

'Church History'

Captain Edward Nugent Bankes (1875-1915) was a professional soldier, a younger son of a highly qualified lawyer, Henry Bankes whose wife was a cousin of the Digbys of Meriden Hall. As a boy he knew Meriden well. Darlaston Hall formerly a coaching inn had become a private school so before study at Charterhouse, he boarded there. The elder of Mr Digby's daughters, Letitia Adelaide Digby became his wife in 1906. He had fought in the Second Boer War with distinction in Lumsden's Horse and the Dorset Imperial Yeomanry and remained stationed abroad at the conclusion of hostilities. Letitia sailed out to S. Africa, married and gave birth to her two elder children John and Adelaide in Natal. Monica her youngest child was born in Dorset.

In 1912 Captain Bankes decided to resign his commission to take up the management of the Meriden estates in which his wife, her sister and step mother held an interest but the outbreak of War in August 1914 meant he was recalled to his original occupation, in the initial stages of the War on the Western Front where he was killed at St Julian, France by friendly fire on April 26, 1915. Meriden Hall was not used as a hospital during the War but Mrs Bankes became a VAD at Berkswell Hall. She gave the site on the corner of Berkswell Lane for the village War Memorial in 1919, headed a list of sponsors and commissioned Camm of Smethwick the leading stained glass manufacturer in the Midlands to design a window placed in the south aisle of St Laurence's church, Meriden in his memory. His name can also be found on the Menin Gate.