ERNEST COPHAM, Private 25517 1st Somerset Light Infantry

Trying to disentangle fact from fiction about the Copham family has proved tricky. Ernest's parents emerge as presiding over a deeply dysfunctional and troubled family. Ernest, christened Frederick Ernest at Holy Trinity, Taunton on November 14 1891, was the son of Kate Florence Lowton, a machinist. In August 1892 Kate married Theophilus Copham at the same church. Was Ernest his son? We can't know, but his name changes from Lowton to Copham.



In 1888 Kate had had a son Frederick William Charles (yes, another Frederick, a name he seems to have stuck with); in 1891 she was living with him and 'John Lowton', a tailor, in Bridgwater; John can't be traced; Kate's maiden name we know was Lowton. On April 15 1893, Charles, son of Kate and Theophilus, was christened at Holy Trinity, but died later that year. In December 1894 another son, Edward John, was born to them. The family were living at 3 Court, King Street in Taunton – not a good location.

Theophilus was in and out of gaol for petty crimes; in *The Courier* of December 1899 he's sent to gaol for 2 months for desertion – 'his wife and children had been chargeable to the Taunton Union during the past three and a half years'. After this he, Kate and Edward vanish completely – we cannot trace them. The Police Superintendent dealing with the desertion case commented that the police 'had done their best to serve the warrant on the prisoner ever since it was issued, but he was an adept at hiding'. Kate and the three children (Frederick, Ernest and Edward) had been admitted to Taunton Workhouse on May 8 1896.

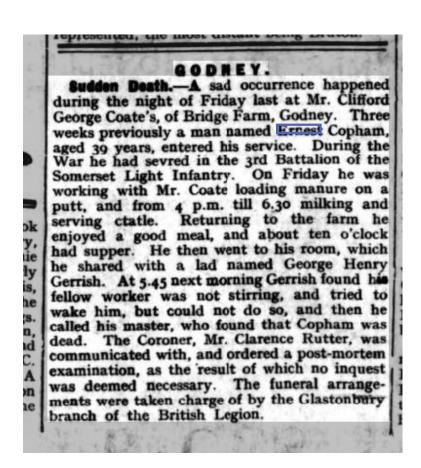
At the 1901 Census Frederick aged 13 and Ernest aged 10 are on their own in Taunton Workhouse; most of their fellow inmates are elderly. It seems a harsh fate.

By 1911 it begins to seem that they are perhaps more resilient – or more honest – than their parents. Frederick, now 22, is living in Cheddon Fitzpaine, the head of his household, with two lodgers. Ernest, now 19 (their ages are a bit elastic) is boarding with a family in St Andrews Road in Taunton and helps 'in Poultry & Fruit Farm'. For 'Place of Birth' he 'says he does not know the place of Birth but it was in Somerset'. Mr Phillips, the Head of the Household is 'a Traveller for Brick & Tile & Coal & Manure & Cake Merchants'. This fact, and the job Ernest was doing must be the link with Buckland St Mary – we can find no other. One can imagine that Mr Phillips may have helped him find another job further up the hill.

Ernest is not on the Absent Voters Register for Buckland St Mary after the War, nor at Buckland St Mary School nor on their School Roll of Honour.

Come the War, Ernest was called up to the 1st Battalion of the SLI. Their Muster Roll and Casualty list for WWI survives, and we learn that he embarked for France on September 9 1916, joining the Battalion on the 23rd. He was admitted to No12 Field Ambulance with diarrhoea on January 1 1917, and admitted to the General Hospital on the 11th as NYD 'Not Yet Diagnosed', and sent back to England on the 18th. What happened then is not clear, but on the list of those entitled to the Victory Medal it's noted that he was discharged to the Z Reserve on 4.10.19 when he was an Acting Lance Corporal. His brother Frederick is listed next to him on the same roll.

We have no knowledge of what happened to Ernest when he left the forces. The final chapter is found in two news reports of 1930. They cover the same story, but *The Wells Gazette* adds that Ernest had been working for 'Mr R. Bruford of Nerrols, Taunton, former MP for the Wells Division. He served in the war in the Somerset L.I. and was badly gassed.'



Central Somerset Gazette

His brother Frederick lived to be 82, dying in Taunton in 1971. In 1939 he was working as a gardener, living in Galmington Road with his wife Alice.

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No. of Schodule	RÓAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	In- habit- ed	Unin- abited U.), or building	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON- DITION	100	GE of Females	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHE	RE BORN	Nacher 1. Deaf-and-Dumb 2. Blind 3. Imbecile or Idiot 4. Lunatio	
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				Porgina Do	Deur		tor .	11		200	200		100
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140	7 Belmand Villa	-		Adolarde & Do	Wife	mar	20	25	Lawyers Managing Clesk	170	Halcombe		
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			16	1.11 B 90	Dour		1	1		90	20		
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	Ovil Parish Mary May dake (Within)	ol_	unicipe Lac	Bor	ton a East	Ward U	entioned I than Santtar	y Dist	riot	situate within the Boundaries of the Town or Village or Hamist Rural Section of ot				of Tournton of	Page 9 desination Purish or District Holy Truncty
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	100	_	-		Harriet a So.	Wife	111	_	A			_		Devon; Bidefad	-
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_					ann A. 7. Muney	aunt-	Wid.	-	00	Howochesper Som		_		1 8 abbotobury	
					Frederick Corke	Lodger	S	16		Shirt Collar Menufacturer	1			Smeret; Wrington	
57	1. Viney Street	1		-	John Cosham	Head	21.	64		Fishing Mod Maker			X	Do. Faunton	
1	1				Emily M. Do.	Wife	m.	_	84			•		Ø0. 80	
					Lilly &.	Dawr.	S.		34	Machinist (Collar)		X		So. So.	
					William Do.	Sm	5.	26		Masmi Labourer		X		Fo. Do.	
h					Theophila Do	34	S.	24	_	e,		X		9, 8,	
					Walter Do.	2.	S.	2/2	1	Collar Cutter		×		80. So.	
1					annie 20.	· Quir.	S.		1/2	Collar Machinet		X		Dr. 50.	
					Frederick Batala	- Meshen	5.	15		Erround Boy But		×		Do. Do.	
					ann Modle	Lodger	S.		67	flore Maker		X	1	So. 90.	
58	2. 80.	1		-	Elizabeth Bully	Wife	m.	-	12	Laundress		'X		Do So.	
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If 1) Deaf-and-Dumb 2) Blind 5) Lunatic, Imbecile or Idiot	E BORN	WHERE	A Land of the land			PROPESSION OF OCCUPATION	O 10 AGE last Birthday of Nales Popules	CON- DITION as to Marriage	RELATION to Head of Family	ME and Surname of each Person	Number of source	HOUSES In- habit- (U.)		No. of
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Thattre of War first served in	THE REAL PROPERTY.			

Page 2 BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of Sacreton Saint James in the Country of merset Quality, Trade, By whom the or Ceremony Profession. was performed. Steery, Southeoth W. T. Reaford local Orchard Septem Thophila John Cophan Nigh Theek Smary Grangofton Fishing W. T. Redford Elizabeth Stephen W. F. Redfern aun Nonor epkube Thee ! No. 11. Le ptanber Sarah Loan and and 1860 No.12 Mandell & illia Farthing High Short Postman Magdalaw Coamson Harnet & plense. + July 18 41 No. 13. Mandell Kate Hyle Street Je Mary Magdalen Farthing Harriet Comson alex Millian 814 hoadell High She Facthing Postman Wanton September 18 auf 1847. No. 14. I Mary mogdales Harrist Joseph Mary 82 Wardell Somouch Wace Labourer Rockett. apanson John John Joney Wardell. 22 mm hack Sheek I mary magnetises apanton

When Baptised.	Child's Christian Names	Pare Christian,	nts Name. Surname.	Abodo.	Quality, Trade, or Profession,	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
1867. 292 & tember No. 17.	Grederick James	Joseph (mary ansi	Radwidze	horth Noww	Beicklage	. W. T. Reafer
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6" Perser No. 19.	alie	John Colizabet	Chidguy	Aug. Shut	Labourer	Mardell Aconson
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5 4x. No. 23.	Olefreds	James Austis	Spiller	Rowbart	Gardene	Mandell Goanson
	James	John	P. of	Coal, Orchance	Stone	W. F. Redf

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Page 3

	BAPT in t	ISMS sole	mnized in	the Parish o		nty Tair	etor I
	When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Pare Christian.	ent's Name.	Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
lwco.	No. 129	Henry Josiah Joster	Richard Harriet Larinia	Marsh	Nº4 . Ct: E. Reach	Hawker	Res. P.S.C. Nash (Curati).
X.4.2.	1891 Nov. /3 No. 130	Frederic Ernest	Katz Florence	Lowton	92 E. Rrach	machinist	Edward of Sugar
Priddle Pardelle Vorier	Nov: 15 No. 131	Percy Horace	John Mary Anna	Priddle	147 East Reach	Labourer	Vicar.
higher N. W.	1891 Nov: /6: No. 132	Elizabeth	Charles Sarah Louise	Worlley	No: 14 Oti East Read	Labourer "	Yicar.
Burt	1°91 Dec 3 No. 133	Violet Gertrude Emily	Frederick Manley Harriet	Westcott	4 Cottage Row Holway Land	alic Constitution	Edward A. Back Vicar
	18 91 See No. 134	Hilda Mabel Gladys	Herry Charles Amore Jame	NAME OF THE PARTY	3 Trenety Street	Brinter Compositi	Ru. 2.1.C. Nasl Curats
John Place	1891 Deci 13 No.135	Watter	Charles Cecilia mary	Thorpan	1 Trinity TES:	Barrack Gregnant	Vicas
rah	1891 Esc. 20 No.136	Waltu	Fird.	Pomeroy	12 Ct. E. Reach	Labourer	Rs. A.C.C. Nash Curats

-	V 100 00 00 000	Solemnized at Holy Jr.						
	at. 28	Theophilus Copham	25	Bochelm	Labourer	92 East Reach	John lopham	Fishing Tackle
103	1892	Theophilus Copham Hate Florence Souton	25	Spinster	Machinist	92 East Preach	Charles Sourton Secessed	Impruface

the evidence of I.C. Dattium, suc costs, in default 14 days. A WIFE DESERTER SENT TO GAOL .- Z Copham, labourer, late of Taunton, was charged with deserting his wife and three children .- Mr. W. F. B. Dawe, clerk to the Taunton Guardians, who prosecuted, said a warrant for the prisoner's arrest was issued as long ago as May, 1895, but the police were not able to find him till last Saturday, when he was dis-charged from Shepton Mallet Gaol, where he had undergone sentence for another offence. Immediately on his release prisoner was re-arrested on the present charge.-Mr. Dawe asked the Bench to deal severely with the prisoner as his wife and children had been chargeable to the Taunton Union during the past three and a half years .- Superintendent Durham said the police had done their best to serve the warrant on the prisoner ever since it was issued, but he was an adept at hiding .- Prisoner was sent to gaol for two months. Henry Samuel Cottoell numb

by the jury.

BRIDGWATER.

At the borough police court on Monday, Theophilus Copham, labourer, of Taunton, was brought up in custody, charged with stealing a watch and chain, value £1 10s, the property of Henry Nelson Hawkins, labourer, of Weston-super-Mare. Prisoner pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 21 days' hard labour.

CHEDDAR.

On Sunday special collections were taken at the

QUARRELSOME ON LICENSED PREMISES.

Theophilus Copham was summoned for having on the 1st July been quarrelsome on the licensed premises of Isaac Billett, and refusing to quit the same premises when requested by the landlord. Defendant was further charged with having, at the same time and place, done damage to a pane of glass and a door, to the extent of 1s 3d.—Defendant pleaded guilty to each charge.—Isaac Billett, landlord of the Telegraph Inn, Bridge-street, said on the evening in question defendant came to his premises and sat down in a chair without calling for anything. He was not drunk. Two other men were there joking. Defendant took off his coat to fight them. Witness told him he could not allow fighting, and requested him to clear out. Upon defendant refusing to go, witness put him outside the front door. Defendant turned round and struck at him. Witness was standing sideways, and the defendant's fist passed by him and smashed a pane of glass in the door. If he had not been standing sideways the blow would have struck him, -A fine of 6s 3d including costs was inflicted. was allowed in which to pay the money.

		ROLL OF INDIVI	SOMERSET DUALS entitled to the V					War :	Medal ;	granted				V		s. 301.		of 1919.	490(6).
On 11/11/18 or non-el		NAME	Unit previously served with trept, No. and Rank in same			Theat	ces of war	ii: which	serred			Olum		d (to be left		Henred	of dispusal of corations		
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21676	Pte /	CCPE Stanley Victor	Pte 21676.	1(a).	Sel	F			10	FIOCI	10			THE				To Z Reserv	30.9.19.
15774	Pte /	CCPELAND John		1(a).	×	/						++	-					Assumed Dead	25.9.15
55121	Pte W	COPESTICK Joseph.	lat Gr: Bn; Northa: Pte 21/58. 2/4 Dorset B	ts 2(p) 🗡													To Z Reserve	30,4.19
25517.	Ptc //	COPHAM Ernest	1/5 Som:L.I.	4(b)	6n													To Z Reserve	4.10.19
		COPHAM Frederick	7th Som:L.I. W.Som:Yeo:	1(a). 4(b)	- Ovr	9 4												Disembodied	12.2.19
15068	Pte	COPP Ernest	Pte 1711. 12th Som:L.I. 8th Som:L.I.	4(b)8		. 0)											Iran from LC/101	184 folio 8709
28013	Pte /	Copp William.	Pte 15068. Sth Dewom.R. Pte (L/Cp1) 11531.	1(a)														To Z Reserve	8,3,19
				h(a). l(a).															

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d C. GODNEY.

Sudden Death.—A sad occurrence happened during the night of Friday last at Mr. Clifford George Coate's, of Bridge Farm, Godney. Three weeks previously a man named Ernest Copham, aged 39 years, entered his service. During the War he had sevred in the 3rd Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. On Friday he was working with Mr. Coate loading manure on a putt, and from 4 p.m. till 6.30 milking and serving ctatle. Returning to the farm he enjoyed a good meal, and about ten o'clock had supper. He then went to his room, which he shared with a lad named George Henry Gerrish. At 5.45 next morning Gerrish found has fellow worker was not stirring, and tried to wake him, but could not do so, and then he called his master, who found that Copham was dead. The Coroner, Mr. Clarence Rutter, was communicated with, and ordered a post-mortem examination, as the result of which no inquest was deemed necessary. The funeral arrangements were taken charge of by the Glastonbury branch of the British Legion.

DEATH AT GODNEY.

DEATH OF FARM LABOURER.

was found dead in bed, on Saturday morning.
Deceased, who was a farm labourer and aged
39 was employed by Mr. Clifford George Coate,
of Bridge Farm. He was about as usual on
Friday and returned to the farm at about 6.30
in the evening. He had a meal and sat in the
house until 10 o'clock. He went upstairs and
spoke to George Henry Gerrish, another farm
employee, with whom he slept. Early next
morning Gerrish tried to wake deceased but
could not do so. He went for Mr. Coate, who
went into the bedroom and found deceased
dead.

Copham had been working for Mr. Coate for about three weeks. He was formerly employed by Mr. R. Bruford, of Nerrols, Taunton, former M.P. for the Wells Divison. He served in the war in the Somerset L.I. and was badly

gassed.

COPHA:	M.	e	2m. L.1.	FE.	25517.
Ernest.	Zol .		Page.	Remarks	
Victory British Syab	6/2/10	2B4	490.		
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Date of entry therein					K. 1380

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Correspondence.

Address.

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