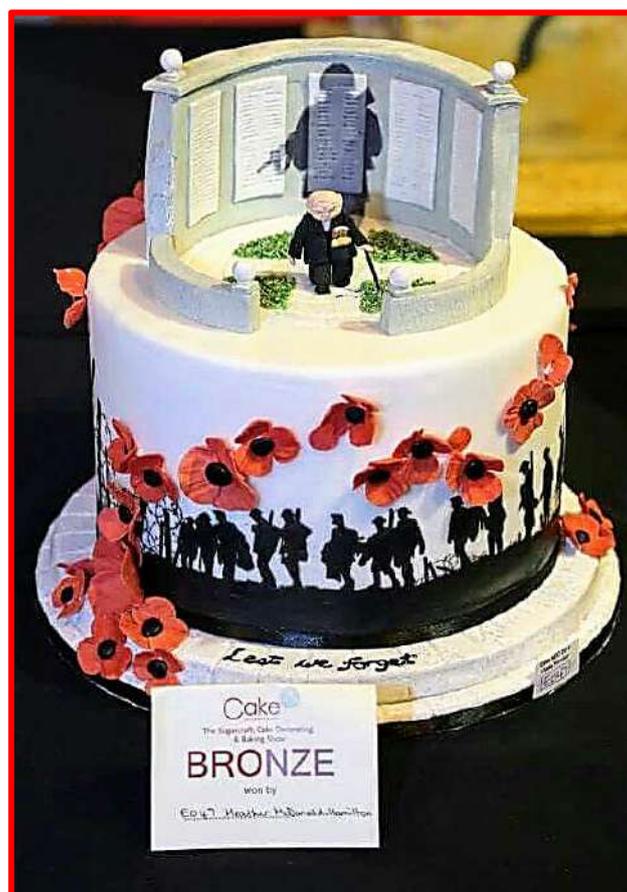


# THE TIGER



*“Remembrance” . . . on a plate!*

**THE NEWSLETTER OF  
THE LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND BRANCH  
OF THE  
WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION  
ISSUE 103**

## CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

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

With the national lockdown, as far as “hospitality” is concerned, continuing into at least early July, once again we find ourselves having to cancel our proposed Branch Meetings and continue to communicate via the pages of “The Tiger”. Many Members, I know, are using their enforced isolation in a positive manner, finally getting around to tackling those “rainy day” tasks around the house and garden that had always been postponed in the past! Having personally shredded enough obsolete paperwork to keep the entire cast of *Watership Down* in comfortable bedding for a number of months, our continued “captivity” has at least proved to have some value, although the opportunity to return to the more traditional activity of creating a Newsletter has provided a much welcome respite from more destructive activities!

Creativity has certainly been displayed in the case of our cover photograph, a “Remembrance Cake” created by one Heather Macdonald Hamilton whose decorative skills with icing are much to be commended. This particular gem was forwarded to us from Ken and Pat Ranger in Southampton, regular Pilgrims with Valerie and myself on our *Friends of Flanders Tours* Armistice visits to the Ypres Salient. Although this masterpiece was created in 2016 (and gained the Bronze prize) for The International Sugarcraft Cake Decorating and Baking Competition, Heather remains active in this field and images of other “Remembrance Cakes” can be found on the internet. Needless to say, the 2020 Cake Decorating Competition has already been cancelled due to the current pandemic . . .

Moving on to other activities, members may like to know that Lynn Roffee has created a chronological index of all articles appearing in the previous 102 issues of “The Tiger”. Lynn has generously offered to share her work with any interested Members and electronic copies can be obtained from Valerie and myself upon request via [foft@live.co.uk](mailto:foft@live.co.uk)

A recent message received from Derek Simmonds, our County Town Representative for Melton Mowbray, advised us that Derek will be ceasing his Membership of the WFA to concentrate on alternative interests and projects. A valued supporter of the Branch, despite his absence from our Meetings for a considerable time, Derek will, however, continue to receive “The Tiger” and thus follow our activities.

I am grateful to Peter Spooner for advising me of the recent passing of David Taylor in Colchester. David was a regular attendee in our early years and continued to “sing our praises” after a move to Essex to be nearer to his family. Once again, David kept in touch via continued receipt of “The Tiger” and we offer our condolences to his family and friends.

Finally, take care, stay safe and remain healthy until we can meet again . . .

D.S.H.

## **NOTHING ESCAPES THE GAZE . . .** **by Valerie Jacques**

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day undoubtedly brought forward many memories of our own parents, grandparents and great grandparents with many a treasured black and white photograph being re-examined and proudly displayed on 8<sup>th</sup> May. Thoughts of my own paternal grandfather came to mind and of how older members of the family would always speak of him with much affection and regret at his loss. The fortunes of war denied me the pleasure of knowing him personally as his ship was sunk by a U-boat in 1941 and he died two weeks later from pneumonia in a Liverpool hospital having been rescued from the Atlantic Ocean.

Born in Sheffield in October 1903, William Joseph Jacques joined the Royal Navy in July 1919 to escape, amongst other things, extreme poverty and difficulties at home. He signed up for a period of twelve years and his MOD record confirms that he stood a diminutive 5ft 3ins tall, had a 37ins chest, auburn hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion. His character was described as “very good throughout” and he was awarded three Good Conduct Badges in 1924, 1929 and 1940 and presented with the Royal Navy Long Service and Good Conduct Medal. Discharged to shore in October 1933, his service having expired, he worked for the General Post Office until, with the advent of WWII, he was re-mobilised and, within two years, had made the supreme sacrifice.

Very few of his personal possessions survive but, upon emptying my parent’s property some years ago, an unexpected discovery was made for there in the drawer of a small cabinet was a long neglected and forgotten brown envelope. Inside was a series of postcards, nautical characters of high quality, which had once belonged to him. I have researched the artist, who, to my surprise, had a quite brilliant military career serving in the French Navy during the Great War. It occurred to me that you, our readers, may be interested in his story. If so, read on . . .

### **COMMANDER CHARLES MILLOT a.k.a. HENRI GERVÈSE**

Charles Marie Joseph Millot (right) was born at Vesoul, Haute Saône, Eastern France, on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1880. Spending part of his childhood in Paris he became attracted to a future naval career due to many of his new school friends being the sons of serving officers and sailors. In 1897, at the age of 16, he was received into the *École Navale* (French Naval Academy for Officers) and, having shown an artistic talent from an early age, soon began sending correspondence to his parents decorated with humorous sketches depicting the rigid discipline of the Academy.



His brilliant naval career, which would see him cross many seas and oceans, had begun and in 1899 he passed out a creditable 6<sup>th</sup>, from his class of 60, aboard the training ship *Le Borda* at Brest. He then spent a year serving on the training frigate *Iphigénie* before being sent to the Gulf of Tonkin (off the coast of southern China) in 1900. A 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant by 1902, he was assigned to the battle cruiser *Dupliex* before choosing gunnery as his speciality and finishing his training aboard the gunnery training ship *La Couronne* between 1907 and 1909. In 1913 he returned to China in command of the gunboat *Doudart de Lagrée* and was sent to patrol the River Yangtze.

At the outbreak of the Great War, Millot was seconded to the staff of Admiral John de Robeck RN serving as Liaison Officer with the British Eastern Mediterranean Fleet. This included a period with the Dardanelles Squadron based at Mudros, on the Greek island of Lemnos, during the Gallipoli Campaign. He travelled out aboard the French Messageries Maritimes liner *Australie* with Captain (later Commodore and Admiral of the Fleet) Sir Roger Keyes who, in his memoirs, described Millot as “*always a good companion*”.

On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1915 Millot distinguished himself by displaying “*the most brilliant courage*” during the sinking of the battleship *HMS Ocean* and was awarded the Croix de Guerre and, later, the Medaille Commemorative des Dardanelles. *Ocean* had struck a floating mine and sank in Morto Bay following the rescue of her crew by destroyers *Jed*, *Colne* and *Chelmer* and, although relieved that the crew had all been saved, he was disheartened at the loss of his collection of watercolours, sketches, paints and brushes.



*Outside VIII Corps HQ at Tekke Burnu, near Seddulbahir, Turkey, December 1915  
Lieut Millot is second from right with Brig-General Street, Commodore Keyes, General  
Davies, and Colonel Aspinal*

In July 1916 Millot took his first command aboard anti-submarine sloop *Algol*. She was part of the *Arabis Class* being one of eight sloops specifically commissioned by the French Navy. All named after stars, (*Algol*, the Demon Star, is a three star system in the constellation Perseus) they were built by Barclay Curie at Whiteinch on the Clyde. Millot then went on to escort convoys around the coast of Africa being promoted to the rank of Lieutenant - Commander in July 1918, becoming Commander in October 1919.

This brilliant naval career ran parallel to Millot's first love, art, and he made a separate name for himself as a draughtsman and painter under the nom de plume, Henri Gervése. He provided drawings for various newspapers such as *Le Rire*, *Fantasio* and *La Vie Parisienne* and, in 1918, whilst frequenting the literary and artistic circles of Paris, met his future wife, one Françoise Brisson. They would marry the following year.

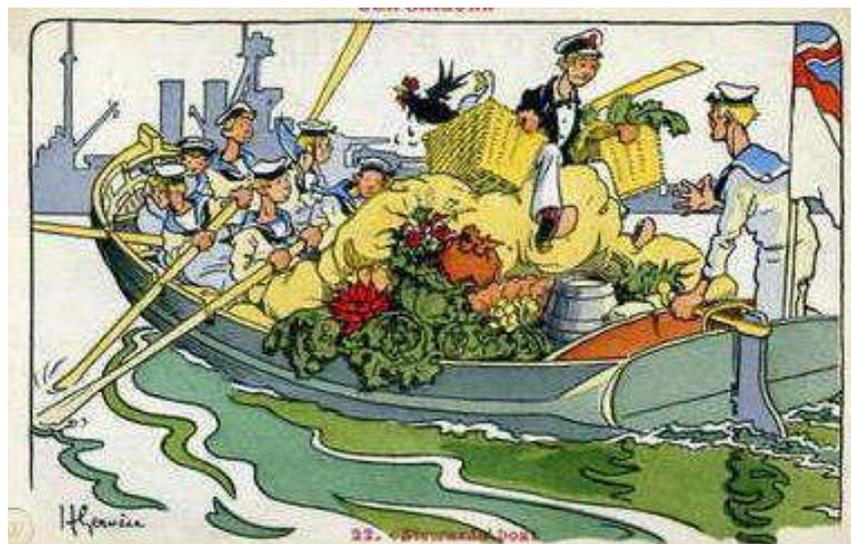


*The marriage of Capitaine Charles Millot and Madame Françoise Millot, née Brisson 19<sup>th</sup> June 1919, Notre Dame de Lorette, Paris*

An exceptional portrait painter and watercolourist, Millot was named “Official Artist of the French Navy” in 1921. In 1923, aged 43, he resigned his commission leaving with the rank of Commandant and joined the French Messageries Maritimes Lines as “Inspecteur des Ports de la Mer du Nord” operating out of Antwerp. Two years later he was hired by a company managing the shipping lines of the South Atlantic becoming, in 1931, their General Agent in Buenos Aires. He then settled permanently in Argentina becoming Naval Attaché in 1939 with painting and drawing continuing to occupy a prominent place in his life.

He died in 1959, aged 79, and lies at Saint Ferjeux Cemetery, Besançon near the French border with Switzerland, his body having been returned aboard the liner *Claude Bernard*.

Millot/Gervése has since been favourably compared to Belgian cartoonist, Georges Prosper Remi (known by the pen name Hergé and best known for creating *The Adventures of Tintin*). He has left us with hundreds of works ranging from commissions for advertising and calendars, beautiful portraits and landscapes (many of his exotic travels) as well as, of course, his wonderful cartoons and postcards. Relatively unknown outside France his comical observations of naval life were depicted in a variety of sets on the theme “Our Sailors” and adapted for English, Russian and Argentinean mariners. Apart from their obvious humorous appeal, his illustrations and paintings, despite his light and delicate touch, were drawn with such attention to detail that they evoked not only feelings of admiration, but also of tenderness and sympathy, as indeed they continue to do today. He was so adept at capturing, in just a few strokes, the very essence of a personality that it was said: *nothing escapes the gaze of Gervése*.



*“The Steward’s Boat” 1916*

I will be pleased to bring my Grandad Billie’s collection of Henri’s postcards to the next meeting (whenever that may be) if anyone would like to see them.

## INDIGENOUS SOLDIERS IN THE A.I.F. DURING THE GREAT WAR by Lynn Roffee

This article provides a brief overview of the Australian Indigenous People's role in the First World War. It started with a trip to Melbourne where the author was interested in looking at the medal records and noticed what appeared to be a low number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men receiving gallantry medals. In appreciating why this was the case, the author discovered it is important to first understand the rules that were in force over a century ago, and the context of why so few of the Indigenous population served during First World War.

When Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, the Australian Government pledged their assistance. Most Australians greeted the news with enthusiasm and both men and women were keen to join up. There was no shortage of recruits and there was no quota system in place in Australia. However, under the then Australian constitution, Aboriginal people were not recognised as citizens, and this did not change until 1967, so they were not considered as eligible to be soldiers when the First World War broke out. The 1903 Defence Act specifically exempted those "*not of substantial European descent*" from service in the cadets and the militia.

In 1914, when Indigenous Australians tried to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.) they were rejected on the grounds of their race and it was illegal for them to enlist. However, some managed to enlist, possibly due to having fairer skin tones. In operation, the Medical Officers had the final say on who may enlist, and some may well have knowingly turned a blind eye to men they knew to be of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.



*The Torres Strait Islands*

In 1916, new recruiting guidance for enlisting officers stated that "*Aboriginals, half-castes or men with Asiatic blood*" were not to be enlisted. It is estimated according to 1901 figures that there were some 93,000 Indigenous people within the Australian population. According to the [Indigenoushistories.com](http://Indigenoushistories.com) website (as at 5<sup>th</sup> October 2019), 1,127 Indigenous Volunteers have been identified who served in the AIF during the Great War. The exact figure may never be known as records of soldier's race were not kept; however, research continues, and the figure is slowly increasing with more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers being identified.

The Australian War Memorial (AWM) continues to try and find out the names of those that enlisted to ensure records accurately reflect those who served. Previous research undertaken by Phillipa Scarlett and David Huggunson supports their work. Researchers and volunteers have obtained background information from service records which indicates Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage and have also received information from descendants of the men. Enlisted men in all of the Australian Defence Forces were not asked whether or not they were of Indigenous background. It appears that before the 1970s little was known and publicised about the presence

of Indigenous people who served in the Defence Forces. Further research continues to be undertaken by the AWM, Phillipa, David and other volunteers into the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers, men who are believed to have served at Gallipoli. Research undertaken has shown that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers involved in the Gallipoli campaign is about 70 men of which 13 were killed.

Many Indigenous men wanted to serve their country for a variety of reasons. Patriotic duty may have been a pull; however, it was more likely that they became aware of an opportunity to escape being in the forced poor living conditions in encampments and townships and avoiding facing aspects of the continual discrimination that was common in the era. Indigenous people had few rights and were not treated equally; many were not employed, and if they were, they were not paid equivalently with similarly-skilled non-indigenous staff. Due to their status as non-citizens, they were not entitled to vote and nor were they eligible to be recorded in the Census. Within such context it is clear that the offer of 6 shillings a day was good pay, received by all members of the AIF, meaning that Indigenous soldiers were paid and thus treated equally, irrespective of their heritage. Such pay, on par with other Australian soldiers, was a lot more than the British Soldier received. Indigenous Australian's serving during the Great War had the same enlistment terms as the other men, though after the war when Indigenous men were out of uniform, they did not continue to enjoy the same opportunities and their return to civilian life was a return to higher levels of discrimination in employment and general societal mistreatment.

By October 1917 with the war dragging on, and the falsity of the glamour of fighting for country revealed, non-Indigenous recruits were hard to find and a new conscription referendum had been held and lost. The enlistment rules in a further Military Order stated that *“half-castes may be enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force provided that the examining Medical Officers are satisfied that one of the parents is of European origin”*.

It is unsurprising with the levels of discrimination faced, that the number of Indigenous men who received gallantry medals is very low, and the author only found three Indigenous men who had received the D.C.M. However, this number may rise, though it is likely to be only a small number, as other researchers identify men of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage.

It is perhaps appropriate to pick out the names and service histories of just three Indigenous men; Albert, William and Joseph, who happened to be brothers; two of whom independently received Gallantry Awards. Albert Knight was the first of three brothers to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force, followed by William, and finally Joseph, the last brother to enlist.

Albert was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1894 on Toorale Station near Louth, New South Wales to John and Elizabeth Knight with the suggestion that Elizabeth was of European descent. Albert worked as a bushman on various stations in the Bourke area until he enlisted in the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion AIF, Service No. 5709 on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1915 at Dubbo New South Wales. He embarked on his journey to Europe from Sydney on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1916 aboard *HMT Clan McGillivray*. Albert joined the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion which was located near Ypres on October 1916.

Records suggest that during an attack by the British and Empire forces on German forces in the village of Bullecourt, Albert was wounded in the face by shrapnel on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1917 and was hospitalised. He rejoined his Battalion shortly afterwards until, it is alleged, William got him into the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion in September that year. Albert was promoted to Lance Corporal after outstanding service at Passchendaele where he was a noted scout. In May 1918, whilst serving on the Somme,

Albert was wounded in action. His injuries were sufficient to warrant two months in hospital in France before he returned to the front in July.

Albert was promoted to temporary Corporal the next month and took part in the attack on the village of Bony on the Hindenburg Line on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1918. He won a Distinguished Conduct Medal for his action with the citation reading:



*Albert Knight*  
(AWM Ref. P01703.001)

*Corporal Albert Knight "handled his Lewis Gun section with great skill and worked forward to a suitable position and handed over to No. 1. And proceeded with another N.C.O. to push forward and reconnoitre the enemy position. This necessitated moving over country which afforded no cover other than shell holes, for a distance of 300 yards. This was carried out in broad daylight and in full view of enemy lines and under heavy machine-gun fire trench mortar and artillery fire. Despite difficulties, he succeeded in reaching a position which he located several machine guns and trench mortars which were at times playing on our position. He then returned to our lines with valuable information which he had obtained and artillery assistance was brought to bear with success on the positions indicated.*

He was promoted to full Corporal on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1918. In July 1919, Albert returned to Australia aboard the transport ship *HMAT Nestor* returning to bush work around the Bourke areas. He died in Brewarrina, NSW on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and is buried in the local cemetery.

William (known as Bill) Albert Knight, the eldest brother, was born in Bourke on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1893. Bill worked as a labourer and he was 23 years old when he enlisted in Adelaide on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1916. He joined the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion A.I.F, Service No.105 and embarked aboard *HMAT Afric* on 9<sup>th</sup> June that year. He was hospitalised on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1916 in France and was then wounded in action on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1917, sustaining a gunshot wound to his leg. Bill returned to his Battalion, in the field on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1917. He was promoted to Lance Corporal on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1917.

Bill was wounded in action for a second time and sustained a gunshot wound to his right wrist at Broodseinde on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1917. He was admitted to the 56<sup>th</sup> General Hospital at Etaples and then on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1917 sent to England aboard the hospital ship *Peter de Connick*. Bill was admitted to the 1<sup>st</sup> London General Hospital - RAMC at Camberwell; followed by another transfer to Harefield Hospital. According to Bill's medical case sheet, "*he got a g.s.w. (gun shot wound) through lower end of right arm just above the wrist joint. A missile passed through laterally in front of both bones. Wounds healed, scars small and firm. The only disability present is that he can bend the fingers only slightly*".

Bill was discharged to Weymouth without furlough and returned home aboard the *Kenilworth Castle* on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1918 for medical discharge due to his injury. His total service was 2 years 176 days and his service abroad was 1 year 345 days. Bill was acknowledged for his bravery for his actions in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of Ypres and was awarded the Military Medal, which was gazetted on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1918. The War Diary for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, (Appendix 4), reads:

*Honours and Awards, Ypres, October 1917, No.105 L/Cpl W A Knight:  
On 4<sup>th</sup> October N of Zonnebeke by his determined and intelligent use of his Lewis Gun, he effectively silenced the enemy MGs and facilitated the advance of his platoon."*

Joseph Knight, a shearer, enlisted on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1916 at Dubbo, N.S.W. as Service No. 6763 and served with the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion A.I.F. He embarked on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1916 at Sydney aboard the *SS Port Nicholson* and disembarked at Devonport on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1917 where he was marched into the 4<sup>th</sup> Training Battalion at Codford. He died of acute pneumonia at the Isolation Hospital in Salisbury on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1917, one month after arriving in England. He was buried on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1917 at St Lawrence Church, Stratford Sub Castle, Wiltshire.

**CASUALTY FORM—ACTIVE SERVICE.**

6763  
D 2110

Regimental No. *6763* Regiment or Corps *13<sup>th</sup> Battalion* Rank *Private* Name *Knight* *Joseph*

Enlisted (a) \_\_\_\_\_ Term of Service (a) \_\_\_\_\_ Service reckons from (a) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Promotion to present rank \_\_\_\_\_ Date of appointment to lance rank \_\_\_\_\_ Numerical position on roll of N.C.O.'s \_\_\_\_\_

Extended \_\_\_\_\_ Re-engaged \_\_\_\_\_ Qualification (b) \_\_\_\_\_

Report		Remarks, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 26, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 26, or other official documents.
Date	From whom received.				
	4.0.1917	4.0.1917	W. St. Michael's (Cathedral) (London)	10.1.17	(D. 2110)
14/1/17	4.0.1917	Marched on from	Codford	11.1.17	6763/131/2/1/3/4-17
15/2/17	15.2.17	Admitted to	W. St. Lawrence Church, Salisbury	13.2.17	6763/131/2/1/3/4-17
16/2/17	16.2.17	Died of acute pneumonia	Salisbury	16.2.17	0.15.1.1204 2.0.2.15.1/4/17
19/2/17	19.2.17	Buried at Stratford Sub Castle Churchyard in Salisbury	Salisbury	19.2.17	6763 2.0.2.15.1-5-17

(a) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or enlisted into section D, Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered.  
(b) e.g., Signaller, Riding Smith, etc., etc., also special qualifications in technical Corps duties. [P.T.O.]

*Casualty Form Active Service for Private Joseph Knight*



*The CWGC plot at St Lawrence Church, Stratford Sub Castle, which includes the grave of Private Joseph Knight*

The contribution made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men during the Great War seems to have had a low profile when comparing to others. It is hoped that this article arouses further interest into their role during the Great War and beyond.

*References available upon request*

## ON THE NOTICEBOARD

### A PREVIOUS PANDEMIC

We are indebted to Denis Kenyon for making us aware of an absolutely cracking film available on YouTube entitled:

#### *Leicester's Influenza Epidemic 1918-1919*

At just short of 28 minutes in length, this comprehensive account of a previous pandemic contains many superb images of Leicester just over a century ago and has fascinating comparisons to our present situation. We thoroughly recommended it to our readers.



The film can be found by activating the following link:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsixXeSwTp4&t=273s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsixXeSwTp4&t=273s)

### V.E.DAY REMEMBERED



Congratulations to all who, despite the current lockdown, emerged undaunted to decorate their houses and local memorials in commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of V.E. Day on Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> May. Our photographs show the War Memorial at Hallaton, suitably adorned by Denis Kenyon and including portraits of the village's four fatalities.



## DIGGING IN FOR SHEER SURVIVAL

by Roy-Anthony Birch

In making every attempt to avoid overuse of the word “inevitable”, I will instead say that it is perhaps unsurprising that I continue to discover parallels between the current Corona crisis and the great conflagration of a little over a century ago. And I am indeed unlikely to be alone in doing so. Hence, as I resume my horticultural theme from last month’s “TIGER”, I am again reminded of similarities, tempered by differences, between the two; of how the demands of daily living – the very business of survival, remain essentially the same, while the exigencies of a radically altered world presage a new and unfathomable normality.

A statement issued to its members by the President of the Royal Horticultural Society, Field Marshal Lord Francis Grenfell (1841-1925), sought to address the dichotomy of a world on the verge of war. Remembered still for his unveiling of Leicester’s Town Hall Square Boer War Memorial in July 1908, His Lordship’s insightfulness and entreaties towards the “new normality” of September 1914 bear an uncanny resemblance to the dilemma we face today in asking to what extent business can or ought to continue as usual: viz; -



*Field Marshall  
Francis Grenfell*

The President and Council of the Royal Horticultural Society feel very keenly that in troublous times such as we are at present passing through, (and which, although we by no means expect it, may possibly become even more acute), counsels of perfection cannot always be carried into effect. It is nonetheless the duty of those who are placed in a responsible position and who can exercise any influence, to give the best advice in their power, leaving it to the conscience and judgment of individuals to act upon it so far as they are able. It is already evident that not only actual gardeners, but all who in any way depend for a living on horticulture and its produce, will be certain to suffer seriously from the indirect effects of the War.

We desire, therefore, to point out to all Fellows of the Society, firstly that garden produce may, in the winter and early spring, become of inestimable value to themselves and to their poorer neighbours who have little if any garden of their own. Secondly, we contend that dismissing gardeners, canceling orders, and refraining from planting etc., must inevitably result in creating a vast amount of additional unemployment and distress.

While rightly denying oneself all unnecessary luxuries it is, in our opinion, an act of the highest patriotism to live our normal lives as far as possible, cultivating the same area of land, employing the same staff, and transacting in fact all our usual business and household arrangements. To act otherwise will, of necessity, throw numbers of men and women out of useful and remunerative work; they having speedily exhausted their own very slender resources, to eventually become dependent upon the poor rate or on the almost equally undesirable provision of indiscriminate almsgiving.

Notions of the suffering likely to be visited on those who “*depend for a living on horticulture*” have a particular immediacy for those attempting to maintain garden centres or promote flower and produce shows in 2020, and not merely through the “*indirect effects*” of what many characterise as our contemporary war. (Devotees will already have mourned the loss of the Malvern Spring Festival and feel “robbed” of the Chelsea, Chatsworth, and Tatton Park displays, except possibly on line, and perhaps be bracing themselves for the loss of the Malvern Autumn Festival also). Likewise, the sensitivity expressed towards those having “*little if any garden of*

*their own*” in the R.H.S.’s 1914 statement touches not only on an inability to benefit from the fruits of one’s own labours, but also on the therapeutic or even the cathartic value of tending one’s own patch; increasingly esteemed as a safety-valve in the present lockdown. As to Lord Grenfell’s strictures regarding the downside of dismissing gardeners and cancelling orders etc., parallels with the current situation are sufficiently obvious to require no embellishment, save to say that the slightly later reference to “*men and women*” in this contest is indeed commendable.

Not quite business as usual, then; but a principle to be followed as closely as possible by its Fellows as well as “*actual gardeners*”, according to the Royal Horticultural Society Council. One of the leading commercial enterprises of the day was at least as forthright in its determination to maintain its public profile and retain market share by adherence to the same maxim. Advertised as “Inspiring Gardeners Since 1806”, the firm of Suttons Seeds (otherwise known as The House of Sutton) issued the following “Letter To Our Customers” from their original base in Berkshire in 1914. Its opening paragraph surely carries something of a foreshadowing of the Job Retention Scheme of our own day, but with the greater emphases and indeed difference here seeming to be that the costs were shouldered by the private sector rather than accruing to the national exchequer; Separation Allowances notwithstanding: viz; -

It will be a satisfaction to those who have, for so many years, supported our House, to know that we have been able to maintain our large staff on full time and on full pay even though, for several months, the demand for seeds is never in any way commensurate with the heavy weekly wages bill. No fewer than 75 of our employees have responded to the call of their King and Country. Their places have been kept open and assistance given to the dependents of married men.

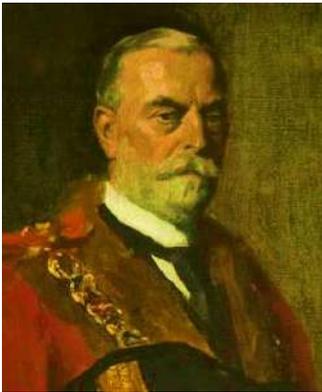
The strategic position of Reading; its comparative proximity to Southampton and Portsmouth, and its direct communication with all parts of the kingdom, have naturally resulted in considerable numbers of troops passing through the town. By adapting certain portions of our large premises and providing Recreation Rooms, we have the satisfaction of knowing that much has been and still is being done to maintain that healthy and moral tone so essential to the welfare and training of His Majesty’s troops. (In apparently continuing to refer to H.M.’s troops rather than its own workforce, while simultaneously congratulating themselves on their bespoke facilities, Suttons’ letter concluded) . . . The picture would appear to indicate that the men are not slow to appreciate the opportunities afforded them.

Quite how support for Suttons’ employees’ dependants sat alongside what we would call “State Aid” - Separation Allowances, for example, is, to me, currently unclear. What is plain enough, however, is that Suttons were keen to be seen doing their patriotic “bit”, and understandably enough, from their perspective, hoping to at least maintain if not to increase sales in so doing. (After all; it’s an ill wind . . . !) By January 1918, the number of Suttons’ employees under arms had almost tripled, as confided in a further letter to their customers headed “Rapid Execution of Orders”: viz; -

Over 200 of our trained expert employees having responded to the Empire’s call, their places had to be filled by others who were less experienced, and last year it was not possible to avoid some delays in dispatching orders. We have now been able, by extending our premises and still further augmenting our staff, to make arrangements as will, we are confident, lead to the prompter execution of orders, for which our House has been so justly noted.

Well before January 1918, a national drive to encourage people to “grow their own” would have boosted sales of seeds and seedlings etc., with Central Government itself actually offering advice and supplying materials. Such interventions became increasingly significance as the War

progressed; tending one's plot or border no longer or for the foreseeable a languid Saturday afternoon diversion, but an indispensable adjunct to daily living. With the onset of food rationing in 1917, and inflationary price hikes more than impinging on family budgets almost from the start, a culture of self-reliance, albeit with some form of government assistance, became key to survival; and irrespective of additional foodstuffs possibly coming "on ration". And as always, it seemed, there was the malevolent U-boat menace. Embryonic schemes introduced under the 1908 Smallholdings and Allotments Act duly expanded to help sustain the physical health and arguably the psychological welfare of many of Britain's chronically disadvantaged.



*Alderman North*

As early as Autumn 1914, Britain's Board of Agriculture was considering giving technical instruction to inexperienced allotment holders, and by early 1917, allotments had become something of a commonplace feature of urban landscapes especially. In Leicester, for example, The Mayor, Alderman North, had made a point of directing that vacant waste ground should be brought under cultivation with an eye to offering an outlet to the poorest householders and, in time, to stimulate wounded servicemen. Lectures on the best methods of producing what were considered the most essential crops were delivered by officials from the Board of Agriculture and by County Council experts. Potatoes, onions, pulses, roots, and assorted varieties of brassica were produced in abundance, as demonstrated, for example, from among the 74 classes at the Leicester West End Association's Flower Show and Fete featured in my May 2020 "TIGER" article.

Guidance was given over ways to maximise yields by mulching and applying soot and farmyard (and presumably, freely-available "street") manure, and by composting etc.; elementary enough, no doubt, to the serially green-fingered; but less so to the uninitiated. Priority seemed to be given to potatoes, with King Edward and Eclipse (early) seed potatoes being distributed by some local authorities to allotment holders, and with advice on forking and hoeing between the rows and on "earthing up" appearing in local newspapers throughout the season. As to protecting crops, a meeting of Wigston Urban District Council on Tuesday July 31<sup>st</sup> 1917 heard from the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee that "*The Committee had decided to allow residents to hire the potato sprayer at a charge of 1s 6d per day, and to supply the necessary mixture at 3d a gallon; minimum 1s 3d*": i.e. 7½ "new pence" for the sprayer and c. 6p for a minimum 5 gallons of mixture.

On reflection, today's allotment holders owe a substantial debt of gratitude to the 19<sup>th</sup> century "back to the land" movement, which became so much more formalised during the 1914-18 War. What had begun as a rather haphazard patchwork of land designated for "the labouring poor" and largely dependent on church or charitable or individual endowment, was seen to have played such a crucial role in Britain's salvation that the post-War Government moved to consolidate the system soon after the Armistice. And this, at a time when so many other issues might have smothered it. Statutes such as The Land Settlement Facilities Act (1919) and The Allotments Act of 1922 obliged local authorities to allocate land primarily for wounded and returning servicemen, so giving official recognition to a form of much needed occupational therapy, following the traumas of wartime service. How remarkable then, that Leicester's principal wartime Mayor, Alderman [Sir] Jonathan North, had already appreciated the value of allotments as therapy back in 1916, and how extraordinary, that a movement which so proved its worth 100 or so years ago should come to have such relevance to the "social distancing" guidance of the present day.

## CONTACT US



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

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

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