

# World War 1

*Author's Note: It was a weird process, 100 years on, researching those from Spencer who went to fight in World War 1 and never returned. Not only did I know nothing of them, I came to realise that no one else does either. For as young men, they were generally too young to be married or if they were, not long enough to have had children. They had no direct descendants and so for today's generation of Spencer members, at best they would be great great uncles, likely lost already in family history. But they lived in the same houses and the same streets as we do today and they played cricket on the same field. Whilst the following segment will be of little direct personal interest to almost all those who read this, it seemed fitting at the time of writing (2017, part of the rolling 100 years commemoration of WW1) that these forgotten men should be remembered as part of this history.*

In Britain, World War 1 changed everything, forever, and Spencer was no exception. 79 members went off to fight in the war, of whom 15 were wounded in action, four were invalided and 11 were never to return, including the 1st XI captain, W D Macbeth. Those that were left sought to protect and maintain what the club had so that 'it would be a live thing when the war was over'. This, in fact, proved to be a real problem and the efforts of those left to keep Spencer afloat were among the crucial points in Club's long history. Although we have no exact records, the 79 who joined up comprised a majority of the playing members, after all, they were young, fit and once their friends joined up, the pressure was to do likewise. And of course, not just at Spencer. As is noted in the 'Picking Up The Pieces' section of the history

'The Show Must Go On' published in 2015 to commemorate 100 years of the Club Cricket Conference: *'The stampede for military service was universal. At Havant CC in Hampshire, one former player, John Freeston, recalled in his club's centenary booklet in 1974 the sight of telegrams being brought onto the pitch to inform various players of their call-ups. But most didn't need to be asked twice. On September 19, 1914, Private JW Hankin, latterly of Malden Wanderers CC wrote from the front line: 'If there are any more boys in Malden, tell them to come at once or they will miss the fun!'* Hankin survived the war. Many didn't.

All this left Spencer denuded of players to form teams, opposition to play against and, crucially, finance to maintain the lease and to pay any groundstaff. Malden considered winding up their club, whereas Spencer fell back on the old 'staunch adherents', cricket being 'played in a desultory fashion, but with some keenness against service sides'. The lease was a particular problem despite Magdalen College contributing £15 per year for usage. Special appeals for donations raised £103 (equivalent to £5,300 today) in 1917 and a further £51 in 1918 which kept the wolf from the door. Wickets took 'a week of evenings to prepare', until the return of Collins, the former groundsman, who was presumably too old to enlist.

Of those who fought, a number won gallantry medals, in particular Robert McCowan Hill, a doctor who had relocated from Cumnock in his native Scotland to private practice in Tooting in 1912. He was commissioned initially as a temporary Lieutenant for the duration of the war but was subsequently made Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He won the DSO (only the Victoria Cross ranks higher for gallantry) in 1916, the citation reading: 'for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty [he] went into an area which was under intense bombardment, amputated the leg of a

wounded officer, and attended to other wounded under most difficult and dangerous circumstances. Finally, he accompanied two stretcher cases back under shell fire.

If that wasn't enough, he won the DSO again (marked as DSO and Bar) in 1918. This time it was noted:

*'For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. While on the way to battalion headquarters his party was caught in an enemy barrage and four of them wounded. He at once dressed their wounds on the spot in a most exposed position and under heavy fire. On arriving at the aid post he was informed that a whole machine gun team were casualties in an advanced position. No stretcher bearers were available, and he at once went forward and attended to them on the spot under heavy fire. He then returned and worked at his first aid post under intense shelling, often attending to cases in the trench outside when the aid post was full. Casualties were being caused all round him, and he was wounded himself, but, though suffering severely, he remained at duty for sixteen hours until the battalion was relieved. He set a most inspiring example of courage and devotion to duty to all ranks.'*

Company Quartermaster-Serjeant Fraser won the DCM in 1916 – this medal being the equivalent of the DSO for 'other' ranks. Attached like many of his fellow Spencer members, to the London Battalion (in his case the 14th London Scottish) his award was given *'For conspicuous gallantry and resource throughout the campaign. On several occasions he brought up supplies for his Company under very heavy fire, and always showed great devotion to duty'*

32 year old Cecil Hardy who lived at 8 Morella Road, joined up immediately in 1914, taking a commission in the Northamptonshire Regiment and attaining the rank of Captain. He fought throughout the war, winning the Military

Cross. He then returned to the Club, played for the 1st XI in the 1920's and he can be seen in one of the team pictures presently hanging in the Spencer clubhouse.

Geoffrey Dolby enlisted at the age of 18 in 2/16th Battalion of the London Regiment (The Queen's Westminster Rifles). Initially a Rifleman, he was by 1915 commissioned a Lieutenant and ended up a Captain, testament not just to his bravery and leadership but also to the appalling rates of attrition, particularly in the officer ranks. He won the Military Cross, the London Gazette of 14th November 1916 recording that it was 'For conspicuous gallantry in action. He rescued three wounded men under very heavy fire, displaying great courage and devotion to duty.' After the war he returned to his parents' house in Henderson Road, married and eventually died on Christmas Day, 1957.

By the end of the war, three Spencer men had also won the newly minted OBE award. The first was 2nd Lieutenant Henry Merry of the South Staffordshire Regiment who was awarded it in the 1918 King's Birthday Honours List *'for services with the British Expeditionary Force in France'*. It's not clear exactly what these services were but, in addition, after the war in 1920 the President of France conferred on him a Bronze Medaille d'Honneur.

The remaining two OBE recipients were both awarded in the birthday honours the following year. Captain Vivian Woodward won his for war service whilst Major John White added his OBE to the MC that he had won in 1915 whilst a 2nd Lieutenant in 7th Battalion Border Regiment. The Military Cross citation read: *'For conspicuous gallantry and determination on 26th September 1915 when leading a bombing party to assist another infantry battalion. The bombers were driven back through heavy casualties, but 2nd Lt. White held on till only he and one bomber were left, when heavy shelling forced them to retire.'*



The World War One Roll of Honour. 79 Spencer members went off to war, 11 didn't return.

As is obvious from this list, Spencer's pre-war social status carried into the trenches with all but Company QM Fraser being commissioned men, even if, as with Geoffrey Dolby, they enlisted in the ranks. The pattern is largely true of those who never returned – only three of whom were of the rank of Private.

The first to die was Albany Featherstonhaugh, the youngest of three brothers who lived at 5 Routh Road, Wandsworth (now part of that area nicknamed the 'Toast-rack') all of whom played for Spencer. Eldest brother John was bowls champion in 1903 and middle brother William was an honorary Spencer life member on account of his military service in South Africa during the 2nd Boer War. Both the younger two brothers were mainstays of the cricket team's bowling attack, Albany being, at the age of 20 in 1903, 'on his day, one of the best left-handed fast bowlers the Club ever had'. Both enlisted in 5th Battalion London Regiment, which as the King's Royal Rifle Corp had been William's regiment in South Africa. With his age (35) and experience, William was made Company Quartermaster Sergeant whilst Albany, four years younger, was ranked Sergeant. Albany died at the Battle of St Julien, part of the infamous Ypres Salient on 3rd May 1915. He is commemorated at the Menin Gate, Ypres.

Private Tom Stoddart lived at 8 Dalebury Road in Tooting. He was a draper, as was his father – they obviously ran a reasonably successful business as along with Tom's mother and sister, their house had two full-time domestic servants. Tom, who was 21 in 1914, marks an early Spencer link with South Africa as he was born in Queenstown, Cape Province. He wasn't there for long as his sister, just a year younger, was born in Glasgow, and it is this link that perhaps explains his enlistment in the 4th Cameron Highlanders. He died on 16th June 1915 at Givenchy, France. The historical notes of

the action sadly epitomise the futility of World War 1 carnage:

*'There was a slow bombardment of the enemy trenches for 48 hours but the artillery shortage meant that there was little covering fire for the actual attack and this was to have grave consequences. The enemy defences here were very strong and had been practically untouched by the British bombardment so when the assaulting troops rose from their trenches to attack they were met by a withering fire that decimated their ranks. Nevertheless some made it across to the German lines where a bombing fight took place. This was an unequal contest with the Germans having a better supply of more efficient grenades and inevitably the British were forced back to their own lines, leaving their dead behind. Undeterred by this setback exactly the same thing was tried again the next day with the same results.'*

Tom Stoddart was to die on that futile second day.

2nd Lieutenant Charles Law was 22 when he died on 30th September 1915 at Bellewaarde, also in the Ypres Salient. His regiment, the 2nd Suffolk, were engaged in a counter attack, trying to dislodge a German advance party that had captured a number of trenches. Originally from Somerset, his father was a clergyman – at the time of his death the family were living at 28 Altenburg Gardens with Law being commemorated at the memorial at nearby St Barnabas.

Perhaps appositely, a summer Saturday, 1st July 1916 was the worst day for Spencer men in the war. It was also a disastrous day for the British Army as it was the start of the Battle of the Somme – a quite staggering 18,771 British soldiers died that day, including nearly 2,500 from London, two of whom, Sergeant Carl Latham and Private Harold Eckford who fought and died in the same 14th London battalion - were Spencer cricketers.

As with much else in WW1, the official records demonstrate the horror, futility and perhaps stupidity of it all, on a day when in peacetime, these men would have been playing cricket. The 14th London attacked at Gommecourt:

*'They had a very wide stretch of No Man's Land to cross and the German fire was so intense that very few made it across. One platoon of D Company were almost completely destroyed by German artillery even before they had got clear of their own trench. Especially deadly was a single light German gun (or pair of guns) enfilading from a hidden point 3000 yards south-east of the head of the Puisieux valley. However some did make it into the first two German trenches and there were even encroachments into the German third line. With the failure of the attack by 46th Division on their left, more and more German reinforcements were sent to oppose them and it was impossible to bring any reinforcements or supplies across. By early evening there were only about 70 soldiers left in the German front line trench and within a few hours the last few survivors made it back to their own lines.'*

Latham of Boundary Mansions, Balham, was posthumously awarded the Military Medal. For Eckford's parents, Edwin and Margaret, who lived at 39 Foulser Road, Tooting it was a second loss as Harold's younger brother Arthur had died earlier in the war, in 1915, aged just 19. Both are on the Roll of Honour at All Saints Tooting. Latham similarly at St Mary's Balham.

John Dodgshon was formerly a Westminster schoolboy and subsequently lived with his mother and stepfather at 99 St. James's Drive, Wandsworth Common. He joined the Honourable Artillery Company as a regular in July 1913 and upon the outbreak of war he served in Flanders and France being invalided home in February 1915. Once he had recovered he was appointed 2nd Lieutenant in the Surrey

Yeomanry and he went out to serve in Egypt on 4th October 1915. He then served in the Dardanelles for six months as an Assistant Military Landing Officer. On his return to England Dodgshon declined a post as Assistant Equipment Officer in the Royal Flying Corps, as he felt he ought to take a more active part in the war. He obtained his 'wings' in August, 1916 and became an instructor at the Royal Central Flying School in Upavon, Pewsey, Wiltshire. He was killed on 1st October when flying from Bournemouth Aerodrome, acting as an observer. The aeroplane's elevator control disconnected causing it to crash near Branksome, Dorset. He is buried in the churchyard at Upavon.

A near neighbour of his was next to die. Arthur Herne lived around the corner at 22 Althorp Road and was a Lance Corporal in the 1/16th London Regiment – the Queen's Westminster Rifles. He was killed in action in that Regiment's last engagement at the Battle of the Somme on 8th October 1916, at Lesbeoufs, some 30 miles south of Lens. Like Latham and Eckford before him, the Somme carnage meant that Herne has no marked grave but is commemorated along with 72,245 others at the Thiepval Memorial in Picardy, France. Herne's story also has a dreadful twist as his elder brother George, a Company Sergeant Major in the same regiment was also to die in the war – tragically in the last action the Queen's fought – on 5th November 1918, just six days before the armistice.

Frederick Berridge would have known Herne well and not just as cricketers together at Spencer, for he lived a few doors down the same street at 11 Althorp Road. A colonial civil servant for the then dominion of South Africa, he joined the local 23rd London Regiment, whose HQ was at Clapham Junction. He was to die eight months after Herne on 7th June 1917 on the first day of the Battle of Messines, part of the long-standing fighting around Ypres. Messines was notable

for the successful British implementation of a new horror, that of underground explosive charges via deep mines tunnelled under the German trenches. Around 20 mines were detonated in 20 seconds at 3.10am, killing approximately 10,000 Germans, more people than any other non-nuclear man-made explosion in history. Understandably, other details are sketchy that day but Berridge's regiment were involved in heavy fighting during the subsequent advance and he is recorded as being killed in action.

2nd Lieutenant John Turner was named after his father and likewise followed him into the teaching profession. Moving from the family home in Walsall, he lodged with fellow Spencer player Henry Janau, who lived close to Fieldview at 39 Ellerton Road, which in those days would have meant an uninterrupted walk across fields to the cricket ground. Both men also taught at the Battersea Polytechnic Institute, the forerunner to the modern University of Surrey, at that time located on Battersea Park Road. For his war service Turner returned to his native Midlands, being commissioned in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Attached to the 14th Battalion, he died on 26th October 1917, part of 5th Division attacking down the notorious Menin Road in what was to become the Second Battle of Passchendaele.

The penultimate Spencer cricketer to lose his life was Lieutenant Arnold Theobald of 42 Hendham Road. His story encapsulates yet another family tragedy, and for Spencer too. It also illustrates the twists and turns of WW1 army life – like many others, patriotism driving him to join up as a Private and then as casualties mounted, being promoted and commissioned. He joined the 4th Battalion, Cameron Highlanders on 7th September 1914 in London. Like many other Spencer men, he had volunteered for the 14th London Regiment (London Scottish) but with 250 others was deemed surplus to requirements for that battalion and they were

snapped up by the 4th Camerons. Theobald travelled to France with the 4th Camerons on 19th February 1915. He was promoted to Lance Corporal on 23rd March 1915 after the Battle of Neuve Chapelle and was wounded in the shoulder and left knee at Festubert on 17th May 1915. He was evacuated back to England on 24th May and was treated at the Southern General Hospital in Bristol until 13th July when he was discharged 'cured'. On 22nd September he applied for a transfer out of the Cameron Highlanders and was posted to the Inns of Law Officer Training Corps. He was then commissioned into the Royal Scots on 23rd January 1916. The 7th Royal Scots served in the 52nd (Lowland) Division in Egypt until April 1918 when they moved to France. He died in a casualty clearing station at St. Omer, France on 29th June 1918. His cause of death is uncertain, perhaps from wounds received in action. Posthumously, he received the Military Cross for an action prior to his death and for *'conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in leading a daylight raid. He entered the enemy's trench and secured a prisoner at the point of the bayonet, shooting two of the enemy himself. Afterwards he coolly rallied his party and sent them back, while he and two other ranks covered their withdrawal. He showed a splendid example of courage and leadership.'*

For the family back home in Tooting it was another terrible blow. Arnold's brother William who had made it into the London Scottish battalion, had been killed the same day as Latham and Eckford at Gommecourt in 1916. But this was not all. Theobald's mother's maiden name was Stoddart, and her brother was the father of Tom Stoddart whose death has already been detailed above. Arnold Theobald was also born in South Africa, in the town of Pietermaritzburg, Natal where his father George was a missionary. On George's early death in Bloemfontein in 1897, Eliza Theobald (nee Stoddart) moved her family back to England, to Tooting and 42

Hendham Road, the next street to her brother. Tom Stoddart and Arnold Theobald, cousins, both born in South Africa, both moved to Tooting and to play cricket at Spencer. Both joined the Cameron Highlanders and both were eventually to die.

The final Spencer member to die may have been the most tragic of all. William MacBeth had been the Spencer 1st XI captain at the outbreak of war, taking over in 1912 from the most famed Spencer man of all, Vivian Woodward. MacBeth was a City stockbroker and freemason who lived at 73 Balham Park Road with his wife Harriett and his unmarried elder sister. Yet another pre-war Spencer player with Scottish links, he was born in Dunfermline and by 1914 he was already 37 years old. Nevertheless, he took a commission in the Worcestershire Regiment as 2nd Lieutenant. His wartime activities are unclear now but he was still alive and attached to the Worcestershire Garrison battalion in 1918. He survived armistice and returned home but succumbed to what must have been war related injuries or illness on 18th February 1919 for he is listed as a war death. Uniquely then amongst the Spencer men who died in World War One, he is buried locally, at the Wandsworth Cemetery, Magdalen Road, just a big hit away from Fieldview. Harriet is buried in the same plot although she outlived him by almost 50 years, finally dying in 1968, having lived in the same house for almost all that time. For the impact of war is not just felt at the time but far beyond and anyone growing up in the 1960s and 1970s will be familiar with the many elderly spinsters of that period, either widowed at an early age or who never married. A ticking consequence of a generation of men decimated, often with just a faded sepia photograph of a young man in uniform as a reminder of what might have been.

This ongoing impact also affected those who returned. Some, like Freddie Boles, were wounded but returned to a successful sporting life. Others, like Woodward, received injuries that meant they never played the game again. All this too was just a microcosm of wider society. The London War Memorial records the overall number of war dead of Wandsworth to have been 1,156, that of Battersea 2,623, of Clapham 1,275, Balham 646 and Tooting 1,044. Not for nothing was it called 'The Great War.'

