

## THE RED BARON AND THE VICAR OF OSSETT

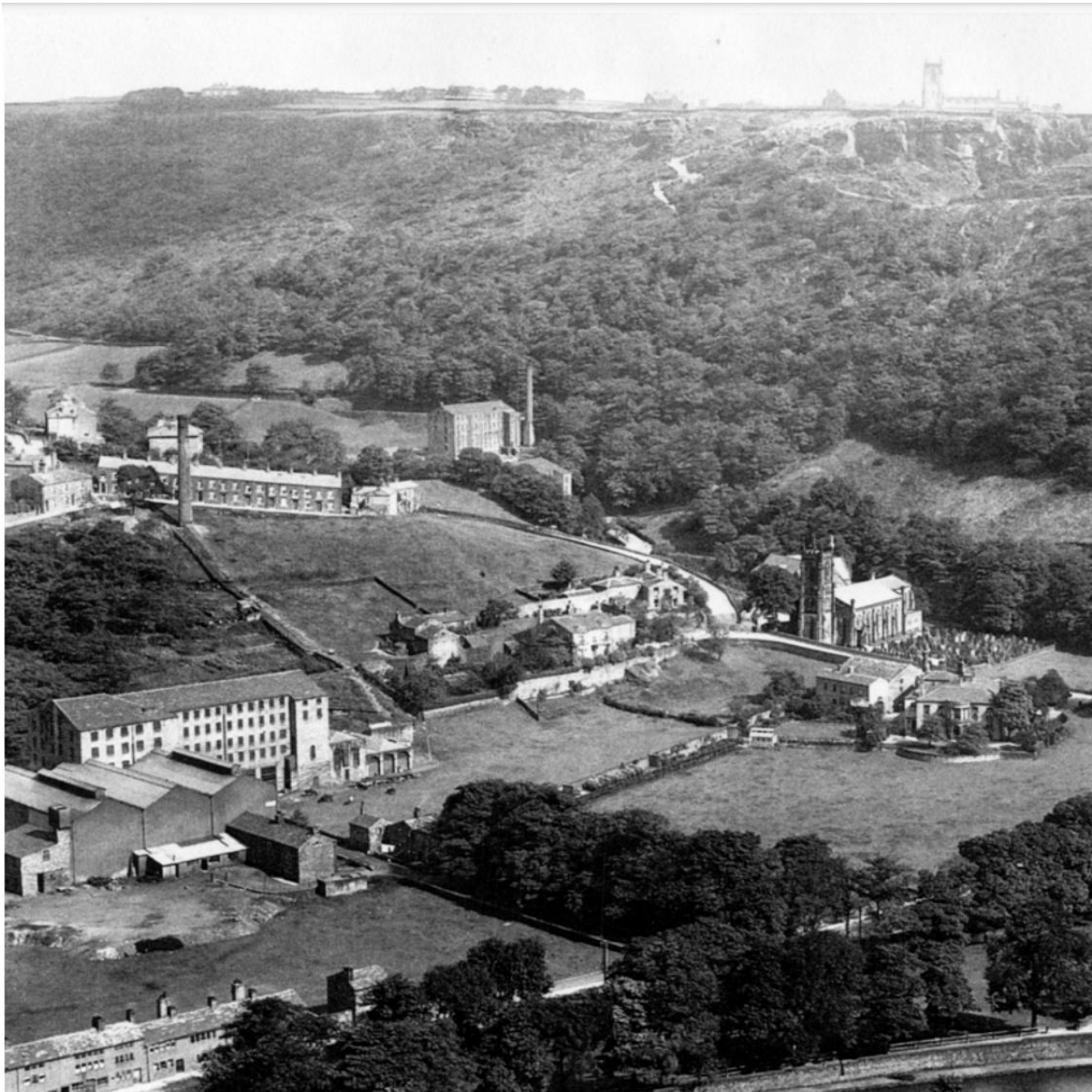


Rev. G.H Marshall

In 1931 a new vicar, the Reverend George H. Marshall was taking up residence at the Holy Trinity vicarage on Dale Street, Ossett. Few in town knew then, or even now, of his connection to Baron Manfred von Richthofen, aka the Red Baron; the Prussian aristocrat who was said to be the deadliest flying ace of World War I.

I aim to try and change that.

On July 15 1889, George Herbert Marshall was born at Old Royd, Heptonstall, situated in the hillside above the Calder Valley, and he was baptised at St James's Church<sup>1</sup>, Heptonstall on September 17<sup>th</sup> that same year.



Above: St. James Church, Heptonstall

George was the fourth of five sons born to Richard Marshall and Annie Elizabeth Gomm who had married on Christmas Day 1882. Whilst their sons flourished, Clara, their only daughter, died in 1888 before she reached her first birthday.





**Above:** The Marshall family, circa 1910. Left to Right: Amos, mother Elizabeth, William, Norman, father Richard, George, Thomas

In 1892 George's father moved his family to Bankfoot House, Hebden Bridge, where he set up in business as a corn dealer. As the boys grew older, two of them in particular: George and his youngest brother, Norman, attracted the attention of the Reverend Sidney Marshall Smith, who was then the vicar of Hebden Bridge, and he encouraged them to enter the ministry.

George matriculated at the University of Manchester and, in 1912 he took his Bachelor of Arts degree. A year later he became a Master of Arts. He studied for Holy Orders at Egerton Hall, a new theological college in Manchester, and in 1913 he became a deacon, licensed to the curacy at Kirkburton, Huddersfield. The following year he qualified as a priest.

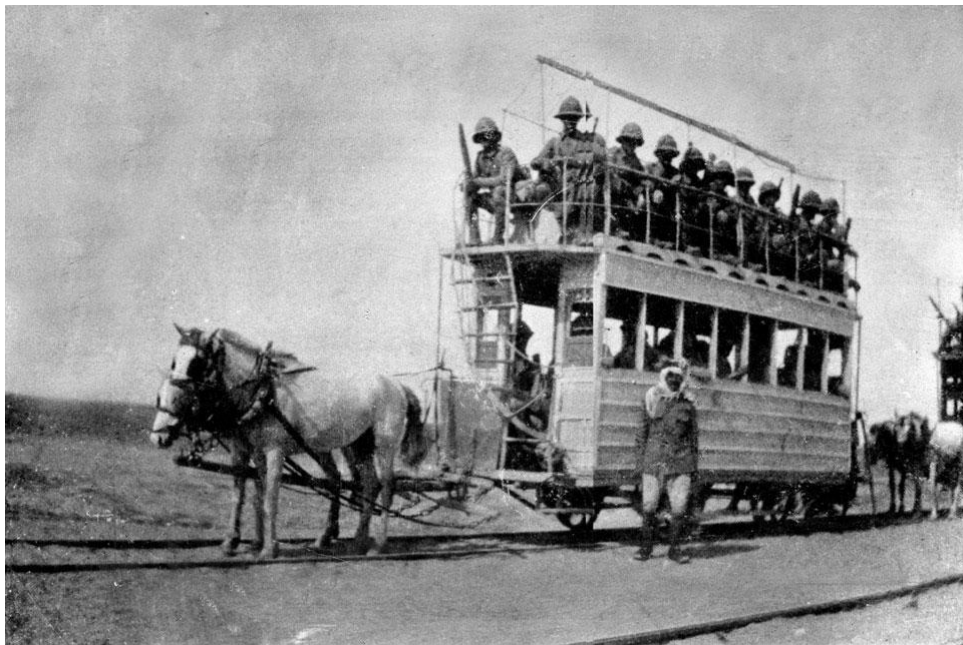
During his time at university, George had been recruited by its Officer Training Corps. In the first sixth months or so of WW1 over 20,000 officers and more than 12,000 other ranks were recruited from British universities. On May 13th 1915 George was commissioned as a Chaplain of the Armed Forces<sup>2</sup> with the rank of captain. On July 15 1915, instead of celebrating his 26th birthday, George embarked on the journey to Gallipoli with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. According to the requirements of King's Regulations, his role was to "*conduct the army's compulsory religious services and bury its dead.*"

## The Army Chaplain

On August 23rd 1915 George joined the British 13th (Western) Division. Up to then he had, for the most part, been acting as chaplain to one of the hospital ships, with the Australian troops, and had been in the trenches with them until he was taken ill with enteric and dysentery.<sup>3</sup>

When the troops were evacuated from Gallipoli on January 8 – 9 1916, George went with them. He was still attached to the 13th Division and was with them throughout the Mesopotamia campaign. The British Army in Mesopotamia would grow to about 440,000 men with almost three quarters of those who fought from the Indian Army. The 13th Division was sent to relieve Kut al-Amara in Iraq and it was during this journey that George spotted a wounded officer laying out in the open and in obvious imminent danger.

For more than an hour, using an entrenching tool, George worked to build a protective shield over him; all the while in full view of the enemy. A bullet struck the shield but all that George said was: *"Not this time Brother Turk"*. The officer he was protecting stated that it was a mystery to him how George escaped being hit.



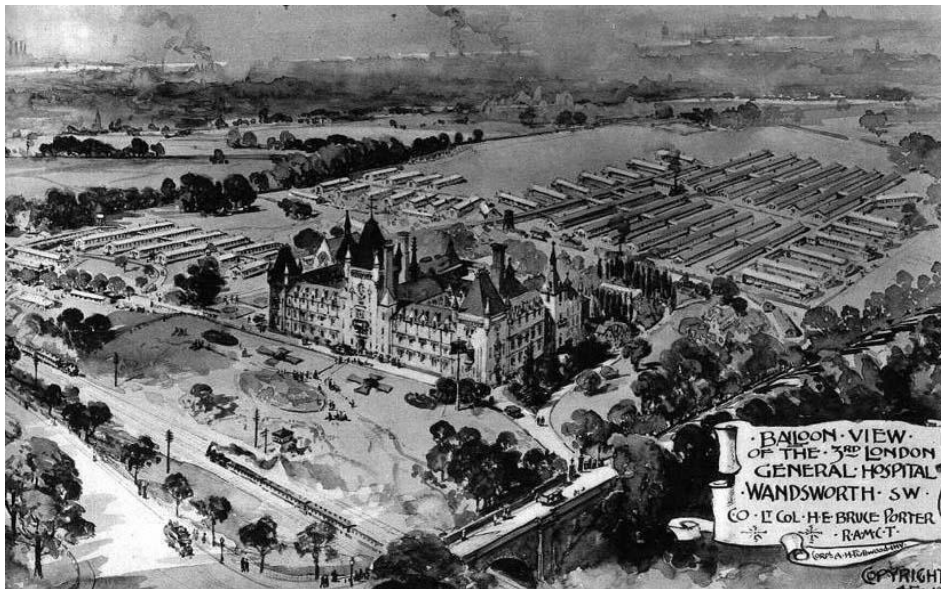
**1916 A tram on rails being pulled by horses, on the way to relieve Kut al-Amara**

The relief force never reached the British troops at Kut al-Amara who were, by then, starving<sup>4</sup> and desperately running low on ammunition. The British Army did make several attempts to lift the siege but all were unsuccessful and on April 29th 1916, after 147 days, they surrendered to the Turks. At that time, it was the longest siege in British Army history.

At home in Hebden Bridge, in May 1916 Richard Marshall received a letter from his son George saying that he was in hospital with fever. George had contracted typhoid and was hospitalised in India from where he was subsequently sent home to England.



George then spent time at the Third London General Hospital in Wandsworth. The hospital had been the Royal Victoria Patriotic School but was requisitioned in August 1914 by the War Ministry and the children transferred to local houses nearby. There is no record of George having been the chaplain of this hospital which leads me to deduce that he was there as a patient. I have to wonder if this is where he first met Irene Carruthers, his future wife, who was by this time a qualified nurse. The medical staff were seconded from the Middlesex Hospital, St Mary's Hospital and University College Hospital. It is quite possible that Irene could have been among those seconded.



**Postcard displaying the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth  
November 1916**

Upon leaving Wandsworth, George took a post as chaplain at the Guards Training Depot at Caterham in Surrey.<sup>5</sup>

In the London Gazette of December 22 1916 George was "*mentioned in despatches*" for his heroic actions in Mesopotamia (Iraq). British commanders-in-chief of a theatre of war or campaign were obliged to report their activities and achievements to the War Office in the form of despatches, which were published in The Gazette.

On April 25 1917, George was summoned to Buckingham Palace where King George V invested him as a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order. The DSO is awarded for meritorious or distinguished service by officers of the armed forces during wartime, typically in actual combat, serving under fire, and usually awarded to those above the rank of captain.

In October 1917, George was stationed in France, as the chaplain to the GHQ Machine Gun School in Wisques. The British Expeditionary Force had established the school three years earlier to train new regimental officers and machine gunners. From there George joined the Royal Flying Corps, 101 Squadron at Bertangles as their chaplain. The RFC had formed at Farnborough on July 12th 1917 and it was only two weeks later that it moved to France to operate as a night bomber squadron.<sup>6</sup>

## The Red Baron

Baron Manfred von Richthofen was born on May 2nd 1892, into an affluent Prussian family. Growing up in the Silesia region of what is now Poland, he led a life of privilege playing sports, riding horses and hunting wild game. Under the instructions of his father, he was enrolled in military school at the age of eleven. Shortly before he turned 18, he was commissioned as an officer in the German cavalry.

After the outbreak of WWI, the Baron served on both the Eastern and Western Fronts and he was awarded the Iron Cross for his daring trips, carrying messages along the front lines. In 1915, he transferred to the German air corps, initially serving as an observer and later as a pilot. He crashed during his first solo flight, but his determination eventually caught the attention of Germany's top ace, Oswald Boelcke, who recruited him for a new fighter squadron.

The Baron claimed his first confirmed aerial victory on September 17 1916. Over a period of 17 months he shot down 80 allied aircraft, though some historians believe the unofficial total to be closer to a hundred. He once said, "*I never get into an aircraft for fun. I aim first for the head of the pilot, or rather the head of the observer, if there is one.*"

The Baron's victims were members of the Royal Flying Corps, many of whom were boys, often with barely a dozen flying hours under their belts. The RFC was soon known as "the suicide club" because pilots were only in the air for a maximum of 11 days before they were shot down. The Baron said that the English pilots were "*dare devils personified and that their intrepidity made them foes to be respected.*"

In January 1917 the Baron was given command of the German squadron Jasta 11. He celebrated the promotion by painting his Albatross biplane red, soon becoming known as The Red Baron. He is reported to have said: "*I want them to see me. And I want them to be afraid.*" He decorated his walls with the serial numbers of the aircraft he shot down and had a jeweller make him a small silver cup engraved with the date and make of each aircraft. He would eventually acquire sixty cups before a silver shortage eventually put a stop to his commemorative trophies. But the killing continued.



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Drawn by Joseph Simpson.

### THE END OF THE RED BARON

Cavalry Captain Baron von Richthofen was shot down in aerial combat on the day when the German papers announced his 79th and 80th victories. Boyd Cable writes: "The Red Baron, with his famous 'circus,' discovered two of our artillery observing machines, and with a few followers attacked, the greater part of the 'circus' drawing off to allow the Baron to go in and down the two. They put up a fight, and, while the Baron manœuvred for position, a number of our fighting scout machines appeared and attacked the 'circus.' The Baron joined the mêlée, which, scattering into groups, developed into what our men call 'a dog fight.' In the course of this the Baron dropped on the tail of a fighting scout, which dived, with the Baron in close pursuit. Another of our scouts seeing this dived after the German, opening fire on him. All three machines came near enough to the ground to be engaged by infantry machine-gun fire, and the Baron was seen to swerve, continue his dive headlong and crash in our lines. His body and the famous blood-red Fokker triplane were afterwards brought in by the infantry, and the Baron was buried with full military honours. He was hit by one bullet, and the position of the wound showed clearly that he had been killed by the pilot who dived down after him."

The End of the Red Baron



The Red Baron was eventually shot down whilst chasing a British fighter pilot. In 1997, almost 80 years after his plane was brought down, it was claimed that British flier Captain Tilden Thompson was the pilot who had deliberately lured the German ace into his final dogfight. By flying a two seater spotter plane low over German lines as a decoy, Captain Thompson is said to have set the trap.

Officially, the death of the Red Baron was credited to Canadian pilot Captain Roy Brown. With an advance in ballistics and forensics, it is now considered by some military historians that the Red Baron was actually killed by an Australian machine gunner, firing from the ground.

Lewis gunners attached to the 3 Squadron Australian Flying Corp were firing at the Red Baron when his machine spun to earth. Although he was shot in the torso the Baron still managed to land his plane but soon died from his wounds.

On April 21 1918, the Allies recovered the body of the Red Baron from a field in Vaux sur Somme, France. Captain George Herbert Marshall was still serving as chaplain to the Royal Flying Corps 101 Squadron at the time that the Red Baron was shot down. He was the closest Anglican chaplain to the scene and, as the Baron was a protestant, George was given the duty of officiating at his burial.



**Rare film footage shows Rev George Herbert Marshall walking at the head of the funeral procession and carrying out the service which took place with full military honours.**



<https://youtu.be/tJUzIKeJJdY>

A crowd of soldiers and several townspeople gathered around as a eulogy was given by George, and then the coffin was lowered into the grave. The brass plate on the coffin said that Baron von Richthofen was killed in action and that he was 25 years old. A firing party, made up of Australian forces, fired three volleys and a bugler sounded the last post.



### **After WW1**

Rev. George Marshall later proceeded to the 18th Division, where he remained during the allied retreat of March 1918 and the subsequent victorious advance. Demobilisation began on December 10 1918 and by March 1919 the division ceased to exist.

As well as the DSO, George was awarded the Victory and British Medals and the 1915 Star. After the war, George returned to Kirkburton and to his wife, Irene.

At the age of 28, George had married 36 year old Irene at Westminster St James the Less. At the time of their marriage, on February 5 1918, Irene gave her address as 165 Vauxhall Bridge Road, Pimlico, just five minutes from St James's. Home on leave from the war, George's address was "Ivy Bank", Hebden Bridge.

1918. Marriage solemnized at <u>The Parish Church</u> in the Parish								
of <u>St James the Less Westminster</u> in the County of <u>Middlesex</u>								
Column:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
3	Feb 5 <sup>th</sup>	Georg Herbert Marshall	28	Bachelor	Acting Army Ordns	Ivy Bank-Charleston Hebden Bridge Yorks.	Richard Marshall	Farmer
	1918	Irene Carruthers	36	Spinster	-	165 Vauxhall Bridge Road	Georg Thomas Carruthers (deceased)	Clerk in Holy Orders
Married in the <u>Parish Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <u>Established Church</u> by <u>License</u> or after by me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		{ <u>Georg Herbert Marshall</u> }	in the Presence of us,	{ <u>J. A. Storey</u> <u>Wm Walker</u> }	{ <u>L. V. de Burgh</u> }			

Irene was the daughter of Scotsman, Rev George Thomas Carruthers MA, and his second wife Elizabeth (nee Cartwright). Rev Carruthers had been a senior chaplain in the Bengal Ecclesiastical Establishment and several of Irene's siblings were born in India. Irene was born in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk on November 20 1881.

By the time she was 18, both of her parents had died and Irene, with her sister Mabel and their brother Vincent, had moved to Edinburgh where Vincent was studying medicine. But the three siblings were soon separated when Mabel died in 1908 at the age of 31. In 1909 Vincent married and then joined the Royal Army Medical Corps and went to serve in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). In 1911 Irene enrolled as a student nurse at the East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital, Anglesea Road, Ipswich.

In June 1919 Rev. George Herbert Marshall, DSO, MA became the curate at St Matthew's, the Anglican Parish Church of Burnley. He and Irene had been there for less than a year when, in early 1920, George was offered the office of the Vicar of Shelley, a church connected to that at Kirkburton. The vacancy arose when Rev. Hay, who had been at Shelley Church for twenty years, moved to Gawthorpe.

George was said to have taken a deep interest in the social side of church work and had a strong connection with the Young Men's Institute. He had also earned the respect of his parishioners and they were sorry to see him move on. He didn't want them to think that he was keen to leave and explained that the Vicar of Kirkburton and the Bishop of Wakefield were anxious that he should accept the new place at Shelley. George accepted the office and, at Easter that year, he left Lancashire and, with Irene, returned to Yorkshire.

On March 7 1922, whilst at Shelley, George and Irene's son was born; they named him George Carruthers Marshall.



George was the Vicar of Shelley for three years, until June 1 1923, when he was inducted as the Vicar of St Augustine's Church, Pellon, Halifax. Traditional parish life at St Augustine's was apparently in decline by this time but, with George's natural enthusiasm and energy and the support of his wife Irene, the church gradually began to regain something of its former prosperity. Almost a decade after he first arrived, the Easter Sunday Service saw the largest congregation it had had for a quarter of a century, which was further testament to George's determination and tenacity.

Along with his role of Vicar of St Augustine's, George acted as chaplain to Alderman Robert Thomas who was the Mayor of Halifax in 1923-24. Both men were strong supporters of missionary work and, whilst at St Augustine's, George was the Chairman of the Halifax Auxiliary of the Church Missionary Society.<sup>7</sup>

### **Ossett**

During his time in office at St Augustine's, George was offered the living at Holy Trinity Church, Ossett but he chose to not accept it. He remained at St Augustine's for eight years until July 1931 when he was again offered the living at Holy Trinity Church in Ossett. This time George did accept the offer and he moved with Irene, George, and his widowed mother Annie Elizabeth, to the Vicarage on Dale Street.



**The Vicarage, Dale Street, Ossett**

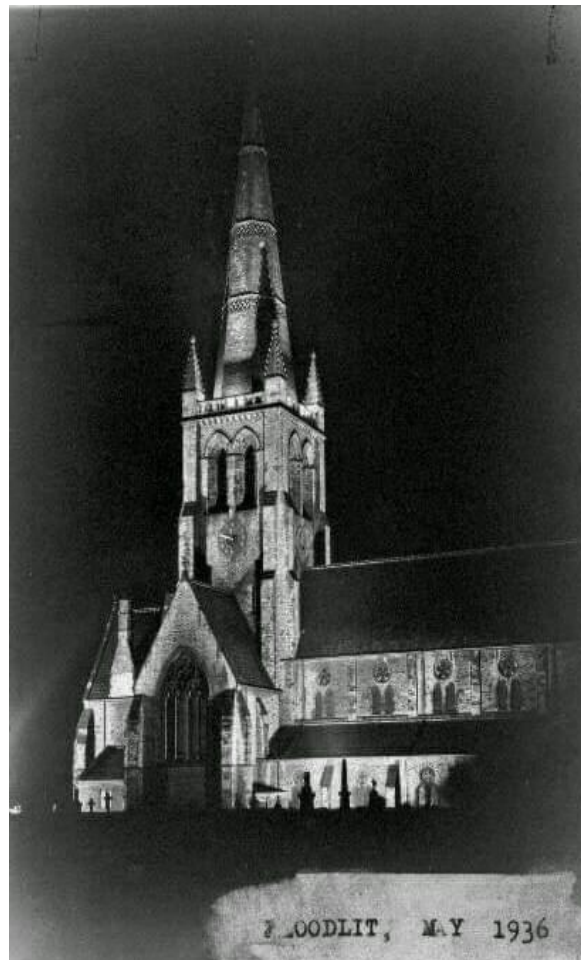
Rev. G.H. Marshall is mentioned many times in local newspapers in connection with births, deaths and marriages at Holy Trinity Church. In May 1936, the Rev. G.H. Marshall was mentioned in the Ossett Observer for something entirely different. The church was having a "Gift Day".



Holy Trinity Church was built in 1866 and the total of the construction costs was more than £20,000. Today's equivalent value is over one and a half million pounds so it's hardly surprising that 70 years after it was built there was still a deficit of £200 (now just shy of £10,000). A Gift Day was established to raise the £200 needed to pay off the debt.

To raise the funds, Rev. George Marshall volunteered to sit in the west end of the church for 24 hours between Friday and Saturday midnight and people took or sent their gifts to him. George had to break off during the day to perform two weddings and the congregation at each contributed generously to the fund. In total 580 people contributed to this novel way of raising funds for the church.

Those who donated included many non-church people and many prominent Nonconformists. The first gift of a shilling was received from an unemployed man and the last came by post from Staincliffe. After 22 hours the total stood at £170. Mayor Gladstone Moorhouse, who was also the church warden, arrived with over £25 which he had collected from friends. Shortly afterwards the £200 mark was passed and at midnight the total had reached £225. With the help of his friends, George had achieved his goal!



**The church exterior, floodlit by the Electrical Distribution of Yorkshire Ltd. The photograph was taken by local photographer JT Neville and it became widely used as a postcard.**

George was in the newspaper again in September 1936. This time he was explaining why he believed that the lack of trees in the town was connected to the lack of Ossett weddings almost two decades later. During WW1, Ossett's many mills had used sulphuric acid in the process of making military uniforms. George explained how the acid which spewed from the mills killed off the trees in Ossett, leaving the town with no "Lover's Lane" and no leafy parks, turning the town into "a cheerless, romance discouraging waste, in which the marriage bells are virtually silent." George said that the amount of marriages at Holy Trinity Church in 1936 was almost zero. He was reported as saying that he had been "prodding" the Afforestation department of the Ministry of Agriculture to plant some trees in "the one treeless town in Yorkshire."

George and Irene left Ossett in 1943. In 2001, his son, George Carruthers Marshall remembered his father telling him: "*They (3 Squadron Australian Flying Corp) gave my father a cylinder from von Richthofen's engine, which he kept in a tin box, wrapped in a sack. When he went back into the Army in WW2 he had to leave his Vicarage, so he donated the cylinder to the War Effort Scrap Drive!!!!*"

Steel and iron were in short supply and so 1943 saw the start of a national drive to collect scrap metal. By recycling unused or unwanted metal the government could build ships, aeroplanes and other equipment needed to fight the war.

How ironic then that the Red Baron, indirectly, contributed to the building of Allied aeroplanes.



**This photo is in storage at Holy Trinity Church, Ossett  
Photo courtesy of Duncan Smith**

On October 9 1943 George was appointed as Army Chaplain to the Wireless School at Forest Moor near Harrogate. The establishment was part of a network of British signals intelligence collection sites which tracked and intercepted German radio transmissions.

This information was so sensitive that it was taken by motorcycle riders directly to Bletchley Park, home of the famous Enigma; the encoder used by the Germans to encrypt secret messages.

George served at Forest Moor until July 5 1945 when he became the vicar of St Paul's Church in Alnwick, Northumberland.

## 1949

George returned to Ossett, and to Holy Trinity Church, to officiate at the wedding of his son, George Carruthers Marshall, and Ann, the daughter of his old friend Gladstone Moorhouse, on April 21 1949, which was the 31st anniversary of the death of the Red Baron.

The Yorkshire Post, dated Friday April 22 1949, reported the wedding, saying that the bridegroom had served in the RAF during WW2 and, at the time of his marriage to Ann, was employed on the Duke of Northumberland's estate where he was engaged in forestry. Perhaps he was inspired by his father?

### Wedding of former Ossett Vicar's son



### Conferences on juvenile delinquency

Both Bradford and Leeds have taken prompt steps to hold conferences on juvenile delinquency following a suggestion from the Home Secretary and the Minister of Education vising such action. The Lord Mayor of Bradford (Alderman F. J. Cowie) had made all arrangements for the setting within 24 hours of the

THE marriage of a former vicar's son to the daughter of a churchwarden caused great interest at Ossett Parish Church yesterday. Mr. George Carruthers Marshall, son of the Rev. G. H. Marshall, Vicar of Alnwick, Northumberland, and formerly Vicar of Ossett, was married to Miss Ann Moorhouse daughter of Alderman and Mrs Gladstone Moorhouse, Ivy Bank, Ryecroft, Ossett. The bridegroom served in the R.A.F. during the recent war and is at present engaged in forestry on the Duke of Northumberland's estate. The bride is a member of the teaching staff of Hunslet Carr School, Leeds. The bride's

father has been a member of Ossett Town Council 18 years, a West Riding County Councillor nine years, four times Mayor of Ossett and five times Deputy-Mayor. The service was choral and the bridegroom's father, assisted by the Rev. J. Barton (Vicar of Ossett), officiated. The bride wore a dress of white ottoman cord, with tulle veil. There were four bridesmaids—Miss Margaret Newall and Miss Barbara Whittles (friends of the bride) and the Misses Elizabeth Ann and Deborah Jane Moorhouse (nieces). Mr. Haswell Anderson was best man.



1949 was a year for celebration, but it was also a year for mourning when, on September 13th, George's wife, Irene, was found dead on the lawn at St Paul's Vicarage, Alnwick. At an inquest their son George gave evidence, saying that his mother had carried some carpets to the front lawn to be cleaned with a vacuum cleaner. At first it was thought by a maid that Irene had merely fainted. George went out and found her, lying on her back. She was dead and the cleaner was still running. The pathologist's report stated that death was due to cerebral haemorrhage.

The last mention in the newspapers of George was a small notice, announcing his death in 1953.

**MARSHALL.—January 6, aged 63 years, the Rev. GEORGE HERBERT MARSHALL, St. Paul's Vicarage, Alnwick, Northumberland, sometime Vicar of St. Augustine's, Halifax and Holy Trinity, Ossett.—Service at St. Paul's Church, Alnwick, on Friday at 2 p.m.: interment Alnwick Cemetery 2.30 p.m.**

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Thanks to Margaret Nettleton for this family picture, which shows a family wedding party in 1931 with the Rev. George H. Marshall seated front left.



**Anne-Marie Fawcett**  
Ossett Through The Ages  
October 2020

## Sources:

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[www.awayfromthewesternfront.org](http://www.awayfromthewesternfront.org)

## Footnotes

1. This church was consecrated by the Archbishop of York in 1833 and was one of the "Waterloo Churches"; so called due to being built with the reparations paid by the French government after the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. To celebrate the end of the Napoleonic Wars, parliament passed the Act for Building New Churches, allocating £1 million for the task.
2. At the outbreak of war there were just 116 chaplains. The chaplains themselves embarked on overseas service with no special training and very little idea about the nature of the task ahead of them. Many were exposed to an environment which churchmen at home could not begin to comprehend. By the end of the war some 4,400 Army Chaplains had been recruited and 179 had lost their lives on active service.
3. The whole time the 13th Division was at Gallipoli the men were in the trenches and the chaplains' work had to be carried out there. Sometimes they had Communion there, with boxes and bombs for an altar, and the men crowded to the services. They did so mostly when in close contact with the enemy within trench bombing range. It was understood that the chaplains of the 13th Division had suffered very heavily, both from wounds and disease. From early 1916, as chaplains were called upon to preach the justice of the Allied cause, they were given much greater access to the front line and they could be deployed wherever senior chaplains saw fit.
4. The multi-cultural nature of the British and Indian soldiers in Kut al-Amara complicated the feeding of the troops under siege conditions. Dispensation from different religious leaders in India was obtained for their followers to eat foods which they were normally forbidden to eat.
5. For more than a century the depot at Caterham played a major role in military history, with thousands of recruits; Grenadiers, Coldstream, Scots, Irish and Welsh guards, passing through its gates on their way to their regiments. The garrison's Chapel of St Michael the Archangel was built for the Brigade of Guards in 1885-86 by William Butterfield, the acknowledged master of Victorian Gothic church architecture.

6. Around 14,000 Allied pilots were killed during the war - rather shockingly, but perhaps hardly surprising, more than half of them died during training. At the start of WW1, the aeroplane was barely a decade old and had never been used in battle. In 1914, when 64 unarmed aircraft set off from England for the Western Front, it was an achievement just to make it the 21 miles across the Channel.
  
7. In July 1930, two missionaries - Edith Nettleton from St Augustine's, and her colleague Eleanor June Harrison were kidnapped by Chinese bandits who demanded a ransom of £7,500 before they would be released. In August 1930, when the ransom had not been paid, Miss Nettleton's severed finger was sent with threats that the women would be murdered if the ransom was not forthcoming. On October 4 1930, the women were beheaded by the bandits. A memorial service, conducted by George, was held and in July 1931 a memorial to Edith Nettleton was unveiled in St Augustine's Church, Halifax. In 1933 Nellie; the daughter of George's friend, Alderman Robert Thomas, took up missionary work in North China, taking the place of Edith.