



Life in Buriton: April to June 1918

Mimi, wife of Charles Cave of Ditcham Park, was a great benefactor of the parish. She had a desire to improve local living conditions, and so in 1897 she funded the building of a custom-built house, St Joseph's in Bridge Lane (now Glebe Farmhouse, Kiln Lane) and the salary of a village nurse.

In 1904 Theresa Maud Kite arrived in Buriton with her family to carry out this role. They came from London, a move perhaps driven by her husband's poor health, because in 1906, Walter Kite died aged 35, leaving Theresa with two children, Alan, 7, and Eva, 6, to support. Nurse Kite had quickly established herself and St Joseph's became the centre for meetings of the Mothers' Union and classes in domestic skills for girls.

Alan Kite attended the school in Buriton and then went on to Churcher's in Petersfield. In December, 1917, he was commissioned into the Royal Flying Corps (soon to be the RAF) and gained his pilot's licence. On the 11th May, 1918, he was involved in a training accident and very seriously injured. His mother was taken from Buriton to Lincolnshire, where the accident had occurred, and was able to

be with him when he died the next day. He was only 18.

Thursday, 16th May, was a gloriously bright spring day when Buriton witnessed the unprecedented sight of a funeral with full military honours. A firing party of Royal Engineers from Longmoor escorted Alan Kite's coffin, draped in a Union Jack and drawn by brother officers, from his home to St Mary's Church. A contingent of the Petersfield Boy Scouts, to which he had belonged, followed behind and mourners all dressed in black lined the route. The children were drawn up in the playground to salute him as he passed by the school and the only sound to break the silence was the slow tramp of feet. After the service his body was interred in a grave lined with flowers. The customary three volleys fired over the grave echoed round the hills, as did the sound of buglers playing the 'Last Post'.

The funeral arrangements were carried out by Henry Bone, whose only son had died in the battle of Loos and whose body had never been recovered. For him, and for others in the parish, this funeral must have been symbolic of all the men who had foreign graves or no known resting place.

The continuing German offensive: April to June 1918

In response to the German offensive the British Commander-in-Chief, Douglas Haig, issued his famous 'Backs to the Wall' communiqué, urging men to 'fight it out' to the end.

Only days before, Brigade-Major Algernon Bonham Carter, had a very narrow escape whilst based at his HQ in a chateau near Hamel, south of the Somme.

"April 4th was the most memorable day of my life. We were attacked by two Hun Divisions and pushed back. They put down the most terrific barrage round us, the worst I have ever been in, and by noon they were all round us. The General and about 15 others were captured but I've always said I would never be taken prisoner."

The walled Chateau grounds had two exits but "at both places there were Huns passing. However, at one place where I met two Hun officers I had the luck to shoot both of them dead at three yards range. Only one fired at me and missed. I then hid in a hole in the grounds from which I succeeded in digging out under a wall. It was noon when I got into the hole and for the rest of the day I had to sit there under our own artillery fire, aircraft and bombing. However, all the time I felt quite confident.

"About 7.30 the Huns began moving about and I was very nearly done by a chicken they were trying to catch, which came in my

direction. It was agonising. It poured all the time. About 8.30 I started. From the firing I had a good idea of where the Hun outposts were, and luckily, I struck them at once. They were taking no risks as they had a post every 30 yards with a patrolling sentry. However, I managed to crawl through on my hands and knees. My hands, face etc were smeared with mud and having crawled for a mile and a half I reached some fallow fields where I walked. Finally, I struck our own outpost line and nearly collapsed with joy. It was wonderful to hear the language again."

These extracts are from a letter home which concluded: "There you are. I have had some adventures but I'm glad I did not chuck up my hands. The reaction was pretty bad after the strain but I am better now though frightfully tired and I cannot sleep properly."

About 10 miles north, one of the Bonham Carters' employees, Harry Legg, was in the lines south of



*Algernon's own
map of his escape*



Harry Legg's Battalion returning from the front line on 9th May

Thiepval and under attack. Runners, like Harry, were vital as communications were cut and, in places, the Germans broke through. By the morning of 6th April all the officers were casualties and the men were driven back with shells raining down. Finally, at dusk, they were relieved and their War Diary noted "The Runners did remarkable work". Harry, from Dean Barn, had been hit by shrapnel in his left shoulder and nose and was in hospital in Bradford by 16th April.

Harry's older brother, George, had sailed to France on 22nd March to join the 2nd Hampshires. Like others they withdrew several miles as the enemy attacked fiercely. George avoided injury until mid-May when he was gassed and taken to hospital in Boulogne. He remained in France, receiving medical attention, until late August but permanent damage to his chest meant that he was no longer fit for the front line.

There were yet more Buriton casualties

in this period of heavy fighting. James Powell, 32, from Bones Lane, was killed on 8th May whilst serving with 2nd Hampshires near Bois d'Aval, about 15 miles from Ypres. A shell exploded in his trench. His parents had learnt of another son's death only weeks earlier and they still had four others serving, one of whom (Frederick) left Palestine in May with the 2/4th Hampshires for France, to join the front line near Buquoy in June.

Another casualty was Edward Aldred, from Weston, who was serving with the 15th Hampshires around Ypres but was in hospital in York by June.

But the German offensive was now stalling with their troops, depleted and exhausted, struggling with stretched supply lines. The Allies had not been forced to negotiate a peace settlement and knew that the Americans would soon arrive in numbers. It was time for the Allies to plan their offensive.

Stuart Bonham Carter and the Zeebrugge Raid

Stuart Bonham Carter, from Buriton House, played a leading role in the daring Zeebrugge Raid which Winston Churchill described as “the finest feat of arms” in the war.

In late 1917, German submarines were almost starving Britain into defeat with their Bruges base sinking over 2,500 ships.

Haig’s plan to break out from Ypres and capture Bruges had been thwarted at Passchendaele and so the hope was to block canals connecting the base to the sea.

An audacious plan was devised for a midnight raid: almost a suicide mission as the raiders would be confronting an enemy who had superiority in guns and troops. Lieutenant Bonham Carter was chosen to command HMS Intrepid: one of the three ships to be sunk to block the canal.

Detailed arrangements, with diversionary assaults, were prepared so the ships could pass a long harbour wall (mole) with German gun batteries.

The fleet of small ships departed on 22nd April. Three vessels, aided by a smoke screen, got to the mole, Marines stormed enemy positions and a British submarine destroyed a viaduct to prevent German reinforcements.

The blockships then proceeded towards the canal. The leading ship fouled an anti-submarine net but Bonham Carter manoeuvred to his exact sinking position, followed by the third vessel. After abandoning ship, he scuttled Intrepid by

detonating explosives. Launches rescued the crews but there was not initially space for Bonham

Carter and he used a ship’s raft before swimming for safety, almost left behind at one stage when he grabbed a rope and was dragged for about 20 yards before letting go.

Stranded, he swam again, coated in oil and lucky that it did not ignite. Fortunately a star-shell revealed him and one of the small boats returned. They sustained casualties as they left but met with British battleships offshore.

The casualties (227 killed, 356 wounded) were significant for an action that lasted less than an hour, illustrating the daunting mission. Eight men received Victoria Crosses.

Whilst the raid was only a limited success (the canal was only blocked at low water) it was a boost for morale at home whilst the Germans were heading towards Paris.

When Stuart Bonham Carter arrived home in the village after the ordeal, schoolchildren marched proudly to Buriton House and lined the entrance: “All had flags and sang ‘Hearts of Oak’. But he must have been so tired that he just went straight past into the house!”



Stuart Bonham Carter