



Life at Home: November 1914 to the new year

By November the reality of the war was becoming very obvious to everyone in the area. The Parish Council debated whether or not to hold a house-to-house collection for the national Belgium Relief Fund, but decided not to, as Sunday collections were already being held in the church.

Diaries kept by villagers record the atmosphere of anxiety that was beginning to descend – worry for the men who had gone and fear that others would have to go soon.

The local paper was already predicting that a million more men would be required for the Regular Army. The weather, which was wet and gloomy, helped to give an air of sadness to the village.

There were, however, happier moments when Hester, the daughter of Edward Harfield, the publican at The Maple, married Harry Smith who'd been given special leave from the Front. Two days later Henry Fisher married Elsie King.

Someone else who had four days' special leave to get married was Algernon Bonham Carter – not long after he had returned to the Front from hospital in England. In other circumstances, his wedding in December to Myra Randolph in Curdridge, would probably have been a 'society' wedding, but as it was, it was described as 'a very quiet affair' for just the two families.

Babies born, conceived before the war even broke out, included Herbert, the son of Herbert and Lily Strugnell, and Mary, daughter of William and Hilda Brown.

Early in December Buriton learnt that its pubs would be shut from 9pm – 9am and from 2pm – 6pm, by order of the military authorities. In the days before radio and television these were meeting places for the menfolk and restrictions like this would have been bemoaned by both customers and publicans!

Just before Christmas an 'unusual incident' took place at Nursted Rocks. The Seaforth Highlanders, posted to Petersfield from Scotland in late November, were marching back from Harting when someone thought it would be a good idea to strike up their pipes and drums. Unfortunately this terrified a cart-horse to the rear of the column. It immediately bolted causing uproar and some injuries to the soldiers. The colonel at the front of the line was even thrown off his horse!

And so the year came to an end. A local diary recorded that 'everything seems dull and lifeless', and things would feel very different with so many empty places at Christmas celebrations. It would not be until the New Year that Buriton people learned that Christmas celebrations had also taken place in the brief truce at the Front.

The war until Christmas

- and the roles of Buriton men

Whilst the first few months of the war had seen quite a lot of movement in Western Europe, 1914 was to end in the unforeseen, stubborn trench warfare which would last for three years.

Elsewhere, the remainder of 1914 saw Russians move through Prussia, Serbs retreat into mountain passes and Turkey enter the war by attacking British outposts and closing the Dardanelles to shipping.



New Zealand and Australian troops landed at Cairo and South Africans attacked German South West Africa. A German port in China was seized by British and Japanese troops.

Back in Europe, German advances had decimated the British Expeditionary Force and, in spite of exhaustion, the Germans made another thrust before having to address the Russians in the east.

For the first half of November, spurred on by their Kaiser nearby, the Germans fought with an utter disregard for losses, trying to capture Ypres.

Douglas Harfield, fighting with the 1st Dorset's, was involved in this action

and saw many colleagues killed. He was withdrawn from the front line briefly and the remnants of his Battalion were mopped up with others to rejoin the fight.

For many men, ten days of battle were fought without rest. They were haggard, unshaven and unwashed with uniforms soaked in mud and torn by brambles. Many had lost items of clothing – but tried to keep their weapons in good order.

William Langrish, a 26 year old grocer's assistant, arrived near Gheluvelt with the South Staffordshire Regiment and experienced some fierce trench fighting. He was to be captured before Christmas and remained a prisoner until 1918.

The German infantry had overwhelming numbers against the remnants of the British battalions. British artillery sent shells crashing into the charging lines so that soldiers could counter-attack towards Gheluvelt Chateau. Some terribly vicious hand-to-hand fighting ensued.

Arthur Strugnell, 32, a Royal Horse Artillery driver from Bones Lane, was only 600 yards behind with a gun team. Drivers cared for and rode the horses as well as helping fire the guns at the front.

Charles Francis, 24, was also in the same area at this time: a sapper in the 3rd Signals, Royal Engineers working with the 3rd Cavalry Division. Involved in communications with the front line, sending messages via lamps and long phone lines, he would have been in the



thick of the action.

Not far away, Charles Cave of Ditcham House and his chauffeur, John Hurton, both volunteers with the Red Cross, were transporting wounded men near Ypres using the family's Wolseley car. Charles Archer was also an unpaid Red Cross volunteer in the area.

All these Buriton men were in a small area, around half mile wide and a distance similar to Buriton to Horndean, with unimaginable numbers of casualties and amounts of ammunition used.

By now the weather was terrible and the Germans called off their push for Ypres.

Algernon Bonham Carter, wounded in September and hospitalised in England, rejoined his men soon after the battle ended.

Meanwhile, Algernon's brother, Stuart, was an officer on 'HMS Emperor of India' helping blockade Germany from Scapa Flow. Charles Treagus, also from Buriton, was an able seaman on the same ship.

Many new volunteers, expecting to fight against the Germans, found

themselves sailing to India to allow more experienced soldiers to come back. Ernest Dennis, Godfrey Harfield and Fred Powell travelled to India, exchanging places with Fred's brother, James.

Two other Buriton men illustrate the variety of transport needed in the war: Arthur Ellis was driving buses around Ypres with 50th Auxiliary Bus Company and Rowland Marriner left for France with 112th Rail Engineers.

With Christmas approaching, huge amounts of mail were sent to the troops including a gift box for every soldier from the Princess Mary Fund and a Christmas card from the King.

Snow fell along the Western Front in December and severe frost froze the mud.

On Christmas Day an informal truce took place over substantial stretches of the British Front. Men exchanged tokens or addresses with Germans although fighting continued in other areas with over 80 British deaths.

Back in Britain, Arthur Watts left home on Christmas Day for Army training and William Tribe, 19, was getting ready to join the 1st Hampshire's. He arrived around Ploegsteert at the turn of the year, joining men who had probably taken part in the truce.

By now, 85 men from Buriton had enlisted with some still at home until training camps were ready. What mood were they in? And what would the new year bring?

Finding out about your family and the First World War

Would you like to find out what your family were doing during the First World War?

Family research is very interesting: you can find out who earlier members of your family were – and also what they did and what sort of lives they led.

Research is a lot easier now that so much is available online, but you still have to be careful that you're looking for the right person!

- The first step for reliable research is to start with what you know – work backwards creating a family tree that extends outwards from your immediate family. Go back as far as you can, so that you get a record of your more extended family.
- Ask around your relatives to see if there are any 'family stories' about men who went away to the war. But do beware - sometimes these stories are not as accurate as they could be!
- If relatives of yours were killed, then a good place to start is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's website. This is free to access and will give you vital details, such as service number and regiment for the army, or service number and ship for the navy.
- If your relatives came back from the war, then things may be a bit more difficult. There are some service records and pension records in the National Archives, as well as medal records

(medals were awarded to all the serving men), but it is important that you tie up a name with a service number or known address, as there are a lot of men with the same name!

- The 1911 census gives lots of interesting information about families and the men who would, just a few years later, go away to war. You can find out what sort of jobs they or their fathers had, and how many people were in the family.
- It might be worth subscribing to one of the internet genealogy sites – 'Find My Past' and 'Ancestry' both give access to National Archives material (which saves paying to download individual records). Both these sites have very reasonable rates for a month's membership, so you can do some initial work and then, when you some time set aside (these searches always take longer than you expect!), you can take out a short subscription and really get your money's worth!

If you find out anything to do with the parish of Buriton, please let us know.

If you have any comments about this project, or to provide any further information, please email heritage@buriton.org.uk