



DERBYSHIRE LIVES

THROUGH THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Galloping Jack

John 'Galloping Jack' Seely
Politician, peer and horseman, John Seely was an inspiration to the Allied soldiers throughout the First World War.

John Edward Bernard Seely, 1st Baron of Mottistone was born at Brookhill Hall, Pinxton, Derbyshire, in 1868. Better known as 'Jack', he was MP for Ilkeston between 1910 and 1922 and Minister for War just before the outbreak of the First World War.



Portrait of John Seely on Warrior

He had ridden horses all his life and at the outbreak of the War he joined the army and then the Canadian cavalry, riding his horse Warrior. They arrived together at the Western Front on August 11 1914 and stayed for the length of the War, surviving all the Germans could throw at them.

The pair served through the Battle of the Somme, Warrior was dug out of the mud of Passchendaele and twice trapped under the burning beams of his stables. Together they undertook many cavalry charges, including the last major charge of the War at Moreuil Wood in March 1918.

Warrior died in the 1930s, remembered as 'The horse the Germans couldn't kill.'
Galloping Jack died in 1947, aged 79.

"He went everywhere I went"
John Seely on his horse Warrior

If you are looking to investigate your own community's heritage, the Derbyshire Record Office holds a wide variety of First World War archives, these include official documents, personal letters, diaries and photographs.

All are available to research at the Derbyshire Record Office in Matlock.



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record.office@derbyshire.gov.uk
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H. J. Rylands

Soldier and Cartoonist

Horace John Rylands of Bakewell enlisted at the start of the War while in his mid-twenties. He fought with 16 Machine Company at many locations along the Western Front. Throughout the War he drew cartoons of the situations he encountered on the front. Many are humorous in nature, depicting other officers, the training men had to go through and day-to-day life in the trenches.

The album of drawings Horace created during his time fighting at the front is now held at Derbyshire Record Office. It is a touching example of a soldier seeing the funny side of the horrific circumstances he found himself in.



A selection of H.J. Rylands cartoons. Derbyshire Record Office



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The Hunter Brothers

Brothers in blood and arms who made a stand against the War

John and Arthur Hunter of Belper were identical brothers in a set of triplets from a well off military family. Their father, Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice Hunter, was awarded an OBE for service in the Sherwood Foresters, although he never saw active service.

John was one of the first to go to France. He fought at Ypres, where his battalion suffered heavy casualties. Both brothers served from 1914 - 1918 and were involved in some of the bloodiest battles of the War.

In 1918, after four years of service, John, having seen the horror of war, wrote to his brother encouraging him to resign his position and make a joint stand against it. Both were court marshalled and John was tried for disobeying a command to re-join his division at the front, receiving one year's hard labour at Maidstone Prison.

They were dismissed without honour, publically shamed in the press, stripped of the right to vote and their parents never spoke to them again.

*You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.*

Suicide in the Trenches, by Siegfried Sassoon

The horrors the Hunter Brothers witnessed convinced them they did not want any part in the War.
Courtesy Imperial War Museum



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Thomas Henry Redfern

Miner, Stoker, casualty of the war

Derbyshire men were often miners, and miners, in the eyes of the military, could dig tunnels and shovel coal. As a result, quite a lot of miners became tunnellers, digging tunnels under enemy trenches or stokers, stoking the engines of naval ships with coal.

One miner, Thomas Henry Redfern born in Bolsover in 1892, joined the Royal Navy in 1911 as a Stoker 2nd Class. The life of a ship stoker was difficult. The conditions were at times unbearable and there was little chance of escape if the ship was attacked.



Stokers keeping the engines running.
Courtesy of Imperial War Museum

In June 1915 Thomas was assigned to HMS Hampshire and survived the Battle of Jutland on 31st May 1916. However, less than a week later the Hampshire was sunk off the coast of Orkney after striking a German mine, with the loss of all but 12 of the ship's crew of 655 men.

Also on board the Hampshire was Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War and face of so many recruitment posters. Up to that point the lives of Thomas and Kitchener could not have been more different but that night their fates were the same, both perished in service of their country.

*"Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again"
And Death Shall Have No Dominion, Dylan Thomas*



HMS Hampshire.
Courtesy of Imperial War Museum

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