



Stephen Gee Collection

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

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Editor's Notes

As I write this editorial the commemorations of the centenary of the 1918 armistice are in full swing across the country with some of the displays being quite breathtaking as well as extremely moving. Calderdale has been no exception with churches and other local organisations making quite wonderful efforts to honour the sacrifice of the young men and women of our district. Our society has been heavily involved in providing information and assistance to several of them. More about that later in the newsletter.

However, there have been a couple of disappointing aspects recently. The first was the decision by the Cambridge University Students Union to vote down a motion to promote Remembrance Sunday as they feared it glorified war. They have quite clearly missed the whole point of the event and obviously do not realise that it is a commemoration and that without the sacrifice those young men and women made we would not have the luxury of living in a safe and comfortable democracy where they are able to express their opinions so freely.

Secondly, at a recent commemorative event, I was engaged in conversation by a person who said that as a member of a Great War historical society I would of course know that the British army were 'lions led by donkeys'. I replied that I didn't agree and pointed out that the conversation between two senior German officers from which the quote was taken didn't actually take place and that it was in fact a fabrication made up by an alleged military historian of the sixties to which the reply was well of course you must agree that Haig was incompetent.

I had to disagree once again and it turned out that their view of the war stemmed from participation in the play 'Oh What a Lovely War'. Wonderful entertainment but in no way factually correct. It is extremely disappointing that such perceptions persist amongst the majority of the population in spite of the efforts of historians and people such as ourselves to alter them.

Rob Hamilton

News Items

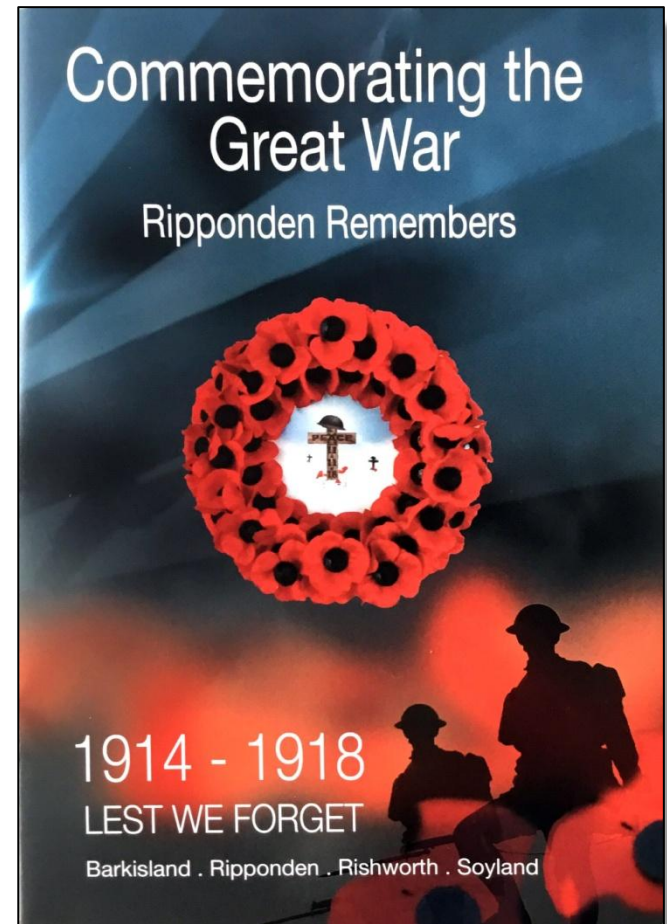
Halifax Courier Series

Just over 4 years ago we approached the Courier to propose a series of articles about the war as reported in the paper. We thought perhaps a monthly article but to our surprise the editor of the Courier asked for a weekly series. With some trepidation we agreed and led by David Millichope we commenced our daunting task. It was clear from the start that we would need a bigger team than just myself and David to write the series and we managed to coerce, sorry persuade, John Sunderland and Elaine Beach to join us. So off we set, each taking one months editions of the Courier at a time, identifying suitable articles, researching the subject and ultimately writing the material which eventually appeared in the paper. If my own experience is typical there was much head scratching, furrowed brows and kicking of the cat in frustration (metaphorically of course as no animals were harmed in the making of this production), however, although there were a few technical issues at times, we always delivered good quality material and never missed a deadline, featuring every week without fail. My thanks go to my fellow contributors and especially David Millichope for editing the series and providing unfailing encouragement and support to us all. The Courier as a thank you, printed a 4 page spread in the edition of 9th November which can be seen in the following pages.

News Items

Ripponden Centenary Booklet

Back in February of this year Ripponden Parish Council advertised for help in compiling a centenary commemorative booklet and we offered our assistance and supplied information about some of the areas they were interested in. The result was the publication of 'Commemorating the Great War – Ripponden Remembers' which includes much material supplied by ourselves. Copies of the booklet can be obtained from the Parish Council offices at 107 Halifax Road Ripponden.



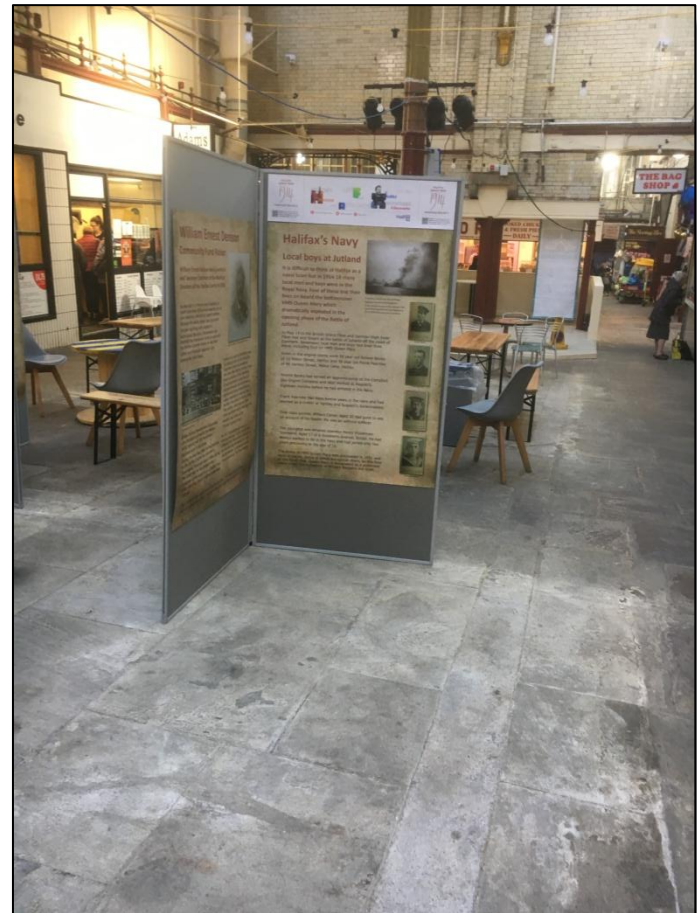
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News Items

Halifax Business

Improvement District

As we reported in our Spring newsletter Halifax BID, an organisation tasked with improving Halifax town centre, asked for our assistance with a centenary exhibition. We were able to persuade them to feature stories about local people and not the usual focus on the casualties of the war. I have to say they did us proud. Using space in the Borough Market they set up a very good display of boards around a small seating area showing information about local people from all walks of life who were involved in some way in the war.



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Sowood Womens Institute Poppy Trail

On 4th November David Millichope and myself attended the official launch of the poppy trail at Stainland Memorial Recreation Ground followed by a visit to an exhibition at Sowood Community Centre. We had been invited earlier in the year to give tips to the members of the institute on how to research the men from the district who had lost their lives and we also helped out with information about some of the men.

The ladies of the institute have done a truly wonderful job commemorating the fallen of their district with not only 4 walking trails but also commemorative benches, ceramic poppies and blue plaques along the routes. They are well worth a look, more information can be found on their website.

<https://sowoodwi.com/poppy-trail>



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Feature

Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines

When war was declared in August 1914 the British air force, known as the Royal Flying Corps sent a total of 63 aircraft to France with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). These primitive machines made of canvas and plywood, held together with wire and powered by unreliable engines were a far cry from the modern aircraft we are familiar with today.

The whole advent of aerial warfare was brand new and both sides strived to master the technicalities and tactics of this new dimension. One particular problem which the British were trying to solve was how to destroy the giant German airships known as Zeppelins, named after their creator Count Graf Von Zeppelin, which were capable of flying long distances carrying bombs that they could drop on defenceless civilians below. They were able to fly high enough to be out of range of anti-aircraft guns and the planes of the time lacked the necessary firepower to shoot them down. One intrepid aviator decided to try a novel way to solve the problem, he would not try to shoot them down but bomb

them instead. On the night of 7th June 1915 Lieutenant Reginald Warneford of the Royal Naval Air Service pursued and destroyed Zeppelin LZ.37 by dropping 3 bombs on it which caused it to explode and fall in flames. The concussion from the explosion damaged the engine of Lt Warneford's plane and he was forced to land in a field 35 miles behind enemy lines but was able to effect repairs and make his way back to a friendly airfield. Boys Own stuff indeed and the following day the King awarded Warneford the Victoria Cross for his exploits. Alas only 10 days later Reginald was dead, killed in a flying accident near Paris. He was buried at Brompton Cemetery, London, one of the very few servicemen whose bodies were repatriated to be buried at home.

The Warneford name was a familiar one in the Skircoat area at the time as Canon John Henry Warneford had been the first vicar of All Saints Church, Salterhebble from 1846 until his death in 1899 and his daughter Minnie still resided in the area and worked tirelessly for the St John Ambulance Brigade. The Reverend Warneford was Reginald's great uncle and Minnie his second cousin. She campaigned for there to be a memorial to her famous cousin in Halifax and Clog Yard, King Cross was renamed Warneford Square in his honour in August 1915. The Square is long gone, demolished in the re-development of King Cross and

the site is now occupied by the car park for King Cross library but if you look carefully at the adjacent buildings you will see that the street sign has been retained to perpetuate the memory of this brave man.

By 1918 the Royal Flying Corps had expanded to almost 4000 aircraft and there was a corresponding increase in the number of pilots required. One of them was George Washington Benson whose family lived at Hadlow, Albert Promenade, Skircoat. He had originally enlisted in the West Riding Regiment and crossed to the Western Front in December 1915. He subsequently transferred into the Flying Corps and during a training flight in March 1918 he decided to pop home for dinner. Although great strides had been made in the design and construction of aircraft they were still small machines by today's standards and he was quite easily able to land on Skircoat Moor, leave his aircraft, enjoy his meal at his parents home and then take off to return to his airfield.

Flying was a seat of the pants experience in those days with few regulations to control where planes could fly or land. A far cry from today's heavily regulated society. George survived the war and passed away in 1971 in Whitby.

In July 1918 another plane landed on Skircoat Moor but this time with tragic consequences. The pilot, Harold Heydewrych, had lost his way and descended to try and ascertain his whereabouts. Aeroplanes were still a novelty and a large crowd gathered curious to see one of the flying machines they had heard so much about. When the plane took off a policeman and some soldiers attempted to clear a lane for it but some of the crowd ran into its path forcing the pilot to take evasive action. His manoeuvre undoubtedly saved many lives but he unfortunately struck four-year-old Arnold Stancliffe of Walton Street, King Cross. Arnold was transported to the Infirmary and his mother rushed there to see him but unfortunately he died the next day from his injuries.

Rob Hamilton