

## THE STORY OF THE PULPIT CRUCIFIX

In 1994, there was a burglary in All Saints Church in Birchington. As Archivist, I was asked by a parishioner, Hazel, "Was my mother's crucifix stolen?" When I questioned further, I was able to assure Hazel that the crucifix was still safely in its place. I then asked what the story behind the cross was and was amazed at the tale that unfolded.

The bare facts are these. The figure on the cross was brought back from France in 1917. It was later given to the Vicar, the Rev. Nevill Maurice Granville Sharp, in 1945-6 who asked Mr Moss, the local undertaker to make a cross on which to mount the figure. It has hung above the pulpit ever since. Those few facts, however, hide a very human story, which ought not to go unrecorded.

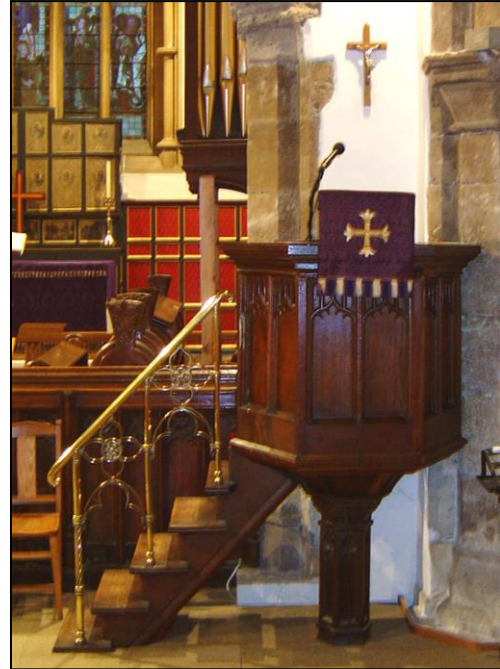
Let us begin with the soldier who brought the figure of Christ back from France. Edward Joseph Knott was born in Birchington 18<sup>th</sup> October 1887, son of William and Susanna Knott. Edward married Catharine Gascoigne Jaquest in about 1914 and they lived in Adelaide Cottages, at the eastern end of Westfield Road. Catharine's mother was Russian and her father French. Edward and Catharine's first daughter, named Eileen Emily Agnes, was born on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1915. At the time of her baptism on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 1915, Edward is listed as a 'railway car-man'.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1916, Edward enlisted in the Royal Firing Artillery (No: 154337) and left for France via Southampton on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1916, arriving the following day. Early in October 1917 he was in a dug-out at the Front near Rouen when he and five others were gassed. While they were waiting in a Church in Rouen for transport back to England, the local priest came among the men, talking and praying with them. Having spoken to Gunner Knott, he gave him a figure of Christ which had been found in bomb debris and brought to the priest for safe keeping. When Edward was invalided back to England soon after this, he took the figure with him. Having spent a short time in a London hospital, he was allowed to return to Birchington to recuperate from the gassing for a while. He was later called back to France, but left the figure with Catharine.

A second baby, Elsie Joan, was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 1918 and baptised on October 12<sup>th</sup>. Sadly, their mother caught the dreaded influenza soon afterwards and died on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Edward was given compassionate leave to return to Birchington for her funeral and to make arrangements for the future of his two little daughters. Eileen was put in the care of her grandmother, by then a 66 year old widow. She did not feel able to cope with the four-month-old Elsie as well, so the baby was sent to the Lees Children's Home at Manston.

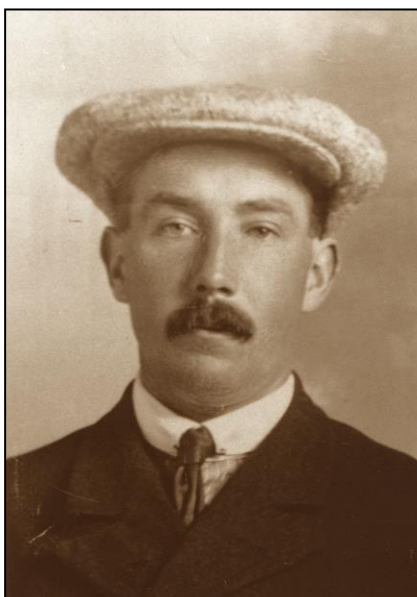
Gunner Knott was sent back to France, only to be struck down with pneumonia. He died on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1918 and was buried in a war grave cemetery in Rouen. By the time Mrs Knott snr died on 23 October 1933 at the age of 81, Eileen was being cared for by her aunt and uncle, Mr and Mrs Hazelgrove in Crescent Road.

In 1945-6 Eileen, by the keeper of the Figure, felt it ought to be in a more suitable place, so she took it to her Vicar Rev. Sharp, to ask his advice. It was then that he asked Mr Moss, the undertaker and cabinet maker with a business at 18 Station Road, if he would make a cross on which to mount the figure – which he duly did. The crucifix was hung above the pulpit and has been there ever since.



*Edward Knott's figure of Christ on the cross made by Mr Moss*

At the Remembrance Sunday Service in All Saints Church in 1994, the Vicar, the Rev. Fred Smale, used the "Story of the Crucifix" to illustrate his sermon and both Eileen and her daughter Hazel were in the congregation to hear it.



*Edward Knott - 1916*



*Catharine Knott - 1916*

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