

THE GREAT WAR MEMORIAL OF SURBITON HILL METHODIST CHURCH: BEHIND THE NAMES

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ABSTRACT

The memorial commemorates six men: two officers and four other ranks who died in the Great War, 1914-1918. Company Sergeant Major Chivers was awarded the Military Cross. Sergeant Hall was awarded the Military Medal with Bar. Private Clark was a member of the Australian Imperial Forces. Private White died of pulmonary tuberculosis in England and is buried in Kingston Cemetery. Lieutenant Rought was a champion rower who represented England in the 1912 Olympic Games in Sweden. He was captured in France at the very end of 1914 and until after the Armistice in 1918 was a prisoner of war in Germany. He died of food poisoning in London on 31 January 1919, before demobilisation. 2nd Lieutenant Shaw, of the Royal Flying Corps, rose from the ranks, served in Egypt, was Mentioned in Despatches and was killed in a flying accident in England. He is buried in the St Mary's churchyard, Long Ditton. All men are commemorated on the Surbiton UDC Memorial.

INTRODUCTION

The 1851 Religious Census of Surrey records a Wesleyan Chapel in Canbury Passage, Kingston upon Thames that was opened about 1835. The present Surbiton Hill Methodist Church, once called the Surbiton Hill Wesleyan Chapel, had its origins in the "*Old Chapel*", a building which still stands at 95 Ewell Road, Surbiton. It was opened before 1871 and was in use until an expanding congregation led to the installation of a second-hand "*Iron Chapel*" that opened on 11 February 1876. The foundation stone of the present Church was laid on 5 September 1881 and it was open for worship on 11 May 1882. The brief history of this Church makes no mention of its war memorial, and no records of its installation appear to have survived.ⁱ Essentially it is a brass plaque, mounted on an oak frame, with incised lettering, inscription and names surrounded by a foliate border. It has been highly polished over the years and its reflection makes it a challenge for an amateur photographer. A transcription of the text can be found below. The objective was to look behind the name to find a *best match* for each one on the memorial, with reference to supporting evidence. A *best match* was defined as someone who, on a balance of probabilities in the light of the

accumulated evidence, was most likely to be a person behind a name on the memorial. The Appendix lists some of the sources for the research.



The war memorial, Surbiton Hill Methodist Church.
Photograph by David A. Kennedy, 3/4/2025

IN LOVING AND GRATEFUL MEMORY OF
THE MEN ASSOCIATED WITH
this church
WHO FOUGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY
IN THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918.
THE FOLLOWING WHOM WERE
"faithful unto death"
S. G. Chivers. M.C. C. G. Rought
H. Clark A. J. Shaw
H. Hall. M.M. H. J. White

The inscription, war memorial, Surbiton Hill Methodist Church, transcription.

1. S. G. CHIVERS, MC

Biographical notes of best match: *Company Sergeant Major Simeon George Chivers*, MC, 8th Battalion, London Regiment [Post Office Rifles], no. 1443. He was the husband of Charlotte Elizabeth Chivers, 34 Douglas Road, Surbiton and father of

Murial Esther and Harold Josiah Chivers. He started work in the GPO as a sorter in October 1892. He volunteered for the Post Office Rifles and served in the Boer War, 1899-1902. He was promoted sergeant in 1900. He was a reservist from 1903 until the start of the Great War when he enlisted again, rising to the rank of Company Sergeant Major. In the 1911 Census he was living in the household of his sister's family in Westminster and was working as a GPO sorter. He was mentioned in dispatches on 16 June 1916 and was awarded the Military Cross. The citation in the London Gazette of 16 August 1916, read "*For conspicuous gallantry and good work. He has displayed great coolness under fire and has set a fine example to his company. He has been wounded.*"

Death, burial or commemoration. He died of wounds on the Western Front, on 19 September 1916 aged 42 and is buried in St Sever Cemetery [B.22, 71] France. He is commemorated on the war memorial of St Matthew's Church, Surbiton and on the Surbiton UDC memorial.

2. H. CLARK

Biographical notes of best match: *Private Harold Clark*, 4th Infantry Battalion, Australian Imperial Forces, no. 6359. In the 1901 Census, aged 15, he was living in household of his father, Arthur Clark, a retired grocer, at *Lynton*, Cranes Park Avenue, Surbiton. Australian National Memorial records show that he was aged 25 when he arrived in Australia, he was a bank clerk, single, a Methodist and lived at 14 Belle View Street, Glebe, Sydney, New South Wales. He had attended Elmhurst School, Kingston upon Thames. This provided shorthand, typewriting, bookkeeping and secretarial training, according to an advertisement in the Surrey Advertiser on 5 October 1912. He had an uncle, Mr F. G. Buckminster living at *Lindwood*, Central Avenue, Maylands, Western Australia. He enlisted on 17 March 1916 and his unit embarked from Sydney on board HMAT A14 *Euripides* on 9 September 1916.

Death, burial or commemoration: He was killed in action, on the Western Front, aged 30, on 5 May 1917, at Bullecourt, France. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour, Villers-Bretonneux, Picardie, France and on the Surbiton UDC memorial.

3. J. HALL, MM

Biographical notes of best match: *Sergeant James Henry William Hall, MM & Bar*, 7th Battalion, attached 26th Trench Mortar Battalion, Seaforth Highlanders, no. S/9204, son of James Herbert and Edith Hall, 4 Brighton Road, Surbiton. In the 1911

Census he was living in the household of his father at 4 Brighton Road, Surbiton, and was a pupil probably at a local school. According to Scout Association records he was a patrol leader in the 2nd Kingston Sea Scout Troop. He enlisted at Kingston upon Thames. His MM and Bar were reported in Supplements to the London Gazette of 16 September 1916 and 22 January 1917, respectively. In both cases his rank was given as corporal. The Surrey Advertiser local newspaper of 19 November 1917 reported that his first MM was awarded for heroism in July 1916 when he rescued a wounded officer at Longueville at great personal risk from very heavy shell fire. His second MM was awarded in October 1916 when he and his corporal worked five machine guns between them at Estcourt l'Abbe which held back the enemy for several hours. In both cases his rank was given as sergeant.

Death, burial or commemoration. He was killed in action on 3 May 1917, on the Western Front, aged 19, has no known grave, and is commemorated on Arras Memorial, France [bay 8]. He is recorded on the Roll of Honour of St Mark's Church and is commemorated on the Surbiton UDC memorial.

4. C.G. ROUGHT

Biographical notes of best match: *Lieutenant Charles Gardner Rought*, The Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment, was the eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Rought, of *Holmwood*, South Bank, Surbiton. He was educated at Clifton College, Bristol, and in France. He was a famous rower who competed successfully in various regattas on the River Thames and was one of the four representing England in the 1912 Olympic Games in Sweden. He enlisted in the Artists' Rifles in August 1914 and obtained a commission in the Royal West Surrey Regiment. He was captured at Fleurbaix near Armentiers, France, on 29 December 1914, then held in POW camps at Osnabrück, Mainz, and Clausthal in Germany before repatriation after the Armistice.

Death, burial or commemoration: Before demobilisation, on 31 January 1919, he attended a dinner party in a London restaurant. After leaving, he collapsed at Waterloo Tube Station at about 11.30 pm and was taken to St Thomas' Hospital where he died three hours later, aged 34. At his inquest, HM Coroner recorded a death by misadventure caused by food poisoning which possibly was caused by a sauce made of cooked mussels. His funeral, conducted by the Rev. F. S. Kirkness, took place at Surbiton Hill Methodist Church, prior to cremation at Woking. An urn with his ashes was buried in the churchyard of St Nicholas, Thames Ditton. He is commemorated on the Surbiton UDC memorial. He left an estate of £2,091.

5. A. J. SHAW

Biographical notes of best match: *2nd Lieutenant Arthur James Shaw*, Royal Flying Corps. He was the only son of Arthur and Agnes Shaw of *The Links*, Fleece Road, Long Ditton, Surrey. In the 1911 Census he was living in the household of his father, “*joiner in a motor works*”, at 11 Ullswater Road, West Norwood, London S.E. His occupation was recorded as “*works in a motor works*”. Before he was commissioned on 22 September 1917, he was an air mechanic in the RFC, having risen to the rank of sergeant. He had served with the RFC in Egypt and received a Mentioned in Despatches citation.

Death, burial or commemoration: He was killed in a flying accident, near Farnborough, England, on 1 February 1918, aged 22. It appears that his body was taken to the Cambridge Hospital at Aldershot. His death certificate, completed after a Coroner’s inquest held on 4 February 1918, as injuries to legs and fracture to the base of the skull due to an accident whilst flying an aeroplane. The certificate stated that he was a 2nd Lieutenant in the RFC of *The Links*, Fleece Road, Surbiton. He is buried in St Mary’s Churchyard, Long Ditton, north of the Chancel and commemorated on Long Ditton Memorial Cross and Surbiton UDC memorial.

6. H. J. WHITE

Biographical notes of best match: *Private Horace John White*, 11 Battalion, East Surrey Regiment, no. 117517, before he transferred to the Agricultural Company, Labour Corps. In the 1901 Census he was living in the household of his father, Horace White, a fruit merchant, of 1 Langley Villas, Surbiton Hill, Surrey. In the 1911 Census he was a contractor’s clerk, living in the household of his cousin, John Frederick Nuthall, clerk in holy orders, in Southport, Cheshire. In 1918 he was a sergeant [no. 408070] in the 877 Area Employment Corps, according to his death certificate.

Death, burial or commemoration: His death certificate recorded that he died of pulmonary tuberculosis, on 4 November 1918, at St George’s Hospital, Lambeth, aged 26. He is buried in Kingston Cemetery, grave 408070, and is commemorated on the Surbiton UDC memorial.

SUMMARY

Two men were killed in action on the Western Front in France and Flanders. One man died there of wounds. Of these, one man is buried in France and two have no known graves. Three men died in England and their remains are buried here. One of these died of food poisoning, one died of pulmonary tuberculosis, and one was killed in a

flying accident. All six men are commemorated on the Surbiton UDC Memorial close to Surbiton Hill Methodist Church.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank Alison Whittle, Church Administrator, for access to the memorial.

APPENDIX: SOME SOURCES

1. Commonwealth War Graves Commission

<https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/>

In the case of the Great War, The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is responsible for commemoration of persons who died between 4 August 1914 and 31 August 1921:

- whilst serving in a Commonwealth military force or specified organisation, or
- after they were discharged from a Commonwealth military force, if their death was caused by wartime service.

2. Soldiers Died In The Great War

<https://uk.forceswarrecords.com/publication/1278/uk-soldiers-died-in-the-great-war-1914-1919>

3. Ancestry

<http://www.ancestry.co.uk/>

census records, births, deaths & marriages, military records, probate records, electoral registers

4. Find My Past

<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>

census records, births, deaths & marriages, military records

6. Surrey In The Great War

https://www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/collections/getrecord/SHMEM_W_M_2760

7. Digitised newspapers

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>

[Surrey Comet, 1854-1910](#)

[Surrey Advertiser, 1864-1973](#)

ⁱ <https://www.surbitonhillmethodist.co.uk/352489650249.htm>

The records that have survived are held by Surrey History Centre,
<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/history-centre>