



## Happy Christmas 1914–2014



**A Christmas Card from WW1**

We all know the story that “It will all be over by Christmas”. In truth Christmas 1914 was stalemate in the trenches. Here is what Private Frank Sumpter of the London Rifle Brigade wrote in his diary:

“After the 19th December attack, we were back in the same trenches when Christmas Day came along. It was a terrible winter, everything was covered in snow, everything was white. The devastated landscape looked terrible in its true colours – clay, mud and broken brick – but when it was covered in snow, it was beautiful. Then we heard the Germans singing ‘Silent Night, Holy night’, and they put up a notice saying ‘Merry Christmas’, so we put one up too.

While they were singing our boys said ‘Lets join in,’ so we joined in and started singing, they stopped. And when we stopped, they started again. So we were easing the way. Then one German took a chance and jumped up on top of the trench and shouted out, ‘Happy Christmas Tommy!’ So of course our boys said, ‘If he can do it, we can do it,’ and we all jumped up. A Sergeant Major shouted, ‘Get down!’ But we said, ‘Shut up Sergeant, its Christmas time!’ And we all went forward to the barbed wire.

We could barely reach through the wire, because it was not just one fence it was two or three fences together, with a wire in between. And so we just shook hands and I had the experience of talking to one German who said to me , ‘Do you know where the Essex Road in London is?’ I replied, ‘Yes my uncles had a shoe repair shop there.’ He said ‘That’s funny. There’s a barber shop on the other side where I used to work’ They could all speak very good English because before the war every pork butcher and every barber’s shop

in London was German. Ironical that he may have shaved my uncle many times.

The Officers gave the order ‘No fraternisation’ and then turned their backs on us. But they didn’t try to stop it because they knew they couldn’t. We never said a word to the Germans about the war. We spoke about our families, how old we were and things like that. I stood there for about half an hour then I came back. But most of the boys stayed there the whole day and only came back in the evening. There were no shots fired and we enjoyed the curiosity of walking about in no man’s land.

## Silent Night a popular Christmas Carol

Douce nuit, sainte nuit !  
Dans les cieux ! L'astre luit.  
Le mystère annoncé s'accomplit  
Cet enfant sur la paille endormi,  
C'est l'amour infini !  
C'est l'amour infini !

Silent night, holy night  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child  
Holy Infant so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace  
Sleep in heavenly peace

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,  
Alles schläft; einsam wacht  
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.  
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,  
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!  
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!

## Research News

### The 191st name

You will note that among the deliveries this month is a wreath to the Royal Air Force Runnymede Memorial in Surrey.

The wreath was laid by Dick Phillips but when Dick approached us our first response was that we have already laid a cross to John Phillips, he is buried in St Mary's Churchyard. It transpires that the J Phillips on Thame War Memorial is not the J E J Phillips who is buried in St Mary's but Sgt John Phillips of the RAF lost in 1941.

An understandable error given the number of J Phillips in the Commonwealth War Graves records, but one we are pleased to be able to correct and add another name to our list, the 191st. We wonder how many more names will be discovered in the next 4 years. John Eric Jesse Phillips is the twelfth name that we have found that is not recorded on Thame War Memorial.

Sgt John Phillips was an Observer/Air Gunner flying with 206 Sqn on patrol over the North Sea when his aircraft, a Lockheed Hudson, ran out of fuel and failed to return in February 1941.



Co-incidentally another name on our list and at Runnymede is Pilot Officer Derek Teden a former Lord Williams's School pupil who was the pilot of a 206 Sqn Lockheed Hudson lost on patrol over the North Sea in October 1940.

The Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede commemorates by name over 20,000 airmen who were lost in the Second World War during operations from bases in the United Kingdom and North and Western Europe, and who have no known graves. They served in Bomber, Fighter, Coastal, Transport, Flying Training and Maintenance Commands, and came from all parts of the Commonwealth. Some were from countries in continental Europe which had been overrun but whose airmen continued to fight in the ranks of the Royal Air Force.

### The Cake Raffle

The draw for the cake raffle was held on stage at the Christmas Lights Switch On on Friday 5th December. We had sold 237 tickets; a good income from a chance offer of a cake. The winning ticket for the 7 kilo fruit cake was held by Mrs Jenny Dodds and the second prize of a presentation box of chocolate poppies was won by Nigel Champken-Woods.



*This newsletter is printed and published by Thame Museum Trust and distributed free to all.*

This paper is a digest of news items about the Thame Remembers project to keep friend and the people of Thame up to date with what is happening.

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### Crosses Recently Delivered

#### 10 December 2014

Pte W T Baverstock 1916  
Kirkee Memorial,  
Poona India  
Miss Sarah Goss

#### 13 December 2014

Sgt G B Parker 1917  
Karori Cemetery  
Wellington, New Zealand  
Mr George Bateman

#### 14 December 2014

P/O D E Teden 1940  
Sgt J Phillips RAF 1941  
Sgt C F White 1943  
P/O V Lower 1943  
P/O S J Slade 1943  
Runnymede Memorial,  
Berkshire, England  
Mr Dick Phillips

#### 18 December 2014

WO S J Plater RAF 1945  
Flt Lt ARP Shields RAF 1944  
Kranji Memorial,  
Singapore  
Mr Peter Lawrence

*Thame Remembers is a project of Thame, Oxfordshire to commemorate the centenary of World War One by researching those from Thame who fell in all conflicts worldwide, and remembering them by placing a Thame Cross on their grave or memorial wherever in the world that may be. If you feel that you can help please contact Dave on 01844 21 5178.*



## Thame Carol Singers

During our research we came across these two letters which give an insight into what the people of Thame were doing around Christmas in the war years.

The letters are dated Spring 1916 so the Carol Singers must have been collecting at Christmas 1915. We have no idea how much was raised but if every Thame soldier received a number of packets of cigarettes, as the letters indicate, then they must have raised a considerable sum of money in Thame.

I wonder how often they sung "Silent Night" among their carols?

We do not know what happened to C Benning, presumably he survived the war, but tragically Sam Howlett was killed on 16th September 1916 and is buried on the Somme. He is one of our 191 crosses to be delivered, this one will probably be placed during the Battlefield Tour in October 2015.

*Thame Gazette*

*Dear Sir,*

*Just a few lines to thank you and Thame Carol Singers for the cigarettes. I received them safely and I enjoyed them very much indeed. Accept my best wishes: hoping you are all quite well.*

*Believe me. Yours Sincerely.*

*C Benning D Sub.*

*Division Veterinary Hospital.*

*A.V.C. France*

*Thame Gazette*

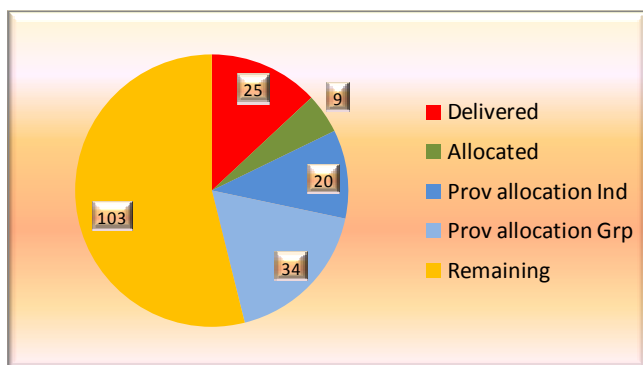
*Dear Sir,*

*Just a few lines hoping you and all at home are quite as well as it leaves me at present, and thank you and the carol singers of Thame so much for the most welcome parcel of cigarettes received safely yesterday. I had just finished my weekly issue and they came rather as a surprise and I gave each of my comrades a packet as the people of their districts do not have carol singing to provide them with good things; so Oxfordshire is well to the front as usual. We are at present in reserve and have just come out of the firing line for a few days, but shall be in the firing line before you receive this. We have had a very warm time lately in the lines, as we have had so many of the German whiz bangs shells burst on the parapet of the trenches and blowing parts in, and they also sent bombs near our part of the trench which we bombers were holding and we sent two bombs back for every one of theirs. We have had some heavy falls of snow the last three weeks and hail and very sharp frosts, but the last few days has been lovely with the sun shining and the birds singing. We have got a pet dog with us which was left in a home at ——— so we are not without a friend. We do not get so many shells from the Germans now as we did when we got here in October. Once again thanking you and the kind carol singers for their kindness in sending us the cigarettes and for their time and trouble; and it reminds us more of our native place and brings us in connection with all our friends in Thame, and makes us long for the time when we hope to return again to our homes in peace and comfort. We have had our army ration for dinner today consisting of water, our army biscuits and jam boiled together and we all make the best of things out here and are still smiling: but conclude now with best wishes to yourself and all friends.*

*Yours Sincerely.*

*Pte Sam Howlett 8th Royal Berks*

## How are we doing?



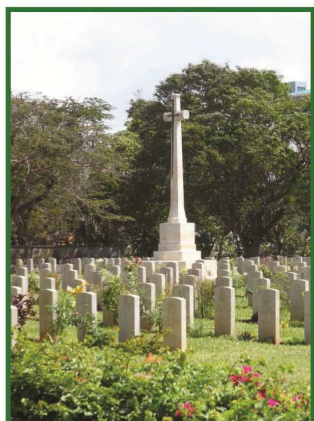
Delivery of crosses is going amazingly well with many of the more distant ones already achieved. The chart shows that we are close to having half of the cross deliveries arranged and we are only five months into a four year project.

To explain the chart a little : "allocated" means that we know who is going to deliver the cross and when. "Prov allocation" denotes that we have a person (*Ind*) interested in the delivery or the cross will be delivered by a group to a memorial. (*Grp*).

The Casualty List on the website contains the details of the latest allocations and deliveries.



We are creating a report for each cross that is delivered. This involves a lot more research but we think that it is worthwhile and they will make a lasting record of the project. Here is one of the reports that has been created so far; more will be included as space allows.



## Thame Remembers



### Corporal David John Burbridge

David John Burbridge was born in Horsham, Sussex on 6 Sept 1886 to parents Joseph Henry and Ellen Mary (nee Brown). He married Ella Kate Stacey West at the Wesleyan Chapel, Thame on 29 June 1911. They had two children Ivy Doreen, born 14 Sep 1912 in York and Stanley David, born 11 July 1914 in Thame (died 1917). They lived at Garfield, Upper High Street, Thame. Ivy (known as Joy) went on to marry the prominent violinist Alfredo Campoli. When David joined the army at age 28 he gave his trade as a motor engineer.

He joined the Army Service Corps at Coventry on 18 August 1915 (number M2117262) and was accepted for machine gun service. In February 1916 he was posted to East Africa, arriving in Mombasa on 16 March 1916 aboard the troopship HMT Huntsgreen. By 27 June 1916 he had been promoted to Acting Corporal and was attached to the 4th Light Armoured Battery at Dodoma, where he contracted malaria in Jan 1917. By 12 March 1917 he was in hospital in Dar es Salam suffering from dysentery, eventually dying of the disease on 23 April 1917.

He is buried in Dar es Salam War Cemetery, Tanzania, and is remembered on Thame War Memorial and on St Mary's Church Memorial Board.



**The Thame Remembers  
Cross was delivered  
to his grave on  
14th November 2014  
by Rev Hugh Prentice**

