

## HURRAH! HURRAH!

The volunteers, sluggish at first, later lined up in droves to serve their country. After all it would be over by Christmas wouldn't it? .....in fact it ended in 1918. As the war went on conscription was introduced to boost numbers. Southfleet ultimately lost sixteen men, but some men survived, perhaps wounded, and returned to live out their lives in the parish. Now, one hundred years later, we look back to a time that is virtually beyond human memory. It's my intention to look briefly at what happened In Southfleet all those years ago.

Southfleet was different in 1914. The population was around 1,200. Today it's much higher and we have many more dwellings to accommodate the ever rising population. Happily the parish has retained its rural characteristics. In fact we still possess wide acres of open farm lands. One hundred years ago the farmers were the major employers of local men. However, women were needed to work at harvest times. The farms had changed little from Victorian times. The same could be said about the living conditions of the farm workers and their families.

The roads were relatively free of traffic. The chief mode of getting around the village was by upright bicycle. But some, more wealthy, went about their business in horse and carriage—for few possessed a motor car then. That did not make life accident free. In 1912 a Mr French was killed between his home at Hook Place Farm and The Ship Inn. His bicycle slipped on the muddy road and he fell beneath a steam driven lorry - it had just delivered beer to The Ship!

During WW1 it was not unusual to see the Special Police around the parish. All of the male volunteers lived locally and were well-known in the parish. The list of men included shopkeepers, a butcher, a builder, railway workers and even farmers. They patrolled pathways, land-ways and roads. They inspected bridges, arches, culverts and telegraph poles and wires. They carried truncheons or sticks and a whistle - passed from patrol to patrol. They patrolled south east and south west of the railway lines. No one was allowed to loiter near any bridge or culvert. Their orders were to 'take notice of all passers by and stop and question anyone who looked like foreigners or suspicious persons and if suspected of being German or Austrians, demand their permits and unless produced to detain them until they could be handed over to the nearest Kent County Constable.'

This was serious stuff, and there was more to come—scary air raids. The airships—called Zeppelins— glowed in the sky at night. But Southfleet was ready!! There were the searchlight Brigade men in Hook Green Road and men manning anti-aircraft guns at Westwood. 'It was Saturday night', wrote Hector Lane, 'when I woke up to find my Father looking out of the window at a huge Zeppelin coming, so it seemed, straight through the bedroom window! It was a moonlit night and you could see every detail. The family, all seven of us, took shelter in the outside lavatory. There was no room for the dog. The bomb exploded near Dean and

Chapter Farm (in Red Street). We were safe, but our dog, which was outside, had his tail severed by shrapnel.'