

A Tonbridge Link with Fred Roberts and 'The Wipers Times'

Fred Roberts, born in Queens Park London in 1882, was the second of the 4 children of Henry and Mary Roberts from Wales. Educated at Hackney Downs School, he pursued a varied and adventurous career as a diamond prospector in South Africa, a power station manager in Malaya, and at the age of 23 he became the first European to trek across the head-hunting country of North Borneo. In 1914 he returned to England to enlist.



He joined the pioneering battalion 'The Sherwood Foresters', part of the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment), as 2nd Lieutenant. During the War he was speedily promoted, attaining the final rank of Lieutenant Colonel. The first action he saw was during the battle of Loos, where the food kitchens became lost and the troops went into battle weary and hungry.

In February 1916, whilst foraging for props to shore up the British trenches, Captain Roberts and his men came across an old printing press in the basement of a convent near the main square in Ypres. One of the division, George Turner, was a printer by trade and, with Fred Roberts as Editor, Lieutenant Jack Pearson as Sub-Editor, the first February 12th edition of 'The Wipers Times' was born in one of Vauban's rampart casemates.

Within its pages was to be found an irreverent mixture of advertisements for non-existent services, letters made up by the Editor and articles carefully designed to bypass the censor. The kind of subversive humour used included the senior officer asking his men: 'Are we as offensive as we might be?' The going was rough, the shelling constant and the typescript often lacking. Vauban's ramparts in Ypres (Ieper) provided the editorial sanctum for the first four issues. When that press was disabled by a shell, another was found at Hellfire Corner. And so this game continued throughout the publication of twenty-three issues. Each volume took on the name of the area in which it was published, until the censor, forbidding this, forced a change of name. 'The B.E.F. Times', as it became, remained until it was re-named "The Better Times" at the very end of the War.

The correction of proofs had to be fitted in between digging or repairing of trenches and hand-to-hand fighting for which Fred Roberts gained his MC at Passchendaele; Pearson won not only an MC but also a DSO after the battalion had resumed its role as a fighting unit.

At the end of the War, Fred caught the flu epidemic which was sweeping the world and spent a month in hospital in France. He attempted to continue editorship by joining the Daily Mail. As the only job available to him was to create the crossword, he felt that a return to the diamond business would be more fruitful.

He sent his younger son, John Roberts, to Parkside from 1931-5. He was followed by Fred's grandson, Nick Roberts, who was at Parkside from 1960-5.

Fred lived his later life in the United States and Canada. Married three times, the family remember him as a brave, funny, generous man, always with a twinkle in his eye. He died in Toronto in 1964 and his ashes were

scattered at Brookwood Cemetery in England, but his legacy remains the newspaper which made fun of that terrible war which decimated his generation.





King Reiss
Egglestone Morgan
M.O. Self
Mohr
Ogle Ward
Pearson (adj.)
Houston Quinn



THE
"NEW CHURCH" TIMES.
 WITH WHICH IS PUBLISHED
 THE WIPERS TIMES

Vol. 4. No. 1. Printed 26th Aug. 1905. Price 1 Penny

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"NEW CHURCH"
 WITH WHICH IS PUBLISHED
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"DEAD CO"

"WAS"

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"MAYN"

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 WITH WHICH IS PUBLISHED
 THE WIPERS TIMES

THE
"NEW CHURCH"
 WITH WHICH IS PUBLISHED
 THE WIPERS TIMES

"SALIENT ACT"

THE NEW CHURCH
 WITH WHICH IS PUBLISHED
 THE WIPERS TIMES

GRAND XMAS

B.E.F.
 The Wipers Times, The
 The Evening Times &

CLOTH
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 SEESH
 JERUSAL

OTHER
 R. Ro

South Island
JULIUS

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