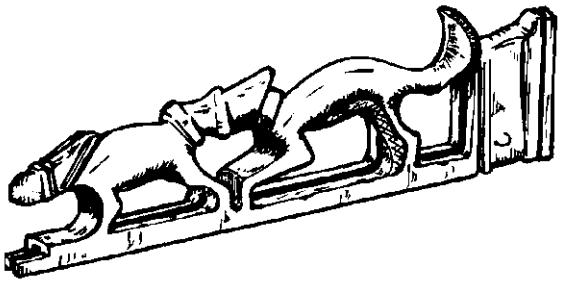
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

A small Exhibition in Honour of the First-Fifth Bedfords In WWl

Kevan J. Fadden.

The Story of the First-Fifth Bedfords



The First-Fifth Bedford Battalion

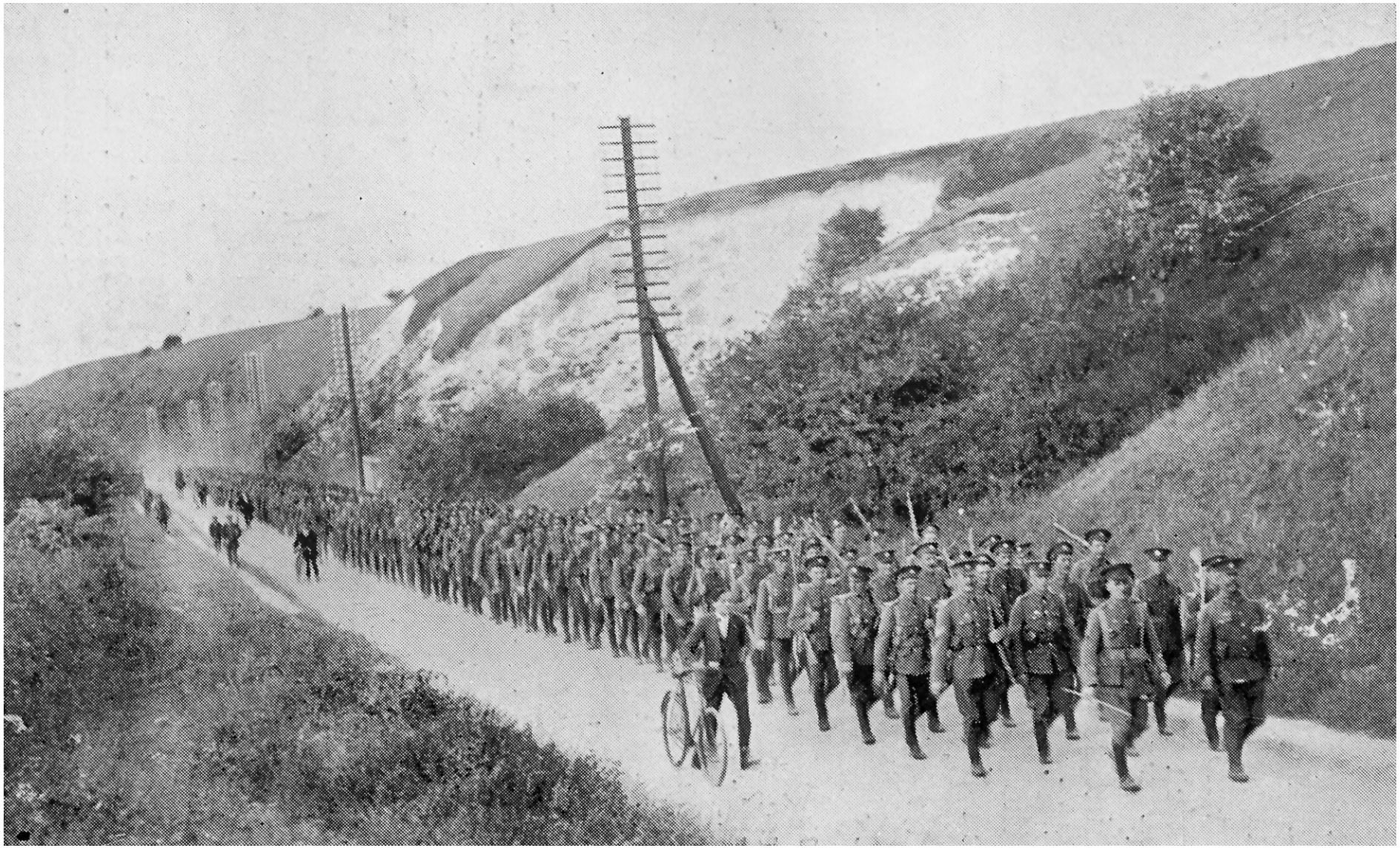


Within a week of being mobilised, the East Anglian Territorial Division was at its station in and around Chelmsford in Essex, with the Bedfords being billeted at Romford, Essex. However, the expected move abroad did not follow and in September they were dispersed throughout the East Anglia, to provide home defence and train hard in readiness for overseas duties. The 5th battalion were stationed at Bury St. Edmunds from September 1914. Late in 1914 the Companies forming the active service battalion were also re-organised from the pre war structure of eight Companies to four Companies, called A to D. In January 1915 the 5th Battalion was designated “The 1st/5th Battalion”.

In March 1915, the 1st/5th Battalion moved from Bury to Norwich and then to St. Albans in May, where specialist training was stepped up and their formation was re-designated as the 162nd (East Midland) Brigade in the 54th (East Anglian) Division. On the 25th July hot climate uniforms were issued, the battalion were ordered to hurriedly collect all stores and equipment and they set off for the south coast on a series of trains.

The battalion left Devonport on the 26th July 1915, bound for “Somewhere out East” and, after a brief stop-over in Egypt, disembarked on Gallipoli, serving there between 10th August and 4th December. During their assault against the Kiretch Tepe Sirt on 15th August 1915 an observing Staff Officer observed their progress through his binoculars and saw the battalion's metal flashes glinting yellow in the sun as they doggedly advanced. He remarked "By Jove! If only we had one or two more battalions of those yellow devils we should be across the peninsular by tomorrow". With that, the battalion's nickname - the “Yellow Devils” - was born. A pitifully small number of them remained by December 1915 and they were moved back to Egypt to be rebuilt between January and March 1916, after which a year-long posting to guard the Suez Canal followed. The battalion advanced to Gaza with the British and Commonwealth forces in March 1917, taking part in all of the actions there and during the advances through Palestine that followed. By the armistice in October 1918, they were stationed at Beirut, having spent the entire campaign in that theatre of war.

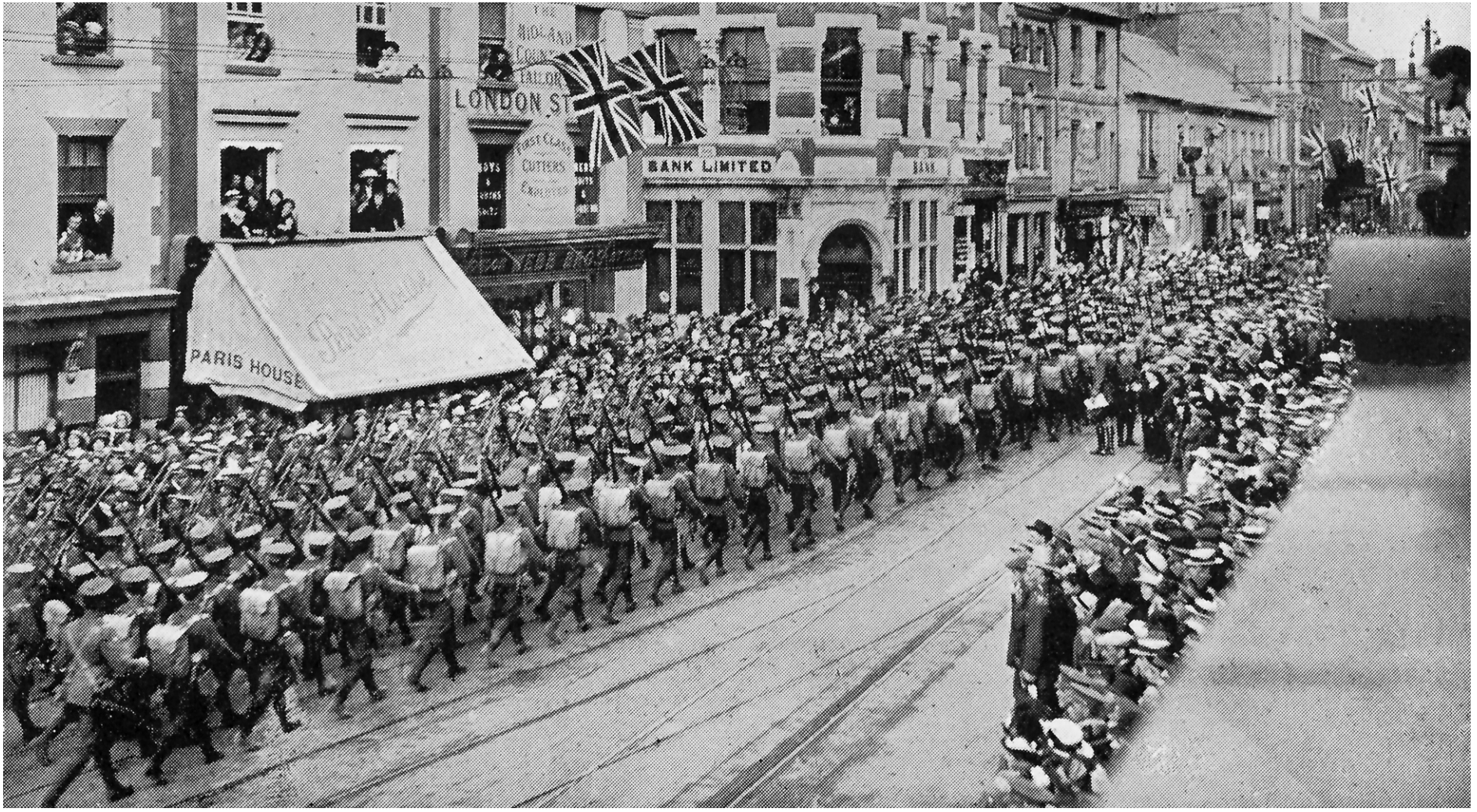
The first-Fifth Bedford Battalion Marching “At ease” through Barton Cutting



A gruelling route march of 60 miles in three days with full packs, finishing with a reception at Luton.

Starting at St.Albans they marched via Dunstable and Bedford in very hot weather.

After The Reception



Nearing the end of their training, the whole Battalion march through George Street Luton - All eager to go to the “Front” following a stirring speech by the Town Mayor Councillor W J Primett.

Before the Battle

"We are going into a strange land to fight our country's battles, and many of us may fall, but I hope the great majority will soon be back in our homes again, enjoying peace and quietness, which I pray to God may soon rest upon the world."

Brigadier-General de Winton Sunday August 8th. 1915 in Alexandria prior to the assault on the Gallipoli Peninsula. (He was wounded on the 15th.)

The Charge of Kidney Hill

"It was a great and glorious charge, but the position was won at terrible cost. The whole advance had been made with bayonets fixed and when the final stage was reached and the order to charge rang out the men dashed to the attack. There was no stopping these unblooded British troops; London, Essex and Bedford Territorials charged together, but the men of the 5th Bedfords outstripped the Regiments on their right and left and dashed into the lead, causing the line to form a crescent and sweeping everything before them. Turks went down before cold steel in hundreds, and those who were not killed turned and fled."

The “Yellow Devils”

Through their bravery and persistence at Gallipoli the First-Fifths earned the Nickname “Yellow Devils” but they met heavy resistance from the Turks and were badly mauled.

The death toll was 7 Officers and 60 Non Commissioned Officers and men.

Luton 24, Bedford 3, Dunstable 3, Flitwick 3, Ampthill 2, Wootton 2, Kempston 2, St.Neots 2, Harpenden 1, Biggleswade 1, Arlesey 1, Leagrave 1, Eaton Bray 1, Shefford 1, Bromham 1, Caddington 1, Leighton Buzzard 1, Stopsley 1, Unknown 16.

In addition there were a considerable number of wounded in the action and many were stricken with dysentery.

Two men “Killed in Action” from Ampthill



Lance Sergeant J A W Robinson

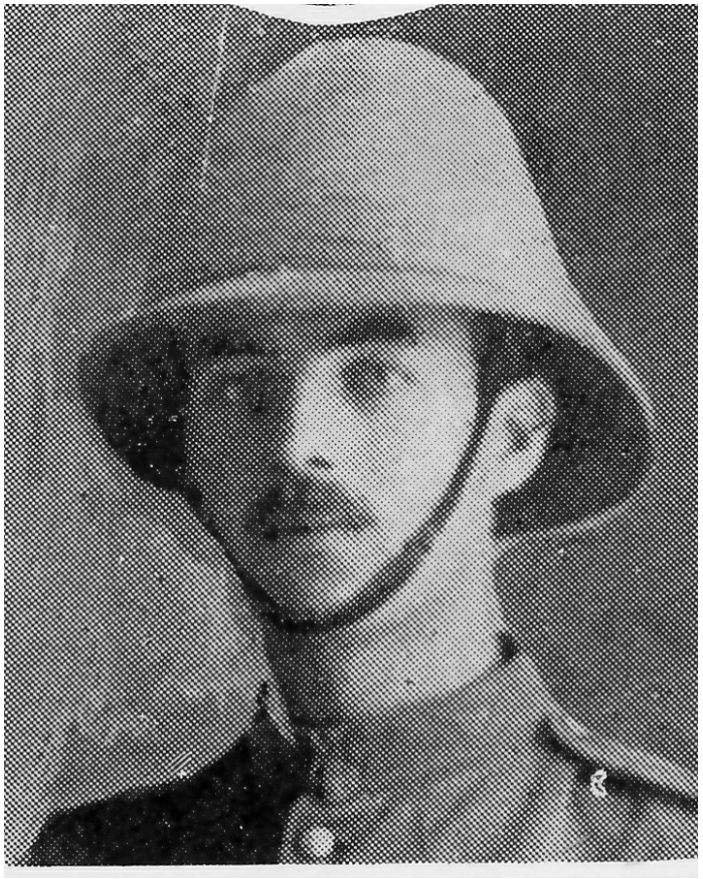


Sergeant W Stapleton

Fallen from Flitwick



Sergeant W H Foster “Killed in Action”

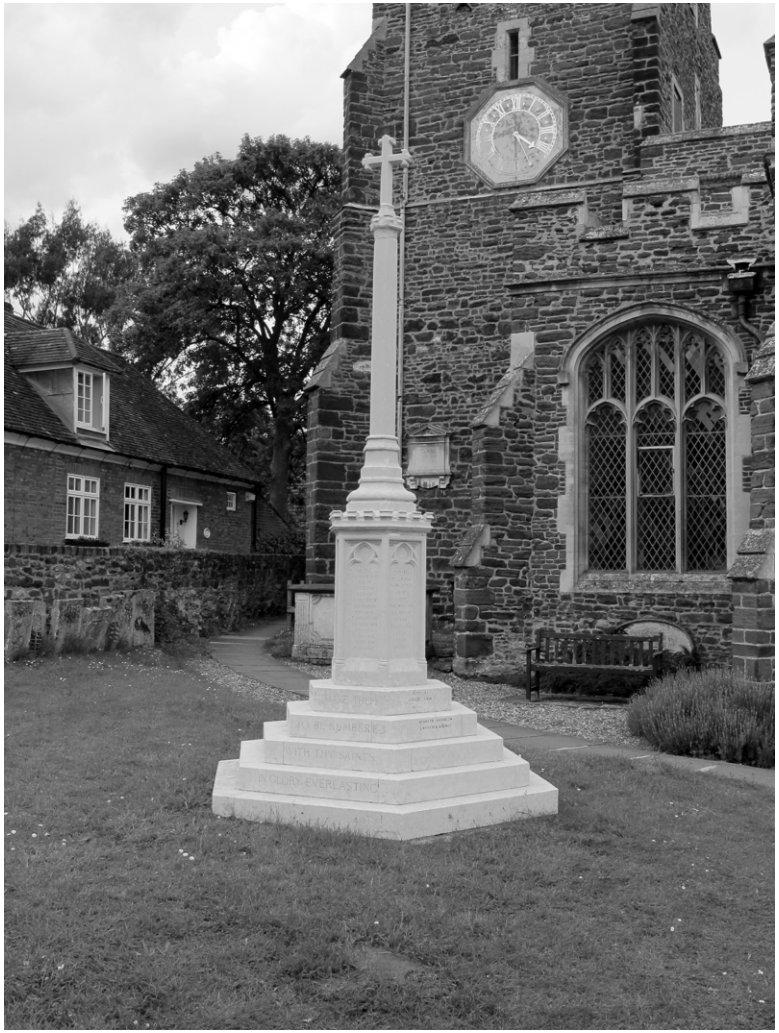


Private William Dix “Killed in Action” Note Tropical Dress



Private A Woodcroft “Died of Wounds”





Unusually Ampthill has two Memorials to honour the men from the town killed in WWI

The Cenotaph at the end of the Alameda, Classic Greek inspired for the Town Council & Gothic for the Church both designed by Professor Richardson.

Lance Sergeant Robinson & Sergeant Stapleton are commemorated on both.

“If Kidney Hill did have any tactical importance, commanders and staffs seem to have lacked the skill to exploit its capture. The Battalion account reads rather sadly that they held on to it for forty-eight hours, with a skill and tenacity which would have done credit to Regular troops, and were then withdrawn so that the line could be straightened out. And straight it seems to have remained until the evacuation of the Peninsula four months later”.

The photographs and most of the information in this exhibition came from *The Story of the First-Fifth Bedfords* by Edmund Rimmer published 1917.

Quotes and back ground from Roll of Honour Regiments - Gallipoli 1915 1/5 th.

& www.bedfordregiment.org.uk/5thbn.5thbattalion.html