

IN MEMORY OF JOHN ALBERT MORGAN

DIED IN ACTION 30 JULY 1916

Unknown Harbury connection
NO PLAQUE

John was born in Bishops Itchington in 1890, to Christopher Constable and Rachel Morgan (not yet married). After the arrival of their son, the couple bowed to social convention and were married, their lack of vows up to that point more to do with poor time management than an unwillingness to be together. They had a further three children, Alice Violet (1892), Arthur Henry (1894) and Rosina Patience (1898), two flowered sisters and a brother joining John. Christopher died before his youngest daughter was born.

Rachel, alone and with four children to take care of, quickly remarried a man called William Freeman. By the time of WWI they were living in Fenny Compton and had several children. On the 1901 census however Alice, Arthur and Rosina are living with their stepfather, though John has left his family, taken his mother's maiden name of Morgan as his last, and is living with Harry Morgan, his wife Sarah and their one-year-old son William - probably his mother's family. By 1911, 21-year-old John was independent, living in lodgings in Bishops Itchington and working as a labourer.

John fought with the 10th Service Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment (a Kitchener Battalion raised in Warwick in September 1914), which embarked for France on 17 May 1915, becoming part of the 57th Brigade of the 19th Division. The men first saw action that September, in the battle of Loos, though they were not directly involved as the regiments were held in reserve. They would, however, have come face to face with the hard realities of battle.

In July 1916, the battalion took part in the whole of the Battle of the Somme, remembered in history as one of the bloodiest battles of WWI. By the end of that first day there were over 57,000 British casualties. Though the troops of the 57th Brigade were not involved in this initial carnage, the huge loss of life would almost certainly have affected the morale of the men, John among them.

On 30 July 1916, during the Battle of Caterpillar Valley, the regiment were involved in an advance, the aim of which was to secure High Wood. John had been promoted to the role of sergeant, most likely due to rare skill and bravery considering he had only been a soldier for just over a year. It was during this assault that John and 43 of his comrades were killed. He is buried in The Caterpillar Valley Cemetery Longueval, which is on the Somme.

The reason for his appearance on the Harbury memorial is a mystery. He may have come to live and work in the village between 1911 and 1914. One of his numerous siblings may have lived here in 1920 and requested it. His mother and stepfather may have moved from Fenny Compton (his stepfather's name of Freeman was a common name in the village). In terms of historical proof, those letters chipped from stone are the only evidence he or those who knew him were ever here at all.



Harbury World War 1 Memorial Trail

Remembering the men of Harbury parish who fell during the first world war in service of their country.

