

Men of the Hampshire Regiment

Hello, I'm Patrol Leader Lilly and I represented the Scouts at the unveiling of the war memorial.

If the Oxford and Bucks Light infantry was our local regiment why did at least 10 Flackwell Heath men (and quite a few Little Marlow men too) join the Hampshire Regiment?

Well, a lot of the men knew each other and that was a huge help to get them to enlist in the first place, mates joining each other in a great adventure. And of course they were also lured by quite a clever ploy by Lt-Col John Rhodes. Let me explain.

The 1/8th battalion of the Hampshire regiment was also known as the Isle of Wight Rifles and the local men who lived or worked in the Little Marlow area were recruited by Rhodes who was the regiment commander. He also happened to be Agent for the Little Marlow estate which owned many of the farms in that area! Each man was offered one pound as an incentive to join up and as this was the equivalent of a week's wages, or more, it was a huge attraction.

The men were mostly labourers working on the big farms or in the factories hereabouts and the war, back in the early days at least, offered excitement, prestige, and escape. They were going to see the world!

A lot of us who weren't yet old enough to enlist would read the letters that our older brothers, uncles, cousins or fathers posted home from countries full of heat, and flies, and from across distant oceans. Often we didn't hear from them for months and months because they were so far from home.

One of the biggest tragedies to hit the local villages was when 19 local men in the Hampshire Regiment fell on the same day - the 19th of April 1917. Four of the men came from Flackwell Heath: **James Payne, Archie Pepper, Owen Rogers, and Joseph Summerfield**. This is their story:

On 30th July 1915 they sailed from Liverpool to the shores of Gallipoli and they saw their first action on 12th August 1915. The Rifles were withdrawn from the Peninsula that November and sailed for Alexandria, in Egypt, where they re-trained near the pyramids to prepare for the advance in to Palestine.

The Second Battle of Gaza, on 17th to 19th April, saw three Battalions advance "with great dash" over the first shallow ridge with little or no cover. The men were facing long range machine gun fire. They had to hold their packs in front of their faces in a desperate attempt to avoid the sweeping machine guns, and the slightest movement drew heavy fire. They were pinned down and unable to move. The battle was a costly failure. The Isle of Wight Rifles lost 8 officers and 186 men, mostly from "C" and "D" Companies.

Our four brave soldiers are remembered at the Gaza War Cemetery and the Jerusalem Memorial in Israel. And of course all the men are remembered on Isle of Wight memorials too.

James, Owen and Joseph are also remembered on the Little Marlow War memorial along with other local Hampshire regiment men who were killed elsewhere. Archie is on the Wooburn Green memorial, along with other names from the village. That's because Flackwell Heath, back then, was divided into three different parishes and it depended on where you lived and where your mother church was situated as to which war memorial your name would be remembered on. Other Hampshire Regiment men like **Frank Baldwin, Thomas Durrant and Albert Sarney** are only remembered on the Flackwell Heath village memorial. Why was there so much confusion?

Well, it's important to appreciate that these village memorials were erected by the local community. There was no central body from which an official list could be obtained. Instead, the names for each memorial were collected by the local committee responsible for the memorial's erection. Some committees set strict criteria whilst others were more flexible.

In Flackwell Heath a committee was established under the chairmanship of our local dignitary and farmer Mr Edward Dickson Park. Incidentally, he had also encouraged the local men to join up by offering them a shilling each, but it was no match to what Rhodes was offering to join the Hampshires! The committee's first decision was to reject a proposal that they should work in conjunction with the neighbouring village of Loudwater – we lads from the two villages had always been rivals and local rivalry still prevailed!

There was lots of fundraising to be done as High Wycombe also wanted us to raise money for the new Memorial Hospital which all of us could use. After raising funds for the hospital our local committee also decided to commission a village Memorial Hall. For this they apparently used an old army gym which was re-assembled by the local men on land donated by Lady Carrington, known as Lady Carrington's playing field which is now the site of Carrington School and the Community Library.

This was followed by the erection of our stone plinth war memorial on 'The Common'. The memorial, which was designed by Mr Thomas Thurlow of High Wycombe, one of the joint owners of Flackwell Heath Golf Club, was unveiled during a ceremony on Sunday May 8th 1921 by Lord Carrington. He was, by then, the Marquis of Lincolnshire and Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire. All the village clubs and institutions were represented at the ceremony and the Flackwell Heath Silver Band, conducted by Mr Vane, led a procession through the village. It was a huge affair and The Common was packed with people.

We scouts had all done our bit for the Home Front, helping out with fruit picking in the orchards, farm chores on the local farms, gardening for absent soldiers, collecting for the war effort, that sort of thing. In the blackberry season of 1917 the village children collected 240 pounds of blackberries and exceeded that amount in 1918. We scouts also had to guard the water tower in case enemy spies poisoned the water supply but as our hours were only from 8 to 5 the idea was soon disbanded.

We knew that if the war continued we'd be called to the Front too, and I was glad to think that I'd be enlisting alongside some of my chums and this would give me the courage to face what fate might await me. Thankfully, for my parents, the war ended before I was old enough.

5 mins