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Cover Illustration: Cross Keys Inn, Delph, 1928
(One time home of Aaron Wheelwright)
Saddleworth Historical Society Archives: H/P/Dp198U

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AARON WHEELWRIGHT: SERVING IN THE ARMY 1918¹

Aaron Wheelwright

After I got this notice I really did get down to intensive training with my punch bag and went for many long walks. I also started to sleep on the old sofa and finished up sleeping on the floor. Then on the day before I had to report, 7.3.1918 I had my hair cut very close, which was the Army custom. When men joined up at the beginning of the war they received what was known as the King's shilling and their pay was 3/6 per week, hence the song "All for a tanner a day". The King's Shilling had gone up to 2/9 and a private soldier's pay was 14/- per week. 7/- you were expected to allow for your mother or wife so that she could draw it at the post office. If I remember correctly 7.3.1918 was a Thursday and I duly reported first at Ashton Town Hall, where I had to give a lot of particulars. After the clerk had asked me my name etc, and my religion, Wheelwright, and Congregationalist, he said "Those are the longest words I have written for a long time". He next said "which regiment would you like to join?" I had never given it any thought to this so I said, "R.G.A." He said why? I said "Because my father is in it".² This bucked me up a little as I had heard some weary tales about the infantry which had to March & March & March but it did not turn out that way. I went into another building for a medical and then we were all told we could go home for the night and report at the barracks on the Friday morning to be fitted out with clothing and equipment. I had gone along with a boy from Whelleyhole St. He was called Wright Hett.³ We duly reported on Friday morning and were fitted out first with clothes then a kit bag full of other things. It did not take me long to get them on as I was used to wearing puttees on our walks round the moors. Wright seemed to be in a tiz-waz and couldn't fix his puttees so an old soldier gave him a hand and also parcelled up his civilian clothes. We were told once again that we could go home and report Saturday morning. My biggest trouble was the boots. Having worked in cotton for six years in bare feet, naturally they spread out and I took size 9s so I asked for 9s. I could hardly pick my feet up and when I got on a tram to come to Oldham, we were going on top and I must have kicked step and I fell, letting go of all of my kit bag which rolled in the road. The conductor stopped the tram, ran back for my kit bag and when he gave it to me, what did he say? "It's a good job we have a navy". Rightly so don't you think? Incidentally when I left the service four years later I could wear 7½ in a good shoe. Wright and I set off for Ashton the next morning, (Saturday) and whilst in the train he told me he had found a man's waistcoat in his parcel and that it had someone's discharge papers in the pocket. I said "I suppose you have brought them with you?" He said "No" I thought, "What a pal" I advised him to report it

¹ The previous section of this autobiography was published in Saddleworth Historical Society Bulletin Vol. 45 No. 2 2015 pp. 31-45. The account is reproduced verbatim with some minor editing and additions noted in square brackets to add clarity. A copy is held in Saddleworth Museum Archives (SMA): M/GX/CG/Whe1.

² John Wheelwright served as a gunner with the 306 Siege Bty Royal Garrison Artillery, army record available at <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/>.

³ The same age as Aaron, born in 1900, named after his father a cotton spinner. He served as private in the 2/Manchester Regiment and died in Oldham in 1963: 1911 census and army record available at <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/>.

when he got to the barracks. The third day in the army and the first time I had seen blue air. The Sgt. Major ranted and roared at him and finally sent him back home for the waistcoat and papers. He said "You should have gone to Rhyl this morning". Whilst Wright was away he had everyone on parade (and there were quite a lot really) and was detailing them for different regiments. I kept listening for my name but all at once he swung his arm and said in a terribly loud voice, "The rest of you the line". Meaning the infantry (Manchester Regiment) However it was about noon when Wright got back with his waistcoat and papers I think the air was purple by now as the R.S.M. roared at him that he had missed the train and would have to travel on Monday. We were once more allowed home about 1pm. We were lucky, four days in the army and a weekends leave thrown in. You should have heard the thanks and back-slapping Wright got when we got away from the barrack gates. Good old Wright. I went to Knowsley to see Aunt Mary Ann's and Paddy, their fox terrier did nothing but growl at me because I was in uniform and previously we had been good pals.

We duly reported again on Monday and finally entrained for Kinnel Park, Rhyl. Off into the unknown. Who could tell what was in store for us? On arrival we were given a meal, then taken to a hut, where we were told to pick a bed which was three boards on two very small trestles, issued with blankets and other necessary things. Mine happened to be second from the door on the left. We had not time to get settled in before boys who were already in the camp were coming round to see if there was anyone they knew amongst us. "Anybody here from Salford, Bury, Oldham?" and so it went on. Anyway a boy who came from Hollinwood hung onto Wright and I and insisted we go to the pictures with him that night. We were very reluctant to go as we did not know the regulations we should have to contend with and of course we did not want to get into any trouble. However he said he would come for us after tea. I sensed straight away we were doing wrong as he did not take us out of the main gates, where the guard was, but out by the trees near our hut. He said "It's alright, I will bring you back to your hut". We all three went to the pictures but I cannot say we enjoyed it as we were on pins to get back to our hut in case we got into any trouble. Our new found friend was alright as he showed us his midnight pass. That made Wright and I more worried still. We hadn't even had time to get our bearings. Anyway he did see us back to our hut door about 11.30pm. I opened it very quietly in the dark and promptly put my foot on the man in the first bed who immediately jumped up and started off towards the far end of the hut, falling over about fifteen or twenty beds until he let thud against the wall and onto the last bed. You should have heard the noise, everyone on that side of the hut was shouting and bawling at one another until through it all you could hear one loud voice that seemed to have some authority saying where he would put us all in the morning. (The mush) nickname for the guardroom. Things quietened down and the man found his way back onto the first bed. I undressed and got into the second, Wright in the third. This was what I had been training myself for and I soon fell asleep, but some said they never slept. At day break the bugler sounded Reveille, we soon learnt that this meant get a move on. "Get out of bed, you lazy devil, now gor blimey the donkey's dead" were the words to the tune. No need to get lost somebody will tell you where to go. Wright and I did not know it but there were big buckets between the huts if you wanted to make water during the night and should you want to do more there were slit trenches under the trees which when getting full were filled with earth. No privacy at all!

12th March and the ground was white with frost, so back to the hut where the only

man still in bed was the one in the top bed who seemed to have some authority the night before. We went to the wash place which was just galvanised troughs with cold water taps here and there. Just out in the open and no cover overhead. This was one thing I hadn't trained for. You should have seen the blue noses. Back to the hut to get some more clothes on and believe it or not the big noise in the top bed was just getting up. Strike us pink, he was only about 5' 2" tall and he turned out to be the corporal in charge of the hut. Who is going to put who in the mush? We were soon to find out that although such a whipper-snapper he had the authority to do it. Breakfast; we had to parade at the cook house with our mess tins, tea in the tin, porridge at one end of the lid, bacon at the other and a piece of bread on top. We had to take it back to our huts and sit around on our beds whilst we ate it. No sugar in the porridge, the bread was dry and by this time the bacon fat had run into the porridge and set hard. Having previously told you I was a sickly boy I think I ate the lean bacon, nibbled at the bread and drank the tea more to try to warm myself up than anything else. Rest of the morning was spent checking our kit and being issued with other equipment. Then we were told to go to a certain hut for our dinner. On the way to this hut we had to pass what we thought was a spare piece of land but on looking at it closer there were thousands of frozen rabbits laid out in the sun to thaw out. This had the effect of putting me off my dinner before I got to the hut. But when I saw what was on my plate I just couldn't help it, my heart heaved. It was a pile off potatoes covered with curry, "which just looked like some baby's yellow" something I had never seen before. Also some half cooked meat and vegetables. I just could not face it so I made my way to the canteen where I bought myself a cup of tea and some P.F. Biscuits. This was the first of many dinners which I didn't have. Now tea was more to my palate. Tea, bread (buttered) cheese and jam. Pozzy as we soon learnt to call it.

The next few days we spent getting to know the routine etc., we were inoculated twice in the first two weeks, forty-eight hours excused duty as the arm could be very swollen and painful. On the other hand when we were vaccinated we had no time off although you could have a real bad arm. Come Sunday morning and Church Parade for Church of England. This parade was a real ceremonial affair. The Regimental Band lead them to the church after being inspected and back to camp after the service when they would have to march past some Brass Hat who happened to be around. However on this first Sunday there was no place of worship for other denominations of which I was one "Congregationalist". Quite a few of us had watched the parade and were congratulating each other on our good fortune when a big loud voice shouted "On parade all other denominations." What a joke. They had us filling barrows with ashes and wheeling and spreading them making a new parade ground. This was a real come down for us so rather than do jobs like this every Sunday we all decided to change our religion to Church of England in time for the next Sunday and risk going on the ceremonial parade.

We had done no drill before and of course were put into the rear ranks so that our hesitant shuffles would not be noticed. However we managed to get to church without any serious trouble. When we came out we noticed quite a lot of soldiers who had not been inside, mostly belonging to the band. Of course we were curious and out to learn all the ropes as soon as we could, but found out they could make other denominations who belonged to the band go on this parade but not force them to go into the service. I think they were mostly Roman Catholics. Now for the march back to camp. Several of us were ticked off for talking whilst marching to attention. This was the way you had to find things out, being bellowed at. My own particular

moment was to come when the band formed up and were marching past. I heard someone shout "Eyes right" and when I did turn my head to the right I saw for the first time in my life about six or eight tenor drummers swinging their sticks around all over the place. I was really fascinated and had my eyes glued on them when a Sergeant bellowed in my ear, "Look him in the eye." It seems I should have been looking at the General who was taking the salute. I thought it would be better wheeling ashes. However this thing sorted itself out a few weeks later when they started a service for the other denominations and we all changed our religion back again. Then started weeks of square-bashing and physical training and learning army routine. It was still very cold and one such morning we were split into groups of fifteen or twenty and put in charge of a Corporal or Sergeant who took us into a hut to show us how to put equipment together. The moment I saw the Sergeant I thought "I know this chap!" Anyway I did not say anything until the class broke up when I said, "Don't I know you Sgt.?" He said, "I think so, didn't you work at Rome [mill]?" "Yes." He also worked there in the card room before call up. I must say it felt very nice to know someone amongst so many strangers. His name was Tom Collins and his wife lived in Salem [Oldham]. It seems he had joined the 1st/10th Manchester regiment, on the outbreak of war and had seen active service in different places. Having been wounded a couple of times, he like so many other N.C.O.s was given the job of training young soldiers like myself. His job was Physical Training Instructor mainly. Although he was always very nice to me I never expected or got any preferential treatment. In fact very often the reverse. As I have already mentioned I was not very big and muscular, like a lot of the other boys who had muscles and calves like the village blacksmith. One thing in physical training which was little too much for me was, "on the hands down, and upwards stretch, bend etc." However I found that by sticking my backside in the air I could manage a bit better. The snag was you were supposed to be in a straight line from the back of your head to your heels in that position, consequently, as Collins was moving about amongst us looking for such faults he very often rapped my seat with his cane and said, "Get that hump down, Wheelwright".

After I left Kinmel Park I never saw him again until I was discharged four years later when I was a member of Springhead Liberal Club. We have been very good friends ever since and if I was to meet him now I would greet him as "Sergeant", and he would stand to attention. I think he is now over seventy years of age and still enjoying good health. He came to see me some time ago and said, "I can't understand you being ill so young" I said "I can" "He said "Why?" I said "You remember that big field at Rhyl where you used to take us for physical training?" He said, "Yes" I said, "You used to, stand in the middle of it and had us running round the outer edge, that's why". Although he knew I had always been a bit of a joker I later overheard him telling several people about it as though he wondered had it some connection. We had by this time been issued with equipment and rifles and as the weather was still very cold, another morning we were once more split up into squads under different N.C.O.s who were told to take us inside a hut to teach us arms drill with rifle and bayonet. We were allowed to wear our woollen gloves which made it more difficult as the wood on the rifles was very polished and when the bayonet was fixed the whole thing weighed over eleven pounds. I did not like the looks of the Sergeant from the first as he both looked and sounded like a bully with his "Slope arms, order arms, present arms" Needless to say I was toiling especially wearing gloves as you couldn't get a real grip on the thing, and of course the inevitable had to happen to me.

He said, "Slope arms" and my gloved hand just slipped up into the air and the rifle and bayonet clattered to the wooden floor. I just stood to attention whilst he glared at me and then the barrage came. "What the hell do you think you are doing?" and "Pick it up, man, it won't bite you. The next time you join the army bring your mother with you" I thought if only she was here now she would give you a bit of her mind. A flood of tears came rushing to my eyes and I just had to let them roll down my cheeks, as you don't even scratch your itching ear or nose whilst stood to attention. Of course he could see it although the other boys could not, but to make my humiliation complete he had me sloping and ordering arms alone for several minutes. However when we were dismissed the other boys were very sympathetic and said, "The rotten so and so, it could have happened to any one of us".

Wright Hett and I had been moved to different huts now and you soon made fresh pals mostly the chap in the next bed. I became friends with a boy called Alf Wooton whose home was in Ardwick, Manchester. He could sing, whistle and yodel very well and became quite a favourite especially in the canteen. When things were a bit dull he would get on his feet and start to sing when all the others would join in. We were now getting quite used to the drills and exercises. We even started to have firing practice on a miniature range. This I did enjoy as it was one of the things I had done even as a boy of thirteen or fourteen. Several of us boys used to go on Oldham Market for this purpose alone. I think it was six shots for 3d and we got so good at shooting at clay pies and bottle, that we started shooting at the string and so bring down the lot. Of course this did not please the stall holder. I remember one Saturday night we dropped all the bottles with the exception of one string and were on our way home, about Rhodes Bank, when one boy, Norman Winterbottom, said, "Lend me three half pence so I can go back and drop the other string". Such was our enthusiasm. It was no wonder that I was never less than a first class shot during my army days. And so the training went on. Route marches, bayonet fighting and then to a proper range when we fired live ammunition at targets on a range quite close to Rhyl. We were beginning now to look more like soldiers, our uniforms seemed to fit better and our boots and buttons were showing the effect of frequent polishing. If we went walking outside the camp we were ordered to carry a swagger cane, although it was not issued we could buy one at the canteen. If we met an officer on our travels of course we had to salute him. In those days we had to salute with either hand according to which side the officer was on. If he was approaching you on the left side you had to put the cane under your left arm and turn your head to the left and salute with your right hand. This had to happen three paces before and three paces after you passed him, but if he was approaching you on your right side you did the reverse. Later a new rule was brought out that you only saluted with your right hand. It was all, what is known today, as a lot of Bull. Just imagine if there happened to be a lot of officers out for a walk you could be saluting every few yards. Most officers seemed to like it although they had to return the salute. Some who perhaps were not so regimental would give a wave down with their hand which meant "not to bother".

They had all sorts of ways of catching you on the hop, as it were, in camp. Turn out for this and that during the night. One day I developed a sore throat and temperature and I thought "If this goes any worse I shall have to report sick tomorrow". Anyway about 2am the bugle sounded for fire call, of course it was only a gag and everybody had to turn out passing buckets of water to the imaginary fire. As I was feeling much worse and actually sweating I didn't turn out, but when everyone else had gone the Orderly Sergeant came into the hut bellowing, "Get on parade" I explained why I had

stayed in bed but he didn't seem to believe me, and said, "You report sick in the morning, or I will put you on the peg", and of course I had to obey the last order so I duly reported sick and after M.O. had examined my throat he said "Tonsillitis, pack up your kit, and hand it in to the stores ready for going to hospital!" On my way back to the hut I thought, "That's funny" as I had always been told that a doctor took out my tonsils with his finger and thumb when I was three years old at Blackpool. Anyway, I packed up then sat down to write a letter to my mother and one to my pal Wootton who was on parade, as I was expecting a parcel and wanted him to look after it. About an hour later the Medical Corporal came looking for me and said the M.O. was going hairless as he said I had been roaming about the camp all morning. I finally handed in my kit and was taken to the Military Hospital. I had been in about two weeks when I heard that all the boys were being drafted so as I was feeling much better I asked the doctor to mark me out so I could go with them.

About one week later we went by train to Herringfleet Camp, about six miles from Gt. Yarmouth and seven miles from Lowestoft. We were now under canvas about twelve or fifteen to a bell tent. This was a much stiffer kind of training. Long route marches both day and night. Assault courses, bomb throwing, Lewis Gun training. We went to Danbury Camp, Chelmsford to fire our final musketry course. Two of the boys came from Hollinwood, they were called Hollins and Hilton. The latter was a big hefty type of a fellow and as usual used to throw his weight about, and although he did some silly things such as smoking whilst guarding an ammunition dump he was brought out of clink to be presented with a medal; for being the best all round soldier. I remember we were practising throwing dummy hand-grenades over a twenty or thirty foot wire netting fence. The little Corporal we met at Rhyl was in charge and he stood in front of the wire netting shouting, "Prepare to throw. Throw. Pick up your bombs, double up." This was going on for a long time without a break, and all he did was stand there and we were sweating cobs. Just as I told Sgt. Collins about the big field. However Private Hilton was getting very ruffled with this lark and started to dawdle on the run to pick up the bombs, so of course the Corporal noticed it and tried to speed him up which only nattered him more. Any way as we were running to pick up our bombs I heard him say "I'll fix him" meaning the Corporal. Sure enough the next time he shouted, "Prepare to throw. Throw." Hilton did not throw his over the wire but straight at the Corporal. It hit him fairly and squarely on the chest and down he went like a log. We had to send for the M.O. and he was taken to hospital with a broken breast bone. Hilton got away with it by saying, "It slipped", but we all knew different. Such were the big bullies you came across, but I did hear that the first time he went into the front line in France he lay on his back with a leg in the air hoping to get wounded so he could get back to Blighty.

Wright Hett had word that his elder brother⁴ had been killed and from then on he seemed to be in another world. He did not give his mind to soldiering and was always getting into trouble. He had a narrow squeak one day. We were throwing live hand grenades from a deep trench and he was so careless he hit the top of the trench with one and as it rolled back the Sergeant in charge pushed him away and threw it over the top but it exploded in the air. Luckily everyone had ducked and nobody was hurt.

⁴ Pte Harold Hett of "D" Coy 1st/7th Bn Duke of Wellington's (West Riding Regiment) died 29/04/1918. He was aged 22 years and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial: Commonwealth War Graves Commission, available at <http://www.cwgc.org/>.



SMA M/P/KWheDp/1

Aaron Wheelwright at Herringfleet Camp 1918

Wright got a real dressing down. You see there was only four seconds between throwing the bomb and it exploding. It was a very brave action by the Sergeant, although he was trying to save his own life as well as the others. I have heard of similar cases during the Second World War where such an action was rewarded by a medal. Wright, I believe, went on dodging the column until he was demobbed, and here is where you cannot understand human nature. He volunteered during the Second World War and rose to the rank of Sergeant. I ask you? Training was very hard now as we all knew we were nearing a posting abroad. There was an epidemic of influenza raging about this time and very few people escaped. Thousands were dying off like flies. I have no figures but I remember it said that more people died than were killed at the Battle of the Somme, and a funny thing about that is that more soldiers were killed in one day on the Somme than were killed in the whole of the 1939-45 war. So many of our boys had gone down with it that an isolation camp was pitched in a valley about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile away from the main camp. One morning I did not feel very well myself but I had gone on parade, but when the call for cook house came at noon I couldn't care less. I had a temperature and a sore throat and just didn't want to be bothered with anything. As I have said before I missed hundreds of dinners and one more wouldn't make any difference anyway. However the rule was that whether a man wanted the meal or not, he was forced to parade with knife, fork, and spoon and be marched to the mess tent. I went on parade feeling awful and when we arrived at the mess tent I just took a look inside to see what the dinner was. It was sausage and mashed potatoes and the sausage looked beautifully cooked so I thought I would try a little. I sat on a form, cut off a piece of sausage, put it in my mouth and then the band began to play. I had not even chewed on it and the noises in my head sounded like rushing water or express trains. The next thing I knew I was on one of the many stretchers on wheels which had been provided and on my way at a jog trot to the isolation camp. The Medical Orderly gave me some medicine and aspirins and said, "Keep wrapped up for a day or two!" This I did as food was out of the question, although a drink of tea was always welcome. This went on for three or four days after which I started to take a little food and perhaps peek outside the tent. There were more tents in that isolation rally than in our camp proper. However after two weeks I was marked out and given a weeks excused duty to get on my feet again. I was glad to see the back of that camp, as it was a common sight to see two or three ambulances there at once taking boys to hospital who had taken a turn for the worst. Many never came back as the death rate was very high.

Our camp itself was very much out in the country and to get a break we often went to Lowestoft on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. It was a lovely quaint fishing town. I only went to Gt. Yarmouth once as it did not seem so nice as the water front was covered in barbed wire. Never knew why as I don't remember any threat of invasion although Yarmouth was attacked by bombs from a German airship. Towards the end of July we were all given a few days leave, that is about 300 of us who were about to be posted abroad. No one knew where but it was most likely to be to France. My platoon Sergeant was a man called Boardman and his home was in Quail St. Oldham. He had also been wounded and like Sergeant Collins, whom we had left at Rhyl was training young soldiers. It turned out that he knew a little something that was beyond the rumour stage. He knew that a certain Sergeant who had never been abroad on active service, and whom nobody cared for very much had been detailed to conduct us to our base abroad. This meant that after handing us over in France he would return to England, and although he would never have seen any active service he would be entitled to wear one blue chevron on his sleeve which could lead people astray as to

his service abroad. Incidentally, soldiers who had been wounded were allowed to wear a thin gold stripe for each time they had been wounded. This was really done I think to help those who had been wounded and discharged as unfit for further service. It was common to see soldiers in uniform with two or three of these stripes on their sleeves, but once back in civilian life there seemed to be a sort of shyness and glad to forget the whole thing. For some time now there had been a kind of jealousy mostly amongst the women, perhaps who had boyfriends brothers or husbands abroad, or who had even been killed. If they saw what appeared to be a smart young man in mufti they would want to know why he wasn't in the forces. Many such questions were asked and a favourite thing was to stick a white feather in his coat lapel, denoting that he was either afraid to go or was in some cushy job at home. As I have already said a lot of these men were reluctant to wear any sort of badge, which would have put them in the clear. This resulted in many mistakes being made and I can best illustrate this by quoting an incident which occurred many times. A woman saw in the street what she thought was a very healthy specimen so she said to him, "What are you doing for your King and Country?" He just raised his hat and said, "Good afternoon, madam". What she saw told its own story. He had a silver plate in his head. See what I mean? The biter bit.

Now back to our embarkation leave and Sergeant Boardman. He had been trying to get permission to conduct us to our base but was not successful so got quite nattered and said even though I can not go with you I will come on leave with you come what may. True to his word when we entrained for London he was there, and no leave pass or railway warrant. Now, travel from Gt. Yarmouth via London to Oldham was no easy matter as all railway stations seemed to be crowded with Military Police or Red Caps as they were known. Their main job was to be on the look out for this sort of person, also to see that any soldiers were not improperly dressed, such as a button undone or not wearing a belt or puttees. We duly arrived at Euston station in London and after a cup of tea we were hanging about waiting for our train to come in when in the distance we saw coming our way, two Red Caps. We all thought, "This is it Sergeant" but he made no move to hide which made us sure he was about to be caught. Without any warning to us as the Red Caps were coming to us he just said, "Party, Shun" and as we were used to taking orders the twenty-five or thirty of us sprang to attention very smartly. The Sergeant said, "All one party this" and the Red caps said "Right O Sergeant" and walked away. His next trouble after we were safely on the train was how to get through the ticket barriers at London Rd. Station Manchester. However he said, "I will deal with that situation when it arrives. When he did get there I was next to him and he just handed a ticket to the collector. This puzzled me so when we were on the train from Manchester to Oldham I asked him how he had managed it. He said, "When the train stopped at Stockport I slipped out and bought a single to Oldham" I thought it was all very clever but could not see where the single tickets came in. This I found out later was another clever bit of brains. We had all arranged to meet again after our leave so that we could return together from the different railway stations. Although I did not think anything of it at the time, the Sergeant never said anything about returning.

It was nice to be home for a few days although it did not seem the same. All my boy friends were away and girls had not entered into it so far. My mother had already received a letter from my Commanding Officer saying amongst other things, that it was in the interests of the Country and her common duty to see to it that I returned to camp on time. This I did but there was no sign of Sergeant Boardman.

The next ten days were spent in kitting us out and I and several others were given extensive training with a Lewis Gun which was capable of firing 1,000 rounds a minute. All very interesting but we had heard a lot of tales of what a rotten job it was in action. This I was to find out in reality later on. We all had our hair cut, close-cropped all over, not even a fringe. For the last two or three days parades were non-existent. Everybody working themselves into a happy mood. After all if a chap had a hunch that he may not come back he would not show it. It was usual to have a little celebration on the last night, and a sing-song. Those who drank beer would have more than usual. During our last afternoon someone noticed that the Company Office Clerk who was not going on the draft had a really good mop of hair so in their exuberance, grabbed him and tied him to a chair. Someone produced a pair of clippers and proceeded to cut his hair like ours was. This was all very good fun but did not end there. Some wag said, "What about a parting?" So they lathered his head and shaved a parting about one inch wide from the forehead to the nape of his neck. He did look a Guy. Although the Captain said what he would do to us we entrained for London and then Folkstone the next day. I'm sure the clerk must have slept in his cap for weeks until his hair grew again.

I heard later that Sergeant Boardman had been picked up as a deserter and brought back to camp under escort. This travel would be at the army's expense which explains why he only bought single tickets (crafty). It was about 2am when we marched across London Bridge and arrived in Folkstone in the afternoon. We had to stay in some big empty houses for one night. It was all very mysterious and no one could guess what was in store in the future but we had all been well trained and were quite prepared for anything. We went aboard a cross-channel paddle boat the next morning and set off escorted by an airship directly overhead. Lots of other boats were coming and going. When we were about half-way across the boat stopped and the airship went on ahead. We were all wondering what was going on when there were several bursts of machine-gun fire from the airship into the sea but we could not see what it was firing at until all of a sudden went up a dirty black cloud of water and smoke, straight ahead of us. We were very much relieved to know that it had blown up a mine and for the rest of the trip all eyes were looking at the water ahead, just in case. However we landed safely at Boulogne and after forming up we set off to march to a camp called St. Martins. It was situated on the top of a hill and it seems that all drafts arriving at Boulogne had to pass through it before moving to a base. We had to climb a very steep hill and as we passed the houses on the way many women and children came to their doors to watch us pass by. Now, forty-three years later, I wonder if I still owe them an apology as remembering my mother's warning I thought many of them were women of easy virtue although they looked like any British family. Perhaps they thought how young we looked and perhaps wondered how many would return. It was 5th August just two days before I would be eighteen and a half years old. We finally got to the top and into the camp. After a meal we were issued with several items including green envelopes and field cards. It seemed that we were allowed to send one of these green envelopes home once a month, and were allowed to seal them up but a percentage were opened by the censor. All other letters had to be left unsealed to be blue pencilled. The field cards were a printed card and all you had to do was to cross out the lines that did not apply and leave open the ones that did. I can best explain by telling you what our Bully Boy Hilton did. He sent one to his mother right away leaving in the lines "Have been wounded, am being sent to hospital, shall be home soon." This should give you a good idea of how crazy he was.

We were allotted tents for the night and about 2am were wakened up to go to slit trenches as there were German aircraft overhead. I couldn't see the point of it but we were made to do it. We soon learnt to tell the difference between ours and the Germans. Whilst ours engines had a continuous drone, the Germans had a Buz, Buz, Buz. The following day we entrained for an unknown destination. No posh carriages but cattle trucks. If I remember rightly printed on the sides of the trucks were the words "eight horses or forty men (hommes)" The trains moved very slowly perhaps about three miles per hour and were always stopping for the only apparent reason being to get up steam. In fact whilst the train was moving you could step down onto the line, walk up to the engine brew up and wait for your truck to come along. We duly arrived at the base called "Etaples". We were allocated tents in part of the camp and, contrary to the twelve or fifteen to a tent at Gt. Yarmouth we found ourselves twenty-four to a standard army bell tent. It was as you may well imagine a work of art getting ourselves, rifles and equipment inside. First thing was to tie all the rifles to the tent pole and place our packs close together inside the outer edge. We were not issued with blankets but there was a circular board on the floor. So the obvious thing was to keep our clothes on and spread half the Great-coats on the floor, then lie down in turn with our feet to the pole and on our sides, mind you, or else we would never have got in. We then covered ourselves up with the remaining Great-coats. Packed like sardines. We only stayed four or five days but before we moved again some of the boys had started to sleep outside the tent having the stars for a roof as the weather was fine being August. We were put through a lot of rigorous tests, at what was known as the "Bull Ring". We also had to go into a gas chamber to test our gas masks. When my father went to France in 1917 their masks were just a hood with two eye-pieces let in and they had to tuck the ends into the collar of their tunic. Ours were the latest design. There was a rubber tube fitted to a small canister filled with charcoal. Inside the mask was a rubber thing which you had to put inside your mouth and a spring clip to put onto your nose. This was to ensure you breathed through your mouth and the air came through the charcoal which was supposed to purify the air. These masks were guaranteed to be perfect protection against most gases except mustard which burnt the skin. It was all very simple through the gas chamber but was a different matter in action when perhaps you were digging a trench or even on the run. They became very hot and you found yourself slipping the tube out of your mouth and even easing the mask away from your cheek to get a breath of air, Gas or no Gas. On the Saturday several hundred of us were marched about six or seven miles to a place called Paris Plage, near Le Touquet. There we found a fine beach and the sea and were able to undress or sunbathe to our hearts content. What a sight, hundreds frolicking about all naked. We each had packs of food covering dinner and tea and then marched back to Etaples. Little did we think that this would be our last luxury for many months. There were all sorts of soldiers at the Base. British, Canadian, Portuguese, nick-named "Pork and Beans", Australians, Indians, Gurkhas, Chinese Labour Corps. who when moving from one place to another did a jog-trot, and were in columns of fifteen or twenty deep and if an enemy plane happened to be overhead would look up and say "No Goodela". Finally the Americans who had not been in the war very long, and were and still are Big Mouths. They used to say, "Where is this God damned Shooting Gallery?"

We went to church service in a Y.M.C.A. Hut on the Sunday morning, a service which went very well until the end when God Save The King was being played. It was very noticeable that only the Padre and Corporal were singing, then came the

cat-calls and raspberries. This resulted in a lecture from the Padre who said it was ourselves and the Country as a whole that we were expected to sing for. Some shouted out "What about saving us for a change?" Of course these were men who had been abroad for some time and were getting a bit fed up but it was no good for the morale of we youngsters. We soon found that every day was alike and during the afternoon it was on parade again for we 300. This time a R.S.M. (Regimental Sergeant Major) was giving us a pep talk. Then all at once he shouted, "Fall out in front all Lewis gunners". Although this was a command right out of the blue not one man moved. I myself had recently passed as a Lewis Gunner and I knew a lot more, but we had heard such weary tales about Lewis Gunners. What a tough job it was and how much weight they had to carry on active service that we must have all been in the same mind. To dodge it if at all possible. Then came the funny bit. ... The R.S.M. then shouted "Quarter Master Sergeant!" ... "Quarter Master Sergeant, bring out the Pay books". Out he came and put several piles of Pay Books on the table, one pile slightly away from the others. It was this pile that the R.S.M. picked up and said, "Fall out in front as I call your names". I may say there were quite a large number including myself. He made no further remarks but just handed each one his Pay Book, but on opening the first page we could see the joke, stamped in thick type was "Lewis Gunner". So it looks as if he had been through this lark before. He then went on to issue the rest of the books.

After that more pep, and then he said, "Open your Pay Books at the end page you will find it blank except for the words at the top which say, "Last Will and Testament". Now it is the duty of every soldier to fill in that page before you leave Base camp. You can leave all your possessions to your mother, wife or anyone you like but if you are unable to make up your mind s you can leave it to me". What a hope he had. He then started to call out our names from the alphabet, and these people had to form up on the left. It seemed ages as he called out the names but finally he stopped, leaving thirteen of us standing away on our own like orphans of the storm, all having names beginning with "W". He said to the 287, "You are being transferred to the York and Lancs Regiment as they have been practically wiped out". (cheerful) He said "File round to the Q.M.S. and he will exchange your Manchester Regmt. cap badge for your new one". He then turned to us and said, "You are being transferred to the Royal Fusiliers who have nearly all been gassed". Job's comforter. We also had to exchange our cap badges but I don't think any of us was sorry as the Manchester Regmt. Badge at that time was big, ugly looking thing. "The Lion and the Unicorn". Our new badge was very much like the Grenadier Guards but had the regimental motto on it. "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense". Translated means, "Evil Be To Him Who Evil Thinks". He said, "Be packed and ready to move off after tea". This we did, those to the York and Lancs we never saw again, and we thirteen and a few others were put on a train of the usual horse boxes. It jogged along and stopped for most of the night, but at dawn we had breakfast and then set off marching. Heaven knows how many miles before we caught up with our new regiment. It was the 23rd Royal Fusiliers (City of London) "Sportsmans Battn." This Battn. had been formed during the early part of the war like the Oldham Pals 24th Manchester Regmt. and the Bankers Battn. Royal Fusiliers. The Sportsmans Battn. was formed by Lady Cunliffe Owen and consisted of sportsmen of every description. Like the R.S.M. had said they had been gassed but only slightly. It seems they had been under fire during the night and had worn gas masks when necessary. They were all spread out in very thick grass and there was a heavy morning dew and when the sun came out and gained strength the gas rose up and most of them had their lungs full before they realised what was happening. Anyway they seemed not too bad and we were split up into different platoons.

Luckily my friend Alf Wooton and I were in the same platoon but not the same section. Our new Platoon Officer welcomed us and told us to make ourselves as comfortable as possible as the battalion was out for two weeks rest so that they could recover from the gas attack. Alf and I scrounged about and found a sheet of corrugated iron. We then dug a slit trench and made a kind of bivouac. In fact we made such a good job of it that one wag said we were thinking of settling there. This was not to be and we soon found out you must not believe everything you are told even by an officer. Two days later and not two weeks we were told to pack up as we were to go up the line. This was to be it. Our Baptism under fire. I must say here and now that you must not expect any blood curdling accounts as I was lucky never to come to any hand to hand fighting although I was in it continuously to the Armistice. As a private soldier you took your orders from the Section Commander who in turn took his from the Platoon Sergt. who took his from the Platoon Officer and he from the Company Captain and he from the Colonel. The Colonel from the Brigadier and he from division and he from the Army and so back to the War Office. My section Commander was a Lance Corporal who was much older than myself and had seen quite a lot of war service in different zones. Although I had only been with him two days he had given me plenty of fatherly advice and I felt quite confident without being in any way courageous. I well remember how he said, "Keep yourself smart and clean, do as you are told, and draw your pay, and you will come to no harm." He was the Post Corporal and the Sanitary Corporal for the Platoon which could often be to or against our advantage. Such as, whilst in the line we had to empty the latrine buckets in the shell holes during the night often under fire. On the other hand when parcels arrived if anyone had gone wounded he would divide them between us.

We had no briefing as to what we were doing or where we were going. Just "Fall-in, Quick-march" during the hours of darkness and I wondered at the time "Who knows the way and so on" However after hours and hours of marching we began to realize that we were getting quite close to the front line and then we were ordered to spread out in sections. This was all out in the open and we were continually falling over dead horses or into shell-holes. The smell was horrible. Gun powder, gas and the smell of dead animals, perhaps men as you could not see in the dark. Finally we were ordered to lie down as we were close to the German line. There were plenty of shells flying about and machine-gun fire. During this breathing space we were told for the first time that we were not going into a static line but over the top. My section Commander explained that just before Zero Hour, (which was dawn) our Artillery would put a barrage on the German line then it would lift 100 yards and we were to go over following behind the barrage. We were to go over in sections in single file and he stressed very much that I was to lead the section of six and he himself would be bringing up the rear. I did not realize it at the time but it was done on purpose just to make sure that I or even anyone else decided to run away. The barrage started which sounded as if all Hell had been let loose. Shells were bursting all around when the Platoon Officer shouted amidst the din, "Advance." The Section Commander said, "Get up, this is it". I just went forward praying to God to look after me and sure enough he did. I must say that I felt no fear and rather than run away I kept turning round to see if the others were following. It was coming day light and the Platoon officer was about twenty yards in front when a very big shell exploded just in front of him and he just disintegrated. I did not even know his name. The barrage lifted again but still no sign of any Germans until we came to a small stream and realized we were being pinned down by their machine-gun fire. The ground rose steeply beyond the

stream thus giving the Germans a good position to look and fire on us. We lay down quite still as the least movement brought bursts of machine-gun fire. One boy in our section got a bullet in his ankle and two of us pulled off his boot and left his stocking on and strapped his field-dressing over the top as he was bleeding quite a lot. We suggested that he abandon his rifle and start to crawl back and the stretcher-bearers would see to him. He willingly threw away his rifle and a bomb-bag he was carrying, but not a hope of him throwing away his haversack. He said, "My rations are in there." However the last we saw of him was crawling to a fair sized tree and presume he would lie or sit on the other side waiting for someone to come along. We crawled through the stream but were told to lie still on the other side. I could see quite clearly where the machine-gun was, about twenty-five or thirty yards ahead, just below the sky line. I was itching to crawl a bit nearer and lob a grenade over but orders were orders. An officer and section of men made their way round the flank and did what I was itching to do from the front. It was obvious that they had done their job well as the firing stopped from that gun, although there was plenty of fire on either side. We crawled along and did not stand up until we reached the top of the rise. The moment we stood up there was a terrific burst of Lewis gun fire from behind and on our left. We all dropped flat, a thing you soon learn to do. We soon realized that one of the boys had been hit. He had a bullet which went in at his chin and out at his ear. He looked in a poor way and the Platoon Sergeant, a Manchester man called Brotherton, was terribly upset as the boy was his batman and the Platoon runner. There was no doubt at all that the firing had come from one of our own Lewis guns who had, and were still being held up, and the moment they saw us on the sky-line they naturally though were the enemy pulling out. Nothing could be done about it in the circumstances, so no complaints were made, but it could be one of our boys lost his life through our own fire. Although it was an accident these incidents did happen quite often. We had another period of waiting until the whole company was in line again. It seemed the Germans had withdrawn their whole body of men and just left a couple of men with a machine gun here and there just to cover their retreat. It is safe to say that all those machine gunners gave their lives for the Fatherland. The way ahead was very much like a plain and we continued to advance for about 1000 yards towards a small wood and again we had to take up a prone position as a battery of artillery began to fire our way over open sights. The same tactics were employed as over the stream. A Platoon worked round the flank and opened fire on the battery with two Lewis guns to which they had no answer and very soon they were coming our way with their hands above their heads. We quickly closed in on them and the captured eight guns, equipment and horses. One of our officers was trying to get some information out of the German officer in charge such as, "Where are your infantry?" and "How long is it since they retired?" but all he said was, in perfect English, "You are a British officer and love your Country, I am a German officer and I love mine and I am not forced to give you any information other than my rank and name"

Our officer was very disappointed but we all realized how cool and brave the German was and we talked about it later and wondered what our officer would have done in the same situation. We moved through the wood without contacting any more of the enemy. We were told to stay put while our officers went into a conference. Later we were told to dig in along the front of the wood. This meant just dig a slit trench with your entrenching tool and not a spade, just deep enough for a bit of cover. After a short time a German spotting plane came along the line flying very low. It did this

several times and as we had no anti-aircraft guns in those days he had complete freedom to come and go as he pleased. This nattered me, as we had so much drilled into us that our business was to kill Germans, I thought "If he comes around again I shall have a pot at him". Sure enough he came flying lower than ever, you could see the pilot quite clearly so I let go a couple of rounds at him. You can safely say that I must have hit some part of it but it flew away again. Strangely enough it did not come back again. The Sergeant shouted at me for firing at it as he said it would give our position away. I said, "Blimey, he had already had his eye full". Not long afterwards as we were digging in a German machine gun opened fire on our left flank. This was a real danger to us as if we had stood up, several bursts of fire would have seen us all off. We lay flat trying to throw a bit of earth up in front for cover. One of the boys kept his head down but his behind up and for his trouble got a bullet in his rump. He got up and said, "I'm off" and ran as fast as his legs would carry him the way we had come. We never saw him again. This machine gun kept us pinned down for quite a time and then the officers came back and passed the word that we were facing the wrong way and that we were to retire and take up a line facing the way the German machine gun was firing from. Just fancy, the first time over the Top and I found myself running back. "This way the Fusiliers", the Officers kept shouting and as I ran back I picked up a Lewis gun spare parts bag. Anything for a bit of cover when we had to get down again. If you could put the smallest thing in front of your face you thought or felt you were safe. We finally took up our position in a very big field of swedes and carrots and in the mix up I got with a man I had not seen before and we dug a slit trench just big enough for the two of us. I had heard it said very often that the longer a man was in the fighting that the more frightened he became. This was very soon proved to me as we were sitting at each end of the slit trench, every time a shell came over we got a shower of shrapnel, plus carrots and swedes, and my new comrade dived his head between my legs each time. He had three blue chevrons on his sleeve denoting that he had been on active service over two years. I thought he should have been setting me an example, but it was the other way round. We found out later that the Cheshire Regiment were supposed to have been on our left flank but had retired sometime before us. We began to wonder where we were as we had travelled many miles before we got to our jumping off spot. We could see a church spire just on the left of the wood, and wondered why it was still standing after all the shells that were thrown about. Darkness fell and things seemed to be much quieter. We could hear voices and thought. "Oh, that will be someone bringing round the nightly Rum ration". If it was we never saw it. Next morning at dawn the K.R.R.s (Kings Royal Rifles) passed through us and we followed up to take the town of Alette.⁵

It was a real shambles apart from the church spire which had only one or two shell holes through it. We were told to make ourselves comfortable as we could remain static for a time as the K.R.R.s had made contact with the Germans and were digging in. When we got a chance to have a word with the Sergeant we said, "What about last night's Rum ration?" He said he was very sorry but he must have missed us in the dark, and would make it up to us the next night. I had been a strict tee-totaller up to this rum business, and of course no man was forced to drink it but you felt, it's an

⁵ The action Aaron has been describing was on 21 August 1918 as part of the Second Battle of Bapaume: H.C. O'Neill, *The Royal Fusiliers in the Great War*, 1922, p. 289.

issue, and it does tend to, keep you warm whilst out in the open. True to his word the Sergeant gave us a real big tot that night and we did not wake up until noon the next day. Apart from the rum we were also very tired having had no sleep for about two days and nights. It was now that all days became alike, no Sunday Church Parade or morning paper. You just had to make the best of it, but we also had to keep ourselves clean and tidy, although they didn't bother much about cleaning buttons and badges of rank were in cloth. We stayed around Alette for a few days and then moved to a place called Boiry where the same routine went on. It was about five miles away and amongst the ruins the Germans had rigged up a few shower baths so we gladly took advantage of this and a clean change of underclothing.

We soon found out we would be better off keeping our underclothes on as we had our first introduction to body lice. At first glance the clothes seemed quite clean but it was when you had them on for a while that the eggs which were concealed in the seams began to hatch out. What a game. It would itch, and off with your shirt and run the seams through a lighted candle. "Crack, Crack, Crack". If you caught a big one that was easy meat just crack it between your two thumb nails. There was no letting up. It went on all the time. We had a Scotsman with us who always seemed to have his hand inside the front of his tunic, and many a time he would pull out a Louse and say, "Poor little so and so", and put it back again. Such was life. I don't think I was ever clear again until I got home and was able to give my clothes a real good wash in very hot water and a strong disinfectant.⁶

⁶ The copy of the narrative in the SMA finishes abruptly at this point but presumably was continued.

ADDITIONS TO SADDLEWORTH 1914-1919 PART 3

Ivan Foster

The *Oldham Chronicle* for 30th June 1923 gave a list of those casualties whose names would be cast on the memorial plaques on the Pots and Pans war memorial. It was also announced that 'Names must be sent in not later than next week: Decorations should be added.' Many families either missed this announcement or, for whatever reason, did not wish their loved-ones to be recorded. Bill Mitchinson in *Saddleworth 1914-1919* (KWM) in 1995 provided information on over sixty more Saddleworth casualties and Neil Barrow's update, in the *Bulletin* of Summer 2010, provided more names. Since then details of more Saddleworth men and women have been discovered, especially from recently uncovered and recorded Saddleworth graveyard memorials, local war memorials and newspaper reports. They all have links with Saddleworth, either through birth, residence, family or employment. The following are updates for those detailed in *Saddleworth 1914-1919*:

KWM p. 178

Ackroyd, Ernest Gladstone Private Army Service Corps
 Service no SS22038 Discharged 13th July 1917.
 Died in 1920 at Saddleworth (of diabetes incurred during war) Age 42.
 Enlisted on 8th November 1915.
 Born in 1878 at Warrington.
 Son of William & Sarah Elizabeth Ackroyd (née Cooke) of Diggle.
 Ernest G married Hannah Maria Bradbury in 1908 at Saddleworth.
 Ernest was a scholar in 1881 & 1891.
 Ernest was employed as a farmer's son in 1901 & as a farmer in 1911
 Commemorated on Memorials; Pots & Pans (Dobcross & Diggle),
 Wrigley Mill Memorial.

KWM p. 181

Bingley, Joseph Sergeant 22nd (Tyneside Scottish) Bn
 (Northumberland Fusiliers)
 Service no 55834 kia on 17th September 1918 Age 25.
 Enlisted at Attercliffe, Yorkshire.
 Joseph's brother John William was kia on 7th September 1918, aged 29
 Joseph was born in 1893 at Sheffield.
 Son of Joseph & Annie Eliza Bingley (née Benn) of Sheffield.
 Joseph was employed as a pony driver in 1911.
 Commemorated on; Loos Memorial Panel 20 to 22,
 Pots & Pans (Dobcross & Diggle)
 Interred at (body not recovered for burial).

KWM p. 186

Burns, William Private 18th Bn York and Lancaster Regiment
 (Formerly 58456, Royal Welsh Fusiliers)
 Service no 53688 kia on 31st August 1918 Age 19.

Enlisted on 2nd October 1916 at Ashton-under-Lyne.
 Born in 1899 at Cheadle, Stockport.
 Son of Cornelius & Isabella Burns (née Johnson) of Mossley.
 Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Greenfield), Joseph Clare Ltd Memorial,
 St Mary's Church, Greenfield, Roll of Honour,
 All Saints Church, Micklehurst Memorial Plaque,
 St George's Church, Mossley, Memorial.
 Interred at Ypres Town Cemetery Extension III. H. 9.

KWM p. 187

[Byram], Harry L/Cpl 1st/10th Bn Manchester Regiment
Biram Service no 375948 kia on 8th June 1918 *Age 20.*
 Enlisted at Oldham
 Born in 18981 at Oldham.
 Son of Edward & Annie Biram (née Clegg) of Oldham.
 Harry was a cotton mill piecer in 1911.
 Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Royal George),
 Chrischurch, Friezland, Memorial Plaque.
 Interred at Bertrancourt Military Cemetery Plot 2. Row C. Grave 15.

KWM p. 187

Byrom Harry Private 7th Bn Queen's Own
 (Royal West Kent Regiment)
 Service no 16533 kia on 18th November 1916 *Age 22.*
 Born in 1894 at Uppermill.
 Harry's brother, Thomas R Byrom, died on 20th July 1918, aged 39.
 Son of James & Mary Byrom (née Lindley) of Greenfield.
 Harry was a cotton piecer in 1911.
 Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Uppermill),
 St Chad's Church, Memorial.
 Interred at Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt VI. E. 19.

KWM p. 187

Carter, Ernest Sergeant 11th Bn King's Own (Royal Lancaster) Regiment
 Service no 2126 kia in France on 25th April 1917 *Age 32.*
 Enlisted at Ashton-under-Lyne.
 Born in 1888 at Greenfield.
 Son of John Frederick & Serena Carter (née Mellor) of Greenfield.
 Ernest was a cotton spinners' piecer in 1901 & a presser woollen cardroom in 1911.
 He married Rachel Andrew in 1906 at Ashton-under-Lyne.
 Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Royal George),
 Christ Church, Friezland gravestone Memorial CCF198.

KWM p. 188

Clegg James Lieutenant 10th Bn Manchester Regiment
 dow on 25th May 1915 *Age 27.*
 Born in 1888 at Oldham.
 James' brother John, died on 4th June 1915, aged 35.
 Son of John Edward & Alice Mary Clegg (née Whitaker) of Thornlee.
 James was a machine engineer in 1911
 Commemorated on; Helles Memorial Panel 158 to 170,
 Pots & Pans (Springhead),

St Anne's Church, Lydgate Memorials.
Interred at (body not recovered for burial).

KWM p. 188

Clegg, John Sergeant 1st/6th Bn Manchester Regiment
Service no 93 Died on 4th June 1915. *Age 35.*
Born in 1880 at Oldham.
John's brother James, dow on 25th May 1915, aged 27.
Son of John Edward & Alice Mary Clegg (née Whitaker) of Thornlee.
John was an undergraduate in 1901 & a solicitor's managing clerk in 1911.
Commemorated on; Helles Memorial Panel 158 to 170
Pots & Pans (Springhead),
St Anne's Church, Lydgate Memorials.
Interred at (body not recovered for burial).

KWM p. 189

Cox, Leonard Private 1st Bn Manchester Regiment
Service no 35123 dow in Mesopotamia on 21st March 1918. *Age 32.*
Enlisted at Hollinwood.
Born in 1893 at Uppermill.
Son of Robert William & Mary Ann Cox (née McAuliffe) of Springhead.
Leonard was a cotton piecer in 1911.
Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Springhead),
St Anne's Church, Lydgate Memorials.
Interred at Amara War Cemetery, Iraq, grave XX. M. 3.

KWM p. 191

Dodson, William Private 4th Bn West Yorkshire Regiment
(Prince of Wales' Own)
Service no 17077 kia on 16th March 1916. *Age 29.*
Enlisted at Oldham.
Born in 1887 at Golcar.
Son of Fred & Helena Dodson of Waterhead.
William was a cotton spinner in 1901 & a minder cotton spinner in 1911.
William married Gertrude L Booth in 1914 at Goole.
Commemorated on; Thiepval Memorial Pier and Face 2 A 2 C and 2 D,
Pots & Pans (Springhead),
St Pauls' Church, Scouthead, Memorial.
Interred at (body not recovered for burial).

KWM p. 193

Fitzgerald, Hanley Gunner "D" Bty 317th Bde Royal Field Artillery
Service no 34566 kia in Belgium on 9th November 1917. *Age 24.*
Enlisted at Ashton-under-Lyne on 26th July 1915.
Born in 1893 at Lydgate.
Son of Frank & Mary Jane Fitzgerald (née Brown) of Springhead.
Hanley was a cotton mill piecer in 1911.
Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Springhead),
St Anne's Church, Lydgate, Memorials.
Interred at Duhallow A.D.S. cemetery, III. B. 5. West-Vlaanderen, Belgium.

St Anne's Church, Lydgate, Memorial Plaque.
Interred at (body not recovered for burial).

KWM p. 198

Hill, Arthur Lance Corporal 41st Amb. Train Royal Army Medical Corps
Service no 35034 Died on 2nd February 1918. *Age 32.*
Enlisted at Liverpool.
Born in 1886 at Oldham.
Son of George Gardiner & Sarah Ann Hill (née Alcock) of Springhead.
Arthur was a telegraph messenger in 1901 & a postman in 1911.
Arthur married Mary E Wilkes in 1908 at Lydgate.
Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Springhead),
St Anne's Church, Lydgate, Memorials.
Interred at Salonika (Lembet Rd) Military Cemetery, Greece, grave 1356.

KWM p. 198

Hinchliffe, Maurice Michael, Private East Yorkshire Regiment
dow on 13th March 1922. *Age 23.*
Born on 25th March 1899 at Delph.
Son of Fred & Edith Hinchliffe (née Settle) of Delph.
Maurice Michael married Nellie Hinchliffe in 1917 at Saddleworth.
Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Delph),
Delph Independent Memorial.
Interred at Delph Independent grave No 213.

KWM p. 203

Lawton, Henry Private 9th Bn The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment
(Formerly 5737, East Surrey Regiment)
Service no 30185 kia on 10th April 1918. *Age 22.*
Enlisted at Halifax, Yorks. (residing at Delph).
Born in 1896 at Delph.
Son of Roger & Elizabeth Lawton (née Waldron) of Bull Brow, Delph.
Henry was a piecer cloth manufacturer in 1911.
Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Delph),
St Thomas' Church Roll of Honour,
Delph Wesleyan War Memorial,
St Thomas' Church, gravestone StThF 107N.
Interred at Croix-Du-Bac British Cemetery, Steenwerck Sp. Mem. C. 5.

KWM p. 207

Mellor, Wilfred Company Sergeant Major 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles Bn
Service no 108377 Died on 30th September 1916. *Age 34.*
Wilfred was awarded the Military Medal.
Born in 1882 at Delph.
Son of Ben & Hannah Mellor (née Carter) of New Barn, Slackcote.
He married Mary Jane Bottomley in 1907 at Rochdale Wesleyan.
Commemorated on; Vimy Memorial, Pas de Calais, France,
Pots & Pans (Delph),
St Thomas' Church Roll of Honour,
Delph Wesleyan Memorial Plaque.
Interred at (body not recovered for burial).

KWM p. 210

Roberts, Albert Gunner Royal Field Artillery
(t/f to (312726) 244th Coy Labour Corps)
Service no 16634 Died of pneumonia on 5th December 1918. *Age 29.*
Born in 1889 at Uppermill.
Son of Peter & Ellen Roberts (née Brown) of Uppermill.
Albert was a woollen finisher in 1911.
Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Uppermill), St Chad's Memorial.
Interred at St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen S. III. BB. 9.

KWM p. 217

Warden, Fred Private 25th Bn. Royal Fusiliers
(City of London Regiment)
Service no G/13719 Died in East Africa on 13th August 1917. *Age 29.*
Enlisted at Oldham (residing at Scouthead).
Born in 1888 at Austerlands.
Son of Frederick & Ada Warden (née Bottomley) of Austerlands.
Fred was a cotton mill piecer in 1901 & a carter in 1911.
Fred married Florence Orr in 1907 at Ashton-under-Lyne.
Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Springhead),
St Paul's Church, Scouthead, Memorial Cupboard.
Interred at Dar Es Salaam War Cemetery Tanzania 6. A. 5.

KWM p. 221

Wrigley, Arthur Carl Gunner 104th Heavy Bty Royal Garrison Artillery
Service no 99762 Died of pneumonia on voyage home from Mesopotamia,
at Cherbourg, France on 15th February 1919. *Age 21.*
Born in 1897 in Saddleworth.
Youngest son of Ben & Sarah Jane Wrigley (née Dickson) of Diggle.
Arthur Carl was a woollen piecer in 1911.
Commemorated on; Pots & Pans (Uppermill),
St Chad's Church, Memorial,
St Chad's New Yard gravestone no NY 2052.
Interred at Tourlaville Communal Cemetery And Extension C. 2.

KWM p. 223

Bardsley, Howard Platt L/Cpl 2nd Bn Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)
Service No 10930 *Age 22.*
kia in France on 7th August 1916.
Enlisted at Manchester.
Born in 1894 in Illinois, USA.
Son of John Buckley & Lily Bardsley, (née Somerset) of Oldham.
Howard was employed as a fluter in textiles in 1911.
Commemorated on; St Chad's New Yard Gravestone NY 4279.
Interred at Vermelles British Cemetery III. L. 22.

KWM p. 223

Biltcliffe, John Waring Acting Bombardier Royal Field Artillery
Service no 1440 Died at Styning, Essex on 29th January 1916. *Age 20.*
Born in 1896 at Diggle.
Son of George & Ada Biltcliffe (née Armitage) of Blackburn.
Interred at St Bartholomew, Marsden, Churchyard SE. 7. 21.

KWM p. 224

Fielding, James Corporal 1st Bn King's Own Scottish Borderers
 Service no 11904 kia on 1st May 1918. *Age 21.*
 Enlisted at Ashton-under-Lyne.
 Born in 1897 at Saddleworth.
 Son of William & Marth Fielding (née Mitchell) of Salem.
 James was a cotton piecer in 1911.
 Interred at Cinq Rues British Cemetery, Hazebrouck A. 25.

KWM p. 225

Hill, John Corporal 12th Bn Manchester Regiment.
 Service no 3043 dow in France on 13th April 1917. *Age 26.*
 Enlisted at Ashton-under-Lyne.
 Born in 1891 at Mossley.
 Son of John & Jane Hill (née Robinson) of Manchester Rd, Mossley.
 John was a labourer in 1911.
 John married Annie Day in 1910 at Ashton-under-Lyne.
 Commemorated on; Christ Church, Friezland CCF 708.
 Interred at Feuchy British Cemetery I. D. 17.

KWM p. 225

Holden, John Private 1st/10th Bn Manchester Regiment
 Service no 2472 dow at sea on 8th September 1915. *Age 31.*
 Enlisted at Oldham.
 Born in 1884 at Oldham.
 Son of John Thomas & Sarah Jane Holden (née Fitton) of Oldham.
 John was a labourer in iron works in 1901 & a piecer in 1911.
 John married Elizabeth A Robinson in 1907 at Oldham.
 Commemorated on; Helles Memorial Panel 158 to 170.
 Interred at sea.

KWM p. 225

Holden, Lewis Vincent Private 15th Bn (formerly 17th Bn) Royal Welch Fusiliers
 Service no 73598 After long suffering through illness contracted whilst
 on active service in France died on 22nd September
 1920. *Aged 22.*
 Born on 20th September 1898 at Diggle.
 Only son of George Albert & Mary Holden (née Hirst) of Chorlton-cum-Medlock, late of Diggle.
 Commemorated on; St Chad's New Yard Gravestone NY2137.
 Interred at Saddleworth (St. Chad) New Churchyard.

KWM p. 226

Kirk, Walter Private 12th/13th Bn Northumberland Fusiliers
 Service no 25247 kia in France on 24th March 1918. *Aged 20.*
 Enlisted at Halifax.
 Born in 1897 at Stalybridge.
 Son of Samuel & Sarah Ellen Kirk, (née Hilsley) of Woodend, Mossley.
 Walter was a cotton piecer in 1911.
 Commemorated on; Pozieres Memorial Panel 16 to 18,
 Christ Church, Friezland, Gravestone CCF 1010.
 Interred at (body not recovered for burial).

KWM p. 226

Marsh, John Private 2nd (Garrison) Bn Manchester Regiment
 Service no 39254 Died on 26th November 1918. *Age 28.*
 Enlisted at Manchester (residing at Scouthead).
 Born in 1890 at Lees Street, Oldham.
 Son of Joseph & Elizabeth Marsh (née Needham) of Northwich.
 John was a draper's assistant in 1911.
 Interred at Northwich (St. Helen) Churchyard in south-east corner.

KWM p. 226

Milner, Stanley Lance Corporal 1st Bn Lancashire Fusiliers.
 Service no 6002 kia on 12th August 1917. *Age 31.*
 Enlisted at London.
 Born in 1884 at Saddleworth.
 Son of Thomas & Martha Milner (née Jackson) of Springhead.
 Stanley was a cotton mill piecer in 1901.
 Interred at Artillery Wood Cemetery IV. C. 20. West-Vlaanderen, Belgium.

KWM p. 226

Moore, Christopher Private 1st/7th Bn The King's (Liverpool Regiment)
 Service no 268971 died on 19th April 1918. *Age 37.*
 Enlisted at Oldham in 1916.
 Born in 1881 at Grimsby.
 Son of Henry & Margaret Moore (née Leslie) of Warrington.
 Christopher was a basket maker in 1901 & a basket & hamper maker in 1911.
 Christopher married Alice Pugh in 1908 at Oldham.
 Interred at Etaples Military cemetery XXIX. G. 11. Pas de Calais, France.

KWM p. 227

Sykes, John Private 1st/5th Bn Duke of Wellington's
 (West Riding Regiment)
 Service no 2966 Died in UK on 11th May 1916. *Age 23.*
 Enlisted at Huddersfield.
 Born in 1893 at Saddleworth.
 Son of Percival Poulton & Emma I Sykes, of Westgate, Almondbury.
 John was an accountant's clerk in 1911.
 Interred at Huddersfield (Almondbury) Cemetery Spec. Memorial.

KWM p. 228

Wormwell, Harry Private 10th Bn Lancashire Fusiliers
 Service no 5661 kia on 30th April 1916. *Age 20.*
 Enlisted at Shaw (residing at Newhey).
 Born in 1896 at Denshaw.
 Son of Herbert & Elizabeth Wormwell, of 18 Gordon St., New Hey.
 Harry was a doffer ring throstle framer in 1911.
 Interred at Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord II. D. 125.

Sources

There is an extensive listing at *Records for the War Dead of WW1* at <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/research/military-records/ww1-war-dead-records.htm>
Saddleworth Museum Archives, A list & notes of personnel in the First World War, M/GX/KB/27
BMD Records: <http://www.freebmd.org.uk/>
Census Records 1841 to 1911: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>
Military records: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>, <http://www.cwgc.org/>, <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>
Neil Barrow, Additions to Saddleworth 1914 -1919 part 1, *SHS Bulletin* Vol. 40 no. 2 Summer 2010 pp. 50-56.
Ivan Foster, Further Additions to Saddleworth 1914-1919 part 2, *SHS Bulletin* Vol. 44 no.3 2014 pp. 66-82.
K.W. Mitchinson, *Saddleworth 1914-1919*, Uppermill 1995.
Mossley and Saddleworth Reporter.
Oldham Chronicle.

Monumental Inscriptions

Transcriptions in Saddleworth Historical Society Archives.
MIs Christ Church, Denshaw by I. Foster [Den]
MIs Christ Church, Friezland by Alison Wild 2002 [CCF]
MIs Delph Dale Lane by I. Foster [DaleLa]
MIs Delph Independent by Howard Lambert & I. Foster [DelInd]
MIs St Anne's Church, Lydgate by I. Foster [Lyd]
MIs St Thomas's Church, Friarmere by I. Foster [StThFr]
MIs St Chad's, New Yard, by Alison Wild & I Foster [NY]
MIs St Chad's, Lower Yard by I. Foster [LY]

Local War Memorials

All Saints' Church, Micklehurst, Memorial Panel.
British Legion Memorial Scroll, at St Anne's Church, Lydgate.
Christ Church, Denshaw, Churchyard Memorial.
Christ Church, Friezland, Memorial Plaque.
Delph Independent Chapel Memorial Plaque (now inside Delph Methodist Chapel).
Delph Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Memorial Plaque.
Greenfield Methodist Chapel, Memorial Roll of Honour.
Holy Trinity Church, Dobcross, Memorial Panel.
Joseph Clare Ltd Memorial Roll of Honour (at Saddleworth Museum).
Pastures Congregational Memorial Panel (at Saddleworth Museum).
Pots and Pans War Memorial.
Springhead Congregational Church Memorials.
St Anne's Church, Lydgate, Memorial Plaque & Scrolls.
St Chad's Church Memorial, in church.
St George's Church Mossley, Memorial Panels.
St John's Church, Roughtown, Memorial Reredos.
St Paul's Church, Scouthead, Memorial Cupboard (now inside Holy Trinity, Dobcross).
St Thomas's Church, Delph, Roll of Honour.
Stalybridge War Memorial.
Uppermill Methodist Church Memorial Panels.
Wrigley Mill Wesleyan Chapel Memorial Panel.

PERCY WHITEHEAD'S WAR DIARY¹

Percy Whitehead

Percy Whitehead was the son of Herbert and Esther Whitehead of Court Street, Uppermill. Herbert had left the family business of stone masons to become a Poor Rate collector. Percy was the third of five brothers. His brother Colin served in the Army Pay Corps and his brother Amos was killed on 13 November 1916 at the Battle of Ancre, the final British action of the Battle of the Somme. He was serving as a sapper with the Royal Marines.²

Aged twenty-five, Percy enlisted in August 1916³ and served in the 1/5 Duke of Wellington's regiment. His Diary starts when he arrives in France in early June and records the mundane matters of army life. Then he was sent to the Somme on 30 June the day before the battle commenced.

1916

JULY

SAT 1st Allies commenced terrific bombardment about midnight and the enemy did not reply till about 6.30a.m. When the noise was deafening. Heard two lines of German trenches taken by 7a.m. Later on third and then part of fourth. Later two lines retaken by the enemy Moved out of Aveling Woods about 11a.m. And proceeded to dug-out at Anthuille Bridge (Ancre R[iver]) Subjected to bombardment by shrapnel at night and had several narrow escapes. Rigged up temporary shelter with corrugated iron Whilst doing so U. Howarth caught in face by piece of shrapnel. A Rhodes took him to dressing station. Heard shrapnel drop on top of shelter several times during night.

Although at the Front his daily life is now largely routine. His entries are short. There is Lewis gun instruction, fatigue work repairing dug-outs and moving supplies and, on a personal level, regular letters to and from home. But they are always under fire.

WED 5 About 3am subjected to lively bombardment from all angles chiefly whizz-bangs, but came through alright. Stood down about 4.15am and had tea. Put on another post in daytime where we were one hour on duty and three hours off in turns. Relieved at 7pm by 4th Batt. Had lively time retiring under shell fire all the way back to Aveling Woods. Quietened down later. Got down in wet trenches under waterproof sheets but wet to the skin. In spite of this slept five hours after a tot of rum. Parcel from Belle⁴ forwarded from Clipstone [Camp].

¹ The complete diary is in Saddleworth Museum Archives M/KB/Whi1b. His niece Mary Cleverley (née Whitehead), the donor, has kindly provided family information.

² K.W. Mitchinson, *Saddleworth 1914-1919*, Uppermill, 1995 p. 80 and CWGC available at <http://www.cwgc.org>

³ Silver War Badge records: available at <http://interactive.ancestry.co.uk/2456/wo329>

⁴ Isabelle, his wife.

AUGUST

TUE 15th Still in reserve line. Wrote Miss Bolan. On working party at night burying the dead in "No-man's land". Subjected to terrible strafing first by heavy shells, then by whiz-bangs and lastly by trench mortars. We sustained four casualties though fortunately all slightly wounded. Lt Rush also sustained slight wound on face but remained with us. Quite the hottest time I have been through yet. No letters from Blighty but one from Amos.

Then again Percy returns to recording the routine of a private at the Front: parades, instruction, letters to and from home. For him the War is soon to end.

SEPTEMBER

FRI 1st Paraded at 10 am. Lecture on L.G.⁵ and magazine filling till 12.30pm. No parade in afternoon. Letter and paper (O.C.)⁶ from home (F) Wrote home (U.W.)⁷



SMA M/P/KWhiUm1e

Percy Whitehead

SAT 2nd Still at Foreceville. Parades in morning. Moved off at pm with guns to Martinzart Woods arriving at about 7.30 Soup served at 8.45pm. Moved off 9pm. towards line Left wagons at Black Horse road and carried guns and ammo from there into firing line via Lancashire Dump Authuille and Elgin Avenue.

⁵ Lewis gun.

⁶ *Oldham Chronicle*

⁷ Probably his sister Una.

SUN 3rd Did not get in position in parallels till 4.45am. Sustained severe cut in fingers of left hand near Authille Bridge coming into trenches. Dead beat when I finally got into position in B. parallels. Barrage on enemy trenches started about 5.15am which was signal to go “over the top” and over we went (opposite Thiepval). We got as far under our own barrage as was safe without mishap we had only been down a few minutes when our A coy began to retire on left. By this time the enemy artillery was playing a devil’s tattoo on our front line, so we urged them forward again which they did after retreating a little way. On moving forward again I felt a sudden shock in my left arm as though it had come into contact with a strong electric current and my arm dropped dead to my side. Did not at first realise what had happened when it suddenly occurred to me that I had been hit. Then I dropped flat like a shot before John Allemande could get another pop at me. Fortunately I found myself close to a big shell-hole which I promptly rolled into and proceeded to “dump” all my tackle. By this time “No-man’s Land” was a veritable inferno the air being pungent with explosive gases and lead and iron flying in all directions. I then crawled back via several shell-holes and a bombing sap into the assembly parallels which I found already blocked with the wounded. However, nothing daunted, I climbed out again and eventually reached the front line, which was already unrecognizable having had a heavy battering from the enemy artillery, and then proceeded down Iniskilling Avenue to the Dressing Station getting hit in the buttocks by a piece of shrapnel from a heavy shell in the process.

On arriving there I was quite dizzy and weak from loss of blood but after having my wound dressed and had a drink I felt a little better and proceeded down the line to the next dressing post. I was again examined here and labelled then I proceeded to the First Field dressing post in Pioneer road picking up Cpl Lawrence on the way. He had some shrapnel in his back. After having breakfast here was taken by ambulance to Forceville where I was inoculated. After dinner was taken to the C.C.S.⁸ where my wound was again dressed. Entrained to Boulogne at 5p.m. but did not start till 7.30.

MON 4th Arrived at Boulogne at 4.30a.m. and taken to No.13 General Hospital. Had a bath and change (Oh blessed relief) then breakfasted after which inspected by M.O.⁹ who afterwards examined me under X-rays. No bones broken no shrapnel. Clean bullet wound and bullet must have grazed tachial pleuis¹⁰ nerve in passing through my arm causing a complete muscular spinal paralysis. Marked for Blighty but missed the afternoon boat so had to remain at Boulogne.

TUE 5th Left Boulogne on St David about 5p.m. and arrived Dover about 6.30p.m. where I entrained for Colchester arriving about midnight. Wrote p.c. home from Liverpool St. Station London.

⁸ Casualty clearing station.

⁹ Medical orderly.

¹⁰ i.e. brachial plexus.

WED 6th Arrived military Hospital Colchester about 2am and immediately put to bed. What a treat to get between clean sheets once more. However was too “comfy” to sleep much. In bed all day except a little in the afternoon when I had to get an orderly to bath me.

THU 7th Kept in bed until noon. Allowed out in grounds in afternoon.

FRI 8th Transferred from Ward 5 (Main Blgd) to B Ward (Hut and Extension) Put on massage and electric treatment. Went out in afternoon and had a look around Colchester.

SAT 30th Transferred to Red Cross Hospital at Saffron Walden. Arrived at about 1.30p.m. and put in Mikado Ward (2nd floor) along with four other chaps, singularly all Yorkshire boys. We all agreed it was “tres bon”.

1917

FEB 23rd Transferred to R.N.O.¹¹ Hospital Gt Portland St West London.

APR 25th Transferred to Michie V.A.D.¹² Hospital Queen’s Gate S.W.

JUN 11th Transferred to Summerdown Convalescent Camp, Eastbourne. Arrived there about 3.30 in afternoon. Very hot day. Billeted in small canvas hut with three others, two Jocks and one Taffy.

Percy was discharged as “wounded” in 1919.¹³ He was an architect and unsuccessfully submitted designs for the Pots and Pans War Memorial. He spent his career as an architect for Liverpool City Council and died in Liverpool in 1966.

¹¹ Royal National Orthopaedic.

¹² Voluntary Aid Detachment.

¹³ Silver War Badge records.



Percy Whitehead at Saffron Walden hospital (second row seventh from left, below nurse)

SMA M/P/Kwh/Uml

