

Ashville Cenotaph: **VAUGHAN J D**

Ashville Memorial Hall: John D Vaughan, Welsh Regiment

The 1911 Census return for Elmfield College shows John David Vaughan was a master.

Date & place of birth: Q3 1886 at Carmarthen, Wales.

War: John enlisted in the Welsh Regiment, date unknown, and was assigned to the 14th (Swansea) Battalion or the "Swansea Pals". He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant on the 29th October 1915 but did not go to the Western Front until 17th July 1916.

The 14th Battalion were part of the 114th Brigade of the 38th Welsh Division. During the first ten days of July 1916 the 38th Welsh Division were heavily involved in the fierce fighting at Mametz Wood. At the start of July the Battalion were under-strength with 676 men and at Mametz Wood they suffered extremely high casualties with 376 men being killed or wounded. They immediately went into reserve and John would have been part of the very welcome reinforcements. In the next few months they saw little front line action but in September 1916 they were moved to the Ypres Salient.



Allied soldiers dreaded the Ypres Salient because the Germans held the surrounding high ground with their stronghold known as the High Command Redoubt. The 14th Battalion's commanding officer planned a night time raid on this stronghold and John played a prominent part. At 5pm the artillery laid down a heavy barrage on the Redoubt but when it stopped no attack came in an attempt to give the enemy a false sense of security. The raiding party of 7 second lieutenants and 145 men set off in the dark across no man's land following reconnaissance work carried out by John. At 11pm the Brigade artillery opened up another extremely heavy barrage on the Redoubt and after 3 minutes advanced it forward towards the German support trenches with the advance raiding party only 50 yards behind. The raiding party got into both the enemy front line and support trenches killing five Germans and taking twenty prisoners. They also brought back an enemy machine gun, important documentation and other booty. This was done at the cost of two killed and eight slightly wounded. It was considered a model raid in its planning and execution and was reported in the national press back home. John and Second Lieutenant Arthur Frederick Hastings Kelk, a graduate of Cambridge University and the son of a CoE clergyman, were awarded the Military Cross for the part they played in the raid and four "Other Ranks" were awarded the Military Medal. John's citation reads: "For conspicuous gallantry in action. He carried out a daring reconnaissance with great courage and determination, obtaining most valuable information."

At the start of March 1917 the Battalion were still in the Ypres Salient and for the first half of the month oscillated between the front line in the Lancashire Farm section and reserve at the East Canal Bank. On the 18th March 1917 the Battalion War Diary has the following entry "Battalion in front line trenches. 2nd Lt J D Vaughan MC wounded". The following day, 19th March, the entry reads "Battalion in front line trenches. 2nd Lt J D Vaughan MC died of wounds at 130 Field Ambulance." Officially John died of wounds on 18th March 1917 but these records do cast doubt on that. Perhaps best to say, as does Bernard Lewis in his very readable book "Swansea Pals", he was wounded on 18th March but died shortly afterwards. Later on 19th March the Battalion were relieved by the 15th Battalion of the Welsh Regiment and went into reserve at East Canal Bank.

What of the other six 2nd Lieutenants who took part in the raid of 17th November 1916? Arthur Kelk predeceased John and died on 9th March 1917. The other five fortunately survived the war with two being awarded Military Crosses on the way and a third being mentioned in despatches.

John was buried in plot 3 of the Ferme-Olivier British War Cemetery at Elverdinghe in Belgium and about 5 miles north-west of Ypres. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website has this to say about the cemetery: "The cemetery was used continuously between 9 June 1915 and 5 August 1917, with the 62nd, 16th, 9th, 11th, 129th and 130th Field Ambulances successively having dressing stations close by. Throughout this period, the village was just within range of the German artillery and a collective grave in Plot 2, Row E, contains the remains of 37 men of the 3rd Bn Monmouthshire Regiment killed on parade on 29 December 1915 by a single shell fired from a naval gun in Houthulst Forest. The graves in Plot 3 run in order of date of death and show the successive occupations of Elverdinghe Chateau by the 38th (Welsh) Division, the Guards Division and units of the Royal Artillery. The cemetery contains 410 British burials of the First World War, 6 of which are unidentified, and three German war graves. The cemetery was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield."

John's grave headstone is inscribed "DY EWYLLYS DI A WHELER" meaning "And Thy Will Be Done".

Family Life: John's parents were Henry and Rachel Vaughan who were both born in Carmarthen – there were far too many Rachel's born in Carmarthen in about 1861 to make even an educated guess at Rachel's maiden name. Their eldest son John (b 1886) and eldest daughter Edith (b 1887) were also born there but by the time of the 1891 Census the family had moved to Burry Port. The census return shows Henry and a lodger were both working at the Ashburnham Tin Works at Burry Port which had only opened the year before in 1890. I suspect that previously Henry had worked at the much smaller tin works at Carmarthen which closed in 1900. Perhaps he saw the writing on the wall and viewed the opening of the larger works at Burry Port as an opportunity – his occupation on census returns shows he took the opportunity:-
1891 = Yardsman at Tinworks; 1901 = Tinsman at Tinworks; 1911 = Superintendent at Tinworks.

The Tinsman was the most skilled job in a Tinworks as he was responsible for dipping the steel sheet in the molten tin and making sure the coverage was as required. Working conditions would not have been acceptable today with terrible heat, fumes and noise. Tin in its solid state is not toxic hence its use in tin cans but molten tin fumes are a different matter. However, Henry lived to a good age as the 1939 Register shows him still living in Burry Port aged 77.

The 1911 Census for the family shows John eventually had another sister, Margaret and the return shows her still at school aged 18. John went to Aberystwyth University and he appears on their WW1 Roll of Honour but it does not say what he studied.

John is also commemorated on the Burry Port War Memorial. Burry Port is on the Carmarthenshire coast and about 5 miles south of Llanelli. Its other claim to fame is as the 1928 landing site of Amelia Earhart the first lady to fly across the Atlantic.

David Redhead, April 2018