

# A Civilian's Great War Diary

*Extracts from the diary of a member of the Church family in Epping*

## October 14<sup>th</sup> 1914

*Tonight in Epping for the first time, nearly all the street lights were extinguished and only those at crossroads (at Station Road and High Street) were alight. Even these were darkened by the upper  $\frac{3}{4}$  of glass being painted black. No lights are allowed outside shop fronts in the Epping district (as indeed in very few districts in the British Isles) at the present time, and when there is a bright light in the shop, the sun blinds (horizontal) have to be drawn by order of the Police. Thus the whole town is in almost complete darkness at nights now, for the purpose that the German Zeppelin airships should not have a target at which to throw bombs, or should have a guide in its possible course to London from the coast.*

*London itself is also darkened; it has never been like it before in its existence since the streets have been lighted by gas or electricity. It is a weird experience walking in the blackness of the once brilliantly lighted city.*

## September 8<sup>th</sup> 1915 (Wednesday)

*A Zeppelin dropped bombs on London tonight. We saw the reflections in the sky every time a bomb dropped and exploded right from Epping, a distance of 16 miles away. Star shells from anti-aircraft guns could also be distinctly seen as they burst in the air.*

## September 12<sup>th</sup> 1915 (Saturday)

*Cyril, May P. and myself went by bus from Epping to Chingford Lake and went on the lake in a boat for an hour. This is my first visit there this year. Last year I went about every third Sunday afternoon. Started today at 5.20 p.m. and arrived home at 7.30 p.m. (about 2 $\frac{1}{4}$  hrs. in all).*

*Tonight Frank S others and myself were out as usual looking for Zeppelins. There seemed to be none about and I went in about 11.45 p.m. I hadn't been in more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour when Frank furiously rang our front door bell telling us to put our lights out as a Zeppelin was passing overhead. All other lights were also ordered out. Those who saw the Zep. as many who were out did,*

said it seemed to come up the Station Road and turn round over the Church and fly down the town. We heard later that two bombs were dropped from the airship on the Military Camp at Thornwood Common, but the fires were soon extinguished. A party of four of us including myself went down to the Camp at 12.20 a.m. but could see no damage done. In bed at 1.10 a.m.

## March 28<sup>th</sup> 1916

The worst hurricane and blizzard in the recollection of the present generation swept over this country last night and again after a lull tonight. Today's storm however was the worst. I went out just to witness and experience it. It was awful, could hardly get my breath. Snow was falling. My father and mother said that the only hurricane to approach tonight's in fierceness in their memory happened as long ago as January 1881, when it lasted a whole day. Numerous trees were blown down in Epping and district today. There were mostly elm trees of enormous size and forced up out of ground with their roots and a lot of earth. (Two elms opposite Mr. Worsley's in Lindsey Street.)

## April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1916 (Sunday)

A Zeppelin raid took place tonight starting just before 12.0. midnight, over Essex. I went to bed at 10.15 p.m. dead tired and when about 10 to 12 I was wakened by the violent rattling of my bedroom window. I got out and saw from the same window shells bursting in the air and glows lighting up the sky every time a bomb was dropped from the Zeppelin. At the time, I thought it was happening at Waltham Abbey. But on dressing and going out into the street, I learned that the bombs were dropped at Woodredon Hill behind the 'Wake Arms'.

As the munition workers came home through Epping each told us of his experiences. All of us in the 'Homestead' were wakened up by the explosions tonight. Dad went out and saw the Zeppelin with searchlights shining on it. I stayed out till 1.30 a.m. and did not go to bed again till 3.0 a.m. This occasion was the one which explosive Zeppelin bombs have been dropped nearest Epping (2½ miles distant). Incendiary bombs were also dropped, all dropping in fields or on forest land. No damage was done and no one killed or injured.

## April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1916

*I went to bottom of Woodredon Hill this afternoon (Monday) but saw only 3 bomb holes made by Zep. last night. One was in road in front of 'Volunteer' public house.*

*Pearl and Ruby also cycled over. M.D. and Aunt (Wiskin) went over in trap. Mr. Daplyn, manager at Dad's beef and mutton shop appealed again tonight for total exemption from the Army being in a "starred" or "reserved" trade. But he did not get what he asked for nor even an extension of time to his previous two months. Dad was very disappointed as he was almost certain Daplyn would get off.*

## April 8<sup>th</sup> 1916

*Today and yesterday as well as on numerous previous days I watched Derby recruits and conscripts leave the recruiting office in Epping and march through the town their way to the station. A sergeant or corporal in khaki is always with them while the new recruits are always in their civilian clothing*

*This. afternoon (Saturday) I cycled Over to Woodredon Hill again to see results of Zeppelin bombs dropped on April 2<sup>nd</sup> . There are about 28 big holes round a farm at the end of the road from the right at top of the hill. One bomb dropped about 10 feet in front of the house but did not explode. The others were scattered over 4 or 5 fields near. The average hole was about 8 ft. in diameter and 3 ft. deep. The biggest was 15 to 18 in diameter and 4 feet 6 inches deep. All portions of bombs had previously been dug out by the police and taken to Waltham Abbey police station. I met Frank Sudul and his girl Miss Allen over at Woodredon this afternoon. Entrance to farm 3d, which goes to the Red Cross.*