



War Walks on the Home Front

The Man Who Fell to Earth and other First World War stories from Market Drayton

by Keith Pybus

LED BY IWM

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In 2014 Market Drayton U3A Local History Group produced quite the most detailed study of any towns brave men I have read.
The cemetery and the war graves are a credit both to the local council and to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
I have also received support from the churches and the Town Museum which I gratefully acknowledge.
This War Walk is my tribute to all those involved.

Armistice Day
On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918 the guns in France and Belgium fell silent. The Armistice marked the end of the Great War and of four years of fighting. But in Russia the struggle continued. On November 11th 1918 'C' Force was attacked by 1,000 Reds. 2/10th Royal Scots lost 19 men killed and 34 wounded.
Arthur Ralphs is commemorated on the Archangel Memorial along with the other 219 officers and men whose graves are unknown. They died during the intervention, as it was termed. His family received his possessions a cigarette case, pouch and photograph. He was 26.

By the time the Royal Scots arrived the Allies had been in North Russia for five months. The day after their arrival, they sailed up the River Dvina on barges. With Royal Marines, Poles, Russians and RN-manned boats they formed 'C' Force.
They patrolled forest and marshland on both banks of the river. By the end October winter had set in and the port was frozen. The Navy's ships were trapped in the ice. Bolshevik river boats sailed up the river and forced the Allies to fall back towards Archangel.

By 1915 we needed to prop up our ally Russia, arms and equipment were shipped to support their war effort. After Gallipoli, ports in Southern Russia were out of reach, instead the ships had to go to Archangel. The Allies landed thousands of tons of arms and equipment, but poor transport links and mismanagement meant huge stocks piled up at the docks.
Russia was in turmoil. Bolshevik Russia and the German Empire and allies signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. It marked Russia's withdrawal from World War I.
The impact on the Western Front was potentially disastrous. The Germans might move a million men from the East. If the stores could be supplied to the White Russians they might defeat the Reds and re-join the War.

Market Drayton – Will the War never end?

- 1 Find your way to the War Memorial at the junction of Cheshire Street and Queen Street.

In May 1917 Market Drayton District Council recorded that the District had returned more recruits than any other in Shropshire.

There are over 68,000 War Memorials in UK. Imagine the chaos of the immediate post-war period – councils, churches, communities sought to agree on how to commemorate the men who had lost their lives. Some were reluctant to leave it all to the Church of England. Some preferred a practical memorial like a village hall or even a cast iron footbridge (Jackfield & Coalport).

On the tortuous way to this memorial, there were some shocking suggestions. The Buttercross might be demolished and replaced by a covered market place.

As for location, the cheapest option appealed. No one wanted the awkward corner of Cheshire St and Queen St – it might cost £600. Eventually the populace lost patience with the Council. The site had been acquired but “Drayton was being left behind” other towns and villages “had already erected memorials.”

By October 1920 the stone for the Celtic Cross was coming from Glencoe Quarries. In January 1921 building began “although funds were still short of target.” In July the town was asked for the names of the fallen and who had lived in Drayton on enlistment.

The memorial was unveiled on Armistice Day 1921. £800 was required to complete. In July 1922 the debt was cleared.

The plinth has the names of the 114 fallen from the First World War on three sides. The separate wall with names from the Second World War is made of granite.

On the left hand side of the memorial are two of the heroes whose last fateful journeys we are to follow in this War Walk – Eric Upton and Arthur Ralphs.



2nd Lt. & Acting Adjutant Upton, John Alberic (known as Eric) Everard was the eldest child of John St. Clair Upton and Grace Anna Upton, of Market Drayton. This local family's legal practice dated back to the 1780s.

Eric was born in Market Drayton. He served with the 7th Battalion King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI). The family has preserved his letters. In May 2002 a small party from Market Drayton: the past mayor, Barry Pitt, the former county librarian, Roy Field, and I used the letters to retrace his last days on the Somme.

During July and August he was involved in the battle of Guillemont. The letters give us a domestic picture “I have had my first wash since we have been up here I haven't had my clothes off for nearly a fortnight.” He describes “a most spacious dug-out built by the Bosche.

They did put some work into their dug-outs.” In his last letter he writes of being proud to be a member of the “Fighting Divisions” and had just returned from a few days leave in Paris.

- 2 Proceed along Cheshire Street.

On the left hand side No 46 now houses Graham Withers & Co. It incorporates Warren, Upton & Garside – Eric Upton, aged 19, was an articled clerk to his father in these offices. When war broke out he was an early volunteer: joining the 16th (Service) Battalion (Public Schools) of the Middlesex Regiment in September 1914. He was 23. The basis of Kitchener's New Army. The training of these early recruits was completed in time for the great test on the Somme (1st July 1916). Once in France, Eric was attached to the 7th Bn KSLI with whom he served until his death.

- 3 Go to the right of the Buttercross and to the end of Cheshire Street. Cross over and turn right as far as St Mary's St. Go down to the church entrance on the right of the tower.

Behind the lectern are three individual memorials

One is “in memory of John Alberic Everard Upton 2nd Lt 3rd Bn KSLI died 20th August of wounds received in action near Guillemont on 18th August in the Battle of the Somme ...”

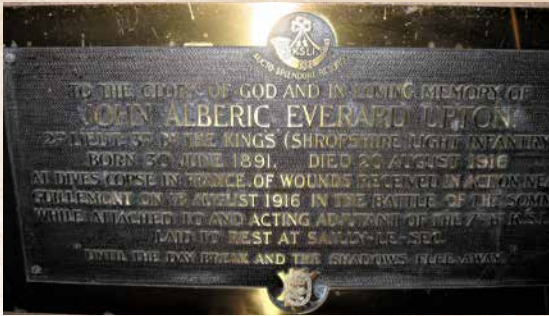
Eric Upton's CO described the attack on Malzhorn Ravine on 18th August 1916, “the best they could do for him was to put him on a stretcher and try to get him away. He suffered pain for a few moments but after that was practically unconscious and I am afraid I realised then there was very little chance for him.” Eric was transferred to XIV Corps Main Dressing Station. He is buried in Dives Copse Cemetery (designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens).

Barry Pitt wrote of the 2002 expedition “The jigsaw ... of Eric's last days was complete. We placed a red begonia against the headstone bringing him greetings and the gratitude of his home town. We had accomplished our mission. The man who wrote the letters had truly come alive.”

The Chapel of Resurrection to the right of the main aisle is dedicated to the “The Glory of God and in imperishable memory of the brave men who gave their lives for their country and their homes.” In exemplary fashion the fallen are given by year, their rank and with whom they served. Many war memorials are frustrating for the casual visitor to a town. The fallen are listed in alphabetical order, often with just the initials.

POSSIBLE DETOUR – see dotted line on the map

If you feel you have time and energy, turn right along Church Street cross the road at the T junction and turn right until you come to Great Hales Street. Keeping to the left walk round the big bend as far as the Catholic Church of St Thomas Aquinas.





On the left is the church and in front of you, beneath a triple window is a modest memorial. It is surmounted by a genuine relic of the battlefields. The wooden cross stood for nine years over the grave of Capt Harding. If the church is open, on the left there are two fine stained-glass windows from Oct 1916 from the Clifford and Harding families; look for soldiers in khaki in the bottom panel.

- 4 RESUME THE ROUTE. Leave the church and return to Shropshire Street. Turn left.
- 5 Just before Frogmore Rd comes in on the opposite side of the road, pause at No 29 The Red House.

Rather than upstairs-downstairs the Clifford family believed in side-by-side. Walter Francis Clifford was born in this house. 21 years later by now a 2/Lt he was hit. Pte Hogan began to carry him when he was hit again, Clifford cried out “Good God I am killed.”

Next door No 31 Red House Cottage is where the Clifford’s butler, Gilbert William Russell, lived. Eighteen months after his young master, L/Cpl Russell died of his wounds. He was 26. Both men volunteered early in the War. Both served with the Irish Guards.

- 6 Continue along Shropshire Street

At no 53 go into the Town Museum (April to October Tues & Wed Fri & Sat 10.30 am – 1.00 pm) where you will find the memorial to the Grammar School boys and masters who served in the War (the two side panels).

The centre panel of the fallen includes “In Proud and Grateful Memory of ...

Austin Theodore Long, Lt Royal Scots, who was an assistant Master and Master of Languages, when the new grammar school opened in 1911. He was a lay preacher at the Congregational Church and a keen sportsman.

He lived at 59, Alexandra Road where Mary Hall, a widow aged 60, was house-keeper. He served sardines on toast to his teatime guests. Long enlisted in Dec 1914 as a private RAMC. He was commissioned in Feb 1916. He reached France on 23rd May 1917. He organised sports and games in camp and acted as grenade instructor to his Brigade. He died on 22nd August 1917, whilst leading his men in the Ypres Salient (Passchendaele also known as 3rd Battle of Ypres.) His C/O wrote “He was a grand fellow, so loyal and such a help. His work was splendidly done at all times it was brilliant.” He was 34.

- 7 Leaving the Museum turn left, go past Kilnbank Road and pause after the small group of shops.

The short road is The Old Armoury: a plaque gives more details. Arthur Ralphs, whose story will be told later in the walk, lived in the town all his short life. His father, John Ralphs, was the recruiting sergeant in the Drayton Volunteer Corps. Men above military age or with business or family commitments sought means to serve. The answer was the Volunteer Training Corps: a home defence militia.

The 1911 census has the family living at “87, Shropshire Street” probably the Old Armoury. The House of the Poor was a substantial building designed to accommodate 100 people. It occupied the entire space between the last of the shops and the black and white building across the road.

- 8 Cross over Shropshire Street bearing right at the fork as far as the Methodist Church. Turn right along Clive Road cross over Longslow Road
- 9 Follow Cemetery Road to the entrance.

On the right mounted on the huts is a precious guide to the War Graves we are heading for Cuthbert Everard Brisley in Grave E 037.

If you are reading the guide, take the path behind you parallel to Cemetery Road until you reach the end and turn right following the path. Just after the central path joins, there is a large yew next to the path. Just before it is a small white memorial. On the path side is a dedication to his wife Mollie.

Major Cuthbert Everard Brisley, The Golden Boy



Cuthbert Everard Brisley was born into the officer class. At public school, Lancing College, he excelled: the Magazine wrote “Plays with a very straight bat, and has more than once saved his side from defeat. Can hit hard. Has fielded brilliantly, at cover, throughout the season. Throws in well.” He was Captain of the Football XI from 1903 to 1905 and was Captain of School in 1904. Then it was a BA at Cambridge. He played football as an amateur for England against France, Wales and Belgium. He also played for Corinthian Casuals. He was called to the bar at the Inner Temple and won the Bar Golfing Society tournament in 1914.

In Argentina at the outbreak of war, he returned to the UK and enlisted in the Artists Rifles. The regiment attracted recruits from public schools and universities. Soldiers in

the Rifles were commissioned in other units including Wilfred Owen in the Manchester Regiment.

Brisley was promoted to Squadron Commander 1st Jan 1918. 1st April he was transferred to the RAF on its creation. Later that month he was posted to Tern Hill outside Market Drayton as CO of No. 13 Training Depot Station. No parachutes were issued to Allied aircrew. It was feared if a pilot had a parachute, when hit he would jump from the plane, rather than trying to save his machine. Cockpits were not large enough for pilot and parachute.

Wishing to test the plane after a few minor adjustments, Brisley took off in an Avro 504K D6361, with a mechanic, Pte Fred Lythgoe. More than 8,000 of this biplane were built during the War. The RAF Museum calls it “one of the greatest training aircraft ever built”

The Wellington Journal:- “Shortly before midday on Tuesday an aeroplane flying at a great height was observed to attempt to climb, as if to loop the loop. The machine however appeared to slip sideways, then turn upside down and something was seen to fall from the machine.

The aeroplane ... descended at a tremendous speed with the engine full on and crashed into a field. A number of people ... rushed to the spot and found the machine a complete



wreck with the body of an RAF mechanic lying nearby. In a field on the opposite side of the road ... the remains of an RAF Officer were discovered.

At the inquest Lt H.J. Murphy said he saw Brisley and Lythgoe were both strapped in when they went up, but witnesses felt Major Brisley’s belt was not tight enough.

Lt Murphy searched the debris and found Major Brisley’s belt still fastened, and his opinion was that he had slipped through the belt. A verdict of “accidental death” was returned.

Many hundreds were present at the funeral of Major Brisley ... when a company of infantry with arms reversed accompanied the cortège ... Whilst the cortège proceeded to the cemetery ... several aeroplanes hovered overhead. A firing party fired three volleys over the grave and the “Last Post” was sounded by five buglers. He was 32.

- 9 Take that central path towards the Chapel. Pause at the last grave on your right.
- 10 Leaving the cemetery turn right and when you reach the T junction turn right again along Prospect Road to the end.
- 11 Go to your left and cross the Adderley Road by the zebra. Continue to your left as far as the bridge.

Once upon a time the GWR ran under this bridge from Nantwich and beyond here to Tern Hill, Hodnet and Wellington.

Looking towards Morrisons, in 1914 you would have seen a lively junction. Ahead the track was spanned by an elegant footbridge in the French Renaissance-style with ornamental ironwork and square-topped pavilions. To the right of the station the North Staffs had built its own small engine shed. Our ally, Arthur Ralphs, employed by the Great Western, was mainly occupied to the left of the station, in the modest goods yard. His job was a Number-Taker/Traffic. He noted down the numbers of other companies’ wagons for which a charge would be levied.

- 12 Re-trace your steps along Cheshire Street, across the roundabout to the War Memorial where you may find a seat from which to follow Cpl Ralphs to Russia!

Like Lt Upton, Arthur Ralphs was an early volunteer, signing up with the 4th KSLI Reserves in Nov 1914. In Dec 1916 (after the Somme) he embarked for France and 1st KSLI. In August 1917 he was suffering from trench fever, a moderately serious disease from body lice. He was in hospital for 62 days. (1915 to 1918 between one-fifth and one-third of British troops reporting sick had the fever).

On the very day that Major Brisley fell from the sky, Cpl Arthur Ralphs was transferred to 2nd/10th Royal Scots. We had begun scraping the barrel. Every available man who could fight was already at the front. So when a task force for Russia was being put together, it was from home defence units on garrison duty. Until 1918 2nd/10th Royal Scots had served in Scotland and Ireland. The men were category B1, B2 and B3 – all considered unfit for active service.

The regiment reached war strength of 1,000 men with drafts from other regiments including Cpl Ralphs from the KSLI. SS City of Cairo sailed from Newcastle; a journey of some 2,000 miles through the North Sea, round the northernmost tip of Scandinavia, via the Barents Sea, into the White Sea and Dvina Bay to its final destination Archangel.

The tides of this World War had our men overlapping in the most extraordinary ways. In January 1917 Major Brisley’s duties had taken him to Russia. From the 11th until the 27th of January he too was in Archangel.

