

OCTOBER 1916

STALEMATE AND SLAUGHTER

The agonising struggle on the Somme continued. The month was characterised by localised operations with limited objectives, partially achieved, eg the Schwaben and Stuff Redoubts. The Germans were forced back but a small distance. The offensives grouped together were called collectively the battles of Transloy Ridges (1st-18th October 1916) and Ancre Heights (1st October-11 November 1916). They were interrupted by heavy Autumn rains which turned the soil and chalky subsoil into a "liquid grey mud" which stuck to everything. There was no escape from it. Gun mechanisms jammed. Tanks were rendered useless. Engineers struggled to build roads often with logs and sleepers to keep supply lines open.

British casualties in October were just over half of our losses in September (66,000 compared to 115,000+) but our locality suffered 4 fatalities in Picardy. The first of these was **Private Albert J Howarth**, who prior to the war was a groundsman living with his aunt Sarah Jane in Davenport Green. He was killed, aged 30, on the 2nd with the **13th Cheshire's (49619)** - originally the 7th - and is buried at Stump Road Cemetery, Grandcourt, north of Thiepval.

He like his battalion colleague, **Private John Howarth (49618)** is commemorated at St John's Lindow. Before the war John was a farm labourer who lived in the Row of Trees. He died on the 16th and is interred in Regina Trench cemetery just off the Albert-Bapaume road.

The 19th marked the passing of **Private Frank Rowbotham** of the **1st battalion the Rifle Brigade (B/203426)** formerly of the King's Royal Rifle Corps. He has no known grave but is remembered at Thiepval and on the civic memorial in Wilmslow. We can find no domestic records.



These two memorials also bear the name of the last local man to perish in France that October - **Drummer Charles Henry Helling (31428)** of the **8th South Lancs** who was killed in action on the 21st. He was a boot maker, the son of George and Mary of Oak Meadows, Heyes Lane, Alderley and the husband of Emma Wheeldon, a former Wilmslow servant. St Bartholomew's and Alderley Edge also commemorate him.



The Somme

Appalling fighting conditions that defy description also affected our troops in another theatre of operations. Mesopotamia astride the Tigris and Euphrates rivers saw extremes of temperature, floods, flies, mosquitoes, illness alongside inadequate medical arrangements, poor supply lines and unexpectedly determined resistance. We were becoming more efficient but nevertheless Wilmslow lost one more of its sons here. **Private Samuel A Bowker of the 1st Manchester's (6459)** - an early enlistment - is buried in Basra War Cemetery in present day Iraq. He was born in 'Old Church Wilmslow' and died of his wounds aged 27.





Mesopotamia

Wilmslow War Memorial marks his passing as it does that of **Private Hugh J Mottershead** who joined the **6th South Lancashire's (27059)**. He, however, died in India - we are unsure why. His name occurs in many other locations - St Bartholomew's, Wilmslow Methodist and Kirkee Memorial near Poona. His parents John and Elizabeth Mottershead had the family grave inscribed "Also in loving memory of Hugh their second son ... 6th South Lancashire's Regiment, died October 27th 1916 aged 27 years".



Kirkee Cemetery, Poona, India



There was little good news at this time 100 years ago - the Italians continued to struggle on the Isonzo River as did the Russians in the east. However, the French under Nivelle launched an ambitious attack at Verdun on the Eastern bank of the Meuse against a German army depleted by the reinforcements it had had to send to its defences on the Somme. The French were thus able to retake the iconic forts at Vaux and Douaumont. This would mark the start of the last phase of that long battle. We could then take some comfort from the fact that since 1st July our efforts in France had helped achieve at least one strategic aim - to save the French army from destruction.

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