



## Welcome to the fourth edition of our newsletter, we hope you enjoy it.

Please pass it on and email [VCH@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:VCH@somerset.gov.uk) if this has been forwarded to you or you know someone else who would like to receive it.

### County Editor's Report

It is with great sorrow that we have to record the death of our trustee and friend Hilary Binding. Hilary had been a great supporter of work on Somerset History for many years and was the author of several books especially on West Somerset history. She wrote regular pieces for local newspapers and magazines and helped to develop heritage education in the county. She was a life member of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society and chaired the West Somerset Village History Society. She helped to establish the Museum of Somerset and worked with the VCH England's Past for Everyone Exmoor project. She had recently helped to produce a booklet on Carhampton during the First World War and we had worked together on some of the stories. She also worked hard to support the church in Alcombe and later in Carhampton. She was a true friend and will be sorely missed.



2014 was a year for anniversaries – not only the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, which dominates this edition of the newsletter, but also the 70th anniversary of the events of 1944 and on a local note the 200th anniversary of the death of Sir Samuel Hood, commemorated by the Butleigh monument. More immediately the Somerset Heritage Service became part of the South West Heritage Trust on 1 November. The Somerset County History Trust, which supports the work of the VCH in Somerset, has also applied for charitable status.

Work has continued on preparing volume XI for the press, checking proofs and indexing ready for a spring launch. The draft of volume XII Dunster and Minehead is complete and half of the maps have been professionally drawn. Work is now under way on general research for the parishes in the Taunton area.

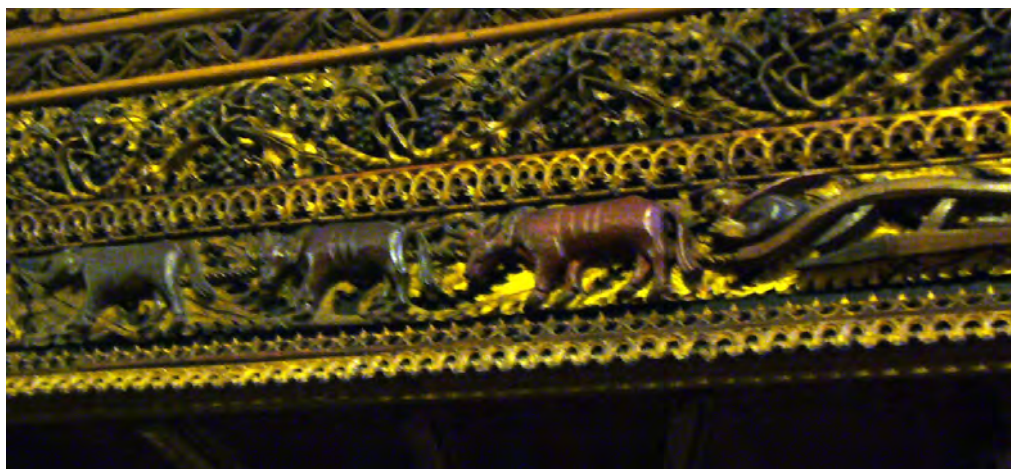


We had a very successful third history walk with County Archaeologist Bob Croft who led a large party around Norton Fitzwarren visiting the church with its magnificent carved screen and the hillfort, unfortunately overgrown and over-visited by dogs!

The Big Event was of course our first Mick Aston Memorial Lecture on 9 October at the Museum of Somerset. Professor Chris Dyer's talk on 'Who made the Medieval Landscape?' drew a large number of people and we almost filled the Great Hall. He gave us an overview of thinking about landscape and settlement, looking at planned towns and what lay beneath them, secondary settlement, the impact of peasant woodland clearance and aristocratic parks and the unplanned growth of most villages. Mick would certainly have enjoyed it and taken part in a lively discussion afterwards. Chris Dyer will be a difficult act to follow but we hope the memorial lecture will become an annual feature.

Other outreach has included many talks and presentations on subjects as diverse as Settling the Poor, An Indian Nabob, Sir Samuel Hood, Social Life on Exmoor and Minehead's economic history. Contact us if you would like a talk for your group at [vch@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:vch@somerset.gov.uk) or at Victoria County History of Somerset, Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Taunton, TA2 6SF.

Very grateful thanks to Helen Claydon of the SHC Design team who produces our newsletter and to everyone else who has contributed.



Carved screen at Norton Fitzwarren Church.

## Somerset People and The First World War

The Heritage Service continues to research the role of Somerset folk in the Great War and the Somerset Remembers Project now has a community archive website. Stories of men like the young Cambridge botanist Alfred Marsh from Crewkerne killed in 1916 serving with the Somerset Light Infantry can be found on the Somerset Remembers site; a young man so talented that his death was noted in the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society although he was not a member. Curiously two Society members, both brewers, died on active service in India: Major Robert Hall Brutton of Yeovil died of malaria 15 January 1916 at Ambala and is commemorated on the Mumbai [Bombay] war memorial and Lieutenant Colonel Walter Baxter of Sherborne died at Naini Tal, Bengal, on 18 May 1917 and is recorded on the Chennai [Madras] war memorial.

Excellent publications have emerged from local communities, notably Carhampton's *A Parish at War*. This parish had several interesting inhabitants in 1914 including the Revd Alfred Allen Brockington from Birmingham who after taking degrees in London and Canada married Mary Clive, daughter of Joseph Clive, a Birmingham brass founder and coffin manufacturer. Brockington was ordained priest for the diocese of Bath and Wells in 1899 and served as curate at Weston-super-Mare, Twerton and Mells before becoming vicar of Chilcompton, curate of Taunton St Mary, and finally vicar of Carhampton in 1911. Already a published writer in 1912 he wrote *In the Cardinal Ward; some pages from the journal of a nursing sister*. In 1915 he became chaplain to the armed forces, a position he held until 1919. He did not return to Somerset and spent his time writing, producing religious works and books on poetry including one on Browning in 1932. He died in Cheshire in 1938.

Another 'incomer' to Carhampton was Mabel Silvester Watts a doctor's daughter from Gloucestershire, although her mother was Somerset born. Mabel settled in York House, Carhampton, probably to hunt, and then moved into St Levan, near the church, which she had originally built as a pair of cottages. During the First World War she supplied all the men from Carhampton on active service with a monthly clothing parcel out of her own pocket. By May 1917 she had sent 147 parcels. She also opened her house to convalescent soldiers and organised fund-raising in the parish for Belgian refugees, the Somerset Soldiers and Sailors Comfort Fund and Alexandra Day. She organised whist drives, dances and sewing parties to benefit the war effort and was a member of the Carhampton food production committee. In 1917 every villager and allotment holder was supplied with seed potatoes at her expense. After the war she was presented with a silver-plated teapot, sugar basin and cream jug inscribed: 'Presented to Miss Watts, with best wishes from

'The Boys' of Carhampton Parish May 1919 for her kindness during the war.' She survived to provide comforts in 1939 and on her death in December 1946 was carried to her grave by six former World War One servicemen of the village.

A much better known figure from the Great War today is the late Harry Patch, the last surviving British soldier from that war, who died aged 111. Harry was born in Monkton Combe, Somerset, in 1898 the son of a builder and the youngest of three brothers who went into building trades. Harry trained as a plumber, a trade he followed after the war. He was a reluctant conscript in 1917, having seen his brother William return wounded from the front and having no desire to fight. During the Second World War he joined the Auxiliary Fire Service in Bath. As a committed Christian he attributed his long life to avoiding drink, tobacco and gambling. 'The three sins, leave them alone.'

He was a campaigner for peace in his later years and his book about his experiences of the First World War brought him national fame. A modest man, his memories of the war came to notice as part of the Imperial War Museum's project in 1972 to record the memories of survivors. He painted a vivid description of the realities of handling a Lewis Gun and almost casually recorded his wounding at Passchendaele at the Menin Road Bridge where his three friends were killed as 'just bad luck'. More than 70,000 British soldiers died in the battle.

We were honoured by a visit from him to the old museum at Taunton in 2008 where he was able to see his portrait by Bill Leyshon on display.



*The county editor and colleagues from the Heritage Service with the late Harry Patch at the old County Museum now the Museum of Somerset in April 2008 Copyright South West Heritage Trust*

Indeed there is much similar British understatement in contemporary letters. A letter from Major Herbert Copeland Cary Batten, with the 33rd division of the British Expeditionary Force in November 1916, referring to conditions at the front, simply said 'the mud is perfectly appalling'. Harry Savory at Christchurch Barracks waiting to be sent to the front in 1918 was confident that the war would end soon. Wounded Somerset officers, often in hospitals far from home including Leeds and the RFC hospital at Heligan, were eager to distract themselves by retaining their interests in Somerset's culture and heritage through reading the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. The Society did its bit for the war effort by employing a Belgian refugee, Leopoldine Bastiaensen, at Taunton Castle.

### Hilary Binding and Mary Siraut

## Captain Arthur Batten-Pool V.C. M.C. of The Somerset Light Infantry

Arthur Batten-Pool was brought up in the family home, Rode Manor, and educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. He was commissioned into the Somerset Light Infantry and seconded during the Great War to the Munster Rifles. He was awarded the VC when serving at Calonne on the Western front in France in 1916. The citation reads ".....in command of a raiding party at the moment of entry into the enemy's lines he was severely wounded by a bomb.....he continued to direct operations with unflinching courage and his voice could be heard clearly encouraging and directing his men. He was urged but refused to retire. During the withdrawal whilst personally assisting the rescue of other wounded he received two further wounds. Refusing assistance he walked within 100 yards of our lines when he fainted and was carried in." The regimental history adds "Dashing to the front Lt. Batten-Pool leaped on the German parapet cheering his men only to fall severely wounded. Up again in a moment he walked the German parapet....his voice could be clearly heard



above the din 'Tally ho, Tally ho have at 'em lads'."

Back in the trenches in 1917 he received the Military Cross when, as cited, ".....a forward movement of the attack seemed to be wavering he rallied and personally led all men he could collect to the attack. He reached his objective and held it enabling his men to inflict heavy losses on the enemy."

His war wounds were terrible. Part of his face and part of one hand were shot away and marked him for the rest of his life, and so grievously that he was never able to work and spent most of his life with his brother and sister-in-law at Rode Manor until it was destroyed by fire. He spent much of his time in researching local history and the people who lived in North Somerset and published his work in a privately-printed volume 'A West-Country Pot-Pourri' which he circulated to his friends. It contains interesting family reminiscences from the 19th century and much else including short biographies of interesting people who had lived in the area as well as descriptions of the surprising number of packs of hounds that had existed, some for only a short time, hunting various quarry. He was a keen hunting man. After the fire at Rode he took an apartment in Bath and moved the Rode wine cellar, which had survived the fire, to the Hole in the Wall restaurant then at the height of its fame. He dined there every evening and gave memorable parties. As a friend of his parents your correspondent knew him in his old age – a charming cultivated gentleman. He died in 1971 and was buried with military honours in the family plot in Woolverton Churchyard.

### H G M Leighton

23 July, 2014



## Taunton St James War Memorial

Tucked away in a side chapel at St James's Church in Taunton there is a brass plaque bearing 102 names of men who died in the First World War. Usually it sits there unnoticed while church life goes on around it, except for Remembrance Sunday when a wreath is laid and our thoughts turn towards those lost in conflict. But with the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War, a small group in the church became curious about the stories behind the names. Who were these men? What did they do before they went off to war? How did they die? And who did they leave behind? And so we began to research.



*St James's church, Taunton*

Through online genealogical research, reading through newspapers of the day, checking the muster roll and many other lines of enquiry we peered back 100 years and discovered much about our men. Some were already serving in the military, many were not. A few were commissioned officers, but the majority were Privates, Lance Corporals and Sergeants. While many died on the Western Front in France and Belgium, the pattern of a truly world war was reflected in their final resting places. Egypt, Mesopotamia, Turkey, Tanzania, India and more places besides showed how ordinary men from Taunton had been gathered up by the war and distributed across the many theatres of conflict.

Inevitably, focusing research on a list of those who died shone a light on the most tragic stories – for example, Mrs Coleman of Laburnum Street, Taunton, who had four sons. The eldest, Walter, was a groom in a livery stable near Fivehead before the war. His experience with horses saw him join the Royal Horse Artillery as a driver. However, during training on Salisbury Plain in 1915 he fell from his horse and was killed. The second son, Henry, was a collar cutter, married with four young children. He enlisted in 1916, was transferred to France in September 1917, and was injured and died of his wounds in April 1918. The third son, Herbert, was injured three times during the war, and only the youngest, Stanley, survived unscathed, by virtue of his being too young to enlist. The Taunton Courier's obituary for Henry states that

Mrs Coleman's husband and only brother died during the war, and that three of her nephews had been killed in France.



*Walter Coleman*



*William James Barnes*

Approaching the subject from the perspective of a parish church also brought up close connections between our church community and some of the families. One of the first men from Taunton to be killed in the war was William James Barnes. William had grown up in the town and had been a chorister at St James. When he left school he became a printer's apprentice, but that wasn't what he really wanted to do. William's father had served 22 years in the army, as had both of his grandfathers, and his great grandfather had fought in the Battle of Waterloo. With this military pedigree he joined up as soon as he was old enough, enlisting in the Royal Field Artillery in 1913. When war was declared his unit was mobilised and sent to France with the British Expeditionary Force, where he was killed in the first fighting the British saw in the war, in the Battle of Mons on 23 August 1914. As a church-based research group we found it very moving that while, over the next four years, every community across the country would taste the bitterness of loss, our church was one of the first to see a gap in the pews, vacated by a much loved man, who had attended the church since he was a child.

One highlight of peering into the past was discovering connections with the present. As part of our search we put out an appeal in the local press to try and contact local

families, and a website hosting our findings ([www.tauntonstjameswarmemorial.org.uk](http://www.tauntonstjameswarmemorial.org.uk)) also made valuable contact with relatives trying to pin down their own family history. Often the relatives could fill in gaps in our own discoveries, and occasionally our research brought new information to the family. For example, we were contacted by a descendent of William Vanstone, who had served with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces. William had lived in Taunton, but in 1913 left his wife and son there while he travelled to Canada to set up a new life for them. On the outbreak of war he was still in Canada, his family still back in Taunton, and he joined the 7th Canadian Infantry Battalion. By 1915 he was serving in France, being injured in August 1915, but soon returned to his unit and was promoted to Sergeant for his devotion to duty. William's descendants had been able to discover this much, but the events surrounding his death were discovered by our team. The advantage of having several contributors to a research project is that each brought their own particular set of interests and knowledge. While some were adept with genealogy, others were more interested in the military history side. Through using sources such as the excellent Long Long Trail website ([www.1914-18.net](http://www.1914-18.net)) we had discovered that William's Division had been in the Battle of Mount Sorrel, and had been due to counterattack against a German advance at 1.00 am. However, due to organisational difficulties the attack did not commence until 7.00 am, and instead of advancing under the cloak of darkness the Canadian soldiers instead marched forward in broad daylight, suffering heavy casualties.

Overall the project was a very fulfilling and moving one, and we discovered at least something about 100 of the 102 men, all of which can be seen on our website. The stories that we found were used to support our 2014 Remembrance Day Service, which included several relatives of men from the memorial who had travelled especially for the commemorations. The information also fed into an exhibition, telling the unfolding narrative of the Great War, illustrated by local experiences. It never ceased to amaze us how great events of the war (Mons, Ypres, the first day of the Somme, the Battle of Jutland, Passschaendaele, the Siege of Kut, etc.) involved someone from our small part of the world. Through our exhibition and Remembrance Service, the website, and with a music and readings evening planned for March 2015 we hope that we have been able to communicate the stories of the men who made the ultimate sacrifice, and truly remember them.

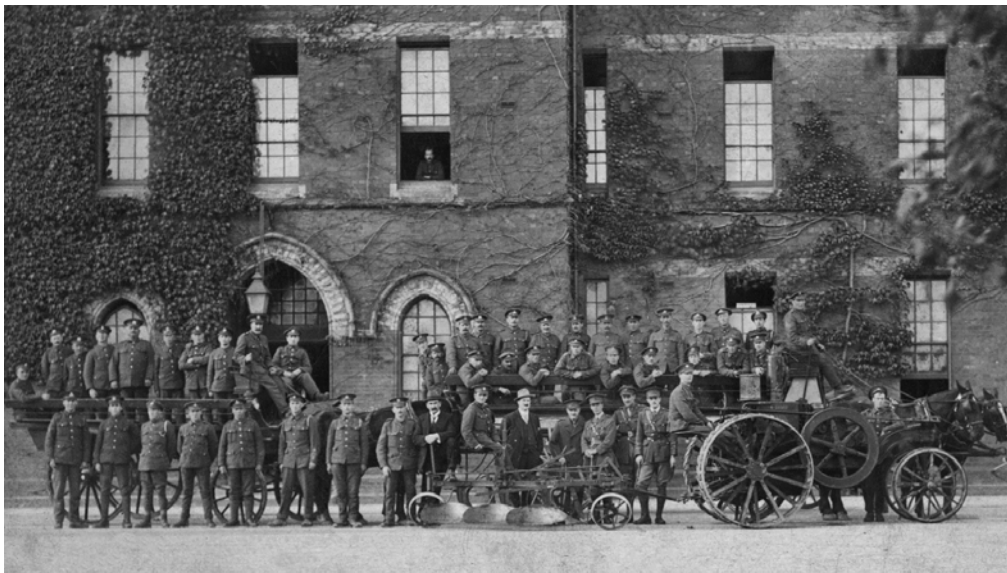
**Nic Tall**

## West Somerset War Time Farming

Apart from the Somerset men who served in the armed forces, it can be argued that Somerset's greatest contribution to the First World War was through its farming and agriculture. The Somerset Remembers project led by the Somerset Heritage Service has uncovered some interesting details.

At the outbreak of war, many men volunteered to join the armed forces and the drain on labour only increased with the introduction of conscription at the beginning of 1916. At the same time the tribunal system was introduced. This system offered a way for men to be released from military service if it was felt that their occupation or family situation represented a greater need. The tribunal records for West Somerset show that it was mainly men engaged in the production or supply of food who were granted exemptions, such as George Routley a carter employed by G Hosegood at Huish Barton Farm, Washford, who was granted a three-month exemption in March 1916 and James Wake of Carhampton, a threshing-engine driver, who was allowed to make a fresh appeal to the tribunal in January 1918.

The school log books show that from early in the war boys nearing leaving age were granted permission to leave school early to help on family or local farms. In October



*Taunton Military plough team*

1914 Albert Cooksley and Tom Farmer, both of Luccombe, were removed from the school register. In both cases a special Labour Certificate had been granted to enable them to work for farmers. By the harvest of 1917, 5,500 boys across the county were being employed on farms.

In 1917 Somerset County Council established a War Agriculture Executive Committee, whose purpose was to better manage the agriculture of the county. The first meeting was held on 8 February 1917 and its first action was to discuss the supply of motor ploughs and tractors from the Board of Agriculture. For many parishes, the war years would see the first use of mechanised machinery on the land, and centralised sites were identified to house communal tractors. In March 1918 a Ford tractor and plough were sent to Dulverton.

Coupled with the shortage of labour was the need to bring more land into cultivation. Orders were issued from the War Agricultural Executive for grass lands to be broken up, for allotments to be cultivated and for gardens to be fully utilized. Sons of farmers were allowed leave from the army to help break new land and plant crops and land owners were prosecuted for failure to comply with these breaking up orders.

One of the biggest changes in agriculture was the employment of women on the land. The Women's Land Army (WLA), organised by the Board of Agriculture, began in 1915. Women were expected to work 50-hour weeks in the summer and carried out all agricultural activities needed, such as threshing, ploughing and tree felling. Training centres were established at Dulverton Brislington, Webbington, Cranmore Hall, Rumwell, and North Perrott. By April 1917 thirty-seven farms had applied for help and by March 1918 over 400 women were employed on Somerset farms.

Women also participated in more light hearted events such as these sports for soldiers' wives Copyright Wells and Mendip Museum

The role of farmers and agriculture in the First World War proved a rehearsal for the Second World War. The practices which proved effective between 1914 and 1918 were remembered and in 1939 were swiftly revived, meaning that work on the Home Front could be immediately effective.

To learn more about Somerset during the First World War, visit the exhibition at the Museum of Somerset. To share your stories and read the research of others, visit the Somerset Remembers Community Archive [www.somersetremembers.com](http://www.somersetremembers.com).

**Liz Grant**

## Historic Images of Somerset

This slightly damaged image of the surviving corn mill at Dunster is instantly recognisable although much of the ivy has been removed. The gate arch is almost invisible in this image. Originally known as Dunster Lower Mills, this mill was in decline in the 18th century but Henry Fownes Luttrell, recognising the decorative function of the site, provided an elaborate gateway and bridge, designed by Richard Phelps, to link the park, mill and south drive with the castle. The mills were virtually rebuilt in 1779–80 under one roof but with two overshot wheels and two sets of new French millstones. The Harvey family rented them from 1801 to 1875.

By the early 20th century the mill stood idle because the Minehead mill was more convenient when much grain was imported. The mill was popular with artists but worked only once a week in the 1930s. The National Trust acquired it and it was restored in 1979 as a working mill while the stables and waggon house were converted into a café.





**If you enjoyed this newsletter and would like to join our emailing list let us know.**

The Somerset VCH is very grateful to its supporters and to those individuals and organizations who have given donations. If you would like to support the future work of the Somerset VCH by a donation or legacy and would like more information or wish to donate on line go to <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/support/donate/county-history-trust> and let them know you would like to support Somerset's history.

By our next edition we hope to have a local Somerset trust and charity account in place.

**Watch this space!**

*Women also participated in more light hearted events such as these sports for soldiers' wives  
Copyright Wells and Mendip Museum*

**Victoria County History of Somerset**

Somerset Heritage Centre  
Brunel Way  
Taunton  
TA2 6SF

vch@somerset.gov.uk

Please pass it on and email [VCH@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:VCH@somerset.gov.uk) if this has been forwarded to you or you know someone else who would like to receive it.