

Derwent Wood: an artist's war

An unexpected link between Little Stretton and the Cenotaph

On December 10th 1863 Anne Mary Maw, daughter of the talented and wealthy tile manufacturer John Hornby Maw, founder of Maws Tiles of Jackfield, married Alpheus Bayliss Wood, an American. Contemporary documents suggest that Anne Mary's father wished to provide security for her without allowing the family fortune to pass to her new husband. Documents in our possession show that a trust was set up for her, administered by her male relatives, with the Tan House of Little Stretton forming part of this settlement.

The marriage produced four children and the family spent many years living in Europe with the Tan House let out to tenants, though the family definitely lived there in 1880 and 1887. Anne Mary's journal also records that in 1882 Alpheus wanted to make improvements to the house. Notable among the offspring of this marriage was Francis Derwent Wood, who clearly inherited the Maw family's artistic talents and became a celebrated sculptor with work displayed in many countries.

Too old for active service during World War One, he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1915. His fine modelling skills were harnessed in a surprising and practical way in the creation of metal face masks which concealed the injuries of badly wounded service men.

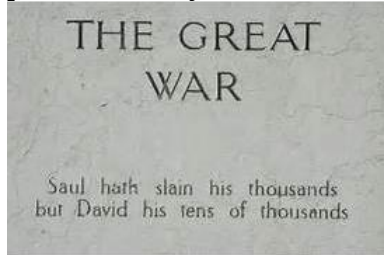
Working at the Third London General Hospital, Derwent Wood sculpted masks in the shape of the soldier's original features, then hand painted the surface and later glass eyes were fitted if necessary.



Writing in *The Lancet*, Wood described the painstaking and lengthy process of mask-making. Once the missing features had been sculpted, a final cast was taken and electroplated to produce a copper mask 1/32 of an inch thick. This was coated in silver and then painted to match the patient's complexion. Wood painted eyebrows on to the plate, and used thin metallic foil,

which he would cut into fine strips, tint, curl and solder in place for the eyelashes.

In contrast to this personal and delicate mask making Wood also produced many commemorative public works of sculpture such



as the Machine Gun Corps at Hyde Park Corner in London. In 1925, the year of its unveiling, controversy arose concerning a biblical quotation on the memorial, described by the International Arbitration League as “an insult to the brave dead whose memory is commemorated,” leading to a discussion in the House of Commons on 4th August 1925. However, it appears that the Machine Gun Corps Memorial Committee supported the wording, and it remains the same today.



Another of Derwent's controversial post war sculptures was “Canada's Golgotha”, a representation of an alleged 1915 Ypres atrocity involving the crucifixion of a Canadian soldier. In 1919 the work triggered a dispute between the German and Canadian Governments and resulted in a de facto ban on exhibiting the work, which was not publicly displayed until 1992 at the Canadian War Museum. Controversy has continued into this century over whether the depicted crucifixion actually took place.

Perhaps the most famous of Derwent's memorial works are the wreaths for Sir Edwin Lutyens' Cenotaph in Whitehall.



Derwent was elected to the Royal Academy in 1920, and died aged only 54 in 1926, being buried in Amberley, Sussex.

It is not clear how much time he spent at the Tan House during his life, but his signature is engraved in one of the windows in the top floor “Poet's Room.” Village rumour suggests that he was responsible for the thatching of Little Stretton's All Saint's

Church, and the insertion of a thatched porch at the Tan House around the same period lends some support to this hypothesis.