

# Lest We Forget: Private John 'Charlie' Hold, 1892-1917

Many of the soldiers from Marlow wrote home from the Front. One surviving collection consists of the letters from Charlie Hold to his family in Medmenham. They provide a fascinating insight into the experience of one young man serving on the Western Front.

## John 'Charlie' Hold

John Charles Hold ('Charlie') was born in Cheshire in 1892. His father Joseph was a gamekeeper and the family moved frequently due to his work, settling eventually in Medmenham where Joseph worked on the Danesfield Estate. Charlie also began working as a gamekeeper but soon after war broke out in summer 1914, he enlisted in the 5th Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.

After training in Oxford and Dorset, Charlie's battalion was sent to the Western Front in May 1916 where he served until he was killed in action in December 1917. His family kept over 90 letters that he wrote to them during this period. In them, Charlie shared his experiences, thoughts and memories of home.

## 'Please send me a pair of thick woollen gloves'

In many of his letters, Charlie asks for extra clothing – gloves, socks and vests for example. His family and acquaintances from Medmenham also sent him food parcels – everything from eggs to potted meat, cake, chocolate, ham and pigeons.

## 'It is a nice country out here'

Despite the demands and pressures of the War, Charlie makes frequent references in his letters to the countryside around him and the wildlife that he sees. He also asked lots of questions about the gamekeeping back home – for example, how the pheasants are doing and how many rabbits have been shot.

## 'Sorry to hear about George Gardiner'

Charlie often asks about old friends from Medmenham and was clearly affected by the large numbers who were wounded or killed. He also tried to reassure his family that he was safe. In a letter of 24th November 1917, he told his mother that he was away from the fighting. The next communication the family received was a notification that he had been killed in action on 11th December.



Charlie c.1915. Photo reproduced courtesy of Special Collections, Leeds University Library.



Charlie's Christmas Card home, December 1916. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Leeds University.



An example of one of Charlie's letters. This one was written on 16th April 1917, when Charlie was serving on the Western Front. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Leeds University.