

NOVEMBER 1915

ONE OF OUR LOCAL SURVIVORS

Our community had lost 29 young men by November 1915, but mercifully that month proved to be a 'thankful' one – no fatalities were reported. Wet, wintry weather prevented major offensives on the Western Front. Desultory, daily exchanges of fire continued.

It may be appropriate therefore, to honour the memory of a courageous Wilmslow man who survived the conflict, as much of his life was typical of many British men at the time. **Fred Sumner** was born in 1894 and lived with his grandparents, Moses and Annie, and their children at 'East Bank', Hawthorn Street, next to the Carter's Arms. He was originally employed as a joiner, but was then 'shipped off' to Canada to make his way with a few pounds in his pocket. Leaving Liverpool on the SS Teutonic, he arrived in Quebec on 20 May 1911, aged 17. Attracted by the booming agriculture of the prairies, he made his way to Manitoba, and making use of the Dominion Lands Act of 1871, accepted the offer of a homestead farm of 160 acres for a mere \$10 administration fee.

Come the Great War like so many "new Canadians" he decided to help the Motherland – 70% of the Canadian Expeditionary Force were actually born in the UK. He travelled for 3 days by train in 1915 to join the 16th Canadian Scottish battalion, part of what was to be the famous 3rd brigade. They were commanded by outstanding leaders one of whom was Lt General Sir Arthur Currie - a master tactician who ultimately led all 4 Canadian divisions to their famous victory at Vimy Ridge in April 1917 and Amiens on 8 August 1918 ("the black day of the German Army" according to Ludendorff).



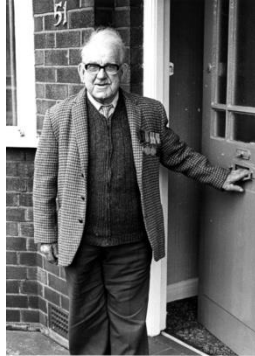
Fred himself (710967) was to join an illustrious company of men of Canada by being awarded the DCM for his important role in an attack and the Military Medal for going out into No Man's Land to rescue the wounded. His battalion took part in all major engagements of the war including the Somme, Vimy, Amiens and Passchendaele. It was in the awful conditions of this 3rd battle of Ypres in November 1917 that he had his greatest escape. A German mustard gas shell exploded near his section of 12 men. He was the only one not to have his gas mask and was ordered to go and get it from the reserve dug out. When he returned he found to his horror that all of his friends had perished – shelled in the trench.



During the war he suffered a number of wounds, including being shot through the wrist for which he later received a small disability pension. Incidentally his unit always went into battle to the sound of the pipes and their motto was “Deas gu cath”, Gaelic for “ready for the fray”. Fred was deservedly invited to the opening by King Edward VIII of the Vimy Ridge Memorial on 26 July 1936 along with 50,000 or more Canadian, British and French veterans and their families.



Demobilized on 15 September 1920, Fred stayed on in England. Attracted by the “lure of the skirt” (his expression) he married Florence Anderson, whose mother kept a boarding house at Warham Street, just off Station Road. Like Florence, Fred’s 2 daughters Norma and Kath, who still live locally, were accomplished singers – Norma for 39 years with the Halle – and like their father were keen supporters of MUFC.



The family were all great supporters of the Methodist Church and Fred is commemorated on one of the 3 memorials in the new Water Lane church along with the 28 members of the congregation who died and the 33 others who, like Fred, came back. Fred went on to live a full life in the community here and died on 12 December 1982, aged 88.

Alan Cooper and Mavis Timson
Wilmslow Historical Society
Based on information from Norma Sumner

