

# Remembrance Sunday 2018

Picardy 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1918.

The attack began at 5.20am, long before dawn, along a 9,000-yard front. In moonlight and thick mist, the barrage of heavy artillery began. This was supplemented with 52 machine guns and field guns including howitzers firing phosgene gas shells and shrapnel which enabled several Brigades and Divisions of the Fourth, Third and First Armies to move forward to the River Selle. The other side's resistance relied entirely on a counter barrage of artillery on its own, with no machine-gun or rifle fire. The barrage was ferocious, but a line on the river was established by 8.00am.

For their part in the operation, the 2nd Royal Sussex were tasked with capturing the high ground east of Cattilion which featured the troublesome bastion of la Haie Tonnoile Farm. They set out with two guns attached to each leading company. However, there was difficulty both with the terrain and the heavy mist. The forming area had been shelled with mustard gas by the Germans and the men had to bunch together to keep in touch. Several tanks moving with them proved ineffectual, one ditching in a small marsh within 400 yards of the farm whilst another lost direction in an orchard soon after moving off.

In these terrible conditions, the Sussex carried on under continued shelling from high explosives and phosgene gas. As they reached the farm, the enemy infantry offered no resistance, abandoning everything and leaving 20 of their number to be taken prisoners of war. By 3.30pm the site was consolidated. Of the 17 officers and 353 other ranks, there were 53 casualties. One of them was Private John Edward Thomas Hayward – the last Cuckfield man to lose his life before the Armistice. He was killed instantaneously by a shell.

Edward (as he was known) had been born in 1888, the son of John and Eliza Hayward, and the family lived in 'Stocklands' – a house on Ardingly Road. Both his father (who was a bricklayer) and his mother had already died by the time of his death. It was left to his sister Edith to hear from his commanding officer that Edward 'was a very fine soldier and the very best of men,' 'who fought for his country and lived a splendid life' with his brother soldiers. He lies in the small peaceful British military cemetery at Pommereuil.

Reading the parish magazine for December 1918 - the record of November - we gain a snapshot of the ongoing cost for our community. There was in fact one more death before the 11<sup>th</sup> – Fred Coleman wasn't generally known within the town but had for some time been a footman at Cuckfield Park. He died in action on November 4th. Pioneer Albert Henley, one of four Henleys on our memorial, died of acute bronchitis on November 20<sup>th</sup> and was buried with full military honours in the churchyard. The vicar recorded that it was good to see Private Backshall, acting as a sidesman here in church, and Private Ede, who was cheerful although he had lost an arm. Private Quickenden had returned to England having been a prisoner of war where he was discovered half-starved, some of his colleagues actually having died of starvation. Corporal Avery was back home, alas suffering from severe shell shock, whilst Cadet Henry Kleinwort and Stoker Morgan were both recovering, having been dangerously ill.

Today, as we mark the centenary of the Armistice, many of us will have family stories concerning both First and Second World Wars. When my grandfather died, my father was given this box which had belonged to him, and inside are some remembrances of my grandfather's life: old driving licenses, national insurance records, a bill for a car – the sorts of things which survive in sideboard drawers. Then there are his service medals. Both my grandfathers served in the First World War, my other grandfather in both. However, the most poignant items in this little box are three tattered pieces of paper. The first is an official army form to my great grandfather dated 27<sup>th</sup> August 1918:

*Sir, I regret to have to inform you that a report has this day been received from the War Office that Private Maine – the King's Liverpool Regiment – was posted as missing after the engagement at PLACE NOT STATED on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1918.*

Then a telegram from Lance Corporal A. Maine (one of my great uncles) – sent from France. It bears seven different post marks and was originally sent on October 7<sup>th</sup>  
*Percy wounded - Prisoner of War*

Then the third – official confirmation on the 5<sup>th</sup> November that he was indeed a prisoner of war at *CAMP NOT STATED*.

What must my great grandparents have experienced, particularly during that gap when no one knew what had happened to 19-year-old Percy Maine? Yet he returned when so many did not. He was invalided out of the army by December 1918 because his hearing had been severely affected at the Battle of the Somme. I remember his face bearing the marks of shrapnel.

A parishioner shared a book with me from one of her relatives who had served in the Great War – *The Traveller's Guide* – a soldier's regulation pocket book – full of stories, questions and answers about Faith, designed to lead the reader on a journey of the comfort of Faith in the unutterable conditions and situations the armed forces found themselves in. 2 million copies (5 tons worth) of this little book together with millions of copies of bibles and prayer books will have similarly been issued to the services throughout the period of the war.

For me, it is only through Faith that one can begin to find true hope for humanity – broken humanity which keeps making the same mistakes: the division and separation from the 'other,' chasing after the dead end cult of 'self.' We continually see where such actions and ideologies lead: from Yemen to Pittsburg, North Korea to those places where women, men and children are held in the grip of slavery, sometimes self-imposed; the curse of addiction; the breakdown of relationships, together with the collateral damage which goes hand in hand with such situations.

In the passage from John's Gospel we heard just now, we join the disciples at the Last Supper. Jesus has astounded them by washing their feet – the job of a servant. Yet this is the example of service to which all Christians are called – the service of Love to the whole

of humanity, the whole of Creation. This is not self-abasement, but the act of loving the other before one's self.

*Jesus says these words to each of us: Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

Christians regard these words as profound for the whole of humanity, because this call to abide in love – to live **with** and **for** each other in love, is said by Jesus in the knowledge that within hours he will give his life for the world - 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.' This is no wishy-washy sentiment, but a radical sign to the world of transformational self-giving love.

Jesus gives himself for each one of us – a gift of love, a sign of the absolute identity of God with every aspect of our humanity from birth to death. Through this, humanity is offered the possibility of living Resurrection life – lives where we are called to invest ourselves **in** and **for** the lives of other people. This is where we find **who** we are called to be. Even for those who don't consider themselves people of Faith, living lives of self-giving love (which can take place in so many ways and at so many levels) enables others to be drawn into the mystery of God's love and transformation which is at the heart of all that exists.

Today we remember with gratitude the sacrifice made for the freedom we enjoy today from those who fought and those gave their lives in both World Wars. We remember too those different areas of action in which our armed forces have and continue to participate in around the globe, down to the present day.

As we give thanks for their gift made for us, let us **all** commit to participating in the transformation of the world by serving others in love, remembering the words of Jesus:

*Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that **your** joy may be complete. Amen*



I will up my eyes to the hills. From where is my help to come?  
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of Heaven and Earth  
*Psalm 121: 1*