



Alf Walton soon after his call-up

# Tragedy recalled as a dale soldier's letters are found

Alf Walton wrote to his beloved wife before dying in action

When Mrs Doreen Rhodes came across a battered case among her late cousin's possessions it revealed a moving episode in her family's history.

Mrs Rhodes, who lives in Wilson Street, Barnard Castle, found the case when she was clearing out her cousin's home after his death. In it were a series of letters sent by her uncle, Alfred Ernest Walton, to his wife Lilian during the first world war.

Alfred was the son of Louise Walton of Ware Street in Barnard Castle. He was a baker by trade. He worked at George Burt's in the town, where the Co-op is now, and was a member of Barnard Castle Band. He was 24 when he married Lilian Wright of Thompson's Cottage, Baliol Street.

At the start of the war Alfred's job was a reserved occupation but in May 1917 he was called up to join the 3rd Durham Light Infantry in South Shields, waiting to go to France.

His letters describe the day to day happenings of army life as well as wanting to know what is happening at home. He writes: *I have come on very badly for food this week as we have nearly hungered out... I would have wrote on Monday but I have not been very well since my inoculations. We have been issued with rifles and I can tell you they are heavy. It is much easier moulding a few bread loaves.*

In a letter dated 22nd May he is confined to barracks: *Our room has been isolated. Most of the chaps has broken out with bad faces. About 30 of us have got it.*

It is not clear what they have got, but in his next letter the two worst cases have been taken to hospital and the rest allowed out of isolation as he looks forward to a weekend on leave with Lilian.

Crime it seems is not just a recent social ill as Alfred asks her to send him a tablet of soap: *Mine has been stolen*



Lilian Walton with her first son Alfred and baby son Trevor, the child Alf Walton never saw

*dear one so could you put me a tablet in your next parcel?*

Other letters reveal the usual moans of soldiers down the years:

*We went on a 15 mile battalion route march and I can tell you my feet are all blistered and I am quite a cripple on my left foot.*

Lilian might have been complaining about him sending washing home as he writes: *Here you don't get your own things back and they are only half washed so I think it would be better if I sent them home every fortnight.*

Officers were obviously on the lookout for good shots with a rifle as Alfred won two packets of tabs (cigarettes) for firing off 36 rounds of cartridges in 26 seconds as opposed to his officer's time of 39 seconds.

He suffers from loneliness as his tender words to Lilian show: *I think of you every minute I have spare and always bid you goodnight before I lay my head down to rest.*

His letters from 5th September onwards are sent from the British Expeditionary Force in France. He talks of a calm sea crossing but his destination has been erased by

the censors. He describes the country as hilly: *Like going up Eggleston way... There are hundreds of troops here. You would wonder what they are going to do with them all.*



He whom this scroll commemorates was numbered among those who, at the call of King and Country, left all that was dear to them, endured hardship, faced danger, and finally passed out of the sight of men by the path of duty and self-sacrifice, giving up their own lives that others might live in freedom.

Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten.

*By Alfred Ernest Walton  
Liverpool Regt*

A scroll sent to Lilian after the war

He was transferred to the 17th Kings Liverpool Regiment. Mrs Rhodes is not sure why. She speculates that it might have been on account of his shooting prowess as his letter of 13th September tells of him going to the firing line: *I have met E. Howe from Montalbo Terrace. We are going up to where Teesy is. (Teesy was Tees Nicholas Wright, Mrs Rhodes' father, well known to Alfred as he was also a member of Barnard Castle Band). I have not much news at the moment, although I hear another one of Smith's lads has been knocked out.*

The couple had one child, Alfred, who was referred to in Alf's letters as Babs. In late September 1917 comes the first hint that Lilian may be



Bandsman Tees Wright

pregnant again: *You have not mentioned about the other thing in your last letter, about how you are and if you are right again.*

November sees him mention the Mercury: *I have got the Barney paper but would you send a Sunday paper too? I am so pleased you are learning Babs to know daddy. But I often wonder if he will know me again when I do come back. I only wish I could be with you and then we could have gone to the dance and had a good time. But never mind dear, we shall make up for it when the time comes and this terrible hell on earth is all over. I see from the paper that E. Dolan has been wounded. These things called shells, you would think nothing would live under them.*

Alfred's last letter, dated 16th March 1918, refers to the death of his wife's grandmother, which he read about in the Mercury:

*I saw your grandma's name in the paper. Poor old soul. She was one of those good sorts. But everybody's time comes dear one and we cannot help it.*

His own time was to come 24 days later when he was killed in action at Festubert near Givenchy. He was 26. Lilian was pregnant and his younger son Trevor was born later that year.

In a report from men who were alongside Alfred in battle one extract says, "Between Festubert and Givenchy our platoon was holding an advanced trench. After a tremendous bombardment the Germans came over at 9.15am and only a few of us got away."

On 21st February 1922 a letter was posted to Alfred's widow. It read, "I am directed to transmit to you the accompanying British War Medal and the Victory Medal which would have been conferred upon 57311 Pte A.E. Walton had he lived, in memory of his services with the British Forces during the Great War."

Alfred's name is carved in stone at the Loos Memorial and British Cemetery, Dud Corner, France.

Lilian survived until 1936. She is buried in Barnard Castle cemetery where her headstone reads,

*Dearest wife of Private Alfred Walton, killed in action 9th April 1918.*

## Farmers hear all about the latest range of tractors

Members of Forest Discussion Society held a meeting at High Force Hotel, organised by Mr Geoff Thorn on behalf of Carrs Agriculture.

A talk was given by the northern area sales manager Mr James Squire. He explained that he was responsible for an area right up to the Scottish border. His company grew out of the expansion of a firm called Agco.

Its range of tractors included the Massey Ferguson 4200 series, Perkins water-cooled direct injection diesel and Natural models. Some of the newest ones on the market had more space for the driver and passengers, excellent visi-

bility, modern heating and ventilation systems and improved instruments and controls.

They featured a range of gear box options, all with a unique side shift control. The latest machines had bigger lift capacity and sophisticated hydraulics systems. Many were fitted with radios so farmers could communicate with one another.

Mr Maurice Toward extended his thanks to Mr Thorn for arranging the meeting and also Mr James Squire for giving a talk, supported by slides and a video.

The next meeting will be on 11th March at High Force Hotel. Conservation issues will be discussed.

## Children send thanks to dale



These children at an orphanage in Lithuania were anxious to thank the people of Teesdale for all their kind efforts. They are pictured during a visit by prison officers from Deerbolt who organise annual aid trips to help them and others like them. The men take clothes, toys, medical supplies and toiletries each year and are always happy to hear from people wishing to donate items for the collection.

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by Lenore  
*Bridal Wear To Hire or Buy*  
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**TILLY BAILEY & IRVINE**  
—SOLICITORS & NOTARIES—  
**Free Legal Advice**  
Three million people a year are injured in accidents, yet only one in five victims make a claim for compensation. This is despite the fact that two thirds of the victims believe that something or someone else was to blame for the accident.  
To increase public awareness of the opportunity for accident claims and the availability of free legal advice, the Law Society has launched a new scheme called "Accident Line".  
Now, anyone who has had an accident can obtain free advice on whether or not they have a claim.  
Tilly Bailey & Irvine have two Accident Line panel members operating the scheme at their Hartlepool office, and are now extending the free initial interview offer to their office at 8 Newgate, Barnard Castle (formerly Watsons).  
Lesley Hemus, a solicitor at Tilly Bailey & Irvine's Barnard Castle office said "Too many accident victims miss out on compensation because they either don't realise that they may have a claim, or because they are worried about the possible legal costs. We are hoping that our free interview offer will encourage accident victims to come forward and to claim the compensation to which they are entitled".  
Lesley Hemus was born and raised in the North East. She qualified as a solicitor in 1988 and joined Tilly Bailey & Irvine in December 1992 from a well respected firm of solicitors in Leicestershire.  
Anyone who has had an accident may be entitled to compensation, and can contact Lesley Hemus at  
**Tilly Bailey & Irvine**  
Telephone 01833 638326  
for a free appointment

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**"I'm going to be in hospital a long time. If only I'd not been in a hurry."**  
  
**PEDESTRIANS FIND A SAFE PLACE TO CROSS**  
DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

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