

## An Artform In Itself

Any history of the twentieth century (whether written, radio, television or CD ROM - and we have many to chose from as the century closes) will tell you that an obvious difference in this latest century compared with previous, has been the importance of "Joe and Joanna Ordinary". History is no longer the classic tales of great leaders, great statesmen, monarchs and warriors. The person in the street has become the new factor, enabled partly by electoral reform begun in the previous century, yet (is it naive to say also?) fed by a genuine awakening of concern for the suffering and the lives of individual people who in a previous age would have been no more than mute statistics.

*Fanfare for the Common Man* was Aaron Copland's musical expression of the change that we speak of. Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and the other World War I poets have given us literary examples. Building Societies and personal bank accounts are economic signs. Thus, as the twentieth century closes you don't have to have been influential or famous to merit a biography, or indeed autobiography. Now, with our word processors we can all write our own, and jolly good too. Families may once again pass on their trees and tales, publishing international magazines for the 'Landon' clan (as we hear has been done!) or putting out feelers on the internet for news of ancestors, as others in the village tell us they are doing.

For several years running now, as a way of marking this month of November, the month of memory, we have been lucky enough to have been given for publishing in *Contact* the diaries and recollections of Harlington people whose own contributions to history writing are surely, though poorly spelt or lacking a stretch of vocabulary, valid precisely for this reason as representative of the wider group, and indeed their records must be regarded as artforms in themselves, unique and vital testimony to their age.

Thus our Feature article. The diary of Fred Baker's journeying between 1914 and 1917, would still be one hell of an adventure today, even with planes and hotels, AmEx cards and chemists shops. Fred marched some of it, and rode on horseback for thousands of miles, with gangrene in one toe, and having contracted malaria numerous times. That he came back at all is miraculous. (His brother's name *William John Baker* we read out each Remembrance Sunday at the War Memorial, killed by a sniper's bullet having survived the main Gallipoli offensive).

That his character and experience were enriched in a way that our own village was ultimately to benefit from, is born out not least by one single photograph.

The final photograph of our feature is not from India or the Middle East or even of army life at all.

It is the earliest known photo of Harlington Scouts, a group that Fred Baker formed on his return.

## A Harlington Lad in India

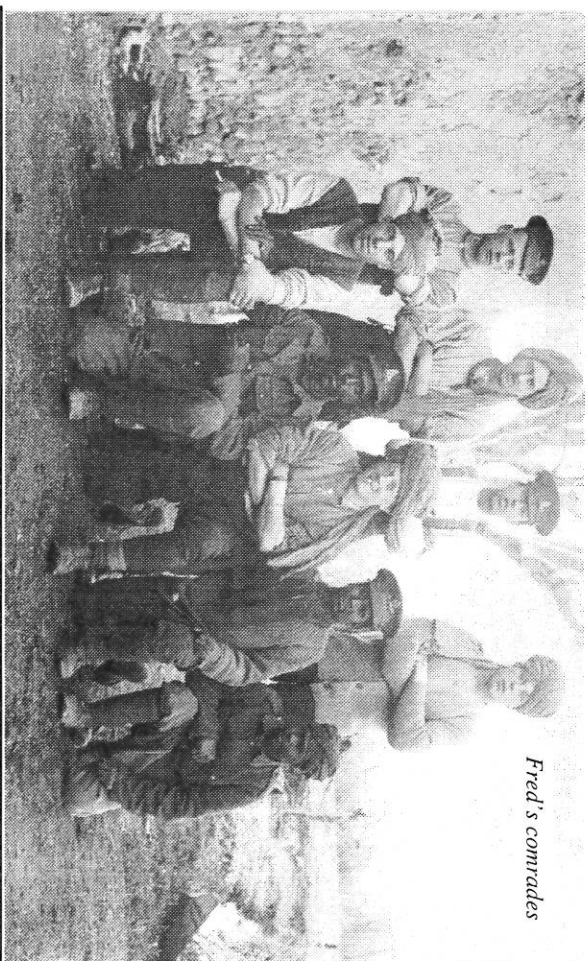
Fred Baker's Diary 1st August 1914-23rd February 1917

*'We get shunted round'*

Started for camp on the 1st August 1914. Returned to St Albans 3rd Aug. Left the latter on 8th Aug our first stop was Naverstock Side in Essex where we spent a week; our next move to Chelmsford where we stayed a night. Then on to Braintree where we spent another night. Next place was Sudbury where we stayed two nights. From there we went to Harringer where we stayed nine days, from there we went to Gt Livermere in Suffolk where we stayed eight weeks & five days. Next we moved to Fakenham, my first stay there was eight weeks; after that I went to Peterborough for seven weeks, returning to Fakenham for another eight weeks. Then again returning to Peterborough for another seven weeks. We went from Peterborough to Thetford where we were under Canvas for one week: from the latter we went to Norwich where we stayed nearly nine months from 5th July 1915 to 23rd March 1916. Left Norwich for Catfield 23rd March, where I stayed until 20th April, leaving Catfield on the 20th inst. I went to High Wycombe where I stayed until 2nd July, leaving the latter on same date for St Budeaux in Devonshire, arriving on 3rd inst., left St Budeaux 10th July, having one night on board before sailing.

*The trip out to India*

We passed Gibraltar at midnight which looked a pretty picture - we picked up two French Torpedo (sic) boats at Gib which accompanied us to Malta, arriving there in the morning we dropped anchor for four hours, and sent the mail ashore, leaving the latter in the afternoon without escort.



*Fred's comrades*

continued.....

*Deserters in Egypt*

Next stop was Port Said in Egypt where we stayed three days, and had route marches every morning and bathing parades. Then we went through the suez, where there were troupes on either side of us, shouting to know who we were. Two men deserted at Port Said, but were caught and sent to us by motor Boat, when we arrived at Port Suez. Later, going through the Red Sea where we had a taste of tropical heat, our next stop was the last which was Victoria Docks Bombay on 4th August 1916 after having a rough time for the last three days as we caught the monsoons. Then we had a three days train journey through Central India up to the foot of the hills.

*"The clouds were peeping in our doors"*

Then we had a fifty two miles march to Dalhousie, which was accomplished in three days, the latter being 7,500 ft up, where the weather was just like England, and the clouds were often peeping in our doors and making everything very wet. We left Dalhousie (Naukote Barracks) after a month's holiday. Next place was Jahore on the Plains and we found it very hot after Dalhousie; we stayed there about a month. We left Jahore 23rd October 1916, had a five day journey from Krachie to Busra on the Agra. We arrived at Makina Camp on 29/10/16.

*Fever stops Fred from seeing the*

*action*

After being there a few days I was taken ill with Fever and Enteritis and had three weeks in Hospital and a week convalescent at a place called Mohomara in Persia. Later coming back to Makina Masus where I stayed until 10/2/17. Left for firing line on same date, passing Ezerces Toomb and many other Bible (sic) places arriving at Sheik Saad on 14/12/17. Left same on 20/2/17 & passed through Twin Canals and Simd. Having a night at each place, the latter being 5 miles from the firing line having my 20 birthday marching to the firing line within (sic) sound of the guns to a place called Pentegan just outside Kut-el-amara. A few days later Kut fell into our hands then we started the force march to Baghdad with little opposition.



continued.....

*The fall of Baghdad and a shortage of food*

The latter fell into our hands on 11th March 1917. We entered on 12/3/17 - we stayed outside Baghdad for three days, then started on the march again towards the Persian Hills. We had a rough time there owing to shortage of food. We stayed there about five weeks, in action nearly all the time, until the Russians come through and took over the position; we returned to Baghdad, and stayed there until 23rd July 1917, then we went up to Bamadi and got a big surprise: we had to give in.

*Xmas Day in Baghdad*

The third day, I went down again with heat stroke and Fever, and was in and out of Hospital until the middle of December. Having Xmas Day at Baghdad and my dinner constituted of Bully Beef and Marconics Rations. I returned to the Brigade at Feleajah in January. The next Action I was left behind with the dump, and did road making and Police Duty, also a guard occasionally. After the Action we went to the Brigade which laid just below Hit where we had floods and sand storms worse than I had ever witnessed. I left hit 6 June for leave. I had my leave at Allahoba and had a good time returning on expiration

18  
WILL.  
*Next - I'll do winter -  
on the west of my coat  
& give the whole of my  
property in a few weeks  
to my Wife's Wife's  
to Robert Baker  
The Bakery  
Starling  
W. Swinford  
Beds*

Signature Richard Baker  
Rank and Regt. Squad Leader, 4th  
Date 12/1/16 R.A.

of leave to Kirkee. I went to hospital with my foot on 25th Sept 1918. [He lost a toe through gangrene] I had my operation on 22nd Oct and was discharged on 18th Mar and returned to Leave Camp. Then I was taken into Hospital again on 14 Jan 19 with Fever with a temperature of 105°. I was discharged on 31 Jan, the Leave Camp had closed down whilst I was in Hospital so I went down to Attached Sec Poona. I had one night there and then went to Belgaum, staying at R.A. Depot. Had a day shooting where I shot a wild Cat and a few birds. Went in Hospital again on 22/3/19 with Anemia.

Army Form D 104-50  
No. 227  
R. A. S. R. A.  
Board Office,  
Madras Station  
187  
I request to have to inform you that a report has been received from the War Office in the file No. 911122  
(Name) Frederick (Rank) Squad Leader  
(Signature) Richard Baker  
The family's notification that Fred was suffering from malaria  
Your obedient servant,  
The Officer in Charge of the Station

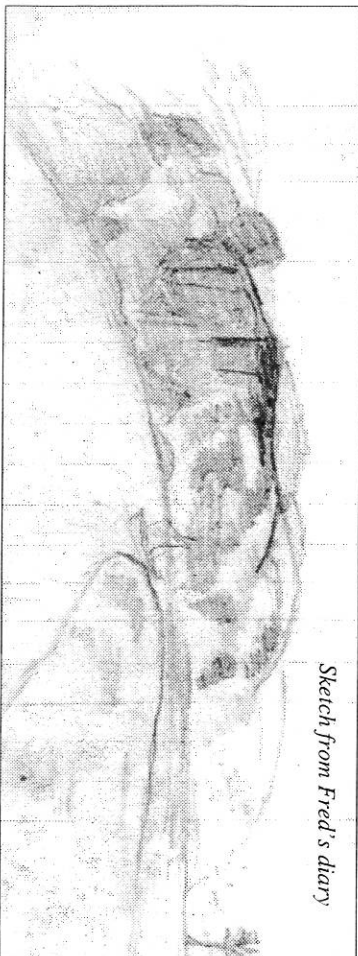


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*A Break before coming home*

Was discharged on 13/4/19 - had three more days shooting, but I only shot one jungle Fowl. I left Belgaum on the 13/7/19, arriving in Trimulgherry on 15/7/19 and found it very hot for the first few days, then everything went smoothly. I left the latter on 25/10/19.

Embarked on the B. J. Boat (Nieurailia). Arrived home on 18/11/19 after a fairly good voyage. Leave was granted me from 16/11/19 to 16/1/20. Ends.



*Sketch from Fred's diary*

**From India**

*The brilliant burning sunshine  
And the date Palms all a blow  
By the famous Tigris River  
Calm and shimmering in the glow  
Aye! it makes a pretty picture  
But my heart's a-breaking high  
For the fields of dear Old England  
Which await for you and I*

*When the burning winds are blowing  
And the sand is flying high  
Once again my heart is longing  
For Old England's dear blue sky  
Then the tropic night comes sudden  
And the angle [angel] up on high  
Sets the glowing stars a twinkling  
In the sapphire tinted sky  
When the Southern Cross is blazing  
And the night winds whisper by  
Still my heart's a-throb for England  
And the twilight of July. F.B.*

**continued.....**

We have not done justice to the material Fred has left. There is a much more descriptive account of his time in India we have not had space to use, and many doodles, morsecode messages, sketches, and daily task sheets we have enjoyed reading and seeing, but which but sadly is not our task to pass on. However, we are most grateful to Barbara Smith, Fred's granddaughter for her co-operation in printing what we have, and to Russell Preston for an initial transcription (of the pencil and pen original) which we have altered in just a few tiny places, so that any inaccuracy must be laid at our feet rather than Russell's. Our thanks too to Fred's three great-grandchildren for being patient whilst sketches were scanned in (and for a super game of Computer Patience afterwards!).



*Fred Baker started Harlington Scouts in about 1920, camping up the Firs. The little boy crouching in the front is believed to be one of the Justice brothers.*

