



Life at home: July to September 1918

By the summer of 1918 things did not seem to be getting any better. Meat was particularly difficult to obtain - butchers couldn't get enough livestock and had to order dead meat from Government distribution centres. Cumbersome administration meant that several deliveries were rotten when they arrived.

A local Food Overseer and Fuel Overseer had been appointed for the Petersfield district, but this could not improve the situation when there were national shortages of sugar, dairy products, beef (mutton was completely unobtainable) and fuel. The lack of street lighting in the district didn't affect Buriton, as there weren't street lights in the village.

At least the Ministry of Food approved an extra allowance of tea for hop-pickers, good news as the crop was due to be unexpectedly good this year. Earlier bad weather had brought the worst attack of aphid blight since 1882 but inspectors praised the local growers for their steps to overcome this.

Effects of the fighting were felt when Fred Rattley, injured by a gunshot in an arm in November 1917, was medically discharged on 8th August as unfit for military service and Albert Strugnell was also discharged, on 10th September,

because of his sickness over many months. There was also more bad news: James and Barbara Powell lost yet another son, Frederick, and Charles Fisher had been wounded.

Harry Legg, now with a bar to his Military Medal and wounded in April, was allowed home in August from convalescing in Tipperary to get married in the Methodist Chapel to Marguerite Vore. His brother, Percy, was best man and the wife of his brother, George, played the organ. The Leggs were a large family, related by marriage to several other Buriton families, so the wedding was well-attended. But the couple could only go as far as Portsmouth for their honeymoon as Harry's leave was short.

By October there was a feeling that things might change for the better. The local Military Tribunals, with Lothian Bonham Carter and Charles Seward as members, had so far been very conscientious in assessing men who appealed against military call-up. Now they were granting six month exemptions to those who they saw, with the Army representative barely disagreeing. Perhaps the end of the war really might be in sight.

The tide turns on the Western Front

July to September 1918

By June 1918, the German advance had gone as far as it could. Men were hungry, as it was taking a long time for supplies to reach them, and thousands had flu. In July, the Allies began to fight back and large numbers of Americans went into action. The Germans began to retreat.

For 100 days the Allies were on the attack and won three quick battles: the Second Battle of the Marne (July), the Battle of Amiens (August) and the Second Battle of the Somme (August). The Germans retreated to their Hindenburg Line defences but, from September, the Allies began to break through with men from Buriton involved.

In mid-July the 2/4th Hampshire Battalion, including Frederick Powell, left the Arras area and took trains and lorries, to Sommesous, between Rheims and Troyes. On 19th they marched to the Ardre valley, down which they would attack the next day. Despite German machine-gun posts hidden in the crops in the valley, they captured Marfaux on 23rd July

and kept the pressure on the retreating Germans by attacking again the next day, taking Montagne de Bligny, about 20 miles from Rheims.

These attacks had been in vital locations in this Battle of the Marne and the men could now spend time in reserve.

After about two weeks rest they moved again, to Ayette, between Arras and Bapaume. On 26th August they took their objectives and stayed in the front line for a few days, making useful advances despite machine-gun fire and shelling. On 29th they assisted the 5th Devons attack the Horse Lines, a well-defended position north-east of Bapaume. Frederick Powell, 23, is believed to have been killed in this attack: the third son of James and Barbara Powell of Bones Lane to die in five months.

The 1st Somersets (including Charles Fisher from South Lane) also undertook daylight raids through crops north of Bethune. In August the enemy withdrew and on 15th the 1st Hampshires arrived to relieve the Somersets. With Buriton men



Marfaux in July 1918

in both battalions there may have been a chance to say hello.

Once back in the front line, the Somersets attacked a northern part of the Hindenberg Line on 2nd September. They encountered thick wire and machine guns but broke through to defeat the enemy. It was probably in these attacks that Charles Fisher, 20, was wounded, reported at home on 18th September.

The 1st Hampshires, including Arthur Watts and possibly Albert Marriner and George Powell, were in the same area and also had a lively time in July before advancing in support as the enemy withdrew. They were also on the fringe of attacks in September.

The 15th Hampshires, including Cyril Fullick and Horace Gamblen, spent July and August in and out of trenches about six miles south-west of Ypres. Most of this was uneventful but there were some raids on the enemy in July, a larger attack with good advances in August and an attack around Messines on 4th September. For the rest of September they worked in and out of the lines and on salvage duties before moving north-east of Ypres ready to attack at Tenbrielen.

The 2nd Hampshires spent much of July training but supported an attack on the Outersteene Ridge early in August. At the beginning of September they moved to Ploegsteert to join an attack on Hill 63. Despite meeting ferocious fire they captured the hill on 4th September but

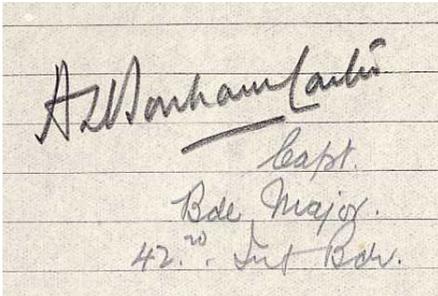
casualties were not light and Herbert Francis, 20, was killed – the last man from Buriton to die on the Western Front.

Algernon Bonham Carter, Brigade Major of the 42nd Brigade, was writing the unit's War Diary during this period and details show his involvement with logistics for attacks, giving detailed orders about equipment and about the objectives for NCOs. Telephones, dogs, pigeons, runners and planes were all being used for communications.

In the Middle East, Buriton men in the 1/6th Hants were employed on rail and road construction around Tikrit but were ready to move off in October to attack Turkish troops.

This period was one of the most significant and dangerous on the Western Front. There was constant movement, often lacking cover as men advanced across open farmland. The German Army began to collapse. Thousands laid down their arms and surrendered. The end of the war was in sight.

Algernon's signature from the official War Diary

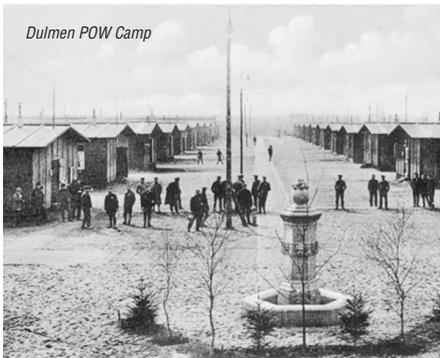


Algernon Bonham Carter
Capt.
Bde Major.
42nd Inf Bde.

Prisoners of War

As the war drew towards a close there were about 185,000 British POWs, including men from Buriton.

William Langrish was captured on 31st October 1914 near Ypres and by 19th December he was over 600 miles further east, in a camp at Altdamm in present-day Poland. Able to receive parcels, he wrote a letter of thanks, on 1st December 1915, for underclothes, cigarettes and bread. By January 1917 he was further west, at Dulmen (near Munster), but records suggest he had also been at Friedrichsfeld, near Duisburg. Soon after the armistice the Hants & Sussex News reported that he was amongst recently-returned POWs.



William Fisher was captured on 3rd September 1916 at Hamel and in October he was in a German war hospital at Caudry, near Cambrai. He was soon moved almost 500 miles eastwards to a hospital camp at Grafenwohr, Bavaria, recovering from a gun-shot wound. By

5th December he had been moved again, to Nuremberg, about 50 miles away and was still there on 3rd January 1917. It is probably a letter from him that was published in the H&S News in December 1917 and, before the war's end, he had been moved again, to Erlangen and to Bayreuth (both north of Nuremberg). He was also back in Britain fairly swiftly, being discharged on 24th December 1918 "due to wounds."

At least one other Buriton man was taken prisoner, but died in captivity in 1916. Ernest Dennis was serving in the 1/4th Hampshires and was amongst thousands forced to surrender to Turkish forces after the siege of Kut in April 1916. He probably received insufficient food and faced epidemics of dysentery, cholera, and malaria, as well as a Turkish regime which didn't, in general, follow Western rules for prisoners. He died on 31st August at a POW work camp at Entelli where prisoners were put to work constructing part of the Berlin to Baghdad railway, including a tunnel through twelve miles of rock.

Elsewhere, in camps across Europe, POWs were sometimes kept in rather squalid conditions with inadequate food, clothing and sanitation. Cholera and typhus were common and the confinement also led to psychological illnesses. After the war many prisoners returned home with severe, permanent dietary problems following prolonged malnutrition.