

Coalville's war heroes

1

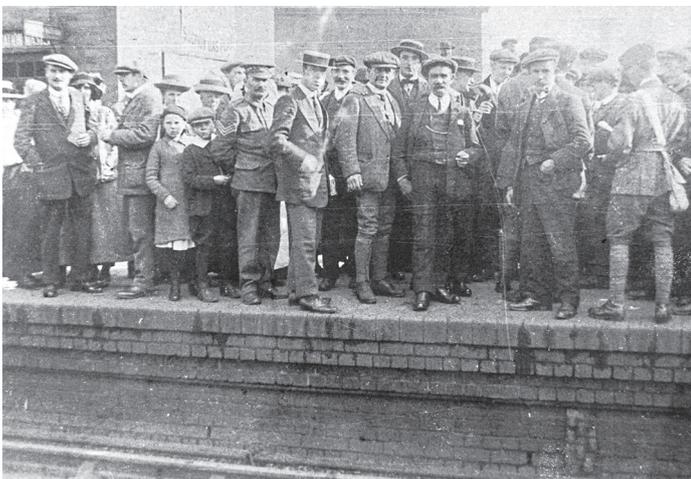
How were soldiers recruited to fight in the war?

When the First World War started men were asked to join the army as volunteers. Posters, such as the one on the right, were used to encourage them to sign up – this was called enlistment.

Other methods of propaganda were used to influence men to join including public speeches and performances by popular music hall artists singing songs that encouraged recruitment.

In the first two months nearly half a million men enlisted. About half of these were younger than 18 years of age – they lied about their age or gave false names, so they could join. By the end of 1914 over a million men had been recruited, but more were needed.

In 1916, a law was passed to say men had to join the war whether they wanted to or not. This was called conscription.



Above: Volunteers leaving Coalville in 1914
© Coalville Heritage Society

At the time of the First World War televisions hadn't been invented and very few people had a radio. Posters were used to attract men to join the armed forces with designs used to make war look exciting and to make them feel proud that they were fighting to save the country.

First produced in 1914 the poster shown below is perhaps the most famous poster of the First World War and shows Field Marshal Kitchener asking men to join the country's army.



Above: Recruitment poster
© Wikipedia (Public Domain)

Coalville's war heroes

2

Why did so many men from Coalville go to war?

Much of the First World War was fought from the trenches. Miners had the right skills to build the tunnels underneath the enemies from where they placed explosives to blow them up.

Miners made good soldiers as they were used to hard work, danger and strict rules.



Above: Soldiers in the trenches
© Wikipedia (Public Domain)

How can you find out more about the servicemen who fought in the First World War?

You can find out about the names on war memorials from a number of different places:

- You can visit the National Archives in Kew www.nationalarchives.gov.uk to look at old records, or subscribe to websites such as www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk to access these records online.
- Coalville Library has a Local Studies section with books about Coalville's past and those who went to war. Local historians and authors Denis Baker, Steve Duckworth and Michael Kendrick are a useful starting point.
- The Leicestershire War Memorials website: <http://www.leicestershirewarmemorials.co.uk/> includes details of many of the soldiers listed in a book called *Their Name Liveth Evermore Leicestershire*, by Michael Doyle.

Coalville's war heroes

3



Above: Charles Cavendish
© Coalville Times

Private Charles Cavendish

In late August 1914 Charles became one of the first fifty volunteers from Coalville to join the war effort - known as the Famous Fifty - signing up to the 5th Leicestershire Battalion.

Charles was wounded at Ypres but recovered and went back out to France.

In 1917 he received a shrapnel injury to the head in the Battle of the Somme and was in hospital for seven weeks. He recuperated at home before once again returning to the frontline in 1918.

Around this time his wife deserted him and their five children.

Charles was killed by an explosive shell in July 1918, at 32 years of age. In his jacket he was found to be carrying the birth certificate of his eldest son, Victor Charles Ernest Cavendish.

Charles has no final resting place, but his name is commemorated at the Loos Memorial, the Coalville Memorial Clock Tower and the Whitwick Memorial.

In his book *Fifty Good Men and True*, Michael Kendrick states:

"These men often felt that by their absence they were letting their friends in the trenches down. Equally, it must have been mentally tortuous for a wife to bring up five children, knowing that her husband could be killed at any given moment."

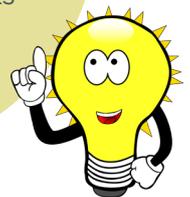
His adoptive parents and sister-in-law helped raise his children who became war orphans.



Above: Loos Memorial
© Wikipedia licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0

How must Charles have felt leaving his family for such a long time to manage on their own?

How might he have felt about abandoning his fellow soldiers whilst recovering in hospital?



Glossary

Battalion	A large body of soldiers (600 -800) that are usually getting ready to go into battle
Conscription	Being made to join the armed forces by law
Deserted	To leave someone on their own often in a difficult situation
Frontline	The position that is nearest to the fighting in a war/conflict
Light Infantry	A term given to soldiers who are fighting on foot
Martyr	A person who suffers very much or is killed because of their religious or political beliefs, and is often admired because of it
Parishioners	Members of a particular church, especially one who goes to the church often
Private	A soldier of the lowest rank
Recuperate	To recover from an illness, exertion or a wound
Shell	A shell is something that is often shot from a large gun that carries explosives and a payload in the First World War, this was often shrapnel
Shrapnel	Items that continue to travel after a shell explodes - bullets. Causing death or injury
Volunteer	A person who joined the armed services before they were forced to do so. (Before conscription)
Ypres	A Belgian municipality in the province of West Flanders and site of battles with the German armed forces; the largest in 1917 is also known as the Battle of Passchendaele

Useful websites

<https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/sections/world-war-one>

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history>

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/first-world-war/

<https://www.britishpathe.com/workspaces/page/ww1-the-definitive-collection>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk>