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**Bertram Prewett**

Bertram Prewett, born in Hampstead, London, in 1878, was the only son of Jacob and Caroline Prewett of Oxhey. He had a sister, Florence, four years older than himself, and they grew up in ‘Park House’, 33 Upper Paddock Road. His father was a railway clerk. Bertram was educated at Watford Grammar School and joined the Civil Service as a clerk in the Savings Bank. In his spare time he became a bell ringer and gradually acquired a national reputation.

On 12 July 1913 he married Ida Lizzie Elton and the wedding was described in the St James’ Parish Church magazine:

A Double Wedding 1913

Bushey Parish Church was the scene of a very pretty double wedding on Saturday, July 12 when Mr Bertram Prewett of Bushey was united to Miss Ida Lizzie Elton of Parfey Street, Fulham, and Mr William Franklin of Twickenham, to her sister, Miss Maud Mary Elton. The brides, who were dressed in white satin and carried bouquets of white carnations and lily-of-the-valley, were given away by their mother. A large company witnessed the ceremony, which was performed by the Rector, assisted by the Vicar of Oxhey. As each of the parties passed through the chancel and the nave, the organ played the Wedding March and the bells crashed forth a joyful peal. The whole company re-assembled at Buck’s Restaurant, Watford and thoroughly enjoyed the wedding breakfast. Mr and Mrs Prewett left at 4 pm en route for Scotland and Mr and Mrs Franklin for Shanklin.

In the evening the Bushey Bell Ringers rang a peal of Kent double-bob-major in 2 hours 54 minutes. The previous Sunday Mr Prewett was presented with a very handsome bar by the Bushey Church Officials and the Bell Ringers’ Band.

Bushey Parish Magazine, August 1913



Bertram and Ida made their home at ‘Alderbury’, Oxhey Avenue, their house named after the birthplace of Jacob Prewett, Bertram’s father.

Soon after war was declared Bertram Prewett joined the Rifle Brigade, enlisting at Bunhill Row, London as a Private in the London Regiment. Serving in France in 1917, he injured his foot but was able to cook for others in his battalion. He wrote:

They went over the top the other night and took the village of B\_\_\_\_, which has changed hands ten times lately. You can hardly imagine the ruin over here. Hardly a wall standing in the villages; fruit and other trees wantonly cut down; huge craters in the roads; and churches blown to pieces. In a village near here the only part of the church standing is the west end, and also a huge crucifix in the churchyard. In the latter lay German and our dead side by side and I saw the grave of a Queen's man, surmounted by a cross, who had been buried by the Germans on 11th March last.

There are no traces of any bells – I expect they have gone to Essen for cannon. I saw, in a huge ruined sugar refinery the stock and lever of the factory bell, but there was no trace of the bell itself. It is very hot out here now, and it is a great contrast to a month ago, when we had frost and snow.  I'm glad to say that I am quite well, with the exception of my foot, but the life is rather trying.”

1 June 1917

Bertram Prewett was killed in France on 31 August 1918 and this obituary appeared in the St James’ Church magazine:

The death of Mr Bertram Prewett is a great loss to Bushey and the ringing world in general. Born in Hampstead, he was brought as an infant to Bushey. He was educated at Watford Grammar School, at 16 years he won a place in the Civil Service. Mr Prewett began ringing at St Matthew’s Church at the early age of 16. He rang nearly a thousand peals, two hundred and thirty six of which he himself conducted. He rang all over England and Ireland, in thirty seven counties, and in two hundred and forty towers. He was a member of the following associations - College Youths, Middlesex, Kent, Hertfordshire, Sussex and Midland counties. No one hated fighting more, but at an early date of the war he offered himself and joined the Rifle Brigade. He was wounded in the German offensive on 23 March 1918. When in hospital at Etaples, his ward was heavily bombed and all its occupants killed. He had just gone out to help the orderlies. We offer our sincere sympathy to his aged father and mother, who live in Bushey Grove Road, and to his wife’.

Bushey Parish Magazine, December 1918.

The wording of this obituary gives the impression that Bertram was killed during the bombing of the hospital at Etaples but this proves to be an earlier incident, in which he escaped death, having left the hospital building to help the orderlies.

He died on 23 March 1918 and two letters sent to Ida, his widow, relate what actually happened. Such was the confusion of the time that news of his death did not reach his wife and parents until October. The first letter, dated 1st October 1918, informed her of Bertram's death and mentions that ‘the majority of his friends became casualties.’ The second letter contained the following: ‘Sergeant Reeves saw the body. He was shot through the throat with a machine gun bullet and his death must have been instantaneous. 600 yards east of the main Peronne to Bapaume road opposite the village of Bouchavesnes.’

Bertram Prewett was originally buried at Aldershot Cemetery, Bouchavesnes, about 800 metres north of the village. His body, like those of many servicemen originally buried in small or isolated cemeteries, was later exhumed and reburied in a war cemetery where proper commemoration would be ensured.

* *(Our thanks for this information to Alan Regin, Steward of the Rolls of Honour in The Central Council Memorial Book of Church Bell-Ringers who fell in the Great War) Received January 2015.*

Rifleman Bertram Prewett of ‘Alderbury’, Oxhey Avenue, aged 39, was finally laid to rest at the Sailly-Saillisel British Cemetery in France. On the white marble stone, with a rose planted at the base, the Rifle Brigade’s cap badge engraved above his name, Bertram Prewett’s tribute says, ‘The Supreme Sacrifice’.



He is commemorated on the Bushey Memorial on Clay Hill, and at the churches of St James and St Paul in Bushey.

His last peal was rung at Wrentham, Suffolk. Altogether he rang 957, a considerable achievement 100 years ago. After his death his parents moved to ‘The Cabin’ Bushey Hall Road, Bushey. Bertram’s sister, Florence, remained single and was still living at ‘The Cabin’, Woodlands Road, (one end of Bushey Grove Road was re-named) Bushey, in 1954 at the time of her death, aged 77.

The Ancient Society of College Youths,established in 1637, is the premier change ringing society in the City of London, with a national and international membership that promotes excellence in ringing around the world.The Master’s initiative of a visit to the World War I war graves and memorials came to fruition on 26 and 27 July 2015, when a group including ten past masters of the Society made the journey to Ypres and visited some dozen locations over two days. At Bertram Prewett’s grave at the Sailly-Saillisel British Cemetery, they rang Stedman Caters in honour of one of the leading ringers of the early twentieth century. Alan Regin, Steward of the Rolls of Honour of Church Bell Ringers,then unexpectedly produced a bag and pulled out some old leather bound peal books, in which Bertram Prewett had recorded all the peals that he had rung, his whole ringing history.

In 2016 peals will be rung in Suffolk to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Bertram Prewett’s last peal on 14 May 1916.