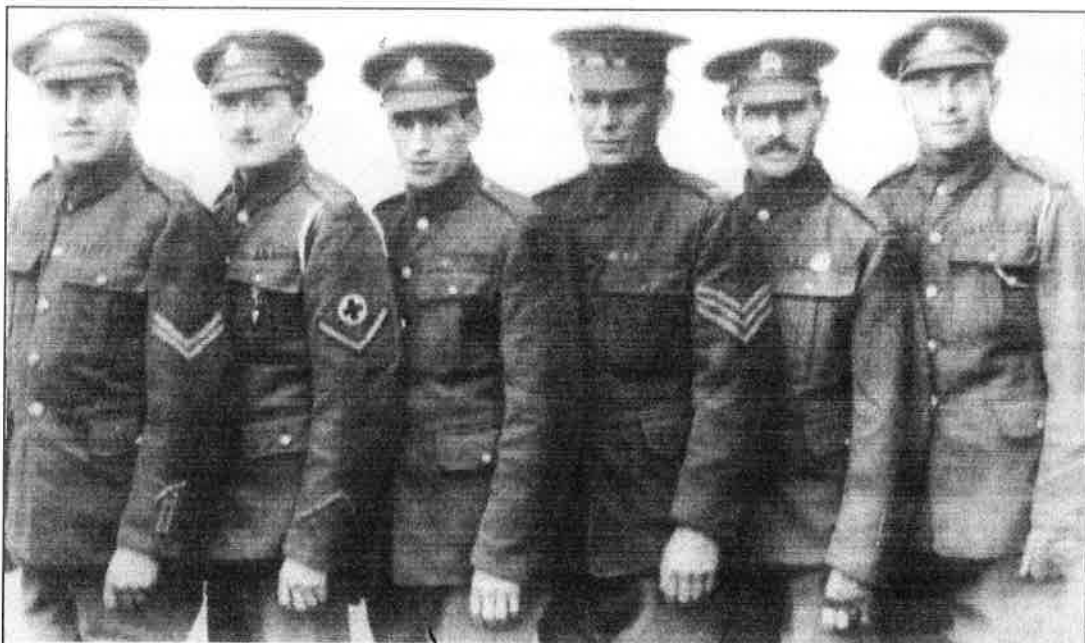


## SIX WHO CAME HOME – THE GRIFFITHS FAMILY

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In October last year the Society's website received an email from Mrs. Lorraine Turner in Hathersage, Derbyshire. She is related to the Griffiths family, who for many years lived in Charlton Kings. She attached a photograph of her grandmother's six brothers, which she thought might be of interest to the Society's World War I commemorations, which they are.

The Griffiths family originated in Leckhampton, where great grandfather William and his wife Mary Ann lived in the Gothic Cottages. By 1881 the family had moved to 2, Lyefield Cottages, Mill Lane, Charlton Kings, with two sons, Francis and Benjamin James. Benjamin married Leah Elizabeth in 1882 and in 1891 the family was living at 1, Coltham Cottages. Benjamin was working as a plasterer and they had four children, James, Mary Ann, Leah Elizabeth and Francis William. By 1901 the family had expanded to eight children and was living at 6, Coltham Fields; James aged 17 was working as a paperhanger and his sister Ann was a daily domestic. By 1911 they were living at 5, Haywards Terrace, Haywards Road, a house which later became 66, Haywards Road, right on the junction with Rosehill Street. The family was now ten strong, with Ernest Edward, Horace, Elsie May and Dorothy Grace added. Benjamin, now 51, was still a plasterer: Mary Ann was in the boot trade, Francis a painter, Frederick a saddler and Ernest a confectioner. It was a tight fit at No. 5, which had six rooms, including a kitchen but excluding a bathroom, and James and Leah Elizabeth went to live with their grandparents in Leckhampton. And then in 1914 came the War, and as soon as they became of age, all six brothers enlisted and went off to war.

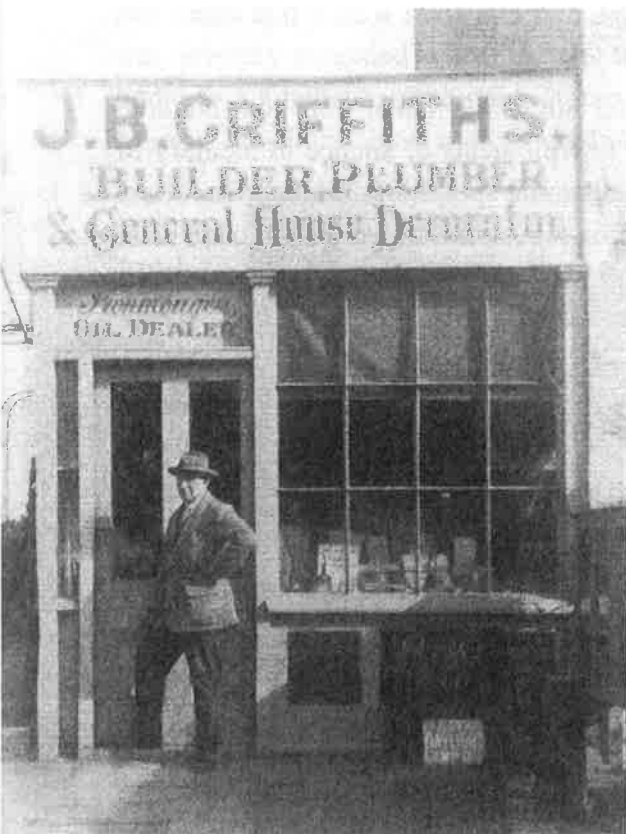
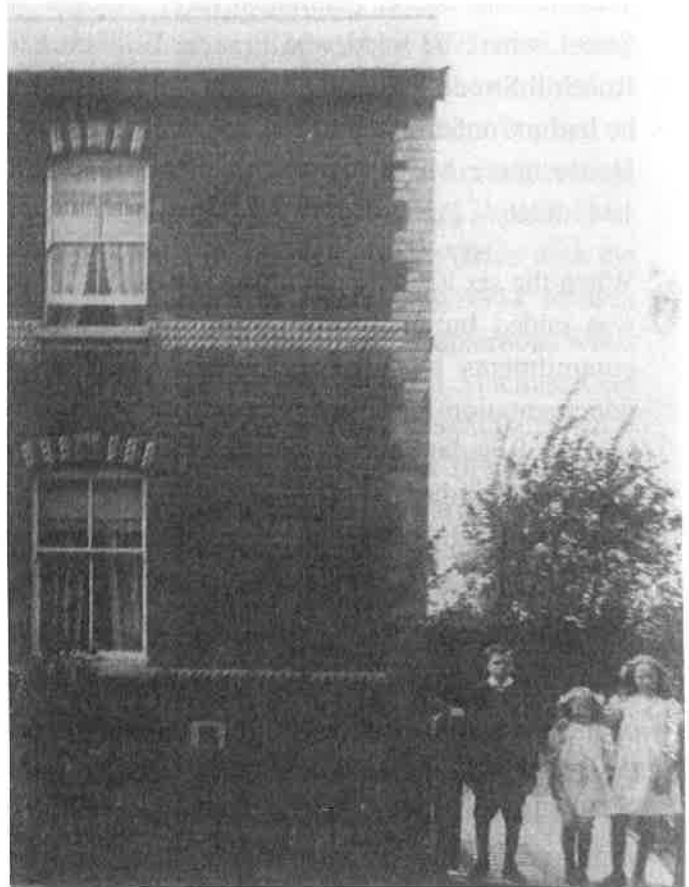


Horace Ernest Frederick Thomas Francis James



Benjamin Griffiths with the chain of office of the Royal and Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, c1910. The father of the six soldier boys was a plasterer by trade.

Horace, Dorothy Grace and Elsie May stand smartly beside their home at 5, Haywards Terrace, (66, Haywards Road). In 1911 they would have been 14, 6 and 9 respectively.



James (Jim) Benjamin Griffiths, the eldest son, poses outside his business premises at 52, Winchcombe Street. It is said that he kept canaries in the back of the shop.

Despite the all too frequent odds against it happening, all six returned home safely. The photo appears to have been taken after the war had ended, as some at least have received their medal ribbons. It shows them arrayed from left to right in order of age, Horace being the youngest, and then aged about 20. Next come Ernest Edward (23), Frederick Birt [Fred] (26), Thomas [Tom] (29), Francis William [Frank] (30) and James Benjamin [Jim] (31). It has not been possible to determine all their regimental affiliations, though Horace appears to be in the Gloucesters, and Ernest was in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Tom, looking very much the sergeant, served in the King's Royal Rifle Corps.

After the war the six returnees returned to Charlton Kings and to earning a living. Kelly's Directory of 1945 shows that James had a Builder's and Plumber's Business at 52, Winchcombe Street (estimates free), Horace also had a Builder's Business at 35, Rosehill Street, where he lived, and Francis William had a Painter's and Decorator's Business at 94, Rosehill Street. Frederick lived at 1, Oakfield Street and Ernest had moved to Hereford where he had a Confectioner's Business. Mrs. Turner believes that Thomas owned an Ale and Porter House: there was a Black Horse Inn in Rosehill Street but he is not shown as owner in the 1945 Kelly's Directory.

When the six actually got home is not clear. Everyone wanted to go home as soon as the war was ended but that was simply not possible. Not only did the British Army still have commitments to fulfil in Germany, Russia and all around the British Empire but the documentation for so many took time. Demobilisation of a soldier depended on his terms of service. Regular soldiers remained in the Army until the terms of their contract expired. Men with scarce industrial skills such as miners were released early and those who had volunteered early were rightly given priority, leaving the conscripts, particularly the 18 year-olds called up in 1918, until last. However, the majority of the war servicemen were back in civilian life by the end of 1919.

Charlton Kings entertained their returned soldiers on 30 July 1919. There were four hundred of them assembled in large decorated tent and after a few moments of silence in memory of the 116 who had not returned, they were treated to a welcoming speech of gratitude from Rev. R.H.M Bouth, who concluded by saying, "We in Charlton Kings most deeply appreciate what you have done for us abroad. We hope you here tonight will look upon this, at any rate, as a sign that we do recognise the great services you have rendered to our country". There followed a cold supper of the choicest quality and an ample supply of drinks and tobacco, which gave added pleasure to the evening's enjoyment. A capital musical programme included humorous songs and monologues, tambourine solos, banjo selections, hand-bell selections, songs by Mr. Spragg and Mr. Rayner and a step-dance by Mr. Hughes. A happy evening closed with the National Anthem. The boys were home.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Cheltenham Chronicle* 2 August 1919.