



THE WAR GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT



In Association
with the CWGC



News from the Front line

Autumn 2009

Where does the time go? I had thought that making the newsletter a quarterly item would give me more time to get sorted and, all of a sudden, it is time for it to be prepared yet again. As usual it has been busy over the last three months with the summer allowing photographers to get good shots of the gravestones, albeit having to contend with the lush foliage which is also at its best depending how you look at it!

TWGPP has now been recognised by the New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage who have now donated all of their images within New Zealand along with their dominion islands. It would have been difficult to find volunteers in many of these locations so, as reciprocal work, we are assisting them in the supply of New Zealand headstones for various internal projects



I, along with others, have been doing the rounds with presentations including the Rotary Club, local history groups and the Royal Air Force Association with more to come in November which we would envisage being the busiest month. Saying that, the site achieved more 'hits' in August than we did last November but this was probably due to Pauline's excellent article for The National Archives (TNA) 'Ancestor' magazine. TNA have given us permission to reproduce this and it can now be found under the 'News' tab on site. We also had an article in Family History Monthly which has increased our 'viewers' substantially.

I managed to squeeze in a 'holiday' to Italy to complete some of the cemeteries between Rome and Naples and Dave Ruddlesden has 'ticked' off a good proportion of others. Images have been coming in from various quarters of the globe with Greece being confirmed complete the last one in being that of Rupert Brooke's grave on Skyros which was submitted by Martin Leiper of the CWGC (along with many more). Hard to get to sites in Algeria have been coming in from John Mitchell and Martin Shilton is ploughing through Germany leaving some sites for others later next year. Of course there has been considerable input from many others, too many to name here.

The re-visits programme has been proving popular with new volunteers who still want to be involved and are happy to return to previously completed cemeteries to update the image archive. The CWGC have now given us access to another database on which descriptions of private memorials are held which will aid the revisits to find previously 'not founds'. The most recent revisit being Poznan in Poland where Peter Beaven, having visited a war cemetery for the first time, was quite overcome by it and now finds himself 'hooked' on helping.

I must mention here a big thank you to all those helping with the re-naming process which can take longer than taking the pictures. This can be a frustrating exercise with challenges in spelling, locations, quality, poor eyesight (I know!) but is essential for us to get the images up to site.

November will be busy around Remembrance Day but that is what it is all about. Unfortunately I still have the day job which gets in the way! Thanks to everyone for your continued support and encouragement.

Steve

A long overdue pilgrimage to a fallen World War I Camelier Dave Coleman

Only a few short years ago a 90 year mystery of what happened to my lost Great Uncle Sidney Harold Coleman, who had left Australian shores to serve his country in the Great War, was solved.

It began with the unearthing of a nearly disintegrated, hand-written letter which had been written by SGT John Barton of 4th Battalion Imperial Camel Corps from the battlefields of Palestine in 1917. The letter was addressed to a friend of Sidney's in which SGT Barton recalled the last moments that led up to Sidney's death on the 29th November 1917 whilst fighting with the Camel Corps at Hill 265 near Jaffa. From the letter I was to discover Sidney's Service number (2655) from which I was able to track down and obtain a copy of his Service records through the Australian War Museum

A Macleay River farmer by occupation Sidney Coleman was to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force on the 18th January 1916 at the age of 18 years and 11 months at Gladstone, New South Wales, Australia where he was to serve abroad during World War One. Sidney's journey was to take him to Egypt and in November 1916 he was taken on strength of the 4th Australian Camel Regiment at Abbassia until in April 1917 he was taken on strength of the 3 Battalion 1st Brigade Imperial Camel Corps and finally he was taken on strength of 4th Battalion in November 1917. The Camel Corps in which Sidney served were a part of the Imperial Mounted Corps in the Palestine theatre of operations; the Mounted Corps also included Light Horse and Yeomanry units along with regular infantry units set about the push to remove mainly Turkish, German and Austrian forces from Palestine and beyond



After researching the Internet I had the great fortune to come across the TWGPP site and I was able to contact a TWGPP volunteer in Israel, Mr Asher Thompson, who gave me valuable on the ground assistance. Asher was to provide me with a location and photograph of Sidney's grave (Section B Grave 36 at Ramleh, South of Tel Aviv).

Whilst continuing to research my Great Uncle, I was buoyed to discover a book called 'The Fighting Cameliers' by Frank Reid. The book corroborates SGT Barton's version of events at Hill 265 – in which after a series of early morning trench charges by elements of the 4th Battalion who were assisting nearby New Zealand troops, Trooper Sidney Coleman, referred to as 'Vic' in the book, was hit by a ricochet bullet fired from Turkish positions. Eye witness accounts by both Frank Reid and SGT Barton attest to one of Sidney's comrades actually removing the bullet from just under the skin of his right temple, to which Sidney promptly announced that he wanted to keep the bullet as a 'souvenir'. Trooper Coleman then insisted that he was well and that he was capable of making his own way to the Field Ambulance Station. However SGT Barton ordered Corporal Hurst to assist him from the battle field to the ANZAC Clearing Station 2nd Light Horse Field Ambulance. Unfortunately Sidney was to succumb to his wounds later that evening and upon hearing of Sidney's fate his fellow comrades expressed their deepest shock. Trooper Coleman was to later be buried with the bullet he so proudly wanted as a keepsake tucked into his tunic at Ramleh War Cemetery.

Armed with all this research I decided to make the pilgrimage to Israel in November 2008 to visit Sidney's graveside and attend the Remembrance Day ceremonies at Jerusalem and Ramleh on behalf of my family. As a treat at the Jerusalem service I had the honour of meeting up with another TWGPP volunteer Mr Fred Strauss. I had the further honour to lay a wreath at the Jerusalem service with Fred on behalf of the TWGPP.

I was to continue to Ramleh with Asher, where I attended the Ramleh Remembrance ceremony and had the opportunity to visit Sidney's graveside to pay my respects. As with the Jerusalem service I also had the honour of laying a wreath with Asher on the Ramleh Stone of Remembrance, once again on behalf of the TWGPP.

My observations on both ceremonies were that they were well organised in immaculate surroundings. I was impressed at the large number of dignitaries such as the Ambassador from Australia Mr James Larsen and the British Ambassador Mr Tom Phillips and the MC for both ceremonies was Colonel Mark Rollo-Walker OBE.

These were very special moments for me and I am sure that my family members back in Australia would have been impressed. The photos I brought back from my trip to Israel were well received by my relatives who were very curious as to Sidney's final resting place and were only too pleased that someone had visited Sidney after all these years.

My trip also included a short but poignant stop off at the site of Hill 265 with Asher to view and stand on what is now left of the battle field, where Sidney was mortally wounded; unfortunately the hill is now surrounded by ever encroaching building development.

I must conclude with my heartfelt thank you to all the volunteers at the TWGPP (in particular to Asher & Dovrat Thompson for their hospitality and Fred Strauss) for their dedication to such a worthwhile project. The TWGPP helps so many people from all corners of the globe interested in tracking down their relatives who were lost to conflict and assists in keeping alive the memory of those who fell for later generations. Lastly to the staff and gardeners of both Jerusalem and Ramleh (I had the pleasure of meeting Mohammed the head gardener in Jerusalem) entrusted with the upkeep of the cemeteries - I must say a job well done.

Heroes Return 2 – Jon Wort

I was particularly taken by the article in June's Newsletter regarding Sheila and her brother in Egypt, whose grave she has never visited.

I was extremely fortunate, and not to say moved, when I escorted a Royal British Legion Pilgrimage to Kohima in 2005 and L/Sgt Walter Spooner of the 1st Bn The Royal Scots was visited by his sister. The reason I thought I would mention it is that the majority of the cost of her trip to North East India was met by the Lottery Heritage Fund Heroes Return grant. I am not sure whether you are aware but Heroes Return 2 has recently been launched and ladies like Sheila are eligible for a grant to visit their loved ones graves.

Details of Heroes Return 2 can be found at <http://www.heroesreturn2.org.uk/>

I would point out that I am not on commission but, as I am planning to take another trip to Kohima and Imphal from 10 -22 Oct this year as part of the Royal British Legion's Remembrance Tours, I am keen that enough people know of the grant so that they can visit the graves of loved ones.

By Steve – By coincidence a chap going on Jons Kohima tour has offered to take images so they are both joining forces to try and get as many as they can. We now have a link to Heroes Return on our FAQ's page as we get so many enquiries about visiting the cemeteries.

Is it in the Genes 1 – Pauline Pedersen



A while ago, Steve forwarded an email to me from volunteer Neil Grundy who lives in Cologne because it concluded with the words, '...also my Mum has written an article regarding my interest in TWGPP and my previous involvement in similar projects when I was a child and she was transcribing headstones for the Doncaster Family History Society. It may be something for your Newsletter.

Neil Grundy's Mum happens to be an erstwhile colleague and friend of mine but as we live over a hundred miles apart and don't bump into each other so often at conferences these days she hadn't made the connection between me and the project, until I wrote to her wearing my sub-editor's hat.

So, with acknowledgements to the Doncaster Family History Society, here is Neil's Mum's Article - and don't you just love the photograph of Neil

'And here standeth Neil Grundy who sticketh his foot in ye bucket lest it bloweth hence'

(Sorry Neil !– Steve)

● Neil Grundy, aged six, investigates an old grave-stone. The foot in the bucket is to stop it blowing away.

Is it in the Genes 2 – Joan Grundy

Having joined the Doncaster Family History Society at its inception in 1980 I was soon co-opted on to the committee and became the Projects Co-ordinator. Along with other members of the Society I was soon involved in transcribing the 1851 census returns, a task that involved spending many hours at a microfilm reader in the Local Studies Library. However, my pet project became the recording of all the Monumental Inscriptions in the churchyards of the Archdeaconry of Doncaster which was the area covered by the Society. I took over this project about a year after it had been started, was taught how to plot the whereabouts of the headstones on a plan of the churchyard and spent many evenings at home typing out the recordings. A small hardy group soon gelled together and we could be found on many Saturday mornings and summer evenings clearing nettles and lichens from around the stones before recording their entire inscriptions. The first question I was usually asked when announcing a new venue was 'Is it near a pub'? It usually was as church and pub were synonymous with village life centuries ago.

My two young sons were always curious as to where Mum was going on Saturday 'Again' and I was hesitant about taking them with me fearing they would get bored but as my husband's job entailed some on-call duties at weekends the dates often clashed. In the summer of 1981 I took six year old Neil along to Sprotborough Churchyard which we were halfway through recording. He was in his element and spent the day running between the volunteers helping us clean the stones and clear the weeds away. Many residents used to stop and ask what we were doing in their churchyards and on this particular afternoon a reporter and photographer from the Doncaster Weekend Post turned up and interviewed several members of the group and took photographs. One of these was of Neil and he was immensely proud of having his photo in the newspaper.

Over the years I continued with my family history and Neil's interest in history grew. Both boys were taken to Louvervall Military Cemetery near Cambrai in France when they were teenagers to see their great grandfather's name on the memorial there. He had been killed at the battle of Cambrai in November 1917.

In his mid twenties Neil was transferred from his job in east Sussex to a post in Germany 20 miles from Cologne and there he has stayed, marrying a lovely German girl six years ago. I have made several trips to Germany and have been taken around German war cemeteries and into the Eifel region to see some of the remaining bunkers used in WWII.

Imagine my delight therefore when I recently had an email from Neil saying that he had offered his services to 'The War Graves Photographic Project' (Its volunteers only stay in the cemetery long enough to take a photograph then download and put a name to each one at home, a much quicker (and warmer) way of doing things than we were used to!) Neil is involved in the Cologne cemetery section of the project and is thoroughly enjoying it.

So was it my enthusiasm that led to this or is it really in the genes? Which ever it is I am very proud that my son is following in my footsteps.

From the archive – Tel Aviv cemetery

In an intimate ceremony on the 15th of August 2007, a wreath was laid at the grave of Salomon Katz, a Jewish officer in the Polish army during both world wars. At the outbreak of the Second World War he was recalled to active service but, as Poland was at war with Russia until 1941, was a POW until the Russians joined the war in 1941 and Katz became part of the Polish 2nd Corps (also known as Anders' Army, or the Polish Army in the East). He died while still on service in September 1944 and was buried in a civil cemetery in Tel Aviv. His grave was "found" by a TWGPP volunteer who brought it to the notice of the Polish military attaché who, in turn, treated the matter promptly and respectfully. Sixty-three years later he received his final salute on the occasion of Polish Armed Forces Day.



In September Jim and I, with Marsha and Geoff Thorndike, spent six days in France gathering in headstones which are either off the beaten track or tucked away in the communal cemeteries. We covered over 950 miles, however, and took over 8000 images as we did have a couple of larger cemeteries on the itinerary, one of which was Aubigny Communal Cemetery Extension.

One of the headstones here was to a John Ellis of Tillsonburg, Canada, and he had obviously had a visitor previous to us for placed on his grave was a plastic holder headed The Canadian Letter and Images Project. The letter it contained was dated Wednesday, 24 January 1917, written at East Sandling Camp, Kent, by John to his 'Own Darling Wifey'. He says how homesick he is and how 'I wish and pray this terrible war will soon be over so that we can go back to our own dear little Canadian home. I had a letter from Mother dear yesterday and she advises me to leave bombing alone as it's very dangerous work so I really don't know what to do...'



The letter peters out a couple of sentences later as it must have run to another page not shown. Despite ourselves we couldn't help but laugh at that comment from his mother. So very typical and so very moving. John was killed on 13th May 1917.

I have recently read *The Stone Carvers* by Jane Urquhart, which ultimately leads up to the construction of the Canadian Monument at Vimy Ridge. Albeit this is a work of fiction in Part 3, The Monument, one sentence really struck home with me: 'There is absolutely nothing like the carving of names; nothing like committing to the stone this record of someone who is utterly lost.'

Maybe the work of TWGPP means that special someone is not entirely utterly lost.

Annual Meeting – 5th September National Memorial Arboretum

This year's meeting was a few weeks earlier than previously in the hope that the weather would be on our side as the venue is essentially outdoors. Although the day began clear and sunny, cloud gradually moved in accompanied by a cold wind but at least it stayed dry.

Thirty seven volunteers arrived bright and early, a number of new faces amongst the usual stalwarts but within no time at all everyone was chatting happily over coffee whilst Steve was setting up his presentation. Quite early on it was established that this was the first visit to the NMA for the majority of people and of the few that had been, they had not seen the impressive Armed Forces Memorial dedicated in October 2007.

The day got under way just after 10am with a warm welcome to everyone by Steve who then gave the by now familiar, comprehensive update on the Project, including site statistics, areas completed or requiring work and other events that have taken place in 2009. After a short break it was a pleasure to introduce Tony Critchley, an NMA volunteer and one of its speakers.

His fluent, easy style both informed and entertained us with the story of how NMA came about (an idea proposed by the late Sir Leonard Cheshire) and the subsequent struggle not only to get it off the ground but keep it going during its first formative years. It was established in 1997 on former sand and gravel workings owned by Lafarge and leased to the Arboretum on a peppercorn rent.



Twelve years on and the visitor can quite clearly see that it was worth the effort involved. In fact, the NMA is an on-going project; it has become a focal point for remembrance and there will invariably be something new to see on a visit for many years to come, during which time the 50,000-plus trees already planted will be maturing too.

The meeting was formally closed at the conclusion of Tony's talk as the rest of the day was free time. Some volunteers headed for the restaurant first, others began the walkabout of the arboretum – the various memorial gardens, The Beat, Shot at Dawn enclosure, the beautiful chapel and the poignant exhibition in the hut dedicated to the Far Eastern Prisoners of War; the whole dominated, of course, by the Armed Forces Memorial.

Those members of our group that we encountered on the walkabout said that they had no idea it was such an interesting, special place; well worth the visit.

Post-script to 'Rescuing a Reputation' – Kay Lovell

You may remember reading, in the last newsletter, the story of Charles Bernard Hansen, an Australian whose life ended tragically less than a month after the Armistice was signed at Compiègne, Northern France, at eleven hours of the morning, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month, in 1918. You may also remember it was the wish of his great-great niece that flowers be laid on his grave at Villers-Brettoneux. Well, her wish has now been granted.

My husband, Dave, and I recently took a weekend trip from our apartment in Paris. Our first stop was at Villers-Brettoneux on a sunny, but wind-swept, day so familiar to that area of the Somme. We easily located Charles's grave and laid the floral tribute. We had chosen yellow and green colours, in honour of Australia, and composed a short poem for the card which reads:

***"In honour of your memory and the service you gave,
This floral tribute is laid on your grave;***

***You've lain here with comrades for ninety-a-year,
Separated from friends and your family dear;***

***Their token of remembrance shows of their pride
And brings them much closer, as if by your side."***



Much as we wanted to leave the flowers at the grave-side itself, we decided that the wind was so strong, whipping up the hillside and along the rows of headstones, that they would last no time at all so we did the next best thing. We took them inside the Australian Memorial where we placed them among many other flowers and poppy wreaths left by previous visitors and where later visitors would see them at the foot of the stairs.



Following our visit to Villers-Brettoneux, we drove to Abbeville to complete our task of photographing there before travelling south again, stopping overnight in Senlis in order to cover some cemeteries in the Oise region on Sunday.

All in all, it was a successful weekend and we returned to Paris in the knowledge that we had played a part in honouring a young man who, like so many thousands, had made the ultimate sacrifice for all our sakes so many years ago. May his family, on the other side of the world from his resting-place, feel proud and may he now rest in peace.

Gone but not Forgotten – Peter Marsden



In 2007 cousin Mavis came upon a letter 'of interest' that had been written by her Grandmother in 1918. It contains the day to day news written by a mother to a daughter, the following is part of that news.

"You will be sorry to hear that cousin Joe Marsden has got killed on the 11th of April, Cousin Florrie got a letter on Friday morning from the 2nd Lieutenant of his Regiment saying he was shot down with Germans Machine Gun bullet as he was leading his men. Joe was Serjeant Major, we went up to Florries on Friday night, she was in a way poor thing, they telegraphed for her to go to Bradford on Saturday as Joe's mother was dying. I don't know whether she got back yet or not, it was a year last week since Joe's brother got killed in France and Joe was the only son left so it would be hard when she heard."

Back in 1918 similar news was being shared by many families, but by 2007, for our family, this news survived only in the knowledge that our Grandfather Joseph had died in the Great War; we did not know the circumstances or manner of his death or that of others in the family.

We knew that our Great Grandparents, Robert and Ellen Day Marsden, had seven children, Ernest, Robert, Martha, Joseph, Edith, Lily and Jane, and had moved from Bradford in the 1880's to become one of Barnsley's many coal mining families - a difficult life that became more difficult on the 4th October 1910 when Robert Marsden Snr. died aged 56. Most of the family moved back to Manningham, Bradford, except Joseph, who married Florence Allott on Christmas day 1910.

Joseph remained in the mines of Barnsley until March 1915 when, like many others, he volunteered for service in the 14th Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment; after completing his training he sailed for Egypt on Boxing Day 1915 to help defend the Suez Canal. Joseph and his Barnsley Pals were then shipped to France in preparation for the battle of the Somme, 1st July 1916. He survived this day but was shipped home wounded on the 16th September 1916, returning to duty on the 3rd October 1916. After continued heavy losses the 2nd Barnsley Pals were disbanded in February 1918 and Joseph became part of the 1st Barnsley Pals; on the 11th April 1918 Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig issued his 'Backs to the wall' special order and this was the day Joseph was Killed in Action during the Lys Offensive near Outtersteene, France, aged 30.



Following the information in the 1918 letter we have now learned that his brother Robert, who was living at 96 Chassum Street, Bradford, volunteered for service in the Yorkshire Regiment in December 1915. Since at that time the regiment was sailing to Egypt it appears Robert transferred into the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Rifles and, probably, after completing training at Hursley Park, Hampshire, joined the Regiment in France, July 1916; nine months later he was Killed in Action near Gouzeacourt, France, 25th April 1917 aged 34. Given that he was not in a Pals Regiment had it not been for the 1918 letter and the address he gave when enlisting we may never have found his final resting place.

The 1918 letter also helped find their mother, Ellen Day Marsden, who had died at that same Chassum Street address, on the 2nd May 1918 aged 60. The 'Joe was the only son left', part of the letter, which suggests Ernest was also dead at the time. is probably a misunderstanding due to the families return to Bradford since.

after leaving Barnsley with his wife Jane, we found that Ernest had become a Boiler Firer at Lister's Manningham Mill in Bradford. He and Jane had at least nine children before he suffered an accidental fall at the Mill on Friday 10th August 1934, which resulted in his death a week later, aged 57.

It's amazing that these few lines written in 1918 can now be pieced together to more clearly define our families' past, thanks to cousin Mavis, the Barnsley Pals book by Jon Cooksey and all those at the Barnsley Library, Bradford Library, Bradford City, Public Records Office, Commonwealth War Graves Commission and The War Graves Photographic Project who help build and maintain the records which have made this possible.

Remembering William Welsby – Phil Morris

I have been a Shropshire volunteer for a number of years now and, whilst photographing war graves and war memorials and then researching the names commemorated, I came by the name of William Richard Welsby who served in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry. According to the church war memorial located at St. George's, Frankwell, Shrewsbury, he was killed or died in WW1. I searched the CWGC site and found no trace of him and a scan through the soldiers died proved also to shed no trace. Next step was to go to the local archives and, over several visits, finally found a newspaper article which told the story of a Mr. & Mrs. George Welsby, of The Glen, Frankwell, Shrewsbury, who had seven sons serving King and Country and there was a photo of Pte Richard Welsby, King's Shropshire L.I. So I now knew he did exist and a quick look at the medal index card showed me one soldier who served with the K.S.L.I., with the name of Richard Welsby, and that his number was 7592 (an early Army number) and that he went to France on 28th September 1915 and was discharged 7th January 1918. He must have been wounded or sick and possibly died sometime after 1918. Another trip to the archives and, after looking through newspapers for 1918 & 1919, I found a memorial notice in the Wellington Journal & Shrewsbury News dated 26th July 1919.

As he died at home in Wellington, I managed to get his death certificate, which stated that Richard Welsby, Aged 38, Ex. Private, 7592, K.S.L.I. Died of Pulmonary Tuberculosis (Cardiac Failure) on 21-July 1919 which was, I assume, the result of gas attack and his address was given as 10, Glebe Street, Wellington.

I then visited the main cemetery in Wellington but was unable to locate his grave. I wrote a letter to the local Wellington Council, and explained what I required (grave location). They duly wrote back and informed me I would have to pay £25 for the information. I then 'phoned the Council and explained the situation, but I was told "rules are rules", so I declined to pay on the grounds that I was doing a local research project at no profit to see that a local soldier who died for his Country was properly recognised with a headstone. I then got in contact with Mr. Clive Blakeway, of the Shropshire War memorial branch who managed to locate the grave, which turned out to be unmarked. All this information and photos were passed onto the C.W.G.C. in August 2006 and, in early July 2009, they erected a military headstone over his unmarked grave. I would like to thank Mr. Blakeway who helped with the organizing and liaising with the C.W.G.C. and seeing to the headstone placed over the grave. We hope sometime soon to have a memorial service with family members, if traced and a Bugler from the Shrewsbury Barracks to play last post.



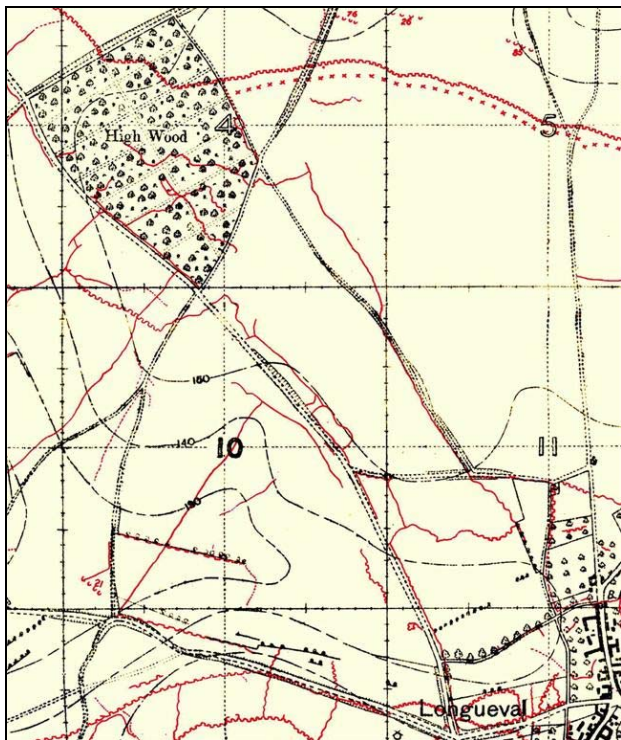
A map in my collection – Chris Higley

I began to collect maps nearly forty years ago when I was a postgraduate student. En route to the lab I would drop into David's bookshop, and happened to arrive there one morning just as a whole box of World War I GSGS maps of France and Belgium was being unpacked for sale at 2/- or, by that time, it may have been 10p each. On a student grant I could only afford to buy one example of each series, including a single 1:10,000 trench map, GSGS 3062 sheet 57c SW3, *Longueval*.

My mother had a half-brother, Alf, who had been killed in the first war, but I knew no more about him than that. In 1993 we were clearing my aunt's house and came across Alf's last letter from France, a very vivid account of life during preparation for the Somme offensive of July 1916.

"We are now on the the move to somewhere & doing a devil of a lot of marching. I have never yet fallen out on a march but it was only that I did not want to break my record that kept me up last night. ... Please don't sent the trench stove etc & no tinned stuff. Every time we get anywhere after a march a few more of my things get dumped and while the tea outfit may weigh little the weight of many little things mount up. ... Please could you send a couple of pairs of socks."

There was also a letter from the Imperial War Graves Commission referring to Alf's remains being reburied. Resisting the temptation to start 'Further to your letter of 19 May 1926...', I wrote to the, now, Commonwealth War Graves Commission asking for more information. They put me in touch with the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers regimental area secretary for Warwickshire, Brigadier J K Chater, who very kindly sent me an extract from the War Diary of the 14th Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, describing the attack on 22 July in which Alf was killed:



A new line running from the Southern corner of HIGH WOOD S.E. ... The Battn takes over the right half of the above line from about S 10 B 4/4 to about 100^x S.E. of road junction S 10 D 8/8 ... The enemy's line of trenches from En corner of HIGH WOOD S.E. on far side of road as far as S 10 B 9/8, & on near side of road from this point to road junction ... 14th. R.War Rgt on the Right, to attack from the point where enemy's line crosses road point S 10 B 8/9 to road junction S 11 C 5/8. ...

At 9.50 p.m. the attacking Cos, A on the Right, B on the Left, advanced from their trenches, in two waves, under cover of the Artillery bombardment. At 9.55 p.m. both waves were seen to extend, from sections in file formation, into line preparatory to lying down until the artillery lifted at 10 p.m. As the extension was in progress, the enemy opened an overwhelming Machine Gun & Infantry fire. Our Troops were cut to bits & although supports were thrown in they received the same treatment, & it soon became a question of organising our original front line to meet a possible counter attack. ... It would appear that our artillery had not ranged accurately on the enemy's trenches.

The diary goes on to record the battalion's casualties, 40 killed, 200 missing and over 240 wounded. On the next morning patrol work took place to recover the dead and wounded and the battalion was relieved. A week later, reinforced by a fresh draft of 213 men, 'physically good but have received but little training', the battalion returned to the line and attacked again. 'The Battn advanced to the attack 14 officers & 454 other ranks. They came out 8 officers & 289 other ranks. The behaviour of all ranks was beyond praise.'

I suddenly realised that High Wood, and the map references mentioned in the diary, were all shown on the one trench map that I had bought over twenty years earlier! Perhaps not quite so remarkable a coincidence once you consider the huge amount of fighting that took place in this small area, but none the less, I now knew exactly how Alf had died, to within five minutes, when, and, to within 200 metres, where. Now, thanks to TWGPP, I have also got a picture of his grave.

This note, in its original form, appeared in 'Sheetlines', the journal of the Charles Close Society for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps, www.charlesclosesociety.org

The story of Douglas Gordon Rayner Geddes – Tom Tribe

In the June Newsletter I told the story of Douglas Gordon Rayner Geddes who, having large debts, disappeared and re-enlisted in another name. I can now update this story.

On July 17th 2009 the party of old boys, wives and partners from Beaumont House School visited Le Touret memorial to pay tribute to Douglas Geddes. We had a discreet and moving ceremony where we laid a small poppy wreath at the Douglas Gordon memorial and one of our group, who is an accomplished piper, played the piper's lament during this little ceremony.

In the meantime there have been two further developments in the story. Firstly, Geneva Charsley partner of Jacques Ryckebosch, our tour guide, had carried out some further research and located the probable place where Douglas Geddes died. She had found information about an engagement by the 2nd Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders on June 17th and 18th 1915 at Givenchy - an abortive attack on a German trench - which probably identifies the place a few miles west of Rue D'Ouvert, Givenchy where Geddes (or Gordon) would have been killed.



The second step forward is that I put evidence in to the CWGC to the effect that Gordon and Geddes were one and the same person and they have now accepted this and changed the records on their database. In due course, when it comes up for renewal, the memorial will be amended.

Putting in the evidence was a useful discipline because it meant close re-examination of the documents and this showed that two of the Douglas Gordon documents were misleading due to WWII water damage.

Of course many WWI documents were destroyed altogether due to the blitz but in our case parts of the file were burnt at the edges and a fragment of the last document on file had become merged with the first. This then suggested that 'Douglas Gordon' said his parents and brother had the surname Geddes, whereas when the documents had been rearranged in their original form it showed that he never did and that these facts only emerged in 1919. This meant that my original story was slightly incorrect at that point, although it makes no difference to the overall story or its outcome.

Also the DGR Geddes documents revealed a possible clue to what actually happened. When Geddes went absent without leave his CO put in a report about his disappearance and, amongst other things, he said '*and from enquiries I have made I am under the impression that he is unlikely to return*'. This seems to imply that the CO knew a little more than he was saying. After all he could have said that he had no idea where he was, but didn't, and so perhaps there was collusion behind the scenes, but we will probably never know since none of this would be on the public record; nor of course do we know what happened about his unpaid debts.

'Glen' the Paratroop Dog – Rene Torsin



Having seen a picture of the grave of a dog in your newsletter here is a photograph of one I've seen at the cemetery of Ranville (Normandy). It concerns Emile S Corteil of the Parachute regiment, killed with his dog "Glen" on the 6 of June 1944 during an attack near the village of Varaville in Normandy. The Company Commander insisted that as Private Corteil and Glen were so close in life it was only right that they share the same grave.

A Brief note on the 32nd Battalion First Australian Imperial Force and Cpl G L Crossman

The 32nd battalion of the AIF was raised in 1915 from civilian volunteers who came from South Australia and Western Australia (about half each). Once formed, it sailed from Australia in November 1915 on the troopship "Geelong" and, after six months of training in Egypt, it went on to the Western Front, France in June 1916. The battalion was part of the 8th Brigade of the 5th Australian Division.

Its first major battle was at Fromelles, France on 19 July 1916. It was absolutely disastrous for the battalion. In two days of fighting it suffered 718 casualties, about 90 % of its fighting strength. Such was the slaughter of its troops that, once this battle ended, the 32nd survivors were withdrawn from the front line and it took most of the rest of the year for sufficient reinforcements from SA and WA to get over to France and to be trained. Only in December 1916 was the 32nd back to a fighting level.

The 32nd took part in the 1917 battles at Polygon Wood, Ypres, Belgium in September of that year and in the following year it fought heavy battles in August and September in France. These battles centred on the pushing back of the German army from Villers-Bretonneux right back to Mont St Quentin when it, and the remnants of the AIF, were withdrawn from the Front in October 1918.

During its two and a half years of fighting the 32nd suffered 613 men killed in action and 1466 men wounded, a total of 2079 casualties, or the equivalent of about two and a half battalions, during its time on the Western Front. The vast majority of these men came from the states of South and Western Australia.



Many of the dead have no known grave. Here on the other side of the globe on long forgotten gravestones of family members reference is often made to sons who left home for an Imperial war on the other side of the world and simply disappeared. Their families were left with nothing to indicate where their soldier was. There are many such poignant family memorials in South Australian cemeteries.

One such memorial headstone is in the Hindmarsh cemetery, Adelaide. It is to Corporal Gordon Llewellyn Crossman and his brother Gunner Freddy John Crossman, both killed in action in France in 1916. The grave is actually their mother's and younger brother's grave.

Gordon Crossman was a young, well built man just under six feet tall when he signed his enlistment papers in July 1915. Judging from his hand writing, he was quite well educated. When he joined up he was employed as a clerk. He was posted to "A" Company of the 32nd Battalion as a fighting soldier. In June 1916 he was promoted to Corporal and commanded a section of soldiers. In this capacity he went into his first battle. This was at Fromelles on 19 July 1916. He was just 22 years old.

Cpl. Gordon Crossman was KIA at Fromelles (not Pozieres) and his body has never been found.

Major sources: The Australia War Memorial, National Archives of Australia, CWGC.

(Note: Errors were made when these headstones were made as often the families did not have the full facts. This is understandable. Cpl G L Crossman was actually killed at Fromelles not at Pozieres. The 32nd battalion fought the Fromelles battle on 19-20 July 1916. The battalion does not have Pozieres on its list of Battle Honours. Gunner F J Crossman noted on the headstone was actually Driver F J Crossman. He was killed by artillery fire when his ammunition laden vehicle was hit by shells. He is buried at Delville Wood cemetery, France.)

A day out at the National Arboretum



Points from the Post

Many, many thanks for sending the two images - they mean such a lot to me. I have been searching for some considerable time and finally got more information and was able to obtain the images from you. What a wonderful service you provide - such a lot of effort must have gone into this and its all so meticulously recorded. My grateful thanks. Mary Kelly

Words of thanks fail me. I never thought I would see these. Thank you doesn't seem enough. Heartfelt thanks. Thomas

I've never seen an elderly woman cry so much as a result of showing her this photo. It was her brother and there has never been (and never will be) a chance to see the grave 'for real'. She is so grateful that she has at least been able to see a picture of where her brother is buried and I pass on her thanks to all who have been involved with this project. I'm choking up myself! Best wishes, and carry on the good work. Dave D

I have just discovered your website and to my amazement found the headstone for my great uncle. Thank you for taking the time and care to carry out this project. I am sure that it means a great deal to many families. Regards Catherine Humphrey

Very many thanks for the photographs. Your team do a fantastic job. Of eleven relatives who lost their lives in the two world wars, thanks to your team I now have photographs of ten of the graves, which I wouldn't have except for yourselves. The last one, I am unlikely to obtain in my lifetime, is buried in Gaza Cemetery but please give my grateful thanks to the rest of your team, you are all very much appreciated. Best Wishes Rick Wallwork. (*now has the one in Gaza!*)

I just wanted to let you know that I have received the photos for the three servicemen which I had requested yesterday. The photos are absolutely perfect, and I wanted to say thank you for not only getting them to me so quickly, but for making them available in the first place. I had been looking for photos of these men's headstones for my research files on them, but to no avail. Finding your site was a great relief! All the best, Jeff

Thank you so much for this photograph. I found it quite moving to see it -even though I don't really know anything other than Augustine was my Nan's brother. All I know is that she wanted to find out what had happened to him and where he was buried. My Mum, who vaguely remembers meeting him when she was a young girl in Cork will be delighted that he has been found at last. Her brothers and sisters will also be very happy with the news. You are doing a wonderful job. Thank you again. Janice Sugg

The photos are wonderful and brought a tear to my dad's eye. Much appreciated. Tracy Lewis

This is absolutely fantastic! I am the grandson of Warrant Officer McMahon. This photograph has what my Mother has been longing for of where her father is laid to rest. My mother was only 14 months old when my grandad died. This will provide so much joy. Thank you so very much. You have made us all so happy and contented to know that my grandfathers memorial is being looked after. Mark Lancaster

I suspect that you are a very busy man, but I thought that I should thank you immediately for the really excellent images I have just received from yourself. I am certain that the person I have been trying to help, (~ the 96 year old sister of Gunner Thorn) will be thrilled to be able to see such a clear image. Wonderful service. Brian Owen.

Please accept my thanks for your extremely prompt reply to my request for a photograph of my Great, Great Uncle's grave. I would also be grateful if you would pass on mine and my families thanks to all those in the project for the fantastic work you all do. I am sure the service you provide, brings a great deal of comfort to many people who may otherwise never get to see where their relatives are buried. Many thanks Diane

Earlier today, my son Mark, received a couple of photographs from you of my cousin George Rawson's grave. For something like 65 years now, we as his family, and cousins have been wondering where George is. It is only in the last month or so that we learned he was buried at Durnbach War Cemetery. Quite by accident I stumbled on the War Grave Photographic Project, and then on to George's grave. At last we have finality and closure! Thank you for the speed in which you were able to email these photographs. It has been a sobering morning for us, and after 65 years a teary morning. My cousins join with me in their thanks to you. Thank you so much for what you have done for us. John

I just wanted to say how pleased I was with the photos you sent of my uncle's grave. It truly is a wonderful idea of taking photos of every grave and memorial as not everyone can make visits themselves but to see the picture of it is the next best thing. I really commend those people who give up their time and do it as well. What nice people they must be. Thank you Sue Grainger

Thanks to everyone involved in the Project

The sinking of the Lisbon Maru – Sarah Chapman

Sarah Chapman has been helping TWGPP in Hong Kong working her way around each cemetery and sending in the images, that is until the wet season! One of her tasks was to photograph Sai Wan Memorial which is located on Cape Collinson Road in the north-east of the island of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong fell to Japanese forces on Christmas Day 1941 following a brief but intense period of fighting. Most of those buried or commemorated on the island were killed at this time, or died later as internees or prisoners of war during the Japanese occupation. The SAI WAN MEMORIAL forms the entrance to Sai Wan War Cemetery and bears the names of more than 2,000 Commonwealth servicemen who died in the Battle of Hong Kong, or subsequently in captivity, who have no known grave. One of the panels lists all those lost when a freighter, the *Lisbon Maru* was sunk by an American submarine.

War came to Hong Kong in the early hours of 8 December 1941. It was to be brief, culminating in the British surrender to the Japanese on 25 December 1941. The garrison, approximately 11,000 strong at the start, lost an estimated 1,550 defenders during the fighting. Following surrender, the remaining forces were rounded up by the Japanese and distributed amongst various POW camps both on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon. European civilians were also interred on Hong Kong Island at Stanley. 1942 proved to be a difficult year in the camps with malnutrition, dysentery, diphtheria and malaria killing almost as many internees as died in the fighting



In the late summer of 1942, the Japanese embarked on a program of transportation of POWs to Japan where they would be put to work in the mines, dockyards and factories.

The 2nd draft of 2,000 fit men were to be selected for the transportation aboard the freighter, the *Lisbon Maru*. However, disease was taking its toll and only 1,900 fit men could be made ready on the morning of 25th September with further men being removed from the ship as they fell ill. The *Lisbon Maru* departed Hong Kong two days later on 27 September with 1,834 POWs aboard. 778 Japanese soldiers were also boarded along with freight. Conditions aboard were grim amid the overcrowded holds in which the men were put. In the forward no 1 hold were 379 members of the Royal Navy. In no 2 hold, the largest, were 1,075 men of the Middlesex Regiment, Royal Scots and a number of smaller units. In no 3 hold, 380 men of the Royal Artillery were put. Each hold had two levels, with each level being made from wood to allow maximum space for transportation. There was one tap on deck for washing and 12 toilets with no facilities within the holds. The conditions in each hold were similar; overcrowded and thoroughly miserable. The men had to take it in turns to lie down in order to get sleep but for those with pre-existing conditions such as beri-beri this proved most difficult. Breakfast and supper was rice and onion soup with and tea was rice, tea and bully beef. Cards were played and the few books available shared to pass the time. Things then worsened in no 2 hold when diphtheria broke out.

The *Lisbon Maru* continued its course to Japan and on the morning of 1st October was passing through the Zhongshan archipelago off the China coast near Shanghai. However, they were not alone. Watching them was a boat of the Pacific Submarine Force, the *USS Grouper*, SS-214. As far as the boat was concerned, the *Lisbon Maru* was a Japanese troop ship, for all they could see were Japanese soldiers on deck and the guns mounted on the deck. Lookouts aboard the *Lisbon Maru* failed to notice the *Grouper* as she manoeuvred around her. The POWs awoke from another miserable night and were readying themselves for breakfast just after 07.00 when the *Grouper* fired three torpedoes



These all missed but the naval men in No 1 hold heard the hissing as they went by. A fourth torpedo hit the ship's stern damaging the propeller and creating a man sized hole. The Japanese responded by firing at the submarine such that a fifth torpedo again missed and a sixth was destroyed by a good shot from a gunner. Within the holds, the POWs could only listen to the chaos going on around them. The *Grouper* dived and later, at periscope depth, assumed the *Lisbon Maru* had sunk as it was nowhere to be seen. In fact, she was still afloat, although now listing and taking on water.

All POWs were now in the holds including the diphtheria cases that had been separated on deck. Malnourished men, enclosed with the dysentery and diphtheria cases were falling ill all around in the rancid, unhygienic conditions. Ten Japanese boats arrived and all 778 Japanese soldiers were disembarked from the *Lisbon Maru* leaving only the crew and a guard force behind. At 20.00 hours the Japanese decided to close the hatches by battening down and covering them with tarpaulin and lashing with rope, thereby affording no means of exit for the POWs. Ventilation shafts were also cut down. Machine guns were placed by the hatches. The men were now in total darkness with oppressive heat, breathing in stale, foul air. They began to die and they knew the ship was sinking. The night passed slowly. At 09.00 hours, after more than 24 hours since the torpedoing, the ship's captain gave the order for the ship's crew to leave. With the ship listing heavily to port, the POWs decided it was time to break out. Making use of a butcher's knife they had, the ropes holding no 2 hold hatch down were cut and a small opening made. Men squeezed through the opening and were immediately fired upon by the remaining guards. Wounded, they could only agree to get back into hatch if the guards stopped firing. Meanwhile, men in no 3 hatch had managed to break free and those that could started to make their escape. The ladder then broke trapping the remaining men within that hold. The officer in charge of no 2 hold decided enough was enough and gave the order to abandon ship no matter what. Wild panic ensued as men climbed over each other to escape until order was finally restored. The Japanese guards continued firing into the hatch but the sheer number of men coming up overwhelmed them. The ship was going down fast now and hundreds of men from no 1 and no 2 holds jumped into the water. They started to swim towards four Japanese auxiliary boats that had originally come to the aid of the *Lisbon Maru*, only to be fired upon once more, being used for target practice. One or two POWs were picked out of the water but most were ignored or shot.

There was a strong current running towards the shore, about four miles away, so many men decided to make a swim for the shore. The local Chinese fishermen, realising they were white men and not Japanese, quickly came to their rescue. They were fed hot vegetable soup and steamed rice, given clothes and shown much kindness by the Chinese. The Japanese patrol boats meanwhile finally started to pick up survivors in the afternoon. However, hundreds of men had drowned with yet more drifting out to open sea. The survivors picked up by the Japanese were taken ashore near Shanghai. The survivors being cared for by the Chinese knew time was limited and that they would have to give themselves up, which they did, and were eventually picked up and taken to Shanghai. Their ordeal did not end there and many more died of disease and sheer exhaustion after all they had endured.

The remaining POWs continued their journey and saw the rest of the war out in camps in Japan or China with many continuing to die from the effects of their harrowing time aboard the *Lisbon Maru*.

Of the 1,834 POWs who boarded the *Lisbon Maru*, 1,000 lost their lives as a direct result of the sinking and its indirect consequences afterwards. It ranks as Britain's worst "friendly fire" incident of World War 2. However, to a man, all those who survived the sinking could never put any blame on the crew of the *USS Grouper* - they were simply doing their job.

With permission from Tony Banham & suggested further reading:

The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru – Britain's Forgotten Wartime Tragedy by Tony Banham
www.hongkongwardiary.com