



History Notebook 59

WE WILL REMEMBER THE POLICE OFFICERS OF ESSEX KILLED IN THE GREAT WAR

On 21st September, 1914, just a month after the outbreak of The Great War, Laurence Binyon's poem *For the Fallen* was published in The Times newspaper. Could he ever have imagined that his poignant words would be regularly recited at memorial services one hundred years later or that they would apply to over one million British and Commonwealth men and women whose lives were sacrificed in that human tragedy?

*They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against the odds encountered:
They fell with their faces to the foe.*

*They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them*

Thirty-three police officers from the County of Essex paid the supreme sacrifice whilst serving with the Military in The Great War. Twenty-two of those men had served with Essex Constabulary, nine were former Southend-On-Sea Borough Constabulary officers and two had served with Colchester Borough Police.

At the end of the war the police officers who had died were remembered, as individuals they were remembered by their loved ones - mothers and fathers who had lost a son, wives and children who had lost a husband or father and by girlfriends, brothers and sisters and those who had known, worked and played with them.



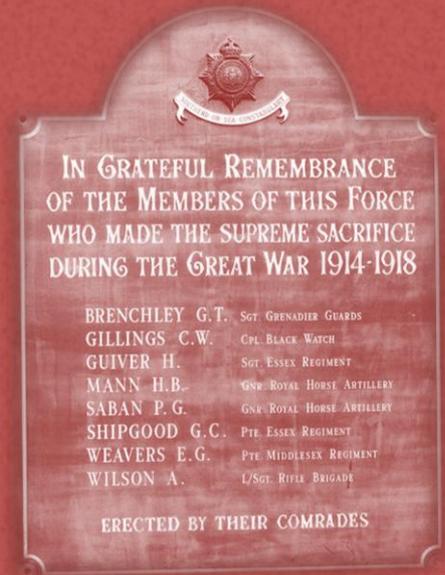
Essex Constabulary remembered the officers who had died and a memorial, made from marble and dark wood, listing the names of the twenty-two officers was erected in the Shire Hall at Chelmsford.

Communities in Essex and elsewhere remembered and names of some of the police officers were included on local memorials erected in memory of those who had died whilst serving their country.

Left: Memorial - Shire Hall, Chelmsford

In 1946 a bronze plate dedicated to eight of the Southend police officers killed in The Great War was displayed at the old police station in Alexander Street, Southend. This plate has now been moved to a wall opposite the entrance to Southend Police Station.

In November 1995, in recognition that the names of Constables Frank Brace and Frederick Redhouse were not listed on a police memorial, a bronze plaque was placed on a wall in Colchester Police station preserving the memory of the two officers. This memorial was erected at the instigation of the Essex Police Memorial Trust, a charity set up with the primary aim of ensuring that those police officers who have served in the County of Essex and who have been killed in the execution of their duty should not be forgotten.



Memorial Southend Police Station

The Memorial Trust also arranged for a Stone of Remembrance to be placed, in a fitting setting, on the lawn at the front of Police Headquarters as a tribute to those who are remembered.

In 2002 it was discovered that Thomas George Joyce had been omitted from the Southend memorial and a small bronze plate, bearing his name was positioned alongside the original Southend memorial.

Each year the thirty-three officers, from the three forces, who were killed in The Great War continue to be remembered when wreaths are laid, by representatives of Essex Police, in their honour on Remembrance Day.

As time has passed, however, it became apparent that little was known about the men whose names are listed on the respective memorials and who are 'remembered' each year, or of the circumstances in which those young men had met their death. Unfortunately many of the police records relating to the officers had been misplaced, lost or destroyed. Contact with families had been lost and there was no record of any visits being made either to the graves of those who are buried or to the memorials on which the others are commemorated.

The lack of knowledge raised the question as to whether it was possible to truly remember the officers who had died as individuals when so little was known about them. In an attempt to rectify this research has been conducted on behalf of the Essex Police Memorial Trust in relation to each of the officers who were killed. The research, based primarily on local newspaper records, regimental records and battalion diaries, has enabled the compilation of accounts relating to each of the officers that gives some insight into the circumstances that led to their death.

Most of the officers had served, and met their death, on the Western Front and it has been possible to visit the locations where they were killed and the respective grave or memorial on which individuals are commemorated. The places visited resound with the horrors of The Great War, and include Mons, Le Cateau, The Marne, The Aisne, Ypres, Loos, Messine Ridge, The Somme, Arras, Cambrai and Passendale. At least one of the officers who died during the war was present during these battles and in some instances, as regiments moved along The Western Front, individuals fought in close proximity to other police colleagues from the County of Essex. Indeed tracing the movements of individual officers follows the history of The Great War from August 1914 to October 1918.

The purpose in conducting the research has been threefold: first and foremost it is intended as a tribute to the thirty-three police officers who paid the ultimate sacrifice, secondly it has enabled Essex Police to lay a wreath on The Western Front in commemoration of fallen colleagues and thirdly, by documenting the research, hopefully, it will encourage others to visit France and Flanders to remember and honour those who did not return.

The second of these objectives was achieved in 2004, when Superintendent Steve Currell and George Cook – Deputy Commandant of the Essex Police Special Constabulary – laid a wreath in honour of those who had died on behalf of the Chief Constable and the past and present members of Colchester Borough Police, Essex Police and Southend on Sea County Borough Constabulary. The Essex Police Memorial Trust ensure that a similar wreath is laid during a memorial service at Lochnagar Crater, La Boisselle, Somme each year on 1st July.



Of the thirty-three officers, thirteen were reservists having served with the Military prior to joining the police, as a consequence they were all recalled to the colours in August 1914 when war was declared and rejoined the regiments with which they had previously served. The remainder were volunteers who responded to 'Kitchener's call' having obtained permission from their respective Chief Constable.

Left: Wreath laid at The Memorial to the Missing on The Somme, Thiepval

At least fourteen of the officers were married and of those seven had at least one child. Some of the children were never seen by their father. Ernest Wedlock, at 41 years of age was the oldest officer to volunteer, had ten children but did not want the indignity of being considered a coward. He had said *'There are some white feathers about and I'm off.'*

Most of the officers were in their early twenties. When the service records of the individuals are traced through battalion diaries the police officers from Essex can be found in all the major battles on the Western Front (France and Flanders) during the five years of The Great War. Officers also served in Salonika, East Africa and Gallipoli. One officer, Joseph Farmer, who was captured as a prisoner as early as September 1914 was held prisoner on The Eastern Front in what is now Latvia only to die from his poor treatment on 15th April, 1917.

Most of the thirteen reservists, recalled in August 1914 took part in the battles that followed the retreat from Mons – Le Cateau, the Marne and the Aisne. Five of them were dead by the end of 1914. Percy Battle was killed just two weeks after leaving his policing beat in Essex.

The main areas of engagement of the police officers from Essex were Ypres (first, second and third battles), Loos, The Somme, Arras and Cambrai. All but two of the officers served on the Western Front, the exceptions being Alfred Hyde and Walter Perry who served in East Africa.

The length of military service of the individuals during The Great War varied considerably from

Percy Battle, who was killed just two weeks into the war, to George Brenchley, a married man with two children, who served for four years till his death on 24th August, 1918.

Fifteen of those who died have no known grave. If their body was ever recovered it was not identified and the headstone over their remains would read *'Known unto God'*. All of these men are commemorated with so many others on memorials in France and Flanders – four on The Memorial to the Missing on The Somme at Thiepval, two on The Tyne Cott Memorial, three on The Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, three on The Loos Memorial, two on The Cambrai Memorial and one on The La Ferte-Sous-Jouarre Memorial.

Right: Memorial to the Missing on The Somme, Thiepval.



Left: The Loos Memorial, Dud Corner Cemetery.

Of the others fifteen are buried in Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries in France and Flanders, one is buried in Latvia, one in Mozambique and one at Wilhamsted in the UK.

The information and photographs relating to these officers is now included on the Essex Police Memorial Trust website and is available for anyone to access via the WW1 heading. As a consequence of researching the website, family members of officers who were killed have made contact and

have been provided with information and photographs that had not, previously, been available to them.

Visiting what was the Western Front is a humbling experience; there are in excess of six hundred Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries of varying size some, appropriately, referred to as *'Silent Cities'*. The locations where these young men are buried/commemorated and the vast cemeteries where young French and German soldiers lie raises many emotions and many questions. The only consolation, when standing in what are now peaceful settings is that after the horrors of war they now lie in peace. We cannot begin to appreciate all they went through or the suffering and hardship that their families had to face as a consequence of their death.

However, having determined some of the background as to the circumstances in which the police officers from Essex were killed in The Great War at least it is now easier to adhere to the words of Lawrence Binyon - *We will remember them*

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OPEN: Saturdays 10am to 4pm

