



Lancashire North Branch

## Despatch – October 2024

Tenth Email edition.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

H09179

## Keeping communications open



With Covid receding it was time to return to the battlefields and as Professor Gary Sheffield is fond of saying “to understand a battle you need to walk the battlefield”. In early April of this year a small group of fellow former MA students from Birmingham University set off to explore the Arras battlefields of 1917. This is an often-overlooked episode of the First World War as it is seen to fall between the major battles of the Somme and Third Ypres.

As usual, once started on a study a few ‘rabbit holes’ opened up and a proposed simple article on our trip expanded to cover the involvement of the King’s Own Royal Lancaster Regiment and the Newfoundland Regiment.

The interest in the first battalion is obvious but the Newfoundland Regiment will need a bit of explanation. I lived in northern Newfoundland for five years working at a hospital in a small remote fishing community. Even in this isolated spot there was a small war memorial to the local Newfoundlanders who had lost their lives during the Great War. Most were seamen in the Royal Navy, but a few were infantrymen of the Newfoundland Regiment. Prior to 1948, when Newfoundland joined the confederation of Canada, it had been a dominion of Britain and as such, the battalion-sized Newfoundland Regiment was absorbed into the British army. Their action at Monchy le Preux during the Battle of Arras is a great battle honour for the regiment. Private William Wallis Patey, a thirty-two-year old fisherman of the small community we lived in, was one of the Newfoundlanders killed at Monchy le Preux. In

December 1917 the King awarded the regiment the right to use the prefix "Royal". They proudly became the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

Private William Wallis Patey is also commemorated at Beaumont Hamel Memorial Park. The monument is a great bronze caribou, the emblem of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. At the base of the statue three tablets of bronze carry the names of over 800 men from the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve, and the Mercantile Marine who gave their lives in the First World War and have no known grave.



Photo courtesy of Mag Lessens

War memorial St. Anthony, Newfoundland

Tom Williams

(Unless otherwise indicated, articles are by the editor.)

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## **A Tour of Lancaster City Centre Memorials and World War One Sites**

It was our Chairman Iain Adams and Branch Secretary Paul Conlon who came up with the bright idea of a walk around the war memorials and other sites of interest associated with the First World War.

Nineteen members of the branch met up in Dalton Square, where our chairman Iain Adams gave us an insight into the social and industrial life of pre-1914 Lancaster including the major buildings, the main employers and the locations of the Territorial infantry, artillery and yeomanry units, the site of the Bowerham barracks and associated training areas.

Our first stop was at the city's main war memorial situated in the memorial garden on the east side of the Town Hall in Dalton Square. Iain's wife Holly gave a presentation of this imposing memorial. There is a central statue of Nike, the winged goddess of victory who is holding in outstretched arms a palm leaf as a symbol of peace. The statue is very similar to the Belgian Gratitude Memorial in London. Behind the statue are ten bronze panels mounted on a Longridge gritstone wall.



Lancaster War memorial



Holly Adams delivers her presentation on the Lancaster War Memorial

The panels contain the names 1,012 men of Lancaster who fell during the Great War. 426 served with the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment. Interestingly, there are 63 groups of brothers each identified within a set of brackets. Amongst these groups are the four Butterworth brothers all lost in the war.





The four Butterworth brothers

The overall design of the memorial including the surrounding Garden of Remembrance, was by Thomas Mawson. The Memorial was dedicated on 3 December 1924. £2,230 was raised by public subscription. The cost of the memorial was £1,894 and the surplus was donated to the corporation for future repair and upkeep.

Although the town hall was closed Iain gave us a brief account of the Lady Mayor's activities in organising ladies' committees to support the war effort and assist Belgian refugees living in Lancaster. The Town Hall being closed we were unable to see the Waring & Gillow war memorial.

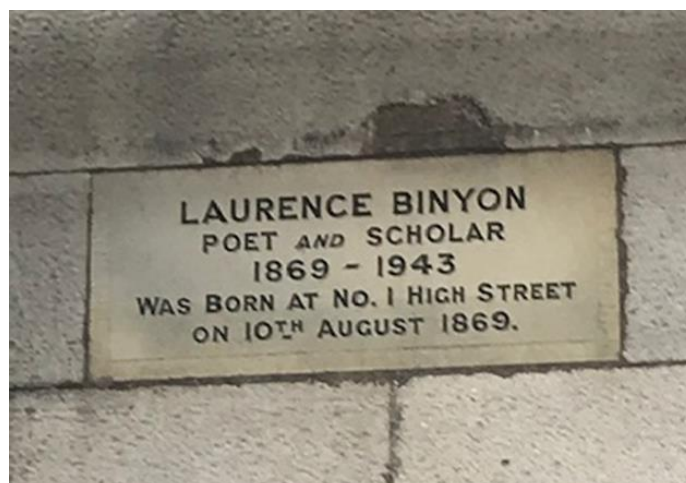
The tour then proceeded to High Street to view the home and offices of Thomas Mawson. Here Iain Adams gave a brief biography of this talented designer.



Thomas Hayton Mawson was born near Scorton in 1861. He had little in the way of formal education and is reported to have left school at the age of twelve. However, later courses in sketching, botany and horticulture enabled him to become a landscape architect when he needed to employ a wider range of skills including building, art, planting, business and, above all, the mind-set of the wealthy Victorians and Edwardians who were his clients.

He later established a small office in London to draw southern clients, including wealthy individuals like Andrew Carnegie, Lord Leverhulme, and Lord Cavendish. The mainstay of his business were the rich industrialists, the aristocracy and the aspirational.

Within Lancashire, some of the important Mawson parks and gardens can be seen at Grey Walls and Hazelwood in Silverdale and Capernwray, the public parks in Barrow, Stanley Park (Blackpool), Lord Street and the Marine Lake in Southport, Lever Park and Rivington Park (Bolton). Within the Lake District his works include Brockhole, Graythwaite Hall, Langdale Chase, Moor Crag and Rydal Hall. He is well remembered for his design of Westfield War Memorial Village in Lancaster.





A quick walk around the corner took us into High Street – at 65 metres in length it is the shortest high street in the UK, Number 1 High Street was the birthplace of the poet Laurence Binyon, the author of the elegiac 'For the Fallen'.

He was born Robert Laurence Binyon on 10 August 1869, the second of nine children born to clergyman Frederick and Mary Binyon. After attending St. Paul's School in London, he went up to Trinity College at Oxford, where he read Classics and won the Newdigate Prize for poetry in 1891. Binyon's reputation before the First World War was such that on the death of the Poet Laureate Alfred Austin in 1913, Binyon was among the names mentioned in the press as his likely successor. He worked for the British Museum from 1893 until his retirement in 1933. He later became Professor of Poetry at Harvard University until his death in 1943.



Laurence Binyon

Iain informed us that Binyon had written his poem "For the Fallen" in 1914 while visiting the cliffs on the north Cornwall coast between Padstow and Polzeath.

This was within the first few weeks of the First World War and the terrible news of the casualties in France may have weighed heavily on his mind. It was here, so far from the chaos of war, that Binyon wrote his most famous work. With its gravitas, tenderness and the depth of grief he spoke to a fearful nation, and seemingly predicted the disastrous

losses that were to come. Binyon's words secured a place in our collective history and our consciousness.



The Cornishbirdblog

In 1915, despite being too old to enlist in the armed forces, Binyon volunteered as a medical orderly in 1915. Interestingly there two Medal Index Cards for Binyon. One records him as being attached to the YMCA and entitled to the British War Medal – which was unclaimed. The other indicates he was with the French Red Cross as an orderly, arriving in France in July 1915. The Medal Roll for the British Committee of the French Red Cross shows that he served from July to August 1915 and from May to July 1916. During 1916 he was involved in looking after the French casualties of Verdun. His medals were unclaimed.

On a much lighter note, across the road on the other side of High Street is the former National School for Girls, now converted to flats. Above the main doorframe is an interesting panel.



Built by Public Subscription A.D 1820

To establish Order, check Vice And uphold Virtue.

We then, followed an uphill walk along Meeting House Lane, past the Storey Institute, the Friends Meeting House, Lancaster Station and on to West Field Memorial Village.



### Westfield War Memorial and Plaque

Designed by Thomas Mawson following the death of his son Private James Radcliffe Mawson of 1/5<sup>th</sup> King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, who Died of Wounds on 24 April 1915 during the first offensive action by the battalion against the Germans occupying Pilkem Ridge following their first gas attack on 22 April. On 23 April as the battalion prepared to attack he was struck by shrapnel before he had even left the trench he died of his wounds the following day.

Mawson had conceived the idea of 'villages' for disabled ex-servicemen who could not return to their families. His forward-thinking aim was to create a caring community as much as it was about building them houses, social facilities and opportunities for training and employment.



Iain gave an interesting background to the concept and construction of the memorial village and the part played by local businesses and individuals in supporting the project.

A total of twenty-one cottages were erected including Leye Terrace. The other fifteen properties were named after battle honours won by the King's Own during the First World War. The stone above the lintel at Herbert Storey Cottage was laid by Lord Richard Cavendish on 15 November 1919. Lord Richard Cavendish was the Officer Commanding the 1/5<sup>th</sup> King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment 1908-15.

Iain recounted how the well-meaning actress, and charity campaigner Hilda Leye presented Westfield with £20,000 raised through a 'Golden Ballot', a forerunner to the charitable lotteries we know today. Despite all profits from the ballots going to helping disabled ex-servicemen, Hilda Leye found herself prosecuted for running an illegal lottery. Summonses were issued and Mrs Leye was tried by jury in 1922. The case against her was overthrown with the result that lotteries held solely to raise funds for charitable causes would, now be legal.

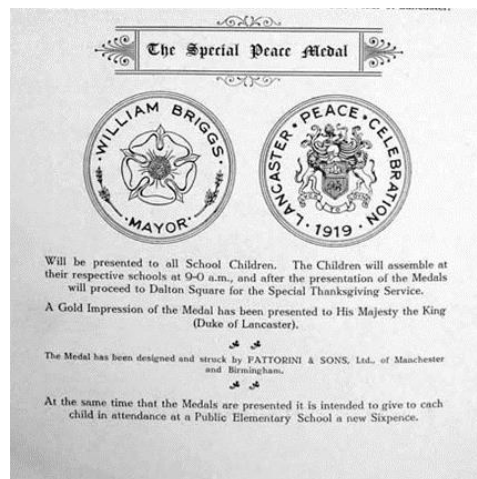
We performed the grand old Duke of York exercise and made our way back up the hill, past the castle and into Market Street. Bill Myers then gave an account of the Peace Parade held in 1919 and passed around a number of contemporary photographs. The First World War did not officially end on 11 November 1918, and treaty negotiations continued into 1919 until the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919. National 'Peace Day' celebrations were to take place from July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1919.





Peace Day Celebrations, Market Street, Lancaster 1919. LCC nla13052008001

The celebrations in Lancaster were peaceful. In a few other cities ex-servicemen who were unhappy with unemployment and other grievances, rioted and in Luton, they burned the Town Hall down. The procession in Lancaster started in Haverbreaks Road, worked its way through the city to the Market Place and then on to the Giant Axe Field, now the site of Westfield Village, where a children's sports gala was held. Bill also had a rare commemorative medal of the event.



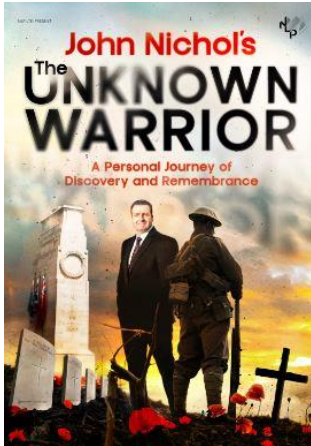
The presentation of Peace Medals to school children

The tour concluded with refreshments taken in the bar of the Sun Hotel.



## Show Review: John Nichol's *The Unknown Warrior: A Personal Journey of Discovery and Remembrance*. The Atkinson, Southport 9<sup>th</sup> October 2024

By Iain Adams



John Nichol, a retired RAF navigator, is known for being paraded bloodied and bruised, along with his pilot John Peters, by their Iraqi captors during the Gulf War. They were shot down by a shoulder launched missile during an ultra-low level attack on an airfield and then held and tortured in the Abu Ghraib prison. After the war, they co-wrote *Tornado Down* and both remained in the RAF until the mid-late 1990s.

Nichol has become a somewhat prolific writer with five novels and thirteen works of history to his name. Most of his historical works are based upon interviews with 'those who were there', relevant archival research and discussions with historians. His latest book *The Unknown Warrior* was published in September 2024 and this theatre tour explores the story of Westminster Abbey's 'Unknown Warrior'.

The show is animated by well-organized emotive visuals and soundscapes. Nichol is an effective and powerful speaker who is confident with



The Unknown Warrior at the unveiling of the Cenotaph, 11 a.m., 11 November 1920  
Courtesy IWM © Q 14965

his material. Throughout the show he successfully intersperses himself as speaker with others reading contemporary personal letters detailed on the audiovisual resources, reminiscent of Terry at our own branch. Nichol's introduction focuses

on the horrifying casualty statistics of the Great War and how so many ended up as ‘unknown’.

He explores the concepts of sacrifice, camaraderie, friendship and remembrance through examples and reflection. He reveals the origins of the concept of a national point of mourning and how the notion came to fruition. He describes how the warrior was selected, the logistics of maintaining anonymity, and the Warrior’s journey back to Britain to be laid to rest ‘among the Kings’. To me this section was the most absorbing as Nichol used archival film to illustrate the warrior’s journey, the synchronous unveiling of The Cenotaph, and the final internment. Nichol provides an interesting comparison to the recent Royal funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the final stages of the Warrior’s journey.

However, his story goes beyond World War 1 to explore loss in more contemporary conflicts and to reflect upon the ongoing need for a tangible place of rest to mourn the fallen.

Overall Nichol provided a compassionate and emotional evening of information, education and entertainment. It was fascinating and thought provoking, some may find a packet of tissues helpful.

The tour’s next event that is reasonably close to Lancaster is at Buxton on Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> October and the tour closes at Chester on Thursday, November 7<sup>th</sup>.





## **SERGEANT WILLIAM HENRY WALLINGTON**

**9<sup>th</sup> King's Royal Rifle Corps**

**DCM AND CROIX DE GUERRE AT HOOGE 1915**

*Derek Murray*



William Henry Wallington (Bill) was born in Warwick on 24 November 1894. At some point his family moved to Ledbury in Herefordshire, presumably for work, and then moved back to Warwick where he met and married Ellen Aston.

Bill enlisted as a Private into the 9<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps on 3 September 1914, number R3315. New Army recruits' numbers were prefixed by 'R'. The Battalion was raised at Winchester on 21 August 1914 as part of Kitchener's First New

Army and joined 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade 14<sup>th</sup> (Light) Division. He would first have been stationed at Blackdown Barracks, Aldershot, subsequently moving to Blenheim Barracks which was shared with the 9<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade.



Cpl Bill and Ellen Wallington on their wedding day.

Following basic training the Battalion moved to Petworth, West Sussex. The billets were comfortable, and training was carried out in every village, road, path and wood for miles around, the whole countryside being scarred with trenches. On 25 March the Battalion moved to Talavera Barracks, Aldershot.

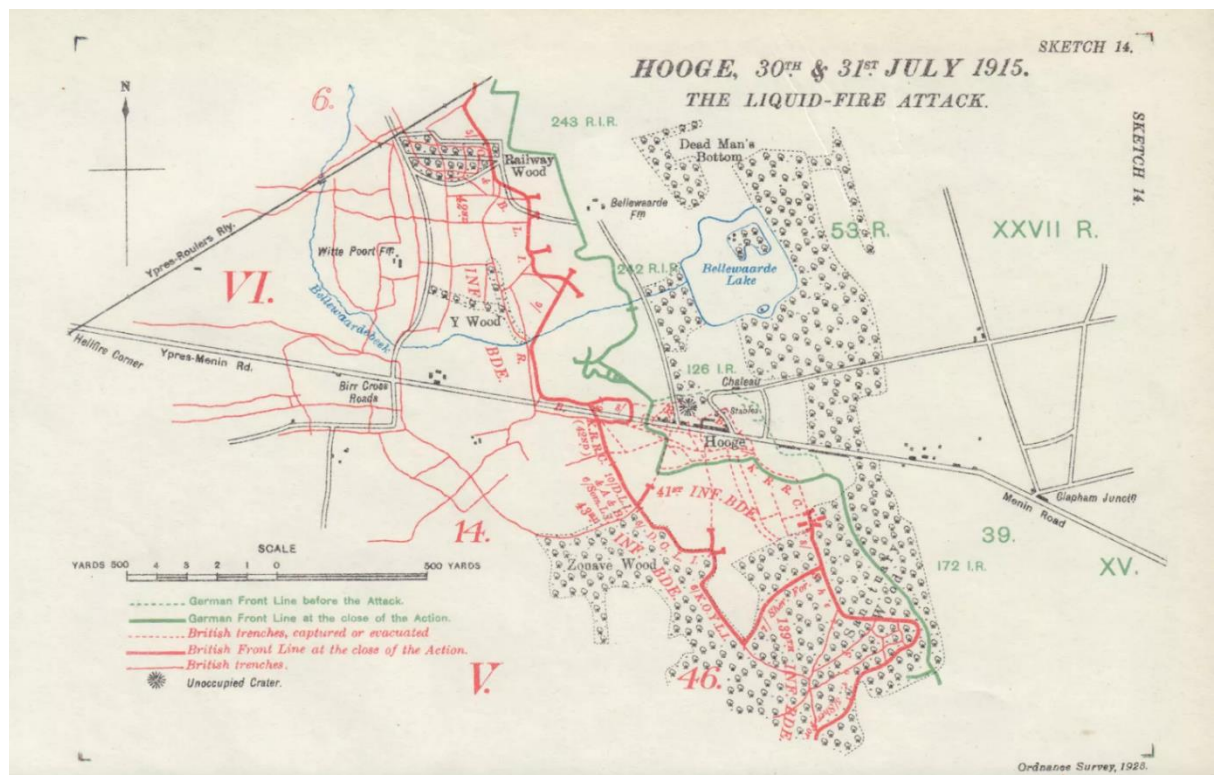
By July 1915, Bill had been promoted to Sergeant, eleven months after enlisting. He must have been an outstanding recruit and recognised as a potential NCO by his superiors at a very early stage.

On 21 May 1915 the battalion disembarked from the S.S. Victoria at Boulogne and spent the night at Ostrohove camp. The next day they travelled by train to Cassel before marching to billets at Zeggars Cassel. It was here that the battalion training included an introduction

to the trenches. On 30 May the 9<sup>th</sup> KRRC moved to billets at Dickebusch near Ypres to continue their training.

Throughout June 1915 the battalion alternated between periods of training and trench duties, mostly acting as reserves. On 16 June 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade was ordered to move from positions outside the Lille Gate, Ypres, forward along the Ypres–Roulers railway to assembly trenches north of the Menin Road. The battalion found the trenches were subject to heavy shrapnel fire and moved to support trenches south of the Menin Road. The 9<sup>th</sup> KRRC were the only battalion to reach their allotted positions. They came under a heavy bombardment including gas shells.

The 9th KRRC were relieved at 5.0 am on 17 July and marched back to bivouac positions at Vlamertinghe. In this short period, they had lost 1 officer killed and 1 wounded. 5 ORs were killed, 1 died of wounds and 58 wounded.



From Official History of the Great War 1915

On 21 July a mine was successfully exploded in the German trenches close to Hooze and about 100 yards of trenches were captured. The following day 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade was directed to move up and take over the trenches and make them good. The Germans maintained an uninterrupted bombardment, which resulted in the systematic destruction of the trenches. Gradually, they were destroyed faster than they could be repaired, resulting in many casualties.

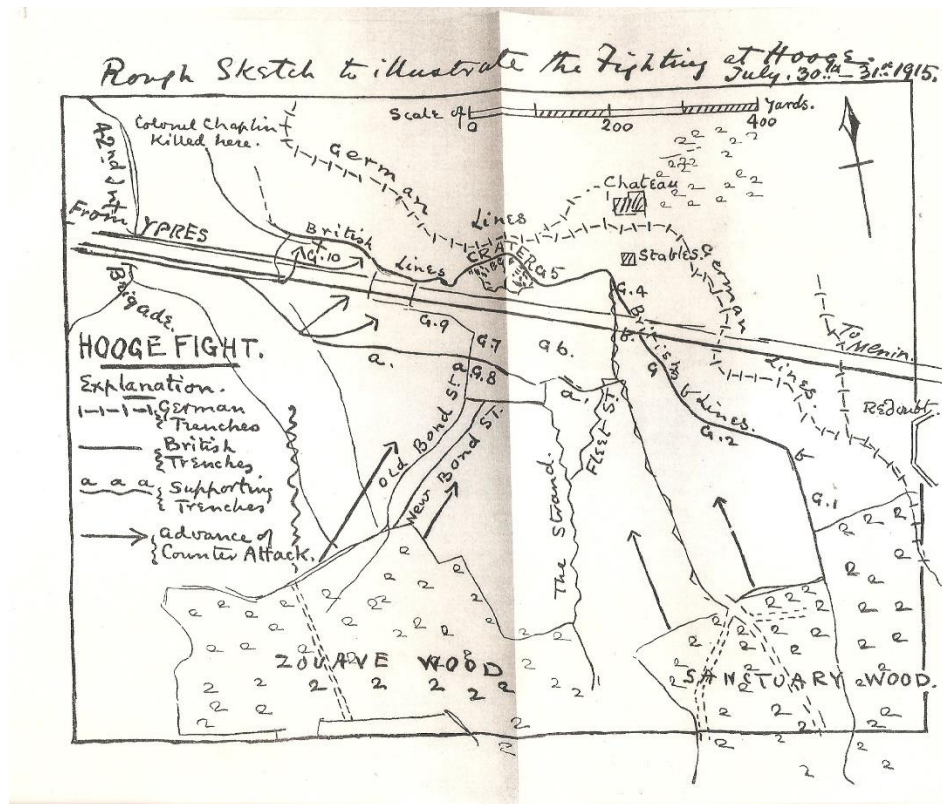
### **Trial by fire**

From mid-June until 29 July 1915 the 9<sup>th</sup> KRRC were mostly involved in trench repairs and working parties. At 3.20 am on 30 July the Germans launched a 'liquid fire' attack on the positions held by 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade. This was the first use of flamethrowers as assault weapons, accompanied by heavy shelling and mortar fire. This was followed by a strong enemy counterattack which recovered the lost trenches.

Orders were received for 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade in conjunction with 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade, to carry out an attack on Trench G10 near the culvert under the Menin Road to retake the trenches lost in the Liquid Fire attack. At 12.30 am on 30 July the battalion moved from the GHQ line into positions for the attack. At 1.30 pm 'B' and 'D' Companies were in Communication trenches north of the Menin Road. 'A' and 'C' Companies were in support trenches south of the Menin Road. Considerable losses were sustained while moving into these positions. Between 2.0-2.45 pm a preliminary bombardment was fired. At 2.45 pm the guns lifted. 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade advanced from Zouave and Sanctuary Woods with 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade on their left. The battalion bombers under Lt. H. S. Richmond advanced to attack, immediately followed by 'B' and 'D' Companies. Trench G10, was taken with little opposition but a lively bombing encounter took place at the top of G10 and considerable losses occurred from rifle and machine gun fire. Three platoons of 'C' Company charged to their front from Old Bond Street but were almost wiped out



by machine gun fire. 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade failed to take the trenches on the right. 9<sup>th</sup> KRRC occupied G.10 and held it under heavy artillery and rifle fire.



Thee fighting at Hooge 30-31 July 1915

From 2.15 am on 31 July the enemy sent up distress rockets. This was immediately followed by a violent bombardment and rifle fire. At 10.0 am the enemy attempted a bombing attack to capture G.10 but failed. Throughout the day there was considerable bombing activity at the top of G10. Towards dusk there was another bombardment, but this was not followed by an attack. After dark the depleted 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade was withdrawn to reserve positions.

The Battalion casualties for 9<sup>th</sup> KRRC between 30 July and 1 August 1915 were as follows: Officers - Killed: 5, Wounded : 6 (one died of wounds), Missing : 2

Other Ranks - Killed: 49, Wounded : 236, Missing: 37

Returning now to Bill. His Service Records have not survived and so we do not know with which Company he served. However, the battle and Bill's part in it was described in an article published in the Coventry Evening Telegraph on Monday 21 February 1916. The article was headed '*Double decoration for Coventry hero*' and it is worthy of quoting in full in the language of the times, as follows:

*Interesting details are to hand showing how Sgt W. H. Wallington of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion K.R.R.C won his DCM and the French decoration the Croix de Guerre. We recently announced the honour which had been bestowed on this former employee at the Coventry Humber Works and now it is possible to give the full story.*

*Sgt Wallington won both medals at Hooge on July 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> and August 1<sup>st</sup>. The 9<sup>th</sup> K.R.R.C were in support and early in the morning of July 29<sup>th</sup> the Germans made an attack on their trenches with liquid fire, taking the first line. The 9<sup>th</sup> received orders to go up and make a charge in the afternoon. The bombardment started at 1.45am and they were to attack at 2.45am. Being the Battalion Bombing-Sgt Wallington was asked to lead the charge and clear the trench for the boys to come in. This he did and bombed the Germans out. After they had taken the trench and barricaded the ends, a volunteer to go back for the company was asked for. Sgt. Wallington volunteered and brought the Company back with him. The next thing wanted was a party to go back for ammunition. Again the Sgt. Volunteered and he took charge of the party, twelve in all. Only six of them got back so Wallington had to make another journey. The enemy counter-attacked the same night and the defenders drove them back. They counter attacked the next morning and again they were driven off.*

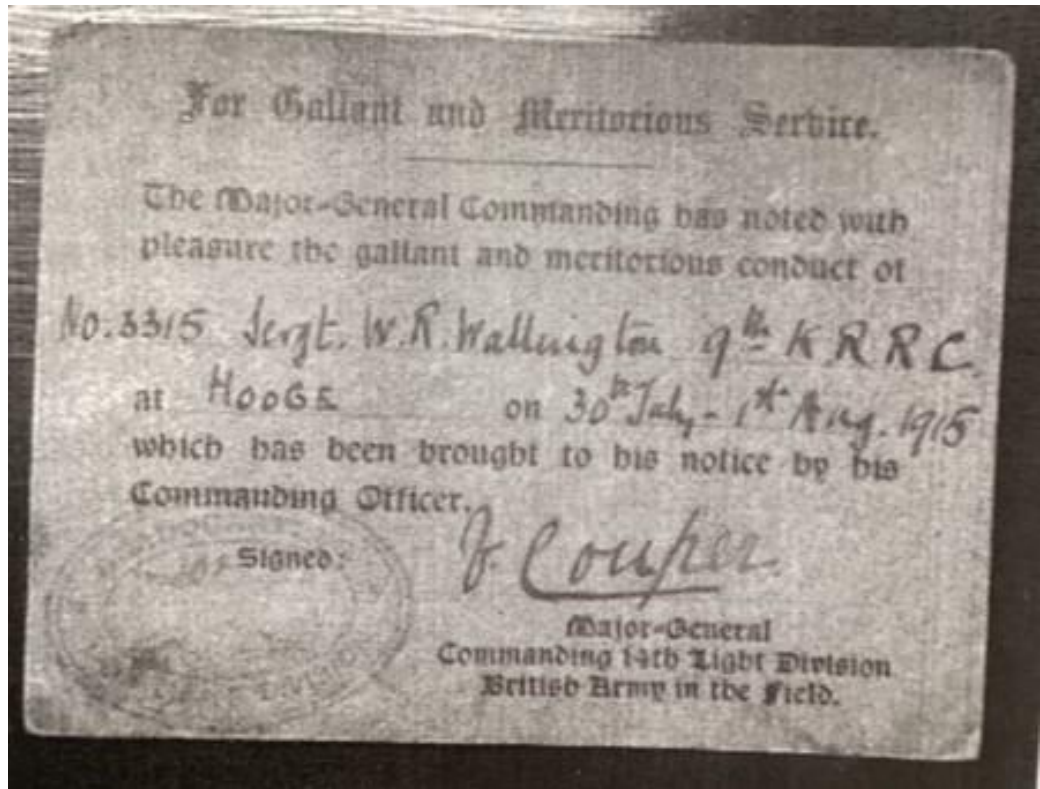
*On the night of the 30<sup>th</sup>, the Germans made a bomb attack at the end of the Battalion's trench, but they were driven back after the killing and wounding of nearly all Wallington's bombers. The Sgt. had to send back for more bombers and this time*

*he was the only sergeant left with one officer who was wounded in the head. The following morning, the Germans got in the Britishers' trench and took about thirty yards, but they managed to bomb the Huns out again. After that, the officer got hit again in the head and dropped unconscious leaving Sgt. Wallington in sole charge of the Company. He hung on to the trench until night until they could be relieved for they were cut off from anyone else. The officer who was with the Sgt. till the last was his captain and he has been awarded the Military Cross. The 9<sup>th</sup> K.R.R.C lost their Colonel, all their officers and sergeants in the Company, Wallington being the only one left.*

*Since then Sgt. Wallington has been in the thick of the fight again. Recently, he has been wounded. On this occasion, he and two mates were in a dug out in the firing line when a shell exploded. His two companions were killed. It was a lucky escape for the Sgt., who only sustained minor injuries.*

The award of Distinguished Conduct Medal Citation (Landon Gazette 11 March 1916) reads as follows:

*For conspicuous gallantry. After both the bombing officers had been killed or wounded, he organised the defence of a captured trench and displayed great bravery and resource in maintaining the position for fifty-four hours under heavy bombardment and repeated attacks.*



Croix de Guerre

The award of the Croix de Guerre by the President of the French Republic was published in the Supplement to the London Gazette 24 February 1916. It was presented to Officers, Warrant Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and men, ‘in recognition of their distinguished service during the campaign.’ The bronze palm is for those awards cited at army level.



A/CSM W. H. Wallington's medals

Bill's service continued thereafter but he was discharged on 7 March 1917 after being wounded. He was later awarded the Silver War Badge for Gun Shot Wounds to his hand and right leg. On 7 March 1917 he was awarded a 50% Disability Pension along with an additional supplement for his award of a DCM. The last entry on his Pension card shows that acting Company Sergeant Major W. H. Wallington was receiving a weekly pension of £1.12.0 and an allowance for one child of 10 shillings and six pence (10/6).

Not only his wounds impacted on his life after his time in France; for example, he developed a love of Gorgonzola cheese. His family were introduced to Anglicised French phrases such as 'San Fairy Ann' derived from 'Ca ne fait rien' meaning it doesn't matter,

never mind, that's OK. Nobody in the family had any idea where this came from until secondary school descendants learnt French.

He continued his love of shooting and won several shooting medals at Bisley – the centre of small-bore shooting – notably in 1927/28 and 1928/29.

Bill died aged 74 on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1969.

### Sources

9<sup>th</sup> KRRC Battalion War Diary – WO95/1900/2

42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade War Diary – WO95/1897/1

A Record of the 9th (Service) Battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps 1914-1918. Eric Barlow

King's Royal Rifle Corps Chronicle 1900-1920

Bill's Granddaughter, Jan Langley (with grateful thanks)





## Joffre

By Peter Denby



*Joffre in the workshop at the West Lancashire Light Railway (September 2024)*

I recently spent an enjoyable Sunday visiting the West Lancashire Light Railway at Hesketh Bank, near Preston ([www.westlancsrailway.org](http://www.westlancsrailway.org)), with the added bonus of meeting a French WW1 veteran (conceived in France, born in England!)

Upon arrival at the attraction, one of the volunteer ladies in the tearoom assured me they serve excellent coffee to accompany their tempting selection of cakes. Needless to say, I immediately rose to the challenge...and I can confirm that, indeed, this is so.

An information board describes the origin and evolution of this narrow-gauge working railway museum, which itself has an interesting history, being set up by a group of six

schoolboy enthusiasts in 1967, some of whom are still involved with its charitable trust today.

On the day of my visit only one locomotive was running trips on the museum's short track - a former Welsh slate quarry steam engine called *Sybil*.

However, it was their steam engine *Joffre* which particularly caught my attention.

*Joffre* is a Kerr, Stuart 'Joffre' class 0-6-0 tank locomotive (the class being named of course after the French general), one of 70 locomotives of this class built in Stoke during WW1 by Kerr, Stuart for the French Government.

*Joffre* was purchased by the schoolboy friends - by now young adults - in 1974, from another narrow-gauge enthusiast group which in turn had acquired several of these locomotives from a stone quarry in northern France.

Kerr, Stuart and Company was established in 1883 when John Stuart joined James Kerr and Company, which James Kerr had established two years earlier in Glasgow; at that time the company was only acting as agents, ordering locomotives from existing manufacturers. After buying out one such manufacturer (Hartley, Arnoux and Fanning), Kerr, Stuart and Company moved into the California works in Stoke to begin building - very successfully as it turned out - their own locomotives. Kerr, Stuart's standard locomotive designs shared many common parts and features making for efficiency and flexibility in assembly and supply of stock and parts; the company also produced locomotives to bespoke designs, especially at the request of international customers.

Hartley, Arnoux and Fanning had also been manufacturers of railway and tramway plant, and this part of the business became Dick, Kerr and Company in Preston: this references my recent *Despatch* article about the Dick, Kerr ladies football team formed at the Dick, Kerr ammunition works on The Strand, Preston, during WW1.

One notable apprentice of Kerr, Stuart and Company was R J Mitchell, later to design the iconic Spitfire.

Being commissioned by the French to a French specification and design, the 'Joffre' class was very different to Kerr, Stuart's standard locomotive designs; the 'Joffre' design arose solely due to a requirement of the French *Commission Internationale de Ravitaillement*, also known as the *Mission Hauser*, for the French artillery railways.

Unlike the British, the French achieved considerable standardisation of locomotives for their wartime light railways, and between September 1914 - November 1918 they took delivery of 320 identical 0-6-0 side tank locomotives from the French company Decauville. Because supplies were limited, assistance was sought from British manufacturers, resulting in the placing of the order with Kerr, Stuart to the same specification as the Decauvilles.

Thus, the appearance, the basic dimensions, and layout of the boiler of Kerr, Stuart's Joffre class locomotives were identical to those manufactured in France, which suggests that Kerr, Stuart were given, and closely followed, the French Decauville design. Kerr, Stuart did however add a spark-arresting chimney.

The 70 locomotives built by Kerr, Stuart were supplied to the French in three batches during 1915 and 1916.

These locomotives worked in the forward areas, transporting ammunition, food and other supplies, and removing empty shells and the wounded. Later they were used during the post-war reconstruction of northern France, with some ending their working days at the above-mentioned stone quarry in the Pas-de-Calais. By the mid-50s *Joffre* and at least four of its colleagues at the quarry were out of service and derelict, and so when *Joffre* was acquired by the West Lancashire Light Railway group in 1974 it had not been used

for some twenty years and was in poor condition. Put into storage, *Joffre* was lovingly restored by the group from 1992 onwards, with completion in 2012.

Unfortunately, at my visit *Joffre* was not running, being back in the workshop for essential boiler work. However, noting my interest one of the volunteers kindly gave me a tour of the workshop and storage shed so that I was able to take the above photograph of this proud veteran.

### Sources:

West Lancashire Light Railway Guide Book (*A brief history and stock list*), 2023  
*Edition*, £4

West Lancashire Light Railway book *Joffre - The story of a 100-year-old World War One Steam Locomotive: Construction, Operation, Dereliction, Restoration*

West Lancashire Light railway Trust website [www.westlancsrailway.org](http://www.westlancsrailway.org)

Apedale Valley Light Railway website [www.avlr.org.uk](http://www.avlr.org.uk)

Wikipedia [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)





## The men who saved Monchy

Another Rabbit Hole

### Background

The German army in the west withdrew to the Hindenburg line in Operation Alberich 9 Feb–20 Mar 1917, thus negating many of the tactical assumptions underlying the plans for the future French Nivelle offensive.

Basically, the Battle of Arras need never have been fought. The original concept was to take the pressure off the French army under the Nivelle offensive during the Second Aisne campaign. By this time the Germans had already withdrawn to the Hindenburg line.

Before the battle was completed men, guns and stores were starting to be transferred north for the coming Flanders offensive. It would not be unreasonable to ask if the Arras battle delayed the start of the Third Battle of Ypres. If the Ypres offensive been launched earlier during drier weather, could the objectives have been achieved before the battlefield turned to mud?

The Battle of Arras was a British offensive on the Western Front from 9 April to 16 May 1917, British troops attacked the German defences east of Arras and achieved the longest

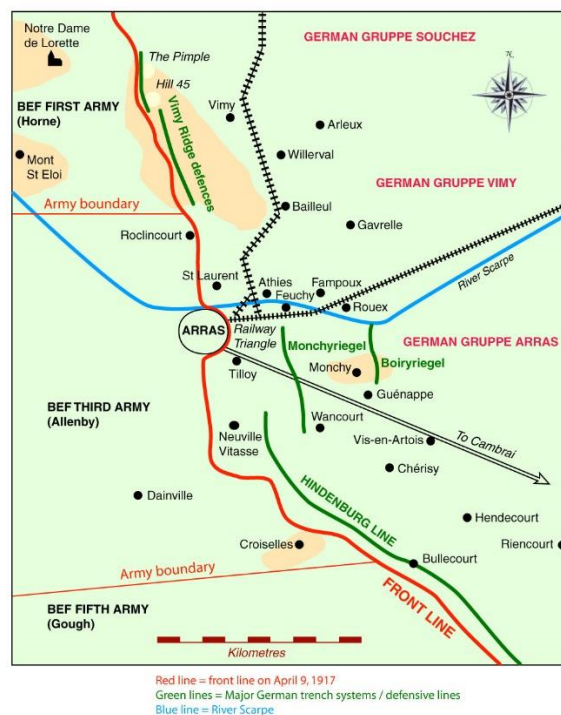
advance since trench warfare had begun. The British advance slowed in the next few days as the German defences recovered.

### The Plan of Attack

The original date for the attack had been put back one day to 9 April 1917 at the request of Nivelle who was not ready. The successive lines of German trenches east of Arras, designated as Black, Blue and Green lines, were to be taken by designated times followed by a pause to allow for consolidation and organisation of the next phase of the advance.

Monchy le Preux on the Green line was intended to be captured on the first day. Three divisions of the Cavalry Corps were made available to exploit the success. Five divisions were to be employed south of the River Scarpe: 15<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions.

The planned attack was on an 11- mile front, from Vimy Ridge in the north to Neuville-Vitasse, 4 miles south of the Scarpe river. The preliminary bombardment was planned to last about a week except for the much longer and heavier barrage at Vimy Ridge.



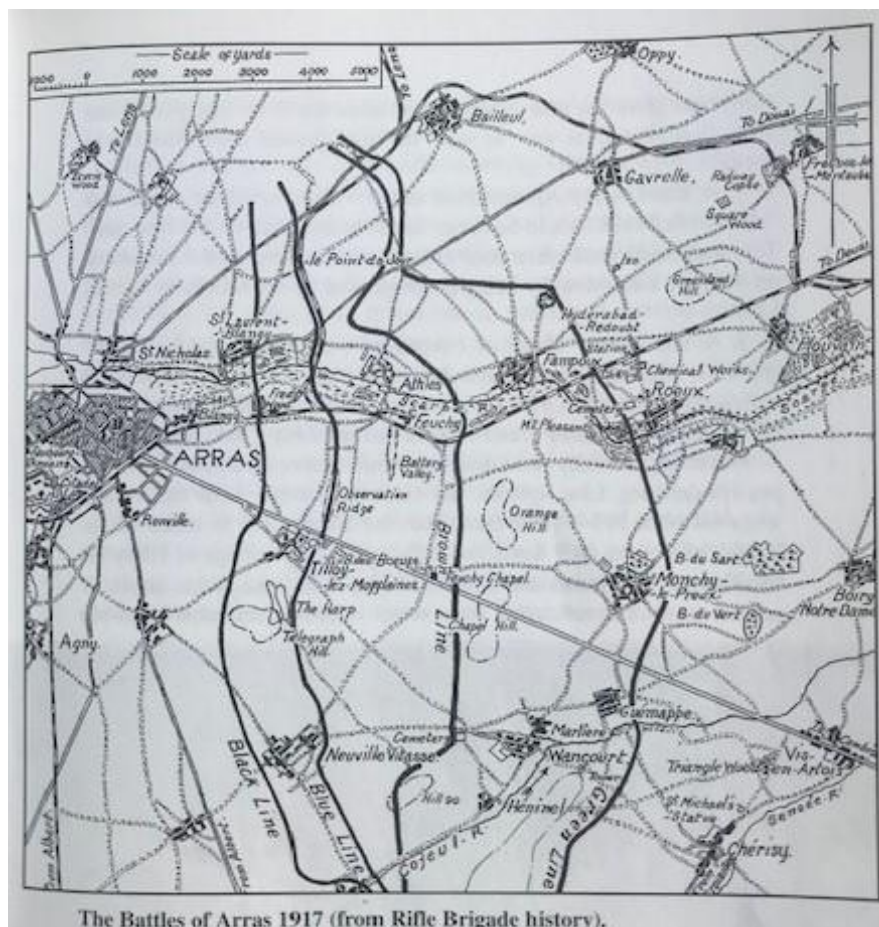
Map by I, Roger Davies, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2400870>



### The opening of the Battle of Arras 9-14 April 1917

Directly east of Arras, the main British assault of the first day started during a snowstorm, with the 12<sup>th</sup> Division attacking Observation Ridge, running north-south between the River Scarpe and the Arras–Cambrai road. On reaching this objective they were to push on eastwards towards the second and third lines of German trenches designated as the Brown Line.

At the same time, elements of the 3rd Division began an assault south of the Arras–Cambrai road with Devil's Wood, Tilloy-lès-Mofflaines and the Bois des Boeufs as their initial objectives on the Blue Line.



The ultimate aim of these assaults was the Monchy Riegel, - a major component in the German defences forming a defensive line running across the battlefield between Wancourt in the south and Feuchy in the north. Most of these objectives, including Feuchy village, had been taken by the evening of 10 April; although the Germans were still in control of large isolated sections of the trenches between Wancourt and Feuchy, particularly in the area of the fortified village of Neuville-Vitasse south of the Arras-Cambrai road.

On the second day, 10 April 1917, the 56<sup>th</sup> Division were able to force the Germans out of Neuville-Vitasse, although the Monchy Riegel line was mostly still in German hands. The ground gained was consolidated and the push resumed towards Monchy le Preux.

One reason for the success of the offensive in this sector was a failure by the Germans to employ a defence in depth. The intention of the German system was for an attacker to be allowed to make initial gains, thus stretching their lines of communication. Reserves which had been held close to the battlefield would then be committed once the initial enemy advance had ground to a halt, and before their reinforcements could be brought up. The German defenders would thus be able to counter-attack and regain the lost territory. Notably, in the Vimy ridge sector - Falkenhausen kept his reserve troops too far from the front, and they were consequently too late to provide a counterattack on either 10 or 11 April.

### **Monchy le Preux**

Monchy occupied an elevated plateau that was invaluable for observation. The village was situated on a ridge from which seven sunken lanes radiated, many of which contained enemy dugouts. The lanes east of the village were invisible to the British, while the

approaches from Observation ridge in the west were completely visible to the Germans within Monchy.



The village of Monchy le Preux to the south of Fampoux Cemetery on the north bank of the Scarpe.

### **The assault on Monchy 10 April 1917**

Four divisions were designated to take part: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup>.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Divisions were to integrate with VII Corps' attack on the still intact Wancourt-Feuchy Line. This was timed to start around noon on 10 April. The 37<sup>th</sup> Division were already in positions around Orange Hill. Most importantly, the undefeated sections of the Wancourt-Feuchy Line had to be taken in both the VI and VII Corps' sectors. The 12<sup>th</sup> Division were assigned to taking the redoubt at Feuchy Chapel on the Arras-Cambrai road before moving on to Chapel Hill, southwest of Monchy, and then finally into Monchy.

On the right of the advance, to the south, 37<sup>th</sup> Division of VII Corps were to assault the Wancourt-Feuchy Line, envelope Guemappe and protect the right flank while in the north on the left flank, the 15<sup>th</sup> Division were to advance between Orange Hill and the River Scarpe. The redoubt at Feuchy fell fairly quickly, and in the south on the Arras-Cambrai road the Germans had also retreated from Chapel Hill.

The 37<sup>th</sup> Division advanced on Monchy with the 111<sup>th</sup> Brigade at the centre and the other two brigades covering the flanks. There was little in the way of artillery support and definitely no creeping barrage. As the infantry came over the top of Chapel Hill astride the Arras-Cambrai road, the well concealed German troops opened fire. Machine guns located in the sunken road to the south of Monchy (Hussar Lane) were inflicting serious damage to the troops advancing over the open ground with only shell holes offering any form of cover. Before very long control and direction were lost. The infantry had advanced about a mile but were now isolated on the western slopes below the village.

The cavalry units who were expected to break through into the country east of Monchy could only wait in the bitter cold and snow with intermittent shells falling on them for the opportunity that never came. A single foray north of Monchy was made by the Essex Yeomanry who were fortunate to retire under the cover of a snow squall.

### **11 April 1917**

The battalions in the northern sector received their orders for a renewed advance at different times and all were late to start. The proposed advance was set to begin at 6.00 am. During the night attempts had been made to bring artillery forward with limited success due to the weather and broken ground. The result was that there was an inadequate barrage to assist the infantry throughout that day. To the north of Monchy the 15<sup>th</sup> Division was ordered to push forward to the Green Line and isolate Monchy from Pelves on the south bank of the Scarpe.

In attempting this, 15<sup>th</sup> Division advanced under the cover of a heavy snowstorm but the troops lost direction and inclined to the right following the rising ground which eventually brought them up against the well-hidden defenders on the northern slopes of Monchy. As the snow cleared the attackers became clearly visible to the machine guns and rifles within Monchy and from across the Scarpe at Fampoux and Roeux to the north.

In the south, 37<sup>th</sup> Division assisted by a few tanks which had arrived from the direction of Feuchy Chapel, now moved on towards Monchy. The intended line of advance for the tanks had been the Arras-Cambrai road. The tanks caused considerable damage to the German positions around La Bergere at the junction of a lane going north to Monchy from the Arras-Cambrai road. As the surviving tank advanced to the village it was followed by infantry of 11<sup>th</sup> Loyal North Lincs and 11<sup>th</sup> Royal Warwickshire regiments.

To the men of 37<sup>th</sup> Division had spent a miserable night sheltering in shell holes, the tank now gave them the support to renew their attack, and before long they had overtaken the tank advancing towards Monchy. As the firing from the village and the sunken road gradually decreased, the mass of mixed battalions eventually found themselves within the village of Monchy le Preux.

Any attempt to pursue the fleeing Germans down the slopes east of Monchy was soon met by heavy machine gun fire from enemy trenches east of Monchy on Infantry Hill. The initial orders for the infantry had been to advance to the Green Line, which was just beyond Monchy, then organise fresh dispositions and consolidate. When this was completed, the cavalry was to be called forward.

### **The Cavalry**

The Cavalry Division, which had spent several nights in the open, had been formed up on the rear (western) slopes of Orange Hill. At 8.30 am the first squadrons moved forward. They left Orange Hill heading east before turning south and entering Monchy. Once in the



village they were under cover from machine guns directed at them from Fampoux across the River Scarpe. German shells soon began to fall on Monchy, and with no cover for their horses some of the cavalry set out north-east along the Pelves and Roeux roads to attack the enemy. Once clear of the shelter of the village, the cavalry instantly came under heavy fire forcing them to return to the village.

The German artillery now laid down a box barrage around the village of Monchy, preventing both entry and exit. Salvos of shrapnel were soon being fired above the infantry and cavalry within the village. Efforts to reinforce Monchy with additional cavalry units were held back by the box barrage. Small parties of infantry from a variety of units continued to make their way into the village to strengthen the holding force.

In the afternoon of 11 April, 15<sup>th</sup> Division was incorrectly informed that Pelves, on the south bank of the Scarpe, was in British hands. Bearing this information in mind, they tried to bolster Monchy along the northern, left flank to withstand the anticipated German counterattack. Similar to the cavalry, they faced significant challenges from machine guns positioned in Pelves and across the Scarpe.

All movement towards the objective designated as the Green Line was impossible against the machine guns east of Monchy in Bois du Vert, Bois du Sart and on Infantry Hill. In this area without German trenches, the troops dug into shell holes to create basic defensive positions. On the right flank, to the south of Monchy, a new line had been established from the Arras-Cambrai road in front of La Bergere on to Monchy.

Monchy le Preux now formed a salient. The Germans still held Guemappe to the south and Roux on the northern side of the Scarpe. Between Monchy and the Scarpe was a front of almost 2 miles and well short of the Green Line a further mile to the east. Until XVII Corps could advance along the northern bank of the Scarpe, there could be no movement up to and beyond Monchy. Meanwhile, to the east of Monchy German troops were now seen massing in preparation for the expected counter-attacks.

As dusk descended on the 11 April 1917, snow began to fall on the dead and mutilated men and horses of those who had reached Monchy. The exhausted infantry were also suffering from the cold. At the end of the day the defence of Monchy was gratefully handed over to the relieving infantry of 37<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 12<sup>th</sup> Division.

The only significant achievement of the day was the capture of Monchy le Preux. In the south, Guemappe and the formidable defences at Wancourt, which consisted of machine guns within concrete pillboxes surrounded by belts of wire was holding up the advance. This deadlock was only broken when 56<sup>th</sup> Division and four tanks broke through at the junction of the Hindenburg line and the Wancourt-Feuchy line.

### **12 April 1917**

Although delayed by the congestion on the Arras-Cambrai road. 12<sup>th</sup> Division were eventually relieved in the Monchy sector by 29<sup>th</sup> Division. A resumption of the attack was initially scheduled for 13 April. To facilitate the attack, a jumping off trench was to be dug 300 yards east of Monchy village. However, this took longer than expected and was only completed during the night of 13/14 April. The trench ran for 600 yards north-south on the east of Monchy between Infantry Lane and Saddle Lane.

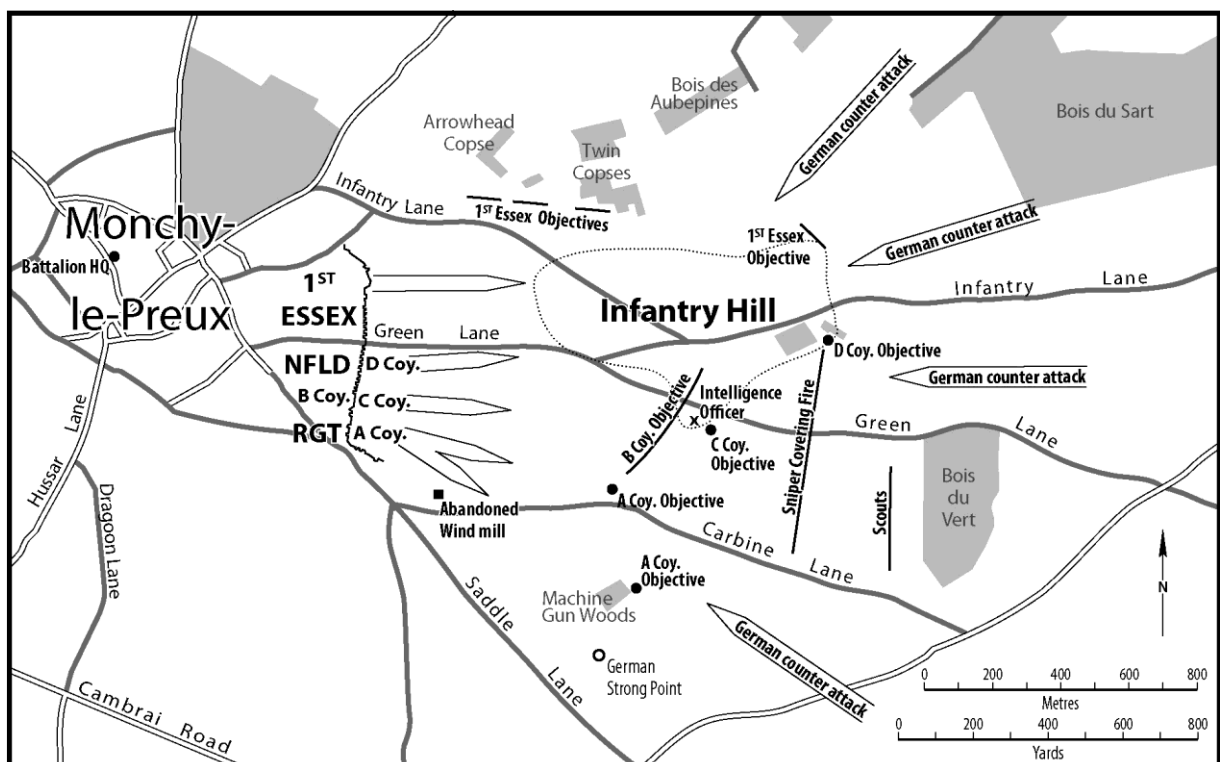
### **The attack by 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.**

The 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade 29<sup>th</sup> Division formed up in the newly dug East Trench at 4.30 a.m. on 14 April. The two leading battalions were the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex to the North with 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland on their right, to the south. The 4<sup>th</sup> Worcesters were to be in support positions along Hussar Lane, from the south-east corner of Monchy to La Bergere on the Arras-Cambrai Road. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Hampshires were to be in reserve south-east of Orange Hill, with one company in Monchy. The left brigade boundary for the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex was Infantry Lane. Separating the two battalions was Green Lane. The 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland on their right were to extend south as far as Saddle Lane. The nearest German positions were in Shrapnel

Trench, 600 yards east of Monchy. This trench extended south from Arrow Trench and Arrow Wood.



Monchy le Preux – Google earth



The attack of the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex and Newfoundland Regiments - From *The Royal Newfoundland Museum*

The attack was planned on a narrow front of 1,500 yards, with no flank support. The 17<sup>th</sup> Division between Monchy and the Scarpe were not involved in the attack and to the south, the 87<sup>th</sup> Division in front of Guemappe, south of the Arras-Cambrai Road were also not involved in the attack.

An officer of 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland described the objective as ‘a balloon shaped position blown from Monchy le Preux, which was already at the apex of a salient’. The first objectives of 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade were Shrapnel Trench and the forward slopes of Infantry Hill. The intention was to establish strongpoints on the hill. Beyond this the plan was open ended. Further advance depended on the German dispositions. Patrols were to be pushed out to the woods – Bois du Vert, Bois du Sart and to the smaller woods to the north – Arrowhead Copse, Twin Copse, Keeling Copse and Bois du Aubepines. If they were not occupied by Germans, they were to be seized.

The supporting barrage started at 5.30 a.m. falling 200 yards in front of the German positions on Infantry Hill. It was timed to move forward 100 yards every four minutes. In reality it was ‘deplorably thin’ and failed to silence the machine guns. The 4<sup>th</sup> Worcesters and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hampshires who were to be in reserve had also failed to arrive at their positions. An error in the Brigade staff plans had also omitted to detail a unit to occupy East Trench once the attackers had gone forward.

The wet and heavy ground made for difficult going but a mist helped the leading elements reach their objectives. When they reached Shrapnel Trench it was unoccupied. The Germans had pulled back when the barrage started. On the left three companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex reached their objectives on the northern end of Infantry Hill by 6.30 a.m. and had begun digging in. They reported large numbers of German troops in Bois du Sart and Bois des Aubepines. Patrols sent forward came under heavy rifle and machine gun fire. The company forming the left flank guard also came under heavy fire from both Arrowhead Copse and Twin Copse. The presence of large number of Germans in the

surrounding woods suggested an impending counter-attack. The 1<sup>st</sup> Essex began forming a series of strong points on the northern flank of Infantry Hill overlooking the slopes running down to the Scarpe.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland attacked on a two company front with 'C' and 'D' companies leading and 'B' Company in support. Their line of attack was the high point of Infantry Hill on a line slightly north of Bois du Vert. The two leading platoons were to capture and consolidate the objectives, then the following platoons were to push through and establish strong points. Once this was achieved 'C' and 'D' Companies were then to move to the eastern edge of Bois du Vert and set up strongpoints. These objectives were reached around 7.00 a.m. 'A' Company was to secure the open right flank by taking the strongpoint at Monchy Windmill and then advance to a small copse about 700 yards west of Bois du Vert, mid-way between Carbine Lane and Saddle Lane. This feature was initially called Machine Gun Wood and later named Tite's Copse.

### **German response**

The Germans initiated their planned 'elastic' defence by pulling back from the advancing troops and allowing them to extend into the trap. The 'balloon' now blown from Monchy le Preux was about to be burst. In a perfect pincer movement, the Germans attacked in the north from the wooded areas of Bois du Sart, Bois du Aubepines and Twin Copse and from the south between Bois du Sart and Infantry Lane. South of the line of advance a force of Germans also attacked from the Bois du Vert below Infantry Lane, while further south, German troops moved in from Bois du Vert and Machine Gun Wood.

The troops of the Essex and Newfoundland regiments that had survived the advance up the slope of Infantry Hill reached the crest and then disappeared from view down the reverse slope. They were never seen again. Surrounded by Germans emerging from the woods to the left and right, many were taken prisoner. 'A' Company in Machine Gun



Wood was heavily shelled and could move no further forward. No runners made it back to Brigade HQ.

The Essex companies in the north faced stiff resistance with heavy machine gun fire from Twin Copse as they set about forming a chain of strong points. They were soon attacked by superior German forces and overwhelmed sometime between 6.30 and 7.0 a.m. With the left flank now exposed and overrun, there was little chance of any retiring Essex troops reaching the lines at Monchy which had already come under a heavy German bombardment.

The losses for both battalions were extremely high. 1<sup>st</sup> Essex went into battle with 923 officers and men; - of these 644 were recorded as killed, wounded or missing, of which 203 became prisoners of war. The Newfoundland Regiment started with 591 officers and men. 487 were recorded as killed, wounded or missing. Of these only 150 became prisoners of war.

### Questions

The big question is – how could the Germans respond so quickly to the attack by 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade?

Later on 11 May 1917, Brigadier-General D E Cayley, commanding 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade issued a special order, part of which read:

‘The attack carried out by the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex and the 1<sup>st</sup> NFLD was entirely successful, the objectives being brilliantly gained. It seems certain that the enemy had planned an attack in force on Monchy on the morning of 14<sup>th</sup>. This attack fell on the two battalions which had advanced and though they were nearly destroyed in doing so, they appear to have completely broken up and disorganised the German attack. The hostile troops consisted of a fresh Bavarian Division which had not been in the previous fighting.’

This version is at slight variance with the German account of the action. The records of the 17<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Regiment make no reference to a planned German attack on 14 April. They refer only to a counter attack battalion being brought west from Boiry, along with troops of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment to help repel the British attack in their sector.

The Bavarians make an explicit reference to the tactics of ‘elastic defence’.

‘In the spring battles at Arras the regiment for the first time practiced the manoeuvre of a ‘mobile defensive action’. The difference between this and conventional defensive tactics is that the enemy is allowed to make progress against a thinly defended forward position so that he can be repelled by troops held back for that purpose.’

The centre companies of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment gave way ‘elastically’ and the two flank companies swung back to avoid being outflanked while providing flank protection. In this way a passage was left open for the British advance which was halted about 7.00 a.m. when a deep salient had been formed into the German defence. The German front line was only thinly held but reserves were immediately to hand behind Bois du Sart, at Boiry and further back in the Drocourt-Queant Line five miles to the east.

Monchy le Preux, the village that had cost so many lives was now wide open to the counter-attacking Germans, who were already shelling the village and the remaining men of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

### **The Men who saved Monchy**

Lt. Col. J. Forbes-Robertson commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Regiment had moved his HQ into the centre of Monchy at 3.00 a.m. on 14 April. It was shortly after 10.00 a.m. when a wounded man of the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex arrived back with the news that his entire battalion had been killed or captured. Forbes-Robertson sent his signals officer, Lt. Kevin Keegan forward to East Trench, the original assembly point for the attack, to see what was

happening. Keegan was back in twenty minutes to report that 200-300 Germans were advancing less than a quarter of a mile away. Forbes-Robertson mobilised his HQ staff, and under shell-fire led them to a large house on the south-east corner of the village where from an upper floor he could see the Germans about to occupy East Trench, which due to an oversight had been left with no holding troops.

Forbes-Robertson noticed a banked hedge midway between the house and the trench which offered some cover. Nine of this group, including the man from 1<sup>st</sup> Essex survived the dash to the hedge which turned out to be the parapet of a short section of unused trench. They were later joined by the orderly room Corporal who had previously been knocked out by a shell burst. The ten men immediately opened fire pinning the enemy in East Trench and Shrapnel Trench while preventing them from being reinforced. To conserve ammunition the Newfoundlanders limited their targets to within 300 yards. At 2.00 p.m. Forbes-Robertson sent a runner back to HQ with a request for immediate reinforcements. The runner delivered his message and returned to the firing line.

For the next five hours these ten men kept the Germans under constant fire, killing many and driving others to ground. Their excellent marksmanship and conservation of limited ammunition allowed them to hang on until reinforcements arrived.

In response to the request for reinforcements, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hampshires were sent up from their reserve positions near Orange Hill, two miles in the rear. One company went to provide a flank cover on the north-west corner of the village. Two further companies went to assist Forbes-Robertson. The Germans had by this time put down a barrage to the west of the village in an effort to block the approach of reinforcements.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Hampshires arrived at the Newfoundlanders' position at 2.45 p.m. British artillery now began to shell Machine Gun Wood south-east of Monchy and the eastern approaches to the village. This may have had the unfortunate effect of killing many of the Essex and

Newfoundland troops lying wounded in the open, and those that had been collected in the assembly trench.

German shelling intensified around 4.30 p.m, and a large number of German troops appeared on Infantry Hill. By this time the Germans had now abandoned East Trench and there was no further attempt to approach Monchy le Preux. At 8.0 p.m. that night the ten Newfoundlanders and the survivors of the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade were relieved.

The 'Men who saved Monchy' lived to fight another day. Lt. Colonel Forbes-Robertson was awarded the DSO for his gallantry, and Lt Keegan a MC. The eight other ranks received the MM.

### **After thoughts**

The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Essex and 1<sup>st</sup> Newfoundland Regiments did everything that was asked off them. It is doubtful from the German records that they suffered as a result of meeting a planned German attack on Monchy. Their heavy losses were almost certainly the result of a lack of flank support and their encounter with the experienced Bavarian Division who were now employing the tactic of 'elastic' defence.

In July 1938, Major-General C G Fuller writing to the Official Historian pointed out that:

‘The attack east of Monchy on 14 April was but one more example of the futility of piecemeal attacks beloved of the Higher Command and abhorred by Divisions and still more by the Brigades and Battalions. Had our attack east of Monchy been part of a general attack we should not in all probability have lost the two battalions and might moreover have gained and held our objective. The attack was another example of inexperienced staff officers. The Brigade Major who drew up the orders for the attack of 88 Brigade was an excellent fellow but very young. In making out the orders, he omitted to detail troops – a matter of routine in the Division. As a result, when the Germans counter-attacked, there was practically nobody in our

front line at Monchy and it was only the courage and presence of mind of Forbes-Robertson that saved the situation.’



The men who saved Monchy

Back row L – R: Cpl A. S. Rose, Sgt. W. Pitcher, Lt. Col. J. Forbes-Robertson, Lieut. K. J. Keegan, Sgt. C. Parsons, Sgt. J. R. Waterfield.

Front row: Pte. F. Curran, Cpl J. H. Hillier, Pte. J. Hounsell.





## 1<sup>st</sup> King's Own Royal Lancaster at the Battle of Arras 1917



The 1<sup>st</sup> King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment (KORL) of 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Division – G.O.C Maj. Gen Hon. W Lambton - had spent the whole of March 1917 training for the forthcoming battle of Arras. On 9 April 1917 the battalion left 'Y' Camp at Etrun, north-east of Arras, and arrived at their assembly area west of St. Catherine's to the north of Arras around 7.30 am.



The Scarpe battlefield



At 10.10 am the battalion advanced east along the northern bank of the River Scarpe. By 12:30 pm, they had moved beyond the initial British objective, the Black line east of St. Laurent Blangy, where they encountered enemy shellfire that caused several casualties: 1 officer and 3 other ranks killed, and 40 other ranks wounded.

The battalion moved forward at 1.10 pm. advancing to the Blue line which ran due south to Railway Triangle south of the River Scarpe. It was here that they caught up with 9<sup>th</sup> Division who were waiting for the barrage to lift from Athies. They entered Athies at 1.35 pm. The 1<sup>st</sup> KORL reached the Brown Line at 3.15 pm and closed up to the barrage as they prepared to move on to the German 4<sup>th</sup> Trench system. With little opposition they entered the German 4<sup>th</sup> trench system around 3.55 pm, taking 60-70 prisoners and capturing six Howitzers and one field gun. All of the guns had ammunition to hand which was later turned on the enemy.

The battalion now dug in on the western edge of Fampoux while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment (2<sup>nd</sup> Dukes) passed through them to take Fampoux. The whole advance stopped here. The rather light artillery barrage provided by field guns near Athies had failed to destroy the wire in front of the German defences. The night was spent consolidating their positions.

At 2.30 pm. The next day, 10 April the battalion advanced again with the object of taking the village of Roeux and the adjacent Chemical Works. One company was sent to secure the bridge on the Arras-Douai railway line, but they were held back by heavy machine gun fire from a trench 500 yards further along the railway embankment. The remainder of the battalion advanced through Fampoux, aiming to cross the embankment from the north, but were immediately met with machine gun fire from the Chemical works and forward trenches.

At this point a message was received at battalion HQ to say that the Cavalry would now advance, and the infantry were to follow closely and consolidate the ground gained. The companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> KORL were thus advised to hold their positions and to advance no further.

An advance guard of the Cavalry arrived at 4.30 pm and sent patrols set out. While a plan was being formulated by the officer commanding the Cavalry, it began to snow, and a report came back that the enemy was counter-attacking. The Cavalry dismounted in order to assist with defences. The counter-attack was not in strength and as the snow increased and darkness began to fall operations were abandoned and the battalion withdrew to the German 4<sup>th</sup> System. The enemy shelled Fampoux until about 9.0 pm.

Casualties during the operations of 9-10 April: 4 Officers and 175 Other Ranks.

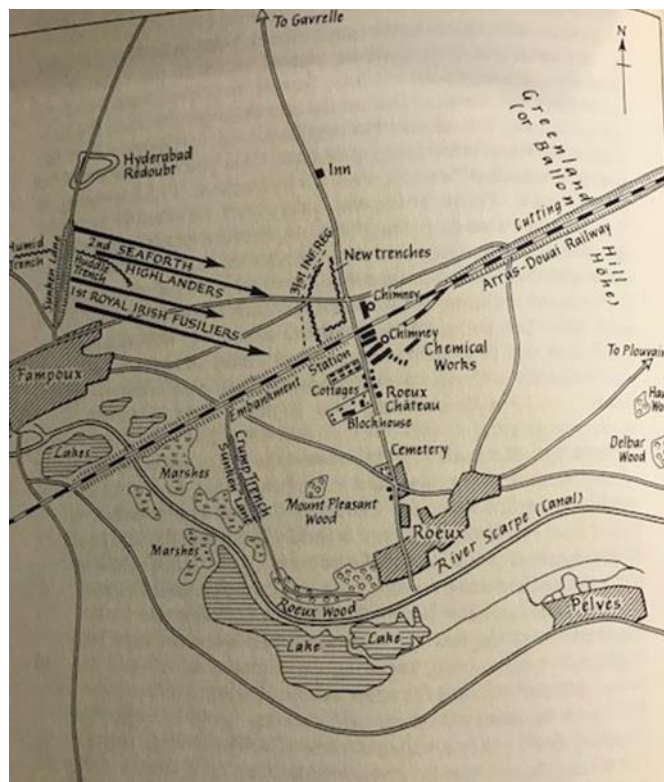
Plans were made for the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade to attack the village of Roeux on 11 April at 12.00 then to advance in an easterly direction towards Plouvain. At noon the brigade advanced under a creeping barrage with the 1<sup>st</sup> KORL on the right, supported by two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers (2<sup>nd</sup> L. Fusil) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dukes on the left. However, the marshy ground forced them to take a circuitous route which slowed them sufficiently to lose contact with the rather 'thin' barrage.

The infantry had great difficulty crossing over the embankment due to a machine gun sited on Mount Pleasant, a small hill south-east of Fampoux, and a further two machine guns ahead in Roeux. All available Lewis guns were brought up onto the embankment and successfully suppressed the enemy fire allowing the infantry to advance. At this time, it was thought that both 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Brigades had progressed satisfactorily, but it soon became obvious that the positions at the Chemical Works had been missed by the artillery; and the enemy were seen to be occupying buildings and the trenches in front. The 1<sup>st</sup> KORL, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dukes and two companies of 2<sup>nd</sup> L. Fusil were now strung along the north side of the Railway embankment and along a bank below Mount Pleasant. The

enemy shelled the British positions and Fampoux during the afternoon. By 4.30 pm it was snowing again and the men without greatcoats or any means of cover, spent a miserable night in the open.

The following morning, 12 April, orders were received at 10.00 am that the 9<sup>th</sup> Division would attack the Gravelle lower road, passing through the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade positions at 5.00 pm. The 9<sup>th</sup> Division attacked on time but without success. The enemy responded by heavily shelling all the exits from Fampoux. 1<sup>st</sup> KORL was relieved by a battalion from 26<sup>th</sup> Brigade and withdrew to the Blue line by 5.30 pm.

On 13 April plans were being made for an attack on the station buildings north of the embankment, but before they were completed a force of Germans estimated to be about a battalion in strength, were observed occupying the buildings and trenches in front of the station. Machine guns were soon firing from these positions. When it became known that the brigade on the left flank had failed to move forward, the attack was abandoned.



From: Cheerful Sacrifice – The Battle of Arras 1917

A defensive line was established from the embankment to a small copse to the north. Lewis guns were concentrated within this copse. Heavy artillery fell on the enemy trenches in front of the Chemical works while the Lewis guns fired on any enemy caught in the open. About 9.0 pm that evening the left of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division was just south of Fampoux. This now left the right flank of 1<sup>st</sup> KORL in the air, with its back to marshy ground. The battalion was pulled back to re-connect with the 15<sup>th</sup> Division. The next morning 14 April, the 1<sup>st</sup> KORL withdrew in stages back to the original British start line and finally to billets in Montenescourt west of Arras.

This was not the end of their part in the Battle of Arras. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division and 9<sup>th</sup> Divisions later returned to attack the Chemical works again on 3 May 1917.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Division's line of general attack was against the enemy positions on a north-south line from Fresnes-les-Montauban to Plouvain, with the 9<sup>th</sup> Division attacking on their left. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division advanced with the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade on the right and the 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade on the left and 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade in reserve.

The objectives for 4<sup>th</sup> Division were to capture the Chemical works, the station buildings, the cemetery and the eastern edge of Roeux. 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade objectives were to capture the Chemical works and a German trench line running north towards Gravelle. This called for an advance that straddled the Arras–Douai railway that ran diagonally across the battle area. The 1<sup>st</sup> KORL and 2<sup>nd</sup> Dukes were given a final objective - the taking of a trench north of the railway protecting Plouvain in the east.

Following an artillery barrage that started on 1 May, that concentrated on counter battery fire, trench bombardment and the use of super heavy guns on the Chemical works and known machine gun sites, zero hour was set for 03.45 am on 3 May. This was a most unfortunate time to start. Sunrise was at 6.26 am which meant the troops would start their advance in pitch darkness; no tapes had been laid and there had been little opportunity to

take compass bearings on the lines of advance. The darkness also made it worse for the troops as they attempted to navigate their way through a mass of ruined buildings.

As the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade advanced on a line roughly west of the Chateau and the railway embankment, they were held up by machine guns in houses that had been missed by the heavy artillery. They suffered a large number of casualties.

Two leading elements of 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade; 1<sup>st</sup> KORL and 2<sup>nd</sup> Dukes with groups of the 1<sup>st</sup> Warwickshire and the Household Battalion from 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade, were the only organised party to reach the first objective. They dug themselves in but were swiftly counter-attacked by the Germans. A defensive heavy barrage was brought down on the counter-attacking Germans but this also fell on the newly arrived troops of 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade. There was no further news of what happened to them. The two leading battalions, 1<sup>st</sup> KORL and 2<sup>nd</sup> Dukes had become isolated from the rest of the brigade and the enemy managed to infiltrate behind them. By this time all the officers had become casualties. A few men managed to get back; those not killed were captured. Eventually the remnants of these two battalions, around 100 men, managed to dig-in, just in front of their first objective.

### **Afterthought**

It was initially understood that the attack on 3 May 1917 would start at Dawn, and zero hour would be 4.45 am. Even at this later hour it is doubtful whether there would have been sufficient light to carry out the attack.

The moon had set at 3.28 am leaving a very dark night. Sunrise was at 6.26 am, twilight would start around 5.34 am. During twilight there is sufficient light for the human eye to distinguish terrestrial objects and the horizon.

With zero hour set for 3.45 am it would be almost two hours before there was sufficient light for troops to see buildings or objects and importantly, where they were going. There

had been no time to set out “lines” of direction or take bearings and the keeping of direction had to be left chiefly to chance.

Maj. Gen C. J. Deverell G.O.C. 3rd Division regarded the change to a night attack at such short notice with dismay and anger and did his best to get it changed. The ground over which 3<sup>rd</sup> Division had to operate was particularly difficult for a night attack of this scale. So great was the confusion that it was reported that troops from the 9<sup>th</sup> Division, on the left, had ‘captured’ the front line trench from which troops of 3<sup>rd</sup> division had just departed. Later, General Deverell told General Allenby, the Corps Commander, what he thought of it. He records that Allenby was very ‘pious’ and said, “that it was General Gough’s fault that it had been changed to a night attack”.

There had been a general feeling that the attack was hurriedly and badly planned and doomed to fail. The infantry was expected to cover about a mile of ground in the dark behind a barrage, lifting 100 yards every two minutes. Much of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division advance was directed through built up areas with the enemy concealed within well defended buildings.

The fierce German response added to the confusion in the darkness. German artillery opened up with a concentrated barrage on the advancing infantry. There was no enemy effort at counter-battery fire and the British efforts at counter-battery suppression obviously had little effect. True to German defensive doctrine the infantry yielded to the first assault before delivering a forceful counter-attack against the British infantry now mostly in the open.

The Chemical works and the chateau were eventually taken by the almost exhausted troops of 4<sup>th</sup> Division on 11 May 1917. Unable to deliver a surprise attack, the German defences at the Chemical works and the surrounding buildings and Chateau were subjected to a prolonged and intense bombardment which was supplemented by guns brought from VI and XIII Corps, plus a machine gun barrage assisted by two companies



of machine guns from 17<sup>th</sup> Division. Zero hour was 7.30 pm, with the infantry advancing behind a creeping barrage. By 11.00 pm the Chemical works had been taken and consolidated. A defensive line of outposts had been pushed east 100 yards beyond the Chemical works. There were a few troublesome snipers who were dealt with the next morning. There was no enemy counter-attack. It would appear the assault had achieved complete surprise.

4<sup>th</sup> Division was relieved on the night of 13/14 May by the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Division. It was later discovered just why the chemical works had been such an impregnable structure. The Germans had constructed a 'MEBU' - *Mannschafts Eisen Beton Unterstande*, a concrete crew shelter. This was an enormous pill box near to the chateau and connected by tunnels to the chemical works and other emplacements. It was constructed with concrete walls six foot thick covered by a concrete roof seven foot thick with several machine gun embrasures, all protected by fields of fire from neighbouring concrete machine gun emplacements.



“Good-morning, good-morning!” the General said  
When we met him last week on our way to the line.  
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of them dead,

And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.

“He's a cheery old card,” grunted Harry to Jack

As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.

But he did for 'em both by his plan of attack.

The General. by Siegfried Sassoon





## **North Lancs branch Meetings - Future Programme**

### **Meetings Nov 2024 – May 2025**

#### **Tuesday 5 November**

Venue – The Reading Room, The Storey, Meeting House Lane, Lancaster. LA1 1TH

Richard Preston

*Examining the Civilian contribution to the medical needs of the Great War with examples from Cumbria.*

The talk looks at the development of Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) and how they were directly related to the growth of Auxiliary Hospitals (VAD hospitals) and the civilian appetite for voluntary efforts. It is based upon a report written in 1921 of the work done in Cumbria (Cumberland, Westmorland and the Furness area of Lancashire) by the combined efforts of the Red Cross, St. Johns Ambulance and the Territorial Associations.

#### **Monday 2 December**

AGM and Members Contributions

#### **January 2025**

No meeting

#### **February 2025 – Daytime Meeting details TBC**

Prof Martin Alexander

*'Backs to the Wall, 1918? From the Kaiserschlacht to Allied Victory'*

**Monday 3 March 2025**

Anne Buckley

*From Tsingtao to Skipton*

Anne will recount the little-known escape story of two German POWs from Fukuoka in 1915 in which they spent a year on the run and almost circumnavigated the globe. The men were two of the 4,700 Germans taken prisoner by the Japanese following the Siege of Tsingtao in November 1914

**Monday 7 April 2025**

Dr Adam Prime

*'Keeping Open the Highway to India: The Defence of the Suez Canal, 1915'*

The purpose of this talk is to give an account of not just of the Suez Canal's place in British strategy and the battle itself but also of the soldiers' experiences in Egypt. For the Territorials from East Lancashire this was their first time abroad. For the Indian regulars this was their first active service outside of India, Afghanistan, or Burma, and the first time they would face a regular army, organised in a manner similar to themselves. Yet this hastily organised defence was successful. Based on a recently published book chapter.

**Tuesday 6 May 2025**

Michael O'Brien

*Haig, Foch, Pershing and the Battle of St Mihiel the first American led offensive.*

**Western Front Association – North Lancashire Branch**

**Chairman:** Iain Adams  
icadams152@gmail.com

**Treasurer:** Fiona Bishop  
Tel: 0777 3399540

**Secretary:** Paul Conlon  
Tel: 07922539256

**Editor:** Tom Williams  
Tel: 01253 886788 / 07931963502

Email: [p.conlon@live.co.uk](mailto:p.conlon@live.co.uk)

Email: [tom@twilliams.plus.com](mailto:tom@twilliams.plus.com)