

LOUIS SPARROW - MARKET GARDENER AND SOLDIER

Louis Henry Sparrow was born at Akch Leach on 7th

October 1883, the third son of Alfred and Lucy Sparrow

About 1886 the family moved to Badsey, where Alfred took up market gardening. At first they lived in a

cottage - long since demolished - which stood on part of what is now the north eastern portion of the

churchyard and there the family was completed with the birth of a daughter in 1889. Later they moved to

the newly built Summerfield Cottage (now no. 14) in

Badsey Fields Lane. Alfred Sparrow became closely

involved in church affairs at Badsey, serving four times

as churchwarden, so it is hardly surprising that

young Louis, aged only nine, joined the church choir, an activity which was to continue into adulthood.

After leaving school in 1897 Louis followed his father

and elder brothers into the market gardening industry.

The 1901 census describes him as 'worker', but later he became self employed as tenant of land at Long Furlong and Foxhill, part of the Byrd family's Badsey Fields estate. In 1910, by which time he had added bellringing to his duties as a choirman, he married his cousin Rosina Caroline Pittard at her home parish in London (1) and they made their home in Badsey at 1 South View Terrace (now 13 Brewers Lane). Their children Philip and Esme were born in 1911 and 1914 respectively. Following the outbreak of war on 4th August 1914 Louis soon volunteered for military service (conscription did not begin until early in 1916) and enlisted in the Worcestershire Regiment. Several months of training followed, including a period at the Cornish town of Looe, where he was able to undertake some spare-time bellringing. (2) In due course it was time for active service and Louis sailed for Gallipoli, almost

certainly with the 9th battalion Worcestershire Regiment, which left Avonmouth on 24th June 1915 and reached its destination on 13th July. The regiment's 4th battalion was already there, having landed on 24th April at Cape Helles, where they met very fierce opposition from the Turkish army. Within a week a third of the men were killed (35), wounded (209) or missing (74). Sadly the 9th battalion fared little better and just four weeks after arrival the original strength of 998 had been reduced to 360 men fit for service, in spite of receiving 100 reinforcements. Of the 28 officers, only five (including Lieutenant C. E. Sladden (3) of Badsey) remained on duty (4). But Louis Sparrow survived the early carnage and on 15th September his friend and fellow Badsey choriman John E. Knight, in a letter to Reverend W. C. Allsebrook, vicar of Badsey, wrote as follows: 'I thought you might like to know that both L. Sparrow and J. E. are in the best of

health and spirits so far'. (2) A month later Louis himself wrote in similar vein but sadly his good fortune did not last and before the end of the year he was badly wounded, thus ending his part in the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign. He was evacuated to hospital in Malta.

Writing to the vicar on 1st February 1916 he said he was feeling better and, with a market gardener's interest in the local crops, noted that pea picking would soon begin and the tomatoes had been planted out. (2) Later that year Louis left Malta and returned to England and a short spell at home. Then, although still not fully fit, he was sent to France, where he was posted to the Worcesters' 1st battalion. On 21st October the battalion was holding the front line near the village of Guendecourt, in spite of coming under heavy bombardment from the enemy's artillery, leading to 54 casualties on that day. To compound the misery the weather was bitterly cold and the

trenches were waterlogged. The next day 'passed without notable incident' (4); nevertheless it was on that day, Sunday 22nd October 1916, that Corporal L. H. Sparrow (no. 20750) was killed when a shell landed on his dugout. He was aged 33. As a mark of respect for him the Badsey church bells were rung, half muffled, on the afternoon of 14th November and later that day the church was packed for a memorial service. On 3rd December the bells were again rung in his honour when members of the Worcestershire and Districts Association of Change Ringers came to Badsey and rang a peal of 5040 changes of grandsire Triples. During the summer of 1918 Louis was again remembered when a brass memorial plate was fixed to the wall of the church chancel, near to the seat which he had occupied for many years. (2) The inscription includes the words 'for 24 years a member of the choir of this church and for 14 years one of the

'band of ringers'.

NOTES

1. Marriage details kindly supplied by Maureen Spinks.
2. Badsey (with Aldington) and Wickhamford Parochial Magazine.
3. Cyril Sladden remained with the 9th battalion until the end of the war, by which time he had reached the rank of major. He was awarded both the Military Cross and the Distinguished Service Order.
4. 'The Worcestershire Regiment in the Great War', by Captain H. F. Skarke MC.

T. C. SPARROW (Great Nephew of Louis Sparrow)
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