

MAYFIELD AND THE GREAT WAR - NO. 53 - AUGUST 2018

The Allies had weathered the storm of the German spring offensive. Along the extensive front line they had, in some places, been driven back but had never been beaten. In August 1918, reinforced by hundreds of thousands of fresh US troops, they faced an exhausted enemy.

Prime Minister Lloyd George, briefed by military commanders and reading the situation well, took the opportunity of the 4th anniversary of the outbreak of war to speak to the British Empire in a novel fashion. On Monday evening 6th August, at principal theatres throughout Britain, a message from the PM was read out to the public. It had been carefully arranged that its purport should not be made known before the appointed hour, at which time the seal of an envelope was broken and a prominent Townsman selected to be the PM's spokesperson for the occasion. The PM's message was read out at the Tunbridge Wells Opera House as follows:

'The message which I send to the people of the British Empire on the fourth anniversary of their entry into the war is HOLD FAST.

We are in this war for no selfish ends. We are in it to recover freedom for the nations which have been brutally attacked and despoiled and to prove that no people, however powerful, can surrender itself to the lawless ambitions of militarism without meeting retribution, swift, certain and disastrous at the hands of the free nations of the world. To stop short of Victory for this cause would be to compromise the future of mankind.

I say HOLD FAST because prospects of victory have never been so bright as they are today. Six months ago the rulers of Germany deliberately rejected the just and reasonable settlement proposed by the Allies. Throwing aside the last mark of moderation, they partitioned Russia, enslaved Rumania and attempted to seize supreme power by overwhelming the Allies in a final and desperate attack. Thanks to the invincible bravery of all the allied armies it is now evident to all that this dream of universal conquest, for the sake of which they wantonly prolonged the war, can never be fulfilled.

But the battle is not yet won. The great autonomy of Prussia will still endeavour by violence and guile to avoid defeat and to give militarism a new lease of life. We cannot seek to escape the horrors of war for ourselves by laying them up for our children. Having set ourselves to the task, we must see it through till a just and lasting settlement is achieved.

In no other way can we ensure a world set free from war. HOLD FAST.'

Within 48 hours the British and French launched a powerful counter offensive against German forces, around the area of Amiens. Spearheaded by the British, using 400+ tanks to drive through German defence lines along a 15 mile front, over the next 2 days an advance of 10 miles was achieved. The opposing German forces were taken by complete surprise, suffered high casualties and had prisoners taken, a pattern which was to continue for the rest of the month. After the war, General Ludendorff stated that *'August 8th was the black day of the German Army in the history of the war'*. The success and timing of the counter offensive, following a long series of German offensives since March, seriously shook the mind and morale of the German Supreme Command. For the German Army and people the downward slope of events was to prove a disaster. Reports of riots in Berlin strengthened the view that German morale was dipping.

During the month of August the 5th (Cinque Ports) battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment spent the month posted at camps near Granezza in Italy undertaking work in the forward area such as working on concrete dugouts, construction of a water point, construction and erection of camouflage on roads and tracks. they even erected kilns to recover solder from old tins; 45lbs of solder was recovered during the month. The battalion endured much enemy shelling at night, and towards the end of the month C company was withdrawn to the main camp at Granezza. 7 ORs wounded during the month.

Locally, to observe the 4th anniversary of the outbreak of war the Mayfield and Mark Cross Platoon of the Crowborough 'C' Company 5th Volunteer Battalion of the RSR attended parade at St Denys Parish Church, Rotherfield.

Continuing the effort to meet National Salvage targets, at the request of the National Salvage Director, Messrs Long & Fry, Outfitters, Mayfield; Mr Eastwood, Baker, Five Ashes; Mr Balcombe, Grocer, Colkins Mill; and Mt Ashwell, Grocer, East St, Mayfield received collections of all fruit stones, date stones, and hard nut shells. They were required immediately for urgent war purposes viz the manufacture of anti-gas masks. Nuts and shells to be kept dry. Advice was offered on how to dry in the sun or in the oven.

The Parish Council provided further information regarding the provision of allotments. The PC had been given appropriate power by ES War Agriculture Executive Committee to take over land in South St, known as Richmeads, for allotments. Owners Messrs Page & Overton asked for £4.00 per annum which was agreed. Said ground had been measured out into 18 plots (16 already let) and it was proposed that 8d per rod be charged to tenants to cover rent and rates.

Local newspapers contained warnings of food and fuel shortages if the coming winter was severe. As if in response to the latter warnings local schoolchildren were encouraged, by the Ministry of Food, to pick wild blackberries for jam making. Collectors to be paid 3d a lb. At the end of week one, 104 lbs had been brought in by local children.

The Mayfield WI continued to attract membership and at its monthly meeting reported 12 new members. A concert was arranged at the Parish Hall, the proceeds going to funds being raised to establish a national kitchen in Mayfield before winter. In the event a sum of £23/7/10d was raised after expenses. (a sum in today's money of over £1400).

There are four names recorded on the Mayfield and Five Ashes War Memorials for August 1918 and a fifth name incorrectly recorded (see below) as September 1916.

George Colvin. Private 1st Battalion The Queens (Royal West Surrey Regiment). Service No G/68986. George died of wounds 5 August 1918 received in action in France aged 19 and is buried at Medingham Military Cemetery, Belgium.

George was born in Mayfield 1899, one of twin boys, to parents Frederick (Ag Lab) and Maria Jane (nee Humphrey); the latter both born of Mayfield families. Sadly George's twin brother died within 3 months of birth, leaving George the youngest of seven children, 2 sisters and 4 brothers, and who as a family lived at Colkins Mill from the 1880s onwards. In 1911 Frederick Colvin died and George, aged 10 and still at school, lived with his mother Jane, eldest sister Esther and older brother William. As the war commenced and progressed his widowed mother must have found life difficult to bear as all five sons served in the army, and older brother Arthur being killed in Basra July 1915 (see article 16 July 1915).

George's service records are missing and it is not known when he enlisted at Brighton, although as he would not have been eligible until his 18th birthday, it seems likely he was called up late 1917/ early 1918. No details have been uncovered revealing the circumstances or nature of his wounds and the only comment found relating to his death are found in the K&SC 23/8/18 P6 which reported '*Mrs Colvin of Coggins Mill (sic), received the sad news on Thursday that her youngest son, Private G Colvin Queens, Royal West Surrey regiment, has died of wounds received in action in France. Previous to joining the army a short time ago, Private Colvin was employed as Porter at the railway station and was in his 19th year. This makes the third Porter from Mayfield station that has made the supreme sacrifice. Private Wheatley succumbed to meningitis and Private Hope was killed in action*'. He is buried in what is known as Medingham Military Cemetery, Belgium. Mendinghem was a popular name given by British troops to a casualty Clearing Station. Other names included Dozinghem and Bandaghem, illustrating the sometimes black humour of the British Tommy.

His mother Jane died in February 1927 at the age of 65 having been employed at the Xaverian College for 35 years. Brother Frederick was living at Wadhurst in 1939

Leonard Dawson. Lance Sergeant Royal Sussex Regiment Service No GS/2283. Leonard Died of wounds 9 August 1918 aged 22 and is buried at Pernoid British Cemetery, Halloy-Les-Pernois. France.

Leonard was born in Ewehurst 1896 to parents Caleb (Roadman ESCC/Ag Lab) and Louisa (nee Milham). The youngest of seven children (4 sons/3 daughters) the 1911 Census reveals that five other children had died over the years before the Great War. By late 1918, of the original 12 children only five remained alive. For at least 20 years the family lived at Cripps Corner, Ewehurst but by 1911 the family had moved to Harts Cottages, Five Ashes where Leonard was described as a carter's mate on farm.

His Army service records are missing but it is known that he enlisted into Kitchener's new army, at Eastbourne, prior to October 1914. The circumstances of his wounding and the nature of his wounds are unknown. It is conjecture but it is possible he was involved with 7 Battalion RSR at the Battle of Amiens in early August 1918. The Battalion participated in heavy fighting around the area of Morlancourt as the German Army was pushed into retreat. The 7 RSR war diaries record 14 Officers and 235 OR killed/wounded over the course of a week. Pernoid cemetery was open between April-Sept 1918 for casualties from No 4 Casualty Clearing Station. To date no local newspaper reports of Leonard's death have been found. However, his name is also recorded on the Hadlow Down memorial tablet together with that of his brother Herbert, who was killed in September 1916 (see article No 30). Two other brothers, Caleb Jnr, a Gunner and Clarence, 7th RSR who was wounded during his service, survived the war. Unfortunately their service records have not.

A glimpse of the effect of the war on the Dawson family is provided on the death of Caleb Snr in 1922, whilst still living at Harts Cottages, when the SAE 19/5/22 P7 reported: *'He (Caleb Snr) had worked on Broad Reed Farm for Messrs Andrew Hartfield for about 14 years. He was a keen agriculturist and well up in the cultivation and drying of hops, being successful in producing some very fine samples. The loss he sustained by the death of his two sons in the Great War sadly told on his declining years.'*

Louisa Dawson died at Lake St Mayfield in late August 1930.

Caleb Jnr was living in Maidstone in 1939 with his family and died in 1964; recorded in the Tonbridge register.

Clarence (service no believed to be G/5398 `RSR) and wounded in 1916, died in 1970 at Hastings.

Edward William Palmer. Sergeant. 10th Battalion Essex Regiment Service No 400940 (formerly with the Royal Sussex Regiment Service No 2967). He was killed in action 8 August 1918 aged 21 and is buried in Dive Copse British Cemetery, Saily-Le-Sec. Somme. It is probable that he was first buried in the Essex Cemetery which was established by the 10th Essex regiment in August 1918.

Research suggests that William Edward Palmer as recorded on the Mayfield War Memorial is mistakenly identified as William Edward Palmer of the 14th Battalion Hampshire Regiment who was killed in action 3/9/16.

Variouly referenced as W; E; WE; or EW, William Edward (as he was christened) was born 1898 in Mayfield to parents James (Labourer/Brickmaker) and Emily Booth. One of five children, four sons one daughter, the family lived in the 1890s at Coldharbour, Tidesbrook, Mayfield and by 1911 were residing at Sharnden Cottage, Mayfield. Little is known of his early years but in the 1911 Census his employment is recorded as house work and gardening. His mother at this time being recorded as employed as a Laundress. Again little is known of family activities in the early 20C, although father James appeared to be in some trouble with the local authorities in 1901/02 for failing to have his children vaccinated.

Edward's service records are missing but it is known that he enlisted early in the war at Hastings into the Royal Sussex Regiment. At a later date for reasons unknown he transferred into the 10 Battalion Essex Regiment. The 10 Essex Battalion were heavily involved, early August 1918, in the advance against the German army around the area between Morlancourt and Malard Wood. Pushing forward the battalion found itself ahead of support and in danger of being cut off by a heavy German counterattack. Fighting

their way back to safe lines it is reported from one source that only 15 survivors managed to reach British lines. This is somewhat dubious but nevertheless illustrates the difficulties of the battalion and perhaps the circumstances of W E Palmer's death. The K&SC 30/8/18 P6 reported: "*The sad news was received at his home that Sergt W E Palmer was killed in action on August 8th. He was 21 years of age and joined the army soon after the outbreak of war. His elder brother Sergt Major J Taylor is with the forces in Italy and another brother is in France.*"

His two brothers both served in the army but to date their service records have not been found. It has also proved impossible to identify their units. What is known is that they both survived the war.

Edward's parents, James and Emily, are recorded in the 1939 Register as living at Colkins Mill, Mayfield; James describing his occupation as labourer. Mother Emily died in 1948. Father James in 1956.

William George Baugh. Rifleman. Rifle Brigade. 2/10 Battalion London Regiment. Service No 48915. William was killed in action 8th August 1918 aged 18. His body was not recovered and he is listed on the Vis-En-Artois Memorial, Pas De Calais.

George William (as registered) was born 1899 in Mayfield to parents Frederick J (General labourer) and Alice V (nee Skinner). In 1901 they were living as a family at Pound Hill, Mayfield which was the address of Alice's father, James Skinner. William had one sister, Edith born 1901 and Alice is noted as being deaf. Nothing is known of their movements or occupation over the following 10 years and by 1911 James Skinner (Alice's father) had died and the dwelling at Pound Hill was occupied by Alice and the two children. Frederick Baugh is not recorded as being at Pound Hill but Alice is recorded as married ie not a widow, although no trace of Frederick can be found in the UK census. No further mention or trace of Frederick has been found.

William's service records are missing, consequently almost nothing is known of his whereabouts or occupation prior to enlisting; presumably after his 18th birthday, at Brighton in 1917. The brief details of his military service record that he was with the Rifle Brigade and at some unknown time posted to the 2/10 Battalion London Regiment. The SAE and K&SC 18/10/18 both reported '*news reached here (Mayfield) on Monday that Private W Baugh, Sussex Regiment was killed on August 10th. He was in his 19th year*'. The printed record is sadly almost non-existent on William's father Frederick and even local newspaper reports of William's death appear to reference incorrect military service details.

Mother Alice Baugh died in early 1917. Sister Edith married Bertram Dawes in 1922 and lived for many years in Heathfield. It is believed Edith had 2/3 children; is recorded in the 1939 Register as living within Hailsham RD, possibly Heathfield; and died at Bath in 1985.

Herbert Dann. Gunner Royal Field Artillery. 'A' Battery 56 Brigade. Service No 103660. Herbert died of wounds 16 August 1918 aged 19. He is buried in Bac-Du-Sud British Cemetery. Bailleulval. Pas de Calais.France.

Herbert was born 1891 in Five Ashes to parents Albert T (Bricklayer/Ag Lab/Hay Binder) and Fanny (nee Pratt). Herbert was a middle son of 9 children (7 Boys and 2 girls). At the time of Herbert's birth the family were living at Criers Cottage, Five Ashes; a cottage the parents eventually lived in for over 50 years. Research has revealed very little about the young Herbert with tantalising but unverified newspaper references to an H Dann, none of which can specifically be attributed to Herbert. By 1911 Herbert had moved into lodgings at Crowborough where his occupation is recorded as Nursery Assistant. His army service records are missing and all that is known for the present is that he enlisted at Lewes. Research has not yet uncovered the circumstances of his being wounded or the nature of his wounds.

Herbert is recorded on the Mayfield;Five Ashes and Hadlow Down War memorials.

Herbert's brother Stanley was killed in action earlier in 1918 (see Article 49., April 1918). Of the other five brothers it is known that at least three ie Percy; Frederick and Frank served in WWI.

As mentioned ealier Herbert's parents lived at Criers Cottage, Five Ashes for over 50 years and was where they celebrated their Golden Wedding. The 1939 register records parents Albert and Fanny living at Catts Cottage, Rotherfield with daughter Fanny. Father Albert T Dann died in 1942 and mother Fanny died in 1956 at the grand age of 94.

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