

Harefield History Society

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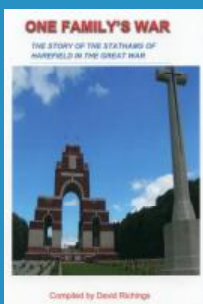
Staying in touch with members and friends of the Harefield History Society around the world.

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Editorial

It has been an awfully long time since we were able to meet face to face - in fact I think it is almost two years since our last society gathering at the Village Centre.

However, at long last, I am very pleased to be able to tell you that we believe it is time get things rolling again. The hall has been booked and several events have already been planned.

As usual, the meetings will on the **fourth Monday in the month**, starting with **Monday 28th February**. There will be one minor change which is that we will start a little earlier. The doors will open at **7pm with the main event starting at 7:30pm**.

We don't know yet whether we will be in a position to serve tea and coffee, but if we do, it might be before the meeting rather than afterwards. Any way, here is the provisional programme taking us up to the summer break.

- 28 February - John Buxton - Dissolution of the Monasteries.
- 28 March - Nick Hardy - The Role of Women in World War 2.
- 25 April - AGM - Andy Harris - Harefield Slide Show.
- 23 May - EMI Archive Trust - The Music Capital of the World.
- 27 June - T.B.A.

Of course, this will only work if people come. Everyone is welcome whether you are a member or not. And, there will be no subscription fees or visitor charges for the rest of the season.

We look forward to welcoming you on February 28th.

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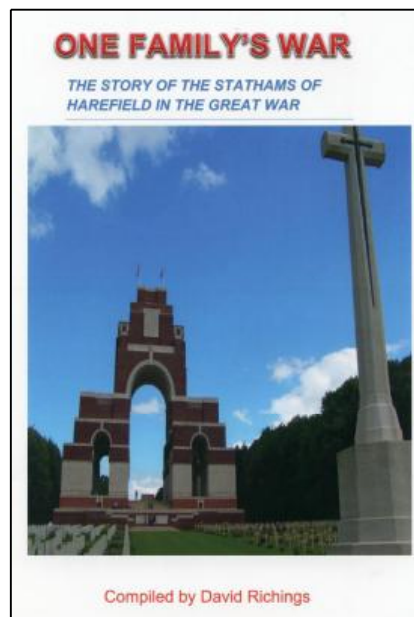
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One Harefield Family's War

Many of you will know that there is a "Contact" page on our website through which anyone in the world can send the society an email. Until six months ago, these messages were picked up and answered by our late and much missed friend, Lorraine. Since then they have been redirected to me and in that time I have received several interesting messages, some containing a request for information which I have tried to answer. However, one message in particular has led to a long, enjoyable and fruitful correspondence which is still ongoing.

It began in November 2021 when I received a message from a **David Richings** from Cranleigh in Surrey asking if we had any information about the activities of the young men of Harefield in WWI.

He clarified this by explaining that he was researching the impact of the war on the **Statham** family to whom he is closely related and which has a long history and connection with Harefield going back to the first half of the 19th century. He had discovered that there seem to be no family papers and very few photographs available and so he has been compiling a history of the family from public records. This he has publishing privately for distribution to the family. He calls it his "magnum opus" and has very kindly donated a copy for the society's archives. It is a very impressive piece of work. *(Members can borrow the book from me upon request).*



The Stathams

In 1851, **George and Julia Statham** with their six children lived in Harefield in a road near to the lime kilns (*probably near the far end of Summerhouse Lane or above the lime works towards Weybeards farm*). **George** and their eldest son **John** were employed at the lime kilns and by 1861 their fifth child, **William**, now 15, was also working there.

However, the main focus of David's research has been directed on the latter end of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century. In 1871 **William** married **Elizabeth** Allit from Paddington and set up home in a cottage at Hill End where they brought up ten children, five boys and five girls. Their seventh child, born in 1884, was **Maud** and the ninth child, born in 1889, was **Thomas**. We will hear more about these two in a moment.

The Richings

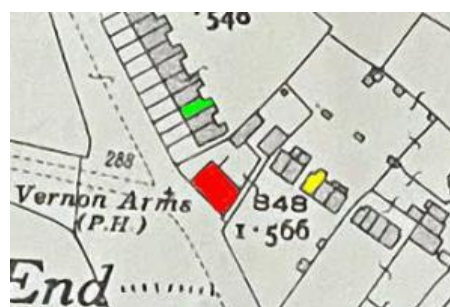
In 1901, the **Richings** family, **Jesse and Harriet** were living in Rickmansworth. They had five children, Thera, George, **Ernest**, Harry and **Emily**. The two who form the link between the **Richings** and the **Stathams** are **Ernest** who married **Maud** (and so became Maud Richings) and his sister, **Emily** (who became Emily Statham) when she married **Thomas**. The link to our protagonist, **David Richings** is his paternal grandparents **Ernest and Maud**.

Back to the Stathams

As already explained, **William and Elizabeth** Statham brought up their ten children in Hill End. The census records show only two properties between their cottage and the **Vernon Arms** public house. However it is not easy to determine which side of the pub the cottage was located (*see the little map*). The only clue is one reference giving the address as Winship Cottages (*which no longer exists*).



This photo with a caption written many years ago by his father, is where David's great grand parents William and Emily Statham lived in the latter part of the 19th century.



On this map, the Vernon Arms is shown in red. The cottage in which **William & Elizabeth** lived was either the one marked in yellow or the one marked in green.

At the outbreak of WWI, Elizabeth was already a widow, William having died in 1901. Also, she had already lost two daughters, **Florence** soon after birth in 1881 and **Rose** in 1889 at the age of 22. Now she had to face the prospect of her sons going to war for King and country.

Her eldest son, **Walter**, was over the age limit to go to war but was already in the regular Army. He was a regimental sergeant major in the Royal Field Artillery. He was retired on grounds of ill health in 1917. He married **Beatrice Florence Hookham** on Christmas Day 1919 and they lived at 1 The Shrubs, Northwood Road. (*Beatrice was the widow of **Ernest Edward Hookham** who she had married in 1905. They had lived at 2 Springwell Cottages. Ernest enlisted in the Middlesex Regiment and fought on the Western Front, dying of wounds in 1917.*)

Second son, **William**, joined the army in about 1901 and served with the Royal Field Artillery. His service record was lost, probably destroyed by a German bomb in 1940. However, it is known that he had a successful career and rose to the rank of Company Sergeant Major. He never married and continued to live with his mother at Hill End. Later he lived in Park Terrace and then at The Shrubs where he had a small poultry farm. He died of TB in 1937.

Third son, **George**, proved the most challenging to research. He is believed to have worked for the Great Western and Central Railway, building the branch line from Uxbridge to Denham. However he didn't seem to appear in any of the expected archives. He was eventually found on the passenger list of a ship called the SS Kaipapa, heading to Brisbane, Queensland in May 1911. He had responded to a huge recruitment campaign for men to build railways in Australia.

The work was very hard and when, in 1915, the Australian Imperial Force was established in response to the call for men from the Commonwealth to fight in WWI, George was one of the first to enlist. After training in Egypt, he was sent to France with the 31st Australian Infantry in May 1916. He saw action at the disastrous Battle of Fromelles where he was killed on July 20th. His body was never identified but he is recorded on the Australian memorial at Fromelles.

Fourth son, **Thomas**, enlisted in 1914 joining the 93rd Field Company of the Royal Engineers. He was deployed to France in 1915 where he was promoted to corporal. While on leave in March 1918 he married **Emily Richings** who continued to live with her mother in Rickmansworth while Tom was away. After he left the army Tom and Emily set up home in Harefield. They worked on various farms, including a stint on Whiteheath farm (*later bought by Don Mitchell*). Emily did the milk round with a horse and cart. One day the



Tom and Emily married 1918



This is baby Jesse in 1919 with her Uncles Ernest & Harry Richings and her trophy for winning the Baby contest.

horse took fright and tipped everything into the canal - including Emily! They eventually bought a house in Breakspear Road North called "Brockley Cottage".

They had one daughter called Jessie who, at the Harefield Peace Celebrations in 1919, won the Baby contest.

In 1939, Jessie married Syd George (Syd owned the Harefield Travel shop in the High Street for many years). They set up home in Northwood Road but later built a bungalow called "Evenley" in the garden of "Brockley Cottage" which had become too big for Tom to manage. ("Brockley" is the white house hiding behind the huge tree.)



Brockley Cottage and Evenly are they are today.

To bring their story up to date, they had a daughter Susan in 1947.

Fifth son, **Albert**, also enlisted in 1914. He appears to have been working at the Bells United Asbestos Company in Harefield because he is remembered on the company's memorial plaque in St Mary's Church. One of his colleagues at the factory was his Uncle Bob (Robert Ryder V.C.) who enlisted at the same time and also appears on the memorial plaque. Albert's Battalion, part of the Royal Fusilliers Regiment, was deployed on the Western Front in May 1915. Official records show that his battalion was engaged at the start of the Battle of the Somme in an action, coincidentally called the Battle of Albert (named after the little town called Albert, near Amiens). He was reported killed in action on 8th July 1916 (just 11 days before his brother George perished at Fromelles.) His body was never identified but he is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, which lists the names of the 73,357 men missing on the Somme.



The Stathams and the Richings at Harefield in 1960.

Left to Right:- Susan and her mother Jessie George (nee Statham); Maud Riching (nee Statham) and Emily Statham (nee Richings); Ernest Richings (husband of Maud and brother of Emily); Tom Richings (son of Ernest and Maud); Tom Statham (husband of Emily, father of Jessie, grandfather of Susan and brother of Maud).

David Richings' book ("One Family's War", 100pp) contains a much fuller story of all the people mentioned in this brief summary along with numerous documents and photographs. If anyone reading this article has any memories of the Stathams from their childhood for example, or any photos, I would be very pleased to receive copies which I will pass along to David.

Harefield's famous recipient of the Victoria Cross, **Robert Ryder**, gets a mention in the above story. He can also be seen in these two press photos I acquired recently. They were taken while on leave at home standing with his father and chatting to some AZAC patients on the village green. In the second picture he is being seen off to rejoin his regiment.

