

Farnhill Volunteers and the WW1 Poets – 8

Thoughts of home

– Is my team ploughing ? by A.E. Houseman

Like many men, the Farnhill Volunteers doubtless often thought about their lives before the war. It is easy to imagine men such as William Birch Holmes, Anthony Dean Hargreaves, Albert Kitson, brothers Frank and Harry Pollard, and Thomas Beckwith Spencer, all members of the Kildwick Albion Cricket Club Second Division cup-winning team in 1913 – below – wondering when they might next get a decent game.



Similarly, many of them must have had sweethearts at home – we know that a number of them got married during the war or immediately afterwards. (In his “Soldier’s Will” made on 1st July 1916 – the first day of the battle of the Somme – Harry Walmsley left £5 to “my friend Miss Norah Whiteoak”, of Glusburn.)

WILL.

In the event of my death
I give 5 £ to my friend.
Miss. Zorah. 2/ Hutegah.
No. 2. Sunny Bank. Villas.
Glasburn. Reighley.
Yorkshire.
And I give the remaining
part to the Family.
Mrs. S. 2/ almost by
No. 5. Harrow. St. Farnham
Ridgwick. Reighley. Yorks.
Signature 5992. Pte H. S. almost by
Rank & Regiment 1/5 3rd Bn. Riding
Date July. 1. 1916

Although published in 1896, the collection of poems *A Shropshire Lad*, by A.E. Houseman became very popular during WW1.

In one poem, a young man has a conversation with his dead friend, in which the dead man asks questions, mostly about football and girls, which the living man finds increasingly difficult to answer – with good reason.

Did the men at the front perhaps feel that they, like the dead man, no longer had any influence on events back home ?

XXVII. Is my team ploughing

by A.E. Houseman

'Is my team ploughing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?'

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

'Is football playing
Along the river shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
Now I stand up no more?'

Ay, the ball is flying,
The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
Stands up to keep the goal.

'Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?'

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

'Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?'

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

