

## Deddington's military past

Deddington had a castle but, as there is no record of military activity, we move swiftly to 1643 and the Battle of Deddington and, to be honest, there is little known about that particular Civil War skirmish. The following year, King Charles I won the Battle of Cropredy Bridge and he, and his army, slipped away from the battlefield in the ensuing darkness. King Charles is reputed to have stayed that night in Castle House, Deddington.

But let us concentrate on the people of the Parish.

Our first is a soldier who has been the subject of a book entitled *Matthew Bishop of Deddington in Oxfordshire* by Brian Carter. 'Matthew Bishop was born in Deddington ... Being of a "rambling disposition", he joined the Navy in 1702 during the War of Spanish Succession, seeing action in Spain and Gibraltar and later proved to be a wily press gang operator in Ireland.

He married in 1706 but decided that his Queen commanded his duty despite the risk of consequential neglect of his wife and he joined the Army, subsequently fighting at Oudenard (1708) and Malplaquet (1709). His army career ended in 1711 with an expedition to New England and Canada.'

Our second soldier is William Parish who enlisted as Matthew Vincent in 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Coldstream Guards in Lt Colonel D MacKinnon's Company and fought at Waterloo. He was awarded the Waterloo Medal.



The Waterloo Medal

The Parish Burial Register has an entry on 5 November 1875 that William Parish of Clifton was buried age 87 years 11 months.

Deddington had its representative in the Crimean War too. In 1899 *Jackson's Oxford Journal* reports that Sergeant Major John Brotherton Wilkie was buried in Deddington. He had served in the Crimea and been awarded 'several medals and clasps.' This included the Crimean Medal with clasp for Sebastopol whilst serving with Major M Clifford's Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Artillery.

Also in 1899, *Jackson's Oxford Journal* makes a passing reference to four Deddington men who had served with General Kitchener in the Second Sudan War. It is implied that they had fought in two major British victories, the Battle of Atbara and the Battle of Omdurman in 1898. We have not found the names of these four men.

At this time Britain was gearing up for the Boer War, now called the Second Anglo-Boer War and, as usual, there were parades and committees supporting our men.

But the only named people we have found are George Bott and those to whom he refers in his letters:

### *Jackson's Oxford Journal* 14 July 1900: A Deddington Man's Letter

The following letter is from a Private in the 1<sup>st</sup> Oxfordshire Light Infantry (O L I) sent to his parents at Deddington.

Kroonstad, June 13

Dear Mother,

I have not fired a shot yet but I have not lost the chance. We have been making trenches and powder mines. We are expecting an attack on Kroonstad tonight.

We are in the trenches day and night, but I got a day off, and I am going to do some washing. We have a big river close by, but the worst is they throw dead horses and bullocks into it. Kroonstad is a pretty place, but there are no Boers in it. They left everything behind them. We fetched a few in this morning.

We don't live so bad. We got some bread this morning, the first time for a week. But we lie out of the veldt with nothing a blanket to cover us, and we are covered with frost every morning. It isn't as if we get up and have a good breakfast. We get a biscuit and about a pint of coffee. But for all that I am happy enough. I think myself that we should get home some time before next March. I think they will keep us twelve months: I hope they will, I am just getting used to it. I think our next shift will be Pretoria. I am longing to go there. We get rum twice a week - two drams. I have had no beer yet.

I was sorry to hear about Mr. Whetton's death. I should like a night or two on the old sofa, it doesn't make your bones ache like the veldt. Remember me to Edmund, Harry and Will. Tell them I think of them very often. Tell Jo Ell I am alright and also tell Mr and Mrs Checkley and Mrs Miller. We have got to stand to arms.

Your loving son

George Bott

***Jackson's Oxford Journal 21 July 1900: A Deddington Man's Letter***

Riet Spruit, Sunday, June 17

Dear Mother,

We had to shift from Kroonstad in a hurry to Ventersburg. The Boers had blown up the railway each side of Zand River and cut the wires. There are about 900 Boers, and we were 400 militia. When they found we were coming they bolted, so we had to chase them. But they had horses, so we left them for the night. Some men were wanted to volunteer for plate laying, so I went with five others and an Officer. We took an engine and truck and soon did the job. The niggers [*sic*] did the work. We went down to where the fighting was, a distance of about five miles. The Officer told us to shoot at first sight, so you can bet I had a shot. We came back to Riet Spruit, and had to entrench ourselves. They afterwards went back to Kroonstad leaving two companies behind, so I had to work night and day. I have not had my shoes off for a week; we had no tents and only one blanket. We got the cotton khaki and it is so thin most of us are in rags, and we are as chatty as pigs living! Well, dogs live better at home. We get two dog biscuits and army rations. People at home think we get everything we want, but let me tell you we don't. I have only one pipe of tobacco left. I had to lose all I had - the only comfort I had: but it is no use grousing. They say there are 2,000 Boers around us, but they will find us a hard nut to crack. We have two guns, 25 mounted men, and 250 of us. We have a good position. I wish they would let us go for them and get it over.

Wednesday - some tents came today and we are in hopes of getting some better grub; we can do with it. I am about as fat as a match, and I've got whiskers three inches long, so you can tell what a mug I look. Knees out and sleeves all in rags, and it's too cold to wash. Never mind, roll on, old England. Jack Vincent has gone back to Kroonstad but Will Williams is with me, and we get on alright together. We often have a talk over the old "show." I've had no beer yet. We have plenty of money but it's no use, for we can buy nothing with it. We are about 950 miles from Cape Town, and I think we should go to Pretoria. I hope so anyway. Don't forget to send some writing paper. Remember me to all I know.

Best love to Harry, Will and Edmund.

Your loving son

George Bott

***Jackson's Oxford Journal 15 September 1900: A Deddington Man's Letter***

Bloemfontein, August 22

Dear Mother,

A few lines to let you know I am getting stronger. I am still in a convalescent home. We get everything we want here, but I expect we shall be going to Norvals Pont about 135 miles away, though I hope they won't shift us yet. There are about 1,200 here of all sorts. I found a mate from Steeple Aston, one of Mr. John Weston's sons. We don't know when we shall be coming home, though it won't be just yet: but we are only playing "fox and hounds": there is no fighting much now. I hope to let you

have some good news next time I wrote [sic]. We can buy butter, eggs, fish, biscuits etc., but they are still very dear. We can go into town when we like. After tea last night we went for a bit of a walk, but I had to turn back; I'm so weak in the legs. I am going to write a few lines to Ernest and I am sending Harry a little book. (this is the soldier's New Testament, specially printed for the forces in South Africa. Nice ornamental and appropriate covers, and profusely illustrated by Messrs H A Harper and J Clack) <sup>1</sup>. I hope Harry has grown a deal stronger and that Will is a good boy. Tell Edmund I still have his pipes for him. I very often think about you all. I lie awake many hours some nights. I am sending some newspapers to Deddington. I shall have a lot to tell you some day. Remember me to Mr and Mrs Checkley, Mrs Miller, Mr and Mrs Belcher. Tell them that I am a teetotaller, but it's not my fault. I am going to try to do without or not have so much. Think of me when you are eating green peas, kidney beans, new spuds, etc.

I am having my photo taken, but it wont be much to look at. I expect J. Miller will be married by the time I get back. We have some nice looking girls here, but they are all black. I get one to do my washing.

I remain your loving son

Georg T. Bott

At the time these letters were written, George Bott was a 28-year-old bachelor. His mother had been widowed twice and lived in the Market Place. George returned to England, married Isabella Boyles, moved to London and they had at least two children, Charles and Eva.

**Editors' note:**

Nationally the first memorials for non-commissioned servicemen are those of the fallen of the Second Anglo-Boer War but these are few and far between and no such memorial exists in Deddington.

<sup>1</sup> This comment may possibly have been inserted by the editor of *Jackson's Oxford Journal* as it has a different 'ring' to Bott's own words.