

Cenotaph: **BANNISTER R**

Memorial Hall: Raymond Bannister, Lincolnshire Regiment

Both are correct.

Date and place of birth: circa 1896, Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire. I think he was probably born on either 31st March or 1st April 1896. The 1901 census, carried out on 31st March, gives his age as 5 whereas the 1911 census, carried out on 2nd April, gives his age as 14.

Methodist connection: Yes – there is a Marriage notice in the *Primitive Methodist Leader* of 25th July 1918 of his unusually named sister, Ilynn, getting married to the son of a Primitive Methodist Minister although the chapel is Wesleyan Methodist. This notice also tells us his father, Alfred, was a Councillor.

Likely time at Elmfield College: normally it would be 1907-1912 but at the time of the 1911 census he is at home in Cleethorpes. It does say he is at school, perhaps he was temporarily at home ill.

War: The date Raymond enlisted is unknown. The 1st Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment was a regular battalion and formed part of the original British Expeditionary Force, arriving in France just over a fortnight after the outbreak of war. It is probable that Raymond was initially assigned to a reserve battalion and, after training, was sent to reinforce the 1st Battalion already in France. Raymond became a Lance-Corporal and was killed in action on 11th April 1917. At that time the Battalion were engaged in the First Battle of the Scarpe which lasted from 9th to 14th April. The Scarpe is the river flowing through Arras and the battle was the start of the Arras Offensive by the Allies. The Battalion War Diary has a lot to say about 11th April but this extract seems appropriate when considering the case of NCO Bannister:-

“The percentage of casualties amongst N.C.O’s of the Battalion speaks for the determination with which they led their sections forward to a task believed to have been impossible.

Casualties:	Officers – killed 1,	wounded 6,	missing 0
	N.C.O’s – killed 13,	wounded 27,	missing 2
	Privates – killed 31,	wounded 63,	missing 13

Sgt Walker with his Lewis Gun detachment specially distinguished himself in his efforts to overcome the enemy machine gun fire, firing the gun continuously himself from 6.30 am to 12.30 pm and returning alone 7 times across the open for ammunition. He was finally killed about 12.30 pm.”

Sergeant Arthur Walker does not appear to have been posthumously awarded a gallantry medal!

Raymond’s body was recovered and he was buried in Cojeul British Cemetery, St. Martin-Sur-Cojeul. He is also commemorated on the Cleethorpes War Memorial.

Family Life: Raymond’s parents were Alfred Bannister & Betsy Ann Henson. They had seven children and Raymond was the youngest but one. In the 1901 Census return, Alfred’s occupation is given as “Fish Company Manager”. In the 1911 census it is “Fish Salesman”, which sounds like a demotion but he also states he is a “Trawler Owner”. By 1911 the family had gained a live in servant and were living in an 8 room dwelling called Saxon House. As already stated Alfred was also a Town Councillor. So a prosperous family of local note and influence.

The above was my initial assessment but then I discovered a Cleethorpes blog apologising for calling Raymond’s father Sir Alfred Bannister in a previous blog but pointing out, although never knighted, he was known locally as “King Alf”. Below is a review of Alfred Bannister’s life indicating the atmosphere Raymond was brought up in and making one wonder what he might have achieved if the Great War had not intervened. I think his father did not take the 1911 census form too seriously.

When Alfred Bannister left school he worked in a brickyard but the call of the sea proved more compelling and aged 14 in 1873 he joined the crew of a fishing smack. He moved on to trawlers and progressed through the ranks to become a skipper. His next step was towards being his own boss by becoming joint owner of the trawler he skippered. Before the start of the Great War he had become a respected businessman owning a fleet of trawlers and a flourishing fish merchandising enterprise.

To manage these businesses he became office bound but, pining to be afloat again, he could be seen rowing round Cleethorpes Boating Lake most mornings before going to work. He also had his own motorised yacht built using a Rolls Royce engine, out of a car he owned, to power it.

He became nationally famous, or infamous some might say, in May 1914. The standing Liberal Unionist MP, for the Greater Grimsby constituency, which included Cleethorpes, died unexpectedly. The Liberal's designated candidate was exploring the southern hemisphere and Alfred agreed to stand in. His opponent was Thomas Tickler who owned the local jam factory which at the start of the Boer War had won the contract to supply the British Army with jam. The two key issues at the time of this by-election were Irish Home Rule and the proposed National Insurance Act. Tickler as a Unionist was opposed to both, the latter because it required employers to make a contribution. Alfred took the opposite view on both issues. Sir Edward Carson, the leader of the Irish Unionists, sent a letter supporting Tickler to all the electors to which Alfred responded "If I was the King I would chop off his head!" Alfred was doing so well that Tickler panicked and decided that he did support the National Insurance Act after all. Alfred produced a swing to the Liberals but not enough to get elected.

Although Alfred lost the battle, in effect he won the war on the two fronts. Later in the year Asquith's Government introduced a Bill giving home rule to a united Ireland but the Great War intervened and it was never implemented – the rest is history or perhaps not! The National Insurance Act became law the next month and it required employers to make a contribution.

Thomas Tickler became extremely wealthy when his contract with the British Army was extended to cover the four year long Great War. Jam seemed to be a staple part of a soldier's diet during the Great War but, the troops, presumably including Raymond, had mixed feelings about his apple & plum jam which had a high turnip content. The empty cans proved useful for making home-made grenades known as "Tickler's Artillery". Five of his sons fought in the Great War and they all survived. He was MP for Greater Grimsby until 1922.

The Bannister Trawler fleet suffered badly in the Great War with, in one week alone, five vessels being lost in the North Sea minefields. Alfred died in 1931 and by the time of WW2 the business was being run by his son, Fred (one of Raymond's elder brothers) and his nephew, Jack. One of their trawlers set a record in WW2 by sinking 181 mines.

Returning to the Great War, imagine the 1st Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment on 9th April 1917 marching the 3 miles from Boiry-St-Martin to Boiry-Becquerelle singing as they went:-

"Tickler's Jam, Tickler's Jam
How I love old Tickler's Jam
Plum and Apple in one pound pots
Sent from England in ten ton lots
Every night when I'm asleep
I'm dreaming that I am
Forcing my way through the Dardenelles
With Tommy Tickler's Jam"

I wonder if Raymond joined in?

The following day they moved into the front line trenches and the next day Raymond was killed in action.

David Redhead, April 1918