



# The Spire Sentinel



**The Newsletter  
of The  
Branch of The  
Front**



**& Magazine  
Chesterfield  
Western  
Association**

***ISSUE 96 - February 2024***

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the Great War'.



## Western Front Association Chesterfield Branch – Meetings 2024

Meetings start at 7.30pm and take place at the Labour Club, Unity House, Saltergate, Chesterfield S40 1NF

January	9th	. AGM + `Finding My Roots` Jon-Paul Harding. ..tracing his Great Grandfathers in The Great War
February	6th	<b>Nobody Of Any Importance: A Foot Soldier's Memoir Of World War 1</b> by Phil Sutcliffe - "How his dad, Sam Sutcliffe, survived his frontline WW1 - in his own Memoir's words".
March	5th	<b>Murphy's Law on the Somme</b> by Andy Rawson. The talk covers the details of the learning process during the campaign and how what could go wrong, did go wrong. We look at the problems encountered and the solutions which were used to try and solve them.
April	2nd	'From Gaza to Jerusalem: the southern Palestine campaigns of 1917' by Stuart Haddaway
May	7th	"Audregnies Flank Guard Action 1914 " by Phil Watson
June	4th	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Battalion the Wiltshire Regiment in WW1</b> by Edwin Astill
July	2nd	<b>Legend of the Pilgrimages - Wilfred Pointon, Sherwood Foresters</b> By Bill Bryan
August	6th	Roy Larkin - <b>The Invisible Corps</b> takes a brief look at the Army Service Corps during WW1 through the use of mechanical transport. A story of growth, evolution, inter-service rivalry and meddling civilians.
September	3rd	Kevin Jepson ' <b>Project Fast Dog</b> ' - from Mark IV to Whippet'
October	1st	Paul Burkitt - Barlborough and Clowne - Villages at War
November	5th	<b>Peter Hart</b> topic to be advised
December	3rd	Hedley Malloch <b>Left Behind</b> - the fate of British soldiers trapped behind German lines in Belgium and France after the Retreat of 1914

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*Any opinions expressed in this Newsletter /Magazine are not necessarily those of the Western Front Association, Chesterfield Branch, in particular, or the Western Front Association in general*

**UPCOMING WEBINARS**As we bid farewell to January, we can look forward to February and early March with three interesting webinars in the pipeline. All these commence at 8pm (UK time) First of all on **Monday 5 February** we have a brand new speaker looking at a very particular logistical aspect. Bradley Shoebottom will give a presentation entitled '**A Self-Contained Military Force: The Story of the Canadian Corps Tramway Companies on the Western Front.**' After starting tramways as local initiatives by British divisions in 1915, the Canadian Corps realised their utility and sought a permanent organisational solution with their own self-contained 1st and 2nd Canadian Tramway Companies in November 1917. This presentation explores the events leading up to their creation, where they operated on the Western Front, and how they significantly improved the movement of supplies. To register for this webinar, click here: [Canadian Corps Tramway Companies](#) Also, later in the month, on **Monday 19 February** we welcome the return of the ever popular Prof Mark Connelly. Mark will talk about the imprint the war left on the lives of ex-servicemen and home front civilians through the lens of Noël Coward. Entitled '**I think I was better off in the trenches**', Mark will explain how Coward grasped that ex-servicemen had a highly complex understanding of the conflict, the value of camaraderie and how the war should be remembered.

To register for this webinar, click here: [I think I was better off in the trenches](#)

Finally, in early March we will have Dr Spencer Jones back, this will be on **Monday 4 March**. Spencer will give us a presentation entitled '**Turning Points**'. Memory of the First World War is often defined by trench deadlock and an impression of perpetual stalemate. But this obscures the fact that there were several key turning points in the conflict which, had things gone differently, could have produced a very different war. This talk explores several of these pivotal moments and speculates on what might have been. To register for this webinar, click here: [Turning Points](#)

Please do join us for these three webinars which we are sure will be interesting and entertaining.



## *Secretary's Scribbles*

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the issue 96 of our Branch Newsletter. It seems ages since we have had a meeting...January is such a long, dreary month

The February meeting feature a first time visitor to the Branch, Phil Sutcliffe, whose talk will be on "Foot Soldier Sam's WW1 Memoir: enlisting at 16 to demob at 20 (via Gallipoli, Somme, Spring Offensive & his POW time)" or more personally, How his dad, Sam Sutcliffe, survived his frontline

WW1 - in his own Memoir's words.

In the last newsletter I said I had one slot still to fill - well we now have a complete programme - and the speaker for July is a well known face at Branch meetings - Bill Bryan - you'll always find him sitting at the front with Phil Goodall and Roger Avill.

As most of you know I'm secretary of Worksop Royal British Legion Branch and Bill came along to our January meeting to give a short talk about his grandfather in WW1. Such was the detail, content and interest in what Bill had to say, I immediately thought his presentation would be ideal for our members here in Chesterfield. Bill will also be bringing along some books, maps and other artifacts to bolster his talk...one which gave Phil Goodall (who accompanied Bill) a 'jaggy' experience.. I'll say no more.

Hopefully next month we will have more details about the Branch Outing to Cannock in April.. watch this space.

In March we have another 'regular' coming to give a talk, Andy Rawson. *Murphy's Law on the Somme* The talk covers the details of the learning process during the campaign and how what could go wrong, did go wrong. Andy will look at the problems encountered and the solutions which were used to try and solve them.

Sadly I have to report some disappointment. At the beginning of the year I mailed all secondary schools in the Chesterfield area inviting them to come to our meetings - students, staff, parents...indeed anyone who could benefit educationally from our presentations. I did not get a single reply...not even an acknowledgement of my mail!

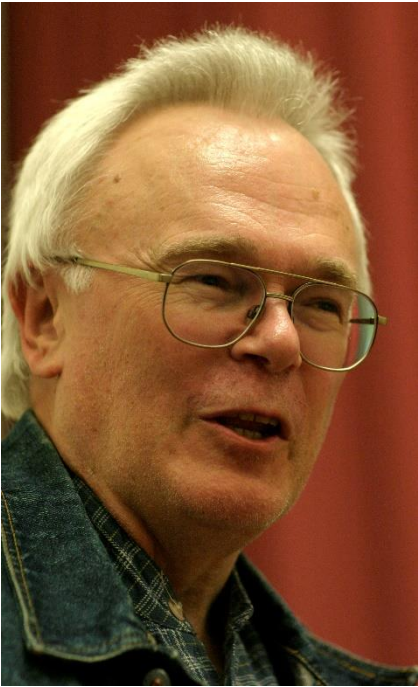
Best wishes to you all,

Grant

Grant Cullen

Branch Secretary Chesterfield Branch - Western Front Association 07824628638

## February Meeting - Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup>



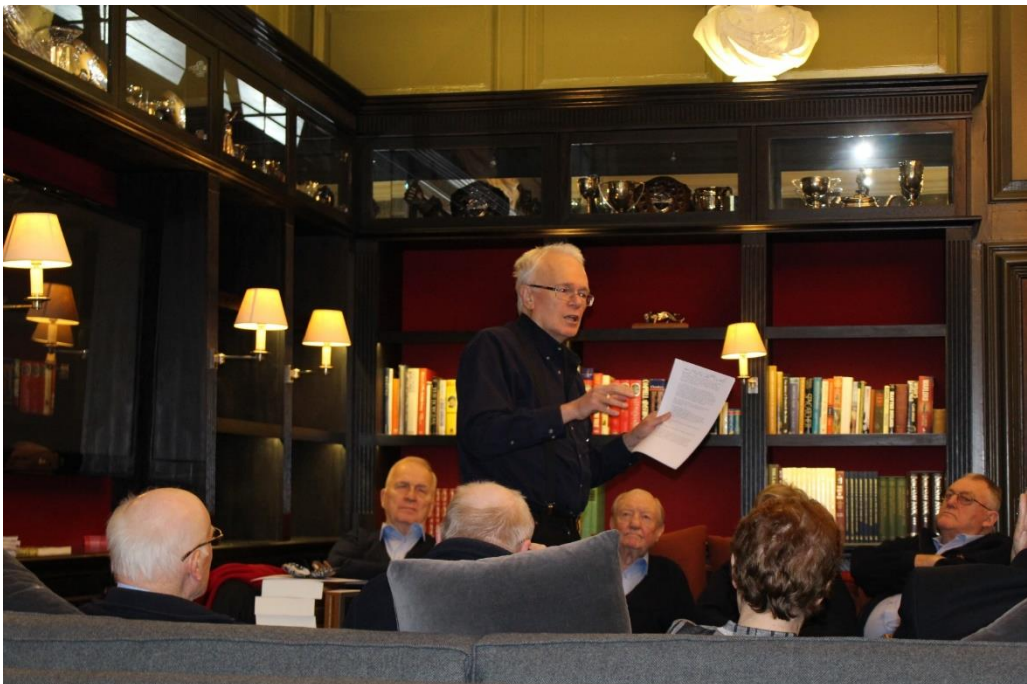
Phil Sutcliffe - Foot Soldier Sam's war: Gallipoli, the Somme, the Spring Offensive, the POW months and beyond

"Phil is a Londoner, born north, lives south. The span of years from his father Sam's birth in 1898 to Phil's reading tonight, aged 76, is... quite a while! Phil is a retired freelance journalist who spent most of 40-odd years interviewing and writing about rock and pop stars - Bruce Springsteen, Paul McCartney, Joni Mitchell, Kate Bush, the lamented Sinead and Shane etc.

Editing and self-publishing Sam's WW1 Memoir for the centenary became his retirement project - all proceeds to the British Red Cross, more than £10,000 raised so far, see [www.footsoldiersam.co.uk](http://www.footsoldiersam.co.uk).

Other ongoing labour of love a digressive history of Bruce Springsteen's music..."

In this picture we see Phil giving a talk to a group of Chelsea Pensioners at The Royal Hospital in London



## January 2024 Meeting

Branch Chair Tony Bolton opened the first part of the meeting with the AGM. Due to a technical hitch the Branch Accounts could not be shown on screen (subsequently circulated by e mail and included with this Newsletter). Treasurer Jane Lovatt reported another successful year with the Branch retained funds increasing. She thanked Chesterfield Labour Club for their support - drawing comparisons with another Branch in respect of cost to hire their meeting venue. The Club had also not charge branch / members for Club membership, required for bar access. Jane reminded members that the Branch was planning on running a free trip for regular attendees to Cannock in April. She also asked for suggestions for other outings and activities for members. No questions were raised and members passed the accounts, thanking Jane for her efforts.

Then came election / re-election of Branch Office bearers. Tony Bolton had given notice that he wished to stand down as Branch Chair after nearly ten years in office. Members warmly thanked Tony for his sterling work on the Branch`s behalf. Tony then proposed - seconded Grant Cullen that Jon-Paul Harding be elected as Branch Chair. There being no other nominations, Jon Paul was duly elected. Jon Paul then made a presentation to Tony Bolton in recognition of his service.

The other Branch Office Bearers were elected / re-elected as follows

Branch Secretary - Grant Cullen

Branch Treasurer - Jane Lovatt

Committee - Tony Bolton

Committee - Peter Harris

Mark Macartney, whilst no longer able to attend Branch meetings had indicated that he would continue as Publicity Administrator. Mark posts Branch activities, meetings, newsletters etc on the main WFA website and is Administrator for the Branch`s Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/157662657604082>

There being no further AGM business, the AGM part of the meeting was closed.

The presentation for the evening was by our newly elected Branch Chair, Jon Paul Harding who would give his talk entitled `Finding My Roots`





Jon-Paul pictured here in his role with the CWGC `Eyes on Hands on` project

Jon-Paul began by telling how what started out as a hobby became a passion. He was an 11-year-old boy when his grandma gave me a set of medals and a `big coin` with lots of postcards, but at a young age I didn't really know what they were, so for many years they sat in a drawer. He had always had an interest in history, especially WW1 and WW2 and anything militaria. It wasn't until he matured in years that he began to

understand what the significance was, it was his great grandfather's 1<sup>st</sup> world war medals and his death penny which was given to the families of loved ones for paying the ultimate sacrifice for their country, this sparked an interest to investigate the medals and family history.

In Memory of  
Private  
**George John Ransom**  
15280, 2nd Bn., Leinster Regiment who died on 10 August 1917 Age 36  
Husband of Ida May Ransom, of 39, Newlyn Rd., Woodseats, Sheffield.  
Remembered with Honour  
Longuenesse (St. Omer) Souvenir Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



He knew his mum had been adopted so there were two very interesting sides of history he wanted to discover. The medals belonged to his great grandfather on the adopted side of the family which were important to him. So, he set about on a road of discovery, all he had was a name, George John Ransom, who was born in Camberwell London and at some point, moved to Sheffield to work in his uncle's firm which was the East London Rubber company on Furnival Street. He lodged in a house where he met his future wife Ida May, they married and had my Grandma Doris.





Then War broke out and George wanted to join up, but he was in his 30's and had a family so at that time was considered too old to join up.

During Jon Paul`s research he found out that he had joined, as a story my grandma told me that he came home one day and told Ida May that he had joined up and she asked why and he said in later years I don't want our Doris when people ask her

“What did your daddy do in the great war”, and she had to say...he stayed at home.

During his research Jon Paul discovered that he was in the Leinster Regiment which was an Irish regiment and looking closer at the medals around the edges its engraved with his name rank and number and regiment, which was Private G J Rawsom (which was his wrong name, and this was confirmed on the medal index card )15280 Leinster Regiment and so his research began.

ancestry library edition

## UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919

Name:	<b>George Ransom</b>
Birth Place:	Woodseats, Sheffield
Residence:	Pontefract, Yorks
Death Date:	10 Aug 1917
Enlistment Location:	Woodseats, Sheffield
Rank:	Private
Regiment:	Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians)
Battalion:	2nd Battalion.
Number:	15280
Type of Casualty:	Died of wounds
Theater of War:	Aldershot
Comments:	Formerly 58044, Training Reserve Battalion.

### Source Information:

Military-Genealogy.com, comp. *UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2008.

Original data: *British and Irish Military Databases*. The Naval and Military Press Ltd.

### Description:

This database contains information extracted from 81 volumes of soldiers that died in World War I. It includes over 703,000 individuals. Information listed about may include: name of soldier, birthplace, enlistment place, residence, number, decoraton, rank, regiment, battalion, type of casualty, death date, death place, and theater of war served in.



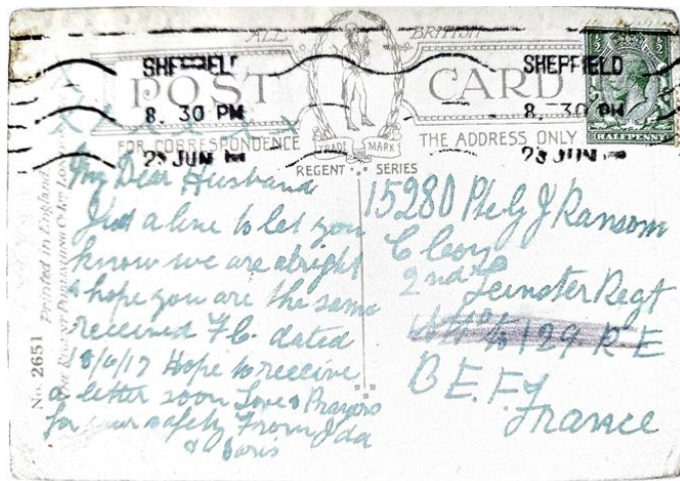
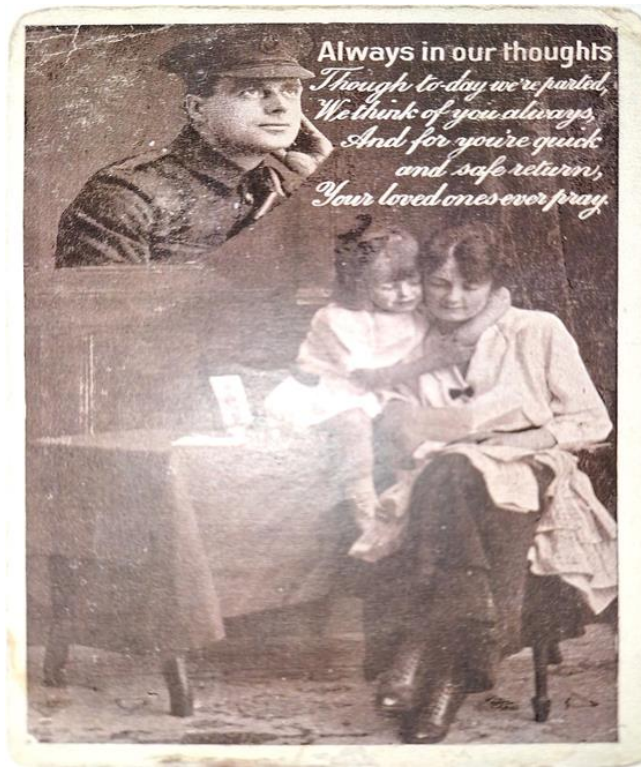
Off to the library Jon Paul went searching on Ancestry Commonwealth War Graves Commission and any other sites that could tell him me about his time in the war and the Leinster Regiment.

Jon Paul was disappointed not to find any information because of the miss spelling of the name , but after many hours and lots of cups of coffee, he eventually came across a small piece of information that he had enlisted in Pontefract where he had joined a reserve Battalion and given number 58044 so lh researched this number but could not find any information from this number even which reserve battalion it was .

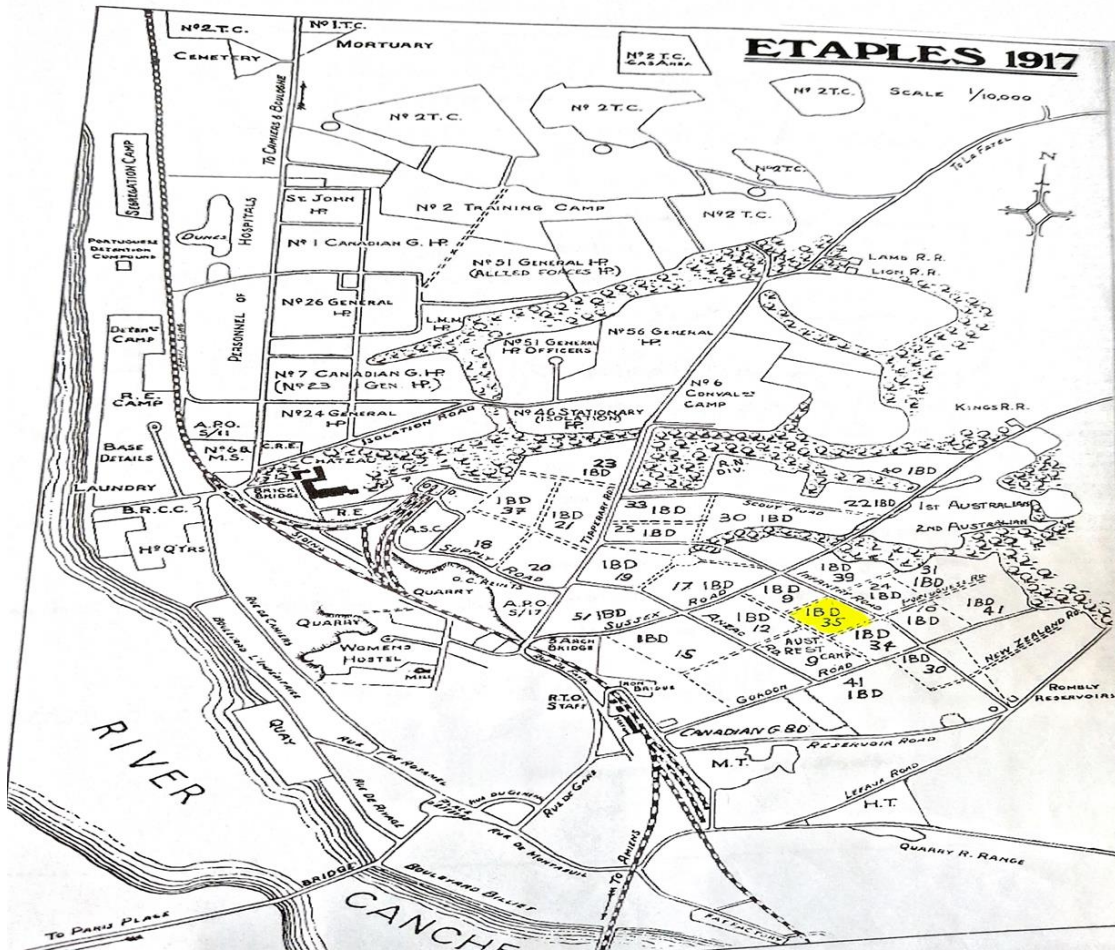
After more and more searching and not really getting anywhere Jon Paul searched various associations where he could ask for advice on what could have happened to George John.

He contacted the Leinster Regiment Association, and their kind historian helped him find some information about what could have happened to his great grandfather and how he went from the reserve battalion to the Leinster regiment.

Unfortunately Jon Paul unable to find his enlistment date as all his service records were destroyed in WW2 as so many where. Apparently he went off to do his basic training and he went overseas in 1917, and as far as Jon Paul can tell he was in France at Etaple, finding this out from one of the post cards which has a number IBD35(infantry base depot) and the historian from the Leinster regiment association also confirmed.



So, we can conclude that he spent some time training at Etaple and that's how he ended up transferring to an Irish regiment. At some point a list must have gone up where reinforcements were needed after a battalion had suffered many casualties, as one of the postcards I have confirmed this by having his reserve number crossed out and his new number and the Leinster regiment on saying transferred it also had a post office number APO S17 and this stands for Army post office and S17 is the office serving IBD 35.



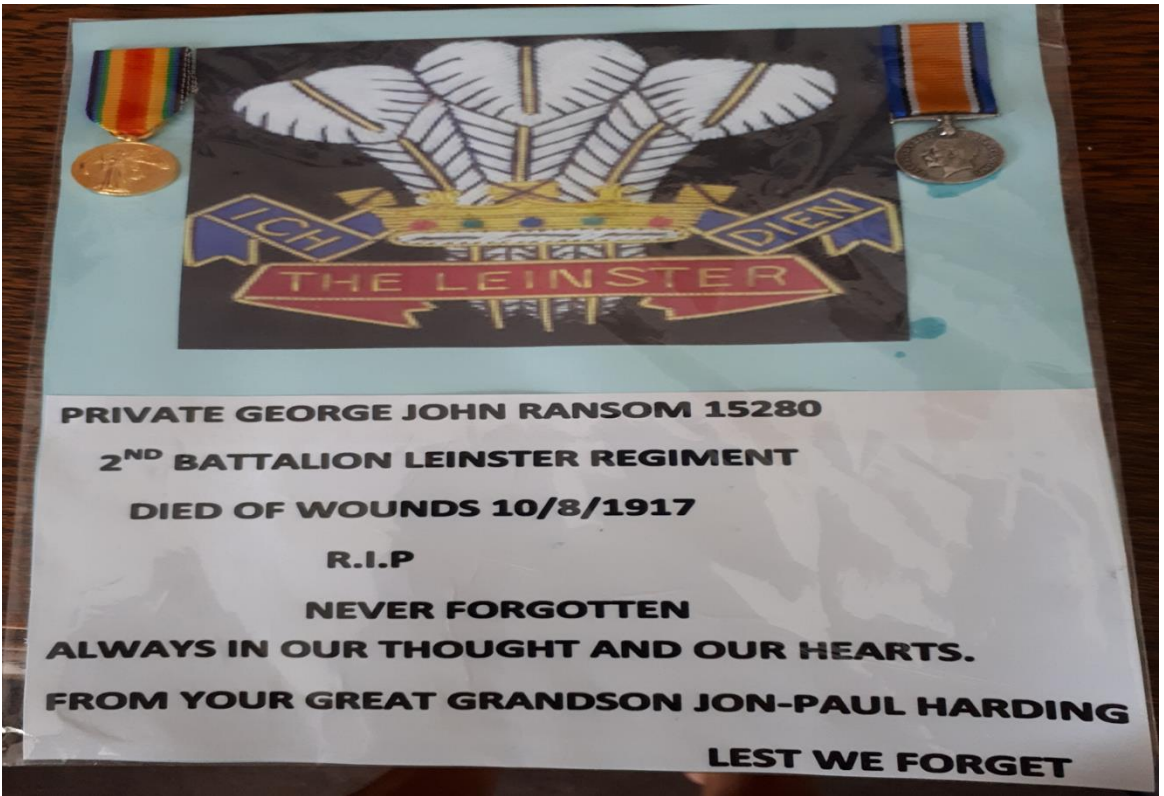
George John spent only a few months in the Leinster regiment as he sadly lost his life on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 1917. As a family story goes he volunteered to go on a reconnaissance mission or trench raid and he was unfortunately shot while returning but was not found until the next day and recovered and ended up going through the casualty clearing process and ended up in St Omer in a hospital, where he was admitted on 7<sup>th</sup> of August and listed as seriously ill also listed was the nature of his wounds which was gunshot wound to the buttocks. Which we can only conclude he died of Sepsis or gangrene as antibiotics were not available.

Jon Paul tried to visit his grave in St Omer and luckily enough found a battlefield tour which went to the area, so he booked and went to the Longuenesse Souvenir Cemetery in St Omer where he is buried which he found out had many hospitals and was where the main headquarters was based at times during WW1.

It was an emotional visit as it had taken a long time to discover, but Jon Paul had a great sense of pride at what he had achieved, his medals and death penny and all the post cards which grandma Nan left him are cherished.







**7P** [MH 4431] 1318 2032 Reg 4 13. 8. 23 4/APW/5645 W.I.

Name Ransom George John Regimental No. 15280 Case No. 349

Regiment 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Leinster Rank Plt

Form 104-88 received 27. 8. 17 Date of notification of death 14. 8. 17 Form 104-76 received 18. 9. 17

Date and cause of death 10. 8. 17 Died of wounds WAC. 371

Widow Ida Mary, 39 Newlyn Rd Date of birth 4. 8. 1850

Children:— J Woodseals, Sheffield Article 13 7/8

Name	Date of birth	Date of expiry	Remarks
<u>Doris</u>	<u>3. 8. 08</u>	<u>3. 8. 24</u>	<u>To grant pd 29. 8. 17</u> <u>30. 7. 23. 1. 18</u> No. for whom S.A. is paid <u>1</u> <u>3. 6 authorized to increase Pension by 1/2 a week with effect from 18. 5. 18 in respect of widow's age</u> <u>widow informed 9. 9. 18</u> <u>sent to G. P. Branch 28. 5. 18</u> <u>wrote that the widow of the Soldier described above has been awarded an Alternative Pension under Article 13 of the R.M.'s of March 1914 and April 1915 as follows:—</u> <u>24/18 a week from the 16. 2. 1918 to 30. 4. 1918 and 33/3 a week from the 1. 5. 1918</u> <u>This award is in lieu of Accrual Widow's Pension of 24/18 a week with all arrears for one week of 31. 10. 1918 &amp; 6/6 from 1. 11. 1918 Dated 4 June 1918</u>

Pension 18/9 20/6 { 33/3 24/18 AP Articles a week from 1. 5. 18 18. 2. 18

Date awarded 14. 2. 18 If refused, reason Amended 7/6/18. Accrual widow's pension 157- (incl 13/9)

Papers G. P. W 11044

(9 38 108) W30343-566 25,000 9/17 HWV(P1453) G15/251


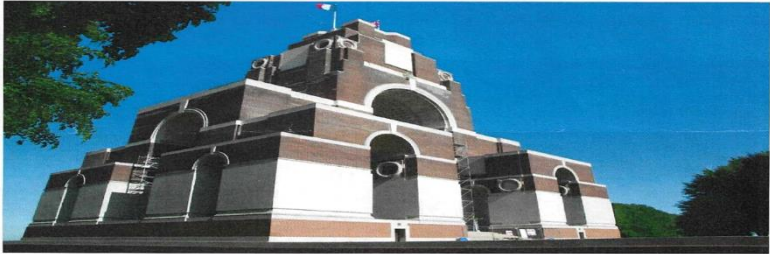
While down the rabbit hole of family history he discovered 2 more relatives that fought in the Great War.

His great grandfather Gervase Litton who was is on his mum's side and his brother Wilfrid Litton.

In Memory of  
Lance Corporal  
**Gervase Litton**

36584, 11th Bn., Manchester Regiment who died on 11 January 1917 Age 34  
Husband of Cecilia A. Litton, of 59, Egerton St., Heaton Park, Manchester.

Remembered with Honour  
Thiepval Memorial





Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission





All Jon Paul had were the names as the family had no other information as he said at the start his mum was adopted. He had started with his great grandfather and found he was born and lived in Manchester and at the outbreak of war he was a postman around Heaton Park, was married to Cecilia with whom they had three children. Back off Jon Paul went again to do many hours of searching and found out he joined the 6<sup>th</sup> battalion Manchester Regiment and later he transferred to the 11<sup>th</sup> battalion and again all his service records were destroyed in the bombing in WW2 like so many of them were.

He was declared one of the missing and is remembered on the Thiepval memorial to the missing on the Somme.

GERVASE LITTON		14C
<p>Lance Corporal, 36584, 11th Battalion, Manchester Regiment  Died 11th January 1917, aged 34  Born in Manchester.  Son of Gervase and Elizabeth Litton (nee Edge). Gervase was an undertaker. They had at least five children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gervase Litton (b. 1882)</li> <li>• Ernest Litton (b. 1884)</li> <li>• Herbert Litton (b. 1891)</li> <li>• Wilfred Litton (b. 1893)</li> <li>• Alfred Litton (b. 1896)</li> </ul> <p>They had at least five children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Litton (b. 1906)</li> </ul> <p>Married Cecilia A. Benton in 1905, lived at 5 Haworth Street, Chorlton-on-Medlock. They had at least five children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Litton (b. 1906)</li> <li>• Mary Litton (b. 1908)</li> <li>• Agnes Litton (b. 1909)</li> <li>• Annie C. Litton (b. 1911, d. 1912)</li> <li>• Francis Litton (b. 1914)</li> </ul> <p>Later lived at 59 Egerton Street, Heaton Park, Manchester.  Employed as a postman.  Enlisted at Manchester.</p>		
<p>His brother <b>Sergeant Wilfred Litton</b>, 38105, 20th Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers, died on 24th October 1917, aged 24.  He is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial.</p>		

Jon Paul visited the Manchester regiment museum in Ashford Under Lynne, but unfortunately, they could not elaborate on his time with the regiment or how long he fought but he kept looking and he eventually found out where and when he had been killed, he had been killed on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 with 8 other men by heavy shelling,

Lance Corporal E Brookes

Private W Carter

Private W Chappels

Private F Cook

Private C King

Private D Logan

Private C Minnis

Private John Scholes

All of them 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion the Manchester Regiment they were all in reserve covering an attack by the 5<sup>th</sup> Dorset's (Read what happened from other papers)

Jon-Paul said he would like to pay his respects to these men as well who sacrificed their life for their country, and he has visited these men who fell with his great grandfather.

Jon Paul was lucky enough to obtain a picture of him from a kind relative in Australia which was absolutely amazing to finally see his face ,once again wanted to visit the place he fought and died but wasn't 100% sure as he thought he died near Forceville ,but having a good friend called Ian Mason who is a battlefield guide had the challenge to find out and also take me over to where he fought and died. He investigated and found what was needed so in May of last year Jon-Paul donned his walking boots and went over to the battlefields to visit the small village of Beaucourt Sur Ancre, which is on the Somme. Ian took him to the exact place where the trenches would have been, which is just outside the village.





Again, lots of pride and very emotional just thinking what these men went through.



To finish Jon Paul`s great uncle serjeant Wilfrid Litton 20<sup>th</sup> battalion Lancashire fusiliers once again he called upon his good friend Ian Mason not having had any luck finding any information on his great uncle apart from little bits like medal index card and a few other bits from the CWGC that he was also missing as he is remembered on the wall at Tyne Cot. Jon Paul also found out a few little pieces of information on him from when he added his great grandfather to the Thiepval memorial database. This was a picture of him but only a grainy newspaper picture and a few newspaper clippings.

Ian once again found where the 20<sup>th</sup> battalion Lancashire fusiliers were, they were in a place called Houthulst Forest at the time of his death, so once again Jon Paul I donned the walking boots and Ian took him to the place where Wilfrid fought and died ( read from the papers ) once again pride and emotions took the better of him



63

Name	Corps	Rank	Regt. No.
LITTON	Machine R.	Co/Cpl	36584
<i>Gervase</i>			
Medal	Roll	Page	Remarks
VICTORY	<i>11/104</i>	<i>535</i>	
BRITISH	<i>do</i>	<i>do</i>	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

Mrs. J. BAKER desires to Thank all friends for their sympathy and floral tributes in her very great bereavement.  
25, Shirley Road, Cheetham Hill.

Mrs. GERVASE LITTON, Brothers and Sisters-in-law, wish to Thank their many friends for kind expressions of sympathy in their sad bereavement.  
5, Howarth-street, C.-on-M.

W. MATHER

**USE EITHER THIS FORM OR THE FORM OVERLEAF, BUT NOT BOTH.**

Form of Will to be used by a soldier desirous of leaving the whole of his property and effects to one person.

(See overleaf for Form of Will leaving legacies to more than one person.)

In the event of my death I give the whole of my property and effects

Name of Legatee in full (Mr., Mrs., or Miss) Mrs. Cecelia Litton  
 Relationship to soldier, if any Wife  
 Address of legatee in full 5 Howarth St Chorlton on Medlock Manchester  
 Signature of Soldier (full name) Gerwase Litton  
 Rank and Regimental Number L/Cpl 36584  
 Regiment 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Manchester Regt.  
 Date 15.12.16.



(a) Insert full name of soldier making the Will.

(b) Witnesses to sign here.

(c) Add addresses in full.

Signed and acknowledged by the said (a) Gerwase Litton and in the presence of each other, present at the same time, who, in his presence, at his request, and in the presence of each other, have herunto subscribed our Names as Witnesses\*

- (b) William Ewart Owen (Corpl)
- (c) 118. Jackson St. Stretford Manchester.
- (b) Victor Spencer L/Cpl
- (c) 181. Horsedje St Aldham Lines

\*N.B.—The Witnesses must NOT be persons intended to benefit under the Will, or husbands or wives of such persons.

**FORMAL WILL.**

W.O. No.: E/ 332192/1 DOMICILE English

Record No. 236/4275435/1916/14

Name Gerwase Litton

Regtl. No. and Rank 36584 Lance Corporal

Regt. Manchester, 11th Battalion

Died at in France

Date of Death 11th January 1917

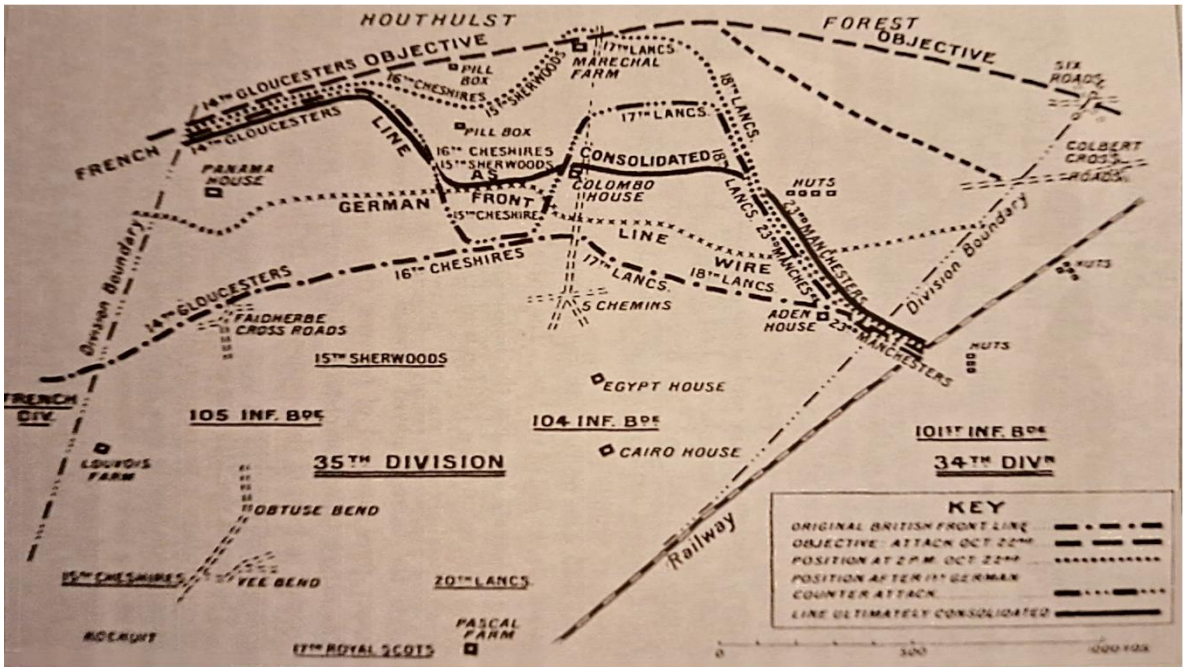
**WAR OFFICE.**

Date 16.5.17.











**INFORMAL WILL.**

W.O. No. E/453397/1 DOMICILE, England

Record No. 349/597/52 7/5

The enclosed document dated 22/12/16 and signed Wilfred Litton

Name Wilfred Litton

Regt. No. and Rank No 38105 Sergeant

Regt. 20th (Lancashire) Fusiliers

Died at France or Belgium

Date of Death 24. 10. 17

WAR OFFICE.

Date April 11/1918

*A. Woodley*  
for the Assistant Financial Secretary.

11. 107200.

**WILL.**

In the event of my death I leave the whole of my property and effects to my wife Mrs. Ethel Litton

50 Bowler St  
Levenshulme  
Manchester

Wilfred Litton  
Sergeant 38105  
Lancashire Fusiliers

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Rank and Regt. Sgt. Lane 2nd

Date December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1916.

To end the evening, Jon Paul thanked everyone for listening to what has been a long journey for him with ups and downs on the way but what a journey of discovery great trips emotional at times but as he have said a whole lot of pride for his relatives in what they did and for paying that ultimate sacrifice.



# THE ROLE OF RAILWAYS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In this centenary year of 2014, much attention will rightly be paid to the brave soldiers who fought and died in the trenches, to the tank commanders and the biplane pilots – yet without railways and railwaymen, the war could not have been won. David Stewart-David reports

BRITAIN'S railways shaped the First World War – but still more did the war change the railways. The 1914/1918 conflict was known until 1939 as 'The Great War' and there were many who referred to it as 'The war to end all wars'. Tragically, that was not to be.

Railway industry preparations for the conflict started as early as 1912 when the British Government decided that war in Western Europe was probable, if not inevitable. In practice, the country's experience of the Boer War from 1899 to 1902 had taught the railway companies much about the mobilisation of troops and the logistics of battle overseas.

The British Government had the authority to take control of railways in an emergency. This power had been held since the Regulation of the Forces Act was

passed in 1871, although it was not used until 1914. In that year, the railways of Britain were in the hands of around 130 companies,

ranging from huge concerns such as the Great Western and the London & North Western to tiny lines like the Knott End Railway.

This fragmentation was in contrast to the situation in Germany, Russia and Belgium, where most railways were by then already under direct state control. The compelling of the various British companies to work together for military purposes (effectively a form of temporary nationalisation) was achieved by the creation of the

Railway Executive Committee (REC). Usually the REC received willing co-operation, but some of its decisions raised protests.

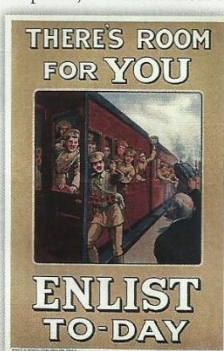
The Midland Railway, which competed with the LNWR between London and Manchester, and with the Great Northern between London and Leeds, was compelled to reduce its express services to those cities to make way for more freight. Not unnaturally, it complained about loss of income –

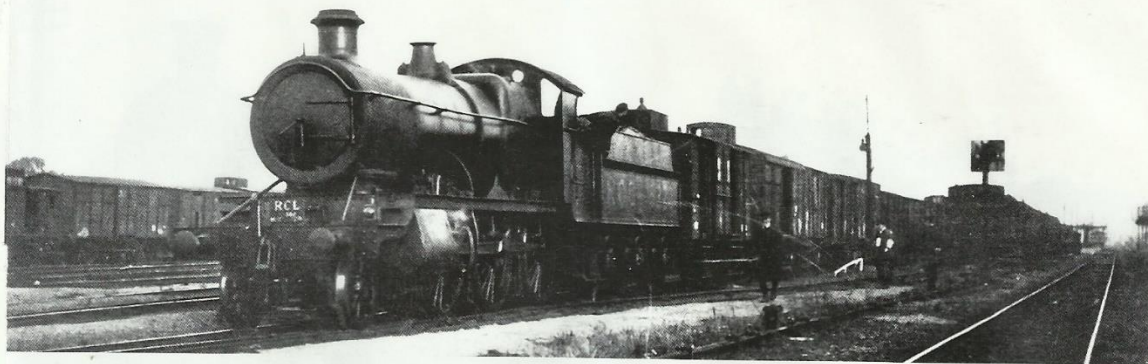
although in the event, the MR suffered far less from the war's demands than lines like the Highland and North British.

The Railway Executive Committee was a group comprised of 10 general managers of major pre-Grouping railway companies (the Caledonian, Great Central, Great Northern, Great Western, London & North Western, Lancashire & Yorkshire, London & South Western, Midland, North Eastern and South Eastern & Chatham).

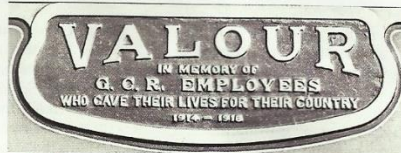
Although nominally chaired by the President of the Board of Trade, the REC was largely in the hands of railway officers who made strategic decisions. The first de facto chairman was Sir Frank Ree of the LNWR. When he died, Sir Herbert Walker, chairman of the LSWR, took his place.

Walker's authority derived from the South Western's key role in handling troops through the port of Southampton and from his undoubted charisma. He was one of the shrewdest and most





**ABOVE AND LEFT:** Ninety years apart: Great Western Mogul No. 5322 in service with the Railway Operating Division in France in 1918 and (left) back in ROD livery at Didcot Railway Centre in 2008. GW TRUST / FRANK DUMBLETON



**ABOVE:** Let us not forget... the inscription on the nameplate of the Great Central Railway's war memorial engine - 9P class 4-6-0 No. 1165 *Valour* (later LNER B3 No. 6165), built at Gorton Works in 1920. RAIL ARCHIVE STEPHENSON

**BELOW:** A remarkable photograph taken at Reigersburg North Junction, near Ypres, on February 22, 1918. British soldiers train their eyes on an aerial 'dogfight' while a London & North Western Railway 0-6-0 waits for the road and a Midland Railway Kirtley 0-6-0 stands in the loop. IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM



energetic of the general managers as he went on to demonstrate on the Southern Railway after 1923.

The REC's first remit from the Government was to plan strategically for a situation in which major east coast ports could be put out of action by enemy attack, so alternative docks on the west coast had to be used to keep supplies to London sustained.

In practice, the first major operational task of the committee was to allocate resources to ensure that mobilisation of army units led to the efficient deployment in France of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) within 16 days of Britain's entry into the war on August 4 (a week after it had started on July 28). This involved the transport of 120,000 soldiers and 38,000 horses together with guns and equipment - a huge logistical exercise that went without a hitch and without the need to suspend the summer holiday timetable.

The movement of the BEF to France involved running 689 special trains and the presence of these troops helped stem the German advance through Northern France.



# RAILWAYS AT WAR 1914-18



The "Boche Buster": This enormous 14-inch naval gun, mounted on 16 axles, was one of two shipped from Britain to France to bombard the German defences. It is pictured on August 8, 1918 – the day it was demonstrated to King George V at Maroeuil, near Arras. It was later taken back to the UK and was used again in the Second World War, being based on the Elham Valley Line in Kent. Although part of Britain's Railway Operating Division fleet, loco No. 2823 is an ex-Belgian State Railway Type 30. IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

As the war turned into one of attrition in the trenches of northern France, the REC required railways with spare capacity to lend rolling stock to those with the fastest-growing wartime traffic. The Highland Railway in particular had a desperate need of locomotives due to the high level of naval activity off the northern Scottish coast and was sent locos from several companies, including some Adams 0415 class 4-4-2 tanks from the London & South Western Railway.

By September 1914, it was confidently expected in Britain that the hostilities would be over by Christmas, but from September 1914 until March 1918, a largely static war was fought in the trenches of Western Europe, consisting of appalling battles at places such as Ypres and the Somme, in which thousands of men were lost for advances of very few yards.

It was the task of the railways, both at home and close to the battlefield, to keep the front line supplied with ammunition, subsistence materials and reinforcements and this, in many ways, was more difficult than the effort that had been needed to

support mobilisation at the start of the war. As that mobilisation had left few experienced troops in Britain, the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, demanded 100,000 volunteer recruits in 1915, to make good the huge losses that had been incurred in the first weeks of the conflict. Similarly, more horses were needed to replace the thousands that had been killed in the fighting.

Many of the novice soldiers came from the railway companies, which consequently lost many of their best men and so struggled to cope with constantly changing supply chains.

The railways also had to cope with a civilian population that had none of today's instant global news technology and was thus largely isolated from (and even largely unaware of) the scale, extent and true horror of the war for the first year or so. This meant that they

expected their train services to be close to peacetime norms.

Once in France, British troops were moved to railheads on tracks organised by the French with the help of the Royal Engineers' Railway Operating Division (ROD). The last few miles from the railheads to the lines of trenches were a nightmare of mud, shell bursts, wrecked villages and general chaos. In the opposite direction there was a constant flow of wounded soldiers from the trenches, many requiring ambulance trains for transport back to Britain for hospital treatment.

There was a constant problem of liaison between the armed services, with their needs and requirements, and the railway professionals, with their knowledge of line capacity, rolling stock availability, shipping schedules and so on. And all the time, enemy shelling was constantly smashing the tracks and trains,

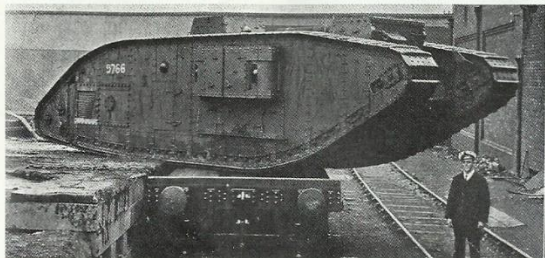
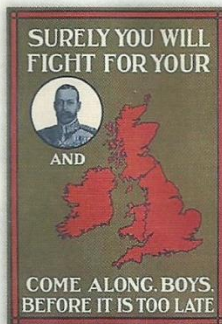
necessitating an almost continuous rebuilding exercise to keep the supply lines flowing.

To move trains to French railheads, standard gauge steam locomotives from the Great Central, Great Northern, Great Western, Great Eastern, Midland, North British, North Eastern, London Brighton & South Coast and other British railways were despatched to the European mainland, along with hundreds of Robinson-design 2-8-0s (Great Central class 8K) built to the order of the Ministry of Munitions.

Some of the GWR 2301 class ('Dean Goods') 0-6-0s were sent to work in Salonika in 1918, but the great majority of British engines worked in France and Belgium and nearly all were returned to their companies after the war (see separate article, p22).

Some later had their war service commemorated, which explains why some North Eastern 0-8-0s carried chevrons on their splashers, and why 24 North British 'C' class (LNER J36) 0-6-0s were given names such as *Marne*, *Mois* and *Somme*.

At the other extreme, anti-German feelings had resulted



ABOVE: Tanks made their debut during the First World War and many were taken to the battlefields by train. Loading them onto wagons called for considerable skill.



RIGHT: Ready for battle: A contingent of new soldiers from Morecambe arrive at Heaton Park station, Manchester, ready to hear an address by Lord Kitchener on March 21, 1915.

## London and South Western Railway.

GENERAL MANAGERS' OFFICE.

Waterloo Station,

London, S.E.

August 4th, 1914.

### NOTICE TO STAFF.

The Government has decided to take over the control of the Railway of Great Britain in connection with the Mobilisation of the troops and general resources in connection with the Naval and Military requirements.

The Management of the Railway and the existing terms of employment of the Staff will remain unaltered, and all instructions will be issued through the same channels as heretofore.

H. A. WALKER,  
General Manager.

The First World War began on July 28, 1914, but Britain's official entry into it was August 4. This is how the staff of the London & South Western Railway learnt that their company was being taken over.

in three locos having their names changed: LNWR 956 *Dachshund* became *Bulldog*; LNWR 2583 *Tenonic* became *The Czar*; and GWR 4123 *Herschell* lost its name altogether.

In addition to operating trains for the Government, the major railways helped the war effort in another massive way – turning over entire bays and workshops of their locomotive works to the manufacture of cannon, shells and bombs. In this respect, Stratford, Swindon and Doncaster were extremely active, often building the bombs just feet away from locos under construction or repair.

The nation's many privately owned locomotive builders also contributed significantly.

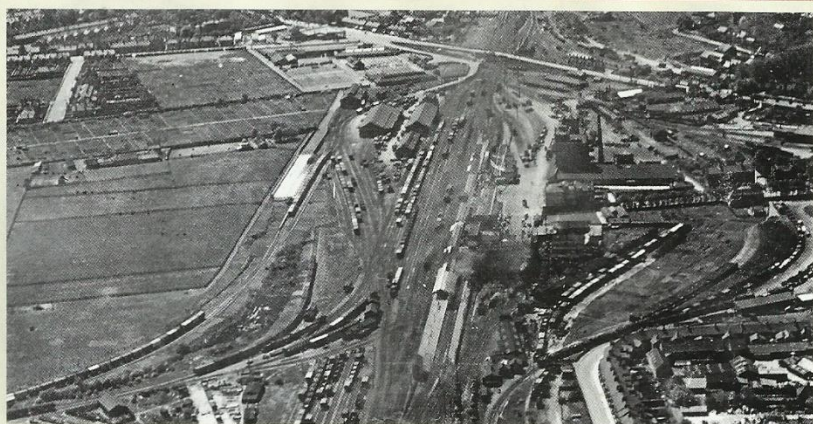
An idea of the scale of the operation can be gauged from the fact that the production of shells increased from 3,000 a month in July 1914 to 174,000 a month in April 1915. Ordnance factories at out-of-the-way places like Gretna generated huge numbers of extra passenger traffic as munitions workers made their way to these huge new places of employment.

On the Western Front, the shells were being fired as quickly as they could be made.

Because standard gauge tracks didn't always run where the trenches had been dug, the French had, from the start of the war, used lightweight pre-fabricated narrow gauge (60cm) lines, which could be laid far closer to the fighting and were worked by steam locomotives or with horse-drawn wagons. When the British took over some sectors of the front line that had been managed by the French, they found the narrow gauge lines very useful, and adopted them (see page 28).

By 1917, many such lines were operated with utilitarian tank engines mass-produced by Baldwin and other companies in the United States. As the war progressed, steam

## TERROR FROM ABOVE



COMPARED with the blitz of the Second World War, the damage caused by enemy air attacks in Britain during the 1914/18 conflict seems remarkably trivial – yet they were nonetheless horrific with 5,800 bombs being dropped and 1,260 civilians killed.

The first attack was not by plane or Zeppelin but by the German Navy, which launched a bombardment from battleships on December 16, 1914, shelling Hartlepool, West Hartlepool, Scarborough and Whitby.

In the attack, 107 civilians were killed, including five North Eastern Railway employees. The deaths of British civilians on home soil caused outrage and increased anti-German feeling enormously. Although the shells caused little disruption to train services, recruitment posters soon appeared showing shell-damaged buildings with the slogan 'Remember Scarborough'.

It was the advent of Zeppelins that really brought the horror of air warfare home to Britons. These German airships carried out 51 raids over Britain during the First World War, killing 557 people. The first occurred in January 1915 when three airships bombed Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn. The

How Cambridge railway station would have appeared to a German Zeppelin or aircraft pilot towards the end of the First World War. This previously unpublished photograph was taken circa 1919 by an early military aviator, Major Joseph Clifford Griffiths. Courtesy ALAN PERRY.

Great Eastern Railway goods yard at Lowestoft was bombed on the night of April 29 that year and four of the company's horses were killed.

Numerous other attacks and sorties followed, with trains on the eastern side of the country being bombed or strafed by either Zeppelins or biplanes. Some engine drivers

Junction line.

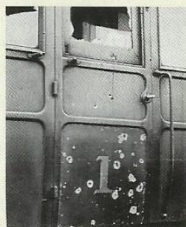
The most destructive raid of the war occurred on the night of September 8, 1915, when the Zeppelin L13 caused great damage and killed 22 civilians in east London. The Great Eastern and North London Railways were badly disrupted. A month later, the GER's Leman Street station was badly damaged by the

bombs started to fall was not a sensible response, so a system of communications between military headquarters and the Railway Executive Committee offices was established. Unfortunately, warnings of raids were often too short for effective action to be taken.

Attacks by warships and airships were followed from May 1917 with raids by German 'Gotha' and 'Giant' bombers. These bi-planes were several times faster and on June 13, 1917, a daylight attack caused a panic-stricken stampede as bombs rained down on London's Liverpool Street station. Three bombs were dropped on the Great Eastern terminus just before midday. Trains were wrecked, 10 GER staff were killed and 23 injured.

It was the turn of the Midland Railway's terminus at St Pancras on February 17, 1918, when a 'Giant' bomber dropped five bombs on the Barlow trainshed, killing 20 civilians, including eight MR employees.

No locomotives were destroyed on British soil during the First World War.



Damage to a GER carriage after an air raid on Liverpool Street in 1917.

were forced to take evasive action by halting their trains in tunnels or deep cuttings, but despite that, several trains were hit.

One of the most remarkable attacks occurred on August 16, 1915, when a U-boat surfaced off the coast of Cumberland and fired more than 50 shells at a Lowca chemical factory close to the Cleator & Workington



Crater made by a Zeppelin bomb at Temple Mills yard, on September 24, 1916.

same airship, which went on to bomb the city of Guildford, causing damage to LSWR tracks.

It was then decreed that all train movements be halted during bombing raids – a directive that had to be altered after trains in London were halted because an airship raid was taking place in Derby and Burton, in the Midlands.

It was obvious that stopping all trains when



traction began to give way to petrol-engined machines such as the Simplex designs.

The German trenches were similarly supported by narrow gauge lines, although they used fewer petrol-engined vehicles. Where roads were passable, motor buses commandeered from London were sometimes used.

Until late 1916, an air of normality was a deliberate aspect of Government policy towards what was known as the 'Home Front' in the UK. Unemployment largely disappeared and many workers received temporary war bonus payments, enabling them to perhaps take a holiday in a seaside resort, many of which were still open for business, especially on the western side of the country. Although passenger services on some routes were reduced in frequency, capacity was often maintained by the operation of longer trains. Some lines even increased their passenger business.

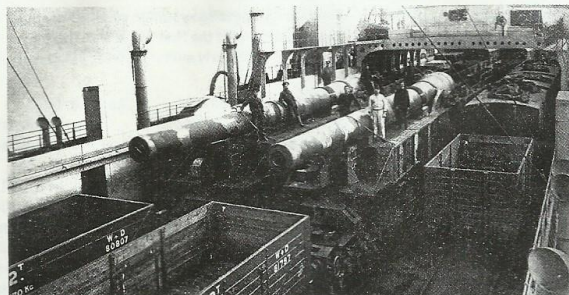
The London & South Western gained from its first stages of suburban electrification and its commuter line journeys increased by almost 10million in 1915/1917. On July 29, 1916, demand for the 'Cornish Riviera Express' was so great that the GWR had to run it in three portions – this in the month when the British army lost 50,000 men at the Battle of the Somme.

It was a different matter entirely in northern Scotland, however – so much so that all private leisure travel north of Inverness was banned to make way for essential war trains.

The Grand Fleet, moored at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands,



**ABOVE:** An indication of the scale of the British and Allied railway operation in northern France can be gained from the size of the Railway Operating Division's workshops at St Etienne-du-Rouvray. Baldwin 2-8-0 No. 1397 has just been assembled and is undergoing steam tests before entering service. IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM



**LEFT:** Train ferries were the usual way to get the locomotives, wagons and armaments across the English Channel. PHIL MARSH COLLECTION

required 100,000 tons of South Wales coal per week, which brought about the so-called 'Jellicoe Specials'. Those ran mostly from Pontypool Road to Grangemouth docks, on the Caledonian Railway – a distance of 375 miles.

Between August 1914 and March 1919, no fewer than 13,630

such trains were run, using the West Coast, East Coast and Midland main lines. Their passenger counterparts, the 'Naval Specials' ran overnight on the 717-mile journey from Euston to Thurso. It is planned to delve deeper into the extraordinary situation appertaining to the Highland Railway in a separate article later in the year.

By autumn 1916, Government policy had changed. The reality of trench warfare was shown (albeit edited) in a silent movie entitled 'The Battle of the Somme' and proved a shocking revelation to millions at home in Britain.

Conscription into the armed services had been introduced that January for men aged 18 to 41 – and women were being encouraged to go out to work in a great diversity of jobs in order to release men to 'join the colours'.

In December 1916, General Douglas Haig, commander of the British Expeditionary Force, invited the members of the Railway Executive Committee to France to observe the fighting. Haig wanted more rolling stock for use by the Railway Operating Division and he wanted more railwaymen to join the army.

More than 20,000 men duly signed up from the Midland Railway and 18,000 from the

North Eastern. By the end of the war, 29% of the total male staff in the national rail industry (almost 190,000 men) had enlisted and more than 600 locos had been commandeered.

In addition, the Government demanded and took tens of thousands of wagons, along with passenger coaches and ambulance trains. Even railway-owned ships were taken over by the Admiralty.

## 'A railway war'

Such was the size of the role played by railways in the Great War that French Marshall Joseph Joffre had been moved to say: "This is a railway war. The Battle of the Marne was won by the railways of France. If we win this war, it will be largely due to the railways."

However, given the vast size of the resources they were losing to the conflict, the railways of Britain could no longer keep up the pretence of offering peacetime capacity to civilians in Britain. From January 1917, all companies placed restrictions on the public's use of railways.

The Government required the companies to increase fares by 50%, although that barely matched the rate of inflation since 1914. Most cheap tickets, except season tickets, were withdrawn, and many of the more lightly used services and

## The Quintinshill troop train Britain's worst rail disaster

IT is ironic that one of the most tragic single incidents involving the deaths of British soldiers during the First World War occurred not in the trenches of northern France but on the Caledonian Railway main line, just north of Gretna.

On May 22, 1915, a double collision caused an estimated 227 fatalities, with 246 more injured, the exact numbers never being determined.

The Quintinshill disaster was by far the worst railway accident the United Kingdom has known, with the death toll being double that of the second worst (Armagh).

Two signalmen were involved, having unofficially switched their shift times and, as part of their cover-up, proper records were

not made in the train register.

A terminating local train, on which one of the men had arrived from Carlisle, was 'forgotten about' even though it had been shunted across to the up main line and a packed southbound troop train, laden with troops of the Royal Scots, was accepted and smashed into the local, its 15 coaches being reduced to debris.

Before anyone could react, a double-headed northbound express ploughed into the wreckage. Two coal trains in sidings alongside the main lines were involved in the subsequent inferno that engulfed the wooden-bodied stock.

As a result of the inquiry, the two signalmen were imprisoned for culpable homicide.



**ABOVE:** Swindon Works was one of several that built munitions alongside engines. In the top picture, 4-4-2T No. 2250 is about to leave the Great Western Railway's factory with a trainload of six-inch calibre field guns. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

stations were shut down. To make good the losses of able-bodied men to the forces, the companies employed women, boys and men over the normal age of retirement.

The static trench warfare that had been characteristic of the Western Front since September 1914 gave way to a 'war of starvation' from the end of 1916, not only in the UK but in Germany and Russia.

Britain's food shortage increased because unrestricted submarine warfare around the coast of the British Isles was sinking more and more merchant ships. In January 1917, 49 ships were sunk by U-boats, but by March the figure had shot up to 147.

For the railways of Britain, this maritime aspect of the war created two conspicuous changes. The first was that flows of agricultural produce changed quite significantly, for instead of grain being imported through the previously safe west coast ports, it now had to be moved from many different parts of Britain where agricultural production had been increased. A symbol of this diversification was the rapid increase in the number and size of allotment gardens used to grow food by the side of railway lines and next to rural station platforms.

Farms, factories and railways managed to cope with these developments through the

employment of large numbers of women, often in jobs that had previously been considered far from lady-like' (see panel on right).

Although *The Railway Magazine* managed to continue monthly publishing (unlike in the Second World War), paper supplies had by the end of 1917 become so short that the magazine was allowed to be sold only to readers who had reserved a copy – and the readers were then encouraged to send their used numbers to the Front to help keep up the morale of the troops.

### Modern steam

The U-boat war had involved the sinking of neutral shipping, which greatly antagonised America, and on April 6, 1917, the United States entered the war. It was some months before the "dough boys" joined forces with the allied armies, but when they did, the course of the war changed dramatically. Convoys of merchant ships increased, improving the supply of food to Britain, and large amounts of railway equipment were brought over from the USA to aid the allied supply lines in northern Europe.

This included Baldwin 2-8-0s that were extremely modern by the British standards of the time (see photograph at the top of page 20) and paved the way for the S160 type of the Second World War.

In Kent, a massive new rail-

### HOW WOMEN FILLED THE BREACH



**DURING** the First World War, 190,000 railwaymen joined the armed services – yet the conflict meant that the railways of Britain were expected to move many new flows of traffic as well as help to operate railways overseas.

The railways tackled this problem by recruiting staff and cutting some existing services. The new staff were women, boys and elderly railwaymen above the normal retirement age.

By mid-1918, there were 65,887 women working on the railways, many as engine cleaners

(see photo). Female clerks were typically paid half as much as men doing the same work. The best-paid women were goods porters, earning an average of £2-6s-9d, compared to a male goods porter earning £2-19s-5d. The general consensus was that women did a splendid job, but most were made redundant at the end of the war.

It is particularly sad that female workers who were widowed during the fighting were also required to make way for men, even though some of the latter had no family commitments.

served port was constructed, virtually in secret, in an inlet at Richborough, near Sandwich. Even though it wasn't fully opened until February 1918, it played a vitally important role in the shipping of locomotives, tanks and other supplies.

They were very much needed in 1918, but after the Russian revolution of October 1917, the Communists there agreed peace terms with Germany the following March, allowing the Kaiser to transfer thousands of his troops from the Russian to Western fronts. This enabled the German army to overrun the allied front line and advance as far as the River Marne.

There they halted because the supply line did not yet reach beyond the railheads of the standard gauge lines to keep the

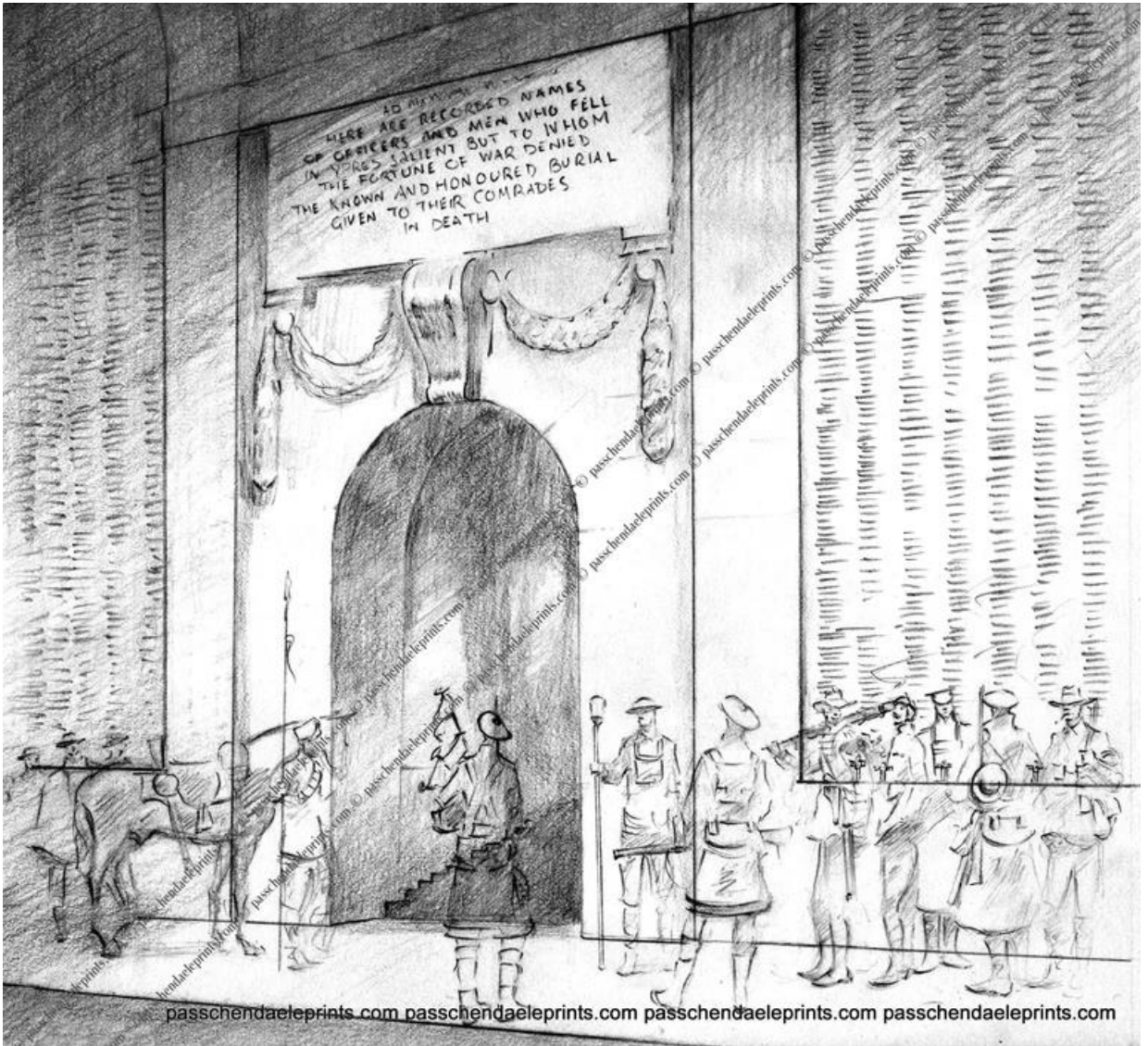
German troops supplied with munitions and food. The delay gave the allies, with the help of the newly arrived Americans, the opportunity to launch a counter attack, which regained most of the lost ground.

By then, however, the war had been dragging on for more than four long years. Much of the German civilian population was starving and sections of its army and navy mutinied. On November 11, 1918, the Germans finally accepted the inevitable and signed an armistice.

As German general Ludendorff commented in 1918: "There comes a time when locomotives are more important than guns."

Britain and its railways, however, would never be the same again. ■





**Ghost Soldiers at The Menin Gate**