



Gladys Sparkes Middle Row in the Middle

GLADYS ALICE SPARKES

Miss Gladys Alice SPARKES. Ashford Civilian. Killed by enemy action (German Gotha Bomber Raid). Died 18.30 hours 25th May 1917 aged 18 years. Daughter of Charles George Sparkes of 15 Providence Street, Ashford, Kent. Buried in the Old Ashford Cemetery, Canterbury Road, Ashford, Kent. Grave reference – 7287. Gladys was buried 28 May 1917.

Her mother Isabella Rosamund Sparkes (aged 42 years) died in May 1916 at 15 Providence Street, Ashford, Kent. She is buried nearby her daughter in the Old Ashford Cemetery. Grave reference 7175.

In the space of less than 12 months poor Charles Sparkes lost both his wife and his daughter!

The Council burial records state that Gladys body was taken to Folkestone after the air raid. It is not known why this was. Perhaps it was something to do with the Coroner?

Gladys name does not appear on any local war memorial which is disappointing. The civilian war dead of the Second World War were placed on the towns tribute. The Ashford Borough Council has recently agreed for her name to be placed on the towns civic tribute. We shall be putting forward her name when we formulate a list of those to be included.

Interestingly her grave lays besides that of another Ashford lost man – **Stoker 1st Class 278041 William Robert PAGE. HMS “Pembroke”. Royal Naval Barracks, Chatham, Royal Navy Reserve (RNR)**. Died 11th September 1917 of diabetes aged 38 years at 28 Postmans Row, Ashford, Kent. His name does appear on the town’s war memorial but his name is not recorded as a casualty of war by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which is disappointing.

Gladys was killed when a German Gotha Bomber dropped a high explosive device on Providence Street, Ashford. Gladys was in the rear garden of her fathers house at number 15. Her death certificate states that the cause of death was a “shrapnel wound in head from explosion of bomb from hostile aircraft on same day”. That day Six bombs were dropped – 2 on Bond Road, 2 on Providence Street, 1 on Rugby Gardens and 1 on Beaver Green. There were other casualties in Ashford that day but none were killed –

James Hook
Thomas Brooke
Ernest Burden (aged 5)

The Kent Coroner Rutley Marsh carried out a coroners inquest on 26th May 1917. The local papers reported that the coroner found that Gladys was “**unlawfully killed (murdered) by the enemy**”. The Ashford railway works was close by and that was the Germans real target. In any event poor Gladys was caught in the open and paid with her young life.

The Ashford area later came under air attack on the 10th August 1915 when Zeppelin airships dropped bombs all over Ashford.

It is the authors understanding that civilians from the Second World War recorded as casualties of war by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The civilian casualties of the Great War deserve the same recognition. I therefore put Gladys name forward for consideration. At the very least her name needs to be recorded in some form by the relevant authorities should the commission in the future eventually agree to add the names of WW1 civilian war dead to their indexes (something that is to be welcomed). It should be noted that there are likely to be far less civilian casualties in the Great War than in the Second World War. The majority of civilian war dead is likely to be in the Kent (notably Folkestone) and London areas (Zeppelins and Gotha bombers) and near Hartlepool (coastal bombardment by German warships).

