

Francis Alexander Stanbury – The Oldest Benson Man to Serve?

Frank Stanbury seems to be the oldest Benson man to have served in WW1, having been born in 1868 in St Helier, Jersey, being one of 11 children born to Thomas & Ann Stanbury.

Frank briefly served as a steward (357810) on HMS Hermes between Oct 1899 and Dec 1900, and his naval record says he was dark haired with blue eyes and just under 6ft tall – very tall for those days. It seems he probably learned his trade in the navy, since he spent the rest of his working life in that capacity.

In 1901 he was working in a hotel in Manchester, but married Emma Collins in Exeter in 1903. Their first daughter Florence was born there in 1905, but by 1911 the family had moved to Berrick Salome where the second daughter – Muriel – was born in 1911.

His army records show there then appeared to be a spell working as a Club Steward at a country club in Connecticut, USA, but by 1914 the family were living in Ivy Villa, Benson when Frank joined up again.

Initially Frank served as a Pte (187) in the ASC, going to France with the BEF in a mobile canteen. However he was discharged from this unit in April 1915, and joined the RAVC as Pte (14194) again working in a canteen. Later, he was with the Labour Corps (Pte 205894) in 188 Labour Coy, until his medical discharge in March 1919 with chronic rheumatism.

In 1918 & 1919 the family still lived in Littleworth, Benson, but they later moved to the Old Mill, Chalgrove where Frank was a butler.

Sadly Frank died in June 1928, and didn't live to see his daughters marry in 1934 and 1939 in Chalgrove

Frank Stanbury probably did not have the most spectacular war service, but he did serve in four different branches of the services, and at 46 was the oldest Benson man to serve. Interestingly, he gave a false birth date on enlisting, since a 46 year old would probably not have been accepted.