



Hanwell FC and the Great War



“Played for Hanwell, played for Middlesex and gave his life for England.”¹

The original Hanwell Football Club folded in 1912. Yet strangely, the Great War served to keep the name of the club alive and it was the war years that paved the way for the re-establishment of the club as Hanwell Town in 1920.

The man who was most responsible for keeping the flame of the club alive during the war was its former secretary, Donald Moir. He himself had volunteered for active service, but was refused on account of his age and was ‘now doing military duty in the capacity of correspondence clerk at Hounslow Barracks to Capt. E. T. Bell who is the recruiting officer for the 7th Regimental District recruiting area’² He was assiduous in keeping track of former players who were serving at the front such as George ‘Scroucher’ Pearce:



who was one of the old Hanwell F.C. team, and also played centre-forward for Aylesbury United F.C., has joined the 7th Hussars, and is at present stationed at Shorncliff. He is the bantam-weight boxing champion of Berks and Bucks, and should render a good account of himself in due course to the enemy.’³

¹ *Middlesex County Times*, Saturday 16 June 1917, 5.

² *Middlesex County Times*, Saturday 12 September 1914, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.



The exact number of former Hanwell F.C. players who enlisted is difficult to ascertain although research has identified 24. This list is probably an underestimate as the club would have had about 600 members since its formation in 1884 and a number closer to 50 is more

likely. Little is known about most of the men although we know about the experience of three in William Henry Phippen, Abijah Cornwell, and Alfred Copus in more detail

The story of Phippen is heartbreakingly sad. A member of the Territorials he enlisted in the 1st Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment which was part of the British Expeditionary Force sent to France at the outbreak of war. It was mobilised on August 11th under the command of Lt Col B.E. Ward, and landed at Harve joining the 19th Brigade under the command of Major-General L.G. Drummond. The battalion fought at Mons and was involved in the general retreat. On the 24th August it stood at Le Cateau and fought a rearguard action allowing other battalions to retreat to safety. It was the British army's first battle of the Great War in France. We are fortunate in knowing what happened to him. Lt-Col Rowley writing to Phippen's wife explained:

I heard this morning from Q.M. Blackwood, who had returned to Havre, that your husband was left wounded in the Chapel at le Chateau on 29th August, since when no further news has been heard of him. He says that there is still hope as many names of men of the Middlesex Regiment taken prisoner (wounded) keep coming in from various camps in Germany. You must not give up hope yet, as many prisoners are not allowed by the Germans to write and I trust your husband is still alive.⁴

Meanwhile another eyewitness wrote that Phippen was wounded and may have been taken prisoner as:

⁴ *Middlesex County Times*, Saturday 6 February 1915, 3.

All the wounded men on that day were taken to church which was shelled by the enemy, killing lot of men who were already wounded. Your husband may have been one of these. In any case, all the N.C.Os and men in the, church were captured by the Germans and taken prisoner.⁵

However, sadly for his wife and family, Phippen was one of the wounded men killed by shelling whilst lying in the chapel. He was thus one of the earliest British casualties of the Great War in France. Indeed, he was dead before most of his former team and club mates had even enlisted. He is buried at La Ferte-sous-Jouarre, a small town 66 kilometres to the east of Paris and the memorial is situated in a small park on the south-western edge of the town, on the south bank of the River Marne.

Abijah E. Cornwell of 66 Queen's Road, Southall was a talented sportsman who worked at the Southall Gas works who played He played cricket for Norwood Green and football for Southall before joining Hanwell in 1911. Nicknamed 'Barger' 'He was a fine type of footballer: able to take all hard knocks good-humouredly, never descending to questionable methods, but always playing a clean game – a sportsman to his finger tips.'⁶ He served in the Territorials from 1909 and went to France with the 8th Batt of the Middlesex Regiment. He was wounded suffering a broken back and taken to hospital in Boulogne on the 25th June 1915 dying early next morning. The hospital Matron wrote to his wife describing his last hours:

Your poor husband passed away this morning. I am so grieved to have to write such sad, sad news. His last words were all of you and the children. I was to give you his fondest love and tell you what a dear loving wife you had been to him and how much he longed to see you again. He said "Give her all of my love and the dear children and tell them to be good children and to look after their Mam." He told me you had lost

⁵Ibid., 3.

⁶ *Ealing Gazette*, Friday June 4 1915, 5

your youngest, the baby, and he said, "She'll soon have her Daddy with her now. He seemed to look forward to seeing his baby again; it took some of the bitterness away of having to go. He died quite early in the morning and was conscious until a short time before he died."⁷

THE GAZETTE. FRIDAY, JUNE 4, 1915.

DEATH OF SERGEANT A. CORNWELL.

FATAL SHELL WOUNDS.

POPULAR CRICKETER AND FOOTBALLER.



It is with infinite regret that the GAZETTE records the death of Sergeant Abijah Cornwell, first 8th Battalion Middlesex Regiment (Territorials), of 86, Queen's-road, Southall. Sergeant Cornwell was wounded by a shell during the fighting on Whit Monday, and was conveyed to hospital at Boulogne, where it was found that his injuries were of a serious nature, his back being badly broken, and he died on Friday morning.

The story of Alfred Copus is more complicated. He was an outstanding goalkeeper who joined Hanwell in 1905 and was selected to play for Middlesex in 1908. Work commitments meant that he moved from Hanwell to High Wycombe, where he played for Wycombe Wanderers winning the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup in 1912. Donald Moir, the former club

⁷ Ibid., 5.

secretary described him as ‘unhesitatingly the greatest goalkeeper that ever stood in “the sticks” of the old Hanwell F.C.’⁸ At the war’s outbreak he enlisted in the Royal Fusiliers, but broke down in training and was discharged. Undaunted he re-enlisted in the Middlesex Regiment. He was wounded in 1916 in France, but recovered and returned to the front line. In May 1917, he was reportedly killed by a shell prompting Moir to write his obituary concluding ‘What an epitaph, “Played for Hanwell, played for Middlesex and gave his life for England.”’⁹ However, all was not as it seemed and Copus was apparently captured as a prisoner of war and ‘his mother states that he is in hospital, but that she has received no letters from anyone, and the Red Cross Society have returned a parcel to her intimating that it cannot be got through to him.’¹⁰ The ultimate fate of Copus is unknown as there is no evidence confirming if he was a POW or not, or if he survived the war. What we do know was that he was, arguably, Hanwell FC greatest goalkeeper and a brave man prepared to ‘do his duty’ for King and country.

As there are no surviving records of Hanwell Football Club, and all information about has been drawn from local newspapers, it is very difficult to have a complete record of the number, names and fate of members of the club who fought in the war. The list below which may be incomplete is our most accurate record and it is right that their names are recorded and remembered. By honouring and remembering any one of them we are remembering all of them: those who were killed in action and those who survived; those who were wounded and those who were not; those who saw combat and those who did not. For one thing is sure all of them would have suffered losing teammates, friends, colleagues or family members.

⁸ *Middlesex County Times*, Saturday 16 June 1917, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ *Middlesex County Times*, Saturday 8 September 1917, 8.

The world was completely changed after 1918. It was a time for renewal, the reconstruction of Britain and the building of 'homes fit for heroes' as Lloyd George promised and it was to be this new dawn that saw the re-founding of the club as Hanwell Town in 1920.

SURNAME	FIRST NAME	REGIMENT	YEAR
BANKS	ROBERT (?)	Royal Fusiliers	1915
BLACKWELL	GEORGE	Royal Field Artillery.	1915
BOWEN	F.	Royal Fusiliers	1917
BUSBY	JACK	Naval Brigade	1914
BUSBY	WILLIAM	Royal Fusiliers	1914
CHOAT	EARNIE	2 nd Btn Royal Fusiliers	1915
COOMBES	A.	Royal Fusiliers	1914
COPUS	ALFRED	Royal Fusiliers: Missing in Action	1914
CORNWELL	LIFUS	8 th Middx Territorials: Killed in Action 28/5/1915	1915
FISH	JIM	Royal Fusiliers (?)	1915
FROST	ROBERT (?)	Royal Fusiliers	1915
GANT	E.	Royal Fusiliers	1915
GREEN	A.		1916
HOOPER	'BAY'	Royal Fusiliers	1914
LAKE	'HONNY'		1916
LEDIARD	SAM		1916
LOUCH	L.A.	15 th Civil Service Rifles	1914
MARTIN	TAFFEY		1917
MUTTON	JACK	2 nd Btn Argyle & Sutherland Highlanders	1915
PAYNE	GEORGE	9 th Btn Royal Fusiliers?	1916
PEARCE	GEORGE	8 th Btn Royal Fusiliers,	1914
PEARCE	FRED	East Lancs	1914
PHIPPEN	WILLIAM	1 st Btn Middx Regt Killed in Action	1914

	HENRY	29/08/1914	
SIM	VINCENT	Sportsmen's Battalion	1915
WADE	'CHICKEN'	9 th Bttn Royal Fusiliers	1916
WALKER	CHARLES	R.A.M.C.	1914
WILLIAMS	VIC	Royal Fusiliers	1915