

## Letters Home

In the Parish Magazine at the end of 1914 the Vicar of Shipley, The Reverend A.C. Baker, invited relatives of those serving their country to submit extracts from letters home for publication. Just two were published.

*From Reginald Prescott in January 1915.* Reginald was serving in France with the British Expeditionary Force. He was a sergeant with the 9<sup>th</sup> Queens Royal Lancers. An extract of a letter sent to his mother, Mrs F Harding of the Post Office, was reprinted in the Shipley Parish Magazine for January 1915. Reginald was subsequently killed in action during the run up to the Second Battle of Ypres on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1915. He was 25 years old.

“With my troop I was selected to hold a house which commanded the apex of a critical triangular position. The Enemy’s trenches were about 15 yards away, and there were a lot of fine shots amongst them. It was pitch dark when I took the job on, and needless to say the Germans were very active and I had to manoeuvre very discreetly. The walls were loopholed and the windows had been barricaded by our Engineers. With one man I held a top window which commanded a view of the enemy’s trenches and their movements, and kept a lookout with my rifle ready for any emergency. Personally I was responsible for knocking over seven [Germans], but they were full of fighting courage and pluck and meant driving us from the house, which I equally intended they should not. They kept advancing and threw bombs into the building, but my men absolutely refused to be shaken and stuck it. I went downstairs anticipating an attack, and left a Corporal and one man to hold the window I had left. I was away scarcely three minutes before I heard a terrific explosion and, to my horror, I found the Corporal and the man badly wounded by the bomb thrown into the window. I believe the Corporal must have made the fatal mistake of dropping off firing in the enemy’s direction- they immediately took action and the inevitable happened”.

*Parish Magazine Editor’s note* “Prescott mentions in this letter that the house alluded to contained 30 dead Germans and 3 English, that one of the dead Germans was a dead Prussian Guards’ officer, and that he was sending home to his mother the latter’s helmet, which helmet Mrs Harding duly received. A gruesome point in this episode was the fact that Prescott and his troop were fighting in this house – tenanted by the dead – in darkness, fearing to give away position or numbers by striking a light”.

*From Thomas Goacher, an Able Seaman, serving aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth.* Thomas was a past pupil of Shipley Boys' School, and on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1917 Mr Bacon, the Headmaster wrote that he visited the school in uniform. The letter reprinted here is in response to the Christmas parcels sent to Shipley men serving in the fighting line, of whom the Reverend Baker wrote there were 60. The Vicar writes that as time was short the parcels would be sent and money raised afterwards. Each parcel contained the message "The parishioners of Shipley send you this parcel, with their best wishes for Christmas, 1917. They are thinking of you and praying for you". Thomas Goacher's letter was selected as a typical specimen reply. Thankfully, Thomas survived and returned home to Shipley.

"Reverend Sir,- I beg to express to you and the Parishioners of Shipley, Sussex, my warmest thanks for the generous parcel of cigarettes and groceries which I received yesterday morning (Tuesday). Everything was in the best of condition, and my mess mates, with whom I shared it, enjoyed the contents immensely. It is a great pleasure to know, although absent, we are ever in the thoughts of those at home. Wishing you each and everyone the best of health and happiness for Christmas and the coming New Year".

I remain,

Yours very sincerely, Thos. Goacher

50 Mess, HMS Queen Elizabeth, c/o GPO, London, 21/11/1917.

(Thankfully Thomas survived the war)

Jean Wright, Shipley History Society October 2016