

## MAYFIELD, FIVE ASHES AND THE GREAT WAR - No. 7 - October 1914

The front line in much of France solidified during October, following the major battles fought in September and early October between the Marne and Aisne Rivers. Armies on both sides literally dug themselves into entrenched positions all the way east/south to the Swiss border. Consequently, the fighting moved north into Flanders where, for the time being, there was still room for movement and manoeuvre. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) move into Flanders provided defensive cover for the vital Channel Ports and allowed for shorter communication lines with Britain. By the 19th/20th October the BEF had moved into the vicinity of Ypres (known for evermore by the Tommies as Wipers) and helped to repulse a strong German offensive in the First Battle of Ypres. Among the German forces were new, recently trained volunteer corps, a large proportion of which were students. Here the German Army suffered high casualties, similar to those suffered later by the British Army on the Somme in 1916. Indian troops, who were being transported by train to the front line from Marseilles, were deployed as the BEF moved into Flanders. Meanwhile, the British Indian Expeditionary Force sailed from Bombay to the Persian Gulf in preparation for the defence of Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq, Kuwait and north-east Syria).

Belgium was in danger of being overrun and Antwerp fell to the German Army on the 9th October; the Belgian Government made its escape and transferred to France on the 14th. Away from the front line Paris was bombed by German aircraft for the first time on the 11th October, a forewarning of how the war would be brought to non combatants behind the front line.

In Bosnia, the trial of the conspirators, who had assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, started and ended. Gavrilo Princip escaped the death penalty, as he was under 21 (19 years of age) at the time he fired the fatal shots. He received the maximum sentence of 20 years imprisonment and food denied once a day each month. In prison he contracted tuberculosis and his body became racked by skeletal tuberculosis that ate away his bones so badly that his right arm had to be amputated. He died in prison on the 28th April 1918 at Terezin, Czech Republic. Five of his co-conspirators were sentenced to death, three of the five eventually executed by hanging.

Meanwhile, Turkey entered the war on the side of the Germans by attacking the Russian Fleet and ports in the Black Sea. On the Eastern Front the Russian Army, recovering from some earlier setbacks, performed well. In maintaining pressure on that front they forced the German Army to transfer/maintain more men on the Front than they wished.

Recruitment for 'Kitchener's New Army' remained of the highest importance in national policy and application. The British government gave priority to vital imports, and as such prohibited the importation of sugar. October also saw the first Canadian troops arrive in England. A German report stated that 149,000 French; 107,000 Russians, 32,000 Belgians and 9,000 British were held as Prisoners of War. A British report put losses for Britain to date as 57,000 including wounded.

At the start of the month the 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment, encompassing the local "G" company from Crowborough/Mayfield, were still stationed at Dover Castle. Lieut. Col Langham, commander of the regiment, reported that the age limit was broad, ranging from 17 to 45, with a large number of public school men in the ranks. Commenting on this he said, "*There are many things forbidden in Dover Castle now that the "Fifth" is in possession, and the chief of these is snobbery*" (Southern Weekly News). On the 6th of October the "Fifth" relieved the Artists Rifles at the Tower of London. The strength of the "Fifth" at that time was 39 officers, 1,354 other ranks. They were housed in Waterloo Tower and were reportedly content, but with not much to do and missing the view of Sussex. The "Hastings Pictorial" reported that 800 of the 5th had already volunteered for foreign service.

At the end of the month Lieut. Col Langham was a member of the court-martial meeting at Middlesex Guildhall, Westminster, for the trial of an alleged spy who was arrested in Ireland some weeks earlier. This spy was later learned to be Carl Hans Lody, alias Charles Inglis, a lieutenant in the German navy, who was sentenced to be shot. He was subsequently executed at the Tower of London on Nov 6th, the first of eleven spies to suffer the same fate during WWI.

Locally, large tented camps for new recruits had been established at Crowborough and Maresfield, although with the onset of late Autumn/Winter it was reported that these were likely to be abandoned; Army regulations did not countenance camping after October. The alternative was to billet in towns/villages or, as strong rumour would have it, wooden huts which were to be built at Crowborough to accommodate large Regiments of Territorials from London. This worried certain sections of the local populace and successfully led to calls for restrictions on licensed premises. In Sevenoaks it was reported that a resolution had been received from the Church of England Men's Society that steps should be taken to keep females indoors after 8.30pm during the presence of Territorials. In other words, a curfew for women.

This month also saw the arrival of the first wounded in Tunbridge Wells when 24 men were transferred from Fort Hospital Chatham. Huge crowds assembled in Tunbridge Wells to greet the men as they arrived in a column of automobiles, many of which were provided by local residents.

Local newspapers started to print lists of wounded casualties and first hand accounts of the fighting provided by the wounded. No fighting casualties were reported from the Mayfield/Five Ashes area, although Pte Charles Kenward 1st Batt. Coldstream Guards, son of P Kenward of the Mayfield Conservative Club, was reported to be in hospital suffering from injuries caused by a runaway horse which had bolted whilst experiencing its first taste of enemy fire. The number of Mayfield men reported to be serving in His Majesty's Forces at that time numbered 92.

Mayfield/Five Ashes residents seemed, as ever, generous of spirit and money at that time of war. Much fund-raising was undertaken during the month, with £2 10s being raised from the sale of kettle-holders and pen-wipers, with all proceeds given to the Belgian Relief Fund. The Relief Committee organised a jumble sale at the Parish Hall, raising £16 for the Belgian Refugees, and a large package of clothing was sent to the "Refugees of Folkestone". Further donations were received for the Red Cross, bringing the total for the previous few months to over £141 and gifts of clothing for the wounded were sent to hospitals in France.

Even in 1914 Mayfield had a long history of enthusiastically celebrating 5th November, but at the October meeting of the Bonfire Boyes and Belles it was decided to abandon the parade that year. The President of the Society, Sir Somerset French, wrote a letter to members suggesting that bonfires and celebrations, even if they were permitted by the authorities, were rather out of place seeing how much anxiety and suffering there was about the terrible War. Members praised his letter and agreed with his suggestions that funds be raised and kept for celebrating a great victory by the Allies or better still, an honourable peace, at some future time.

Harvest Festival was celebrated on Sunday 11th in the Parish Church. The church was decorated with flowers, fruit and vegetables, and three services and a children's service were held throughout the day. At the end of the month black-currants were picked in the village and equalled the flavour and juiciness of the summer crop. The annual meeting of the Farmers Club was held at the end of the month.

This series is written by Carole Stilwell and Brian Oldfield. If any reader has any information, however seemingly trivial, to add to the research being undertaken please contact Carole Stilwell on 01435 873407 (e-mail [carolestilwell@hotmail.com](mailto:carolestilwell@hotmail.com)) who is Events Coordinator for Mayfield, Five Ashes and Hadlow Down Branch of the Royal British Legion.