



17 THE GREAT WAR

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Stainforth in the Great War of 1914-1918

The War Memorial outside Stainforth Parish Church records for posterity the names of 33 men of the parish who served in the Great War of 1914 to 1918. Inside the church, a tablet commemorates the seven Stainforth men who died in that terrible conflict.

Stainforth's first fatality of the Great War was Captain William Thomas Stackhouse, a regular officer of 1st Battalion The Sherwood Foresters (Notts & Derby Regiment), who went out to France in October 1914 and was killed in action 'while gallantly leading his company' at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, 11 March 1915, when his battalion made four brave but unavailing attempts to cross no man's land. Captain Stackhouse was born in 1883, son of Major and Mrs Stackhouse of Ingfield Hall, Settle and educated at Harrow and Sandhurst. 'He was an officer whose cheery and kindly nature made him extremely popular with the men who served under him', said the Craven Herald. 'He was always ready to help and encourage them, and no one who made his acquaintance failed to retain a delightful impression of his winning personality. He was a keen sportsman, polo, shooting and motor-ing being among his favourite pursuits'.

At a memorial service in the Parish Church on 22 October 1915, when Lieutenant John Stackhouse unveiled the brass memorial plaque to his brother, the Vicar stated:

The Captain died nobly leading his men out of the trenches, the first to spring out to meet the foe, and was fatally wounded 20 yards in front of the first man nearest to him. When dying, he begged to be buried with the brave men who had fallen in the charge, and his wish was carried out. A soldier who was wounded and in hospital said, 'We all loved him and would follow him anywhere, and if any man deserved the VC the Captain did for he was the means of once rescuing a platoon from falling into the hands of the enemy.'

John Stackhouse also served in France with the 1st Sherwood Foresters, leaving for the Front just before the news of his brother's death reached Stainforth.

Martial sounds

Other Stainforth residents were soon involved in the war effort and martial

sounds were even heard in the village streets, for the *Craven Herald* of 1915 records:

‘On Good Friday, although so wet, the Cadet Corps, under the command of Lieut. D. Mackenzie, of the Hollies, Stainforth, had a march from Settle by Stackhouse and Knight Stainforth to the New Hall, Stainforth. Carrying their guns and preceded by the bugle band of the Corps, they presented a smart and soldierly appearance in their khaki uniforms. In the New Hall they had a substantial tea provided by the Lieutenant who, in spite of the rain, must have felt gratified at the manner his Cadets acquitted themselves. After tea, the Cadets marched back to Settle by way of Langcliffe.’

Duncan Mackenzie was commissioned into the Duke of Wellington's Regiment later that year.

Local regiment

A majority of the Stainforth men, 17 in all, joined the Duke of Wellington's Regiment which, then as now, was the local infantry regiment, and many of them naturally enlisted in the 6th (Territorial Army) Battalion of the ‘Dukes’, which then had a Drill Hall in Settle. Two of them, both Greenbanks, were killed, while Private Walter Dinsdale and Lance-Corporal William Hoyle were awarded the Military Medal for gallantry. Hoyle, who served with 10th Duke of Wellington's, earned particular distinction, winning his first Military Medal at the Battle of Messines, June 1917, a bar to this award at the Third Battle of Ypres, October 1917, and a Mention in Despatches for his part in stemming the German offensive of March 1918. Walter Dinsdale, who also served with the 10th Duke of Wellington's, and then the Cyclist Corps, was with the 2nd Battalion The East Lancashire Regiment when he earned his Military Medal in that desperate 1918 battle to halt the Kaiser's final attack.

Four sons of John Greenbank of Town Head Road, gamekeeper to Mr T F Knowles, went to the war. Private Arthur Greenbank, who enlisted in the 6th Duke of Wellington's in January 1915 and went out to France with the Battalion in April, was killed in action in the muddy trenches of the Ypres Salient on 6 November 1915 and is buried, with many others from the 49th (West Riding) Division, in Talana Farm Cemetery. The *Craven Herald* reported:

‘Private John Lund, his chum from early boyhood, and who enlisted with him, sent the sad news to the village. Only a fortnight ago he paid his native place a visit, straight from the trenches, and returned to France on 2 November. The news cast a gloom over the village and great sympathy was expressed to the family in their bereavement. He leaves a widow and baby son to mourn his loss.’

James Greenbank also volunteered in January 1915, but was posted to the 2nd/6th Battalion, a 'second line' TA unit, which moved to France early in 1917. In the April of that year he was wounded for a second time and some three weeks later, on 1 May, he died from severe chest injuries in the Casualty Clearing Station at Achiet-le-Grand, Pas de Calais, where he is buried. Since leaving school Jim Greenbank, aged 30, had worked for Mr Knowles as gardener and, with his father, as gamekeeper, and he was also assistant bell-ringer at the church. 'He was always of a cheerful disposition and a right decent fellow', wrote the *Craven Herald*. 'Much sympathy has been shown to his widow and the five little children he has left to mourn his loss.' An Army chaplain wrote from France to Mrs Greenbank:

It is with very great sorrow that I write to tell you that your husband died at 4 a.m. this morning. He was, as I told you, very severely wounded and at first we thought there was not the slightest hope of recovery, but the doctors here are very skilful and the last few days we began to hope he would pull through. Yesterday we were able to move his bed into the sunshine and he was very pleased about that and about your letter, which he got yesterday. He went to bed and to sleep very peacefully, and then this morning he just passed away, quite peacefully and without pain—from weakness I think ... We were all so fond of him, and you may be sure that there was no care or attention that he did not get from the nursing sisters, the doctor, and so far as I could help him, from myself.

Battlefields

Stainforth men fought in other theatres of war and it was in Salonika (modern-day Greek Macedonia) that Private Tom Towler, son of Rose and the late John Towler of Knight Stainforth, earned a Military Medal for gallantry in August 1916. He was with a small reconnaissance patrol of 9th Battalion The East Lancashire Regiment, which daringly penetrated the enemy's trenches in daylight and successfully withdrew under heavy fire at point-blank range. Less fortunate was Gunner Thomas Birtle, son of Richard and Elizabeth Birtle of Brookhouse Farm, who died in Salonika on 28 September 1916, aged 21, and is buried in the military cemetery there. Tom Towler was subsequently promoted to Lance-Corporal and transferred to the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment on the Western Front, where his brothers George and Lawrence were also serving.

George Towler was working in Calgary when war broke out, and he enlisted in the 50th Canadian Infantry (Alberta Regiment) with whom he fought in France and Flanders until, on 26 October 1917, he fell on the opening day of the Canadians' valiant but costly assault on the Passchendaele Ridge during an offensive which, even by Great War standards, plumbed new depths of horror. The *Craven Herald* carried the following obituary:

'This brave young soldier was in his 26th year, and served his apprenticeship

with Greenwood and Whitehead, grocers, Lancaster. After leaving there he went as assistant to Liverpool. Being of a pushing disposition he went to Canada and soon obtained a lucrative position at Calgary in Alberta. Here he was highly esteemed but, answering the call of the mother country to her sons, he enlisted, together with his pal James Handby of Austwick. Both were trained in Calgary and came to England for a short training in Hampshire before going to the front in the early part of this year. Handby was killed a few weeks ago and now George has paid the supreme sacrifice. He received his education in the village school here and was ever a plodder, ever trying to excel as a man, a reliable friend, a careful and smart business colleague ... His Commanding Officer has sent a letter in which he states: "Your son was a man I was immensely proud to command. He always performed every duty allotted to him in a most efficient manner and his place in the Company will be hard to fill. It will be some consolation to you to know that he suffered no pain, and his death was instantaneous, and that he was decently buried where he fell".'

George Towler's body was never recovered from the Flanders mud but he is commemorated on the Menin Gate at Ypres.

One other Stainforth family had yet to suffer a double loss and the loss of the sons of Mr and Mrs Tom Wilson of The Green, Stainforth was all the harder for coming within weeks of the Armistice. Private Albert Wilson is believed to have been killed in action with 2nd/4th Battalion The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment on 13 September during the final Allied offensive. The Loyals suffered some seventy casualties in four days of continuous fighting to capture and consolidate crossings over the Canal du Nord on the Bapaume-Cambrai road. The body of Albert Wilson was subsequently buried in Moeuvres Communal Cemetery Extension near where he fell. Albert had originally enlisted at Clitheroe into The East Lancashire Regiment. Five days later, on 18 September 1918, Private Tom Wilson of 1st Battalion The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) was also killed, aged 25. He had previously served with 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment. He is commemorated on the Vis-en-Artois Memorial to over nine thousand men who fell in Artois and Picardy during the Advance to Victory and who have no known grave.