

# OX & BUCKS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

## JUNE 2017



@WFAOxBucks



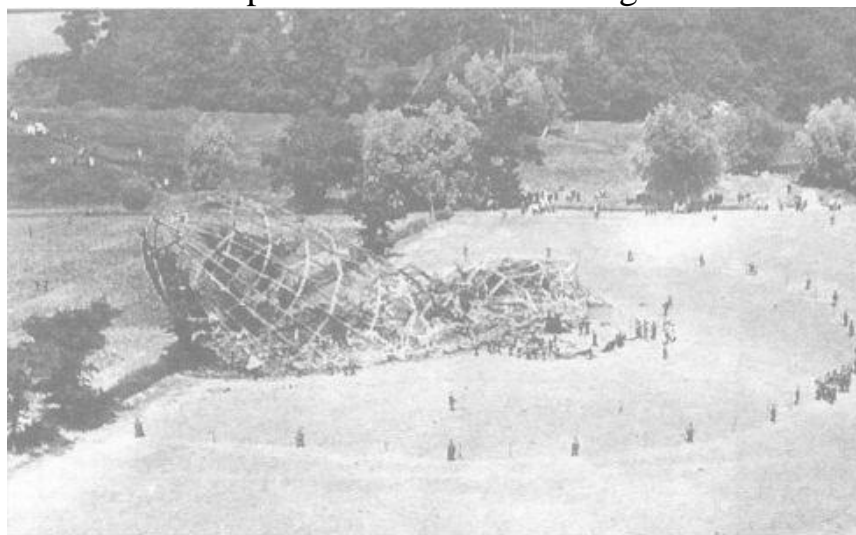
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## COMMENT

Welcome to the June edition of the Newsletter. The topical picture is of the remains of Zeppelin L48 which was shot down on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1917 by aircraft over Theberton in Kent. The airship had suffered serious engine problems and, failing to reach London, had attempted to bomb the Naval base at Harwich. Although three crew members survived, the new commander of the German Naval Airship Division, Vikto Shütze was among those killed. The picture is from the Theberton and Eastbridge Parish Council website



LOCAL ATTRACTION: Crowds of curiosity seekers arrive to take a look at the downed zeppelin at Theberton in 1917

Photograph:  
G. MCKERROW

(<http://thebertonandeastbridge.onesuffolk.net/history/history/zeppelin-l48/>). Please note that there has been a change to the speaker s in June and July. Michael LoCicero is, unfortunately, unable to come to us in June, but we hope to see him sometime next year. As a result, Stuart Hadaway has kindly agreed to bring his talk forward one month. I am very grateful to Geoff Spring who has sent a fascinating article about an office of the 21<sup>st</sup> Division which complements the report of last month's talk by Francis Handford.

- David Adamson



## **Future Meetings and Events**

**June 17<sup>th</sup> - Stuart Hadaway - Palestine 1917**

**July 15<sup>th</sup> – To be confirmed**

**August – NO MEETING**

**September 16<sup>th</sup> - Aimee Fox Godden - Thomas Cook's Tourists**

## **Reports of Events**

**May 20<sup>th</sup> – Francis Handford – “Infantry Training at Halton 1914 – 1915”**

Francis, who is the curator of the Trenchard Museum at RAF Halton, explained that the military use of the site began before it was an airfield. With thousands of men answering Kitchener's call for volunteers in 1914, there was a problem finding enough locations for training. Kitchener turned to his friends for help, one of whom was Alfred Rothschild. Rothschild had a country retreat with 3,000 acres at Halton and he offered the land for army use. The 21<sup>st</sup> Division was the first Division of the Kitchener's third New Army ('K3') and comprised 25,000 men of the following units:

62<sup>nd</sup> Brigade: 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers, 8<sup>th</sup> East Yorks & 10<sup>th</sup> Yorkshires

63<sup>rd</sup> Brigade: 8<sup>th</sup> Lincolns, 8<sup>th</sup> Somerset Light Infantry, 12<sup>th</sup> West Yorks & 10<sup>th</sup> Yorks & Lancs

64<sup>th</sup> Brigade: 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> KOYLI & 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry

Although the Army now had some land, they had to provide the entire infrastructure. Second Boer War era (c1900) bell tents were taken out of store and at least 1,500 of them were used at Halton. Senior officers had a tent to themselves, junior officers were two per tent and privates were up to 19 per tent. The first few weeks were like a happy Boy Scout camp, until it started to rain.

The Division was commanded by Lt-Gen Sir Edward Hutton one of the so called 'dug-out' retired officers who volunteered at the outbreak of the war. He was not one of the best examples of these men. After the Battle of Mons, many reserve officers were summoned to the Front. Therefore, many officers for the New Armies came from India Army officers who were on leave in Britain at the time (and were prevented from returning to India by Kitchener) and from former members of Officer Training Corps (OTCs). [The article by Geoff Spring, later, is about one such officer]. The OTCs were formed in the early 1900s at Grammar & Public Schools and provided rudimentary knowledge required by officers and former members received letters offering them commissions in the New Armies. These officers could also have developed general leadership skills from playing team sports at school. As a result, there were only about eight experienced officers per Brigade in the New Armies!

There was also a shortage of senior NCOs. There were some reservists and men wounded early in the war, but many had to be selected from the volunteers. A number of strategies were used by the young officers to do this. One approach was to ask "has anyone ever been in charge of anyone?", or "does anyone want to be in charge of anyone?". One officer chose men with moustaches as NCOs so that he could recognise them! In the event this was a good decision as it transpired that in a Battalion comprised mainly of miners, the men with moustaches were above-ground supervisors; men below ground did not have moustaches as the coal dust collected in them.

A month after the men arrived at Halton, about 40 deserters from the 14<sup>th</sup> DLI were arrested by the police in Milton Keynes. These men said that they would rather go to prison than back to their battalion and starve. It seems that although the Army provided food, this particular battalion was not distributing it properly. Initially rifles were in short supply with a small number of old SMLEs, more Second Boer War Lee-Enfield but even more wooden drill rifles. By 28<sup>th</sup> October 1914, 'Kitchener Blue' uniforms started to arrive. As there was a shortage of khaki cloth (one of the dye constituents was sourced from Germany) these blue uniforms of a Post Office pattern were provided. Webbing equipment was also in short supply until more machinery to make it was bought from the USA so leather equipment was issued. The Infantry Training Manual detailed three stages of training: (1) Developing soldierly spirit (not too difficult with a



volunteer Division), (2) develop the body (even the fit miners were not fit enough for long marches with packs), (3) training with rifle, bayonet & spade.

The winter of 1914-15 was one of the wettest on record and Halton Camp was on a flood plain. It was said that each tent was issued with a shovel to remove liquid mud! As a result of these conditions, the men were dispersed to billets in places such as Leighton Buzzard and Amersham etc.. The Battalions sent to Aylesbury and Tring were actually sent to the wrong towns and as a result of Army bureaucracy they had to swap over. The battalion moving to Tring as a result, found that the residents were not particularly friendly; two men were forced to strip and wash in a back yard before they were allowed into the house. It transpired that the departing battalion had said that the incoming men were 'lousy'! After this, relations improved with the money for billeting the men being good. Another example of how well relations developed is that one landlady and her two daughters were all pregnant when the battalion left.

Meanwhile, at Halton Camp, McAlpine was contracted to build huts but it took until April for them to be finished. Part of the problem was the large number of employees who had volunteered for the Army. There were three hutted camps, one for each Brigade. Also in April 1915, Lt-Gen Hutton was replaced by Lt-Gen George Forestier-Walker, a veteran of the fighting at Le Cateau. He started to prepare the men for the war in earnest with route marches of over 20 miles long (in the course of which some men died). He also got more rifles and started the men digging practice trenches. It was said that Kitchener men made as much progress in 10 months as regulars in two years.

In September 1915 the Division left for France, including a local man, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Alexander Jamieson who had volunteered as locally as a Quarter Master. The 21<sup>st</sup> Division fought at Loos and suffered massive casualties. It suffered more casualties than any other Division throughout the war. After the 21<sup>st</sup> left, the East Anglian Reserve Division was at Halton Camp. There was a fixed body of instructors training recruits and men returning from injury and it became a 'them-and-us' camp with many of the instructors never having been to the Front. The local people benefitted economically from the Camp. For example, there were seven coffee booths between Halton Camp and Princes Risborough.

### **Soldiers Remembered: Pte George William MIDDLETON, Ox & Bucks LI Eton**

Private George William Middleton who died of wounds 20<sup>th</sup> May 1917 aged 19. He was serving with 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Ox & Bucks Light Infantry. The 5<sup>th</sup> were part of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade in the 14<sup>th</sup> Light Division. Where he received the injuries has not been discovered but it is possible that they were around Fosseux whilst the 5<sup>th</sup> were attacking the Harp or later near Vis en Artois. George was living on Brocas St, Eton with his parents and is remembered on Eton Memorial Gates. He was buried in Mont Huon Military Cemetery, Le Treport, Seine Maritime.

### **Gordon Haswell – An Officer of the 21<sup>st</sup> Division**

*Harrow County School, a state grammar School, was opened in January 1911. Former peoples of the School are known as "Old Gaytonians". Nineteen Old Gaytonians died in the service of their country in World War One, sixteen were boys who attended the School, one was a member of the School's support staff and two were masters.*

*In this piece I have followed the convention of the time that boys and masters at Harrow County School were referred to by their surname.*

Gordon Haswell, an Assistant Master at the School, was the first Old Gaytonian to be killed in the First World War.



Gordon Haswell was born in Sunderland on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1892. He was the first child of his parents, Robert and Jessie. He had two brothers, Frederick born in 1895, and Robert



born in 1900. Fredrick, a Lieutenant in the East Yorkshire Regiment, was killed in action at Ypres on April 23rd 1915, aged 19 years.

Haswell's first school between 1898 and 1900 was Chester Road, Sunderland Elementary School. In 1900 he moved to Bede Collegiate School, in 1907 he achieved Oxford L Senior Honours, in 1908, London Matriculation, leaving in July 1909.

In September 1910, Haswell went to Armstrong College, Durham University, now Newcastle University, studying Latin & English leaving in July 1913 with a 2<sup>nd</sup> class Honours B.A. (Dunelm) degree and a Diploma in the

Theory and Practice of Primary Teaching.

For his College, he edited the College Magazine, was Sports Champion and a Member of the Cricket and Football teams. He also represented Durham University in inter-university debates.

At Armstrong College Haswell was a member of the Officer Training Corps passing War Certificate A. He also played the Piano & Organ and was a Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music

Haswell was appointed an Assistant Master, a salary of £130 per annum with £10 increments, at the County School Harrow on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1913. He was to teach to:

Lower 1 and Upper 1B: English & History.

Lower 1: Arithmetic & Writing

Lower 4<sup>th</sup>: History

Outside of School, Haswell was Organist and Choir master of Roxeth Christ Church.

Haswell volunteered for the Army during August 1914.

In his application to the War Office, dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 1914, Haswell said "he had a "fair" ability to ride" and asked to join the Infantry, as for unit he asked for: "Any, Middlesex preferably". Haswell application was supported by Major J. Morrow, Chairman of the Durham University Military Education Committee (M.E.C), who said:

*Gordon Haswell is recommended by the M.E.C. as a suitable candidate for appointment to a Commission in the Regular Army for the period of the war.*

The report of his medical examination by R.H. Clement, Major RAMC said:

|                   |                   |         |           |               |         |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------|-----------|---------------|---------|
| Age last birthday | 22                | Height  | 67 inches | Weight        | 149 lbs |
| Chest             | 36½ Max    33 Min | Hearing | good      | Teeth         | Good;   |
| Remarks           | Fit               | Vision  | both 6/6  | Colour vision | normal; |

The London Gazette of 22 September, 1914 says:

*The undermentioned Cadets and ex-Cadets of the Officers Training Corps to be temporary Second Lieutenants, dated 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1914:*

*Gordon Haswell.*

There were 191 officers commissioned as temporary Second Lieutenants in this London Gazette.

The October 1914 Army List shows in the list of the officers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (9<sup>th</sup> KOYLI):

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant G Haswell.





The men of the 9<sup>th</sup> KOYLI were recruited from volunteers, mainly miners, for Kitchener's Army living in the West Riding of Yorkshire centered on Dewsbury in late August and September 1914. They were sent to Berkhamsted and formed into two units; 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> KOYLI in the 64<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Division, a K3 unit. In 1914 an Infantry Division required for its twelve Infantry Brigades 387 officers, but only 14 officers in the whole Division has previous Regular Army experience. In October 1914, 9<sup>th</sup> KOYLI had one Lieutenant Colonel and eleven 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants. 9<sup>th</sup> KOYLI were initially billeted in Aylesbury and then moved to Halton, near Tring for their Initial training.

The London Gazette Issue of 16 July 1915 shows:

*Temporary Lieutenant Gordon Haswell to be temporary Captain, Dated 28th June.* The 21<sup>st</sup> Division moved to France in early September 1915 and went into action, in an ill planned attack, on the second day of the Battle of Loos on 26<sup>th</sup> September, suffering 3,853 casualties. 9<sup>th</sup> KOYLI casualties were 216 with 37 killed; one officer was awarded an immediate Military Cross and the Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Lynch, the Distinguished Service Order.

The 1915-18 "The Gaytonian" the School's Magazine, published ten times a year, often included articles from Old Gaytonians serving in the Forces. The January 1916 Gaytonian included an article by Haswell describing how he with another officer and a private stalked and killed a German sniper who caused three casualties to Haswell's Company.

For the Battle of the Somme planned for July 1916, the 21<sup>st</sup> Division was in the XV<sup>th</sup> Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General Horne, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Army commanded by General Rawlinson.

On the eve of the Battle of the Somme, the of 9<sup>th</sup> KOYLI officers met for one last time before going up to the trenches opposite Fricourt. Their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Lynch was not a popular commanding officer, Lancelot Spicer, then an officer in the battalion, recalled the incident in his memoirs:

*At about 6pm on June 28th all officers received a summons to go to Battalion HQ for a final drink before going into action. We assembled, glasses were put into our hands, drinks were passed round and we drank quietly to one another – everyone was naturally feeling strained. The Adjutant and Second-in-command were away on some course, so the Acting Adjutant, Keay, was in charge. Lynch came into the room and was given a glass. Keay went up to Haswell, the senior Captain, and said quietly to him,*

*'I think you should propose the CO's health!'*

*'I'm damned if I will', said Haswell 'I don't wish him good health and am not prepared to be insincere on this occasion.'*

*'You must', said Keay.*

*'I won't.', said Haswell.*

*For a few moments they argued, and then Haswell stepped forward and raising his glass said:*

*'Gentlemen, I give you the toast of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, and in particular the 9th Battalion of the Regiment' – a slight pause –*

*'Gentleman, when the barrage lifts...'*

*We emptied our glasses and were silent. Dramatically, Haswell had avoided an unpleasant scene, and the toast has never been forgotten.*

*Letters from the Front 1915-16: author: L D Spicer: publisher: Robert York 1979.*



On 1st July 1916 at 07.25. Captain Haswell commanding B Company of 9<sup>th</sup> KOYLI, leading the Battalion's second wave, was killed by a shot in the head. Of the Battalion's thirty officers, twenty-four went into action on 1<sup>st</sup> July in the attack on Fricourt. The officer casualties were: twelve killed, including Lynch and Haswell, three died of wounds, eight were wounded, one slightly. Only one officer was untouched. Over Rank Casualties were 383 with 178 killed. Haswell is buried in Norfolk Cemetery: Becordel-Becourt.

### Geoff Spring



Gordon Haswell's Grave



Norfolk Cemetery Becordel-Becourt

### Forthcoming Events

#### **3rd Ypres Commemoration Tour**

This tour, in conjunction with Rifleman Tours will be between 30th July and 2nd August 2017. More details are available from Nigel. If you may be interested please note the dates now and let Nigel know of your interest.

#### **Bucks FHS Open Day – 29<sup>th</sup> July**

As usual, the Branch will be exhibiting at this event in Aylesbury and any help for all or some of the day would be welcome. Please see me if you are able to help. Thank you.

- David Adamson

#### **Oxford FHS Open Day – 7<sup>th</sup> October**

The Branch will also be attending the event at Woodstock, as usual, later in the year. Again if anyone can help please see me.

- David Adamson

#### 2017-2018 Committee

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**Chairman & Newsletter Editor - David Adamson (adtm@btinternet.com)**

**Treasurer – Lance Hale**

**Committee Members – Norman Bonney, Val Crompton, Nigel Crompton, & Jacqui Ward**

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Meetings: The Guide Centre, School Lane, **Chalfont St. Giles.** HP8 4JJ  
Starting at 2:30

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