

## COMMEMORATING THE FIRST WORLD WAR: THE CHURCH LADS' AND CHURCH GIRLS' BRIGADE REPORT BY IAN JENNINGS



On the 13th July 2019 we were privileged to welcome a full church of visitors to Denham. The special event was 'Swift and Bold, A Commemoration Service for the 100th Anniversary of the Return of the 16th Battalion (Church Lads' Brigade) Kings Royal Rifle Corps.' The historic connection between the Church Lads' Brigade and the Village of Denham is truly fascinating.

At the outbreak of the First World War the recruiting arm of the services turned first to the Church Lads' Brigade which was a huge organisation in those days. It was part of the Church of England so truly national and unashamedly Christian. It was also a highly disciplined organisation run on military lines. The services discovered when they recruited these young men

that they were already well on the way to being fully trained. Over the years that training took place in Denham and more than 50,000 young men from the Church Lads' Brigade were trained. St Mary's was their church. This is where they worshipped and this is where they had Church Parade. Reports of how the village felt about having these young men billeted upon them are very positive. That was unusual because other communities often complained at having training facilities close to them because of the rowdy behaviour and anti-social antics. Not so in Denham. These were Christian young men and behaved accordingly.

There was a selection of photographs from those times on display in church on the afternoon of the service.

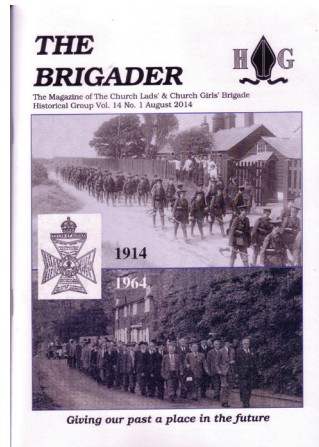


I found it very moving to see uniformed young men walking through the village and everyone with a smile. They were all so young and were full of hope and high spirits. They had no way of knowing what lay ahead for them. Here is a reminder of those days, "No amount of training could prepare them for what would happen in Flanders or the Somme that summer. The 16th Battalion of the Kings Royal Rifle Corps, over 1000 strong and all Church Lads' Brigade members were waiting to take part in the 'Great Push' that would, according to the Generals, defeat the enemy and bring the war to a rapid conclusion. Early on July 1st the great action started. All along the frontline men left their trenches to attack but some 20,000 were killed in one day alone, mainly in a hail of machine gun fire."

One of the young soldiers wrote a poem which is called The Bard:

*We lost the flower of our flock.  
It left us sad and weak.  
But still we have to carry on,  
Of work we do our share  
And unless we have an R.E. fatigue  
You seldom hear us swear.  
Now that the war is finished  
And we return once more,  
If they take us back to Denham  
There will be a treat in store.*

The service in St Mary's was very moving. The Church Lads and Girls and their leaders paraded and filled the air with grand music of brass and percussion. Brigadier Tom Bewick OBE Commander of the 7th infantry Brigade spoke of the fact that his command is directly descended from



16th Battalion Church Lads' Brigade and he honoured their memory. Rt Revd Peter Eagles, Bishop visitor to the Brigade was the preacher and made reference to St. Martin of Tours, the soldier Saint who shared his cloak with a beggar. He is depicted in the Banner delivered at considerable cost from Westminster Abbey for the occasion. It is back in the Abbey now but for a few days it came home to Denham.

Staff Chaplain Rev Chris Buckley was with us in our Service on Sunday 14th July and gave us a brief picture of the work and witness of the Church Lads' and Girls Brigade. This is part of our history here at St Mary's Denham. Until the 1970s, veterans used to parade through the village once a year. They are gone now but they must never be forgotten.

**Do join us for our Remembrance Sunday Service: Sunday 10 November, 10.45 am (there will be Sunday Club for children).**