

Shipley 1916

1915 ended in sombre mood. The Vicar, the Reverend Baker wrote in December *"At the commencement of the War the opposing armies marched out under the new excitement of war, full of strength and confidence. There were, as yet, no devastated homes and no long lists of casualties – it was purely a test of arms and valour; but now it is more a contest of endurance"*. Up to this time Shipley had lost two men but 1916 was to call for even more endurance from parishioners.

A day of National Intercession in time of War was held on 2nd January. Muffled bells were rung all over England and the Vicar wrote of his gratitude to the Shipley bell ringers *"I should like, once again, to offer our own band of ringers our thanks for their good services, given free of reward. We have a very accomplished band of ringers"*.

In February 1916, because of a national directive to save heating and lighting costs the Vicar had to bring forward evening service. He hoped that *"those whose habit was to attend principally the 6.30 p.m. service, and who find the earlier hour inconvenient, will make the effort to attend the Morning Service, and we trust that the older people who could not come out to the Evening Service in the darkness will attend the Afternoon Service."* When daylight saving was introduced for the first time in May, Mr Bacon, Headmaster of the Boys' School wrote *"this was the first time ever on record that it was 8 a.m. by the sun but 9 a.m. by the clock."* Despite this, no boy was late for school.

Shipley had responded generously to the call to raise money for the War Fund with whist drives, entertainment and house to house collections. Lady Burrell had organised sewing parties where clothes were cut out and taken home to make up into garments to send to the troops and there were collections to provide Christmas treats for men at the front. Fund raising activities continued in 1916, both for the war and local charities. Coolham had standing room only in February for entertainment to raise money for the Local Nursing Fund. The Socials in aid of War Fund by April totalled £15.19.11d of which £6.4.8d was spent on *"wool for making soldiers' comforts."* The balance was sent to the Horsham War Hospital Depot.

At Easter the Vicar procured special cards *"suitable to send to soldiers and sailors, and I shall be pleased to supply these to those who have sons or husbands serving in the Forces. These cards will carry the message that we shall be remembering and praying for our men on Easter day."*

In June Lady Burrell sent £5.17.0d to the Red Cross, made up of school childrens' collections in Shipley and Coolham, the Choir Boys Carol concert and sale of acorns gathered by the children the previous autumn. A whist social on Easter Monday brought in £1.10.0d for the Blind Soldiers' Fund.

By July the terrible losses on the Somme were still to come, and the Vicar instead had some happy news. *"For more than ten years there has been no Vicar's wife, and no doubt you say that I am to blame for such a state of affairs; however, I hope you will now rejoice"*

with me in my good fortune. A very nice lady has consented to come and live at the Vicarage. Miss Prickett has told me, many times that she wants to help me all she can with my work. She is a sportswoman and loves the country, and between us we hope to be able to visit the Parish more systematically than I could alone. If the times had been normal I should have wished to be married in Shipley Church – if that could have been arranged, so that I might have invited you all to be present.”

By September some news of the losses on the Somme had filtered through. *“I hope to arrange, a little later on, a Memorial Service to be held in our Church for the brave men who have already given their lives for King and Country. At the moment we are all feeling deepest sympathy with Mr & Mrs Russell, Mr & Mrs Gratwick, whose sons were so recently killed; and with Mr & Mrs Pierce, whose boy Leonard has been reported missing since the end of June.”*

Life went on in Shipley according to Church and seasonal calendars. Parishioners sent generous offerings of fruit and flowers for the Harvest Festival Service and collections were given to local hospitals. Mrs Baker organised the Pound Day collection on behalf of the hospital and Mrs Colville of Butterstocks carted a heavy load of groceries to Horsham. There was more sad news for the Vicar to report *“I have just heard of the sad news that has come to Mrs E Faires of the death of her boy at the Front. So another of our Shipley lads has laid down his life for his King and Country.”* The following month a Memorial Service was held, and the Reverend Baker acknowledged the anguish of those whose loved ones were missing *“We deeply sympathise with those who can only know at present that their friends are ‘missing. The suspense we know is hard to bear.”*

At Shipley Boy’s School Mr Bacon reported that one pupil, Peter Booker was unable to concentrate. His father Leonard was fighting in France and brother Stanley was a prisoner of war. The School Admissions Officer, Mr Richardson enlisted and started his duties at the end of January. Five boys left school at the age of 12 to take up agricultural work in place of the men who were away fighting and Charles Laker, an old boy, returned in June to tell the boys about his role as a gun layer in a battleship during the Battle of Jutland. The schoolchildren learned about Jack Cornwell, the young hero of Jutland, and brought in pennies to support a ward in the Star and Garter Home in his memory.

Throughout 1916 Shipley responded generously to appeals for funds for various war related organisations and supported “our boys at the Front” in whatever way they could. The Reverend Baker, although moved deeply by the dreadful losses, believed this was a just war and that victory would come. *“Our country’s cause for fighting is just and righteous; no country ever had a noble object to strive after. The final result, therefore, cannot be in doubt.”*

Jean Wright, Shipley History Society, August 2016

Sources: Shipley Parish Magazines 1916/1917. Shipley Boys’ School Log Book, 1916.

Jean Wright would like to thank the Reverend Pat Sinton for allowing her to borrow the Parish Magazines on behalf of the Shipley History Society.