

CREDITON WW1 TOWN TRAIL

Approximately 6¹/₂ miles
Start at Crediton Railways Station

In August 1914 Crediton Station was a hive of activity as many families saw their sons, husbands, fathers and lovers off to war. Over the next four years it was a place of tears and smiles as men left and returned from the fighting. This makes an ideal starting point to the Crediton WW1 Town Trail.



From the main station platform go over the railway bridge and down onto the road by the level crossing. The fields across the road are said to be where the horses that had been requisitioned were trained for the Front. It was chosen because the steam trains passing the fields would familiarize the horses to the noise and disturbance of large machines such as tanks and guns.



No. 2 West View, overlooking the fields, is where Walter Hallett, one of the first Crediton casualties, lived. Walter had worked on the railways and was killed on 14th September, 1914, not long after the outbreak of WW1. There is a touching letter written by his colleague W. Heath to Walter's parents which describes how Walter died, saving Mr Heath's life. This letter is in the archives of the Crediton Area History and Museum Society.

Return across the level crossing and take the small path which runs along the wall of KJM Services Garage, just off Four Mills Lane. Walk up the path to the gate on your left going into a field. Cross that field and carry on straight ahead into the next field towards some houses. Don't leave the field but continue on the left fork of the path skirting the houses to the next gate. Go through the gate and follow the path between the wire fence and the hedge, keeping the houses on your right. Go through the next gate and continue straight on. Go through the left hand metal gate. Continue along the path and through the next gateway towards some red brick houses. Go through the next metal gate, under the big oak tree and follow the path with the wooden fence on your left and hedge on your right until you reach Barnfield near the entrance to Queen Elizabeth Lower School.

Turn right and walk down Barnfield. At the bottom you will see the Moose Hall at the top of Bowden Hill, which used to be another Drill Hall during WW1. Facing Moose Hall turn left and continue down Union Terrace towards the High Street.



No. 2 High Street, on the left where Union Terrace joins the main road, is the house where six convalescing Belgian soldiers were accommodated with a Mrs. Jones.



Further down the High Street you pass No. 31, now the office of Charlesworth Nicholl Solicitors. As you can see from this photo, 31 used to be the Court House and it is possible the Tribunals for men

in Exeter who were conscientious objectors, or otherwise felt unable to fight, were assessed. Col. Leopold Montague, often presided over these Tribunals.

Walk along the High Street until you reach Wetherspoon's pub, the General Sir Redvers Buller. It is worth taking a look inside and a rest as this was the site of one of the hospitals in Crediton where the wounded soldiers were nursed.



Coming out of the Wetherspoon's pub, turn left and then left again into St. Saviours Way. A short distance up on the right is a path between the houses. This has always been known as The Dung Path.

At the end of The Dung Path turn right into Greenway and cross the road down into Threshers Opposite the turning for Tuckers Meadow, take the path up to the right. When you reach the main A377 at the top of the path, turn left and continue along a few yards before turning into the entrance to Crediton Old Hospital grounds. Follow the road straight ahead about 100 yards down to the bottom and bear right where you will see the old entrance to the Workhouse. Continuing on past a grassed area on your left, ahead of you is



a separate brick building called Woodcote, and behind it Olcote. This was the Isolation Hospital where they treated soldiers wounded at the Somme. They built a wooden structure in the grounds to house the extra numbers returning.

Passing Woodcote on the left, follow the road round to the right which will bring you back to the entrance to the hospital grounds and the main A377. Cross the main road at the lights and turn right. Continue past Queen Elizabeth School where the first entrance to the School leads up to a large brick building, built in 1911 to house the Girls High School. The old original entrance at The Green is where the Boys Grammar School, which opened in 1860, would have been during WW1.

News of the Armistice didn't reach Crediton until Tuesday 12th November, 1918 and at 6.30pm on Wednesday 13th November a large procession formed on The Green and marched down the High Street to the Masonic Hall. On Saturday 16th November an effigy of the Kaiser was burned on The Green. Across the road from The Green there is a building which was The Grape Vine restaurant and then Il Casita restaurant. Before it became a restaurant it was the dairy and prior to that it was The Dock Hotel where Lieut. Charles George Bicknell lived with his family. Educated at Queen Elizabeth School, he was awarded the Military Cross for bravery at the Front in April 1918. He was further awarded a bar to his Military Cross in November 1918 for further acts of 'conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty' at the Front. He was only 20 years old.



Lieut. C.G.
Bicknell

In 1915 a Miss Winifred Adams funded the building of a viewing area - called The Upper Deck - where the wounded soldiers could sit and admire the superb views across to Dartmoor. One wonders how many wounded soldiers were actually able to climb the steep hill to enjoy her generosity.

Those wishing to visit The Upper Deck should turn at The Green into St Martin's Lane which goes up the hill beside the school. At the crossroads with Alexandra Road carry straight on up George Hill to the top. The Upper Deck is at the T junction of George Hill and Higher Road. The only way back is to retrace your steps down George Hill and St Martin's Lane to take up the walk again from The Green.

If you're feeling less energetic, cross The Green into Kiddicott. Opposite the Ambulance Station turn right onto a cobbled path which then bends round to the left, parallel to the main road. This little cobbled pathway was known in the 19th century as Cockwell as it was where they used to hold cockfighting with a couple of scouts on the lookout for police. Follow the cobbled path round into Kiddicott again. Turn right and continue along Kiddicott to the corner where you turn right onto a path leading you up to the main road. Turn left and continue along the High Street to the Museum.

The Museum is housed in the Town Hall which was built in 1856 and used extensively during WW1 for various events; concerts to raise money for the Red Cross and 'Smoking Concerts' where cigarettes were handed out for the soldiers. In February 1916 Dame Clara Butt, a well known singer of the time, performed at a concert there.

Continuing along the High Street, just before Adams Homecare on your left there is a blue door marked 'The Bargein' which was no. 119a where the first Belgian refugees - two women and three children - were housed in October 1914. In Devon there was great support initially for the Belgian refugees with fundraising events held to provide them with food and clothing. The support in Devon was so good that the grant donated by the Government to each county towards the support of the refugees was sent back from Devon as they had raised enough funds independently. At the end of the war, however, Crediton was less enthusiastic as reported in a national newspaper: 'The committee in Crediton, Devon complained that 'many refugees seemed to have the impression that because they had helped England, they had the right to indefinite support from the English'

Beyond Adams Homecare, on the left, is the impressive stone doorway to Francis Court marked 'Dart & Francis', the entrance to the company's former premises. During WW1 48 male employees of Dart & Francis went to fight. Seven of those died and doubtless more were wounded. Recruitment of young men from Crediton meant that a lot of businesses were short-staffed as were the farms around Crediton.



On the corner of the High Street and Market Street is The Ship which was



again the centre of much activity during WW. The Ship, being a rather smart hotel at the time, was where the officers were quartered. The Ship was also where the Peace Parade on 19th July, 1919, part of which were some 200-300 discharged servicemen led by Col. Leopold Montague, which started at The Green and processed down the High Street, halted to be addressed by Mr. Adams, Chairman of Crediton Council.

Turn left down Market Street. During WW1 what is now the Town Square was the centre of activity in Crediton. This was where the market was held. The market buildings were built in 1839 and some remain along the right hand side looking from the Post Office. Photos of the market place during the coronation of George V on 22nd June 1911 show all the market buildings so they were most probably still there during WW1.



Crediton Market in 1911

On 17th October, 1916 there was great consternation when 'the Military Police seized Crediton Market and nobody was allowed to enter without their 'card'' (p17 in 'Life in Crediton in World War One' by John Heal). Most people hadn't bothered to carry their card and had to go home to look for it. Some people who had come in from the hamlets didn't even know they had one.

On the corner of Market Street and Parliament Street, the building which used to be the Council Offices until 2018 was the Old Police Station in WW1. Below this building there are still the old cells to the Police Station. It is very possible that the Recruiting Office was also based at the Old Police Station but we haven't been able to confirm this.



Cross the Town Square and continue right up North Street to the High Street, turn left and walk along to Redvers House. This was the last boot and shoe factory to be closed in Crediton, just before WW1 broke out. Had they waited a few months they may well have had a very lucrative order to make boots for the soldiers. In WW1 it housed the trainees

waiting to go off to the Front.

The Church Workers Institute, the timber framed building past the Masonic Hall, had various uses during WW1 including the accommodation for convalescing soldiers and a display of 'War Economy' where cooking demonstrations making meals from rationed food took place.



There is a chapter devoted to the War Memorial, which is just past the Church Worker's Institute, in John Heal's book 'Life in Crediton in WW1' for those interested in more information. It

was unveiled on 16th May, 1923 with Col. Leopold Montague presenting it to the Council on behalf of the Military. Opposite the War Memorial there are two large blue doors to what used to be Cherry's Garage. This was one of the Drill Halls during WW1.

Cut down beside the War Memorial into the park known as Newcombe's Meadow and follow the path across to Church Street on the right hand side of the park. On Church Street turn right and make your way into the Church grounds where you can look for memorials and gravestones to some of the Crediton men killed in WW1 remembered both within and outside the church.

Return to Church Street and turn right. 200 yards along on the right is the entrance into the old Vicarage. The gardens used to extend right down to the churchyard and it was here that some of the fundraising and celebration events would have been held during the war.

Turn right into Belle Parade and cross the road by the roundabout at the foot of Jockey Hill. Take the left hand fork, Penton Lane, and walk up beside the back of a terrace of thatched cottages. This leads on to the entrance to Penton House where Col. Leopold and Amy Montague lived.



Penton House

The Montagues were an influential and respected couple in Crediton.

Amy was a staunch suffragette but during WW1 she trained as a VAD nurse and worked in the Exeter and Crediton hospitals. They lost both their sons, Paul and Felix during WW1. Not long before WW1 Rupert Brooke, a friend of the Montague sons, had visited

Penton House and it was there he was said to have had a mystical experience which inspired his poem 'Dining Room Tea'.



**Col. Leopold & Amy
Montague**

Continue along the path between the cob and stone walls, occasionally glimpsing Penton House through the trees. Descend the stone steps on the right and turn right into Old Tiverton Road taking great care of the traffic as there are no pavements along this stretch.



**Charles Ware
& family**

At the bottom of Old Tiverton Road turn left and then right at the T junction into Mill Street. Follow Mill Street until you get to East Street. Turn right into East Street. Opposite a big house called The Limes, go under the arch into Queen's Place. Number 7 Queen's Place, which has since been pulled down, was where Charles Ware lived with his mother Minnie and his two older sisters during WW1. Charles was very keen to enlist and his first attempt was at the age of 14. His mother found out and thwarted his attempt but he successfully enlisted again when he was 15. He survived the

war and returned to live in Crediton where he died in 1946.

Returning to East Street turn left onto Charlotte Street. Continue for 500 yards past The Crown, cross Park Road and continue straight on taking the right hand fork away from Exeter Road, into Four Mills Lane.

At the bottom of Four Mills Lane cross the road and return to the station.

The Station Tea Rooms offer hot and cold drinks, lunches and cakes. They are closed all day on Sundays and Mondays.

We are grateful for the photographs which were supplied by members of the Montague and Ware families, and by the Crediton Area History & Museum Society.

More information can be found in 'Life in Crediton in World War One' by John Heal, price £4.95, available from the Crediton Museum in the Town Hall.

More information on the workhouses in Crediton can be found in 'The Crediton Workhouses' by John Heal, price £4 and also available from the Museum.

The Echoes of Wartime Project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts Council of England.