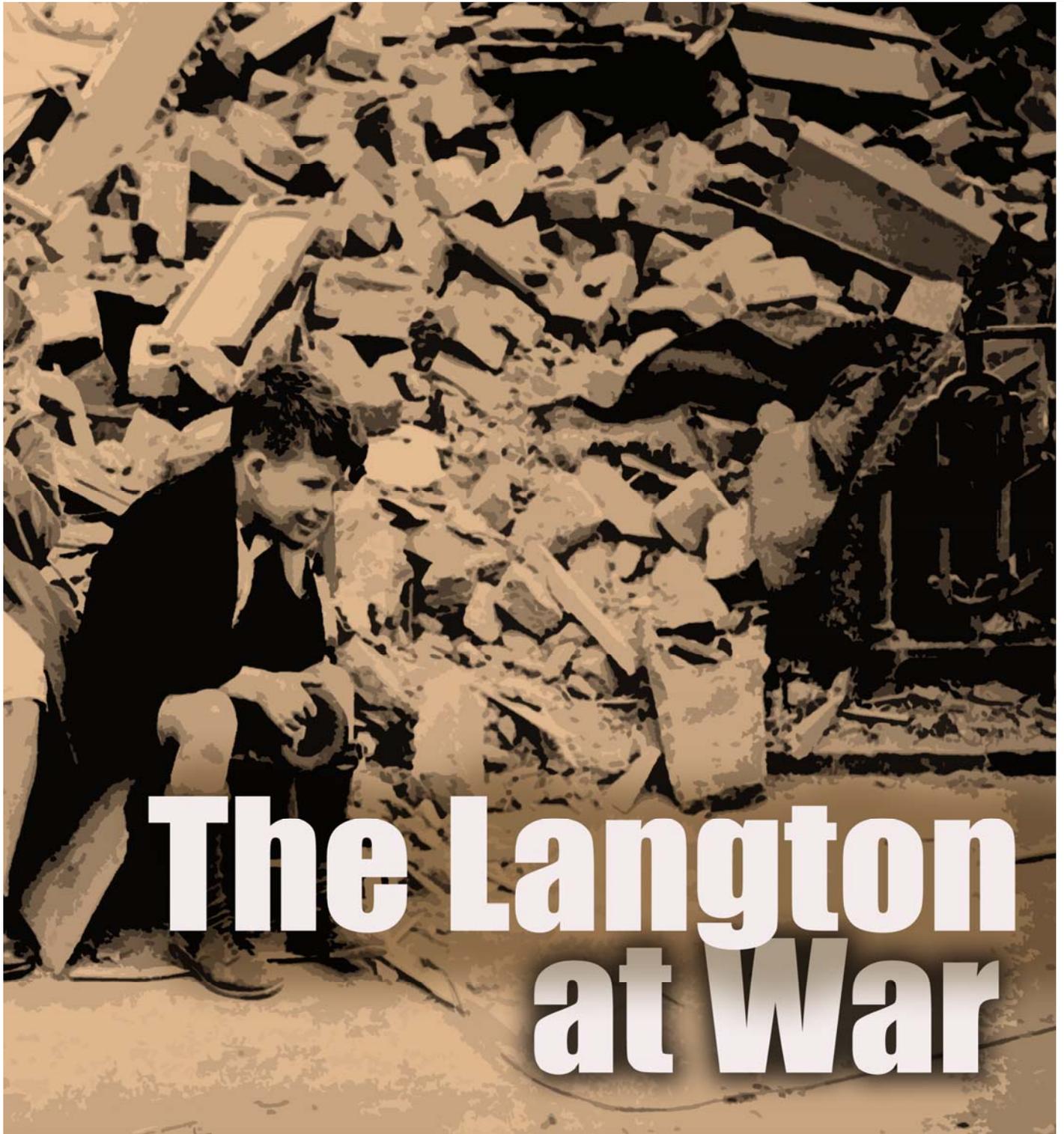


# LANGTON NEWS

November 200

Issue No. 140

Editor: Susan Begg



## The Langton at War

A Langton News Special Edition 2008

*Featuring stories about the School and its students during the two World Wars*

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**BILSTON FOOD CONTROL COMMITTEE**

OWING TO THE

**GREAT SHORTAGE OF MEAT**

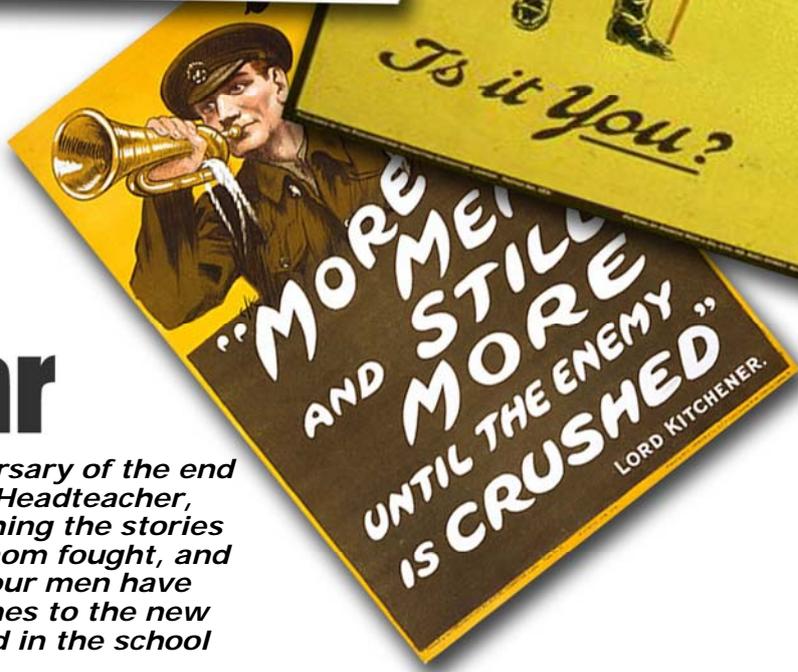
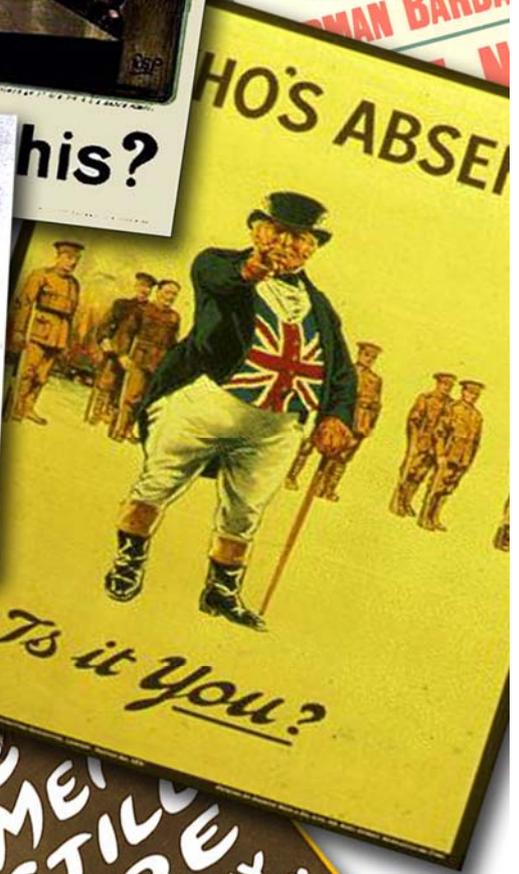
this week the full Ration cannot be given, but  
Butchers are instructed to

**DIVIDE THEIR SUPPLIES EQUALLY**

BETWEEN THEIR REGISTERED CUSTOMERS.

February 15th, 1918. F. BARNETT, Executive Officer.

WILLIAM WOODLEY, PRINTER, ORCHARD, BILSTON.



# The First World War

2008 marked the 90th anniversary of the end of the 'Great War'. Assistant Headteacher, Ken Moffat, has been researching the stories of four Langtonians, all of whom fought, and died, in the conflict. These four men have been chosen to give their names to the new Houses that will be introduced in the school next term.

# FROM THE HEAD

*Dr Baxter tells the story behind the naming of the new Langton Houses.*

At the end of last term we introduced a House System into the school. More precisely, the system has been re-introduced after the previous House System was abandoned in the 1970s.

During the past few years there has been an increasing emphasis on competitive activities, particularly in sport, at the Langton and there is an extremely high commitment to these activities amongst our students. The introduction of the House System provides a focus for these activities and will encourage students to support the performances of students in year groups other than their own.

There is, however, a greater significance to the introduction of the House System. Several years ago a group of our students encouraged the senior staff of the school to introduce an annual Remembrance Assembly as an opportunity for the school community to reflect on the wider remembrance events which take place in November each year. Since arriving in the school I have been deeply moved by these assemblies. In themselves they are private events, involving the school's immediate community of students and staff. The atmosphere is solemn and reflective and has become one of the most important days in the school's calendar. Since the school was established in 1881 its community has been deeply affected by conflict; members of staff and many students served in the Boer War and the two World Wars and the original buildings of the school, in the centre of Canterbury were destroyed in the bombing of 1942. There are many members of our present community affected by international conflict;

there are students and staff whose lives have been permanently displaced by warfare and they are unable to live in the countries of their birth, members of staff and students whose husbands, fathers and brothers have served in recent conflicts and some who have lost loved ones.

Many students from the school have been casualties in various conflicts. Recent research shows that of the boys who attended the school between 1900 and 1914 virtually all served in the First World War. Over ten percent died in the battlefields.

Our four houses Burgess, Hardman, Mackenzie and Sharp are named after four of the boys who fell in the First World War. There is no attempt in establishing the House system to glorify warfare. Rather, by permanently remembering these boys there is an opportunity to reflect on the tragedy of the loss of life brought about by warfare. The four boys represented much that we value in the school; all were bright and Archie Hardman, who was also Head Boy, is said to have been a boy of extraordinary intellectual gifts. They were all good sportsmen too; Eric Sharp, the Headmaster's only son, was an outstanding athlete and William 'Budge' Burgess is thought by many to have been the finest sportsman ever to attend the Langton. All were noted for their leadership at school, in their professional lives and whilst serving. And all were noted for their integrity and honour. Eighty years ago this week Cyril Mackenzie's mother received the letter notifying her of her son's death:

*This is the most distressing task that has ever fallen to my lot on Christmas Day. Last night your son went out on patrol to discover whether a position was held by the enemy or not. He got to within ten yards of the place when the enemy opened fire on him and his party. Your son was hit by a bullet and died shortly afterwards, without I believe suffering much pain.*

*By your son's death the Regiment – and the country – has lost one of the finest*

*officers I have ever had the fortune to meet. Everything he set himself to do or was ordered to do, he did with wonderful thoroughness and efficiency. In the short time I have been commanding the battalion, and while he was commanding 'A' company, I fully realised what a valuable officer he was; no one inspired greater confidence or was more deserving of that confidence. Besides his unusually brilliant military qualities, everyone who met him respected him and those fortunate in getting to know him well loved him and respected him. It is on that account that I do sympathise most intensely for you as I know how lovable he was.*

Students currently at the Langton are likely to live into the 2070s and beyond. Their children will live in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century. It is my hope that membership of a house will become a lasting memory of the Langton and that some of our students' stories of their schooldays will refer to their houses, the lives of the boys lost to warfare and that the sense of the tragedy, horror and obscenity of war is passed on to future generations.

# ERIC SHARP

1895 – 1917

On May 10<sup>th</sup> 1917 news arrived from the Colonial Office that the Headmaster's son, Eric Sharp of the King's African Rifles, had been wounded in action. Eric Sharp left the Langton in 1911 after a glittering school career which saw him as the captain of the school 1<sup>st</sup> XI football team and Champion Athlete. He was the only son of the Headmaster, John Henry Sharp



Upon leaving school, Sharp took a position with the Capital and Counties Bank and moved to Croydon. When war broke out in 1914 he sought permission from his employers to enlist and joined the Royal Fusiliers as a Private in September 1914 and served in the ranks for about seven months, achieving the rank of Lance Corporal. He then obtained his commission, being gazetted to the Buffs. At the request of the Adjutant he permanently transferred to that battalion to which he became deeply attached.

The battalion, however, was detailed for support and training at home, much to Sharp's chagrin. He twice attempted to get back to his old battalion, unsuccessfully, when he discovered it was going over to France and then eagerly seized an opportunity to join the King's African Rifles, shortly before they embarked for Africa.

Before leaving for the Dark Continent, he returned to the school to drill the school Cadet Corps one last time just days before he sailed, described by *The Langtonian* as "full of life and hope."

His service with the King's African Rifles was exemplary and occupied all his war service. His commanding officer was later to write, "He was, to all

privates and non-commissioned officers who knew him in this company, the finest type of officer, and by his interest in their welfare, regardless of any self sacrifice, he obtained that devotion from his men of which any officer would have been proud."

On May 8th, at a place called Libembo, in what was then known as German Tanganyika, he was ordered to take his platoon across an open space of about 100 yards to some rocks, where about 20 Germans were thought to be concealed behind a machine gun nest. He dashed the rocks, but found no-one there. Later, a short distance away at Kitanda, he again made a forced march to the German camp and advanced to within about 20 yards of the enemy position giving orders to his men, the Askari tribesmen, to lie down. If any alarm were given by the Germans, Sharp would blow his whistle and signal the charge. Suddenly a murderous machine gun retort opened on the platoon. Sharp blew his whistle and

charged but, in a cruel twist of fate, the Askari didn't hear the whistle above the gunfire and failed to move in support. Sharp charged the guns to almost certain death. He was shot

through the head and shoulder and was found when his men advanced later. Death was not instantaneous and he was taken to hospital where he died of wounds on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Such was the adoration of the tribesmen who served under him that over a hundred of them trekked thirty miles to be present at his funeral.

His closest friend, Captain Scales, said of him, "*Unfortunately, I always felt that he would ultimately meet with disaster, as he cared absolutely nothing for his own safety.*"

He was buried at Dar es Salaam War Cemetery, Tanzania.

# CYRIL MACKENZIE

1892 – 1917

*Cyril Atkinson MacKenzie was born in Rome in 1892. By the turn of the century the MacKenzie family were living in Whitstable. 'Mac' proved to a very able sportsman at the Langton, and during 1908 played for both the school football and cricket teams as well as winning a number of athletic events at the annual school sports day.*

After leaving school in 1909, MacKenzie moved to Kentish Town where he worked in the civil service whilst also joining the London Scottish Territorial Regiment.

He was discharged in 1912 and took the opportunity of a lifetime to work for the Anglo Egyptian Oil Fields Company as an assistant engineer on the Red Sea.

When war broke out he enlisted almost immediately, back into his old regiment, The London Scottish, as a private. January 1915 found him on the Western Front. He wrote cheerfully home to declare that *"I am all right except for a bit of cold on my chest and feet! We do grease our feet and have Vaseline served out for that purpose. Lots of love to you all! From your loving son, Cyril."*

By March, MacKenzie had been promoted to Lance Corporal, by May, full Corporal. Shortly afterwards he was discharged from the London Scottish and commissioned in the Liverpool Regiment, conveniently stationed at that time in Canterbury, on the Old Park.

There followed a lengthy period of home service from February 1915 until July 1916. One can assume that young MacKenzie made the most of his home environment. He moved away with

the battalion to Aldershot in July 1916 and returned to the front in February 1917. He was wounded almost immediately. The Medical Board report of 21<sup>st</sup> July 1917 records that he was burned and blistered and his eyes were scorched.

Two months recuperation took place at the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital and he was declared fit to rejoin his battalion at Oswestry

On September 25<sup>th</sup> 1917. He returned to duty on the Passchendaele front around Poelcapelle. It was this return to the front that cost Mac his life.

Christmas 1917 was cold on the Western Front and the sodden battlefields froze. At 10 pm on Christmas Eve, MacKenzie went out on patrol with three other men to reconnoiter a pillbox. They crawled from the security of their trench towards the enemy line until, about 10 yards from the

position, the enemy opened fire from three rifles and a machine gun. Mac was hit by a single bullet. His servant, Private Tyler, stayed with him until the sergeant



gathered another wounded man in. Help came too late and he died on his way down to the dressing station. He was buried near the village of Elverdinge and his grave later grouped together with those known as Canada Farm. The inscription on his gravestone is very simple:

*Captain Cyril A MacKenzie, The King's Liverpool Regiment, 24th December 1917, age 25. Beloved son of R. Fowler and Agnes C MacKenzie, Whitstable Kent.*

# WILLIAM BURGESS

*William 'Budge' Burgess, in many respects embodied the true "Langtonian Spirit". He was active in most aspects of the school, from acting in annual theatrical productions, to his tremendous contributions to the sporting life of the Langton. Indeed, he was probably the greatest sportsman the school has produced. He was a scholarship student, winning both a junior and a senior award. His younger brother, Joseph Theodore, also attended the school, and his sister, Lilian, was a pupil at the Girls' Langton.*

William was active in all sports, particularly football and cricket, which, at the time, were the main team games. In the 1913/14 football season he scored 51 goals as centre forward for the school 1<sup>st</sup> XI and he captained the school cricket team, scoring two centuries.

After leaving school in the Summer of 1914 he transferred to Goldsmiths' Teacher Training College to read for a B.A. He joined the College Officer Training Corps and distinguished himself by winning the Goldsmiths' tennis doubles tournament in the Summer. He was gazetted to the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1915, just one day before his twentieth birthday.

After training in Dorset he arrived in France on June 26<sup>th</sup> 1916, a few days before the "Great Push" on the Somme. His first action was with the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Berkshires as part of the Four Army assault on the German second line on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> July which, as far as attacks on the Somme went, was relatively successful.

The Battalion then found itself engaged North West of Mametz Wood occupying the communication trench, Pearl Alley, which again led up to the German second line. Burgess was soon posted to the 6<sup>th</sup> Berkshires who had been engaged in heavy

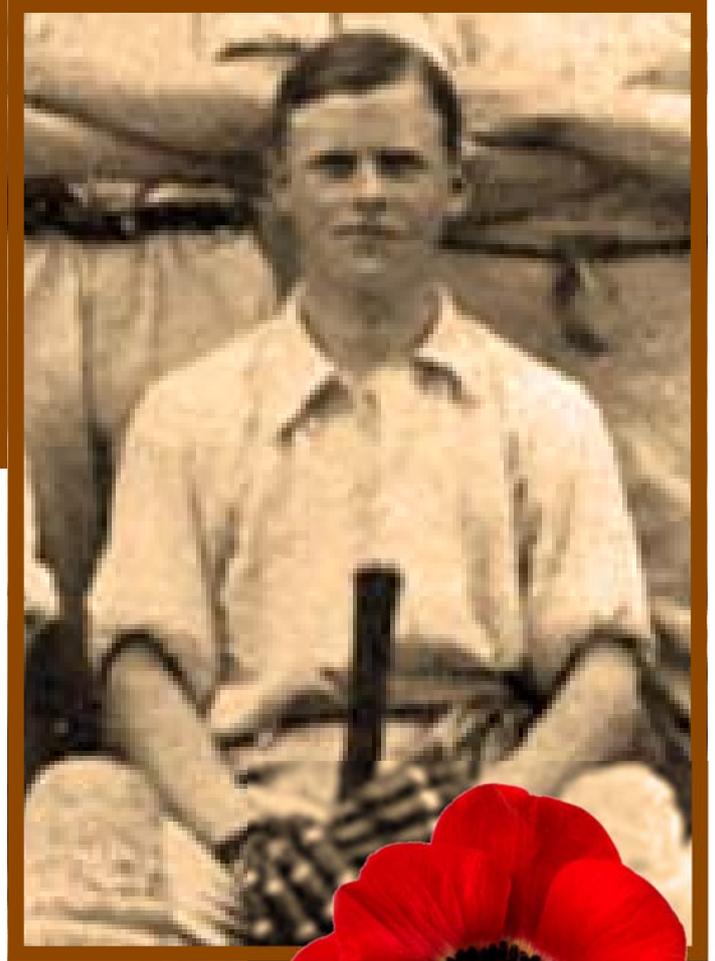
fighting on the Somme since day one of the offensive.

At 7 pm on the 18<sup>th</sup> July, the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, with a fighting strength of 19 officers and 401 other ranks, received orders to move from their position south of Carnoy to take part in an action the following day at Longueval and Delville Wood.

Delville Wood became a long agony of bitter fighting involving the South African Brigade reducing the wood to mere splinters. Initially the South Africans almost swept the Germans from the wood but, following a desperate counter attack, the allied forces were forced to retreat to the south western corner of the wood from whence they struggled to regain ground for the next three days.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Berkshires attacked the Northern section of the wood on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July and suffered heavily, occasionally from "friendly fire". The Battalion dug in to

consolidate their gains at 2.15 on the afternoon of the 19<sup>th</sup> and settled in to repulse the many



German counter attacks. They were bombed and attacked pretty much constantly for the next twenty four hours but they held their position until relieved on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, by which time they had

lost 40% of their original number. This was the last major action on the Somme for the Berkshires and William Burgess was killed, almost certainly on the 19<sup>th</sup>, just 25 days after first landing in France. His body was lost on the Somme; initially buried in a shallow grave and subsequently devastated as the battle continued to rage. His father kept up a lengthy correspondence with the War Office, but neither his body nor his possessions were ever recovered. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.

# ARCHIE HARDMAN

Archie left the Simon Langton School in 1902; in that same year he had been Captain of the School and Payne-Smith medalist, which was the special honour of the school bestowed on the Head Boy. A fitting tribute was paid to Hardman by the school magazine: *'To have a Captain of the school such as he, a leader in sports, the head of the school for attainments and conduct, and one who though distinguished for modesty, could, in face of over six hundred people take the command of over two hundred of his schoolfellows, is something almost unique, and something of which any school might be proud.'*

After leaving the Langton, Hardman went up to London to work as a Civil Servant in a Savings Bank, and was living in West Kensington in early 1905. By the end of 1907 he had resigned his position in the Civil Service and had accepted a Mastership at the Mathematical School at Rochester. During this period, Hardman managed to combine teaching with studying for an Honours Degree at the University of London. By April 1912, he had become a Master at King Edward VII Grammar School, Sheffield.

On the outbreak of war he attempted to enlist but because of his short sight he was initially turned down. Nevertheless, as the war progressed and standards became less exacting he eventually managed to obtain a commission in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, in time for the Somme Offensive.

By the 6th of July 1917, Hardman was promoted to the rank of acting Captain. The 9th KOYLI now made their way northwards to the Ypres Salient. They were to become involved in one of the later phases of the Battle of Passchendaele, when on the 4th October the Regiment formed part of the first wave assault on Broodseinde Ridge. At this stage in the battle the now familiar image of a desolate landscape subsumed under an Ocean of mud had

emerged; shell holes linked together by sodden duckboards, had replaced the warren of trenches which surrounded the Salient.

According to the Battalion War Diary, on the 5th of October the 9th Battalion and the 10th Battalion were combined. *"At most there was 150 bayonets in the amalgamated Battalion in the front line"*

It was not until 9 pm the next day, 6th October that the 64th Brigade was relieved by units from the 7th Division.

Archibald Hardman was killed in this action. He was most likely hit by machine gun fire in front of Joist farm, as an obituary, from the school magazine of Sheffield Grammar School states:

*" Just before he went over the top he was as cheery as ever. When asked by one of his men , "Do you think we shall come through all right, sir?" he replied, 'I hope so. Don't worry. Stick close to me." After charging some 200 yards, he*

*was hit in the right temple by a machine gun bullet, and death was instantaneous"*



His body wasn't recovered from the battlefield and he is commemorated, along with a number of his comrades, on the wall of the Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing, roughly two miles from where he was killed; overlooking the Brooseinde ridge.

# The All Too Brief Life of Harry Hutton

By Sam Burt (9S)



My great-great-Uncle, Harry Hutton, was born in Canterbury on 22nd May 1899 and was only sixteen when he signed up in the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Buffs (East Kent Regiment) in the First World War.

Harry was a member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canterbury Scout Group and also a keen Cricketer. At the age of 13, he won the top scholarship award for Simon Langton Grammar School and after leaving school aged 16, started work in a solicitor's office. At the age of 16 ½ he volunteered for the army following in his Father's footsteps. From the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion he transferred to the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion and then finally he joined the Royal Scots.

Harry enlisted on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1915 stating his age as 19 years and 17 days. However his true age was 16 years, 6 months and 7 days. Two days later, on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1915, he arrived at a training camp in Shoreham, Sussex. There he was prepared for the war with bayonet fighting, bomb throwing and musketry courses as well as having vaccinations. He then spent a short time in Dover before leaving for France on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1916.

Harry spent time on the front line including Ypres and the Somme. Unfortunately his best friend (Horace Ratcliff, who was also from Canterbury) was killed on 18<sup>th</sup> August. Despite Harry's efforts his body was never found. Harry became very depressed after Horace died and had asked his mother to send his birth certificate that would prove he was under age. This would mean he would automatically get sent back to England. However at the end of November 1916 Harry was invalided home with trench fever (a highly contagious typhoid related disease transmitted by lice).

Harry was sent to St. Mary's hospital near Blackburn which meant that he was further away from home than when he had been in France. He spent a month in hospital before returning to Canterbury on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 1916. After spending Christmas at home he returned to Dover to join the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Buffs but could not return to France as he was still too young.

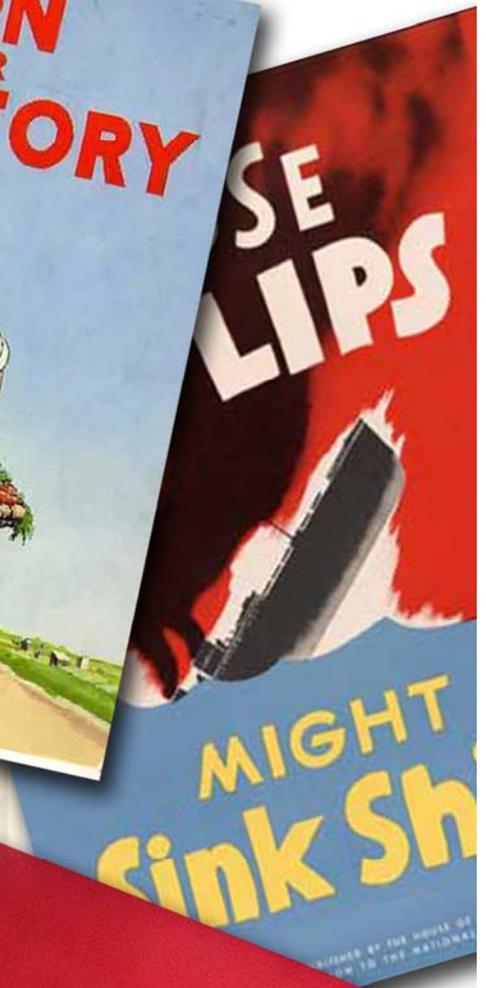
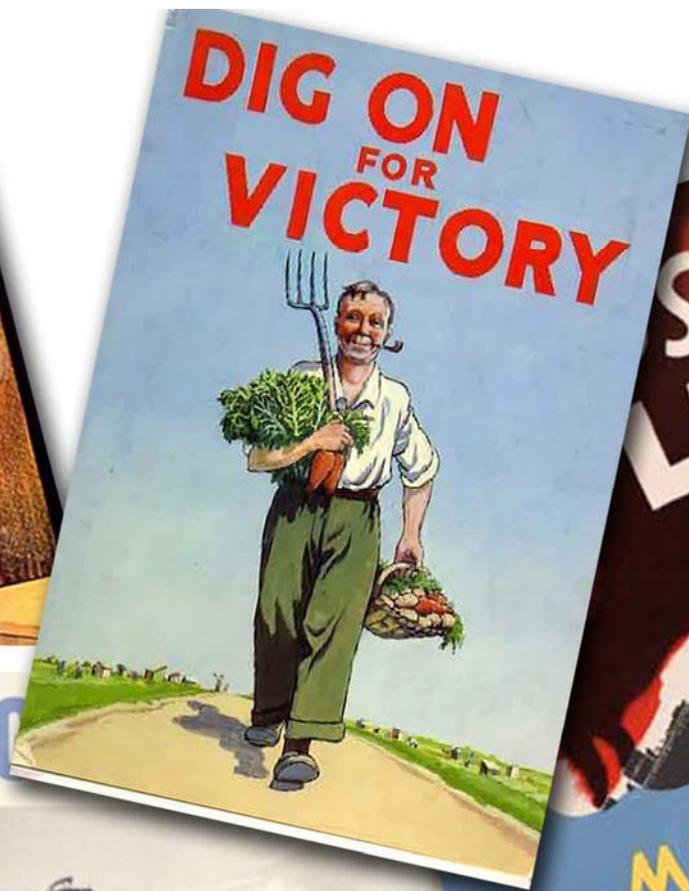
In February 1917, Harry was sent to Dublin to join the 2/7<sup>th</sup> Royal Scots Regiment. Then in March 1918 he went to Edinburgh for a short time before returning to France in April 1918.

Throughout his time in the army he regularly corresponded with his parents and sister, Evelyn, my great-grandmother, and the many letters have been made into a book by my great-Uncle, also called Harry. They illustrate both the normality of day to day life in the awful trench conditions and the ever present fear and horror of war.



Sadly, on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1918 Harry was killed in action, aged 19, and was buried in Le Peuplier Cemetery, Caestre, Northern France.

I feel very proud to be going to the same school that Harry went to all those years ago. It also makes me proud that his name is on the plaque in the school foyer. It is frightening to think that boys the same age as those in year eleven went to war and that so many of them did not return.



# The Second World War

*The following pages contain extracts from 'Front Line School', a booklet produced in 1947 which contained 'The war-time story of Simon Langton Boys' School, Canterbury told by Masters and Boys of the school'.*

*The rumble of gun-fire from the Continent; Dunkirk; 'Bus-loads of wounded Tommies and Poilus rumbling through Canterbury's streets, stopping sometimes at chemists' shops for first-aid; terrific air-fights; the cloudless skies scored with vapour trails; the first bombs, and then 'Danger of Invasion' - those ominous words suddenly, in huge letters of red, blazing from every wall. That was Canterbury in the early Autumn of 1940. All who could do so were urged to leave the City. So, one day, the citizens of the sleepy little town of Wantage in Berkshire, awoke to find hordes of 'foreign;' schoolboys in bright Langton scarves swarming around the revered statue of King Alfred in their market-square. How the boys got there and how they lived and worked there is told below by Mr W Thomas a Master at the school.*

# WANTAGE

Wantage in respect seems now almost a pleasant interlude in the long years of war! The many kindnesses, the comradeship among the Staff; the loyalty which grew up among the boys themselves; these are the impressions that remain permanently. Yet with what anxiety did we set out on that memorable Thursday in September 1940.

By the end of the day our little party of one hundred and thirty boys had been temporarily scattered among the empty boarding schools of rural Berkshire for their first night away from home. One the following morning our scattered parties were collected and taken by motor coach to Wantage where we were to be billeted, sharing the buildings of King Alfred Grammar School. While the exodus took place I was sent hurriedly to Newbury to collect sufficient food for lunch as Wantage could not cope with this sudden invasion.

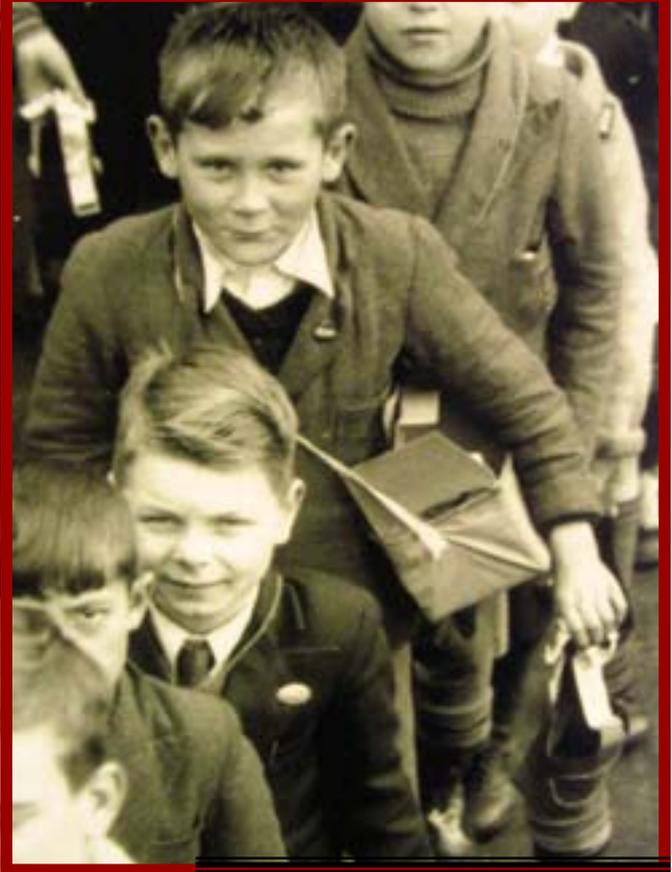
During our early days of settling in we were fortunate to be able to use King Alfred's School while that school was still on holiday, but experience soon showed how inadequate instruction was likely to be unless separate premises could be found. Of the discovery of the Annexe to St Catherine's, used as an Art Studio by the girls of St Mary's School, and of the Headteacher's interviews with Mother Superior, Member of Parliament and Director of Education, quite a story could be told; but it is perhaps sufficient to record that within a short time of the return to King Alfred's we were able to take over the Annexe in which, once our furniture had arrived from Canterbury, we were able to function adequately as a school.

The school buildings were open in

the evenings so that boys might play games such as Table Tennis, Chess, Draughts and Dominoes' indulge in Whist Drives organised for them by Messrs Beynon and Ward; join in community singing (led by Mr Redman); read plays with Mrs Thomas or, alternatively continue their studies for General Schools in the comparative quiet of the upper rooms. By the time effective black-out material had been installed 'evening activities' were an important part of the school life. In the meantime, sports facilities had been made possible and a very strong football eleven challenged teams from the neighbourhood.

Thanks to the generosity of friends in Canterbury and to the kindly help of the Mother Superior and Sisters of St Anne's we all sat down in the refectory to a sumptuous Christmas dinner that year. To the nuns we also owed the weekly bath which could not be provided in billets. Our relationships with the little community throughout our stay were both happy and relaxed.

Later in the summer term, there came a sudden call for the return of many of the junior boys to Canterbury, due to the fact that in making arrangements for a greater evacuation of Canterbury, notices had been circulated that only those children actually in Canterbury on 21st June could be included in these fresh arrangements. Consequently on a very hot Saturday in June 1941 I



brought back some 53 boys for registration at our school, all of whom then remained in Canterbury.

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**"To the nuns we also owed the weekly bath"**

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In September 1941 the entire school reassembled at Canterbury after two years as evacuees in the town of Wantage, Berkshire. Hitler had invaded Russia and the invasion of Britain was evidently - for the time being - not to take place. The School settled down to a routine existence not very unlike that of pre-war days. But any hope of hum-drum days was shattered on June 1st 1942. Mr Kenneth Pinnock, a master at the school between 1941-1945 recalled the events of that night...

# THE "BLITZ"

Sixteen blood-red flares dripping slowly from the sky, banishing the moonlight and transforming the familiar School buildings in a fantastic pattern of burning crimson and jagged, black shadows. That was the sight which greeted me when I rushed out of the school very early in the morning of Monday, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942.

Behind me the school door swung shut with a resounding bang. The sound jerked me to my senses. I realised that I was standing alone in the playground with the ever-deepening hum of 'planes overhead. I called to Mr Redman, my fellow fire-watcher; located him and went up to him.

*"It's the real thing this time."*

*'Looks like it. We pasted Cologne last night. Wonder if the Jerries are going to stage one of their Baedeker raids here?'*

We gazed around us, and listened hard. Bell Harry's chimes quivered through the flowing haze, a familiar, loved voice breaking into an awful dream.

But this 'dream' was real. Suddenly, a 'plane swooped: it had black crosses on its wings. We raced into one of the surface shelters, and as we did so a rain of fire-bombs spattered over the playground. There were confused explosions and, distantly, the

chatter of machine gun. We could see nothing but a growing white light from the shelter entrances.

*"Better get to the deep shelter entrances,"* said Mr Redman, *"We can see what's happening from there."*

We raced across the playground, dodging between pools of molten flame, till we reached one of the flights of steps leading down into the underground shelters. From here we could see that already the fire-bombs had found one target' the roof of a wooden classroom near the Hall was blazing fiercely. We began to debate which of the fires to tackle first.

But now the shrill whine of falling bombs pierced through the crackle of the burning timbers. Again and again there came the 'zoom' of diving planes, the short swansong of their deadly cargo and thump, thump, thump racking explosions which sent debris swirling through the air and drove us back into the shelter.

Soon the lights went out. As bomb after bomb burst above us, gusts of air brushed our faces and rippled on through the black caverns behind us. Sometimes we ventured to the entrance, only to dart back as a deadly hail of stones and masonry showered down. Six feet underground we stood surrounded by steel and concrete, yet the earth trembled violently and constantly beneath our feet.

The

ordeal seemed endless. "Won't they ever run out of bombs?" I asked Redman plaintively. If only we could do something. We wondered about in the darkness. Still the black air shuddered, still the explosions went on.

After an age the hum of 'planes subsided, giving way to another, steadier sound – the full-throated roar of huge fires, an angry noise, surging at times to a deep and massive crescendo. The infernal symphony had its chorus too, a multitude of devilish mutterings as spars and laths and timbers crackled into sudden flame. From time to time shoals of tiles and slates clattered down from caving roofs with a huge hollow rattle such as shingle makes when it is sucked back by yawning waves. I had never seen or heard destruction on so awe-inspiring a scale.

The New Wing was unharmed, apparently the fire-bombs had skidded off its steep roofs and fallen on the ground. The old buildings near the Hall had been hit by so many fire bombs that nothing could be done to save them. There was one smaller fire on the roof of the Physics Lab that we could cope with. Ladders, stirrup-pump, crowbar, axe, buckets of water were assembled. Mr Redman directed operations and proved himself an admirable leader in emergency. He and I hacked at the smouldering roof timbers and the two regular fire-watchers employed by the school worked manfully to keep the stirrup-pump going.

Then, just as we had nearly conquered the flames the tap in the playground ran dry. We did not yet know it, but one of the mains had been cut by a bomb. Canterbury was ablaze. And there was no water.

Great waves of hot air were now sweeping across the playground. We were, it seemed in a little island completely surrounded by



fires of unimaginable size. The heat was intense. Rivulets of sweat furrowed our smoke-grimed faces. Above St George's Street the sky glowed and shimmered amidst rolling clouds of smoke. Bell Harry Tower was hidden behind an immense pall which did not lift all morning. Once I looked through to the Girls' School entrance into the street. All I saw was a sheet of fire blinding to the eyes and unbearably fierce at twenty yards' distance.

We had plenty to do. We cleared most of the school records and a good deal of the ground-floor furniture from the school. Then, as the wind swept the remorselessly on to the Girls' School, we salvaged what we could there; cups and saucers were one item – and a very valuable one at that time – I remember. This done, we had time to explore a little. We walked along a corridor in the older part of the Girls' School and opened a door. What we saw took our breath away. Where the girls

laboratories had once been there was now a vast hole full of rubbish. Only a fragment of their New Wing remained, and its steel fire-escape stairway, a large and solid affair of pre-1914 massiveness, lay on the ground, coiled and twisted as if some giant had been trying to tie it into knots. Now we knew where some of the tons of rubbish on the playground over which we had been stumbling had come from. The bomb which had done all this damage had fallen some thirty yards from

where we had been sheltering, yet so heavy and concentrated had been the bombardment that we had not noticed any one explosion as being of outstanding violence.

Towards dawn the NFS arrived with pumps connected with the Stour. Soon the charred timbers were sizzling, flames died and steam mingled with smoke. The voracious, ramping fire wilted and expired. The wind was cold, and so were we. In the growing light

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**"I had never seen or heard destruction on so awe-inspiring a scale."**

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we could see the playground. All over it were little white heaps where fire bombs had burnt themselves out; there were great pieces of masonry, and everywhere there was earth and stones. Not an inch of its original tarmac surface could be seen.

Dawn had come; some of the City, at any rate, was still standing; we were alive!



*"Three Towers standing triumphant amidst a sea of ruins." This is the phrase which Brian Porter, a 13 year old boy still at school, uses to embody his impression of Canterbury on the morning after the 'blitz'. Below he tells what he saw and felt in the early hours and on the morning of that fateful day.*

# CARRYING ON

Towards 1.00 am on the morning of 1st June 1942, I was awakened by the almost commonplace sounds of guns and siren. Wandering from window to window I soon halted - and saw something that was brewing over the south-east. I knew what lay in that direction for it was that way which I travelled every morning. Over there, blood-red flares were descending ... over there Canterbury lay... Gradually the outline of a nearby hill appeared, then tree trees stood out in silhouette - it might almost be dawn ... but no dawn ever possessed such an ominous deep red tinge. The morrow would soon tell...

Morning arrived and at about 8.30 am I joined two friends in waiting for a bus. But no bus ever came. Rumour had it that they had all been burned. Eventually two gentlemen gave us a lift in their car. As we came to the crest of each hill, things grew tenser. It was like waiting for an examination result. We were soon to know.

We reached the top of St Thomas's Hill and I was aware of peering through the front window of the car and seeing three towers standing triumphant amidst a sea of smoking ruins. At last we reached the Westgate and after thanking the gentleman, set off for school by any route that was open to us. After arriving at the Mercery Lane turning, we found the High Street clocked and turned up St Margaret's Street. Passing the smoking remains of the Fountain Hotel, we entered Watling Street, a good part of which was gutted, and turning again we came upon the desolate shell of St Mary Bredin's Church. A few seconds later we entered the School's main gate.

We came, we saw, and we turned away.

As I look back on this period it is possible to treat lightly the



difficulties which we encountered and see the humorous side of them. In reality, however, this was a period of great disruption, and the strain on the teachers, especially the Headmaster who was responsible for the safety of the pupils, must have been very great. Our school work was constantly interrupted and feeling of uncertainty was constantly with us. Sport suffered as well as lessons and we also lost that every valuable part of education which is received from the participation in school activities. Yet in spite of all this, the Langton remained firm and fought its difficulties with energy. We certainly have a record to be proud of and hope we are now entering upon a period when the school will be able to quickly restore these things, material and spiritual, which it has lost and once more give its pupils the full benefit of the Langton Grammar School Education.

**Over there, blood-red  
flares were descending ...  
over there Canterbury  
lay...**