

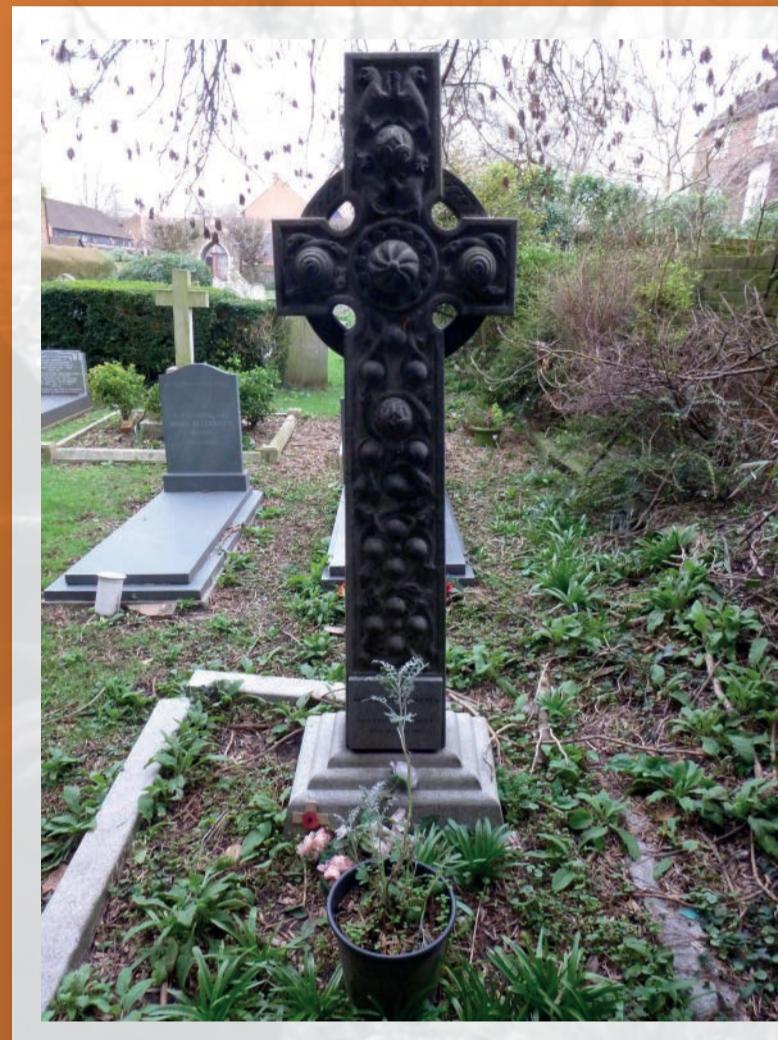
The Mystery of Major Nigel Baynes

FEBRUARY - APRIL 1915

Nigel Baynes came from a wealthy family in Devon, joining the Gloucestershire Regiment in 1900. Having died in London in 1915, following an injury at the front, he was buried in Marlow. Despite extensive research, however, we have not been able to find out why he was buried here.



Soldiers of The Gloucestershire Regiment. c. 1914
Courtesy of Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum



Memorial to Major Nigel Baynes
in St Peter's chuchyard
Courtesy of Belinda Ford

Life at home

Nigel was born in 1878 to a wealthy family, in Torquay, Devon. His father, Walter was a solicitor and Nigel had three siblings. The family also had six servants.

In 1904 Nigel married Phoebe Morris. A year later they had a daughter, Katherine. Sadly both mother and daughter died shortly afterwards, Phoebe in 1906 and Katherine in 1908. Nigel subsequently married Gladys Talbot in 1912.

Career soldier

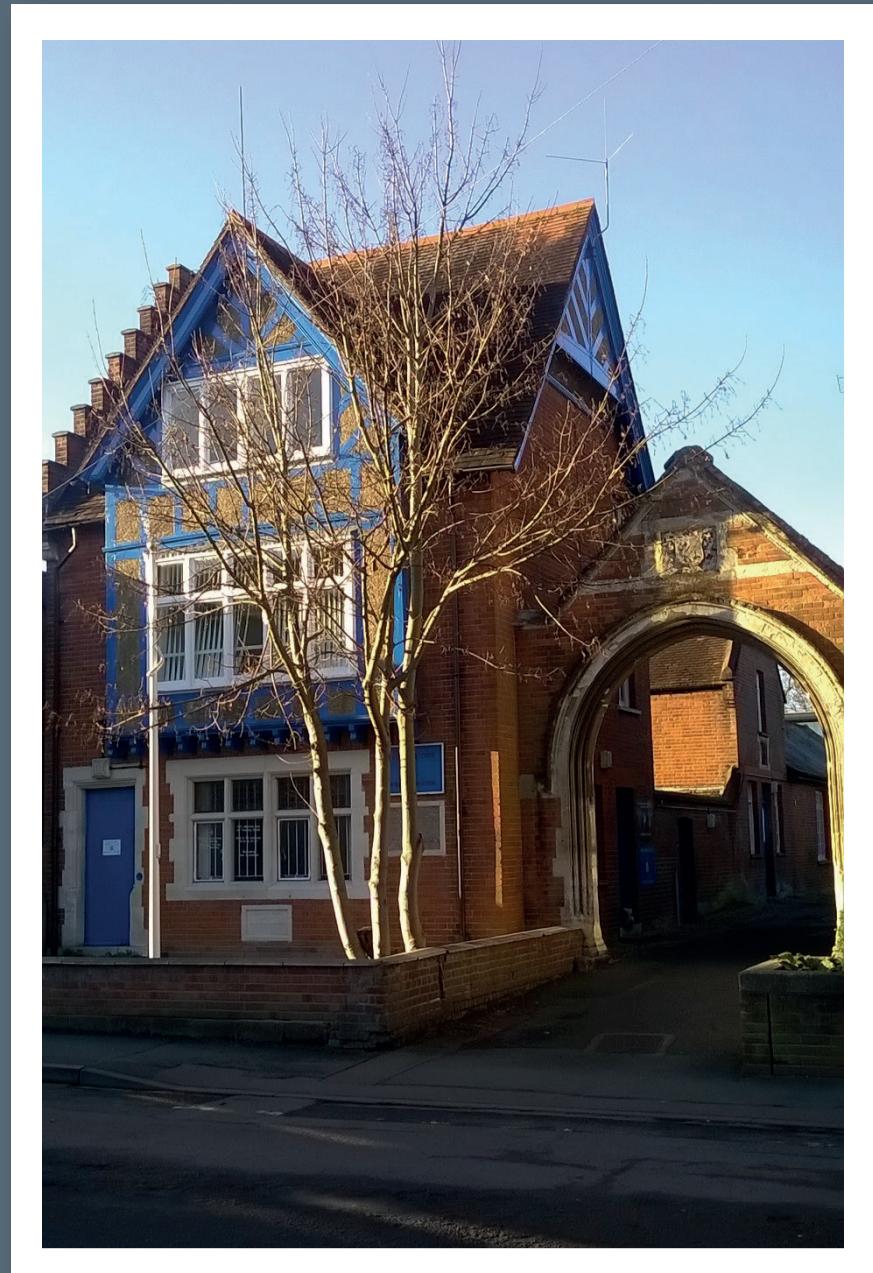
Nigel was a career soldier, joining the Gloucestershire Regiment in 1900. He fought in both the South African War and then with the West African Frontier Force, being promoted to Lieutenant. Retiring from the active list in 1907, Nigel joined his regiment's 3rd Battalion as Captain.

Outbreak of war 1914

When war broke out Nigel was quickly called up and sent to France. While leading his Company at Festubert in December 1914, he was severely wounded. He returned to England to recover and made good progress. However, this recovery was short lived as, in March 1915, aged 37, Nigel died of pneumonia. He was subsequently gazetted Major. His widow, Gladys, died the following month.

Why was he buried in Marlow?

Nigel was buried in St Peter's Church, Marlow, with full military honours. The local press reported the event in full, calling it 'an impressive scene'. A firing party formed a guard of honour and the coffin was covered by a Union Jack and carried the deceased officer's sword and cap. The ceremony was conducted by Westminster Cathedral's the Rev Father Daley and the firing party fired three volleys, whilst the buglers sounded 'The Last Post'. However, despite much research we haven't been able to find out why he was buried here. He seems to have had no family or work connection with Marlow. So if you know the answer we would love to find out!



The Armoury, Institute Road
Courtesy of Belinda Ford

The Home Front

BUCKS VOLUNTEER TRAINING CORPS - FEBRUARY - APRIL 1915

The creation of a local volunteer home defence Corps in Marlow in early 1915 would have brought the reality of war ever closer to local people. The Marlow unit of the Bucks Volunteer Corps was set up in response to wider County and national initiatives. Marlow's unit was well supported and, in April, staged its first march out.

Inaugural meeting

In early February 1915 a public meeting was held in Marlow to discuss the formation of a Marlow Unit of the Bucks Volunteer Training Corps (South Bucks Battalion). This was in response to a county decision to raise a Volunteer Corps, following War Office agreement to encourage the creation of such home defence units through a Central Association.

Marlow's meeting was well attended and there was evidence of strong interest in the new Corps. The meeting was chaired by John Langley, Chairman of the Council and General Sir George Higginson made a speech encouraging those men who were eligible, to join up.

Some ground rules

Once the decision had been made to form a Corps some ground rules were set out:

- Only those men who were not eligible to fight for their country in the regular army – through age or another reason, could join
- The Government provided no funding, so clothing, arms and equipment were provided by private sources and individuals were asked to purchase their own uniform which was a blue-grey colour
- The local group agreed to drill two or three times a week. This was generally at the Armoury, Institute Road, although Higginson also offered his grounds
- Officers could be appointed but the accepted military ranks and titles could not be used

First march out

In April 1915 platoons of the Volunteer Corps from Marlow and Hambleden marched to Danesfield. The 65 strong Marlow Corps met at the Armoury and were accompanied by a drum and bugle band and for part of the way, by General Higginson. Being in his 90th year this was regarded as quite an event. Once at Danesfield the two platoons drilled together on the cricket ground, before General Higginson congratulated them on their patriotic spirit and on the progress they had made.

Memorial Stone at the Armoury
Courtesy of Belinda Ford



The Western Front Neuve Chapelle



Ruins of Neuve Chapelle after the battle, March 1915.
Courtesy of Imperial War Museum

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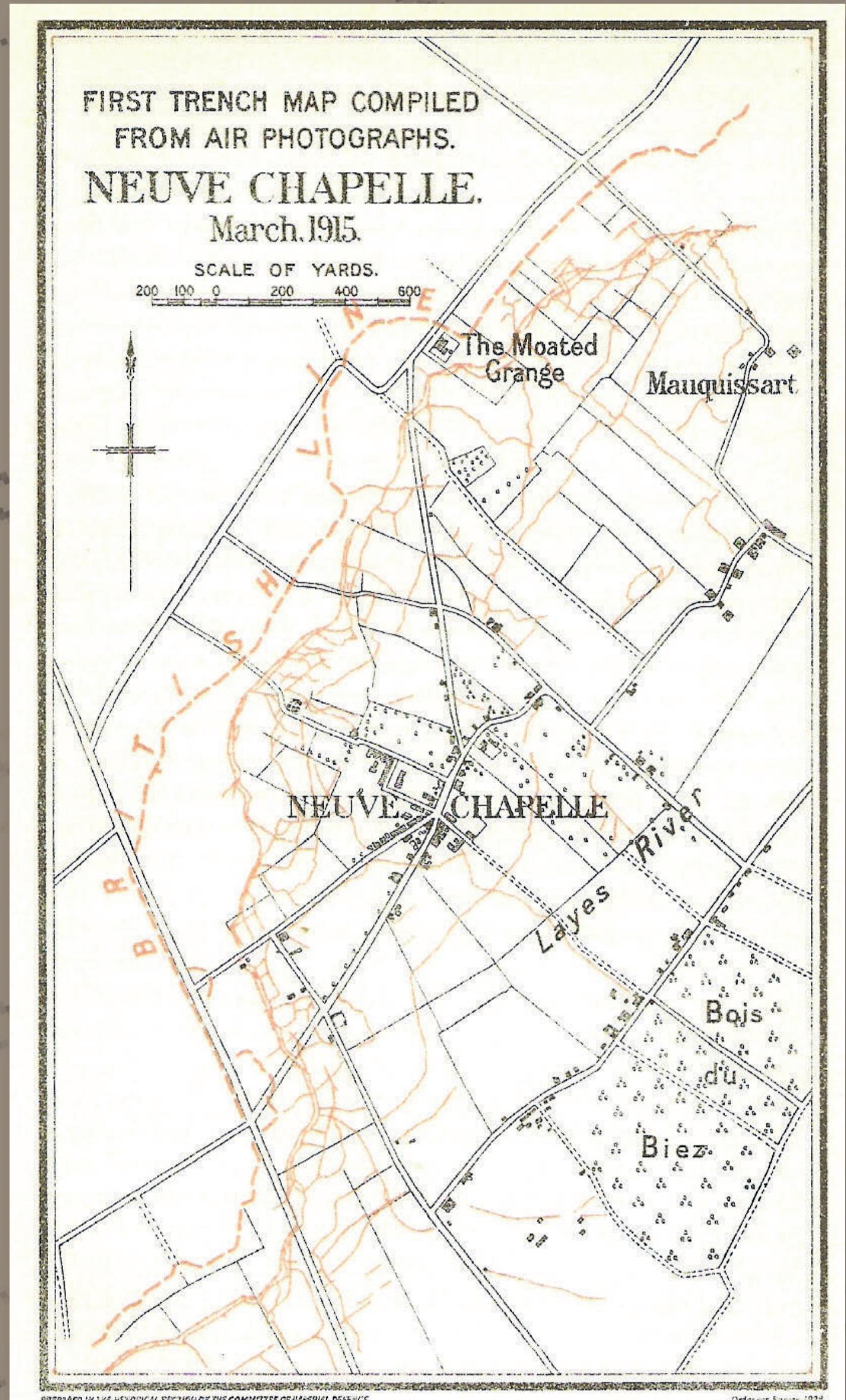
The stalemate of the Western Front was well established by Spring 1915. In an effort to break this the British launched an attack at Neuve Chapelle. Casualties were high and little was gained. One of the men killed was Arthur Gordon, a 17 year old soldier from Marlow.

By the spring of 1915, the opposing armies of Britain, France and their Allies on the one hand and Germany on the other were locked in a stalemate along what was known as the Western Front.

Frequent attempts were made by both sides to end the stalemate. On 10 March 1915 the British launched an attack to break through the German trenches at Neuve Chapelle.

At the start of the battle, over 300 British artillery guns launched a 35 minute barrage on the German trenches. British and Indian soldiers then attacked along a 4,000 metre front. Although the assault was initially successful and Neuve Chapelle was captured, progress was hampered by poor communication and a shortage of artillery ammunition.

The battle ended on 13 March, with the British holding on to about 2km of captured ground. Over 40,000 Allied troops took part in the battle, with 7,000 British and 4,000 Indian casualties. One of the British generals wrote "I am afraid that England will have to accustom herself to far greater losses than those of Neuve Chapelle before we finally crush the German army".



Trench map showing Neuve Chapelle



Coster's Grocery Store, High Street, Marlow c1912.
Courtesy of Michael Eagleton

The Royal Berkshire Regiment was part of the British forces. It suffered over 300 casualties during the battle, some killed by British artillery shells that landed short of the German trenches.

Among those from the regiment killed on 10 March was Arthur Gordon, who was just 17 years old. Arthur was born in Reading, but his family moved to Maidenhead some time before the War. His father was for a time the manager of the Co-Op Stores in Station Road, Marlow. Before the War, Arthur was employed at Coster's grocery store in Marlow High Street, probably living in South Place at the time. He volunteered for the Army and was sent to France in December 1914. He is buried at Neuve Chapelle Farm Cemetery and is commemorated in All Saints' Church in Marlow



Neuve Chapelle Farm cemetery where Arthur Gordon is buried.
Courtesy of Commonwealth War Graves Commission