

# **King's Road: for King and Country**

**Compiled by  
Judy Sutton & Helen Little**

**Published and available from**  
TheEndlessBookcase.com

**This booklet is available in both paper and electronic format.**  
Available in multiple e-book formats.

**The Endless Bookcase Ltd**  
Suite 14 Stanta Business Centre, 3 Soothouse Spring  
St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL3 6PF, England

**First edition: July 2021**  
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**ISBN: 978-1-914151-13-2**

## Reviews

This book is a poignant tribute to a past community by their successors; a vibrant testimony to the strength of both. Memorialisation has been important throughout history in the wake of significant events. This was pre-eminently so in the aftermath of the First World War as communities sought to perpetuate story and articulate the human cost of a devastating conflict. Something of this spirit was renewed at the centenary of these events. The King's Road project is one of several local expressions of this. Drawing, in particular, on earlier work by Ann Dean, Judy Sutton and Helen Little's meticulous research remembers fifteen lives tragically cut short as well as narrating a useful wider history of the street. The text is beautifully complemented with contemporary photographs and four moving poems by John Mole. It is especially good to see the inclusion of the three men whose names had already faded from local memory when the parish's Great War plaque and Memorial Hall were raised in the 1920s.

*Rev Kenneth Padley, Vicar of St Michael's Church, St Albans*

Historians talk airily about 'history from the street'. This is magnificent and poignant history from a very special street.

*Sandy Walkington, County Councillor for St Albans (South) and  
a former president of the SAHAAS*

I am delighted to see a memorial being installed on King's Road commemorating the brave service personnel who lost their lives during the Great War.

It's astonishing that this street in St Albans lost more men than many other streets in the city, yet there has been no record of their sacrifice. This memorial will be a lasting reminder of the human cost of war and of the fifteen men who tragically lost their lives.

I pay tribute to all King's Road residents who have done a fantastic job in finding an artist to design a memorial and in raising the funds to make it a reality.

This will be the first new street memorial in St Albans for some time and will ensure the lives of those who sacrificed so much will never be forgotten.

This book, too, will be a lasting record of the human cost of war and the fifteen men who tragically lost their lives.

*Daisy Cooper, Member of Parliament for St Albans*

This is a detailed, informative and impressively researched piece of local history. A moving tribute to the men who lost their lives in the Great War.

*Sue Dyson, a resident of King's Road, St Albans*

I was delighted when I read, in 'King's Road: for King and Country', the name of the house I had moved to in 2014. When my predecessor, John Edward Hunt and his parents, George and Jane, lived at No 3 it was known as Lily Cottage and I shall continue to call it that from now on.

I congratulate Judy and Helen on the immense amount of research they have done to bring this little road, tucked away in St Albans, back to life; to tell the 'backstory' of people who lived here over 100 years ago. It is a moving account, told with genuine pathos and heartfelt emotions, that makes today's residents proud to know what families went through during the Great War, in order to bring to those of us living now the freedoms we enjoy today.

When I moved to 3 King's Road it was the actual address that sparked my interest and made it one of the 'selling points' for me. I have often sung, at Christmastime, the carol, "We three kings", but never thought I would ever live in a house with that address. However, from now on, Number 3 will always be associated with Private John Edward Hunt, at one time of the Hertfordshire Regiment, one of the brave lads from King's Road, who died in the service of King and Country at the age 21 in 1918 and who, up until the time of his death, had lived at Lily Cottage.

*Guy Marshall, a King's Road, St Albans, resident and a committee member of the Society of St Michael's and Kingsbury*

## About the compilers: Judy Sutton & Helen Little

**Judy Sutton** moved to King's Road St Albans with her husband in 1986. It was there that they raised their family. She has a keen interest in local and social history and, over the years, has enjoyed learning more about her street and its residents.

In 2018, when the country honoured those who had sacrificed their lives in the Great War, her thoughts turned to King's Road and the part it had played in this conflict. Who were the men and what were their stories?

This publication is a tribute to them and a reminder of how these ordinary men made extraordinary sacrifices.

A native of St Albans and life-long resident in the city, **Helen Little** found that becoming involved in the King's Road project has indulged two of her great loves: St Albans and genealogical research. One of Helen's great-grandfathers had been killed on the Somme, not knowing that he'd left a daughter.

Consequently, Helen is keen that the men of King's Road who died in the Great War are not forgotten. She believes that their stories should be told so that their memories can live on in the lives of their sons, daughters, nephews, nieces and wider family, along with those who are now connected, by residence, with their home city and street.

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“From quiet homes and first beginning,  
out to the undiscovered ends...”

*Hilaire Belloc*



*Figure 1, St Michael's Church, St Albans c1910.  
Photograph courtesy of Andy Lawrence.*

King's Road: for King and Country



Figure 2, St Michael's Church Great War Memorial, made from oak, erected c1922. A small rectangular board was added to the memorial in 2018 to include the names of five other men of the parish who had died in the Great War.

## Introduction

Several years ago, I attended a display in St Michael's Church about their Great War memorial which had been organised by the local historian, Ann Dean. The names of those men from the parish who lost their lives in the Great War were listed and I was struck by the terrible loss of young life from our small street, King's Road. Fifteen lives were sacrificed from the 67 homes in our street. That may well be the largest loss of life – at least in percentage terms - from any street in St Albans. Of these 15 men, three were brothers. The youngest was 16 years old when he died and the oldest, 38.

These were ordinary men who did ordinary jobs. Their occupations included a gas worker, gamekeeper, cowman, boot factory worker, butcher's assistant, sawyer and postman. Many came from large extended families and were part of a close, mobile community. Parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts and cousins were frequently living nearby, either in King's Road or in the surrounding streets. Widowed grandparents, their children and grandchildren were often found together under one roof. It was not unusual to find eight people living together in one house. It was also not unusual to find that these families had lodgers. Houses were rented and families seemed to move frequently within a small radius.

It is clear that the war personally affected nearly every household since many men from King's Road served in the Great War and, remarkably, the majority survived. The Absent Voter list tells us that 58 servicemen from this street were away

at war in 1918 (see Appendix 1). A rough calculation shows that more than three quarters of these men returned home.

More than 100 years later it is difficult to speculate on the impact of the Great War on the residents of King's Road. It's tempting to say that, for four years, life was consumed by tragedy but, prior to 1916, only one of its sons, William Hart, was lost. He was reported 'missing presumed dead' on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1915, possibly following the Second Battle of Ypres. He is commemorated on the Menin Gate.

After 1916, deaths mounted. William's brother, Henry Hart, and neighbour, Arthur Peters, lost their lives on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1916 during the Battle of the Somme. This offensive claimed a total of one million men. Both Henry Hart and Arthur Peters have no known grave and are remembered on the Thiepval Memorial. Nineteen-year-old Fred Henry was wounded on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1916, quite possibly also at the Somme, and was taken to Boulogne military hospital where his parents were granted permission to visit him before he died. The fathers, Edward Atkins, Thomas Hunt and Alfred Foster, were killed in 1917, all leaving behind small sons. Edward Atkins and Thomas Hunt died in the summer of that year at Passchendaele, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres.

The remaining eight King's Road men died in the final year of the war. Many of them fell during the German Spring Offensive and the subsequent counter-attack. Particularly poignant are Charles Burridge who died on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1918 and his young nephew, John Hunt, who was lost less than three weeks later.

John has no known grave and is commemorated on the Soissons Memorial. Archie Faulder, who had served for more than three years, was killed in action 11 days before the war ended and is buried in a Commonwealth War Grave in a churchyard in Belgium. He had been home on leave earlier in the year. Sixteen-year-old Drummer boy, John Coleman, following in his two older soldier brothers' footsteps, had joined the Duke of Bedford's private band in Easter 1918. The influenza pandemic of 1918-19 claimed his life, along with that of 50 million people worldwide. John died on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1918 at Ampthill Red Cross hospital. He is buried in Soldier's Corner, Hatfield Road Cemetery, St Albans.

The Abbey parish of St Albans has ten street memorials dedicated to the memory of those who lost their lives in the Great War. These were erected in the first few years following the war. They are fashioned out of Portland stone and presented in a traditional tablet form. We believe that it is now time for King's Road, which is located in St Michael's parish, to have its own memorial using modern materials and a contemporary design. We chose to include on our memorial all those who died while serving their country in the Great War and whose family lived in King's Road during this time.

It is an idea that has certainly captured the imagination and support of many of our neighbours. Its ripples have spread further afield. We have been fortunate to have had offers of help and support from various groups and individuals including Jon Mein of the St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and

Archaeological Society (SAHAAS), County Councillor Sandy Walkington and Councillor Edgar Hill. Edgar has been instrumental in getting St Albans District Council to add our memorial to their existing street memorial portfolio.

We have also been extremely fortunate to have secured the help of artist Renato Niemis, who created the 'Counting the Cost' glass memorial at the Imperial War Museum at Duxford. He has designed a beautiful, subtle memorial made from Corten – a type of rusty metal – in the form of 'bricks' that represent the earth of the trenches and the ordinary nature of these men. It is also the same size as, and is symbolic of, the telegram these bereaved families would have received. At the time of writing our memorial has not yet been erected but our plans are moving forward.

We have been in touch with several of the relatives of these men and they have shared with us information they have including photos, letters and pictures of medals and graves. With the help of Gareth Hughes and Helen Little from the Herts at War group, along with Jon Mein of SAHAAS, we have now collated this information into booklet form.

During our research we came across a newspaper report in The Herts Advertiser of 6<sup>th</sup> April 1907, where we learn that the teenage condition is not such a recent phenomenon. These Edwardian lads also enjoyed hanging around in noisy, boisterous groups causing annoyance to the general public, just as some teenagers do today!

Under the headline 'The London Road Promenade' (see Appendix 2), it reports that William Hart (see page 30) and George Jeffs of King's Road as well as Arthur Peters of Blacksmiths Lane (see page 14), were part of a group of young men (The Herts Advertiser describes them as 'lads') who caused considerable public complaint by their anti-social behaviour, so much so that St Albans police felt compelled to act.

Head Constable Whitbread sent several police constables in plain clothes to patrol the Sunday promenade on London Road on 1<sup>st</sup> April, resulting in 11 cases being brought before the magistrates of either using bad language or obstructing the highway. Arthur Peters, of Blacksmiths Lane (later of King's Road) was fined six shillings for using bad language. William Hart and George Jeffs, both from King's Road were younger and received a caution. The report reads: 'The cases were brought as a warning to others in order to check this nuisance and render London Road a fair and proper place for people to walk up and down'.

Less than ten years later, both William Hart and Arthur Peters had lost their lives in the Great War.

The following pages tell the stories of these ordinary men and the part they played in the Great War. They are arranged according to their family house number.

*Judy Sutton*