



# Memories of Belgian Refugees in Okehampton

Volunteer Researcher: Chris Walpole

## Note to readers:

Our research files have been compiled by a committed and diligent team of volunteer researchers.

Please be aware that while our volunteers have received training in basic research skills, they are not professional historians.

We welcome further use of our research-files (with due credit). However, we encourage you to perform your own fact-checking / research processes before relying on any of the information contained here.



This brief mention of Belgian refugees comes from the 1927 reminiscences of Belstone's, Rev Herbert Wilson Milner. The full document is referenced in the *Devon Archives and Local Studies Service* (old Devon Heritage Centre) at Sowton as **Ref No 9018Z**:

*'A certain number of Belgian refugees were housed in the neighbourhood for a time, some in Belstone, some in Sticklepath, and many in Okehampton. They were not a very desirable lot as a whole. Three Belgians who were settled in Belstone had to be provided with both brushes and clothing, and then tried to earn a living by teaching French to any who would pay for lessons: but they were better than the majority of their compatriots.'*

The Belgian refugee book (referenced at the Devon Heritage Centre 18.11.2014) is a temporary acquisition for them (TL 415), being on loan from the grandson of Mrs Clapp, the lady in the Exeter Belgian Reception Committee who originally compiled it. It's an approx A5 size book with about 410 Belgian people in it, laid out by name, age, address of where they came from (many from Ostende), occupation and then where they went. Some destinations are just place names, some are named people who took them in. Destinations are all round Devon and Cornwall and a bit further afield, but no destinations in our area of interest. The nearest places in the book that took people are North Tawton (11 names) and Chagford (7 names).

#### **Other Sources of Information**

There is a gravestone in Belstone churchyard:

'In Loving Memory of Alphant Dedons de Pierrefeu Born July 29th 1913, Died Jan 12th 1928  
Son of the Late Sergent Comte Jehan Dedons de Pierrefeu Medaille Militaire'

The Belstone Church Register says: Alphant Pierre Albert Philip Bedras de Pierrefeu, Torquay, 14 years old.

Brief inconclusive online research:

Late Sergent Comte Jehan Dedons de Pierrefeu Medaille Militaire is probably Marie Alphant Rene Jehan Dedons de Pierrefeu born 9.11.1890, died 20.8.1918, 'killed by the enemy', at Audignicourt. He was a Sergeant in the 289th R I (Infantry Regiment)