



*"The Weald had been the world of my youngness, and while I gazed across it now I felt prepared to do what I could to defend it. And after all, dying for one's native land was believed to be the most glorious thing one could possibly do"* (The Weald of Youth London 1942). Soon after writing these words, Siegfried Sassoon enlisted in the army and on the day Britain declared war on Germany, Tuesday 4th August 1914, Trooper Sassoon was in the uniform of the Sussex Yeomanry.

This expression of patriotism for the English countryside emerged during the spring and early summer of 1914. The villages, churches, pastures, fields, woods, the rolling hills, and the very soil of England must be defended against the German machine.

Thousands volunteered, from public schoolboys to agricultural labourers, all prepared to lay down their lives for King and Country. However, perhaps more importantly for the village or town of their birth. But for the agricultural labourer there was another more compelling reason to enlist. In 1914 almost all of them were living below the poverty line, their living conditions were inadequate and their prospects non-existent.

At the outbreak of World War I Tillington was a quite, rural parish where most of the young men were employed as agricultural labourers with the two great estates of Pitshill and Leconfield. Much of the fertile land was tilled with horse drawn implements to grow wheat, barley and root crops and the rich pastureland provided grass for several milking herds. Woodlands, streams and hills completed this idyllic countryside.

Certainly a homeland worth fighting for and the parish provided a good number of brave young volunteers.

In 1914 the Petworth Armoury, situated in Tillington Road (opposite the entrance to Silvia Beaufoy car park) served as the main recruiting centre for D Company of the 4th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment (Territorial Force). Over the next few years many young men, including those from Tillington, Upperton and River, found their way to the Armoury, all eager to enlist in the 4th Battalion.

These eager recruits, along with hundreds of others, soon found themselves in regimental training camps in different parts of Sussex or further afield. Once trained, a soldier often remained with the Royal Sussex, although he may have been posted to any regiment, but sooner or later he would find his way to Gallipoli, Flanders or France.

For a number of years a simple, oak board hung in the old Armoury at Petworth, commemorating the soldiers of D Company, Royal Sussex Regiment who gave their lives in the 'Great War'. It's maker has long been forgotten, but the memorial board still exists; it found its way, via Roussillon Barracks, Chichester to the Royal Sussex Regimental museum at the Redoubt Fortress, Eastbourne. Somehow this simple rustic board, fashioned and painted from the heart of an unskilled hand is a fitting memorial to the never-ending debt we owe to the thirty men who never returned home to their loved ones in Tillington, Upperton and River.

