

Chapter 2

'Wasteage' 1915

The first full year of warfare brought very little in the way of success for the Allied cause.

In early 1915 Allied commanders were divided on whether they should concentrate on the Western Front and attempt to break the stalemate there, or open up an attack in the east.

In the event, the British public and the people of West Calder were to become used to news from a new theatre of battle, the Dardanelles. The decision was made to attack Turkey and attempt to force passage through the Dardanelles to the Black Sea. This would open Constantinople up to bombardment, lead to the fall of the Turkish government, effectively removing it from the war, and also create an effective alternative supply route to Russia. Or at least that was the plan. In its execution it became one of the most disastrous missions of the war.

In February and March, attempts to open the Dardanelles by naval bombardment failed. The decision was made to land an expedition on the Gallipoli Peninsula and push in land to Constantinople. The landing soon became a battle of attrition on both sides and the pages of the Midlothian Advertiser bear witness to the tremendous loss of life that occurred here, before a decision was made to withdraw in January 1916.

The situation on the Western Front was little better.

On March 10th the British offensive at Neuve Chappelle began with little success.

In April the Germans mounted a surprise attack at Ypres in Belgium, using poison gas for the first time.

In May and June lack of British success was blamed on the mounting numbers of 'dud' and ineffective shells produced by the munitions factories at home. The 'shell scandal' was to have a wide political and social impact, bringing Lloyd George to power, changing the face of military command on the Western Front and leading to licensing laws that were only amended in the 1980s.

From the 25th of September through to the 14th of October, the Battle of Loos saw small allied gains initially, at the price of horrendous casualties.

In December, Sir Douglas Haig replaced Sir John French, as Commander in Chief on the Western Front and the stage was set for 1916 and one of the greatest British military disasters ever.

In West Calder, the start of 1915 was celebrated in sombre fashion.

“On New Year’s Eve a crowd assembled in the Main Street to herald the entry of 1915, but there was not the usual evidence of rejoicing and after the clock had struck the hour of 12 those present quietly dispersed to their homes.”

Those at the front were never far from the thoughts of those in the village.

When the local lodge of Freemasons held their annual inauguration of office holders, they toasted the ‘Army, Navy and Territorial Forces.’ Fourteen or fifteen of their members were serving the country and rumours that the Hun was taking no prisoners, but shooting British and French POWs, must surely have taken the edge of the evening’s events.

The hard working ladies of the Women’s Work Party could at least feel reassured that their efforts had brought some comfort to the boys in the trenches waiting for the old year to end. There had been suggestions that gifts and ‘comforts’ had not reached their destination, but an article in the Advertiser in early January described how the work of those at home had brought some relief to those far from home.

“It will probably be gratifying to the thousands of kind-hearted people at home who have sent out luxuries for the soldiers to learn that there was no lack of Christmas fare for them. At every regimental headquarters could be seen piles of plum puddings, chocolate, tobacco, and other luxuries.”

Mrs Calder of Burngrange, who had been giving constant and valuable help in connection with the parish work party, received a letter of thanks from the front.

“Dear Madam, I have received a parcel of socks, scarf, and cigarettes from you, and I take the chance of telling you how much I appreciate your kindness. I thank you very much for your kind thoughtfulness and have the honour to be yours faithfully. Q C Brown, Air Mechanic.”

Special precautions were taken for the presents supplied by the Princess Mary’s Fund.

“They were conveyed in closed vans locked by letter-locks, of which the key-word was known only to certain officers. Some of the vans were also tied up with barbed wire. This great precaution nearly led to disaster in one case. The receiving officer had either forgotten or not received the opening word ‘Noel’ and could not get the van open until he hauled at the fastening with a motor lorry.”

More interesting than the delivery of ‘comforts’ and royal gifts would have been the amazing happenings along certain sections of the Western Front on Christmas Day.

“The following letter received from a member of the 6th Gordon Highlanders describes the curious scene which happened in the trenches on Christmas Day.”

“On Christmas day a remarkable thing happened. I was sitting having breakfast in my trench when the word came along ‘The Germans have got out of their trenches.’ Naturally I thought our leg was being pulled, but on looking over the top of the trench I was amazed to see large groups of German soldiers standing in front of their trenches, all without arms.”

A ‘truce’ was arranged amongst the officers of both sides and time allowed for each to bury their dead and celebrate the season.

The governments on both sides did their best to quash these meetings, even threatening court martial and firing squads for those who ‘fraternised’ with the enemy.

In early January news of German atrocities, real or imagined, began to circulate including the torture of Belgian priests and the use of women and children by German soldiers to dig trenches and act as human shields in some of the fighting. War might not be a good thing, but few could doubt that Britain was on the side of the just and the righteous.

When Mr James Grant presented a paper at the weekly YMCA meeting, calling for international unity and peace and the ‘propagation of the Christian gospel after the close of the present war’, few would have disagreed that peace was only possible once the Hun had been well and truly beaten. That fight would involve civilians and soldiers in equal measure.

The Women’s Work Party got down to work straight away and dispatched boxes of clothes to the Belgian Relief Fund, as well as parcels of ‘goodies’ to the Territorial’s serving on the east coast.

The King had called for ‘intercessionary services’ on behalf of the Nation and the Empire and on Sunday, January 3rd, these were held in the churches of the parish, in the presence of a number of local soldiers who were home on leave.

In the parish church, Dr Anderson read from a Roll of Honour of those engaged on national service at home and abroad. It contained 114 names and once framed, would be hung in the church and added to as the numbers increased.

Despite the fact that the threat of invasion was remote, it must have come as something of a shock to read, in early January, instructions from the government on what to do in the event of a ‘landing by the enemy in this country.’

The police would declare a state of emergency and:

- All motors, bicycles, horses, mules, donkeys, carts, carriages and other vehicles, harness, petrol, launches and lighters must be moved as far away from the area of military operations as possible. Those that could not be moved should be destroyed or rendered useless.
- Livestock must be driven off and, if possible, clear of public roads. If this was not possible they should be slaughtered.
- Small tools must be placed at the hands of the military authorities or destroyed or rendered useless.
- All physically fit persons will be required to do any work deemed appropriate.
- The civil population must avoid roads.

These instructions no doubt caused some heated discussion around the dinner tables of the parish and some may genuinely have been alarmed that West Calder, with its surrounding oil companies, could have been a priority target for enemy action.

Throughout 1915 there was a constant belief that there were a hard core of dodgers - young, single men - who should be doing their patriotic duty and signing up for the colours. The belief proved unfounded and despite healthy recruitment, a national campaign was organised.

By the autumn of that year over 54 million recruiting posters had been circulated, 8 million letters sent and 12,000 meetings organised.

In the first week of January 17th men left the village to join the regulars, Kitchener's Battalions, or the Territorial's.

Many families did more than their 'bit'.

"Mr and Mrs McGinty of Baker Street, Addiewell, have 5 sons in the family and 4 of them are now serving their king and country."

"Mr and Mrs George Watson, Dee Street, West Calder, had 5 sons serving in the Army up to within a few days ago. They have lost one of their sons at Hill 60, where Lance-Corporal John Watson fell a victim of the German gases."

On April 17th, a detachment of the 2/10 Battalion of the Royal Scots visited the village to recruit. They arrived late and their visit not well publicised. There was a poor response from locals. As the newspaper comments, 'in this hour of need these events need to be better organised.'

The next visit to the village for recruitment purposes was a far 'slicker' affair. It was reported in the Scotsman - but for all the wrong reasons!

The event had been well publicised and well organised by the Central Recruiting Campaign in Edinburgh for Saturday, May 22nd.

“The cars are to be assembled in Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, at 1.45 and proceed to Broxburn, Uphall, Bathgate, Armadale, West Calder and Mid Calder, the journey occupying about 5 hours. The procession will be preceded by a band in a char-a-banc 20 minutes ahead, and their purpose will be to gather the crowd at the stopping places, preparatory to the arrival of the main procession with the speakers. It is expected there will be about a dozen speakers.”

Those speakers had an unexpected reception!

“A most regrettable scene took place at the recruiting meeting held in the village, when a large number of drunks mixed in the crowd and interrupted the speakers. It was not a credit to the village that the Scotsman on Monday had to direct attention to such a state of affairs in West Calder at a time like this. The policeman had to remove several of the worst offenders, and one of the speakers intimated that if interruptions were made they had power to arrest a recruiting meeting. If one or two examples were made it would have a wholesome effect.”

A fuller report gives some idea of the methods employed by the speakers to encourage men to sign up.

The pipe bands of the 16th Royal Scots and the 17th Royal Scots preceded the procession, the skirl of the pipes attracting an audience.

Mr Stewart was one of the speakers and he spoke about conscription. He said the object of the meeting was to ‘stimulate’ the young men of West Calder and get them to realise that ‘men and more men were still needed’. ‘The blanks had got to be filled one way or another, and they had regiments which could not get away to the front for lack of reserves’.

Mr Stewart said Lord Kitchener had appealed for 300,000 more men. “If they did not get them by appealing to their patriotism, then they would get them by another way. If they did not come forward voluntarily to help defend their homes, and to support the men who were laying down their lives for them, then they would take them. The conscript soldier would wear the letter C on his shoulder straps, and they could not expect the country to be so generous to him or to his dependants as they were to those who had come forward of their own free will.”

(A Voice - Why?)

“Because they had skulked until they were forced to do it. If the young men would not do their duty then he appealed to the women to get them to do it. Surely they would not refuse to go to defend them and save their homes from what had happened in France and Belgium. All that stood between us and what had happened to the homes in Belgium was the thin khaki line of British troops and our brave sailors. The appeal of the women was the best recruiting agency they had.... The football season was over and there was nothing to

distract their attention or keep them from going. If once they took the step and donned the King's uniform they would be the proudest men in West Calder." - Cheers

'Major Aitkin gave much the same appeal about defending their homes and wives and sweethearts from the Hun. He was asking for volunteers now. If none came forward he might be forcing them to sign up in June.' - Cheers

'Mr Davidson, who had been invalided home but who was returning to fight in France the following day, found it strange that so many fit young men did not respond in this hour of need, if he could do it. He appealed to the young men to do their bit.' - Cheers

'Mr Tait in moving a vote of thanks to the speakers said this war would not be finished until the Kaiser, his son and Admiral Tirpitz, who were chiefly responsible, were hanged at the Tower of London.' - Cheers

And still the complaints continued to be made against those who had not signed up.

'Hundreds of Young Men at Home Yet', said a headline on June 11th.

"The football which took place at West Calder on Saturday revealed the large number of young men who are still at home in the district. A gentleman who was present estimated there were at least 200 men of military age there. The 22 players would have made splendid soldiers. Why do so many young men still hang back from service? There are families with 3 or 4 sons and not one in the colours. This will be the first thing to bring conscription nearer. Every factory, workshop and office should be represented. Let there be no mistake however, the young men who can be spared ought to go, or it will bring down upon us a form of service which every liberty-loving citizen detests."

In July, the National Registration Act called for the registration of all men aged 18 to 41 'so that the government may better know the resources available to them'.

In October, the lack of a recruiting officer in the village was viewed as having a more sinister undertone.

"There is no recruiting officer in the village again. Two weeks ago 4 young men from Fauldhouse came to enlist. They could not. It is well known in Parliamentary circles there are some who favour this situation because they want conscription and this is the way to get it. The military authorities should supply a recruiting officer for each district. The men in the trenches need it. We need recruits to replace those lost in the 'heavy losses in the recent fighting'. Some industries are working with the bare minimum of men they require, but we know there are others who can be spared and 'they ought to be roused to a sense of their duty.'"

The heavy losses on the Western Front brought a very specific appeal from the King.

“At this great moment in the struggle between my people and a highly organised enemy who has transgressed the laws of nations and changed the ordinance that binds civilised Europe together, I appeal to you. ... The end is not in sight. More men and more are wanted to keep my armies in the field, and through them to secure victory and enduring peace. ... I ask you, men of all classes, to come forward voluntarily and take your share in the fight.’

Through out October the appeal for more men and the threat of conscription continued. In November Lord Derby’s recruiting scheme was widely seen as offering the last opportunity to avoid compulsory service. Basically it offered men the opportunity to enlist for 1 day’s service, and then pass to the reserve for call up when required.

On Monday evening, November 3rd, a representative meeting was held at the Masonic Hall in connection with Lord Derby’s Recruiting Scheme. The meeting opened by expressing regret at the accident that had happened to the King and that he would make a speedy recovery. It then urged men to support Lord Derby’s scheme for three reasons:

- ‘They required a great many more recruits to make up the wastage in men which was constantly taking place at the front’
- ‘They also required to give Lord Kitchener sufficient men so that when he won he could obtain a just and lasting peace as well’
- ‘The sooner the war was brought to an end the sooner our men in captivity in Germany would be brought home’

‘A Local Committee was to establish a body of voluntary canvassers. These canvassers should be above the age for enlistment or exempt from it. They should be persons of discretion, able to approach men and deal with sensitive issues. Each canvasser was to have an ID card, a leaflet explaining pay and conditions in the army, and a blue card for the men. The canvasser was to have a personal interview with men who have been identified. Men who expressed a wish to enlist will fall into two classes, those who wish to enlist at once and those who are willing to enlist at some future date. A local committee is to be established to see these arrangements through.’

A local committee was duly established on this evening and canvassers were soon to be seen out and about on the streets of the village and the district.

As good an advertisement for recruiting as any, was the sight of those men who had enlisted, home, on leave in the village.

“During the week-end six local men who are in the Kings Own Scottish Borderers were home on furlough. The men looked very fit and have certainly benefited from their military training.”

And there were plenty cases of individuals who had ‘answered their country’s call’ and whose good example was encouraged on others.

“The patriotic response of Pte William Cooper of East Street, Mossend, West Calder, showed the fine spirit of our ex-soldiers. Pte Cooper was over the age limit, but his strong desire to accompany his old regiment was granted by the authorities, and he rejoined the 1st Seaforth Highlanders. He has been three weeks in the trenches in Flanders and has so far escaped without a scratch. His son Pte David Cooper of the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders has been in the fighting line since the outbreak of the war and has also escaped injury.”

Pte Cooper received a tremendous send off from friends and family in the village.

“Pte Cooper, who was at home on a short furlough from France, received a very hearty send-off when he left for the front on Wednesday evening. The West Calder Musical Union Band, of which he was a former member, played him to the railway station, accompanied by a large crowd of well wishers. Pte Cooper, who was an ex-soldier, showed a fine example of patriotism by rallying again to the colours, when he might well have claimed to be exempt. As the train steamed out of the station hearty cheers were raised, and the band played Auld Lang Syne.”

There was always plenty of news from those serving at the front to show that conditions were not as bad as might be expected and that things were going well for the allied cause.

‘Pte William Turner of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, who resides at Dee Street, West Calder, has been at the front since November last. “Hardly a day passes he says (in a letter home) without some of the ‘Huns’ giving themselves up to our men.”’

Even when personal news from the front was good and could even be exciting, for most men the continual descriptions of battle and the roll call of the dead must have had an unnerving effect.

‘Pte T Wood of the Royal Scots, who belongs to Gavieside, was wounded in Flanders and is now at home to recover. A bullet grazed his neck nicking his jugular. He was also wounded just below the heart. He is recovering well.’

Officially, stated the newspaper, over 60% of British soldiers wounded, such as Pte Wood, made a full recovery!

“On one occasion he and a chum named Anderson were on duty when they observed what they took to be two members of the Red Cross carrying a wounded man on a stretcher. Allowing them to come closer, and knowing some of the German tricks, they saw that instead of it being a wounded soldier it was a machine gun which was upon the stretcher. Taking aim, Wood and Anderson accounted for both men.”

“Snipers he says do a lot of damage and it is often difficult to locate them. On one occasion his company was suffering badly until they turned a machine gun on the clumps at the top of the trees. When they did so, to their surprise they brought down quite a number of German snipers.”

Pte Wood described his emotions on going over the top.

“On going into attack a strange feeling takes possession of the soldier and he knows little until it is all over. As a rule, after such a fight, the men fall asleep very readily in the trenches.”

“On one occasion he was sorry for a German. He was in the front of the German lines, and when they met he threw down his rifle and held up his hands. The British would have allowed him to pass through the lines but his comrade behind him bayoneted him. The German soldier was subsequently bayoneted himself - a fair fate.”

There is no doubt that there was ‘glory’ to be had and it’s easy to imagine the welcome that Pte Seath would have received on his return home, after an officer wrote to his wife to describe his act of bravery.

“Dear Mrs Seath, I want to write and let you know how well your husband behaved on the 9th May when A company were sent into the assault. I got hit about halfway to the German trenches. Seath lay down just behind me and did guardian angel. To move meant almost certain death, as we were only 40 yards from the Germans, yet I understand that your husband did an exceptionally gallant action.”

“Apparently a Pte Inglis was lying wounded quite near, and was hit again, his arm being badly shattered. Seath crawled to him, got him on his back, and so crawled with him to our own trenches. He tells me that an officer of another regiment took his name. His gallantry did not finish there, as he started to crawl out to me again, but thank God he was stopped by one of our officers. I am going to try and collect evidence and bring his deed to official notice. It all depends upon whether the evidence is still alive.”

“He looked after me splendidly and you may have every reason to be proud of him. May God grant that he come back alive to you Mrs Smeath. I wish we had more like him.” (Letter from Capt C L Patton, Bethune, of A Company Cameron Highlanders).”

Of course, news from the front was carefully censored and in early 1915 the Advertiser described to its readers the effect of such censorship on the press and on the soldiers serving abroad.

“What with the events which have not happened, though we are told they have, and the things we may not tell of, even when they are good and have happened, and the things which are deemed fair subject for comment, though the Censor deletes them, the life of a war correspondent under modern conditions is something like that of a mouse under the patronage of a cat in a house where all the nourishment is kept in traps.”

“One can imagine how the troops in the trenches before La Basse must have felt when they saw the London newspapers recently announcing their success, for one hears they are often up to their waists in water and mud, and that wounded men have been drowned in their own pits. The bitter comment of men who find we are blithely discussing a forward movement, when their condition is literally that of sticking in the mud, and under fire, can be imagined.”

Nevertheless, descriptions of battle, considering the censorship and the desire not to panic or worry friends and relatives at home, could be quite graphic.

The letter of a West Calder officer at the front relating to the attack upon the German lines on Saturday, 25th September, makes grim reading.

“I have managed back to billets again. We went up on Thursday to our trenches, the rain pouring down the whole way, and indeed ever since. However, with what was in front of us, little did we mind bodily discomforts. All went as usual until Saturday morning at dawn. At 3.50am our artillery started the bombardment, and we crouched down behind our parapets whilst this inferno raged. Two mines were blown up, and then another two went off. We then got over the parapet, the officers leading the way.”

“We stumbled on in the darkness amidst a hail of shot and shell right up to the Germans second line, over their dead and wounded, bayoneting all who offered the slightest resistance and established ourselves firmly in our new position.”

“It was an awful sight, the charge. Everyone got out at the same time, and there was nothing but a black mass of men in front of us with bayonets. The shells were bursting in amongst us, and the flares flashing up. Added to the darkness, the whole formed a picture which one could never erase from memory.”

“My company consisted of two platoons under myself and another officer and we were the furthest advanced. The rest of the company cleared up about 30 yards behind us. The regiment captured 116, and

our two platoons had 50 of them, so you see we distinguished ourselves.”

“I secured a German officer’s pistol and glasses. The latter are excellent, so I am keeping them; the pistol however I will send on later. We had German helmets and everything, but when we were forced to retire we lost them all. After we got their lines, they started shelling us, which kept up for 12 hours, which was terrible. At 3 o’clock in the afternoon 5 Jack Johnson’s landed in my trench killing four and wounding six. One Jack Johnson burst two feet above my head and killed a man beside me. I was buried in earth, but apart from shock, was unhurt. One piece of the shell blew my bully-beef tin and my food right through my haversack, which was on my back, so you see I had a miraculous escape. Another piece of shrapnel went through my cap. ... retiring was brought about by the overwhelming superiority of the German guns.”

In such conditions, British losses began to mount and at the time of each major engagement the Advertiser warned villagers about the bitter harvest that was to be expected.

“There is a feeling abroad at the present time that we are on the eve of big events in the progress of the war. Arrangements are being made on a large scale for the reception of the wounded. Doubtless there is a feeling of satisfaction that the long period of waiting is passing, and that the Allies will soon enter upon the offensive, but it is well that we should prepare ourselves for the price we will have to pay for a general advance. Neuve Chapelle has shown us what is likely to be, and we will require to steel our hearts for the inevitable loss we will sustain. The best we can hope for is that our victory may be so complete that it will materially shorten the war and lead to a lasting peace.”

This ‘warning’ preceded the British campaign of September and even the best of censorship could not keep villagers from the news that things were not going well. “A feeling of despondency swept over the country this week due to the somewhat unsatisfactory news from the seat of war. It is human but it is nonetheless regrettable. We cannot hope to get through a war of such magnitude without occasional checks, and if what we have seen is the maximum effort of Germany there is little cause for alarm.”

From a national perspective there may have been little cause for alarm, but there can be no doubt that the steady stream of casualties from March to May and in September and October was felt keenly by the small communities from which these men came.

12th March.

‘We regret to announce the death of Pte J Morgan of the 2nd Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers who was killed in action on Feb 19th. He was born in Mungle Street and is 23 years of age. His grandfather is Mr John Morgan

ironmonger of West Calder. He enlisted as soon as the call went out and on January 12th he proceeded to France and was in the trenches 4 days later.'

March 26th.

'Information reached West Calder this week of the death of Pte John Collins of the Argyle and Southern Highlanders who died from wounds in Germany. Pte Collins who resided at Tennants March West Calder rejoined his regiment when the present war broke out. It appears he was wounded in action and captured by the Germans who sent him to one of the prisoners camps, where he has succumbed to his injuries.'

'Pte James Whigham of the Cameron Highlanders, who resided at Harburn Rows, WC, is reported missing. He rejoined his regiment last year. The Cameron Highlanders have suffered severely and it is thought that perhaps he was taken prisoner at one of their engagements. No information about his whereabouts has come from Germany and he is reported missing by the War Office. His brother David is also at the front and has so far escaped injury.'

The sense of not knowing must have been greater than the sense of loss felt by those who at least knew that for their loved ones the war was over. Pte Whigham in fact died on the field of battle.

April 23.

'Pte James Gray, Mossend, West Calder has been killed in France. He was 21 and enlisted in August along with his brother Tom. The sad news of Pte Gray's death was conveyed in a letter to Mrs Gray from her son Tom. The sons were the support of a widowed mother. Seven of our local men have now given up their lives in the cause of King and Country.'

Very often unofficial news of a death, in the form of a letter from a friend or relative, was received before official notification from the War Office.

May 7th.

'Pte Thomas Dolan of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders who resided at West Calder. His death was reported on Monday night. The sad news was received by Mrs Dolan in a letter received from an officer at the front. He enlisted in August. The officer in charge of the Company writing to Mrs Dolan says her son was killed by a bullet when firing over the parapet of the trench. His death was instantaneous and without pain. A service was held and he and another hero were buried together.'

Pte Dolan's death may not have been instantaneous and without pain and yet on the Home Front this myth was maintained.

May 21.

'The death of Pte Martin Allen who was killed in action on Sunday, May 9th, is announced. Prior to the war he was a coal miner in the former West Main Coal Mine.'

Despite mounting losses the newspaper could still find local soldiers to support the official line. At the beginning of the Battle of Loos, in September, a West Calder soldier writing from somewhere in Belgium could be quoted as saying about his recent experiences that, "Although the sacrifice was great, we have had one of the greatest victories since this war began, and one which will never be forgotten by those who were spared to come out of it."

There were greater 'victories' to come, with an even greater loss of life.

September/October.

'It is reported that West Calder men have suffered heavily in the big engagement in France. Although we have not as yet been able to verify all the cases, it is reported that Pte W McGinty and Pte D Ferguson, Addiewell are killed. The following are reported wounded - Pte J Brash, Pte W Nimmo, Pte Tonner, Pte Purse, Pte Smith, Pte J Calder and Pte S Haldrane.'

The October 8th edition of the Advertiser carries a record of the largest amount of casualties suffered by the district to date. The wounded and dead came from Uphall, Broxburn, Fauldhouse, Shotts, Addiewell, and West Calder and very few villages escaped.

"Pte R Turner of the 13th Royal Scots who resides at 21 Westwood Row was killed in the big engagement in France on September 25/26. The deceased was a miner. Westwood Row has 12 men serving with the colours."

It was obvious that the official policy of allowing friends and neighbours to enlist and fight side by side was going to have a devastating effect on local communities as losses mounted. Westwood Row was to lose more than a few of its residents in the battles that were yet to come.

Tributes to loved ones took a variety of forms. Throughout 1915 there is a growing use of poetry in the pages of the Advertiser to praise the memory of those who have fallen, although much of it was probably written to order by a member of the newspaper's staff or borrowed from other publications.

In loving memory of Pte William McGinty, 10982 Royal Scots, 24 Westwood, West Calder, who was killed in action on Sept 27th, 1915 at Hill 70.

Though buried in a distant grave
Amidst the shot and shell
For country's sake his life he gave
He stood his trials well

Who could have dealt that horrid blow
On one we loved so well
We never knew the pain he bore
No mortal tongue can tell

Oh! This world is full of sorrow
Now his pains and trials are o'er;
But some day we hope to meet him
On that bright eternal shore

No matter how we think of him,
His name we oft recall,
There is nothing left to answer
But the photo on the wall
Four country's sake his life he gave,
He died beloved by all

Inserted by his mother, sisters and brothers

There is a little grave in France
that mine eyes may never see;
Though that little grave in France
is the dearest spot to me.

For it's there they've laid my husband,
Once so winsome, and so glad,
And my heart is torn and sad,
That his face no more I'll see.

There are many graves in France,
Dear to others, as to me,
As that little grave in France
Which mine eyes so long to see.

Yes we mourn with sorrow deep,
For the brave who sleep death's sleep;
Yet we exult while we weep,
For they died to set us free.

Inserted by his wife, Mrs McGinty

For some, the agony of not knowing dragged on. The following appeal appeared in the Advertiser in November.

'Pte James Hamilton of the 1st Battalion Cameron Highlanders who belongs to Raeburn Row, West Calder, has been reported missing in France. After the fight he was observed by a member of the RAMC lying on the battlefield, but he was unable to say whether he was alive or dead. Any information regarding him will be gladly received by his father Mr John Hamilton, Raeburn's Row, West Calder.'

By the time this was printed, the hopes of the family had been dashed. Pte Hamilton had been killed in action, on the 9th of May in Flanders.

“Lieutenant Corporal W Wardrop, of the 2nd Royal Scots, in a letter to Mrs Duffy of West Calder, describes an engagement and the fate of her son, a chum of his. “If was only when we got back to our billets and had a roll call, that we knew all missing, etc. He might easily have been wounded and taken away to the dressing station without us knowing. I hope that is what has happened anyway and nothing worse, because he was such a nice quiet chap and very brave, and he was well liked --- I hope you get some good news for the better. I hope you will let me know if you get any word of him.”

Good news was indeed forthcoming and Lieutenant Corporal Wardrop was alive.

“November 26th. Mr R Gray of New Breich West Calder has received a letter from his brother Pte William Gray of the 8th Gordon Highlanders. He was wounded on the 25th and is now a prisoner of war in Germany. He took part in the big advance and was posted as missing by the War Office. His postcard states he was wounded in the knee and his left leg has been amputated. Previous to war he resided in Mossend and worked as a shale miner with Young’s Oil Co. He enlisted last December and has been in France for some time.”

The war was effectively over for Private Gray, as was any hope of returning to normal life after the war had finished.

As September and October wore on, the local death toll mounted.

“Writing from France to his mother, Pte Roden or Sweeney of the Royal Scots whose home is at 14 Forth Street, West Calder, says he took part in the severe fighting on the 25th September and has been recommended for the DCM for bravery in the field. He also states that Pte Peter Wynne who resides in Clyde St with his mother was killed not far from him. He reports that Pte Nimmo has been wounded.”

“Pte David Cooper, son of Mrs Cooper of Mossend, has died of heart failure after coming out of the trenches.”

“Mrs Robertson of Dee Street received official news of the death of her husband Pte James Robertson. He was killed in action in France on 14th November. His death was caused by a shell exploding near him. In civilian life he was a shale miner. He leaves a widow and five of a family. He has two brothers serving - Pte Alex Robertson is wounded and home on leave - Pte Ebenezer Roberston is with the Royal Scots in the Dardanelles.”

Gallipoli has gone down in history, as one of the most infamous military campaigns of the war and the Dardanelles was a name that villagers were to become accustomed to as 1915 wore on.

'Mr Robert Simpson, Addiewell, has received information that his son, Pte John D Simpson of the 5th Royal Scots, has been killed in action at the Dardanelles. Pte Simpson was serving his apprenticeship as a cooper in the Addiewell Oil Works when the war broke out, and when the call for recruits came he at once enlisted in the 5th Royal Scots. Although under the age for foreign service, he volunteered and the consent of his parents being secured he proceeded with the expedition to the Dardanelles. He came safely through the severe fighting in the early stages, but was killed on 17th May. Deceased was a member of the West Calder and District Pipe Band.'

'Pte James Neasy, of Happy Land, West Calder, was killed in action at the Dardanelles. He was in the KOSB and went out with a number of other local lads. Previous to enlisting he worked as a shale miner with Young's Oil Company in No 10 Mine.'

'The five young men from West Calder who went out to the Dardanelles with the Kings Own Scottish Borderers have suffered severely. Pte Neasy has been killed, Pvt A Storry is missing, Pts J Reid and W Watson were both wounded. Pte Easton who was also one of the company has so far escaped. The village also has several young men in the 5th Royal Scots at the Dardanelles. Pte James Young has been slightly wounded in the hand and Pte Alex Rae is at present ill on a hospital ship. Pte McCallum, Addiewell, has so far come through the severe fighting scatheless, but in a letter home this week refers to the sad losses by the 5th Royal Scots.'

A West Calder soldier, whose letter home was published in the Advertiser, described the fighting in the Dardanelles in much the same way as that along the Western Front. His greatest discomfort was the water, which had to be boiled before it could be drunk. Oh how he longed 'for the taste of Crosswoodhill Water.'

April saw the introduction of the one weapon which has long been associated with the Great War, that of gas. On April 23/24 the Germans released poison gas along part of the front, near Ypres in Belgium. The allies were taken completely by surprise, despite the fact that they had prior evidence that it might be used.

During the course of the war, two types of gas were to be used, lethal and irritant. The gas could be released in vapour form from cylinders, although it was reliant on wind direction, or in liquid form in a shell, where it evaporated on explosion.

The earliest protection afforded to soldiers was to hold a urine soaked cloth over the nose and mouth.

The use of gas did not give the Germans the advantage they hoped for.

The Advertiser quickly condemned the Germans and described the effect of a gas attack upon soldiers.

'A British officer from the front tells the story of the victims of the gas attack:

"Yesterday and the day before I went with _____ to see some of the men in the hospital at _____ who were gassed yesterday and the day before on Hill 60. The whole of England and the civilised world ought to have the truth fully brought before them in vivid detail, and not wrapped up as at present.

When we got to the hospital we had no difficulty in finding out in which ward the men were, as the noise of the poor devils trying to get breath was sufficient to direct us.

There were about 20 of the worst cases in the ward on mattresses, all more or less in sitting position, propped up against the walls. Their faces, hands, arms, were of a shiny grey-black colour, with mouths open, and lead glazed eyes, all swaying slightly backwards and forwards trying to get breath.

It was the most appalling sight, all these poor black faces - struggling, struggling for life, what with the groaning and the noise of the efforts for breath.

There is practically nothing to be done for them, except to give them salt and water to try and make them sick. The effect the gas has is to fill their lungs with a watery, frothy matter, which gradually increases and rises till it fills up the whole lungs and comes to the mouth. Then they die. It is suffocation; slow drowning, taking in some cases one or two days."

Local men were amongst the first gas casualties.

'West Calder soldier asphyxiated - information has reached Mr and Mrs Forester of West End, West Calder, that their son Pte William Forrester, of the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders, has been incapacitated near Ypres by the German gases and is now in hospital at Rouen. He enlisted in August and was training in Cromarty up until a few weeks ago from where he was transferred to Ypres. He met Pte David Cooper there, another local lad who is at the front. Forrester, when at home, was a well-known runner under the nom-de-plume of Hogg.'

William Forrester recovered from his injury, but was later killed in action in the Persian Gulf in 1916.

According to the Advertiser, soldiers had more to worry about than simply the Hun!

'Belgium, besides being the battlefield of Europe, is also said to be the most haunted country in the world. People who make a study of these matters aver that the two facts are not without connection. According to some of our soldiers, more than one authentic ghost has made its appearance during the present war. The trenches at Mons furnish a case in point. Two British soldiers who were lying wounded there declare that during the battle they were being constantly comforted by the figure of an old woman in a curious poke bonnet and a vivid blue skirt. This figure was also seen by a third soldier who declared it to be his mother. "I believe she's come for me", he said and a moment later a shrapnel burst almost on top of him and blew him to pieces.'

Is it any wonder that there were some who simply could not face returning to the theatre of battle.

'On Monday evening when Sergeant Steel was at the railway station in West Calder he observed a soldier dressed in the uniform of the Royal Scots leave the 6.46 train from Glasgow. He waited until the train had moved off and said to Sergeant Steel he was sorry he had lost the train, as he was due to be at the depot at 9.30 that evening. He was told that the best thing he could do was to go with the 10.30 train and explain matters to his commanding officer.'

'He promised to do so, but failed to keep his promise. On Tuesday Sgt Steel saw him in the village under the influence of liquor. When questioned why he had not returned to the depot on Monday night, he said his leave was not up until Tuesday night. The sergeant then asked to see his pass, but as he had none he was taken to the Police Office. On communicating with Headquarters it was found out that he had deserted the previous week. On Tuesday afternoon an escort arrived in the village and took him to the regimental depot.

Apart from the losses and the absence of sons, brothers and fathers abroad, 1915 saw the war impacting on village life in a number of different ways.

January

To read the Advertiser you would assume that each New Year in the past must have been heralded with a near riot, for according to the newspaper, the arrival of 1915 was exceptional in that "There was a gratifying absence of disorder during the New Year holidays and the police authorities report a clean sheet. This is very satisfactory."

The Parish Work Party women quickly resumed their weekly meetings in the Drill Hall on Monday nights at 5pm. Throughout the year they would organise a variety of fundraising events in the village and send 'comforts' to the soldiers at the front, as well as boxes of clothes and supplies to the Relief Funds for Belgium, Serbia and numerous other needy causes.

The C.O.O.P. Women's Guild was also organising much needed relief supplies.

The shortage of manpower had brought a number of new workers into the village. By the middle of the month they were desperately seeking accommodation and an appeal was being made to the council to help with the building of houses.

Despite the war, the C.O.O.P. announced profits up for the last quarter of 1914. There was a suspicion that some firms were profiteering out of the war and the hardship of others. The price of foodstuffs and goods was rising and the Advertiser announced that, "It is reassuring to learn that the government is enquiring into and about to deal with the question of the increase of the necessaries of life."

On a lighter note, the annual Burns Suppers took place as normal across the village and district.

February

Throughout 1915 two major 'fears' engulfed the civilian population.

One was the use of Zeppelins to bomb populated areas of Britain. The other was the growing U Boat menace, which threatened the sea-lanes and supply routes into the country.

The February edition of the Advertiser carried details of the enthusiasm that was sweeping Germany over the use of this new weapon.

In the same month the Territorial's at Bathgate had been distributed greatcoats and also 300 bicycles had arrived for them. Up until now they had been creating a good impression marching in the district and would now undoubtedly be seen out and about on their new modes of transport.

March

In March the government recognised that there had been a 20% rise in the cost of living since the start of the war and the collieries of the district were complaining about the shortage of manpower.

Readers of the Advertiser could sit at home perusing the latest batch of 'cheery letters from the front', whilst outside severe snowstorms had brought down telephone lines and blocked roads around the village.

There was good news for the local oil workers. The oil companies had made a wages offer and it had been accepted by the men, 'so that peace will reign in the shale field.'

A number of local doctors had offered their services to the army and the resultant shortage led to an appeal for those retired medics to enter practice once more.

And on a lighter note, 'the war has given rise to quite a new set of conundrums - One of the latest and best is - Why is khaki a fast colour? Because it never runs.'

April

In April, local teachers and parents were being asked to impress upon boys the dangers of stone throwing. A number of boys had been throwing stones round the streets of the village and a little girl had to be taken to hospital for treatment.

During April and May the police were to be found visiting households in the village to check that the Aliens Registration Act was being enforced.

"Notice is hereby given that after 25th April 1915 it will be the duty of every manager of any hotel, inn, boarding-house, lodging house or apartments, to keep a register of all Aliens over the age of 14 years staying in his House and to obtain from every person staying in his House a signed statement showing his Nationality and in the case of an Alien, showing also the particulars required for the register. There will be a fine of £100 or 6 months in prison for failing to comply."

In the same month the price of burning oil increased and there was a Sale of Work and Flag Day for comforts for soldiers.

May

In May the police were making house-to-house visitations in the village to ascertain the nationality of all lodgers.

The price of bread had risen and the German submarine war on allied shipping was threatening to create shortages of foodstuffs and drive prices up further.

The YMCA launched an appeal for huts for troops in Northern France and villagers were urged to help the nation by collecting their own groceries and not expecting them to be delivered by the male shop assistants who were in short supply. Those very assistants threatened to take strike action this month, demanding a wage increase of 3 shillings. Their demands were met!

A war bonus was to be paid to oil workers and miners as a result of the Conciliation Boards Award (set up by the government). Miners were awarded an advance of 9d per day war bonus and oil workers 7d.

In Loganlea and Stoneyburn the annual Games were postponed due to war and lack of public interest.

The Advertiser congratulated the management of the Picture House for obtaining and showing the film 'The Sinking of the Lusitania'.

'In several of the burghs in West Lothian the public have been warned that the gas supply may be turned off without warning. It is evidently expected that with the arrival of the summer weather we may occasionally expect a visit from a German Zeppelin and the only way to secure immunity from attack is to plunge the whole village into darkness.'

Dr Allsopp, assistant to Dr Young, West Calder, left the village last week to join the RAMC.

'Military news from the pulpit is something of a novelty. In the local churches at Kirkliston information was given that on the ringing of both church bells all lights were to be extinguished. This is a precautionary measure to safeguard life and property from Zeppelin attack.'

June

'In response to an appeal made to the children of Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Branch of the British Red Cross Society, the Gavieside school children have been instrumental in raising £5 15s for the Children's War Effort.'

'In order to fill the vacancies caused by the men enlisting, Edinburgh Tramway Company have followed the lead of Glasgow and induced women as conductors. West Calder Co-operative Society have also had to introduce women into their grocery department to take the places of the grocers who left last week to join the Colours. Truly the women are coming into their own. In many departments they will undoubtedly be retained after the war, many of our young men will not settle down to the old life behind the counter after seeing active service at the front.'

With the fine weather in June, the West Calder and District Pipe Band marched to Mossend and Gavieside and then played in the bandstand in West Calder. 'The merchants annual holiday took place as usual. The weather was fine and many left village for a day outing.'

At a public meeting there were proposals to hold a children's gala day to replace the annual games, which had been cancelled due to war. It was felt that since the various Sabbath Schools have picnics a gala day would not be a good idea.

'Messrs John Thompson and Sons coach-hirers, have purchased a handsome new motor bus to take the place of the one taken by the Military Authorities for conveying the wounded in France. It can seat 30 passengers. The first run took place yesterday to Roslin. The bus has a most handsome appearance.'

At the Picture House you could be charmed by the dancing of Lola Charm; the dancing kilties; Baguley, the lively little Scot; Cartmell in song and dance, and Little Fitz a remarkable dancer. The management have booked Bandoni, a marvellous concertina player with a number of life-sized figures. The great film 'The Master key' continues to be a favourite.

And just to show that nature was not to be outdone by the momentous events abroad, 'in a local garden a cuckoo laid an egg in a blackbirds nest that already contained five eggs.'

Such was daily life in the village and district in June.

July

At the Parish Church Sunday School the children had been collecting and sending gifts to the front. They received a letter from a soldier and this was reprinted in the Advertiser.

"My dear little friends - I am writing to you on behalf of my platoon to thank you for all your kind and useful presents to us. As you all know there are very few shops about here where Tommy can go to purchase his everyday needs, and then he cannot obtain the class of goods which suit his taste best. On the whole we are having a really good time, considering the conditions under which we are placed, and the weather is just lovely; in fact it just reminds one of the good old summer at home. If I am spared to get through this and back to dear old Scotland, I will certainly come to West Calder and pay you all a visit - BEF France June 23rd 1915"

In July the recruitment of oil workers was stopped. No worker could join the army without the permission of employers.

August

'Life is going on in the country without due regard to the cutting of luxuries. A national campaign for thrift and economy is to start soon.'

'A good deal of surprise has been occasioned in the licensed trade by the sweeping nature of the restrictions, though some persons declared on Saturday that instead of restricting the hours, the closing down of licensed places should have been ordered.'

'The early closing of the public houses in the evening has made the streets quieter than normal. The new regulations are undoubtedly stringent and as an experiment will be followed closely.'

A disturbance at Westwood Rows resulted in the wife of a miner being fined five shillings for disorderly conduct. "On being asked to plead she said that she had to put up with an awful lot from the neighbours and said that even if she were to be given the patience of Job she could not live amongst them."

The girls of the Parish Church had been selling flowers and raised £15 to go to comforts for Women's Work Party. The latter held their own Sweet Pea Day.

September

A Heather Day was held, the proceeds to go to the Children's Shelter in Edinburgh. 'Owing to the war the funds of the Scottish National Society for the

Prevention of Cruelty to Children have seriously diminished, whilst the number of suffering children is steadily increasing.'

A miner from Dee Street committed a Breach of the Peace and failed to attend court in Edinburgh. He was fined £1 or 10 days imprisonment.

'At the Juvenile Court on Tuesday, five school boys all of whom reside in West Calder, were charged with entering a fruit store in Dickson Street, West Calder and stealing 8lbs of tomatoes, 8lbs of pears and 7lbs of plums on Sunday, 5th Sept. They pled guilty and were each sentenced to 6 stripes with the birch rod.'

The Advertiser had received a photograph of the local Motor Bus in France. It had been renamed Mary and the photograph had been signed and sent by men who had used it.

'Conscription will come if the thousands of young men still in factories, shops etc. do not sign up.'

More wounded soldiers were daily arriving at Bangour Military Hospital.

The government Budget announcements reflected the impact of the war and were unfavourably received in the village. There was a rise in income tax; sugar duty raised; a rise of 50% on duty on tea, tobacco, cocoa, coffee, chicory and dried fruits; an increase of 3d per gallon on motor spirit; taxes on a range of imported goods; abolition of the halfpenny postage; and a minimum charge of 9d on telegrams.

October

The West Calder Glee Club planned and executed a concert for the wounded at Bangour Hospital. 'Bangour is especially fortunate in the possession of a beautiful large concert hall, seated with chairs for fully 500 persons and finely illuminated with electric light. The scene in the hall was one to be remembered, the wounded soldiers in their loose fitting, light blue coloured suits, with arms in slings, heads bandaged, etc. and the nurses in their very becoming uniforms, made a picture that brought home to one the stern realities of war. The Glee Club performance was well received and brought to an end with God Save the King.'

'A workman residing at Clyde Street was charged at Edinburgh Sheriff Court with having assaulted the door keeper of the local Picture House on Friday night. He struck the doorkeeper on the face and inflicted a severe wound. He was seized and held until the arrival of the police. He pleaded guilty and admitted 4 previous convictions. He was sentenced to 300 days imprisonment.'

'At Linlithgow Sheriff Court last week a young woman appeared on a charge of having committed a breach of the peace in a house at Westwood Rows on Aug 31st. The accused, who is a soldier's wife, had been before the court recently, when she gave an undertaking to keep away from drink. It appeared

she had been teased by neighbours about her conduct, some words passed, she had a drink. She was a young and respectable woman and her children were well fed and clothed. On the 7th September a priest had got the accused to take the pledge and she had kept it religiously. The priest acknowledged that she had been under great stress because she was ill and had been forced to take some drink. It was agreed that the woman should keep her pledge to the priest and not drink. She would return to court on December 7th and if she had been drinking then he would imprison her.'

'A 14 year old boy from Uphall who stole newspapers from WC station is sentenced to 12 stripes with the birch rod.'

November

The lists of wounded and dead seemed to overshadow everything else that was happening in the district this month.

December

In December the village was heading for its second Christmas of warfare.

From the pulpit of the parish church Dr Anderson declared that, "We are all probably agreed that the present hour is one of great disappointment and grave national anxiety."

On Sunday the 12th a memorial service was held in the parish church for the ten members of the congregation and six parishioners who had fallen in the war so far. Notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, there was a large congregation present.

In December the power of prayer was obviously a dividing issue.

'On Sunday first intercessionary services will be held in all the churches on behalf of the national cause and that of our Allies. The weekly meetings have not been attended as one might have expected, and the churches appear to be very lukewarm about the power of prayer to affect the issues. At the front the army chaplains tell us the very reverse is the case, and that the men gladly flock to the services.'

Perhaps the editor of the Advertiser should have called upon the services of Pte Joseph Foster, of Gavieside, has left for active service, who was serving with a machine gun section, either in France or Egypt, and who during his period of training 'conducted very successful religious services amongst the troops at an English town.'

In true Christmas spirit the directors of the Oil Company decided to send festive gifts to oil workers serving abroad with the army and the Women's Work Party was as busy as ever.

'In the village and district Christmas was ushered in quietly, and the joy which is usually associated with the festive season was not much in evidence this

year. This is doubtless due to the effects of the war which is now having a restraining influence on all forms of enjoyment.'

'With the daily newspapers still full of the record of a world-wide war it was not at all surprising that the message of peace and goodwill on earth did not awaken the customary response in the hearts of men and women, many of whom are anxious for the safety of those who are near and dear to them.'

'It was our second war Christmas, but there is a feeling of hope that ere the bells ring out again the glad message, the clang of warfare may be hushed, and a long and enduring peace may be handed down as a dearly won heritage to our children.'

Postal deliveries in the village were down in number as were parcels at the railway station. There was however a 'good trade in the village stores due to full employment and high wages.'

In its final edition of the old year, the Advertiser carried a message of hope and promise for the new year ahead and a sign that some at least were beginning to question the conduct of the war.

"GREAT events will happen for us in the year 1916. It should be for us, the year of victory. But the world may be sure we shall face whatever has to come with confidence and high heart. The spirit of our race has been tested in the past 17 months and found as true and as strong as of old. ... there is an idea about that there is too much old fogeyism and too much of the old official ways among the leaders who are organising the conduct of the war. It is argued that we should break down the old customs and introduce a sterner, quicker system. I don't think this discontent is a bad sign if it is not carried too far."