

# ROBERT HENRY ROBINSON



13836, 6/7th Bn., Lincolnshire Regiment

Born 1888 in Skillington, Lincolnshire

Killed in action near Ypres on 3 March 1916, aged 28

Buried in Bedford House Cemetery, 2.5 Km south of Ypres

DRIVER. F. BARKER.	GUNNER F. INGLETON.
RIFLEMAN. J. W. BELL.	PRIVATE W. JOYCE.
LIEUTENANT. F. J. BURROUGHS.	CITY. CPL. L. W. K. MORLEY.
CORPORAL. H. BURROUGHS.	SERGEANT. A. MEADS.
PRIVATE. J. H. BURROUGHS.	PRIVATE. WM. MEADS.
PRIVATE. G. W. BURROUGHS.	PRIVATE. WY. MEADS.
PRIVATE. A. BARKER.	PRIVATE. J. MEADS.
SERGEANT. T. R. CHRISTIAN.	PRIVATE. T. MELLADAY.
† PRIVATE. F. CHARLESWORTH.	PRIVATE. W. K. KAYSON.
PRIVATE. W. DUFFIN.	PRIVATE. C. ROBINSON.
DRIVER. C. DUFFIN.	PRIVATE. J. ROBINSON.
PRIVATE. H. DUFFIN.	† PRIVATE. G. ROBINSON.
† PRIVATE. CH. DUFFIN.	† PRIVATE. K. ROBINSON.
PRIVATE. C. W. GOODLIFFE.	KFM. C. B. RAWLINSON.
PRIVATE. C. B. GOODLAND.	† RIFLEMAN. K. KICK.
PRIVATE. G. GARFOOT.	DRIVER. P. G. SELBY.
PRIVATE. H. GARFOOT.	† PRIVATE. T. B. SELBY.
PRIVATE. E. GREEN.	† PRIVATE. A. J. SHARPE.
PRIVATE. F. W. HOWITT.	† PRIVATE. G. TOMBLIN.
PRIVATE. E. HOWITT.	LIEUTENANT. H. WHITLEY.
PRIVATE. K. HOWITT.	PRIVATE. J. M. WHITLEY.
PRIVATE. T. INGLETON.	PRIVATE. J. W. WHITLEY.

The Book of Remembrance in St James' church, Skillington

For further information about many of these men see pp. 14-15

# **SKILLINGTON MEN IN THE GREAT WAR**

ROBERT HENRY ROBINSON

One of eight Skillington men who lost their lives in the  
Great War, and his family relationship with others who  
served

(1888-1916)

by

Ron Cosford (grandson)

(Oxford, July 2014)

## INTRODUCTION

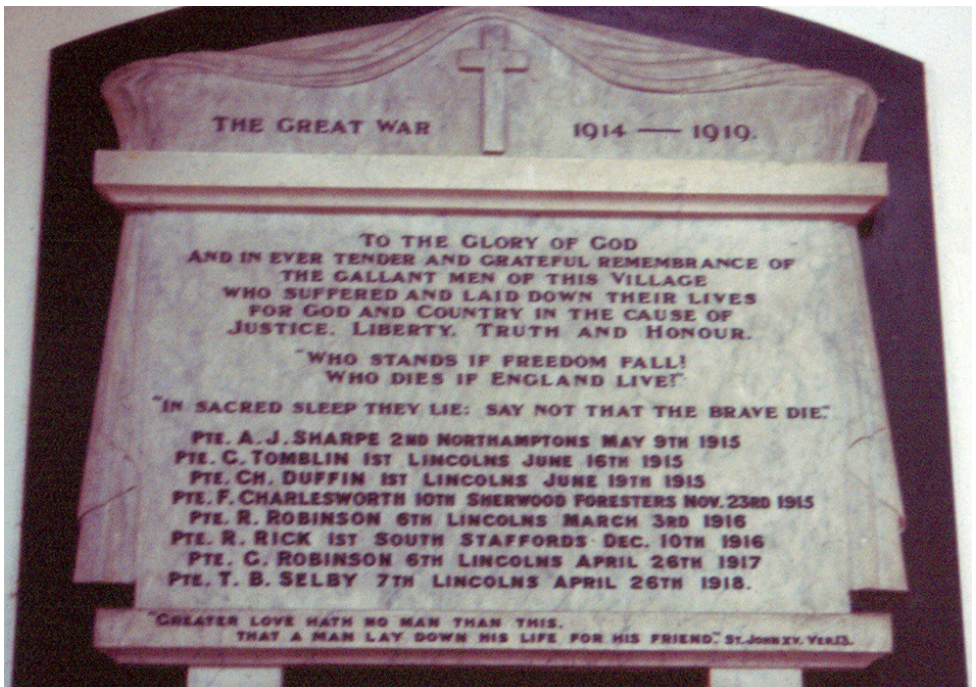
My wife and I lost three of our grandfathers in battle during WW1 and we know too well the effect of such losses on succeeding generations. How we would like to have shared at least part of our lives with our grandfathers!

Virtually all memorials bear promises that the men who died will never be forgotten, but in the case of WW1, it is difficult to maintain these promises when families have died out or moved away.

We attend St Mary's church, Iffley, Oxford where none of the actual names on the memorial are any longer represented by the current population of the village. Once-famous names resonate no more, except in one or two street names. The publication of research we have been doing on the Iffley memorial, despite an article in the parish magazine inviting information, has eventually had to be completed without the benefit of any information from families. Despite which, with the exception of one man, we have succeeded in finding out who they all were, their names, their occupations and their connections with the community. However, we would have given anything for just one family member to have contacted us!

Information about my wife's grandfathers, together with memorabilia, is now, in one case, in the collection of the Imperial War Museum and, in the other case, earmarked to go into a museum planned for the new stand of the Northampton Saints RFC. In the case of mine, Robert Henry Robinson (b. 1888, Skillington), I felt the least I could do is to provide the information anyway in the form of a written account that, I hope, might be placed somewhere in the church of St James, Skillington as a form of prayer, in memory not only of my grandfather but also of all the others who sacrificed their lives in that terrible war – a kind of prayer to honour them, to thank them but, above all, to keep alive their memory.

## THE FALLEN OF SKILLINGTON



The Marble Memorial in St James' church, Skillington

Looking first at the 8 names on the marble war memorial, the two Robinsons were brothers: George William (b.1886, Skillington) and Robert Henry (b.1888, Skillington). Charles Duffin (b. 1896, Skillington) was their first cousin. For further detail, see below:

## THE 44 NAMES IN THE BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

All four Robinsons were brothers (George and Robert, as above, plus John Thomas (b.1884, Skillington) and Charles (b.1889, Skillington)):

- Robert Henry, an ostler, was killed at Ypres on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1916 and his grave is at the Bedford House Military cemetery just south of the town
- George William, an ironstone labourer, was killed at Arras on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1917 and his grave is at the Duisans military cemetery 9 km. west of Arras
- Charles, a farm labourer, was gassed and taken prisoner in June 1918, but returned at the end of the war
- The oldest brother, John Thomas, a waggoner at Car Colston, was awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre. He survived the war but we do not know what happened to him afterwards.

All four Duffins were brothers (and my grandfather's cousins), children of Henry Yarrall Duffin and Martha Senescal: Herbert (b.1890, Skillington), Walter (b.1892, Hungerton), Charles (b.1895, Hungerton) and Cecil (b.1897, Skillington). Charles, a farm boy at Saltby, Melton Mowbray, was killed on 19 June 1915 and is buried in the Aeroplane Cemetery, 3.5 km. north east of Ypres.

The four Meads are also closely related to the Robinsons through the marriage of Robert Henry Robinson to Ellen Meads in 1910. They were the offspring of the marriages of three brothers:

- John Charlesworth Meads and Mary Elizabeth Lee had 11 children, all born in Skillington, including: William (b.1879), Walter (b. 1889), Arthur (b. 1886) and Andrew (b. 1891)

- William Francis Meads and Jane Rowland had five children, including the brothers, Joseph (b. 1894, Skillington) and Alfred (b. 1886, Skillington)
- George Thomas Meads and Mary Ann (?) had two children, including a son, William in 1886

Thus, William Meads was either Ellen's brother or first cousin, Walter Meads was her twin and Joseph was her first cousin. It is unclear whether "Sergeant A Meads" was one of her brothers Arthur and Andrew, or Joseph's brother, Alfred, another first cousin.

## NOTES ON THE ROBINSONS OF SKILLINGTON

My mother, Elsie Robinson, was born at The Drift, a terrace of labourers' houses at Harlaxton, near Grantham in 1913. In those days, though, families moved wherever their work took them, around local villages, perhaps moving every year. Workers were hired on Lady Day, 25<sup>th</sup> March, and moved on 1<sup>st</sup> April ("Flit Day"). Her family really belonged to Skillington, a small farming community about three miles off the A1, south of Grantham. She used to say of it: "God created it and then forgot all about it!" That did not mean that she disliked the village; on the contrary, she held it in great affection all of her life and kept in touch with various families, in particular with Walter and Fanny Meads.

But now things are different: the village is a "conservation area". My mother and her elder sister, Marie, last returned to see it in 2000 and thought it had not changed much at all! The old school was then in the process of being converted, but the houses the Robinsons had lived in, the church, the huge Methodist chapel and even the pubs were all still there. Although a number of new houses have been built near the centre, the feel of the village had not changed.

My mother's parents, both born in Skillington, were Robert Henry Robinson (b.1888) and Ellen Meads (b.1887) from families that had been in the village for centuries – from the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the case of the Robinsons. Although they were humble



agricultural labourers they must have had influence in the area since one of them, William (b.1727), was evidently for a time parish clerk. His name features often in the church register with a beautiful copper-plate handwriting and his grave-stone is a relatively grand one near the west-end door of the church.

Less information has come down to me about the Meads, but my mother knew that her uncle Andrew ran the local bus service and his wife, Grace, was the local schoolteacher. My maternal great grandmother, Mary Elizabeth (née Lee), was the local midwife, but did other things. If she had on her white pinafore, the locals knew she was off for a delivery, but she sometimes wore a black pinafore, in which case they knew she was about to lay out a body!



Left to right: Fanny and Walter Meads with his twin sister Ellen Gammons  
(née Meads)

Robert Henry Robinson, my grandfather, was one of eight – five boys and three girls. He was an ostler, looking after horses at a time when transport and carriage of goods all depended still on horse-drawn vehicles. His father was a farm carter. Ellen Meads, my



grandmother, was one of eleven children, six boys and five girls. Few people had cars yet and the local bus, driven by Ellen's brother Andrew Meads, must have been a real novelty.

Robert and Ellen married in Skillington in 1910. My mother was the youngest of three sisters: Marie (b.1910); Florrie (b.1911); then my mother, Elsie, in 1913. (There was also a brother, Robert Andrew, born on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1915, who died on December 6<sup>th</sup> 1915).

The third Skillington family closely related to the Robinsons were the Duffins. (See the family charts pp. 12-13).

It is a sad reflection on family losses in the war that Mary Jane Robinson, when she died on July 24<sup>th</sup> 1918, thought she had lost three sons. Charles had been reported missing in June, but she did not know that he had been taken prisoner. When Charles eventually returned, he did not marry but was cared for by his sister Agnes who, till the end of her life, also looked after the fifth brother Horace, who suffered from Downs Syndrome.

My mother was only three when her father was killed, so remembered little or nothing of that time. No one needs a lot of imagination, however, to think what it must have been like for the family in general as bad news followed bad news from the battle front. And there was bad news too at home: firstly Robert must have gone to war just after the death of his first and only baby son. How he and my grandmother must have felt! But think also of this small settled farming community, in a different world from the slaughter of the Belgian and French battlefields. The young fit men not only left, but they left to go and die, leaving their families behind in bitter grief, bewilderment - and poverty. And some were so young, and some so slight in build - for example, Walter Meads' service record shows his height as 5ft 0¾ inches and with a chest measurement of only 30 inches!

My grandmother was left with three young girls to care for and, although she received help from the wider family in the village, it isn't surprising that she felt the need for a breadwinner. In fact she married again as early as August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1918 to Alfred Gammons, a master plasterer who still made elaborate ceiling decorations for wealthy homes around the country. They continued to live for a few

years in Skillington where the following children were born: Bessie (1919), Vera(1920) and the twin brothers Ben and Albert (1923).

Unfortunately, along with his modest wealth, his strength and his skills, he brought also a pack of trouble, not least as result of his drunken violence. His work ultimately took him to his native Northampton, where he found lodgings in the nearby village of Blisworth. There, whilst my grandmother was seven months pregnant with her daughter Mary, Alfred's violence reached such a peak that Andrew Meads drove all the way in his bus from Skillington to take her and my mother Elsie back to Skillington where they were looked after by Andrew and his wife, (Violet) Grace. The baby, Mary (Violet Mary), was later born safely in Skillington on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1925. Eventually, Ellen returned to her husband in Northampton and had two further children, Ray and Joan.

She continued to look after my own mother, Elsie, in Northampton. There Elsie married Eric Cosford, a boot and shoe clicker and had two sons, my brother Ray and myself.

The other two Robinson sisters managed to avoid direct involvement in the problems caused by their stepfather. Both had gone into service: Marie was "upstairs" as a lady's maid in Merivale Hall and Florrie was employed in a kitchen, still in Skillington. Marie met her future husband, Dick Hudson, a skilled carpenter and eventually settled down in Nuneaton, where she had two boys. Florrie met and married the local butcher boy, Joe Dawson. After a period in Burton-on-Trent, they settled down in Bordesley Green, Birmingham where Joe became manager of a large pork-butcher's firm, Bowater Pies. Joe and Florrie had two daughters.

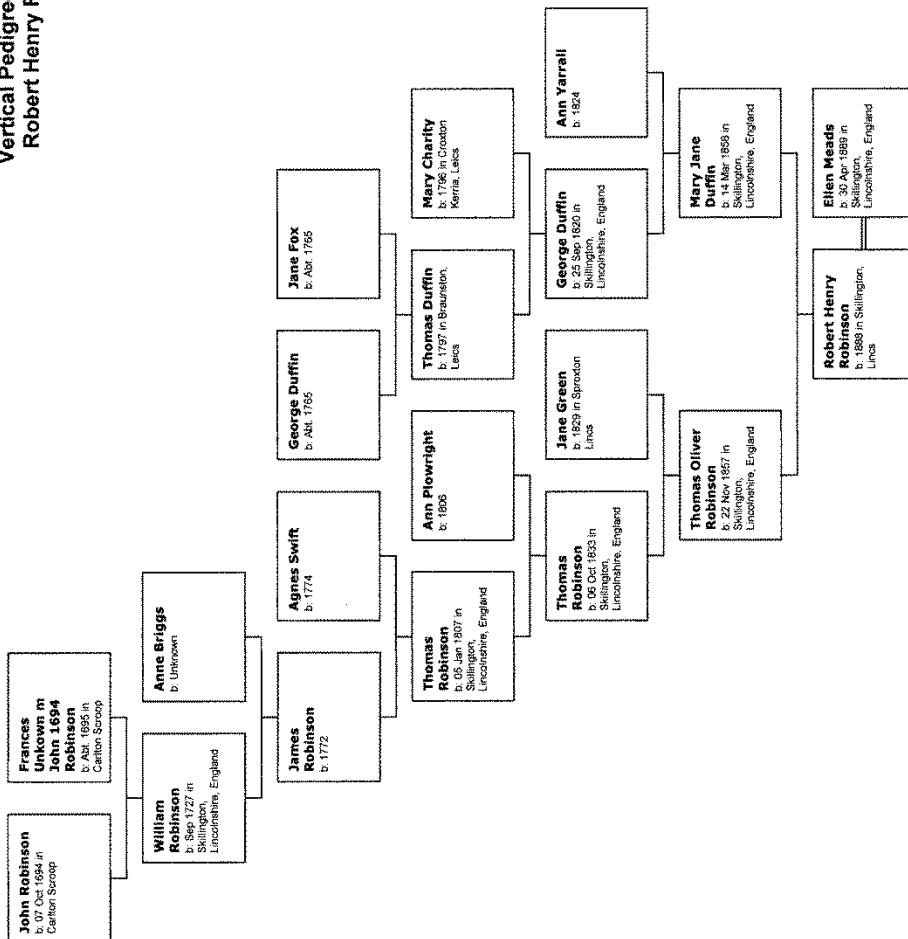


The "Widow's Penny" (left) was so well polished over the years by Florrie that the name is now scarcely visible

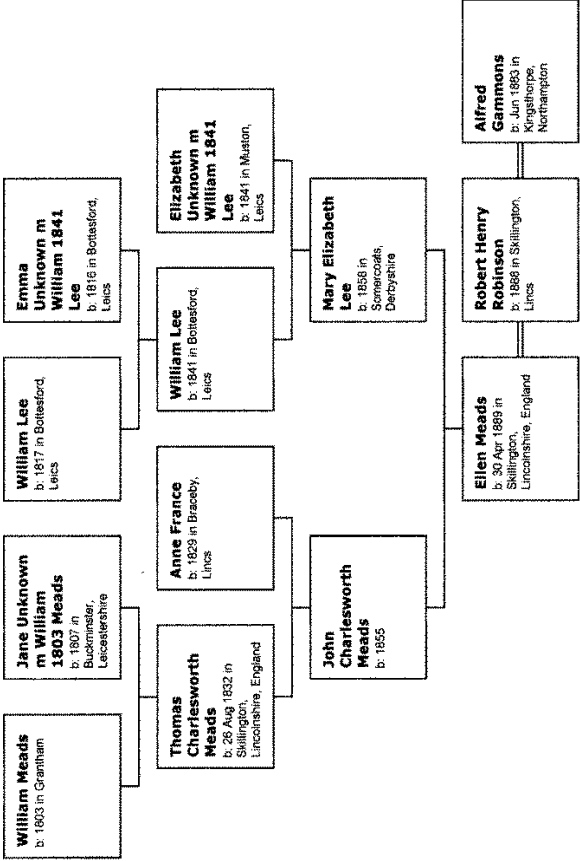


The graves of Robert Robinson in the Bedford House Cemetery near Ypres (left) and George Robinson at Duisans (right)

# Vertical Pedigree Chart for Robert Henry Robinson



Vertical Pedigree Chart for  
Ellen Meads



Name	Initials	Christian name/s	Date of birth	Place of birth	Service no	Rank	Regiment	Date of death in action
Barker	F	Francis	1893	Skillington		Driver		
Barker	A	Alfred	1900	Gt Ponton		Pte		
Bell	J W	John	1893	Skillington		Rifleman		
Burroughs	F J	Frederick	1880	Skillington		L Cpl		
Burroughs	H	Harry	1889	Skillington		Cpl		
Burroughs	J H	John	1883	South Witham		Pte		
Burroughs	G W	George	1884	Skillington		Pte		
Christian	T R	Thomas	1890	Skillington	204394	Sgt	Norfolk Regiment	
<b>Charlesworth</b>	F	Frederick	1898	Skillington	17014	Pte	10th Sherwood Foresters	23/11/15
Duffin	W	Walter	1893	Hungerton	13837	Pte	Lincs	
Duffin	C	Cecil	1898	Skillington	204229	Driver	Royal Field Artillery (SR)	
Duffin	H	Herbert	1891	Skillington	782125	Pte	West Yorks (SR)	
<b>Duffin</b>	C	Charles	1896	Hungerton	14349	Pte	1st Lincs (SR)	19/06/15
Goodliffe	C W	Charles	1879	Skillington	23231	Pte	Lincs	
Goodland	C B	Charles	1890	Sproxtton, Leics		Pte		
Garfoot	G	George	1899	Skillington		Pte		
Garfoot	H	Harry	1893	Skillington	38067	Pte	Lincs	
Green	E					Pte		
Howitt	F W	Frederick	1890	Skillington		Pte		
Howitt	E	Edwin	1900	Skillington		Pte		
Howitt	R H	Robert	1887	Skillington	242364?	Pte	Lincs	
Ingleton	T K	Tom	1888	Grantham		Pte		
Ingleton	F	Fred	1886	Skillington		Gunner		
Joyce	W	William	1897	Skillington		Pte		
Morley	L W R	Louis	1896	Skillington	70882	Cpl	Royal Engineers	
Meads	A	Andrew	1892	Skillington	49576	Sgt	Lincs	
Meads	W	William	1879	Skillington	22238	L Cpl	2/4 Lincs	

Meads	W	Walter	1890	Skillington	242259	Pte	1/5 Lincs (SR)
Meads	J	Joseph	1894	Skillington	442229	Pte	Machine Gun Corps (SR)
Melladay	T	Thomas	1899	Buckminster, Leics		Pte	
Rayson	W R	Walter	1890	Skillington		Pte	
Robinson	C	Charles	1889	Skillington	14352	Pte	2 Lincs (SR)
Robinson	J	John Thomas	1884	Skillington	21190	Pte	West Yorks (SR)
Robinson	G	George	1886	Skillington	23138	Pte	7th Lincs
Robinson	R	Robert Henry	1888	Skillington	13836	Pte	7th Lincs
Rawlinson	C B	Charles	1897	Skillington	42252	Pte	King's Own Yorks LI
Rick	R	Richard	1882	Skillington	40030	Rifleman	1st South Staffs
Selby	P G	Percy	1895	Skillington	196712	Driver	Royal Field Artillery
Selby	T B	Thomas Beaver	1883	Skillington	23139	Pte	7th Lincs
Sharpe	A J	Arthur Joseph	1886	Thurlby	6939	Pte	2nd Northants
Tomblin	G F	George	1887	Boothby Pagnell	14353	Pte	1st Lincs
Whittle	H	Harry	1898	Denton	311767	L Cpl	Royal Tank Corps (SR)
Whittle	J	James	1891	Wyville	M/416609	Pte	RASC (SR)
Whittle	J W	John William	1895	Harlaxton	78496	Pte	W Yorks (SR)

## NOTES:

**SR** indicates that at least a partial service record has survived. Most WW1 service records were destroyed by a fire following an air-raid in WW2. About 25% survived and are frequently referred to as the "burnt records".

The difficulty of identifying all these men, without the existence of service records and before the publication of the 1922 Census, accounts for the many gaps and perhaps some of the inadvertent mistakes made in compiling this chart.



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