



At home: the last few weeks of the war

November began with more warnings of food shortages – farmers were warned hoarding grain would be punished. Residents of the district were urged to use every scrap of waste wood that they might be able to find to save precious coal for the worst of the winter.

None of that prevented the great joy at the signing of the Armistice on Monday, 11th. Scout bugler boys went round announcing the news and the church bells in Buriton and all the district rang out. The news was announced in Buriton school and all the children were then allowed to go home. Many from the parish gathered at the Drill Hall in Petersfield to join in a service of Thanksgiving.

These celebrations were of little consolation for one family: Thomas Chitty and his wife, of The Landpits on the Causeway, learned that their son, Harold, had died of pneumonia at Basra on November 7th.

Before the end of November: William Browning from the Hampshire regiment was back from Mesopotamia. By early December, William Langrish, a prisoner of the Germans since early in the war, was home.

Suddenly there were many other things

to think of: the need to provide housing; concern that those returning would not find employment; and, on a domestic level, how to feed hungry men on the limited amount of provisions available.

And nearly two years on, there still hadn't been any resolution of the water supply problems in High Street: what system was going to be used and who was going to pay for it ...

But the war wasn't yet over for some families in the parish. In November 1919, at Weston, Bessie Francis was eagerly awaiting the telegram which would tell her that her husband had safely landed. Instead, the telegram told her that he had died from the Spanish 'Flu, 24 hours away from England. Samuel Francis was buried in St Mary's churchyard, where his WWI gravestone can be seen. The Shepherds were also to lose another son: Frederick, still in the Army in 1921, had been sent to Constantinople (now Istanbul). While there he was seriously injured and was invalided home. He was in hospital for several years and died during an operation. He is also buried in St Mary's churchyard and his name appears on the War Memorial, out of alphabetical order because of the date of his death.

1918: The final few weeks on the battlefields

With the Germans on the run, Allied advances were covering miles of open ground – but this did not mean men were out of danger. Enemy strong points and counter attacks held up advances and troops were more inclined to be careful with the end potentially in sight.

The remaining Buriton men in the 2nd Hampshires experienced typical conditions. Starting at Ghelewe, south of Ypres, they attacked at dawn on 2 October behind a creeping barrage and advanced, taking 1,000 prisoners. Further advances followed before relocation, at the end of the month, to Tourcoing where they were greeted by liberated locals. From 3 November they were pursuing the withdrawing enemy again and were near Lessines when news of the armistice arrived.

Cyril Fullick and Horace Gamblen in 15th Hampshires were also at Ghelewe at the beginning of October, dealing with an enemy position near to the 2nd Hampshires. After lively fighting they were relieved and had ten days rest. On 12 October they moved to support trenches on the Menin Road and were soon attacking, taking their objectives.



The Menin Road

On 1 November they moved to divisional reserve and were in reasonable billets at Nukerke when the Armistice came.

The 1st Hampshires, including Arthur Watts, George Powell and possibly Albert Marriner, were in lines at Eterpigny, east of Arras, where it was quieter. After training and other duties, they entered front lines near Cambrai where they were shelled with gas on 22 and 23 October. But they attacked the next day and on 1 November: their last action. The next day, they were relieved and went back to Haspres. On 11 November they were training in the same area.

In Mesopotamia the 1/6th Hampshires (with William Browning, Harold Chitty and Reginald Steadman) moved to the Fartha Gorge where, on 23 October, they attacked Turkish forces in the final days of fighting. Advances were checked by artillery fire but by 27 October they had reached Qalah Jibbah and were in reserve when the Turks requested an Armistice on 30 October – ending the fighting here. Sadly, Harold Chitty died of pneumonia on 7 November.

Frederick Durrant, an undergardener at Bolinge Hill, was with 2/6th Royal Warwickshires in support at actions to take the city of Valenciennes. Men went over at 5.15am behind a creeping barrage and fought from street to street as the enemy withdrew. The men appear to have spent the armistice somewhere on the road to Mons and then served in the armies

Joy at news of the Armistice



of occupation. Fredrick Durrant was discharged due to sickness in April 1919.

Crossing the River Scheldt



Early in October Algernon Bonham Carter, Brigade Major with the 42nd Brigade, moved up from south of the Ypres Salient and advanced eastwards taking prisoners as they went with relatively few casualties. By 10 November the Battalion HQ was at Dottignies and the next day orders came for hostilities to end at 11am. The War Diary, signed by Algernon Bonham Carter, has no other entries for that significant day but they soon moved into billets at Herseaux where they stayed for some time.

The armistice was signed just after 5am on 11 November. In some places the news spread in minutes; elsewhere troops did not know until 8 or 9 o'clock. The news was received with mixed emotions:

for many it was not celebrated but was met with disbelief or plain relief, whilst others in rest areas rejoiced rowdily. Nevertheless, about 11,000 men became casualties on 11 November.

Francis Cave, back in France with RAF 94 Squadron, was due to fly at 9am and his machine was running at 8.35 when an aircraft approached from another airfield. "He flew round the aerodrome and fired off a white light and then landed, telling us to wash out the patrol as the war was over. There was a little cheering but it was taken very calmly." Later in the day he visited Amiens and noted "We saw flags all over the place. It was a wonderful sight – many shell-wrecked houses, but flags all along the streets and tied to every cart or car." In the evening, after a quiet dinner in a restaurant "the whole room broke out singing Tipperary."

The war was over and the remaining men would come home over the coming weeks and months. Buriton men had, statistically, suffered more casualties than the average and they had served in every role and in all theatres of the war.

A forgotten army?

The final adventure of Fred Smith and Harry Marriner was probably one of the most remarkable episodes of the war – but they felt rather forgotten.

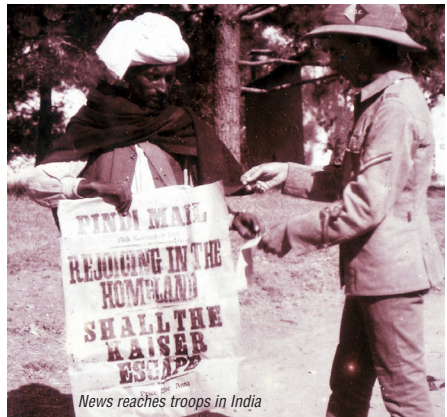
Based in India with 1/9th Hampshires, they had begun to mobilise to go to the north-west Frontier in October 1918 when they were ordered to join a force being sent to Russia.

The Bolshevik-German peace treaty posed some threats to the Allies and so military intervention was agreed to help anti-Bolsheviks in a Civil War. Fred Smith and colleagues were to be part of this help and sailed from Bombay on 29 October.

Hit by influenza during the four-week voyage, they lost a number of men before arriving in wintery Vladivostok on 25 November. They left on 18 December for a 4,000 mile Trans-Siberian railway journey in trucks with rudimentary heating stoves. On 7 January 1919, they arrived in Omsk where they stayed for five months, backing an ill-equipped Russian force but not engaged in any fighting.

In May they were sent further west to Ekaterinburg, helping to form an Anglo-Russian Brigade largely made up of Russian peasants. But, with a Bolshevik advance, the battalion was withdrawn early in August. A letter from one of Fred's colleagues described regret at leaving the White Russians unprotected.

They went back all across Siberia to Vladivostok, before sailing for Vancouver on 1 November, crossing Canada by rail



and sailing home across the Atlantic. After travelling around the entire world, the battalion arrived back in Southampton on 5 December 1919.

Others from the parish also had delayed home-comings including: James Hills, who served in the Army of Occupation in Germany; Edward Aldred, who helped with reburials in the Army Labour Corps; Richard Bunce, 18, who had enlisted in August and was soon out in India for some time; Charles Hall, still serving overseas including the Anglo Afghan War in 1919; and a number of Buriton men serving in the Navy, including Admiral Sydney Fremantle who was in charge of guarding the interned ships of the German High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow.

Sadly two more men from the parish, both from Weston, were still to die: Samuel Francis died of influenza on 24 November 1919, the day before his ship from Aden reached Liverpool; and Frederick Shepherd was injured in the Army of Occupation in Constantinople and spent most of the rest of his life in hospitals, dying on 16 July 1924.