

Landscapes of war and peace

SUSSEX, THE SOUTH DOWNS AND THE WESTERN FRONT 1914–18

By John Godfrey

This article explores how and to what extent an attachment to the localities and landscapes of the county of Sussex (and in particular the chalk landscapes of the South Downs) motivated and sustained soldiers of the Royal Sussex Regiment fighting on the Western Front during the First World War. It discusses the significance of locality and landscape as creations of the mind, and explores the origins and significance of the concept of ‘the South Country’ in the development of notions of England and Englishness in the years immediately before the First World War. The relevant history of the Royal Sussex Regiment is discussed, and 12 soldiers who fought with the Regiment on the Western Front, and whose letters, diaries or memoirs survive, are introduced. The article comments on the nature of these records and their reliability for historical research purposes. It analyses how, and to what extent, these men were motivated in their decisions to enlist in the Regiment and then to endure the conditions of 20th-century warfare by thoughts of their homes in Sussex and the localities and landscapes with which they were familiar in their civilian lives, and the significance of these motivating factors compared with others, such as patriotism, comradeship and ambition. The article concludes that considerations of locality and landscape were material in motivating these 12 soldiers to enlist and to endure, although other factors are probably equally important in understanding their motivations.

LANDSCAPES AND SOLDIERS

There is more to landscape than geology. Simon Schama writes that:

For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock¹.

Early 20th-century writing (in particular, Hilaire Belloc’s early prose study of the Sussex landscape², his Sussex poetry³ and that of Rudyard Kipling⁴) did much to create the emotional concept of the county of Sussex in the years immediately before the First World War, in which both Belloc and Kipling were to lose much-loved sons.⁵ Landscape and war are brought together in the writing of Edward Thomas, poet and author of *The South Country* (1909), who was to be killed at Arras in 1917.⁶ Home on leave in 1916, he was asked by his friend Eleanor Farjeon, ‘Do you know what you are fighting for?’. His response was immediate. ‘He stopped, and picked up a pinch of earth. “Literally, for this”. He crumbled it between finger and thumb, and let it fall.’⁷ These writers were largely responsible for the creation, during the first decade

of the 20th century, of the myth of ‘the South Country’, the invented England which, it will be argued, played an important role in motivating men to enlist and endure in the First World War, and which was used by the authorities to stimulate and sustain morale, overseas and at home, during both of the two World Wars.⁸

Alun Howkins⁹ writes that ‘Since 1861 England has been an urban and industrial nation ... Yet the ideology of England and Englishness is to a remarkable degree rural’. He points out that rural images are used ‘to mobilise innocence or purity against an industrial image of corruption and violence’ and that these images are very specific, relating to the south of England.

‘The South Country’: roughly speaking ... the country south of the Thames and east of Exmoor, and it includes therefore the counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and part of Somerset.

This ruralist imagery can be traced back to the mediaeval *Piers Plowman* (which relates to the Malvern Hills in Herefordshire and Worcestershire) and was developed, Howkins argues, by Belloc, Thomas and W. H. Hudson in *Nature in Downland*.¹⁰ It then informed the attitude of soldiers fighting in the First World War. ‘For the young officers of

the New Armies in particular, Englishness meant ruralism and the South Country' and 'this vision seems to have spread downwards' to other ranks. Howkins comments that 'England is in some respects peculiar in this. In France, for instance, the ideal has, until very recently, been an urban one'.¹¹

In the elevation of the countryside as the pre-eminent symbol of England, Sussex and the South Downs occupy a special place. Peter Brandon discusses this phenomenon in his book *The Discovery of Sussex* (2010), where he writes that 'Following Belloc and Kipling, the county's writers never doubted that Sussex earth had something of heaven in it',¹² going on to say that 'Such excessive homage inevitably incurred scorn from those who did not live in the land of the blest'.¹³ Interestingly, one of the other poets he quotes, G. D. Martineau, is also the author of the Royal Sussex regimental history.¹⁴

Cultural responses to the First World War, on a national and an international scale, are explored by Paul Fussell¹⁵ and Samuel Hynes.¹⁶ Fussell embraces the notion of landscape as a significant point of reference for the British coming to terms with the War, writing that:

Recourse to the pastoral is an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them. Pastoral reference, whether to literature or to actual rural localities and objects is a way of invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable; at the same time, it is a comfort in itself, like rum, a deep dugout or a woolly vest.¹⁷

Similarly, when discussing the work of the war artist, Paul Nash, Hynes writes that:

The disfigurements of the earth obsessed Nash because they were the obsessions of trench life, and many letters and diaries of men at the Front support that judgment. It is striking how often the words **landscape** and **nature** appear in those writings, in passages that take note of how these concepts have been transformed by war.¹⁸

In his major work on the Downs, Brandon writes:

The South Downs are no ordinary hills. They are perhaps the most familiar hills in England and before the mid-1920s they were regarded as its most beautiful stretch of downland. Their exquisitely smooth yet

sculpted landscape imbued with the tang of the sea remains unspoiled, its loveliness only enhanced by man-made associations arising from its bountiful corn and Southdown sheep ... With 19th-century urbanisation the rhythmically-rolling Downs came to be regarded as peculiarly and beguilingly English, the landscape of dreams ... For these reasons the Downs became world-renowned as a focus of English culture.¹⁹

Keith Grieves asks 'Why men choose to go to war, how they endured and whether their lives and others around them became different, if they survived?'.²⁰ His conclusion is that:

It is an overstatement to suggest that the parish and the county were rediscovered during the First World War and its aftermath. However, at these intermediate administrative levels communities reaffirmed the moral righteousness of the cause and secured solace from the deranged mental and material landscape of war by identifying with 'Sussex in the war'.²¹

In going through this process, soldiers from Sussex sought to understand their new surroundings by reference to the familiar landscapes of home (Fig. 1). Grieves considers that 'the different morphologies of valleys and ridges created in chalk uplands ensured that the similarities of the Somme and the South Downs were apparent to many soldiers'.²² On the other hand, patterns of land ownership were very different in France, where holdings were continuously divided between heirs, resulting in a very large number of very small proprietors, compared with the patterns of land ownership with which soldiers were familiar in Sussex.

Traditionally, the regiments that form the combat arms of the British Army (cavalry and infantry) recruited from specific areas of the country. Infantry regiments were assigned specific areas from which they could recruit by the mid 18th century. This approach was developed by Edward Cardwell during his period as Secretary of State for War (1868–74). As single-battalion infantry regiments were amalgamated into two-battalion regiments, then assigned to a depot and associated recruiting area, which usually corresponded to all or part of a county, the recruiting area would then become part of the regiment's title. It was this that gave birth to the concept of the 'county regiment', with the local



Fig. 1. Ralph Ellis, 7th Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment: Remains of small wood near Vermelles (WSRO Add Mss 25004).

infantry regiment becoming part of the fabric of the local area. What became the Royal Sussex Regiment had its origins in Northern Ireland early in the 18th century. The Regiment was raised by the third Earl of Donegal, whose family name was Chichester, although he had no connection with the city of Chichester or the county of Sussex. In line with their Ulster origins, the Regiment was known as 'The Orange Lilies' until 1832, when, in view of the fact that it was by this time based in and recruiting from Sussex, under the patronage of Charles Lennox of Goodwood House, the title Royal Sussex Regiment was conferred by King William III and the orange regimental colour gave way to the royal blue.²³

By 1914, the Regiment consisted of seven battalions, each comprising up to 1000 men. The 1st and 2nd Battalions were Regular Battalions. The 1st Battalion served in India from 1902 to 1919 and was not engaged on the Western Front, while the 2nd Battalion fought in France throughout

the war. The 3rd Battalion stayed at home (first at Dover, then at Newhaven) training drafts for the overseas active service battalions and did not itself serve overseas. The 4th and 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalions were Territorial Battalions, the latter raised largely in Hastings. The 4th Battalion served in the Dardanelles and then on the Western front during the German offensive of spring 1918, while the 5th Battalion was in France from 1915 to 1917 and in Italy and Austria from 1917 to 1919. These two elements (the regular Army and the Territorial Force) formed the first two components of what Peter Simkins refers to as the 'four armies' that fought in the First World War, the others being Kitchener's 'New Armies' (which arose from the Secretary of State for War's successive calls for volunteers from August 1914 onwards) and the fourth 'army' of conscripts resulting from the introduction of compulsory military service in 1916.²⁴ Simkins writes that:

As the result of these initiatives, Britain's Army in the First World War became the largest in the nation's history. Between August 1914 and November 1918, 5,704,416 men passed through its ranks ... The overall total of those who served represented slightly over 22 per cent of the male population of the [country].²⁵

Bruce Gudmundson reminds us that:

On 6 August 1914, Kitchener took formal charge of the War Office. The next morning, he made public, in the form of announcements to the press, newspaper advertisements, and posters, his intention to expand the Regular Army by 100,000 men, each of whom would be enlisted 'for a period of three years or until the war is concluded'.²⁶

In Sussex, following the outbreak of war, the 7th, 8th and 9th Service Battalions were raised as part of Kitchener's first New Army. In the third week of August 1914, Kitchener took the decision to create a second New Army and launched a campaign to recruit another 100,000 men for the Regular Army.²⁷ In Sussex, this led to the formation of the 11th, 12th and 13th Battalions, which were raised primarily in East Sussex and were known as the 116th Southdown Brigade. The 10th and 14th were Reserve Battalions for the 11th, 12th and 13th. All these Service Battalions served on the Western Front throughout the War. Following the passing of the first Military Service Act of 1916 and the introduction of conscription for single men aged 18–41, the local nature of recruiting for infantry regiments was abandoned. The entire system was centralised, regimental distinctions disappeared and the reserve units were instead redesignated as battalions of what became the Training Reserve (TR).²⁸

THE SOLDIERS

The names of the 7302 men of the Regiment who died in the War are recorded in the regimental chapel in Chichester Cathedral (Fig. 2). On the basis that roughly 12% of all men mobilised in Britain during the War were killed in action²⁹ and that casualty rates were higher amongst infantry regiments than in other units, it seems likely that at least 50–60 thousand men, and possibly more, served in the Regiment during the War, and that a significant proportion of them came from Sussex.



Fig. 2. St. George's Chapel, Chichester Cathedral: The Royal Sussex Memorial Chapel.

The nominal roll of the 2nd (Regular) Battalion shows that over 6000 men served in that one Battalion alone during the course of the War. These figures reflect the national position referred to above, with roughly one in five of the male population of the county serving in the army in the War.

For the purposes of this article, 12 soldiers were selected for whom records of one sort or another are available, in the Regimental and Shippams archives in the West Sussex Record Office, in the British Library, and in the library of the Sussex Archaeological Society in Lewes. While there is no way that a selection of such a small number of people to study can be regarded as a representative sample, it is suggested that, depending on the basis on which the selection is made and the extent to which the basis of that selection is made explicit, a study of the records of a very small number of soldiers may enable some tentative conclusions to be drawn. The following criteria informed the selection of soldiers whose records were to be studied. First, only a small minority of soldiers left any records of their experiences; many, if

not most, soldiers wrote letters and cards home to family and friends and some survive; a few kept contemporaneous diaries, some of which survive; some wrote up accounts after the war (in some cases more or less immediately, in others many years later); some wrote with a view to publication, at least to family and friends and, in some cases, a much wider audience; some records were subject to censorship, either self-imposed or by order of the military authorities; the quality and depth of the surviving records vary considerably, from hastily completed pro forma postcards ('I am well; I have received your letter') to the very detailed and readable descriptions of trench life by accomplished writers.

Second, the War may have been the first major conflict which, for the British people, involved a literate mass soldiery, but not surprisingly some of the more extensive records were the work of the more highly educated, who tended to be members of the officer class. To assemble a group of people with any claim to be a representative sample, the researcher must make sure that all ranks are included. Third, other factors to be taken into account include the need to compare and contrast the experiences of soldiers recruited from different parts of Sussex and elsewhere: their age and former life experiences, in which theatres of war they were engaged, and whether they were fighting in Regular, Territorial or New Army Battalions. Finally, the selection should include men who survived, those who were wounded and those who, sadly, died. Using these criteria, the records of the following 12 individuals were identified for analysis.

Edmund Blunden was born in 1896 and was educated at Christ's Hospital, the famous Bluecoat school near Horsham in West Sussex, where he became Senior Grecian, or Head Boy. On leaving school in the summer of 1915, he deferred his scholarship to Oxford University, and took a commission in the Regiment. He served with the 11th Battalion Royal Sussex as a second lieutenant and then as a lieutenant on the Western Front from spring 1916, and was eventually demobilised in February 1919. After the War, he wrote an account of his experiences, in prose and poetry, published as *Undertones of War* in 1928. *Undertones* rapidly acquired canonical literary status, alongside the works of such celebrated writers (in English and German) as Ernst Junger, Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen, Erich Remarque and Siegfried Sassoon.

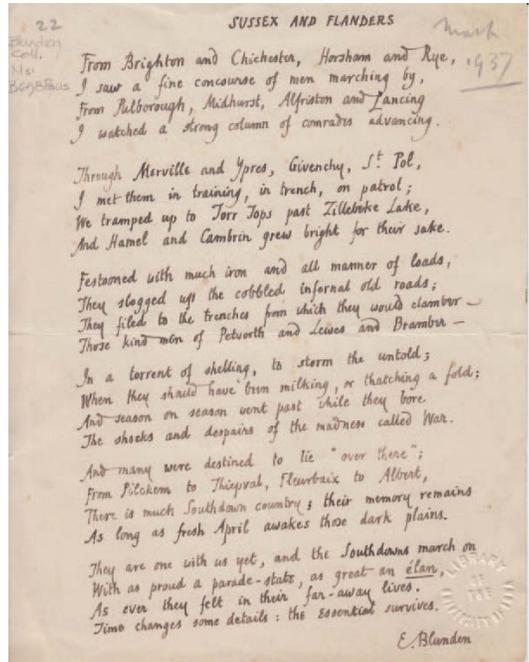


Fig. 3. Sussex and Flanders: ms of poem by Edmund Blunden, 1937 (University of Iowa, Blunden Collection Ms B658 Psus).

Other Blunden papers are retained by his family and in the archives at the University of Iowa. Subsequently, Blunden pursued an academic career, mainly in the Far East, but also becoming professor of poetry at Oxford University and continuing to write (Fig. 3).

Nelson Carter was born in Eastbourne, East Sussex, in 1887, and lived with his parents and three brothers at Hailsham. After elementary education, he worked as a carter on a local farm for a while, but then left home to join the Royal Field Artillery. He served in the Far East, latterly in Singapore, from where he was invalided home. He met, and married, an Eastbourne girl and had various jobs, including as doorman at a local cinema. This role suited the fine physique and military bearing of a man who later became battalion heavy-weight boxing champion. Carter enlisted in the 12th Battalion Royal Sussex in 1914 and was promoted, eventually to company sergeant-major. He was killed in action in June 1916 at the Boar's Head, Richebourg, and was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his exceptional gallantry while rescuing comrades under fire.



Fig. 4. Ralph Ellis, April 1917 (WSRO Add Mss 25001).

Ralph Ellis was born in 1885 in Arundel, West Sussex, where his father was in business as a taxidermist (Fig. 4). He was educated locally, left school at 14 and took up interior decoration and sign writing. Leaving his wife to run the business, he enlisted in the 7th (Service) Battalion Royal Sussex in 1914 and served as a private soldier on the Western Front. He was commissioned into the Royal West Surrey Regiment in April 1917, but was wounded and transferred home in September. While recovering and convalescing, he wrote a memoir of his two years' service, using the notes and sketches he made at the time. Much later, in 1947, Ellis revised the document, and entitled it *A March with the Infantry by Four-Two-Eight*. Both documents are in the County Record Office in Chichester.

George Farndale was born in 1893 and lived with his parents and siblings in Victoria Road, Chichester, West Sussex. He worked at Shippam's

North Walls food-processing factory in Chichester. With 16 other Shippam's employees, he enlisted in the 7th (Service) Battalion Royal Sussex in 1914, trained at Newhaven Camp and went to France with the British Expeditionary Force in 1915. He was wounded and lost the sight of his left eye, but returned to the front, being promoted to lance-corporal and, in 1918, to sergeant. He was awarded the Military Medal in October that year. A gifted entertainer, Farndale was the star turn at many battalion concert parties. He was also an energetic and eloquent letter writer, and his regular bulletins to Mr Ernest Shippam, the chairman of Shippam Ltd, are preserved in the company archive at the County Record Office in Chichester.

Harry Fuller was born in 1895. He lived with his parents, his two sisters and his elder brother, Percy, in Havelock Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex, and was employed as a junior clerk. He enlisted in the 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion Royal Sussex, left Sussex for France in March 1916 and served on the Western Front for 18 months, mainly with working parties working on reserve and communications trenches on the Somme. From January 1917 he was attached to a company in the Ypres sector, acting as servant to an officer, whom he later accompanied to the mountain regions of Italy. He kept a diary of his experiences, now held in the regimental archive at the County Record Office.

Born in 1879, Neville Lytton, 3rd Earl of Lytton, a member of an old-established gentry family in Sussex, grew up on the Crabbet Park estate near Crawley, West Sussex. He was educated at Eton and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. At the outbreak of the War, he was aged 35, the father of three children, and a landscape and portrait painter. He joined the 11th Battalion Royal Sussex and left for France in March 1916, in the rank of major. A fluent French speaker, he was appointed as a press liaison officer at General Headquarters (GHQ), working with French war correspondents. He served with Edmund Blunden, who described him as 'outspoken in his loathing of war'. After the war, Lytton designed and executed the memorial Peace and War frescoes at Balcombe Victory Hall. He then wrote about his experiences in *The Press and the General Staff* (1920).

Ivan Margary was born in London in 1896. He was privately educated and matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford in 1913. He took a commission in the 7th Battalion Royal Sussex and left for France

in June 1916. He served on the Western Front for two and a half years, during which time he was hospitalised on five occasions as the result of wounds or illness. He was eventually demobilised in January 1919. He returned to England and to Oxford University. In the long vacation of 1919, Margary wrote an account of his war-time experiences, which is in the library of the Sussex Archaeological Society in Lewes, East Sussex. He later became the Society's president and a very generous benefactor of its work.

Frederick Packham was also born in London in 1896, but in very different circumstances. He was working as a casual labourer and was attracted to regular army life by the prospect of better pay and secure employment. He enlisted in the 3rd Battalion Royal Sussex in 1912 at Chichester and later transferred to the 2nd Battalion. When war was declared, Packham sailed immediately to France with the British Expeditionary Force and he remained on the Western Front throughout the War, being demobilised in 1920. He was proud to have been a professional soldier, and considered that he had benefitted greatly from the experience. Much later in life, he wrote 30 pages of typescript entitled *Memoirs of An Old Contemptible 1912–1920*. A copy is in the County Record Office.

Alfred Sansom was born in 1856 and was approaching 50 when he joined the 5th Battalion Royal Sussex, initially as a lieutenant. In civilian life, he was the proprietor and headmaster of a boys' preparatory school in Bexhill, East Sussex. He left Sussex for France in September 1915 and served on the Western Front until he was killed in action on 5th July 1917 at Monchy (where, coincidentally, Ernst Junger was engaged in the autumn of 1915)³⁰. By that time, he had transferred to the 7th Battalion as commanding officer, in the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Throughout his time in France, Sansom wrote every day to his wife, Ivy, in Bexhill, with detailed accounts of his activities. After his death, Ivy edited the letters and had a 380-page volume printed, with the title *Letters from France*.

Charles Tullett was born in 1891. He worked at Shippam's in Chichester alongside Farndale, and joined up with him when war was declared in August 1914, enlisting in the 7th (Service) Battalion. Under training, he spent time at Sandling (Kent) and Aldershot (Surrey) and left Sussex for France in June 1915. He served on the Western Front throughout the rest of the War,

being promoted to corporal in May 1916 and sergeant in December. In September 1918 he was recommended for a commission. He suffered a serious wound to his hand in the summer of 1916 and spent time being treated and convalescing in England. Like Farndale, Tullett wrote regularly to Mr Ernest Shippam, exchanging news of fellow workers serving in France and enquiring how things were going at the factory. His letters are held in the Shippam's archive in the County Record Office in Chichester.

Hugh Whitcomb was born in Petworth, West Sussex, in 1898. At 14 he won a scholarship to Midhurst Grammar School, which he hated. To escape, he enlisted in the 13th Battalion Royal Sussex in December 1914, aged 16. His initial training was at Cooden Camp, near Bexhill in East Sussex, and he then trained as a signaller. Whitcomb left Sussex for France in March 1916 and found himself immediately in the trenches in Flanders. A change in Army regulations which prohibited men aged under 19 from fighting on the front line resulted in Whitcomb being sent back to Etaples for retraining. He rejoined the Battalion the following year and was demobilised in 1919. Many years later, Whitcomb wrote an account of his experiences, in which he is very critical of the conduct of the war. The document is now held in the County Record Office in Chichester.

George Whittington was born in Washington, West Sussex, worked locally as a stableman and enlisted in the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex as a regular soldier in 1911, aged 18. He trained as a drummer. On the declaration of war, Whittington left Sussex for France on 14th August 1914 with the British Expeditionary Force. He took part in the mobile campaigning which preceded the entrenchment of the opposing armies and was killed in action at Priez on 10th September 1914. He took over a diary started by an unknown comrade and continued it until the day before his death. The diary, which reports on the warm welcome given to the British troops by the French population and comments on local landscape and agriculture, is in the regimental archive in the County Record Office, Chichester.

In her study of Ralph Ellis's memoirs, Sue Hepburn cautions that 'Historians have regarded autobiographical writing with some unease'.³¹ This arises as the result of the literary properties of autobiography that link it with fiction, concerns

that autobiographical writings may be seen as too subjective to provide reliable historical evidence, in that they represent one individual's interpretation of events, the effect on reliability of the process of selection which inevitably must take place in the production of memoirs, and the impact of received interpretations of events, to which the author may be inclined to conform, or not. On the other hand, the recent development of oral history, making use of techniques originating in anthropological studies, has become accepted as useful for historical research. The moral is that memoirs need to be approached with care, but that, if they are, they may contribute to historical understanding.

CLASSIFICATION OF SOURCES

The sources which have been used in the preparation of this article fall into five categories, as follows: letters (Farndale, Tullett, Sansom), journals (Fuller, Margary, Whittington), contemporary memoirs (Ellis, Lytton), subsequent memoirs (Blunden, Packham, Whitcomb) and press reports (Carter). Each of these categories will be considered in turn.

The letters that Farndale and Tullett wrote to Mr Ernest Shippam are available in their original form, unreproduced and unedited. They were both regular, but relatively infrequent, correspondents. Their letters do not constitute anything like a daily account of their activities. Their letters were subject to military censorship; their origin is always described as 'Somewhere in France' and they are careful to avoid providing any information that could establish their more exact whereabouts, hinting at one point that they are on the Somme by referring to the fact that their trenches are in the chalk. They enjoyed a particular relationship with their correspondent, wishing to retain his favour and to return to working at his factory after the War.

Sansom's letters are the fullest and most detailed of the sources studied. He wrote long letters every day to his wife at home in Bexhill. He equipped himself with a writing case and had it with him at all times, continuing the day's letter whenever opportunity occurred. He intended his letters to be read not only by his wife, but also by other family members and friends. He adopts a cheery tone throughout, although, as the war grinds on, the efforts he is making to remain positive become more obvious. He, too, was aware

of the need for his letters to avoid passing on any significant military intelligence, although, as an officer, he was subject more closely to self-censorship than were private soldiers. His rule of thumb was that he would never reveal information about what was going to happen, but would give an account after the event. This was the case with his attachment to divisional staff in the build-up to the 1916 Somme offensive. Following his death, Ivy Sansom edited his letters and had the resulting manuscript published in book form in 1921. It is not known what was involved in editing the letters or what, if anything, was omitted or amended.

The journals of Fuller, Margary and Whittington were all compiled 'in real time' and are also genuinely contemporary records. Whittington's takes the form of a handwritten pocket diary, which finishes abruptly on the day before he was killed in action. Fuller's diary is in a similar form. Margary must have kept a detailed daily journal (which does not survive), but then wrote up his account in manuscript in the summer vacation of 1919, after he had returned to Oxford. The journal, which is accompanied by a set of trench maps and photographs, including aerial photographs, is very detailed, with precise timings and positions included. It appears to be a purely factual document, devoid of commentary or interpretation and, as a result, is of significance as a 'neutral' historical source.

The memoirs of Ellis and Lytton were compiled in the immediate aftermath of the War. Ellis's account was written in 1919 (although it did not achieve its final incarnation as *A March with the Infantry by Four-Two-Eight* until 1947), and Lytton's *The Press and the General Staff* appeared in 1920. Blunden's *Undertones of War* was published in 1928, ten years after the Armistice. Blunden and Lytton wrote consciously for publication, and both books, but particularly *Undertones*, have significant literary merit. Ellis's memoir was not intended for publication, although he took great care in the presentation of the 1947 version, his own drawings being included to illustrate the text. They were all affected by what they endured, and their memoirs are the most reflective and sympathetic.

Packham and Whitcomb wrote their accounts much later, in 1970 and 1979 respectively, when they looked back on their experiences from the perspective of old age, Packham being 74 at the time and Whitcomb 81. Both were encouraged

to commit their thoughts to paper by the knowledge that their lives were drawing to a close. Inevitably, memories dim over such a long period of time, and Whitcomb acknowledges this, seeking corroboration and triangulation from time to time from surviving comrades and the regimental history. He also shows every sign of having absorbed a great deal of information from subsequent books and television programmes on the war, and subscribes to the 'lions led by donkeys' interpretation fashionable at the time he was writing. Packham, on the other hand, presents a workmanlike account of a professional soldier's perspective on his experiences on the Western Front.

Finally, Carter's archive consists of just two letters to his wife, Kitty, back in Eastbourne, together with press cuttings on his heroic death in action and subsequent VC. What knowledge we have of the man and his career is gained from the flowery, patriotic language of the popular press, keen to use his story to bolster sagging civilian morale.

LOCALITY, LANDSCAPE AND THE DECISION TO ENLIST

In his account of the Regiment on the Western Front, Hugh Miller writes:

On the outbreak of war, of the Royal Sussex Regiment's two regular battalions, the 1st was in India and remained there throughout the War. The 2nd, on the other hand, was based in England during the early months of 1914. There, at various locations, was continued that form of peacetime training which bore no resemblance to what the battalion would be required to face and experience before the year's end. Bell-tented camps, set out in immaculately straight lines on grassy, dry, rolling tracts of the English countryside provided pleasant living quarters during that summer of 1914, purpose-built rifle ranges and assault courses taxed the skill and fitness of the men, as did the long and frequent route marches, but there was no enemy, no true battleground terrain and no incoming shells or bullets.³²

The two regulars among the selected 12 Sussex soldiers were Private Packham and Drummer Whittington, who both embarked for France with



Fig. 5. Recruiting poster: Save Sussex From This!

the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in August 1914. The second category in Simkins' 'four armies' classification is the territorials. Before the war, the role and organisation of the auxiliary or territorial forces had been reviewed by a Royal Commission, headed by the Duke of Norfolk, Lord-Lieutenant of Sussex. The Commission made a series of recommendations for reform, many of which were implemented in the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907, the new Territorial Force (TF) becoming the volunteer component of the British Army from 1908 to 1920. The administration of the TF was undertaken locally by county associations, led by the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, and each TF battalion was attached to a regular army regiment. By the end of the War, 692 TF battalions had been raised across the country. Two of the 12 Sussex soldiers (Fuller and Sansom) served in the TF, both in the 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion of the Royal Sussex.

Simkins' third category is Kitchener's New Army. Kitchener launched his famous nationwide appeal for the 'first 100,000 volunteers' on 7th August 1914, three days after war was declared, and the next day two officers and 15 NCOs left the regular 2nd Battalion stationed at Woking and travelled south to Chichester to set up the Royal Sussex Regiment's first New Army battalion, which transferred to Colchester on 21st August as the 7th (Service) Battalion of the Regiment.³³ By 5th September, 2101 men had been recruited in Sussex, of whom 1503 volunteered to serve in the 7th Battalion,³⁴ and others were deployed to the newly formed 'overflow' 8th and 9th Battalions. The recruits to the 7th Battalion included Ellis, Farndale, Margary and Tullett, four of the Sussex soldiers selected for this study.

The second phase of recruitment to the New Army in Sussex took place in the autumn of 1914 and, by Christmas, three battalions had been raised (Fig. 5). They often took the form of what became known as 'Pals battalions'. Simkins explains that:

These units ... were mainly raised, with War Office approval, by the mayors and corporations of large cities, by Members of Parliament, or by self-appointed committees of industrialists or leading citizens. The popular description of them as Pals battalions derived from the fact that the raisers of many such battalions deliberately encouraged men who lived in a particular city or district, or who shared a common social or occupational background, to enlist with their friends and workmates on the understanding that they would be allowed to train and fight together. Their emergence, in late August and early September 1914, quickly altered the pattern of enlistment, offering individual communities additional opportunities to express their patriotism in a specific way by raising units with a pronounced local identity....³⁵

In Sussex, the enlistment of men from the Shippam's factory in Chichester clearly falls into this category and will be discussed below, but the pre-eminent example of the application of the Pals concept in Sussex is the formation of the 11th, 12th and 13th Battalions of the Royal Sussex Regiment, the 'Southdown Brigade'. In terms of recruitment and deployment, the brigade had many features in common with the Pals battalions raised in the

cities of northern England. Winter and Robert express the significance of local loyalties in wartime as follows.

Some men fought for nation and empire, for King and country. Others fought for their part of London in a way they never fought for England; and even when they saluted England in song and verse, their 'England' was envisioned as a very local and particular place, bounded in many cases by the streets they knew, and the daily lives they led.³⁶

Four of the selected soldiers served in the Southdown Brigade: Blunden and Lytton (11th Battalion), Carter (12th Battalion) and Whitcomb (13th Battalion).

Voluntary recruitment remained in place until the end of 1915. However, by the spring of that year it was becoming clear that the flow of voluntary recruits was dwindling. During the autumn, the Group, or Derby, Scheme was put in place as a half-way house. However, this failed to produce the number of men needed, and conscription was seen as the only way forward. As a result, Parliament passed the Military Service Act 1916, which provided for the compulsory mobilisation of all unmarried men of military age. With the introduction of conscription, the local nature of recruitment for infantry regiments was abandoned and the entire system centralised, reserve units being redesignated as battalions of the Training Reserve and used to reinforce units in the field wherever they were needed. The link with locality was abandoned.

The two regular soldiers among the 12 selected for study, Whittington and Packham, had enlisted in 1911 and 1912 respectively. Packham was 16 when he joined up and his motivation appears to have been entirely economic; seeing no future in labouring on building sites in London, he was attracted to army life by the prospects of job security and a decent wage.³⁷ He thus conformed to the pattern identified by Beckett and Simpson: 'Unskilled labour, especially "town casuals", continued to provide the largest contribution to the annual intake ... The vast majority of men lacked any employment before they offered themselves for enlistment' in the regular army.³⁸ Whittington was born in Sussex, but neither he nor Packham gives any indication of locality or landscape playing any part in their decisions to enlist, which were made well before the outbreak of war.

Two of the 12 Sussex soldiers whose records have been studied were territorials: Fuller of Eastbourne and Sansom of Bexhill. They were both members of the 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion. Grieves refers to 'the well-defined sense of territoriality of the ... Battalion ... which had its headquarters at Hastings and was ... officered by the gentry and aspiring professional classes'.³⁹ This description would certainly fit Sansom, the 47-year old proprietor and headmaster of a boys' preparatory school in Bexhill, but perhaps not Fuller.

Miller describes the Battalion as follows.

Its men, who had been enlisted predominantly at the Sussex seaside town of Hastings, one of England's historic Cinque Ports, were proud to have the designation ('Cinque Ports') incorporated formally into the Battalion's title. The enthusiastic volunteers had been drawn, to a very large extent, from Sussex, particularly the eastern part of the county, and from the nearer parts of Kent. They had always known that they were to be in readiness to be called to support and reinforce the units of the regular army if [needed].⁴⁰

Neither Fuller nor Sansom writes about their reasons for enlisting, although Fuller records that his unit of the Battalion 'had a splendid send-off from Rye'.⁴¹

On 25th August 1914 a poster appeared in local newspapers in Sussex urging Sussex men to volunteer for the new battalion of the county regiment (what became the 7th Battalion): 'Will you come forward, or must recruits be obtained from outside the County? We are confident you will help to uphold the honor [sic] of the County of Sussex.'⁴² The recruitment campaign was supported by the Duke of Norfolk and other major landowners, including Lord Leconfield at Petworth, Charles Lucas at Horsham and Viscount Gage at Fittlehampton. 'They spoke the language of duty, obligation and service, in a local context, as they had in 1900, when many scions of landed families departed for the South African war in active service companies of the Imperial Yeomanry.'⁴³ In the very early days of the war, recruitment in Sussex was largely directed by hereditary aristocrats and landowners, many with military experience themselves, who formed the backbone of the county association formed to manage the Territorial Force and its mounted arm, the Yeomanry. As Lord-Lieutenant

of Sussex, the Duke of Norfolk played a key role in this process. The emphasis was on deference and duty. As Howkins suggests, 'Men were urged to go as much as part of their duty to the social structure of rural areas as to King and Country'.⁴⁴ The influence of the landed gentry in rural Sussex, and particularly in West Sussex, was considerable: in a county where land was in relatively few hands and 'close' parishes abounded, landlords enjoyed respect and expected obedience. They also saw it as their duty to set a personal example by themselves enlisting as soon as possible. Thus Neville Lytton at Crabbet Park, near Crawley, writes 'The average squire at the outbreak of war was a Territorial and, as soon as he put his affairs in order, he joined his unit and got his marching orders'⁴⁵, which is exactly what Lytton did himself. Having raised 150 recruits from villages south of Horsham, he reported with his men at the training camp at Cooden Beach, Bexhill, and was commissioned a major in the 11th (1st Southdown) Battalion.

Lytton's methods may appear unconventional, but they were certainly effective, men responding to pressure from their landlords to enlist. For example, the fact that the family of Ralph Ellis, the Arundel sign-writer, were tenants of the Duke of Norfolk may well have been significant in his decision to enlist at Chichester on 30th August 1914.⁴⁶ For others, particularly in the larger towns, the example and influence of a paternal employer were the critical factors. George Farndale and Charles Tullett worked together at Shippam's food-processing factory in Chichester, well-known for its fish and meat pastes. With the encouragement of the managing director, Mr Ernest Shippam, 17 Shippams employees enlisted in the 7th Battalion in August 1914⁴⁷ and, during the course of the War, 100 men left the East Walls works for military service.⁴⁸ Mr Shippam maintained regular correspondence with most of the employees serving in the forces, and he and his wife ensured that every man received regular food parcels, including seasonal delicacies at Christmas. The men wrote back to Shippam, thanking him and Mrs Shippam for their interest and kindness, reporting on their experiences and those of other Shippams men at the Front, and asking for news of doings at the factory. These letters are held at the West Sussex Record Office in Chichester.⁴⁹

Based on his study of these records, Grieves writes that:

On the outbreak of war, Shippam's encouraged the 'patriotic and loyal action' of enlistment from the works by providing ten shillings per week to volunteers to supplement their army pay. This statement was a characteristic employer intervention in support of recruiting Kitchener's New Armies. Seventeen men from Shippam's enlisted together in the 7th Service Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment, which was raised in Chichester. They had rapidly left their place of steady employment, albeit with the expectation of an early and guaranteed return to their workplace. On 3 September 1914, Colonel Osborn, commanding officer, was asked by Ernest Shippam that they 'be kept together' in the same company and a list of names was enclosed ... He was not an authorised raiser of manpower in the sense that he fed, housed, clothed and equipped whole units at his own expense. However, Shippam was one of many employers who urged his men to enlist at family-centred workplaces and who obtained direct access to military authority in doing so.⁵⁰

Throughout the war, Shippam corresponded regularly with over 30 employees, and their hopes of regaining employment after the War was a dominant theme, men reporting how much they would prefer to be at their workbenches and asking about employees still at the works. Grieves concludes:

The hope of happier days ... was never far away. These ... men remained, in their imagination at least, employees of C. Shippam Ltd., to the benefit of unit cohesion and military discipline through the idiom of local patriotism. In their letters from the front, pride in duty was evident as was the sense of having 'done their bit'. But so was the quest for peace and an end to soldiering.⁵¹

With monthly recruiting figures falling during the summer of 1915, Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, estimated that 35,000 recruits a week were needed to keep existing units at strength.⁵² It became apparent to the War Office that the manpower demands of a modern, industrialised, attritional war could not be met solely by the exercise of *noblesse oblige* in predominantly rural areas, and the authorities cast round for other

local champions, to supplement the work of the traditional leaders of rural society. The aim was to spread the net wider, particularly into the coastal towns of Sussex. The alternative local champion who emerged in Sussex was Colonel Claude Lowther MP, the recently arrived owner of Herstmonceux Castle estate, near Hailsham in East Sussex. Lowther had no traditional association with Sussex and his territorial affinity was with north Cumberland, where he was a Conservative MP. Recruitment took place during the autumn of 1914 and, by Christmas, three battalions had been raised (Fig. 6). Based on a sample of 300 men of Sussex origin who died in the War, Grieves calculates that 36% of the new recruits came from the coastal towns, including Brighton (11%), Eastbourne (7%) and Worthing (6%), 14% from villages and towns within five miles of the South Downs and 43% from mid and north Sussex, predominantly from Wealden villages. East Sussex provided 75% of all recruits in this sample.⁵³ This distribution contrasts sharply with that of the 7th, 8th and 9th New Army Battalions, which were raised mainly in the western part of Sussex.

The importance that Grieves attaches to the chalk hills of the South Downs as the predominant factor in motivating recruitment to the Southdown battalions is best expressed in the following paragraph of his 1993 article in *Rural History*.

To 'Join the Southdowns' was to respond to the most powerful unifying reference point in Sussex. The chalk upland provided a universal image of countywide proportions, instead of acting as a metaphor for a 'bygone' Sussex. Unlike the ... geographical affinity of the 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion the motif of the South Downs crossed the rural-urban and yeoman-townsman dichotomies. From the wooded heights of the South Downs on the Sussex-Hampshire border this clearly defined hill range and scarpfoot area extended sixty miles eastwards across the Arun, Adur, Ouse and Cuckmere valleys to Beachy Head at Eastbourne. It defined the urbanising extent of Worthing, Shoreham, Brighton and Seaford on the coastal plain and dominated the southerly aspect of the 'open' Wealden villages to the east and the estate villages around Midhurst, Petworth and Pulborough to the west.⁵⁴

Men of the Southdown battalions from



Fig. 6. Postcard: Lowther's Lambs Cooden Camp "C" Coy Dinnertime.

Worthing, encamped on the Downs above Shoreham, chose as their mascot a Southdown lamb named Peter, provided by Mr William Passmore of Applesham Farm, Coombes.⁵⁵ The emergence of the Southdown Brigade as the Sussex equivalent of the Leeds and Accrington Pals provides further evidence that locality and landscape were important factors in motivating recruitment into the New Army. Four of the 12 Sussex soldiers whose records have been studied (Blunden, Carter, Lytton and Whitcomb) enlisted in the Southdown Brigade. Their motives were mixed. Blunden's memoir was written by a scholar and poet, who described himself as 'A harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat'⁵⁶, with the intention of publication. While *Undertones of War* is infused by Blunden's love of England, the countryside in which he grew up and the friends he made in the army, his precise motivation for enlisting remains unclear. However, the fact that he chose to join the Southdown Brigade of his adopted county's regiment suggests a strong association with Sussex and a wish to be identified with the people and landscapes of the county in which he spent his happy schooldays and holidays.

Carter, on the other hand, has left little trace, only two short letters to his wife, Kitty, surviving in the regimental archive. His importance lies in the way in which he was memorialised and feted after his death⁵⁷, but his motives in signing up are unclear. However, he had previously been a regular soldier, serving in the Far East with the Royal Field Artillery as a bombardier, was invalided out and had a series of poorly paid jobs before war was declared. He enlisted in the Southdown Brigade at Eastbourne on 5th September 1914, was given the number SD/4 and promoted to corporal that same day. He rose to become a company sergeant major, which rank he occupied when he was killed in action. His motivation for enlisting seems to have been his love of army life, his experience as a regular, the prospect of rapid advancement and the association of the 12th Battalion with his home town and county, and with old friends.⁵⁸

Lytton's enthusiasm for supporting Colonel Lowther's project to recruit the Southdown Brigade is discussed above, but he makes it clear that his decision to enlist resulted from a number of factors, of which his strong attachment to locality and landscape was but one. Of equal importance

was his sympathy with France, where he had been brought up, and his resulting antipathy to their German invaders, and the circumstances of the death at the Front of a close friend.⁵⁹ Hugh Whitcomb's reasons for enlisting were more focused; he wanted to leave school. A Petworth boy, he had won a scholarship to the nearby Midhurst Grammar School. However, he could not abide the snobbish head master who tried to run it on public school lines and looked down on 'scholarship boys' like Whitcomb. In his memoir, he recalls:

When the War broke out in 1914 [I] became very unsettled, especially when thousands of young men, scenting adventure, made a rush to join the army. Even boys of my own age, 16, joined by increasing theirs to the minimum limit of 19 so that in December 1914 when I was 16¾ I persuaded my parents to let me follow suit ... With three others from Petworth I was posted to the 13th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment in training at Bexhill.⁶⁰

This review of the reasons why the 12 selected Sussex soldiers chose to enlist in their county regiment reveals wide variations, from the commitment of regulars like Fuller and Whittington to doing the job for which they had been trained, through Whitcomb's desire to escape from an unhappy situation at home, to the attraction for men like Carter, Farndale and Tullett of the prospect of serving with workmates and other men from their home town. Patriotism, in the sense of support for France and antipathy to German ambitions, was a factor, and there is some evidence, for example from Blunden, Ellis and Lytton, that a feeling for the county of Sussex and its landscapes played some part in their decisions to enlist. Grievs asks 'To what extent could a sense of belonging to Sussex have importance in an industrialised attritional war?'⁶¹ The evidence provided by the 12 soldiers whose records are the subject of this article is inconclusive, but suggestive of sense of place playing a role, if not a decisive one, in enlistment.

LOCALITY, LANDSCAPE AND THE CAPACITY TO ENDURE

From the time of their arrival in France, there is evidence of the 12 Sussex soldiers observing the landscapes of northern France and comparing

them to the familiar landscapes of home (Fig. 7). In the first summer of the war, Drummer George Whittington, the stable boy brought up at Washington in the heart of the South Downs, observes:

Large tracts of cornland, flat belts of country stretching for miles and afterwards gently undulating country of a typically English character abounding in grazing sheep and cattle but with cereal crops also ... The harvest is just being gathered in and in many cases the reservists are engaged in harvesting work.⁶²

The following summer, Sansom writes that 'The harvest is going on – the crops are a lesson to all Englishmen in this part of the world, as they are simply wonderful'.⁶³ Private Farndale from Chichester, where the River Lavant is canalised through the City, draws a parallel with home. 'Close by us here runs a river a little wider than Chichester canal, with nice clean water in it. Here we are allowed to bathe'.⁶⁴ Farndale thought that the landscape around Le Havre was very like Sussex, and that 'a nearby house reminds one very much of Goodwood [the country seat of the Duke of Richmond, near Chichester]'.⁶⁵

Whittington was killed in action at Priez on 10th September 1914. From early 1915 through to the spring of 1916, all the surviving 11 Sussex soldiers were deployed in Flanders, mainly in the Ypres and Cuinchy sectors. They were then progressively redeployed to the Somme, in preparation for the offensive of 1st July, Company Sergeant-Major Nelson Carter being killed in the diversionary attack on the Boar's Head on 30th June. The surviving 10 men fought on the Somme throughout 1916 and into 1917, Lieutenant-Colonel Sansom being killed in action at Monchy on 5th July. The focus then shifted back to Flanders, and the Sussex Battalions participated in the second battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). 1918 found Sussex soldiers engaged in resisting the German spring offensive on the Somme. Their records reveal their responses to the two very different landscapes of war: the mud of Flanders and the chalk hills of the Somme. Their responses were informed by their familiarity with the landscapes of Sussex.

Grievs refers to the similarities of the Somme and the South Downs, but writes that 'In comparison, the flat mud-drenched fields of Flanders were the antithesis of the South Downs and remained so shortly before the outbreak of the

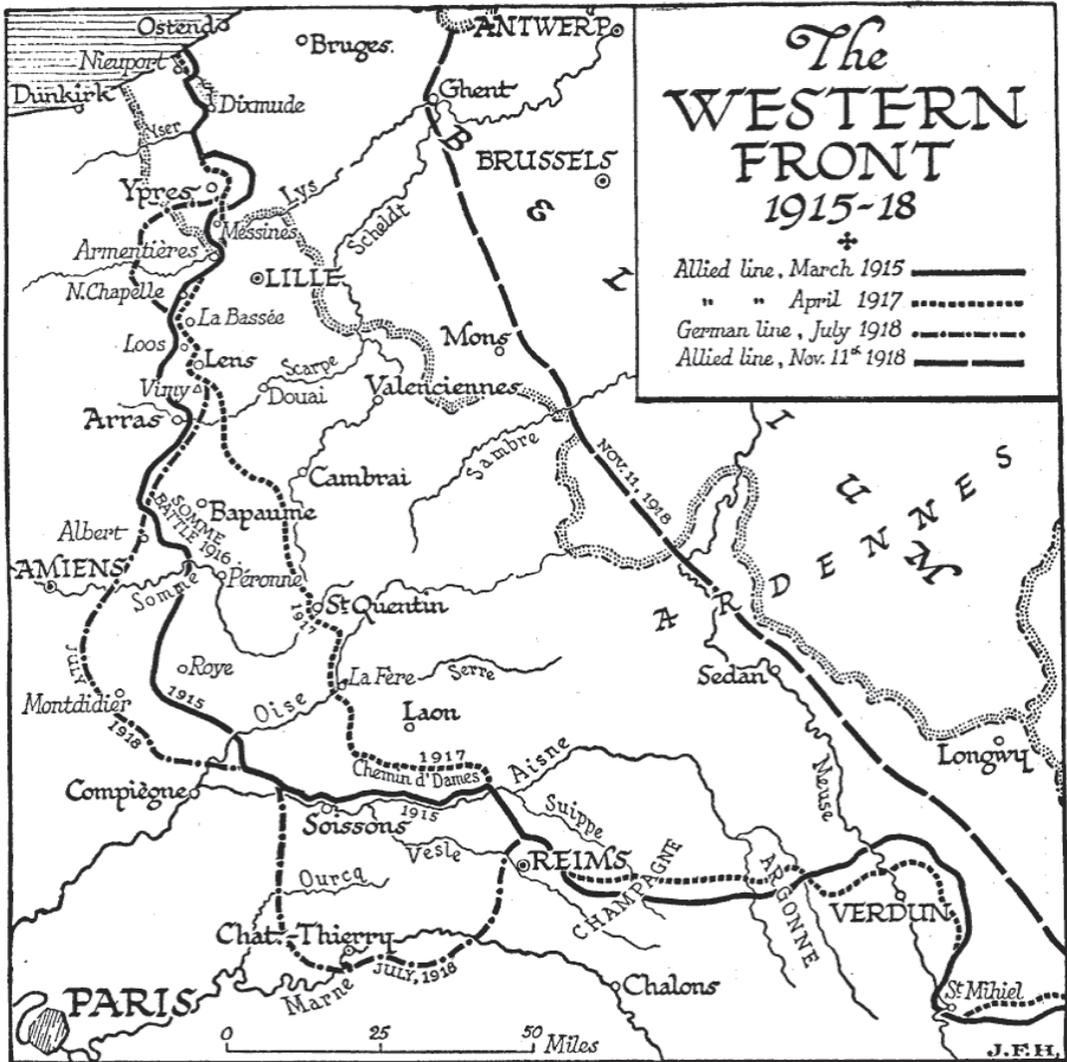


Fig. 7. Map: the Western Front 1915-18.

next war'.⁶⁶ The Sussex soldiers agreed. Describing conditions near Festubert in 1916, Whitcomb says:

This place was unique in that the land was marshy so that it was impossible to dig trenches ... We were on flat, low-lying ground which, but for the drainage system, would have reverted to what it had originally been, viz a swamp ...⁶⁷

Ellis says that, in the trenches of Flanders 'Everything is vile, horrible and hateful'.⁶⁸ He refers to the front-line trenches at Givenchy as 'a mass of mud ... crumbling and impassable' and says that

the line at Festubert 'formed a swamp of mud and water'.⁶⁹ Lytton writes that 'The country ... was completely water-logged and I doubt if any system of drainage could have kept the trenches dry ... Our communication trenches were more than half full of water...; this meant a steady occurrence of casualties during reliefs'.⁷⁰

The contrast with the Somme immediately struck Lytton, who was sent on ahead of his men to make a thorough reconnaissance on horseback of the sector which his battalion was to occupy in the Ancre valley. He recorded:

No greater contrast could possibly be imagined to the horrid flat marshes of Flanders; here was fine rolling country in the midst of which was a winding marshy stream of great beauty. The valley was still green and the German lines stood out in white (the soil being chalky) as clearly as the lines of a lawn-tennis court on an English lawn.⁷¹

Sansom describes the landscape of the Somme as follows.

We are now in a country very like parts of Sussex; there are fruit trees, streams that move, hills and valleys high enough and deep enough to break monotony and make you realise how much more interesting a country is when you can't see the whole of it.⁷²

Margary was detailed to join the 7th Battalion, Royal Sussex, and travelled by train.

The country was rather open and rolling, and full of fine cows. ... The next stage of our journey ... was very beautiful, as our train rolled at an easy pace down the marshy and poplar-covered valley of the River Somme, with the twilight gradually deepening. It was quite dark before we reached Amiens.⁷³

The other area of contrast which the Sussex soldiers' records feature is that between their experiences on the front line and behind the lines. Officers and men on the Western Front spent significant amounts of time away from the firing line, in reserve, at rest, attending courses and on leave, during which they had time to explore and observe the countryside behind the lines. Margary describes the pattern of trench life in a quiet sector of the Somme battlefield in 1916.

Each battalion did the following tour: six days at Dainville, six days in the trenches, six days in support at Agny, six days in the trenches, then at Dainville again, and so on. The companies in the Battalion went into the reserve line trenches in rotation, and thus had their rest every fourth spell.⁷⁴

The precise pattern of deployment varied between units and sectors, and depended on what was going on at the time, but the point is that the experience of soldiers was not confined to the front line, but included more peaceful times out of the line, when the countryside could be explored and observed, and parallels drawn with the remembered landscapes of Sussex. Lytton was

accompanied by his horse on his reconnaissance mission on the Somme, and Sansom also had his horse Jorrocks with him throughout much of his time on the Western Front. It was his great delight to snatch the occasional day off and disappear on long expeditions behind the lines. Towards Christmas 1915, 'with some sandwiches in my pocket and a feed in a nose-bag on the saddle', he set off on Jorrocks on a 30-kilometre ride to Mailly-Maillet and Albert, passing as close to the front line as he could. He writes to his wife 'The sun was out all day ... I think it has been the pleasantest day I've had since coming to these parts'.⁷⁵

Time spent behind the lines also enabled soldiers to remember happy times at home, including time spent in training on the South Downs (Fig. 8). Blunden recalls a golden day in the summer of 1915 in charge of a squad of men recovering from wounds at Shoreham Camp.

It had been my happiness to march them out to a place at once sequestered and sunny as I could find, overlooking the lazy [River] Adur, and there to let them bask on the grass, and tell their tales, and be peaceful. How contently they had rested in the lucky sun!⁷⁶

Locality and landscape mattered to the Sussex soldiers, but a number of other motivational factors are also revealed in the sources. The friendships between comrades in arms and the confidence which officers and men had in each other are referred to by several of the Sussex soldiers whose accounts have been studied. The letters from Farndale and Tullett to Mr Ernest Shippam are full of references to the activities of other Shippam's men at the Front and the support which such contact provided: 'I saw several Chi [Chichester] lads, and it made one quite forget there was a war on for the time being'⁷⁷, 'Ernie Hull is away suffering from shock'⁷⁸, 'Farndale is another one of the lucky ones to be home in 'Blighty'.⁷⁹ Private Fuller took strength from the fact that, from time to time, he ran into his brother. 'Saw Percy at Herroncourt, outside Peronne. I hadn't seen [him] for some time, until we got here and had a good time together.'⁸⁰

Lytton records his admiration for his brother officers.⁸¹ Sansom is fulsome in his comments on the fortitude of the private soldiers under his command.⁸² Fuller describes Blunden as 'a good officer'.⁸³ Packham says that his company commander 'was in my opinion the finest officer that anyone could serve under'.⁸⁴ Ellis records that,

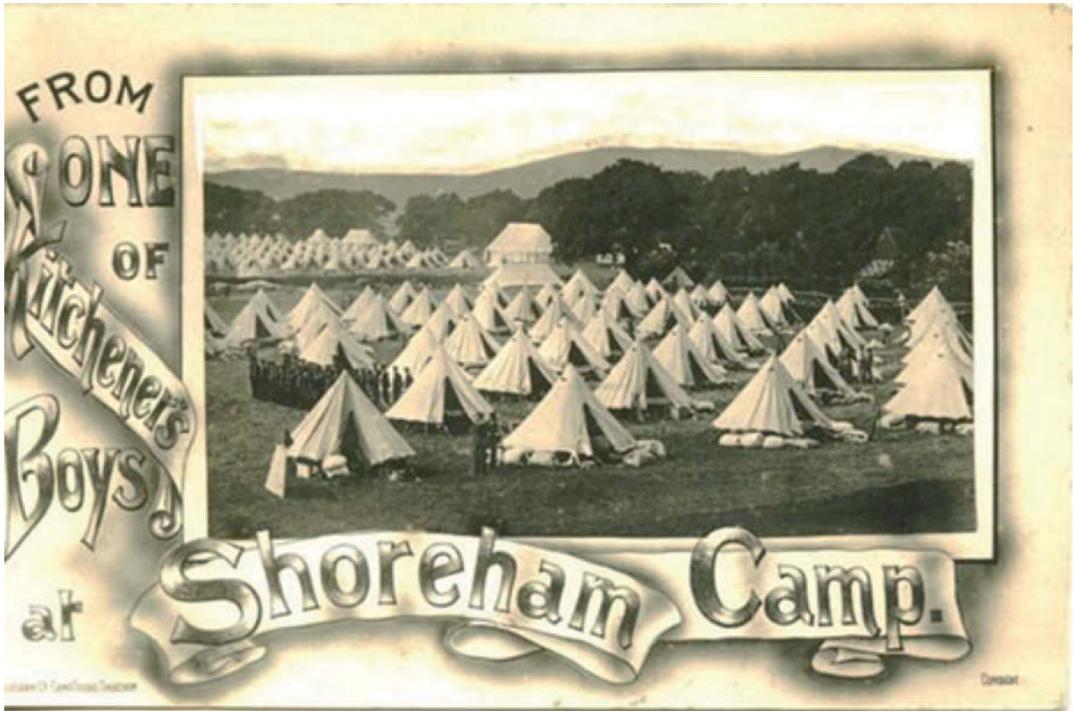


Fig. 8. Postcard: From one of Kitchener's Boys at Shoreham Camp.

when his commanding officer left, the battalion's 'highest esteem and goodwill' went with him⁸⁵ and Blunden refers to his affection for his wiring sergeant, Frank Worley from Worthing, with whom he later made contact again, following the publication of *Undertones of War*.⁸⁶ Writing many years after the event, and reflecting what was then a conventional view, Whitcomb is highly critical of the conduct of the war⁸⁷ but the evidence of the other Sussex soldiers reflects a respect for each other's valued contributions.

There is no doubt that professionalism, the desire to do a good job and ambition were important motivating factors for several of the Sussex soldiers whose records have been studied. Many of them actively sought advancement and, in a war which lasted a long time and in which there were many casualties, able men who survived could expect rapid promotion. Thus, Blunden became a full lieutenant and was made brigade intelligence officer; Carter was successively promoted, becoming company sergeant-major; Ellis was promoted to sergeant and given the opportunity to take a commission. Farndale was

also promoted to sergeant. Fuller remained a private, but secured a comfortable billet as servant to an officer posted away from the Western Front. Lytton was already a major and joined the General Staff, in charge of press liaison with French war correspondents; Margary became a full lieutenant; Packham was promoted to sergeant. On his promotion to captain, Sansom writes to his wife:

It is a great thing to feel I am in a position more consistent with my age, and, I hope, I shall do the job properly ... I expect you are smiling at my keenness and think I have my tail up because I have a little brief authority. Well, I don't think life is worth living unless one can be keen on something.⁸⁸

Following his final promotion, to lieutenant-colonel and commanding officer of the 7th Battalion, Sansom confided to Ivy, after the Battle of Arras in April 1917, 'I have commanded a Battalion in hot action and my ambition is satisfied'.⁸⁹

Signaller Packham, the only regular in the group to survive the War, summarises his army service as follows.

I was discharged on the 30th March 1920. So ends my story of a great adventure. It lasted for seven years and one hundred and thirteen days ... During those seven years I was taught how to ride a horse; how to communicate by signals, using the Morse code; ... how to use and operate a Lewis machine gun, Vickers and Hoskins machine guns and was able to instruct classes. I was taught to kill and how to bury the dead... I was very proud of being a member of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment who had served in practically all front line sectors from Nieuport Bains on the English Channel to the Chemin des Dames on the River Aisne.⁹⁰

This was a record of which Packham was justifiably proud, and many of the soldiers whose records have been studied shared his satisfaction in a job well done. Other powerful, more practical, motivators are the prospect of a bath⁹¹, food⁹², a comfortable billet⁹³, rest behind the lines, a 'Blighty one' requiring hospitalisation, convalescence and the attention of pretty nurses⁹⁴, a concert party⁹⁵, football⁹⁶, alcohol⁹⁷ and the company of accommodating women.⁹⁸

CONCLUSIONS

The reasons that led men to enlist to fight in the First World War and to endure the conditions they encountered on the Western Front were many and varied. As has been evident from the accounts of the Sussex soldiers whose records have been studied, their motives included patriotism, loyalty to King and Country, antipathy to the aggressors, belief in the righteousness of the Allied cause, social pressure, loyalty to comrades, officers and the regiment, excitement and a sense of adventure, dissatisfaction with civilian life, professionalism, ambition, fear of disciplinary reprisals, support from home, 'seeing it through', determination, the compensations of life behind the lines, a wish to eventually get back to England in one piece and to resume 'normal' life.

But, in addition, this article concludes that a powerful motivator for this group of men, both to enlist and to endure, was an attachment to the landscapes of 'the South Country'. That construct of rural England was created by poets and artists in the first decade of the 20th century, and writers such as Fussell and Howkins identify it as the

pastoral vision which, for so many people, came to be what the notion of 'England' meant to them and therefore, by extension, what they were fighting for in the First World War. Sussex and the South Downs are at the core of this imaginary South Country, and it is not surprising that attachment to locality and landscape was particularly strong here. It is also clear from the evidence that this was not something restricted to the better educated, officer class. Of course, officers like Blunden, Lytton and Sansom exhibit this feeling most strongly, but it also comes over very clearly in the accounts of private soldiers, such as Ellis, Farndale, Fuller, Tullett and Whittington, all of whom write movingly of their experiences by reference to the landscapes at home in Sussex.

Hynes points out that, as well as this being the first war to be fought by volunteers,

for the first time in English military history they would be **literate** volunteers – young clerks and young artists, students from Oxford and Eton, the sons of peers and the sons of parsons, men from all classes, but sharing a common literacy.⁹⁹

The evidence of the sources studied strongly bears this out, with eloquent testimony from men from humble backgrounds, as well as those born in more favourable circumstances, of the common importance of this powerful image of pastoral England in the minds of the generation that went to war. The vision had, indeed, 'spread downwards', to use Howkins' words,¹⁰⁰ as is evidenced by the way in which the Sussex soldiers, of all ranks, observe and interpret their surroundings in France through the lens of their appreciation of the landscapes of 'the South Country', to which they feel a powerful emotional attachment. This attachment seems to have been particularly strongly felt by volunteers enlisting in the New Army, especially in the Southdown Brigade, and territorials in the 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion, both of which were raised in very specific areas of East Sussex. The recruitment of the territorial 5th Battalion was concentrated around the town of Hastings, an area of Sussex that is relatively self-contained and has its own distinctive sense of place. The New Army Southdown Brigade, known as 'Lowther's Lambs', was created by Colonel Lowther as a distinct entity raised from Sussex towns and villages. The Brigade trained at Cooden, exercised on the South Downs and had a Southdown lamb as its mascot.



Fig. 9. Grave of CSM Nelson Victor Carter VC, Laventie, La Gorgue, Pas-de-Calais, France.

Little wonder that its members felt a keen sense of place and commitment to ‘the South Country’ as the homeland they were seeking to defend. The regulars in the group saw soldiering more as a profession than a vocation, were less moved by considerations of locality, but still felt a strong loyalty to the county regiment, taking pride in its

reputation and proud history.

The authorities were, of course, well aware of all this – hence the appeal made by government, community leaders and the press to county loyalty in encouraging enlistment, such feelings reflecting a powerful sense of place and belonging, genuinely felt by men of all classes. Hence, also, the way in which the local press lionised the gallantry of Nelson Carter VC, and local dignitaries supported events to raise money for his widow and children, and to install a captured German gun at Eastbourne as a memorial to him (Fig. 9). Attachment to locality and landscape was encouraged, even exploited, by the authorities to encourage recruitment and sustain morale, but that does not necessarily diminish the potency of the imagery of ‘the South Country’ for the men fighting in the county Regiment. Of course, other motivations are also important, but it is clear from these soldiers’ accounts that an attachment to the landscapes of the county of Sussex (and in particular the chalk landscapes of the South Downs) did indeed play a part in motivating and sustaining men fighting for their county, as well as their country.

I can’t forget the lane that goes from Steyning to the Ring

In summer time, and on the Down how larks and linnets sing

High in the sun. The wind comes off the sea, and Oh the air!

I never knew till now that life in old days was so fair.

But now I know in this filthy rat infested ditch

When every shell may spare or kill – and God alone knows which,

And I am made a beast of prey, and this trench is my lair.

My God! I never knew till now that those days were so fair

So we assault in half an hour, and – it’s a silly thing –

I can’t forget the narrow lane to Chanctonbury Ring.¹⁰¹

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NOTES

¹ S. Schama, *Landscape and memory* (London: Harper Perennial, 1995), 14.

² H. Belloc, *Sussex Painted by Wilfrid Ball* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1906).

³ For example, H. Belloc, *The South Country* (1910) in H. Belloc, *Complete Verse* (London: Pimlico, 1991), 36–38.

- ⁴ R. Kipling, *Sussex* (1902) in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse Inclusive Edition 1885–1918* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, undated), 244–5 and *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), (London: Wordsworth Children's Classics, 1994).
- ⁵ 2nd Lieutenant John ("Jack") Kipling, 2nd Battalion Irish Guards was killed at the Battle of Loos in 1915, and Flying Officer Louis Belloc, Royal Flying Corps, was killed in action in France in 1918. Rudyard Kipling never forgave himself for putting pressure on friends in high places to enable his short-sighted, unmilitary, son to enlist.
- ⁶ E. Thomas, *The South Country* (London: Hutchinson, 1909).
- ⁷ E. Farjeon, *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years* (London: Faber, 1997), 154.
- ⁸ F. Newbould, *Poster: Your Britain: Fight for it Now!* (Imperial War Museum, London, 1942). The poster features the South Downs landscape at Eastbourne.
- ⁹ A. Howkins, *The Discovery of Rural England* in ed. R. Colls and P. Dodd, *Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880–1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 62–83.
- ¹⁰ W. Hudson, *Nature in Downland* (London: Longman Green, 1923).
- ¹¹ Howkins, 62.
- ¹² P. Brandon, *The Discovery of Sussex* (Andover: Phillimore, 2010), 9.
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- ⁴⁶ R. Ellis, *A March with the Infantry by Four-Two-Eight*, WSRO Add Mss 25001, 3–8.
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- ⁵⁵ J. Baines, *The Day Sussex Died: A History of Lowther's Lambs to the Boar's Head Massacre* (Brighton: Privately published, 2012), 19.
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- ⁵⁷ Fulsome obituaries appeared in local papers, particularly *The Eastbourne Gazette*, benefit events (including film shows at the cinema where he worked before the War) were held to raise money for his widow and children and, following the Armistice, funds were contributed to enable Eastbourne to take delivery of a captured German gun, under a scheme organised by the War Trophies Department that aimed to place such a gun in every community whose inhabitants included a holder of the Victoria Cross (RSR 7/27–41).
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- ⁶⁰ *Family Notes and War Memoirs by Hugh Whitcomb, 13th Battalion Signallers, Royal Sussex Regiment, 1979*, WSRO MP 2413.
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- ⁶³ I. Sansom (ed.), *Letters from France June 1915–July 1917* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1921), 68.
- ⁶⁴ WSRO Add Ms 1606 *Letters written from the Western Front by G. Farndale to Mr Ernest Shippam, chairman of Shippams (Chichester) Ltd.*, 25.7.15.

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- ⁶⁵ Farndale, 18.6.1915.
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- ⁶⁷ Whitcomb, 14 & 17.
- ⁶⁸ WSRO Add Mss 25001 R. Ellis, *A March with the Infantry by Four-Two-Eight* (1947–8), 45.
- ⁶⁹ Ellis, 51–7.
- ⁷⁰ Lytton, *The Press*, 24–25.
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- ⁷² Sansom, 97.
- ⁷³ *Some Experiences of the Great War Whilst Serving with the 7th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment in France* by Lieutenant Ivan Margary, 3rd Battalion, The Royal Sussex Regiment, written in 1919, original and typescript version in the library of the Sussex Archaeological Society, Barbican House, Lewes, East Sussex, 5.
- ⁷⁴ Margary, 35.
- ⁷⁵ Sansom, 162.
- ⁷⁶ Blunden, 15.
- ⁷⁷ WSRO Add Ms 1606 *Letters written from the Western Front by C. Tullett to Mr Ernest Shippam, chairman of Shippams (Chichester) Ltd.*, 14.2.1916.
- ⁷⁸ Tullett, 21.3.1916.
- ⁷⁹ Tullett, 29.11.1915.
- ⁸⁰ RSR5/85 6 March 1916–29 January 1919. Diaries of H.S. Fuller of Eastbourne, 5th (Cinque Ports) Battalion, The Royal Sussex Regiment, 24.3.1917.
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- ⁸² Sansom, 76, 144, 246 & 281.
- ⁸³ Fuller, 21.7.1916.
- ⁸⁴ RSR2/54 1912–1920 *Memoirs of an Old Contemptible: The recollections of Sergeant F. M. Packham*, 30.
- ⁸⁵ Ellis, 104.
- ⁸⁶ Blunden, 66.
- ⁸⁷ Whitcomb, 11.
- ⁸⁸ Sansom, 197.
- ⁸⁹ Sansom, 310.
- ⁹⁰ Packham, 30.
- ⁹¹ Ellis, 115.
- ⁹² Fuller, 25.12.1916.
- ⁹³ Margary, 60.
- ⁹⁴ Lytton, 31; Margary, 104.
- ⁹⁵ Fuller, 29.7.1916.
- ⁹⁶ Ellis, 49.
- ⁹⁷ Fuller, 19.
- ⁹⁸ Ellis, 115.
- ⁹⁹ Hynes, 28.
- ¹⁰⁰ Howkins, 62.
- ¹⁰¹ 2nd Lieutenant John Stanley Purvis, 5th Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment, *The Steyning Poem* (London, 1916). Chanctonbury Ring is an Iron Age hill fort on Chanctonbury Hill, on the South Downs north of Worthing.
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