

From Chesterfield to Cairo – a journey into the unknown.

By Yvonne Mason

When I started researching my family tree, my uncle and my father both told me about my great uncle Douglas Hayward who served in the Great War until his death from the Spanish flu epidemic. My uncle Walter provided me with some pictures of Douglas and an obituary notice – as well as a goodwill message sent to my grandmother Evelyn Hayward (Born 29 December 1894).

Although my uncle and dad knew a bit about Douglas' war effort, neither knew his regiment, army number, date of birth or date of death. The obituary notice does not give these details and I was unsure which paper published the article, as this was not on the picture I was supplied with. As I was aware that the family came from Darnall, Sheffield, I had several papers to choose from, plus an uncertain date of death, I have been unable to this day to find out which paper was involved.

I tried researching Douglas Hayward on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website with no luck for many years (website www.cwgc.org), until dad gave me Douglas' war medal, which had the words D Hayward and his service number on it. With this information, I was able to re-search the CWGC site and I found he was only listed as D Hayward. I got a fellow researcher from the Sheffield and District family history group to research the war diaries and other documents in the National Archives.

Douglas Hayward is not mentioned in the "Soldiers who died in the Great War 1914-1918" book, as he died in March 1919 in Cairo, Egypt. He is, however, mentioned in the Royal Army Medical Corps war diary as having died of influenza and pneumonia. What is tragic about his death is that the unit he was with returned to England just two weeks later. He is buried in the Cairo War Memorial Cemetery, Al Qahirah, Cairo, Egypt and my dad and I visited the grave in February 2010.

Again he is only listed as Private D Hayward. There are only 6 further graves in the cemetery after his. I am now the owner of his grave on www.findagrave.com and I have added some more biographical details on this website.

Whilst visiting the grave, the cemetery custodian brought us two seats to sit on, a cup of tea each, and brought us some flowers to put on the grave. The memorial inscription (MI) only said D Hayward. He also brought me the War Graves Book and I was able to photograph the entry for D Hayward.

As the other entries had biographical data, I asked the custodian if he would like the information I had already collated (e.g. birth date, father's details including occupation, and details of who had visited the grave). This was entered in the back of the visitor's book.

I also updated the Find a Grave website with the photographs I had taken, on my return. I took a pendant with my grandmother's picture in it and this was mentioned on Find a Grave, so anyone searching would find biographical data and my contact details on it. I update the site with any other information as I find it. My grandmother Evelyn Hayward lived in Staveley all her married life but was born in Sheffield. My grandfather was born in Beighton, Derbyshire (Joseph William Mason born 3 July 1899) but was living at Old Whittington when they married in 1929.

Douglas and Evelyn's father Walter Hayward was born in Worcestershire and I traced them on the various census (1881 – familysearch.org, other census www.ancestry.co.uk

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www.findmypast.co.uk, www.1901censusonline.com, www.1911census.co.uk) but lost him (Walter) on the 1871 census. As he could have been in any county between here and Worcestershire I was unsure where to start looking, but a fellow researcher found the family at Old Whittington, with additional children Frederick and William Hayward. My family had always believed that there were only 3 boys (Walter, Arthur and Harry) who all attended the wedding of my grandparents.

In 1901, Walter Hayward and his wife Harriet (nee Bilson) were living in Attercliffe, Sheffield (www.1901censusonline.com) with 7 year old Douglas and sister Evelynne (sic) aged 6. Brother Sidney was not shown as he was born later on in 1901.

In 1911 Walter and his family were living at a different address in Attercliffe where Walter was listed as a heating engineer and Douglas aged 17 was a steel fitter (www.1911census.co.uk) I have, so far, been unable to find where either of them worked. Family lore states that Walter helped build the Methodist Church where I was christened, but I do not know how to verify this.

Neither of the addresses in the 1901 and 1911 census were where Douglas or Evelyn were born in 1893 and 1894 respectively. The family finally settled in 46 Station Road, Darnall (source – Walter Hayward's death certificate in 1932) and were still there when Harriet Hayward died in 1949 (source Harriet Hayward's death certificate in 1949).

Harriet and Walter Hayward were buried in Burngreave Cemetery, Sheffield in an unmarked grave (although Harriet died in 12 Molineux Avenue, Staveley – my grandparent's address). Information regarding Walter Haywood (sic) and Harriet Hayward's burial was provided by Burngreave Cemetery archivist Christine Steers (email – chris.burngreave@blueyonder.co.uk) This gave information about a third occupant of the grave – a Jim Brant. I have no idea if he has any connection with the Bilson or Hayward families. He was buried there in August 1952.

Going back to Private Douglas Hayward's war efforts, I and another researcher have been unable to obtain his personnel record, which I can only assume means it was destroyed in the Second World War 1944-1945 London Blitz.

I can tell he enlisted relatively early as he was first in service in July 1915 in the Balkans (an area of Turkey). This information was on his war medal record card (www.findmypast.co.uk) He was entitled to three medals. We only have one of these – the British War medal. My dad is unsure why we do not have the others but he remembers seeing them.

We also do not know why Douglas joined the Royal Army Medical Corps, but it has been suggested that he was previously involved in either St John Ambulance or Red Cross organisations as part of his work as a steel worker. Again I do not know how to check this information.

In addition the family was sent a Dead Man's Penny and Scroll. These are also missing – my dad reckons he left the penny in the glove compartment in an old van he sold!

Visiting the grave in Cairo was very moving for me and my dad, but it was worth the effort we made. Knowing some of the story behind his death in Cairo made our Egyptian holiday more memorable, I think.