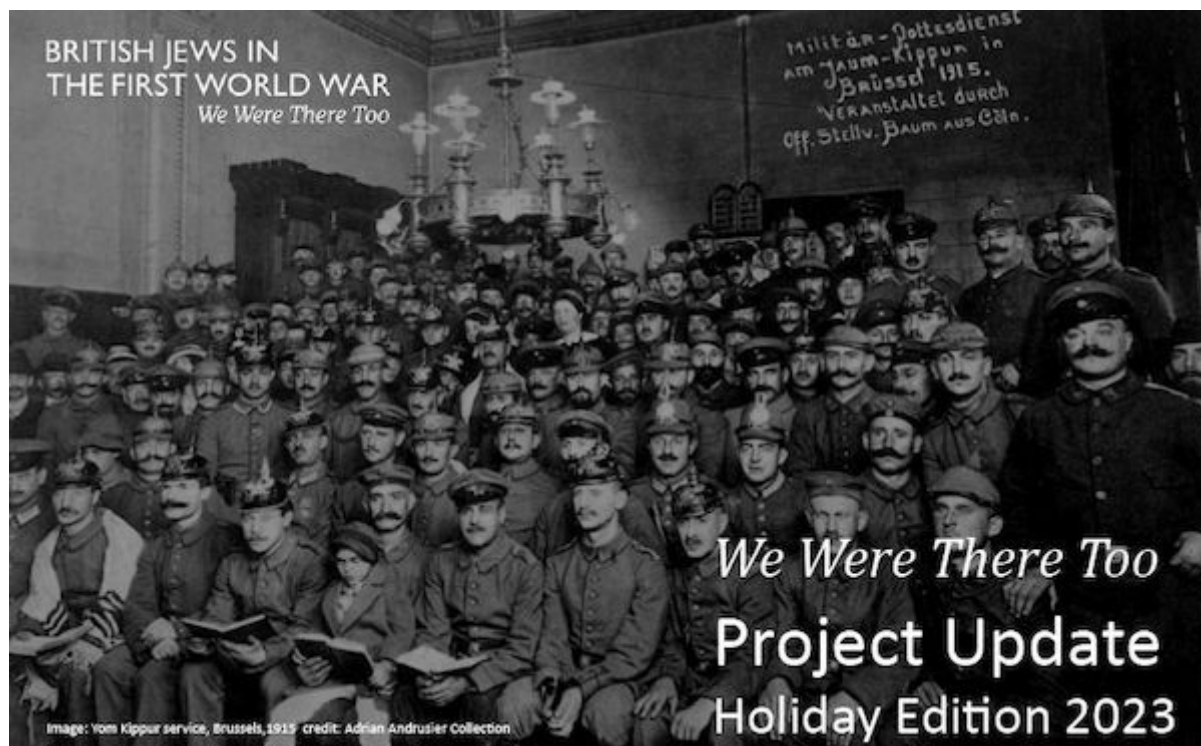




Welcome to this September 2023 edition of We Were There Too Newsletter. We have chosen to open with a photograph from the Adrian Andrusier collection [Jewish Life in the German Armed Forces](#), depicting Yom Kippur service held in Brussels in 1915. It serves not just as a reminder that Jews on both sides of the conflict were united in their observance at this time, but also that, even surrounded by the horrors of the battlefield, many faith communities still found ways to celebrate important holidays to retain a sense normality, community and own identity. The key message of this newsletter is that of remembering. We will share several stories from our collections relating to the holiday season but many more can be found on our website.

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## MISS KATE CLEOPATRA BONNY

The massive loss of life and personal tragedy inevitably dominate any project focusing of the history of the First World War. As such, most of our personal profiles are those of soldiers or men and women otherwise involved in the war effort. The story of Miss [Kate Cleopatra Bonny](#) serves as a a sobering reminder that not all casualties of the war were sustained on the Front. On the evening of 13th September 1915 Kate was standing at the gate of her home in Cliftonville, Margate, waiting for the arrival of her parents on their way to spend Yom Kippur with her. She became one of two human casualties (two horses also died) of the 10 bombs dropped on the area by a German plane. Kate was struck by splinters from the bomb and died 4 days later, on the eve of Yom Kippur. Her name appears on the memorial board of the Bevis Marks synagogue. Many thanks to volunteer Lola Fraser who researched Kate's story.



Bevis Marks memorial board

## VOICES FROM THE TRENCHES

Some months ago, we acquired an interview with [Joe Clyne](#) recorded in 1977. Joe describes his experiences of the High Holydays during the war:

“When it came to the Jewish holidays...every Jew on active service, according to the exigencies of the service, was given permission to go to a certain place where the Jewish Chaplain to the forces would hold a service....I did get, on two occasions, when it was Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I did get even transport, so that I could carry on with my religion.”

We have other personal accounts describing services organised to allow soldiers to observe holidays on the front, such as the [Louis Harris diary](#) or the photograph of [Solly Abrahams](#) celebrating Rosh Hashanah with Reverend Adler and a group of friends, but it is especially poignant to listen to a first hand account.

The war had a massive effect on Joe, as described in the following passage:

“When I was a lad of 19 years of age in the front-line trenches of France in 1916, and I saw lads of 18 and 19 just being mowed down, limbs blown off, men dying from gas crying to God to save them, how do you think I felt? I became at one time an agnostic, really, because at that time and when I came home on leave from Italy, my body was practically eaten up with lice, and my father was on the station to meet me, and I said “I’ve had my Yom Kippur for the rest of my life!” That’s my Yom Kippur.”

You can listen to more [here](#).



Yom Kippur celebration, Knockaloe Camp, 1915

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### "GUTEN YOMTOV!"

Another moving account of holidays in the trenches comes from Staff Sergeant [Jack Canton](#). His letter to the senior Chaplain was published in the Jewish Chronicle in October 1915.



"Sorry I couldn't send you that report down sooner but like yourself, sir, I am near the battle line, and have been ever since a few days after Yom Kippur. I'm running

an advanced dressing station, consequently you can guess I'm having a rather hot and busy time of it and haven't had much leisure for writing purposes, so hope you will excuse the delay. Thanks to your valuable aid, I was quite astonished to find that twenty-three men came down for the service which far exceeded the number I anticipated getting down to our camp. Below you will find a list of their names... and of course, myself, who, as requested by you, conducted the service. I remember it was a hot, burning morning, the sun was beating down mercilessly, one could hardly breathe and yet the boys came straggling in by twos and threes, most of them carrying all their "packs," rifles etc. looking hot and dusty and weary, their boots covered with dust.

Many of them had obtained leave from the C.O.'s and came right down from the trenches a distance of three to five miles; not one of them have breakfasted and all told me they were determined to keep up the Fast. Needless to state, I got them to sit down in the marquee (which our Major kindly lent me for the service) and after a few minutes rest we commenced. I conducted the service, as regulated by you, in the special Prayer Book issued to all Jewish troops for Yom Kippur, at the termination of which they all deemed it a success. I'm afraid I didn't do so "great" though - being an amateur Chazan for the first time in one's existence is not exactly as easy as it seems. After the service we all had a chat about old times, many of us having met before at the Tabernacle in Aldershot where the Rev. Mr Plaskow conducts the service on Shabbos.

It was quite good to talk over the old times. Many of us were still in England last year and were lucky enough to get passes to our homes for Rosh Hoshana and Yom Kippur. We dwelt on the elaborate dinners we had last year, before fasting, among our own people, but we jolly soon got off that subject, as it made our mouths "water" too much.

I know previous to fasting that I "dined" on some bread and cheese, but it doesn't do to grumble on active service. I made up for it when the fast was over. Went to a neighbouring cottage and bought some "cafe-au-lait," a couple of eggs etc, rather a "spread" in these days. But I'm afraid I have to get off the subject; all things come to an end and so did our gathering. As the day was rapidly waning and many of the chaps had to get back to the trenches, so we bid each other "good luck" and "guten Yomtov," shook hands all round and all of us departed our various ways, taking with us memories which I'm sure most of us will never forget of a pleasant, though earnest, Yom Kippur Service held on "active service" by British Jews serving in His Majesty's Army."



Reverend Adler with a group of soldiers, Rosh Hashanah, 1917

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## HOLIDAY WISHES

Finally, the WWTT team would like to wish all our supporters, volunteers and contributors a happy holiday season and the very best Shana Tova!



Happy Rosh Hashanah

Thanks for reading, we hope you enjoyed it! Make sure to visit the website [jewsfcw.uk](http://jewsfcw.uk) to upload your family stories, and to learn more about our project.

To get in touch, email [contactus@jewsfcw.uk](mailto:contactus@jewsfcw.uk) or you can find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) @jewsfcw

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