

# THE TIGER



*The Braithwaite Memorial Cross, Serre  
"God Buried Him and No Man Knoweth His Sepulchre"*

**THE NEWSLETTER OF  
THE LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND BRANCH  
OF THE  
WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION  
ISSUE 160 – MARCH 2025**

## CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Welcome again, Ladies and Gentlemen, to *The Tiger*.

With the continuance of Remembrance destined to rest firmly in the hands of future generations, one sign of encouragement was recently discovered at a local Secondary School, whose "History Club" are participating in the WFA Malcolm Doolin Memorial Award for Local History Research. Malcolm, a highly active Branch Chairman with a passionate interest in Local History, passed away in March 2018 following a short illness and has been remembered via the Award by the WFA since 2023. Requested to act in a liaison role between the WFA and the School, I have been very impressed with the enthusiasm of the students – aged either 11 or 12 – on all of my visits to the School so far, and I look forward to further contact as their work on this project continues.

Not only have they been receptive to my suggestions regarding their research, the students also refer to their chosen fallen as "my soldiers", a relationship that will hopefully continue for the remainder of their studies and then lay foundations for their attitude to Remembrance as they enter adult life. For all our sakes, let us hope this will prove to be the case.

D.S.H.

## OUR NEXT MEETING

Venue: The Council Chamber, Braunstone Town Council,  
Braunstone Civic Centre, Kingsway, Braunstone Town, LEICESTER LE3 2PP  
Arrive from 7 p.m. for a 7:30 start – Free parking on site

**ALL WILL RECEIVE A WARM WELCOME - THERE IS NO NECESSITY FOR ANYONE TO BE, OR BECOME, A MEMBER OF THE WFA**

A £3 "donation" from each attendee would be much appreciated to assist with our Speaker's Fees and Room Hire costs – thank you.



**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

**Guest Speaker: Nigel Atter**

*"Douglas Haig: First Army Commander  
at the Battle of Loos, 1915"*

A welcome return for Nigel Atter, military author, researcher and one of the founders of our Branch. Nigel has a particular interest in the 1915 Battle of Loos and his latest presentation covers the role of Sir Douglas Haig, then Commander of First Army, in that engagement.

## AND NO MAN KNOWETH HIS SEPULCHRE by David Humberston

Of the many military Cemeteries that scar the landscape fought over in 1916 during the Battle of the Somme, none is larger than Serre Road No 2, situated on the road running south-west from the village of the same name and crossing the front line of 1<sup>st</sup> July, the most infamous day in British military history. Substantially enlarged in the post war period, it is now the resting place of some 7,100 of the fallen, nearly 5,000 of whom lie beneath headstones inscribed “Known Unto God”.



On the roadside to the left of the Cemetery stands a memorial cross (depicted left and also on our front cover) on which is carved:

*IN MEMORY OF  
VAL BRAITHWAITE, LIEUTENANT  
1st BATTALION SOMERSET LIGHT INFANTRY  
WHO FELL IN ACTION NEAR THIS SPOT  
1st JULY 1916*

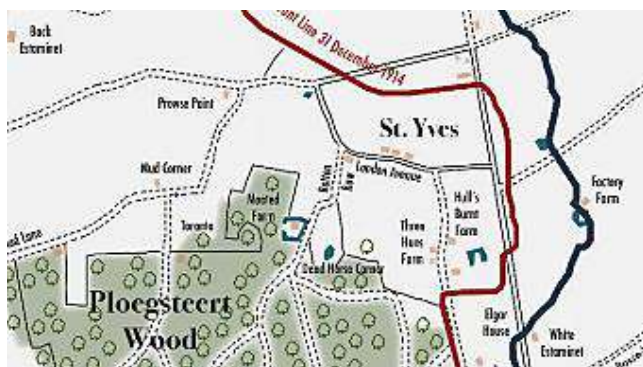
Braithwaite, however, is not amongst those buried here as his grave was never located and his name was subsequently carved onto the panels of the nearby Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.

Born on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1896 – St Valentine’s Day – Valentine Ashworth Braithwaite (shown right) was the son of General Sir Walter Braithwaite and his wife Jessie, nee Ashworth. A career soldier, Sir Walter had served with the Somerset Light Infantry in the Second Boer War. By 1914 he held the rank of Temporary Brigadier General and was Commandant at the Staff College at Quetta (in modern day Pakistan).



Valentine, known as ‘Val’ was educated at Twyford School and, from January 1910 at Winchester College, where records show he rowed for his House and was noted as a “good” racquets player. Leaving the College in the summer of 1912, he worked for a year for an Insurance Company before applying to enter Sandhurst. Obtaining his Commission in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry in August 1914, Val arrived at the Front on 5<sup>th</sup> October as the Battalion began its journey north towards Flanders. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month the Battalion moved to the village of Ploegsteert and the following day were ordered to mount a counter attack against the hamlet of Le Gheer, situated on the eastern edge of the “Bois de Ploegsteert” (later “anglicised to “Plug Street Wood”. It was later recorded that the enemy was cleared from the village “at the point of the bayonet”, having incurred casualties of 1 Officer wounded, 7 Other Ranks killed and a further 19 wounded. A week later the Battalion was relieved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Hampshire Regiment and withdrew to reserve positions.





*Map of the north-east corner of Ploegsteert Wood, showing the front line position near St Yves. The British front line is shown in red, the German line in blue. The Somersets erected their barricade across the road north of St Yves running towards "Prowse Point".*

Around midday on 30<sup>th</sup> October, word was received that German forces were gathering in force in front of the Hampshire trenches at St Yves, on the north-east corner of the Wood. A Company of the Somersets, commanded by Val Braithwaite was sent to reinforce the Hampshires. Arriving just as the enemy had broken the line. The Somersets responded by hastily erecting a barricade, from behind which they inflicted considerable casualties on the German forces. Appreciating that a German breakthrough would have serious consequences for the British forces in the area, at 5.30 p.m. the Battalion commander, Major Bertie Prowse, made a personal reconnaissance of the position and decided to launch a

counter-attack that very night. Leading the assault himself, with two Companies armed with only small arms and bayonets, the speed and ferocity of the assault quickly overcame the enemy, who rapidly evacuated the area. For his leadership and initiative, Prowse was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and awarded a D.S.O. whilst Braithwaite, dubbed by his men "the Hero of the Barricade" was awarded a Military Cross and Mentioned in Despatches.

As winter deepened, conditions began to take their toll on Officers and men alike. Braithwaite became ill with influenza and was unfit for duty until the end of November. On Boxing Day, he then reported to the Regimental Surgeon with swollen feet and numbness in his toes. Diagnosed with frost bite, he was given ten days sick leave and, although appearing before several Medical Boards, he was absent from his Regiment for the following three months.

In March 1915, Sir Walter Braithwaite was promoted to the rank of Temporary Major General and appointed Chief of Staff to General Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force shortly to launch the disastrous campaign in Gallipoli. Upon his return to duty, Valentine was appointed Aide De Camp to his father (the pair are depicted right) and was once more Mentioned in Despatches. Sir Walter, however, proved to be a controversial figure; although valued by Hamilton, the Australian forces regarded him as "arrogant and incompetent" with one commenting that he had "the mind of a waiter", meaning that he was only anxious to please influential people! The Campaign was a desperate failure and Sir Walter was recalled to London. In 1916, Valentine resigned his appointment and rejoined his Regiment in France.



At 10.00 p.m. on the night of 30<sup>th</sup> June 1916, the 1st Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry left the village of Mailly-Maillet and marched to their assembly positions on the right of what the British called "The Serre Road". From here on the following morning, 1<sup>st</sup> July, they were to advance and

capture two German fortified trench positions known as The Redan Redoubt and The Quadrilateral. The ground they were attempting to cross was swept by German machine gun fire, forcing the advance to veer left and into the forward trenches of The Quadrilateral itself. One report later confirmed *“It is impossible to get a detailed account of the fighting that ensued, but the situation after the first hour or two was that men of various Battalions were holding part of The Quadrilateral and were involved in a fierce grenade fight. Heavy casualties were suffered from the enfilade machine gun and rifle fire from both flanks”*. Valentine Braithwaite and most of his fellow Officers were posted as “Missing”. He would be officially declared “Dead” in June 1917.



When Sir Walter (left) received the telegram informing him of his son's official death, he asked if it could be re-worded to state 'killed in action' rather than 'died', commenting, *“I think, perhaps, it is not too much for a soldier to ask the War Office to do for a soldier's son”*. The War Office, however, refused. Determined to find his son's body, Sir Walter visited the Somme battlefield that same year looking for signs of where his son might have fallen.

In June 1921 he subsequently purchased a plot of land in the field on the Serre Road, near the former site of the Quadrilateral, at the spot he believed his son had perished, erecting a memorial there in his memory. It is thought that a temporary wooden cross (now preserved in the crypt of Winchester Cathedral) was later replaced by a stone one, which survives to this present day, albeit on a slightly different site. At some stage over the next eight years a request was made by the owner of the rest of the field for the memorial to be moved as it “hampered cultivation”. Further enquiries then revealed the wrong piece of ground had been bought by Sir Walter and he actually owned land within the Serre No 2 Cemetery adjacent to the field. In 1929, the landowner sold Sir Walter a piece of ground by the roadside, to where the Memorial was moved to its current position.



*Valentine  
Braithwaite*

Sir Walter died in 1945 at the age of 79 and, prior to her own death in 1950, his widow made financial provision for the upkeep of the Memorial to their son. For a number of years it was then cared for by Lieutenant General Sir John Swayne of the Somerset Light Infantry, who was married to Valentine's cousin, before care passed into the hands of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Today the Memorial remains in good condition, its inscription clearly readable, included the words inscribed at its base: *God Buried Him and No Man Knoweth His Sepulchre*



*The Braithwaite Cross,  
Winchester Cathedral*

## **DATES FOR THE DIARY**

### **LEICESTER POSTCARD FAIR** **SUNDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY 2025**

Glen Parva Memorial Hall  
50 Dorothy Avenue  
Glen Parva,  
Leicester  
LE2 9JD

**10.00 A.M. – 3.00 P.M.**

**Free Admission**

### **ALTERATION TO BRANCH SPEAKER PROGRAMME**

Please note that. due to military commitments,

**Major (Retd) Phil Watson**

will now be giving his presentation

**12<sup>th</sup> Lancers at Dunkirk 1940**

on

**Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

and not

Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> April

as originally advised

Details of our April Speaker will be announced  
in due course

## WILFRED SHIPPERBOTTOM'S POIGNANT POSTCARD

by Mark Gamble

Wilfred Shipperbottom was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 1895, in Bolton, Lancashire. He was the son of Thomas Peter Shipperbottom, an iron moulder, and his wife Margaret, née Hunt. In 1901 five years' old Wilfred lived with his parents, two older siblings, Ernest and Mary Elizabeth, and a younger sister, May, at 12, Luton Street, Bolton. In 1898 Mrs. Shipperbottom had had another boy, John Willie, who died soon after birth. In late 1901 a fourth son was born, who was named Thomas. Her penultimate child was Elsie, who was born in 1904. Her last child, Arthur, also died as an infant. On the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1907 Wilfred's father passed away at the family home on Stewart Street, Bolton.

In 1911 Wilfred lived with his widowed mother, and his five siblings in the household of widow Annie Jane Barnes, at 172, Hallwell Road, Bolton. Wilfred's mother worked as a dressmaker, whilst he was employed tying in ends on a cotton mule spinning frame.



*Wilfred Shipperbottom's postcard, sent to the family home in Bolton.*

*The card was franked in Soltau, Hannover, on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1918. The card also bears a censor mark.*

In around November 1915 Wilfred Shipperbottom, who had been working as a carpenter, joined the army at Bolton. It likely that he went over to France in mid-1916. He first served overseas as Private, 4220, W. Shipperbottom. The records of his service have not survived. However, what is known is that on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1918 he was serving with 'D' Company of the 1/4<sup>th</sup> (Territorial Force) battalion of the King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, when he was captured near Givenchy-lès-la-Bassée, about 1½ miles south of Festubert, and just under 3½ miles west of La Bassée. He was taken as a prisoner-of-war, back through German lines, and thence, via Limburg an der Lahn, on to a prisoner-of-war camp at Soltau, 380 miles to the north-east, 45 miles south of Hamburg. Unfortunately, he had been wounded in his body, his right hand, and his face.

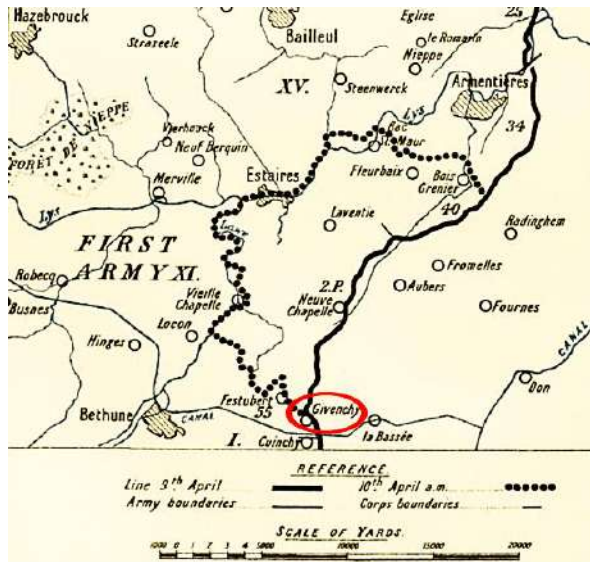
Although the 1/4<sup>th</sup> battalion of the King's Own had been in France since May 1915, as a component of the 51st (Highland) Division, when Wilfred had joined it in the field, it was part of the 164th Brigade of the 55th (West Lancashire) Division, to which it had been transferred.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1918 the 1/4th battalion of the King's Own was behind the lines at Gorree Chateau, which had been held by British forces since 1914. However, by late in the evening the companies of the battalion had moved 3 miles to the east along the northern bank of the Aire-La Bassée Canal to the front at Givenchy-lès-la-Bassée.



On the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1918 the battalion, as part of the 164<sup>th</sup> Brigade, came under an early morning bombardment by German artillery, the prelude to what became known as the *Battle of Estaire*, a part of the *Battle of the Lys*. When the battle began the 55th (West Lancashire) Division occupied a front that ran north from Givenchy-lès-la-Bassée to Richebourg L'Avoué, with the 164<sup>th</sup> Brigade at the southern end of the line.

The position of the 1/4th battalion of the King's Own, on the site of the obliterated village of Givenchy-lès-la-Bassée, was on a knoll at the end of the Fromelles-Aubers ridge. The knoll was covered in joined-up craters and to the south of the position the Aire-La Bassée Canal prevented a southern flank attack.



*Part of a map from the  
British Official History of Military  
Operations, France and Flanders, 1918  
volume II.*

*The German advance on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1918,  
when their forces crossed the River Lys  
and the 55th (West Lancashire) Division  
fought a magnificent defence at Givenchy  
(ringed in red on the map).*

‘A’ and ‘D’ companies of the battalion occupied the outpost line from the Death or Glory sap, north of the canal, to the vicinity of Warlingham Crater, together with the main line of defence – Spoil Bank Keep, Bayswater, Oxford Terrace, and Cambridge Terrace. ‘B’ and ‘C’ companies held the support line, Gunner Siding, and two defended posts, Orchard Keep and Mairie Keep. The Germans, although avoiding a frontal attack on the position of the 164<sup>th</sup> Brigade, moved forward under the cover of thick mist and fog, with the intention, using storm-troop tactics, of outflanking and isolating the brigade. Owing to a lack of shell-proof cover, the 1/4th battalion of the King's Own had suffered heavily under the initial German artillery bombardment. As the visibility at the front was poor the Germans overran the outpost line and managed to enter the main line of defence – Bayswater and Oxford Terrace.

*In Béthune under fire, showing the  
damaged tower of the church on the  
right. The Germans, in their attempt to  
reach the Channel ports in April, 1918,  
failed to get past the barrier town of  
Béthune.*



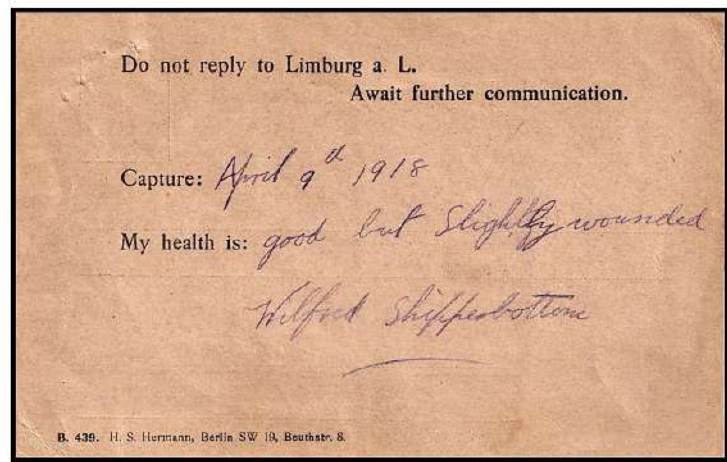


It is likely that Private, 201417, Wilfred Shipperbottom was captured during this phase of the action at Givenchy-lès-la-Bassée, because from 11.00am a counter attack recovered most of the brigade's front. During the attack of the 9th April and the night of the 9-10<sup>th</sup> April the 164<sup>th</sup> Brigade, comprising the 1/4th Battalion, King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, 1/4th Battalion, Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, and the 2/5th Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers, lost 35 officers and 659 other ranks, either killed, wounded, or missing.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1918 a prisoner-of-war postcard (Kriegsgefangensendung) sent by Wilfred Shipperbottom was franked at Soltau. Wilfred sent the card to the family home at 100, Arkwright Street. The card was addressed to the head of the house, Mrs. Pennington, who was called Annie Jane, and is thought to be Annie Jane Barnes, Wilfred's mother's adopted sister, with whom the Shipperbottom family had lived from at least 1911.

*The reverse of Wilfred Shipperbottom's postcard, which references Limburg an der Lahn, the location of a POW camp.*

*It is presumed that he passed through the camp on his way to Soltau POW camp.*



Wilfred reported on the card that his health was good, but that he had *been slightly wounded*. He was held in Soltau prisoner-of-war camp. However, he became ill and was transferred to Verden an der Aller Military Hospital, some 27½ miles to the west. He died there on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1918; the cause of his death was recorded as Meningitis (Gehirnhautentzündung). It is probable that Wilfred Shipperbottom was buried in Verden Garrison Cemetery. However, his resting place is now in Hamburg Cemetery, Germany (Plot III.H.10.).



*Nurses and patients at the Verden an der Aller Military Hospital, where Wilfred Shipperbottom died on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1918*

In October 1918 Wilfred's elder brother, Ernest, left the family home at 100, Arkwright Street, Bolton, to serve with the Royal Air Force. He left the service in March the following year, and returned to his mother and siblings in Bolton. For a period after the war Mrs. Margaret

Shipperbottom received a pension in lieu of the loss of her son, Wilfred. In 1921 Ernest was still living with his family at 67, Arkwright Street, Bolton, with Annie Jane Pennington the head of the household. In 1939 forty-seven years' old bachelor Ernest, who suffered from a curvature of the spine, lived in Coventry, where he worked as a store keeper in a wood machining mill. He lived with his sister, Mary Elizabeth, and her husband, Ronald Bertram Storr. During the war Ernest served with the Air Raid Precautions Service (ARP). In later life he lived with his sister and her husband on Lansdowne Road, Leicester. Ernest died on the 12th February 1960. At some time thereafter, Mr. Eric Pratt of Leicester, who collected postcards, acquired the Shipperbottom postcard. The card is now in the possession of his son, Stephen.

The postcard reminds us of the fragility of life, the joy that the Shipperbottom family must have experienced on receiving Wilfred's card, and the subsequent grief of receiving the news of his death. Wilfred Shipperbottom was posthumously awarded the British War Medal and the Inter-Allied Victory Medal for his service on the Western Front.

I thank Steve Pratt for allowing me to research the postcard from his late father's collection.



Editor's Note: The Memorial Plaque (Dead Man's Penny) for Wilfred Shipperbottom was recently sold via the Internet complete with its original cardboard case. These are shown above and we hope the purchaser will also be able to see Mark's article above.

## CONTACT US



### Leicestershire & Rutland

#### YOUR BRANCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

**David Humberston**  
*Chairman & Speakers List*

**Paul Warry**  
*Vice Chairman, Treasurer & Website*

**Valerie Jacques**  
*Secretary & Newsletter Editor*

**Angela Hall**  
*Events*

**Roy-Anthony Birch**  
*Promotion & War Memorials*

#### YOUR COUNTY TOWN REPRESENTATIVES:

**Greg Drozd** - *Hinckley*  
**Dr Karen Ette** - *Loughborough*

Branch Website Address:  
*To be confirmed*

Branch Twitter Address:  
[@WFALeicester](#)

We thank once again those readers who contacted us following the production of previous issues of *The Tiger*. Your comments are valued and welcomed and we are always open to suggestions as to what you, our readers, would like to see included/excluded.

All articles reproduced in this newsletter are accepted in good faith and every effort is always made to ensure accuracy of the information given. It should be noted however that the opinions expressed by the contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor, her associates, or the Western Front Association. The Editor reserves the right to amend, condense or edit any article submitted although the full version will be available, via e-mail, upon request.

Anyone wishing to submit material is more than welcome to contact us by e-mail at: [foft@live.co.uk](mailto:foft@live.co.uk)

The deadline date to ensure inclusion in your next edition of *The Tiger* is:

**Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

*"We very much value your continued support"*

***EXPLORE, LEARN, SHARE***