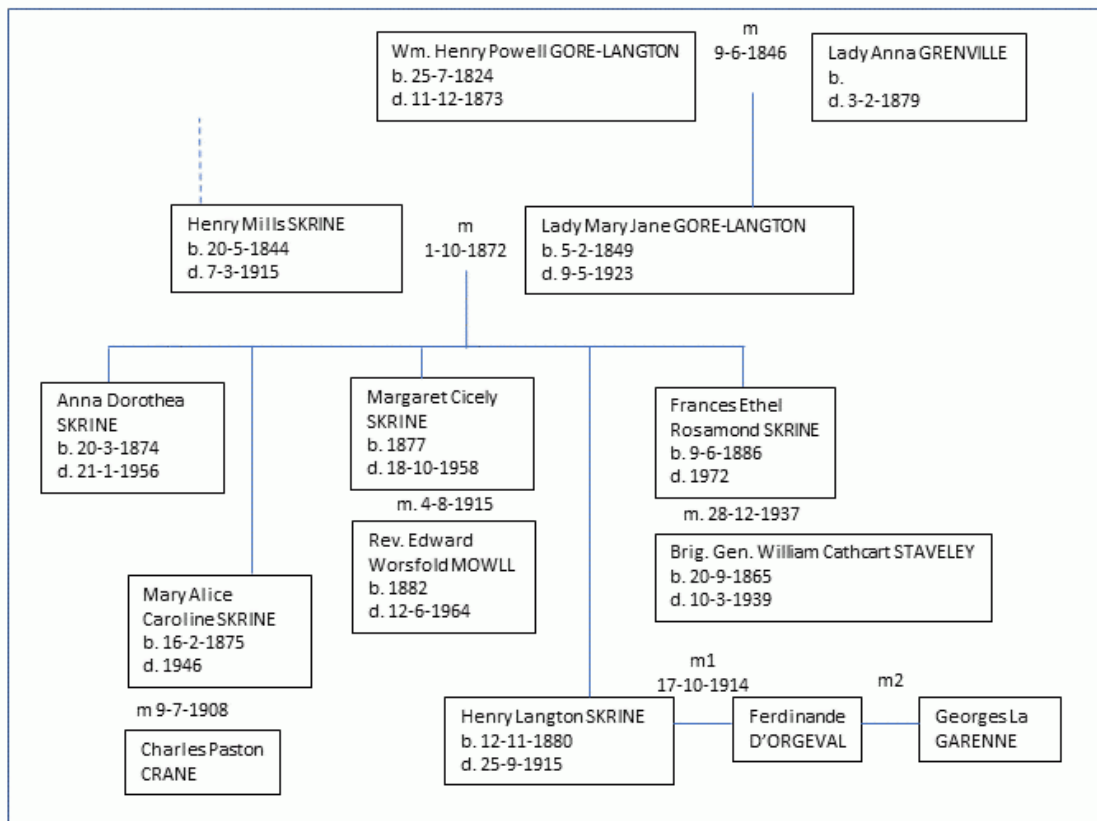


HENRY LANGTON SKRINE (A10) of Warleigh Manor, Claverton Manor, Co. Somerset; Stubbings near Maidenhead. Co. Berkshire. (1880 – 1915). Son of Henry Mills Skrine and Lady Mary Jane Gore-Langton.

Henry was the only son of Henry Mills Skrine and Lady Mary, taking ‘Langton’ as his second forename from his mother’s maiden name. His three older sisters were Anna Dorothea, Mary Alice and Margaret Cecily, and his younger sister was Frances Ethel Rosamond, as shown in the family tree extract.



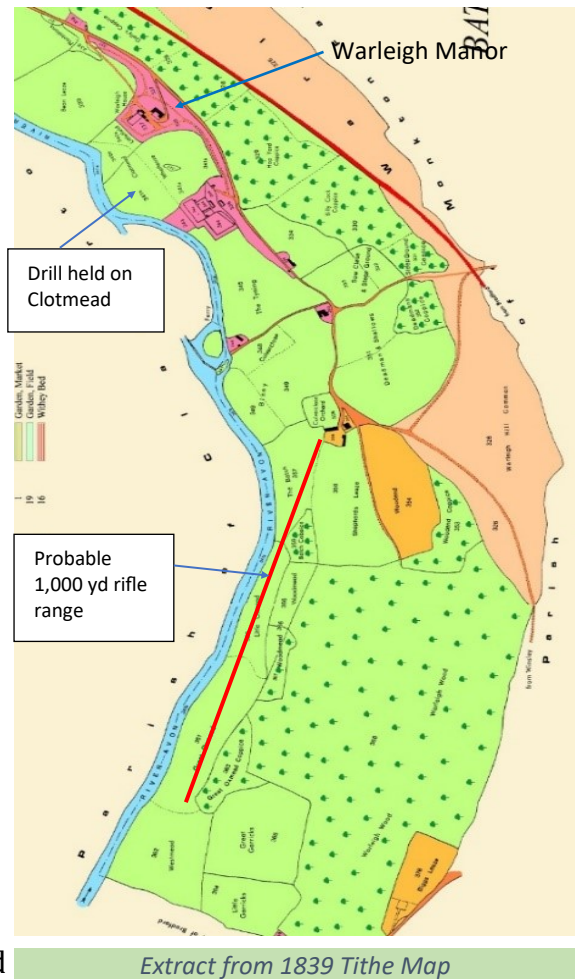
Included on this tree are Lady Mary’s parents showing that her title came from her mother’s line, Lady Anna Eliza Mary Grenville. Lady Anna’s parents were Richard Plantagenet Temple-Nugent-Brydges-Chandos-Grenville, 2nd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, and Lady Mary Campbell.

Henry Langton was born on the 12th November 1880 and grew up in Warleigh before attending prep-school at Mr. Radcliffe’s Preparatory School, “Fonthill”, near East Grinstead. He left there in 1894 to go to Eton, where he was in Mr. Arthur James’ House. Whilst at Eton he passed ‘fourth’ for a Newcastle Scholarship. He won an Oppidan Prize in 1898 and 1899 and

<p>Oppidan Scholarships – are honorary awards for boys who earn a distinction in three internal examinations and for boys who narrowly miss election as a King’s Scholar.</p>	<p>Newcastle Scholarship. is an annual prize awarded at Eton College for the highest performance in a series of special written examinations taken over the course of a week. It was instituted and first awarded in 1829 on the initiative and benefaction of Henry Pelham-Clinton, 4th Duke of Newcastle.</p>
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was treasurer of the Arthur James House Debating Society. His interest in military matters was evident even then as he was also a serjeant in the college Rifle Volunteers.

Volunteer Militia forces had been in existence for hundreds of years to protect the country from invaders. The historic numbers reached their highest levels from around 1800 as a reaction to threats of invasion by Buonaparte but subsided after the battle of Waterloo in 1815. Then during the second half of the nineteenth century there was a resurgence of territorial groups across the country, stimulated by the Crimean war when the regular troops were abroad. By 1860 the 1st Battalion of the 45th Somerset Rifle Volunteers had been formed and it included the 14th Warleigh Corps known as the 'Warleigh Manor Rifle Volunteers' with Henry Duncan Skrine as the Paymaster and one of the founder members. Later he was joined by his son, Henry Mills Skrine, Henry Langton's father. Henry Mills was a very active member and eventually become the colonel of the unit. The main activity was rifle practice and matches with teams from surrounding districts



taking place on the ground beside the river Avon as shown in the diagram and with drill taking place in a field close to the manor house called Clotmead on the 1839 Tithe map.

Henry Langton grew up with rifle shooting as a significant part of life at Warleigh, so it is not surprising that he joined the Eton Rifle Volunteers, then the Oxford University Volunteers and subsequently entered the army. No doubt, his father would have been proud of him even then.

In 1899 he followed in his father's footsteps and went up to Balliol College, Oxford. He was awarded a 2nd Class Honours in Mods in 1901. When not studying he became a Marksman in the Oxford University Volunteers and was accepted on the list of Varsity Candidates for the Army in 1901. Henry was apparently not interested in following in his father's footsteps further by becoming a lawyer, and so joined the army.

At the end of May 1902, he sailed for South Africa in the 2nd Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry. Henry was very disappointed that his battalion was too late to take part in the Boer War and, on his return to England, he looked for active work in other fields. He went through the Army School of Musketry at Hythe in Kent with distinction and in 1904 Henry was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. Hythe developed over the years to become the Defence Training Estate with sites spread over the country.

Henry quickly established himself as a first-class officer, respected by his senior and fellow officers, and loved by his men. This may be an unusual word to use but in fact is taken

. . . he is doing the duties of Fort Adjutant which is rather a tiring situation for him just now, being so many regiments there. But we would far rather him with us on the Manoeuvres. Everyone of us loves him dearly. He has always got a smile for everyone and which has won so many hearts from our Tommies. Have heard his Company say after he has passed "That's the little officer you wants in your Company, He's a Gem" But you must not let him know that I tells you this or he will be calling me a telltale. But I have parents of my own and Master Henry praises me up to them.

from documents at the time. There is a letter written by W. Axford, Bugler, 2nd Batt. Somerset Light Infantry when exercising on the Salisbury Plain in August 1904, to Henry Mills Skrine in which he praises Henry Langton as follows in this extract –

William Axford, coincidentally, was also from Bathford and is listed in the Book of Remembrance kept in St. Swithun's church as having fought and survived the war.

In 1906 Henry was selected for special duty in Northern Nigeria where he spent a considerable time up country, learning the native languages, and working hard, but appears to have had difficulty with the languages. Then fever put him out of action, so much so that he returned to England where he was placed on the Reserve of Officers list. During his recovery he went to Oxford again, where he resumed his old studies and in 1908 obtained his bachelor's degree.

When he graduated, and a civilian again, he revisited South Africa, travelling through the country *"to gain a knowledge of men and the condition of things in the newly-settled dependencies. The wild, free life of the Veldt appealed to him strongly, and he settled down on a farm for two years, happy as a boy in his new surroundings. His letters to those at home were full of the charm of his outdoor life, full, too, of quiet humour and fun. For his was a nature which saw in everything around something of the Beautiful, and much of that humour without which life is but a drab affair."*

In 1913 he became engaged to Ferdinande Josephine d'Orgeval, the only child of Baron Georges d'Orgeval, a member of Napoleon III's bodyguard, and god-daughter of Ferdinand de Lesseps, engineer of the Suez Canal.

The first World War, much written about elsewhere, started when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on the 28th July 1914. The fighting escalated and when Germany invaded Belgium on the 4th August 1914 Britain entered the war. At this time Henry joined the 3rd Battalion of his old regiment. Whilst training at Aldershot, Henry and Ferdinande were married. The marriage took place on 17th October 1914, at the Church of Our Lady, Farnborough. The lengthy newspaper report begins:

"MILITARY WEDDING AT ALDERSHOT

AN ARCH OF CROSSED BAYONETS

The marriage of Mr. Henry Langton Skrine, only son of Henry Mills and Lady Mary Skrine of Warleigh, Somerset, and Mdlle. Ferdinande d'Orgeval, only child of the late Baron Georges d'Orgeval, Villa Vert, Nice, took place on Saturday afternoon, the 17th inst. At the Church of our Lady, Farnborough, Hants. Owing to the war only relatives and intimate friends were invited beside the of-

fficers of Lieut. Skrine's regiment (the 6th Somersets), and the men of his company, now in training at Aldershot."

and then continues with descriptions of what the bride wore, a list of the distinguished guests followed by a list of the wedding gifts. The couple left the church through an arch of crossed bayonets and left for London later that afternoon. Baron d'Orgeval held a reception at the Queen's Hotel, at Farnborough; now a Travel Lodge.

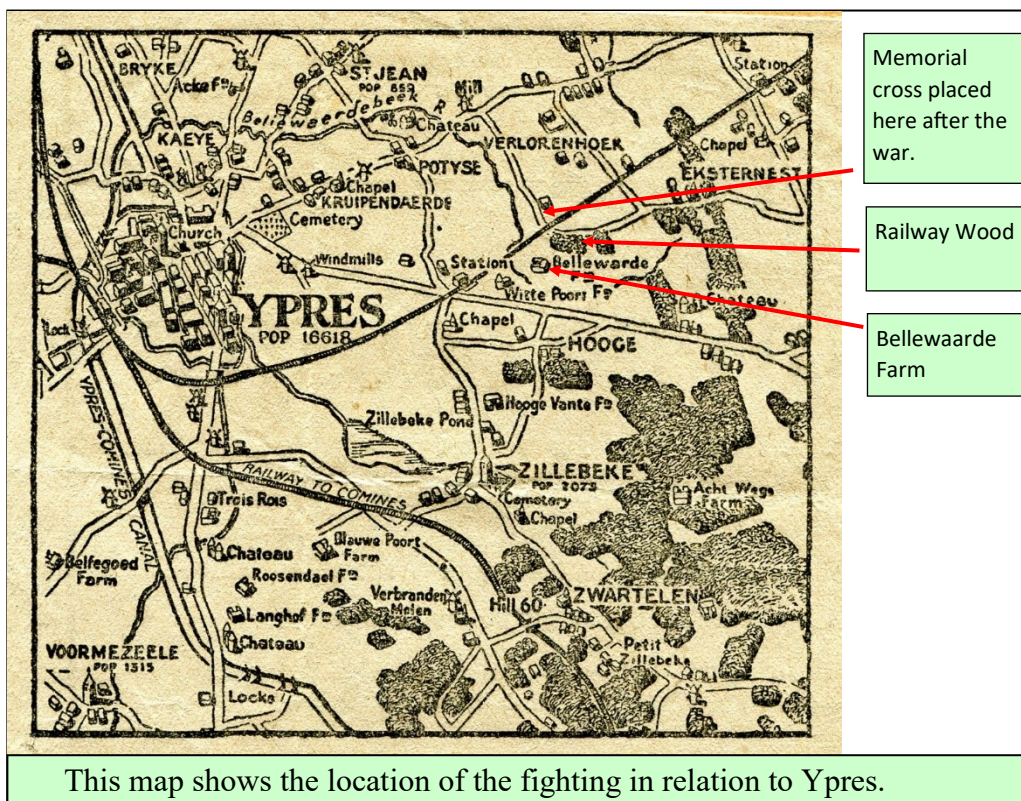
Soon after the wedding, on 24th October 1914, Henry was gazetted Captain in the 6th (Service) Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry, one of the first of Kitchener's 'New Army' to be raised.



Wedding of Henry & Ferdinande

The happiness was to be short-lived because Henry's father, Henry Mills Skrine, died suddenly on the 7th March 1915 at the age of 70, and so Henry inherited the estates of Warleigh, Claverton, and Stubbings. It appears that Henry and his father were close and so it would have been a sad time for him. Henry must have barely come to terms with his new responsibilities when on the 21st May 1915 his battalion was posted to France.

As 'A' Company commander he went to France with the 6th Battalion (43rd Brigade, 14th Division) on 21 May 1915. By the 25th September, the 6th Battalion S.L.I. were at



Bellewaarde Farm just north of the village of Hooge, which is about 2 miles east of Ypres. Prior to the second attack either side of Bellewaarde Farm on 25th September the Battalion was attached to the 42nd Brigade. After a heavy night of bombardment of Railway Wood and the trenches beyond, the three attacking companies of the Brigade went over. Shortly afterwards the 'Somersets' were ordered to reinforce the line just north of the Wood when the enemy retaliated and drove the attackers back. During the attack he saw Germans collecting in a communication trench, and immediately ordered rapid fire on the enemy. A machine gun on a flank opened fire in return and Henry died instantly from a bullet to the



A postcard showing the devastation near where Henry died,

head.

Such was the fighting that it wasn't until the end of the day when the roll call was taken that it was found that Captain Skrine, two other officers and eleven men had been killed, one officer and 38 men wounded and three missing in the engagement.

This postcard, from an album of the Lavington family, was brought back from the war by one of Frederick Lavington's sons. Five sons fought and survived the war. The Lavington family ran The Crown Inn in Bathford from c. 1880 to 1932.

In October 1915 a fellow officer wrote to Henry's widow:

- I have wanted to express to you, both as the last representative of 'A' Company's Officers and as one who was very proud to consider himself a friend of Henry's, very very deep sympathy. - - - -

You cannot possibly imagine the heart whole regret shown by the two hundred odd men whom his gallantry had inspired, and whom his cheerfulness had so greatly assisted through so many trying times and situations of danger. But I do not think that his influence, and the memory of him, will ever cease to affect the lives of anyone of us.

Sincerely yours, Stuart E. Birrell, (Lieutenant)

Another fellow officer, Lt Charles Hawker, writing to Henry's father, describes his devotion to his men and his fearlessness in this extract: -

“One afternoon a huge shell fell beside a trench and three men were quite buried. Henry was in another trench and the report was shouted across to him. A communication trench led round to where the men were buried but it meant a considerable distance and when men are suffocating, minutes mean lives. Henry came straight across the open to make sure that anything possible was done. The men were saved! Again, during a very heavy bombardment several men were hit, in the apology for a trench that Henry was in. I was in another some distance to the left. The two were joined by a very exposed trench, just begun and that beginning almost obliterated. One man was in great pain, nothing could be done for him as there was no morphia. Without waiting for even a lull in the bombardment Henry came across what was practically the open to get some. I think you know how splendidly he stuck to his work when he was so ill, and how wonderfully he worked, until the great need was over, before going to hospital.”

Lt Charles Hawker,

This letter was dated the 19th April 1916, a year after Henry Mills Skrine had died, such were communications at the time. So Henry’s father was unaware of these outpourings of sympathy and praise for his son. From this letter we also learn that Henry was ill, possibly a recurrence of his fever?



No grave was discovered after the War, but his damaged wooden cross was found lying at Gully Farm in 1920. Skrine's sister, Dorothea, and his widow bought the 1500 square metre field where he had fallen and erected a memorial beside the Begijnenbosstraat road, then called the Cambridge Road, just north of Bellewaarde Farm and erected a stone cross in memory of Henry and those of his men that died that day. The cross is there to this



Views of the Memorial Cross beside the Begijnenbosstraat road.

day, it is a rough-hewn cross in blue stone with a curved block base set on two steps, inscribed:

'TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND
IN LOVING MEMORY OF HENRY LANGTON SKRINE
CAPTAIN 6TH SOMERSET L.I.
WHO FELL IN ACTION AND WAS BURIED
CLOSE TO THIS SPOT 25TH SEPTEMBER 1915'

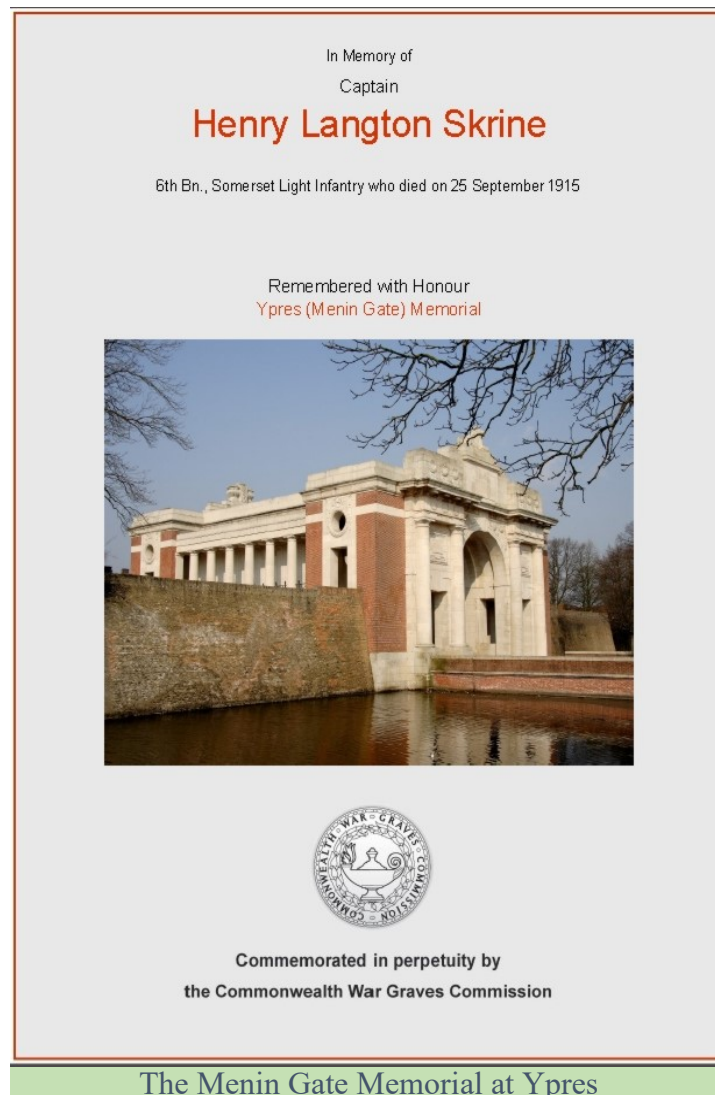
Below that are the words:

'IN MEMORY ALSO OF THE MEN OF
HIS COMPANY WHO LIE HERE WITH HIM'

and on the bottom step:

'DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI'

Originally there was a small garden, and dwarf posts and an iron railing which needed frequent repairs. Soon afterwards some land was sold to the widow of Captain G V S Bowlby and she erected a memorial at the top of the track to Gully Farm. Both families found it difficult to maintain their memorials adequately and in 1930 Miss Skrine arranged for the site to be cared for by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Ownership of the spare land appears to have reverted to the Belgian State in 1957. In 1996 a lay-by was built, and Cap-



tain Bowlby's memorial was moved to join that of Captain Skrine by the roadside. Now much easier to maintain and visit, these two memorials are now safe for the future.

After the war a large memorial archway was built at the Menin Gate at Ypres for soldiers who died but whose graves are unknown. Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and built by the CWGC it was unveiled on the 24th July 1927. Memorial plaques cover the interior walls – Henry is recorded here as well. Part XXXII (Index No MR.29).

How better to sum up Henry Langton Skrine than to quote the letter sent by Colonel Rawling to Henry's widow, Ferdinande: -

THE LETTER FROM COLONEL RAWLING,

6th Somerset Light Infantry,
British Expeditionary Force.

September 26th, 1915.

MY DEAR MRS. SKRINE,

I am grieved to have to write and tell you of the death of your husband yesterday. We were in reserve during the attack of the 42nd Brigade, and were sent up immediately the attack had failed, then we held the line and still hold it. I never saw him again, and he was buried by his Company in rear of the fighting-line. He died instantaneously, shot through the head. With him died four men. He was a grand soldier, absolutely fearless; in fact, I have never seen one who so little feared the enemy. He seemed to bear a charmed life, for he has risked it many times before. He died doing his duty to the utmost, and in the following manner, so I have been informed. During the attack he saw Germans collecting in a communication trench. Immediately he ordered his men up and opened rapid fire upon the enemy. A machine gun on the flank opened fire in return, and your husband fell. His Company are deeply grieved, for he was not only a good leader, but a generous sympathetic friend to all. I feel his loss deeply, as not only was I very fond of him for his ever cheerful, kind hearted self, but because I shall never get another to replace his valuable services in the Battalion. His subaltern, Mr. Hawker, was severely wounded at the same time, so the Company is desolate. Every officer in the Battalion loved your husband and showed most evident signs of sorrow when they heard of his death, a thing rarely done when they are surrounded as at present by terrible fighting. But he died a splendid death fighting for the right; he felt no pain and did his duty to the last. But for all that you have my sincerest sympathy and that of every officer and man in the Battalion.

Yours very sincerely,

C. G. RAWLING.

A memorial book was also printed summarising his life including these two extracts: -

"I want to thank you very much for all you have said about my father. I only hope I may prove a worthy successor to him. At any rate I mean to try my level best to carry out the duties of my new position as well as ever I can."

– and concluded with: -

"Then came news of his being in hospital for a time, and a chance of a short spell of leave. And then the disappointment, when duty called him once more to the firing-

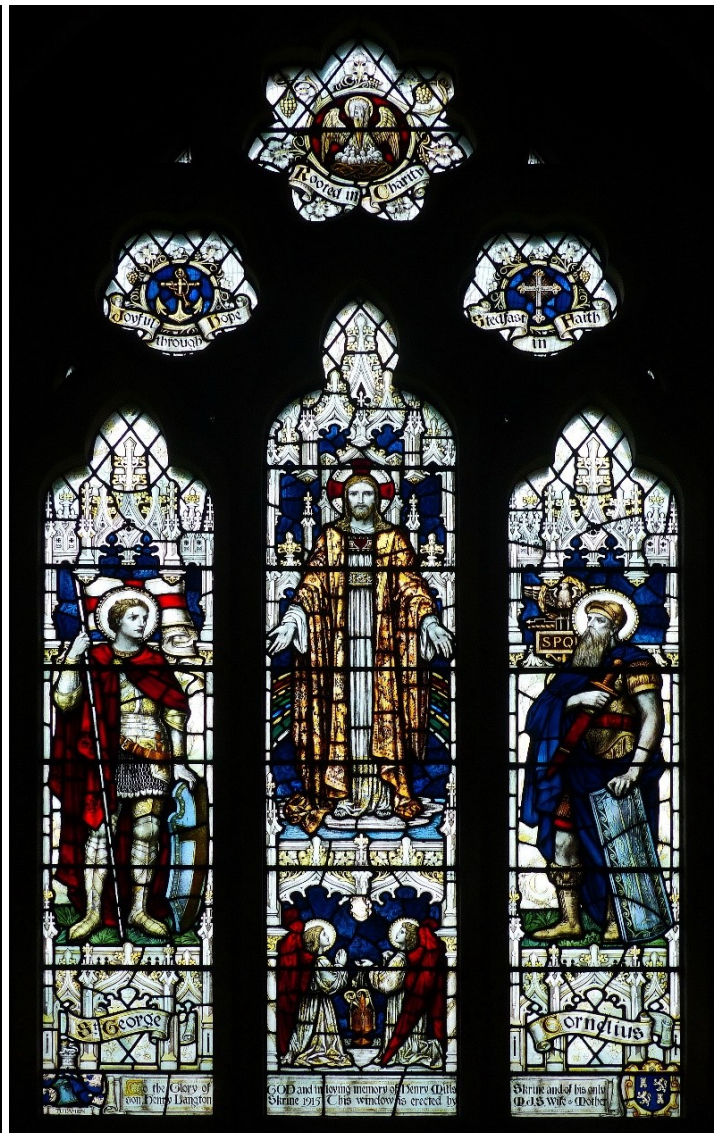
line—for the last time—and then the battle was fought, and many a gallant soldier fell. A brief telegram to his waiting wife told the worst. “Killed in action ... no details.”

In England on Tuesday, Oct. 19th, 1915 at 2.30, a memorial service was held at St. Swithun’s church, Bathford. The service was taken by the Archdeacon of Bath, the Venerable Lancelot Fish and assisted by the vicar of Bathford, the Rev. H. Wheeler Bush and the Rector of Claverton, and the Rev. A.H. Scott-White. The Bath Chronicle printed an account of the service and listed the large number of mourners.

Henry’s widow, Ferdinande, installed a window in his memory in St. Swithun’s church. It is in the north wall of the Lady Chapel. In April 1917 Lady Mary Skrine, Henry’s mother, re-



Ferdinande's window in memory of her husband, Henry Langton Skrine.



Lady Mary’s window in memory of her husband Henry Mills Skrine and her son Henry Langton Skrine.

placed the East Window in the Lady Chapel with one in memory of her husband Henry Mills Skrine and her son Henry Langton Skrine. Lady Mary died on the 9th of May 1923 leaving her unmarried daughter, Dorothea, to run the Warleigh estate.

These windows were unveiled at a service in St. Swithun’s church in April 1917 attended by Lady Mary Skrine and Mrs Henry Skrine (Ferdinande), Ferdinande had been devoting herself to the care of wounded soldiers in London.

And so the long, distinguished, male line of the Skrine family at Warleigh came to an end on the 25th September 1915 on the battlefields of Flanders with the tragic death of a very brave, caring and much loved man – Henry Langton Skrine.



Captain Henry Skrine



Henry's elder sister, Dorothea, born 20th March 1874, continued to live at Warleigh Manor. During World War 2 the manor was used by an RAF bomb disposal squad, and also housed some refugees from London. Dorothea lived there throughout until she died on the 21st January 1956. From then on, the manor became a succession of schools before being converted into luxury apartments around 2000 AD, as it is today.



Warleigh Manor in 2018

Acknowledgements:

Numerous articles on the internet relating to WW1.

A collection of various small documents, mostly contemporary with WW1, kindly loaned by Mr John Skrine, and also his comments.

'Skrine of Warleigh' by Ainley Walker.