

The Great War  
Our Community Commemorated

# Beating the Drum

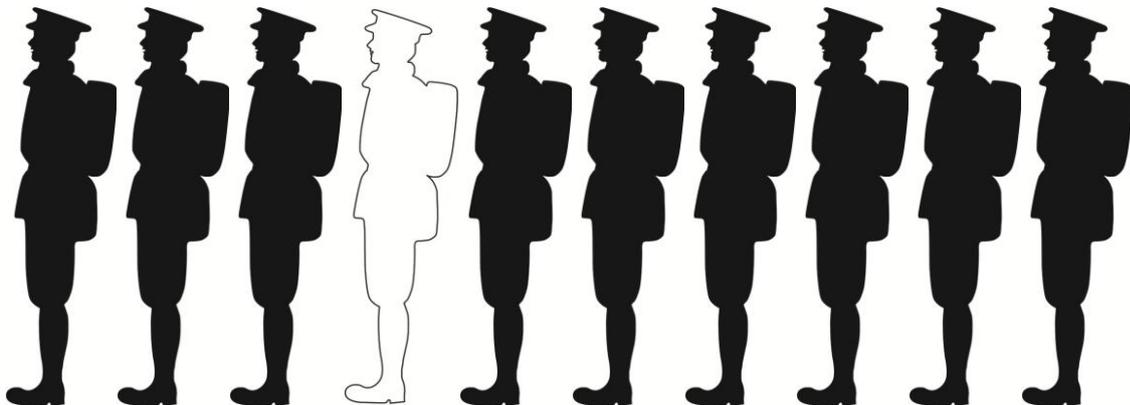
Communication and Recruitment

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Booklet 5: Bill Barber

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Holmes Chapel and District U3A Local History Group

This booklet, fifth in a series about the effect of the First World War on Holmes Chapel and district, describes how people were informed about the progress of the war and how men were recruited. Even though Holmes Chapel was relatively remote, news was passed on via the newspapers, the Parish Magazine and through local meetings.

*Ref: Cover image is the Lord Kitchener recruitment poster by Alfred Leete 1914.*

## **BEATING THE DRUM COMMUNICATION & RECRUITMENT**

In 1914 Holmes Chapel was only a small country village with a Post Office and one public telephone for communication. But the village had its advantages. Since the early days of the turnpikes its position on the crossing of the Dane at the junction of the roads to north and south meant a constant passage of visitors who supported several wayside inns and brought news from the wider world. Additionally since its arrival in 1841, the railway had enabled the flow of goods and services – even a few pioneer commuters- to towns such as Crewe and Manchester. As a consequence of this, the latest editions of the national press would arrive at the village daily.

In general newspapers were the prevalent method of communication at this time with everything from government proclamations to adverts for soap. Even though Holmes Chapel did not warrant its own newspaper, the local press from Winsford, Congleton, Middlewich and Crewe often carried details of events and advertisements, providing information for the newsagents Mr Henshall and Thomas Williams to disperse. Therefore the population of about one thousand people would certainly be aware of the solemn declaration by Mr Asquith about the nations of Europe preparing for war, and hopes for peace fading. This was reported in all the local newspapers with the Congleton Guardian speculating on how far a European war would spread. The major commercial, business, and financial communities were extremely concerned with the advent of war. C. P. Scott, editor of the Manchester Guardian, initially opposed involvement, reporting that the Chamber of Commerce advised neutrality. The Governor of the Bank of England warned of a potential financial collapse. On the other hand Lord Northcliffe, owner editor of both The Times and The Daily Mail, wrote strong editorials in favour of war calling for full conscription from the beginning.

War was declared on the evening of August 4<sup>th</sup> with the national press reporting how the London crowds gathered and cheered the announcements. Special war editions were printed and distributed throughout the land so the people of Holmes Chapel would read about the situation for themselves. Whilst the location of any fighting would be far away, there were immediate local effects, such as the formation of a Voluntary Aid Detachment to nurse the wounded, and a Sewing Guild for comforts for the troops, both reported in St Luke's Parish Magazine. Serving the three townships of Church Hulme, Cranage and Cotton, this was published from 1883 and continued monthly throughout the war, giving details of events and meetings carried out by local organisations. It encouraged recruitment, gave news of the wounded and dead and condolences to their families. It is still published monthly.

The government quickly seized control and on 8<sup>th</sup> August the Defence of the Realm Act was invoked, putting the country on a war footing. Amongst other things, this provided authority to control the railways, requisition all horses, and to initiate licensing hours in public houses (including the 'no treating' order). The Act also gave the powers necessary to ensure the availability of labour in the National Emergency. These were later adjusted and extended to meet changing conditions as the war progressed. In contrast, an appeal from His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, published in the Crewe Guardian, and the press in general called for the creation of a National Relief Fund for the alleviation of any distress that might arise from the consequences of war.

### England's Urgent Call

All newspapers reported a national rush of volunteers to sign for the colours, but there was also a government effort to include women, the wives and mothers, with posters bearing slogans such as "IS YOUR LAD

IN KHAKI YET? DON'T YOU THINK HE SHOULD BE?". At this early stage in the preparations for war, it was necessary to appeal to patriotism as a driver of recruitment. Unlike the continental armies, Great Britain did not operate conscription, and so had to generate a large number of volunteers to match the opposing forces. At first, information on mobilization and troop movements was freely available. The Winsford and Middlewich Guardian reported on 7<sup>th</sup> August that local Reservists and Territorials were called up and left Middlewich that Wednesday. The departure of Northwich Territorials fully equipped with horses and the sudden order to move the Yeomanry were also listed. Field Marshall Lord Kitchener was appointed as Secretary of State for War. He immediately called for 100,000 men to volunteer for service. This was the origin of the famous phrase that would resonate throughout the empire, "YOUR KING AND COUNTRY NEED YOU". Holmes Chapel did not ignore the call.

The Parish Magazine carried the headline, "Serious National Emergency – Kitchener's Army - More Men Needed" and reported the consequent Public Meeting, which was held in the Assembly Rooms on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September 1914. The chairman was W.O. Carver Esq., J.P., of Cranage Hall. The speakers, G.C. Hamilton M.P.;

J.H. Whitworth Esq. and F.A. Haworth Esq., spoke of this supreme crisis and repeated Lord Kitchener's appeal for all unmarried men to volunteer their services. In closing, the Chairman reiterated the call to arms, "Let every unmarried man under 35 ask himself why can I not offer my services on behalf of My King, My Country, My Home. Come and support the cause – God save the King." It was announced that a motor would always be available to take those that wished to any recruiting station. Patriotic songs were sung, and votes of thanks to the speakers were proposed by Mr Haworth and Dr Picton, the Rev J.H. Armitstead proposing thanks to Mr Carver. It was also arranged that a Roll of Honour of the serving men would be published regularly on the church door. For those unable to attend the meeting, details were

repeated in the October edition of the Parish Magazine, with a further reminder of the available transport. There was also an offer to the wives or dependants of servicemen to render assistance in obtaining the pay and allowances due to them from the government.

The local press also carried reports of the Holmes Chapel meeting, alongside reports of similar events taking place throughout the locality. The Crewe Guardian described recruitment at an open air meeting in the Square, Nantwich, where Sir Edward and Lady Cotton-Jodrell sang "Onward Christian Soldiers" to the accompaniment of the Nantwich Town Band, winning many volunteers for Kitchener's Army.

The national press reported on the progress of the war. In August the Germans had taken Brussels, and by September were nearing Paris. Their advance was stopped at the Battle of the Marne, and Calais was saved by the first Battle of Ypres. Neither side could claim any victory in these battles and both involved enormous casualties. By October the number of British casualties reported had passed 57,000. Thousands of civilians fled to Britain from the early fighting in Belgium and arrangements were made for them to be distributed around the country – some of them coming to Sandbach and Holmes Chapel. This meant that first-hand accounts of the conditions in the areas affected by the fighting and stories of the atrocities by the invaders could be heard in the village. This would be another spur to the recruitment drive. In December the headline in the national press was "DEATH BY SEA AND AIR" as German warships bombarded east coast towns from Lowestoft to Hartlepool. Zeppelins appeared over the Thames and London was bombed. Women and children were among the casualties. The horror of war had arrived on the British mainland.

Locally, the Winsford and Middlewich Guardian reported a further meeting at Holmes Chapel, with speeches by Mr F. Milne and Crewe M.P. Ernest Craig and the headline, "Concerning the war against

tyranny!” The village was congratulated on previous results but urged to send more men. Messrs Carver, Armitstead and Reiss were present, Mr Carver saying that Holmes Chapel had already sent sixty recruits but that more still remained. In January 1915, the Congleton Guardian reported on the formation of a Home Guard Unit of forty men with Mr Young of the Holmes Chapel Agricultural College as Commanding Officer for Cranage and District. Life went on as normal in many ways, with Congleton Rural District Council discussing the condition of housing at Holmes Chapel at great length and the efforts of local councillors to obtain improvements in the village water supply.

Early in 1915 Lord Northcliffe’s Daily Mail published an article about the poor quality of munitions, noting that the Royal Armaments factories were supplying the wrong type of shells to the front. His other paper The Times called this “the shell scandal”. Pursuit of these problems eventually led to Lord Kitchener being demoted and David Lloyd George taking over the war effort as Minister of Munitions, with a policy of encouraging commercial firms to convert to munitions supply. Lord Northcliffe also arranged to have special continental issues of his papers sent to the troops in the trenches, amounting to some ten thousand copies per day. Most news came from the daily newspapers which published two or three editions, but the post was quite cheap, mostly 1d with delivery of postcards and letters twice daily. There were very few telephones even in private houses, but for urgent items the telegraph was available at a cost per word. All newspapers carried lists of soldiers killed in action, many with photographs. Letters from the wounded were published but some communication from the trenches was censored both for security and morale, the troops being issued with pre-printed postcards with sentences such as “I am well” to send home.

A.F.A. 2042.  
114/Gen. No./5248.

FIELD



SERVICE



POST CARD

The address  
only to be written  
on this side.  
If anything else  
is added the  
post card will  
be destroyed.

*Ms. Mottshaw  
Elizabeth  
Thank  
for her kind  
letter*

© Crown Copyright Reserved.

NOTHING is to be written on this side except  
the date and signature of the sender. Sentences  
not required may be erased. If anything else is  
added the post card will be destroyed.

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card  
addressed to the sender of this card.]

*I am quite well.*

~~I have been admitted into hospital~~  
{ ~~sick~~ } *and am going on well,*  
{ ~~wounded~~ } *and hope to be discharged soon.*  
~~am being sent down to the front.~~

I have received your { letter dated *Aug. 19<sup>th</sup>*  
" "~~letter~~ "  
" "~~letter~~ "

*letter follows at first opportunity.*

~~am awaiting a letter from you~~  
{ ~~lastly~~ }  
{ ~~for a long time.~~ }

Signature  
only

*E. Mottshaw*

Date *23. 7. 18*

W. W. 1506. H. 1619. 13539 8000th. 6-11. G. & Co. Grange Mills, R.W.

The Parish Magazine continued to be issued throughout the hostilities covering, amongst other topics, additions to the Roll of Honour and the progress of the wounded in hospital. At one point special mention was made congratulating Mr and Mrs Bishop who had five sons in the service of the country. A further recruitment meeting was held at Holmes Chapel on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1915 but the results were not satisfactory. Voluntary enlistment had dwindled all over the country. This was exacerbated by the fact that up to one third of the earlier volunteers had proved to be unfit for service, some being undernourished city dwellers hoping for good food and others looking for a smart uniform. Obviously the country folk from Holmes Chapel would not fall into this category but many were in farming which became a reserved occupation. The National Registration Act 1915 was brought in to create a register of all remaining men who might be eligible for military service. They were targeted by advertising posters, tales of atrocities in the press and many public meetings.

Not all the news was of the war. That June the Winsford and Middlewich Guardian reported the wedding of Miss A.L. Carver of Cranage to Canon E. Sheppard, Sub-Dean of the Chapel Royal. It read, "This County Wedding and the attendant festivities will live in the minds of the villagers. The bride is endeared to the people of Holmes Chapel where she has been a valued worker for church and charity." The church was decorated for the occasion with flags and garlands and the service conducted by the Archbishop of York, who said of Miss Carver, "The people gather to honour one who has lived amongst them."

In October 1915 Lord Derby became Director General for Recruiting. He arranged for teams to make door to door visits with registration forms, and sent out individual letters urging men to sign up before they were conscripted. The national press and magazines were brought into play, as were the music halls. The artists on stage encouraged volunteers, the

most popular song of the day, performed by Vesta Tilley, contained the line, "We don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go". Women joined in by giving white feathers of cowardice to men not in uniform. Of course, some men were already registered and not yet called and many others were in reserved occupations. Armbands, badges and printed certificates were issued to them for display in this situation.

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**Certificate of Registration of a man who is willing to serve his King and Country as a Soldier for the War.**

Name	Address	Date of Registration	Date of appearing for Attestation	Age	Medical Officer's Remarks
Davidson	29 Addison Street	26 JAN. 1916		21	
Thomas Doyle	North Shields				

Station Newcastle-on-Tyne.  
 Date 26 JAN. 1916  
 Army Form W. 3027.

Signature of Recruiting Officer James Morrison  
 RECRUITING OFFICER OF RECRUITING AREA Maid

Despite the pressure, voluntary recruitment failed to keep up with the requirements of the services and, in January 1916, the first Military Service Act introduced conscription for all single men and childless widowers between 18 and 41. This was adjusted later that year to all men between 18 and 41 unless in a reserved occupation.

Another outlet for government propaganda and an aid to recruitment turned out to be the cinema. In the early days of the war, filming in the war zone was discouraged mainly for security and safety reasons, but by 1916 official war correspondents had been authorised and at home M.P.s and Cabinet Ministers regularly appeared in filmed interviews to

report to the nation. Originally shot as a newsreel, one of the most successful films was "The Battle of the Somme". This was an immediate "must see" for civilians and soldiers alike, showing realistic battle scenes and war conditions. Many prints were produced and distributed all round the country with government posters urging everyone to come and see the film. It is possible that villagers saw these films on visits to local towns where there were picture houses.



The Parish Magazine continued to report on the progress of the people of the village who had been directly caught up in the war. In January 1917 the Roll of Honour listed seven servicemen coming out of hospital and two convalescing abroad, with six entering hospital in England. In contrast, the next item was about Mrs Carver donating and presenting the school prizes at Cranage. Around the same time, the Winsford and Middlewich Guardian carried news of troops on leave and reports of casualties, but also local items on frost damage and girls falling through ice. In a road accident in the Square at Holmes Chapel only vehicles

were damaged, but in a separate incident a Mr Yoxall of Holmes Chapel was killed when his horse took fright and he fell off his wagon. At the Middlewich Petty Sessions a farmer from Holmes Chapel was summoned for selling adulterated milk. In his defence he claimed that, due to the shortage of corn and cattle cake, his cows were fed on grass and mangels. The case was dismissed. Another small item involved a man who was fined for having a dog with neither licence nor collar.

By this time the German U boat blockade was causing food shortages and a poor potato harvest added to the problem. The national press reported daily queues in the cities. Holmes Chapel was probably spared this but even so some items were unavailable. Sugar, flour and potatoes in particular were in short supply. An order from the Food Controller was issued to try to stop people hoarding. The Ministry of Food, tried to promote voluntary rationing with an "Eat Less Bread" campaign, asking people who could afford to buy other food to leave the bread to the poor.

The King issued a signed proclamation in support of this appeal. There was a further instruction from the Ministry forbidding feeding scraps to pets or putting out crumbs for the birds. Holmes Chapel played its part when the Allotment Society was formed. This had financial support from Mr Reiss and offers of land from several sources, including the directors of the wallpaper factory and Canon Armitstead. The plots were 230 sq yards each and seed potatoes were available for the tenants to get started. This seemed very successful and at the end of the year an exhibition was held with awards being made for various categories. After the judging all the exhibits were offered to Somerford Hospital.

The Roll of Honour in the Parish Magazine continued to report more deaths and on August 8<sup>th</sup> a memorial service was held for Gunner Harold Veale, who had been killed in action. A letter from his company

commander was read at the service, describing how a German shell burst next to his gun. He was killed immediately and buried the same afternoon. In December 1917 Mr and Mrs Reiss were thanked in public for presenting a new hand-painted Roll of Honour with a full list of all who had served from Holmes Chapel to date and provision for new names to be added from time to time.

The Parish Magazine of November 1917 reported on changes to the Assembly Rooms. At Mr Carver's suggestion and expense a recreation club was set up to provide music, dancing and other activities for local people. This was a popular venue for fund raising events in 1918 such as a whist drive and dance, held to raise funds for the Winsford Cottage Hospital, where Dr Picton of Holmes Chapel operated on some of his patients. Another dance raised money for the soldiers' and sailors' Christmas parcels fund.

In January 1918 the national press reported that the U boats were still taking their toll, exacerbating the food shortages and price increases, and by February more rationing became inevitable. At first the rationing of meats and fats applied only to London and the South but other areas soon followed suit. In March it was the turn of the Winsford Area Food Controller and by April included the whole country. The Holmes Chapel Parish Magazine conveyed information on the official entitlement to meat and bacon for manual workers and boys aged 8 to 18 years and that all children of 6 years and over were entitled to a full meat ration. The next communication from the government was on the paper shortage because of the U Boat blockade, with 2000 tons being needed each week by the Ministry of Munitions alone in addition to other paper mill requirements. In Holmes Chapel the girls of the church choir volunteered to undertake the collection of waste paper and readers were requested not to burn or throw away any old books and magazines as they would be collected regularly.

By late summer 1918, influenza was reported to be spreading at an alarming rate and becoming an epidemic in all the local areas. Several deaths were announced and much sickness among the children. In Holmes Chapel the Harvest Festival services were curtailed and both the day schools and the Sunday schools closed until further notice. This pandemic of Spanish flu went on into 1919 and it was estimated that there were over 200,000 victims in the UK alone.

Eventually there was an armistice. The good news reached the village promptly on November 11<sup>th</sup>. Peals of bells were rung, and an abundant display of flags and bunting appeared. A two minute silence was held at 11am as it is nowadays, followed on 13<sup>th</sup> November by a solemn service of thanksgiving for the cessation of hostilities and victory for Britain and her Allies. The offertory was to be used toward a suitable memorial. On 22<sup>nd</sup> November a meeting was held at Holmes Chapel School to decide on the memorial for the village and its location. Mr Carver and the Rev J.H. Armitstead proposed a memorial East window in the church, whilst others suggested a Memorial Hall, playing fields or a column bearing the names of the dead and a lamp above. Mr Carver vetoed the Memorial Hall as he had already given the Assembly Rooms to the village, and the memorial window was chosen. The cost of £493 8s 6d was raised by public subscription and the window unveiled by Lt General Sir Beauvoir de Lisle in 1921.

Despite its rural location, the parish of Church Hulme was kept informed of war news from home and abroad by the media of the time, though it must be remembered that they were used to shape certain attitudes towards the war and boost recruitment. The national newspapers were delivered to some homes and may have been available in reading rooms in the clubs and meeting places, prompting discussion amongst neighbours. The Parish Magazines were published throughout the war and must have been a vital source of information for the community. They have proved to be an invaluable source of

information for this study of the local experience. Government posters too must have been displayed here, though none survive and no photographs showing them in situ have been discovered. Documents similar to those reproduced in this booklet must have been familiar to villagers, though few actually from the area have survived. Nevertheless, it is possible to gain an insight into the reasons why men joined up and the consequences of this for their families and the community.



Booklets in this series produced by the Holmes Chapel U3A Local History Group:

1. Holmes Chapel before the War
2. Village People 1914 – 1918
3. The Men Who Went to War
4. Refugees come to the village
5. Beating the Drum – Recruitment and Communication
6. The Community Response
7. Feeding the People
8. Rationing During the War
9. Rules and Regulations
10. Education
11. Life Goes On
12. Holmes Chapel at the End of the War

For copies of booklets see web site  
[www.holmeschapelhistory.co.uk](http://www.holmeschapelhistory.co.uk)

*First Published August 2014*

*Revised August 2018*

# WW1 and Holmes Chapel & District U3A

In 2011 the Holmes Chapel & District University of the Third Age (U3A) was set up in the village and one of the activities under its umbrella was a local history group. This attracted people who had been involved in research in the past as well as some new volunteers eager to learn more. After an initial period of encouragement and training for the newcomers it was decided that the group would work together on a topic - The Story of Holmes Chapel and district during the First World War.

This is one in a series of booklets describing different aspects of life in Holmes Chapel and district before and during the First World War. A full list of the booklets is given on the inside of this back cover.

Research Group Members in 2014: Bill Barber, Cath Cameron, Rod Cameron, John Clowes, Peter Cotton, John Cowburn, Stella Freer, Gwen Hayhurst, Barbara Jackson, Lynda Kappes, Val White, Janet Yarwood.



Supported by

**The National Lottery**<sup>®</sup>

through the Heritage Lottery Fund

