

SANDBACH SCHOOL IN THE GREAT WAR ...

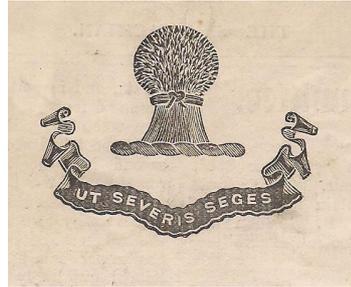
COMPILED by Connor Reeves (Sandbach School Pupil at the time)

The FIRST TERM OF THE GREAT WAR ...

**2nd/Lt. Alfred John Haughton
Alfred Stanhope O'Dwyer**

The FIRST TERM OF THE GREAT WAR ...

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The coming of war instigated many of the changes that would be made, around the school between 1914 and 1919.

One of these was the creation of the First Form Knitting Society, which was established to knit scarves, gloves and other articles of clothing to send to the brave soldiers in the winter trenches of France and Belgium. The masters and pupils of the school knew that Britain entering a war meant there was a real chance of invasion by Germany. Because of this threat, and no doubt the knowledge that once pupil left school they would be joining the colours, the Miniature Rifle Club was set up to provide extra training and practice for the boys to improve their skill with firearms. The school booklet jokingly states that “the Kaiser has been the making of the Miniature Rifle Club”. Joking aside, people were worried - the regular rifle club was said to have had more members in the last term of 1914, than the three years previous, at least. This goes some way to showing the extent of fear felt around the school.



The local Community knew that war was a costly business. By the last month of the first year of the Great War weekly collections from the pupils, masters and parents had enabled the school make donations to the Belgian Relief Fund (£1), the St. John Ambulance Society (£1 1s) and the King George Hospital (£1 5s) to help with the cost of caring for sick and wounded soldiers, sailors and airmen as well as displaced Belgian refugees. Although in the context of the time and social environment a combined total of £3 6s is quite a substantial sum, the school was not too pleased with their efforts and hoped to see their contributions “largely” increase next term. Donations from the school showed that people were aware of the casualties being inflicted on servicemen throughout the world, so much so that, in 1914, the war was already know as the “Great War”. Despite the knowledge that the fighting would come at some cost to British lives, the school remained, through no fault of its own, very naive to the true toll that war would eventually take. This is probably partly in thanks to the filtration of what could be published in the newspapers and media because of the introduction of the Defence of The Realm act of 1914, giving the government permission to suppress and ban information, no matter how trivial or seemingly unimportant, that may jeopardise the war effort of the country. Already, a mere 3 months into the conflict, people were talking about the war being over. Plans were made which entailed a reunion of the serving Old Boys, after the war. It is almost tragic that the school planned this reunion, not knowing that they would lose almost 40 men in the fighting that would follow. Sandbach Grammar’s naivety can be understood

when the facts are observed; in December 1914, the school has not lost any men, yet has several soldiers and naval men serving the Empire were “Doing their duty”, Masters at the school were incredibly proud that they had educated these young men and were responsible for the production of fine soldiers and sailors. They, too, had done their bit for the Empire and it makes it easier to understand the view taken by the school.

It is well known that mothers, brothers, sisters and all people associated soldiers, if at first shocked and worried, were proud of their “soldier boys” and Sandbach Grammar School as an organisation was no different. The school was “indeed proud of its Roll of Honour”, which listed serving old boys and masters in the school publication, “The Sandbachian” and was amended between each edition. Many a proud Officer and Other Rank, returned to the school wearing their Khaki uniforms to see the old masters and tell them of their service. The ‘Old Sanbachian’ proudly boasts, in December 1914, “We have been delighted to receive many visits this term from Old Boys in Khaki”.

If you had joined the colours, you were made to feel very welcome at Sandbach School, but if you had not, it was a very different story. In a debate about conscription, currently a system that was not in practice, J.H. Whitter, a pupil of the school in 1914, said that “Those who stay behind are cowards” and any men that were compelled to join would “bring no credit to our army”. A fellow pupil, E R Patrick seconded Whitter’s remarks by saying that “a volunteer is worth three pressed men, and that every young man who loves his country volunteers”. Whitter’s motion was passed by 13 votes to 8.



As 1914 drew to a close, a school Roll-of-Honour was published in “The Sandbachian”. Naming 50 Old Boys or masters, the R-o-H served as a reference piece to present pupils and family that were all engrossed by news received from the front. Many of the boys that would read the names on this list, still pupils in 1914, would go onto the lay down their lives alongside the listed.

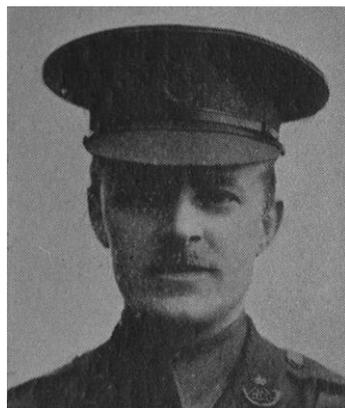
The first year of Sandbach Grammar School’s Great War had come to an end.

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Sandbach to the Salient – 2nd/Lt. Alfred John Haughton

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Alfred John Haughton was born in Sandbach, his future home, on 23rd December 1881. The oldest child of David and Emily of the Bank Manager’s house, Sandbach, Haughton was the first alumnus of Sandbach School (then Sandbach Grammar School) to give his life in the defence of the Empire. Alfred was born to a relatively well-off middleclass family, owing to his father’s position as the Manager of the District Bank. David would have been an integral part of the community as he was required to handle people’s finance. Being “in the know” regarding the local people’s affairs he would have been one of the bolts that supported the small market town community, part, in thanks, due to their central positioning within the town. Alfred and his sister, Marion, two

years younger than him, lived with their parents, and two live-in staff: housemaid Annie Ledwards and a cook Mary Ledwards, on the High Town. Attending Sandbach Grammar school between the years of 1892-1898 before moving onto the prestigious Sevenoaks School, Kent.

After his Grammar School years, Alfred went on to gain an offer from Queens' College, Cambridge, which he gratefully accepted. Reading the Natural Science Tripos at the university, from 1900 to 1903, Alfred became a Cadet Corporal in the Cambridge University Rifle Volunteers which was taken into account when he would apply for a commission some years later. Many universities offered extracurricular Rifle Volunteer societies which, aside from the training provided by the joining the Territorial Force, provided perhaps the best preface for the eventual coming of war, especially for the training of new young Subalterns. Taking part in regular drill and rifle shooting, the young Cadet Corporal was, purposefully or not, being trained and prepared for his future service, in the form of a continuation of the experience already attained from his time at Sandbach Grammar School, two years before.

Haughton was a greatly talented sportsman, regularly representing Sandbach in a wide range of school sports, displaying natural sporting ability on many occasions. Whilst at Cambridge, he took up the honour of becoming captain of the Queens' tennis six. He became "a good Association football player" and was a member of the Cambridge football team which won the 1900-01 inter college cup. Unfortunately for John, he only missed out on his 'blue' as a result of injury. News of Alfred's well deserved appointment to fullback in the team found its way back to the Sandbach, with updates of his progress being printed in the O.S section of the Sandbachian magazine.

After gaining a Second Class undergraduate degree from Cambridge, Alfred entered the Egyptian Civil Service where he initially worked in the Education Department and went on to become an inspector for the ministry of finance in Cairo. News of Alfred's success again filtered back to the school, in the April of 1909.

Alfred returned from Egypt on hearing about the outbreak of war, to offer his services in the British army, as he believed his patriotic duty was to do so. Haughton, who was 5ft10 and a half at the time of application, gained a commission as Second Lieutenant in the 1/9th Bn (Territorial) the Durham Light Infantry on October 6th, just over two months after the outbreak of war.

On the 4th of November of 1914, exactly 4 years before the Wilfred Owen would die crossing the canal at Ors, Alfred married Elisabeth Williamson, in Christ Church, Yarmouth, knowing that he may not return from the war to be wedded after the hostilities. His Mother was a witness of the marriage between Elisabeth and Alfred who now lived in Lorain House, South Shields.

Haughton, alongside his battalion of the Durham Light Infantry, arrived on The Western Front on 19th of April 1915, just 3 days before start of the Second Battle of Ypres. He was soon thrown into the fierce fighting in the defence of Ypres, as he took part in the battle.

Alfred was killed during night or early morning of 23/24 June, 1915, doing a very daring job. Whilst out of the safety of his trenches, examining the defensive barbed-wire in front, he met his fate. Making sure the wire was intact, or 'checking the wire' as it was commonly known, was a relentless task. In static warfare, the primitive but rather effective barbed-wire was an important line of defence because it would either stop attacking forces, hold them up for enough time to allow the defenders to get ready for the advance, stopping it in the early stages or, finally, to channel the attackers into small areas (where there were gaps in the line) where they could be cut down with enfilade fire. It was an important task because there were several reasons the wire could become damaged; enemy artillery could cause destruction and gaps to form, or an enemy planning to attack would often cut gaps in the wire to allow clear paths for their infantry to tread before an offensive or trench raid. Although of paramount importance, checking the wire was incredibly dangerous as it had to be done under the cover of darkness, when, unfortunately, human senses are most heightened. Dangers could include being on the wrong end of a sentry's searching rifle shot, Maxim machinegun fire or, the most unfortunate and unnerving of situations, the possibility of running into an enemy patrol or raiding party. The job required the utmost grit and bravery, as well as the ability to be silent and at one with the battlefield, to avoid being seen, heard or 'felt'. Haughton's death was described as "A great loss for the Battalion as he was a most reliable and energetic officer". It's a great testimony to his character that a personal tribute in exact detail was written in Battalion War Diary. He died whilst proving his extraordinary character, displaying the leadership and coolness under pressure that he had displayed in the sporting arena at Sandbach School, Sevenoaks and Queens' College Cambridge. Lieutenant (Temporary) Haughton, was in temporary command of his company after the officer commanding was killed, injured or missing.



Alfred's colonel wrote to David and Emily, Alfred's parents, on the 4th October 1915, after hearing about the death of one of his most respected 2/Lts., telling them, their "son was a splendid officer, one of the best in my battalion, always doing his duty...and he took the greatest care in every way of those placed under his command. He was one of the finest men I ever had the honour of knowing...I had already recommended him for promotion...he was such a sound and conscientious worker...He was also an absolutely fearless officer."

Alfred's widow, Elisabeth, wrote to the war office after the war had finished to claim her deceased husband's death plaque or "dead man's penny" in 1919, the same year that production started. The next of kin of all fatalities were entitled to claim a death plaque. Plaques were made of bronze hence becoming known as the "dead man's penny". Engraved on the memorial pennies was the name of the soldier who became a victim of the Great European War. To the left of the soldier's name is the figure of Britannia, trident in hand, with the Great British emblem, that is a fierce looking lion bearing its teeth, at her feet. Just underneath the lion is another, this time facing the opposite direction, biting into the Eagle which is representative of the Imperial Eagle associated with the nation of Germany. Around the margin, reads the phrase "HE DIED FOR FREEDOM AND HONOUR", which was amended to "SHE DIED FOR FREEDOM AND HONOUR" in exceptional circumstances where women had died as a direct result of involvement in the conflict.

On the 23rd of June the Great British Army lost a "fearless officer", the members of the 9th Battalion Durham Light Infantry lost a valued friend, The United Kingdom lost a true patriot and Sandbach Grammar School lost one of its most successful alumni.

Alfred found eternal rest in Kemmel Chateau Military Cemetery, Heuvelland, in West Flanders, Belgium. Set up just to the North of what was Kemmel Chateau in December 1914, the cemetery has a beautiful hill side location on one of the highest points in the Ypres Salient, looking out over the Messines Ridge, the scene of some of the most deadly mine warfare on the Western Front. This son of Sandbach lies forever surveying the land which was fort tirelessly over for years after his death. He went out there to serve his England and that he had done.

Although the Commonwealth War Graves Commission keep the cemeteries beautifully presented, the power nature will always overcome nurture. Unfortunately, Alfred's position places him in the shadow the trees that border part of the burial ground. Perhaps inevitably, the resulting shade has cause the growth of algae and what seems to be Pleurococcus on the, what should be, crisp white Portland stone of Second Lieutenant Haughton's headstone. Luckily, the text on the stone is still legible and visiting Alfred's grave is a thoroughly moving experience.

Stood in poignant silence, surveying the Flanders countryside, it is all too easy to forget the horror and death that cursed this land that you are stood on, during the First World War. When stood at the foot of Alfred Haughton's grave, it is impossible to put yourself in the middle of no-man's, in the early hours of the morning, trying to commit simple tasks under the most intense pressure. To make a noise would be to alert the enemy; to alert the enemy would risk certain death. The quietness and atmosphere brings with it thoughts of home. Thoughts of England and subsequently of Sandbach. I could not help but feel I knew Alfred, at least through our connections with Sandbach School.

While it is impossible to empathise with the soldier's loved ones' feelings, it is possible, in fact more than possible, to be overcome with some emotion. Mainly gratitude for the sacrifices made and sorrow for this man, this Cambridge educated man, and a fine officer and gentleman did not return back to England; his beloved England.

“They shot a glare above us, when it fell
And spluttered out in pools of No Man’s Land,
We turned and crawled past the remembered dead:
Past him and him, and them and him, until,
For he lay some way apart, we caught the scent
Of the Crusader and slid past his legs,
And through the wire and home, and got our rum.”

From ‘The Night Patrol’ by Arthur Graeme West.

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Alfred Stanhope O’Dwyer

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There are many mysteries when researching any soldier that died during the Great War but Alfred’s story contained many particularly elusive details.

In 1896, Stanhope, who ran a company that fitted out offices and banks, married his wife, Maud, in Manchester.

A year later, Maud gave birth to Alfred Stanhope, who was born in Cheadle Hulme on 1 July. By 1901, Alfred and his family had the address of 111 Withington Road, Whalley Range, which, at the time, was a reasonably wealthy area. Aside from the prestigious address, Stanhope’s business afforded the family the employment of a live-in servant, Annie Parker.

Soon, the family had moved to the even more fashionable area of Bramhall, where they lived in ‘Glencoin’ on Bramhall Lane. The family were heavily involved with the local community and Alfred, known as “Laddie”, took a keen interest in the Scouts, and consequently he was made a patrol leader of the parish church’s Boy Scout Troop.

After beginning his education King’s Macclesfield and Manchester Grammar school, O’Dwyer finally gained a place at Sandbach Grammar school, in 1912. Whilst at Sandbach, he was given great responsibility when he was made a Praeposter of the school. A year after winning the 1913 Evans Medal, Alfred gained a scholarship to read Holy Orders at Bangor University, in an attempt to fulfil his desire to become an Ordained Minister.

As with most universities, Bangor had an Officer’s Training Corps, which the young student joined, gaining a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant, in July 1915.

