



Stephen Gee Collection

The Estaminet Times

Number 33
Spring 2018



The newsletter of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society
Commemorating the Great War Centenary

Contact Details

Newsletter Editor

Rob Hamilton

robhamilton@live.co.uk

Tel: 07793 463810

PR Officer

Alan Rhodes

alan.rhodes@talktalk.net

Tel: 01422 647457

Committee Members

Rob Hamilton (Chair)

Elaine Beach (Funding)

John Sunderland (Treasurer)

Ann Wilkinson (Secretary)

Graham Bradshaw (Minutes Secretary)

Rosemary Jones

Photographer

Patricia Morley



LED BY **IWM**

The newsletter of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society
Commemorating the Great War Centenary

Editor's Notes

Welcome to the latest edition of our Newsletter. Since our last edition we have held our AGM when a short report was given by the interim chairman on the previous years events and the financial state of the society following which all the current officials were re-elected. A copy of our accounts are below.

1/3/17 - 28/2/18		INCOME	1/3/17 - 28/2/18	EXPENDITURE
42795 c/f At Bank	1028.87		42867 Tim Lynch talk	30
42843 Elaine's talks (Stones +1)		105.96	43139 David Raw talk	65
43143 Rob's talks		50		
43161 DM's talk Bradford F Hist.		40		
43181 Donation from Rosemary J		100		
	1028.87	295.96		
TOTAL	1324.83			
Less EXPENDITURE	95		TOTAL	95
43181 Balance c/f at Bank	1229.83			

It seems our reputation is spreading as we have recently been contacted by several organisations, more of that later in the newsletter.

Rob Hamilton

Monthly Talks

November

Archaeology

Dane Wright

For many of us, our experience of archaeology has been perhaps limited to watching a local dig in progress, or just viewing the Time Team TV programme as they grapple to understand some Roman or Medieval site. Our speaker on this occasion, Dane Wright, Field Archaeologist with Elmet Archaeology, described an altogether different type of excavation when he talked about his work at Thiepval Wood, the jump off point for the 36th Ulster Division on 1 July 1916.

Fascinating and thought provoking, I just wondered what Tony Robinson would have said about the danger of coming across unexploded ordnance; or indeed the ethical dilemma of removing human remains lying undisturbed for some 100 years.

The newsletter of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society
Commemorating the Great War Centenary



Archaeological work in progress at Thiepval Wood

The newsletter of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society
Commemorating the Great War Centenary

December 2017 *Christmas Social*

Our 2017 programme of meetings came to its traditional end with food, drink, good company, and a quiz. Thanks to everyone for their contributions to the evening.



The newsletter of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society
Commemorating the Great War Centenary

January *1918 An Overview*

Rob Hamilton

How difficult, if not impossible, it is for us to put ourselves into the mind-set of someone living the dangers and uncertainty of the first half of 1918 through to the relief and satisfaction of the November 11 Armistice. People had experienced the carnage and unrealised expectations of 1916 and 1917; our senior military and political leadership were aware of the exhaustion and unreliability of the French Army; the United States had joined the Allies but had still to make an impact on the Western Front and we were short of manpower; there had been a revolution in Russia resulting in a separate peace treaty which, in turn, had given the Germans the opportunity to move large numbers of experienced troops from the Eastern theatre to the front line across Belgium and France; and, at home, food



The newsletter of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society
Commemorating the Great War Centenary

shortages and rationing were becoming more and more of a problem.

Rob Hamilton, our chairman, provided a masterful overview of the events of the last year of the Great War - from the German Army's deepest advance into France since 1914 to the Allies' Hundred Days Offensive resulting in the Germans retreating or being driven from all of the ground taken that Spring, the collapse of the Hindenburg Line and the capitulation of the German Empire that November.

February 2018
Charles Trevelyan

David Raw

Our Guest Speaker, David Raw, made a welcome return to The Old Mill to talk about the career of Charles Philips Trevelyan, Liberal M.P. for Elland and a junior Education Minister in the Asquith Government, and in particular the events and consequences of his 1914 Ministerial resignation and opposition to the First World War.

Having been elected in March 1899, he continued as the Member for Elland until the post-war election of December 1918. In an open letter to his constituents, Trevelyan made his opposition to the war very clear (referring to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the struggle between Russia supporting Serbia and Germany allied with Austria) “...we have not the least interest with the loathsome murder or the passionate retribution, it is not worth the life of a single British sailor”.

David's presentation was well-researched and ably presented. It was a pleasure to be in the audience.



The newsletter of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society
Commemorating the Great War Centenary

April 2018

Skipton's WW1 POW Camp

Anne Buckley

We heard an extraordinary story of a German Naval Officer who commanded a gunboat during the siege of Tsingtao and was captured in 1914 by the Japanese. Held at a camp in Japan, he escaped and tried to return to Germany via an overland route crossing China and Russia. Russia proved impassable so he returned to the Chinese coast and obtained passage across the Pacific to the then neutral United States. A land journey to New York followed by a berth on a ship sailing to Norway and a relatively easy crossing of the Baltic would take him home. However, his luck finally ran out when the Royal Navy intercepted the ship as part of the sea blockade of Germany, and he was found, after a 48 hour



Speaker Anne Buckley pointing out an item of interest on her display boards

The newsletter of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society
Commemorating the Great War Centenary

search, hiding under a pile of mattresses. Initially thought to be a civilian, he was interned in the Isle of Man but, as a German Officer, his efforts to return to fight for the Fatherland ended in early 1918 as a Prisoner of War at Skipton's Raikeswood Camp.

This was just one story revealed by Anne Buckley's research and the project to translate a 330-page book of memoirs the German prisoners published on their return home from Skipton. A most memorable meeting for a number of other reasons, the only one of which I will mention is Anne's supply of Trench Cake and Macaroons made by Syrian refugees to an original egg-less Great War recipe.

News Items

We have recently been contacted by several organisations with requests for information about the role of Halifax in the Great War. Firstly a television production company got in touch as they were researching a drama about a northern provincial town in the Great War and we were pleased to supply them with some of the many stories we have collected. Unfortunately the production was postponed until next year but hopefully will go ahead then.

Halifax Business Improvement Development, an organisation tasked with improving Halifax Town Centre, then contacted us asking for information for a commemoration of the end of the war that they propose to hold in Halifax. We are putting together relevant information for them which will be displayed in Halifax.

Lastly Ripponden Parish Council asked for information for a booklet they intend to publish to commemorate the Great War. Once again we are busy putting together a number of items for them.

These are busy times indeed.

Feature - Military Service Tribunals in Calderdale

Conscription was only introduced in January 1916 after much soul searching by the Liberal Government. It was considered militaristic, un British and exactly the sort of thing we were fighting against, however it was essential as the volunteers were drying up. It was possible for individuals to appeal against conscription and many men took up this option and members of the Military Service Tribunals which heard such appeals became the busiest men in the country. The work of the tribunals was controversial and after the war the government quickly ordered that all records should be destroyed with the exception of one district which would be retained as an example of the work that was carried out. Halifax was no exception and the only place evidence of the work of the local tribunals can be found is in the local papers. One of our members has volunteered to create a database of these appeals and these are his thoughts on the project so far.

Notes on the Halifax & District Tribunal - A Long & Winding Road

John A Sunderland

In November 2017 I volunteered to record the names of men who came before the appeals committee in the Halifax District. Little did I realise what a mammoth, but interesting task I had let myself in for.

The format I'm using is a simple spreadsheet giving essential information such as Name, Occupation, Employer, Grounds of Appeal and Decision. Addresses, age and marital status were included in the headings but only certain reporters gave this information. After consultation with other members we came up with a set of sub-categories for the 'Grounds of Appeal' column, including essential work, reserved occupation, domestic, health, conscience and business difficulties, additions to this list were made as and when necessary. Under the heading 'Decision' the initial rulings list lengthened as the Military Authorities changed the tribunals remit.

I meant what I said earlier that it was a 'mammoth task'. Each Tribunal report and each individual case has to be read to get a real idea of how the committee arrived at its decision.

The First Sitting

The report of the first sitting in public of the Halifax Tribunal appeared in the *Courier* 19 February 1916 under the heading 'Compulsion Tribunal, Claims for Exemption' and there were 'Many Interesting Halifax Cases' according to the sub-heading; there were indeed. The Council Chamber at the Town Hall was the venue with Mr J E Shaw (presiding), Councillors T Hey, A Broadley and Mr J W Wallis from the Engineers Federation. Also present was Mr R M Stansfield, the military representative.

The first application came from W H Broadbent, carpet cleaner, on behalf of his son, who was the only assistant he had left. After deliberation the decision was that the son should be put back to April 16. This meant that Mr Broadbent had to find somebody of non-military age or see if the work could be done by a woman.

Another decision on the same day brought a swift reply from 'The Directors' of James Ackroyd & Son who answered a claim by Mr Stansfield that "This firm have not lost any men by enlistment at all". The directors claimed this was untrue as three of their employees 'had enlisted some considerable time ago' and that they were paying weekly allowances to the wives of the married men. On this basis the company insisted the *Courier* insert a denial which duly appeared. (I must point out that the Tribunal sat on Wednesday and the *Courier* appeared on the news stands on Saturday.)

Points of Interest

Probably the most interesting piece of information is about conscientious objectors. The first one I came across was Isaac Solomon, a master tailor from Sowerby Bridge. He came before the Halifax Tribunal asking to be excused service for business considerations and also on the ground of having “a physical objection to the taking of human life.” A discussion between Mr Solomon and Mr Denton Walker ensued. When asked “Supposing a German attacked your sister or your mother, you would defend them wouldn’t you?” Mr Solomon replied that he did not think it was a fair question and therefore did not have an answer. “You would stand and watch them do it ?” continued Mr Walker, “I don’t know whether I would or not,” Mr Solomon answered. The application was refused and told that he must make arrangements for his brother to take over the business.

The 18 March 1916 Courier Halifax Tribunal report had two interesting conscientious objectors cases. First was Arthur Ritchie a pawnbrokers assistant of Norland House who said he “...had never thought of killing anything or anybody.” “None of us have,” replied committee member Mr J Black. When asked if he would be willing to help putting up barbed wire, digging trenches and bringing in the wounded his answer was, “Well, yes.” The outcome of this case is most interesting because Ritchie joined the Tank Corps and was in one of the first tanks in battle on 15 September 1916.

The action of Crew C14 (pictured below - Imp. War Mus.) is recorded at length and describes Gunner Ritchie's bravery and subsequent fatal injury. His mother and step-sister were allowed to visit him in France and were with him when he died on 14 November 1916.

On a lighter note the next entry is that of Charles Wadsworth a bookmaker from Norland. When asked "Can you kill a fowl?" he replied "I never did but I have kept them." "Then they were killed?" His answer brought laughter from the gallery, "I hope they were!" He agreed to be a stretcher bearer.

There are, of course, many different job descriptions but I found the Christian names fascinating. Generally surnames are quite normal but try to imagine a mother calling Bagshaw (Stott), Saxon (Walshaw), Columbus (Stephenson) or, probably the best, Welcome (Farmer) in for their tea.



These are just four Christian names I have picked out but there are many others.

At the time of writing I have reached 21 July 1917 with over 5500 entries. This is not the definitive number as the Courier could not enter every appeal due to the limited space available. My research does not cover other local papers (Halifax Guardian, Brighouse Echo, Todmorden News, Hebden Bridge Times) which may have further names to add to the list.

I continue down a 'long and winding road' with many interesting cases to record.

Feature - Laura Willson

2018 marks the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918 which gave some women the vote and it is only fitting that one of the pioneers of women's rights in Halifax should be featured. Graham Bradshaw has submitted this piece.

The Great War brought many changes, not least to the position and status of women in society. Laura Willson lived through and played a significant role in influencing the movement for improved conditions for women. Before the war, she was a suffragette who later became a director of her husband's engineering company which manufactured lathes for the production of munition and gun work. After the war her attention was drawn to the housing shortages and she went on to become a successful building developer in Halifax and Surrey.

Laura was born in Halifax to Charles, a dyers labourer, and Augusta Buckley, who were living at Gledhill's Yard, behind a beer house at King Cross, when Laura was three years old. She was working as a "Half timer" at the age of ten, most likely as a spinner in the local mill. She worked for half of the day in the mill and the other half was spent in the

classroom. She worked 30 hours per week to earn one shilling and sixpence (7.5p), when most families were living on earnings of twelve shillings (60p) per week. At fifteen she became caught up in the Labour Movement, and was one of the early pioneer women in that movement to realise the need for women to become trade union members. It was whilst working as the local Trade union secretary that she met and married George Henry Willson, an engineer with his own business. Unlike most women at that time Laura, who had her first child, George, a year after her marriage, was not to lead a life entirely centred on the home and family. She was very active in the Suffragette movement and was arrested in 1907 and spent two weeks in prison. In the fustian worker's strike in Hebden Bridge she was accused of saying "If you can't get justice by fair means get it by foul." And "take the law into your own hands; the police are few and you are many". Later that year she was again arrested following a protest outside the Houses of Parliament and later imprisoned for a second time.

With the outbreak of the War such was the demand for lathes in munition manufacturing that Smith, Barker and Willson, the company in which George Willson was a partner, increased production three-fold. Women started to work in the company to fill the gaps left by the men who had gone into the services. By the end of the war 74 of the 200 people employed there, were women. Laura took on the role of supervising the women and making the working conditions for them as good as possible. Realising

that many of the impoverished mothers were going without food, Laura set up a canteen at the factory to ensure that the women were properly nourished. (This was one of the first canteens of its type, and the idea soon caught on at other factories around Britain.) In 1917 she was awarded the MBE for her contribution to 'Women's Work in Munitions'.

Whilst it had been seen as necessary during the war to bring women into engineering to fill the gap left by men joining the armed forces, government, employers and trades unions were against the continuing employment of women after the war. Like many other women who had held down engineering jobs during the war, Laura was incensed by the 1919 Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act and similar measures designed to force female industrial workers back to the home after the war – and it was the desire to protect the position women had won for themselves in industry that brought her, together with like-minded pioneers in 1919, to found the Women's Engineering Society (WES) and, later, to become a founder member of the Electrical Association for Women. She was president of WES 1926–28.

After the war, Laura applied her knowledge of labour-saving ideas from industry to housework and house design. This inspired her to construct modern housing for working people to include the latest gas and electrical appliances. She began the construction of

several housing estates in the 1920s in Halifax, later moving to Englefield Green in Surrey, where she did more of the same. She was the first woman member of the Federation of House Builders.

Laura died in 1942 in Walton on Thames where she had lived since moving there in 1927 with her husband who died three years later. Their only son George died in 1943 in Halifax where their only daughter Kathleen Vega died in 1985



The newsletter of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society
Commemorating the Great War Centenary