



Buriton Life at home: April - June 1916

April brought lovely weather and local diaries show trips to Chalton Park with children, amongst agricultural activities. But news of the war and growing pressures for men to enlist cast a pall over everything.

By now, all men up to 41 faced military service although some, like men in the lime works, were exempted as 'key' workers. In spite of some local farmers' reservations, more women undertook agricultural work, with some in Buriton docking the lambs.

The Parish Council re-appointed Albert Marriage an 'Overseer of the Poor': a reminder that money, food and clothing was still administered locally under the Poor Laws.

With increases in motoring, accidents were more common. Charles Seward, who farmed at Weston with brother Percy, was knocked off his bicycle by a van travelling at a dangerous speed (18 mph). Although Charles' injuries were not serious, the driver was given the heavy fine of £1.

The times were literally changing like never before with Parliament deciding that, for a period, clocks should be set one hour ahead of GMT: "to reduce the number of hours during which artificial lighting is used in the evenings and save to the nation part of the fuel and release quantities of coal which are urgently

needed for other purposes arising from the war."

There was excitement about the wedding of Harriet Bennion and Bishop John Mercer. Villagers contributed to buy a writing case for the bride which teachers and children complemented with a silver inkstand, presented by 'little Miss Stubbs', daughter of the grocer and sub-postmaster. The wedding was a magnificent affair with the village thronged by visitors and residents. Two other local girls due to be married, Margaret Chandler and Margaret Smith, were possibly envious of Harriet's Liberty dress! The flowers were particularly praiseworthy: a credit to Nursted House gardener, Henry Steadman.

Spring also welcomed new babies: Eva New, Roy Silver, Arthur Marriner and the Chitty twins, Evelyn and George, as well as Alan Francis, youngest son of Samuel Francis of Weston, a father who was to die on his way home from war in 1919.

When Lord Kitchener was killed on 5 June a Buriton diary reflected the national mood: "Terrible, sad news for the country." And our small parish lost more men: Thomas Harman, Charles Pink (a year after being injured) and Thomas Hill and Alfred Kilham at Jutland.

Preparing for the Battle of the Somme: April - June 1916

At this time, 100 years ago, many British men were taking positions along the Somme front line. The scale of the operation would be very apparent as they reached the area.

The British plan included a five-day bombardment before the infantry attack. This ceaseless rain of shells on the enemy was conducted in a number of stages, designed to cut barbed wire defences and then destroy trenches, emplacements and artillery. Roads and tracks were shelled at night to prevent supplies and relief units.

Every day, ten trains brought munitions to railheads, twenty miles to the rear. Percy Harfield and Frederick Marriner of the Army Service Corps moved things forward on "Corduroy Roads" of timber using horse-drawn transport, maintaining an eight day supply for the guns. Frederick is thought to have been based in Vadencourt, five miles behind other British men in artillery brigades.

Local infrastructure was overwhelmed. In one twenty-four hour period Fricourt, a village similar in size to Buriton, saw 26,500 men march through, with 3,756 horse-drawn wagons, 63 big horse-drawn artillery pieces, 900 trucks / buses and 330 ambulances.

Tens of thousands of tents were erected



and supplies of clean water arranged for men and horses from new bore-holes and many miles of pipes. Washing was kept to bare minimum.

As June drew towards its close, Lindsay Harfield and Charles Lee, in the

12th Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, were near Carnoy, one mile from the front. George Silvers was three miles to their left, near Poizieres, with the 70th Royal Field Artillery.

The weather was poor but, when clear, planes aided the ranging of the guns, adding to information from forward observation posts. Men in the front trenches looked skyward as the shells poured overhead. As well as the deafening sound, the ground trembled with the constant rate of explosions just 200 yards across no-man's land. Towards the end of the bombardment the 12th Heavy Battery moved forward again to nearby Billon Wood.

In all, over 1,738,000 shells were fired by 1,300 artillery guns, along a distance similar to the distance from Buriton to Havant: a gun every 18 yards. About 250,000 shells fell each day (10,000 per hour): enough to hit every tennis-court sized piece of the enemy front line every six minutes for a week.

On 30 June a number of Buriton men were involved in a diversionary attack forty miles north at Richebourg l'Avoué, above Arras, designed to keep the enemy guessing. The attack was a failure but

fortunately the 14th Hampshire's (including Caleb Chitty, William Fisher and Victor Windebank) did not lead the attack and survived.

Buriton men were now in position in a number of places ready to attack. In the centre of the front, on a gentle rise of open ground, close to Beaumont Hamel village, were Percy Case, Alfred Cook, George Harding, Godfrey Hughes, Frank Newman, Basil Treagus and Arthur Watts of the 1st Hampshire's.

To their right, Albert Bunce, James Powell and Percy Strugnell were in support lines, due to go over the top at midday. Given the lie of the land, these two Hampshire Battalions could surely see each other as they looked to left and right.

A few miles north, Douglas Harfield was with the 1st Dorset's in the tree lines of Authielle Wood, near Thiepval, also ready to attack in the morning. It's possible,



though unconfirmed, that his brother, Godfrey, was 2-3 miles south near La Boisselle with the 7th South Lancashire's.

A mile or two further south, more Buriton men were in support lines, available to attack in subsequent days. Among them was William Porter (with 19th London Regiment), moving in below a tuft of woodland atop a dominant high point of downland called High Wood.

A mile east of William was Delville Wood where Algernon Bonham Carter, now a seasoned, twice wounded, officer with the 1st Kings Royal Rifles, was moving into trenches on a corner of the tree line; 300 yards to his left, Victor Welch was doing the same with the 15th Royal Warwickshire's.

Wilfred Gamblen, Thomas Lovell, Frederick Rattley were also close by, part of the follow up force.

The Somme infantry attack would begin in the morning.

At sea and in the air: April – June 1916

Since the outbreak of war, the British and German navies had avoided a major clash, perhaps fearing that it could be decisive and leave their nation vulnerable.

But, by 31st May 1916, with the British having established a blockade of enemy ports, the Germans were tempted into action. The result was the largest battle in naval history, involving 250 ships and 100,000 men.

The Battle of Jutland began just before 4pm and was over in a matter of hours. One of the first casualties was Buriton-born Thomas Hill, 34, a Gunner in the Marines who died when HMS *Indefatigable* sank quickly after a direct hit.

Later, as night fell, Alfred Kilham, 18, a Telegraphist on HMS *Castor*, was also killed when German ships came within 2,000 yards, turned on spotlights and fired. *Castor* was hit but returned fire before turning away. She stayed afloat but Alfred was one of 10 men killed by the hit – one of over 6,000 British deaths as well as 2,500 Germans.

Both sides claimed victory as, although the British lost more ships and men, Germany's aim of destroying a substantial part of the British fleet failed.

This was the first war ever fought in the air; a time when pilots had to wrestle with unreliable flying machines as well as with the enemy and their own inexperience.

Only months after his 18th birthday Francis Cave, second son of Charles and Wilhelmina Cave of Ditcham Park, joined

the Royal Flying Corps at the end of March 1916.

After theoretical training in Reading, a series of exams and three days flying, his diary for 13th May records: "went up to get my "Ticket": seemed to go off all right". He was swiftly transferred to a squadron at Croydon where he found "Drew, Jones and Scott (all Reading fellows) are here". By Thursday Scott had crashed and broken his leg and a few days later Jones was killed.

On 26th June Cave learnt that he'd be proceeding overseas and on 29th he was shown into a room in London to get his orders: "Malcolm Bonham Carter was in there. I am to leave at 8.20 am tomorrow and get further orders at Boulogne."

Cave's second day in France was Saturday 1 July, the first day of the Battle of the Somme. He learnt that he would be joining a squadron near Beaumont Hamel, to begin to find out what he would be doing to support the major offensive.



Damage to HMS Castor