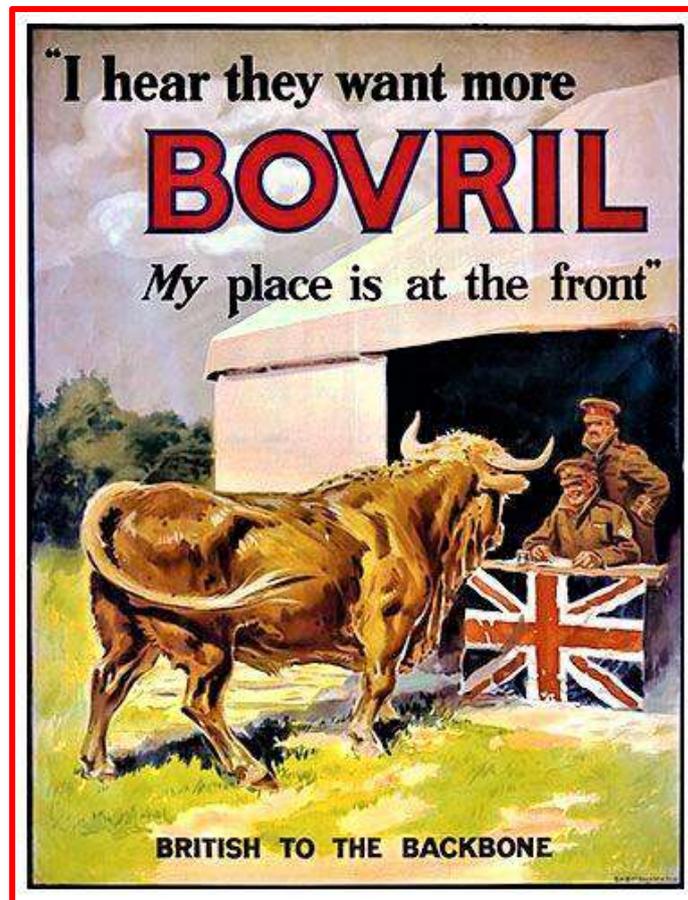


THE TIGER



Bovril – "A Trusty Ally"

THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND BRANCH
OF THE
WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION
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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

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

This month marks the anniversary of the last time we were able to hold a Branch Meeting and a very personal reminder of the difficulties we are still facing came with the unexpected passing of my own father, from Covid 19 contracted whilst in hospital under treatment for another illness. In these circumstances, I must ask you to excuse the brevity of this column and assure you that "normal service" will be resumed next month.

Before closing, however, I trust you're all enjoying Michael Nugent's *Frizelle Family* trilogy – the concluding part of which appears in this month's edition on pages 6 - 8. It's an extremely well written account of a fascinating family which Valerie and I felt would particularly appeal to our aviation enthusiasts. A comment received from a WFA member who read the original article (in Issue 5 of *Distant Thunder*) stated: "*This story deserves much more publicity*" – we hope you all agree!

Stay safe until we can meet again.

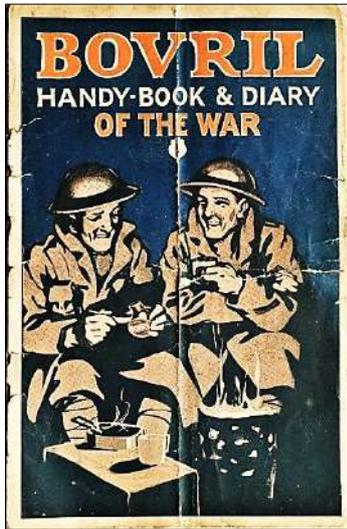
David

DATES FOR YOUR GREAT WAR DIARY MARCH

2 nd	1916	Home Front	Conscription introduced as Military Service Act comes into force
3 rd	1918	Eastern Front	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
5 th	1916	East Africa	British advance on Kilimanjaro begins
9 th	1916	Italian Front	Fifth Battle of the Isonzo
10 th	1915	Western Front	Battle of Neuve-Chapelle
11 th	1917	Mesopotamia	Capture of Baghdad
17 th	1917	Western Front	Bapaume captured
18 th	1915	Gallipoli Front	Attempt to force the Narrows
21 st	1918	Western Front	Operation Michael
23 rd	1918	Western Front	Paris shelled by long-range gun from Crepy-en-Valois, 75 miles distant
26 th	1917	Palestine	First Battle of Gaza
26 th	1918	Western Front	Ferdinand Foch made Generalissimo
28 th	1918	Western Front	Mars Offensive

BOVRIL “A TRUSTY ALLY”

by Lynn Roffee



In the lead up to the commemoration of the First World War, and subsequently, various books, leaflets and photos surfaced that perhaps hadn't seen the light of day for years. One such item that came my way is the “*Bovril Handy-Book & Diary of the War*” believed to have been published in 1917, which was probably to act as a souvenir record. Inside the front cover written in pencil is the name of the original owner: “*Presented to L Stokes for Good Attendance*”. The diary commences on the 28th June 1914 and unfortunately ends on 26th June 1917 with the next page, which is the rear cover, missing. There is no information on the publisher.

The 20-page booklet comprises 14 pages of events of the First World War to 26th June 1917 when American troops arrived in France. Included is a coloured centre spread of War Medals and Decorations, four pages of Ranks in the British Army and Navy, and Special Army and Navy Badges. At the bottom of each page are several Bovril slogans that were used during WW1 e.g. – “*Bovril gives strength to win*”, “*A Trusty Ally – Bovril*”, “*Bovril is British to the Backbone*” and “*Bovril the mighty energiser*”.



BOVRIL gives strength to win.

A TRUSTY ALLY—BOVRIL.

The coloured centre spread of War Medals and Decorations and two of the advertising slogans found at the bottom of the pages, as described above.

Bovril was the invention of a Scotsman, John Lawson Johnston (1839-1900) who in 1870 produced “Johnston’s Fluid Extract of Beef”. He had studied at Edinburgh University at some stage and it seems that it was after he was an apprentice butcher to his uncle and later took over his shop. Johnston became interested in dietetics through his friend Lyon Playfair, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh.

In 1871 Johnston emigrated to the Quebec province of Canada and set up business there and where he developed Bovril. Johnston’s interest in dietetics and the interface with military, climatic and medical requirements helped him to develop Bovril. In 1874, he won a 3-year contract to produce one million cans of beef to the



John Lawson Johnston

French Army during the Franco-Prussian war. Transportation and storage was a problem. As a result, Johnston came upon the idea of making a salty beef extract mixture with yeast extract. It is believed that Johnston used the leftovers from this order to develop a beef concentrate at his Quebec operation which later moved to Montreal. The mixture became dark and viscous during the manufacturing process and heat made it concentrated. It was bottled in jars requiring hot water to be added to dilute and make into a warming drink. It could also be added to soups and spread on bread or toast. The British Army saw Bovril as an ideal portable ration to sustain the troops whilst on campaigns and they frequently consulted Johnson on army rations.

In 1886 Johnson decided to name the product “*Bovril*” which was to become its trade marked name and the name Bovril was registered in 1887. The first part of the word “*Bo*” comes from the Latin word “*Bos*” meaning ox. The second half “*Vril*” was a made-up word from a popular science fiction author Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s in his then popular spoof novel “*The Coming Race*” published in 1871. The plot revolves around the Vril-ya, a superior fictitious race of people who derive their powers from an electromagnetic substance named “*Vril*”. Johnston named the product *Bovril* based upon his dietetic research; to indicate the great strength obtained from an ox and was to become an iconic name within British food brands. In 1888 the classic bulbous brown bottle was introduced and distributed by over 3,000 British pubs, grocers and dispensing chemists.

When the Canadian operation burnt down Johnston returned to England and it was here where The Bovril Company was formed in 1889. In 1891 he was living at Kingswood House, in South Dulwich. Johnston had extended and remodeled the house and added battlements. Due to its castellated features, Kingswood was known locally as Bovril House. During WW1 it was used as a convalescence home for wounded Canadian Soldiers. By 1896 Bovril was very popular with civilians and available in over 100,000 establishments including pubs, grocers, workhouses, hospitals and infirmaries. In the same year the Bovril Company was sold to a financier for £2 million. Johnston became a very rich man and he purchased the Prince of Wales’s racing yacht *Britannia* in 1897. He later bought the yacht *Whyte Ladye*, and died aboard whilst anchored in Cannes Harbour, France in 1900.



Kingswood House

During the First World War Bovril continued to be used as a war food for the troops for both fighting and wounded men. One Bovril advert quoted an extract from a letter from Gallipoli “*Its Bovril, Tobacco and Chocolate that made life endurable*”. Bovril adverts at the time stated that “*Bovril is far more than a delicious stimulant – it is a body-builder of astonishing power. Independent scientific experiments have proved the body-building power of Bovril to be equal from 10 to 20 times the amount taken*” “*Bovril is invaluable, both for those at the Front and those at home*”.

The Bovril organisation became a major supplier to the armed forces during the First World War, and the public was particularly pleased because it refused to increase the prices of its products during the conflict. Bovril was also issued to troops during the Second World War.



A Bovril Poster depicting a British Bull at a recruiting tent, encouraging a sense that everyone had to do their duty. A variation of this poster appears as our cover illustration.

Perhaps the final words of this narrative should be from men serving during WW1. Below are extracts from Diary/letters sent home by 4 men of the A.I.F. and printed in newspapers which show that Bovril was available to troops in conflict areas:-

Private Jack Colless, of Mudgee, Extract from his Diary titled "The Glorious 25th", published on 28 October 1915 in the *Mudgee Guardian*. Colless landed at Gaba Tepe, Gallipoli on 25th April and was wounded some weeks later at Anzac "... I was lucky though, as just as we started to descend the hill a couple of stretcher bearers came along. So, they put me on a stretcher and carried me to the beach, where the doctor dressed my wound and gave me some Bovril. After that I felt a lot better".

Lt Allan Boase of 7th AIF was at the General Hospital Victoria in Alexandria, Egypt on 6th May 1915. He wrote a letter to his mother, published in the *Gympie Times* on 19th June 1915, saying "The 7th Battalion stretcher bearers then carried me down to the clearing hospital on the beach, about 2 miles very rough going, steep rocks and shrub. My wound was again dressed there.... and we got some hot Bovril which was most excellent after 2 bites of bully beef and a biscuit in 48 hours".

Lt Frank L Apperley, R.A.M.C. who was in Alexandria, Egypt on 9th September 1915 wrote a letter to his father published in *The Examiner*, Launceston, Tasmania on the 25th November 1915 saying "a few days after leaving Malta one morning a wireless message flashed through to us that a transport with 1500 troops on board had been torpedoed about 20 miles away, and were the first to arrive on the spot when we found the ship in a sinking condition...we had a rush preparing bovril and brandy and warm beds". He was referring to rescuing men from a submarine attack in the Dardanelles.

Trooper Harry Davis, of Jamberoo, wrote in a letter to his mother, printed in the *Kiama Independent NSW* on 6th July 1918, saying that "...Must give you an account of the trip from Ammon to Port Said with a shattered thigh. I happened to be taken to the 7th dressing station where the leg was dressed, and tied to a rifle splint..... we started on camels for the Camel Corp Clearance Station, here we were treated to a drink of Bovril and cocoa".

Sources:

Bovril Handy-Book & Diary of the War – Authors own copy- photos taken from this

Inventor of Bovril Dead, The New York Times, 25th November 1900

Wikipedia

Letslookagain.com

www.nla.gov.au

**THE FRIZELLE FAMILY OF
BALLYCASTLE, COUNTY MAYO
(PART III)
by Michael Nugent**

*THIS ARTICLE WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN ISSUE 5 OF "DISTANT THUNDER",
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IRISH BRANCHES OF THE W.F.A. AND IS
REPRODUCED WITH THEIR KIND PERMISSION*

Having completed research into all the members of the Frizelle family, I was fairly confident that I had captured all the details of their service however, I was premature in that assumption. Whilst researching Major Louis Burton at the National Archives, Kew, I came across a letter in his file from the Air Ministry, dated September 1934 and enquiring into the circumstances of Louis' death, as his youngest son, Howard Frizelle Burton had applied for a King's Cadetship at the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell. This led to another fascinating story of service and bravery.

**Wing Commander Howard Frizelle Burton DSO, DFC and Bar, Croix de Guerre
(France)**

Howard was known throughout his RAF career as 'Billy' and was born on Wednesday 21 June 1916 at Letchworth, Hertfordshire, the youngest son of Louis and Edith Burton, nee Frizelle. He was educated at Bedford School, an independent boarding school in the county town of Bedford. Following this in 1934, Howard applied for a King's Cadetship to the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell. His application was successful, and Howard was admitted to RAF Cranwell as a Cadet in 1935.

Whilst there, on 7 October 1936, Howard was involved in a fatal flying accident. He and another pilot, Flight Lieutenant Roy Bartlett were flying Hawker Fury aircraft carrying out camera practice when their planes collided. Howard baled out and survived though injured. Flight Lieutenant Bartlett was killed in the accident.

Notwithstanding this incident, Howard was an excellent student and passed out of RAF Cranwell at the end of 1936 having been awarded the Sword of Honour for the most outstanding Cadet. On graduation, Howard was posted as Pilot Officer to No 46 Squadron at RAF Kenley, Surrey, on 18 January 1937. At that time, the Squadron flew Gloster Gauntlet aircraft. This was a single seat biplane fighter and the last RAF fighter to have an open cockpit. Howard was promoted to Flying Officer in June 1938 and in February the following year, the Squadron was re-equipped with the Mk 1 Hawker Hurricane.

On 26 June 1939, Howard was posted to RAF HQ 12 Group. This was a command organization which controlled a number of squadrons in an air defence role. Howard's stay there was not long. Four days after the outbreak of war, Howard was posted to No 66 Squadron as Commander of B Flight.

No 66 Squadron was initially based at Duxford and moved shortly after Howard's arrival to RAF Coltishall, Norfolk. Flying Spitfires, in early 1940 the squadron was involved in providing cover for bombers attacking targets in occupied Holland and were then involved in offensive patrols covering the evacuation from Dunkirk.

In June 1940, Howard married Jean Feredith Maxwell Robertson at Leatherhead, Surrey. A 21 years old Secretary, Jean was the daughter of Air Commodore Edmund Digby Maxwell and Evelyn Jane Robertson (12). Jean's elder brother, Duncan Maxwell Robertson was a BBC employee before the war and enlisted as Flying Officer Air Gunner (Service No 70570). He was killed on 28 October 1940 when the aircraft he was in stalled whilst making a sharp turn as it climbed away from a target during a live firing exercise in Lincolnshire. He is buried at Manby (St Mary's) Churchyard, Lincolnshire.



*Wing Commander
Howard Frizelle Burton*

On 3 September 1940, Howard was appointed Acting Squadron Leader and was posted to 616 Squadron, initially based at Kirton-in-Lindsay, Lincolnshire, before moving to RAF Tangmere, West Sussex, as the Battle of Britain intensified.

RAF Tangmere housed three Squadrons of Spitfires, 145, 610 and 616, all part of HQ No 11 Group commanded by Wing Commander Douglas Bader DSO, DFC. Bader and his superior, Air Vice Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory favoured what were called 'Big Wing' tactics. This involved the three squadrons working in unison against German formations. From records it appears that Wing Commander Bader favoured flying with Howard's 616 Squadron. He was a notoriously aggressive fighter pilot, pushing himself exceptionally hard and expecting everyone else to adhere to the same standards. He also had an abrasive personality and frequently clashed with those higher in rank and his own colleagues. Before he was shot down and captured in August 1941, it was reported that the Squadrons under his command were on the verge of mutiny over his leadership style.

Howard's rank of Acting Squadron Leader was made substantive on 1 September 1941. On 19 September 1941, Howard was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. The citation read: This officer has led his squadron with commendable skill and coolness. He has participated in fifty-four sorties over enemy territory during which he has assisted in the destruction of two Messerschmitt 109's, probably destroyed a Heinkel and damaged a further two enemy aircraft. Squadron Leader Burton has on all occasions proved an inspiration to his unit.

On 29 September 1941, Howard was posted to HQ No 11 Group as Squadron Leader-Tactics. Later that year he was posted to RAF Hawkinge, near Folkestone, Kent. This was the home to several Squadrons although there is no definitive role mentioned for him.

On 11 April 1942, Howard was posted to RAF HQ Middle East and in October of that year was appointed Squadron Leader HQ No 212 Group based at Benghazi, Libya. He only remained there a month before transferring to No 243 Group also at Benghazi, flying Hurricanes against the Afrika Corps troops of the then General Erwin Rommel. In December of that year, he transferred again to No 243 Group, flying Curtiss Kittyhawks. This was a fighter-bomber regarded as a 'tankbuster' and Howard achieved much success against Afrika Corps armoured columns, despite

the fact that the RAF formations were outnumbered three to one by German and Italian squadrons.

On 13 February 1943, Howard was promoted Acting Wing Commander and ten days later was awarded a Bar to his DFC, the citation reading: Since he assumed command of the wing in December 1942, this officer has taken part in nearly all its sorties. On one occasion, the formation was attacked by a very large force of enemy fighters, one of which Wing Commander Burton shot down. He has displayed great keenness and devotion to duty. In April 1943, Howard was again decorated, this time with the Distinguished Service Order, the citation reading: Wing Commander Burton is the commanding officer of an exceptionally successful wing. Recently, he has taken part in several sorties involving low level attacks on heavy armoured fighting vehicles. His brilliant leadership has contributed in a large measure to the great success achieved.

Around this time, Howard returned to the United Kingdom on leave. On 3 June 1943, he boarded an RAF Lockheed Hudson at RAF Portreath, Cornwall for the Flight back to North Africa. In addition to Howard, the passengers comprised three Wing Commanders, a Group Captain and two Squadron Leaders. The aircraft was intercepted by a long-range German Junkers JU 88 fighter-bomber aircraft over the Bay of Biscay and shot down. There were no survivors. An officer surely destined for much higher rank, Howard was killed two weeks before his 27th birthday. Howard's remains were never recovered. He is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial, the Battle of Britain London Monument at Victoria Embankment, London, and the War Memorial at Ashted, Surrey, where he had resided with his wife, Jean.

Having initially started research to identify two family members who may have served in the Great War, I have been amazed by the depth and breadth of service within one family. I have been honoured to have had the opportunity to carry out this research and as I uncovered new links and facts, the thought struck me that if this is the service attributable to one family, what are the chances of similar stories waiting to be uncovered?

FOOTNOTES FOR ENTIRE ARTICLE:

- 1) Also spelt McNeilly
- 2) The church is St John's, Dunfeeney in the Diocese of Tuam, Killala and Achonry
- 3) It is believed that Archibald's name was included at South Woodford by Robert's widow, Martha.
- 4) Martha used the surname Frizelle until her marriage to Douglas Albert Jeffrey in January 1942. A Schoolteacher before her marriage, she died in 2009 aged 94
- 5) Daniel Dollard enlisted in the Rifle Brigade in May 1916 and later transferred to the Cheshire Regiment, service number 53093. He was wounded with GSW to the right leg and discharged with the Silver War Badge in June 1919.
- 6) www.cwgc.org
- 7) The Commonwealth War Graves Commission states that William was 43 when killed, he was in fact 38.
- 8) Fenny Stratford now forms part of Milton Keynes
- 9) St Andrews Parish church was situated at Hope Street, Belfast, just to the rear of Great Victoria Street Railway Station. It was closed in 1971 and demolished with a new church bearing the same name being constructed at Glencairn.
- 10) Burnaby Street ran from Distillery Street to Roden Street.
- 11) Caroline died three days after the accident, on 11 June 1916.
- 12) Edmund Robertson had enlisted as a Naval Cadet in the Royal Navy in 1902. Originally a Gunnery Specialist, he qualified as an Admiralty Flying Officer in March 1914. He was permanently transferred to the RAF in 1920 retiring in the post of Air ADC to King George V in August 1935. He re-engaged at the outbreak of War and served until 1945

MIGHTY OAKS FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW . . . **by David Humberston**

A recent review of my own family history, and in particular an attempt to “tie up some loose ends” as far as some of the more distant Humberston cousins are concerned led to a piece of research that proved the validity of the ancient saying “*mighty oaks from little acorns grow*”. That a genealogical Family Tree was the catalyst is pure coincidence, but surely not inappropriate for the proverb concerned. I hope, therefore, the **growth** of the following tale will be of interest . . .

In 2014, a visit to the National Archives confirmed my suspicions that I was, after all, related to a Lieutenant Herbert Humberston, 1st Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, who had died of pneumonia in Marlow, Buckinghamshire on 20th October 1918. His Service Record file also contained a large number of letters regarding his young widow, Gertrude Kate, and the restoration of her War Widows Pension following her subsequent marriage to a Frank Percy Perry was annulled 16 months later when Perry was imprisoned for bigamy. The Pension was restored until 1924, when Gertrude married once again, becoming Mrs Frank Hammond. My attempts to complete Gertrude’s story unearthed the birth of two sons, the death of Mr Hammond in 1950 and a further marriage to a Walter Firth, before Gertrude herself passed away in December 1964. Other than the satisfaction of finally completing her story, the fact that she and her second husband died at the Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital in Taplow (also in Buckinghamshire) revealed a possible War connection to which I then turned my attention. I quickly established that the hospital had been constructed and used by the Canadian Red Cross during the Second World War, but stood on the site of a Great War predecessor with an interesting history.

Situated some thirty miles from London and only six miles from Windsor, Taplow was a popular destination of the *crème* of Edwardian society, who were regular visitors to one of two great country houses situated near the village. Here they would be richly entertained by two rival hostesses, either the redoubtable “Ettie” Grenfell, Lady Desborough at Taplow Court or the equally formidable Mrs Nancy Astor at nearby Cliveden. The two ladies were far too dominating



*“Ettie” Desborough,
1909*



*Cliveden (pronounced “Cliv-den”),
home of Waldorf & Nancy Astor from 1906*

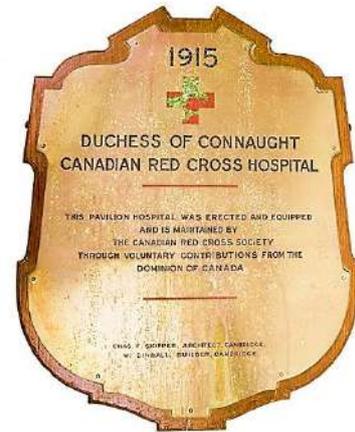


*Nancy Astor,
1909*

in character to ever be friends and their guests were expected to remain loyal to either one or the other! However, as the biographer of Lady Desborough would later comment “*while the Desboroughs were well-off and Taplow was pretty, the Astors were super-rich and Cliveden was palatial*”. (Ironically, Nancy’s niece, Joyce Phipps would later marry Reginald Pascoe Grenfell, a distant cousin of Lord Desborough in 1929 and, as “Joyce Grenfell”, enjoy an outstanding career as an actress and comedienne prior to her death in 1979.)

At the outbreak of the Great War, the Astors offered Cliveden to the War Office for use as a military hospital. Considered unsuitable for conversion, the offer was declined, but a subsequent approach to the Canadian Government, who accepted on behalf of the Canadian Red Cross, saw the construction of a temporary hospital built on the site of the tennis courts and bowling alley about a mile from the main house. Accommodation for the staff was provided at nearby Taplow Lodge. Work on the new building began in November 1914, was completed by the following February, and received its first patients by Spring.

Although often referred to as either “Taplow” or “Cliveden”, the Hospital (as the plaque depicted right shows) was officially named the “Duchess of Connaught Canadian Red Cross Hospital”. The Duchess, formerly Princess Louise Margaret of Prussia, was the President of the society until her death in 1917 and wife of Queen Victoria’s third son, Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, the society’s patron. The Duke was the first member of the British Royal Family to serve as Governor General of Canada and it was considered a great honour to have him and his wife affiliated with the Canadian Red Cross. (The history of the name plaque is more obscure although today it is in the custody of a museum in Ottawa.)



By the end of the War no fewer than 23,000 patients had been treated, enjoying, according to one source *“free access to the resources of the estate, food items and knitted clothes supplied by the Women of Canada, participation in various sports, stimulating lectures from learned people, entertainment by musicians, and training for future civilian life.”* The music hall artist George Robey and writer Rudyard Kipling were amongst the famous visitors, as was the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, whose visit in July 1915 was reported in *The Times*.



Cliveden Military Cemetery

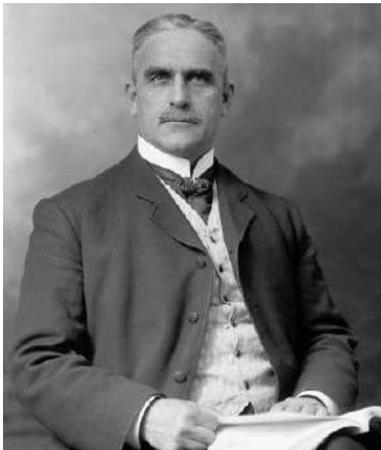
The graves, shown right, are overlooked by a figure of Canada, shown left

Given the number of troops treated, the Hospital had remarkably few deaths. Those who succumbed were laid to rest in a burial ground within the grounds of the estate, known today as Cliveden Military Cemetery and cared for by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The Astors allowed their Italian Garden to be modified for this purpose, a mosaic floor being replaced by turf into which inscribed burial markers (which lay flat to the ground) were set. The graves are

overlooked by a specially commissioned symbolic female figure of Canada created by the famous Australian sculptor Sir Bertram Mackennal who reputedly modelled the face of the statue on that of Nancy Astor. Of the 42 Great War burials, 28 are Canadian (including two Nursing Sisters) and two are American. A further 19 Americans were repatriated after the Armistice, whilst two further burials were made during the Second World War.

Despite its high reputation, in late 1916 the Hospital became involved in what became known as “The Taplow Affair”. The miscreant was none other than Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, Sir Sam Hughes, whose policies were shaped, at least according to one source, by his “*perennial contempt for military professionals which became an excuse for chaos and influence-peddling in militia administration*”. Hughes leaked a report to the Canadian Press that he himself had commissioned from one of his associates, Herbert Bruce, a leading Toronto surgeon, which was highly critical of the care Canadian wounded were receiving in hospitals in England. The resultant outcry provided Hughes with the excuse he sought to recall his intended target, Surgeon General Guy Carleton Jones, to Canada and replace him with Bruce.

Bruce had identified some 23 deficiencies in a report that combined generalities with petty detail. Some issues were beyond the remit of the medical services altogether whilst others were pure comedy. Unfortunately, particular criticism was reserved for the hospital at Cliveden where, apparently, a NCO was accepting bribes from local suppliers to purchase their goods whilst also running a scheme to sell donated socks for personal profit. The highly regarded Head Matron, Edith Campbell, and the hospital administrator, Colonel Charles Gorrell, were both unjustly dismissed, a decision that led to Gorrell taking his own life with poison in January 1917.



Sam Hughes



Edith Campbell



Charles Gorrell

The Instigator and two victims of “The Taplow Affair”

Whilst the disgraced Surgeon-General maintained a dignified silence, others were not slow to leap to his defence. Donald Armour, a Canadian born pioneer of neurosurgery in England forced Bruce to issue a public apology for inaccurately accusing him of performing inappropriate surgery and took the opportunity to declare his total faith in Jones’s leadership. Lady Julia Drummond, head of the Canadian Red Cross Information Bureau, whose son Guy perished at Ypres in April 1915, undertook a scathing letter campaign through the pages of *The Times*, again denouncing the Bruce report. It was, however, the protests of Sir William Osler, one of the most outstanding figures in the history of Canadian medicine, which proved decisive.

Osler, readers may recall, was a mentor of John McCrae, author of the famous poem *In Flanders Fields*, who’s only surviving son, Edward, would die of war wounds in August 1917. (Regulars on



*Sir William Osler,
c. 1912*

our annual Armistice Tours may remember our visit to his grave at Dozinghem Cemetery, west of Poperinghe.) In 1914 Osler had proudly volunteered for service in the Canadian Army Medical Corps and became chief physician at the hospital at Cliveden. Osler had also been personally insulted by Bruce during the compilation of his report and, deeply concerned over the treatment of Edith Campbell (granddaughter of his tutor at McGill University) and Gorrell, he resigned his Commission in the Corps. When his concerns were ignored by both Jones and Hughes, Osler appealed to Canadian Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden who, it will be remembered, visited the Hospital in July 1915.

By now, Hughes had become far too controversial a figure to keep his post and Borden recalled him to Canada and created a new Department for Overseas Military Forces, whose subsequent investigation into Herbert Bruce found him “overwhelmed” by his task. The Bruce Report was therefore repudiated and Surgeon General Jones reappointed. More importantly for this narrative, the work of the Cliveden hospital continued without further interference for the remainder of the War.

At the resumption of hostilities, the Astors repeated their previous offer to the Canadian authorities and, by July 1940, a substantial brick hospital stood on the site of the now-demolished Great War facilities. Built and equipped by the Canadian Red Cross Society and financed by funds raised by the people of Canada, The Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital was later presented for use to the British Government as a National Research Centre for Rheumatism in Children.



*The Canadian Red Cross
Memorial Hospital, Taplow, c. 1955*

Opening to the public in 1947, the Hospital came under the supervision of the newly-formed National Health Service, who added a large maternity unit to its facilities. In 1985, some twenty years after my distant relative, Gertrude Kate Humberston/Perry/Hammond/ Firth, had passed away there, the Hospital was finally close and the site was left to deteriorate for the following two decades. What remained was demolished in 2006 and a new housing development, Cliveden Village, today stands on the site. In 1942, the Astors donated Cliveden itself to the National Trust, but retained rights of residency until 1968. Another high profile “affair” began there in July 1961 with the introduction of one John Profumo to a certain Christine Keeler . . .

I have no photograph or description of Gertrude Kate, but I do hope that she found some happiness in her later life. Her brief “membership” of my own family and my research into her later story has certainly borne fruit, proving the old adage that *mighty oaks from little acorns grow*.

WYGGESTONIANS AT WAR

by Roy-Anthony Birch

In continuing my research into the roles played by the Wyggeston Boys Grammar School in the life of the then Borough of Leicester during the 1914-18 War, and into contributions made by some of its former pupils, I rediscovered a newspaper item which is very much to the purpose; showing how the repercussions of the conflict had been visited on the School, virtually from the start.

The item in *The Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury* from March 1915 was a resumé of the annual report on the Boys' Grammar - his 38th, no less, delivered by The Headmaster, The Reverend Canon James Went B.A. (1845-1936). In his review, Canon Went stated that the School had been “*over-full the whole year*” and that there was “*still a considerable number of boys waiting for admission*”. He continued: “*The inadequate accommodation has compelled us to restrict the number of boys entering the School and in the Spring term, we were unable to take any new pupils. During the year, we have taken 120 new boys and the number at present in the School is 582*”. Most significantly, for my current purpose, his audience heard that “*During this term, the Governors have sanctioned the admission of seven boys; the sons of Belgians who have settled for a time in Leicester*”, and moreover, he was pleased to say that “*the conduct of these boys has been all that could be wished, and there has been an obvious desire on the part of the other boys to look after them and to make their school life here as happy as possible*”.

Such sentiments would no doubt have been echoed by the families of former pupils and by Old Wyggestonians themselves, as they “rubbed shoulders” with the Belgian newcomers. One such is highly likely to have been George Henry Gristwood, known familiarly as Harry. Born on 22nd August 1892, he was the elder of two sons - the only children, of George and Eliza Gristwood, latterly of the Spinney Hills and West Humberstone districts of Leicester. George Snr. was born in Loughborough, Leicestershire, in 1852, while Eliza, some 12 years George's junior, hailed from Aldridge in Staffordshire. By 1891, however, the couple had settled in the part of Leicester where they were to spend quite literally the remainder of their lives; living firstly at 49 Park Road (sometimes shown then as Park Road East and now East Park Road), bordering Spinney Hill Park, with George's mother Mary Gristwood, native of Woodthorpe near Loughborough, completing the 1891 ménage. It seems reasonable to see the Gristwoods as what could be called “a comfortable middle-class family”, with Gristwood Snr. engaged as “clerk to the Bankruptcy Court” in his early and middle years, and being able to retire by 1911, just shy of 60, having attained the heights of “Chief Clerk in the Bankruptcy & Official Receiver's Office”. Eliza, meanwhile, is regularly shown in Census returns as having “no occupation”, although, as we shall see, she played an active part in her local community.

Fittingly enough, therefore, by 1901, the family were occupying a more substantial property at 187 Uppingham Road Leicester, where they continued until after the 1914-18 War, and where the young Gristwoods - sons George Henry and Cecil Edwin, were to progress through youth to young adulthood. George Henry – “Harry” Gristwood, is known for certain to have attended Bridge Road Elementary Council School, just as his brother Cecil, some 11 years younger, is likely to have done; both boys thereby coming under the influence of the School's first Headmaster A.H. Baddeley, in the ranks of those affectionately portrayed as “Mr Baddeley's Boys”. In 1903, with his 11th birthday in August, “young” George entered Leicester's Wyggeston Grammar School for Boys, then occupying its original premises at no. 1 Highcross Street, where the School's first and

longest-serving Headmaster, the revered and aforementioned Rev. Canon Went, held sway. (This same building is now St. Martin's House, a.k.a. Leicester Cathedral Centre, since re-designated 2 Peacock Lane, at LE1 5PZ). Having left The Wyggeston in 1908, by April 1911, now aged 18, George has taken "a situation", in the parlance of the day, as an "accountant's clerk", possibly with an eye to following in his father's commercially orientated footsteps.

Conversely, of course, Harry Gristwood may have envisaged something rather less sedentary and with broader, even more adventurous, career prospects. Either way, within a year of the onset of the so-called "Great War" he had served as Private no. PS/1451 in 16th Bn. The Middlesex Regiment before being commissioned Probationary 2nd Lieutenant in 3rd (Reserve/Training) Bn. The Leicestershire Regiment on 8th June 1915. He entered the School of Instruction at Bury St. Edmunds on 12th June and was posted to 1st Bn. The Leicestershire "Tigers" Regiment 12 months later. He was in fact one of five 2nd Lieutenants to report to the 1st Battalion in June 1916, in addition to almost 60 N.C.O.s and men who either arrived from home or returned from stays in hospital at much the same time. (The number of 2nd Lieutenants joining in June was made up to six through the promotion of Arthur Cummins from C-S-M, on the 2nd of the month according to *The London Gazette*).



Harry Gristwood

The 1st Leicesters had disembarked at St. Nazaire on 10th September 1914 and by November 1915 formed part of 71st Infantry Brigade within 6th Division; the formation with which they would remain as a fighting unit until November 1918. Their tour of duty on The Western Front was in fact to last beyond the little over four full years of fighting until 6th Division, by then part of IX Corps within General Sir Herbert Plumer's Second Army, formed part of the Army of Occupation on the Rhine. (It was not until December 28th 1918 that a certain Sergeant W. Birch became the first of the Battalion's members to be "demobbed"). By then, those who had "gone through the thick of it"; who, in the fullest and deepest sense had "endured", had been battle-hardened in some of the most gruelling episodes of the War, surviving the Battles of The Aisne and Hooge etc. and, as if we could ever forget, what I prefer to think of as The Somme Campaign, rather than The Battle of

That something on a truly monumental scale was in the offing was hardly a secret, even for miles behind both sides' front-line defences, by the time Harry Gristwood joined 1st Leicesters in June 1916. Unprecedented levels of activity, not only on the ground on the Allied side especially, but also in the air, presaged what was to prove the most titanic and most costly struggle for the British to date. The only surprise perhaps, and that, in retrospect, was the protracted nature of The Campaign, extending for an horrific 141 days until 18th November 1916.

The 1st Leicesters could be regarded as somewhat fortunate, regarding casualties, in the weeks preceding what we might otherwise call "The Somme Offensive". May was largely uneventful and June "tolerably quiet", according to the Battalion Diary; uncannily so in view of what was to follow, with just 18 killed or wounded or reported "missing" in a month of ever intensifying activity behind the British lines. With G.H. Gristwood being one of four 2nd Lieutenants about to be deputed to "D" Coy. 1st Bn. Leicestershire Regiment, the combined forces of 6th Division embarked on a comprehensive training exercise on a "mocked-up" battlefield, complete with

trench-systems, preparatory to a proposed attack on Pilckem Ridge in coordination with the Guards. But the plan was aborted on the Division being ordered to The Somme, where, having been spared the traumas of the first two phases of The Campaign, 1st Leicesters were to show their metal in the third and final stage, scheduled to begin on September 9th.

While as noted earlier, 1st Leicesters had been part of 71st Infantry Brigade within 6th Division since November 1915, as they would indeed remain, in mid-1916, 6th Division actually formed part of XIV Corps in General Sir Henry Rawlinson's Fourth Army, with The Corps comprising the 56th and The Guards Divisions in addition to the 6th. And it was as part of XIV Corps that 1st Bn. Leicestershire Regiment fought on The Somme. Having first entrained from the Ypres Salient and endured much arduous foot-slogging, by 14th August 1st Leicesters were relieving 2nd Bn. Grenadier Guards in forward positions opposite Beaumont Hamel. Marching was resumed on 27th August as the Leicesters decamped from Maily Wood, bound for the designated assembly area near Meaulte, in readiness for yet another "battle within The Battle", which so epitomised the Somme experience. Having rendezvoused on September 11th and with units of Fourth Army (not including the Leicesters) having captured Ginchy and Louze Wood on the 9th, the object of the ensuing offensive stood, menacingly, before them in a concentrated area which came to be known by the British as "The Quadrilateral".

The attacks of September 9th had in fact been only partially successful: the Germans, quite literally, retaining the upper hand. Their heavily protected artillery and machine-gun emplacements dominated the landscape southwards, towards the British, from the highest point of a geographical feature akin to a horseshoe, with the enemy particularly well- entrenched at the curve of the shoe, bisecting their adversary's recent gains. The initial aim for the British, therefore, was to straighten their own line by forcing the enemy back and obliterating the curve, to provide as it were, a launch-pad for a decisive assault on the enemy's principal stronghold. This last took the form of a four-sided parallelogram - hence "The Quadrilateral", measuring broadly 300 x 150 yards or 270 x c. 137 metres, and its connecting trenches. Follow-up assaults by 16th and 71st Infantry Brigades, (again not involving the Leicesters) on 13th September had been repulsed, so that all stood ready for a full-scale attack by XIV Corps on September 15th.

September 15th 1916, we recall, is one of the more notable dates in WW1 history, marking the debut of the tank in modern warfare. Attention nowadays focuses chiefly on the participation of the so-called "Wonder Weapon" in the advance against the villages of Flers and Courcellette. But three tanks were at least nominally intended to aid 6th Division's attack on a front now embracing Gueudecourt, Flers, Lesboeufs, and Morval, and including The Quadrilateral, with the capture of Morval and Lesboeufs entrusted to the Guards and to 6th Divisions. Zero hour on September 15th was 6.20 a.m. The 1st Leicesters were to advance keeping close to Ginchy on their left and with the 9th Norfolks on their right; each battalion to maintain a front some 250 yards wide. "B" and "D" Companies spearheaded the 1st Leicesters' advance with "A" and "C" in support; "D" under Captain C.W. Herbison, and including 2nd Lieutenant G.H. Gristwood.

Largely impenetrable mist and smoke from an unyielding enemy bombardment quickly led to disorientation among those leading the attack and made communication with Bn. and Brigade H.Q.s all but impossible. Unerringly accurate machine-gun fire and some of the densest barbed-wire entanglements, largely uncut, made for all-too-familiar difficulties, and with only limited progress being made, it was accepted that hopes of pressing home the attack were utterly unrealistic. As for the tanks; the performance of the three allocated to 6th Division could barely be classed as "minimal". Two simply failed to start, while the other had its periscope shattered early in the assault and so was swiftly rendered hors de combat.

Each of the four 1st Leicester companies had sustained very heavy casualties by the time troops were withdrawn late on September 16th, with 14 officers and 410 N.C.O.s and men registered killed or wounded. “D” company’s C.O., Captain C.W. Herbison of Burton-on-Trent and 2nd Lieutenant G.H. Gristwood were among those who “died of wounds”; the latter, who received two bullet wounds on the 15th, dying in no. 34 Casualty Clearing Station at Grove Town, Meaulte, the following day, less than a month after his 24th birthday. His death, like those of his comrades, might perhaps be seen as all the more tragic because of the failure of the operation in which they had taken part.



LEFT: The grave of George Henry Gristwood at Grove Town Cemetery.

He is also commemorated on his parent’s headstone at Welford Road Cemetery in Leicester, RIGHT



George Henry Gristwood now rests in Grove Town Cemetery (grave reference I. C. 27), which came to occupy the site of the CCS in Meaulte where he died. He is commemorated on War Memorials belonging to Leicester’s former Bridge Road and The Wyggeston Boys Grammar Schools, and on the 1914-1918 Memorial in the church of St. Barnabas, Leicester, which honours no fewer than 155 WW1 Fallen; five of whom, including G.H. Gristwood, are Old Wyggestonians. Many of the “Men of this Parish and Congregation” to whom this Memorial is dedicated, and indeed their bereaved relatives, would have been well known to the Gristwoods through St. Barnabas being the family’s regular place of worship, and to Mrs Eliza Gristwood especially through a lifetime’s involvement in a variety of church activities. I have no doubt that in addition to her proven support of “ordinary” church endeavours, such as “Sales of Work” etc., she would have played her part in contributing to the welfare of the many Belgian refugees who migrated to the parish and were duly welcomed at St. Barnabas from the earliest days of the War.

Families such as the Depows, for example, who were already living in Parry Street off Humberstone Road by January 1915, were among several receiving regular messages of sympathy and support in the St. Barnabas Parish Magazine. The March 1915 issue, for one, carried the following: “*We regret to have to compassionate our Belgian guests at the news they have received definitely from Bruges, that their house and workshops, with their contents, have been destroyed. The work, thrift, and success of a lifetime; gone for ever*”. But the most poignant acknowledgement of Mrs Gristwood’s own life of service comes in the December 1918 Magazine; viz: “*Under the wardenship of Mrs Hand, assisted by Mrs Gristwood, the St. Barnabas War Shrine is now well cared for. Relations pay frequent visits to it. God rest the souls of the dear departed ones*”. Here then were two women united in grief and in service to “*the dear departed ones*”, with Mrs Hand’s son, Private Reginald Hand, no. 9581, of 2nd Leicesters, having died in Mesopotamia - present-day Iraq - in April 1917.

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