

34 MEN

A Study of the men of Moulton village
who died serving humanity
in the Great War 1914–1918.

Compiled and written
by Geoff Crompton

Designed and edited
by Ted Smith

In Gratitude

34 Men of Moulton lie in graves
Beneath the changing sky
They gave their youth that we might see
Our lives through.....to eternity.

We clasp their hands across the void
Salute them through our tears of pride
And pray to God that never again
Will our young men endure such pain.

GAC

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FOREWORD

President Abraham Lincoln said some potent words about 'remembrance' after 'Gettysburg' in 1865, the defining battle of the American Civil War. He said:

Why do we need to remember? Sacrifice is quite meaningless without remembrance! Too often as a nation, we take for granted the freedom we cherish today. Freedoms purchased with the blood and sacrifice of others! That is why we need to remember!

The great man was quite right of course. Too often in recent years, during this quite amazing explosion of interest in all things 1914–1918, we pass the many war memorials of all sizes throughout the country, look at the names carved there in a quite casual way, and then go on our journey. And yet, if we stand and ponder for a moment, the sensitive soul will take on board the theme of remembrance that Abraham Lincoln was propounding, and understood.

A. E. Houseman, the great English writer, once said, when referring to the nation's fallen:

Here dead we lie, because we did not choose to live and shame the land from which we sprung. Life to be sure is nothing much to lose, but young men think it is, and we were young!

At least, thanks to Geoff Crompton and this splendidly memorable book detailing their collective sacrifice, the young men of Moulton who fell in the Great War will have nothing to feel shame for. Geoff records their lives where possible, their military service, and supplies a picture where available.

These village men, everyone a son, a brother or a husband, some with relatives living today, are buried at home, on the old British Western Front or even further afield. They will never again be just bland names carved in stone, for Geoff with his inquisitive, sensitive spirit has ensured that they will live amongst us 'for evermore', and be remembered with pride.

This book records their passing in a human way, and is an enduring tribute to young men long gone from our sight.

May they all rest in peace.

My son died by the hand of strangers,
But by a strangers hand, his limbs were reposed
(Inscription on the headstone of a British soldier at Ypres)

Tony Spagnoly, October 2001

INTRODUCTION

On a Sunday night in the late autumn of 1998, my wife Lois and I were attending evensong at St. Stephen's Parish Church in Moulton. We occupied a pew on the right of the aisle and directly in front of a green marble memorial tablet commemorating those men of the village who had given their lives in the Great War of 1914–1918.

I began to read through the names of the 34 men listed, and noted that some surnames repeated themselves – four Buckley's, two Clarkes and three Tomlinsons. My mind began to wander and, with no disrespect to Stephen Wilson our vicar, or his sermon for that matter, I began to wonder about these men of yesteryear. Who were they? Where did they live? What did they do for a living? Were any of them related? How did they die and where? Did anyone know? Did anyone care?

I resolved then and there that I would conduct a study of each and every one of those men and to write something about them for posterity.

In the research and preparation of this tribute I have tried to ensure that all detail is correct. My greatest stumbling block however, has been the non-availability of a confirmed list of regimental numbers for them. They are not to be found in any archive I have searched and, in one or two cases, I have had to make considered guesses on certain data. If I have guessed incorrectly, I apologise.

What follows then is my amateurish attempt to do justice to the memory of those men and, at the same time, to record my own appreciation for what they sacrificed for me.

Geoff Crompton, October 2001

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to have put this tribute together without the help, support and understanding of countless numbers of people and organisations, some of whom are listed below:

Relatives of the 34 men; The Villagers of Moulton; Moulton Village News, BACSA; Librarians at Northwich and Winsford; Staff at The Northwich Salt Museum; Archivists at Cheshire Records Office; The Editors of the Northwich/ Winsford Guardians and Northwich Chronicle for allowing the publication of photographs; Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery collection; Ray Westlake for the use of his line drawings of Regimental badges; The Imperial War Museum, London for allowing free use of Crown Copyright photographs; Andrew Naden for his permission to print his poem A Last Bombardment; The Reverend Stephen Wilson for the photograph of the Memorial East Window in St. Stephens Church; Brunner Mond Ltd for the use of photographs of their memorials; The Regimental Records Officers of the Regiments in which the 34 men served, and for their help and advice on Regimental war diaries, histories, photographs and badge illustrations; Stephen Barker for permission to use extracts from his article for the Western Front Association about three Northwich soldiers; Kim Clarke, of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for photographs of the two graves in Greece; Earl Bateman for information on production at Brunner Mond's Lostock Works during the Great War; Alan Ravenscroft, for his photographs of Winsford and Whitegate War Memorials; Peter and Paul Nixon for the photograph of Vis-en-Artois Memorial; Joy Bratherton of The South Cheshire branch, Western Front Association; Ian Alexander, of the War Research Society for providing many of the grave photographs and for sharing some of his vast knowledge with me; David Coulbeck, Headmaster of Moulton County Primary School, for the loan of old school photographs; Tony Spagnoly, Military Author and Researcher for casting his experienced eye over my amateur efforts and for his Foreword; Ted Smith for the design of the front cover, for the supply of many of the photographs and for putting the book into such perfect order. My friends Donald Crawford and Phil Ashton, for their suggestions, encouragement and help, and Les Burgess for listening patiently each Thursday evening over our weekly pint in the Moulton British Legion, whilst I recounted my latest 'find'; Grant Stanning, my son-in-law, for proof reading the finished manuscript; to Lois, my wife, for tolerating my long hours away from home and the time spent in my 'eyrie' putting this tribute together; And finally, to all those unnamed friends and acquaintances who listened, helped, provided and encouraged.

Geoff Crompton, October 2001

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A Last Bombardment
As we sit here in our trench,
Amidst the mud – the blood – the stench,
I can't think straight but wonder why
How and when we all shall die.

The thunder never goes away –
Shell after shell – day after day –
The earth heaves up to rain back down.
We cling to life in our piece of ground.

Night gives way to another dawn,
To the warmth of the sun on a bright new morn.
Once again the shells we hear,
To fill us again with an endless fear.

A flash – a bang – a cannon's roar
Oh god we are gone – we are no more!!
For now I am in my endless sleep
Will you for ever my memory keep?

For in this foreign field we lie
With fine white stone to remember by.
So when at last you come to see
All my fine mates who lie with me.

These fields where the poppies grow
– each one a soul of us you know!
To sway to and fro but never bend
– just like the British soldier to the end.

Andrew Naden, September 2001
In memory of his grandfather,
Private. David Naden,
killed on the Somme, 1916

The 34 Men

Sam Ashley	Harry Hodkinson
Fred J Bates	John William Jones
Alfred Barber	Jack Maddock
Ernest Blyth	Oliver Middleton
Arnold Buckley	Arthur Noden
Robert H Buckley	George Ravenscroft
Robert Buckley	Joseph Shaw
Wilmot Buckley	James Southern
Jervis Clarke	Thomas Southern
William J Clarke	Dan Tomlinson
William H Cookson	Enoch Tomlinson
John Crank	John Tomlinson
Walter Didsbury	Peter Wakefield
John William Foster	Albert V Walker
George Greatbanks	George Weedon
Harry Groves	Arthur F Wilkinson
Horace Hitchinson	Joseph Yardley

Dedicated to the Glory of God and in Loving Memory of the
men of Moulton Parish who gave their lives in the Great War
1914–1918



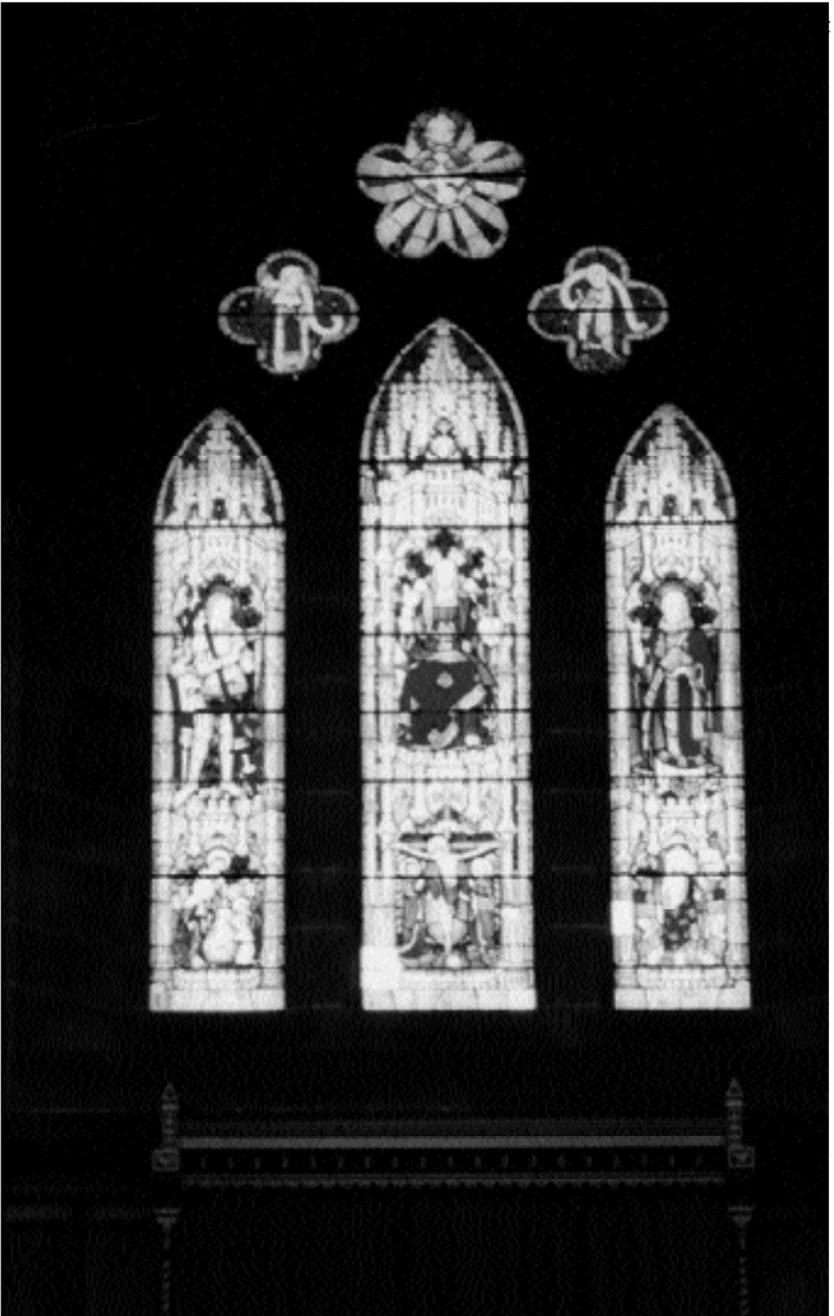
The Moulton Village War Memorial

The War Memorial

ON 25 APRIL 1919 a public meeting was held in the Moulton village Verdin Institute to consider the question of a memorial to the lads of the village who had given their lives during the struggle. The Reverend J. T. Vale presided. It was agreed that a committee be formed to raise funds by public subscription for a stone monument bearing the names of those who had fallen. This to be erected on a suitable site close to the heart of the village. It was estimated that a sum of £350 would be required to complete the work and that £40 had already been subscribed.

By 19 August 1919, the design and site for the memorial was agreed. It would take the form of a soldier of the Cheshires, with rifle 'at ease', set on a raised plinth of Yorkshire stone. The figure would be sculpted in Italian marble by Mr Samuel Welsby, of Mossley Hill and Widnes. The names of the 34 men would be deeply inscribed on the face and in-filled with lead. Salt Union Ltd, having been approached, donated a plot of land at the side of Main Road and more or less opposite the lower entrance to Regent Street. The Subscription Fund was growing, but slowly. It was hoped that the final sum would be reached in the last quarter of 1919.

On Saturday 18 December 1920, a large gathering of villagers and their guests formed a procession at the Verdin Institute. Headed by the village band, under the direction of Mr Hitchinson, the procession paraded the village before halting at the memorial. Members of the Hartford Church Lads Brigade formed the Guard of Honour. Many ex-servicemen were present to pay their respects to those of their fallen comrades who didn't make it home. There were signs of deep mourning as Reverend J. T. Vale read out the names of the fallen. After hymns, led by the Memorial Choir, Captain W. H. France-Hayhurst gave the address. He went on to say that he could do no better than to quote the words of the King written on the scrolls presented to the next of kin "See to it that their names are not forgotten". The unveiling service ended with the sounding of Reveille.



The East Window in St. Stephen's Church, Moulton

The East Window

AT A MEETING of the Parochial Church Council in April 1920 it was suggested that a Parish Church War Memorial be placed on the agenda for discussion at some later date.

On 10 October 1921 a decision was taken to place an East Window and Tablet in St. Stephen's Church in memory of all men of Moulton who had died in the Great War. The estimated cost of £300 was to be raised by donations, summer sales and the like. A figure of £73 was already held towards this sum.

By May 1922 the fund had swelled to £128, with the estimate for the work quoted at £320. In October 1922 the Diocesan Registry at Chester granted a Faculty for the East Window Memorial. By early 1923, the majority of the money had been raised, and work began. The East Window was designed by John Bewsey RA and the following inscription agreed upon:

Remember O Lord with compassion thy servants who, going forth from this Parish, gave their lives for their King and Country in the Great War 1914 – 1918

4 February 1923 was designated for the unveiling and dedication of the new window. At 2.15 pm the parade assembled at the Beehive corner under the command of Sergeant Major Oakes. It then proceeded to the church where a service of dedication took place. After Captain France-Hayhurst J.P. had unveiled the window, the Lord Bishop of Chester performed the dedication ceremony.



The wall Tablet and Shelf in St. Stephen's Church, Moulton

The Tablet and Shelf

AS A FINAL ACT of remembrance the congregation of St. Stephens made a decision in July 1923 to place within their Church a suitable Tablet and Shelf on which would be listed the names of the 34 men of the Village who had laid down their lives. A faculty was granted by the Diocesan Registry at Chester on 18 September 1923. All was now set for the work to begin.

By October it was agreed that green marble and alabaster would be used for the construction. At the same time a suitable inscription was agreed.

On Sunday 18 November 1923 at 3.0 pm, and to a packed church, the unveiling and dedication of the Tablet and Shelf was performed by the Reverend Canon Sanders of Davenham. The service was conducted by Reverend J. T. Vale.



Regent Street, Moulton, with the war memorial sited at the far end

The Village

MOULTON VILLAGE stands in the heart of the Cheshire countryside between the towns of Northwich and Winsford. Located on a ridge overlooking the vale, it runs more or less parallel with the River Weaver. The 1086 Domesday Book mentions that 'Moletune' was part of the estate of The Baron Richard de Vernon of Shipbrook. Roughly translated from the old English the entry reads:

Moulton. Leofnorth held it – he was a freeman. There is one hide paying tax.

There is land for 2 ploughs.

There is one villager and one smallholder who have 1/2 plough.

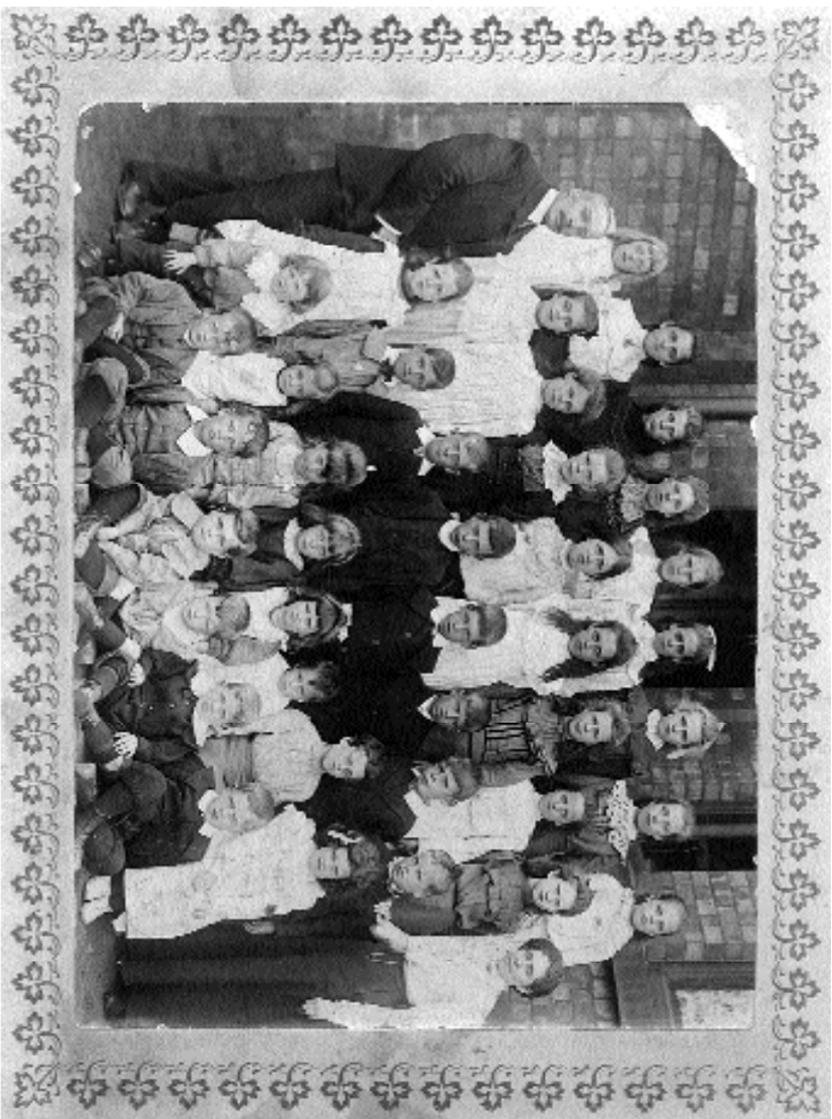
There is 1 acre of meadow; Woodland 1 league long and 1 wide; 1 enclosure.

Value was and is 5s (25p).

In the mid-18th century, Moulton and the surrounding area was purchased by the France-Hayhurst family who took up residence in nearby Bostock Hall. The estate was sold during the 1950s. Bostock Hall was converted into flats in the late 90s. Today the village boasts two places of worship: The Methodist Chapel, dating from 1875, and The Parish Church of St Stephen the Martyr, built in 1876. It has two pubs: The Lion and The Travellers Rest, a County Primary School built in 1894, a Village Hall, British Legion Club, Verdin Institute and Youth Group Headquarters.

In 1801, the population of the village was 103. In 1851 it had risen to 328, in 1901 to 1,004, in 1951 to 1,218 and, in 1997, to 2,330. In this current year (2001) the figure exceeds 3,000. The heart of the old village, comprising Main Road, Regent Street, Church Street, Chapel Lane and Chapel Street is now surrounded by new estates of houses, bungalows and flats.

Employment in the 19th and early 20th century was dominated by the salt industry, and the houses in Regent Street and Church Street were built to house its workers. At dawn, salt workers would trudge up the rise from their homes, then down the path past the Sand Pit and under the railway tunnels to the Newbridge Salt Works. Some would walk further, crossing the River Weaver to clock-on at Falk's Salt Works.



Attendees of the village school in the early 1900s

The Village

When Sir John Brunner and Ludwig Mond established their Chemical Plants in Northwich towards the end of the 19th century, men from Moulton sought jobs in their factories at Winnington and Lostock.

Life in Moulton prior to 1914 was typical of a country village in the early part of the 20th century. Men worked on the land and at various trades in and beyond the village. Their wives brought up large families in small houses, with three children to a bed not being uncommon. The 1891 Census repeatedly lists the occupation of the head of the household as Salt Boiler, the job being to look after large open pans filled with salt brine. The Salt Boiler tended the fires under the pans and regulated the flow of brine into them until a combination of time and heat produced the required crystal size. Various grades of salt from 'block' through to very fine granular were made. The process could take up to a week after which time the pans would be emptied, cleaned and the cycle repeated. It was hot, steamy, sweaty and intensive labour with the men stripped to the waist and wearing clogs to keep their feet dry.

The village war memorial stands on the side of Main Road on land donated by The Salt Union Ltd. The figure of the soldier faces Regent Street surveying the houses from which many of the 34 men made their last journey. The memorial was vandalised by mindless idiots in 1998 but has now been fully restored.



A Salt Boiler tending his pans

Death has no Favourites

A SURVIVOR OF THE Great War whose name is etched on the memorial close to those of the 34 men, was Captain W. H. France-Hayhurst, Lord of the Manor of Bostock and Davenham, who lived at Bostock Hall. He was the third son of Colonel Charles Hoskin France-Hayhurst whose family took over the estate, including most of the village, from the heirs of Thomas Cholmondeley, in the 18th Century. The France-Hayhurst's continued to run the estate until its sale in the 1950s. It was Captain France-Hayhurst who unveiled the memorial on 18 December 1920.

The Captain and his family suffered more than their fair share of grief before, during and after the war. His father died in early 1914. In February 1915 the second son, Captain/Commander Cecil Halstead France-Hayhurst died of pneumonia in Glasgow aged 40 years. He had recently taken command of HMS Patricia and left a wife and two daughters aged 6 and 8 years. Following closely on his death came news from France on 9 May 1915 that the eldest son, Colonel Frederick Charles France-Hayhurst, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, aged 45 years, had been killed in action. He had inherited the estate and title. The value of the estate at that time was put at £415,000. The brothers are commemorated on the Davenham Village war memorial. On a happier note, the remaining son, Captain W H France-Hayhurst, married his colonial bride Renee in York in June 1918. She was a South African and had lived in Cape Town. Their joy was short lived however, for Renee died in childbirth at York, just one year later.



Captain W. H. France-Hayhurst, and his bride Renee.

Not Forgotten

IN 1939, JUST 20 YEARS after the end of the Great War, humanity was once again threatened by Germany and her allies. This time it wasn't Kaiser Bill who had visions of Empire, but one Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party who came to power in the mid-30s. In six short years this political grouping would plunge the world into the most dreadful conflict it had ever known. At the dawn of the new millennium, memories of the terror over which Hitler presided are still vivid in the minds of all those old enough to remember. Once again the men of Moulton responded to the call, and once again they marched down Main Road to fight for our liberty and freedom. 12 of their number marched into oblivion and their names are listed on the village War Memorial alongside the 34 who died in the Great War. They were:

Brookes, Harold
Buckley, Felix Frank
Dickens, George
Eyes, John Henry
Goulding, Stanley
Kendrick, James Eric
Kennerley, Gordon
Latham, Ralph
Miles, George
Shannon, George
Stockall, Albert
Wright, Frederick

God willing, these 12 men will be the subject of a separate study and dedication.



The Kaiser reviews his field artillery in preparation for war

1914

The Horror Begins

WHEN GAVRILO PRINCIP, a 19-year old Bosnian Serb militant, thrust his way forward in a Sarajevo street on 28 June 1914 he was only seconds away from collapsing a house of cards that would change the course of the 20th Century. The three shots he fired from the running board of the car carrying the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife, triggered a war that, even now evokes, not only sadness, but a feeling of utter hopelessness for those who died so tragically in the cause of liberty and freedom.

Princip's assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the thrones of Austria and Hungary, and his wife Sophie as they sat in their stationary open car, was a dreadful reminder of what one act of terrorism can achieve if performed at the right moment in time. The car, which had taken a wrong turning, was en route to the local hospital to allow the Archduke and his wife to visit a member of their staff, wounded earlier in the day, when a bomb had exploded nearby. Prophetically, it is believed that the registration plate on the car was 11.11.18. The ensuing conflict would eventually involve a total of 57 nations in the Great War of 1914 – 1918, now better known as World War One or the First World War.

Austro-Hungary charged Serbia with the assassinations. They demanding ten concessions, one requiring Serbia to put an immediate stop to the wave of anti-propaganda against Austro-Hungary sweeping Serbia at the time. Serbia, finding itself on a very sticky wicket, and having accepted advice from Great Britain and Russia, agreed to eight of the ten demands. This was not sufficient and on 28 July, Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Russia, who had previously warned Austro-Hungary against such a move, began mobilisation. At this, Germany stepped in and threatened Russia that, if they did not stop mobilisation, they would have them to contend with. This was like a red rag to a bull, and Russia rejected



On the march through Belgium

the German threat out-of-hand. At this slap in the face, Germany declared war on Russia on 1 August. France then decided to climb aboard the wagon and began to mobilise. On 3 August, Germany decided to declare war on the French as well.

Great Britain who, until then, had tried to act as an honest broker, was drawn into the web. In early August the Belgians were informed by Germany of its intent to march through Belgium to stop the French from using the same route to attack them. In fact this move was part and parcel of the Schlieffen plan drawn up by Count Von Schlieffen between 1897 and 1905. The plan called for a massive blow in the French west, then to encircle Paris by way of Belgium. Naturally, Belgium refused to countenance this action and called on Great Britain to help. Great Britain who, as a signatory to an agreement dating back to 1839 guaranteeing Belgian neutrality, demanded that Germany withdraw their threat. This was refused, at which Great Britain declared war on Germany.

The die was cast.

On the 17 August, a British Expeditionary Force (BEF) commanded by Field Marshal Sir John French, comprising regular and territorial units, was despatched post haste to France. Liege had fallen the day before and the German armies were well on their way, marching through Belgium. On 23/24 August, the British force came to grips with a vastly superior German one at the Belgium town of Mons. With the French retreating on both their right and left, and in danger of being out-flanked, the BEF itself began to retreat. It should be emphasised that this was no rout, for the retreat was conducted strategically, and in good order. The discipline shown by the BEF was superb as it fought, retreated, turned about and fought again, all the way back to the River Marne. The old adage that 'He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day' was never so true as with the retreat of the BEF from Mons to the River Marne. On 3 September, having retreated 200 miles, it crossed the River Marne and dug-in. After re-grouping, pontoon bridges were built across the river and, on 9 September, the BEF advanced into a gap that had opened on the German right. The enemy, under the command of General Von Bulow, panicked, and immediately began to withdraw. The battle of the Marne was as good as won, with the Germans withdrawing to positions along the River Aisne. Then came the 'race to the sea' to safeguard (or to occupy in the German case) the Channel ports.

On 9 October, Antwerp fell to the Germans and the Belgian garrison

1914 – THE HORROR BEGINS

together with the British Naval Brigade escaped westwards towards the Dutch border. The British 7th Division and 3rd Cavalry Division, which had landed at Zeebrugge and Ostende on the 6th, 7th and 8th October, helped cover the Belgian retreat through West Flanders and arrived at Ypres on the 14th. The British II and III Corps from the Aisne reached a line behind Hazebrouck and La Bassée on the 10–11 October. The I Corps entered Ypres on the 20th. The Allies fought off German attacks in the Battle of the Yser (18 October to 30 November) and the First Battle of Ypres (30 October to 24 November) in which the BEF were virtually eliminated while stopping the German forward movement. Huge losses of life were inflicted on both the British and German sides, with German losses so severe that General Eric Von Falkenhayn acknowledged that casualties of this magnitude could not be sustained, and wound down his onslaught on what was to become known as the Ypres Salient. The name Ypres would become a household name in Britain as the war progressed, as was the name of the Somme after July 1916.

Today, over 80 years on, at 8 o'clock every evening, buglers of the Ypres Fire Brigade sound Last Post and Reveille under the arches of the Menin Gate Memorial. This poignant sounding has taken place every evening since the unveiling of the monument in 1929, except during the German occupation of the town in the Second World War, although the sounding recommenced the very day the occupying force was driven from the town. The Menin Gate Memorial was constructed after the war to honour the 54,361 missing of the British Empire who fell in the Ypres Salient between October 1914 and 15-16 August 1917.

By December, deadlock had set-in on the Western Front. The attempt by Austria to take Serbia failed miserably and they scuttled back over their borders in December, having lost over 20,000 officers and men. A line of Allied and German trenches and dugouts faced each other from the Belgium coast to the Swiss border, a distance of nearly 500 miles. The war of movement had ceased. It is probably true to state that, for the remainder of the war, the Germans looked down on the allied from superior positions.

As 1914 ended, the BEF was bleeding badly and in need of a life-saving transfusion. This was at hand, for Lord Kitchener's call for volunteers had resulted in over a million men enlisting in the New Armies in the first few months of the conflict. The 'Service' or 'K' battalions as they were known were preparing to enter the fray.

Other Fronts

By the end of 1914 fighting had broken out in other theatres apart from the Western Fronts of France and Belgium. In Africa, German forces surrendered in Togoland and Cameroon. On the Russian front the battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes ended inconclusively with the Russians slipping away to fight another day.

On the oceans of the world the British and German fleets tested each others mettle. Ships on both sides joined Davy Jones in the battles of the Heligoland Bight, Coronel and the Falkland Islands. The east coast towns of Hartlepool, Whitby and Scarborough were shelled by German battleships standing offshore. On 9 November the German raider Emden was sunk by HMS Sydney after having created havoc for some months to the ships of the Mercantile Marine.

Moulton

Young and not so young men from Moulton took the King's shilling, and by the end of the war 230 of them had enrolled out of a total village population of 1,100. A magnificent response, and one of which Moulton should be very proud.

There may be only 'One way in and one way out of the village' but the men of 1914–1918 knew where their duty lay and marched down Main Road to the recruiting offices and, sadly, in some cases into oblivion. They served, and some died, in distant corners of Europe, Africa, Palestine, India and on the high seas.

Over 70 men in the last quarter of the year had marched off to join their regiments, amongst them a large proportion of married men.

By the end of 1914 the people of Moulton had adjusted their lives to the war and to their new circumstances but, during October, the real tragedy of war left its mark on the village. John Crank, was dead, albeit from natural causes brought on by a horrendous channel crossing on his way to France, and another, Charles Hampton had been wounded. The future looked bleak.

Dedicated to the Memory of John Crank

John Crank holds the unenviable record of being the first soldier from the village to die in the Great War. He was born at Kelsall on 17 December 1881. His parents, James and Mary, like so many families in those days, moved house frequently. In 1881 they were to be found living, with their four children, James 15, Mary 10, Frances 8, and Peter (Alex?), a 4-year old, in Yeld Lane in the Eddisbury Census district. By the mid 1880s they had moved to Chapel Lane, Moulton and, in 1891, were settled at 67 Main Road with their children James now 25, Frances 18, Peter (Alex?) 14 and John, their 'latest arrival', now 9-years old. At the time of his death in 1914, John and his widowed mother Mary, were living at 8 Chapel Lane, Moulton. John was his mother's sole means of support.

John Crank enlisted in Northwich at the very start of the war and was immediately drafted into the Royal Army Service Corps as a transport driver. By September 1914 he was stationed in Antwerp, Belgium and it was here, in late October, that his health broke down. Just before the Germans occupied Antwerp on 10th October, John was hospitalised to Fort Pitt Hospital, Chatham where his condition deteriorated. He died at home on 30 October aged 32 years. His funeral took place on 4 November and he was interred at St. Wilfrid's Churchyard, Davenham in the afternoon. Many villagers watched and grieved as the cortège, the coffin draped with a Union Jack, passed slowly down Main Road and out of the village.

In July 1915 John Crank was commemorated on the Moulton Roll of Honour in the Parish magazine. On 21 November 1915, a Memorial Service was held in St. Stephen's Parish Church for John and three other Moultoners; William Jervis Clarke, George Weedon, and George Greatbanks, who had by this time paid the supreme sacrifice.

Private John Crank



John Crank, Private No. M2/11447

Royal Army Service Corps

Died at home on Friday, 30 October 1914. Age 32

He is buried in St. Wilfrid's Churchyard, Davenham, Cheshire



Private John Crank's headstone in St. Wilfrid's Churchyard

Private John Crank

John Crank's Awards



The 1914 Star

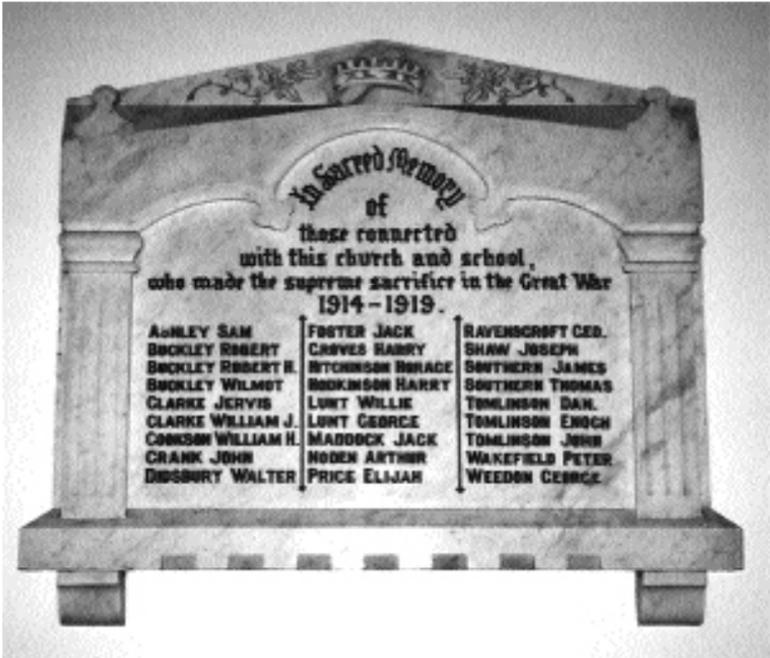


The British War Medal



The Victory Medal

John Crank is also commemorated on the
Moulton Methodist Church Tablet



The memorial tablet in Moulton Methodist Church.

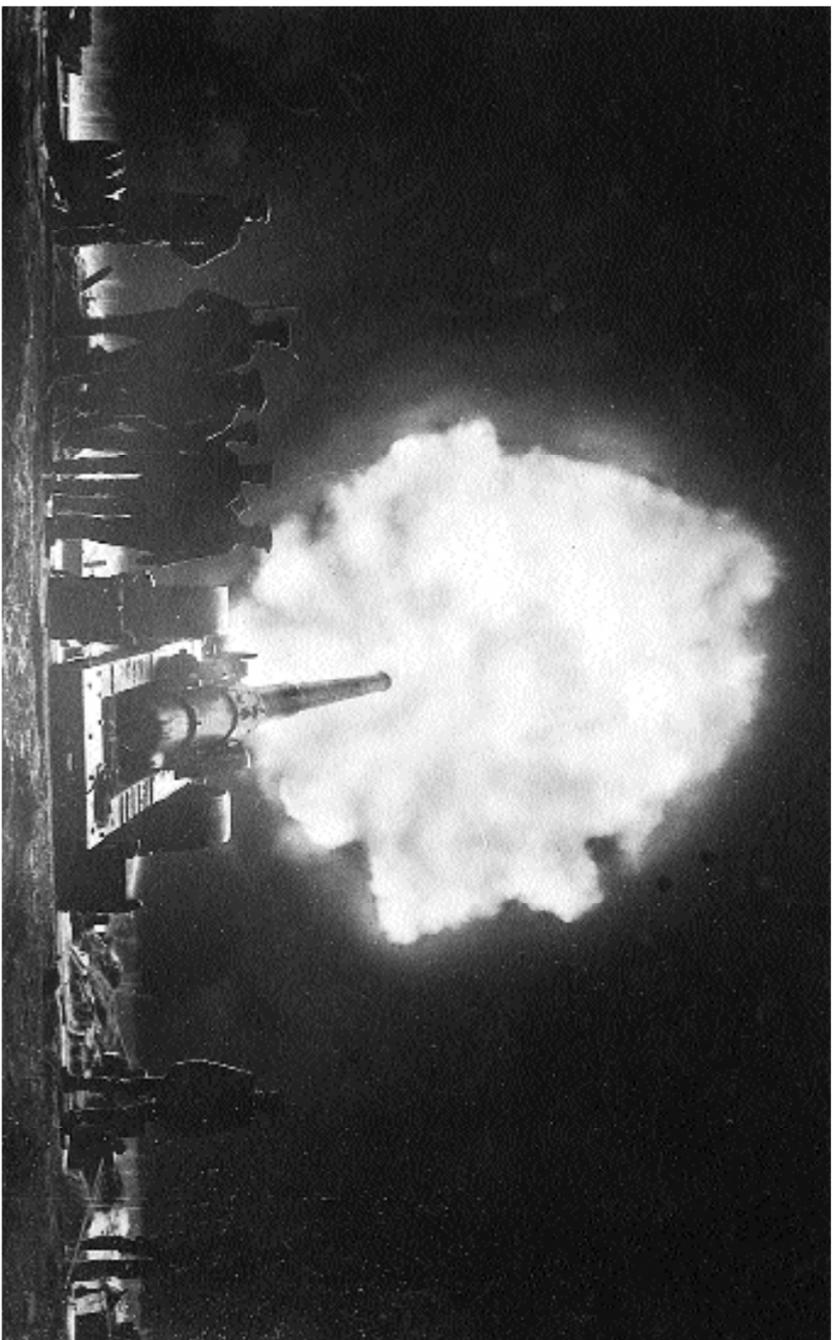
Private John Crank



In 1891 John was living at 67 Main Road, with his mother, father and four brothers and sisters

8 Chapel Lane, the house in which John Crank died in October 1914





Artillery has no respect for night or day

1915

STALEMATE

1 915 SAW THE CONSOLIDATION of the trench systems along the whole of the Western Front. In places, the German and Allied trenches were as little as 30-yards apart and men could be heard talking, singing and generally going about their everyday chores by the enemy opposite. Trenches were deepened, duckboards laid, fire-steps and dugouts improved and barbed wire to the front of each trench thickened. To minimise casualties from blast, the trenches were dug in a zig-zag fashion and support, reserve and communication trenches were worked on. Men could spend up to six days standing in these open ditches, in all weathers and conditions. They would creep forward, usually at night, along the communication trench to relieve the battalion in residence. Having done their stint, the relieved men would retire to the rear for four days to wash, eat proper meals, clean their gear and sleep off their exhaustion in shelters and in reasonable comfort. Their mud-encrusted uniforms were washed and fumigated, for lice plagued the men to distraction. Lice managed to get everywhere and the men spent hours running lighted matches, candles or even cigarettes along the seams of their clothes to incinerate the little devils who seemed hell bent on making their uncomfortable lives even more difficult. Having rested and generally restored themselves to sanity, the troops would then move into reserve for a further four days, before performing another stint in the front line trenches. And so the cycle continued: four days in the line, four days rest and then four days in reserve.

Lord Kitchener's New Army volunteers, very often serving in the City or 'Pals' Battalions, as some became affectionately known, were completing their training and joining their divisions abroad. The idea of Pals battalions, keeping together men from the same district, was sound in principle. They very often knew each other, spoke with the same dialect and had a fierce pride in their battalions. Examples of these battalions were

1915 – STALEMATE

the Accrington Pals, Liverpool and Manchester Pals, Grimsby Chums and University Regiments. The Glasgow Boy's Brigade formed a battalion of Boy's Brigade old boys from the city. Later in the war, this battalion lost 514 of its 1,000 strength on 1 July 1916, the opening of the Battle of the Somme. The Accrington Pals lost 585 the same day and, worst of all, the 10th West Yorks. (Leeds and Harrogate) lost 710 officers and men. For, what could not be foreseen, was that many of these battalions would be wiped out in a matter of hours and that 'angels of death', in the guise of postmen and telegraph boys, would deliver their messages of doom and anguish by the bagfull to small communities up and down the country.

Major battles occurred at Neuve-Chapelle and St. Eloi in March and April. On 22 April the Second Battle of Ypres opened. The Ypres Salient, extending ten miles across its base and five miles deep, was faced on three sides by eleven German Divisions. Just before 5.00 pm on the 22nd, the German guns, which had been pounding the Salient all day, fell silent. The spring sun was about to drop below the horizon when the town and surrounding villages were subjected to another fearful bombardment. Squinting over their front line trenches to see if the bombardment was to be the prelude to a frontal attack, the troops saw a greenish-yellow fog



Gas mask parade

creeping towards them. Chlorine gas was about to join the weapons of war. *Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori* ("It is sweet and fitting to die for one's Country" – the last lines of Wilfred Owen's poem about men dying in a gas attack). As the gas enveloped the French and Algerian troops, they fled, allowing the Germans following behind their gas cloud, to claim a huge piece of the Salient.

All along the front from April to September, battles raged at St. Julian, Aubers Ridge, Festubert, and Vimy Ridge, culminating in the Battle of Loos at the end of September. At Loos the British, who by now had added gas to their own weaponry, released chlorine gas prior to their attack. In some sectors this was successful in driving the enemy out of their front line trenches. In other parts of the line the wind suddenly changed direction, with the result that the gas either hung about in No-Man's Land like a great festering cloud, or worse, blew back into the faces of the men about to go forward.

Despite initial gains the French were unsuccessful in their attempt to take Vimy Ridge, neither were the Guards successful in their efforts to capture the notorious Hill 70 east of Loos. German counter-attacks later negated most of the gains made at the start of the battle.



Men of the R.H.A. in trenches at Aubers Ridge



New Zealand infantry dug-in on the ridges above Anzac Cove, Gallipoli

1915 – STALEMATE

Other fronts

In the early part of 1915, a decision was taken to open up another front at Gallipoli to allow the British fleet unimpeded access through the Dardanelles and into the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea beyond. After an initial bombardment in mid-February, coupled with a small landing on the Gallipoli peninsula, an attempt was made to sail through the narrows into the inland sea. The Turkish forces, having been given four weeks to ready themselves, destroyed three Allied battleships and badly disabled three others with both mines and gunfire from the heights above the narrows. The operation was then called-off and never again attempted.

At dawn on 25 April the Expeditionary Force gathered in Murdos Bay and landed at three points along the coast. The force comprised Australian, British, French and New Zealand troops. By nightfall a toe-hold had been achieved at all landing points, but losses were heavy. The Turks, under German command, were well dug-in on the heights – waiting as the attacking force came ashore.

For the next eight months the Allies continued to sustain terrible losses in their attempt to subjugate the Turks. All their efforts came to nought and places such as Sulva Bay, Anzac Cove and Cape Helles would go down in folklore as killing grounds where men gave their all to no avail. On the night of 9 January 1916, having decided that their losses were too heavy to bear, the last of the Allied troops crept quietly down to the beaches, climbed aboard their landing craft and sailed off into the blackness. Next day the Turks and Germans awakened to find empty trenches in all sectors of the Allied line – the birds had flown.

Between May and December, the Central Powers waged a fearsome assault on the Russian Army in an attempt to drive them back from the Carpathian Mountains and thereby rid Austria of the 'Bear' on their doorstep. Over 600,000 German troops took part against an enemy three times as large. By early October the Russians had been driven back to a line in front of Minsk and although not beaten, were so badly weakened that they were never a serious threat again.

On the Italian fronts battles for Isonzo raged from June until November. In Palestine the Turks attacked the Suez Canal and, in July, the last of the German forces surrendered in South Africa .

At sea the battle of Dogger Bank took place in January. The liners Lusitania and Arabic were sent to the bottom along with the German Dresden and the French Leon Gambetta.



Men of the Cheshire Regiment at training camp somewhere in England

1915 – STALEMATE

Moulton

By the end of January 100 men from the village had enlisted, including 17 Army Reservists. Their names were published in the Northwich Guardian and included 17 of those who subsequently died. In March a dance was organised raising £1 for the Belgium Relief Fund. Because of the war, a decision was taken in May to cancel the village festival.

In the same month the Council School published a Roll of Honour listing the names of 78 former pupils who had joined the armed forces. In July the Parish Magazine followed suit with a full list of all those serving. These two publications had a double-edged effect on the men of the village. Firstly, they cemented the bond of comradeship between those who had enlisted and secondly, acted as a spur to those of eligible age in the village who had not at that time stepped forward.

Mr J. Winstanly, landlord of the Red Lion, with his 'Soldiers Christmas Cheer Fund', was determined that every man from the village should receive a quality Christmas gift. Various functions were organised including a dance in The Verdin Institute, with singing by local vocalists. Refreshments were provided and a total of £3.5s.0d. was raised. On another occasion The Institute band, joined by members of the Over Silver Band, paraded through the village collecting 30s, en route.

A football match – Moulton Alexandra v Over Congos swelled the coffers of the Christmas Cheer Fund to £32. This was increased by one guinea (£1.1s.0d) when the manager of the local picture palace decided to contribute a percentage of his takings to the fund. Others in the village were also raising of funds for parcels. The Verdin Institute organised a Potato Pie Supper in December and Mr and Mrs Rains of the Travellers Rest raised sufficient money to send every soldier a Christmas parcel containing cigarettes and other goodies. After Christmas many letters of gratitude were received from the troops for these parcels which had helped brighten their terrible conditions. One letter, from Sergeant J Burnes, said that they were billeted in an old barn some three miles from the firing line, and that wrapping paper, cards and photographs were used to decorate the barn walls for Christmas. On 21 November a memorial service was held in the Parish Church for those who had died. They were John Crank, William Clarke, George Weedon and George Greatbanks. Another of the Moulton fallen, Wilmot Buckley, was killed in action at the Battle of Loos on 3 October, but presumably his death had not been confirmed at the time of the memorial service.

Dedicated to the Memory of Wilmot Buckley

Wilmot Buckley was born in Moulton on 24 July 1885. He attended the village Council school and is shown on its May 1915 Roll of Honour as serving with the 3rd Battalion, the Cheshire Regiment. His parents, Mark and Lucy Buckley, appear to have had gypsy blood in their veins, for they moved house regularly. In 1881 they lived with their six children and one other (Sarah Preston – aged 8) at 17 Moulton Lane (Main Road), in 1885 at 53 Main Road and, in 1891, they had moved to 24 Main Road. By this time the family had increased by three, although this was negated by the fact that three of the originals were no longer at home, possibly married or working away. Mark earned his living as a Salt Boiler, very likely at the Newbridge Salt Works, close by the village.

At the outbreak of war Wilmot was in lodgings with his married sister, Mrs Galley, at 49 Main Road and, at sometime in mid-1915 along with many of his pals from the village, was posted to the Western Front with the 2nd Battalion, the Cheshire Regiment. On 7 October his sister, Mrs Galley, received a letter from him to say that he was well.

The Battle of Loos was fought from 24 September to 4 November. On 3 October, 30-year old Wilmot Buckley was killed. By all accounts he went over the top in company with some of his village friends and, after the action, Wilmot and his chum George Greatbanks, did not answer roll call. It would seem they had died together, somewhere in No-Man's Land.

The Regimental History's account of the action reads:

... On 3rd October, the Germans attacked all along the line of 84th Brigade, but were repulsed except on the left where they gained a footing... A bayonet counter attack, led by Major Roddy, was met with a hail of bombs and driven back to the British front line,

Wilmot's body was never recovered and his name is commemorated on the Loos Memorial to the Missing at Pas de Calais. He is in good company – John Kipling, son of the poet, Rudyard and Fergus Bowes-Lyon, brother of the Queen Mother are also commemorated on the memorial.

Private Wilmot Buckley



Wilmot Buckley, Private No. 25893
2nd Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment
Killed in Action, Sunday 3 October 1915. Age 30
His name is commemorated on

The Loos Memorial to the Missing, Pas de Calais, France. Panels 49 – 50



The Loos Memorial in Dud Corner Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France

Private Wilmot Buckley

Wilmot Buckley's Awards



The 1914-1915 Star

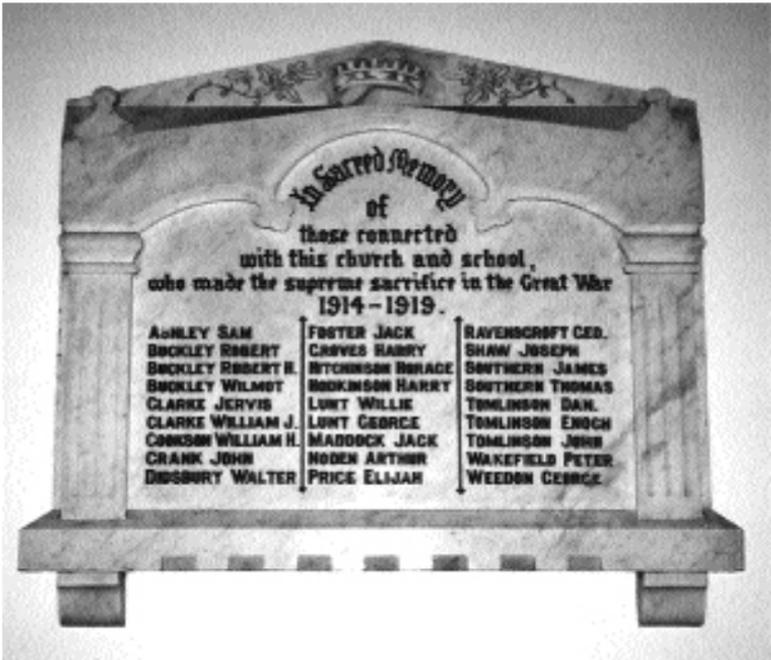


The British War Medal



The Victory Medal

Private Wilmot Buckley is also commemorated on the
Moulton Methodist Church Tablet



The memorial tablet in Moulton Methodist Church.

Dedicated to the Memory of William Jervis Clarke

At the beginning of January 1915 the weather in the English Channel was at its most malevolent. The seas were ferocious as the troop ship carrying young William Jervis Clarke clawed its way towards France. William was violently ill and on arrival was promptly bundled off to the nearest hospital. Some days later he developed 'Brain Fever' (Meningitis?) and died from this condition on Tuesday 26 January. He was 20-years old.

It is worth recording that on William's Medal Roll card, held in the Public Records Office at Kew, a scribbled note states "Died of Disease".

William was born in Moulton at Bank Farm on 7 October 1894. He was the son of Jessie and Betsy(?) Clarke and, on leaving Moulton Council school, secured employment as an apprentice motor engineer with Mr J. N. Stubbs of the Arcade, Winsford, where he was very popular.

At the outbreak of war he is recorded as living at 82 Regent Street, Moulton and it was from here that he went to Chester to enlist in the Royal Garrison Artillery as a mechanic. Later he was transferred to the Royal Army Service Corps. In 1915 his name is shown on both the Parish and School Rolls of Honour as having paid the supreme sacrifice.

On 14 February 1915 a memorial service was held for William at the Primitive Methodist Church. In December 1915 St Stephen's Church held a joint Memorial Service for him and three other village soldiers, John Crank, George Weedon and George Greatbanks. A large congregation attended both services, including relatives, friends and workmates.

Private William Jervis Clarke



William Jervis Clarke, Private No. M2/021253
169th Company, Royal Army Service Corps
Died on Tuesday, 26 January 1915. Age 20
Buried at St. Sever Cemetery, Rouen, France. A II. 22



William Jervis Clarke's headstone at St. Sever Cemetery

Private William Jervis Clarke

William Jervis Clarke's Awards

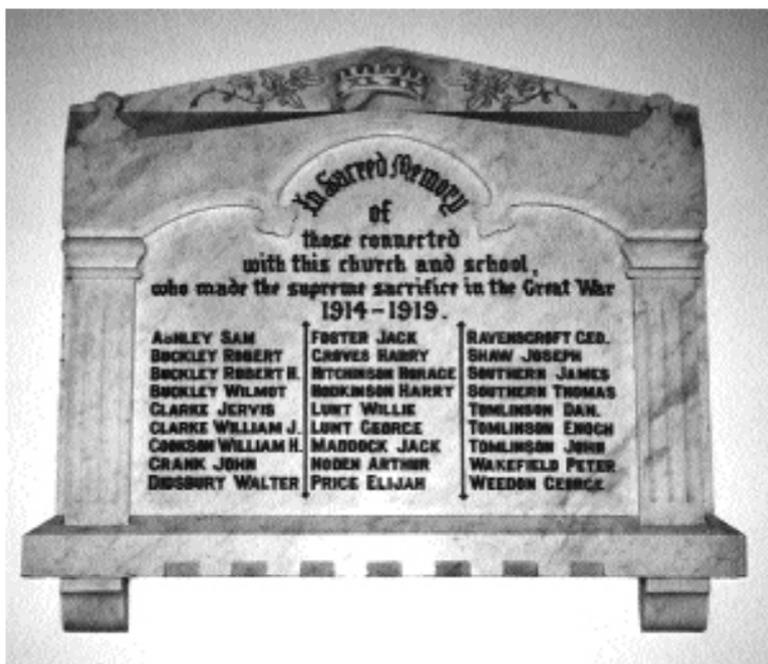


The British War Medal



The Victory Medal

Private William Jervis Clarke is also commemorated on the
Moulton Methodist Church Tablet



The memorial tablet in Moulton Methodist Church.

Dedicated to the Memory of George Greatbanks

George Greatbanks was a Winsford man who moved to 5 Chapel Lane, Moulton after his marriage to Clara Annie. Prior to the War he was employed as a chemical worker at Brunner Mond's Winnington site.

At the very outset of the war, George enlisted in Northwich but was discharged as unfit – he was missing a finger from his right hand. He was recalled to the colours on 14 April 1915 and sailed for France with the 2nd Battalion, the Cheshire Regiment on 23 June. In July George is shown on the Parish Roll of Honour. Three of his brothers also served in the Army and one, J W Greatbanks, was captured at the Battle of Mons.

Annie received two letters a week from George, who regularly described the conditions he was experiencing. In August he wrote of the narrow escape he had whilst firing from between some sandbags. He had "helped a German down with – a bit of bad" as he put it. As he ducked down into the trench a bullet hit the sandbag where his head had been seconds before. He kept the bullet as a souvenir,

* The Battle of Loos was fought between 24 September to 4 November 1915 and, on 3 October, during the battle, George Greatbanks was killed – he was 27-years old. By all accounts he went over the top in company with many of his friends from the village. After the engagement, George and his chum, Wilmot Buckley, did not answer their names at roll call. It would seem that they had died together, somewhere in the devastation of No-Mans Land.

The account in the Regimental History reads:

* On 3rd October, the Germans attacked all along the line of 84th Brigade, but were repulsed except on the left where they gained a footing.... A bayonet counter-attack, led by Major Roddy, was met with a hail of bombs and driven back to the British line.*

*These last two paragraphs are more or less a mirror of the report in Wilmot Buckley's dedication.

The news that George was missing was first received in a letter from an old Northwich Vics footballer, Harry (Kelly) Birkenhead, to his wife living in Main Road. She immediately passed the news on to Annie Greatbanks.

In early November, and sometime after Annie had been advised officially of her husbands 'missing' status, she received a letter from Company Sergeant Major McIntyre, 1st Battalion, Scots Guards in which he said that one of his patrols had come across the body of a soldier in No-Man's Land. Before they buried the body they searched his pockets and retrieved a letter from which Sergeant Major obtained her address. The letter was enclosed – it was one Annie had written to George earlier.

The grave of George Greatbanks was later lost in the heat of battle. His name can now be found on the Loos Memorial to the Missing at Pas de Calais along with his pal, Wilmot Buckley. They are in good company, for the names of John Kipling, son of the poet, Rudyard and Fergus Bowes-Lyon, brother of the Queen Mother are also inscribed there.

Sometime after the war Annie re-married and became Mrs Clara Annie Dahin and settled in Hainaut, Belgium. Maybe she met her new husband whilst on a visit to the memorial at Loos. Who knows?

On 21 November 1915 a memorial service was held in St. Stephen's Church for George Greatbanks, John Crank, William Clarke and George Weedon. Strange that Wilmot Buckley's name was not included in the service. Maybe he was still in the 'missing' category.

Private William George Greatbanks



George Greatbanks, Private No. 25924

2nd Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment

Killed in Action, Sunday 3 October 1915. Age 27

His name is commemorated on

The Loos Memorial to the Missing, Pas de Calais, France. Panels 49 – 50



The Loos Memorial in Dud Corner Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France

Private William George Greatbanks

George Greatbanks' Awards



The 1914 – 1915 Star



The British War Medal



The Victory Medal

Other memorials commemorating George Greatbanks' name



Brunner Mond War Memorial,
Winnington.



Winsford Town War Memorial

Private William George Greatbanks



5 Chapel Street, Moulton, where George Greatbanks lived

Dedicated to the Memory of George Weedon

George Weedon was born in Jack Lane, Moulton in 1882. His parents, Charles and Ellen Weedon were 32 and 25 respectively at the time of his birth. His two older siblings were Ester and William. Charles was a Salt Boiler, most probably at Newbridge Salt Works on the banks of the Weaver Navigation. Sometime before George's 9th birthday the family moved from Jack Lane to 34 Regents Street and, along with other village children, attended the local council school.

Some years before the outbreak of war, George moved from the salt village to work in Stafford. He married a local girl there and they had a child, a boy, also named George.

George served for a number of years with the Royal Welch Fusiliers before being discharged into the reserve. He re-joined the regulars at Northwich in August 1914 and was posted to the 2nd Battalion of his old regiment. The Battalion's War Diary for 16 May 1915 reads:

Bombardment of enemy's wire opposite Middlesex Regiment (on the left flank of the RWF) at 11.15 am and 6.0 pm. Very quiet on our front – one man killed

That man was Lance-Corporal George Weedon. A letter from a friend stated that George was cooking breakfast at the back of a trench near Bois Grenier, some two miles from Armentières, when he was sniped in the head. On the way to the field hospital George succumbed to his wound. He was 33 years old.

He is mentioned in the July 1915 Parish Roll of Honour. At that time he was one of three men from Moulton who had made the supreme sacrifice. On Sunday, 21 November 1915 a memorial service was held in St. Stephen's Parish Church for George and three other soldiers who had died. They were John Crank, William J Clarke and George Greatbanks.

Some time after his death George's wife re-married and their son (George junior) came to live at Lodge Farm, Moulton with his Aunt Ester. Nora Hickson, Esters daughter, now living in Lawrence Avenue, remembers the little boy as being rather frail.

George's father Charles died during the war and his mother Ellen moved to 17 Church Street. Their eldest son William, serving in the 10th Royal Hussars, survived the conflict.

Lance-Corporal George Weedon



George Weedon, Lance-Corporal No. 8165
2nd Battalion, The Royal Welch Fusiliers
Killed in Action, Sunday 16 May 1915. Age 33
He is buried in Bois Grenier Cemetery, France. D I



George Weedon's headstone in Bois Grenier Cemetery

Lance-Corporal George Weedon

George Weedon's Awards



The 1914 Star

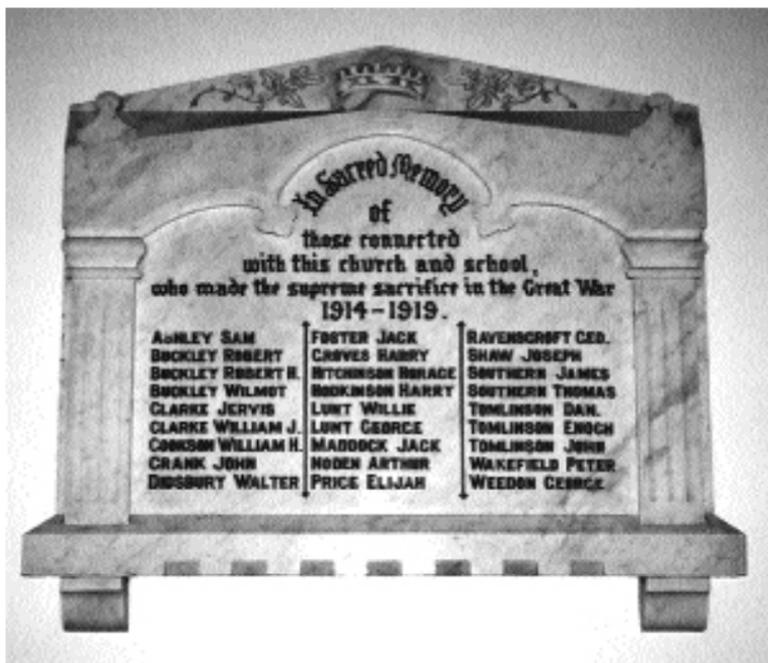


The British War Medal



The Victory Medal

Lance-Corporal George Weedon is also commemorated on the Moulton Methodist Church Tablet



The memorial tablet in Moulton Methodist Church.



An ambulance passing through one of the Western Front's many war-torn villages