

# CARDALL'S CORNER

November 2016

By Val Brodie



## Southam's Sacrifices on the Somme

After a hundred years, people across Europe are remembering the horrors of the Battle of the Somme. Amidst the tributes to the tens of thousands who lost their lives in those terrible months 1<sup>st</sup> July – 18<sup>th</sup> November 1916, it falls to all of us to remember the twelve men of Southam, then a very small town, who gave their lives.

On the first day of the battle 20,000 men were killed including Southam's Arthur Adams, serving with a Manchester 'Pals' regiment, and Ernest Pratt in the London Scottish. During the ensuing night, William Pittom, serving with Royal Warwicks on the Ypres salient, where action continued unabated, died in action.

Each death brought tragedy for a family and none more so than the Devenports of Napton Road, where Alf and Louisa had brought up seven children in a two-up, two-down cottage, (see picture). All four of their sons served in WWI. Alf (junior) and Arthur were both in the front line on the Somme, and when their father heard that his son Alf was injured, he set off for France. Sadly, he arrived after news reached Southam that his eldest son had died in hospital. When the father returned home, he found that Arthur too had been killed in the 'big push'. Young Alf left behind a loving girl friend Win, and Arthur left a beautiful young wife Elizabeth Alice, who was to learn that his body was not identified; he is commemorated, with 72,000 others who have no known grave, on the Thiepval Memorial. After the war the youngest Alan returned safely home, but the life of Albert, was tragic. Only twenty-one years old, he was emotionally and psychologically scarred for ever.

As the summer rolled on, more names of the dead came to the town - Fred Constable, Henry Hodges, Arthur Pratt - and better news that John Duckett was awarded a Military Medal for his distinguished service at High Wood.

Father of eight, Henry Morby was serving in Greece. His youngest child Rose, whom he never saw, was christened just six weeks before he died of mortal wounds on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. He is buried at Struma.

In the quagmire of mud and snow the action on the Somme drew to an end, but not before in the final weeks, three other Southam men - William Gould, William Abbott and William Smith - all were tragically killed in action. Neither side had achieved a breakthrough but tens of thousands were maimed for life, and over a million lay dead.

*At Southam Heritage Collection we are creating a Centenary Archive to honour the dead and all who served. If you have information or are interested in finding out more please contact us. The Collection is currently housed in the basement of Vivian House, Market Hill and is open Tuesdays 10 am to 12 noon. Contact: 01926 613503 email [southamheritage@hotmail.com](mailto:southamheritage@hotmail.com) visit our website [www.southamheritage.org](http://www.southamheritage.org) and find us on Facebook: Southam Heritage Collection.*

