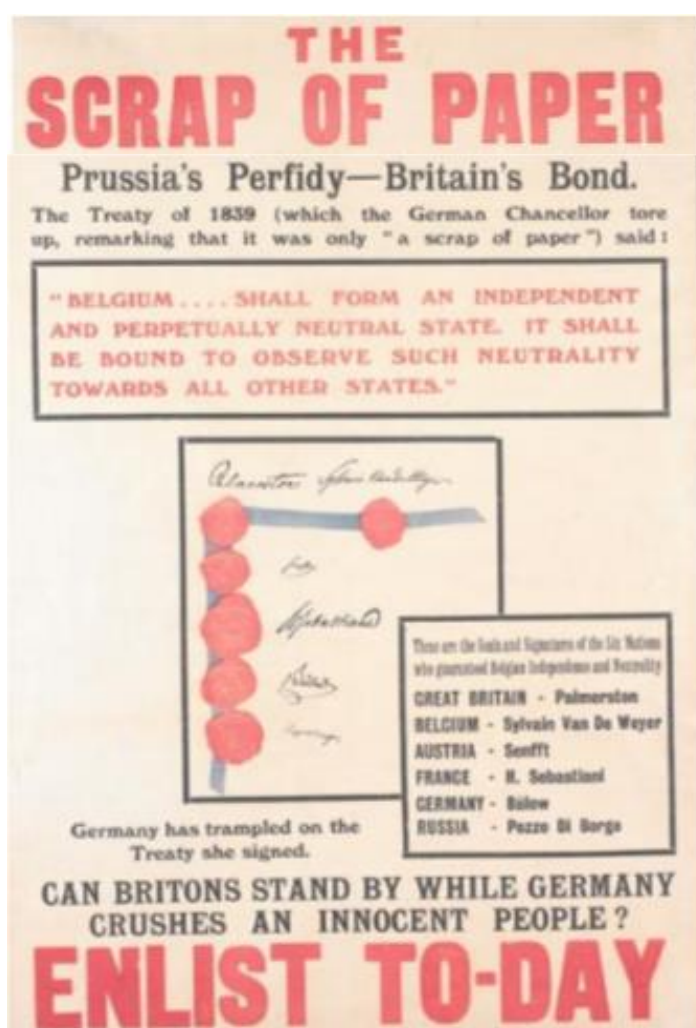


Lenham's First World War Story

By Amy Myers

The First Months of War

Unlike the Second World War, the outbreak of the First World War at 11pm on Tuesday, 4th August 1914, seemed to the village to have blown up out of nowhere. There had been rumours following the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Serbia on 28th June, the Royal Navy had been mobilised and trains were full of foreigners rushing to return home,



© IWM Art.IWM PST 5902

but the growing conflicts taking place in Europe had not directly challenged Britain. Not until Germany invaded Belgium which Britain was pledged to defend.

In Lenham's post office, Mabel, wife of the postmaster John Hughes, took the morse telegraph with the news that the country was now at war. Lenham, like every other village and town in Britain, was immediately affected. Special Reservists such as Lenham's Boer War veteran Charles Bugden were

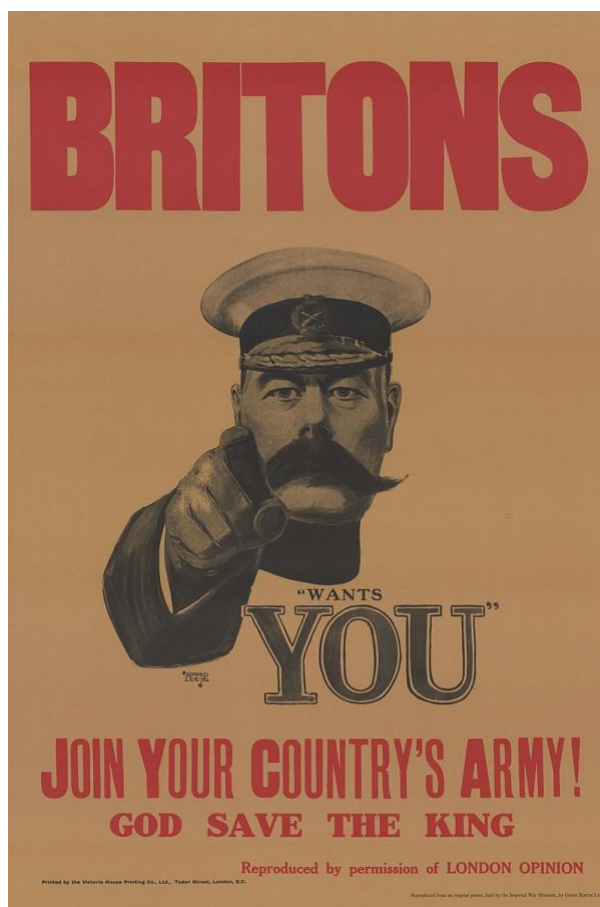
mobilised and two days later the new secretary of state for war, Field

Marshal Lord Kitchener, called for 100,000 volunteer recruits aged between 19 and 30. The village immediately responded. These men were chiefly to form his New Army to back up

the regular army; some of them, such as Lenham's Jacob Morgan who joined the Navy and found himself almost immediately in action.

Lord Kitchener's famous recruiting poster¹ with its pointing finger and caption 'Your Country Needs You' had its effect and in September the age limit was raised to 35, and many more men, such as Lenham ploughman Harry Amon, promptly signed up. Horseman and cowman Thomas Gilbert from Church Square was another Lenham man to join the forces.

Those over military age also clamoured to help the war effort. At first they were discouraged by Lord Kitchener, but by



the spring of 1915 the unofficial groups that had sprung up over the country were recognised as the Voluntary Training Corps. Exactly a year after the war after a mass meeting in Maidstone over 12,000 men from Kent joined it. By 1917 Lenham's James Troup Hatch of Grove House was lieutenant of a platoon in the 5th Volunteer Battalion, The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment (later reorganised into the 2nd Volunteer Battalion).

The outbreak of war in August 1914 affected everyday life in Lenham in many other ways. The first visible sign of the effects of war in Europe was the arrival of Belgian refugees who had crossed the Channel and were being temporarily sheltered in Kent, with Lenham taking its share. The Village Institute, Stanfield House, where Lenham's doctor Dr Temperley Grey

¹ Thanks to <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

lived (next to the Dog and Bear pub), and the Ancient Order of Foresters' hall (now Lenham Social Club) all opened their doors.

The Grim Reality

By the end of the year it was clear that the men who departed so confident of their return for Christmas had been wrong. Instead Lenham had another taste of war when the first Zeppelin appeared in the Kentish skies. By 1917 an even bigger threat arrived with Gotha bombers targeting Kent.



As the fighting in northern France at Ypres and Loos took its toll in 1915, the grim reality of the war was all too obvious when the wounded returned to England for hospitalisation.

Dr Temperley Grey and his wife moved out of Stanfield House which became Kent VAD² Detachment 134 for the rest of the war with Dr Temperley Grey command.

From the beginning of the war

women had been anxious to play their part but the government turned down any plans for national women's organisations until two years later the tide of war changed their attitude.

² [more about VAD](#)

Meanwhile Lenham women, as in the rest of Britain, rushed to train as nurses and take other local jobs. Several of the nurses served at Stanfield House, including Norah Maylam of the Clark Maylam family, Meg Woolley daughter of the barber Thomas Woolley who lived in Maidstone Road, and the new vicar's wife Mrs Etherington. Her husband, the Rev Francis Etherington, served as a chaplain to the forces in Egypt.

On the downs, the newly built hospital for tubercular patients was taken over by the Canadian Forces for their wounded soldiers, opening officially in 1917, under Lt Colonel W M Hart. At first it was for tubercular patients only but a month later it was redesignated as a Canadian Special Hospital. A Patients Comfort Fund was set up in Lenham for both Stanford House and the Canadian patients, and in May 1918 a concert was arranged for them. When well enough the patients from the Canadian hospital would come down to the village and Meg Woolley's niece Esme remembered as a child playing with them in the Square. One patient at Stanfield House was the badly wounded Fred Cox, who having been paralysed in the trenches of northern France in 1915 became a familiar sight in the village as he drove around in a carriage drawn by his beloved donkey Ginny. Sadly, he died of his wounds in 1921.

No End in Sight

The autumn of 1915 brought another ominous indication that this war was far from won. The volunteer method of recruitment for men of military age was proving insufficient with casualties mounting in France. As the government was reluctant to introduce conscription, the Derby Scheme was introduced in October, whereby men between 19 and 41 could attest their willingness to serve if called upon, with single men to be called up before those who were married. From Lenham, butcher George Post, shepherd Edward Fisher, farm labourers George Bugden and John Morgan were amongst those who signed up, but such was the overall shortage of men that the Scheme proved insufficient and in the late spring general conscription was introduced.

By 1917 the government at last realised the contribution that women could make and soon women were serving in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Women's Land Army to replace men for service overseas. Food shortages brought national rationing in during 1918.

To ease the demands and tragedies of war, concerts and dances took place in the Village Institute, and in the final year of the war, Lenham held a Gala Day on 7th August, when both hospitals attended an Athletic Fete for the Canadian soldiers. There was a baseball match between the Lenham Canadian Athletic Association team and one from the Ashford Canadian Ordnance Corps. Come September and there was a concert in the village for the VAD hospital patients, and on Bonfire Night, one for the patients in the hospital.

The Reckoning

Although the war was almost at an end, another enemy then entered the scene: the Spanish flu which raged until 1920, killing an estimated 50 million people worldwide, and affecting both Stanfield House and the Canadian hospital.

Two hundred and sixty men had left Lenham to serve in the forces. This figure was provided by James Troup Hatch, who founded the present Hatch Charity in 1913, and who was determined that those who had served their country should be remembered. Accordingly, he pinned a list on the church door on which everyone could add any names that should be on it. Over the years the list lay hidden in a trunkful of papers but it was discovered in time to hold a day of remembrance on the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of war.

However the names of the fallen based on that list do not tally exactly with those on the memorial stone now outside St Mary's Church, which records 42 deaths for the First World War. There are many reasons for the discrepancy in the figures: some families could have moved away after the war, some living on the parish boundaries might not have attended St

Mary's church and so missed the list, some had died of their wounds after the war and were later included, and some were recorded in other parishes. There are two graves in Lenham cemetery bearing names that cannot be identified as they are on neither the memorial stone nor the Hatch list. They are Lenham's unknown soldiers.

For further information on those who served in the First World War and their families, see Lenham and the Great War: Those who served in war and peace by Amy Myers. Our thanks to the Hatch Charity for permission to base this article on it. The book is available for purchase from the Lenham Community Centre, 12 Groom Way, Lenham, ME17 2QT. Tel: 01622 853800, email: booking@lenhamcommunitycentre.org