

## A Tribute by Wendy Cowan to Kenneth Reginald Flint Kemp

Thank you for allowing me to say a few words about Ken Kemp, and thank you for arranging this commemoration service for him. And for all the other men (and one woman!) from Dawlish who lost their lives. It's a truly inspiring and generous thing to have done for them all and my family are extremely grateful to you.

My own connection with Ken is as a distant, rather than as a blood, relative. Ken's mother Bertha was my paternal grandmother's aunt - I understand from my father that Granny was Bertha's favourite niece! This probably explains why Granny had a painting of Ken's hanging in the spare bedroom of her house...which brings me to the reason for my own quest into Ken's background.

When my grandmother died in 1974 I was allowed to choose three items from her house. The first thing I chose was a watercolour painting of a sleeping girl which I had always loved. It was only then that my father told me that the artist was in fact a relation of ours, who had sadly died during the First World War. The painting was signed "Ken Kemp" and dated May 1918. On the back, in manuscript, was his studio address of 26 Flanders Road (quite poignant!), Bedford Park, Chiswick, with the price tag of £15, 5 shillings. The painting was called "Simplicity".

My father told me that Ken was the only child of his Great Aunt Bertha and her husband Reginald, and he produced a small, framed photo of Ken in Army uniform with the caption "Lt Ken Kemp, RBA, Croix de Guerre, 1895-1918". This, sadly, was all my father knew about him.

It was only much later in around 2006, thanks to Ian Hislop's series on Channel 4 called "Not Forgotten", where he traced the background of some of the soldiers on various war memorials around the country, that I realised I could do the same for Ken.

I soon discovered from the Commonwealth War Graves website that he was buried in Dawlish and that he had a memorial plaque in a church in Chiswick. But this was a puzzle. If he'd been killed in battle why had he not been buried in France or Belgium, and why was he buried in Dawlish when he and his family lived in Chiswick?

The second puzzle was what "RBA" stood for. Was it some kind of military medal?

And the third was, how did he win his Croix de Guerre?

I eventually discovered that "RBA" stands for The Royal Society of British Artists, which is an offshoot of the Royal Academy. Its old records are locked away in the vaults of the Victoria and Albert Museum and only its Chairman holds the key. I haven't progressed this aspect yet, but it at least shows that even at such a young age Ken had a bright future as an artist.

The Commonwealth War Graves certificate for Ken describes his parents as living in Chiswick - so that explained the church plaque. But it didn't explain his burial in Dawlish...

So, one day in May 2006 my husband Ian and I came to Dawlish for a few days, hoping to find the answer. We first came here to the cemetery, looking for the unmistakable Commonwealth War Graves headstones which always stand out. We found several but they weren't of our man. Just as we were beginning to think we were out of luck, Ian gave me a wave and there Ken was...buried along with his parents, at the top of the hill, under a grey stone plinth and a very distinctive cross - which was still upright. It was a special moment.

There's a long and moving inscription on the headstone for Ken, set within an artist's palette, and includes the words "By his wish he sleeps amongst the hills and valleys he so loved".

The inscriptions on the base plinths for his parents both gave some intriguing information which

soon set us off on the path to the Museum to try and discover more! The one for his father Reginald told us that he had been a JP and Coroner for West Middlesex for 42 years. The one for his mother Bertha gave her address as “Up-Along, Dawlish”. So of course we had to try and find it!

At the Museum we got talking to Tricia Whiteaway in the ticket office, who happened to be standing in for someone who had a hospital appointment. Tricia also just happened to be the author of a booklet listing all the house names and the streets they were in, as at 1937. Sure enough, “Up-Along” was listed as being in The Drive – which from the map turned out to be on the same level as, and just a few houses along from, our B&B in Priory Road. What an amazing coincidence! So, armed with this information, we walked up to The Drive that afternoon but could find no house named “Up-Along”, so we could only conclude that whichever house it was had had a name change.

The following morning, just before we left, I decided to nip up to The Drive again, this time with my camera, and take a photo of each house just in case my father recognised any of them. Fortunately, Mr Williams at Bay Tree House just happened to be looking out of his window at that moment and quite understandably came out to see what on earth I was up to! And that's how I discovered that Bay Tree House used to be called Up-Along! Since then Ray and Beverley have kindly showed me around their house and I can quite see how the Kemps chose that spot to build their home.

My father remembered happy summer holidays at Up-Along during the 1920s/early '30s with his Uncle Rex and Aunt Mimsie, which is what my father said they were usually known as. He particularly remembered days out in a charabanc – which I think is an open-top bus – into the hills for strawberries and cream teas.....and then bringing it all up on the way home!!! He remembered his Aunt Mimsie as being a very jolly and slightly eccentric lady who liked to play tennis in her bare feet. According to Reginald's obituary in The Dawlish Gazette in March 1943, he and Bertha had retired to Dawlish in 1941. They had a great love for Dawlish and had for many years spent their vacations in the town. Bertha had been very musical and regularly took part in amateur dramatics and Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

Bob has discovered that Reginald used to visit his great uncle, Charles Wade, who lived at 11 Westcliff in Dawlish, which may have been why he chose to build his holiday and retirement home here.

Some of the names mentioned as being at Reginald's funeral are Mr and Mrs Jolley and Mr and Mrs Pugh (I think Mr Pugh may have been the gardener and Mrs Jolley the housekeeper) and Mr and Mrs Gordon Shapter, who I think may have owned a garage in the town? Also mentioned are Mr and Mrs Coats, who would probably have been Tommy and Dimps Coats of 'Wayfield', Dawlish. The Rev. J K Maurice officiated.

Unfortunately, this is all the information I have about the Kemps and their lives in Dawlish. If only I'd asked more questions when my father was alive! But the great thing is that my research on Ken has meant that Ian and I have now discovered Dawlish for ourselves and we really enjoy, and feel comfortable, coming here. Last time we stayed here we went into an art exhibition being held in the Theatre and I came out with a lovely seascape of Dawlish Warren by local artist Ann Lunn. As Cousin Ken was apparently more renowned for seascapes than portraits I felt I just had to have it! Serendipity again!

Going back to Ken's painting of his sleeping girl, it's dated May 1918, just five months before he died, and I can only think he must have found the gentleness and peace of his subject a balm to his terrifying memories and experiences of the battlefields of Belgium. My aunt told me that she had had no idea that Ken had painted a portrait; she only remembered his land and seascapes. So perhaps his future was turning in a different direction? Sadly, we shall never know. But Ken's sleeping girl will remain in the family, and he will always be remembered.

I feel very honoured and grateful to have been able to say a few words about Ken and his parents today and I feel sure that wherever they are they would feel the same. So thank you again. May they forever rest in peace in this tranquil cemetery.  
Wendy Cowan

#### A Tribute by Tom Elliott of Dawlish WW1 Project

Kenneth Reginald Flint Kemp was born in Chiswick, London on 17 April 1895 and was the only child of Thomas Reginald and Bertha Kemp (nee Flint). He was baptised at St Michael And All Angels Church in Chiswick (already mentioned – come back to that later).

Kenneth was born into a family with legal skills. His father was the son of a barrister who had attended Westminster School and subsequently qualified in law, also worked as a JP and Coroner.

*In 1891 Thomas Kemp was staying at 11 Westcliff, Dawlish with his great uncle, Charles Wade, also a barrister at law. This may have been one of a number of visits to Dawlish which led to his eventual choice at retirement.*

Kenneth's mother, Bertha Flint, was the daughter of Abraham Augustus Flint who was a solicitor and a Coroner for Staffordshire.

Kenneth was also sent to Westminster School and was 15 at the time of the 1911 census when the family lived at 16 Woodstock Road, Chiswick. He was probably leaving school as the threat of war was building, and he became a painter and one example of his work is shown here/project web site. He was a member of the Royal Society of British Artists (RBA).

Kenneth Kemp enlisted on 2 March 1916 but was not called up for service until 4 June 1917.

However, on 4th October 1916 he went to work in Flanders with Dr Munro's Field Ambulance Corps. Dr Hector Munro set up a 'Flying Ambulance Corps' to help the Belgians who had been caught badly unawares by the German attack of August 1914.

Dr. Munro advertised for "adventurous young women to equip an ambulance unit for service in Belgium," and of the 200 applications he received, he accepted four: Lady Dorothe Feilding, Mairi Chisholm, Mrs. Elsie Knocker, and Helen Gleason. All these women became well known, even famous in their own right, but the most outstanding was Lady Dorothe Feilding who had shunned her aristocratic background to become a highly decorated volunteer nurse and ambulance driver on the Western Front. She was also a prolific communicator who wrote many letters, diaries and notes during her time in service. The Munro field ambulance was provided in the absence of other services between February 1915 and March 1916, when a naval surgeon was appointed and clearly more ambulances were provided in that area. These units were based at Furnes (Veurne) and ranged between Dixmude and Nieupoort on the coast. They were frequently out at night collecting wounded

men to bring back to field hospitals, or to transport to general hospitals behind the lines for treatment. In one letter Lady Dorothea describes having “taken between 45 and 50 men in the Fiat-myself only” and in another letter “last month our six cars took 334 people... and in the last 8 months the total is 1,547 cases.”

On 12th November 1916 she wrote, “A new man arrived for us yesterday, one Kemp, to replace Newall who had to return. He seems nice, but we are sorry to lose Newall who was a very dependable chap and a hard worker.”

Only 9 days later she wrote to her father “I have just received a most compromising wire, which will show the sort of reputation I now have. ‘Lady D F etc – Beseech you return my son immediately – Kemp.’ “I think it is quite priceless and so does everyone else & I am being called a babysnatcher!!...The reason of it all is a youth called Kemp who came to replace Newall & is somewhat a rabbit. He came in for a good few obus (shells) at once and Dr Jellett took him up to Nieuport to teach him how to reverse a car under heavy fire, as he explained ‘just to give the lad confidence’. This put the lid on it and the lad wrote home to Papa; his nerves & health wouldn’t stand it hence frenzied wires from his parent birds – about 3 a day! We explained he was under a military contract for 6 months & must stick it. He is already improved & I think a little hard work & being shot at as often as possible will soon buck him up.”

On 15th January 1917 Lady Dorothea wrote to her mother, “Do you remember our last new member, one Kemp of ‘Beseech you return my son’ fame? He & Gurney were in one of the cars yesterday & an 11 inch obus (shell) neatly removed all trace of what a second before was a more or less complete house. As it took place alongside their car, it ought to teach him to be neurasthenic. He’s getting on quite well tho’, except he still drives abominably.”

The winter of 1916/17 was severe with extremely low temperatures and much as the troops suffered in exposed trenches, the ambulance crews had to deal with frozen roads and shell holes that were treacherous to negotiate in the dark. Casualties had to be carried some distance to the ambulances which were often shelled when in range of enemy guns. Vehicles had to be drained down to avoid burst radiators and the build-up of mud had to be scraped from under the body and wings to keep them mobile.

Although Kenneth Kemp enlisted on 2 March 1916 he was not called up for service until 4 June 1917, and during this interval that he was in Flanders he was awarded the Croix de Guerre, possibly by the Belgians but more likely by the French whose naval brigade of Marins were supported by the ambulances based at Furne. (CdG explain).

*The Croix de Guerre may either be awarded as an individual or unit award to those soldiers who distinguish themselves by acts of heroism involving combat with the enemy. The medal is awarded to those who have been "[mentioned in dispatches](#)", meaning a heroic deed or deeds were performed meriting a citation from an individual's headquarters unit.*

Following a medical examination on 20th March 1917, he was marked down as “fit for transport but not for infantry”. He was initially made a Private in the Army Service Corps (M.T.); The ASC, later the Royal ASC, were the unsung heroes of the British army in the Great War – nicknamed Ally Sloper's Cavalry, after a newspaper cartoon character at the time. Soldiers cannot fight without food, equipment and ammunition, and in the Great War, the vast majority of this tonnage, supplying

a vast army on many fronts, was supplied from Britain. Using horsed and motor vehicles, railways and waterways, the ASC performed prodigious feats of logistics and were one of the great strengths of organisation by which the war was won.

His own declaration on April 2nd 1917 Kenneth stated that he was “unable to march long distances and carry heavy weights” and that he had a “weak back”. The medical diagnosis was of scoliosis, an abnormal twisting and curvature of the spine, and he put his ill health down to strains involved in driving ambulances and carrying the wounded on stretchers.

Following another Medical Board on 15th April 1917 he was found “Unfit permanently for General Service” but fit for Light Duty at Home.

He then applied for a Commission which he was entitled to do as he had been a member of the Westminster School Officer Training Corps. He was discharged as a Private on 12th August 1917 and appointed 2nd Lieutenant on the following day.

After a further Medical Board on 12th January 1918, he was then reviewed by a Medical Board Report on a Disabled Officer. His disability was put down to 10 months as a field ambulance driver. During this more recent period he had been attached to the Home Mechanical Transport Depot at Holborn.

He was taken sick and placed on the Sick List on 7th October 1918 and died from double pneumonia on 18th October. By the time of his death his parents had a retirement home in Dawlish (Wendy) called ‘Up-Along’ in The Drive. They arranged for his burial in Dawlish Cemetery.

The Dawlish Gazette of the 26<sup>th</sup> October reported “We announce the death in this issue of Second Lieut Ken Kemp (Croix de Guerre), a capable officer and talented young gentleman, who died in the service of his country. The family formerly resided in Dawlish, and the funeral took place here last Wednesday, the interment being at the cemetery.

Kenneth’s grave here in the cemetery carries the inscription:

*In proud and tenderest memory of Kenneth Kemp, RBA, Croix de Guerre, 2nd Lt, RASC MT, the beloved only child of Reginald and Bertha Kemp of Bedford Park, London. Died on active service October 18th 1918. By his wish he sleeps among the hills and valleys he so loved. Aged 23.  
“At the setting of the sun and in the morning We will remember them.”*

Kenneth Kemp also appears on the Devon Roll of Honour.

Dawlish War memorial inscription shows: KEMP K. 2ND LIEUT. (C. De G.) R.A.S.C.

The Imperial War Museum also records the presence of the Memorial tablet on the South Wall Of South Aisle Of St Michael And All Angels Church in Chiswick, where he had been baptised.