

The Akehurst Brothers at War

One hundred years ago, Surrey was playing its part in the first global war between modern, industrial nations. How did Surrey answer the call? Here, ‘Surrey in the Great War’ apprentice, Alex White, (pictured below) reveals the story of his Woking ancestors, the Akehursts.

The story of the Akehurst family in Woking follows a pattern which may be familiar to many. They moved into the area in the late 1800s, looking for work in the growing town. A local family, the Turners, later married into the Akehurst family. The Turners had moved from Chobham to Horsell to Woking, whereas the Akehursts had moved from the Sussex/Surrey border to Maybury.

Christopher and Mary Akehurst, initially lived at the Princess of Wales Inn (now The Princess), where Christopher was landlord during the 1890s. In 1894, their second son Christopher died aged four. This wasn't the last tragic death that the family would experience.

Christopher and Mary Akehurst had three sons who all served in WWI: Donald (Sapper, Royal Engineers), Charles (Private, 2/4th Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment) and Thomas (Private, 3rd Battalion Suffolk Regiment).

With the Akehurst family's WWI service records seemingly amongst the millions to be destroyed by bombing during WW2, their stories have been reconstructed from family anecdote, documentation

(online and at Surrey History Centre) and local newspapers.

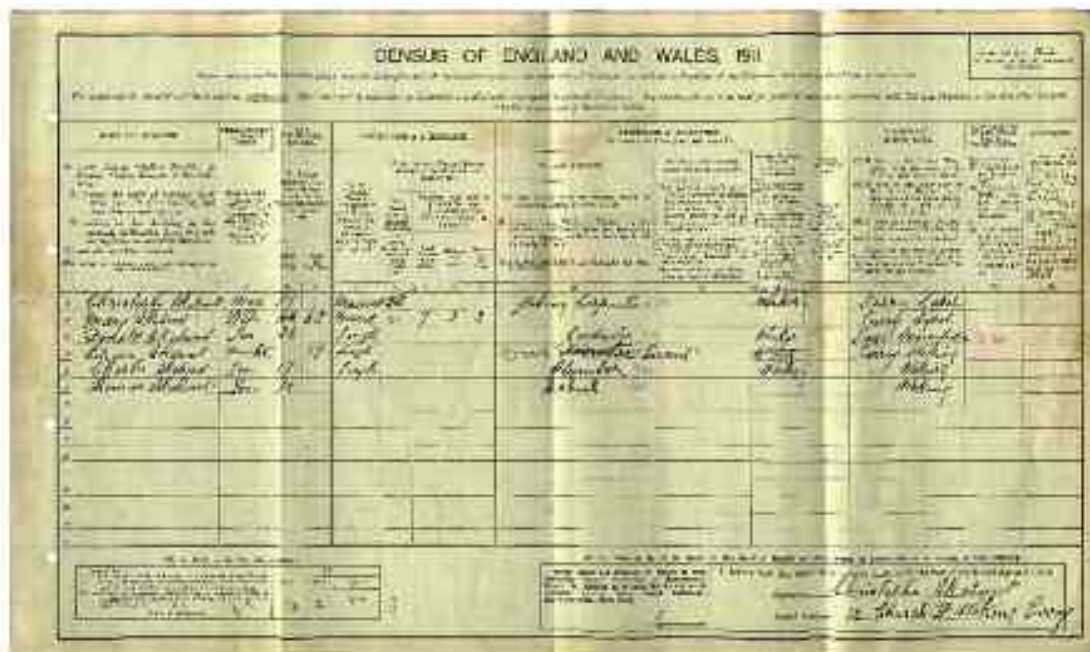
Donald Akehurst

On 1 August 1914, Donald Akehurst (27) married Edith Turner (27) at St John's Church, Woking. Donald and Edith were living on College Lane, St John's, with Edith's mother and brother. Their first daughter, Kathleen, was born in January 1915.

Donald arrived in Egypt during September 1915 and was transferred to army reserves in May 1919, having served in Mesopotamia. Donald and Edith later had two more children: my maternal grandfather Charles "Colin" Akehurst (born July 1920) and Edith Mary (1921).

THE LAST POST

Join the Last Post ceremony which takes place at 3pm on the first Sunday of every month at the RAF Memorial in Brookwood Military Cemetery. Everyone is welcome and attendees can request an individual to be named in the Individual Remembrance section of the event.



The Akehurst household prior to WWI: the 1911 census for England and Wales (© The National Archives of the UK / FindMyPast)



Unfortunately Donald's children would never know him, as he died, aged 39, in 1925. According to family anecdote, he had contracted tuberculosis, so had sometimes lived in isolation in the family's garden shed at 10 Church Street, Woking.

Thomas Akehurst

Thomas Akehurst attested aged 19 on 12 June 1917. The recruitment registers are a snapshot of that moment, recording that he was 5' 7", weighed 119lbs and was, like his father and eldest brother, a carpenter. He served in Egypt. After the war, Thomas married and had a son, who would later serve in WW2.

Charles Akehurst

Charles joined the Queens' (Royal West Surrey) Regiment shortly after war broke out. He was involved in heavy fighting, being wounded at Gallipoli, before fighting through Palestine until the Egypt Expeditionary Force liberated Jerusalem in December 1917.

Christopher and Mary (by then living in Arthurs Bridge Road) had just received an upbeat letter from Charles about Jerusalem when they received the telegram that Charles had been killed defending eastern Jerusalem against Ottoman forces. Many Surrey and Woking men were killed on that day, 27 December 1917.



Charles Akehurst (above) (*Woking News & Mail*, 1 February 1918) and his great-great-nephew, Alex White (right) (© *Woking News & Mail* and Alex White).

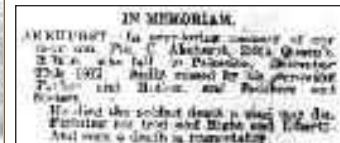


Their efforts were not in vain as the Ottoman counter-attacks were ultimately unsuccessful. Charles' obituary paints a



left: Charles Akehurst's obituary in the *Woking News & Mail*, 25 January 1918 (© *Woking News & Mail*)

below: In Memoriam notice for Charles Akehurst, *Woking News & Mail*, 27 December 1918 (© *Woking News & Mail*).



picture of his life in Woking as a schoolboy and member of the community, working for J. Harris and Son (father of Hugh Harris of Woking Menswear, now Ashworth & Bird) as a plumber before enlisting.

Charles is one of the first names on the Woking Town War Memorial. A year after his death, on January 25 1918, his family commemorated him with a touching 'In Memoriam' notice in the 'Woking News & Mail'.

Regrettably, there seem to be no records of the Akehurst women during the war, so their story will have to remain untold, for now.

Get involved

There are many ways to become involved in 'Surrey in the Great War: A County Remembers'. Delve into contemporary newspapers, letters, photos and archive sources, trawl through cupboards and attics for letters and diaries, and seek out local memorials to those who fell to discover the people behind the engraved names.

Anyone can participate: schools and colleges, community groups and local societies, experienced researchers and novices with a thirst to discover - all are welcome.

To find out more, please call **01483 518238/518239**, email surreyinthegreatwar@surreycc.gov.uk or visit www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk

