



Life at home: July – September 1915

In the summer of 1915, a National Registration scheme was introduced to discover how many men between 15 and 41 were not enlisted. The local enumerators were Alfred Patrick, head teacher at the school, and Henry Bone, village carpenter, undertaker and Parish Clerk.

Sadly, Henry Bone was to lose his only son, Arthur, to the war in September but, as one of the countless 'missing', his death was not confirmed for nearly two years.

Men returning on leave, including Fred Legg (described as 'looking very well in khaki'), inspired others to join up and, in August, Edward Aldred, one of four sons of a widow, Jane Aldred of Weston, enlisted. In September, it was the turn of nineteen-year-old printer, Reginald Wareham, also from Weston.

Not all were quite so eager – one Buriton soldier appeared in court for being AWOL for the third time. He claimed he'd just come back to see his wife and children, but the Court felt that he was anxious to avoid deployment abroad – and who, with hindsight, can blame him?

Two local soldiers, Harry Smith and James Powell, returned to help with harvesting but, due to the shortage of man-power, Lothian Bonham Carter himself, together with his son, Algernon, also had to work in the fields.

Women wanted to help on farms, but Lothian Bonham Carter didn't think they could do more than hop-tying and picking; women, he said, just didn't have the training or the muscles for such work, especially on clayey soils, such as those at Buriton.

Women were, however, able to help in other ways. Soldiers posted to India complained that army socks and shirts were too heavy for the climate. Local families of men serving there, like the Powells in Buriton, and the Dennis's (who lived in Petersfield, but whose son, Ernest, was a Buriton gardener), probably contributed to the total of 286 pairs of socks and 166 shirts sent to India.

In the middle of September, families arrived from Portsmouth for their annual hop-picking 'holiday'. As usual, PC Arnold, the Buriton constable, was kept busy with people being drunk and disorderly and using obscene language.

Every year the local clergy organised a mission, giving services and educational talks to the hop-pickers. This season was felt to be a great success although there was only one non-local baptism during the period, compared to seventeen the previous year when eleven children from Portsmouth (including triplets) had been baptised on one day!

Action in France and Flanders: July - September 1915

The Hampshire Regiment has no 'Battle Honours' listed for this period, giving an impression of no significant action. However, fighting continued to take place with Battalions losing about 10% of their men.

June had been relatively quiet and men on the banks of the Yser Canal were able to wash beneath poplar trees and swim amongst water lilies: almost idyllic except for the regular loss of men, known as 'wastage', from artillery bombardments and snipers.



The quiet period ended abruptly as commanders decided to push the Germans back and the Germans rekindled their intentions to push towards Ypres by making use of an old French trench, known as 'International Trench' in ensuing fights.

The Hampshire's attacked the International Trench, supporting others, and suffered 25 casualties in five days early in July. By 8th July the Germans gave up this trench and British troops claimed

about 30 yards.

This fight, unreported in newspapers, was deemed 'successful': casualties were about 100 per Battalion. Joseph Marriner, only recently arrived, was wounded and returned to Buriton by the end of July with fever.

The Hampshire's, due some proper rest, left the front line on 10 July and rested for two weeks before travelling by train to Hamel, on the Somme: currently a relatively quiet place compared with Ypres.

Albert Chitty, of North Lane, joined them there whilst Dr Bennion of Nursted House also travelled out to Flanders in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Percy Smith returned to his unit and his brother Harry shipped out to Flanders, too.

In Thurso, King George V and Prince Albert inspected the fleet and boarded HMS Emperor of India on 8 July where Stuart Bonham Carter was an officer.

For most, August was relatively routine: usually six days at the front line, six in reserve and six in the rear where they moved supplies forward under cover of darkness.

In the front line, each day began with 'Stand to', rifles aiming across no-man's land, at 6am (a popular time for attacks). After that, unless on watch, men would repair and develop trenches, whilst both sides fired regular mortar bombs and snipers were ever watchful. At night, both sides reconnoitred no-man's land, listening or raiding to capture prisoners. Even 'quiet



sectors' tested men's nerves and mettle.

Douglas Harfield, in the Dorsetshires, was probably experiencing this routine in a quiet sector in Flanders and the Shepherd brothers from Weston (Charles, Frank and Frederick) were also in the trenches. Word was received that one of them was wounded on 4 September.

As summer turned to autumn, the British and French planned the Battle of Loos where the British used Chlorine gas for the first time.

Arthur Bone's journey to this battle began on 31 August, boarding a troop train in Frimley at 2.30pm and arriving in Boulogne by midnight. After a night under canvas they departed by train at 1am on 2 September for a five hour journey to Montreuil and a twelve mile march to their billets. Miserable weather alternated with extreme heat as the men practiced rapid firing, bomb throwing, night attacks and route marches for about two weeks.

They moved off on 21 September passing Bethune and on towards Vermelles where they were halted for three hours behind artillery guns firing non stop. Reginald Wareham and George Silver (from Bolinge Hill) were gunners here, having arrived in July. They fired constantly for four days ending with a four hour crescendo before zero hour.



At 5.50am on 25 September orders were given to release the gas but winds blew it many ways, affecting British troops as much as the enemy. In places the gas worked as intended and, mixed with smoke, it exceeded the operational life of German gas masks.

As the initial attackers went in, Arthur Bone and colleagues got ready to follow. They waited through the night in a dark maze of trenches but when the whistles blew at 11:05am they charged into machine guns and enemy barbed wire.

Arthur Bone was killed along with 400 others in his Battalion. The British took three miles of territory which the Germans recaptured within a week.

George Watts, from the High Street, in Flanders since 31 May, was just arriving here with the Royal Sussex's and would soon be attacking close to where Arthur Bone had died. He would survive heavy shelling and live to fight another day – only to lose his life less than six months later.

The Mesopotamia Campaign

Mesopotamia lies between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates and forms a large part of modern-day Iraq. In 1914 its northern border was Persia (Iran) and it was part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire.

The campaign in Mesopotamia started in 1914 as an operation to protect oil-fields together with a limited show of British force in the Persian Gulf area. After war was declared on the Ottoman Empire on 5 November 1914 this grew into a full-scale invasion of the area.

A number of men from Buriton were involved in this campaign and both Henry Rogers (a gardener for the Seward family in Weston) and Ernest Dennis (who had been employed by the Bonham Carters in Buriton) died in Mesopotamia.

Initially the troops comprised an Indian Expeditionary Force together with the Royal Navy Gulf Division. The city of Basra was taken in December 1914 and a series of easy victories made the British believe that the Turks could be beaten with little effort and that Baghdad could be captured.

The town of Nasiriyah was taken in July 1915 as part of this advance with British forces losing 500 men as well as many more dying from exhaustion and disease.

Although successful, the British force was hampered by poor logistics and a critical lack of medical support. Equipment, too, was outdated and insufficient for the task. Troops suffered from debilitating heat, insects, disease and floods as they worked up the Euphrates to Kut and beyond,



reaching a point only 40 km from Baghdad.

Here the Turks counterattacked, forcing the British back to Kut where they surrounded them. This prompted swift British action but troops sent to break the siege and relieve Kut were beaten back. The garrison at Kut finally surrendered in April 1916, having been effectively starved out: a crushing blow for British prestige in the Middle East.

Following Kut, the whole British logistical system was reformed, including a railway and metalled roads to the front. This allowed rapid reinforcement and steady logistics flows. British commitment grew steadily with the number of imperial troops reaching about 250,000 in 1917.

By November 1917 morale amongst Turkish forces was dropping and, after a number of engagements the following year and a final offensive in October 1918, the Ottoman Empire signed an armistice on 1 November.

During this campaign Anglo-Indian forces suffered almost 100,000 casualties. Little of this was known in Britain as the campaign was barely reported and it was a surprise for many to learn just how large the commitment to Mesopotamia had been.