



Life at home: April - June 1915

This was a gloomy time in Buriton. The Easter weather was cold and wet with only rare good spells and the war was having a greater and greater impact on the area.

Also, everyone had been saddened by the death, in April, at the age of 57, of Emily, wife of Lothian Bonham Carter of Buriton House. Born at the Rectory, she had spent the greater part of her life living in the village. Her eldest son, Algernon, came back from the war in France for the funeral, but her other son, Stuart, was in the Navy and unable to return home.

More families in Buriton were mourning the loss of a son: Thomas Harman died from his wounds on 9 May, less than a month after his deployment to the Front, and Levi Hiscock was reported missing.

There was more urgency in the recruiting campaigns and pressure put on men of a suitable age. More men from Buriton were enlisting: George Watts followed his brother, Arthur, into the Army in May, and Fred Legg and Percy Strugnell joined their unit in Winchester, days after the death of Percy's brother, Arthur, was reported.

If some estate workers seemed a little reluctant, Lothian Bonham Carter did not hesitate in offering encouragement to go

– understandable, perhaps, as both his sons were serving and, in June, Algernon returned home again having been wounded for the second time.

There was quite a bit of coming and going as men returned home for a few days leave bringing news from the Front. One local diary records, in April: "War looks very black still."

The Parish Council decided that, because so many men were away "with the colours", no groundsman for the Recreation Ground could be appointed. They also noted that the Government had decided that the absence of any Councillor for these reasons would not render the seat vacant.

Missing men on the farms had to be made up by hiring soldiers from the Army for the hay harvest. To add to these troubles, in June the school was shut as a measles epidemic swept through Buriton.

Some other aspects of life seemed to go on as usual with local diaries speaking of playing 'footer' after tea and of everyday farm work. It comes with a jolt of surprise to discover that some of these activities took place as planes flew overhead and the Reservists carried out rifle practice on Butser Hill.

On the front line: April - June 1915

Warmer weather on the front lines in northern France and Belgium finds all the men from Buriton who have endured the winter still in their trenches.

Four more soon depart for France (Lindsay Harfield, Charles Lee, Joseph Marriner and Arthur Watts) and on 14 April Thomas Harman, from Nursted Lodge, arrives at the front joining the 1st Hants marching north to Ypres.

Nearby, on 17 April, in the first British operation of its kind, tunneling enabled mines to be blown under a strategic vantage point known as Hill 60. All remaining German defenders were captured or driven off with bayonets. Douglas Harfield, held in reserve, moved onto the hill two days later and had to endure shelling, gas attacks and waves of enemy infantry before the British were forced from the hill only a week after capturing it.

Around the same time, just seven miles north of Hill 60, the Germans released thousands of chlorine gas canisters, killing 6,000 French and Algerian men in minutes. Many Germans also died in this clumsy deployment which gained a few kilometres of allied ground.

Two days later, on 25 April, the 1st Hants help to plug gaps in the new front line. Under darkness they navigate open ground to reconnect with nearby trenches and then dig in to create a defensible line before light came at 3.30am. When the morning mist lifted, rifle fire and

shells poured in on the British troops. Some Buriton men survived this attack but unfortunately William Tribe, aged 20, was among the 100 men killed. Joseph Marriner, who had only arrived two weeks earlier, is wounded and receives some brief home leave as well as a promotion to Corporal.

Soon afterwards, in another phase of this Second Battle of Ypres, the Germans attacked at Frezenberg Ridge with shelling, gas and waves of infantry. Thomas Harman and other 1st Hants men, wearing makeshift gasmasks, kill many Germans but Thomas (22) is wounded and dies two days later. At the same time, Arthur Watts arrives to join the Battalion.

Further south, just east of Vimy near Arras in northern France, Levi Hiscock (18) of Faggs Farm, attacks Auber's Ridge on 9 May with 2nd Royal Sussex. During a short bombardment they creep through no-man's land to within 80 yards of enemy trenches. Arthur Strugnell, from Bones lane, is less than a mile behind in the artillery. After 30 minutes the shelling lifts and they charge, followed by reinforcements. However, huge numbers were killed climbing from their trenches. More shelling was ordered, some of it falling onto British men in forward positions, and further waves were sent over the top all day until the attack was called off and failure admitted. Levi Hiscock was one of 11,000 who died that day in a very short stretch of the front line.



A few days later, and only a few miles away, Algernon Bonham Carter moves up with 1st Kings Royal Rifles to Festubert for the first night attack of the war. At 11.30pm they creep across no-man's land undetected and take the first trench with the enemy fleeing down support trenches. On their immediate left, however, it was a different scene with flares illuminating the attackers who came under heavy fire. The Germans had only fallen back to their second line positions and two days of heavy machine gun and shell fire cost Algernon's Battalion 30% casualties despite the initial success. Algernon himself got ten wounds in this battle and

returned back to Buriton on sick leave.

On 5 June Charles Francis, 24, is killed here and late in the battle, Artilleryman Arthur Strugnell, 32, of Bones Lane, is wounded and dies on 15 June. Meanwhile, Percy Harfield and George Watts (Arthur's brother) arrive at Boulogne for their first experience of the conflict.

Far away, Henry Rogers arrives in Basra. Using local canoes and a few small Navy boats they head along the River Euphrates in searing heat, encountering retreating Turks and Arab tribes attacking from the riverbank. After weeks, they reach flood defences and a makeshift dam six miles from their objective, Nasiriyah. The dam is blown and the British pass through. The town will be fought for in July.

On the Western Front the war continues at a daily cost of 300 British lives.

The Gallipoli Campaign - from April 2015

The ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign was conceived largely by Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty. He felt that by landing in Turkey, forces could travel through the Dardanelle Straits, knock Turkey (the Ottoman Empire), a German ally, out of the war whilst establishing a supply line to Russia.

Sadly, weeks before the landings, the Royal Navy had tried to force a passage through the Dardanelles alone. This failed emphatically but alerted the Turks to the possibility of invasion and gave time to build defences. Surprise was lost.

The landings began at first light on 25 April. Most of the beaches were opposed by Turkish units and fighting was bloody with allied troops caught in the open in wire and other obstacles. The 2nd Battalion, Hampshire Regiment landed from SS River Clyde but this attack failed until at nightfall they could fight their way ashore. Many Hampshiremen died that day.

On X beach in the west, British troops landed unopposed but failed to exploit this advantage by not moving inland to cut off the forward Turkish troops. British soldiers had just finished training with no experience of battle. Leadership was also poor through lack of experience. There was, however, no lack of courage that day with many Victoria Crosses won.

Mobile fighting soon gave way to static trench warfare with neither side being able to break through. Troops had to endure blazing sun, flies, poor food, boredom, disease and constant harrying fire from the enemy.

A second landing was made in August but this failed to penetrate inland and the deadlock continued.

The peninsula was finally evacuated in January 1916; ironically, in a text-book withdrawal with no battle casualties and to

the complete surprise of the Turks. The failed campaign had lasted 8 months and resulted in 115,000 dead on the allied side and more on the Turkish.

A number of Buriton

men were involved at Gallipoli – some with fatal consequences: Charles Pink of Bones Lane was seriously wounded on board HMS Prince of Wales and died later; Joseph Marriner was one of the early attackers, wounded on 29 April; Ernest Rean of the High Street was also wounded and subsequently died of enteric fever; George Henry Harding of Weston survived but sadly lost his life later in the war; Buriton's popular postman, John Bridle, was injured; and Thomas Aldred, from Weston, was in the Royal Marines who replaced other troops as part of the withdrawal.

If you have any information about Buriton and the First World War, please email heritage@buriton.org.uk

