

## Edward Knott's PULPIT CRUCIFIX



The bare facts are these:

The figure on the cross above the pulpit in All Saints Church, Birchington, was brought back from France by a soldier in 1917. It was given to Canon Granville Sharp in about 1945-6 and he then asked Mr Moss, the local cabinet maker to mount the Figure on a cross. This has hung above the pulpit ever since.

These 'bare facts', however hide a very human story which ought not to go unrecorded. Let us begin with the soldier who brought the figure of Christ back from France. Edward Joseph Knott was born in Birchington 18<sup>th</sup> October 1887, son of William and Susannah Knott. He married Catherine Gascoigne de Jaquest in about 1914. Catherine's mother was Russian and her father was French. Their first daughter Eileen Emily Agnes was born on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1915 and at the time of her baptism, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1915, Edward is listed as a Railway car-man.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1916 Edward enlisted in the Royal Firing Artillery (No: 154337) at the age of 29 and left for France via Southampton on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1916, arriving the following day. Early in October the next year he was in a dug-out at the front, when he and five others were gassed. While sheltering in a bombed-out Catholic church, the priest came among the men as they lay on their stretchers waiting for transport to the coast. Having spoken with several of them, he blessed them. He then laid a figure of Christ, which he had just picked up from the rubble on the church floor, in Gunner Knott's hands.

When Edward was invalided to England shortly afterwards, he brought the Figure with him. Having spent a short time in a London hospital, he was allowed to return to Birchington for a while. He was then sent back to France, but left the Figure with his wife. A second baby, Elsie Joan, was born on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1918 and baptised on 13<sup>th</sup> October, but sadly the mother caught influenza and died on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1918, aged only 33. Edward was allowed to return to Birchington for her funeral and to make arrangements for his two little daughters. Eileen was put in the care of her grandmother, Mrs William Knott at 3 Manchester Villas, Crescent Road, who by then was a 66 year old widow. Unfortunately she did not feel able to cope with the four month old Elsie, so she was taken over to the Lee's Children's Homes at Manston. These Homes were still in use in the 1960s and early 1970s, but have since been closed and redeveloped.

Gunner Knott was again sent back to France, only to be struck down with pneumonia just three weeks later. With the damage already inflicted on his lungs from the gas attack, he died on the 30<sup>th</sup> November and was buried in the war-grave cemetery in Rouen.

Eileen remained in her grandmother's care at 3 Manchester Villas (now 22 Crescent Road) for a while, but soon after she started at the Infant School in Albion Road, Eileen's aunt and uncle, Mr and Mrs Jack Hazelgrove, appear to have moved in with Mrs Hazelgrove's mother and taken on the job of caring for their niece. Mrs Knott senior is thought to have lived at one time in one of the Alms Houses in Gas Row (although her name does not appear in any of the lists of residents). When she died on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1933, the entry in the Burial Register states she was in Hill House at Minster at the time of her death.

In 1945-6 Eileen, by then the owner of the Figure, felt it ought to be in a more suitable place than one of her cupboards, so she took it to Canon Sharp to ask his advice. He then asked William Moss the local undertaker and cabinet-maker with a business at 18 Station Road, if he would make a cross on which to mount the figure of Christ, which he duly did. The crucifix was blessed during a Eucharist Service soon afterwards and has hung above the pulpit in All Saints Church in the Square at Birchington for over sixty years.