

Farnhill Volunteers and the WW1 Poets – 7

The Volunteer chaplain

– Poems of Geoffrey Anketell Studdart Kennedy (aka Woodbine Willie)

The Farnhill WW1 Volunteers Project was based on the list, put together by Farnhill Parish Council, of men who were serving in the forces before the introduction of mandatory conscription early in 1916.

However there was one local man who volunteered to serve even after conscription was introduced; a man who would never have been conscripted, because of his occupation – but who volunteered to serve because he felt he should. He was the vicar of St. Andrew's Church, Kildwick.

Rev. Christopher Edward Vere Hodge was appointed to the job at Kildwick in December 1916; the post having been vacant since the previous vicar, Rev. Rhodes. had been to all intents and purposes kicked out by the parishioners in 1912. He arrived in the village, along with his wife Gladys and three children, in January 1917, after a 14-day journey from their previous home in Canada.

He was inducted at the end of March by the Venerable Archdeacon Cook who, perhaps aware of the problems that had arisen between the congregation and the previous vicar, asked them in his sermon *"... to remember that if differences arose between them and they resorted to prayer, a solution would be found. If they carried on their work in the spirit of prayer the parish would become the most peaceable place possible"*.

But a peaceable parish would have to wait.

In February 1918, Rev. Hodge used the Kildwick Parish Magazine to announce that, with the support of his wife and the Archbishop, he had applied to become an Army Chaplain and consequently was likely to be away from the parish for some time. In his letter to the congregation he wrote *"I do feel very strongly that the Church at home must be prepared to sacrifice some of her privileges [in order to] work among our soldiers."*

Ordained ministers of the Church were exempted from conscription. However, every battalion in the British army had a chaplain and their work was important. In many cases the only religious duties they did in a day were to say a few prayers with the men whilst they waited for the whistle to tell them to go 'over the top'. But chaplains risked their lives on or near the front lines, helping to bring back casualties and alerting stretcher-bearers if they came across ones they could not bring in themselves. They played a crucial role in burying, with dignity, the dead; returning personal possessions to their families; and writing letters. Chaplains embarked on service with no special training and became exposed to an environment they would never have thought they would have to experience.

Rev. Hodge was appointed chaplain at Prees Heath Camp, Whitchurch, in Shropshire, and subsequently served in France. At the end of the war he volunteered to serve as a chaplain with the army of occupation, but his services were not required and he returned to Kildwick on 17th March 1919.

The Hodges' last child, a daughter called Gillian Margaret, was born in 1922 and was baptised, at St. Andrew's.



St. Andrew's Church, Kildwick



Christmas 1930.

With all Good Wishes from Rev. C. E. V. and Mrs. HODGE.

Services : Holy Communion 7 and 8 a.m.

Holy Eucharist 10-30 a.m.

Evensong 6 p.m.

Gladys Hodge died in 1931 and was one of the first burials in the new graveyard at Kildwick. The side-gate was created in her memory.



Rev. Hodge and his family left Kildwick the following year and Christopher Hodge took up a post near Chichester. He died in 1945.

Geoffrey Anketell Studdart Kennedy was born in Leeds in 1881. His father was a clergyman and Geoffrey followed in his footsteps.

Educated at Leeds Grammar School and Trinity College, Dublin, Geoffrey obtained a degree in divinity and the classics in 1904 and then trained as a clergyman at Ripon College. At the outbreak of war he volunteered as a chaplain to the army on the Western Front. Here he acquired the name 'Woodbine Willie', because as well as giving spiritual aid and a copy of the New Testament to soldiers before battle, and tending the injured and dying he gave out Woodbine cigarettes. He described his chaplain's ministry as *"taking a box of fags in your haversack and a great deal of love in your heart"*. He found time to write poetry whilst at the Front – many written in a jaunty, humorous and encouraging style.

The Spirit

When there ain't no girl to kiss you, and the postman seems to miss you,
and the fags have stopped an issue – carry on
Though your pals are pale and wan and the hope of life is gone – carry on
For to do more than you can is to be a British man,
not a rotten also ran – carry on.

Kennedy was awarded the military cross in 1917 for helping the wounded at Messines Ridge in West Flanders.

After the war Kennedy wrote about his war time experiences in a collection of two volumes-*Rough Rhymes of a Padre* and *More Rough Rhymes*.

From –**Prayer Before an Attack**

It ain't as I 'opes' E'll keep me safe,
While the other bloke goes down.

It ain't as I wants to leave this world and wear an 'ero's crown.

It ain't for that as I says my prayers when I go to the attack,
But I pray that whatever comes my way I never turn my back.

Kennedy was appointed missioner for the Industrial Christian Fellowship. As a public speaker he was an advocate for the working classes. He died in London in 1929, aged 45.

