

REGINALD WELLER STAMP AND ANNIE (NANCY) HAWTIN

Reginald Stamp's letters to his fiancée Annie Hawtin (he always called her Nancy) from the Western Front between 1915 and 1919 have survived thanks to a lucky chance. They were presented by Mr. Wally Boater to the Wheatley Branch of the Royal British Legion for display at an exhibition to mark Armed Forces Day on 27th June 2009. The letters have now been passed to the Wheatley Archives together with a typed transcript of each one. Second copies of the transcripts have been presented to the Soldiers of Oxfordshire archive.

Mr. Boater's late father, Wally Boater Senior, lived at the house in the High Street, Wheatley, called Rellew, where Reginald and Nancy lived throughout their married life and they were found when Mr. Boater himself died. They are a wonderful collection of letters from a very ordinary man who lived in Wheatley all his life apart from his four years in the Army. There is little information in them about the campaigns in which Reginald took part - Army censorship prevented that - but they show a man who was thirty years old when he was called up, making light of the danger, discomfort and tedium of his life in France and who was constantly concerned for the health and welfare of his beloved Nancy and their respective families back home.

Nancy moved away from Church Enstone during the war and Reg writes to a number of different addresses in London so she was probably employed in war work of some kind or possibly as a housekeeper or domestic servant as that had been her occupation before the war.

He writes in a clear hand given the circumstances, and, the odd spelling error apart, with a good command of English. Throughout he seems cheerful and there is hardly a complaint about his lot in any of the letters. He suffers very little illness though in late 1918 he does seem to have caught a mild dose of influenza, which killed more people worldwide than those who died in action during the war. The letters, apart from those written after he left the Army, are all in pencil on thin buff-coloured paper and there has been a little fading over the years. A very small number of words are illegible which is in itself remarkable.

Reginald was born in Wheatley in 1884, the son of Frederick and Sarah Ann Harriet Stamp. Annie was born in Church Enstone in 1882. Reginald died on 17th December 1944, aged 60 and Annie on 18th June 1950 aged 68. They are buried together in the churchyard of St. Mary's Church in Wheatley.

Reginald joined the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, also known as the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, in 1915, due almost certainly to his work with horses in Wheatley. He spent nearly four years in the Army and his surviving letters mention no leave at all, but they are only a fraction of the total number he wrote. Unfortunately none of Nancy's letters to him have survived. Reg came through the war unscathed despite being present at some of the worst campaigns including the Somme and Passchendaele, although the letters do not say as much, due to strict censorship. He reached the rank of Corporal.

The letters he wrote to Nancy after leaving the Army in March 1918 show him returning to civilian life seemingly unaffected by the war and getting on with plans for their wedding in May and their future life together in Wheatley.

Annie's cousin Alfred, also from Church Enstone, joined the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars in September 1914, and reached the rank of Sergeant before dying of wounds on 2nd April 1918. Another cousin, Frederick, was killed at Loos on 25th September 1915. Reg refers to Alfred frequently in his letters but makes no mention of his death in any surviving letters. To complete the family story, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission entries for Alfred and Frederick are included in this collection. Reginald also writes of Tom and another Alf both of whom survived the war.