



SHEFFIELD CATHEDRAL

A PLACE FOR ALL PEOPLE

A Soldier's Story

Corporal William Hillfoot of the 1st Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment, reporting for duty. Perhaps you're wondering what a soldier like me has got to do with Sheffield Cathedral? Well, you ought to take a look at the Chapel of St George – that's ours, that is. It was built especially for the York and Lancaster Regiment and it's a fitting tribute to those who fought and died for their country.

The Yorks and Lancs have been all over the world, you know. As soon as it formed our lads were seeing service in America, India, New Zealand – and later on in South Africa too, at the Relief of the Siege of Ladysmith.

And we did our bit in the First World War– 18 battalions of us out in the thick of it – the Somme, Wipers, Gallipoli. Some people said that back then that we were 'lions led by donkeys' – well, history will decide - but Viscount Plumer of Messines was one of our lot and he was called the 'Soldiers' General'.

The Sheffield City Battalion was formed back then in 1914, you might have heard of them, the Sheffield Pals. The Pals signed up with their mates and went off to the Front line together. I suppose if you've got to go off and fight

you'd want to be with your mates - but most of them never came back, killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the 1st of July 1916. It's been said the Pals were: 'Two years in the making, ten minutes in the destroying' – that just about sums it up.

As for me, I served during the Second World War. My lot, the 1st Battalion, we sailed to Norway in 1940 on the HMS Sheffield - the Shiny Sheff as she was known because of all the stainless steel fittings on her – all made in Sheffield, of course! Made us so proud to have our hometown on the side of the ship like that.

We did most of our fighting in the Italian campaign though and ended up in Germany at the end of the war. Tough times and not all of us made it out but being with your mates made it somehow ...easier to bear.

We fought in Suez too, but we decided in 1968 to disband rather than join up with another regiment. Didn't seem right after all those years together to just become part of some other group. So that was that....

That's when we gave the swords and the bayonets to the Cathedral, the ones you'll see in St George's Chapel. The bayonets are pointed downwards to show that the fighting is over but the swords are pointed upwards, which means we're still serving. I think it's important, to prove we've set aside our weapons and we're at peace now. I for one hope they never have to be picked up again.