

GREAT WAR STAINED GLASS WINDOW MEMORIALS IN KENT

No. 8: Christ Church, South Ashford

Lt Charles William Jemmett

7th Buffs (East Kent Regiment)

MIA 15th March 1918, Leiz, Oise

Window: Christ Church, South Ashford

Kent links: Family home; School, Tonbridge; further education, Wye College; work

Medals: British and Victory Medals

War Grave: Brissay-Choigny Churchyard, Aisne

By the time of the Great War the Jemmett family had been prominent in the Tonbridge-Ashford region of Kent for many generations. They were a banking family, owners of the first private bank established in Ashford in 1791.¹ In 1902 the bank merged with Lloyd's Bank and William Francis Bond Jemmett, formerly a partner in the family firm, became manager of the newly named Lloyd's bank in Ashford. He and his wife Edith were to have only one son, Charles William, born on 26 May 1885.² Charles was educated at Mr Branack's, a small but popular preparatory school in Folkestone, and at Tonbridge, a major public school and member of the elite Headmasters' Conference. There he joined the Officer Training Corps during the period of the Boer War. After five years at the school he left in 1902 and, perhaps reluctantly, began work in a bank.

Charles Jemmett's great passion was entomology, the scientific study of insects. In 1906, aged 21, he became a student at Wye College near Ashford. Officially known as South-Eastern Agricultural College and affiliated to the University of London when Jemmett was present, the college, having once trained priests, now focused on rural management and the biological, zoological and agricultural sciences. Students were often sons of the gentry, faced with the prospect of running an estate, or young men whose future was seen to be in the empire, as rubber planters or farmers.³ Jemmett remained there until 1908.

He left in order to pursue his scientific studies in Nigeria, where he spent several months each year between 1909 and 1911.⁴ His particular interest was a bloodsucking fly known at the time as *Haematopota pallidicornis*, which was to be found around the Cross River in Southern Nigeria. In 1910 he reported some findings to the *Bulletin of Entomological Research*.⁵ The following year he returned to Wye College as Assistant in the Zoological (Entomological) Department.⁶ In 1912 Jemmett was

¹ *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 25 May 1917.

² Kent War Memorial Transcription Project, <http://www.kentfallen.com/PDF%20REPORTS/WYE.pdf>

³ This is based on data of other officers who served in the Great War.

⁴ UK Incoming Passenger Lists, Ancestry.Co.

⁵ These findings were described in the *Bulletin of Entomological Research* (1917), p. 150.

⁶ *Journal of the South-Eastern Agricultural College, Wye* (1911), p. 11.

elected Fellow of the Entomological Society of London.⁷ That same year, on 14 December, he married Dorothy Elizabeth Sankey, the daughter of a Ramsgate solicitor. They were to have three children, all daughters.

So far, apart from his membership of Tonbridge's OTC, Jemmett does not appear to have been an obvious candidate for the army when war broke out. But, like so many of his class, he swiftly enlisted. He joined the ranks of the 5th Buffs (East Kent Regiment), a territorial battalion, on 17 August 1914. He was still in training when the now designated 1/5th (Weald of Kent) Battalion hurriedly left for India on 29 October 1914 to replace regular troops that were *en route* to France. Jemmett was left behind with the second line battalion (the 2/5th) and was soon promoted to Sergeant. Entomologists are noted for their skills in classification and hierarchical organisation, talents that would be highly regarded in an army that was expending very rapidly in the first year of the war. It is likely that Sergeant Jemmett was needed more in the orderly room than on the barrack square.

In May 1915 Jemmett received a commission and was posted back to his own battalion, not an unusual occurrence in territorial units. This battalion was never to leave England and Jemmett was to remain with it until at least October 1917.⁸ He did not receive promotion until July 1917, but in the intervening period was given the temporary ranks of Lieutenant and Captain while acting as Adjutant, a position that was at the centre of battalion bureaucracy.⁹ At last, however, towards the end of the year Jemmett was posted to a fighting battalion in France, being attached to the 7th (Service) Battalion The Buffs, which was in 55th Brigade, 18th (Eastern) Division.

Jemmett joined the BEF when it was close to its nadir during the war. Still recovering from the losses at the battle of Passchendaele; with the threat of large German reinforcements arriving from the Eastern Front; and with the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, refusing to send adequate reinforcements yet at the same time allowing the French to hand over an extra ten miles of trenches to British control, Sir Douglas Haig faced the prospect, indeed the certainty, of a massive enemy attack along an extended front line that he could not adequately protect.¹⁰ Hubert Gough's Fifth Army was particularly vulnerable and during the last days of January 1918 several Fourth Army divisions, including the 18th, were transferred from Ypres to Fifth Army's III Corps, where they were placed at the army's extreme right on the supposedly impassable marshy ground either side of the River Oise.¹¹ Hasty, and in the event uncompleted, preparations were made for a defence in depth, with a Front Zone designed to absorb the initial blows and a Battle Zone, of three defensive lines that included many strongpoints, aimed at halting the main impetus of the German advance.

⁷ *Transactions of the Entomological Society of London* (London 1918-1919).

⁸ Jemmett was still listed in the quarterly *Army List* as being with the 2/5th Buffs in October 1917.

⁹ For Jemmett's changes in temporary and acting rank, see *London Gazette* 8 December 1915, p. 13015, 11 April 1916, p. 3887, 19 February 1917, p. 1745, 11 May 1917, p. 4585, 3 September 1917, p. 9140, 3 December 1917, p. 12656.

¹⁰ Sir James Edmonds, *Official History of the Great War: Military Operations France and Belgium 1918* (London 1934), vol. 1, chaps. 2-5. A succinct account of the BEF's difficulties in early 1918 can be found in Chris Baker, *The Battle for Flanders: German Defeat on the Lys 1918* (Barnsley 2011), pp.11-16.

¹¹ Order No. 96, 7th Buffs War Diary, 29 January 1918, TNA PRO WO95/2049/1; Peter Hart, *1918: A Very British Victory* (London 2009), p. 74.

Jemmett, however, was not destined to face the German onslaught, which began on 21 March 1918. Officers serving in the front line for the first time were often encouraged to lead small nocturnal raids across No Man's Land, in order to obtain some idea of the lie of the land and to test both their mettle and their leadership skills. In early 1918 such raids became increasingly necessary, for it was vital, now that many new and fresh German divisions were known to be in France, that the military authorities gained solid intelligence concerning the disposition of enemy units along the front line. On 15 March the 7th Buffs were in trenches about three miles north of La Fere, protecting a line with a length of more than two and a half miles. That night, according to the War Diary, 'A fighting patrol left [across No Man's Land] for the purpose of obtaining identifications. No identification was obtained'.¹²

Jemmett took part in this patrol and did not return. The battalion's war diary is frustratingly silent on this episode, partly no doubt owing to the great onslaught that followed a few days later.¹³ Whether Jemmett was the only officer involved is unknown. Whether he was the only casualty is also unknown.¹⁴ The diary does not even mention that he was missing. Fortunately, R.S.H. Moody's history of the Buffs during the Great War adds some detail. According to his sources, Jemmett was killed instantly by a bullet to the temple while 'leading his platoon' on the canal bridge at Vendeuil-Chugny Road in Leiz, three miles north of the River Oise and two from the St Quentin canal. The Germans subsequently found his body and buried it.¹⁵

Jemmett's father had died in May 1917, so his mother had to face the dreadful period waiting for news of her only child with just his equally suffering wife to give emotional support (the wider family were also mourning the loss of George Jemmett, Charles' cousin, only a few months earlier).¹⁶ Eventually, in July 1918 his death was officially announced after the authorities received news from Germany via the Dutch Legation in Berlin.¹⁷ He had been buried in Brissay-Choigny churchyard and there he still rests, under an Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission headstone, the only British war casualty in the cemetery.

Commemoration

Jemmett's name as a casualty of the Great War can be found on two war memorials and in the published roll of honour that Tonbridge School produced. The war memorials are both in Wye. One is the brass plaque in the porch of St Gregory and St Martin. Outside in the churchyard is a large cross of Portland stone on a plinth, but

¹² 7th Buffs War Diary, 15 March 1918.

¹³ The battalion's war diary as a whole for this period is not so extensive as those of many other battalions. The arrival of officers, for instance, or their periods of leave or attachment are not mentioned in the 1917 diary.

¹⁴ The CWGC data, searched through <http://www.hut-six.co.uk>, shows no 7th Buffs deaths either on 15 or 16 March 1918. Jemmett's death is recorded in *Soldiers who Died in the Great War* under the section on the 2/5th Buffs.

¹⁵ *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 12 July 1918.

¹⁶ 2nd Lt George Elwick Jemmett of the 1/13th (Kensington) Battalion London Regiment, had died of wounds on 17 December 1917. *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 25 May 1917, 16 April 1920.

¹⁷ *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 12 July 1918.

without names.¹⁸ Jemmett's name is also on another plaque at the agricultural college.¹⁹

In addition to this community memorializing, Jemmett's family were determined to commemorate personally the two cousins who died in the war. They chose to erect memorials in St Mary's, Ashford's parish church. On 12 April 1920 a small congregation of family and a few friends watched the unveiling of two marble tablets in honour of George and Charles Jemmett. As well as describing how Charles died, his tablet also included the names of his daughters and a line written by Rudyard Kipling: 'Who dies if England lives'. This is the final line of the poem "For all we have and are", which Kipling wrote soon after the outbreak of war in 1914. In this poem Kipling does not welcome the war, which he blames on society's 'wantonness'. He warns his audience that 'Our world has passed away' and that winning the war will be far from easy. 'Iron sacrifice of body, will and soul' will be needed to 'bring us to our goal' and everyone has to risk all ('One life for all to give'), for 'What stands if Freedom fall? / Who dies if England live?'. The poem is ultimately consolatory. There are things worth fighting and dying for and by using Kipling's last line as an inscription on Jemmett's memorial tablet his family are acknowledging that, although no doubt grief remained strong.²⁰

By inscriptions such as this on a plaque or tablet, or with a few lines from a poem or the Bible in a newspaper *In Memoriam* notice, the bereaved could show how they were trying to understand the premature and violent deaths of their relatives, as well as letting the community know that the dead and their deaths were valued. In a sense the focus is more on the survivors than on the departed. The feelings expressed are those of the living, not the dead. A different form of memorial, the stained glass window, not only serves the same purpose, but also allows visual representation of the person commemorated, both allegorically and, sometimes, literally and reduces the focus on the living. Such is the case with the two-light stained glass window that was dedicated in Christ Church, South Ashford to Charles Jemmett on the same day in April 1920 that the two marble tablets were unveiled.²¹ This church, built in 1867 to cater for workers of the South Eastern Railway Company, was an appropriate site, for George Jemmett, lord of the manor and grandfather of Charles Jemmett, had donated the land on which it stands.²²

Jemmett's memorial is a two-light window with St Francis of Assisi on the left and The Black Prince—Edward, Prince of Wales and elder son of King Edward III—on the right (see Fig. 1). Below St Francis on the left is a shield with three unicorn heads, possibly a representation of the family's links with Ashford or an image depicting virtue. Below the Black Prince on the right is the badge of The Buffs Regiment. Also on the right is what may be a medieval milestone, on which is carved, unusual on such memorials, the names of Jemmett's three children: Elizabeth, Katharine and Barbara. The inscription spanning both lights is similar to the one on Jemmett's

¹⁸ <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Kent/Wye.html>.

¹⁹ A photo of this Honour Board can be found at <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Kent/WyeSouthEasternAgriculturalCollege.html>.

²⁰ Jemmett's widow Dorothy remarried in 1922 and subsequently lived in Sussex House, Winchester.

²¹ *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 16 April 1920.

²² South Ashford: Christ Church and St Francis, <http://southashford.co.uk/a-short-history/>.

marble tablet, but with two significant additions: he is described as an entomologist and there is an engraving of a small fly (see Fig. 2).

Jemmett's family wished to remember him visually as soldier, scientist, Englishman and patriot within the Christian chivalric tradition. This led them to the symbols of St Francis and The Black Prince. The former, a man of war turned man of peace, is the patron saint of animals, nature and the environment (in 1979 Pope John Paul II officially pronounced him Patron of Ecology). In the left light no fewer than seven birds surround St Francis, as well as three butterflies, two beetles, two stoats, a dragonfly and a lizard (see Fig. 3). All coexist within an environment provided by the bountiful True Vine, which signifies Christ's eternal connectedness with humanity.²³ That was, metaphorically and perhaps romantically, Jemmett's world before the war.

The dominant representative of English patriotism in the stained glass memorial windows of the Great War is St George. Usually depicted triumphant over a dead or dying dragon, he was perhaps not a suitable choice to commemorate a nature lover, even though the afflicted beast is mythical. The Jemmett family instead chose as their symbol of England's martial patriotic prowess an image of the Black Prince, victor of the battles of Crécy and Poitiers in the fourteenth century. In this light a falcon, personifying gentlemanly chivalry, represents the natural world (see Figure 4). It rests on a branch of an oak tree, itself symbolic of English strength and endurance. Thus the background to the Black Prince brings us back to the qualities necessary to win the war that Kipling mentioned in the poem that was quoted on Jemmett's marble tablet in St Mary's.

The most striking feature of this light, however, is the face of the Black Prince. One that is recognisably modern has replaced the original. It is a rather incongruous addition to the knightly figure, which itself seems out of proportion. Such replacements are not unknown among Great War stained glass memorial windows and represent a trend that was unknown in English churches before the war. Whether the face, engraved on clear glass, has been copied from a likeness of Jemmett is unknown, although its regular features and solemn gaze suggest that if it was, it was taken from a group photograph. Clearly, the Jemmett family wished to associate their lost relative as closely as possible to the English patriotic tradition and also to see at least his caricature whenever they visited the church. In 1920 they were still not prepared to let Charles Jemmett go, not yet having reached the stage of acceptance in the grieving process.²⁴ Aesthetically, the result is not very satisfactory, but it suited the family's purpose.

²³ John 15:1.

²⁴ For the stages of grief, see the classic Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Scribner 1969).

Figure 1: Charles William Jemmett's memorial Window



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Figure 2: Part of Inscription



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Figure 3: St Francis of Assisi



Figure 4: The Black Prince



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