

## Lt B.B.Geake – The York & Lancaster Regiment

Boyd Burnet Geake was born in 1888, the son of John and Emily Geake who lived at 'Woodlands' in Coast Hill Lane. Boyd was a Motor Car Agent in civilian life. Shortly after war was declared he enlisted in the 9<sup>th</sup> Bn. The York & Lancaster Regiment and obtained a commission. The Battalion had been formed at Pontefract in 1914 as part of the 'New Army' created through Lord Kitchener's appeal for volunteers. After its formation the Battalion moved first to Frensham, then Aldershot and on to Hythe in February 1915.



In April 1915 Boyd married Dorothy May Cutforth, of Redhill. A month later the Battalion moved to Bordon and then to France, landing at Boulogne on 27 August 1915. Further intensive training was to follow before it was moved up to take part in the Battle of the Somme. Boyd Geake was a Platoon Commander and it would be his task to lead his men in their assault on the German lines.

The prelude to the battle was a heavy artillery barrage on the German lines. The barrage lasted for seven days and was the heaviest of the war. The British High Command mistakenly believed this had destroyed the German defences and the infantry was ordered to advance at a steady walking pace across the open ground. On 1 July 1916 Boyd Geake led his men over the top and advanced towards the village of Ovillers La Boiselle. Casualties mounted as they were met by intense machine gun fire.

Boyd Geake was one of nearly 20,000 British soldiers who died that day, the worst day in the history of the British Army. He was buried in Blighty Valley Military Cemetery at Authuille Wood. His parents placed a stone relief of the 'Happy Warrior' in his memory on the north wall of the chancel in our church. This was commissioned from the studio of George Frederick Watts at Compton.

In 1922 Boyd's father arranged for the village 'dovecot' sign to be erected on the Green as a more prominent memorial and for the thatched bus shelter to be erected beside it. John Burnet Geake did much for the village; he helped to acquire The Hut as a recreation room for returned servicemen and, in 1934, provided the funds that enabled the Westcott Village Club to obtain its freehold. He also supported the cricket and bowling clubs, scouts and guides, and many other groups and organisations in the village.

**Boyd's widow, Dorothy, did not remarry. She lived at Normans Cottage, Newdigate, where she and Boyd had briefly set up home together, until shortly before her death, aged 100, in January 1986.**

**It is now known that Boyd Burnet Geake also had a relationship with Ethel May Clements of Seattle, as a result of which a child, Adelaide Jean Clements, was born. Adelaide lived in the USA, but later came to England and lived with Boyd's parents. She married in 1939 and had two children who both came to the village in 2011 to unveil for us a plaque on the bus shelter, in place of the original which had been lost, and which bears the following inscription:**

<p><b>This dovecot and bus shelter were given to the village by John Burnet Geake in memory of his son, Lt Boyd Burnet Geake, who was killed on 1st July 1916 at the Battle of the Somme.</b></p>
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