

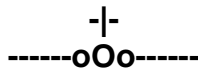
Branch Newsletter – September 2020 (War Emergency issue No. 6)

Next Meeting Cancelled:

Would have been on Saturday 12th September at St Peter's Collegiate School, Compton Park, Compton Rd. West, Wolverhampton WV3 9DU.

There will be no meetings in October or November either.

What happens after that, we shall have to wait and see. St Peter's school will make the decision as to when we are able to resume meetings.



Something for nothing, by courtesy of Richard Bagshaw:

“A marvellous FREE e-book for aviation anoraks

These two marvellous books are advised on the British Badge Forum, and are a free download.

A huge work of scholarship.

DO NOT HESITATE!

RAF Collectors Guide 2020

The final version of my RAF books are now available, free of charge. Anyone who previously requested copies may like to have the latest update. I have written these books as the result of many years of collecting. There are two volumes one of 582 and one of 144 pages of RAF history in badges and emblems. The e-books are available to download here (Large! Not suitable for mobile phones): The link is available for the next 28 days.”

<https://we.tl/t-qxnHMllpG4>

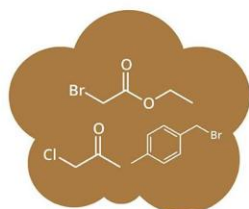
I know these are trying times for many, and the books are free, but if you download it you may like to consider showing your appreciation for the work I have put into it by making a contribution using PayPal at the address shown in the books

Thanks for the tip, Richard.

We all love chemical warfare, don't we? It is, after all, a "higher form of killing"?

CHEMICAL WARFARE WORLD WAR I

WORLD WAR I IS SEEN AS THE DAWN OF MODERN CHEMICAL WARFARE. SOME 50 DIFFERENT CHEMICAL AGENTS WERE DEPLOYED ON THE BATTLEFIELDS, AND 3,000 CHEMICALS WERE INVESTIGATED AS POTENTIAL WEAPONS. THEIR USE CAUSED APPROXIMATELY 1.3 MILLION NONFATAL CASUALTIES, AND 90,000-100,000 FATALITIES. HERE, WE SUMMARIZE THE MOST PREVALENT OF THE CHEMICALS USED.



TEAR GASES

(ethyl bromoacetate, chloroacetone & xylyl bromide)

SMELL & APPEARANCE

Both ethyl bromoacetate and chloroacetone are colorless to light yellow liquids with fruity, pungent odors. Xylyl bromide is a colorless liquid with a pleasant, aromatic odor.

EFFECTS

Tear gases are what are known as lachrymatory agents: They irritate mucous membranes in the eyes, mouth, throat, and lungs, leading to crying, coughing, breathing difficulties, and temporary blindness.

FIRST USED

1914 In August, the French used tear gas grenades against the German Army, to little effect.

ESTIMATED CASUALTIES

0 These gases were used to incapacitate enemies rather than to kill; the symptoms commonly resolved within 30 minutes of leaving the affected area.



CHLORINE

SMELL & APPEARANCE

Chlorine is a yellow-green gas with a strong, bleachlike odor. Soldiers described its smell as "a distinct mix of pepper and pineapple."

EFFECTS

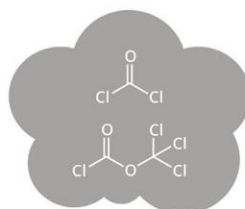
Chlorine reacts with water in the lungs, forming hydrochloric acid. Coughing, vomiting, and irritation to the eyes occur at low concentrations. At concentrations of 1,000 parts per million, it leads to rapid death.

FIRST USED

1915 German forces used chlorine near Ypres, Belgium, in April. British forces retaliated in September, at Loos, France.

ESTIMATED CASUALTIES

>1,100 Chlorine was devastating because troops were initially unequipped to deal with it. Later, gas masks limited its effectiveness.



PHOSGENE & DIPHOSENE

(carbonyl dichloride & trichloromethane chloroformate)

SMELL & APPEARANCE

Phosgene is a colorless gas with a musty odor comparable to that of newly-mown hay or grass. Its density is four times that of air. Diphosgene is a colorless, oily liquid.

EFFECTS

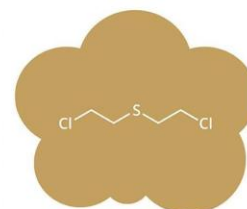
They react with proteins in lung alveoli, causing suffocation. They cause coughing, difficulty breathing, and irritation to the throat and eyes. Have delayed effects, not evident for 48 hours, leading to death.

FIRST USED

1915 In December 1915, German forces used phosgene against the British at Ypres.

ESTIMATED CASUALTIES

85% It's estimated that this pair caused a majority of gas-related fatalities. Phosgene was primarily deployed from gas canisters. Both chemicals were used to fill artillery shells.



MUSTARD GAS

(bis(2-chloroethyl) sulfide)

SMELL & APPEARANCE

When pure, mustard gas is a colorless and odorless liquid. In its impure form, it's used as a chemical agent. Then, it's yellow-brown in color and has a variable odor resembling garlic, horseradish, or rubber.

EFFECTS

Irritant and blistering agent that damages the eyes, skin, and respiratory tract. It causes chemical burns on contact with skin. Effects are delayed by hours, and repeat exposure increases sensitivity and blistering.

FIRST USED

1917 On July 12, 1917, German forces used mustard gas against the British at Ypres.

ESTIMATED CASUALTIES

2-3% The mortality rate of mustard gas casualties was low, but the gas's effects were debilitating, and patients required elaborate care.

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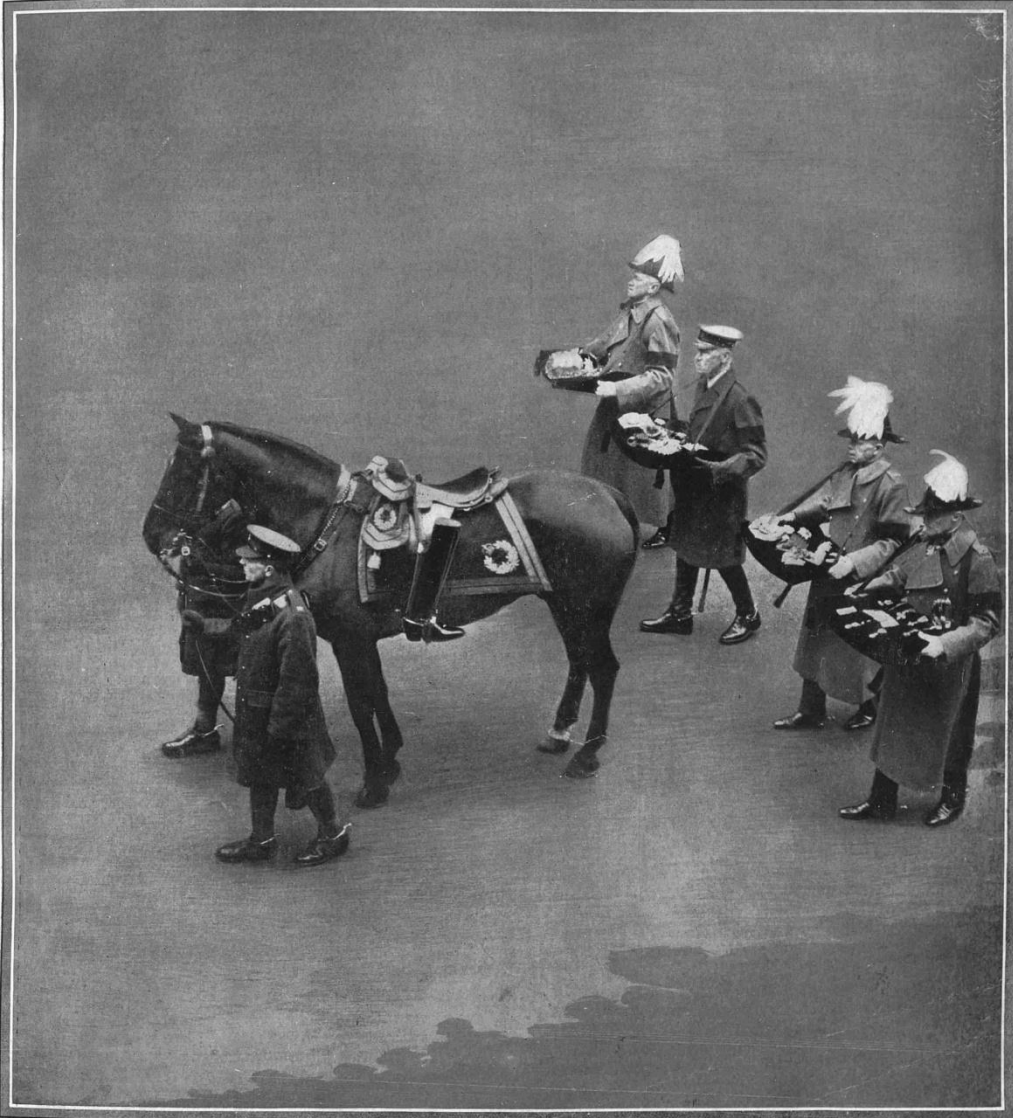
Identity discs: all you ever wanted to know but were afraid to ask...

<http://blog.cwgc.org/blog/the-story-of-the-double-dog-tag>

Haig's funeral – thanks to Richard Pursehouse for the photo:

The **Graphic**
Founded 1869 *The National Weekly*

No. 3038, Vol. CXXIX. LONDON, FEBRUARY 11, 1928. Price ONE SHILLING. Inland, 11d.; Canada and New-Postage 2;foundland, 11d.; Foreign, 21d.



THE RIDERLESS HORSE
The Passing of a Great Soldier

AMID the panoply of a Field-Marshal's last honours, the squadrons of Lancers, Hussars and Horse Guards, the Foot Guards and kilted regiments, and the representatives of the French and Belgian armies, nothing in Lord Haig's Funeral in London touched the imagination so much as the Commander-in-Chief's riderless horse, with its furniture of gold and black, and full-dress riding boots reversed in its stirrups. Earl Haig's charger followed immediately after the coffin, which was borne on the gun-carriage of the famous "E" Battery, R.H.A. (used as the bier of the Unknown Warrior). Immediately behind it came the four bearers of the Field-Marshal's insignia, (from left) General Sir Noel Birch, Lieut.-General Sir L. Kiggell, Major-General Sir J. Davidson, and Colonel B. D. Fisher. A special portrait, signed by Earl Haig, is inserted loose in this Lord Haig Memorial Number of THE GRAPHIC.

Note the reversed boots.

Thanks to Chairman Alan for this story of Worcester Cathedral's temporary Cenotaph:

[Worcester WWI \(Temporary approx 1919-1922\) - War Memorials Online](#)

Apparently it was a temporary Cenotaph erected outside Worcester Cathedral. Just love the car. Wonder if it might be Norton-Griffiths Rolls Royce?!!

All the best. Alan.



David Whitehead has sent us this account of the early days of the Guards in the Great War:

THE GUARDS AT WAR 1914

When I joined the branch back in the mid nineties (95?), Dr. Geoff Noon was in the chair (Alan Angell was still in nappies – size 5+ if you must know!) and a past member, Dennis Gillard, had left his entire collection of books on the Great War to the branch in his will.

Included in that collection was 'Fifteen Rounds A Minute' which I expect many of you will have read. The book recounts the experiences of the Officers and Men of the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards serving in the BEF during 1914 and the anecdotes and incidents

described in the diverse ramblings that follow have been culled from the book.

I am also including some comments of my own in regard to officer recruitment but let me make it clear that these comments are in no way intended as a criticism of the military capabilities or conduct of these officers which was exemplary at all times – as you would expect. However, there is mention of one unnamed officer who made a point of applying for positions that did not involve duty on the front line. The comment in the book that “this officer was not well liked” must qualify as the understatement of 1914!

In the main, the Guards Regiments drew their officer recruits from what was then known as the 'Upper Class' that is to say the aristocracy and long established, wealthy land owning families of impeccable heritage whose descendants, in some cases, are still around today. Examples of these families could include such well known surnames names as; Cavendish, Egerton, Fitzclarence, Percy, Cecil, Smith(!) and Stanley and many more.

Slight digression here – I am anti one particular Stanley namely the traitorous Sir William Stanley, who, with his army, famously waited on the fringes of the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 until it was clear which side was going to win and then joined forces with the usurper Henry Tudor. So, be careful with your dealings with anyone with the Stanley surname, they cannot be trusted!

Many of these aristocratic and wealthy families inter married giving rise to a host of double barrelled surnames, a sprinkling of triple barrelled and even one example in the book of a quadruple barrelled who rejoiced in the name of Hon. John Frederick Hepburn-Stuart-Forbes-Trefusis.

In those days and in those circles, there was a strict dress code for the men. Brown and green were considered to be country colours, giving rise to the edict ' One never wears brown in town!' Town (London) wear was always a suit in shades of either in blue or grey and always worn with black shoes – brogues during the day and oxfords at night.

The book mainly chronicles the war time experiences and exploits of the then Major George Darrell Jeffreys whose family background was typical of a Guards Officer.

Born in 1878, the son of the Rt. Hon. Arthur Frederick Jeffreys MP and Privy Councillor and wealthy Hampshire landowner, George was educated at Eton and Sandhurst having decided on a military career. He was commissioned into the Grenadiers in 1897.

One of the family ancestors was the notorious Judge Jeffreys of Bloody Assizes fame but I imagine this was not discussed in polite family circles.

At the time George joined the Grenadiers there was a high class House of Ill Repute in London much frequented by young Guards Officers. The Madame of this establishment was known as 'Ma' and her surname was Jeffreys and so it came to pass that the brand new 2nd Lt. Jeffreys was given the nickname 'Ma' which stuck with him for the whole of his military career!

By the outbreak of war in August 1914 George Jeffreys had risen to the rank of Major and was stationed at the Guards Depot at Caterham.

The 2nd Battalion Grenadiers were already en route to the BEF assembly area in northern France when Jeffreys received orders that he was appointed 2nd in command of the battalion (following the posting of the current incumbent to a staff position) and he was to proceed immediately to France.

At the time of the Great War, every Army officer was entitled to a servant and, for Majors and above, a groom for one's horse. So Major Jeffreys' logistical problem was getting himself, his servant, his groom and his horse from Caterham to northern France in double quick time.

It went like this: Horsebox attached to rear of train from local station to Southampton, servant in 3rd class (no second class in those days) and groom with horse. Jeffreys motored down to Southampton. Overnight sailing to Le Havre (thought not to be a troop ship as Jeffreys was given use of the Captain's cabin!). Le Havre onwards via rail (again with horsebox attached at rear) to Amiens. Detach horsebox and reattach on second train to Arras. Repeat exercise with horsebox and third train to Busigny. Repeat exercise with horsebox and on to final destination at Wassigny. Phew!

An interesting incident that did not directly involve Jeffreys occurred early during the retreat when the position occupied by the battalion was thought to be untenable. The C.O. Lt. Colonel Noel Corry consulted with the C.O of the battalion next to him and they jointly agreed to withdraw. A message to this effect was sent by runner to Brigade HQ. The runner returned with an order forbidding withdrawal. The two battalion C.O.s again consulted and decided to invoke the Army Regulation that permits an order to be disobeyed if it is believed that the order issuer would not have issued the order had he been in full possession of the circumstances. On this basis both battalions withdrew. The book does not mention any immediate consequences for this action, indeed Corry was appointed temporary Brigadier shortly afterwards. But later in September following his return to command of the 2nd Battn he was relieved of his command and sent home. This action was not well received by his officers. Jeffreys even wrote a letter of support for Lt. Col. Corry to Regimental HQ in London. Lt. Col. Corry was subsequently given command of 3rd Battn Grenadiers so Jeffreys letter may have had some bearing on the outcome.

Lt. Col. Corry's successor as C.O. 2nd Battn. was Lt. Col. Wilfred Smith who, in a letter home to his wife, instructed her to tell Fortnum & Mason to send him 2lbs of coffee every week! So it seems you don't have to have a posh name to be able to afford Fortnum & Mason as your corner shop!

Another side to Col. Smith's character was him finding the time to write to Regimental HQ enclosing his cheque for £1.10 shillings which he requested should be sent to the wife of one of the Battn HQ orderlies who had been wounded. The money was the orderly's back pay and much needed by his wife as she was shortly 'due to be confined'! Sadly, Col. Smith was killed in action at Festaubert in 1915.

Jeffreys served as 2nd in command during the retreat from Mons and beyond. During the Great War he was severely wounded and although not awarded gallantry medals he was Mentioned In Despatches no less than nine times!

By the time he retired in 1938 he had achieved the rank of General and was Peer of the Realm— not bad for an Old Contemptible! He died in 1960 aged 82.

Drive north east from Paris on the N2 and after an hour or so you will arrive at the village of Villers-Cotterets.

On the 1st September 1914, in a forest some two miles east of the village, elements of the Grenadiers, Coldstreams and Irish Guards encountered a strong enemy force. The fighting, some of it hand to hand, caused many dead, wounded and missing on both sides, resulting in all the Guards units being obliged to withdraw leaving their dead behind.

The British dead included Lt. Col. Hon. George Morris, C.O. 1st Battn Irish Guards and 2nd Lt. George Cecil, 2nd Battn Grenadier Guards. What follows now is the truly extraordinary story of the lengths the respective families of these two officers went to in order to find what had happened to the bodies of their loved ones.

In late September, barely four weeks after the fighting in which her son George Cecil was killed, his mother Lady Violet Cecil arrived in Villers-Cotterets having stopped off in Paris to visit the American Ambassador who had kindly loaned her his motor car and a military attache to complete her journey. How she got from London to Paris is not explained but it is known that she had the necessary military passes. Clearly, a prime example of it's not what you know but who you know! Sadly, Lady Cecil's visit did not find positive proof of her son's death or, if still alive, his present whereabouts.

On 16th November, Lord Killanin (brother of Lt. Col. George Morris, kia on 1st September), Lord Robert Cecil, Lord Elphinstone and the Rev. H.T. Briggs arrived in Villers-Cotterets. They were given information about a mass grave in the vicinity of where the 1st September fighting took place.

The grave was found and, during the course of next two days and using local labour, a total of 98 bodies were exhumed of which four were officers. The officers were identified as Lt. Col. George Morris; Captain C. Tisdall; 2nd Lt. George Cecil; Lt. Geoffrey Lambton. Sadly, the book makes no mention of confirmed identities for any of the 94 Other Ranks.

The original grave, dug by the Germans, was really no more than a burial pit into which the bodies had been thrown haphazardly. Lord Killanin and his party took the trouble to have the grave enlarged and ensured that the 94 other Ranks were re-interred with dignity.

The bodies of the four officers were taken back to Villers-Cotterets and buried together in a plot purchased in perpetuity by Lord Killanin & Co.

The post script to the above is that perpetuity didn't last very long in Villers-Cotterets! After the war, the four officers were exhumed again and reburied with the 98 Other Ranks at the site of the original grave in what is now known as the Guards Grave Cemetery, Villers Cotterets Forest – see photo on CWGC web site.

The extracts referred to here are only a fraction of those in the book which, if you can find a copy, is well worth you reading – enjoy!

Source: 'Fifteen Rounds A Minute' J.M. Craster 1976

P.S. The book title refers to the ability of a Guards rifleman to fire at fifteen rounds a minute.

Richard Pursehouse has sent us this most useful App for when we are able to visit Ypres again:

[Last Post App - News | Last Post Association](#)

I thought I'd missed this – but thanks to Quintin Watt I haven't! His cancelled talk to the Wolverhampton Society is available on line:

As you are hopefully aware "Forgotten Soldiers of the Midland Railway", cannot take place in person. I am pleased to announce, however, that the talk will be available via YouTube. You can access the talk using the link below:

[Forgotten Soldiers of the Midland Railway](#)

You do not need to have a YouTube account, or require any other software, just use the link in this email to access the talk at any point.

I look forward to seeing you all again in person soon.

All the best,

Quintin

Nick Baker puts a local spin on that famous football match of 1914:

A Black Country Lad and THAT Football Match

Nick Baker

"Some people", said the great Bill Shankly, "think football is a matter of life and death....I can assure them it is more serious than that." Now, whilst the sport's immediate relevance to personal survival to a soldier under fire might be disputed, it is a fact that football, from organised tournaments to behind the lines kick-about, occupied a vital part in the lives of British soldiers during the First World War. Despite the professional game being suspended for the duration following immutable pressure from middle class amateurism (posh sports writer Edward Dalrymple Sewell, writing in the 1914 'Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News' expressed certainty the war would rid the working class of its addiction to 'Association Rules' once they experienced their public school educated officers leading a charge using oval-ball techniques...honestly, he did....), football came to be recognised as essential to moral. Indeed 'Field' magazine, hardly a bastion of working class interests, noted in 1918 that '...it will be as task worthy of the greatest of historians to record what this

[wartime] sporting spirit has done, not only for the British Empire, but the whole civilized world.'

However, one sporting event the 'Field' could not have predicted would still be occupy the minds of historians major and minor a century later, was a football match that may not have even taken place. This possibly mythical match allegedly occurred during the Christmas Truce of 1914 and has provided an abiding popular image of the Great War ever since. Unlike the 'Angel of Mons' which was certainly illusory the 'Christmas Day Match' has become firmly lodged in the British psyche as something it is desirable to believe in but cannot apparently be proven.

And not just the British. Anyone who has attended a lecture on the subject by Taff Gillingham of Khaki Devil re-enactments, an acknowledged expert, will have been amused by his story of being invited to UEFA Headquarters to discuss a centennial monument to commemorate the event. Taff, awaiting an audience with Michel Platini, informed an acolyte that no such match had yet been shown to have taken place. "Ah," replied this unctuous assistant to the Prince of Soccer Darkness, "but you see, Mr. Platini wants there to have been one." A line as menacing as anything from 'The Godfather', with exception that Marlon Brando's criminality was bogus. Taff came away without the contract, but Platini's monument was spawned near Ploegsteert by a company called 'Designwerk' (which sounds like it should be located in the Black Country but isn't) to join the increasing number of desultory and inappropriate modern-day 'monuments' that are beginning to literally litter the Western Front. An iron football mounted on a pavement inscribed with Platini's signature is close to



a railed enclosure in which visitors (usually schools, who should know better) can place offerings of footballs, scarves and other paraphernalia. Sealed inside the iron ball is a 2014 newspaper – just too early to include reports of Platini's ban from football administration for 'conflict of interests'; which as any English football supporter will tell you is code for

'corruption' and was years overdue.

Taff was later involved in a 1914 Christmas TV advertisement for Sainsbury's which included a football match as part of a truce. However, this was very well done and at no point was the match presented as fact. Meanwhile a statue showing a British and German soldier exchanging a handshake has been erected in the town square at Messines and, whilst



unfortunately including a ball, it at least focuses on the undeniable truth of the truce rather than Platini's footballing phantasmagoria (and yes, while we are at it, of course he orchestrated a conspiracy against England).

Nevertheless, research into the Christmas Truce match continues, building a body of evidence that stubbornly continues to provide no solution. It was therefore with some delight that whilst researching one thing I came across another that, at first glance, and even after some further investigation, seemed to offer a credible report of a match – of sorts – and with a Black Country connection. This was included in a report in the Stourbridge based 'County Express' in March 1915, of an interview with Private William Hubble from Brockmoor, Brierley Hill. Hubble, of the 1/South Staffs, claimed to have taken part in, or at least witnessed, a football match on Christmas Day 1914 in no man's land. He states, 'We made a football out of some old shirts and formed sides. We made goalposts with great coats and from twenty to thirty a side took part in the match – English on the one side and Germans on the other. It was a draw, neither side scoring; in fact you couldn't shoot with the 'ball' when you tried' The 'County Express' added authentication (of a kind) by stating that 'Private Hubble was a member of the Moor Lane Albion Football Club, Brierley Hill'.

So far so good. Unlike other fictional accounts this does not include a real ball (why on earth would anyone have carried one into the front line?), and the thirty-a-side teams and coats-for-goalposts credibly describes a scratch match to anyone who was once a small boy in the days before Nintendo (which in the WFA is all of us). The next thing to do was check out William Hubble to see if he could have been there and, if so, cross reference his account with any

additional evidence.

Hubble claimed to be a member of 'C' Company, 1/South Staffs. Disappointingly a check found this battalion leaving the front line trenches at 5pm on Christmas Eve, reliving the 2/Queen's (West Surreys). However, the Staffs war diary then reveals that 100 men were sent back to the front to support the latter. If Hubble was amongst these then he would have been in the front line on Christmas Day. The War Diary of the 2/Queen's describes the Christmas Truce in some detail. There were two days of fraternisation, ending at 3.30 pm on the 26th. Obviously written from an officer's point of view it includes a report of burying the dead in no-man's land and the relative 'social quality' of German Infantry Officers (low) and Staff Officers (much better). However, there is no mention of a football match. Meanwhile, Hubble's description of the truce notes that apart from a 'visit to the playing ground' officers remained in their dugouts, and that on Boxing Day hostilities recommenced after breakfast. Of course it is entirely possible to get two contrasting points of view of the same event, particularly between officers and other ranks, but the disparity between Hubble and the War Diary are so great as to cast doubt on his as a reliable account. Indeed his interview taken as a whole contains an amount of questionable information, although some of this could be put down to poor reporting as much as deliberate misinformation. For example, Hubble is described as a Kitchener volunteer, but joining the 1/Staffs at the front in September 1914. This is highly unlikely – he must have been a reservist. Meanwhile a medal card which is probably his shows him entering the Western Front on 17 December 1914, just about in time to be at the front by Christmas, but nowhere near the September date he claimed. Again this could be a journalist's error, Hubble exaggerating, or an incorrect card.

There is no doubt that William Hubble was on the Western Front and that he lived in Brockmoor. Moore Lane Albion was a real club. He certainly returned home in early 1915 after hospitalisation. Unfortunately he has no surviving army record (at least that I can find) which makes further investigation difficult. Therefore, whilst he might just have taken part in the truce, there is enough flakiness in his account to make it just as likely he may have been repeating the words of others, or simply making it up.

Finally, and the Holy Grail of Christmas Truce football research, there would seem to be no corroborating account from a second source of a match between the 2/Queen's and the Germans. So, unless someone has anything further to add, the claim of Private William Hubble of Moor Lane Albion as having taken part in a 0-0 draw with Germany on Christmas Day 1914 has to, unfortunately, join the rest of the Christmas Truce match reports as unlikely. Damn!"

Dates for your Diary

There ain't none for the immediate future!

- i. **Saturday 24th April 2021 – Great War Forum Conference**
Venue: Tally Ho! Conference Centre, Birmingham

Further details to follow.

If you know of any other relevant events that our members may be interested in, don't be shy – let me know and I'll put it in the Newsletter.

Future Newsletters:

Please send any items you would like to be included to me at my official e-mail address: wfawtoneditor@gmail.com

Don't force me to write all this – your contributions gratefully received. Many thanks to those of you who have read this sentence and contributed to past newsletters: you know who you are, and your reward shall be in Heaven...

John Hale
Branch Newsletter Editor

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