



Life at home: October - December 1915

Although war could never be out of people's minds, some aspects of normal life continued: hop-picking finished on 1st October, Petersfield's annual Fair was held on 6th October and shoots took place on the Manor Estate.

After reports about Zeppelin raids in the south-east, Petersfield Town Council decided to stop street lighting: later reconsidered, after Charles Seward suggested there was more danger from tripping over in the dark than there was from Zeppelins!

In November everyone was invited when Dorcas Tussler married John Nicholson, a soldier in the King's Hussars, at the Primitive Methodist Chapel. Her five sisters were bridesmaids and it was clearly a stylish wedding: the bride wearing white silk decorated with pearls and all the bridesmaids had black hats decorated with silks matching their dresses. Lily Powell, the twelve-year-old flower-girl, wore a white hat, more befitting her age. The evening dance at the Institute was enlivened by the presence of many dashing young men from the bridegroom's cavalry section.

People were saddened to learn of the death of Levi Hiscock, 19, from Fagg's Farm. Killed on 9th May, the news only became known in October. The deaths of Ernest Rean (from fever after wounding at Gallipoli) and of Cecil Cadmore (from

Bolinge Hill) will also have been mourned.

Recruitment was a great talking point as voluntary enlistment was beginning to tail off, in spite of visits by recruiting officers, stirring speeches in Petersfield Square and an appeal from the King on the front page of the local paper two weeks running.

More men were needed than were coming forward and so Lord Derby introduced his 'Group Scheme', requiring every man between 18 and 40 to attest (by 12th December) that they would be available for service when called for. In Buriton every man met the deadline – reportedly due to the 'energetic work of Mr Lothian Bonham Carter'.

Caleb Chitty from Cowhouse Farm, Percy Rattley (probably underage) and Arthur Eatwell from Old Ditcham all enlisted. Married men enlisting at this time included George Legg, James Rattley, Samuel Francis, Arthur Strugnell and James Hills. Some who tried, like Percy and Harry Legg, and Arthur Durrant, failed the medical. But the time would come when the army would need their services.

Christmas parcels were sent to all the local soldiers and sailors abroad and, although the number of communicants on Christmas Day was less than usual, there was a large congregation on Boxing Day when Bishop Mercer preached: quite a 'catch' for St Mary's.

Away at war: October - December 1915

On the Western Front a number of Buriton men were still involved in the Battle of Loos, the largest British attack of 1915 and part of a major Allied plan, launched simultaneously with a major French offensive in Champagne.

The British attack had won ground in the first days, but this was lost again just as quickly and troops now fought over the original lines. Earlier in the year, limited munitions had held forces back. On this occasion reserve troops had been held too far from the front to be able to exploit successes.

There may also have been problems in supply lines but the scale of operations was bewildering: medical facilities for Loos included 16 Advanced Dressing Stations, 15 Main Stations and 13 Clearing Stations for 11,500 casualties at any one time with 17 ambulance trains (plus road transports and barges) moving men coastwards.

The Loos battlefield was immediately north of the mining town of Lens on pancake-flat ground except for slagheaps and a quarry: in German hands. Mining villages, collieries and industrial buildings presented difficulties for attackers.

Lindsay Harfield and Charles Lee, both in the 12th Heavy Royal Garrison Artillery, moved south to the Loos area. The weather was bitterly cold and so wet that work parties were cancelled. Reserves inched forward in sodden greatcoats, carrying extra rations since "it may be some time before their cooks caught up".

George Watts from Buriton High Street, with the 7th Royal Sussex, also marched south to attack 'Gun Trench', so called as it contained artillery, extending back from the German front. Adolf Hitler, an officer's runner, was also serving hereabouts. Heavy shelling greeted George and his Officer Commanding was killed. On their left, on 'Hohenzollern Redoubt', a formidable wire-clad bulge into no-man's land, enemy machineguns rattled away relentlessly.

After repelling a German attack, they withdrew into grounds of a chateau, and then, via a swampy wood, to houses in Vermelles. The Battalion soon returned to charge 'Hohenzollern Redoubt' with George in a later wave. They succeeded, taking 'Gun Trench', too. The artillery seized was later paraded in England and Australia to stir recruitment. Five days rest followed,



Devastation at Loos

Reginald Holloway



Etaples Field Hospital



before holding the area through a wet November.

Although minor fighting continued for some weeks and discussions took place between Commander-in-Chief Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig (commander of the First Army) about the merits of continuing, the Loos offensive was effectively ended before October was out: 61,000 casualties from 22 days fighting. Many officers were casualties, including a Major-General, 3 Brigadier-Generals and 30 Lieutenant-Colonels. There were calls for Field-Marshal French to resign.

Elsewhere, after training at Kempton Park and Salisbury Plain, Churcher's College student Cecil Cadmore arrived at Boulogne on November 17th with the 16th Middlesex (Public Schools) Battalion. He continued to Morbecque moving supplies, patrolling railways and training: 20 miles behind the front. But, after only 10 days in this reserve location, Cecil was seriously wounded and sadly died on December 9th at the large Etaples field hospital.

7,000 men were lost in this way every day: killed in their own lines (not attacking) and described at the time as "wastage". Many were maimed by shells or bombing, but others were hurt in transport and horse-related accidents, injuries from

dropped grenades, bayonets, drowning and illnesses.

At sea, at this time, Stuart Bonham Carter was training off the Orkneys and Alfred Kilham joined the newly commissioned light cruiser HMS *Castor*.

On December 1st Albert Bunce departed to join 2nd Battalion Hampshire's in Egypt, replacing losses incurred in Gallipoli. Later in the month Artilleryman, Walter Pretty was deployed to France and Henry Rogers travelled to join 1/4th Hants escaping the besieged town of Kut in Mesopotamia. On the front lines, Christmas passed with no truces reported.

Out in India, Reginald Holloway wrote home to his sister Polly, thanking her for the newspapers that he received every week and sending her a silk handkerchief for Christmas.

1915 had not been a particularly successful year for the Allies with no decisive advances on the Western Front, the disaster at Gallipoli and the Germans continuing to inflict damage on the Russians on the Eastern Front.

General French resigned and Douglas Haig took his place. But, would he be able to do any better with an army now largely consisting of new recruits and newly appointed officers?

Charles Cave & WW1 weather forecasting

Charles Cave, of Ditcham Park House, is an unusual unsung hero – described as the most under-appreciated British meteorologist of the First World War.

And, as the months passed, meteorologists were increasingly important.

Cave had never been trained in weather-forecasting – he was simply a keen amateur who had taken an interest in this new science in 1905. By 1913 he was President of the Royal Meteorological Society!

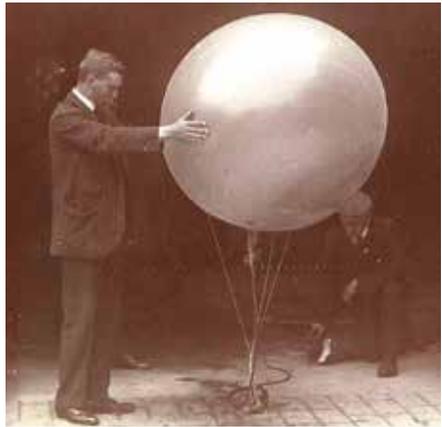
At the start of the war the Army felt that there was little need for meteorology and pilots would simply look out of a window to assess whether conditions were suitable for flying and hope that they remained so.

However, after losses in the air and the use of gas as a weapon on the battlefield, attitudes changed rapidly. In the spring of 1915 requests for help were received and within weeks a Meteorological Field Service was established in the Royal Engineers.

Captain Cave, who had been commissioned as a Reserve Officer, soon travelled to France to train meteorological observers behind the front lines around St Omer.

After a few weeks he returned to England and trained recruits at Old Sarum for all theatres of war. By October 1915 Cave was also meteorologist-in-charge of an important South Farnborough establishment.

By now it was recognised that meteorology could be very important for the armed forces in connection with the use of poison gas, smoke screens and flame



throwers as well as the everyday avoidance of damage to equipment by wind and rain.

But Captain Cave was also able to assist Artillery units as the accuracy of gunfire depends on knowledge about the density and motion of the air at different heights. With new high-angle trajectories of fire, knowledge of the winds up to considerable heights was needed.

Cave and his colleagues introduced the idea of pilot balloons to provide information for artillery units and he was later told that these saved thousands of British lives. Without them there could never have been the accuracy necessary for the creeping barrage behind which the infantry used to advance.

Aircraft needed to know cloud forecasts and details of upper winds – particularly as the speeds and heights of planes increased and night-flying became more common.

Many of the men trained by Charles Cave regarded him as their father in meteorology and he was popular for other traits as well: at Christmas 1915, all those in France who he had trained received a parcel of delicacies from a notable Piccadilly firm!