he married and had a family, living to an old age.

ERNEST KNOWLES

Ernest Knowles is the brother of John Knowles (see separate entry). He was born on 17 June 1881, the son of Harry and Elizabeth Knowles. He was the next to last child of fourteen.

He enlisted in the Territorial 1st Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment. In August 1915 he landed at Gallipoli. There is a story that he advanced through a 'V' in the Turkish flank under fire from bullets and shrapnel. They advanced five hundred yards but casualties were high. They then emerged into a cornfield when he was ordered to advance another two hundred yards. Lance Corporal Knowles led the way but he was hit in the left hand by a sniper. He was evacuated and sailed home to England with two hundred other wounded. He was sent to Graylingwell Hospital, then being used as a war hospital. (My thanks to my cousin, Peter Knowles for supplying this information.)

Lance Corporal Ernest Knowles recovered and returned to active service in Egypt. Sadly he died of wounds sustained in Egypt in 1917. His death is recorded on the Sullington Church War Memorial.



[Image taken by the author]

DONOVAN HORACE ARNOLD

Donovan (always known as Don) was the son of Horace James Arnold and was born in Sawston, Cambridgeshire on 6 October 1899. The family moved to Worthing, Sussex.

He enlisted in the 4th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment and his number was 49322. He gave his trade as "carrier, carman" for Messrs. Durtnall & Co., Worthing. His home address is listed as 34 Orme Road, Worthing.

Don was used as a messenger in France, where he was shot in the throat on 24 April 1918. He was moved to the Grove Military Hospital, Tooting. On 24 August 1918 he was transferred to the Red Cross Special Hospital for facial injuries at 78 Brook Street.

His children understand that the American doctor told him he was only a "fag paper" away from death.

He was invalided out and became a "blue boy". The name came from the special uniform issued to injured soldiers. This was introduced to avoid them being handed white feathers for cowardice by so-called patriotic ladies back home in England.



[Image from the collection of Joan Turner]

Don was discharged from the Army on 16 November 1918 as “no longer fit”.

Don was awarded the Silver War Badge on 24 December 1918, this was awarded to those injured in the conflict. He also received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Don had corresponded with the love of his life, Elsie Knowles, throughout his absence from home. They married on 30 July 1927 and had two children, Derek Michael and Joan Elsie. Don had a very successful business career and lived a full life, despite his injury. Don died on 9 February 1970, aged 70.

CONCLUSION

I should like to thank my family for their assistance with this project. In particular, access to personal papers and photographs made available by my mother, Olive Richardson nee Knowles, my brother, Eric Richardson, and my cousins, Peter Knowles, Derek Arnold and Joan Turner.

I was pleased to be able to add my relatives to this project – “Lest we forget”.