

WOKING AT WAR

Iain Wakeford 2014

One hundred years ago next week, Britain declared war on Germany. This was to be the 'Great War', the 'War to end all Wars', but it turned out instead to be the 'First World War' and sadly not the last of anything (other than a huge number of lives).



Above: Woking's War Memorial (now in Jubilee Square) lists the names of local men who fought for 'King & Country' during both the First & Second World Wars, but what about memorials to other conflicts?

Right: Are the Bell Barrows on Horsell Common, Woking's oldest memorial to those who died in battle?

I don't know how many men and women from our area went off to war – nor how many returned? Although many names are carved on local War Memorials (some names recorded on more than one) there are probably some forgotten soldiers who slipped through the net. And what about those that did survive, how many of them survived in one piece? If you think of the psychological injuries that they all must have suffered then surely the answer is none. War is seldom the answer, yet it seems that for most of our history it has been the 'default'.

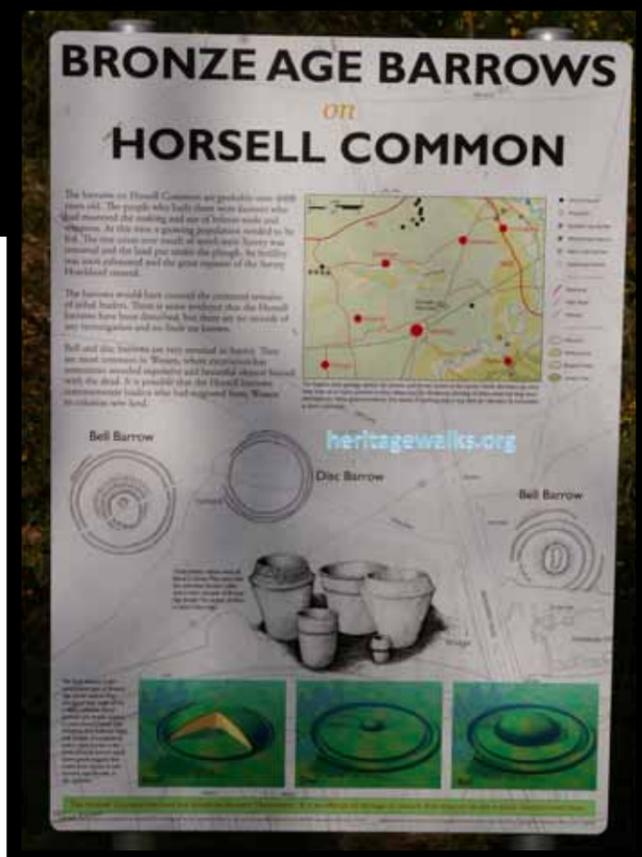
The First World War wasn't the last war, but it certainly wasn't the first and to the memorials that now list the names of those who died 'For King and Country' during the 20th century (and some who have died since), perhaps we should also remember some of the other battles that Woking men (and women) fought in over the centuries.

Perhaps if memorials had been erected for

those battles, a second thought may have been given before they sent thousands off to battle again – or am I just hopelessly optimistic!

You could say that the oldest 'war memorial' in our area are the Bronze Age burial mounds on Horsell Common. They are said to be the last resting place of some warriors killed in battle – but who they were (or who they were fighting) is lost in the mists of time. Thousands must have died over the centuries fighting invaders to these shores such as the Romans, the Vikings and the Normans, but their names too have largely gone un-recorded.

In the last few months I have recalled the names of several nobles connected with



SUNDAY IS ARCHERY PRACTICE DAY - NO IFF'S OR BUTT'S

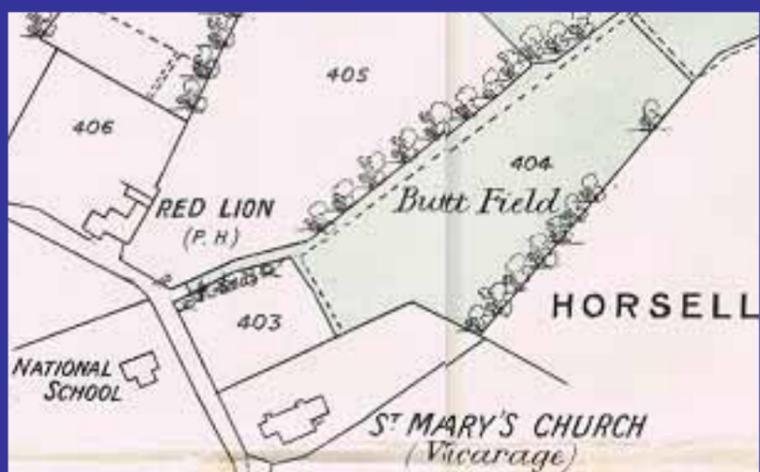
In Medieval times laws were passed to ensure that every man between the age of fifteen and sixty were equipped and able to use a bow and arrows. The first Archery Law was passed in 1252 and in 1363 Edward III decreed that no sport should take up time better spent on war training and archery practice, which should take place every Sunday and on Holidays.

The areas where practice took place, known as 'butts', needed level ground over 200m long with turf mounds at one end ranging between 2m to 8m across and 1m to 3m in height. They were often on common ground or on the outskirts of the village, but with the need for practice to take place on a Sunday, a site near the parish church would have been ideal. In Horsell, the field that is now the extension to the churchyard is marked on old maps and plans as 'The Butts'

A trained archer was expected to be able to shoot between twelve and fifteen arrows a minute, which is probably why at the Battle of Crecy in 1346 nearly 2,000 French knights and soldiers were killed, whilst the English lost just fifty men. Hopefully none of those were the ones that had practiced on the Butts at Horsell.

heritagewalks.org

From the Horsell Land Company, 1901 Abstract of Title



CHOBHAM'S CRIMEAN WAR MEMORIAL



The original cannon in Chobham

In 1853 Queen Victoria inspected 16,000 troops on Chobham Common before they went off to fight in the Crimean War. In 1901 the War Office presented a cannon to the village to commemorate the event (and presumably those troops that didn't make it back).

For just over forty years the old 24 pounder stood on the green outside what became known as Cannon Cottage, but in 1942 to help the latest war effort the old gun was sent off to be melted down to make another weapon. The current cannon on the site dates from 1788 and was found laying in the Thames before being cleaned up and erected on its replica gun carriage in 1979.



Left: Queen Victoria reviewing the troops in 1853.

Above: The memorial to Queen Victoria on Chobham Common, erected in 1901.

