



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

Welcome to the latest edition of our Newsletter. Once again we have had a very busy time with both positive and negative events to report. On the plus side our series of monthly talks have gone from strength to strength with a number of very informative speakers having appeared at 'The Old Mill'. If you haven't made an appearance so far please come along, you will find a friendly and welcoming atmosphere with a range of interesting subjects to listen to and the hospitality provided by our host, Alan Rhodes, is second to none. The NewsCat project is entering the final stages with a second look through the papers to pick up any errors or omissions, once again our thanks to Graham Bradshaw and Peter Walls for their efforts in this respect.

On a negative note our bid for lottery funding has been unsuccessful which puts us in a difficult position regarding the online version of NewsCat. However we are exploring new avenues and will hopefully have some more positive news in the future. The society received a second blow when our founder, David Millichope, decided to step down from the position of Chair and from the committee. The society would not be in the healthy position it is without David's commitment and I would personally like to thank him for all he has done.

Editor's Notes - continued

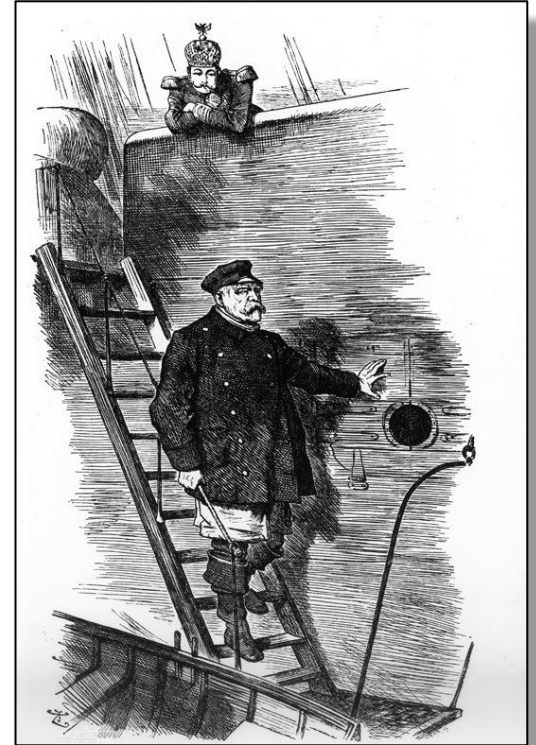
I have agreed to step up to the position of Interim Chair until the AGM when we will be able to put matters on a more formal basis. I will try to fill David's considerable boots and I hope to continue his good work.

Rob Hamilton

Tribute to David Millichope

When David announced at the end of the September Committee Meeting that he was resigning as our Chairman, the image that came into my head was the 1890 Punch cartoon by Sir John Tenniel “Dropping the Pilot”.

Not that I would wish to compare Chancellor Bismarck with Chairman Millichope (although there might be physical similarities, I'll leave you the reader to judge). My analogy also fails in that Bismarck left the German ship of state and Wilhelm II on a course that led to the shipwreck of 1918, whereas David is leaving the ship's wheel of a thriving and active society en-route to achieving its goal of celebrating the inspiring and victorious efforts of Halifax and Calderdale during the First World War.



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Nevertheless, it does feel that we have lost our pilot. Back in 2011, he was the driving force in establishing the then *Halifax Great War Trail Association* and has been our chairman ever since. He has given stimulating and informative talks to many organisations as well as our own society. He has represented us at meetings and on committees, and worked tirelessly on our behalf. We have enjoyed and appreciated his skills well displayed on our website, the newsletter and the *Central Halifax Great War Heritage Map*.

Sometimes comparison is made between the professional historian and the amateur dabbler, however David can only be described as a Professional Amateur. Professional because of his M.A. Degree in Great War Studies; his studious and painstaking research into, not least, his book *Halifax in the Great War* (I know it was a team effort but David was both pilot and chief stoker); and his willingness to share his vast knowledge of the Great War in a friendly and informative manner as honed by his experience as a respected teacher. Unprofessional only because, rather than receiving a monthly salary, he has made financial contributions in support of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society.

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Amateur only in the respect that he is a volunteer who takes on a job and does it to the best of his very considerable abilities and, as he has now done, exercises his right to say in effect “I want to spend more time with my family and to concentrate on a planned second book so I am handing over to someone else”.

Thankfully, David is remaining a member of our society and will continue as Editor of the weekly Halifax Courier Great War series.

Alan Rhodes on behalf of the committee of the Halifax Great War Heritage Society

HLF Bid

As reported in several of our recent editions of the Estaminet Times, HGWHS has been in the process of submitting an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). At all stages of the process HLF have been helpful and supportive and had repeatedly flagged up that there were more good applications than could be supported by the money available. We have been informed that our application was of good quality but did not achieve their outcomes as strongly as other applications. Our application has therefore been unsuccessful. They pointed out what could strengthen our application and reminded us that there was a reapplication route. The HGWHS committee is now looking at all options.

We would like to thank the following individuals who provided us with letters of support for the application.

Carole Knowles and Pauline Lancaster (Calderdale Libraries Services)

David Glover (Friends of Lister Lane Cemetery)

Corinne MacDonald (Halifax Antiquarian Society)

Clifford Drake (Calderdale Family History Society)

Professor Richard Grayson (Chair of Imperial War Museum Digital Projects Advisory Committee)

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Finally, a few details about what was being proposed in the application. The objective was to create an on-line resource which would be available without charge for any individuals, groups or organisations wishing to explore the impact of WW1 on the communities of Halifax and the Calder Valley. Emphasis was on the home front and the experiences of everybody in the local communities from all walks of life. Part of the funding was to maintain the site for at least ten years so that it could be a 'living' resource expanded by the addition of letters, diaries, stories, photographs etc.

The resource was to be built around two databases already compiled by our society. We have often referred to these databases in our newsletter as 'NewsCat'. They contain most of the war related content of the Halifax Courier (Weekly) and the Brighthouse Echo (Weekly) from 1914-19, indexed by theme and searchable by key words. Examples of themes were war production, role of women, recruitment, servicemen, support for servicemen, hospitals, government regulations, food problems, Belgian refugees, resistance to war etc.

The on-line resource was to be more than a database. There was to be a number of other features digitally integrated with it to engage with the users and encourage them to explore more.

A timeline based on our current centenary series in the modern day Halifax Courier which would contain many local stories and put the local themes into the wider context of the war.

Explanatory background information for each themes used in NewsCat.

A heritage map of Calderdale containing key locations associated with the themes

Digitisation of all other remaining local newspapers (1914-19) searchable by optical character recognition (OCR).

Monthly Talks

June

Messines 1917

Richard Smith

Society member Richard Smith gave a well researched and informative talk about the Battle of Messines Ridge, a British victory which has been overshadowed by the 'Passchendaele' offensive which followed shortly after. He highlighted the innovative use of tunnelling operations and meticulous planning which led to the detonation of a series of mines under the German defences on the Messines Ridge and which enabled this commanding position to be taken and held with relatively light casualties.

July

Captured Memories 1914-1945

Peter Liddle

Our Patron presented another fascinating glimpse into the voices and written documents he has accumulated in the Liddle Collection at Leeds University and the Second World War Experience Centre at Wetherby. With the help of the Sunderland Patented Lectern he gave a fascinating and sometimes emotional account of his experiences interviewing and gathering material from the participants of all sides in the two great conflicts of the 20th Century.

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September

Food

Elaine Beach

Our September talk was given by our redoubtable Elaine; I had better not say it was on her favourite subject “Food” but suffice to say that Elaine has so much material that there will be a second offering in 2018 covering the food shortages of 1917, rationing, and the situation in Halifax until the end of hostilities.

For anyone young enough to have only experienced the weekly supermarket shop, it may be difficult to understand the relationship between the independent or small private shopkeeper and his neighbourhood customers. For me, one of the highlights of Elaine's talk were the letters to the Courier explaining and apologising for shortages and price rises, and assuring regular customers that there was no favouritism shown.

It also took me back to my childhood in the 1950s when my parents managed a branch of Gallons the Grocers. I suspect things then were not all that different to the period we study. It was all personal service, there was a chair for the customer, a broken biscuit for a child, a lad and the shop bike to deliver your purchases, mental arithmetic in pounds, shillings & pence to add up your bill, and my father to remember what you usually order.

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October

The Life and Death of Nicholas II

David Glover

For October, The Life and Death of Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia was the talk given by David Glover to our Society. As always from David, we had a well-constructed, meticulously researched and fascinating presentation. If you were unfortunate to miss it, look out next year for David's Wednesday Afternoon Illustrated Talks at Square Chapel when the programme will include this talk.

Somewhat strangely, David's story began in the leafy suburbs of Harrogate but the link was there. A quite moving story about Princess Alix of Hesse, one of Queen Victoria's grandchildren, and the future and last Empress of Russia as the wife of Nicholas II.

Princess Alix visited Harrogate in 1894 to take in the spa waters and during her time at Cathcart Guest House, the hotelier, Mrs Allen, gave birth to twins. The Princess agreed to be the twins' godmother and, until 1915, sent beautiful and valuable gifts to Harrogate every year. There is an exhibition on the Russian Royal family and these gifts at the Royal Pump House Museum.

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This link to Yorkshire made David's account of the life and terrible fate of the last of the Romanovs all that more poignant.

Feature

When the word 'Pals' is used when talking about the Great War our thoughts immediately go to the young men who volunteered in their droves in the heady days of 1914 and formed the famous 'Pals' battalions about whom so much has been written and who are so greatly associated with 1st July 1916, the disastrous first day of the Battle of the Somme.

However, a recent discovery by the Sowood Women's Institute demonstrates that the term has a much wider context. The names of Harold Wheater and George Thorpe both appear on the St Andrews Church war memorial at Stainland. They lived within 1 mile of each other in Holywell Green and both worked at Dempster's engineering works in Elland. Luckily both men's service records have survived so we know that they were both called up on 23rd January 1917 and both were sent to the 9th Training Reserve Battalion at Rugeley Camp which was on Cannock Chase in Staffordshire.

At the time Horace Wheater was 19 years old, unmarried and living with his elder brother and foster parents, Alice and Benjamin Pilling, and their three children. Why the two Wheater boys were not with their mother is not known, all we can say with any certainty is that their father's name was not recorded on their birth certificates and their mother was not married.

23 year old George Thorpe on the other hand had only recently married Hetty Dixon at St Andrews Church in September 1916 and was living with her and her six-year-old illegitimate daughter in Station Road. George was a native of Ripon, as was Hetty. The 1911 census records her living in Stainland whereas George was still in Ripon, did he move across to Holywell Green to pursue his sweetheart or did his family moved to the area for some other reason and he met Hetty later ? Was George the father of her daughter ? We shall probably never know.

By April 1917 they had completed their training and on the 13th April they went to France, firstly into a base depot from where they were both sent to the 2nd Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment on 29th April. If they had perhaps only been on nodding acquaintance before their call up they would surely have become good ‘pals’ after enduring the hardships of their training and finding themselves as newcomers in the same battalion.

On 13th May the War Diary of the 2nd York and Lancaster Regiment recorded the following

“Quiet day. Heavy trench mortar troublesome on our left front company. Retaliation obtained with our 4.5 Heavies”

What isn't recorded is that one of those troublesome trench mortar shells killed Horace and George. Worked together, joined together, trained together, abroad together, died together, buried together. True pals indeed. Horace and George are buried next to each other in Philosophe British Cemetery, France.

Four months after his death on 19th September 1917 George's daughter, Eileen, was born.

As a postscript to this story a shortened version was featured in the Elland 'Go Local' magazine and elicited an immediate response, the great niece of Horace Wheeler contacted the Sowood Women's Institute and invited them to look at some photos, badges and medals that were in her possession.

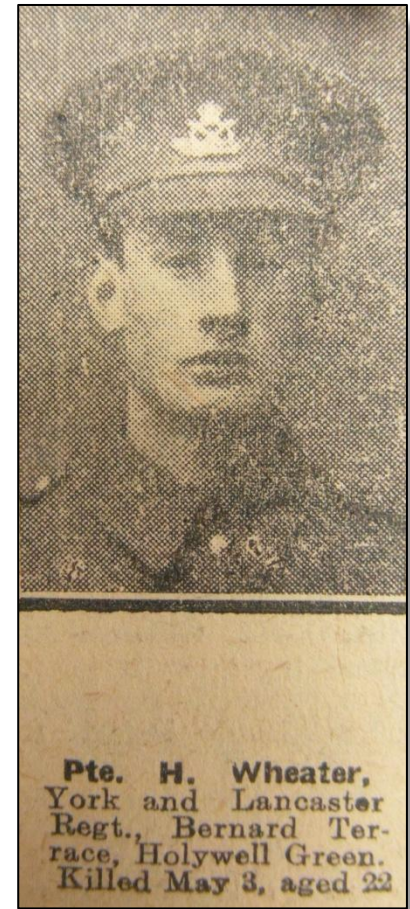
PTE H. WHEATER AND PTE. G. THORPE.
The friends of Pte. Horace Wheeler (32433), York and Lancaster Regiment, have received a letter from Sec.-Lt. Wilfred B. Clarkson, informing them that the first-named was killed in action at 4.30 on the morning of Sunday, May 13. The officer proceeds:—"He was a brave soldier, and even though quite new to the dangers of trench life he carried himself most courageously. We have lost a good man." Pte. Wheeler, whose address was Bennard-terrace, Holywell Green, enlisted last January, and went to France in April, four weeks before he met his death, being killed by the same projectile as his comrade, George Thorpe. These two joined up together. Both were in the Training Reserve, North Staffordshire, became attached to the York and Lancaster Regiment, went to France and into the same trench together, where, in less than 30 hours, both were killed by the same shell. Previous to joining, Pte. Wheeler was employed by Messrs. Dempster, Elland, and was highly esteemed and loved by all with whom he came into contact. He was but 22 years old.
Pte. George Thorpe (32431), York and Lancaster Regiment, whose military career is referred to above, was 26 years old, married, and lived at Station-road, Holywell Green, working for Messrs. Dempster's, Elland. Lt. B. Clarkson, writing to Mrs. Thorpe, says:—"I had only yesterday been chatting with him about you and his family. He was not at all afraid and met his death most courageously. My platoon has lost a good soldier and my men a brave and congenial comrade."

Halifax Courier 7th July 1917

There were Horace's campaign medals, badges of the West Yorkshire Regiment and South Staffordshire Regiment and some photos featuring two separate soldiers believed to be Horace and his brother Ralph although the family did not know which was which. We were contacted and invited along and by comparing the photograph of Horace that appeared in the Courier we were able to identify each brother. We were also able to clear up the mystery of the badges as Ralph served with the West Yorkshire Regiment and does not appear to have served overseas whereas Horace, although he served on the Western front with the York and



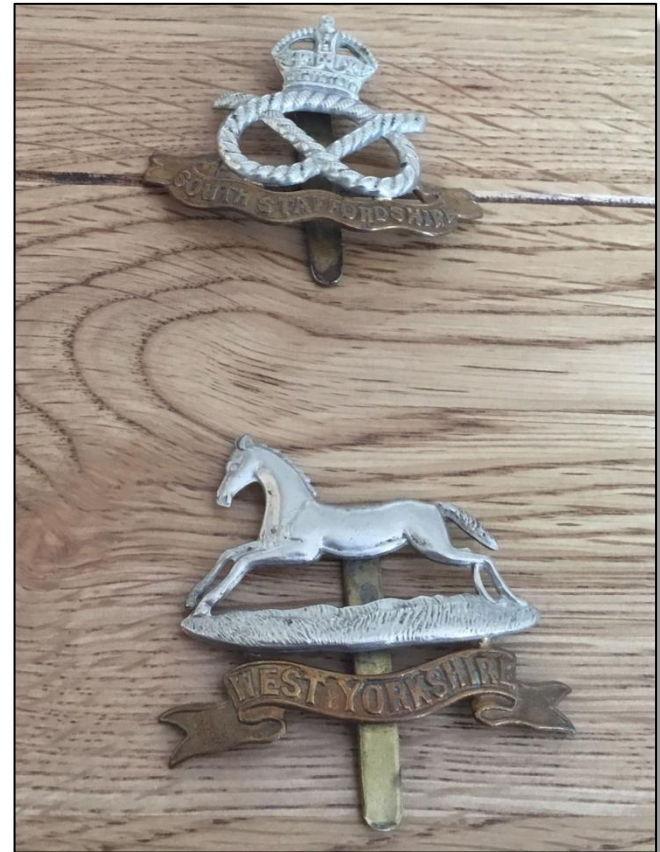
The family photo of Horace



Courier Photo
7th July 1917

Lancaster Regiment, initially served in the 9th Training Reserve Battalion which was attached to the South Staffordshire Regiment. We were also shown an autograph book belonging to a family member which dated from 1911 and as well as having autographs from family and friends it also included some from servicemen who presumably were patients at St Luke's War Hospital.

The family are keen for some research to be carried out to find something out about the people who signed the book. If there is anybody who would be interested in doing this please contact us.



Examples from the Autograph Book



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