

The following story comes from the on-line website of the "Bexhill-on-Sea Observer", dated 4th October 2014.

"The name of a Sidley soldier who killed himself after WW1 ended has been added to the memorial at All Saints church in Sidley - he was George Charles Hammond."

"It's a touching tribute to a man who couldn't cope with living when so many friends and comrades had been lost, and happened because great-nephew John Hammond visited the church and asked if George's name could be included, alongside those of two brothers who also served their country."

"He approached church member, Anne Green, who has done much research and written a booklet about the memorial, and it then took a year for appropriate permissions to be granted including that of the Arch Deacon."

"George was born in 1881 to Richard and Annie Hammond and baptised at St Mary the Virgin, Ninfield. He was the third child of the family and there were five more children. The family moved to Sidley during the 1900s and Richard became head gardener at Sidley House. George was one of his assistants. Shortly after his 20th birthday, however, he and younger brother, Herbert, set up on their own as market gardeners."

"Within a few weeks of war being declared in August 1914, George had voluntarily enlisted, joining the 8th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment. This battalion was formed at Chichester, then it trained at Colchester before moving to Salisbury Plain in 1915. It was a Pioneer battalion which meant the men were mainly involved in construction, repair and engineering duties. They were sent to Boulogne on 24th July 1915 and George served with them on the Somme Front."

"In 1916 he fought on the Somme and in 1917 at Arras and Ypres. He was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in 1917, most likely during the opening stage of the third Battle of Ypres in 1917. In 1918 he returned to the Somme, the Hindenberg Line and took part in the final operations on the Western Front."

"After hostilities had ceased George remained in France to assist with battlefield clearance and the creation of war cemeteries. One of his nieces asserted that by this time he was suffering from shattered nerves and had difficulty coming to terms with his own survival whilst so many of his comrades had lost their lives."

"On 7th February 1919, aged 37, he committed suicide by shooting himself. He is buried in the Esnes Communal Cemetery in Northern France."

"Richard and Annie Hammond later moved to 9, Belmont Terrace, Sidley and in the glass panel above the front door they had engraved, ESNES, the final resting place of their son, George."

"To modern eyes, it would seem that George was suffering greatly but as suicide was a criminal offence at the time, it would have been unlikely that George's parents would have felt it was right to ask for his name to be added to the church memorial."

"His name is on the original town memorial outside St Mary Magdalene, however the name over their front door was an additional way to honour their son."

"John commented: I was very pleased to have George's name added to the war memorial, as I am proud of his record during World War 1, and it was only afterwards when he was suffering from what we now know as post traumatic stress that he took his life. As a result he was omitted from the Bexhill war memorial. My great grand parents were obviously still proud of him as they had the French town of Esnes, where he is buried, inscribed onto the glass panel above their front door."

"My overwhelming feeling is that my late grandfather would have been happy to know that his brother is now commemorated on a war memorial, even if it took nearly 100 years."