

# **The Whitakers – A Family at War**

## **Introduction**

The Farnhill WW1 Volunteers project restricted itself to those men – service men and volunteers – who were named on the list compiled for Farnhill Parish Council early in 1916.

It was always likely that we would find that some names had been missed off this list and the project had not been going long before people started to mention the name Thomas Fielding Whitaker.

Now that the project has completed the bulk of its work, it has been possible to research TF Whitaker and, in doing so, we have found that there were three men from the family, all of whom were involved in the war, one way or another.

We present this information here not because we believe the Whitaker family were exceptional; rather the contrary – they may have been typical of many of the families in the village whose lives were impacted, in different and unpredictable ways, by the war.

## **William Whitaker, the older brother – a “guest” of the German Navy**

William Whitaker was the oldest child of Jonas and Ann Whitaker (nee Fielding). He was born in Glusburn, in 1886.

Towards the end of 1909, he married Elsie Lavinia Jennings, the daughter of a greengrocer from Middlesbrough. The 1911 census shows the couple living in Colne but sometime between then and the start of the war they must have moved to Farnhill – to 11 The Arbour.

Although William started his working life in a worsted mill, it was not long before he joined his father working for the Midland Railway Company. In 1911 he was working as a plate-layer and it seems likely that he rose rapidly, so that by 1915 he was sufficiently experienced to be employed in the building of a railway in Nigeria.

That was when the war intervened, in the form of the German Navy – an event reported in both the Craven Herald and the Keighley News.

## A FARNHILL MAN'S ADVENTURES ON THE APPAM.

In an interview shortly after his return home Mr. W. Whitaker, of Farnhill, gave his experiences whilst on board the Appam, the Elder Dempster Liner which was captured by the German Auxiliary Cruiser Moeve, in the region taken to Newport News in America. Mr. Whitaker had been working on the Government Railway in Nigeria and was coming home for a holiday. He left Bonny in the Appam on December 24th. Calling at various places en route they finally left Dakar on January 11th.

At 3-30 in the afternoon of January 15th, whilst about 70 miles out from Dakar, they fell in with the Moeve. There were about six persons on deck at the time watching the stranger ship, amongst them being a Lieut. Lambert who was coming home for promotion. Lieut. Lambert, who was using glasses, suddenly threw them down, and cried out "don't shoot, it's a German cruiser," and ran aft to stop the gun crew, who were in charge of the three pounder which was on deck, from firing. The Moeve, which had the appearance of a tramp steamer, then fired across the bows of the Appam, as a signal for the ship to stop; they again fired, and it seemed to those on deck as if they were trying to cut away the wireless apparatus. No more shots were fired, and the Moeve sent across boats and boarded the ship. The boats brought across mines which they deposited in various parts of the holds of the ship, and connected them all with wires to a switch on the bridge.

All were then informed that they had to deliver all revolvers, guns, cartridges, cameras, knives, etc., and after a search anyone who had failed to do so would be taken on deck and shot.

There were on board the Appam, 9 German prisoners from the Cameroons, and about 6 men who had been traders on the West coast of Africa; these were released and their guards were themselves made prisoners.

They also transferred to the Appam the crews of six ships which they had captured, five of which they had sunk, being the Farringford January 11th, the Diamond, Author and Trader, January 13th, and the Ariadne on the 15th. The sixth ship, the Corbridge, which they caught on January 11th, they did not sink as it was loaded with coal which they wanted for their own engines.

There were at first on the Appam about 250 persons with provisions for 17 days, which was the time it would take them to reach the United States, so that when the crews of these six ships, along with that of the Clan McTavish were added, making a total of about 480, there was a shortage of food, and for 14 days they had to live on rice, three meals a day.

The Appam after being captured cruised about with the Moeve until the following day when they fell in with the Clan McTavish. Two shots were fired as in the case of the Appam, but the Clan McTavish showed fight, and a battle ensued for the space of about 20 minutes, with the result that three Germans on the Moeve were killed and 11 coolies on the Clan McTavish. The crew of the Clan McTavish were brought on board the Appam, where a coolie who had been wounded died the following day.

been wounded and the following day. Asked about the armament of the Moewe, Mr. Whitaker said that it was well armed, there being four large guns which looked to him as if he could creep down the barrels of them. He said she had also a number of torpedo tubes. All the ships which she had sunk had not been sunk by direct fire from the Moewe, but had been blown up by mines placed in the holds.

After the Clan McTavish had been sunk the two ships parted, the Appam going to America. They were very well treated whilst on board, and they had no cause for complaint except with regard to the food. They were allowed on deck anytime, and the only time they were ordered below was when they arrived at Norfolk Roads.

An instance of how they were treated was shown in the case of a Sunderland man who had been taken off one of the cargo boats sunk. This man had had the misfortune to break his leg in being transferred to the Moewe. In being transferred to the Appam he was placed in a bunk, and when he heard the firing with the Clan McTavish he thought it was a British Cruiser and jumped out of bed, making the simple fracture of his leg into a compound fracture. He was exceptionally well treated, two German ladies who were on board going to see him every day, taking for him fruit, wines, etc., and doing all they possibly could to relieve his suffering.

These ladies also got up concerts every night for the benefit of the men, one of them singing almost every night. The men were very happy, singing "Tipperary," "Are we downhearted," and "Rule Britannia." They had also Divine services on the Sundays, which were attended by the German ladies who stayed until at the end. When the Britishers sang "God save the King" they left.

They had been asked in New York why a company of about 500 persons had allowed 22 persons to carry them for 17 days without making an attempt to overpower their guards. Mr. Whitaker said it would have been useless, even silliness, to make the attempt as they knew if there was any trouble of any kind the ship could have been blown up by the officer on the bridge simply pressing a button.

They arrived at Newport News on the 1st February, whence they travelled by the S.S. Jefferson to New York, where they arrived on the 5th. They were excellently accommodated in the best hotels in New York, and left there on the 7th, per the Holland American Liner S.S. Noordam and arrived at Falmouth on the 16th.

## A FARNHILL MAN ON THE "APPAM."

### EXCITING EXPERIENCES.

There arrived at the home of his parents in Farnhill on Thursday week Mr. William Whitaker, who is employed by the Government in Nigeria, and who was a passenger on board the Appam at the time of its capture by the Germans. Mr. Whitaker left Honny in Nigeria on December 24, and the ship was captured on January 15 by the Moewe. The night before the capture, Mr. Whitaker says, they saw a boat which they thought in distress, and next day they saw the boat flying the Union Jack and showing signals of distress. The Appam went towards this ship, and when it got broadside on the Moewe signalled them to stop, and as soon as the Appam stopped the Moewe fired two shots across her bows and hoisted the German ensign. It was thought one of these shots had struck the Appam, and lifeboats were hurriedly given out, but fortunately, both the shots missed. Boats were lowered from the cruiser, and they came to the Appam with mines and infernal machines. They fixed these machines under the engine room, and connected them with the bridge, and the Germans declared that if there was any mutiny on board the ship would be blown up. The passengers and crew on the Appam were also told to give up all weapons and cameras, after which their boxes would be searched, and if any weapons were found there the owner would be shot instantly. The Germans also told them that if a British cruiser was met they would be given time to get into the ship's boats, and then the Appam would be blown up. The Appam cruised about with the Moewe until the following day, when the Clan McTavish was sighted. The Moewe fired two shots at the Clan McTavish, which retaliated, and there was a battle royal for over twenty minutes, which was witnessed by those on board the Appam. At the time she captured the Appam the Moewe had on board the crews and passengers of five boats she had previously sunk, and the crew of a coaling boat (the Corbridge), which was manned by Germans after its capture, and is still with the Moewe, and all these, numbering about 230, were transferred to the Appam. Mr. Whitaker said they were fourteen days off home, and the food which would have been sufficient for

Whitaker said they were fourteen days off home, and the food which would have been sufficient for their own boat for fourteen days had to suffice for seventeen days with double the number to feed. They ran out of coffee, tea, and meat, and there was a scarcity of water, and for every meal for six days they had rice. The provisions and coal just lasted until they reached Newport. After the capture of the Appam they had perfect freedom on deck, except that the night they entered Norfolk Roads they were kept below.

### PASSENGERS WELL TREATED.

Mr. Whitaker said they were treated very well. There was a man on board the Appam from Sunderland, and one of his legs was smashed when he was being transferred from a captured boat to the Moewe. The man was below at the time of the fight with the Clan McTavish, and when he first heard the firing between the Moewe and the Clan McTavish he thought a British cruiser had come, and he jumped out of bed, with the result that he made his leg considerably worse. During the seventeen days this man was in the ship's hospital only two English women visited him out of all on board, but two German women went to see the man every day and took him such dainties as wines and cigarettes, and bestowed every attention on him—in fact behaved like "perfect ladies" to him. On the two Sundays after they were captured they had divine service on board, and the same two German women attended these services and stopped until the close, but when the congregation began to sing "God Save the King" they took their departure. Captain Harrison, of the Appam, was awfully cut up at losing his ship. Asked as to the armament of the Moewe, Mr. Whitaker said that when they got alongside he saw four big guns which looked as though he could have crept down them. When they reached Newport on February 1 they had no difficulty in securing their release, and the passengers and crew from the Appam went to New York on the Jefferson, arriving there on February 5. At New York they were accommodated at one of the finest hotels in the city, and were exceptionally well treated. Whilst they were being conveyed on the Appam across the Atlantic they had concerts every day, organised by a German lady, and they sang "Are we downhearted," "Tipperary," and "Rule, Britannia." The Germans never interfered with them. There was nothing whatever to grumble about on the Appam except the food. On February 7 Mr. Whitaker left New York for home on the s.s. Noordam, a Dutch vessel, which landed at Falmouth after an uneventful voyage. He had been asked why about 500 allowed twenty-two Germans to take them across the Atlantic, but he said, if they had rebelled, the Germans would instantly have blown the ship to atoms by simply pressing a button.

## Thomas Fielding Whitaker – the missing volunteer

Thomas Fielding Whitaker was the second child of Jonas and Ann Whitaker (nee Fielding). He was born in Cononley in 1887, just a year after his elder brother William.

The 1901 census records the family living at 58 Club Row, Cononley.



**Aire View, Cononley – an early 20<sup>th</sup> century photograph**

Officially Aire View, Club Row was so-called because the residents formed a club to pay for a gas supply to be laid to their houses. It's also known as "Frying Pan Row", because of a local tale that the whole street only possessed one frying pan, which was passed up and down the street as needed.

By 1911 the family had moved to 7 Kirkgate, Farnhill.



**Kirkgate (bottom right), viewed from the tower of St. Andrew's Church**

Early in 1913 Tom married Laura Jennings, the sister of Elsie Lavinia, his sister-in-law. (Just to be clear, two Fielding brothers married two Jennings sisters.)

## Tom Fielding Whitaker in WW1

Tom Fielding Whitaker's WW1 army service records have not survived. Over 70% of all such records were destroyed during WW2 when a bomb hit the office in which they were stored – TF Whitaker's appear to have among those that were lost.

However a partial description of his WW1 activities can be put together from the remaining medal cards and rolls, a newspaper article, and family photographs.

Tom Fielding Whitaker volunteered for WW1 service on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1915, perhaps in response to General Kitchener's famous call for men to come forward.

He joined the Army Ordnance Corps (AOC), the body charged with supplying weapons, ammunition and equipment to the army. On the Western Front the AOC created an extensive logistic infrastructure, largely rail based, to get material to the front line.

After training, Tom was sent to France, arriving on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1915. The photograph below is likely to have been taken immediately prior to his departure.



**TF Whitaker with wife Laura and their son, William Jennings Whitaker (b. Q1-1914)**



Tom is wearing a uniform with the AOC cap badge from the early part of the war.

When the AOC became the Royal AOC in 1918, the design of badge was changed.

### Early WW1 AOC cap badge

Based on the design of the cap badge, the following photograph may have been taken at about the same time.

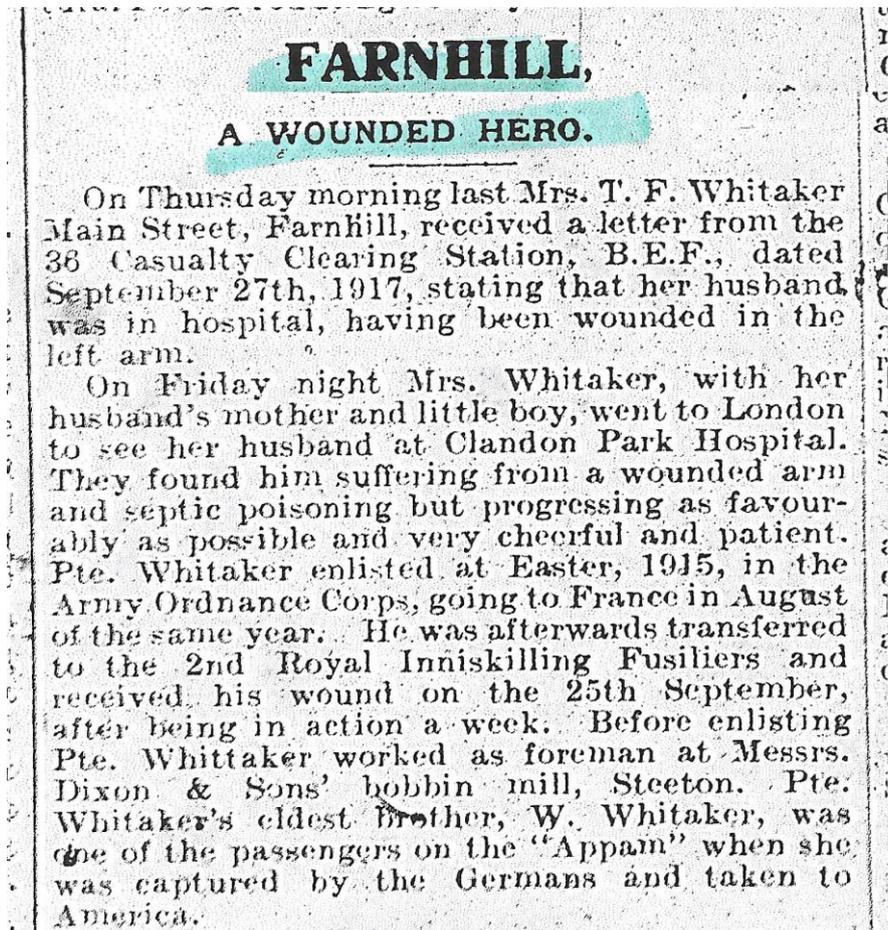


**Tom (front row, 3<sup>rd</sup> from right) with members of the AOC**

At some point during his army career, before the end September 1917, Tom was transferred to 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

The transfer of a man from one unit to another was not unusual in WW1 as the army's needs changed.

It was while serving with the Inniskillings that Tom was wounded, on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1917. This was reported in the local newspaper.



Article from the Craven Herald , October 19<sup>th</sup> 1917

At this time, 36 Casualty Clearing Station was based at Zuydcoote, on the coast of northern France. It is likely that Tom was wounded close-by.

When Laura Fielding visited him, Tom was already back in the UK and being treated at Clandon Park Hospital, in Surrey.



**Clandon Park – WW1**

<https://www.surreyinthegreatwar.org.uk/story/clandon-park-war-hospital/>

It is likely that that is where this photograph was taken.



**Tom (in the middle behind the nurses ?) with hospital staff and other patients**

Tom's arm was repaired, but he was discharged from the army on account of his wounds on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1918.

The medals and awards granted to Tom for his war service were recorded on his Medal Card.

*See Whitaker Hos,*  
 Campaign:— **1914-15.**

(A) Where decoration was earned.  
 (B) Present situation.

Name	Corps	Rank	Reg. No.	Roll on which included (if any)
(A) <b>WHITAKER</b>	<b>A O C</b>	<b>Pte</b>	<b>06770</b>	<b>MEDAL VICTORY</b>
(B) <b>T.F.</b>	<b>R Inniskilling Fus</b>	<b>Pte</b>	<b>42277</b>	<b>BRITISH 15STAR 10/10 102</b>

Action taken **Discharged**

*SWB list B/916.*

**THEATRE OF WAR.** *(1) France.*

**QUALIFYING DATE.** *17-9-15*

(6 34 46) W234—HP5590 500,000 4/19 HWV(P240) K608 [OVER.]

This shows:

- Tom was involved in the campaigns of 1914 and 1915, beginning his service in France on 17/9/1915. As such, he was eligible for a 1915-Star.
- He would also automatically have been awarded an Allied Victory Medal and a British War Medal.
- He served with both the AOC, as Private no. 06770; and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, as Private no. 42277. (Unlike today, during WW1 it was quite usual for a man to have multiple service numbers, particularly if they served with more than one unit.)
- He was discharged and his name included on the list of men eligible to receive a Silver War Badge (SWB).

## Post-war life

After the war, Tom returned to Farnhill, where the family lived at 8 Main Street (Ivy Cottages) for most of the 1920s before moving to Grange Road. He was employed as a postman, in Keighley.



**Ivy Cottages, Farnhill (right). The cottages were demolished in the 1960s.**

In 1937, the family left the village and moved to Crosshills.

Tom Fielding Whitaker died in December 1975, and Laura a few years later. They are commemorated in the Memorial Garden at St. Andrew's Church, Kildwick.



**Memorial markers for Tom F. and Laura Whitaker in Kildwick St. Andrew's graveyard.**

## Arthur Thomas Whitaker, cousin – Killed in Action

Arthur Thomas Whitaker was the paternal cousin of William and Tom Whitaker. (Jonas and William Whitaker, Arthur's father, were brothers.)

Arthur was born in September 1896, the eldest child of William Whitaker of Eastburn and Edith Alice (nee Newton), originally from Darlington. His parents lived on Grange Road, Farnhill, and his father was a gardener – most probably employed at Kildwick Hall.



**Edith Alice Newton (public domain photograph from Ancestry UK)**

His mother died in 1910, aged 39, and his father married for a second time early in 1914.

## Arthur Thomas Whitaker in WW1

Like his cousin, Arthur Whitaker's WW1 army service records have not survived. However a partial description of his WW1 activities can be put together from the remaining medal cards and rolls, newspaper articles, and information from the website [Craven's Part in the Great War](#).



**Arthur Thomas Whitaker, in uniform – from Craven's Part in the Great War**

Name.		Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
WHITAKER Arthur. T.		N. Staffs. R	PRG.	32274
		North Derby R		71551
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.	
VICTORY	F.103 <sup>B</sup> 16	3089		
BRITISH	<del>do</del>	<del>do</del>		
STAR				
Theatre of War first served in				
Date of entry therein				

K. 1380

#### Arthur Thomas Whitaker's WW1 medal card

Arthur Whitaker began his service as a Private with the North Staffordshire Regiment (service number 32274) but was later transferred to the 16<sup>th</sup> battalion of the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment, the Sherwood Foresters (service number 71551). The 16<sup>th</sup> battalion was reduced in size on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1918 and Arthur was transferred to the 15<sup>th</sup> (Nottingham) battalion.

**Note:** The medal card (above) shows Arthur Whitaker's service with both regiments. His transfer from the 16<sup>th</sup> battalion to the 15<sup>th</sup> battalion Sherwood Foresters comes from his entry on the WW1 medal roll (not shown).

The 15<sup>th</sup> battalion formed part of the 35<sup>th</sup> Division of the British Army which, during the 100 Day Offensive that led to the collapse of the German Army on the Western Front, was active in Belgium and Northern France – in particular during the Battle of Courtaai and the subsequent advance through Flanders.

On 20<sup>th</sup> October 1918, Private Arthur Thomas Whitaker was killed in action.

Official notification of Arthur's death to his family was something of a fiasco. They were first told on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1918 – just two days before the Armistice:

*News was received from the authorities on Saturday by the parents of Private Arthur Whitaker that their son had been killed in action on the western front. Private Whitaker was the eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. William Whitaker, Grange Road, Kildwick, and was in the Sherwood Foresters. He had been in France for a considerable time.*

**From the Keighley News 16/11/1918**

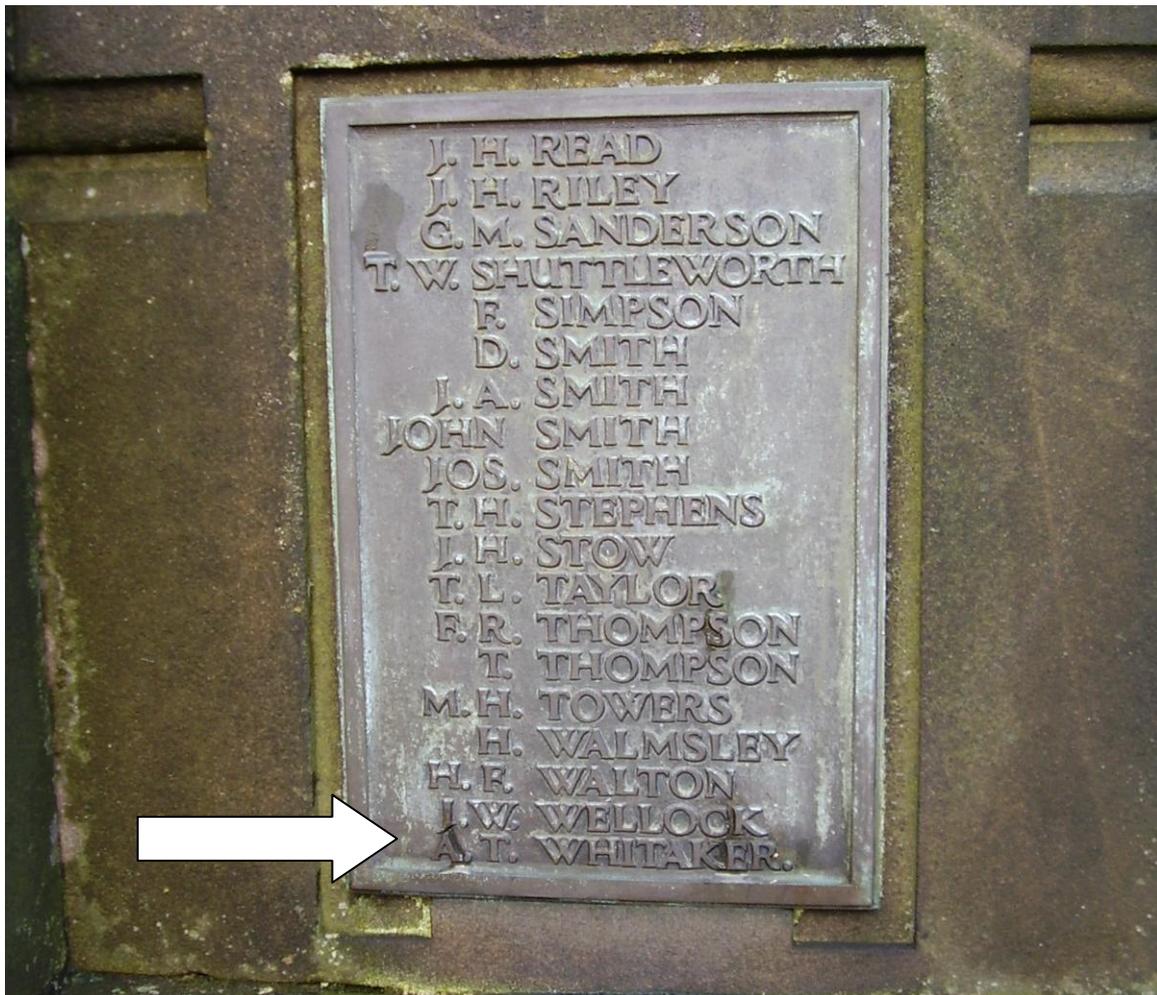
However, by Christmas the news appeared to be much better:

*Mr. and Mrs. William Whitaker, Grange Road, Kildwick have this week received an official intimation that their son, Private Arthur Whitaker, is a prisoner of war – location unknown. Private Whitaker was officially notified as killed in November last. He is in the Sherwood Foresters.*

**From the Keighley News 28/12/1918**

Sadly this second report, which must have made one of the best Christmas presents ever, turned out to be false.

Arthur Whittaker had indeed been killed in action in October 1918.



**Kildwick War Memorial**

## A final resting place

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1920, two years after the confusion over Arthur Whitaker's death in service, the following announcement appeared in the Craven Herald:

*Reburial of a Farnhill Hero – Mr. W. Whitaker, of Grange Road, Farnhill, has been informed by the Infantry Record Office, Lichfield, that the body of his son, Private A. Whitaker, Notts and Derby Regt., has been exhumed and re-interred at Harlebeck New British Cemetery, three miles north-east of Courtrai.*

**From the Craven Herald 31/12/1920**



**Harlebeck New British Cemetery**

Photo from [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)

