

Memories of the Eley Family at Escrick Villa

Thank you to Judith Evans for sharing information about her Grandmother, cook to the Eley Family, who were at The Villa Escrick during WW1.



'The Villa' was built in mid 1800's as a Dower House for the Wenlock family. It became known as, and continues to be known as, The Dower House. When it was built it was the only building in the village to the east of the Skipwith Road. When there was no Dowager Wenlock, the house was tenanted by other families. In his book Sam Taylor says for example, that Rev Fredrick Peel lived there until his death in 1860 and then his widow for a further 10 years.

During the First World War William Eley, his wife Helen and their family lived at the Villa, Lt Colonel Eley being Commander of the Yorkshire Hussars.

Prudence (known as Kate) Sanderson, nee Attewell worked for Major Eley during WWI as a cook.

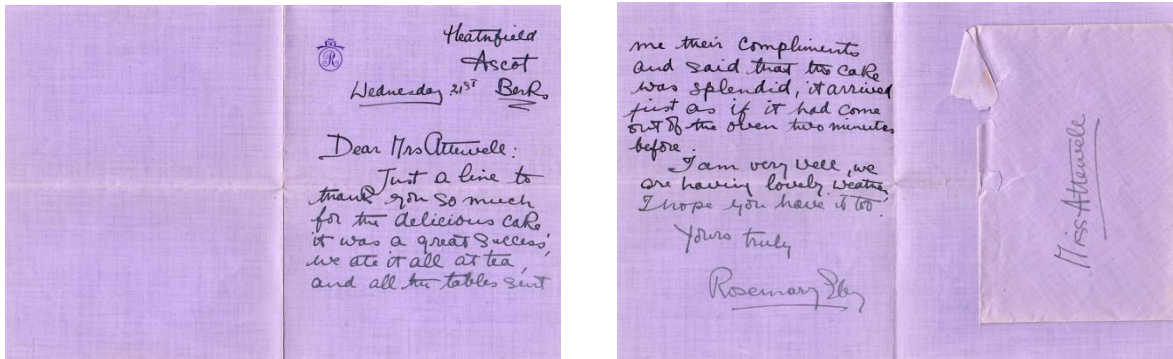


Kate (centre) with other members of the Eley household



Prudence (Kate) with her husband

Judith's family have several letters addressed to Prudence at The Villa, Escrick including one from the Major's daughter, Rosemary, who was away at boarding school and had received a fruit cake baked for her.



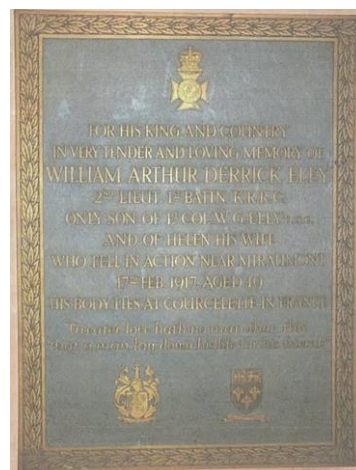
The Eley family also took a house on The Isle of North Uist for a month during the summer of 1914 and the household went with them.



Major William Gardiner Eley, Yorkshire Hussars. Courtesy of Imperial War Museum

During WWI between July 1917 and the spring of 1919, both Pamela and Rosemary Eley volunteered as nurses at the convalescent hospital for officers, set up at Escrick Hall, under the command of Irene Lawley. There were a maximum of 25 injured officers at any one time.

The Eley's son's, Derrick, was unfortunately killed in action and is remembered on the Escrick War memorial and also on a plaque inside the Church.



WILLIAM ARTHUR DERRICK ELEY was a 2nd Lieutenant, 5th Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps (attached to 1st Battalion). Derrick (as he was known) was killed in action on 17 February 1917, aged 19. He was the only son of Helen and Lt Col William G Eley, members of the Escrick War Memorial Committee and they contributed to the War Memorial Fund. Derrick is buried at Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt, Somme, France. (Extracts of a contemporary report about his death are below)

2nd Lieutenant William Arthur Derrick Eley - killed in action aged 19

8th April

I have just returned from seeing Derrick's Battalion. The enclosed wire reached me yesterday and I started off at 9am today. The village where they are being about 12-14 miles off. It was a lovely spring day, a little snow still lying about on the high ground, but sunny and warm, as I walked up to the gate of the house where the officer's mess was, a little bird, probably a robin, began to sing in a tree over my head. I couldn't see the bird, but it sounded like a message of welcome from Derrick. Stafford was away with the Brigadier but the adjutant was expecting me. He gave me all details about the fight. The day that I left them (Feb 15th) they marched into huts for the night and went up to the line on the following night (the attack being timed for 7am on the day after, Derrick was employed by Battalion Head Quarters and made himself very useful in several ways and Stafford had great difficulty in keeping him in the Battalion dug out at all. He was always wanting to go out on some job or other. The Battalion dug out at that time was some way back from the 'jumping' off trenches or shell holes. Early on the morning of the attack, the Huns put a very heavy barrage over our lines and the morning was very dark and foggy, consequently there was a lot of confusion in bringing up the Company to the 'jumping off' trenches and a good many casualties. Derrick was out at 2a.m. acting as a guide and directing people and seemed to have worked wonderfully well and very pluckily. He assisted a number of men who were wounded, including Sergeant Mayers (whom I talked to for some time). The N.C.O. was wounded between 2 and 5 am in the head and hand by splinters of shell. Derrick tied him up with his own field dressing and helped him back. The man got very faint and lay down so Derrick gave him some ---(juice?) ----- from his flask. He seems to have spent all the early hours doing this sort of work and was invaluable as a guide. The men who had been told off as guides being (as usual) absolutely lost in the darkness.

Report April 8th 1917 (transcribed from the original)

I have just returned from seeing Derrick's Battalion. The enclosed wire reached me yesterday and I started off at 9am today. The village where they are being about 12-14 miles off. It was a lovely spring day, a little snow still lying about on the high ground, but sunny and warm, as I walked up to the gate of the house where the officer's mess was, a little bird, probably a robin, began to sing in a tree over my head. I couldn't see the bird, but it sounded like a message of welcome from Derrick. Stafford was away with the Brigadier but the adjutant was expecting me. He gave me all details about the fight. The day that I left them (Feb 15th) they marched into huts for the night and went up to the line on the following night (the attack being timed for 7am on the day after, Derrick was employed by Battalion Head Quarters and made himself very useful in several ways and Stafford had great difficulty in keeping him in the Battalion dug out at all. He was always wanting to go out on some job or other. The Battalion dug out at that time was some way back from the 'jumping' off trenches or shell holes. Early on the morning of the attack, the Huns put a very heavy barrage over our lines and the morning was very dark and foggy, consequently there was a lot of confusion in bringing up the Company to the 'jumping off' trenches and a good many casualties. Derrick was out at 2a.m. acting as a guide and directing people and seemed to have worked wonderfully well and very pluckily. He assisted a number of them who were wounded, including Sergeant Mayers (whom I talked to for some time). The N.C.O. was wounded between 2 and 5 am in the head and hand by splinters of shell. Derrick tied him up with his own field dressing and helped him back. The man got very faint and lay down so Derrick gave him some ---(juice?) ----- from his flask. He seems to have spent all the early hours doing this sort of work and was invaluable as a guide. The men who had been told off as guides being (as usual) absolutely lost in the darkness.

Sergeant Mayers told me he went backwards and forwards several times, helped to load stretchers and do first aid and that the men were full of his praises. The last time that he saw him (this was

probably all before the attack took place) Derrick had just guided back a wounded officer from another Battalion and Derrick looked very shaken, as if a shell had nearly killed him. Everyone said the shelling was very heavy especially round the Battalion quarters and first aid point.

The attack itself was much bigger than I imagined. The Battalion of Derrick's Brigade attacked and some 4 or 5 other Battalions on either side of them. It was an encircling attack on [Petit Miraumont], some of the Battalions attacking on the north side of the river. Derrick's Battalion advanced over the ground that I walked over. The Hun trenches were very knocked about and 1 company went right over there in the dark without knowing if the front trenches were easily taken and the fighting, although was very fierce, was over in a short time. The rest of the operations were not a success, owing to fog and darkness principally. Boom Ravine was taken at the same time and the Battalion spent the day in consolidating under a pretty heavy rifle fire which ----- them and caused a lot of casualties more than half their casualties were caused by bullets. The shelling however on the support trenches was always heavy. At one period of the morning, I think about ten o'clock, the C.O. had no idea as to how the situation was and Derrick went up to enquire. He went to each Company, found out exactly what had happened and then went to the Battalion on the right and learned what they had to report and had cleared up several situations that required explaining. Wilson who commanded the firing line told me that Derrick was perfectly cool and simply walked along the whole line accompanied by one orderly although bullets were firing everywhere. It appears he was very disappointed at not being with his platoon in the attack. Chambers, his Company Commander was not in the attack however and so could not help me with any news.

At one period of the morning (the time was not known) a comp of the Battalion of the -- division on the left retired in great disorder; the Huns counter attacking and driving them right in. Derrick rallied these men apparently and either led them or saw that they did go forward again and saved his own Battalion from being left in the air. He did not mention this to anyone, but a wounded officer from some other Battalion told Stafford that one of the K.R.R.C. officers had rallied a lot of men and saved a serious situation. He described Derrick who could only have been the officer mentioned as no-one else in his Battalion was there at the time. In the evening the message came that the K.R.R.C. had to move their Battalion H.Q. further forward and Derrick went out to find a suitable spot, he was told that the only likely place would be Boon Ravine, a very heavy barrage had been put on this spot by the Huns after our troops had taken it. It looked to me a regular death trap just the place to be heavily shelled on the chance of troops being sheltered there. The Boy was killed in the dark when away with some orderlies only no-one on the Battalion saw him killed; he had 4 orderlies with him and I believe that either all were killed or wounded. 2 are known to be killed. He was killed in the ----- close to where he was based. Stafford sent up to try to get his body but he had been buried already by a party in charge of a sergeant from some other Battalion. The K.R.R.C. had heavy casualties only 1 officer's body was buried on the high ground south the Petit [Miraumont?] close to the East Road. I did not stay to lunch with the Battalion but just had something to eat and left at 12.30. They were full of regret at Derrick's death and Wilson said that he had never known anyone become so popular in so short a time and that he was a splendid officer.

I asked about Sevett and H(Herbert?) The former was killed in the attack on March 10th by our own barrage fire just as he was clearing our trenches. I am told he was a particularly nice boy. H(Herbert?) has not joined the Battalion yet and they say it is doubtful if he will as he appears very delicate. As regards being killed by our own barrage, it is quite unavoidable at times. When Derrick's Battalion attacked on February 17th the barrage got right ahead of them as the men could not keep up with it in the dark and fog. On March 10th they made a rapid advance and possibly went quicker than they were supposed to go.