



“A Noble Band of Heroes”

A commemoration of
those from Tewkesbury
who lost their lives
during the Great War



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Foreword by Charlie Stayt
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Relative of the Moore Brothers;
two of our 'Noble Band of Heroes'

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Foreword

Foreword by **Charlie Stayt** of **BBC Breakfast**



I was delighted to be asked to write this foreword – and I know many hours, weeks, months, even years have gone into the writing of this book.

The actions of those from Tewkesbury who served in the First World War are wonderfully documented in the pages that follow: the research and attention to detail is extraordinary. For my own part reading about the contributions of members of my own family is both fascinating and humbling.

As I write this, in mid July 2015, a number of thoughts come to mind about just how important it is to remember and learn from what happened in conflicts all over the world.

Recently in Srebrenica (in Bosnia, as is Sarajevo) there have been ceremonies to mark the massacre carried out twenty years ago, and we live in a world where new kinds of conflict have emerged, linked to terrorism and ideology.

In my industry, television journalism, the speed of communications means contemporary reporting is far more immediate and the risks taken to recount what happens in distant places are very real.

This week I was particularly moved by the words of a young RAF pilot involved in the Battle of Britain commemoration, including a flypast over Buckingham Palace. He had the honour of meeting the pilots who flew the fighter planes in wartime. He concluded how much he could still learn from what they had seen and done.

That principle seems to be so important in this book too, where individual stories of sacrifice from one town, are told against the backdrop of the First World War.

It is a chance to hear detailed accounts, from so many sources, about a bravery that should not be forgotten.

(Born in Gloucester and educated at Wycliffe School, Charlie is a relative of the **Moore Brothers**; two of our “**Noble Band of Heroes**”. Charlie is a fourth great-grandchild of patriarch Charles Moore (d. 1810), while the Moore Brothers were second great-grandchildren.)

Author’s Note

This project was, indeed, conceived in 2008 as part of any 90th anniversary commemorations of the war. However, it was soon clear that the only appetite for commemoration was for the start of the war in 2014. For this event, the **Heritage Lottery Fund** has been involved; it has made a grant to the Society so that we can publish an anthology of biographies of all those from Tewkesbury who had lost their lives in that war.

The concept built on that established in 2005, when the focus was World War II. *THS* then published a book¹ of biographies of all those local men who had died. We started with the brief names inscribed on local memorials – yet it was soon evident that the inscription of names was not at all a scientific exercise and that the names of some of those who had lost their lives had been mysteriously omitted.

Thus our “**Noble Band of Heroes**”² will comprise, not only those who have been inscribed on memorials, but also those who, for various reasons, were omitted. All organisations impose arbitrary dates – 1925 for names on the War Memorial while, for the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission**, it was 1921. However, human beings do not always die according to that timetable because of the deleterious effect of war wounds. The *CWGC* has rightly won international respect for the way it has marked all those who died in service. The terminal date of 1921, however, ensured that a significant number of war victims now have unmarked graves since any permanent commemoration was left to the family; to have family information included on the gravestones, the *CWGC* required – after the Great War only – the payment of ‘3 pence hapenny’ (2p) a letter for a headstone.

The Centenary of this war would, therefore, be the appropriate time to use the benefit of modern research tools to make sure that all those who lost their lives for their country are included in this anthology – whether or not they are commemorated officially.

¹ John Dixon, ‘*Never has so much been owed*’, *THS* Publication No. 4

² The term was first used concerning the death of the first Volunteer, **Harry Preston** [†] in 1915

I. Introduction

“Noble Band of Heroes”: *THS* wishes this project to take a broad definition of this emotive label. In a democracy, we feel it is the right of all those who lost their lives while being part of the armed forces – or even as civilian victims – to be commemorated. That should still be the case if that death was the result of an accident or natural causes. We rightly salute the enthusiasm of those who volunteered but also praise those whose fate it was to be conscripted by their government or to lose their life “unheroically”.

The book was also inspired to remedy another deficiency of most memorials in that they record a minimum amount of information about so many people. After a century, many descendants may not realise that a name might belong to their family because generations of marriage have changed family names. Tewkesbury’s official Memorial also has the disadvantage of being designed in days when the impact of the motor vehicle was not understood – to study the names is a serious road safety hazard.

Photography was also in its infancy and expensive and so photographs of WWI victims are harder to trace. Newspapers, like the *Cheltenham Graphic*, did a fine job in publishing photographs of those who served until the depressing days of 1916, when so many were dying. This was considered bad for civilian morale to see those now forlorn faces. Many photographs were indeed taken of volunteers, who had the time and enthusiasm to have that all-important photograph in uniform taken before they left for active service. Conscripts had no such leisure as they were swept off to the Front, without parade or ceremony.

One major research handicap has been a lack of minutes from an official Council committee, set up to decide which names should be commemorated. We must also be aware that the County Archives have never held much information on the biographies of simple soldiers. However, commercial on-line collections of data have transformed the life of the researcher. To have the availability of the 1911 census, compiled so close to 1914, helps significantly in building up the personal profile of these recruits. We can also benefit from the voluntary work of so many members of societies like the *Tewkesbury Historical Society (THS)*, which has built up over two decades an invaluable *Woodard Database* of local information. A project which pre-dated *THS* was that of Tewkesbury Library when it started indexing the local newspaper, the *Tewkesbury Register*. That information, linked to microfiche copies, has enabled us to learn so much more.

The fact that many soldiers were recruited from the poorer classes at a time when laws were far more draconian than they are today, poses something of an editorial dilemma. Some soldiers committed youthful indiscretions, which came before the courts. We have felt it important not to censor this information, unless it appeared likely to be unduly upsetting to families today. Perhaps society can obtain some measure of satisfaction that such indiscretions were significant in forming the character and strength of the young people who went on to serve their fellow men so well. In the same way, we would mark the evident bravery of ‘conscientious objectors’, who suffered for their beliefs, yet who went on to serve their country, however reluctantly, in various ways. So far as we know, nobody from Tewkesbury was executed following a court martial but one was sentenced to death for quitting his post along with four others.³

Our *Noble Band of Heroes* is, therefore, a diverse mixture of characters, social classes and experiences. We felt it very important to record the military experience of the people and to record the circumstances in which they fought and lost their lives. To write a biography of an officer is easier than that of so-called “*Other Ranks*”, since the fate of an individual “*OR*” is rarely mentioned by name. The best we often receive from a war diary is “*10 ORs were killed*” on a certain date and we can work out possibilities through filtering other known information. Newspapers often reported circumstances of death – but cannot be relied upon since obituaries were often written by hard-pressed young officers or chaplains, who wished to spare the family as much pain as possible. Families also possess handed down stories, which do not always stand up to official evidence.

We, therefore, set out to try to write a biography of each person from Tewkesbury who lost his life in this war. I am deeply indebted to two close colleagues in particular: **Malcolm Waldron** and **Sam Eedle**, who both have a long history of research into this war. **Derek Benson**, **Wendy Snarey**, the late **David Willavoys**, **Cliff Burd**, **Gordon Baker** and our **Proof-Reader** (whose advice was absolutely invaluable) are other members of the Society who have provided so much information and support, without which this book could not have been written. **Jan Natrass** has shared the journey with great patience and forbearance.

³ The sentence of this soldier was commuted but he died in late 1918 in the Middle East; and his name is rightly commemorated on the War Memorial – for further discussion of his service, see page 65.



**A commemoration of those from Tewkesbury who
lost their lives during the Great War ~ 1914-1919**

THE YEARS FROM 2014 have given us the opportunity to focus upon the Centenary of the War which failed to be the 'War to end all Wars'.

It was, nevertheless, a war which scarred not only that valiant generation but it also engulfed future generations who are still trying to come to terms with its long-term consequences.

It is only fitting, therefore, that the Government, through the auspices of the Heritage Lottery Fund, encourages local people to undertake research about the war as it affected their communities.

In the post-war years the people of Tewkesbury commemorated the loss of so many of its young people on various memorials in the Town, sponsored by different community groups. Usually for the most innocent of reasons, not all those who lost their lives in the conflict were officially remembered. The Society has set out to commemorate in this book, not only those whose sacrifice has been officially recognised, but

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also those who were omitted. The Society, therefore, has identified the deaths of 192 men and one woman who lost their lives as a result of this conflict. At least two remain unidentified.

The primary aim of this book is to write a biography of all those –

now largely forgotten – names that appear on the several war memorials in the Town. These biographies will appear in Section V but, on page 107, we have endeavoured to fill these gaps in commemoration by providing an Extended Roll of Honour.

The secondary aim is to place those deaths in the context of the Great War, 1914-1919. The focus for Sections I-IV is to provide an analytical narrative for relatives and the general reader. In doing so we have also remembered as many as possible of those who did not lose their lives but were badly wounded, rendered prisoners of war, widowed and orphaned; in addition, we salute the conscripts as

well as the volunteers, all of whom constitute this "Noble Band of Heroes".



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