



**DOUGLAS BRIDGEWATER'S**

***Heroes of Henley-in-Arden***

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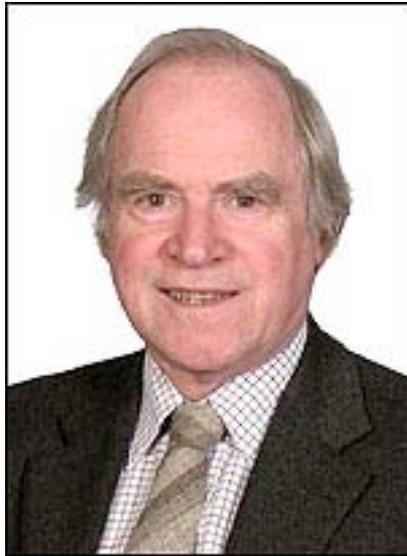
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## ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***



Douglas Bridgewater spent two years in the army on National Service and was posted to the Headquarters of British Commonwealth Forces Korea that, fortunately for him, was located in Japan. His first degree was in Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford, followed by a career in the computer industry. On his retirement he represented Henley for four years on Stratford District Council and for eight years on Warwickshire County Council.

During these years he also resumed his studies, being awarded an MA in English Local History and then a PhD in Modern History by the University of Birmingham. He is a member of the Centre for First World War Studies in the University, where he is also an Honorary Research Fellow. Douglas is Low Bailiff of Henley Court Leet and served as High Bailiff from 1998 to 2000. He is married to Sue and has lived in Beaudesert for the last 22 years.

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# JOHN AUBREY HAWKES

(1894-1918)

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion Leicestershire Regiment.

Jack Hawkes was baptised in St John's Church in Henley on 6 May 1894. He was the second son and the third of the six children of Harry and Mary Jane Hawkes (*nee* Shakespeare). Harry Hawkes then described himself as a butcher and farmer of Henley. The family lived at 116 High Street for many years.

Jack Hawkes was on the staff of the London City and Midland Bank in Selly Oak on the outbreak of war. He was also a member of the Red Cross men's Voluntary Aid Detachment in Henley. In the early months of the war he joined the Warwickshire Yeomanry, in which his elder brother Percy was already serving.

His abilities were quickly noted: he became a Lance Corporal in November 1914 and was a Sergeant by December 1915. He was serving with the second line of the Warwickshire Yeomanry, which had moved to King's Lynn on 21 June 1915. The first line of the regiment, including his brother, had sailed for Egypt two months earlier and subsequently served in Gallipoli and Palestine. Jack was a riding instructor, who also became a master of the art of musketry and was appointed an instructor in the same. His regiment moved to Holkham in July 1915 and to Fakenham in October. One of the principal functions of the second line was to provide reinforcements for the first line and at about this time a draft of 130 men was sent to join the first line in Egypt. Subsequent moves of the second line took them to various locations in Kent and Essex. During this time, Jack made numerous attempt to be sent on active service, but was retained by his regiment because of his value as an instructor.



Continually thwarted in his wishes, he finally stated his intention of leaving the Warwickshire Yeomanry and joining the regular army as a private. His commanding officer then strongly recommended him for a commission. Jack was posted as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant to the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment and joined them in France on 15 June 1918.



The battalion had been formed at Leicester in September 1914, as part of Kitchener's New Army. At the time of the German Spring Offensive in March 1918, it was part of 110<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 21<sup>st</sup> Division. The Division had been engaged in confronting the enemy around St Quentin from 21 to 23 March 1918 and fought at Bapaume on the following day. During the German offensive in Flanders from 9 to 29 April, the Division fought at Messines, Bailleul, Kemmel Ridge and Scherpenberg. Between 27 and 30 May it fought in the Battle of the Aisne and, during the allied advance, at Albert and Bapaume. This was followed by fighting on the Hindenburg Line in September.

After a short but eventful period of active service, Jack Hawkes was severely wounded while leading his men and died of his wounds on 11 September 1918, aged 24. His parents were advised of his death on 12 September. On 14 September his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel G H Sawyer, wrote to his parents that Jack had been wounded when leading his company and died a few hours later: the doctors did not think he suffered any pain. "I cannot speak too highly of the work he has done while with the battalion and only

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quite recently I had selected him to command a company." Another letter received from Captain H R Horne of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion testified to his cheerfulness and efficiency. Jack Hawkes was described as being of an unassuming modesty and having a cheerful disposition: he made his way by his own natural abilities and everything he took up was done with thoroughness and concentration of effort.

A memorial service was held at St John's in Henley on Sunday, 22 September. It was conducted by the Rector, the Rev F D Lane, and a report at the time described the service as "well attended and exceedingly impressive". Members of the congregation included wounded soldiers and Red Cross nurses from the Henley hospital, led by their commandant W E Nelson (then also the High Bailiff). Jack Hawkes was subsequently awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. No doubt many readers have seen the obelisk in his memory, which stands in the churchyard of St Nicholas', Beaudesert.



*In ever loving memory  
of  
John Aubrey Hawkes  
(2 Lieut Leicestershire Regiment)  
killed in action in France  
September 11<sup>th</sup> 1918*

*Interred in Fins New  
British Cemetery S E of Bapaume*

*"Greater love hath no man than this,  
that a man lay down his life for his friends"*

*Fins is a village on the road between Cambrai and Peronne. The New British Cemetery is a little south-east of the village in the district of Sorel Le Grand. Jack Hawkes is buried in grave VIII B 10.*

He had not waited to be conscripted, but volunteered for service shortly after the outbreak of war, as many other men from Henley did. He could easily have seen out the war in safety, serving as an instructor in England, but positively insisted on being sent on active service. A 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the front line had a very short expectation of life, and so it proved for Jack Hawkes.

At the time of his death, he was engaged to be married to Nancy Izod of Hall Green, Birmingham.

*If any reader has any further information on Jack Hawkes, please contact Douglas Bridgewater on 01564 793633 or e-mail him at [rdb@rdbridgewater.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rdb@rdbridgewater.fsnet.co.uk). He would also be pleased to have information on any of the other men from Beaudesert and Henley who served in the Great War. A list of these names is available in the Heritage Centre.*

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# ***WILLIAM HENRY BONEHILL MM***

**(1885 – c 1947)**

**Private, 9940, 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment.**

William was born in Henley in 1885, the son of James Bonehill. It is likely that he attended the Council Schools in the High Street, but unfortunately the best source for this information, the Register of the Junior School, is missing for the years 1891 to 1901. He had been employed as a groom when he joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment as a regular soldier on 19 February 1904, aged 18 years and six months. His Soldier's Small Book shows that he was then 5'3½" tall, with a fresh complexion, grey eyes and brown hair. He enlisted for 3 years, with 9 years in the reserve, so that he left the army for the first time in 1907. He was then employed by the Great Western Railway as a carman at Henley-in-Arden, delivering parcels in the local area.

He married Minnie Leah Steedman (*nee* Neal), then a widow, who already had a daughter Ethel. They had five children of their own: Minnie Muriel (known as Muriel, baptised in St Nicholas' Church on 4 September 1910), Florence, William Henry (known as Bill), Denis Albert (known as Denis, baptised in St Nicholas' on 3 September 1916) and Thelma (born after the war and now the only survivor). The family lived in Beaudesert Lane until they moved after the war (most reluctantly on Mrs Bonehill's part) to 14 Cherry Orchard, as the Council felt that the family was overcrowded in their two bedrooms in Beaudesert Lane.



*William and Minnie Bonehill with their children Muriel, Florence, Bill and Denis in Beaudesert Lane (c 1919)*

Being a reservist, William was called up into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment on 5 August 1914, the day after war was declared. It is not known which of the two regular battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment he was posted to. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion landed in France on 22 August 1914 as part of 4<sup>th</sup> Division, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion landed at Zeebrugge on 6 October 1914 as part of 7<sup>th</sup> Division. Whichever battalion he was with, William was in the firing line very quickly and was wounded in the right foot by shrapnel on 9 November 1914. This brought him back to Henley where, being one of the first from the town to return home wounded, a subscription of £2.10s.0d (£2.50) was raised for him. He returned to France and was attached to the grenade company of his battalion. On 30 July 1915 he was again wounded, being shot in the thigh by a sniper when carrying grenades: he was fortunate that the bullet did not hit the grenades, which would then have exploded. William was sent to hospital in Dublin to recover. Writing home from there, he said that he was hoping to see his wife and children in Beaudesert very soon. His letters showed him to be "his usual cheerful self". He came home on another occasion after suffering in a mustard gas attack.

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It is not known precisely when he joined the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which had been formed as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Birmingham Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in September 1914. It landed at Bolougne on 14 January 1916, moving to Italy in December 1917 and returning to France in April 1918. It was then part of 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup> Division. A near neighbour of William Bonehill's in Beaudesert, Captain A C Coldicott, was also serving with the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion in 1918 and more will be written of him in a future article.

William was awarded the Military Medal for "gallantry and devotion to duty". The history of the Battalion by Major C A Bill records that on 20 July "2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant W Farrimond and 23 other ranks carried through a successful raid on the enemy trenches. Zero hour was fixed for 1.30 am but the party moved into No Man's Land half an hour before. At zero hour the barrage opened on the enemy trench and lifted at zero plus one minute, when the party entered the trench. They bombed 14 occupied shelters, destroyed two machine guns and brought back one prisoner for identification purposes, and one machine gun. They returned at 2.00 am having had only two men slightly wounded". The *Stratford Herald* of 23 August 1918 reported that Private Bonehill had killed nine of the enemy and captured a machine gun. He was one of three men to be awarded the Military Medal on 6 August by Lieutenant-General Richard Haking, commanding XI Corps. His award was listed in the *London Gazette* on 13 November 1918. The 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion was relieved on 30 July and was disbanded on 6 October, its men being transferred to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalions. The battalions remained in France after the Armistice, most of their men being demobilised between January and April 1919.



Mrs Thelma Briedens with her father's medals the Military Medal, the 1914 Star with clasp, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal

In addition to the Military Medal, William was awarded the 1914 Star (indicating that he had served in France or Belgium between 5 August and 22 November 1914), the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. His 1914 Star carries the clasp "5<sup>th</sup> August-22 November 1914", indicating that he had served under enemy fire during that period: fewer than half of the recipients of the 1914 Star were entitled to wear the clasp.

William Bonehill was one of the Old Contemptibles and was at the front, except for the three occasions when he was wounded, for virtually the entire war.

Rats were one of the enemies soldiers had to fight in the trenches and William carried on his war with them after his demobilisation. He was an enthusiastic member of the Henley Rat Club and appears on most of the Club photographs. In this photograph he is standing on the extreme right of the front row: on the extreme left is Jack Beard, another veteran of the Great War, who served in the Royal Army Medical Corps for almost four years, spending most of his time in Belgium.



Can anyone identify any of the other men on this photograph? If you have any further information on William Bonehill, please contact Douglas Bridgewater on 01564 793633 or e-mail him at [rdb@rdbridgewater.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rdb@rdbridgewater.fsnet.co.uk). He would also be pleased to have information on any of the other men from Beaudesert and Henley who served in the Great War. A list of these names is available in the Heritage Centre.

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