

HTSM First World War Monthly Journal

September 1914

Britain entered the First World War on August 4th. Most people knew it was coming and the previous day, a Bank Holiday, was very tense. The normal excursion trains had been cancelled and sentries were stationed outside the Post Office in North Street and the Telephone Exchange in Market Street. The Territorials were told to report to their HQ and the 5th Battalion of the Queen's Regiment was called back from their annual training camp near Salisbury. Their train was met by cheering crowds who followed them to the Drill Hall. There was a rush to join up at the Drill Hall and at Stoughton Barracks. Civic and church dignitaries saw the men off, including E.C. Kirwan, the rector of Holy Trinity and St. Mary's. Mr. Kirwan had arranged a service of intercession as soon as war was declared, for 5th August in Holy Trinity.

A service of intercession was held every day in Holy Trinity at noon, and the tenor bell was tolled so that people elsewhere could make a silent prayer. Both churches were open every day for private prayer. Other Days of Intercession were held throughout the war.

In the town there was a recruiting station at the County & Brough Halls in North Street. Dr. Percy Levick of the Royal Surrey County Hospital took the medicals. He would die on the Western Front as an RAMC captain in 1918.

A committee was formed to promote recruiting. On 18th August the Town Crier read the proclamation 'Your King and Country need you' at the Guildhall. The Stoughton Band led a parade to the Railway Hotel and the Cattle Market (in Woodbridge Road) where the proclamation was repeated. The local MP had a list of recruits printed in the *Surrey Advertiser* to encourage more to join up.

The cheerful church news in the parish magazine quickly changed from accounts of sales of work, garden parties and the choir outing, to the War. There was a section about it each month, and Rector's letter for September noted that 'war spells the bankruptcy of much that we lightly call Christian. In a sense, our Lord is being crucified afresh ... The Government has entered into this war under a grave sense of duty to little Belgium ... In Guildford there has been no flag-waving nor senseless jingoism ...' He suggested a verse from Deuteronomy, to use as a motto for 'inspiration and comfort in the dark days' - 'be strong and of good courage; the Lord, He it is that doth go before thee.' Although he longed to be an army chaplain he never glorified war and took a compassionate approach to those involved. He asked to be told of those left behind who were struggling, and promoted the work done for the Red Cross. As early as September he appealed for comforts for the troops, including illustrated papers, chocolate and tins of tobacco for sailors, and gave instructions for addressing letters to the troops abroad.

Two soldiers from Guildford were wounded at Mons in August: Sgt Warlock and Pte G. Lucas. They had both been Holy Trinity choir boys. The parish magazine records two local men who were killed early on the Western Front: LCpl William Cobbett and Lt Col Walter Reginald Lloyd. They died on the same day, by coincidence, 14th September during the battle of the Aisne. The altar rails at St. Mary's were given in memory of Walter Lloyd.

Mary Alexander, September 2014.

August and September 1914 saw changes in the nature of conflict even at this early stage in the First World War. The British Expeditionary Force received its orders the day after Britain entered the war on 4th August. Much of the initial grouping, including 1st Battalion The Queen's, was based at Aldershot, and had been out training in recent days. One of the main features of the pre-war Army's training was its standard of musketry, with accuracy and rate of fire being a source both of pride and extra pay. Now though it would be for real, and even those soldiers and officers who had fought in South Africa 12 years earlier, and in small wars since, realised that they did not really know what to expect. The regiments, reinforced by their reservists including ex-soldiers returning to the colours, started off towards France. Contingency planning for the move had been meticulous. Rail and ships were made ready, many normal services were suspended and in a feat of logistics, 100,000 men, their horses, guns, ammunition and equipment arrived in France, where large crowds turned out to greet the British troops.

British and French staffs had been considering where the BEF might deploy, but the final decisions had to be taken late. German forces had invaded Belgium as well as France, so the BEF moved to the northern left flank of the French army and by 23 August had reached the town of Mons. British commanders were unaware that they were in the path of a large German force, which in turn had no idea that the BEF was there. The battle of Mons was therefore planned by neither side. In what was to be the pattern of the opening phase of the war, the BEF was required to create a temporary 'stop line', which at Mons was along a canal, to delay the German forces and cause casualties. The German plan (the 'Schlieffen Plan') was to outflank the French to their north, through Belgium, while holding them further to the south, and by encircling the French from the north, overwhelm them in force and cause them to collapse within 6 weeks. The French had already taken heavy casualties in the southern battles and it soon became clear to the BEF that they would need to withdraw rather than advance. The BEF had to improvise ways to start to knock the German forces off course. At Mons, the musketry skills on which the BEF placed such emphasis was to cause heavy casualties, especially among inexperienced German volunteer units.

On 24 August, the BEF began its retreat from Mons. In doing so, 9th Lancers were ordered to charge German lines to help cover the beginning of the retreat. Later the same day, the surviving soldiers from this charge went forward on foot to rescue the guns of the Royal Artillery, whose crews had been killed or wounded holding back the enemy. For his gallantry that day, Guildford-born Captain Francis Grenfell was awarded the Victoria Cross and is now commemorated in Tunsgate Arch. The BEF fell back, and through the battles of

Le Cateau, Nery and others they reached the Marne on 6 September. In that short time, the BEF had retreated over 200 miles, harried by the Germans, taking casualties but keeping the enemy from breaking through and showing high levels of soldiering skills, even though they were exhausted and perilously near Paris. They had kept touch with the French forces on their flanks, albeit that they were not really properly co-ordinated until the battle of the Marne, where the allies turned and attacked the Germans, pushing them north to the Aisne, where another major battle started on 12 September. On the Aisne, the war turned from one of movement to being static. Trench warfare was new at the time, but was to be characteristic of much of 1914-18. Casualties had been heavy on both sides as the allies had retreated; as the allies attacked on the Marne, German casualties became so heavy that the Schlieffen Plan was abandoned and on the Aisne both sides sought to dislodge the other. British casualties were at every level. Lieutenant Colonels Dawson Warren (Commanding Officer 1 Queen's when he was killed in action age 49 on 17 September) and Walter Lloyd (who had been promoted to command 1 Loyal North Lancs only 2 days earlier, following the death of his predecessor, was killed in action age 46 on 14 September) were both experienced pre-war Regular officers. They are remembered in Holy Trinity and in St Mary's. Such were the previously close links between Britain and Germany that Lloyd's father, Chairman of Lloyds Bank and an MP, had married the daughter of a Prussian general. Walter Lloyd was therefore killed fighting against his mother's fellow countrymen and his grandfather's professional descendants. Among the reserve individual reinforcements killed in action on the Aisne, both like Lloyd on 14 September, were Francis's twin, Captain Rivy Grenfell serving with the 9th Lancers age 34, and Guildford resident LCpl William Cobbett of 1 Queen's, who is remembered in Guildford Post Office and in Holy Trinity. As the Aisne battle drew to an end, the Times published on 21 September "*For The Fallen*" by Laurence Binyon, a Red Cross orderly tending wounded at a hospital in Cornwall. One of the verses has come to symbolise remembrance even as we commemorate the centenary of the beginning of the war. It is an appropriate that we should also mark the centenary of Binyon writing these words:

*They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*

Philip Pratley, September 2014