

WICKHAMFORD ROLL OF HONOUR FOR WORLD WAR II

The names of four soldiers who died in World War II are recorded on the War Memorials in Wickhamford Church and the Village Hall. The military records of these men are not freely available apart from the information given by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The following details concern their locations when they died and some historical context to events leading up to their deaths. An outline of their family background is also given.



Tablet in Wickhamford Church to the soldiers who died in World War II

1. Pte Eric George Camden, joined the 1st Battalion Worcestershire Regt (No 5250673). He died at Tobruk, aged 20, on 23rd February 1942, as his unit was defending the Southern part of the front by the town, and he is buried in the War Cemetery there in grave no. F. 28.

Family Background: Eric Camden the son of George William Camden and Nellie, nee Gannaway, who had married in the Pershore area in 1920. George had been a gardener's labourer in Wyre Piddle at the time of the 1911 census. The couple had four children – Eric (b. 1921), Joan (b. 1923), Audrey (b. 1930) and Brian (b. 1934). Nellie died in 1967, aged 76, and George in 1981, aged 86 and they are buried in Wickhamford Cemetery.

Historical context: The battles between the Eight Army and the Axis forces ebbed and flowed along the Libyan and Egyptian coast plain during 1940-42. Tobruk was cut off and besieged by the Axis from late April 1941 until the Eight Army relieved it in early December 1941. Another Axis campaign in 1942 led to the fall of Tobruk in June 1942.



Eric George Camden



Eric Camden in desert uniform



Tobruk military cemetery in 1942, before the fall of the town to Axis forces



Eric Camden's grave in Tobruk War Cemetery

2. Gunner John Stephen Styles, 76th Anti-Tank Regt, Royal Artillery (No 1609111) was the husband of Illot Betty, *nee* Wasley, whom he had married in 1940. John Styles' military record states that his wife lived in Aldington at the time of his death. He died, aged 32, on 28th October 1942, and he is buried at the El Alamein War Cemetery in grave no. III.H.12.

Family background: John Styles was the son of Stephen Styles and Anne, *nee* Lardner. At the 1911 census, Stephen and Anne and 6-month-old John lived in Manor Road, Wickhamford, with Stephen working in market gardening. Stephen died in the influenza epidemic in 1918 but Annie lived until 1963. They had one other child, Frank, who was born in 1912 (his mother's maiden name was recorded as 'Larner' on the birth registration index).

Historical context: With the Second Battle of El Alamein, Gen Montgomery started the last and decisive British campaign against Axis forces in Egypt. On the night of the 23rd October a massive bombardment preceded the advance of first infantry and then armour through the German and Italian lines in the centre. Progress was at first slow and the battle became a straight slogging match. By the 4th November, the Second Battle of El Alamein had been won by Eighth Army. Rommel's losses in men and material were so great he withdrew, first to Fuka and then Mersa Matruh.



John Stephen Styles





Stephen Styles' grave in El Alamein War Cemetery

3. Pte Henry Morton Taylor, 1st Battalion Worcestershire Regt (No 5254532) is commemorated on the Alamein Memorial, Column 62, as his body was never recovered for burial. He was a Prisoner of War aboard the Italian transport ship SS Scillin (along with 19 others of his unit), amongst around 815 Commonwealth prisoners and about 200 Italian soldiers, when it was torpedoed *en route* from Tripoli to Sicily on 14th November 1942. He was aged 23.

Family background: Henry Morton Taylor was the son of Thomas Morton Taylor and Catherine Mary, nee Freeman, who married in Wickhamford in 1913. At the time of the 1911 census, Pte Thomas Taylor, aged 24 and born in Evesham, was serving with the 4th Battalion, Worcestershire Regt at Bareilly, United Provinces, India. Originally a bricklayer, he had enlisted in 1905 and was in India from 1908-1912 and also served in Malta, 1905-06, and in France, 1914-1916. The couple had five children – Charles Thomas (b. in Montreal, Canada in 1914), Catherine (b. 1916), Henry (b. 1919), Eileen (b. 1926) and Frederick John (b. 1929). Thomas returned from Canada to re-enlist for active service in September 1914. Catherine died in the Evesham area in 1955 and Thomas in the same year in Birmingham.

Historical context: Italian cargo/passenger ship SS Scillin was en route from Tripoli to Sicily with about 815 Commonwealth prisoners-of-war on board, was torpedoed by the British submarine HMS Sahib (Lt. John Bromage) 10 miles north of Cape Milazzo in the Tyrrhenian Sea. The Sahib rescued 27 POW's from the water (26 British and one South African) plus the Scillin's captain and 45 Italian crew members. Only then, when the commander heard the survivors speaking English, did he realize that he had sunk a ship carrying British prisoners-of-war and some Italian soldiers and had drowned 783 men. At a subsequent inquiry into this 'friendly fire' tragedy, Lt. Bromage was cleared of any wrongdoing as the ship was unmarked and at the time he firmly believed that the ship was carrying Italian troops. The Ministry of Defence kept this incident a closely guarded secret for fifty-four years, misleading relatives by, maintaining that they had died while prisoners-of-war in Italian camps or simply 'lost at sea'. It was not until 1996, after repeated requests for information from the families of the drowned men that the truth came out. The Sahib was attacked by bombs from escort German Ju-88s and depth charges from the Italian corvette Gabbiano in the counter attack immediately after the sinking. Badly damaged, the Sahib was later abandoned and scuttled.

	
<p><i>Henry Morton Taylor</i></p>	<p><i>The Alamein Memorial where Henry Taylor's name is recorded on Column 62</i></p>

4. Pte Stanley Robert Winfield joined the 7th Battalion Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (No 5381127). His family origins may account for his choice of Regiment. He died on 8th September 1944, aged 31, and he is buried in the Coriano Ridge War Cemetery, Italy in grave no. IV.D.12.

Family background: Stanley R. K. Winfield was born in late 1913 in North Bierley, Bradford, West Yorkshire, the son of Sylvanus Walter Winfield and Matilda Elizabeth, nee Kyte. His father had been born in Witney, Oxfordshire in 1871 and a 'Mr Winfield' was aboard the SS Mexican when she sailed from Southampton for East London, Cape Colony in April 1892. Using 'Walter' as his preferred name he married Matilda in the Albany district of South Africa in 1894 where he was a policeman in Graham's Town; she was born in S. Africa in 1876. The family moved to England around 1898-1903 and at the 1911 census Matilda and four children – Rosa Susannah, 15, and Ethel Winifred, 13, both born in South Africa, and Edith Maud, 8, and Richard George Sylvanus, 3, born in Southam, Warks. and Coventry respectively - were all living in Coventry. However, Walter was in Halifax with relatives working as a stone quarryman. Sylvanus W. Winfield, as he appears in the registers, died in Liverpool in 1951, but Matilda had died earlier, in 1941, in the Evesham area.

Historical context: Following the fall of Rome to the Allies in June 1944, the German retreat became ordered and successive stands were made on a series of defensive lines. In the northern Apennine mountains the last of these, the Gothic Line, was breached by the Allies during the Autumn campaign and the front inched forward as far as Ravenna in the Adriatic sector, but with divisions transferred to support the

new offensive in France, and the Germans dug in to a number of key defensive positions, the advance stalled as winter set in. Coriano Ridge was the last important ridge in the way of the Allied advance in the Adriatic sector in the autumn of 1944. Its capture was the key to Rimini and eventually to the River Po. German parachute and panzer troops, aided by bad weather, resisted all attacks on their positions between 4 and 12 September 1944. On the night of 12 September the Eighth Army reopened its attack on the Ridge, with the 1st British and 5th Canadian Armoured Divisions. This attack was successful in taking the Ridge, but marked the beginning of a week of the heaviest fighting experienced since Monte Cassino in May, with daily losses for the Eighth Army of some 150 killed.



Stanley Winfield's grave in Coriano Ridge War Cemetery, Italy



Section of War Memorial plaque in Wickhamford Village Hall

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Tom Locke and Val Harman – Revised 23 February 2012

