Marlow Remembers WW1 March 2014 No 1

Marlow

Welcome
to Marlow and World War 1

World War One marked the beginning of the world as we know it today. There were occasions of incredible bravery, carnage and purposeless loss of life, as well as unbelievable tedium and

squalor. While the Forces were away fighting the world they had left behind changed for ever. The years 2014 to 2018 will see a commemoration of that time....

Marlow Remembers WW1 has been set up to lead and co-ordinate this in Marlow and some of the surrounding areas - we have great plans to produce an abundance of local and of international information with details of the Marlow men who gave their lives - and the lives and community they left at home. Most of this will be included on our website over the months and years ahead – www.marlowww1.org.uk

Kaiser Wilhelm II and Kaiser Franz Josef

World War One declared!

Surprisingly, when the Times covered the much anticipated announcement that the British Empire had declared war, the story was not front page news - it actually appeared on page seven under the weather report! (Southerly and south-easterly winds, shifting later to westward or north-westward; rainy at first; then fair; remaining cool).

Talks and Events

18 July Liston Hall 8.00 - Professor Gary Sheffield "The Western Front"
Garry is a popular academic, an entertaining speaker and a celebrated military historian.

18 Sept Liston Hall 8.00 - Dave Greenwood et al on WW1 trenches
Local experts present one of Marlow's most important contributions to the war.

7 Nov - Mr N Hanson on "The Unknown Soldier"- This famous author presents the stunning and entertaining story of three unknown soldiers.

On the Home Front

In 1988 Marlow resident, Percival Plumridge recalled 'Well, the earliest memory, I think, is leaning from my bedroom window and hearing a newspaper boy running down the street shouting 'War declared!'

In August 1914 Marlow was a small, busy town of 5,000 people. Within weeks the war impacted on all aspects of life – men called away, relief committees set up and Belgian refugees arrived. Over the coming years this newsletter will show you how "the war to end all wars" changed life in Marlow, for ever.

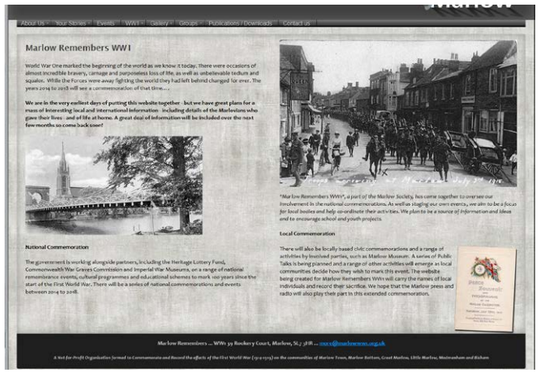
Marlow Ladies Choir

Marlow Remembers WW1 Website Launched

Come and have a look at our exciting new website - it's on www.marlowww1.co.uk. So far it is just the beginning and we plan to add masses of background information about the War itself - particularly as it related to Marlow and the Home Front. We will record the stories of many of the men who went away, many never to return - but never forgetting those who remained behind to carry on.

We plan to update the site as the war goes on so you can see it as it unfolded, but a hundred years on. Let me thank the Bucks Free Press here and now for their kind permission to use many of their words and photographs.

www.marlowww1.co.uk.



Sport in 1914

Sport suffered right across the country during the war, with the major exception of a blossoming of Women's Football! Many sportsmen joined up and as early as September 1914 and Marlow Football Club decided to suspend the season's remaining games.

In Rowing, many of the races that were planned were also cancelled with, again, many of the rowers joining up at the beginning of the war, including every member of that seasons very successful senior rowing eight.

(PHOTO RIGHT) Marlow R. C. Eight and cox in 1914
From left to right) Lieut. G.H. Collins, . Lieut. J.W Shaw, Bombardier F.S. Fisher, Lieut. J.R. Jackson, Trooper F.N. Clark, Private H.R. Foster, Private N.S. Flint, Trooper R. Flint

For Schools

Ten primary schools & two senior schools in the Marlow area have already expressed an interest in working with us to learn more about WW1 – and we have exciting plans for a week-long local exhibition in conjunction with an exuberant WW1 historian, his host of truly incredible artefacts and his passion for re-enactments of the troops in the trenches.

We hope that well over 500 primary and secondary Marlow school children will have the opportunity of visiting the event, having a presentation/re-enactment and visiting some of the locally preserved WW1 trenches, along with other planned activities.

Our education group is led by local primary school teacher Claire Farrell and is being specifically designed to meet current curriculum objectives. But more than that, we hope to give the children an enthusiasm for WW1 and the country-wide commemoration that is planned over the next four to five years.

We are in the process of developing extra activities to enrich the day which may involve senior students taking part with primary learning to enhance their relationship with continuing learning. We have a huge opportunity to engage young learners.

We are also compiling a series of resources, including detailed information about the Marlovians who went to war, and what life was like for those who stayed behind.

WAR & the Territorials at Bovingdon Green Camp

As war broke out on a weekend in August 1914 the Territorial Army was planning to camp at Bovingdon Green and Marlow was looking forward to a 'fortnight of amusements and rejoicing.' Battalion bands were tuning up, sports, receptions and fireworks were all planned. At the camp and town football competitions, receptions and other sporting events and functions had been planned.

Troops from Maidenhead, Henley and Wycombe marched through Marlow and on to the camp where they were met by companies from Wolverton, Banbury, Hungerford and Newbury. Birmingham's Royal Army Medical Corps soon followed with their ambulance wagons and horses.

Sadly the camp never happened, even while the troops marched in the war clouds were already gathering. At 10

Troops marching past Institute Road, Marlow Circa 1914

o'clock on Sunday evening, the news was heard that the Government had decided to call up the Naval Reserve and 'embody' the Territorial Force.

At 1 am the order to strike Camp was received, bugles sounded and at around 4.30am the Royal Berks contingent was the first to march out - with their band playing at full blast. The music woke up the town and most of the residents got up to watch.

BELGIAN REFUGEES IN MARLOW

In September 1914 at the start of World War One, the British government offered "*victims of war the hospitality of the British nation*" and the largest wave of refugees England had ever seen came to this country - nearly a quarter of a million Belgians who had fled from the German invasion.

Public sympathy for the poor refugees, many of whom had lost everything, was overwhelming. Initial fears from trade unionists that the Belgians would provide a pool of cheap labour soon evaporated as the war effort constantly demanded ever greater capacity.

Belgian Refugees working an armaments factory by 1915

The process of supporting and resettling the refugees fell mainly to private charity. Fortunately it was well run from the start due as it was led by the charity-experienced wives of the county's upper classes.

Several thousand local committees were set up across the UK, including the "Marlow Committee for Assisting Belgian Refugees" to coordinate the housing, feeding, clothing and work.

As early as 18th September the Bucks Free Press reported on Marlow's needs for help for several Belgian refugees.

In mid-October 1914 fourteen refugees, including a baby, arrived in Marlow and were housed in two villas in Glade Road, along with houses in Station Road and St Peters Street.

The community rallied around donating furniture, food, clothing and money to the relief effort. The Committee thanked those who had helped saying that the necessarily hurried preparations for our Belgian guests had been truly generous. The Committee reported that all those who had donated would feel '*amply repaid for sacrifices made by the happiness they have imparted to these bitterly wronged people.'*

My Family and WW I

by Jeff Griffiths

Robert Rees DCM

Sometimes those tales passed on within a family do have substance. One story that circulated in ours was that a family member won a medal for bravery in the First World War. My great-uncle on the maternal side, Robert Rees, was one of a dozen children brought up in an industrial town in South Wales. As was usual at the time, his schooling finished at 14 when he became a Post Office Telegram Messenger. This has a certain irony as it was these teenage boys who would deliver the news that families dreaded of the death of their relatives in WWI.

In 1915 at age 26, Robert volunteered to join the Royal Welsh Fusiliers (RWF), a regiment which recruited writers like Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon in the First World War. Robert's wartime records, along with those of many others, were destroyed in the Blitz in the Second World War. However, the occasional postcard and photograph that survived, together with regimental records, have enabled me to put together a picture of his wartime service. He did his military training at Winchester where there is a photograph of him in a white apron outside the kitchen of the Officers Mess where, incongruously, he is sat clutching a black kitten in his arms. Little would my relative have known back then what was to face him on the Western Front where Robert would be injured a number of times over the next three years.

Robert Rees with Post Office Colleagues

I have read the RWF battalion war diaries and learned how one commander wangled an extra set of uniforms for his men and also purchased clothes brushes for them to try to counteract the ever present mud - which he described as being "like a mixture of porridge and glue" in the trenches. His battalion was also instructed to rub whale oil into their feet to guard against trench foot caused by mud and rain. Their record is favourably compared with that of the two neighbouring regiments who suffered greater casualties from this ever present condition. While some regiments on the Western Front were content to lead a quiet life in their sectors, with both sides colluding not to give their opponents too much aggravation, the Scottish and Welsh regiments were known to be keen to take the fight to the enemy. One of Robert's RWF battalion commanders, Lord Howard De Walden, designed a trench knife for close combat fighting. Supposedly based on an ancient Welsh weapon, it went along with the mediaeval barbarity involved in trench warfare.

In 1916 when he was home on leave, a niece was born to Robert's elder sister. The child was to have been given the first names of her grandmothers but Robert pleaded that she should instead be named Clarice after a French nurse who had cared for him after one of his battlefield injuries. As an added inducement, he put money in a Post Office account for the child. This cousin of mine lived to the age of 96, proud of the story from WWI about the origin of her name. In September 1918 Robert was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for taking charge during a German attack on his trench line which was repulsed due to his courage and initiative. At the time the DCM was the second highest bravery award that an enlisted man could earn after the Victoria Cross. By some administrative oversight at the time, the post nominal letters DCM were left off after his name on the town war memorial and it took me two decades of campaigning to have this omission rectified in 2011.

Robert made it to the end of the war but, on 15 November 1918, four days after the Armistice was declared, he succumbed to war wounds and pneumonia. He was doubtlessly another victim of the Spanish 'Flu pandemic which took more men than had died in combat. He rests in a small military cemetery near Deauville on the French coast which contains British and German graves from both World Wars, a nearby chateau having been used as a hospital base in both conflicts. I assumed that I was probably the first family member to visit Robert Rees's grave in Tourgeville military cemetery. However, an intriguing find in the family archives caused me to question this. I discovered a handwritten note from Fabian Ware, the man who founded what became the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), in which he gives details of the location of Robert Rees's grave. Unfortunately, it is undated but the CWGC were sufficiently interested to copy for their archives this rare example of a handwritten communication from Ware, the head of the organisation, to the family of an individual fallen soldier. This discovery causes me to wonder if any of his grieving siblings had made an earlier pilgrimage to the grave of this relative who so very nearly survived the war.

The second family tale which turned out to have interesting connotations with the First World War concerns my maternal grandmother, Anna, who married a brother to Robert Rees. Renowned for her culinary skills, she was rumoured to have cooked for European royalty when in domestic service in London. It transpired that she had worked in the Hyde Park area for General Sir Henry Burleigh Leach. This Boer War veteran was badly injured early on in 1914 and spent the remainder of his service in the War Office in London. In 1919 he organised the Peace March through London which was the precursor to the annual Whitehall Service of Remembrance and Parade we know to this day, an achievement for which he was knighted. Moreover, his wife Florence Leach - after whom my mother would be christened - was the most senior female British army officer during World War One as Controller in Chief, later President, of Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (formerly the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) for which she was awarded a dame-hood in her own right. It seems entirely plausible therefore that as an employee of such high ranking Army officers during the war years Anna would indeed have cooked for important personages.

As I imagine would be the case with many of us, how I wish now I had paid more attention to the family yarns around the fireplace which might have added more fine detail to these personal histories.

Flora Sandes - A rector's daughter

And the only British female fighting on the frontline in WWI (and WWII!)

by Gerry Palmer

Flora Sandes was the daughter of a Suffolk rector but dreamed of being a soldier. In the years between leaving finishing school and the start of WW1 the now 38 year old and adventurous Flora had already worked as a secretary in Cairo, camped in British Columbia and even shot a man in self-defence.

By 12 August 1914, having signed up as a volunteer with the ambulance service she was already on her way to Serbia with the first volunteer unit to leave Britain. She arrived at Kragujevac she worked in an ambulance for the Serbian Army's Second Infantry Regiment (known as 'Iron Regiment') fighting against the Austro-Hungarian offensive.

The war was going badly for the Serbian Army and they retreated through the Albanian Mountains. When Flora's unit reached an area that her ambulances couldn't pass, she took the Red Cross badge off her arm and joined the Regiment as a private. It was not unusual for women to serve in the Serbian Army, but Flora was the only British woman to do so.

Surprisingly, one other woman managed to join up as a soldier in the British Army - ambitious 20-year-old journalist Dorothy Lawrence enlisted by passing herself off as a man with the alias Denis Smith. She gave herself up after 10 days as she was worried for the safety of the men who had helped her join.

Flora, however, was regarded as a considerable asset by her Serbian comrades, who looked on her as a representative of England and she frequently raised money and support for them in the UK. Their personal affection turned to idolatry because of her truly outstanding courage (she was twice mentioned in dispatches). She advanced quickly through the rank of corporal to become a sergeant.

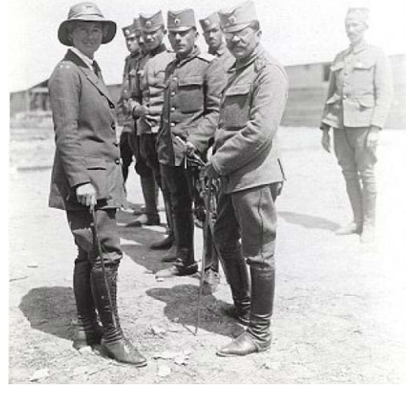
In 1916, as part of the Serbian advance on Bitola, she was seriously wounded by a grenade during hand to hand combat and was awarded the Serbian Military's highest decoration - the Order of the Karađorđe's Star. She was also promoted to the rank of Sergeant Major and made headlines around the world, but it had come at a price - her right arm had been broken and badly lacerated and shrapnel had shredded the flesh off her back and the right side of her body from shoulder to knee.

Undaunted, she recovered and re-joined her previous regiment in the front line of the trenches as they fought their way back to re-take the country they lost nearly three years before. After the war ended she remained in the army until 1922, saying: '*I never loved anything so much in my life.*'

Flora married in 1927 and moved with her husband to the new kingdom of Yugoslavia. 14 years later in April 1941, with tension once again rising, the Nazis invaded and four days later, aged 65, Flora re-donned her uniform and marched off to fight.

Within days her old war wound put an end to her plans and when, after just 11 days, the Germans defeated the Yugoslav army and occupied the country. Flora was imprisoned by the Gestapo – though she was soon freed after agreeing to report to a Gestapo officer each week.

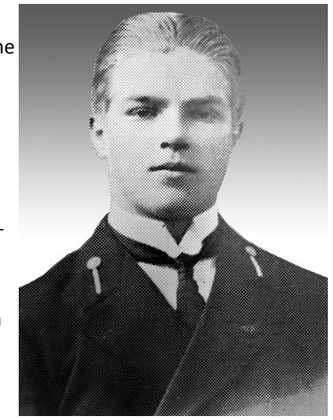
After the war, penniless but undeterred, Flora moved to Jerusalem and then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) where at the age of 70 she raised local hackles by drinking and smoking with the black peasant population. Encouraged to leave by the authorities, Flora returned to the UK and died on 24 November 1956, at the age of 80 having just renewed her passport and, probably, with yet more plans of adventure.



David Dickson – the Hawk and the Submarine

Killed in Action (KIA) October 1914 by Belinda Ford

David Angus Dickson died on October 15 1914. He wasn't the first person from Marlow who gave his life – that sad honour possibly goes to William Ewart Gladstone Eaton from the 2nd Grenadier Guards who died on 1st September at La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre in Flanders. He wasn't even the first Marlovian to die from a submarine attack at sea as William John Rance died on the HMS Cressy the month before. What makes David so special is that we already know so much about him and his early death.



David Angus Dickson

David was born in 1897 to a relatively wealthy and well-to-do Marlow family. His father John, was a surgeon, JP and local councillor and the family lived at the Gables in Institute Road. His mother, Emily was Scottish and he had three older brothers; Desmond, Brian and Ian. They had five servants in 1901, including a cook and a housemaid.

At the age of nine David went to Sir William Borlase as a boarder. He was particularly interested in boxing and rowing - and a member of Marlow's Rowing Club. He also played hockey for Marlow Hockey Club.

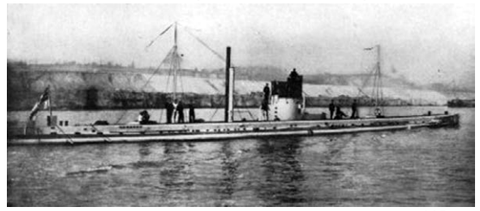
HMS Hawke

Just four years later David left school to became a Naval Cadet at the Royal Naval College, Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, previously the home of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. After two years as a cadet at Osborne and a further two at Dartmouth studying marine engineering, David was well equipped to work on a modern warship. While at Dartmouth he became one of the two chief cadet captains for his year and was awarded the King's Gold Medal for 'the cadet who… exhibited the most gentlemanlike bearing and the best influence amongst the cadets.' He also won the light and middle weight boxing championships and the senior sculls race.

In June 1914 he joined HMS Cumberland and, at the outbreak of war, HMS Hawke as a Midshipman. The Hawke was an old cruiser that had been built in Chatham in 1891.

On 15 October 1914, HMS Hawke was on patrol in the North Sea alongside her sister ship HMS Theseus, some 60 miles from Aberdeen. As older ships of the fleet, they were an easy target for the new and fast-moving German submarines, particularly as the Hawke had slowed down to deliver mail to a third ship, HMS Endymion.

The German submarine U-9 was on patrol in the vicinity and spotted the cruisers and one of its crew later wrote: "I gazed at the little picture of the upper ocean. The distant three cruisers were some wide space apart, but were converging, and were steering for a point and that point was apparently in the vicinity where we lay. No wonder the Commander thought they must want a torpedo.



U9

"We imagined they were bent on joining forces and steaming together, but it presently became apparent that they intended to exchange signals, drop a cutter in the water, and deliver mail or orders, and then go their respective ways. We steered at full speed for the point toward which they were heading, our periscope showing only for a few moments at a time. The Cruisers, big armoured fellows, came zig-zagging. We picked one, which afterward turned out to be HMS Hawke, and manoevered for a shot. It was tricky work. She nearly ran us down. We had to dive deeper and let her pass over us, else we would have been rammed. Now we were in a position for a stern shot at an angle, but she turned. It was a fatal turning, for it gave us an opportunity to swing around for a clear bow shot at 400 metres.

" 'Second bow tube fire!'. Weddingen snapped out the order, and soon there sounded the tell-tale detonation."

The torpedo launched by U-9 hit HMS Hawke in the middle of the ship, igniting a magazine and causing a tremendous explosion which ripped much of the ship apart. Hawke sank in a few minutes with the loss of her commander Captain Williams, 26 officers and 497 men, including David Dickson. Only four officers and 70 of the crew were saved.

One of the survivors later reported to the press, "We were struck right amidships between the two funnels quite close to one of the magazines. All hands were on deck, and it was a terrible explosion. The vessel immediately took a heavy list to starboard. I have never been on a ship so well equipped with life saving apparatus, but the way the vessel heeled over made it almost impossible to get the boats out. The boat in which I was saved had a narrow escape from being taken down with the suction.

"We were struck about 11 o'clock in the forenoon, and just as we got away from the Hawke, we distinctly saw the periscope of the enemy's submarine come to the surface. We thought he was going to ram us, but apparently he was on the lookout for any other rescuing vessels. Prior to the accident the Hawke was cruising about zigzag fashion, and we never saw the submarine until we felt her."

A second survivor reported, "Those on deck for an instant, immediately after the explosion, saw the periscope of a submarine, which showed above the water like a broomstick. When the explosion occurred, I, along with the others in the engine-room, was sent flying into space as it were, and must have been stunned for a little. When I came to, I found myself in the midst of an absolute inferno…I scrambled up the iron ladder to the main deck. Already the captain, commander, and a midshipman were on the bridge, and calmly, as though on fleet manoeuvres in the Solent, orders were given out, and as calmly obeyed. The bugler sounded the 'Still' call, which called upon every man to remain at the post at which the call reached him. Soon there came the order, 'Abandon ship, out boats'.

"Many of the crew had scrambled on to the side of the sinking cruiser as she slowly turned turtle, and from this temporary place of safety were sliding and diving into the sea. The captain and the midshipman stuck bravely to their posts on the bridge to the last, and were seen to disappear as the ship finally plunged bow first amid a maelstrom of cruel, swirling waters."

The catastrophe caused some controversy when the details became clear. Archibald Hurd, a correspondent with The Daily Telegraph, wrote an article in the paper on 17 October questioning the Navy's policy of deploying cadets such as David Dickson on patrol.

"We could spare the ship, for she was old, but we could not spare the officers and men of the ship, for they were in the very prime of life. The loss of life - apparently between 450 and 500 have been drowned - is a cause of sorrow which we cannot conceal. Once more…the questions will be asked, "Should these cadets, even though rated as midshipmen, be afloat? Is their presence necessary?" Would it not be better if they completed their training, so that when the war is over we may have young officers to take up the duties which others have had to relinquish - to fill, in fact, the gaps in the fleet at sea?"

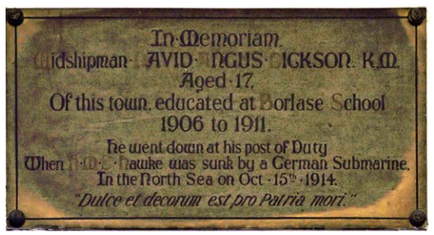
One consequence of the attack on HMS Hawke was that the ageing cruiser ships of the fleet were withdrawn from patrol duty. But by then, the threat of the German submarines to the British ships had already become all too apparent. It was the same submarine, U-9, that had sunk three other British warships on a single day in September 1914.

Otto Weddingen, Commander U-9

The U9 was celebrated in Germany after sinking three British warships in under an hour on 22 September 1914 and the Hawke just a few weeks later.

Otto Weddingen, the successful and highly-decorated Commandant of U-9 in 1914, was killed in action the following year.

.



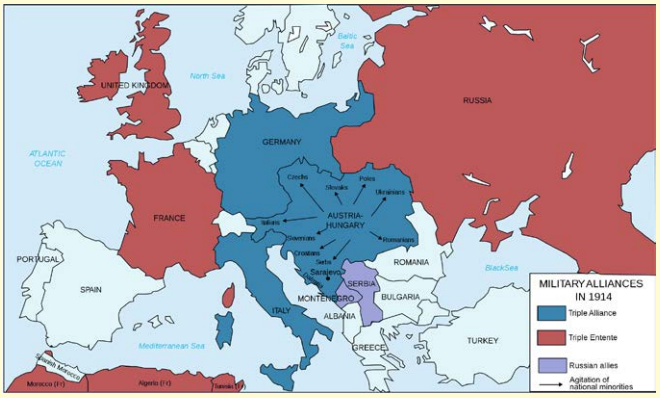
David Dickson's memorial, Sir William Borlase's chapel

www.marlowww1.org.uk more@marlowww1.org.uk

World War I in brief

1914 June 28 - Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Habsberg Austro-Hungarian Empire, assassinated.

1914 August 1 - 4 – Germany declared war on Russia, then France, then invaded Belgium. UK declared war on Germany. Japan joined the Allied forces and the Ottoman Empire soon joined the Central Powers. War spread to the seas.



WW1 military alliances 1914

1915 - Stalemate on the Western Front. The passenger liner RMS Lusitania was sunk by a German U-boat, with 1,200 lives lost. London was attacked from the air by German Zeppelins.

1916 - Conscription was introduced in the UK for men aged between 18 and 41. A million casualties in 10 months: Germany aimed to "bleed France white".

1917 - German Army retreated to the Hindenburg Line. US joined the war. Tank, submarine and gas warfare intensified. Royal family change of surname to Windsor to appear more British.

1918 - Germany launched a major offensive on Western Front but the Allies launch successful counter-offensives at the Marne and Amiens. The armistice was signed on 11 November, ending war at 11am.

1919 – Treaty of Versailles and the German Navy's scuttling of their Grand Fleet in Scapa Flow.

PLANE LANDED IN MARLOW

Farman biplane

There was great excitement in Marlow in early September 1914 when a plane – British not German - landed in the meadow in front of the railway station. A thousand people gathered to find out what was going on. The plane was a new Farman biplane which was being flown by Lieutenant Gould and Sergeant Barr from the Royal Flying Corps. The plane had engine problems which the men clearly sorted out as after tea with Dr Dickson, JP, at the Gables (David's father, see article on the last page), the men ascended again and flew away.

How big was the British Army of 1914-1918?

With just 400,000 men (plus 475,000 reserves) the British Army of 1914 was tiny by comparison to Germany total of 3.8-4.5 million, Austro-Hungry 3 million and France's 4 million. Germany had by far the most efficient and effective army in the world.

Rapid British army expansion meant that from mid-1916 onwards our army was on equal or better terms, in addition to providing winning forces in many other theatres. By 1918, the size, armaments and sophistication had improved dramatically.

CONTACT US

If you have any stories, recollections, images or artefacts from WW1 please feel free to contact us on more@marlowww1.org.uk