



# frontline.

The newsletter of the MK WFA, June 2024.



## **Our next talk - Roy Larkin - 21<sup>st</sup> June.**

At the start of the Great War the British Army relied mainly on horsepower and had only a handful of motorised vehicles. From just 200 motor vehicles in 1914 to over 120,000 by 1918 was an incredible expansion at any time. In the early days of vehicle manufacture and ownership it was an incredible achievement. Just as incredible was the repair and maintenance industry that had to grow to cope with the demand for repairs. More than simply another war story, Roy's presentation, fully illustrated with period images, tells the story of how the growing number of motor vehicles were kept roadworthy and working during the Great War, one of the great unsung achievements behind the lines during WW1. This will be our third talk by Roy, an expert on motor transport and logistics, and one that we are very much looking forward to.



## **Albert French Commemoration at MK Rose**

On Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June, the anniversary of Albert French's death in action, there will be the annual commemoration at the MK Rose. Starting at 5.30, this year's event is organised, and attended by, representatives of the armed forces. This will be followed by wreath laying, including one from MK WFA, and the two minute silence. The British Legion, and Friends of the MK Rose will also be there, as well as our loyal band from MK WFA. We are hoping for both good weather and a good turnout, so please support the event if you can.



June

**Gunner James Duckworth (Royal Field Artillery) killed in action 4<sup>th</sup> June 1915 aged 38. Anne's relative.**

James Duckworth, husband of Harriet Alice Duckworth, of 53, Nelson Street, Accrington, Lancs, was a Battery Quarter Master Serjeant in the RFA and was killed in action at Gallipoli on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1915. He is commemorated on the Helles Memorial.

**Nathan Wignall Carey East Lancs Regiment died of wounds as a POW 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1918 aged 25. Anne's relative.**

Nathan Wignall Carey was born in Withnell, Lancashire in 1893 to Patrick and Elizabeth (née Wignall) Carey, the younger of 2 children. His father, a cotton spinner, was from London, the son of a professional soldier. Nathan's mother died in 1907 when he was 14 and his father re-married three years later. His sister died in 1914, having been married just six months. Nathan worked as a labourer in the weaving department of Abbey Mill in Withnell where his father was a spinner.

In 1916 Nathan married a local girl, Elsie May Ashmore, at Brinscall Wesleyan Chapel. Soon after his marriage, Nathan joined the 1/4 Bn East Lancs Regiment and was sent overseas.



He fought at Passchendaele and in France along the Western Front. During the Spring Offensive in March 1918 there was a heavy bombardment near Hargicourt where Nathan was severely wounded and later taken prisoner in Soyécourt. Among many injuries he sustained, his shattered arm had to be amputated. He was held in Wittenberg POW Camp in Saxony but in the unsanitary conditions he succumbed to his wounds and died on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1918 aged 25. Nathan was initially buried in the Wittenberg prisoner of war cemetery but

after the war was brought to Berlin South-Western Cemetery.

Nathan is commemorated on the family grave in Withnell, on the War Memorial in Abbey Village, Chorley and the Brinscall Chapel War Memorial.



## Albert French Remembered.



Albert's story starts in 1900 when he was born, but for us it really starts in 1975 with the discovery of a bundle of letters in a local bookshop, an incredible stroke of luck! The second piece of luck was that these letters fell into the right hands. The third piece of luck, which happened during WW2, was that Albert's service records were among the 40% that survived the London Blitz, the bulk of the First World War records being destroyed in the bombing.

Albert was born in New Bradwell, Buckinghamshire but the French family soon moved to Wolverton. According to the 1911 England & Wales Census Collection: Albert was aged 11 on the night of 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> April 1911 when the census was taken. At that time there were 6 members of the French household living at 60 Young Street, Wolverton, Buckinghamshire. The French family was made up as follows:

Edward French was 47, head of the household and a widower. (His deceased wife was Mary Ann Amelia Mortlock. She had married Edward in 1895 when she was 23 years old and he was 30. She is recorded on the 1901 Census of England & Wales living as the wife of Edward with daughter May, aged 4, and son Albert, aged 1 and had obviously passed away between the 1901 and 1911 census's.) Edward was a drilling machinist at the Railway Works, presumably the Wolverton Railway Works; the largest railway carriage works in Great Britain. Also living with the family was Edward's sister, Jane French. Jane was single, aged 40. Presumably she was living with the family at this time to help Edward care for the four children. They consisted of a girl, May, 14 years old and working as an envelope maker in a printing works (McCorquodales?) and her three brothers, all at school at the time, Albert aged 11, William, aged 8 and George aged 6.

By the time war started, Albert was working at the Wolverton works but one day he just disappeared. We do not know if his father had any knowledge of this, many lads who lied about their age in order to join up were 'reclaimed' by their parents, but in Albert's case this didn't happen, even after he started sending letters home from training. One might imagine that Edward was proud of his son volunteering.



Parade in Wolverton 1916

His Service Record shows that he went down to London and enlisted as a volunteer on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1915 at St. Pancras. Albert, along with many other underage lads, added enough years to his real age to become 19, so that he would be eligible to be accepted by the Army, and serve in a theatre of war. He stated (truthfully) that he was living at 60 Young Street, Wolverton, Buckinghamshire but confirmed (untruthfully) that he was 19 years old and his trade or calling was stated as "Labourer" (presumably to mask his real calling as a machinist at Wolverton Works, which he had 'left without notice'). Although he was only just under 5 feet 4ins and quite slight in build, his physical development was considered to be good and despite the fact that he looked so young he was accepted. He definitely wasn't the first to pull this off, nor would he be the last.



Albert signed up as a recruit with the Service Number C/7259 and posted to the 18th (Service) Battalion the Kings Royal Rifle Corps (K.R.R.C.). He was writing letters home at this time, re-enforcing the idea that his father accepted Albert's decision to join up, many underage soldiers were pulled back out of the army by their parents. One wonders if his mother, had she been alive, would have also done this. The 18th Battalion moved from Gidea Park, Essex to Witley in Surrey, forming one of the units in the 122nd Brigade in the 41st Division of Kitchener's New Army. He then carried on with his training at Aldershot. Included in his letters home was this extract, 'We all have troubles and trials but with a little pluck, and grit, you win through all right. We went on a 16-mile route march yesterday with packs, ammunition, bayonets, rifles, in fact we had everything. 4 miles of this march was over a boggy plain, up to our knees (without exaggeration) in sand, mud and water. Two horses which sank in the mud up to their heads had to be hauled out with ropes. Before we got back the fellows weren't half carrying on.' (Sounds as if their training was becoming exceedingly realistic!)

On 29<sup>th</sup> March 1916 Albert received vaccinations in preparation for service overseas and on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1916 he was posted with the 18th Battalion Kings Royal Rifle Corps (K.R.R.C.) to the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) serving in France, leaving Aldershot for Southampton and sailing across the English Channel to the French port of Le Havre, disembarking there on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1915, and continuing their training in the field before moving up to the front.

Alfred blotted his copybook on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1916. His Service Record states that Albert was "Confined to Barracks" for three days for being caught by Sergeant Ferguson with "dirty equipment on parade". As it sadly turned out, those three days were quite a large chunk of the brief period of time that Alfred was to remain alive. The next few days were spent travelling and marching from the French coast to the battle area near Armentières.

For Albert, the war was not going to last much longer. On 15<sup>th</sup> June 1916 he was reported as having been "Killed in Action". Although his letters home state that he was in France, he was actually in a part of the British Front Line sector in Belgium near Ploegsteert Wood, just north of the French border. Albert had only been in the front line for 44 days and was unlucky enough to be one of only three casualties from 18th Battalion Kings Royal Rifle Corps to be killed in action that month. He was on a routine working party, repairing and replacing sandbags on the parapet of the trench when four bullets from a burst of machine gun fire caught him and he died instantaneously. His father received the following letter -

B.E.F.

June 17th '16

Mr E French

Sir

I regret to have to report the death of your son C7259 Rfn. A. French, who was killed by machine gun fire, whilst with a working party June 15th 1916. He was a very good soldier, although so young, and a willing worker, who made many friends in the company. He is sadly missed not only by his section, but by his platoon and company, and not the least of all by myself

Yours faithfully

R Pennell, Capt. for

Major

Cmdg. 'A' Coy.

Rifleman Albert E French is buried in Hyde Park Corner (Royal Berks) Cemetery, Grave Reference: Row B, Grave 2.



Albert's original grave marker.

Albert's story was likely to have ended here, a memory for his family, and just another name on a war memorial. However, in 1975 Roger Kitchen bought a box of books in a local second-hand store. At the bottom of the box he found a bundle of letters. Albert's sister May had passed away and presumably the letters from Albert had ended up in this box during house clearance. It was a miracle that they hadn't ended up in the dustbin. It was also a miracle that they had fallen into Roger Kitchen of the Living Archive hands. Through his, and other like-minded peoples' efforts, Albert French's story remains alive. Through contacts made between people from Wolverton with local people at an exhibition of his First World War letters near his grave in Belgium, moves were made to twin Wolverton and Ploegsteert. Since then there has been a meeting up of citizens of the two towns, and their brass bands, alternately in Wolverton and Ploegsteert. This was formally recognised with An Act of Twinning in May 2006 and then in the Affirmation of Twinning Charter that was signed by representatives from the two councils, including a special clause, to *'continue to pay tribute to Albert French whose story has forged a lasting bond between our two communities'*.

The discovery of Alfred's letters has resulted in a book, a Radio 4 presentation, and locally, plays and songs created in his memory. The letters are available to read on the MK Heritage site. Albert French is remembered on Wolverton and Stony Stratford War Memorials and in the local church. He has a pillar at the MK Rose and a special tree in Wolverton Square, and commemorations held every year at both of these venues. He will not be forgotten.

### *Bibliography*

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/people/albert-french.htm>

<http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/la/index.html>

# Mentioned in Despatches



## Now The War is Over.

Our talk on 17<sup>th</sup> May was 'Now the War is Over' by Dr Daniel Weinbrien and provided a fascinating look at the events in England following the Armistice, and the English people attempted to retrieve their perspective of the halcyon days before the Great War.

There seemed to be a desire after the war to create a myth of a pre-war quiet life, resulting in people trying to make sense of the world by looking backwards. A whole generation had disappeared, a generation that should have been there to grow old gracefully, and infuse the world with a wealth of new ideas and achievements in every field; all that vision and promise had been lost. This missing generation had left a void that people tried to fill, hence the huge efforts, often voluntary, that went into commemoration and remembrance. Memorials of every kind sprang up across the battlefields, and across England. Memorial halls were created - what the ex-servicemen really wanted was a hut where they could meet up with their old comrades to tell stories and get drunk every Armistice Day - but the authorities were not keen on that idea, so 'grander' thoughts were adopted.

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**THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA**  
GASTON LE ROUX  
LON CHANEY  
NORMAN KERRY  
MARY PHILBIN  
5000 others

**Illness, disfigurement, mourning**

I had a little bird,  
And its name was Enza  
I opened the window  
And in flew Enza

Spanish flu thwarted many of the efforts to return to the old ways, filling hospitals and cemeteries. The disease took a massive toll on men and women in the younger age bracket of 15-30 years, killing off the healthiest and most promising. Industries that had been turned over to the massive war effort struggled to adapt to peacetime production and needs. Women who had been employed as war workers now found that they were not wanted in a land that was supposed to be fit for heroes, and men returning from army service found that work was not in plentiful supply, especially for the disabled. In 1919 there was a massive railway strike. The huge amount of disruption and unrest often involved servicemen, both demobbed and still enlisted. Strikes caused the loss of 35 million hours. Crime rocketed. Seven thousand newly redundant munitions workers marched through London. There was no coherent plan to re-jig the factories, no vision for what the future should look like. The police went on strike and there were mutinies within the armed services, often caused by the boredom of soldiers with no important tasks left for them, petty officialdom, and delays and inconsistencies in the demob process. There was another reason against mass demobilisation, the threat of being further drawn into the civil war raging in Russia. A hundred thousand people attended a march in London against antisemitism in Poland. Some of these marches turned violent, a good local example was when the Mayor of Luton organised a march to celebrate peace but didn't see fit to invite any ex-servicemen to the parade. They turned up in good numbers anyway and burnt down the town hall to demonstrate their anger at being ignored.



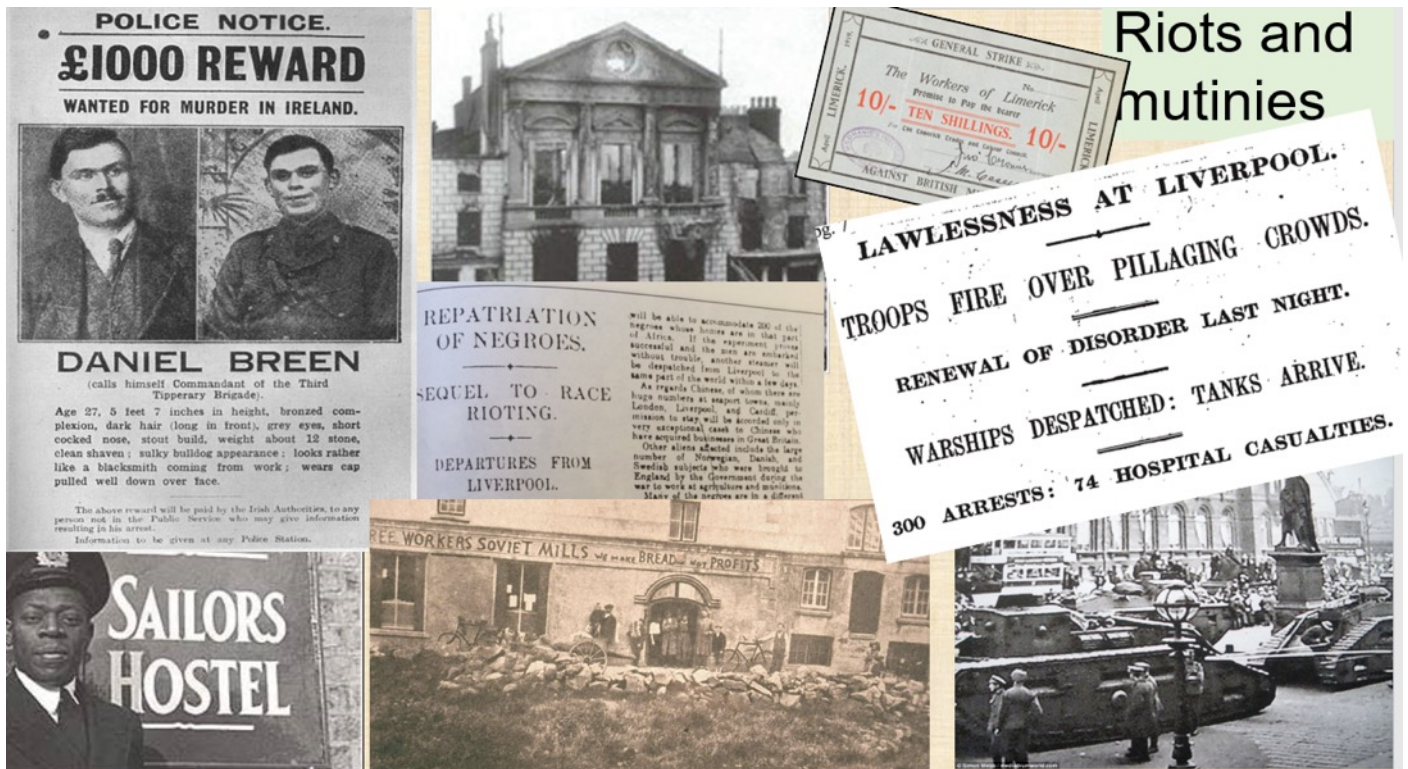
## Strikes and marches

All over England were riots, civil unrest and attacks on police. There were race riots, especially in ports like Salford and Hull, where the old idea that immigrants were taking the jobs of white men resurfaced, especially against Chinese and Indian dock workers and sailors. There was also the gender issue against women working, bus 'clippies' for example were targeted in Bristol. But women were equally annoyed at being laid off, especially the canary girls, who had worked such long and dangerous hours. The newspapers were full of stories about girls who did not want to be domestic servants anymore, and the Suffragettes were in full swing.

Shortages also caused unrest, there were beer riots in Norfolk, and pubs were broken into. The government rapidly promised better supply and stronger beer. In England there was a huge fear of a Russian style revolution, and workers groups known as 'soviets' arose all over Europe. The British



Communist Party was set up. In reality many of these disputes were sorted by local improving of whatever the original grievance was, usually about pay and working conditions.



Ireland had a huge number of soviets spring up, but these too were short-lived. What wasn't short-lived was the activities of the IRA, not only in Ireland but in places with strong Irish links like Liverpool where there was smuggling of arms and explosives, rioting and attacks on the police. In 1919 most of Ireland became independent.

After the war the political parties, especially the Conservatives, had a great fear of ex-servicemen becoming violent, and some certainly did turn to crime in a Monocled Mutineer slash Peaky Blinders style. All this unrest and uncertainty about the future caused many to turn to some sort of escapism, maybe in a search for their lost youth because of the war. Newspapers like 'The Daily Mail' had a field day, reporting on dance crazes etc. Headlines trumpeted 'Smoking!' 'Dancing without Gloves!' 'Short Skirts!' 'No Corsets!' There was a 'horrible new sound' called jazz. Narcotics were also involved. Harrods sold morphine as gifts to the troops. The Chinese were again singled out as a bad thing. Opium Dens! 'White Girls Hypnotised by Yellow Men!'

The new 'war' against crime included harsher punishments and an increase in hangings. Life in the trenches was blamed for an increase in domestic violence. Again the population tried to go back and search for what had been lost. This was the time of the Cottingley Fairies. Spiritualism became massive in and after 1919, with the Spiritualist's Union having a quarter of a million members, often grieving mothers, but also championed by leading figures, notably Arthur Conan Doyle, himself a grieving father who had encouraged his son to join up, resulting in his death in action. The Church had become identified with war, not peace. People had lost their faith, and sort comfort in the new spiritual churches and societies like the Panacea Society in Bedford.

Daniel then explained the changes that became about. The economy needed rebuilding. The electorate had changed, and grown, three times as many people now had the vote. The Conservatives wanted to get rid of all the wartime changes and get back to what they considered was the 'good old

days,' reducing the state, cutting wages, reinstating class barriers etc. There was piecemeal support for industry and virtually there became a private sector versus state sector situation. Some were looking forwards instead of backwards, but with little support. In Galloway a car company of women engineers was set up and designed a car for female drivers, with a gearstick on the right out of the way of long skirts, and innovations such as rear view mirrors, but it was a limited market and without official support, doomed. The Empire was under threat, partly through pessimism and exhaustion. In England there were improvements via the Housing Act, in education and national health, but it was pretty small beer. Even so the Government survived, although the Eden of the past was as far away as ever, and no one could claim that they had created 'a land fit for heroes.'

Many thanks to Dr Weinbren for a riveting, unusual, and informative talk.

Change of venue for Mk WFA's seminar. (Now at the Old Bath house Wolverton, full address below)



Following on from the success of last year's seminar,  
Milton Keynes Branch is hosting a 2024 event

## “A Great War Miscellany”

on 19<sup>th</sup> October 9.30am – 4.30pm

There is an excellent line up of professional speakers on a wide variety of topics :

Major Charlie Barrett "The Story of the Q-Ships"

Nigel Crompton "Women's Police Service in the Great War"

Helen Frost "When the Land Ships came to Town"

Peter Hart and Gary Bain "Fly or Cry" (Dark humour in the RFC/RAF)

Additionally, there will be short talks and demonstrations by The Great War Society



Ticket includes excellent buffet lunch and free tea and coffee will be available throughout the day. Attractions include militaria displays, a raffle and a second-hand book stall (cash please). The Old Bath House 205 Stratford Rd, MK12 5RL

(Free car park, 4min walk from station) Book early to avoid disappointment. Tickets available priced £30 each by emailing [wfa.miltonkeynes@gmail.com](mailto:wfa.miltonkeynes@gmail.com)

## 'Sudden Death - The development of combat sniping in the Trenches 1914 - 18 (Part one).



Source 1 Images of the final scene of "All Quiet on the Western Front" [1929]

In the concluding lines of the novel 'All Quiet on the Western Front' death is described in a detached and understated manner.

'He fell in October 1918, on a day that was so quiet and still on the whole Front...' [2 All Quiet on the Western Front - Erich Maria Remarque 1928]

This simplicity and the lack of dramatic detail highlight the anonymity and commonality of death in the Trenches. However, the film adaptation in 1929, directed by Lewis Milestone, is more brutally symbolic in so many ways. The central character, Paul, is killed suddenly by a sniper - in a scene that is so shocking and sudden - as he reaches for a butterfly, a symbol of beauty and peace, which contrasts starkly with the violence and brutality of the war. The sniper, an anonymous, faceless soldier shows how death can come suddenly and from any direction, adding to the pervasive sense of fear and vulnerability experienced by soldiers who

fought in trench warfare. The sniper is mechanical, detached and trained to kill from a distance. Paul's death, therefore, serves as a powerful symbol of the random, impersonal, and dehumanizing nature of war.

After this many films set in the trenches depict snipers - capturing the danger, tension and fear associated with this deadly aspect of warfare - *Paths of Glory* [1957], *Gallipoli* [1981], *The Trench* [1999], *Beneath Hill 60* [2010] and *1917* [2019] These films portray the ever-present danger and psychological strain experienced by soldiers during World War I. Snipers are portrayed not just as physical threats, but also as symbols of the random and omnipresent nature of death in the trenches.



Source 3 The fear of the unseen sniper - *1917* Film [2019]



Source 4 German sniper and observers - *Beneath Hill 60* film [2010]



Source 5 Pain and fear - Cheek exit wound - Sniper bullet - 'The Trench' film [1999]

In reality, the development of snipers during World War I marked a significant evolution in military tactics and technology. At the outbreak of war in August 1914 it was expected to be a series of large-scale battles and movement. However, the fighting quickly bogged down into trench warfare. Adrian Gilbert in his study of combat sniping states: 'the war of movement lasted little more than two months. And it was on this static battlefield that the modern sniper emerged'.<sup>6</sup> -'Sniper - One on One .The world of combat Sniping - Gilbert A 1994] Gilbert continues 'In the new war of trench technology , the Germans were well in the lead.....quick to introduce snipers, first rate shots armed with service and sporting rifles fitted with telescopic sights' [7 IBID]

Germany had a distinct advantage of a strong pre-war hunting culture with a tradition of marksmanship. Many German recruits came from rural backgrounds and were skilled in shooting, hunting, camouflage, observation, and stalking, which were essential skills. Often the new snipers were policemen, foresters, and estate gamekeepers in civilian life.



Source 8 German Hunters, gamekeepers, and foresters - Excellent marksmen - from 'Sharpshooters and snipers in World War One' [ You tube Documentary]



Source9 Jager [ Hunter] Battalion Excellent marksmen - from 'Sharpshooters and snipers in World War One' [ You tube Documentary]

German Jager played a significant role forming a crucial component of the German Army especially in marksmanship which effectively adapted quickly in sniper combat in the static trench warfare as in developed in late 1914- early 1915. Adrian Gilbert says the Germans were 'masters of improvisation' 10 [Sniper -One on one. Gilbert 1994] Quickly realising the importance of sniping the Army initially issued commercial hunting rifles with telescopic sights which were effective up to 300 m [ 900feet]. However, by the end of the year the Army supplied the Mauser Model G 98 sniper rifle with a range of 1 km [3000 feet] 'fitted with a five round magazine...accurate and reliable, modified to include a turned down bolt to keep the action clear of the telescopic sight' 11 [IBID]

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Source 12 German army issued commercial hunting rifles 1914 -- from 'Sharpshooters and snipers in World War One' [ You tube Documentary]



Source 13 Mauser Model G98 sniper rifle <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2088555>

In addition, German snipers were equipped with better optical technology, such as high-quality telescopic sights produced by companies like Zeiss giving German snipers a technological edge in terms of accuracy and range in 1914.



Source 14 Superior telescopic sights gave the Germans an initial advantage.  
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2088555>

The Germans also set up sniper training schools providing the necessary skills and knowledge to be effective on the battlefield. Clearly military doctrine placed a significant emphasis on the use of snipers as a strategic tool. They understood the psychological impact that snipers could have on enemy troops, causing fear and uncertainty. Martin Pegler, historian and expert on military sniping, makes this point: "the constant threat of unseen snipers had a profound effect on morale, often causing soldiers to alter their behaviour drastically to avoid being targeted." Source 15 [Sniping in the Great War -Martin Pegler 2017 edition]. As a result, the Germans integrated snipers into their military tactics more effectively and systematically than Britain or France at the beginning of the war on the Western Front.

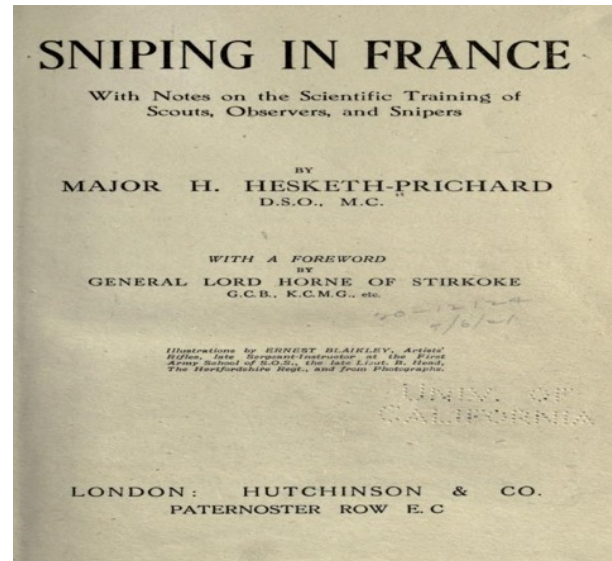
To begin with the British Army was ill-prepared for sniping and in 1914 -15 'the.... ...response to the German sniper threat was amateur and ad hoc" source 16 [ Sniper One on One - A Gilbert] The effectiveness of German snipers became apparent through the significant casualties they inflicted on British troops. The effect was unnerving and deadly -'Bullets couldn't be heard until they had gone past . There was often little bleeding from the wound they caused, just a bluish aperture as the bullet cauterised as it went. Ricochets and short-range bullets did much more obvious damage. The wounds of such bullets [15 square inch gapes] could break the nerve of onlookers. While men with half their heads shot off might take an hour or two to die - and be conscious all the time.' Source 17[The View from the Trenches Paul Mulvey [https://www.academia.edu/2129873/Life\_in\_the\_Trenches]

Lieutenant Neville Woodroffe, in a letter sent during the Mons retreat (3rd September 1914) 'We have been trekking hard all these last days. Heat and dust terrible. We were in action the day before yesterday. We got in a wood and were surrounded by Germans. The Germans are very fond of wood fighting and detail snipers to get up trees. We lost considerably including nine officers.'

Source 18 [https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWsnipers.htm]

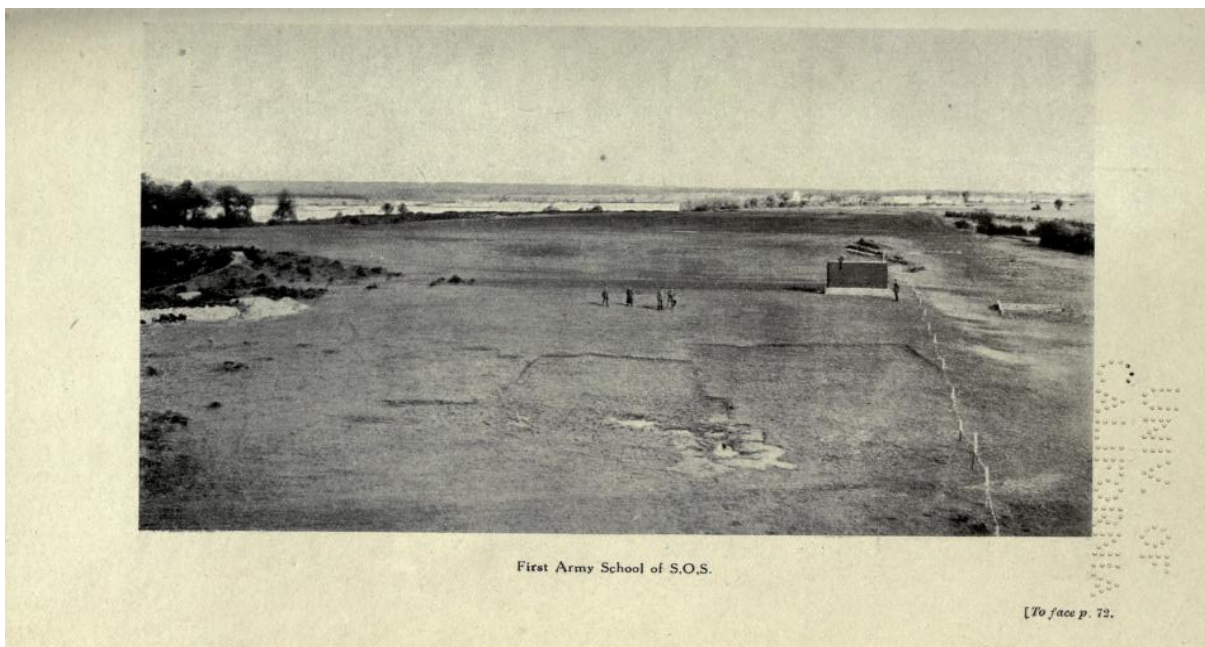
In his seminal text 'Sniping in France' Major H Hesketh- Prichard empathised the scale of the problem posed by German snipers - 'It is difficult now to give the exact figures of our losses. Suffice it to say that in early 1915 we lost eighteen men in a single battalion in a single day.' Source 19 [Sniping in France - Hesketh Prichard]. It must also be understood how much sniper fire and sudden death effected morale. Hesketh Prichard states 'If your trench is dominated by enemy snipers' life in it is hard.....and morale must in inevitably suffer...The truth of the matter is that in the middle of 1915 we were undergoing almost everywhere a severe gruelling to say the least '. Source 20 [IBID]





Source 21 Major Hesketh Prichard - Sniping in France <https://archive.org>

To counter the German sniper menace Hesketh-Prichard was instrumental in establishing the first formal sniping schools for the British Army. He organised training programs that focused on improving marksmanship and the use of camouflage. His methods included the use of telescopic sights and understanding the principles of concealment in the use of natural terrain and movement in the trenches. Hesketh-Prichard also pressed for the introduction of improved sniper rifles and optics, which gave British snipers a technological edge. As a result of this "the specialized role of the sniper developed among the ranks of the British Army over the course of World War I" Source 22[Sniping in the Great War -Martin Pegler 2017 edition].



Source 23 The first SOS - Scouting Observation Sniping School [Sniping in France <https://archive.org>]



Source 24 SOS Marksmanship - [Histoire des SNIPERS: des origines à 1918  
Le Feu aux Poudres You tube documentary]



Source 25 Camouflage training for American snipers with a British officer of the King's Royal rifles. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4338200/Kit-Allied-sharpshooters-used-pick-enemy-targets.html>

The main British sniper rifle used was the SMLE Mk III (Short Magazine Lee-Enfield) fitted with a telescopic sight.



Source 26 The Smelly - SMLE Mk III Lee-Enfield-

With the telescopic sight, trained snipers could effectively hit targets at ranges up to 800 yards depending on visibility on the battlefield. Most British sights were manufactured by the Periscopic Prism Company (PPCo) and Aldis. In addition, the SMLE Mark III had a short barrel which was ideal for snipers to use in enclosed spaces.



Source 27 Telescopic sight manufactured by the Periscope Prism Company

<https://www.leeenfieldresource.com/no1-mk3-smle-sniper-ww1>

The scopes were mounted using specially designed brackets that ensured stability and accuracy. The sights were not centred offset to the left which allowed the swift reloading of the five round clips which were very popular with snipers who wanted the possibility of rapid fire. Most however, were centrally mounted.



Source 28 Offset telescopic sight SMLE

<https://www.leeenfieldresource.com/no1-mk3-smle-sniper-ww1>



Source 29 Centrally mounted Sight SMLE - IBID

To be continued.....

Paul Salver.

## Local Lads.

### Loughton War Memorial Casualty

#### Private Joseph Slater 1893 - 1918



Joseph James Slater was born in Loughton in 1893, the third child of William and Elizabeth (nee Adnitt) Slater. He had 6 siblings - Violet, Percy, Martha and 3 others that died in childhood.

The Slaters were originally from Bedford where Joseph's grandfather started out as a brick-layer before re-training and becoming a hospital nurse. Joseph's grandmother was a dress-maker, an occupation his mother subsequently took up.

Joseph's father was a coach builder for the railways, moving from Bedford to Newport Pagnell in the 1880s.

Sadly, Joseph's mother died in 1910 at the age of 48. His father re-married in 1911, Lizzie Adnitt of Northampton who was Elizabeth's cousin.

In 1911, Joseph, his father and brother Percy lived in 58 Priory St, Newport Pagnell.

In 1915, Joseph married Dora Maud Jones and they had two children, Olive in 1916 and Joseph in 1917. They were living in Loughton.



Joseph enlisted at Bletchley in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battn Yorkshire Regt.

It is likely he was conscripted and as a married man, would have been in the later cohorts of conscription in 1916. After initial training in Britain, there was a draft of 10 officers and 77 men sent out in May to the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn camped near Arras after suffering casualties in the front line over the previous few months. Back in the frontline in mid-June at Fontaine-les-Croisilles, on the 26<sup>th</sup> they launched an attack on the Germans, successfully gaining their objective and repelling a German counter-attack. The battalion moved back into support the following day and into reserve camp in July.

In May 1918, the regiment was in Craonne and it appears Joseph was wounded on the 12<sup>th</sup> May. He died of wounds on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1918 and is commemorated at Beaurepaire French National Cemetery, Pontavert.

Extract from War diary in the last few days of Joseph's life :

MAY 1918.

**1st - Battalion** billeted at St Gilles. Divisional Field Day - 149th Inf Bde as enemy forces. 151st Inf Bde attacking. 159th Inf Bde in Reserve.

33081 Pte **Jarrett** Ernest Edward. Died of wounds on the 1st May 1918 aged 35

**2nd to 5th - St Gilles, Training**

**5th - Battalion** moved to billets at Maizy. CO and Company Commanders went round Line at Craonne.

**6th - Maizy training.**

**7th to 14th - Battalion** moved into trenches at Craonne, relieving 273rd Infantry Regiment. Relief complete 4 am on the 8th. Day quiet in trenches. 1 OR wounded on the 12th.

## The Roll of Honour.

**KILLED.**  
Sergt. W. F. Wood, M.M., son of Mr. Frank Wood, of Eltham, Kent, and formerly of Wolverton Mill, Stony Stratford, has been killed in action. He enlisted in the Sportsmen's Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, and has served in France 3 years. The gallant soldier was awarded the Military Medal for rescuing wounded under heavy gun fire.

Corpl. W. H. ELLIMAN, O and B. Light Infantry, Husband of Mrs. Elliman, 4, West View, Stantonbury, and only son of the late Mr. and Mrs. G. Elliman, 146, Stanhope-road, Queen's Park, Northampton, aged 31. Killed in action in Italy, May 18th. Before joining up on May 31st, 1916, was a teacher at Bradwell County Schools, Bucks.

Pte. J. SLATER, Yorkshire Regt., husband of Mrs. Slater, Loughton, and younger son of Mr. W. Slater, 91, Newport-road, Stantonbury. Formerly employed in Wolverton Works. Leaves a widow and two young children.

**WOUNDED.**  
Gunner AH. Bodley, R.F.A., son of Mr. and Mrs. David Bodley, Loughton, now laying in Eastleigh Hospital suffering from wounds in the muscles of the arm received in action on June 1st. Has just been awarded the Military Medal for gallantry at Kemmel Hill.

Joseph Slater was 25 when he died. He was awarded, posthumously, the Victory Medal, and the British War Medal.

The Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell-Ringers

North Bucks Branch

*St Mary, Shenley*

On Monday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2018

A Quarter Peal of 1260 Plain Bob Minor was rung to commemorate the death 100 years ago today, of Private Joseph James Slater, aged 25, of the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn, Yorkshire Regiment, the fifth Loughton man to die in the Great War, who died of wounds received on 12<sup>th</sup> May at Craonne. He is buried at Pas de Calais, France, and left a widow and 2 young children.

- 1 Robin Starr
- 2 Anne McIntyre
- 3 Martin Potchey
- 4 John Brookman
- 5 Gary Reading
- 6 Simon J O Head (C)



## Shenley War Memorial Casualty

12251 Private Arthur Walter Shouler, 7<sup>th</sup> Bn Ox and Bucks Light Infantry  
died 30<sup>th</sup> May 1917, aged 23, in a Red Cross hospital ship in the Mediterranean.



Arthur, Joe and Rachel's youngest boy, lived in the village of Shenley Brook End. It was very rural. Joe, his father, was a cow man, but Arthur was a gardener. Maybe he worked at Shenley house.

Arthur volunteered in September 1915, on or about his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday; in 1915 you needed your parents' permission to join up if you were under 21. Just 4 days later Jamie Waddell of Shenley died at Loos in the worst casualties of the war so far. Long lists of casualties' names in the paper for Joe and Rachel to read and ponder. Arthur was sent to Salonika, in what is now Macedonia, to stop the Bulgarians overrunning Greece. They built the Bird Cage Line near Lake Doiran - the front-line defence, backbreaking work with pick and shovel high in the rocky mountains. Harsh, unforgiving country. There was a big Allied attack from 22<sup>nd</sup> April until 9<sup>th</sup> May 1917, but they had to give up in the end because casualties were so high - 12,000 killed. It was so bad that one place, Boris Point, was nicknamed "The Valley Of Death".

Arthur and his mates were infantry. When they attacked a mountain called the Petit Couronne, all their officers were killed or wounded, but the lads didn't give up, they held on for 10 hours until they were ordered back down the mountain. Teenagers, a lot of them.

On May 30<sup>th</sup> 1917, aged 23, Arthur died in a red cross hospital ship on the way to Oran, in Algeria; kidney failure, some documents seem to say, but we don't really know what happened to him - was he wounded? Did he, like many others, fall ill in the dreadful conditions? We just don't know. Arthur is buried in Le Petit Lac cemetery in Algeria. He is one of only 10 WW1 men buried there. There are about 100 WW2 graves as well. Very few people visit the cemetery, it is a dangerous place for westerners. Unusually for a commonwealth war grave it doesn't look completely immaculate; they could use Arthur's skills as a gardener.

(With thanks to Colin Best for his research)

Anne McIntyre.



## 'India's Great War' - Adam Prime

Dr Adam Prime, lecturer in the Politics and Contemporary History at Salford University talks about his research into the Indian Army during the Great War. He will explain how the Indian Army came about, its origins in the defence of the East India Company from 1757, and a hundred years later, when the British Army needed to defend the Northwest Frontier against the Russians, a more professional army began to emerge. By the time of the outbreak of the First World War the army was made up of 240,000 Indian and 17,000 British soldiers. This talk looks at India's contribution to the First World War in every sense of the word. It takes in the huge recruitment boom, and how the diversity of religious and caste differences was met to maintain peace, order, and morale. It also looks at the experiences of Indian soldiers, and their British officers, on the Western Front, in Gallipoli, in Mesopotamia and in the Middle East. Finally, it looks at India itself and the actions undertaken there to defend the Northwest Frontier.

**June 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>** Twinning Trip to Belgium

**June 15<sup>th</sup>** Albert French Commemoration at MK Rose.

**June 21<sup>st</sup>** 'Repairs and maintenance on the Western Front' - Roy Larkin

**July 7<sup>th</sup>** 10th Anniversary of MK Rose, including MK WFA commemorating Albert French.

**July 19<sup>th</sup>** India's Great War - Adam Prime.

**August** - no meeting. Summer Break.

**September 14/15/16<sup>th</sup>** MK WFA at MK Museum Heritage event.

**Meetings are 7.30 - 9.30 at Wolverton Working Men's Social Club, 49 - 50, Stratford Road MK12 5LS**

**Committee members are...**

Stuart Macfarlan - Chairman (macfarlan87@gmail.com)

Anne McIntyre - Secretary/historical events co-ordinator (annefmmcintyre@gmail.com)

Ian Wright - Talks organiser

Caroline Wright - Treasurer

Jim Barrett - Seminar and visits co-ordinator

George Maby - Wolverton Town Council liaison (Twining and Albert French commemoration)

Gary Short - Social Media co-ordinator.