

## Alfred Bennett

When John McGinty suggested I research the soldiers commemorated on the Great War memorials in our churches, as part of the run up to marking the centenary of WWI, I leaped at the chance. It's been a deeply moving, profoundly interesting (and at times highly frustrating) process. I'll be sharing the fruits of my searches here until every one of them has been remembered.

We'll start with the first name on the Rownhams list, Alfred Bennett – and our first conundrum (or two). Alfred served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Hampshire Regiment, died on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1914 (aged 26) and, according to our memorial, he was a private. He's buried at Neuilly-sur-Seine New Communal Cemetery where his rank is given as "Serjeant". (You'd be surprised how often what's written on memorials doesn't accord with ranks given on gravestones or with what you find in online records.) If he really was a sergeant, (which was often spelled "Serjeant at the time") that suggests he was in the army before the war began. The fact that Alfred Bennett was already with the 2nd Hampshires, as a Lance Corporal, in 1911, tells us the war memorial is in error.

Alfred was the son of George and Mary Bennett, of Upper Soothill, Romsey, Hants, according to the Commonwealth war graves commission, but I suspect that's another typo. There were Bennetts living at Upper Toothill farm at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of whom were brick makers, so perhaps he was part of that family.

1st Battalion, the Hampshire Regiment were in Colchester when war broke out in August 1914; within two months, Alfred was dead. The 1st Hampshires landed at Le Havre on the 23rd of August 1914 arriving in time to provide infantry reinforcements at the Battle of Le Cateau. They were in action at the Battle of the Marne, the Battle of the Aisne and at the Battle of Messines in 1914.

Alfred Bennett was awarded the 1914-15 star campaign medal of the British Empire for his service in World War One. He also should have received the British War Medal and Victory Medal, as it was not awarded singularly. These three medals were sometimes referred to as Pip, Squeak and Wilfred.