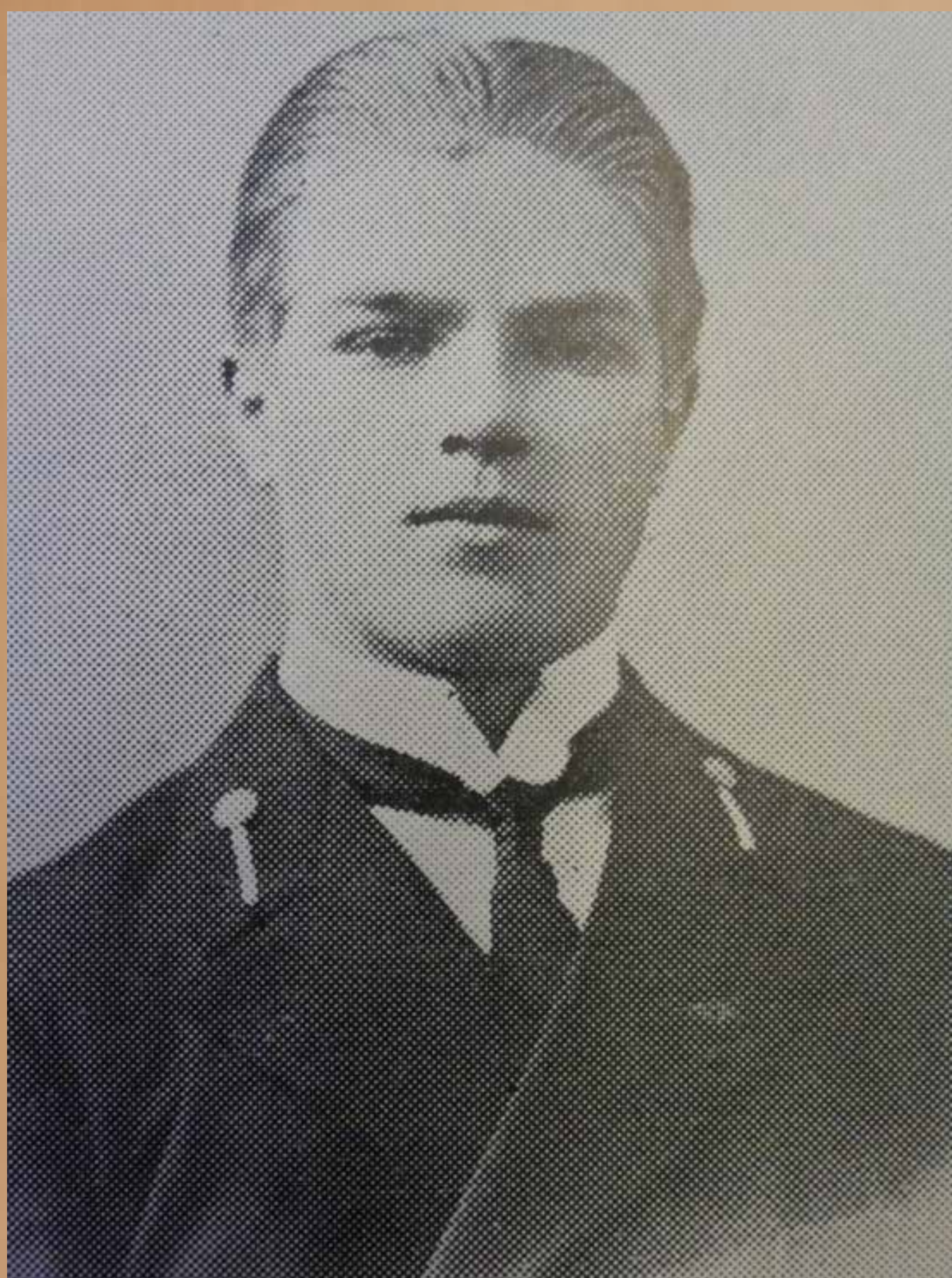


# MARLOW IN WORLD WAR ONE

## AUGUST – OCTOBER 1914



**DAVID DICKSON, 1897 - 1914**

*With kind permission of Sir William Borlase's Grammar School*

**David Dickson was brought up in Marlow in relative comfort, his father being a doctor and a pillar of the local community. Being a junior navy officer at the outbreak of the war, David saw early combat and was one of the first men from Marlow to be killed.**

### Early life

David Angus Dickson, born in 1897, lived with his family in relative comfort at the Gables, Institute Road, Marlow. His father, John Dickson was a surgeon, JP and local councillor. David had three older brothers, Desmond, Brian and Ian and the family had five servants.

David joined Sir William Borlase school in 1906 aged 9, as a boarder. He was a keen boxer and a member of Marlow's Rowing and Hockey Clubs.

### Becoming a naval cadet

In 1910 David became a Naval Cadet at the Royal Naval College, Osborne on the Isle of Wight, moving to Dartmouth to finish his training in 1912. Here he won the light and middle weight boxing championships and the senior sculls race. In June 1914 David joined HMS Cumberland and, on the outbreak of war, HMS Hawke as a Midshipman. Before him lay a career as a commissioned officer in the Royal Navy.

### The Sinking of HMS Hawke

HMS Hawke, an old cruiser which was used primarily for patrols around the British coast, was an easy target for the new and fast-moving German submarines. On 15 October 1914, whilst patrolling the North Sea, she was torpedoed amidships. This caused a tremendous explosion, ripping the ship apart. Hawke sank in a few minutes with the loss of her commander, 26 officers and 497 men, including David Dickson. Only 74 crew survived. This catastrophe caused some controversy, particularly following similar recent incidents. Another Marlow man had been killed the previous month: Petty Officer William Rance who was serving on HMS Cressy. The Telegraph ran an article questioning the Navy's policy of deploying cadets on patrol. The ageing cruiser ships were subsequently withdrawn but cadets continued to be deployed.

### *"We are prepared to give still more"*

As evidence of the standing of the family in Marlow, David's death was covered by the South Bucks Free Press and Dr Dickson received a telegram from the King. The King said that he and the Queen 'deeply regret the loss you and the Navy have suffered by the death of your son in the service of his country'. The local paper talked of 'a gloom ... cast over the town' and called David 'One of the most promising boys in Marlow...[who] was liked by everyone... a bright, upright and fearless young Briton, good at work and play alike, he will be long remembered'.

### Dr Dickson wrote to the paper, stating:

'the loss of our brave boy has roused...no feelings of a desire for revenge ... but we ... are prepared to give still more and ... to do all in our power to help to wipe this cursed German militarism, with its ruthless atrocities, off the face of the earth once for all. If perchance any parents who read this are holding back their sons, we appeal to them over our son's watery grave for their King and country's honour, and for their children yet unborn, not to hesitate to send their boys forward into the battle line.'

Dr Dickson, a governor at Sir William Borlase's school also gave a speech to the pupils. He was clearly very proud of David and said of him he was not 'a bookworm', or 'clever'; he was in fact 'low in his term at Osborne'. It was only by 'pegging away' that David was elevated to Cadet Captain, receiving the King's Medal for 'the cadet who... exhibited the most gentlemanlike bearing and the best influence amongst the cadets'. He was 'a boy with no special ability who made his mark simply by doing his duty'.

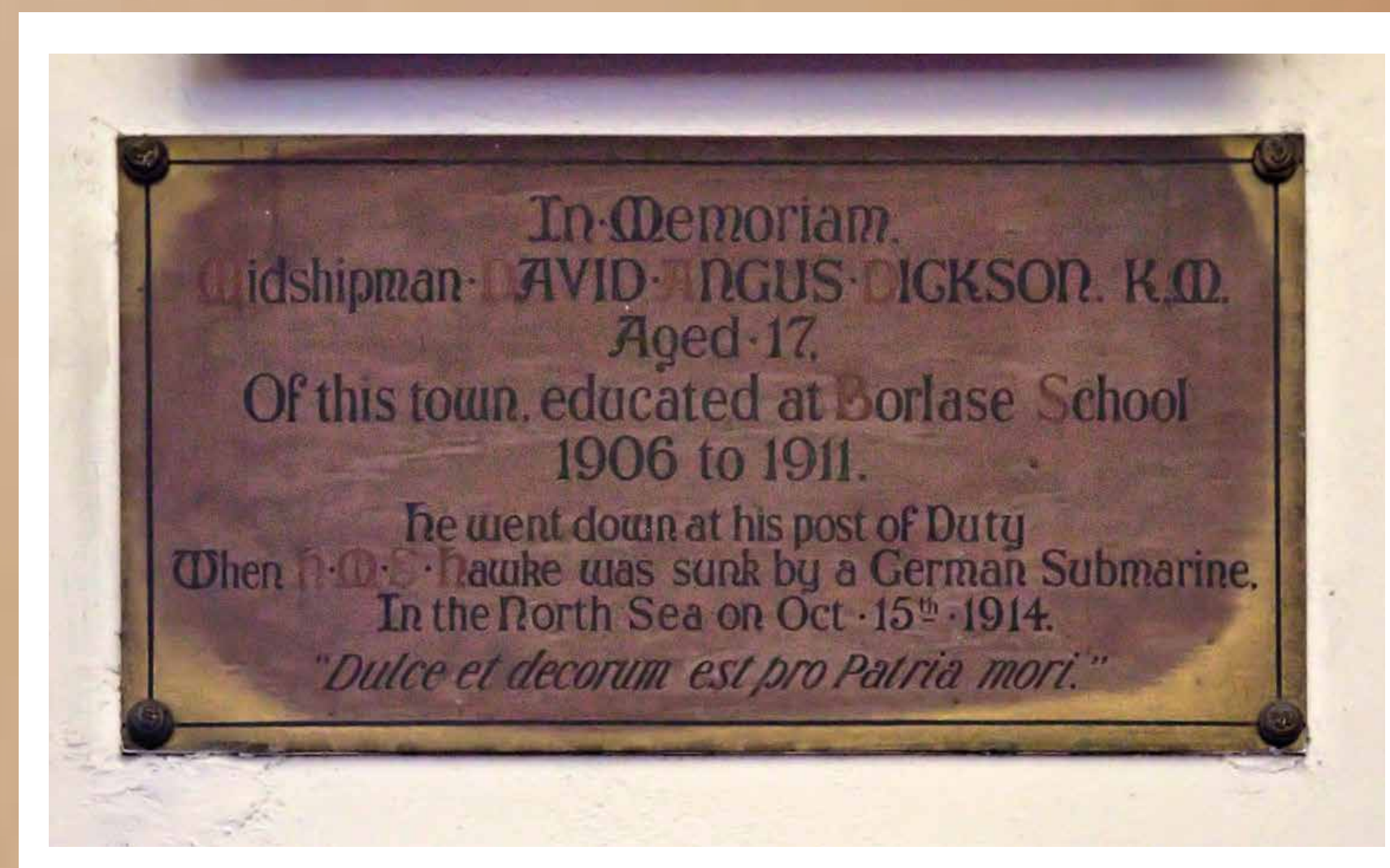
### Dr Dickson encouraged the boys at Borlase to work hard:

'This is the gravest crisis your country ever went through...show ... that you also answer to the call duty. If things go a bit hard with you, if you do not succeed at first – don't be downhearted. Keep pegging away and in time you will have your reward.'



**The Gables, Institute Road, Marlow as it looks today**

*Copyright Belinda Ford*



**A memorial to David was erected in the Borlase chapel by his family.**

*With kind permission of Sir William Borlase's Grammar School*





# MARLOW IN WORLD WAR ONE

AUGUST – OCTOBER 1914

## The Outbreak of War - August 1914



Looking south, a view of both sides of the street, and in the road a man on a tri-cycle. High St, Marlow. c 1914.

*With kind permission of Mike Eagleton, photograph held on SWOPs database, copyright High Wycombe library*

### Sport Events Cancelled

In September 1914, Marlow Football Club suspended its games as many of its players signed up for service. Local rowing events were also cancelled. All of Marlow Rowing Club's senior eight crew joined up in 1914.



View of the Marlow R. C. Eight + cox, Thames Towpath, Marlow. 1914  
Names (left to right): Lieut. G.H. Collins, Lieut. J.W Shaw, Bombardier F.S. Fisher, Lieut. J.R. Jackson, Trooper F.N. Clark, Private H.R. Foster, Private N.S. Flint, Trooper R. Flint

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### Belgian Refugees Arrive

Almost 250,000 Belgians fled to England after the German invasion of their country. The Marlow Committee for Assisting Belgian Refugees coordinated support work locally and, by October, fourteen refugees were housed in the town. The community rallied, donating furniture, food, clothing and money to the fund.

### Plane Lands in Marlow

In September, over a thousand people gathered to watch a plane land in the meadow by the railway station. The Farman biplane, which was being flown by officers from the Royal Flying Corps, had engine problems. The men sorted the problem out, had tea with local dignitaries and then flew off again.

The earliest memory is leaning from my bedroom window and hearing a newspaper boy running down the street shouting 'War declared'. Percival Plumridge, Marlow resident, born 1909, speaking in 1988

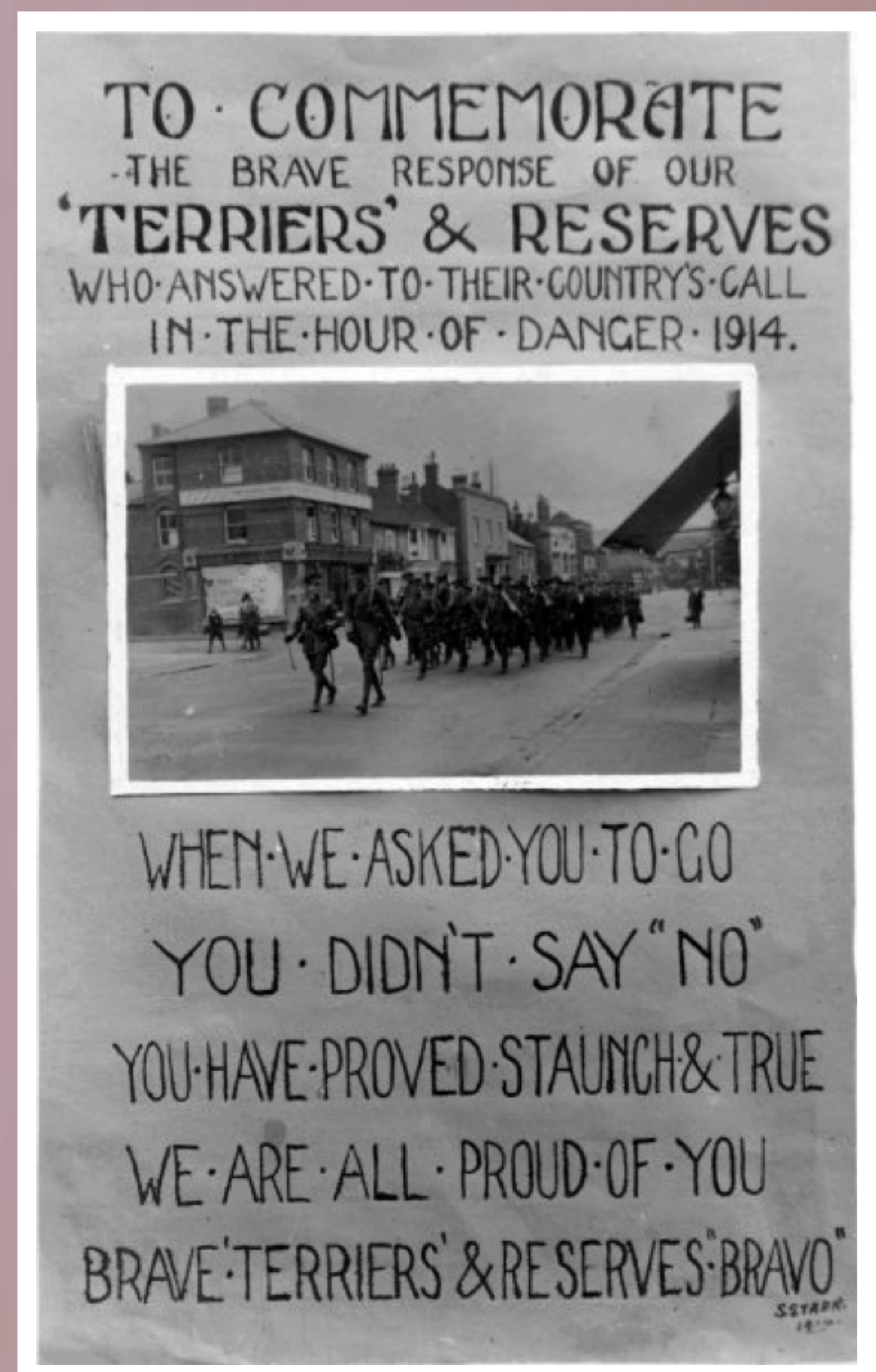
Marlow in August 1914 was a small, busy town of approximately 5,000 people. But life changed very quickly following the outbreak of the war. Here are just a few examples of the impact of the war in Marlow in the summer and autumn of 1914.

### War Relief Committee Set Up

By October 1914, over 300 Marlow men were on active service. A local War Relief Committee was established to help families affected by the war. It collected subscriptions from households and published these in the newspaper. Organisations also made donations - Marlow's Picture Palace gave its takings from showings on 9 October. Grants to families varied from 1s to 5s a week. The Committee also made payments to enable wives to visit wounded husbands in hospital.

### Nurses Trained

The Relief Committee also arranged for the training of 13 Marlow women who volunteered to be auxiliary nurses (Voluntary Aid Detachment workers – VADs). The women helped in the emergency hospitals which were set up across the country, including one at Bisham Abbey.



View of a postcard with commemorative text, showing soldiers marching north past Institute Rd. High St, Marlow. 1914

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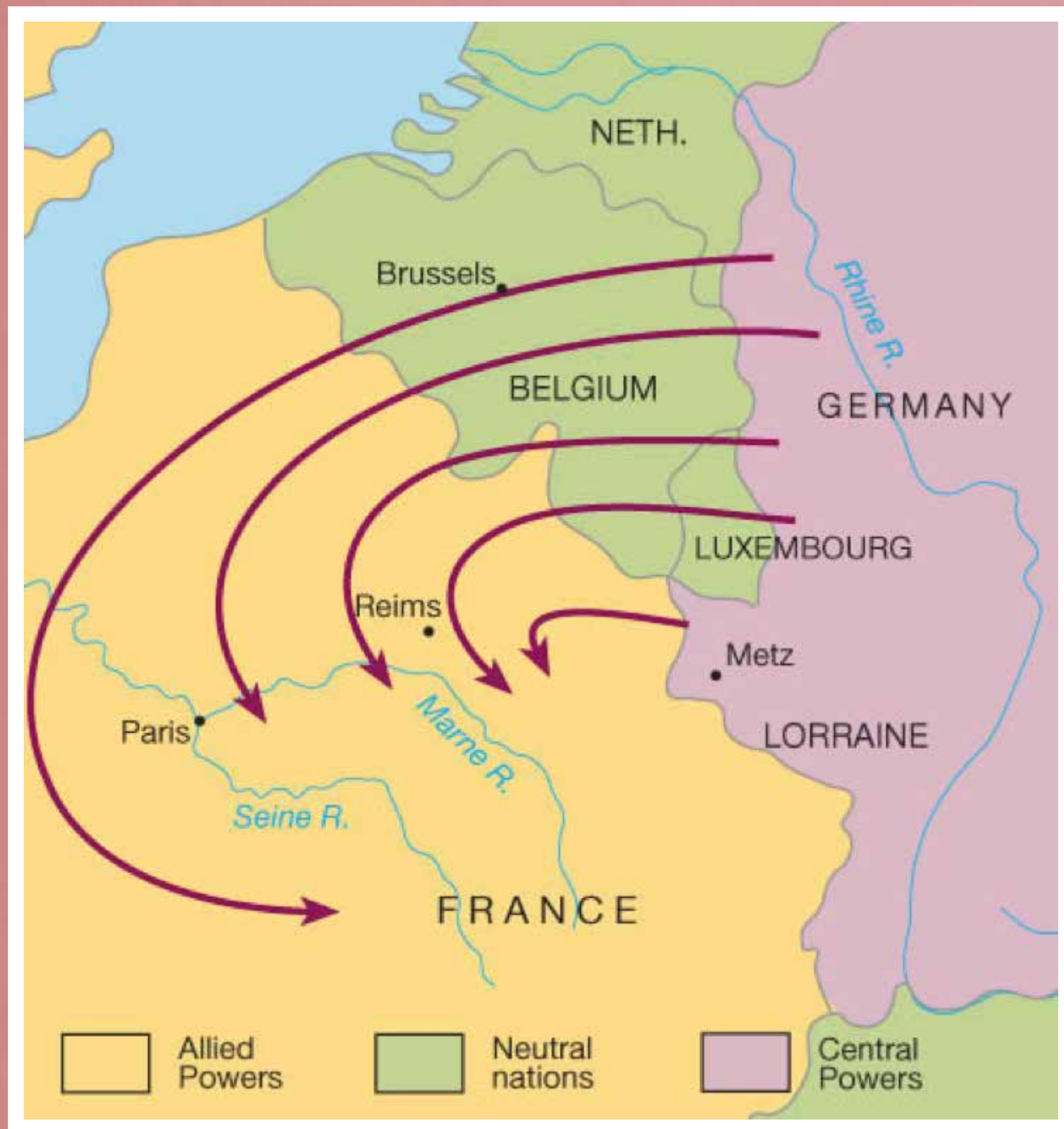
# MARLOW IN WORLD WAR ONE

AUGUST – OCTOBER 1914

## The Western Front

Professional soldiers from Marlow were amongst the first British soldiers to be sent to defend Belgium and France in August 1914. While the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) helped to halt the German invasion, it suffered terrible casualties and many men from Marlow lost their lives.

Germany's aim in 1914 was to win a quick war against France in the west and then defeat Russia in the east (the so-called Schlieffen Plan). It invaded through Belgium and northern France with the hope of quickly capturing Paris. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was sent to support France and Belgium fight off this invasion. This became an area of intense fighting between the opposing armies over the next four years and was known as the Western Front.



The Schlieffen Plan



British Expeditionary Force soldiers leaving their barracks in London to go to France, summer 1914

### The BEF was ridiculed by

Kaiser Wilhelm II as a "contemptible little army". But the "Old Contemptibles" were also a professional and highly trained force. It included men from Marlow who were either on active duty or in the reserves when war broke out. Five of those Marlow men were killed in the first three months of fighting.

The BEF's first battle against the German army was on 23 August 1914 at Mons. Heavily outnumbered, they were forced to retreat, suffering heavy casualties in fierce rearguard fighting. One of these was Guardsman William Eaton who was a reserve and working as a policeman in Marlow when he was called up. William was killed on 1 September when the Grenadier Guards fought to hold off the advancing German forces.

The Allies pushed the Germans back in early September as the invasion lost momentum. Following fierce fighting in the autumn, a stalemate emerged with opposing lines of trenches stretching from the English Channel to Switzerland.

The BEF suffered very heavy casualties during this fighting. Two other professional soldiers from Marlow – Sidney Beldon and George Nicholls - were killed. On 23 October, Joseph Ridgley, who was born in Little Marlow in 1883, was killed while serving with the Rifle Brigade. Three days later, his younger brother George, a soldier with the Royal Fusiliers, was also killed in action. Such examples of multiple losses within one family were to become a tragically familiar experience over the following four years.



Courtesy of Imperial War Museum

The Retreat from Mons, summer 1914.



# MARLOW REMEMBERS

## WORLD WAR ONE

**The First World War began in the summer of 1914 and lasted until November 1918. It involved Britain and over 30 other countries across the world and resulted in the deaths of over 9 million people, with 21 million more wounded. Every town and village in Britain was affected by the war.**

Over 800 men with connections to Marlow served during the war and over 200 of those died. The impact of the war at home was profound, not only because of the losses but also through the many changes it brought about in Marlow.

One hundred years on from the conflict, our aim is to commemorate the impact of the war on Marlow and the contribution made by its people. We want to research and share the stories of Marlow's people who were affected by the war – at home and in battle. If you have any stories or memorabilia from the time of the war, please do let us know by emailing us at [more@marlowww1.org.uk](mailto:more@marlowww1.org.uk).

We have set out below some of the key events of the war. We will be arranging regular exhibitions in the museum between 2014 and 2018 to show how the war's events impacted on the people of Marlow.

### 1914

- June 28 - Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to Austria-Hungary's throne, and his wife are assassinated by Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip
- July 28 - Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia. August 1 - Germany declares war on Russia.
- August 3 - Germany declares war on France.
- August 4 - The United Kingdom declares war on Germany, after Germany invades Belgium. October 19 - Battle of Ypres begins.

### 1916

- February 21 - The Battle of Verdun begins. The Battle of Verdun was the longest battle of World War I and was one of the bloodiest.
- May 31 - The Battle of Jutland, the major naval battle of the war, begins.
- July 1 - The Battle of the Somme begins.

### 1917

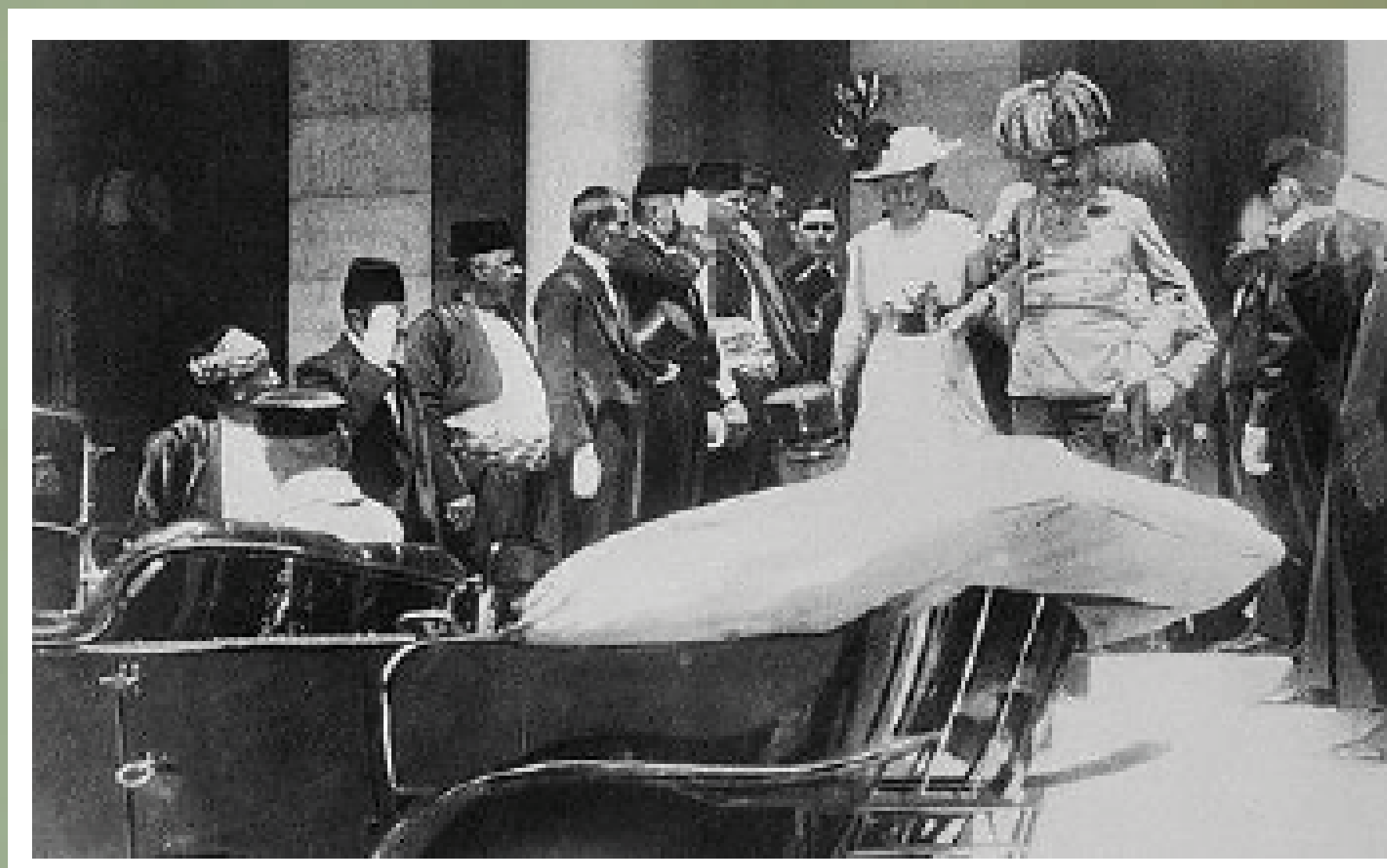
- April 6 - The United States declares war on Germany.
- July 31 - The Battle of Passchendaele (also known as the Third Battle of Ypres) begins.
- November 7 - The Bolsheviks overthrow the Russian government.

### 1918

- March 3 - Russia signs the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, which is a peace treaty between Russia and the Central Powers.
- March 21 - Germany launches the Spring Offensive. July 15 - The Second Battle of the Marne begins.
- November 11 - Germany signs an armistice. Fighting ends on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

### 1919

- June 28 - The Treaty of Versailles formally ends World War One



Austrian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie on June 28 1914. They were assassinated five minutes later



British troops on the Western Front, where many men from Marlow fought and died