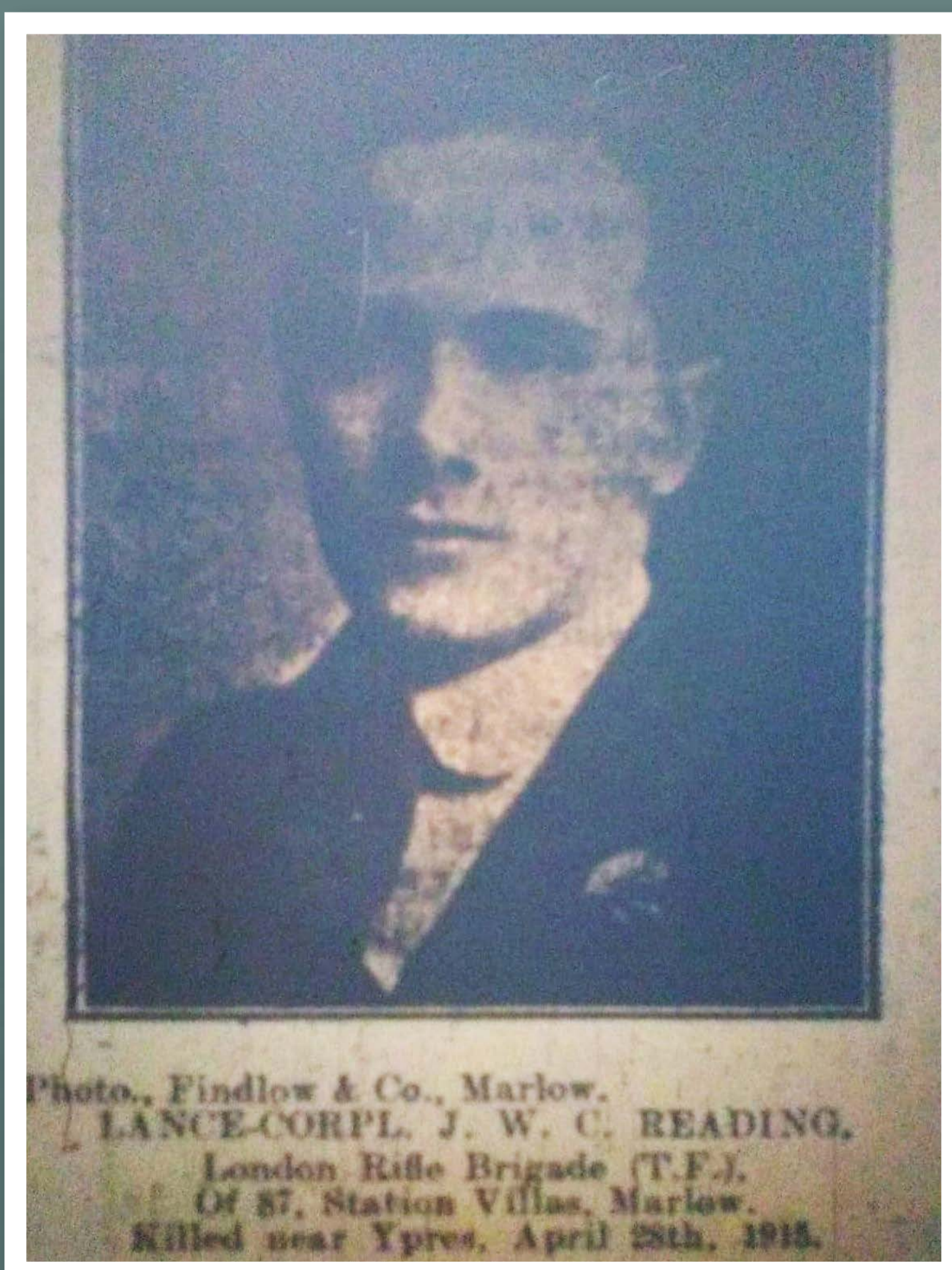


Letters from the Front

Many Marlow men serving during the War wrote letters home describing their experiences. Some were printed in the local newspaper, the South Bucks Free Press. Here is a copy of a letter from Lance-Corporal James Reading to his family from January 1915 that was printed in the paper.

James was born in Marlow in 1891. He was educated at Sir William Borlase's School between 1901 and 1907. Before the War, he lived with his parents in Station Road and worked as an insurance clerk with Royal Exchange. He was a member of the rowing club. A month after writing the letter, James was wounded but continued to serve in France. He was killed by shell fire on 28 April 1915 and is commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres.



LETTERS FROM THE FRONT.
Marlow Man's Muddy Time in the Trenches.
 Mr. Reading, of 87, Station Villas, has received a letter dated Jan. 4th, from his son, Pte. J. W. C. Reading, of the London Rifle Brigade, a member of the Marlow R.C., from which the following is an extract:—
 "Many thanks for letters all received. You can't think how I look forward to letters. I suppose you will want to know all the last fortnight's news, so here goes. The Saturday before Christmas we made an attack here. We were in reserve in the woods. We had a few bullets and a good few shrapnel. No casualties, however, in the reserve. The front line were successful, and did what they set out for. We had a pretty unpleasant night that night, as we were in trenches (very wet and muddy) in the woods, and we had to go about a mile through awful slushy mud, well over our boot-tops, and spent the rest of the night in the breastworks, very crowded. The next day, Sunday, we had to go on fatigue in the evening. We carried up barbed wire, through wets mud than the night before. It was right over our knees, nearly got "bogged" several times. When we got up in front of the trenches, four of us were told off to form a listening patrol in front of the Engineers, who were putting up barbed wire. We had nearly four hours of it lying down in the mud. I was very cold, and we got very cramped. We could hear the Germans about 100 yards away, moving barbed wire and giving orders, and walking about. I fully expected they were lining up for attack. We could not have got back through the mud to warn our chaps if they had attacked, so we simply got ready to open rapid fire till we were wiped out. Some time after the Engineers were a few yards from us when a flare went up, and the Germans saw them. We then had a very lively ten minutes, as they let us have it for all they were worth. We kept down very close, then, as the bullets were whizzing all over the place. Was not sorry when the fatigue was over, and we got back to billets. The woods just there are not very pleasant, as you are apt to slip up and put your hand on a face, or sit down on what looks like a log in the dusk, and find it is a dead body. There are quite a number of dead of both sides there—some unburied for weeks—as it's so dangerous to get to them. At Christmas we were in reserve in a barn, so we were able to have quite a decent time. Our last turn in the trenches was very quiet. The Germans waved to us, and we strolled about on the back of the trench as we pleased. They are not the same now, though. We went in last Sunday, and out again New Year's Eve—four days and nights. We had to be baling all the time to keep the water down. We go in again to-night, and as it is very wet, I am not looking forward to it. You seem to be getting the same kind of weather, for I notice the floods are out in parts of the Thames. I have lost sight of Flint and Foster now, as they are in the machine gun section."



The Menin Gate Memorial where James Reading is commemorated.