

## LOCAL MEN LOST IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

**Captain John Otway Hamilton Beamish**, the younger son of Rear-Admiral Tufton Beamish and Mrs. Beamish, was aged 25 when killed in action in January 1945. He served in the Royal Artillery and went to India in June 1942. In March 1944 the Regiment went to Burma and took part in six months arduous campaigning in mountain and jungle warfare. Following a period of further training, he declined a safe post in Western India to rejoin his own Regiment in Burma. He met a brave end, in January last, fighting the enemy with his Battery and his friends, and leaving us with an example of duty well done.

**Albert Belfield.** His parents lived at Vale Farm, Boxes Lane, Chelwood Common. His name does not appear in the local 'Roll of Honour'. His family probably moved to Vale Farm during the war; a Christopher Belfield attended Danehill School. It is believed that he served in the Royal Air Force and died of pneumonia.

**Hugh Blackall**, son of Rev. Lewis & Mrs. Gertrude Blackall, was born in Canada on 22 November 1914. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Blackall returned to live with her mother, Mrs. Beech, at Jesmondene, Chelwood Gate. Mrs. Blackall married the widowed Mr. Harris, retired head master of Danehill School. Mrs. Harris taught at the school for many years. Hugh attended Danehill School from May 1919 to April 1927 when he went to Belvedere School, Haywards Heath. He joined the Civil Air Guard and learned to fly before the war, enlisting in the R.A.F. at its outbreak. Hugh was commissioned and joined 603, Edinburgh Defence Squadron, stationed at Turnhouse, near Edinburgh. Hugh married Dorothy Frances Richardson of Uckfield at Danehill on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1941. His squadron moved south to Rainham in Essex. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1941 his Spitfire ran out of fuel returning from a mission over northern France and was lost when it came down in the sea. He was buried at Brookwood (R.A.F.) Cemetery on July 26<sup>th</sup> 1941.

**Victor Burns** of The Royal Sussex Regiment. Thomas Victor Burns was born 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1916. His parents lived at Rock Cottage, Furners Green. Victor attended Danehill School, leaving in 1931. He may have enlisted in the regular army. He was posted as missing in June 1940 and confirmed killed in action in August 1941.

**Arthur Gardner.** The parents of the five Gardner brothers who saw service moved to Chelwood Gate early in the war from London. Arthur was killed in action in France shortly after 'D' Day. His death was reported in the final 'Roll of Honour' of May 1945. His brothers, Albert and James, had both been Prisoners of War.

**James William Payne** was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1911. When he was admitted to Danehill School in 1916, he was in the care of Mrs. Baker of Danehill. It is probable that he was one of the children found a home by Mrs. Corbett. 'Jim' was a local sportsman and he appears on photographs of football and cricket teams. Some of us will remember him calling on our homes with the 'Club' book, making weekly payments for household items and clothing; a draw was made to determine who would receive the chosen item in the 20 week sequence. Although he lived just outside the parish with his wife and two daughters in Horsted Keynes, Jim was very much a Danehill man. His death was reported in the Parish Magazine:

"FALLEN IN BATTLE. James William PAYNE - The village was distressed to learn at Christmas that James William PAYNE, R.A.S.C. had been killed in December in the fighting which took place in the streets of Athens itself. Payne was driving in convoy when he was shot at with others by men in ambush. The casualties in this incident were mercifully few. A Service of Remembrance, attended by the British Legion and many friends of Mrs. Payne of Withy Cottage was held in the Parish Church on Sunday January 7<sup>th</sup>". There was also a requiem in Athens Cathedral attended by the Regent, the Archbishop of Athens, several members of the Government and the British Ambassador."

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**Herbert Leigh** was a Major in the Indian Army. He was the son of Col. T.H. & Mrs. Leigh of Holly Rough, Chelwood Gate.

My younger brother, Herbert, was in business in Bombay at the outbreak of war when he joined the Indian Army. Reinforcements were sent from India to help with the defence of Singapore; the Japanese were there first; ships of the convoy were sunk. No news was received from or about my brother until some months after the war was over when it was assumed that he was one of those lost when the convoy was attacked; the Japanese did not release any details. For all that time we hoped that he was a prisoner of war (awful as that would have been) but sadly it was not so.

*(Miss R. Leigh)*

*See "We Will Remember Them" - Details of the men whose names are on Danehill War Memorial - published by Danehill Parish Historical Society in 2001. A reprint of this is now available.*

A number of men were Prisoners of War. **Arthur Green**, reported missing in July 1940, had been taken prisoner. Others mentioned in the Roll of Honour were **Leslie Bates, John Hudson and Herbert Leigh, Major.**

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"I was a local Post Lady during the war and remember there was great excitement in the Post Office when a letter arrived with the sender's name "Peter Wells" on the back. Peter had been missing for four months. It was still early morning when I reached the cottage in Boxes Lane. Mr. Wells was still in bed so I called out to him. He looked out of the bedroom window and hurried down when I told him I had a letter from his son. Peter was safe and a prisoner of war in Switzerland"  
*(Mrs. Win Stepney).*

*From the Parish Magazine of May 1945:* The Parish learnt with great relief that **Charles Lucas**, R.A.F., elder son of Dallyn Lucas Esq. and Mrs. Lucas of Lambs Rough, was safe after being missing for six months. Mr. Charles Lucas was shot down over Holland, remained in hiding for many months and after many adventures which for security reasons he cannot yet relate, returned home on leave at the beginning of last month". In fact, he was sheltered by a Dutch family who recently wished to make contact with him through our local policeman; he now lives in Australia.

Also "Leslie Bates, until recently a prisoner of war in Germany, is home again, and is most welcome. **Ernest Turner**, rather seriously wounded in Italy, is back in Danehill Parish to the great comfort of his wife and mother. **John Baker** is making progress towards complete recovery from a wound he received in Normandy shortly after D-Day. We understand Colin Manners has also been slightly wounded".

The exploits of **Major Geoffrey St. George Allen, Ghurka Rifles**, elder son of Mr. & Mrs. Allen of Kidborough Farm who was awarded the Military Cross were reported in the January 1945 issue:

"Major Allen, whilst on his way from Italy to a German prison camp, jumped from a moving train when six of nine others similarly escaping were shot. He was twice re-captured in Italy and twice escaped, eventually to the 5<sup>th</sup> Army lines. He roamed Italy for eighteen months; was flown back to India and was besieged by Japanese for three months in Imphal, Assam".

*This short article, using reports in the Parish Magazine and some personal recollections, can only include the experiences of a few of the many people from our parish who served their country during the war. In addition to those in the armed services, many other people were engaged in war work, often away from home.*