

AUGUST 1916

"DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU ..."

After the initial all-embracing offensive of the battle of Albert from 1st July to 15th July 1916 failed to achieve the expected breakthrough, the battle of the Somme became one of attrition with numerous limited attacks at specific villages, ridges or woods. Their names are etched forever on the national psyche - La Boisselle, Longueval, Contalmaison, Delville Wood (Devil's Wood), Fromelles, Mametz, Bazentin, High Wood and Guillemont (where the Prime Minister's son was later to die). The struggle of attack and counterattack was ferocious, wasteful and heartbreaking, producing only marginal gains at great cost to both sides. So great were the Australian losses at Pozieres, for instance, that the Australian government tried (unsuccessfully) to introduce conscription. We refined our 'creeping barrage' technique. As casualties mounted Falkenhayen was replaced as Commander in Chief by Paul von Hindenberg with Erich Ludendorf as his nominal Deputy.

Both metaphorically and literally the heartbreaking Somme battlefield may be seen as a hill up which the British had to climb. We only managed to inch forward - between perhaps 1 mile and 3.5 miles by the end of September 1916. Our locality lost 5 more men this month - 4 on the Somme and 1 elsewhere.



Private Joseph Broughton of Park Road, Wilmslow died at home on 8th August 1916. He is buried in Wilmslow Cemetery but his family grave in St Bartholomew's recalls "son of John and Mary ... of the **15th Royal Scot's Fusiliers** (1st Battalion 27203) ... died of wounds received in action on the Somme 1st July 1916 aged 25 years". He was part of the attack on La Boisselle. Before the war he had been a domestic gardener and resided with his widowed mother, 3 brothers and 1 sister.

Flatiron Copse Cemetery, Mametz marks the final resting place of **Private Percy Mackenzie** aged 24 of the **7th battalion the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry** (24350) who was killed in action on the 18th August 1916. Also a domestic gardener, he was the son of Annie and the late James who in 1911 lived in North Oak Lane. Percy is remembered on Wilmslow War Memorial and in St Bartholomew's.

We can find no domestic records of **Private William Henry Townley** who died on 19th August 1916. This is a pity as he is one of only 2 or 3 local men awarded the Croix de Guerre - a military decoration created in 1915 by the French to those who distinguished themselves by acts of heroism involving combat with the enemy. He was with the **7th Manchester's** (4896) - a territorial unit. His number of 4 digits shows he joined up very early on. He is commemorated at Thiepval and on Wilmslow War Memorial.





Thiepval Memorial

It was on the 24th of the month that **Private William Moore** of the **10th Cheshire's** (25250) was killed in action. He is buried in Blighty Valley Cemetery, Authuille Wood and remembered in St Chad's Church. He was a domestic gardener, who lived near/on Lindow Common with his sister and brother-in-law.



Hundreds of miles away in Amara War Cemetery on the left bank of the Tigris in present day Iraq can be found the grave of **Private Walter Pugh** (23278) of the **6th battalion Kings Own Royal Lancashire's**. He died in the Mesopotamia campaign on 13th August. His mother Sarah and father James, a chimney sweep, lived in Hawthorn Street. Walter, like his brother James, was also a chimney sweep. Commemorations to him can be found on Wilmslow War Memorial, in St Bart's and on the family grave near the church which mistakenly says "... also Walter Pugh who died in India ... 13th August 1916 aged 26 years". The dreaded telegram that came to so many doors during the Great War always started with the words "Deeply regret to inform you ..."

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