

The Estaminet Times

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HALIFAX
MILITARY HISTORY
SOCIETY

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Editor's Notes

Welcome to Spring and the first edition of the *Estaminet Times* of 2024. Yes, we went back to our cosy old familiar title and a link to our roots when we were the Halifax Great War Heritage Society commemorating the centenary of the Great War. Since then, we have expanded our remit to 'Military History', and this is reflected in the mix we now offer in our speaker evenings and this e-magazine. Our interpretation of 'Military' is quite wide ranging. Although our emphasis is likely to lean towards military issues that featured on home soil (and in particular our immediate locality), we are happy to feature topics which have a wider context. Hence the talks given by Eli Dawson on the Crusades and a talk on 'The Battle of the Little Big Horn' to be given by Steve Birnie in 2025. It's probably also fair to say that topics on the Great War are likely to be disproportionately represented for a while yet. Old habits and all that.

I would like to finish off by emphasising again that this e-magazine welcomes contributions from all members. If you have something which you think would interest our readers, then please submit your ideas (not the full article) to the email address below. You will then be emailed the magazine guidelines for your full submission. Think in terms of 500-1000 words.

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The Magazine of the Halifax Military History Society

British Gallantry Medals from the Crimea to World War II

Rob Hamilton

Before the Crimean War, there was no official standardised system for recognition of gallantry within the British armed forces. Officers were eligible for an award of one of the junior grades of the Order of the Bath and brevet promotions while a Mention in Despatches existed as an alternative award for acts of lesser gallantry. There was no system at all to recognise gallantry in the other ranks of the armed services.

The war in the Crimea, Britain's first major war since the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, highlighted this discrepancy and Queen Victoria determined to remedy this situation by instituting a medal in 1856 which would only be awarded to officers and men who had served in the presence of the enemy and had performed some signal act of valour or devotion. The medal was to be named the Victoria Cross.



Victoria Cross

British Gallantry Medals from the Crimea to World War II

It soon became apparent that many acts of bravery while being carried out by the other ranks of the army were not sufficient to warrant the award of the Victoria Cross. Consequently in 1854 a gallantry medal commensurate with this level of bravery was instituted but in typical British fashion, the Army and the Navy, would receive different awards. Army personnel received the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Navy received the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal. In 1886 it was decided that officers should receive a similar medal and the Distinguished Service Order was instituted for both services.

When the First World War broke out and the armies found themselves bogged down in the stalemate of trench warfare, it became clear that there were many acts of gallantry which would not necessarily fall into the level required for the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Rather than devalue this medal the Military Medal was instituted, the Military Cross for officers having already been introduced in 1914. As an indication of the intensity of the fighting in the trenches, over 115,000 of these medals were awarded by the time the war ended.



Military Cross

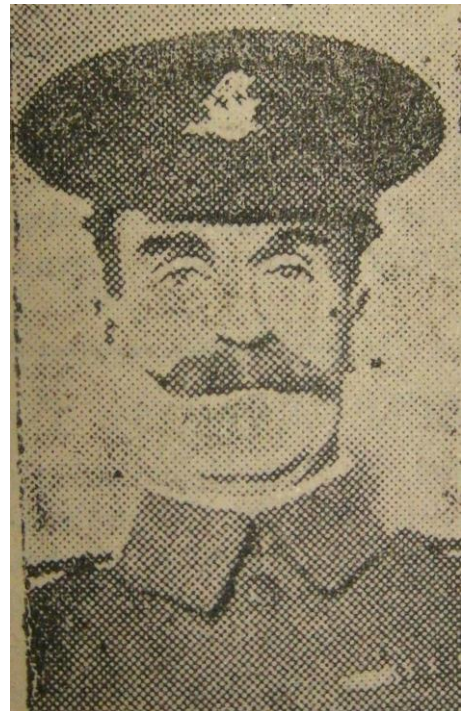
British Gallantry Medals from the Crimea to World War II

Awards for gallantry were also available for civilians. In 1867 the Albert Medal was introduced initially for saving life at sea but then being extended in 1877 to acts of gallantry on land. There were two classes of the medal, gold and bronze and then, as a result of the German bombing campaign of 1940 – 1941, the George Cross and George Medal were introduced with the gold Albert Medal being superseded by the George Cross in 1949 and the bronze award in 1971. All these medals were also available for personnel of the armed services for acts of gallantry not in the face of the enemy.

Many local men received gallantry medals particularly during the two world wars and the following men are just three examples of Calderdale heroes.

Bernard Behan

He was born in 1880 in Halifax and served in the British Army during the Boer War. On the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 he immediately volunteered and by April 1915 was serving with the 2nd West Riding Regiment in Belgium. The battalion, along with troops from other regiments, was involved in an attack on the tactically important feature of Hill 60 in the southern sector of the Ypres Salient.



British Gallantry Medals from the Crimea to World War II

Bernard Behan distinguished himself by fearlessly driving the Germans from a trench with only one companion and then, when reinforcements arrived, leading a charge to clear another trench. For his gallantry he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Britain's allies, eager to show their appreciation for his efforts, awarded him the French Croix de Guerre and the Russian Order of St George. At the time, Bernard Behan was the most decorated local man and, when returning home to recuperate from a subsequent wound, he became quite the toast of the town with Halifax Council holding a dinner in his honour at the Town Hall. He went on to be wounded a further three times and as a result was discharged from the army in 1917. He died in 1924 and was buried with full military honours in Stoney Royd Cemetery, Halifax.

Although he was undoubtedly a brave and fearless soldier, his aggressive nature did not serve him well in peacetime. By the time he joined the Army in 1914 he had been convicted no fewer than 23 times for incidents such as drunkenness, resisting a police officer, disorderly conduct and obscene language, all of which involved his fondness for drink. His time in the army did not mellow him and he continued to fall foul of the magistrates after the war. His death at the early age of 44 from a ruptured duodenal ulcer was almost certainly caused by his alcohol problem. As they say it takes all sorts, even in time of war.



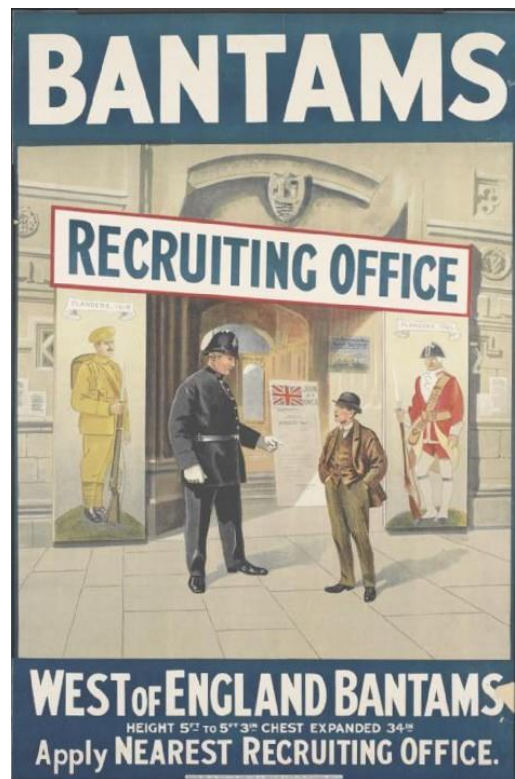
Distinguished
Service Medal

British Gallantry Medals from the Crimea to World War II

William Shooter

33-year-old Brighthouse William Shooter immediately volunteered for the army upon the outbreak of the First World War but was rejected three times as he was only 5'2" tall. Along with so many other working class men, he was a victim of the poor working conditions and pay endemic in Victorian and Edwardian England. So many men were being rejected that Birkenhead MP Alfred Bigland successfully campaigned for special 'Bantam' battalions to be raised consisting entirely of men who failed to meet the army's height requirements and William joined the 15th Cheshire Regiment.

While serving as an instructor at the Brigade Bombing School in April 1916 he was instructing a group of men when a nervous recruit dropped a live Mills grenade in the trench. With no thought for his own safety, William picked up the grenade and threw it out of the trench where it exploded harmlessly, saving the lives of five other men. For this act of bravery, he was awarded the Albert medal. Later in the war he was severely disfigured when the lower half of his face was blown away. When he returned to his home town, he was unable to speak at a reception held in his honour. He was a little man with a big heart.



British Gallantry Medals from the Crimea to World War II

Copley bus driver **Hanson Turner** was awarded Britain's highest award for valour, the Victoria Cross, during the Second World War. He had originally joined the West Riding Regiment but by June 1944 he was serving as a sergeant in the West Yorkshire Regiment in Burma. On the night of the 6th - 7th of that month the Japanese were attacking British positions at Ningthoukhohg, part of a concerted offensive to advance into India.

Sgt Turner single handedly held off repeated Japanese attacks by advancing and throwing grenades. He returned no less than five times to his own lines for more grenades but on his sixth foray he was killed. The numbers of the enemy found dead the next morning was ample evidence of the effectiveness of his grenade throwing. He is buried in Imphal War Cemetery, India and left a wife and daughter. His Victoria Cross was bought by Calderdale Council in 2004 and is now on display in Bankfield Museum.



Hanson Victor Turner

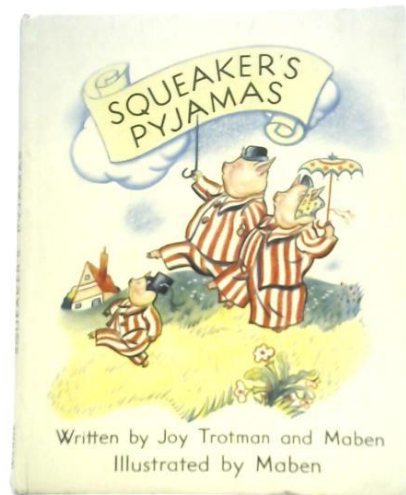
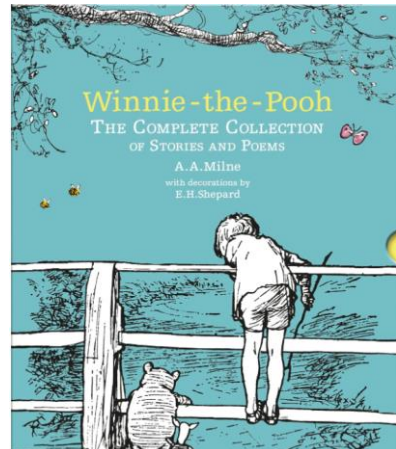
Bookworming

Peter Liddle

ED. In the last edition of our e-magazine, we featured an article where our patron, Peter Liddle, reviewed books on the Great War that had impressed and/or given him particular pleasure. It was a sort of reader's *Desert Island Discs*, partly autobiographical as well as a list of recommendations. We have decided to run this as a series, as Peter has written extensively on many other historical topics. So, we begin at the beginning with Peter's own introduction to musings from earliest days.

Growing Up

In high old age I have been experiencing such an enhancement of my enjoyment of books that I feel I must write about it. As it happens, I have always taken pleasure from books – those read to me from my earliest days like the Mumfie books about the little elephant; the Christopher Robin books, though I did not like the illustration of Christopher dragging his bear, Winnie the Pooh, downstairs bumping his head at each stair; and *Orlando the Marmalade Cat*. When I myself could read, the first readings were probably *Squeaker's Pyjamas* or *The Adventures of Grump*.

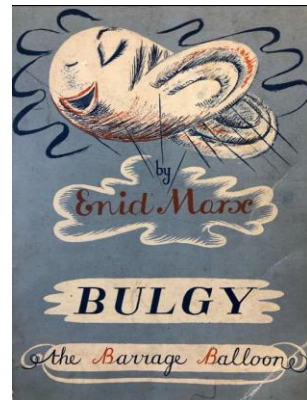


Bookworming

Then, more advanced, I took to my brother, Brian's, Just William books which were such a delight, though I got into trouble leaving easily identifiable sticky finger marks in one volume. During the war, the *Wimpey the Wellington* (Bomber), and *Bulgy the Barrage Balloon*, stirred my little understanding of being under threat and needing to be brave. (Most of these books are still with me.) They were followed by the exciting Biggles books making clear from where the threat came. Some of the rather repetitive text is with me still:

'Leave the talking to me, said Biggles', a phrase used teasingly in conversation at home today.

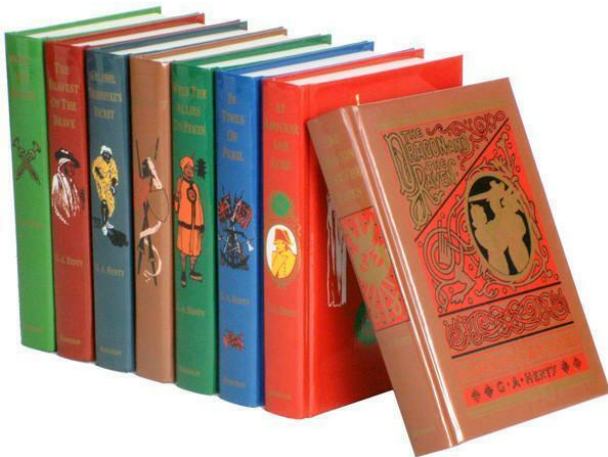
My mother or father's R.F. Delderfield novels come next in my memory though I am uncertain of whether in fact I read any. I do remember however being taken into deeper waters by Denis Wheatley's *The Devil Rides Out* and William Harrison Ainsworth's *The Lancashire Witches*. At Boarding school I am sure that supervision guided our leisure reading and Lt Col JH Patterson's *The Man-eaters of Tsavo* and a book about the disappearance of Colonel Fawcett in his exploration of the Amazon are remembered favourites. The GA Henty stories of English heroes stimulated a national pride which sadly today would stimulate but derision. School stories like *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* by Talbot Baines Reed were eagerly devoured too. Easily my favourite Comic was *The Wizard* with its unbeatable ageless athlete, Wilson, in his black, closefitting costume – was he the pioneer of Lycra?



However, these flushes of literary pleasure were to be submerged as 'A' Level demands at Bede Grammar School, Sunderland, required seriously **directed** reading. I still wince at the well-targeted humour of an Economic History master's instruction giving out approved books for study 'Give that one to Liddle; he likes books with pictures in'.

Bookworming

This was the start through sixth form, university and college, student then lecturer, and through school-mastering, which came first after college, teaching at 'O' and 'A' Level, subjects too shallowly known to me. READING as a MATTER of NEED was now mandatory. It did not stop there either because NEED became still more the case when I first attempted to write for publication. That stage came to an end some years ago but the dormant pleasure, rather than necessity of reading, re-emerged like some super hibernating creature or seed. Of course, I now had time on my hands but with my capacity to follow a lifetime pursuit of cricket, tennis and hockey balls long gone, and my combined lack of both interest and competence in 'do it yourself' or cookery, reading proved an inviting course to follow. Rich has been my reward.



Sensing this, Louise bought me a notebook to list and comment on what I was reading. Frequently I have written not just judgementally on the books listed but noted what I had learned from them. Additionally, I have been drawn back by the books I have read, to my memories of people met, places visited, and experiences undergone.

For anyone reading this other than my dear wife, Louise, do please be assured that I am fully aware of the subjectivity of the foregoing. Just as what we choose to wear, how we furnish and decorate our houses, reflects our taste, how we select and then judge our reading, illustrates our individuality with our personal opinions and prejudices. Ironically, it might be borne in mind that professional reviewers in journals and newspapers sometimes seem oblivious that they can be judged relatedly.

Is there a Peninsular War buff in the house?

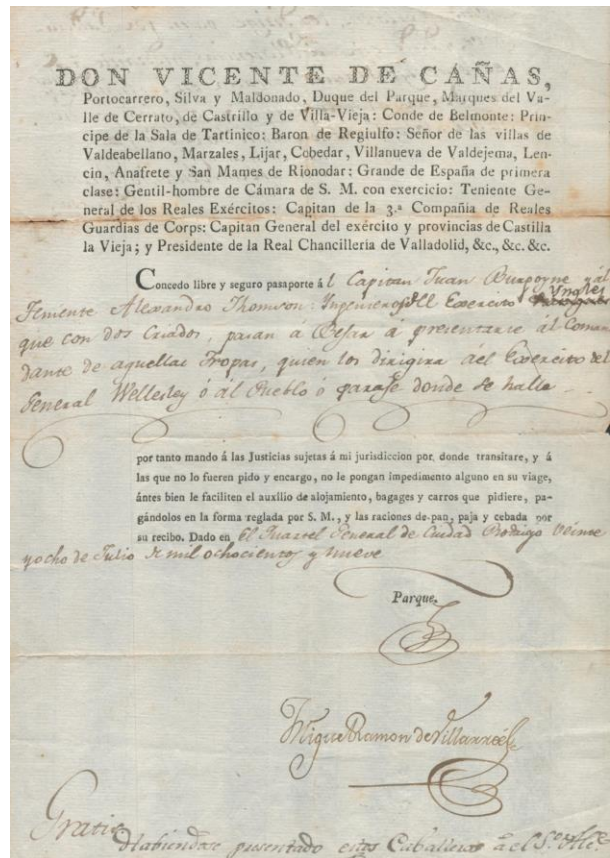
Alan Rhodes

This request started (as a lot of things do for me) with an auction lot described as "Wellington related Safe Passage in Spain document. 1809 for Duke of Parque. Refers to "General Wellesley".

The description is incorrect. *Don Vicente de Canas....the Duque del Parque* is the issuing authority and the document is signed by him. Our "buff" needs a good knowledge of Spanish. *Concedo libre y seguro pasaporte a* translates as "I grant free and secure passage to" but that has exhausted my Google translation ability. However, I think the passport was issued to two English officers, a Captain John Burgoyne and an Alexander Thomson.

Wikipedia provides some information about the Duke (1755 – 12 March 1824). He was a fervent supporter of Napoleon and Joseph I of Spain but changed sides in July 1808. In April 1809, he was appointed Captain General of Old Castile and given command of the Spanish Army of the Left.

This appointment did not find favour with the British and Arthur Wellesley's brother Richard as Ambassador to Spain tried to get him dismissed. Parque was defeated by an Imperial French Corps under Kellermann at the Battle of Alba de Tormes on 28 November 1809



Is there a Peninsular War buff in the house?

The then Marquess of Wellington disparagingly wrote of his Spanish allies "I declare that if they had preserved their two armies, or even one of them, the cause was safe. But no! Nothing will answer excepting to fight great battles in plains, in which their defeat is as certain as the commencement of the battle".

This brief outline demands someone with more knowledge to investigate the roles played by Messrs Burgoyne and Thomson. In addition, Parque's own story deserves a much longer treatise. Suffice it to say that in a little over a year he went from being the President of Spain's *Congreso de los Diputados* to dying whilst under house arrest in Cadiz ordered by the Spanish King Fernando VII as a result of backing the wrong side.

Hopefully, one of our readers can fulfil this task.



A Christmas Box for the Troops:

Ian Richardson

I have been engaged in family history research for many years, and I have been particularly interested in researching the stories of my grandfather and his five brothers who served in the Great War. I recently visited my older brother who had been attempting some tidying and downsizing, and – knowing of my interest – he said he thought I might be interested in something he had found in a drawer. He produced a metallic gold-coloured tin box, which I immediately recognised as a Princess Mary Christmas Gift Box, dating from 1914.



Princess Mary Christmas Gift Box 1914

A Christmas Box for the Troops:

The tin, which is approximately 5" long by 3" wide by one and a quarter inch deep, is made of embossed brass. It has an image of Princess Mary, the words "Imperium Britannicum" on the lid, and the names of Britain's allies in the corners (Belgium, Japan, Russia, Montenegro, Serbia and France), with the slogan Christmas 1914. It also contained a pencil contained within a "bullet" in an imitation cartridge case, but the contents were originally a photograph of Princess Mary, and Christmas cards from the Royal Family together with twenty cigarettes (wrapped in a distinctive yellow monogrammed wrapper), an ounce of pipe tobacco, a pipe and a tinder lighter, although there were variations in the contents.



A Christmas Box for the Troops:

To my even greater delight, the tin contained three medals – the proverbial “Pip, Squeak and Wilfred” set (the 1914 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal, which are inscribed with the recipient’s name, rank, regiment and number). These were the medals of one of my grandfather’s brothers - Company Quarter Master Sergeant George Richardson of the 1st Battalion of the Grenadier Guards, who was killed in action on 29th October 1914 in the first Battle of Ypres, and therefore entitled to a clasp for the 1914 Mons Star, for serving under fire in France or Belgium in the period 5th August – 22nd November 1914. Incidentally, his younger brother L/Corporal Harry Richardson (of the same Battalion) was killed nearby nine days later. The medals were sent to another of his brothers in 1920, and they must have ultimately been passed to my grandfather and then to my father.



Pip, Squeak and Wilfred

A Christmas Box for the Troops:

Princess Mary, the 17-year-old daughter of King George V, had expressed the wish that “every sailor afloat and every soldier at the front” should have a gift at Christmas 1914. It was her original intention to pay for the gifts out of her private allowance, but that was deemed impracticable, and it was agreed that a public fund would be launched with her name, to pay for the gifts. She took a keen interest in the Sailors & Soldiers Fund, and she urged people to help send “our little token of love and sympathy on Christmas morning”, which she suggested might also provide employment in trades adversely affected by the war.

The appeal was launched in October 1914, and raised £162,591 12s 5d (equivalent to £17,836,232 in 2024 prices), mostly in small gifts from the general public. This was more than was needed, and eligibility was broadened.

More than 355,000 tins were successfully delivered by the Christmas deadline, although another source suggests that 400,000 were delivered by the beginning of January (often with a New Year card instead of the Christmas card). However, a shortage of brass – needed for weapons and munitions - meant that many entitled personnel did not receive their gift in time, and some did not get theirs until Christmas 1916, or even later. Orders for brass strip were placed with the USA, and a large consignment was lost with the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and the boxes manufactured later in the war were made of a plated inferior alloy. The gift was not an annual event, but because of the logistical issues involved, its distribution was spread over several years, and it was stated in January 1919 that “considerable numbers” had still not been distributed.



Princess Mary

A Christmas Box for the Troops:

Although a substantial percentage of men were regular smokers in those days, the needs of non-smokers were recognised, who received a packet of acid drops instead, plus a khaki writing case, paper and pencil. The ratio of standard smokers' packs to non-smokers was 28:1. Other variants included a gift box for nurses, which had chocolate instead of cigarettes, and two for Indian troops, containing spices and sweets, with the gift for Sikh soldiers containing no cigarettes. There was also another version for Indian "followers" or Bhistis (non-combatants who performed administrative or other tasks) which only contained spices and a Christmas or New Year card. The gifts were generally well received: the brass box was watertight and made a useful container for money, papers, cigarettes etc., although many service personnel repacked the presents in the box and sent them home to their families.

It was reckoned that more than two and a half million tin boxes had been distributed by the end of the war. The fund was wound up in 1920 and the remaining assets were passed to the Queen Mary Maternity Hospital.

On a personal level, there remains an element of mystery as to whose Christmas gift this tin was, bearing in mind that the accompanying medals belonged to a soldier killed several months before that Christmas. It might well have belonged to my grandfather who was serving in the Army Service Corps in Picardy, supplying the British Expeditionary Force. On the other hand, I understand that gift boxes were also distributed to the next of kin of deceased servicemen (in this case probably the older sister of the deceased), so it is possible that it did belong to the gallant Grenadier, whose medals were inside.

The moral of this story is that you never know what treasures and family heirlooms are still hiding in drawers and attics, so good luck in your search, whether it be in the attic or on eBay!

The Man who started a World War

David Millichope

Gavrilo Princip was a revolutionary nationalist who might be described in today's terms as a terrorist. His cause was Serbian nationalism and he belonged to a conglomerate of conspirators known as the *Black Hand*. On the morning of 28 June 1914 seven of them including Gavrilo Princip were in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo planning the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The day's events unfolded in almost comic-opera style. Several of the plotters, including Princip, failed to act when the Archduke's motorcade passed them on the street. Later, one of them, Nedeljko Čabrinović, managed to throw a bomb which bounced harmlessly off Franz Ferdinand's car and exploded under the following car, injuring twelve spectators. Čabrinović attempted to kill himself by swallowing cyanide and jumping into the river. His attempt failed as the cyanide caused him to vomit and the river was too shallow because of the hot summer weather. He was soon dragged from the river and badly beaten by the crowds before being taken into custody by the police.



The Man who started a World War

The motorcade proceeded to the City Hall for the planned civic reception. Here a furious Franz Ferdinand confronted the Mayor. "Mr. Mayor, one comes here for a visit and is received by bombs! It is outrageous!"

Following the civic reception, Franz Ferdinand requested a change to the planned route, to visit the hospital where some of the injured had been taken. It seems the driver was not informed and Franz Ferdinand, noticing his car taking the wrong direction, ordered it to be stopped. The driver attempted to reverse the car causing it to stall – incredibly right by the spot where Gavrilo Princip was sitting in a café brooding over his earlier missed opportunity.

At first Princip intended to activate and throw his bomb but was unable to do so because he was hemmed in by the crowds. Instead, he drew a pistol and, without time to aim, fired two shots at point blank range. One bullet severed Franz Ferdinand's jugular and the other entered the abdomen of his wife, Sophie. She is reputed to have exclaimed "For Heaven's sake! What happened to you?" and Franz Ferdinand in turn to have exclaimed "Sophie dear! Sophie dear! Don't die! Stay alive for our children!" The couple were driven away but both died shortly afterwards. Princip's shaky aim was intended only for Franz Ferdinand. Sophie had been pregnant, and her unborn child perished with her.



Sophie Duchess of Hohenberg and Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria

The Man who started a World War

Princip tried unsuccessfully to shoot himself and also attempted cyanide poisoning, but, like his fellow conspirator, managed only to vomit.

He was tried and convicted alongside the other conspirators but escaped hanging because he was under twenty years of age. Instead, he was imprisoned and, never in good health, spent a miserable four years in captivity before finally succumbing to TB of the bone in April 1918.



The
fateful
car. Now
in the
Military
Museum,
Vienna.

The legacy of Gavrilo Princip was enormous. The *Black Hand* were believed to have connections with the Serbian government provoking Austria-Hungary to issue it with a punitive ultimatum. Its conditions were impossibly unacceptable, giving Austria the excuse to invade with the intention of destroying Serbia as an independent state. Protective of Serbia, Russia moved to confront Austria, but her mobilisation handed the hawks in the German Army an excuse to declare war on her in a pre-emptive attempt to check her rising power. As France was bound by treaty to come to the aid of Russia, Germany moved to strike at her first. In what is widely regarded as one of the 20th century's worst decisions, Germany attempted to invade France through Belgium, alarming the British Empire sufficiently to also bring her into the conflict. It had become a world war that played out in two phases, separated by a twenty year 'peace'. It shattered the old order.