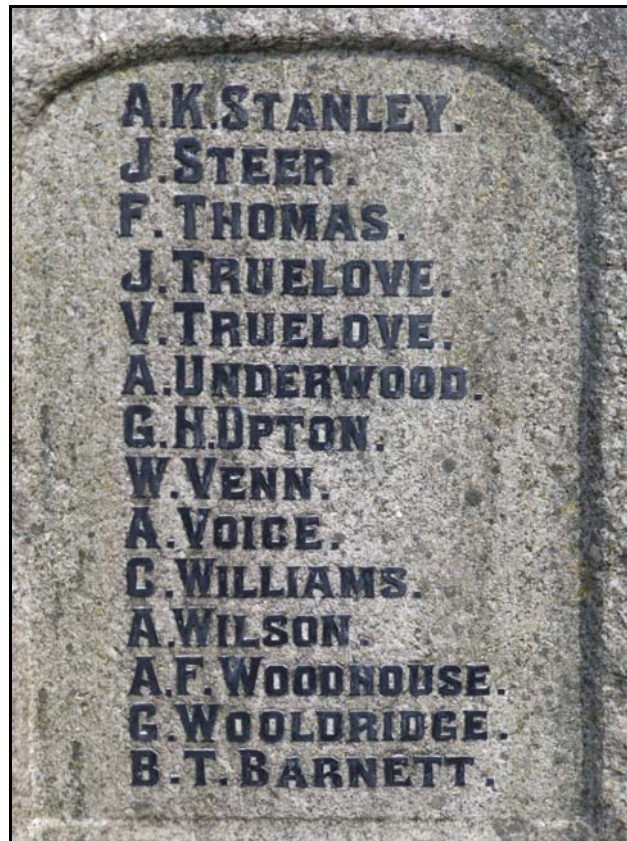


Private Benjamin Thomas Barnett,  
Royal Engineers,  
Private Benjamin Thomas Barnett,  
Royal Sussex Regiment,  
Gunner Albert Edward Barnett  
Royal Field Artillery



Author's Photograph

By Julie Wade

## Summary

For three generations, sons in the Barnett family were named Benjamin Thomas. This is the bitter/sweet story of two of those sons, one of whom, at the age of 41, joined the Royal Engineers and survived and one who, at the age of 20, joined the Royal Sussex Regiment and did not. In addition, the story of the Albert is included who was the son of the older Benjamin.

## Introduction

I chose to write about this family because they are distant members of my extended family tree through marriage, one of whom fought for the Royal Sussex Regiment.

## Background

One of about ten children, Benjamin Thomas Barnett (I) was christened on 3 May 1846 in Alfold<sup>1</sup>, on the Surrey/Sussex border. This is where the family was still living in 1851<sup>2</sup>. It is possible that he was a farm servant in 1861<sup>3</sup> at Rowner, New Bridge Road, Thakeham. He married Harriet Ann Gravett on 16 October 1870 at St Mary's, Billingshurst<sup>4</sup>. In 1871, he was an agricultural labourer, living at Layhold, Billingshurst.<sup>5</sup> From 1881, Benjamin (I) was a shepherd/agricultural labourer, living at Little Brewhurst, Plaistow Road, Wisborough Green.<sup>6</sup> Probably part of Brewhurst Farm and Mill and near Brewhurst Lock on the Wey and Arun Canal, many of the buildings in this locality are now Grade II listed.

Benjamin (I) and Harriet had three children including Benjamin Thomas (II) christened on 26 October 1873 in Loxwood<sup>7</sup>, Emily Jane and Harriett Ann. Benjamin (I) died in 1914<sup>8</sup>, a few months before the outbreak of WW1. At the time of WW1, Loxwood had a general stores where you could buy a loaf of bread for 2d and a baker's dozen of lardy rolls for a Shilling. Groceries were delivered to homes by horse and cart.<sup>9</sup>

## Benjamin Thomas Barnett, Royal Engineers

Benjamin (II), like his father, was an agricultural labourer in 1891 at Little Brewhurst.<sup>10</sup> In 1901, he was a stockman, living at River Cottage in Slinfold.<sup>11</sup> Previously, he had married Annie Edith Etheridge in 1895 in Petworth and they had five children; Albert Edward born 1897 in Loxwood, Emily Jane born 1899 in Billingshurst, Samuel James born April 1903 in Cranleigh, Basil Albert Charles born February 1906 in Loxwood and Benjamin Thomas (IV) born December 1908 in Rudgwick.<sup>12</sup> In 1911, Benjamin (II) and Albert were farm labourers at Medhone Farm, Blackhouse Lane, Petworth.<sup>13</sup>

Benjamin (II), weighing twelve stone, of average height but with a chest measurement of 34", enlisted on 23 August 1915, at the age of 41, in Horsham<sup>14</sup> as a Private in the Royal Engineers. He was living at 290 Horsham Road, Petworth, at the time. He embarked for France as Private

292579 on 2 September 1915 and was transferred to the Labour Corps. On 14 January 1918, he embarked for Boulogne and, on 15 January 1918, 12 April 1918 and 12 July 1918, still a Private, when he was posted.<sup>15</sup>

Within his service records, there is an order which states "With reference to your minutes dated 9/2/18 recording to War Office Casualty list HB9847 292579 Pte Barnett B T of 704 Labour Coy (sick) was admitted to 4<sup>th</sup> Northern Gen Hospital 14/1/18", signed for Colonel Labour Corps Records. The hospital was in Lincoln. However, happily but against the odds, Benjamin (II) survived three years in the Royal Engineers and was demobbed on 8 February 1919. He was awarded the Victory, British War and 1914-15 Star medals.<sup>16</sup> Benjamin (II) died, aged 78, in the first quarter of 1951 in the Chichester district.<sup>17</sup>

### Benjamin Thomas Barnett, Royal Sussex Regiment

Benjamin's (II) sister, Emily Jane, who appears to have married their cousin, Charles Barnett, in 1892, also had a son called Benjamin Thomas (III) born in 1894 in Petworth.<sup>18</sup> In 1911, Charles, Emily and Benjamin were living with Emily's father at Little Brewhurst.<sup>19</sup> As Private 4462, he enlisted in the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the 39<sup>th</sup> Division of the Royal Sussex Regiment.

He was killed in action on 14 December 1916<sup>20</sup> and is buried at the New Irish Farm Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, north-east of Ypres.

The 12<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment left the Somme on 17 November 1916, having been fighting there since 11 March 1916 in the most appalling conditions. The entire 39<sup>th</sup> Division made the same move. The battalion moved by train from Doullens to Poperinge where the men underwent training. The battalion moved to the front line of the Canal Bank sector on 11 December. It was a relatively quiet time but, according to the Division's war diaries, before they were relieved by another unit and despite having survived the terror of the German bombardments, vicious machine gun fire and deadly snipers on the Somme which killed over 150,000 men, one man (Benjamin (II)) was killed and three wounded by sporadic enemy shellfire.<sup>21</sup>



Author's Photograph

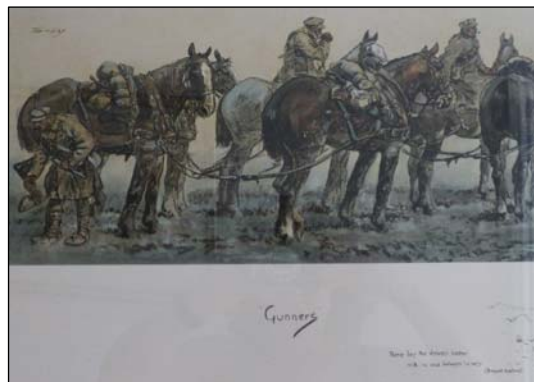
New Irish Farm Cemetery was first used from August to November 1917 and was named after a nearby farm, known to the troops as 'Irish Farm' (originally there was an Irish Farm Cemetery immediately South of the Farm. New Irish Farm Cemetery is about 300 metres North of the Farm at a crossing once known as Hammond's Corner). It was used again in April and May 1918 and at the Armistice it contained just 73 burials - the three irregular rows of Plot I - but was then greatly enlarged when more

than 4,500 graves were brought in from the battlefields north-east of Ypres and from smaller cemeteries.<sup>22</sup>

Benjamin's (III) death is recorded at the end of the list of names on the War Memorial at St Mary's Church, Billingshurst.

### Albert Edward Barnett, Royal Field Artillery

Benjamin's (II) son, Albert Edward, born in Loxwood, also enlisted. He was a Gunner, no 109941 and G/16300, in the 112<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Division of the Royal Field Artillery<sup>23</sup>. He died of his wounds on 3 August 1917<sup>24</sup> and is buried at Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, Poperinge, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium, 12km west of Ypres. His death is recorded on the Petworth War Memorial. He was



Author's Photograph

awarded the Victory and British War Medals.



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During the First World War, the village of Lijssenthoek was situated on the main communication line between the Allied military bases in the rear and the Ypres battlefields. Close to the Front, but out of the extreme range of most German field artillery, it became a natural place to establish casualty clearing stations. The cemetery was first used by the French 15th Hopital D'Evacuation and in June 1915, it began to be used by casualty clearing stations of the Commonwealth forces. From April to August 1918, the casualty clearing stations fell back before the German advance and field ambulances (including a French ambulance) took their places. The cemetery contains 9,901 Commonwealth burials of the First World War,

24 being unidentified. The cemetery, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, is the second largest Commonwealth cemetery in Belgium.<sup>25</sup>

### Returning to Sussex

Benjamin (III) and Albert Edward were never to return to West Sussex, however, those men, such as Benjamin (II), who were able to come home, were not necessarily returning to life as it was before they left, as the following memories of a Rudgwick resident show:

“When Dad (Mr Walker) came home there was no work for the men. What had they been told? “A land fit for heroes!” “A piece of land of your own to farm!”? That was if you had worked on the land before. (Also if you had, you were the first ones to be sent home at the end of the War.)<sup>26</sup>

You were told: “Every man must do his duty!” – with Kitchener’s finger pointing at you. Oh well, promises are cheap; not so lives. What hardship if your man hadn’t come back!”<sup>27</sup>

However, the fallen and returned were remembered annually with pride and sadness:

“On Armistice Day everyone would meet at The Fox (Bucks Green) ... During the service in the Church the names of the fallen would be read out. Muffled sobs could be heard around the Church as the grieving congregation waited for “The Last Post” to be sounded by one of our village bandsmen ... Then came the singing of the last hymn – and after that we children would be free to ... make our way home, very proud to have taken part.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/J3M1-WHL> (3.12.2013)

<sup>2</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>3</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>4</sup> <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/N6LW-WQ5> (3.12.2013)

<sup>5</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>6</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>7</sup> <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/NBKK-M83>

<sup>8</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>9</sup> West Sussex Federation of Women’s Institutes, “*Within Living Memory*” (Countryside Books, 1993) p31

<sup>10</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>11</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>12</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>13</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>14</sup> Service Record from Ancestry Library Edition (2.4.2013)

<sup>15</sup> Service Record from Ancestry Library Edition (2.4.2013)

<sup>16</sup> Service Record from Ancestry Library Edition (4.12.2013)

<sup>17</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>18</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>19</sup> [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (3.12.2013)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/451961/BARNETT,%20B%20T>  
(3.12.2103)

<sup>21</sup> C Baker, [www.1914-1918.org](http://www.1914-1918.org) (email dated 31.7.2013)

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- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/52200/NEW%20IRISH%20FARM%20CEMETERY> (3.12.2013)
- <sup>23</sup> Service Record from Ancestry Library Edition (8.4.2013)
- <sup>24</sup> <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/433800/BARNETT,%20ALBERT%20EDWARD> (3.12.2013)
- <sup>25</sup> <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/14900/LIJSENTHOEK%20MILITARY%20CEMETERY> (3.12.2013)
- <sup>26</sup> P Walker, "*Rudgwick Memories*", (Billing & Sons Ltd, 1982) p 22
- <sup>27</sup> P Walker, "*Rudgwick Memories*", (Billing & Sons Ltd, 1982) p 23
- <sup>28</sup> P Walker, "*Rudgwick Memories*", (Billing & Sons Ltd, 1982) p 48-49

With thanks to Penny Hyde-Smith of Edgcott House, Exford, Somerset, ([www.edgcotthouse.co.uk](http://www.edgcotthouse.co.uk)) for permission to use the image of "Gunners" by the artist known as Snaffles. NB Charles Johnson Payne (Snaffles) joined the Royal Garrison Artillery at the age of 18 as a gunner but in 1906 he was forced to leave because of illness.