

Sydney Bennett



Sydney Bennett was born at Troutbeck, Westmorland in 1887. He married Myna Wills (formerly of Crosby Garrett) in 1915. He enlisted at Penrith in 1914 and initially joined the Border Regiment (service number 24936). He later joined the 2nd Battalion, Dorsetshire Regiment (service number 24270).

Sydney died on 25th March 1917 aged 29 and is remembered with honour at the Basra Memorial in Iraq about 8 kilometres north of Basra. The memorial commemorates more than 40,500 members of the Commonwealth forces who died in operations in Mesopotamia from the autumn of 1914 to the end of August 1921 and whose graves are not known.

Extract from "The 2nd Dorsets in Mesopotamia" by Mark Follis

The 2nd Dorsets found themselves moving through a succession of small towns and villages, with various companies staying behind, before 'F' Company finally arrived at Ctesiphon, scene of their pivotal battle of 1915. With the Turks now regrouping north of Baghdad, the British decided to advance up the Diyala valley in the hope of engaging the 13th Turkish Army Corps. The 2nd Dorsets now found themselves marching north as part of General Keary's Lahore Division of which the 9th Brigade formed a part, arriving at Abu Jisra on March 22nd. The following day they started their advance across difficult terrain towards their objective of securing a position behind the enemies left. Unfortunately, they were spotted and came under sustained fire, which slowed down their progress considerably. The following day it became apparent that the Turkish position was far too strong to be taken without far greater forces, especially artillery, so a retreat was ordered.

The withdrawal was beset by heavy fighting and difficult terrain, so by the time the 2nd Dorsets had managed a full retreat, they had sustained around 220 casualties out of a total of 500 in action. Of these 22 were killed and over 100 missing."

Relatives:

Joe Bennett, Malley Cottage - Nephew

Ian Thompson, 34 Meadoway, Steeple Claydon, Bucks – Grandson

Gillian Davis, 59 Lowther Street, Penrith CA11 7UQ - Granddaughter

John Wills - Nephew

In Memory of

Private

Sydney Bennett

24270, 2nd Bn., Dorsetshire Regiment who died on 25 March 1917

Remembered with Honour

Basra Memorial



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Basra War Memorial

Location Information

Until 1997 the Basra Memorial was located on the main quay of the naval dockyard at Maqil, on the west bank of the Shatt-al-Arab, about 8 kilometres north of Basra.

Because of the sensitivity of the site, the Memorial was moved by presidential decree. The move, carried out by the authorities in Iraq, involved a considerable amount of manpower, transport costs and sheer engineering on their part, and the Memorial has been re-erected in its entirety.

The Basra Memorial is now located 32 kilometres along the road to Nasiriyah, in the middle of what was a major battleground during the first Gulf War.

Casualties are listed under the regiment they served with in rank order. The Panel Numbers quoted refer to the initial panel dedicated to the Regiment. If a further panel is quoted, this refers to the Prisoners of War panels.

Visiting Information

NOTE: Whilst the current climate of political instability persists it is extremely challenging for the Commission to manage or maintain its cemeteries and memorials located within Iraq. Alternative arrangements for commemoration have therefore been implemented and a two volume Roll of

Honour listing all casualties buried and commemorated in Iraq has been produced. These volumes are on display at the Commission's Head Office in Maidenhead and are available for the public to view.

The Commission continues to monitor the situation in Iraq and once the political climate has improved to an acceptable level the Commission will commence a major rehabilitation project for its cemeteries and commemorations.

Before considering a visit to Iraq the Commission strongly recommends that you check the advice given by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office on the travel section of their website:

www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/

Historical Information

The Basra Memorial commemorates more than 40,500 members of the Commonwealth forces who died in the operations in Mesopotamia from the Autumn of 1914 to the end of August 1921 and whose graves are not known. The memorial was designed by Edward Warren and unveiled by Sir Gilbert Clayton on the 27th March 1929.

Article from Daily Telegraph 13 November 2013

Iraq cemetery containing graves of British servicemen is destroyed

A First and Second World War cemetery in Basra has been destroyed by vandals and looters



Only a few smashed headstones and memorials remain to mark the cemetery site.

Photo: AMARICF

By Colin Freeman, Chief Foreign Correspondent 8:20AM GMT 10 Nov 2013

A cemetery in Iraq that contains the graves of thousands of British servicemen who died in the two World Wars has been completely destroyed.

The graveyard in Basra has been left without a single one of its 4,000 headstones still standing after repeated vandalism and looting in the years since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

When British troops first took control of the city in 2003, wreaths were laid at the cemetery on Remembrance Sunday for the first time in decades.

Some soldiers even honoured the graves of relatives who had died in action during the Mesopotamian campaign of World War One.

But the growing insurgent threat soon made it impractical for British forces to protect it, and after their withdrawal from the city in 2007, it was too dangerous for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to send teams to repair the damage.

The scale of destruction dwarfs vandalism of graves in Libya last two years ago and may be the worst damage done to any Commonwealth cemetery - although finally, efforts have begun to bring it back to the immaculate standards of the Commission's estate.

Today, once again, there will be nobody there to mark Remembrance Sunday.

"It is an act of pure destruction," said Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, the executive chairman of the Iraq British Business Council, who visited the cemetery recently.

"We think this has been the work of militias over the years, although it's true to say that most of the people in Basra I have spoken to are rather ashamed of what has happened."

Unlike the main British war cemetery in Baghdad, which has remained largely intact, the one in Basra appears to have suffered deliberate sabotage.

Among the items missing from it are the both the Cross of Remembrance and the bronze plaques from the Wall of Remembrance, which carries the names of the fallen. While some of the gravestones have simply crumbled in Basra fierce heat, and some removed by a local caretaker for safekeeping, others are thought to have been stolen by looters and sold for use as building materials.

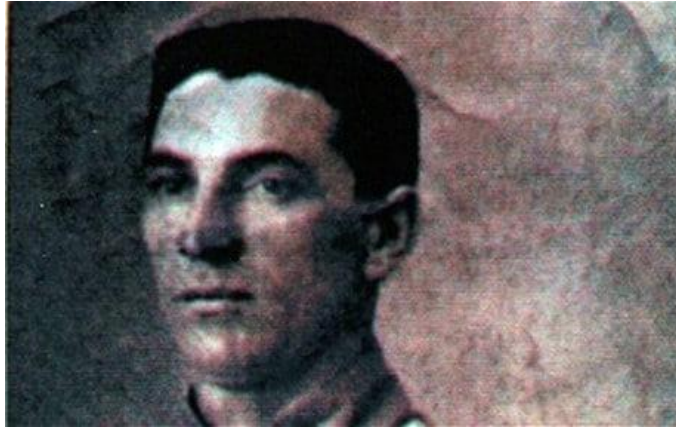
In one corner of the bare earth, a set of football goals has been erected.

A neighbouring plot, containing mainly Indian colonial servicemen who fought alongside the British, has also had many of its headstones destroyed.

The Basra war cemetery is one of several around southern Iraq that date back to the British Mesopotamian campaign of 1914, when Britain launched an ill-fated assault on what was then a corner of the Ottoman empire.

After initially securing Basra, troops pressed north towards a military disaster in the city of Kut, 100 miles south east of Baghdad, where they were besieged for five months by Turkish troops, with some 20,000 members of the British killed or wounded. Britain then invaded again with an Anglo-Indian army led by Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Maude, which took Baghdad on March 11, 1917.

In total, 2,551 casualties from the First World War and 365 from the Second are buried at the cemetery.



Corporal Ernest Gibbons

Among them is Corporal Ernest Gibbons, of the Royal Field Artillery, who died of pneumonia in October 1918, aged 29. A report from the time in the *Peterborough Advertiser*, his local newspaper, said he had joined up at the outbreak of war and had been drafted to India and then Mesopotamia. It said Cpl Gibbons was “of a very quiet disposition, and was most popular and beloved by his comrades and friends”.

Also buried in Basra is Private Alex Paterson, of the Army Ordnance Corps. Pte Paterson, from Arbroath, Scotland, had gone to India and was then a tailor in Mandalay before joining up in February 1917. He died, in May 1918, of dysentery, aged 33.

Across Iraq, Commonwealth war sites honour some 54,000 servicemen from both world wars, a figure that puts Britain’s modern-day military campaign there into perspective.

In Saddam’s time the cemeteries were still maintained by local caretakers, although around the time of the first Gulf War, the Iraqi dictator did order some war memorials to be moved out of Basra city to a new location in the desert. A Commonwealth war grave in the city of Amarah, 100 miles north of Basra, is currently under threat from plans to build a fairground on part of it. Britain is pressing the local governor to halt the plan.

One source with knowledge of war graves said: “The war graves tend to be on prime land in the cities, and if we don’t do something about it, people will seek to develop on it.”

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has now started work to renovate the Basra cemetery, with Iraqi security forces guarding it.

Peter Hunt, director of HWH and Associates, a British engineering company based in Basra, which is involved in the work, said: “Work has started to refurbish it six months ago, and with the co-operation of the Basra governor, we hope to eventually restore it to its former glory.”

Peter Francis, a spokesman for the CWGC, said: “Work is ongoing and it is our intention to start restoring the headstones when the security situation permits.”