

York Family History Society WW1 Project



Soldiers from the Royal Scots at Strensall Camp, York.

(© City of York Council)

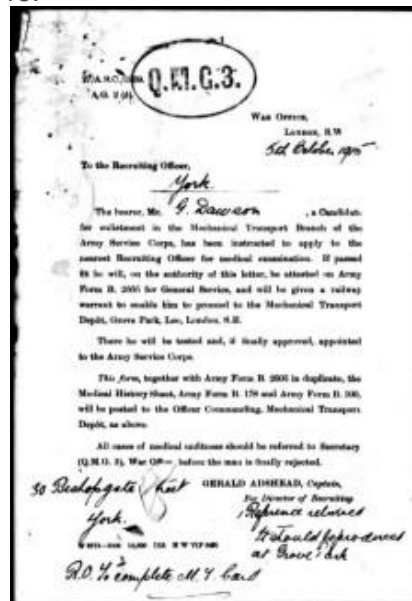
As part of the World War One Centenary, we are asking for our members to write up short histories of their ancestors who experienced the great war. As we receive them we will publish them here for people to read and we hope to eventually collate all the submissions into some form of publication. If you are a member of York & District Family History Society and you would like to see your ancestor's story published here please drop a line to the [webmaster](#). We are looking for any interesting story so it doesn't matter whether your ancestor served with the forces or not. A few pages with some pictures is ideal and we'd appreciate it if you could email your submission in the form of a Word document or PDF. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to [contact us](#).

George Dawson 1871 – 1939

Submitted by David Dawson (Click on the images to see a larger image) George Dawson was the son of Thomas & Rachel Dawson, born 21st May 1871 in Kirkbymoorside. After leaving school he became a farm labourer as was his father. He came to York sometime in the mid 1880's and lodged with a cousin, Thomas Dawson at 34 Lower Ebor Street in the Clementhorpe area of York. He married Edith King the 17 year old sister of Matilda, Thomas's wife on the 22nd May 1897.



Certifying that George could drive a motor car and motor lorry and carry out running repairs c 1915
On his marriage certificate his stated occupation was a cab driver but the 1901 and 1911 the census show that he had become a coach builders labourer. His employment before enlistment in 1915 was with Wales & Son, engineers & body builder's of Lendal Bridge, York. Whether he was employed by Wales & Son on his arrival in York would be speculation but it would appear that Wales were in the business of cab building before advancing onto engineering and body building. In 1907 they had five surviving children the last child Edith Rachel born 20th June 1906. His wife, Edith died in 1907 aged 27. George remarried in 1908 to Lavinia Utley, they went on to produce 5 more children the last one Harry was born on 6th August 1915.



George Dawson's enlistment application 1915.

He made his application for enlistment on the 5th October 1915 two months after the birth of Harry and the thought of leaving a wife and five children and two boys from his first marriage must have weighed heavily on his mind. He may have been joining to get a guaranteed income or for some peace and quiet. This enlistment application form showing that if passed fit he would be eligible for service with the Motor Transport Branch of the Army Service Corps given a pass to travel down to Grove Park London. There he would be tested for suitability for service and after final approval be appointed to the Army Service Corps.

131847

To be used for records relating to the Regular Army of Army Form B. 1318 to be used for Special Reserve and Special Reservists entering into the Regular Army.

MEDICAL HISTORY

Name *George Dawson*

REGIMENTAL TABLE

1. Regiment - *1st Battalion, 1st London Division*

2. Battalion - *1st Battalion, 1st London Division*

3. Company - *1st Company*

4. Platoon - *1st Platoon*

5. Position - *Motor driver*

6. Date of Enlistment - *16/10/15*

7. Date of Discharge - *1/11/18*

8. Height - *5ft 4 3/4 in*

9. Weight - *7st 10lb*

10. Chest - *33 1/2 in*

11. Arms - *18 1/2 in*

12. Legs - *30 in*

13. Feet - *10 in*

14. Head - *18 1/2 in*

15. Neck - *14 in*

16. Forearm - *14 in*

17. Wrist - *6 in*

18. Hand - *7 in*

19. Middle Finger - *3 in*

20. Ring Finger - *2 1/2 in*

21. Little Finger - *2 in*

22. Thumb - *2 in*

23. Ear - *2 1/2 in*

24. Eye - *1 1/2 in*

25. Nose - *1 1/2 in*

26. Mouth - *3 1/2 in*

27. Chin - *1 1/2 in*

28. Jaw - *3 1/2 in*

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560. Height - *5ft 4 3/4 in*

561. Weight - *7st 10lb*

562. Chest - *3*

London S.E. George was ready for duty.

These next two forms are duplicated; one used on entry and the second completed when his service ended. The writing is so identical it is difficult to see the differences. His address on enlistment was 30 Bishopgate Street York, and his next of kin as Mrs L (Lavinia) Dawson with the dates of their marriage also the date of marriage to his first wife Edith. His children with dates of birth:

- George, 15th January 1901
- Leonard, 22nd November 1902
- Nellie, 28th December 1908
- Ada Lavinia, 4th April 1910
- Beatrice Mary, 28th June 1911
- Arthur, 6th March 1914
- Harry, 6th August 1915.

He returned home until 3rd November and then returned and joined the London Mounted Brigade Field Ambulance on the 4th November 1915. He seems to have joined The London Mounted Field Ambulance & reported to Avonmouth on the day. He also seems to have gone straight from civilian life to Egypt with no training whatsoever - he was never taught to march never mind salute! An allowance would have been paid for the children and part of his soldier's pay would have been given to his wife. We can see on this form for some reason he forgot to put Edith Rachel, born 20th June 1906 on his original descriptive report, so he looks to be making a claim for her allowance in retrospect. It is also the end of service form detailing his final times with the unit. His war service 4th November 1915 until 10th April 1919, given home leave from the 11th April until the 11th June 1919 and returning to Grove Park on the 11th June 1919 for demobilisation.

Form No. 1 Casualty Form - Active Service. Army Form No. 100

Regiment or Corps *ASL* Regimental Number *11187*

Rank *Private* Christian Name *George Dawson*

Religion *Anglican* Terms of Service (a) *12.15* Service reduces from (a) *16.10.15*

Date of promotion to present rank *12.15.15* Date of appointment to latest rank *16.10.15*

Extended *12.15.15* Re-engaged *16.10.15* Qualification (b) *12.15.15*

Date	Place where medical	Remarks	Place	Date
		Embarked per "Ilston" Avonmouth		4/11/15
		Disembarked at Alexandria		24/11/15
11/11/15		ASL for duty 11/11/15	Cairo	11/11/15
12/11/15		ASL for duty 12/11/15	Cairo	12/11/15
13/11/15		ASL for duty 13/11/15	Cairo	13/11/15
14/11/15		ASL for duty 14/11/15	Cairo	14/11/15
15/11/15		ASL for duty 15/11/15	Cairo	15/11/15
16/11/15		ASL for duty 16/11/15	Cairo	16/11/15
17/11/15		ASL for duty 17/11/15	Cairo	17/11/15
18/11/15		ASL for duty 18/11/15	Cairo	18/11/15
19/11/15		ASL for duty 19/11/15	Cairo	19/11/15
20/11/15		ASL for duty 20/11/15	Cairo	20/11/15
21/11/15		ASL for duty 21/11/15	Cairo	21/11/15
22/11/15		ASL for duty 22/11/15	Cairo	22/11/15
23/11/15		ASL for duty 23/11/15	Cairo	23/11/15
24/11/15		ASL for duty 24/11/15	Cairo	24/11/15
25/11/15		ASL for duty 25/11/15	Cairo	25/11/15
26/11/15		ASL for duty 26/11/15	Cairo	26/11/15
27/11/15		ASL for duty 27/11/15	Cairo	27/11/15
28/11/15		ASL for duty 28/11/15	Cairo	28/11/15
29/11/15		ASL for duty 29/11/15	Cairo	29/11/15
30/11/15		ASL for duty 30/11/15	Cairo	30/11/15
1/12/15		ASL for duty 1/12/15	Cairo	1/12/15
2/12/15		ASL for duty 2/12/15	Cairo	2/12/15
3/12/15		ASL for duty 3/12/15	Cairo	3/12/15
4/12/15		ASL for duty 4/12/15	Cairo	4/12/15
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6/12/15		ASL for duty 6/12/15	Cairo	6/12/15
7/12/15		ASL for duty 7/12/15	Cairo	7/12/15
8/12/15		ASL for duty 8/12/15	Cairo	8/12/15
9/12/15		ASL for duty 9/12/15	Cairo	9/12/15
10/12/15		ASL for duty 10/12/15	Cairo	10/12/15
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14/12/15		ASL for duty 14/12/15	Cairo	14/12/15
15/12/15		ASL for duty 15/12/15	Cairo	15/12/15
16/12/15		ASL for duty 16/12/15	Cairo	16/12/15
17/12/15		ASL for duty 17/12/15	Cairo	17/12/15
18/12/15		ASL for duty 18/12/15	Cairo	18/12/15
19/12/15		ASL for duty 19/12/15	Cairo	19/12/15
20/12/15		ASL for duty 20/12/15	Cairo	20/12/15
21/12/15		ASL for duty 21/12/15	Cairo	21/12/15
22/12/15		ASL for duty 22/12/15	Cairo	22/12/15
23/12/15		ASL for duty 23/12/15	Cairo	23/12/15
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27/12/15		ASL for duty 27/12/15	Cairo	27/12/15
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29/12/15		ASL for duty 29/12/15	Cairo	29/12/15
30/12/15		ASL for duty 30/12/15	Cairo	30/12/15
1/1/16		ASL for duty 1/1/16	Cairo	1/1/16
2/1/16		ASL for duty 2/1/16	Cairo	2/1/16
3/1/16		ASL for duty 3/1/16	Cairo	3/1/16
4/1/16		ASL for duty 4/1/16	Cairo	4/1/16
5/1/16		ASL for duty 5/1/16	Cairo	5/1/16
6/1/16		ASL for duty 6/1/16	Cairo	6/1/16
7/1/16		ASL for duty 7/1/16	Cairo	7/1/16
8/1/16		ASL for duty 8/1/16	Cairo	8/1/16
9/1/16		ASL for duty 9/1/16	Cairo	9/1/16
10/1/16		ASL for duty 10/1/16	Cairo	10/1/16
11/1/16		ASL for duty 11/1/16	Cairo	11/1/16
12/1/16		ASL for duty 12/1/16	Cairo	12/1/16
13/1/16		ASL for duty 13/1/16	Cairo	13/1/16
14/1/16		ASL for duty 14/1/16	Cairo	14/1/16
15/1/16		ASL for duty 15/1/16	Cairo	15/1/16
16/1/16		ASL for duty 16/1/16	Cairo	16/1/16
17/1/16		ASL for duty 17/1/16	Cairo	17/1/16
18/1/16		ASL for duty 18/1/16	Cairo	18/1/16
19/1/16		ASL for duty 19/1/16	Cairo	19/1/16
20/1/16		ASL for duty 20/1/16	Cairo	20/1/16
21/1/16		ASL for duty 21/1/16	Cairo	21/1/16
22/1/16		ASL for duty 22/1/16	Cairo	22/1/16
23/1/16		ASL for duty 23/1/16	Cairo	23/1/16
24/1/16		ASL for duty 24/1/16	Cairo	24/1/16
25/1/16		ASL for duty 25/1/16	Cairo	25/1/16
26/1/16		ASL for duty 26/1/16	Cairo	26/1/16
27/1/16		ASL for duty 27/1/16	Cairo	27/1/16
28/1/16		ASL for duty 28/1/16	Cairo	28/1/16
29/1/16		ASL for duty 29/1/16	Cairo	29/1/16
30/1/16		ASL for duty 30/1/16	Cairo	30/1/16
1/2/16		ASL for duty 1/2/16	Cairo	1/2/16
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7/2/16		ASL for duty 7/2/16	Cairo	7/2/16
8/2/16		ASL for duty 8/2/16	Cairo	8/2/16
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11/2/16		ASL for duty 11/2/16	Cairo	11/2/16
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14/2/16		ASL for duty 14/2/16	Cairo	14/2/16
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16/2/16		ASL for duty 16/2/16	Cairo	16/2/16
17/2/16		ASL for duty 17/2/16	Cairo	17/2/16
18/2/16		ASL for duty 18/2/16	Cairo	18/2/16
19/2/16		ASL for duty 19/2/16	Cairo	19/2/16
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22/2/16		ASL for duty 22/2/16	Cairo	22/2/16
23/2/16		ASL for duty 23/2/16	Cairo	23/2/16
24/2/16		ASL for duty 24/2/16	Cairo	24/2/16
25/2/16		ASL for duty 25/2/16	Cairo	25/2/16
26/2/16		ASL for duty 26/2/16	Cairo	26/2/16
27/2/16		ASL for duty 27/2/16	Cairo	27/2/16
28/2/16		ASL for duty 28/2/16	Cairo	28/2/16
29/2/16		ASL for duty 29/2/16	Cairo	29/2/16
30/2/16		ASL for duty 30/2/16	Cairo	30/2/16
1/3/16		ASL for duty 1/3/16	Cairo	1/3/16
2/3/16		ASL for duty 2/3/16	Cairo	2/3/16
3/3/16		ASL for duty 3/3/16	Cairo	3/3/16
4/3/16		ASL for duty 4/3/16	Cairo	4/3/16
5/3/16		ASL for duty 5/3/16	Cairo	5/3/16
6/3/16		ASL for duty 6/3/16	Cairo	6/3/16
7/3/16		ASL for duty 7/3/16	Cairo	7/3/16
8/3/16		ASL for duty 8/3/16	Cairo	8/3/16
9/3/16		ASL for duty 9/3/16	Cairo	9/3/16
10/3/16		ASL for duty 10/3/16	Cairo	10/3/16
11/3/16		ASL for duty 11/3/16	Cairo	11/3/16
12/3/16		ASL for duty 12/3/16	Cairo	12/3/16
13/3/16		ASL for duty 13/3/16	Cairo	13/3/16
14/3/16		ASL for duty 14/3/16	Cairo	14/3/16
15/3/16		ASL for duty 15/3/16	Cairo	15/3/16
16/3/16		ASL for duty 16/3/16	Cairo	16/3/16
17/3/16		ASL for duty 17/3/16	Cairo	17/3/16
18/3/16		ASL for duty 18/3/16	Cairo	18/3/16
19/3/16		ASL for duty 19/3/16	Cairo	19/3/16
20/3/16		ASL for duty 20/3/16	Cairo	20/3/16
21/3/16		ASL for duty 21/3/16	Cairo	21/3/16
22/3/16		ASL for duty 22/3/16	Cairo	22/3/16
23/3/16		ASL for duty 23/3/16	Cairo	23/3/16
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26/3/16		ASL for duty 26/3/16	Cairo	26/3/16
27/3/16		ASL for duty 27/3/16	Cairo	27/3/16
28/3/16		ASL for duty 28/3/16	Cairo	28/3/16
29/3/16		ASL for duty 29/3/16	Cairo	29/3/16
30/3/16		ASL for duty 30/3/16	Cairo	30/3/16
1/4/16		ASL for duty 1/4/16	Cairo	1/4/16
2/4/16		ASL for duty 2/4/16	Cairo	2/4/16
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4/4/16		ASL for duty 4/4/16	Cairo	4/4/16
5/4/16		ASL for duty 5/4/16	Cairo	5/4/16
6/4/16		ASL for duty 6/4/16	Cairo	6/4/16
7/4/16		ASL for duty 7/4/16	Cairo	7/4/16
8/4/16		ASL for duty 8/4/16	Cairo	8/4/16
9/4/16		ASL for duty 9/4/16	Cairo	9/4/16
10/4/16		ASL for duty 10/4/16	Cairo	10/4/16
11/4/16		ASL for duty 11/4/16	Cairo	11/4/16
12/4/16		ASL for duty 12/4/16	Cairo	12/4/16
13/4/16		ASL for duty 13/4/16	Cairo	13/4/16
14/4/16		ASL for duty 14/4/16	Cairo	14/4/16
15/4/16		ASL for duty 15/4/16	Cairo	15/4/16
16/4/16		ASL for duty 16/4/16	Cairo	16/4/16
17/4/16		ASL for duty 17/4/16	Cairo	17/4/16
18/4/16		ASL for duty 18/4/16	Cairo	18/4/16
19/4/16		ASL for duty 19/4/16	Cairo	19/4/16
20/4/16		ASL for duty 20/4/16	Cairo	20/4/16
21/4/16		ASL for duty 21/4/16	Cairo	21/4/16
22/4/16		ASL for duty 22/4/16	Cairo	22/4/16
23/4/16		ASL for duty 23/4/16	Cairo	23/4/16
24/4/16		ASL for duty 24/4/16	Cairo	24/4/16
25/4/16		ASL for duty 25/4/16	Cairo	25/4/16
26/4/16		ASL for duty 26/4/16	Cairo	26/4/16
27/4/16		ASL for duty 27/4/16	Cairo	27/4/16
28/4/16		ASL for duty 28/4/16	Cairo	28/4/16
29/4/16		ASL for duty 29/4/16	Cairo	29/4/16
30/4/16		ASL for duty 30/4/16	Cairo	30/4/16
1/5/16		ASL for duty 1/5/16	Cairo	1/5/16
2/5/16		ASL for duty 2/5/16	Cairo	2/5/16
3/5/16		ASL for duty 3/5/16	Cairo	3/5/16
4/5/16		ASL for duty 4/5/16	Cairo	4/5/16
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7/5/16		ASL for duty 7/5/16	Cairo	7/5/16
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10/5/16		ASL for duty 10/5/16	Cairo	10/5/16
11/5/16		ASL for duty 11/5/16	Cairo	11/5/16
12/5/16		ASL for duty 12/5/16	Cairo	12/5/16
13/5/16		ASL for duty 13/5/16	Cairo	13/5/16
14/5/16		ASL for duty 14/5/16	Cairo	14/5/16
15/5/16		ASL for duty 15/5/16	Cairo	15/5/16
16/5/16		ASL for duty 16/5/16	Cairo	16/5/16
17/5/16		ASL for duty 17/5/16	Cairo	17/5/16
18/5/16		ASL for duty 18/5/16	Cairo	18/5/16
19/5/16		ASL for duty 19/5/16	Cairo	19/5/16
20/5/16		ASL for duty 20/5/16	Cairo	20/5/16
21				

Posted back to Alexandria in February 1917, then Cairo in June where he suffered a relapse with a fever (Pyrexia) then Malaria before being discharged on the 14th August 1917. Back to Alexandria in August for a week before returning to Cairo. Posted again in June 1918 to Kandara, admitted again to hospital with influenza on the 4th September 1918 being discharged on the 11th. He must have been in a bad way as he is sent home for three weeks compassionate leave on the 25th February 1919 embarking on the SS Kashgar in Port Said.



The SS Kashgar

George Dawson Casualty Form 4

This form is a summary of his service, in six short comments it shows: Attested 16th October 1915
 Joined 17th October 1915 Embarked 5th November 1915 Alexandria 26th November 1915
 Southampton 11th March 1919 Grove Park 14th April 1919

George Dawson rations issue

Here he has been given 21 days Ration Allowance this would be because he would not be fed by the army and was responsible for feeding himself.

George Dawson conduct sheet

The above form shows his misdemeanours, he should have asked permission to be absent!

Period of employment	Unit	How employed and general ability	Signature of S.O.
1. 2-17	12. 8-17	1st Cavalry Div (Hawaii) by special order	Alonso Capt. A.S.C.
12/18/17	6. 6-17	Base 207 4th S. I. C.	Alonso Capt. A.S.C.
6-6-17	23-10-17	1st Cavalry Div	Alonso Capt. A.S.C.
23-10-17	16-2-18	S.O. Adv. B.T. Sub-Inst. Camp	Alonso Capt. A.S.C.
16-2-18	11-4-18	No. 50 SAN. SEC. Hospital	Alonso Capt. A.S.C.
11/1/18	11/1/18	1st Cavalry Div	Alonso Capt. A.S.C.
7-6-18	7-6-18	1st Cavalry Div	Alonso Capt. A.S.C.

George Dawson employment report

A bit of good news re his conduct, came through with good comments. The above form shows the reports from the units he served with and the one below is a statement of his service overall.

ARMY FORM NO. 100 (REV. 1-1-17) 100a 8-1000 Army Form W. 1026

PARTICULARS as to CHARACTER of a Soldier serving with an Expeditionary Force who is not liable for discharge or punishment for any reason. (The form will be signed by the Soldier's Commanding Officer)

No. 1012222 Name George Dawson Regiment 1st Cavalry Div (H. I.)

1. Employment Asst. S. I. C.
2. Sobriety Good
3. Is he reliable? Yes
4. Is he intelligent? Yes
5. Has he shown any special aptitude for particular employment in civil life? Asst. S. I. C.
6. Any other facts regarding him you wish to be noted? None
7. In the case of a Non-Commissioned Officer only: Has he a good power of command and control, and is he entitled to the way of leading men? Yes

Date 11-1-18 Commanding 1st Cavalry Div A.S.C.

George Dawson unit reports

These Photographs of George after his joining the army, the one below shows him posing with an image of his wife Lavinia embedded in the top left corner.



George Dawson with wife Lavina inset.

The two below are of him on active service in Egypt:



George Dawson on active service in Egypt

After the war George handed in all his kit, somehow it was all complete:

Substitute A.F.V. 200.

TRANSFER STATEMENT OF CLOTHING, EQUIPMENT & EQUIPMENTS.

Regtl. No. Rank.

Boots, ankle prs.	1.	
Cap, S.C.	1.	EQUIPMENT
Coat, woolen prs.	1.	
Coat, canvas, 2nd.	1.KIT
Coat, S.P.	1.	
Trousers, S.C. prs.	1.	EQUIPMENTS
Waistcoat, Cardigan.	1.	
Gloves, 2 prs.	1.	KIT complete.
Pullover, S.C. prs.	1.	

I certify that this statement is correct.

Signature of Soldier:
George Dawson
 for Lt. Col. General Commanding
 No. 1 Reserve M.T. Coy 21.

GROUP FILE
 / 1919

George Dawson returns his kit

The next two forms document his service, show his medical classification as "B2" (B2: Labour Service Abroad. B2: Able to walk five miles to and from work, see and hear sufficiently for ordinary purposes.) and transfer to the dispersal centre at Ripon (Casualty forms were routinely used for documenting things at the end of the war).

Table IV - Service Table

Station or Theatre	Date of arrival at station or theatre	Place or Theatre	Date of departure from station or theatre	Date of arrival at station or theatre
	1918/19			
	1919/20			

George Dawson post war documentation

George Dawson post war documentation

Name	From where included	Place of County	Date of departure from station or theatre	Date of arrival at station or theatre
	L. Dispersal Centre Ripon	L. Dispersal Centre Ripon		

George Dawson post war documentation

Other forms issued were his Statement as To Disability (which ensured he could not claim injury at a later date that wasn't recorded here) and a Protection Certificate which identified him and confirmed he was free from service.



George Dawson's Medal Card

After returning home George and Lavinia set up a dairy delivery service in the Leeman Road area of York. Lavinia must have been a bit canny with the house keeping to put a bit by for them to start a business.

Andrew George Henderson

Corporal 17100 Andrew George Henderson, 2nd Field Company Royal Engineers



Andrew enlisted on 21st January 1908 and was serving in Cairo when war broke out. He was referenced by Mr T Rhodes of Huntington, York for whom he worked, presumably as a joiner as this was his role in the Royal Engineers.

His parents were George and Rose Ann Henderson who had married at Alne on 10th December, 1887. George was a policeman, subject to moving about the West Riding, hence Andrew was born in Dewsbury in 1889 although by 1901 he was living on Dringhouses Main Road, the eldest of three children. His parents were living at 12 Milner Street, Acomb in 1911 and George was a Sergeant at Acomb until retirement and moving to Stokesley.

Military records show that Andrew was almost 5' 7" tall, 117 lbs in weight with a fresh complexion, brown eyes and dark brown hair. Aptitude tests showed him to be a fair joiner but on examination at Chatham he was rated as "skilled" and later as "a first class shot". The evidence is that he was called upon to demonstrate both in abundance.

On 22nd August 1914 Andrew was promoted to Lance Corporal but it wasn't to be until 5th November 1914 that he entered active service in France. It was his fate to serve and die on what became known as the "Forgotten Front" of French Flanders, from Loos to the North East of Arras towards

Armentieres and facing the enemy dug into the higher ground overlooking Bethune and protecting Lille.

2nd Field Company was deployed in support of the first major set-piece battle of 1915 involving the BEF, at Neuve Chappelle in March, helping 21st Brigade to dig in and consolidate advances from the South West during the second wave of attack as the Indian Brigades simultaneously attacked from the South. Eventually the village was taken although at great cost and failing in its ambition to seize the higher ground of Aubers Ridge. Subsequently the RE 8th Division, including 2RE was ordered to relieve Canadian Engineers Companies in the line towards Armentieres.

Andrew was granted home leave in the summer of 1915, presumably returning to York and also visiting Stokesley where his grandfather Andrew lived in College Square, aged 84. Unusually for such a low ranked soldier his Major recorded his return on 2nd August in the Battalion Diary. Perhaps the latter was relieved to see Andrew who was promoted on 1st September 1915 to Acting Corporal. By this time the Battalion was deployed at Bac St Maur, facing Fromelles where, in opposition to him, may have been another young Lance Corporal by the name of Hitler. Some idea of the conditions experienced by both men is evident from this extract from the diary. In early August the Battalion was consolidating defences by constructing, dugouts by day and night in support and reserve trenches. By 23rd September "6 AM Daywork 22nd September. Sections tried to work in IRON DUGOUT, but had to give up owing to shrapnel. Nightwork 22/23 Sept. Completing gun emplacements sec 6.R.17 and trench 50. Steel girders placed in IRON DUGOUT. Tested circuit to BRIDOUX CULVERT. 24th Sept. 6AM. Daywork 23rd Sept. Shell hit charge on culvert and broke leads; was not able to fire charge while 8" howitzers were bombarding BRIDOUX FORT AT 10am in consequence. (Night) Leads repaired by night and culvert completely demolished at 8.5 pm."

Later the same day the 8th Division was ordered to attack German trenches from CORNER FORT – BRIDOUX FORT at 4.30 am on 25th Sept led by 25th Infantry Brigade and supported by 2nd and 15th Co's RE who were to consolidate the captured position.

Andrew survived this sort of warfare until 17th March 1916 when his luck ran out. By comparison with earlier entries the diary is almost laconic in its description of the time. Since being redeployed in the area of Bac St Maur in early January the Battalion was engaged in remodelling dugouts and preparing for the demolition of Sailly Bridge. There was work to do;

Remodelling fire line

Repairing revetment of posts

Repairing revetment of communication trenches, and pulling down trench brands

Draining posts.

then on

14/3/16 8 Carpenters and 11 Labourers available

BAC ST MAUR 17/3/16 Company on front system. Usual party of 8RE with infantry in fire trench.

66RE remodelling Reserve line 10 RE on post in Reserve line. 16RE in Reserves. 2 RE Defended

House Disinfecting,

7 RE D.A.R.C., 3 RE erecting trench towers in RA O.P.S.

1 RE in M.O. dugout in front line.

Remainder on trench miscellaneous work (illegible sentence)

Intelligence, snipers house opposite N.H.Q.

BAC ST MAUR 18/3/16 Sniper's house opposite NHQ demolished by 4.5" howitzer. German observers on roof of Fromelles Station....continues...

20.03.16 Infantry refill. 24 hours rest. 6 carpenters available in yard.

From this evidence I have concluded that Andrew was probably sniped whilst undertaking the duties given to 2RE on 17th March 1916. He died of wounds at 22nd Field Ambulance Station on 18th March 1916 and is buried at Saily sur La Lys Canadian Cemetery. His Grandfather Andrew died at almost the same time and his mother in 1920. George remarried a war widow when in his fifties and added three more children to his family which is how I can proudly say that Andrew George Henderson was my Uncle.

Submitted by Gordon Smith, Member of YDFHS

John Baillie Barstow

JOHN BAILLIE BARSTOW
(1872-1914)



John Barstow was the eldest son of Henry and Cecilia Barstow who lived at Hazelbush, in the village of Stockton-on-the-Forest, outside York. There were six children altogether, four boys and two girls. Three of the four boys were officers in the British Army before the First World War. John was killed on the 31st August 1914 less than one month after the start of the First World War, and only five days after he had arrived in France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. This is the story of his last few weeks: his embarkation for France, his march to the Front to join the retreating British Army and an attempted assault on the bridge across the Oise at Bailly to delay the advancing German army. John was reported as wounded and missing in the attack on the bridge. There followed a harrowing period for the family in England when hopes were raised that he might still be alive. Finally the news came through of the recovery of his identity disc, followed by the official report of his death. Shortly afterwards an elderly French woman living in a nearby village gave an account of how she had visited the grave, and had been told how he had been buried by German soldiers. The courtesies observed after he had died were from the pre-war era and would not have survived the mass carnage which followed. Similarly the determined

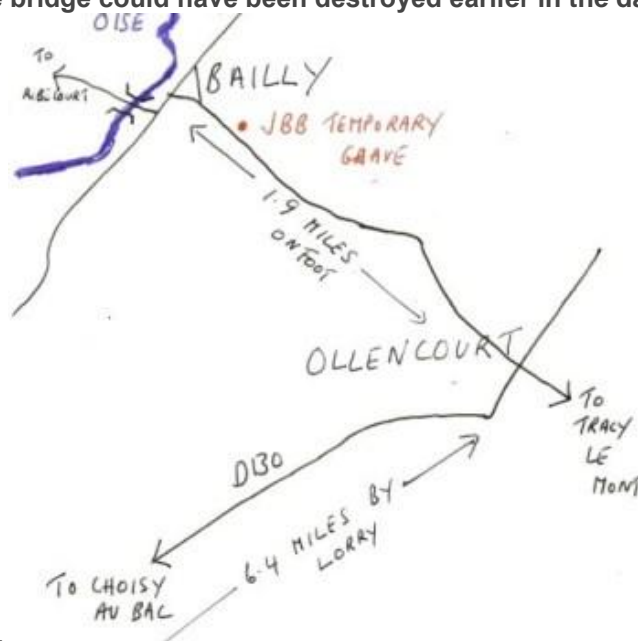
attempt to find out the exact circumstances of John's death was unlikely to have been made if he had been killed later in the war. At the start of the First World War, John Barstow was commanding the 9th Field Company, Royal Engineers. The company was stationed at Woolwich, and the Barstows, with their four children aged between six and six months, lived at Elmhurst, Shrewsbury Lane, Woolwich. The 9th Field Company was attached to the 4th Division who were to form part of the reinforcement to the British Expeditionary Force, the main body of whom were dispatched to France in early August. At the outbreak of war, the 4th Division was based in East Anglia so John proceeded there with his company. John wrote to Ethel, his wife, from Woodbridge, Suffolk on 15th August. The letter referred to the gorgeous weather and went on to ask for suitable clothing: ".....Can you send me the clean thin shirt and collar that I left at Woolwich, it is still too hot to wear flannel, and the other one is split....." The letter ended with the instruction to write subsequent letters to Harrow School, where the division was going prior to embarkation. John wrote to his wife again on the 18th August telling her how he was getting on: "Dear Pesky Your letter addressed to Harrow was given me by Dobbie this morning when we arrived at Kenton Station. I was inoculated for enteric on Sunday, spent all yesterday knocking about, and started last night on a march to Ipswich where we entrained this morning at 5.30. My arm is still a bit sore but otherwise I am feeling no ill effects from the inoculation, which is nothing like as serious as it used to be. We met some very nice people at Woodbridge, a Col. Dyas, late of the Warwickshire, and his wife who gave us supper and baths on Sunday and Monday so we started clean anyhow. Now we are encamped on the football ground at Harrow School. For how long who knows? The arrangements seem rather to indicate a stay of some days, but that may mean nothing. Of course you can come down here. We are in the 11th Bde. Area near Kenton Station, or I suppose better in the football field not far from 'Ducker', the famous Harrow bathing pool. You know how much I would like to see you dearest, but if you feel that you could not bear to say goodbye again, write and tell me. I shall quite understand. I hope the children continue good and are not being demoralized by Nurse. Much love dearest Your John" John's company crossed the channel to Rouen on the 24th August, John reporting to Ethel, in a letter of that day, that "we had a most pleasant voyage, the sea was like a mill pond. The ship was a bit of a tub, and not very clean, but she was not a passenger boat". On arrival there were practically no men left behind in Rouen but, according to John, "the remaining inhabitants waved dusters and shouted Vive L'Angleterre".

In a letter of the 26th August John reported that the company had left its base in Rouen. “I write sitting by the side of a poplar lined road during a halt. The weather has become more unsettled, and we arrived yesterday evening during a thunderstorm which made our bivouac very muddy, but cleared off fortunately before the evening. Today is a little windy with an occasional spot of rain.” This letter was stamped by the censor, as were all the letters from France. It is postmarked 10th September, so this and subsequent letters would not have been received by Ethel until after the news had reached her that John had been reported wounded and missing. By the 26th August, the British Expeditionary Force was in retreat after the battle of Mons. The 9th Field Company, Royal Engineers, marched northwards to meet them. John’s last letter to Ethel was dated 28th August: “My Dearest We had another very tedious march yesterday all mixed up with a mass of train and details but it was not a long one. Unfortunately there were several thunder showers so that standing waiting for blocked transport to move was not very pleasant, and marching along the pavé covered with mud was highly unpleasant. I forget – I did not write about our night march in rain on the evening of the 26th. It was so far a night march that I did not get to bed or rather lie down till midnight, and I think it rained from 5 o’clock on. I expect we shall have showers from now on. Some of the fellows have colds but so far I have escaped. These are very dull letters I am writing and so far there have been none from you but we are continually moving, and we are not with the division which may account for it. You have more news than we have I don’t doubt. Very much love to you dearest – I should like to hear from you and I hope the children are good and well. Give them all hugs from me. Your John Send me a pair of rubber boots when you can. I want them big.” The letters from Ethel to John have not survived but there is a letter from their eldest son, Michael, dated 1st September, which may never have been sent. Dear Father I hope you are getting on nicely in camp. Ever so many soldiers have marched past here. I gave George[1] a book for his birthday. Sometimes we have tea out in the garden with George, and he is very delighted. I hope your men do their work nicely. I wish you were here. Much love from Michael xxxx

THE ASSAULT ON THE BRIDGE AT BAILLY

By the 29th August, John and the 9th Field Company had made contact with the rest of the 4th Division who had crossed to France a few days earlier and therefore missed the battle of Mons. On the 29th, the 4th Division had retreated south of the Oise. Only a rearguard, the 10th Infantry Brigade, remained north of the river. The 9th Field Company and John Barstow were located at Choisy au Bac, just outside Compiègne.

On the 29th August, a section of the 9th Field Company, under Captain Westland, had been instructed to prepare the bridge at Bailly for destruction. This was done, and for the whole of that night and most of the following day the section stood by the bridge awaiting the order to destroy it. However an order then came through from the rearguard, north of the Oise, that the bridge was to be left intact. The explosive charges were, therefore, withdrawn, and the section left the bridge, but did not rejoin the rest of the 9th Field Company until the 31st. Later on the 30th, new orders came from HQ II Corps, of which the 4th Division and the 9th Field Company were a part, to destroy various bridges, including the bridge at Bailly. It was suggested that a cavalry escort was needed. By this time, as it turned out, the bridge at Bailly was already in enemy hands. It was in faithfully carrying out this order, without the benefit of either cavalry or infantry escort, that John lost his life. A subsequent account^[2] of what happened records: "The demolition party ... destined for Bailly, started from camp in a lorry at 9 p.m., to find their way in the dark by unknown roads, to a village they had never seen, to blow up a bridge that had not been reconnoitred by any of the party ... The same account notes, somewhat ruefully, that "the bridge could have been destroyed earlier in the day by Captain Westland without any



trouble".

(Map showing the journey from

Choisy au Bac to the bridge at Bailly) The full story of what was thought to have happened is told in the various accounts of the survivors which reached the family in London in September. In short, during the final stage of the journey to the bridge at Bailly, in the early hours of the 31st August, John's section came under fire from the cyclists of the Guard Jäger.^[3] Initially, the survivors of the attack, on returning to base, reported John as "wounded

and missing". Ethel received a telegram to that effect. "Regret to inform you that Major J B Barstow as reported wounded and missing further information when received will be telegraphed immediately secretary war office" The date of the telegram has now become illegible, but it must have been sent at the beginning of September. Corporal Sullivan, one of the survivors of the attack, although wounded, was interviewed by John's younger brother, George, on the 11th September 1914. George wrote up the account as follows: "Yesterday I saw Corporal Sullivan of the 9th Company, Royal Engineers, at the Herbert Hospital, Woolwich. He was with John in the action in which he fell. His story is as follows: On the 30th August in the evening the Sappers were ordered to blow up four bridges over a river which he believes is the Oise. The place of the British camp was called, he thinks, Choisy. The British force had retreated over the bridges in the course of that day and they were to be blown up to prevent the Germans' further advance. Cavalry and infantry were detailed for the support of the Sappers. A volunteer party of Sappers was got together including John, a Lieutenant of Sappers[4], a Sergeant, two Corporals and two others, besides two members of the Army Service Corps, one a Lieutenant in charge of a motor lorry. They loaded up with explosives but when they proceeded to try to find the infantry and cavalry detailed to act with them they were nowhere to be found. Finally the Major (John) said that they must go on and try to blow up the bridges without support. They accordingly motored down the road. The distance was apparently fifteen miles from Choisy and seven from the British outposts. On their way they had a narrow escape, stampeding a party of Uhlans.[5] When they reached the village which he thinks is called Bayette,[6] they left the motor lorry and proceeded two miles in single file down the road carrying the explosives. This was about 2.30 in the morning. He thinks that the German sentry must have let them pass by, for presently they found the Germans in force. He saw the Major in front struggling with one. Presently he ran back shouting to them to take cover and they lay down by the side of the road, and the Major opened fire upon the enemy. He has no idea how long this went on, but he was hit by a ricochet in the eye, and crossed over the road and found himself lying next to the Major. The enemy fired a volley and he heard the Major give a groan and he was hit. He never stirred afterwards and the Corporal undoubtedly thinks he was shot dead. Presently the Lieutenant called out they must retire so as to get away with the explosives. They called again and again to the Major and to Corporal Stone[7] but neither answered. Of the five that got away three were wounded, one in the leg, one through

both hands and himself in the eye. He had lost the sight of one eye. They got safely back to camp and John was reported, wounded and missing. The enemy advanced over the bridges on the following day and a battle was fought. Undoubtedly John would have been picked up if alive and I hope he has been taken care of. He may of course only have been rendered unconscious, so there is still a glimmer of hope.” Lieutenant Fishboune’s account^[8] of what happened is broadly similar but gives more detail as to why John, a senior officer, was in the bridge blowing party: “...we had to go some 8 or 9 miles beyond our outpost line with country presumed to be occupied by the cavalry ... of the advancing German army. The infantry escort not turning up Major Barstow insisted on coming with me as he considered that there should be two officers in the party. He could not be persuaded from coming.” Corporal Stone’s account provides some additional details. He explained that the reason why the party proceeded on foot was that the headlights of the lorry failed. He said that during the approach to Bailly the officers of the party were on the left-hand side of the road in single file^[9] and the NCOs and men on the right, also in single file. REPORTS OF JOHN’S DEATH In mid-September, following the Battle of the Marne, the French and British armies again advanced northwards, and Bailly was re-taken. On the 18th September, a French field ambulance recovered John’s identity disc and cap badge reporting as follows Couden 18th September, 1914. NOTE. Cette plaque d’indentite a laquelle on a joint une insigne provenante vraisemblablement de la coiffure, ont etc remises a la. S.C. 13me C.A. par Th 25me Div. Ces objects ont été trouve’s a Bailly sur la personne d’un Major Anglais qui a ete tue (il y a environ 10 jours). A remettre, a l’officier de liason du Corps Britannique. Couden le 18 Sept. 1914 L’Officier de service Leriquin The identity disc and cap badge were forwarded to the Secretary, War Office, on 25th September, but in the meantime the discovery of these items enabled the War Office to confirm that John had been killed. A telegram to this effect was received by Ethel on the 22nd. On the 23rd September this was followed up by a telegram from Buckingham Palace: “The King and Queen deeply regret the loss you and the army have sustained by the death of your husband in the service of his country. Their Majesties truly sympathise with you in your sorrow” There were numerous letters of condolence. Those preserved by Ethel included letters from John’s father, Henry Barstow, his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Jones, some officers who had served with him in India and George, his brother. The following is an extract from George’s letter. “I am sending you a draft of an acknowledgement of Their

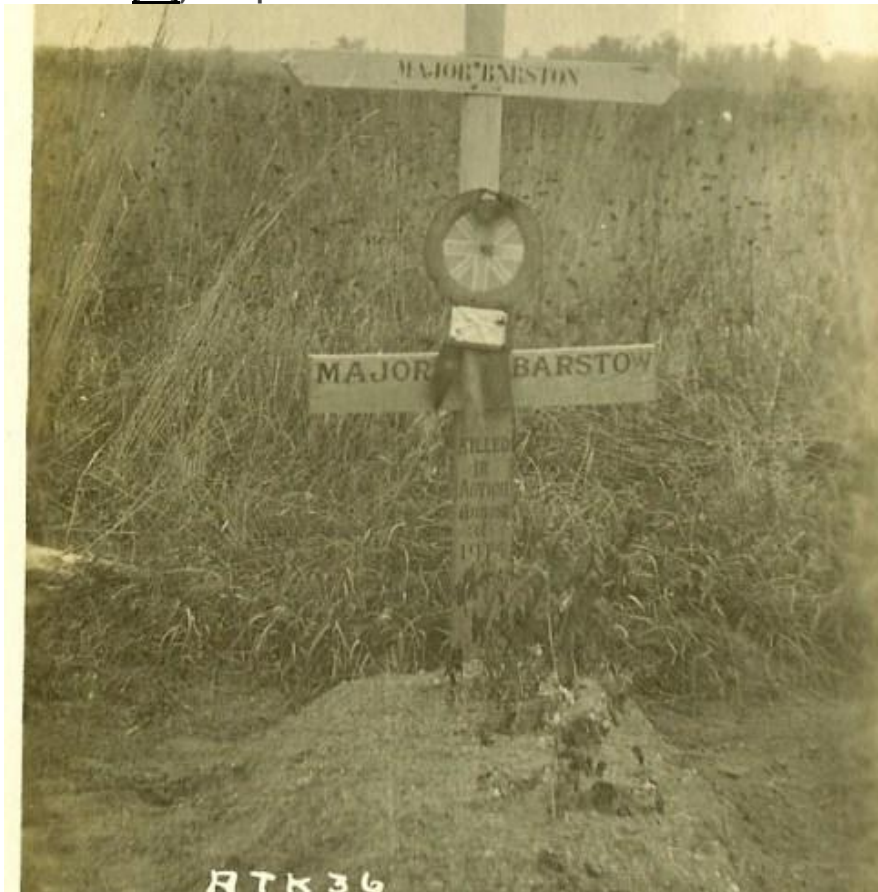
Majesties' telegram. Address reply to HM the King, Buckingham Palace. I can hardly even now fully make up my mind to accept as final and irrevocable the news but I know we must now give up hope except for a miracle, and number poor John among the many heroes who have given their lives for their country. One realizes how freely and ungrudgingly he gave it, and what a noble death it is to be killed in the fullness of his strength, and at a moment of rare excitement, such excitement as makes life worth living and death worth dying. I can hardly feel sorry for him, deeply as I mourn him. I should like to tell you too, if I felt able, how warmly I admired his character, and how sincerely I loved him. He was a man of all I have ever seen the most modest and retiring and least given to heroics. One feels that if he had cared to push himself, he would have earned and won the recognition he deserved; but that was not his way, and he was happier in his unselfish and unswerving devotion to duty, rightly so I think for the honours of this world seemed to have no attraction for him, and he would always be ready to yield the pride of place to others. But in abilities and interests he was of the front rank. You know, I hope, that you have my deep sympathy in your sorrow, and that you can always command me if I can be useful to you in any way and to the children. They will be an interest and a consolation to you." Even after the confirmation of John's death, George, as can be seen from his letter, and probably Ethel, still hoped for a miracle. It, therefore, must have been very stressful for Ethel to receive a letter from Lieutenant Fishbourne dated 2nd October 1914, still serving with the 9th Field Coy., in which he continued to assert that John had not been killed: "I personally do not for one moment assume that he was killed and I have every hope that he was only wounded and picked up an hour later by the German picket ... a Lt. Jury^[10] of some territorial regiment told me that he was next to Major Barstow and that he was hit and I think there is every probability that the major was knocked out by a bullet..... .. I should not for one moment accept Corp. Sullivan's belief – men always think that anyone hit is dead and there have been so many cases out here of people unofficially reported as killed turning out to be wounded and prisoners. ... I myself confidently believe that the major will turn up again all right and I am anxious that you should by no means give up hope." Later that month further confirmation was received of John's death, and how and where he was buried, in a letter from a resident in a village near Bailly. The French woman had written to her cousin in England who had passed the contents of the letter on to the War Office: "I enclose an extract from a letter^[11] I have today received from a cousin of mine, an elderly lady who has resided for

many years with her sister at Tracy-le-mont, Nr. Compiègne. Major Barstow X.31 shot by the Germans on Aug. 31st at the outskirts of the village of Bailly, Oise and was buried by the roadside. This may be absolutely depended upon, because hearing that an English soldier had been shot I myself walked for 3 miles to Bailly. At the first house I made enquiries and the woman told me “ the Germans were here in my front garden and they shot him at that post there over the way.[12] Then they borrowed my spade, made a shallow grave and laid him in. They took my washing plank, broke it in two, nailed it in the form of a cross and with a knife engraved on the cross, Major Barstow x31. They wound his silk neckerchief about the cross and said ‘Vous mettez des fleurs’. I asked to be taken to the grave which was in the middle of a field adjoining the house about 10 yards from the roadside. The village having been taken and re-taken no trace may be left but the friends and relations of Major Barstow might feel relieved to know his fate. Signed Marie Raban”

ETHEL BARSTOW’S POST WAR VISIT TO BAILLY

In 1917, a fresh cross was erected on the grave by the British Army, and on the 11th March 1918, the Director of Graves Registration, on enquiry from George, wrote to him stating that the grave was: “On the left hand side of the road going from Bailly to Tracy Le Mont, 5 yds. from the road and 50 yds. from the last house in Bailly” Later that year, Ethel was sent an official photograph of the grave. In July 1919, Ethel decided to travel to France to see for herself where her husband had been killed and where he was buried. She was accompanied by a Mlle. Ruamps, who had come down from Liverpool specially. Ethel kept a notebook of the visit. On the visit to John’s grave, she recorded: “On Saturday morning I went to Compiègne and on to Bailly to find John’s grave, the journey was most interesting. We went by car from Compiègne, we saw on the way several villages that had been greatly damaged and one town that had been burnt by the Germans before they were driven out. Compiègne is rather damaged by shellfire, and after leaving it we went by the road and crossed the Aisne at Choisy au Bac. The river looked lovely and then we drove through the Forêt de L’Aigle. On all sides there were signs of the soldiers having been there: shelters in the woods, barbed wire in quantities between the trees and strong blockhouses made of wood. We then came to Ollencourt, the houses still standing but nearly all merely shells and greatly tumbled down. Here and there people were beginning to creep back and were living in the ruins of their houses or in dugouts. There were 2 or 3 wooden huts built by the government for families but they must gradually pay for them themselves as the government gives no compensation for all

the damage done. Most of the village's gardens and fields were overgrown with tall rank grass, weeds and wild flowers but here and there owners had returned to reclaim a little plot. We got out at Ollencourt and walked to Bailly, about ½ a mile,^[13] ruins and a wilderness on every side. The road is a long straight one down which the party of sappers who were to blow up the bridge would have travelled, carrying the explosives. We soon came to the place. Along one side of the road are the old 1914 trenches all overgrown, and at the other side on the right as you enter the village and just before coming to the first house is the grave, with that of a French soldier beside it. It is beautifully neatly kept, cleared of weeds. There is a shell hole a few yards to one side. The cross is slightly damaged by shellfire but the name – (spelt wrong BARSTON^[14]) – is quite clear and the date.



There is a little opening

from the grave to the road and across the road are several French graves in a little square of ground – very neat. We walked through the rest of the village, all ruined, not many stones of the church still standing and the cemetery a complete wreck, many graves shattered by shells and all in confusion and a great contrast to the military graves and very pathetic. There are crowds of German prisoners in the place, I suppose trying to rebuild the houses and fill in the trenches. We passed several parties of them going to work after their midday meal and I was

thankful that I was not alone. They all have P.G. – Prisonniers de Guerre on the back of their coats and some have it on the seat of their trousers too. I expect they look round in satisfaction at what they have done, but, at any rate, I am glad that they have to live in the ruined houses and dugouts and hope that they are thoroughly uncomfortable.” Later, John’s body was moved to the Noyon New British Cemetery. Reference number IV.B.5. Ethel wrote to her relation Goddard Orpen in 1920 about a suitable inscription. His extremely tentative suggestion was: “He fell when advancing to destroy a bridge in the face of the oncoming foe.” And below it, a quotation from Wordsworth “A noble aim faithfully kept is as a noble deed” The quotation from Wordsworth appears at the base of the gravestone. At the top is the insignia of the Royal Engineers and below the insignia is the simple inscription: MAJOR J B BARSTOW ROYAL ENGINEERS 31st AUGUST 1914 AGE 41 [1] His brother George had his second birthday on 29th August 1914. [2] Royal Engineers’ Journal June 1932. [3] This reference to the Guard Jäger is on the authority of the German historian, Vogel. [4] Lt Fishbourne, whose account follows. [5] German mounted troops. [6] There is no nearby village called Bayette. It is probable that the village where the party disembarked was Ollencourt, which is about 1.9 miles from Bailly. [7] Cpl. Stone survived but was captured by the Germans, and remained in captivity throughout the war. In 1918 he was interviewed by George. He was able to dispel a continuing concern of Ethel’s that John had been captured alive by the Germans, and shot by them. Cpl. Stone also wrote to Ethel in September 1918, mostly about troubles with his wife, but providing some additional information on the events of 30th/31st August 1914. [8] Letter to George dated 25th September 1914. [9] It is likely that John was the leading officer. [10] Presumably the lieutenant in charge of the lorry. [11] Letter dated 10th October 1914 [12] The phrasing in the letter may have given rise to Ethel’s fear, albeit mistaken, that John had first been wounded and then killed in cold blood by the Germans. See also footnote 18.[13] The actual distance from Ollencourt to Bailly is 1.9 miles. [14] The photograph shows two crosses. The lower cross was the one erected in 1917 by the British army. Submitted by Christopher Barstow, Member of YDFHS

First World War ancestors: Harry Kington’s story – an update (2016)

First World War ancestors: Harry Kington's story - an update (2016) By Paul Gliddon, member of York Family History Society My grandfather, Harry (Henry Arthur) Kington left notes and

newspaper cuttings from his First World War service in the 12th Battalion, London Regiment. I used these sources in an account of his experiences, posted on York Family History Society's website (see the society's World War One project: posting on *The Kingtons of Woolwich, England*).



A page from Harry's World War One diary

However, the story had a gap between late 1916 (when Harry's notes ended) and 1919 (when he was demobbed). But this short update shows how the gap can now be filled. When I first researched Harry's story, I had a copy of his World War One medal index card (found via The National Archives and Ancestry websites). This showed service with the 12th Battalion, London Regiment, service number 2742, which matched the information that Harry himself left. However, the card also showed a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps and then the Royal Air Force, service number 407339. I enquired about a service record. But a response from the RAF said that 407339 was not Harry/Henry Arthur Kington. Kington is not a rare name, and military records can contain mistakes, so I assumed that that the medal record had mistakenly combined two servicemen named Kington. It looked like a dead end. Since then, though, thousands of RAF service records have been released via the Findmypast website. Among them is a record for 407339 Henry Arthur Kington, and this is definitely my grandfather. The reason for the RAF's wrong response remains a mystery. Nonetheless, the record - although sketchy - has helped me to complete Harry Kington's story and find out a few more interesting things. Wider reading (shown below) about the RFC and RAF has also helped here. Harry was posted to the Royal Flying Corps in France, as an aeroplane rigger, in September 1917. His unit was difficult to read, but appeared to be 1 ASD or something similar. Sources showing how the RFC and RAF were organised (see 'Main sources', below) narrowed down the possibility to Number 1 Aeroplane Supply Depot at St Omer, France, where Harry seems to have remained until 1919. Enquiries via the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon discerned that aeroplane riggers in World War One worked on the metal struts and wooden casings of the aircraft. As for the reasons for the posting, Harry's medical assessment showed he was well short of A1 (he'd recovered from war wounds, sustained at Ypres with the 12th Battalion, London Regiment). This would have ruled out a return to the trenches. Also, he had been apprenticed as a carpenter before 1914, so he would have been well equipped to work, after some training, as a rigger. As for the timing of the posting, September 1917 was a significant month. Earlier that year the Royal Flying Corps had suffered huge aeroplane losses on the Western Front. By September the RFC was heavily occupied in bombing missions and aerial combat around Passchendaele. That month, the Allies' two Aeroplane Supply Depots in France 'worked non-stop' to supply over 1000 aeroplanes to the frontline squadrons (Barker, *The Royal Flying Corps in World War I*, 2002). In short, we can see that Harry was posted with the right skills to the right place at the right time. The *Official History* of the RFC and RAF in World War One neatly summarises the Aeroplane Supply Depots' vital role in the war. From 1915 onwards, the two depots in France sufficed to supply 'the whole Flying Corps in the West' (Jones, *The War In The Air*, 1928). They received and forwarded all new aircraft from Britain and France, supplied stores, manufactured fittings, and maintained and repaired aeroplanes, balloons, and related transport and accessories. Only engine repairs, and minor repairs to aeroplanes, were carried out elsewhere. In 1918 Harry Kington was transferred to the RAF. The RAF Museum informed me that

he was recruited to the RAF on the first day it was formed - he appeared on the RAF Muster Roll, 1 April 1918 as an air mechanic 3rd class. His service record shows that he was demobbed in 1919 with a small temporary pension, apparently related to his wounds from Ypres. Harry's experiences after the war, as well as his notes and newspaper cuttings about life in the London Regiment during 1915-16, appear in the original item (mentioned above) posted on York Family History Society's website. Once again it has been very pleasing to link an ancestor's exploits to the wider picture of the war.



Harry and Doris Kington

Main sources

1. Barker (2002) *The Royal Flying Corps in World War I*, London: Robinson.
1. A. Jones (1928) *The War In The Air: Being the Story of the part played in the Great War by the Royal Air Force*, vol. 2, Oxford: Clarendon.*

1. Tomaselli (2007) *Tracing Your Air Force Ancestors*, Barnsley: Pen and Sword.

Military service records and medal index cards on The National Archives, Findmypast and Ancestry websites: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk www.findmypast.co.uk www.ancestry.co.uk Family correspondence and other papers were also used. The books by Jones and Tomaselli above give the orders of battle for the RFC and the RAF. Even though more online material has become available since it was published, Tomaselli's book is a 'must' for anyone interested in air force ancestors. *Part of the *Official History* of the RFC and RAF in World War One (series authors: Sir Walter Raleigh [!! Apparently this is not an unusual name] and H. A. Jones). **Acknowledgements** Special thanks are owed to:

- Paul Thomas-Peter, Jo Hyndman and Yvonne Clarke of York Family History Society.
- The Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon.

Appendix Two pictures are available, showing:

- Harry and Doris Kington (thought to be an engagement photograph).
- A page from Harry's World War One diary.

World War I – Experiences of Herbert Nicholson

Submitted by Audrey Nicholson, Membership no.1752. This is put together using a large number of letters sent by Herbert which came into Audrey's possession quite recently.

When war broke out in 1914, a lot of young men volunteered for the Army thinking the war would be over by Christmas. They suffered enormous losses, and 1915 did not seem to be promising peace any time soon either! My father-in-law Herbert Nicholson was seriously thinking of enlisting, but that is as far as he got until 21st October 1915 when, like many other young men of his age, he received a

letter from Lord Derby, inviting him to enlist. A few weeks later a “canvasser” would call. If the candidate said that he would enlist, he received a card stamped “enlisting” to take to a recruitment centre for attestation, with the usual form filling we now take for granted everywhere! These attestations were often held in pubs, in his case it was The Exhibition. A doctor was also on hand to examine the recruit, although not absolutely necessary as the recruit would get a thorough medical when he actually joined up. They were then divided into numbered groups. These group numbers were published in all the newspapers as they came up for call-up. Herbert was attested on 11th December 1915, thereby becoming “a Derby man”. This date also became his enlisting date. The men came away from attestation with payment of 2s.9d. to compensate them for time taken off work to attend. They were also given the privilege of choosing their Regiment when the time came to join up. They had a special armband to wear till joining up. When Herbert’s group came up he was due to report somewhere on 20th March 1916. He had decided to join the Royal Field Artillery, although he had no experience with horses, purely because his future brother-in-law sang the praises of the RFA. So he reported at Ripon. All too soon reality kicked in! 1st April 1916 he got his first taste of horses when he was on picket duty, described by him as follows:

“I was warned for picket duty and had to fall in at 5.45 p.m. My word, I don’t want any more picket. It means standing guard over horses and attending to their wants. If a sheet falls off the back of one of the horses we have to put it back on, and I had 57 horses to attend to. At 9.45 p.m. we had 170 horses to feed, in the dark except for a candle and I can tell you it was some job! “I went on again at midnight until 2 a.m. It was pitch dark and the din was terrific. The horses are ranged each side of some corrugated iron and they kicked and kicked, chains rattled and one or two broke loose. It was all very strange to me. At 4 a.m. we had to feed them again and then cleaning them out. Work till 6.30 a.m. then Orderly in the hut again (the Orderly was responsible for Army property in the hut and had to try and stop any thefts as they also had many visitors to the camp. Orderlies were also excused drill, which they knew anyway). “The drivers have most to do with the horses, but they are not supposed to do pickets or guards. The gunners have to go through a course in the riding school and they also come into contact with the horses when the guns are taken out for practice. I have already had a taste of that! I was out for 3 hours. My word, they did gallop those guns around, over little rises in the ground, over big stones etc., sometimes turning a corner almost on one wheel, while the gunners have to hang on as best they can. We are supposed to have blankets to sit on, but we had none and sitting on iron with nails sticking up for 3 hours was not very comfortable. I was pretty sore, but one can get used to anything!”

Food, he says, was not very good at Ripon:

“Sometimes we get biscuits for breakfast and tea. Hard ones at that. I had to break mine with my heelplate. One day we got 1 slice of bread and some German Duck for breakfast and when some of the men complained, we got another half a slice per person”!

The middle of May was very hot for drilling. On a lighter note, at the end of May 1916 he wrote:

“I was on hospital guard and found it rather amusing. One of our chaps was taken ill whilst on draft leave before going to France, and had returned late. He was put under guard in the guardroom where he was taken ill again and transferred to our hut. You will be surprised to hear that it takes three men and a bombardier to guard one man in bed!!

(Bombardier – a gunner in the Artillery corresponding to Lance Corporal in the Army – originally in charge of a bombard). Route marches were the order of the day once a week – 10 or 12 miles usually on a Tuesday. On a Sunday they were marched from the camp to Ripon Cathedral for Sunday Service – and back again, regardless of the weather – which suggests that the camp was not too far out of Ripon. **And so to Seaton Delavel.** Around 18th June 1916, 400 RFA gunners were suddenly, without warning, transferred to Seaton Delavel in Northumberland. The food here was worse – they got one potato, some meat and beans for dinner. No pudding and no mess tins either, so they had to

wait for some chaps to finish their meal first!! They are accommodated under canvas and when it rains they all get wet, as there are 13 men to a tent. But they could have weekend passes, but had to pay 9s. when their pay was only 3s.6d a week. This seems to have caused some dissatisfaction, so some RFA men wrote to their officer setting out their grievances. They were promptly told off for their presumption (it was not allowed to write to an officer, although the officer in question appears to have tried to help them!) I don't suppose any of these recruits were aware of the hardships they would face in France, and were probably still missing home life. Meanwhile drilling and route marches went on. He mentioned one to Killingworth and one to Blyth. Although they would march 22 km, more than 15 miles, in France. In the middle of August a number of RFA men were transferred to the East Yorkshire Regiment, given new Regimental numbers and moved at the end of August. They had been at Seaton Delavel for two and a half months. **And so to Withernsea**, which was a permanent training camp (6th Battalion) for EYR throughout WWI. He wrote:

"Over 900 men have arrived in the last week. It is the real Army here, a regular battalion and much stricter too. The men in detention are surrounded by barbed wire. The food is slightly better here". 2nd September: "There was a Zeppelin raid last night at night. We were turned out at 10.30 p.m. to a country road, 1 and a half miles away, where we laid down on the road till 3 a.m. The following day there was a report in the newspapers that one Zeppelin was brought down near London".

1st December 1916 Zeppelins hit a house in Fountayne Street, round the corner from where his family lived. He was delighted when he was chosen to go to Strensall for two weeks rifle practice, hoping to go and see his family in York; but there were no weekend passes, could only go at their own expense and had to be back by 11.30 p.m. There was also a course on bombing (no details given).

And now to France.

2nd December 1916 saw him leave Withernsea bound for France. The following day they sailed from Folkestone to Boulogne where, on arrival, they had to climb a hill 5 or 6 times the height of Whitwell. Next day they had to descend and march to the station for a short train ride in box cars or similar en route to Etaples, their Base throughout WWI, where there was more training, or guarding German PoWs, and a spell in the camp Police, before actually going up to the front. 9th or 10th April 1917 was his first time "in the line", where the new arrivals were put on stretcher bearing and carrying ammunition up the line, but they still came under fire! He says the villages they passed through to get to the fighting were all razed to the ground with barely a wall left standing and, for good measure, the wells were all poisoned by the retreating Germans. When their relief from the front came after 4 days they had to march about 5 miles behind the line in a snowstorm. Weather was not a consideration; orders were orders. Upon arrival they had to rig up sleeping arrangements as best they could. In June, probably after heavy rain, they encountered a lot of mud, feet were stuck in the mud and had to be dragged out one foot at a time, whilst in other parts they were knee deep in clay and mud, heavy clay at that. On a long march he collapsed, and was rewarded with pack drill for a week every afternoon for one hour, as an example to others. Before joining up he had worked in an office, not used to marching or even walking a lot, although he was an enthusiastic member of a cycling club – but we don't know which one! The time "in" gradually grew longer until, towards the end of 1918, he told his Mother that he had just come out after 42 days in the trenches. As the war dragged on and conditions got muddier, "Trench Foot" was very prevalent, due to permanently wet feet, wet socks and wet boots. For this they were usually given "Condy's fluid" which helped for a short time but was not a cure. Another favourite Army remedy was "Chlorodyne" for all stomach problems. 5th May 1917, Herbert, behind the lines on his way back from returning empty Dixies to the cooks, got hit in the face by one of four whizzbangs, which exploded in front of him (whizzbangs were a low velocity shell which came silently giving no warning). He just managed to turn his face to the left at the last moment, but still got hit on the right hand side of his face. One tiny shrapnel remained in his right ear for the rest of his life, deemed too dangerous to remove. He was then in the 5th Battalion, EYR. He spent the rest of

May – in various Convalescent Depots and returned to his unit to find all his kit gone and himself soon back in the trenches – in borrowed kit, I assume! A birthday parcel also disappeared!

Sunday 1st July – at night out with a wiring party Monday 2nd July – patrol at night Tuesday 3rd July – patrol at night Wednesday 4th July – in bivouacs (behind the lines?)

This spell of duty brought trouble. He found himself “on the peg”, accused of not going out on patrol on the Tuesday night. He was in fact out, but lost contact with the rest of his party in the pitch dark. As he searched for the others and could not shout for them, he returned to the starting point and, luckily for him, was challenged by the sentry, who counted him into the camp. Nevertheless, a Court Martial followed!

Court Martial

It meant that he was now under guard or “arrested” and had to sleep in the guardroom every night, but – he was allowed out to join the trenches parties quite regularly whilst he was under arrest. However, he had to report to the guardroom upon return. It looks as if, for the first time, he welcomed going into the trenches, because he had had more freedom and could at least smoke, which was denied in the guardroom! A written statement was taken from both sides. It was not absolutely necessary for him to appear at his Court Martial, but then the Army did not always inform the soldier quickly of their decision, either!! I don't think he ever knew the exact date of his “trial” but he was not told until 3rd August 1917, when he came out of the trenches, that he had been acquitted. Pay of 3s.6d a week was of course stopped whilst he was in “clink”. But it was worse for his Mother in York who was also stripped of her weekly allowance, she a widow with two dependants, so she too had a tough time, apart from worrying about her son. Wiring was done in No-man's Land after dark. Everything had to be carried in. If it was a large coil of barbed wire it was carried by 2 people, a stick through the middle. If a small coil it would be carried by 1 person. But they also had to carry all their tools as well. If “Fritz” (Germans) thought there was something going on, he would send up some starlights, which would last about 30 to 45 seconds. During that time, the work party would have to be absolutely still in whatever position they were in when the lights went up. No matter how uncomfortable their position was. Any movement and the German machine guns and/or snipers were in action, till the starlights died out. In and out of the trenches, 9 or 10 days at a time or more, 2 days out and back in until they were in for 2 or 3 weeks. If they came under heavy or sustained fire, food could not be got to them, so they went without, sometimes for 2 or 3 days. I think they survived on biscuits or cake sent from home. Time dragged on and towards the end of the year, when he had been in France 12 months, he finally got his leave. He just made it to York in time for Xmas, arriving late on 24th December 1917, to the delight of his family, fiancée and friends. It must have seemed peaceful to him after the relentless gunfire. But, at the end of his leave, he still had to return to France! He allowed only his brother to see him off (and his brother nearly cried). Herbert could not cope with the possible tears of the womenfolk. He found it hard enough to go back to the fighting, but back he went in early January 1918. By the same route as the year before, but this time by paddleboat and – he says – when they got to Boulogne they had to climb that same horrible hill again, only now in snow and frozen snow. They were sliding all over the place, one step forward and two back, it seems. They had a few hours at the top and were given a meal, after which they descended again, in by now pouring rain, slithering all over in pitch dark, falling a lot. He wrote:

“I cannot vouch for the language – oh dear the language I heard”

(at least colourful, perhaps?). After a train journey in box cars and cattle truck, ironically described as “the usual first class carriages”!, and some more marching, they reached their Base, to be told that they were for the front the next morning. His second year in France seems

to have been worse for him. He missed his family and York and at times despaired of the war finishing any time soon. But he had to settle down as best he could in the circumstances. So up to the front in a snowstorm and two days of snow. Most of these two days were spent in shovelling snow out of the trenches. Then – rain – working parties at night, carrying parties during the day, in very muddy conditions, so often mud, another hazard. In one letter he explains that, when they have been in the line four days, they are usually withdrawn a mile or so in “support lines, in reserve”. It is often safer at the front than in reserve as they tend to come in for more shelling. Another time he talks about the Germans coming silently over the top into their line and hand to hand fighting resulting in the enemy fleeing. He does not mention if there were any casualties on either side. The censor would have deleted that, anyway. In February 1918, York held a Tank Week, when a tank was displayed in York and money raised from the public to pay for more tanks. These tank weeks were held all around the country, with towns and cities vying with their neighbours to raise more money than them. In and out of the trenches. But Easter 1918 seems by all accounts to have been a pleasant one. The weather was fine and they were out for a rest. They were some way behind the lines in a pleasant and green village that had not been ravaged by war. He could not tell them at home where it was. They enjoyed the peace and quiet of it without constant gunfire. During their stay some of them went to a local café for a coffee, sat down at a table and had a Rowntree’s tin on their table. A new arrival to their outfit, a Lance Corporal, sat down and introduced himself with the words: “You belong to York?” They gossiped about folks back home that they knew. It transpired that this stranger was in fact Herbert’s fiancée’s cousin, who Herbert had not met before. This meeting must have been around the 4th or 5th of April. 25th April 1918 – Herbert was stretcher bearing and sheltering for a while under a piece of corrugated iron, when the blast from an exploding bomb lifted him bodily and blew him into a shell hole full of water and various gasses (mustard, blue gas and others). He found himself up to the neck in water. The chap on his right was blown about 10 feet away and was killed. The chap on his left was unmarked and told Herbert to put his hands up, and pulled him out. He was in that hole for perhaps 1 minute, he says, but in his wet uniform for 12 hours before he got to hospital and later to various Convalescent Depots. He had to surrender all he had with him, clothes, tobacco pouch, etc., which were destroyed for fear of contamination. It was during this time that he wrote the only letter home in ink (because it was provided) and was a rare luxury. All

his other letters are written in faded pencil on, by now faded, paper. Herbert was posted missing on the 25th April, as was his new-found cousin to be. The Lance Corporal was wounded and taken prisoner, and finished the war a prisoner in Germany. In a letter home he explains the various classifications at the Convalescent Depots he was at. If a man on arrival is fit he is marked A and shipped back to his unit at the first opportunity. If he is marked G at their weekly examination, that means Games. If he is marked MB that means he has to go before a Medical Board for assessment, resulting usually in their papers marked ACTIVE, after which they are sent back to their Base, ready for the front again. He lost all his kit again. This was a frequent occurrence to all of them. He had been posted missing, so the others shared his belongings amongst them, a common practice, so he had nothing left except what he was given at the hospital, as everything was either confiscated and destroyed or shared out. In one letter he tells of a yarn that if they took their objectives they would 2 weeks out of the fighting. They were successful, but had a mere 24 hours out before going back in! Apparently this happened time and time again, with all sorts of promises, even 2 months rest, but this never happened. Herbert explains in another letter to his Mother, later on, that he is part of a nucleus party, which means that every time the Battalion goes out on a stunt so many men are left out and sent a little way back until the stunt is over, and then they rejoin their unit. This was done so that there were some men left to represent the Battalion in the event of it being wiped out. In the meantime, the nucleus party welcomed a little rest! Sometime in 1918 Herbert learned about Proficiency Pay of 3d. a day extra pay after 2 years service. When he made enquiries, he was told that he did not qualify for it. The Army had not given him credit for 20 months he served in the Royal Marine Light Infantry between 1902-1904. His family had to take his discharge papers to the Pay Office, with the strict instruction not to let the document out of their possession. He does not say which P.O., but it could have been in Park Grove School where there was a Pay Office for at least part of WWI. The papers proved that he had qualified for the extra pay in July 1917 and not April 1918, as the Army insisted. Later letters do not say if he got all the arrears or if part of it was paid out to his Mother. He had to fight for it, though. In some letters he says that they have been hard at it and sending "Jerry" homewards. He did not describe one of the big battles they were in (Epihy) but simply advised his family to read the papers again on or around 18th September 1918, when they took a lot of prisoners, some as young as 16, who seemed keen to surrender. They also had a good haul of guns. Their

Battalion got a special mention. Letters from home were apparently not censored, and some were returned to sender marked “whereabouts unknown” etc. They are often very helpful in dating battles such as Passchendaele (1914 spelling), now Passendale, Ypres, Kemmel as well as Epihy, all mentioned in returned letters. The East Yorkshire Regiment seems to have been very active and sustained great losses, according to Everard Wyrell in his book of EYR in 1914-1918. There are also a number of maps in this book. I found it invaluable. He had one more spell in hospital in France and was in Trouville on Armistice Day. He described how the French people celebrated with torchlight processions, gleefully telling everyone “the war is over” in English and in French. Torchlight was important after 4 years of lights out. Flags, hidden during the war, were now flying openly everywhere. Herbert’s war was over as were his days of fighting and, often, stretcher bearing. He returned to their Base where now, instead of drill, they were taught some new dances – Canadian Barn Dance, the Butterfly Waltz, etc. What a lovely frivolous change from fighting and gunfire! 21st December 1918 he arrived back in York and presented himself at his former office, when he learned that Heads of Department were having tea at Terry’s, to which he was invited and which he says was a classy show – silver, lot of knives and forks and wine glasses too! Must have seemed strange after roughing it in France for 2 years. He was officially demobilised from Ripon in February 1919 and told his reserve Depot was Clipstone. He returned to the office in Micklegate, to the firm where he had worked for 10 years before joining up. When in later years his sons asked what he had done during the war, he always spun them a yarn about having had a parrot in the trenches, and they believed him, as children do, but never anything about the fighting. How they all suffered for our freedom. In WWII he joined the Home Guard.

First World War ancestors: the Kingtons of Woolwich, England

Submitted by Paul Gliddon, member of York Family History Society

My grandfather and his two brothers, from the Kington family of Woolwich, England served in the First World War. They left various papers telling of their experiences before, during and after the war. These papers, followed up with other research, are used in the stories below. The main points of interest are found in the stories of Harry Kington, his brother Walter Kington, and Harry’s army comrade Robert Pointer.

Harry Kington (born 1896):

Harry left notes and newspaper cuttings from his First World War days. He served in one of the crucial battles of the war (the Second Battle of Ypres), and was one of the few dozen survivors of his battalion, the 12th London. He recovered from wounds to play a part in the history of Charlton Athletic Football Club, including their early days at the famous football ground, The Valley in 1919. His papers contain no great detail, but they do give an idea of life in the battalion before and during the battle, and some individual soldiers are mentioned. Harry Kington's papers also include a newspaper cutting about one of his comrades in the 12th London Battalion, Private Robert Pointer. The cutting tells a moving story about Pointer's recovery from shell-shock, which attracted widespread interest in 1915.

Walter Kington (born 1895): Walter, who served in the Royal Artillery, claimed to have been behind the cannon that fired the first British shell of World War One. His letters to relatives in later life told of rootlessness and hardship before and during the war - these experiences left him trying to make some sense of life. Walter and Harry Kington had a younger brother, Cecil (born 1899). His son recalled that Cecil was little more than a boy when he was assigned to the Labour Corps to dig graves beside the dead on the battlefields. The Kington family experienced a stark contrast between the deprivation they suffered before the 1920s, and the prosperity that came later. Walter, Harry and Cecil, and a younger sister Olive (born 1902) lost their father to TB at age 39 in 1909 - three months, it is said, before he would have been eligible for a pension from his workplace, Woolwich Arsenal. Their mother could not afford to keep them, and the family was split up; in the 1911 census two of the children were found in a refuge school for the needy. Several generations of the family had seen deaths from TB, and a dread of this disease persisted among later generations between the world wars.

Harry Kington and the 12th Battalion, London Regiment

This is the World War One diary of Private Henry Arthur ('Harry') Kington of the 12th Battalion ('The Rangers'), London Regiment. It appears to draw on notes made day-to-day with some memories added later. The diary runs from March 1915 to July 1916, and covers: Harry Kington's journey and posting to Ypres; part of the Second Battle of Ypres; and his recovery from injuries sustained during the battle. The text of the diary is shown in italics, and appears verbatim except for occasional changes of punctuation and capitalisation. Explanatory comments have been added in normal type. By 1915 German troops held most of Belgium, but not the area around Ypres (the 'Ypres Salient' in the Allied lines). Germany was desperate to drive the Allies away and advance to the French coast. The first part of Harry Kington's diary records his journey from England to join the 1/12th Battalion in Belgium, and the run-up to the Second Battle of Ypres.

March 9th Tuesday [1915] Left Southampton for France on S.S. Balmoral. Signalled to two warships in Channel. A new draft of almost 200 'other ranks' was travelling to join up with the 12th London Battalion in Belgium. 10th Arrived Rouen No 2 Terr. Base after lovely ride up River Seine. 3 am outside Havre. 9.30 am Rouen. 11th 12th 13th 14th Knocked about camp. Often inquired for E. Batt. R.H.A. [E Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery] Harry Kington's brother, Walter was serving in that unit. Saw Indians roasting ram's head. 15th Monday. Left Rouen to join Battn. Rotten ride in train. Left train every time it stopped. Jumped in again when it was going. People want souvenirs. 16th Stopped Calais. Went wrong way to Abeele [also spelt Abele]. Returned Hazebrouck and slept the night in railway shed. 17th Went out into town & had a good breakfast at estaminet [i.e. a cafe]. Saw many motor buses (Generals). Place rather interesting itself. Left Hazebrouck. Arrived Ypres via Abeele. 14 miles march rotten roads. Met Batt. in Ypres Cavalry barracks. Hot shackles ready. Met old pals. Place blown to bits. In Reserve. 18th Inspection by Brig-General. All the time in barracks many aeroplanes about, fine sight. 19th Heard first shell, quite near. Knocked a bit of roof off. Knees began to shake. 20th Spy reported caught in barracks. Many children sell us bread. Anxious to know what trenches were like. 22nd Left Ypres for Baillieul. Slept in a barn. Had a bath and change. 24th Left Baillieul for Dramoutre [also spelt Dramouter]. Paid 10 francs. March about 1½ mls. Clicked a guard

first night in new billets (barns) and thought everybody was a German spy, who passed. Could see the starlights in the distance. Looked like a firework display. 25th Pole carrying to trenches. Heard first rifle bullet. Tedious work. Sniper about somewhere. Dead tired on way home. Mate carried my pack and rifle. Practically sleepwalking. 26th Made a second line trench. 28th Entered trenches 1st time at Kemel [also spelt Kemmel]. Mixed with Cheshires. Whitehead shot in the head. 29th Left trenches and slept in barn a little way back. 30th Entered trenches 2nd time. Very quite [i.e. quiet]. Relieved Monmouths. 31st Still in trenches. April 1st Left trenches and went back to same barns at Dramoutre. 2nd Played Cheshires at football won 6-1. Kington 3. Dawes 1. Capt Wyatt 2. Capt. Wyatt later co-edited a published history of the 12th London Battalion (see 'Main sources' below). 3rd Moved to new barns further south Neuve Eglise. Bishop of London service at Locre [also spelt Loker] - North of Dramoutre. Some language flew about that day. This was because the battalion had to endure a march of 8 miles and wait for an hour in cold weather for the privilege of hearing the Bishop. 4th Sunday. Service in field. 5th 6th Drilling all rot. Lost to details 2-7. Batt. sports at Headquarters. Plenty of sport. 7th B. Company messenger. Inspection by Gen. Smith Dorrien at Locre. March to Baillieul. Billeted in a Convent. 8th 9th Visited town. Warwickshires band playing in square. Bought steak in butchers and took it to a fried potato shop for frying. Good dinners. 10th Latest draft versus old B. Company. Draft won 6-2. K. 2. [Kington 2] 11th Service on flying grounds. Lost to A.S.C. [Army Service Corps] 1-2. Kicked a chap in mouth. Knocked two teeth out. 12th Left Baillieul. Past Queen Vic's arrived Vlamertinghe. Billeted in bakers shop. Bombardment by Zeppelins at night by moon disturbed me. Dead tired. Blew up 1 Queen Vic's tent. Killed many. 13th Played the 9th Batt. footer won 2-0. Great game like Final Cup tie. 14th More football. Concert at night in a schoolroom. Thousands of kilted Canadians passed us in the day. 15th Right half Batt. v Left half. [football] 16th Left Vlamertinghe. Arrived St Jean. Slept in barn over some pigs. Inhabitants skinning a horse. Bought bread and butter for trenches. 17th Left for trenches at Zonnebeke. Waited an hour on road and saw hill 60 bombarded on the night the British took it. 18th In a trench with 15 others. Ellis wounded and Poynter loses senses. See separate newspaper article and accompanying notes on Rifleman Robert Pointer. 19th Trenches. Germans firing trench mortars. No relief arrived. No rations. Suffolks cannot find our trench. 20th Find and relieve us at night. 21st Sleep in brick room. Communication trenches knee deep in mud and water. Back to trenches Zonnebeke.

The next part of the diary covers part of the Second Battle of Ypres, fought between Allied and German forces from 22 April to 25 May 1915 (according to the timescale most sources give). The battle comprised four main engagements: Gravenstafel (22-23 April); St Julien (24 April- 5 May); Frezenberg (8-13 May); and Bellewaerde (24-25 May). On 22 April 1915 German artillery bombarded the Allied lines and followed up by deploying poison gas on the northeast rim of the Ypres Salient. They tried the same tactics again on 24 April. These were the first uses of gas in west European warfare (and among the first uses of gas in any warfare). Terrible injuries were inflicted, mostly among the Canadian and French Algerian units, and on some British troops. On 24-25 April, German troops made a ferocious assault on British lines to the northeast of Ypres, resulting in a small advance but no breakthrough. By the afternoon of 24 April the only reserves still available to shore up the British lines in the area around St Julien were two battalions of the 28th division: the 1st Suffolk and 12th London. They were ordered to make for Fortuin, near St Julien, with two companies of the 8th Middlesex. These troops suffered heavy losses under strong artillery fire, and had to halt on the Zonnebeke-Keerselare road, before withdrawing at night and digging in along the Gravenstafel-Fortuin road.

22nd Trenches. 15 mins rapid. We cover an attack on left. No relief. Roads being shelled. Monmouths bring rations early morning. 23rd Mons relieve us at night. Sleep just off the Ypres-Zonne-road in dug outs. 24th Being shelled like hell. Canadians wounded wicked sight, gassed mostly. Germans broken through St Julien [also spelt St Juliaan]. Order to advance, under heavy fire in daylight for a mile or so. 25th We lose many men. Make trenches under fire for British to fall back on. Durhams sad sight. Nothing to eat for 2 or 3 days. 26th Misty morning. We check German advance. Great delight in seeing the Germans fall. Relieved by East York at night. Was pleased as I was on patrol. When a good way away from trenches could hear Br. [British] stopping a charge.

During the night of 27/28 April the Germans continued to shell the whole area, devastating all roads, crossings and villages (or what remained of them).

27th Back to dug outs. Germans set fire to houses every night. Have a mud wash. First for a week.
28th 29th 30th Continually being shelled. Tearing my leg to pieces through bites.

Despite coming under further shelling early in May, the British managed to make tactical withdrawals to a newly prepared position, so as to shorten their lines.

May 1st B. Coy. ration carrying. In the day fetch down a German aeroplane. Observer alright but pilot shot through abdomen. Great excitement. Irish Rifles shelled out of their house. Saw limber waggons racing for life from shrapnel, fine sight. 2nd Trench digging at Langemarck. 4th English retire again. We lose many in trenches. 5th 6th Terrible fire. Seems as though we lack shells we do not reply. 7th Buried by parapet. Rotten shell gas in my lungs.

On 8 May, four battalions (the 2nd Cheshire, 1st Monmouthshire, 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers and most of the 1st Suffolk) were struggling to hold their position near Frezenberg, about 3 miles northeast of Ypres, amid massive artillery fire. In the late morning Brig-General Bols ordered the 12th London Battalion forward from reserve to support the front line. Heavy losses over the preceding few weeks had reduced the 12th London to about 200 men, and as soon as they advanced they began to incur further casualties under machine gun fire. Then shell fire hit them as they came up to the flattish summit of Frezenberg ridge, yet survivors managed to make the front line to assist the Monmouths. The Ranger crew manning the single machine gun was picked off, but a Monmouth officer took over and managed to support the troops with raking fire until the gun was knocked out.

8th Relieved by Mons. 3 am early. Germans brake [i.e. break] through. Order to advance and reinforce. Mate hit early. Bullet struck my water bottle, and dropped. Souvenir. Pitiful screams. Hit by shrapnel in leg. Fragment of shell hits my skull, not serious. Get back to dug outs. Germans after me. Crept over dead Ranger. Drank petrol for water, awful for days after. This was an easy mistake to make: water was often carried in petrol cans. Treated badly by RAMC in dressing station. Historian Ana Carden-Coyne, reported in *Practical Family History* (Summer 2009), claims that poor treatment of casualties was not unusual. Get back to Ypres hospital. Sleep night. Officers good to me.

Edmonds and Wynne (1927) wrote of the 12th London's action of 8 May that: this most determined Territorial battalion, whose survivors held the line they had gained until 6 pm, was annihilated. Only 53 men of the Rangers, mostly pioneers and signallers ... answered the roll call that night ... A captured British officer of another unit who saw the advance of the Rangers ... records that they came through a barrage of H.E. [high explosive] shells which struck them down by dozens, but they never halted for a minute, and continued to advance until hardly a man remained. The German forces eventually surged forward, and overwhelmed the Monmouthshire battalion in the late afternoon, but not the Northumberlands, who held out until dusk. Edmonds and Wynne recounted that the Rangers' advance, and the stand of the battalions with them, were: 'worthy to rank ... among the historic episodes of the war.' These men's extreme courage during these crucial engagements helped to ruin German hopes of reaching the French coast. The fighting at Ypres resulted in a slightly shortened Salient, but no German breakthrough. Casualties in the action of April-May were: Allies, about 60,000, German, about 35,000. Meanwhile Harry Kington underwent a long recovery from his wounds:

9th Injection for blood poisoning at Vlamertinghe. Arrived Baillieu dressing station. Leg very bad. All clothes taken except tunic. 10th Entrained for Boulogne. Arrived No 14 General Hosp. French soldier gives me biscuits on station. Very happy. 12th Boarded Red Cross Boat St Patrick. 13th Left Boulogne harbour. Arrived Cambridge via Dover. May 21st Operation. June 22nd Operation. July 17th Arrived convalescent home Balsham. October 1st Left Balsham. October 2nd Arr. Eastbourne. October 18th Arr. Home. 10 days leave. October 28th Reported back Batt. November 1st Started recruiting. Thirty 12th London Battalion NCOs and privates who had been casualties manned

recruiting offices in London. Feb 18th [1916] Joined 3/12 [i.e. the 3/12th Battn. of the London Regiment] Salisbury. May 29th Arrived Seaford C Depot. July 19th Left Seaford. July 24th Arrived Berkhamsted OTC [Officer Training Camp].

Stationed at the Officer Training Camp in Berkhamsted were officers recruited from the Inns of Court near Holborn, London. Harry Kington's battalion, the 12th London, came from the Holborn area, which probably explains his posting to Berkhamsted after recovery from his injuries. No record survives of Harry Kington's wartime service after 1916. His medal index card shows a posting to the RAF in 1918, but this is almost certainly wrong (see separate item on First World War records below). Most likely, he served at the Berkhamsted OTC to the end of the war, and met his first wife in Berkhamsted, where she had grown up. Possibly he was transferred to the 9th (Reserve) London Battalion, formed in 1916 from reserve units of the 12th London and two other battalions.

After the war: Harry Kington

Harry married soon after the war, and the couple had a daughter. Harry continued to enjoy playing competitive football; in 1919 he joined Charlton Athletic as an amateur footballer. Harry kept a cutting from an unnamed newspaper, some time in summer 1919, which reported: Charlton Athletic ... will be strengthened by the inclusion of men who have played Army football against France and Belgium. G. W. Tweedy, late of Durham City, the popular Johnny Mitchell, who is well-known by Charlton supporters, A. Weaver ... G. Pleasant, A. Kingsley, and a new centre forward in H. A. Kington, are all fit and eager to play. In September 1919 Harry Kington was named in the local press passing the ball for the first goal to be scored in a competitive match at Charlton's ground, The Valley. A 'Kimpton' is also mentioned in some games, and this may be the same player, though this is uncertain. Sometimes Harry sustained injuries that interrupted his new career with the civil service. He remembered that a collision with England's amateur centre half laid him up for several weeks with damaged ribs, and he used to joke that this opponent had 'treated him to a long holiday.' Others were less amused, and for the good of his career he cut short his football at this level. After the death of his first wife, Harry emigrated to Canada, and married again. In his late 80s, he was still running up the stairs. He died aged 90 in 1986.

Robert Pointer's story

In Harry Kington's papers is a newspaper cutting about one of his comrades in the 12th London Battalion, Private Robert Pointer. The cutting tells a moving story about Pointer's recovery from shell-shock. The newspaper article reads:

DUMB SOLDIER TALKS. "Jawed all Night in Case it Went Again." Medical men on both sides of the Channel have been greatly interested in the case of a young soldier, Rifleman Pointer, who is in the 12th County of London Rifles, and is now a patient at the 4th Northern General Hospital, Lincoln. By the terrific explosion of a shell five weeks ago Pointer was deprived of speech and hearing. He has now regained his speech, and it is anticipated that he will eventually regain hearing in the right ear. "Before I left Boulogne," Pointer explained yesterday, "the doctor had me in his room, and told me that nothing but my own effort would bring my speech back. He told me to keep shaping my mouth as if I were pronouncing the vowels. Ever since I had been in Lincoln I had been trying this, and was successful the other night, but found I could not carry on next night. "I determined to make some sort of show, and suddenly found I could speak. I kept jawing to myself all night in case it went again. I saw the night sister flying around, and it was in my mind to say something to her; but then I thought she might faint, and I remembered that a man would be coming round with a cup of tea at five in the morning, and thought I would give him a shock instead. "So when he came along with the tea, and was just putting it on the table, I said 'Shove it down there, old son!' He nearly shot the tea over me. Then he fetched the sister, and everybody seemed inclined to kiss me." Pointer's home is in Hampstead-road. He was employed by a New Oxford-street firm of silversmiths. His age is 22.

The date and title of this newspaper article are not known, but it was published towards the end of May 1915. Rifleman Pointer is mentioned in Harry Kington's war diary, spelt 'Poynter': 18th [April 1915] In a trench [at Zonnebeke near Ypres] with 15 others. Ellis wounded and Poynter loses senses. Robert Pointer's service record survives; it shows that before World War One he had already served four years with the 3rd Battalion, London Regiment. After being assigned to the 12th Battalion in 1914, he served on the Western Front, being posted abroad, with many of his comrades, on Christmas Eve of all times. Despite Pointer's impressive physical presence (over 6' tall and chest almost 40"), there were signs that his health was becoming fragile well before the shelling that incapacitated him. Twice he suffered debility from effects of cold, and once from myalgia. Not that he was exceptional; many soldiers of his battalion were invalided with frostbite and trench foot brought on in the wet trenches and perishing cold that winter (The Rangers Historical Records, 1921). After the shell-burst on 18th April, Pointer was diagnosed with severe shock and loss of speech, and he was hospitalised in Belgium before being repatriated by hospital ship in early May. Following the signs of recovery reported in the newspaper article above, he received a home posting in the 3/12th Battalion of the London Regiment, and it is likely that he met up again with Harry Kington, also in that unit. However, unlike the optimistic account of Pointer's recovery announced earlier in the press, the army's verdict on Pointer's health was bleak in 1916: Medically unfit. Neurasthenia. Shell shock originated April 1915 at Ypres. Disabled by shell explosion - remembers nothing till he found himself in hospital Boulogne. Is in a highly neurotic condition, with muscular tremors and increased reflexes. Suffers from insomnia. Due to shell shock from explosion of shell on active service. Permanent. Capacity lessened ½ for 6 months. Loss of speech 22.4.15. Robert Pointer was discharged in August 1916: 'No longer physically fit for War Service.' In January 1917 he was awarded a 'final gratuity of £25 in lieu of total incapacity pension for 3 months and partial incapacity pension for 4 months.'

After the war: Robert Pointer

Robert Pointer had married in 1914, shortly before leaving for France. The return to England brought the chance start a family. By the time he left the Army there was a five-month-old son to support, and a search of the FreeBMD website suggests that another son followed before the end of the war and that there was an eventual total of five children, with the family settled in south London. There were almost as many medals; he received the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal, Victory Medal and Silver War Badge.

Walter Kington and the Royal Artillery

Walter Kington joined the Royal Horse Artillery in 1911 and embarked for France and Belgium with the British Expeditionary Force in 1914 as a gunner. On 22 August the first fighting of World War One between the British and German armies broke out near Mons in Belgium. There followed a series of battles and manoeuvres that brought about the almost 'deadlocked' Western Front of winter 1914-15. Walter later wrote: 'I was a serving soldier in the Royal Horse Artillery, and I was actually behind the gun that fired the first shell, British shell, on the 20th August 1914 near Mons.' Walter was a couple of days out in his recollections, but this is not unusual among people remembering events of long ago. Although Walter's claim will probably never be precisely verified from other sources, he was in the same battery as the one in which the first British shell of World War One was fired. His army service record survives, and although damaged, it is partly readable. It gives his unit as Royal Horse Artillery E Battery with the BEF, 1914. In March 2009 I came across, by chance, an exhibit at the Imperial War Museum North, in Manchester: 'Royal Horse Artillery E Battery 13-pounder field gun.' Notes displayed with the exhibit read: This field gun fired the British Army's first shell of the First World War on 22 August 1914 near Binche in Belgium during the retreat from Mons. On 15 September the gun received a direct hit which killed one crew member, Bombardier W. King and injured four others during the advance from the Marne to the Aisne ... The gun remained in action until the end of the war. A quote from one of the gun's crew, Bombardier Osborne, was added: Just after 11 a.m. came the order to 'stand-by.' Number three gun had the order to fire. It was a mis-fire, so our gun carried on

and our first shell was despatched against the German cavalry ... we fired eight rounds ... The Germans came through with strength, and after about half an hour, we had to pull out and move back. A picture of the gun, or an identical one, appeared on a leaflet issued in 2009 by the Friends of the Imperial War Museum. During this action, Royal Horse Artillery E Battery fired shells to assist British cavalry resisting a German advance to the southeast of Mons. Incidentally, the first British rifle shots of the war had been fired earlier in the day of 22 August. In late August and early September the same battery supported the 3rd Cavalry Brigade during the Battle of Mons and the British retreat to new lines about 30 miles east of Paris. Walter was awarded the 1914 Star (with clasp and roses for coming under fire with the BEF), the British War medal and Victory Medal. He ended the war in the Royal Field Artillery as a bombardier (promoted 1918) and he was also an Acting Corporal for a month. Although he was abroad for the entire war, the worst injury inflicted on him was a broken arm. The death rate among British soldiers in the war was about 1 in 8, though this will have varied by rank, length of service and places of posting. Walter survived the risks attached to spending more than 4 years as an artilleryman, an obvious target.

After the war: Walter Kington

Walter Kington's experiences before and during the war had made a deep impression on him. Later he wrote that in his early life: 'I travelled around a bit, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, France, and other places ... For the whole of World War 1, I served overseas. Experience, yes, but wisdom, doubtful.' Soon after the war, he nearly emigrated to Canada. Later he reflected: 'Like all the masses of mankind, we are of the "if" brigade. If I had done this? If I had done that? ... In my case, if I had not respected my Dad's will and [had] gone into the Arsenal when they sent to me after his death, instead of travelling here and there to no purpose.' The hardship and rootlessness that Walter experienced before and during the war left him baffled as to whether life made any sense. His first marriage did not really work out, and by 1944 he and his first wife, having had two children, had divorced and each had married again. Walter had four children with his new wife, and in later life he seemed to have found contentment and peace of mind in his new family and in strong religious faith. He enjoyed a good career in the civil service and died aged 79 in 1975.

The rest of the family after 1918

In the 1920s several of the family, though not Walter, did emigrate to Canada. Cecil, having served nearly 3 years in the Labour Corps, ended the war in the Royal Sussex Regiment, and was awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal. Soon afterwards, he emigrated to Canada, where he married and had children, as did his sister. Their widowed mother Ethel also found a new husband in Canada.

A note on First World War sources: the wrong, wrong trail

The First World War medal index card for 'H. A. Kington' correctly shows service with the 12th Battalion of the London Regiment, service number 2742. However, it also shows RAF number 407339, as well as the 1915 Star with a reference from the Royal Flying Corps medal rolls. Enquiries via the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon showed an 'H. A. Kington' on the RAF Muster Roll, April 1918, joining the RAF from the RFC. However, enquiries to RAF Disclosures, Sleaford discovered that this individual was not Harry Kington. So it appears that the medal index card has mistakenly combined two servicemen named Kington.



Medal Card - H.A. Kington

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Acknowledgements

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Noel Lightfoot 1898 – 1918

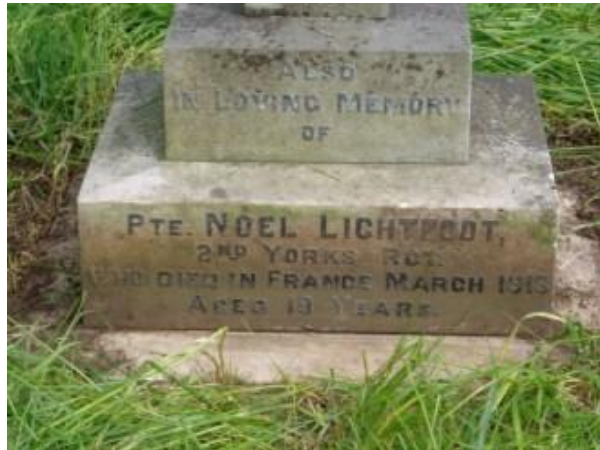
Submitted by David Rawdon (YFHS Member No. 2041) Noel Lightfoot was his 1st cousin 2* removed. Noel's father William is David's 2* great uncle, the brother of his maternal great grandfather. Through his family history research David is in contact with Norman's daughter Marjory in Canada.



From the Kings Book of Heroes held in York Minster

Noel Lightfoot was born on 25 December 1898 at 12 Richard Street, York. He was the first child of William and Elizabeth (Cartledge) who had been married on 18 December 1897 at the nearby parish church of St. Dennis & St. George. William had been born at 8 St. George's Court, York and became a Confectioners Labourer. Elizabeth originated from Piercebridge, Co. Durham and had moved to York prior to 1891 when the census shows her working as a Domestic Servant at a doctor's house at 39 Blossom Street, York. The 1901 census shows that the family had moved to 9 St. George's Court, York next door to William's parents George and Mary (Briscomb). Noel's brother, Norman was born on 10 May 1903 whilst the family were still at 9 St. Georges Court however by the time of the next census in 1911 the family were living at 27 Fossgate, York. Noel joined the Yorkshire Regiment as Private No. 46788 presumably being conscripted early in 1917 following his 18th birthday. Unfortunately his service record hasn't survived however it is thought that he would have been posted overseas to join the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment around the middle of 1917. At this time the Regiment was in Belgium near to Ypres and was involved in front line actions to the south of the town near to the Messines Ridge. The Regiment was transferred to France to the Fifth Army Somme area in January 1918. By late February 1918 the Battalion were billeted at Aubigny near Amiens around twenty miles from the front line but were in addition to training duties carrying out railway and trench work close to the front line. They were put under orders to prepare for action and be ready to move at one hours notice. On the 5 March 1918 the Battalion was moved forward to Etreillers and then on 18 March 1918 to Fluquieres just a short distance from the German held town of St. Quentin and made preparations in case of attack. On 21 March 1918 the German Army began its spring offensive known as the "Kaiserschlacht" (Kaisers Battle). At 4.50am on that foggy morning the Battalion was ordered to "Man Battle Stations". Under the codename of "Operation Michael" the first phase of the German offensive was launched between Cambrai, St. Quentin and La Fere along the Somme battlefield. A massive bombardment preceded the attack along a 50 mile stretch of the British front line. The aim was to push the British westwards and drive a wedge along the boundary of the British and French forces at La Fere. German troops and equipment outnumbered the British by around three to one and significant gains were made in the first few days. Noel went missing presumed killed in action on 22 March 1918 between Saint-Quentin and Ham. Roll calls were normally taken on three separate occasions at the end of each day and soldiers declared missing after that time. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial situated on the D929 between Albert and Pozieres, a few miles north-east of Amiens. Where bodies of those killed in action were able to be recovered they were buried in makeshift battlefield cemeteries. Many enemy burials were carried out by British and German soldiers. In most cases attempts were made to identify those involved. Some of these cemeteries were unfortunately destroyed by subsequent shelling. In later years a cemetery was created by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission at Savy just to the west of St. Quentin and graves from the battlefields and a number of small cemeteries concentrated into it. There are over 850 casualties commemorated of which more than half are unidentified. These include unidentified graves of the Yorkshire Regiment and some of those are dated 22 March 1918 so it is possible that Noel is at rest there. His last recorded address is 35 Winterscale Street, York which was

where his parents were then living. It is difficult to appreciate how William, Elizabeth and Norman dealt with their loss and how this impacted on their lives. A photograph exists of a street party held in Winterscale Street at the end of the war which must have been a very difficult experience for the family. William and Elizabeth passed away of unrelated reasons within two weeks of each other ten years later in 1928 at 35 Winterscale Street, York and York County Hospital respectively. They both made the short final journey from their home and are buried in separate public graves in York Cemetery. They are however both included along with Noel on a memorial inscription on William's parents private grave also in the Cemetery. Norman left England for Canada in 1930, married the daughter of another emigrant family, and died in 1967. I had the privilege in June last year to visit the battlefield areas around Ypres and the Somme and in particular where Noel was killed and was also able to pay my respects to him at the Pozieres memorial. Whether Noel's remains lie in the countryside or in Savy Cemetery he rests in what is now a very beautiful and thankfully peaceful place.



York Cemetery – Memorial Inscription



Pozieres Memorial, Albert, France – General view



Pozieres Memorial, Albert, France – Panel of Yorkshire Regiment names

Thurstan Bassett Hugh Thomas-Peter 1895 – 1974

Submitted by Paul Thomas-Peter, this was prepared some time ago as part of the IHGS correspondence course.

Thurstan Thomas-Peter was my paternal grandfather. I never met him or knew his name before embarking on tracing my family history. He lived in Canada for much of his life and my father rarely spoke of him. I have since found that he lived an interesting and varied life, serving in both World Wars, living in a number of diverse places and having had a number of occupations. Thurstan Basset Hugh Thomas-Peter was born on 6 Jan 1895 at 168 Bedford Hill, Balham, London[1]. His parents were John Franklen Thomas-Peter, a barrister, and Mary Elizabeth (formerly Oxenham)[2]. He was the youngest of six children still alive; Mary Elizabeth, Edith Kate, George Franklen, Amy and William Henry. Two other brothers died in infancy. Thurstan's early life was largely shaped by the deaths of those around him. On 29 Jan 1897 his father John Franklen Thomas-Peter died of "Neuritis (6 months), Anaemia (1 month)" at 364 Brixton Rd, London aged 46 years[3]. The 1901 census shows Thurstan aged 6 living with his mother, his sisters Mary and Amy and his brother William at Carlton House, Kenwyn, Truro, Cornwall[4]. It is likely that they moved here after John Franklen's death as he had family in Cornwall and his mother's parents were already deceased. However Thurstan's paternal Grandfather; John Luke Peter died on 12 Nov 1900 in Truro aged 80[5] and his paternal grandmother Mary Selina (formerly Collins) died on 13 May 1902[6]. On 23 Apr 1904 Thurstan's mother Mary Elizabeth died of pneumonia and exhaustion aged 49[7]. Thurstan was orphaned at the age of nine with no paternal or maternal grandparents still living. It is unclear where he spent the next three years or who cared for him, he may have lived with one of his elder sisters Mary, Edith or Amy who were aged 25, 23 and 20 respectively, none had married at this stage. He may also have lived with his older brother George Franklen who was aged 22 at the time of his mother's death although he was married in the June quarter of 1904[8] so this is unlikely. His Royal Navy service record[9] shows him at a training establishment from 15 Sep 1907 to 15 May 1912. The 1911 census shows him as a Naval Cadet at Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth[10]. Family anecdotes relate that he was formally interviewed for Dartmouth College at about the age of 10. He believed that the only reason that he was accepted was because when leaving the interview one of the officers asked him the time in French; Thurstan replied correctly in French[11]. He would have spent the first two years of his training at Osborne Naval College, Osborne House, Isle of Wight and then completed his training as a midshipman at Dartmouth[12].



Osborne Naval College – 1910



Britannia Royal Naval College

In 1908 Thurstan suffered the loss of what must have been his closest sibling; William Henry Oxenham Thomas-Peter died of acute appendicitis and acute septic peritonitis on 18 Nov 1908 at Woodside Nursing Home, Plymouth[13]. William was aged 15 at his death just two years older than Thurstan.



Britannia Royal Naval College – Vincent Term 1911 (TBT-P circled)

Immediately after graduating from college in 1912 he was posted to HMS Shannon; a Minotaur class armoured cruiser[14].



Midshipman T B Thomas-Peter



HMS Shannon – 1915

He stays with HMS Shannon when World War 1 breaks out and until 15 Feb 1915. He was then transferred as a Sub-Lieutenant to HMS Cochrane[15]; a Duke of Edinburgh (or Warrior) class armoured cruiser. This ship takes part in The Battle of Jutland as part of Second Cruiser Squadron on 31 May – 1 Jun[16] 1916. Immediately after the Battle of Jutland on 5 Jun 1916 he is transferred to HMS Dolphin; a training establishment for the submarine service, which he had applied for in Jan 1916[17].



HMS Cochrane

After 2 months training he is transferred to “Bonaventure for S/M’s” on 7 Aug 1916 and in October 1916 is allocated to submarine C9[18]. HMS Bonaventure was a depot ship for the 2nd Flotilla of submarines (C7 – C10, C12 – C14 and C16) and was based on the river Tyne[19]. On 15 Dec 1916 he is promoted to Lieutenant, this is later adjusted to 15 June 1916[20]. On 14 Feb 1917 he is transferred to HMS Titania; another submarine depot ship based at Blyth, and allocated to Submarine J1[21].



HMS Bonaventure – 1910



C Class Submarines C5, C6, C2, C7 & C9



HMS Titania



Submarine J1 – 1916

During his time based in the North-East he met Mary Butterworth, daughter of John James and Mary Ann (formerly Anderson)[22], and they married at the Church of The Holy Name, Newcastle on 18 Oct 1917[23]. On his marriage certificate his address is shown as 76 Osborne Rd, Newcastle. Their first child Philip Bruce Thomas-Peter (my father) was born at 61 Tavistock Road, Newcastle (shown as Mary's address on the marriage certificate) on 8 Aug 1918[24]. On 14 Oct 1918 he is transferred to the Depot ship HMS Alecto based in Yarmouth, where he is put in command of submarine V1 until just after the end of World War 1 on 21 Dec 1918[25]. There was little excitement for him in this short period of command, the ship's log[26] records days where the hands spend the morning painting and the afternoons on what is logged as "Make do and Mend". Occasionally they put to sea with other submarines and take turns acting as targets for each other. The last few pages of Submarine V1's log shows that on 11th December it sailed from Great Yarmouth to Dover where they handed in confidential documents. On the 14th December V1 sailed to Chatham where they hand in stores and essentially decommissioned the ship. The last entry on 21 Dec 1918 states simply "16:15 – Paid Off".



HMS Alecto



Submarine V3

On 21 Dec 1918 he is transferred back to HMS Titania for submarine J4 as First Officer[27]. He would have probably welcomed the transfer back to Blyth after the war to be with his wife and baby son. His stay was short lived as in early 1919 all the J class submarines were presented to the Australian Government for service with the Royal Australian Navy[28]. On 25Feb 1919 he is transferred to HMS Thames at Queenborough, Kent, but not allocated to a submarine, his service record mentions a course. On 3 July 1919 he is transferred to HMS Lucia, stationed on the River Tees, to command submarine E44. In November 1919 he is transferred to HMS Dolphin in Portsmouth and then in December 1919 he is transferred to HMS Lupin, an Arabis class minesweeper[29]. The Admiralty were never particularly enamoured with the idea of submarines, they were viewed as an underhand weapon and not quite British[30]. The submarine service was also regarded as somewhat second class by The Admiralty although the members of the submarine service saw themselves as an elite section of the Navy[31]. After the war ended, in common with most branches of the armed services, the submarine service was scaled down considerably. This led to disaffection amongst the younger officers as they were transferred back to “standard” ships. Family anecdote has it that Thurstan and others threatened to resign after the war and this is possibly due to being transferred away from the submarine service[32]. A note on Thurstan’s service record states:

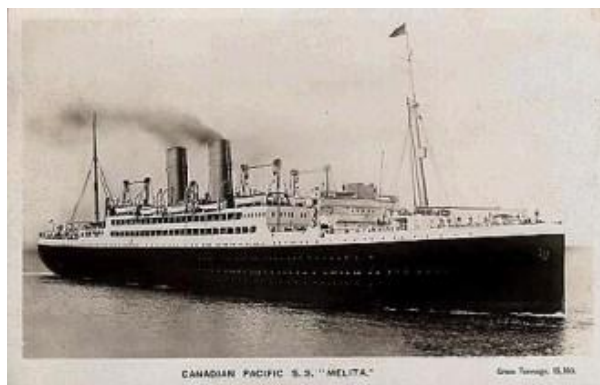
“19-3-20 C.O. Lupin informed he is not eligible to resign with Retired Pay but if he forwards resignation it will be formally considered.”

Apparently, Thurstan resigned and it was accepted. His record shows him “discharged to shore” on 8 Apr 1920 and transferred to the Emergency List on 9 Apr 1920. A further note on his service record shows that on 3 Aug 1920 he was requested to forward amounts to cover his mess bills at HMS Lupin and HMS Dolphin and if it was not received within one month he would be removed from the Emergency List. On 25 Oct 1920 he was removed from the Emergency List so presumably he either ignored or did not know about the request. It is likely he did not know, as Thurstan had sailed alone from Liverpool on 23 Jul 1920 aboard the Minnedosa bound for Quebec, Canada, arriving on 30 July 1920[33]. The ship’s manifest shows his destination as Winnipeg, Manitoba, and that Canada was his intended country of permanent residence. His intended occupation was Engineer.



Canadian Pacific Liner Minnedosa

Family anecdote says that he evidently had quite a hard time when he arrived in Canada, Thurstan found work difficult to come by and took any work he could find, some of it heavy and manual. Immediately after the war Canadians viewed immigrants as taking their jobs and also saw the English as haughty[34]. This would have probably been particularly true of an ex-Royal Navy Officer qualified as an Engineer. Thurstan's wife Mary and their son Philip Bruce followed on 12 Apr 1921 aboard the S.S. Melita, departing from Liverpool and arriving at St John, New Brunswick, Canada[35]. According to my father, Thurstan met them in poor health and poorly clothed.



Canadian Pacific SS Melita

Thurstan worked as a storekeeper for the City of Winnipeg Hydro-Electric company[36] for about four years[37] and during that time took a correspondence course in accountancy[38]. His second son George Anthony was born on 22 Nov 1924 at Suite 14, Marie Apartments, Winnipeg[39]. Once he gained his accountancy qualifications Thurstan applied for and obtained a position with the Hudson Bay Company. He joined on 14 Nov 1925 as an accountant at a store in Lethbridge, Alberta[40]. He established himself as something of a trouble-shooter and was subsequently employed at stores in Edmonton, Vancouver and Saskatoon[41]. On 1 Apr 1939 he joined the Fur Trade Department and was attached to Mackenzie River Transport, Edmonton[42]. As Canada became involved in the Second World War, Thurstan was keen to get involved. He applied to both the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force. The Air Force replied first and accepted him as an administration officer, but he really wanted to join the Navy. He waited until the last minute for a reply from the Navy and then bought his Air Force uniform. The Navy replied just after his uniform was delivered but unfortunately for Thurstan it was too late[43]. In April 1942 he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force as a Flight Lieutenant[44]. Thurstan's eldest son Philip Bruce was already in England with the Canadian Army[45] and his younger son George joined the RCAF and trained as a Pilot[46]. When George graduated Thurstan took the parade and presented his son with his pilot's wings.



Thurstan presents George with his wings 1944



Thurstan, Mary and George in the UK 1945

After the war, in April 1945, Thurstan returned to Mackenzie River Transport as Accountant and continued his career with The Hudson Bay Company. In June 1949 he became Accountant of the Edmonton Merchandise Department. In September 1952 he was transferred to Montreal as the Accountant of the Eastern Post Division. In July 1953 he rejoined the Transport Division in Winnipeg and served there as an Accountant until his retirement in January 1959[47]. After his retirement he settled in Edmonton where he owned two properties that had been rented out whilst he was travelling with the Hudson Bay Company. Most of 1959 was taken up renovating these properties that had become somewhat neglected[48]. My cousin Brian remembers visiting them in Edmonton in the 1960's as a child. Thurstan, he says, "was always in tweed, smelled of tobacco - his pipe was nearby if not in his face"[49]. Later, probably in the early 1960's, Thurstan and Mary moved to Victoria on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Brian remembers visiting them there too, he said:

"They lived near in a lovely house with large garden, enormous trees that I got into trouble for climbing, nearly to the top. He used to say that he would stand guard in case my parents came, to allow me to climb the most dangerous one."[50]

I know very little about their lives after this time, though I do have a picture that shows they were very happy.



Thurstan and Mary in the 1970's

Mary Thomas-Peter died on 16 Mar 1972 aged 81 in Victoria, British Columbia[51] and left a big gap in Thurstan's life. My cousin Brian said[52]:

"he was not the same when his wife, Mary, died. It was obvious he was not coping very well without the woman that supported him through thick and thin. She was a rock."

Thurstan Bassett Hugh Thomas-Peter died on 30Aug 1974 aged 79 in Victoria, British Columbia[53]. My brother found this picture of Thurstan after my father died, none of our family had seen it before.



Thurstan Bassett Thomas-Peter

References: [1] Birth certificate for Thurstan Basset Thomas-Peter. [2] Ibid. [3] Death Certificate for John Franklen Thomas-Peter [4] 1901 Census. RG13 P2222 F36 Pg24 [5] From

gravestone, Ruan Laniorne church yard, Cornwall. [6] From gravestone, Treleigh church yard, Redruth, Cornwall. [7] Death Certificate for Mary Elizabeth Thomas-Peter [8] <http://www.freebmd.org> [9] National Archives catalogue ref. ADM 196/117 [10] 1911 Census RG14PN12820 RD273 SD3 ED10 SN9999 [11] Email from Brian Thomas-Peter dated 28 Jun 2009 [12] Email from Dr Jane Harrold BA MA.PhD , Deputy Curator & Archivist: BRNC Dartmouth, dated 17 Jul 2009. [13] Death Certificate for W. H. O. Thomas-Peter [14] RN service record, National Archives catalogue ref. ADM 196/117 [15] Ibid. [16] D Milford. Article *Warrior Class Armoured Cruisers*, available on internet at: <http://www.worldwar1.co.uk/armoured-cruiser/hms-warrior.html>. Viewed 17 May 2009. [17] RN service record. [18] Ibid. [19] D. Perkins. Article *Disposition of RN submarines, 1916* available on internet at <http://www.gwpda.org/naval/rnsub16.htm>. Viewed 17 May 2009. [20] RN service record [21] Ibid. [22] Birth certificate for Mary Butterworth. [23] Marriage certificate for Thurstan Thomas-Peter and Mary Butterworth. [24] Birth certificate for Philip Bruce Thomas-Peter. [25] RN service record [26] Ships logs for Submarine V1 covering November and December 1918, National archives documents references: ADM 173/13125, ADM 173/13126. Viewed 23 Jul 2009. [27] RN service record [28] Article *J Class Submarines* available on internet at http://www.battleships-cruisers.co.uk/j_class.htm.. Viewed 20 May 2009. [29] RN service record [30] R.K Massie, *Castles of Steel*, (London: Jonathan Cape 2004), p. 123. [31] Ibid, pp. 124-125. [32] Email from Brian Thomas-Peter dated 28 Jun 2009. [33] Ships manifest, Minnedosa, Canadian Pacific Ocean Services Ltd , dated 23 Jul 1920. [34] Phone conversation with George Anthony Thomas-Peter, Nov 2008. [35] Ships Manifest, Melita, Canadian Pacific Ocean Services Ltd , dated 12 Apr 1921. [36] Birth Certificate, George Anthony Thomas-Peter. [37] Retirement notice, Moccasin Telegraph magazine, Hudson Bay Company, "Break-Up" Issue 1959. [38] Phone conversation with George Anthony Thomas-Peter [39] Birth Certificate, George Anthony Thomas-Peter [40] Retirement notice, Moccasin Telegraph magazine [41] Ibid. [42] Ibid. [43] Phone conversation with George Anthony Thomas-Peter [44] Retirement notice, Moccasin Telegraph magazine [45] Canadian Army Service record for P. B. Thomas-Peter [46] Phone conversation with George Anthony Thomas-Peter [47] Retirement notice, Moccasin Telegraph magazine [48] Article, *With Our Retirees*, Moccasin Telegraph, Winter 1959, p.2. [49] Email from Brian Thomas-Peter dated 28 Jun 2009. [50] Ibid. [51] Death certificate for Mary

Thomas-Peter [52] Email from Brian Thomas-Peter dated 28 Jun 2009. [53] Death certificate for Thurstan Thomas-Peter.

William Henry (Harry) FEARN MM 1884 – 1953

Submitted by Janet Lea, William Henry (aka Harry) Fearn was her great uncle; her grandfather's (Mark Eden Fearn) elder brother.



Sergt. H. Fearn, M.M.

William Henry known as Harry was born on 27 February 1884 in the Walmgate area, he was the son of Thomas Fearn and Hannah Oxberry March. Harry married Florence Gertrude Spence on the 22 June 1908 in York. Harry died on the 23 June 1953 is buried in York Cemetery in a private grave. At the time of his death William was living at 16 Dodsworth Avenue, York 1891 Census Taken Sunday 5th April: At this time, Harry is living with his parents and his brothers Mark Eden and Edwin at 32 Moss Street. 1901 Census Taken Sunday 31st March: The family are now living at 15 Fishergate. Harry is working as a 'Glass Blower Bottle'. His Father Thomas dies on the 11 June 1901 at 15 Fishergate, York of heart disease and is buried in York Cemetery. There is no headstone. 1908: Harry marries Florence Gertrude Spence on the 22 June 1908 in York. 1911 Census Taken Sunday 2nd April: On the 1911 Census, William Henry (Harry) and Florence are living at 4 Mill Street, York and he is working as a butcher. 1915: We know from an article in the Yorkshire Gazette dated 21.12.1918 that Harry was drafted to the Front in April 1915 being then a Lance-Corporal, having served in the Territorial Force for 12 years prior to the outbreak of WWI. 1917: He was awarded the Military Medal December 1917. At the time of his award he was still living at 4 Mill Street. The newspaper article reported that before the war he was working as a Groom to the late Colonel FH Anderson of Fulford Barracks. When did he change profession from Glass Blower to Butcher to Groom? This article was printed in The Yorkshire Gazette dated

21.12.1918. The newspaper article also mentions 2 children, i.e. John Thomas and Henry.



This is the transcript of the article:

Yorkshire Gazette – 21 December 1918 **FOUR BROTHERS AND TWO BROTHERS-IN-LAW WHO HAVE SERVED THEIR COUNTRY WELL** The Military Medal for gallantry in action has been awarded to Sergeant Harry Fearn, one of the four soldier sons of the late Mr T Fearn and of Mrs Fearn of 21 Richards Street, York. Sergt. Harry Fearn is 34 years of age and is serving in the 1-5th West Yorkshire Regiment. He was a member of the Territorial Force for twelve years before the outbreak of war and wears the Long Service Medal. Embodied with his unit on mobilisation, he was drafted to the front in April 1915, being then a Lance-Corporal, but has since been promoted sergeant. He was home on leave towards the end of October last, and upon returning to his unit received the Military Medal decoration. His wife and two children reside at 4 Mill Street, Piccadilly, York. Before the war he was groom to the late Colonel F H Anderson of Fulford. Private Mark Fearn, aged 32 joined the Royal Army Medical Corp on December 29th, 1914, and in the following February was drafted to France. About two years ago, he suffered from shell shock, consequent upon which is received his discharge and is now in the employment of Messrs. Leatham. Private Edwin Fearn joined the York and Lancaster Regiment in November 1915, was sent to France in April 1917 and in the following July was gassed. Upon recovery he returned to the Western Front but later was moved to Italy, where he is still serving. He is 30 years of age has a wife and one child, and in civil life was a baker in the employment of Mr J Tittensor, baker and confectioner, Fishergate. He is a son-in-law of Mr J Smith, 35 Francis Street, Fulford Road, who served for 23 years in the West Yorkshire Regiment and retired with the rank of quartermaster-sergeant, and two of whose three soldier sons have been lost in the war. Private John Fearn, aged 20 years, joined the West Yorkshire Regiment soon after the outbreak of war, being then only 16 years of age. He was wounded two years ago, and has since been engaged in the Forage Department of the Army Service Corps. At the time of enlistment he was engaged by Mr Tittensor. Private Harry Spence, brother –in-law of the Fearn, joined the Northumberland Fusiliers in October 1916, was sent to France in June 1917, when he transferred to the 1st Middlesex Regiment: a month later he was wounded but returned to his unit on recovery in January last and is still on active service. In October he was presented with a parchment certificate for gallant conduct and devotion to duty. It is recorded, on the certificate that during operations from October 10th to 12th his devotion to duty on many occasions under very heavy shell fire, was both a fine example to the members of the platoon and in his capacity of Company runner, of the greatest value to his company commander. Before the war he was in the employment of Messrs. Waddington Stonegate and resided with his sister Mrs Fearn at 4 Mill Street. Bandsman Herbert Coyle, another brother-in-law, is serving with the 5th Royal Irish Lancers. In May 1914 he completed twelve years as a member of that regiment and joined the reserve, but was recalled to the Colours on August 4th

following, and has fought with his unit in France throughout the war. At the time of re-joining he was in the employment of Messrs Boots, Cash Chemists and his wife and child live at 5 Mill Street.

Marriages: Harry (William Henry) Fearn married Florence Gertrude Spence in the June Qtr of 1908 Mark Eden Fearn married Mary Ellen Hill on 26 December 1908 Edwin Fearn married Frances Smith in the March Qtr 1910 John Thomas Fearn married Ethel Steel in the September Qtr 1920 Harry Spence Brother of Florence Gertrude Spence (Harry's Brother-in-law) Herbert Coyle married Alice Spence in the June Qtr 1914. Sister of Florence Gertrude, therefore the Brother-in-law of Harry's Wife Florence Notes from a visit on 12th October 2012 to the West Yorkshire Regiment Museum in York. Information supplied by Don:

There is no citation available for Harry's Military Medal. During WWI there were too many Military Medals issued to print all the citations. A Citation would have been given to Harry with his medal. Prior to the outbreak of war, Harry was in the Volunteer Force with the 1st Volunteer Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. In 1908 this was renamed the Territorial Force. The Territorial Force doubled in size due to the outbreak of war and 4 battalions were created 5th, 6th, 7th & 8th. Harry was in the 1st-5th Battalion. Harry would have been issued a service number when he joined the Volunteer Force and from research undertaken by Don, we know that his number would be pre 143 which was given to the surname Helps and Harry joined before him. Unfortunately there is no record of his earlier number. In March 1917 all territorial soldiers still serving with the Territorial Battalion were issued with new 6 figure numbers and the 1st-5th Battalion West Yorkshire started at 200001. The numbers were issued to the longest serving members first. Harry's number was 200010, meaning he was the 10th longest serving member of the 1st Battalion. Unfortunately, each battalion had its own range of numbers and these could be the same as any other regiment, so there could have been any number of soldiers with this number. From the picture of Harry, Don was able to advise that the leather bandolier he was wearing from his left shoulder down to the right was not commonly worn during WWI. It would have been used by the Horse Transport Section. It is felt that if, when Harry joined up, he had experience of horses, it would be logical for him to be in this section. (Harry has got a history of being a groom). The job of the Horse Transport Section was to deliver ammunition and stores to the front line. Generally this would be a cart/wagon pulled by 4 horses. The soldier would sit on the near side horse and hold his whip in his right hand to control the horses. If the load was too heavy, then a soldier seated on a wagon using reins would be used. The delivery of the ammunition and stores was mainly at night and along the few roads/tracks that were available. These would be heavily shelled by the Germans. If the transport was shelled, the soldier wouldn't dive into the nearest ditch or shell hole, he would stay with horses. Whatever Harry did he certainly earned his Military Medal and I suspect his actions were quite heroic.

In the 1920's it was decided to once again re-issue the army service numbers. This time they would be unique to the person. Harry's new number was 4523032. On the 20 November 1917 Harry was awarded the TFEM (Territorial Force Efficiency Medal). This was awarded to soldiers with more than 12 years service. (Service during war counted as double). He was awarded 'Clasp & Roses' to the TFEM medal in December 1927. I think this was for additional years of service as a volunteer. I was given a copy of Harry's personal/service information (from 1920) from the West Yorkshire Regiment Register. It gives details of his marriage and the names and dates of birth of his 3 sons. It also schedules the dates he enlisted/was discharged etc. After WW1 he re-enlisted on 23 March 1920 for 4 years. At that time he was a groom. It would appear that he was 'Discharged on Enlistment Defence Force' on 11 April 1921. He then re-enlisted on 5 July 1921 for 1 year. It is thought that at this time, there was unrest in the country (strikes, poor wages etc) and that old soldiers were called upon to guard key facilities i.e. railways. It is possible that Harry would have been in uniform with a rifle and bayonet standing on guard. I am not sure when he was discharged from this term. He re-enlisted once again, on 26 February 1938 and discharged on 22 December 1940. There is a note in the register that the discharge was 'age limit'. I think Harry must have been a 'career volunteer soldier'.



Harry Fearn 1943

Harry's nephew Terry (Edwin's son) remembers Harry running a bar. It is thought that it was the bar in the Drill Hall on the corner of Colliergate and St Andrewgate, York. The Drill Hall in the 1990's was still being used by the Territorial Army in York. Part of the Drill Hall is now occupied by Barnitts. Photos of the Drill Hall in St Andrewgate, York. Taken in January 2013:



Drill Hall in St Andrewgate, York 2013



Drill Hall in St Andrewgate, York 2013

1953: Harry died on 23 June 1953 and at that time lived at 16 Dodsworth Avenue. He is buried in York Cemetery.

Horace James Jordan Hummel

Submitted by Mrs Vicky Furness. My Grandfather, Horace James Jordan Hummel, (Hartie) was born 24 May 1869 at Lewisham, Kent, the first of five children of Horace William Hummel and Ellen Lousia nee Cutting. Horace W was the third generation at least to keep a hosiery/outfitters shop, formerly on Conduit Street and now at 6 Old Bond Street, London. Hartie was educated at Dulwich College, Tonbridge School and the Crystal Palace School of Engineering. He qualified as a civil engineer and later became an associate member of the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers.



Hartie in South America 1890

Hartie's career took him to El Salvador and Southern Brazil surveying for railways. Then he became assistant engineer to Pintsch's Patent Lighting Company for whom he built gasworks for railways in Scotland, London and India, where he worked in Madras, the North West, the East and South. We have photos of the Assam-Bengal Railway. Hartie was said to be wild. Perhaps so, or was it because he worked in far away places? In between times, in 1900, Hartie married Eveline Adelaide Stevens at Horley, Surrey. In 1901 Uncle Rex was born; William was born and died in 1906; and Aunt Eileen arrived in 1908. They lived in a large house with a large garden in a row built by great grandfather Stevens and had a Singer Tricar and holidays at the seaside. In August 1914 Hartie was in India. He had a German surname and so was interned by the British authorities. The Hummel shop in Bond Street, which he now owned in partnership with his brother Bertie, had the windows smashed. My mother, Margaret Hummel, was born in December 1915 and Hartie registered the birth. Her story was that when the shop windows were broken, the Home Office researched the family and found we'd been in Britain for 200 years. Of course the perpetrators would not know that! I assume that the successful search allowed Hartie to be released to return home. His skills were used by the Ministry of Munitions and in his spare time he drilled special constables in Horley.



Horace James Jordan Hummel

At the end of 1916 Hartie became ill and died on 3rd March 1917 of pneumonia and septicaemia. He was 47. Uncle Rex was 15 and left school. My mother never knew her father. She was told he died of a broken heart. Over the uyears Rex's three sons would ask their father about his childhood. He would refuse to speak and sometimes cried. We do know he resented having to leave school without qualifications in order to work. He became the man of the house. Income was reduced and the family moved to asmallr home. Unfortunatley Eileen died in an accident in Southern Rhodesia before her children had enquired about her childhood. Eveline had a weak heart and my mother was only 14 when she died. In 1917 most of Eveline's sibilings were near neighbours. , so "Poor Eva" was well supported, but she kept in touch with the Hummels too, and I visited an aunt and cousins as a child. Members may remember the original Costume Gallery at Castle HOward, which as set up by Berties's daughter, Cecile Hummel. I don't think Eva knew much of her husband's career; my mother certainly did not. My information has been gleaned mainly from cousins, the Horley Advertiser and the Institutioion of Mechanical Engineers.

Joseph Edward Parsons MM 1886 – 1948

Submitted by Stan John



Joseph Edward Parsons

My Grandfather, Joseph Edward Parsons, fought in the First World War and was awarded the Military Medal "For Bravery in the Field". He survived the War, his brother George Henry was not so fortunate. He fought with the Durham Light Infantry and was killed on the Somme. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Thiepval War memorial.



George Henry Parson's name on Thiepval Memorial



Thiepval Memorial

George Henry was also commemorated in the list of York's Fallen Heroes kept in York Minster. Joseph Edward Parsons was born on the 21st of June 1886 at which time his parents were living at 20 Frances Street Fulford. He married my Grandmother, Lillian Robson, on the 17th November 1908

at St Maurice Church, York. In 1911 they were living at 8 Buckingham Street York. Before marrying, Lillian worked at the Rowntree Chocolate Factory. Lillian unfortunately died young, in 1919, at the age of 32 of T.B when my mother was only 4 years old. My Mother said she remembered passing the Hospital where Lillian spent her last days and being told her mother was in there. Joseph subsequently remarried.



Lillian Parsons nee Robson with her 2 daughters, my mother in the middle
 Joseph was onetime indentured to an undertaker. His eldest son said that Joseph had made his own fathers coffin. Joseph served in First World War as 165978 Fitter Staff Sergeant with 301 Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery and also with 139 S.B and 108 SB. His Service Record Card shows:

Mobilised	8.5.1917.	Service reckoned from this date
Joined POC	Gnr 12.5.1917	
Appointed Fitter		
	12.5.1917	Examined in Military Workshop, Ordnance College, Woolwich
		Superior Fitter and skilled Millwright in Woodwork
And posted Staff Sgt	12.5.1917	
CSS Lydd	28.7.1917	
108 Siege Battery		
108 Siege Battery		
301 Siege Battery		
Posted to BEF France	1.9.1917	
Posted from Base	31.10.1917	
	1.11.1917	Joined 108 Siege Battery

The Royal Garrison Artillery was that part of the Royal Artillery that serviced the larger guns. 301 S.B went out to the Western Front on 2nd April 1917 armed with four 6" Howitzers and served in France and Flanders throughout the war. The Battery's War Diary for Nov 1916 to Feb 1918 is at the Public Record Office Kew under WO95/299, the diary for Mar 1918 to Nov 1918 has not been found. 139 S.B went out to the Western Front on 13th August 1916 armed with four 6" Howitzers.



Firing a Heavy Howitzer in France

A Christmas card that Joseph sent back from the front to his sister Charlotte. The writing on the inside is too faint to scan but it lists the actions that 139 Siege Battery took part in: SOMME 1916, ANCRE 1916, ARRAS 1917, YPRES 1917, CAMBRAI 1917, ALBERT 1918, ARRAS, 1918, CAMBRAI 1918, VALENCIENNES 1918



Christmas card 1918 - 1919

Joseph is mentioned in the unit war diary and the battery's action is detailed in the following extract:
War Diary 108 Siege Battery Royal Garrison Artillery

Place	Date	Hour Summary of Events and Information
THELUS	1.11.1917	Fitter Staff Sergeant J.E.Parsons and Fitter Gunner G.Jermy joined from RGA Base Depot as reinforcements
	5.11.1917	
	6.11.1917	The Battery fired approximately 200 Rounds over these 2 days at various targets. Typically roads, cross roads, trenches, enemy batteries, enemy working parties. Sometimes targets were picked out and/ or firing accuracy reported on by aircraft (with whom they were in radio contact), balloons or Observation Posts (OP's) on the ground
	6.11.1917	Battery shifted to HERSIN
HERSIN	7.11.1917	Battery shifted to ARRAS
ARRAS	8.11.1917	Battery entrained at ARRAS and detrained at BAPAUME
BAPAUME	9.11.1917	Battery shifted to AIZECOURT
AIZECOURT	10.11.1917	Battery shifted to GOUZEACOURT where it took up position

GOUZEAUCOURT 20.11.1917 Bdr J.D.Pont wounded and admitted to hospital
 Barrage and counter Batteries. 633 Rounds fired

23.11.1917 Map Ref: *** 48 Rounds fired
 Guns were shifted and placed in position at SONNET FARM

SONNET FARM 25.11.1917 90 Rounds fired

26.11.1917 Direct Hit on Howitzer No. 2100

27.11.1917 Howitzer No. 2100 pulled out and taken to Workshop
 Guns were shifted and placed in position at La Vacquerie

Earlier, anticipating that they would be forced to retreat, the Germans constructed a fortified, defensible line further back behind the Front. This was the Hindenburg line and La Vacquerie was one of many fortified villages that formed part of it.

LA VACQUERIE 30.11.1917 Enemy attacked. Approximately 500 Rounds fired. All the ammunition in Battery Position. Guns disabled, Breech Blocks taken off and buried. Personnel Retired to FINS.

Although understated here, this must have been quite a serious attack. Forcing them to abandon their guns and their position. No casualties are identified but a couple of men get Mentioned in Dispatches. Later the Battery is to be found firing on La Vacquerie where presumably the enemy have now taken up residence.

FINS 3.12.1917 Personnel of Battery marched to PERONNE to be billeted there.

PERONNE 4.12.1917 Personnel of Battery marched to AIZECOURT

(Peronne was under German Occupation from 1914 to March 1917 and changed hands again for about 6 months starting March 1918. Buried in the Cemetery there, killed by a shell in March 1918, is Brigadier General Cape, Artillery Commander in the 39th Division) After making peace with the Russians the Germans transferred a large number of their forces to the Western Front giving them numerical superiority. They decided to mount a series of violent attacks against the British, initially on the Somme in March 1918 (Note that this diary ends at the end of Feb 1918) 76 German Divisions were assembled against 22 British. The British Front Line was overwhelmed with an estimated 38,512 killed, wounded, missing or captured in the first day, (250,000 British and Commonwealth during the offensive which lasted 2 weeks). At Peronne the Germans had advanced 12 miles in 3 days (The Somme Battlefields, Martin and Mary Middlebrook ISBN 0-670-83083-6)

AIZECOURT 5.12.1917 4 Howitzers were drawn from Gun Park No. 3, ALBERT and taken to AIZECOURT.

14.12.1917 Battery moved and took up position in SUNKEN ROAD off FINS-GOUZEAUCOURT Road, near HEUDICOURT attached to 86 HAG.

Major Loggie MC and BSM Lowrey mentioned in dispatches

HEUDICOURT 15.12.1917 To 29.12.17 Approx 1500 Rounds fired at various targets including La Vacquerie, the Gouzeaucourt – Cambrai Road, Bonavis House and Sonnet Farm (*near the Hindenburg Line*)

La Vacquerie is now a sleepy little Farming village near a Service Station on one of the roads leading to the South of France. A small information post commemorates the fighting that took place there.



La Vacquerie then. On the way to total destruction



La Vacquerie July 2009

The Hamlet was part of the German defences that the British called the Hindenburg Line and the Germans called the Siegfried Stellung (whether or not this was the Siegfried Line the Tommies were going to hang their washing on, I do not know). The village was heavily fortified with trenched, barbed wire and machine gun emplacements and the severity of the fighting is borne out by the fact that 6 VC's were won within a mile radius of it. It formed a salient jutting out 500 yds from the forward edge of the Hindenburg line connected into it by deep trenches. The land about is open farmland, not many trees and relatively flat, ideal for strolling towards enemy machine guns. From what I have read, the Germans after taking heavy casualties on the Somme had prepared the Hindenburg Line as a heavily fortified defence to which they could retire and regroup in some safety. This they did, pursued by the British (and Commonwealth) Troops in the Spring of 1917. As the German retreat neared the Hindenburg Line their resistance stiffened. Certain villages had been designated areas where the final

rearguard actions would inflict as much damage, casualties and delay upon the pursuing forces as possible. One such village was La Vacquerie. The British could not pursue too rapidly or they would leave their supporting units, sappers etc, behind and if the Germans counter attacked would have little shelter in which take cover. Also the Germans were destroying everything in their retreat, roads, bridges, sources of food and water which meant that the British could not straight away bring up their heavy guns in support. Things settled down before the British reached the Hindenburg Line proper to a relatively calm period of trench warfare partly because the main British fighting was going on further North and partly to await the arrival of the guns and other support. Things changed dramatically in late 1917 with the Cambrai offensive (Cambrai being about 15 km East). Joseph Edward Parsons joined 108 Siege Battery at Thelus on 1st November 1917. The first British (unsuccessful) attack on La Vacquerie was on the 5th May 1917. The next attack, successful this time, on La Vacquerie was part of the Battle of Cambrai and occurred on 20th Nov 1917. 36 Tanks were involved but there was also fierce hand to hand fighting. As an example, one company of the Kings Royal Rifle Corps lost all its officers and NCO's leaving Rifleman Shepherd to take command. Only 34 of the 97 men of the company who began the advance survived the day. Rifleman Shepherd was awarded the VC for single handedly charging a machine gun nest and killing it's crew. The British were unable to make much further progress and things remained more or less as they were for nine days. Joseph was at Gouzecourt about 5km down the D917 from La Vacquerie on the 20th November. 9.2" Howitzers were hauled up to within 1000yds of the enemy line. Joseph's Battery moved to Sonnet Farm on the 23rd November, this Farm was on the D917 crossroads about 750 metres from La Vacquerie village centre. They moved to La Vacquerie on the 27th November.



British WWI Howitzer

On the 30th November the Germans counter attacked and swept through to Gouzecourt which Joseph had left 7 days ago. 108 Siege Battery left La Vacquerie in a hurry.

“The artillery had played a formidable role in the defence of the position. Gunners stayed at their posts until the last moment, and even then most had the nous to take breech blocks and sights with them as they beat their own hasty retreat. Their actions throughout the 30th served to slow the German advance towards La Vacquerie and took a particularly heavy toll of them as they advanced.....”

On the morning of the 3rd December following fierce fighting, the Germans retook La Vacquerie. The British dug in for Winter and things remained relatively quiet till March 1918 apart from constant massive bombardments of Gas shells. The Guards recaptured Gouzecourt only for it to be evacuated again on the 21st/22nd of March. It was not until the end of September 1918 that the British retook La Vacquerie, by now in ruins. At some point Joseph was awarded the Military Medal “for conspicuous gallantry”. I have not been able to find any citation but he gets a mention in the London Gazette below:

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Military Medal for bravery in the Field to the undermentioned Non-commissioned Officers and Men:—

M2/092257 Pte. B. Abrahams, A.S.C., R.A.M.C. (Kilburn).
 96724 L./Bombdr. H. J. Abaslon, R.G.A. (Helborn).
 74870 Pte. F. J. Adams, R.A.M.C. (Reading).
 200429 Pte. W. Adams, R.E. (Grangemouth).
 42040 Pte. D. Adamson, M.G. Corps (Hyde).
 24022 Pte. A. H. Adcock, Suff. B. (Hopton).
 (Waltham).
 8208 Sjt. H. Auger, M.G. Corps (Waltham).
 8634 Pte. A. Austin, R. Scots (Maitland).
 293076 Sjt. J. B. Austin, R.G.A. (Hastings).
 12718 Pte. W. Avis, Hamps. B. (Hastings).
 172424 Gar. H. A. Backus, R.G.A. (Hastings).
 06206 Bombdr. E. Badley, R.F.A. (St. Albans).
 111853 Gar. E. Baggott, Tank Corps (Hastings).
 211144 Cpl. (A/Sjt.) C. H. Bailey, R.G.A. (Northampton).
 26460 Pte. J. Bailey, Boer. B. (Manchester).
 117328 Pte. L. Bailey, R. York. B. (Hastings).

London Gazette

SUPPLEMENT TO THE LONDON GAZETTE, 16 JULY, 1918. 8325

11217 Cpl. H. Parrott, R.G.A. (Dukinfield).	532376 Spr. (L./C.) W. W. D. Pilbeam, R.E. (Brighton).
22014 Pte. R. Parry, G. Gds. (Birkenhead).	11910 Cpl. (L./Sjt.) A. E. Pilkington, Manich. R. (Moss Side).
22773 Pte. E./Sjt. J. E. Parsons, R.G.A. (Birkenhead).	241867 L./Sjt. J. Pinder, Boer. B. (Hull).
112533 Pte. M. Parsons, A.V.C. (Deyford).	12423 Pte. J. Pirie, R.S. Fus. (Glasgow).
11772 Spr. P. E. Partington, R.E. (Leyton).	194363 Gar. G. H. Pitcher, R.G.A. (Dundee).
11751 Pte. W. Partser, North'n B. (Birmingham).	32088 Sjt. W. P. Pitfield, R.G.A. (Stockport).
11779(S) Pte. J. Partridge, R.M.L.I. (Birmingham).	87875 Gar. P. J. Plackett, R.E.A. (Salisbury).

London Gazette

Joseph like so many others rarely spoke of what he did and was apparently upset because a soldier who was with him and underwent the same dangers, being a Private, did not receive any award. Family memory has it that, under gas attack, he attended one of the Howitzers that had been damaged by enemy fire and either was unable to be operated or was unable to be moved and thus saved from capture. In order to successfully effect the repair he, and presumably the Private Soldier with him, had to remove his gas mask. There are another couple of family memories relating to Joseph's exploits in WWI. Apparently the Howitzers he worked on were so large that the breeches had to be pumped open and this took a long time therefore reducing their rate of fire. Joseph, being a resourceful sort of chap, rigged up a system whereby a connection was made between the rear wheel, (minus tyre) of a motorbike and the howitzer breech opening mechanism. This greatly speeded up the process. He should have got a medal just for that. On another occasion he was returning to camp, after going on a foraging expedition, with 2 live chickens concealed in his Greatcoat. Unfortunately he met 2 Officers walking towards him. Having to salute them, this dislodged the chickens. On passing, one of the Officers said, "drop one of those off at our Mess". After the War, Joseph spent some time in France. There obviously was a lot of clearing up to do – unused munitions lying around etc. On returning to England he eventually remarried and had a further 4 children. Sometime earlier he had moved to Birkenhead and later was employed there as a Foreman in Spiller's Flour Mill. Joseph died on the 18th of April 1948 and is buried in Christchurch, Barnston, Wirral, Cheshire.