

2291 LANCE CORPORAL ALFRED JAMES HUGHES

1/4TH BATTALION ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT



Alfred James Hughes (known as Alf) was born in Wantage on 4 July 1896, the son of James Hughes and his wife Jane. In the 1901 census the family was living at Belmont Cottages in Denchworth Road, Wantage, and James Hughes was a domestic gardener. Alf can be found ten years later in 1911 working as a grocers errand boy.

Around 1913, Alf Hughes joined the 4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment (4th Royal Berks). On 4 August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. The same day, the 4th Royal Berks were mobilised and the Wantage members of the battalion were served with their rifles and spent the night at the new drill hall in Springfield Road. The following day the men travelled to Reading to join the rest of the regiment there, the Wantage group being in D Company. A period of training at Chelmsford followed, which took place from August 1914 until March 1915.

The 4th R Berks left Folkestone for Boulogne on 1 April 1915. It subsequently became attached to the 145th Brigade 48th (South Midland) Division. For the next few months, they held a front line at Ploegsteert Wood just to the south of the border between France and Belgium.

By May 1916, the battalion was in the Somme area of France in preparation for the Somme offensive which was due to begin at the beginning of July 1916. The front line that 145th Brigade occupied ran between Hebuterne and Serre. The front line was described by Captain Cruttwell in his history of the 4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment:

“The ground was entirely new to us, and extremely difficult. All rations and supplies had to be brought up from Hebuterne by communication trenches more than a mile long and in bad repair. The whole sector had been the scene of a fierce battle in June 1915, for the possession of Tourvent Farm and the outskirts of Serre, and was everywhere cut up by old disused trenches, French and German, and shell holes, and was still littered with bones and skulls. Nor was the front line more attractive, it formed a sharp salient projecting towards Serre, held by disconnected posts, ill defended, close to the enemy, and joined to the support line by only two communication trenches one at each end of the salient.”

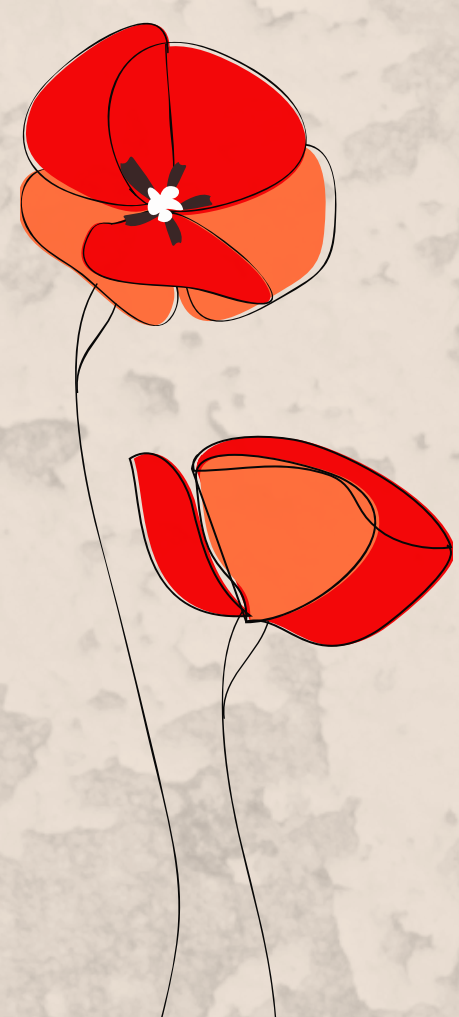
So vague and difficult to identify was this line of posts which made up the front line that Captain Cruttwell, when visiting them for the first time, nearly walked into the German front line.

Up to midnight on 15 May 1916 all was quiet, but then the enemy opened a bombardment of the front line. A trench raid by the Germans to gain intelligence, possible prisoners and possibly to take the salient had begun. The Germans attacked all the posts held by the 4th Royal Berks. Their defences were blown to pieces, the men's rifles damaged, broken or buried and thus they were left defenceless. At one post, as the men began to extricate themselves, Germans appeared behind them and ordered them to surrender or they would be shot. Four men were taken and one escaped. It was a similar story along the front. The battalion fought back bravely as the German bombardment continued and eventually the battle ended. There were 29 men missing including two from D Company, one of whom was Alf Hughes, who had been taken prisoner.

Men taken prisoner by the Germans on the Western Front would first be taken to a reception or holding camp where they would be interrogated and classified. From there they would be transported to a main camp in Germany. Alf Hughes ended up at Doberitz POW camp.



Doberitz POW Camp was a large camp 8 miles from Berlin, and was close to an important military training centre. In 1915, there were 79 Belgian, 290 French, 3687 British and 4,338 Russian prisoners here. The men would be employed on agricultural work in the local area. To show that the prisoners were being treated well photos were taken to allow the prisoners to send them home. Alf can be seen in this one (in centre with striped jersey). As the war went on, food became a problem and the prisoners became increasingly dependent on Red Cross Parcels for survival.



Back in Wantage, in February 1917, a dance had been held at the Town Hall in aid of the Wantage Territorial Comforts Association which had guaranteed to keep Alf Hughes supplied with food, a parcel of which was sent out through official sources every five days at a cost of 6s per parcel. About 150 were present at the dance which was from 8 till 12 and the financial result was very satisfactory and pleased the Association.

Alf Hughes was repatriated back to the UK in early 1919 and resumed his life in Wantage. He worked at Wantage Engineering Ltd. and married Queenie Belcher in 1925. The family lived at West Hill in Wantage. Alf died in 1966.



L-R Queenie Belcher, Alf Hughes and Florence Kinch

CAPTAIN RAYMOND NICHOLS

102ND BATTALION CANADIAN INFANTRY



Nichols & Son was a successful Printers and Stationers in Wantage Market Place. The business was started by Mr Henry Nichols in 1875. Henry and his wife Mary had four sons and a daughter. In 1913, Henry took into partnership his second son John Alexander Nichols, and the business continued as Nichols & Son. Two years later Henry died; the business continued to be run by his son John.

All Henry's sons were educated at King Alfred's School. The youngest was Raymond, who was born on 16 January 1885. A Fellow of the Chemical Society, Raymond worked for several years in the laboratory of Guinness Brewery in Dublin. In about 1912 he secured a job with the Canadian Civil Service at their experimental farm at Ottawa and left the UK for Canada.

By 1916, however, he was a Captain serving with the 102nd Battalion Canadian Infantry, on the Somme in Northern France. In October of that year Raymond's brother Henry received the following letter:

Dear Mr Nichols

Captain Spencer who is with me in the Victoria and Albert Ward No. 4 General Hospital, Denmark Hill, London has just shown me your letter of October 31st re your brother whose death in action we all deeply regret more than words can say.

He was my second-in-command and I have wondered what his next-of-kin's address was so that I could write. All my books are still in France and have not yet reached me so that I have been helpless in the matter of addresses. Your brother shared the same tent with me at Tara Hill, Albert and we have spent many pleasant hours together since he joined my company. I did not know he had a brother in England.

I will tell you what I know about his death. On the night of the 20th October my company took up a position in the front line in front of Courcellette. We went there with orders to attack Regina Trench on the 21st. On the right of the 102nds was the Canadians and on the left an English regiment. I was in command of the extreme left of the 102nds consequently my left joined the Englishmen. I was particularly anxious about my connection with the Englishmen during the attack so I detailed your brother to take charge of my left whilst I took the right of my company. The barrage started at 12.06 pm (noon) and we immediately went over the parapet. Six minutes later the barrage had lifted off Regina Trench by which time we had taken it. Two or three minutes later I was hit in the face with a bullet which came out behind my ear and I was knocked down. My men carried me into a deep shell hole in Regina Trench and laid me down. I was only partially conscious and after a while regained full consciousness. Sometime between 12:15 and 1 pm Captain Nichols passed me. He stopped, and I told him he was to take over command of my company. He spoke a few words to me and he was anxious about the men digging themselves in as fast as they could and was moving up and down superintending the work when he found me.

After staying a moment or two he said, "Well, I can do no more good here" and passed onto his duties which no doubt were causing much anxiety as I think by that time he must have been the only senior officer not out of action. That was the last I saw of him. I have since heard verbally from Captain Loudon (with us here) who heard by letter that the 102nd was relieved from its tour of duty on the night of Monday the 23rd at about 8 or 9 pm and that my old company under your brother's command was moving out when he was killed.

Captain Loudon tells me that the company had left the front line and that your brother in company with Major Lee of the 87th Canadians was moving down the communication trench when a shell burst over his head. Major Lee was unharmed but your poor brother was killed instantly. I hope I am not too blunt in the recital of this but I feel you would like to know the truth. The 102nd suffered badly with its officers. I am told that four out of the 21 of us who started came out uninjured. I ask you to accept my sympathy, it is all I can do; I wish I could do more. We shall always have the most pleasant recollections of Captain Nichols whose company we enjoyed. He did his work as an ideal officer should as I know well from my own observations both before and during the attack. He has given his life like many another gallant man for our great cause. I can say no more.

Believe me, yours very sincerely, J S Matthews, Major.



Sadly, Raymond Nichols has no known grave and is commemorated on the Vimy Memorial in France. His wristwatch was returned to his family. It had stopped at 8:57pm.

42476 PRIVATE ALBERT STOTER

9TH BATTALION YORKSHIRE REGIMENT

(THE GREEN HOWARDS)

Albert Stoter was born on 23 February 1892, in East Hendred, the son of William Stoter and his wife Sarah (née Haines). He can be found in the 1911 census living with his parents and siblings William, Edward, Henry, Leonard and Ivy, near the Wheatsheaf in East Hendred. All the sons and their father were farm labourers working on the nearby farms.

Albert would have had to enlist into the army under the Military Service Act of 1916 which introduced conscription in January 1916. Under the provisions of the Act, men were deemed to have enlisted if they were aged between 19 and 41 and resident in the UK and were unmarried or a widower on 2 November 1915. This was extended to married men and the age dropped to 18, on 25 May 1916. Men were placed in a group depending on their age and occupation. Initially at the start of WWI when a man enlisted he could express a preference for the unit he joined, usually but not always the local regiment. However, as time went on, the needs of war meant that this was not always the case, and after training men could be transferred to an entirely different unit on the Western Front that needed fresh drafts of personnel for a variety of different reasons.

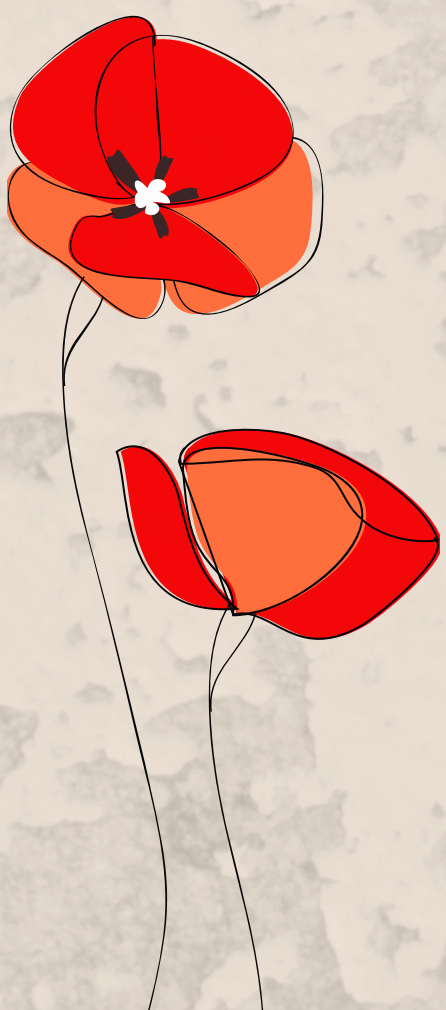
Albert initially expressed a preference to join the Royal Field Artillery and it was with them that he had his initial training, receiving the army number 164273. After training, Pte Albert Stoter was transferred to the 9th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment (The Green Howards) for his army service on the Western Front. It is not known exactly when this would have taken place, as Albert's service record has not survived, but it probably would have been in 1916.

The 9th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment (Green Howards) was originally formed at Richmond in Yorkshire, and went to France on 26 August 1915. It was part of 69th Brigade 23rd Division, and for the next six months served in the Armentieres and Loos sectors of the Western Front. The Division (with the 9th Yorks) entered the Battle of the Somme on 3 July 1916, and subsequently captured the village of Contalmaison by 14 July 1916. Fighting later ensued along a trench called Munster Alley towards Martinpuich, in which all the Brigades of the Division took part. On 8 August 1916 the 23rd Division was relieved and sent north to the quiet sector of Ploegsteert Wood near Armentieres and subsequently returned to the Somme sector in mid September 1916, where it was placed in reserve. It was in times like this that army units in WWI took the opportunity to re-equip and retrain. It was also the time that new drafts of men would be received and it is likely that this is when Private Stoter would have joined the 9th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment in France. October 1916 found the 9th Yorks fighting around the village of Le Sars, which was captured on the 8th of that month. At the end of October 1916, the 23rd Division was back in the Ypres Salient where it relieved Australian troops in the Sanctuary Wood area. They were to remain in the Ypres Salient until October 1917, taking part in the Battle of Messines Ridge in May 1917, and then during the 3rd Battle of Ypres the 23rd Division was in action around the Menin Road and Polygon Wood.

In November 1917, three UK Infantry Divisions were sent to Italy, to support the Italians in their campaign to defeat the Austrians on the Asiago Plateau in Northern Italy. One of these Divisions was the 23rd Division. On arrival in Italy the 23rd Division concentrated around Mantua, south of Verona. From here they marched out on 19 November 1917 to the front line, relieving the Italians on the western part of the Montello and the adjoining plain south of the Piave River at the beginning of December 1917. Defences were reorganised and patrols were sent out to locate the enemy. The troops were relieved by the 41st Division on 13 February 1918. Casualties for the Division were 38 dead and 136 wounded, which were mainly due to artillery and air attacks. Amongst them was Private Stoter who on 14 January 1918 was wounded in the left hand and evacuated via the Field Ambulance to the Casualty Clearing Station at Dueville.

On recovery, Private Stoter returned to his battalion, which was to serve in Italy until September 1918. As a result of a reorganisation of the army in Italy, the 9th Yorks returned to France where they were attached to the 74th Brigade 25th Division. The 25th Division was to take part in the 100 Days Offensive that finally ended the war. This had begun with the Battle of Amiens in August 1918. The battle pushed the Germans out of France, forcing them to retreat beyond the Hindenburg Line, and culminated in the Armistice of 11 November 1918. It was during this offensive, that the 9th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment took part in a battle to retake the village of Pommereuil, 3 kilometres east of the town of Le Cateau.

On the night of 23 October 1918, the 9th Yorks were at Honnechy, with orders to advance to help take the village and the nearby Bois de l'Eveque. The attack was launched in bright moonlight at 1:20am. The village was captured in the face of heavy fire from the mills and farms along the banks of the Richemont River. Bois de l'Eveque was reached and the infantry consolidated their gains from the day's battle. The 9th Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment's casualties for the day included nine men killed in action who were all buried at Pommereuil. Included with them was Private Albert Stoter. Less than three weeks later the war ended.



33983 PTE MONTAGUE WILLIAM WELCH

1ST BATTALION DUKE OF CORNWALL'S LIGHT INFANTRY



Montague (or Monty) William Welch was the only son of James and Ellen Welch of 32, Grove Street, Wantage. He had two sisters, Dorothy and Hilda. His father James was a well-known personality in Wantage; he was for over twenty years the town crier, bill poster and toll collector for Wantage. Joining the Wantage Fire Brigade at the age of 16, James Welch became one of its longest serving members and was involved for many years with Wantage Football Club.

Monty was born on 12 August 1897. Until he joined up he was employed by Messrs Kent and Sons Ironmongers, Market Place, Wantage. Monty enlisted in Reading in Spring 1916 and was posted to the 9th Reserve Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment for training at Bovington Camp near Wool, Dorset. With the introduction of conscription, training systems changed, and the 9th Royal Berks became known as the 37th Training Reserve Battalion. Under the new system, on completion of training, men were sent to any unit in the country needing new troops. Hence in October 1916, Private Monty Welch was posted with a draft to join the 1st Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry in France.

Private Welch's career with the 1st DCLI can be followed with reference to the battalion war diary and in a series of letters he sent home. These comment on the life he is having behind the lines and at the front, such as visiting a cinema show and seeing a couple of concert parties featuring the 'Whizz-bangs' and the 'Very-lights'. Monty requests supplies from home, including 'fags' and tooth-powder. News from home is not forgotten and Monty comments on three men from Wantage (namely Eddie Sims, Charley Pegler and S Belcher) who sadly had died. The battalion was inspected by the King in July 1917.

Monty was wounded twice in early Summer 1917. The first of these is mentioned in a letter he sent home on 2nd June 1917. He says

"No doubt you will think that I have forgotten you but as a matter of fact I have been in hospital. As it happens me and some more of my chums were dug in a sunken road under very heavy shellfire, when a shell struck the top of the parapet knocking it down on top of me. Of course I was buried alive but two of my chums were near at the time and after a time dug me out. I am glad to say I am not a little worse for it now."

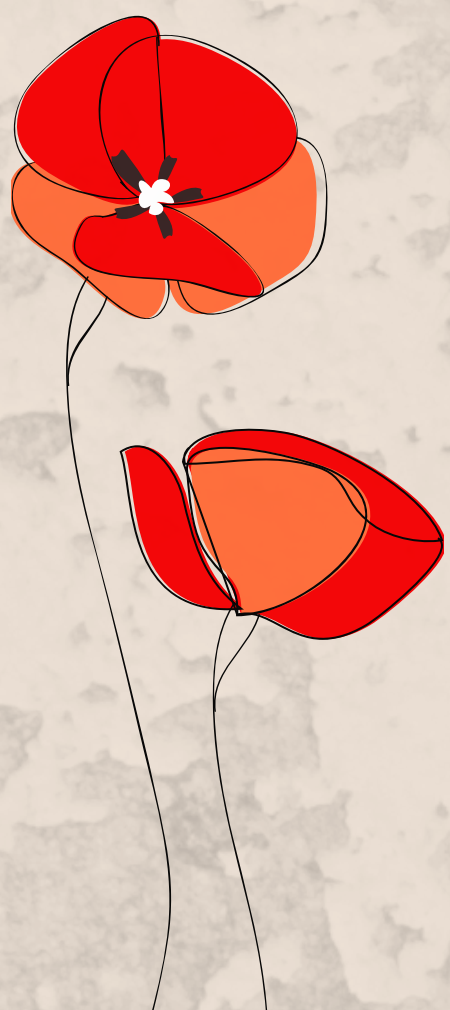
After treatment to his leg, Pte Welch returned to his battalion on 16 June 1917. However he was wounded again by a piece of shrapnel in his back as explained in another letter dated 20 June 1917.

By October 1917, Pte Welch was with his battalion, who were in billets in Meteren training for the forthcoming attack on Broodseide Ridge.

For the battle, the 1st DCLI reached its reserve position in Sanctuary Wood at Zillibeke the night before. The night was very dark, the ground wet and badly cut up by shellfire. The DCLI got into position quickly with about 60 casualties due to hostile enemy shelling near Black Watch Corner. Later that evening the battalion moved to relieve the East Surrey Regt in the front line.

The troops went over the top at 6:00am, meeting considerable opposition from enemy machine guns and pill-boxes in Cameron Culvert and the ruins of Polderhoek Chateau. Severe fighting ensued and Cameron Covert was captured, with over 200 prisoners taken. Three tanks helped with the battle, and the final objective, Juniper Hill, was reached. Casualties for the 1st Battalion Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry during this action were costly, with 118 men killed. Amongst the missing was Pte Monty Welch, and his parents received a telegram to this effect.

Then, four years later in 1921, James Welch received notification that his son's body had been found at Zillibeke and was being reinterred in Duhallow ADS Cemetery at Ypres. It is likely that Monty was one of the 60 casualties before the battle. His grave is next to those of an unknown Lieutenant and Private of his Regiment, probably found at the same time.



Monty Welch's grave in Dunhallow ADS Cemetery, Ypres.

10381 SGT ERNEST CAMDEN

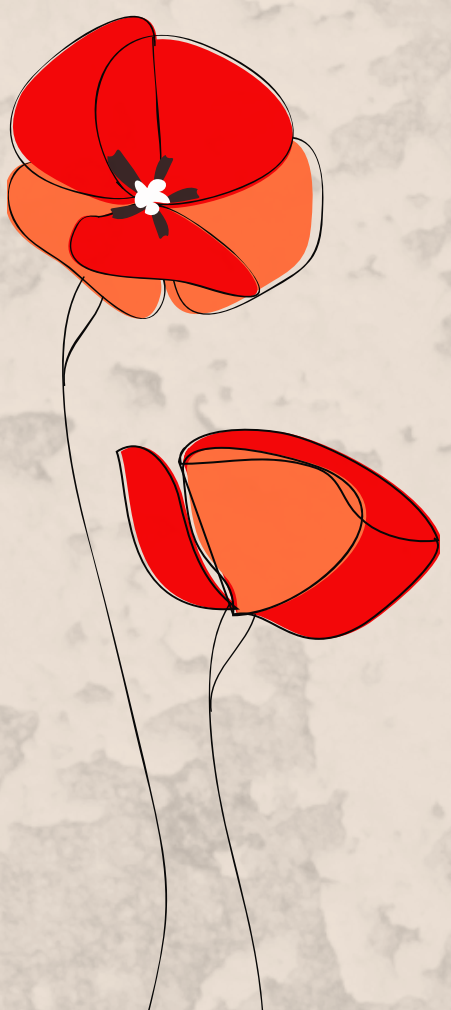
8TH ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT



Ernest Camden was born on 4 February 1887 in Grove, the son of Henry and Mary Ann Camden. Henry and his wife had two more sons and a daughter, Henry, Walter and Fanny. The next time Ernest Camden's name appears in local records is when he marries Alice Holloway in Wantage on 22 June 1910.

Their son George Henry John was born on 19 May 1912. By this time Ernest was a gardener with his brother at St Katharine's School close to where he lived. He was also a member of the Wantage Fire Brigade, and posed proudly for this photograph with other members of the Wantage Brigade, as winners of the Junior Hose Cart Competitors in Fire Brigade competitions held in Wantage in 1912.

Ernest Camden joined the 8th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment in September 1914, eventually being promoted to Sergeant. He met his death during the Battle of Loos on 25 September 1915, leaving behind his wife and 3 year old son.



K/16587 STOKER 1ST CLASS JOHN WILLIAM HARRY BEECHEY HMS HAMPSHIRE



The fate of Stoker 1st Class ‘Jack’ Beechey from Wantage is linked with that of Field Marshal Earl Kitchener of Khartoum.

Lord Kitchener is probably the best known face of the Great War, owing to the famous recruiting poster by Alfred Leete that features Kitchener's portrait with pointing finger. At the outbreak of WWI, Kitchener was seen as Britain's greatest soldier and was the natural choice as Minister for War. He was amongst the first to realise that the war would not be over by Christmas and therefore he planned for a three year conflict at least. It is largely due to him that over two million men enlisted into the army in the Great War between August 1914 and December 1915. For all his popularity with the general public, Kitchener was not a popular man with his fellow members of the war cabinet due to his autocratic manner and failure to delegate important tasks. The failure of the Gallipoli expedition and the creation of a Ministry of Munitions under Lloyd George slowly undermined his power and position. In June 1916, it was decided that he would lead a mission to Russia in an attempt to boost the Russian army's efforts against the Germans.

Jack Beechey or John William Harry Beechey (as he was christened) was born on 13 August 1894 at White Waltham near Windsor, Berkshire. He was the son of William and Annie Beechey and his family was later to move to 39 South View Cottages, Grove Street, Wantage. Jack was a milkman before he enlisted for 12 years in the Royal Navy on 25 October 1912. Between then and the outbreak of war, Jack served as a stoker on board the cruiser HMS *Edgar* and later the battleship *Queen Mary* in 1913. The beginning of 1914 found Stoker 1st Class Jack Beechey serving aboard the cruiser HMS *Europa* which met with HMS *Hampshire* at Columbo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) where the two ships exchanged crews.

On 4 June 1916, HMS *Hampshire* was at anchor at Scapa Flow, when a signal came for it to anchor close to the flagship HMS *Iron Duke*. Lord Kitchener and his party were aboard the *Iron Duke* and *Hampshire* was to take them on the next leg of their journey to Russia.

It was bad weather with high winds, rain and mountainous seas so it was decided to sail to the west of the islands to avoid the worst of the weather. What was not known at this time was that on 23 May 1916, a German submarine, the *U-75*, had laid 22 mines to catch any unwary ships sailing to the west of the Orkneys.

Lord Kitchener came aboard the *Hampshire* at 4pm after dinner with Sir John Jellicoe on board the *Iron Duke*. Then at about 4:30pm HMS *Hampshire* set off on her fatal voyage, met by her two escorting destroyers, *Unity* and *Victor*. The little convoy proceeded along the western coast of the Orkneys. However, the tremendous seas proved too much for the destroyers, which were unable to keep up with HMS *Hampshire*'s higher speed. Therefore, they were ordered to return to port at 6:20pm.

At 7:30pm HMS *Hampshire* was roughly 1½ miles from shore between Marwick Head and the Brough of Birdsey. It was at this time that the ship struck a mine and sank within fifteen minutes. Only three overcrowded Carley Life Rafts (similar to a large lifebuoy) were launched from the ship. Of the men who managed to escape from the sinking ship, only 12 survived to tell the tale of the disaster. There was no sign of Lord Kitchener. There were reports of him reaching the upper deck and an officer, Lieutenant Matthews, is reported to have shouted "Make way for Lord Kitchener". It is believed that he went down with the ship.

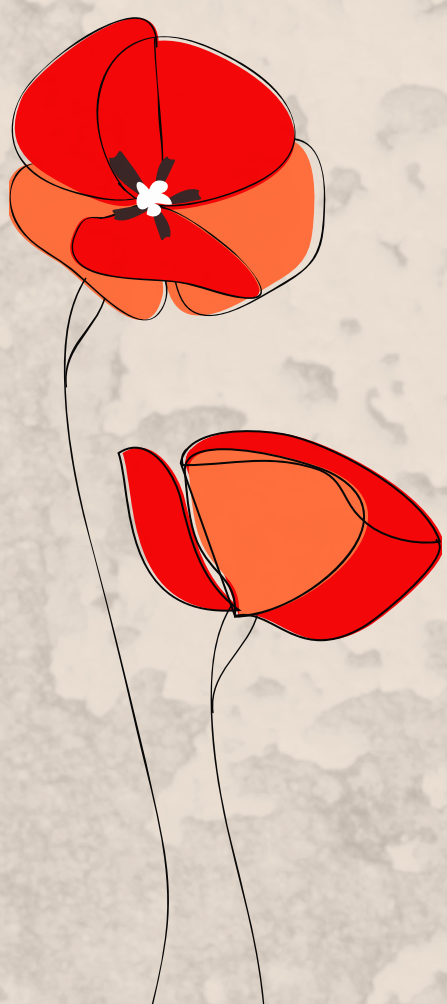
Both Jack Beechey and Lord Kitchener have no known grave but the sea. Jack Beechey is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial and there is a memorial to Lord Kitchener and HMS *Hampshire* at Marwick Head on the Orkney Islands.



Lord Kitchener



Jack's niece still treasures a gold cross that he bought for his sister Doris on his last leave.



1049 SERGEANT ARTHUR DAWSON

1/4TH BATTALION ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT

Arthur Dawson was born in 1875, one of 11 children of Henry and Ann Dawson at Ardington. He enlisted into the army on 4 January 1897, joining the Royal Berkshire Regiment with whom he was to serve over the next 19 years. At this time soldiers enlisted for 12 years - five years active service followed by seven on reserve when they could return home, but remained liable for call-up in case of national emergency. After his initial basic training Arthur was posted to the 2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment. He was to serve with them in the South African War of 1899-1902 as a mounted infantryman. His granddaughter remembers his spurs hanging in his home at Ardington in the 1950s. For his service in South Africa, Arthur Dawson was awarded the Queens South African with the clasps Cape Colony and Orange Free State and the Kings South African Medal with clasps for 1901-2. Following his service there, Pte Dawson was with this battalion in Egypt for his final two years of active service. On his transfer to the reserve in 1904, Arthur resumed his work as a labourer with the Lockinge Estate.

On 2 December 1905, Arthur Dawson married Charlotte Partridge in East Lockinge. The couple were to have two children, Arthur Henry (born 1907) and Clara Elizabeth (born 1908). Three years later Arthur's service with the regular army came to an end. However, experienced soldiers like him would be in demand to join what was known then as the Territorial Force.

The Territorial Force was a part-time volunteer organisation, created in 1908 to help meet the military needs of the United Kingdom without resorting to conscription. It consolidated the Rifle Volunteers and the Yeomanry into a unified body, commanded by the War Office but administered by local County Territorial Associations. Experienced regular soldiers would be encouraged to join their local units, especially if they were coming to the end of their regular service, and many wanted to join as a way of keeping in touch with their old life.

Arthur Dawson attested on 29 June 1909 and joined B Company, 4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment, who recruited men from Wantage. The 4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment was quickly mobilised on 6 August 1914, and the now 1049 Sergeant Arthur Dawson went with them for their period of training at Chelmsford which took place from August 1914 until March 1915. The battalion left Folkestone for Boulogne on 1 April 1915. It subsequently became attached to the 145th Brigade 48th (South Midland) Division. For the next few months, the 4th Royal Berks held a front line at Ploegsteert Wood just to the south of the border between France and Belgium.

Meanwhile back in Wantage, Mr H N Nichols of Nichols & Son was collecting money for a tobacco fund (in connection with the Weekly Dispatch) for the local territorials serving at the front. £5.00 was raised to provide 200 packets of tobacco and cigarettes. The parcel was forwarded to Cpl. Arthur T Gale of the 4th Royal Berks, serving in France. Arthur Gale was a local man, an auctioneer's clerk employed at Adkin Belcher and Bowen. Pte Gale wrote back to Mr Nichols:

British Expeditionary Force

Dear Mr Nichols

I am just writing to thank you very much indeed for your kind letter and cigarettes received quite safe. I cannot express how glad the men are to know that the kind people of Wantage are thinking about them so much, it came as a great surprise to me and to them, although of course we get our army ration of it, but this will seem quite a treat having this from our own town and from our own townspeople. The people of course cannot realise the amount smoked while we are in the trenches, it is a wonderful help to the men I can tell you. I have not received the parcel yet but will let you know as soon as I get it. If I find we are getting a little over-run with it you won't mind if I ask you to send us a few other comforts in lieu of the tobacco and cigarettes will you? As, of course we get a good share of it, but what seems more useful to the men would be say some writing paper and envelopes and pencils as we have to pay 1½d for four sheets and four envelopes and postcards are scarce. A few tins of condensed milk and cocoa and hard sweets as the weather out here is very hot in the day and jolly cold nights - or any such things as provisions etc are terribly dear. I hope you won't think I want you to stop sending us cigarettes but a change now and again would, be a great help to the men and also a great comfort for only us that are really in the fighting line know what is best required, and am writing you this from the trenches. Well I must say all the men are at present in good health and are doing their share in the trenches. We have been in several times and are getting used to the shelling. We had a very good baptism of fire the first time, plenty of shells bursting close to us, but glad to say no casualties. We had a pretty warm reception I can tell you but we don't take much notice of it now. Well I must now close, thanking you from the men for your very kind thought for us, and I hope you will thank the townspeople of Wantage from the men for their generosity in sending us these comforts and to assure them that we shall all try and do our best for them and the country.

I remain always yours sincerely

Arthur T Gale Corporal

As a result of this, a committee was formed in Wantage headed by Mr Nichols to supply 'comforts' to the men of the 4th Royal Berks serving in France. Sergt Dawson became the contact with the battalion. Transcripts of his letters can be found in the accompanying gallery notes.

Sergeant Arthur Dawson remained with his battalion till April 1916, when he fell ill with myalgia, a chronic and severe muscle pain caused by the conditions that soldiers had to endure at times in the trenches. Evacuated to No 2 General Hospital at Le Harve, Arthur Dawson was not to return to the Western Front. After recovery he did serve in Ireland, for a short while with the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment, and was finally discharged from the army in 1919. Arthur Dawson returned to work at the Lockinge estate and died in 1956.

