

The Volunteers.

The Kensington Volunteers

Setting the Scene

Queen Victoria died in January 1901..., her son Edward VII, succeeded her to the throne, giving impetus to the new century... The Edwardian period was one of exuberance for some but degradation for others - the many. Edward, a leader of fashion in all the arts, was sympathetic to continental society – its style and culture. The politics of the era took a significant shift towards liberalism, accepting that the working class and women would become politicised... even so, class divisions were rigidly maintained.

Edwardian society spans from Edward's accession till half-way through his son's reign. It was an age that became interested in socialism believing that there should be better opportunities for the poor, and greater class equality. Edward's easy outgoing personality gave rise to: much travel, frequent gambling, changes to his wardrobe, and a revelling in the company of beautiful women... That the new Monarch was an extrovert is undeniable...

It was inevitable that social change would accompany industrialism... as it swept through the country; railways allowed the movement of people, assisting in the enjoyment of leisure activities and sports - many partaking, in the new cycling and dancing craze, two of the new 'in things' - for the young socialite. The music of the Impressionists era followed the style of the artist. However much historians portray the Edwardian period as unsubstantial any Monarch coming after Victoria would have

faced a similar barrage of criticism. Society and the media followed the flippancy and triviality of the rich; it seemed inevitable - it was a welcomed distraction from the hard world of work... some of the downturns was a number of social scandals, both political and financial.

It was the age of the railways – steam locomotion. The previous decade had seen its introduction – had shown its positive advantages – as a mechanical power source, and liberating practicalities for business as well as pleasure..., now it was the turn of its complete development – to serve the whole country.

London was the headquarters for all the major railway companies... this ensured the capital received most of the financial and business benefits. The expanding community became railway enthusiasts - supported the industrial expansion, as the warehouses, offices and businesses were built beside the track. These places of work required staff and servicing, and those workers needed homes and infrastructure...

The pool of London - and the shipping companies - lying to the east, had provided trade and work through past generations. The railways, and the recently constructed canals, required cartage to deliver their freight. Each of these methods of transportation fed off each other - generated even greater profits.

As the main Continental countries improved their societies they looked at Britain's Empire with longing, wishing they too had the benefits of trade and commerce to develop their country. This jealousy created tension and unease.

This book follows those years 1900 - 1920... through the life of Albert Kearey - his formative years: perfecting his piano playing, attending the Boy's Brigade and starting work with a haulage company; his Voluntary Service, shooting at Bisley, and finally, marching off to War... each step, like 'Pilgrim's', prepared him for the next, to finally become a national hero.