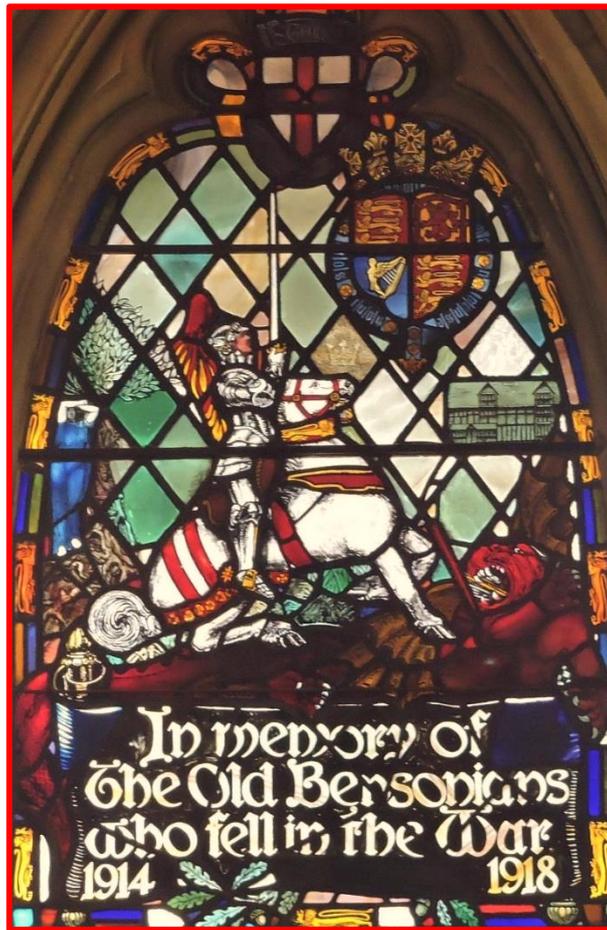


# THE TIGER



*The Old Bensonians Memorial Window,  
Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford upon Avon*

**THE NEWSLETTER OF  
THE LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND BRANCH  
OF THE  
WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION  
ISSUE 90 – MAY 2019**

## CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Welcome again, Ladies and Gentlemen, to the latest edition of *The Tiger*.

The advantage of attending local History Fairs was once again proven at the *History and Heritage Fair* held in Wigston on 9<sup>th</sup> March. Amongst the visitors to our stalls was one John Frearson of Rugby who, in a subsequent e-mail, mentioned a War Memorial about which he had written and which commemorated twelve actors of the Great War. One of the surnames, "Rathbone", was certainly familiar but, as Basil Rathbone, most famous for his portrayals of Sherlock Holmes, had survived the War, who was the Guy Rathbone commemorated on the Memorial and were they related?

Born in 1884, Guy Rathbone (shown right) was the son of Arthur Benson Rathbone, a descendant of the prosperous Rathbone family of merchants in Georgian and Victorian Liverpool. Educated at Oriel College, Oxford, he spent a short time as a Schoolmaster before turning to the stage and joining the Theatre Company of his third cousin, Frank (later Sir Frank) Benson. Benson's great grandmother, Sarah, was a younger sister of Richard Rathbone, great grandfather to Frank. Enlisting in 1914, he was commissioned the following year. He served with the Gloucestershire Regiment in both Gallipoli and Mesopotamia, falling at the head of his men whilst assaulting Turkish positions on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1916. He is remembered on the Basra Memorial to the Missing.



By this time, Frank Benson devoted himself to the production of Shakespeare plays and was knighted in 1916 following a performance of *Julius Caesar* at Drury Lane Theatre, London. In June of that year, Sir Frank and his wife, Lady Constance, served in Salonika at a Serbian Military Hospital, before later running canteens for the Red Cross in France. In 1918 Constance was at Etaples whilst Frank drove Ambulances, earning a *Croix de Guerre*.



The only son of Frank and Constance, Eric Benson (shown left) was already serving on the Western Front, having been commissioned in the King's Royal Rifle Corps in August 1914. As an Officer in the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, he was wounded at Hooge during the German flame-thrower attack in July 1915 and was later awarded a M.C. and a M.I.D. for his gallantry that day. As Lieutenant-Colonel of the same Battalion, he was killed leading his men into German machine-gun fire at Delville Wood (during the Battle of the Somme) on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1916. He had been married for less than three months and is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.

In 1925, the fallen of Frank Benson's Theatrical Company were commemorated in stained-glass in the Swan Gallery of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford upon Avon. Unveiled by Dame Ellen Terry, the window remembers 10 fallen "Old Bensonians" and shows the figure of St George defeating the dragon, St George being a likeness of Eric Benson. The window is depicted on the cover of this edition of *The Tiger*. This building, though thankfully not the many Memorial windows, was badly damaged by fire in 1926. Rebuilt and re-opened in 1932, this new Theatre is known today as the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Another of Frank Benson's company was yet another third cousin from the Rathbone dynasty, Philip St John Basil, better known as "Basil" and the future portrayer of Sherlock Holmes. The two distant cousins were remarkable alike, as can be seen from the photographs below. Basil made his debut appearance in 1911 and married a fellow performer, Ethel Marion Foreman, in October 1914. Their son was born the following year.



*Basil Rathbone  
as Sherlock Holmes*

In 1915 Rathbone was enlisted via the Derby Scheme into the London Scottish Regiment and was later commissioned as an Officer in the 2/10<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment, known as "The Liverpool Scottish". Here he served as an Intelligence Officer and attained the rank of Captain.

On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1918, Basil's younger brother, John, was killed in action serving as a Captain with the Dorsetshire Regiment, an event that marked a change in attitude to Basil's attitude to his own safety. According to one source, he persuaded his



*Sir Frank Benson*

superiors to allow him to scout enemy positions during daylight, wearing a special camouflage suit that disguised him as a tree and within which he "appeared" in No Man's Land to observe German trenches! In September 1918, he was awarded a Military Cross for "conspicuous daring and resource on patrol". John Rathbone was not Basil's only war-inflicted loss. Billeted in a farmhouse in France, Basil fell in love with the farmer's daughter, Marie, and, upon learning the house had subsequently been shelled, borrowed his Colonel's horse to return and dig unsuccessfully through the rubble for any survivors.

Postwar, Basil and his wife separated and in 1939 made his first appearance as Sherlock Holmes, playing alongside another Great War veteran, Nigel Bruce (who played Dr. Watson). Basil Rathbone lived until 1967, surviving Frank Benson by nearly thirty years.

As stated earlier, the research for this column was the result of a chance conversation with a visitor to our display at a local history fair. Although Mr Frearson did not mention any of the family connections I have outlined above, his reference to his own work on "the Green Room Plaque", a further memorial to 12 actors – including Guy Rathbone – which once hung at the Green Room Club for actors in Leicester Square, but later sold at auction in 2009 - was the catalyst for my own further investigations. In this particular case it can be said that from little acorns some particularly mighty oaks had grown . . .

D.S.H



*The Green Room Plaque*

## PARISH NOTICES

### FORTHCOMING BRANCH MEETINGS

The Elms Social & Service Club, Bushloe End,  
WIGSTON, Leicestershire, LE18 2BA  
7:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. (Approx.)



**29<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

Guest Speaker: **Alan Robinson**  
*The Battle of Verdun*

The longest Battle of the Great War was fought around the city of Verdun between February and December 1916. Tonight we welcome battlefield expert Alan Robinson on his inaugural visit to our Branch to deliver his presentation on the first of the great “attritional” battles of the Great War

**27<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

Guest Speaker: **Megan Kelleher**  
*The Commonwealth War Graves  
Commission*

Regular visitors to the Great War battlefields are familiar with the beautifully maintained Military Cemeteries cared for by the staff of the C.W.G.C. In her presentation, Megan Kelleher will recount both the the history and the on-going work of the Commission, one century after its founding.



**24<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

Guest Speaker: **Dave Dunham**  
*The Great War German Air Raids  
on Britain*



Advances in aviation technology saw Germany launch a series of strategic bombing raids against Great Britain from December 1914, thus bringing the war to the “home front”. Making a welcome return to our branch, Dave Dunham tells the story of these raids.

**OTHER DATES FOR YOUR DIARY . . .**

<p><b>THURSDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2019</b></p>	<p><b>Friends of Welford Road Cemetery ANZAC Day Service</b></p> <p>Welford Road, Leicester LE2 6BF</p> <p><b>10.30 A.M. for 11.00 A.M.</b> (Meet in the Cemetery Visitor Centre by 10.50)</p> <p>Visit <a href="http://www.fowrcl.org.uk">www.fowrcl.org.uk</a> for further details</p> <p><b>YOUR BRANCH WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE</b></p>
<p><b>SATURDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2019</b></p>	<p></p> <p><b>AT RISK WAR MEMORIALS OPEN DAY</b></p> <p>The Chancel, Rear of All Saints Church, Highcross Street, Leicester</p> <p><b>11.00A.M. – 4.00P.M.</b></p> <p>Visit <a href="http://www.atriskwarmemorials.co.uk">www.atriskwarmemorials.co.uk</a> for further details</p>
<p><b>SUNDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> JUNE 2019</b></p>	<p><b>LEICESTER POST CARD FAIR</b></p> <p>Holiday Inn 299 Leicester Road Wigston Fields Leicestershire LE18 1JW</p> <p><b>10.00A.M. – 4.00P.M.</b> <b>Admission £1</b></p> <p></p> <p>See <a href="http://www.paperandplastics.co.uk">www.paperandplastics.co.uk</a> for further details</p>

# **BRANCH VISIT TO RAF COSFORD SATURDAY 27<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2019 FINAL DETAILS**

Just a few lines to confirm the details for our coach trip to  
RAF Cosford this coming Saturday, 27th.

**THE COACH WILL LEAVE OUR MEETING VENUE,  
THE ELMS, WIGSTON MAGNA, LE18 2BA, AT 8 A.M.**

The club stewards, Mandy and Stewart, have agreed that cars can be  
left in the their car park, free of charge, for the day.

Mobile Phone Numbers:

David **07745 563296** – Valerie **07908 003398**

Please make a note of our mobile phone numbers as, in the unlikely  
event that you are delayed, or unable to travel on the morning of  
departure, we would very much appreciate you letting us know.



**APRIL**  
**27**  
RAF Cosford

**2019 Spring Conference  
and AGM**

**Saturday 27th April 2019**  
at RAF Cosford, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 8UP

Transport - free parking: Half hourly trains from Birmingham (Shrewsbury Line) to Cosford Station (10 minute walk to venue)

**Programme for the day**

9.30am	Doors: tea & coffee
10.15am	Welcome by the President
10.20am	Escapes and Escapades? British Prisoners of War during the First World War Dr Oliver Wilkinson
11.20am	Shell Shock after the First World War Dr. Fiona Reid
12.20pm	buffet lunch (need to pre-book)
13.20pm	AGM
14.40pm	tea/coffee
15.05pm	AGM

**FREE TO MEMBERS**  
Contact Steve Cram to book place + book optional £15 buffet lunch.  
secretary@westernfrontassociation.com

## **THEODORE BAYLEY HARDY** **(PART III)** **Compiled by Colin Kilgour**

The next day, a shell exploded in the middle of one of our posts and Hardy at once made his way to the spot despite shell and trench-mortar fire and set to work to free the buried men. He was at great personal danger, not only from shell fire but also because of the dangerous condition of the wall of the building, which had been hit by the shell.

This series of posts some 150 yards apart, were each garrisoned by about seven men. It was very difficult to visit them at night but Hardy was always there - going from one post to the next, sometimes lying in one and chatting with the men. This despite the Boche being enterprising in rushing the posts quite frequently.



*Theodore Bayley Hardy*

During this time, the Padre would not live at Company HQ a few hundred yards behind the post line - but at advanced Platoon HQ much closer to the actual post line and where mortar shells sometimes made things very unpleasant. It was this constant sharing of danger and hardships in the line, which gave him his tremendous power with the men and which so endeared him to them all, although he would never realise this himself.

On 11<sup>th</sup> of July, it was formally announced in the London Gazette that the Reverend Theodore Bayley Hardy had been awarded the Victoria Cross. The consensus of opinion in the two Battalions was that 'he should have had it served up for breakfast every day'.



*The V.C. Presentation.  
Hardy's daughter Elizabeth is seen behind the  
King's shoulder*

The King himself presented Hardy with the supreme award on 9<sup>th</sup> August at 3<sup>rd</sup> Army HQ at Frohen-le-Grande. Theo's daughter Elizabeth was present and she wrote "He had to stand in front of the King for about ten minutes listening to a full account of his deeds, looking perfectly miserable".

Some fifty years later, Elizabeth was there when her father's medals were presented to the Royal Army Chaplains' Dept, at Bagshot - on permanent loan. His pocket New Testament with many passages highlighted, was presented to the same unit in 1988 by his then only living descendant (granddaughter, from his son's side).

The publicity resulting from the 1965 medals donation, gave rise to letters from old comrades. One remembered his 'gallant and beloved chaplain' returning with the VC to find the battalion assembled in a barn ready to greet and cheer him - much to Mr Hardy's astonishment and embarrassment'. The writer said he has always remembered 'the way when the Rev. Hardy left the

barn, he held his hand over the decoration and also blessed a photograph of my baby son'. Hardy had just two more months to live.

The citation for the award of the Victoria Cross includes:

'For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on many occasions. Although over fifty years of age he has, by his fearlessness, devotion to men of his battalion and quiet, unobtrusive manner - won the respect and admiration of the whole division. His marvellous energy and endurance would be remarkable even in a much younger man. Throughout the day the enemy's artillery, machine-gun and trench-mortar fire was continuous and caused many casualties. Notwithstanding, this very gallant Chaplain was soon moving quietly amongst the men and tending the wounded, absolutely regardless of his personal safety' .

At 4:50 a.m. on 21<sup>st</sup> August, Hardy's troops climbed out of the trenches in heavy mist to attack Bucquoy. As usual, a now much-decorated non-combatant went with them. Five days fierce fighting followed, during which they advanced six miles and captured Bapaume. It was during the subsequent rest and recovery period that a new distinction was conferred on Hardy. He was appointed a Chaplain to the King, an accolade within the King's personal gift .

This honour and its implicit obligation that Hardy return home, may indeed be seen as a move to save him from further risk. The Bishop of Carlisle offered him a ministerial post at twice the income of his previous one but Hardy would not accept. He said that his greatest happiness in life was to be among his friends in the two battalions, a comradeship built up over two years. Also, he felt it was his duty to return to serve his little parish of Hutton Roof, especially since his long absence had been met without any murmur of discontent from the parishioners there.

The CO of the 8<sup>th</sup> Lincolns also tried to influence him. "I had a long talk about him accepting some post at the Base. He had done his bit ..... but my arguments were useless. I resolved to try again when we next came out of the line for a rest - but the occasion never came".

On September 4<sup>th</sup> the Lincolns and the Somersets joined in the advance again. By this time the days of trench warfare were gone and the war of movement had at last resumed. Both battalions gave support to the advance troops as they went forward - and across the old Somme battlefields. On October 8 they were to attack south of Cambrai, towards the river Selle. Two days later the two battalions were near the banks of the river, in the area of Briastre. The men knew he would come. He always did. Every night, you could count on it.

Sometimes he had come from in front of them, from 'No Man's Land'. He had even been shot at by some of them when their nerves were twitching. Sometimes he brought a wounded man on his back, sometimes a body.

"It's only me, boys" he would say. "There's nothing to be afraid of. He won't hurt you. Help me to bury him and then I'll read the burial service. You can join in if you wish." Tonight, though, he had come from behind them with a team of Lewis Gunners and stretcher bearers. He had scrambled down the bank and crossed the plank bridge just finished by the Engineers over the River Selle. All he brought tonight was cigarettes and the comfort of his presence.

He didn't need to say much. It was enough just to be with them. He asked if they had any letters he could take back. They spoke in whispers because the enemy was close. It couldn't last much

longer they said. They had advanced thirty miles in the last month. Could this Christmas be the first one of peace in over four years?

A few birds sounded the coming dawn. He had to go he said. Minutes later they heard a shot as he crossed the plank bridge. He had taken a bullet through the thigh. At first it was hoped his wound would not be too serious. His fellow stretcher bearers braved a hail of machine-gun bullets to get him back to the dressing station. He said to them in a voice husky with weakness and pain "I'm sorry to give you all this trouble boys, when you are urgently needed elsewhere". As always, his thoughts were not for himself.

In the First War, blood transfusion and intravenous fluid replacements were barely considered by the medical authorities. Many were to die from shock and loss of blood. Hardy was no exception and no doubt the years of physical punishment and exhaustion were to play a part too.

He was evacuated by train, in itself an ordeal, well over 100 miles to a Red Cross Hospital at Rouen. His daughter was sent for and Douglas Carey also saw him there, noting 'I saw him for a few moments ..... pneumonia had not yet set in but he was very tired from his journey and not wholly conscious. He mistook me at first for his son, who he thought might have turned up to see him'.

From the day of Hardy's wounding, the 8<sup>th</sup> Lincolns and 8<sup>th</sup> Somersets were to see only eight more days of action. A week later on 18<sup>th</sup> October, two days before his 55<sup>th</sup> birthday, their padre, Theodore Bayley Hardy, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., died of his wounds in Rouen. Three weeks later the war was over. His daughter wrote to thank the stretcher bearers for bringing him in under fire. "Yes", they wrote back, "it was difficult but we would go through Hell itself for our dear old padre".

Carey, whom Hardy had badgered to be allowed to go up to the front, conducted the funeral service. Six chaplains acted as bearers. Back at the front, when Col. Sheringham broke the news to the 8th Somersets .... 'I shall never forget the expression of the men when the news came that the Padre was dead. There was an atmosphere of deep emotion. We all felt I know, that we have all lost a very dear personal friend and very few eyes were dry. This can easily be understood when one remembers that Padre Hardy was in very truth a brother to all those young soldiers who now heard the news of his death. These lads were like us all, very proud of him'.



The Col. of the 8<sup>th</sup> Lincolns wrote 'What his loss has meant to us is more than I can express. But his name will always be recalled with reverence and to those of us who knew him really intimately, a great blank has appeared in our daily lives'

Hardy is buried in St. Sever Military Cemetery, Rouen. There is a memorial tablet in Carlisle Cathedral. He was most certainly an extraordinary man, who a few months before his death had written 'What is courage but the inspiration of the Spirit'.

Other testimonials to Hardy:

A Captain: *'Never met a man so unselfish and fearless'*  
A Private: *'He was always with us. He was always in the front line'*  
RAMC Corporal: *'In the mud of Passchendaele it could take as many as eight men to move a stretcher. That Hardy is the finest chap I have ever seen; he is not content to go out with one squad of bearers, he goes out with all. By God, he deserves every decoration a man can win!'*

Vallings once wrote: *'In less than a week this unit lost more than one hundred stretcher-bearers knocked out in one way or another'.*

Vallings' poem written when he heard of his close friend's death:

*Only a comrade is dead,  
But relieved, thank God, from pain,  
Ere he soared in flight  
Far beyond our sight,  
Where heroic spirits reign.*

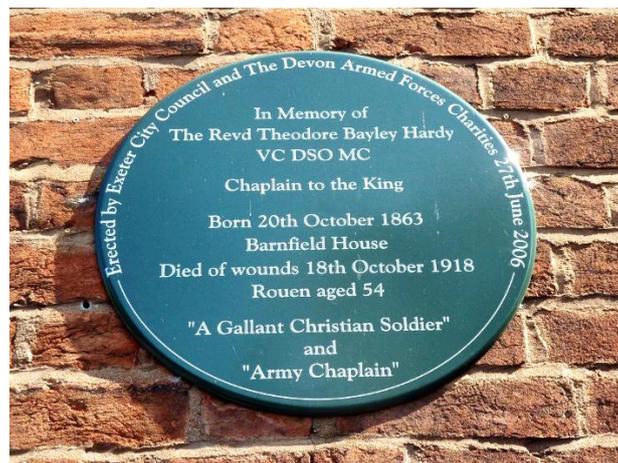
*Only a Padre, and old  
With an unassuming grace.  
In his heart of gold  
Was true courage bold,  
And love-light shone in his face.*

*Only a pal of my own  
On the road we twain have trod,  
Till he passed alone  
Through the great unknown  
To shew me the way to God.*

*Only one man, just one more  
In the roll of England's fame,  
Yet his friends of yore  
And the cross he wore  
Are honoured by this man's name.*



Memorial Tablet in Carlisle Cathedral



A Blue Plaque in Exeter unveiled in June 2006  
near Theodore Hardy's birthplace

*Compiled by Colin Kilgour May 2018 Main source "It's Only Me" by David Raw c. 1988 which itself draws heavily on a memoir pub. 1919 by Hardy's sister-in-law Mary Hardy.*

## BROMPTON REVISITED II

by David Humberston

My recent visit to Brompton Cemetery, recounted in the previous edition of *The Tiger*, provided another connection to the fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes and a sequel to my *Chairman's Column* earlier in this issue.



*The Cumberbatch Headstone*

Cumberbatch's demise on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1918, only a few weeks after the signing of the Armistice?

Another headstone to catch my eye was that commemorating Henry Alfred Cumberbatch, the Consul General in Syria, who died in December 1918. The first, and most obvious, thought was any possible relationship between our diplomat and current actor Benedict Cumberbatch, the present “Sherlock Holmes”? The second question, given the break-up of the Ottoman Empire at the conclusion of the Great War was how long Syria had been recognised as a separate country by the elder

The answer to the first query was quickly resolved. Henry Alfred Cumberbatch had three sons and a future son-in-law who all fought in the Great War. The third son, Henry Carlton Cumberbatch, served as a Midshipman on *H.M.S. Repulse* and saw action at the Second Battle of Heligoland Bight in November 1917. His only son Timothy (who acted professionally under the name “Timothy Carlton”) married actress Wanda Ventham in 1976, with Benedict, their only child, born later that same year.

Henry Alfred Cumberbatch, himself the son of a diplomat, followed his own father's profession and was appointed Consul-General for the Vilayet of Beirut and the Mutessariflik of the Lebanon (two of the Ottoman Empire's 36 Provinces) in 1908, remaining in residence in Beirut until Turkey joined the Great War in 1914. The ancient lands of Syria had been conquered by the Ottomans as early as 1516 and quickly became one of their recognised provinces. Governmental reforms in 1864 divided all Ottoman Provinces into smaller Villayets, including that of Beirut where Cumberbatch would serve.



*Benedict Cumberbatch  
as Sherlock Holmes*

As many readers may remember, the subsequent secret division of the Ottoman Empire under the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 was

intended to provide Great Britain and France with new Colonies. In the event, the subsequent creation of the League of Nations meant these territories were later administered by Great Britain and France as Mandated Territories for the League. With modern Syria and Lebanon both included within the territory of “Greater Syria” in the final years of the Ottoman Empire, the inscription on Cumberbatch's headstone is therefore correct, despite his death occurring before the establishment of the shortlived independent kingdom of Syria in 1920 under the rule of King Faisal (who had fought alongside T. E. Lawrence in the Great War), followed by the assumption of power by French forces in the area a few months later.

It would also be very incorrect of me to conclude my pieces on Brompton Cemetery without mentioning the grave that actually prompted my visit.



*Grave of Rex Warneford, V.C.*

Sub-Lieutenant Reginald (“Rex”) Alexander John Warneford, Royal Naval Air Service was the second aviator of the Great War to be decorated with the Victoria Cross when he shot down German Zeppelin Airship LZ 37 over the skies of Ghent on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1915.

Ten days later, having just been presented with the French *Croix de Guerre*, Warneford then undertook a demonstration flight with an American journalist as his passenger. In a tragic accident, both men fell from the aircraft and incurred fatal injuries, Warneford dying on the way to hospital. His body was repatriated and buried with great ceremony at Brompton Cemetery on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1915. Warneford is one of eight holders of the V.C. who rest within the Cemetery.



*Rex Warneford, V.C.*

## ON THE NOTICEBOARD

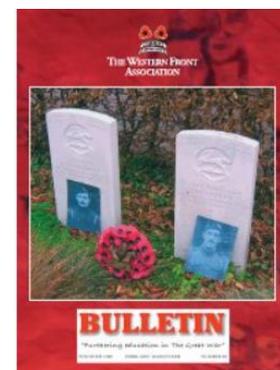


### WANTED!



Any unwanted Back Issues of either “Stand To!” or “The Bulletin” would be most welcome for use in promoting the Branch at the various local History Fairs we attend throughout the year.

If you can help us with this please bring any along to your next Branch Meeting.



*Valerie & David*

## AT THE CHURCH ON THE CORNER by Roy-Anthony Birch

One of the most striking of Leicester's landmarks, especially to those travelling southwards along the A6 London Road or turning right into present-day University Road, is what many locals (those of a certain age) continue to call "Victoria Road Baptist". It is, perhaps, its noble spire that gives the church the appearance of a "traditional" Anglican place of worship. But as the familiar soubriquet suggests, this was once one of Leicester's pre-eminent centres of Non-conformism; serving, though not exclusive, the burgeoning Baptist community of the mid and late 19<sup>th</sup>-century which, in turn, mirrored the general growth of the Borough's population; rising from the 68,056 recorded in the 1861 Census to an estimated 250,000 on the eve of "The Kaiser's War". An increase such as this, coupled with the emergence of an increasingly affluent middle-class, brought rapid expansion of the town's peripheral suburbs, with town houses and churches alike



encroaching onto hitherto virgin soil. In the early 1860s, for example, allotments on the west side of London Road, between present-day De Montfort Street and University Road, made way for extensive property development by local architect and builder William Rushin (1801-1878), while the Church of England's Church Extension Board committed £20,000 to an ambitious programme of new church building.

Not that the Non-conformists were content to be outshone. Demands for a new Baptist church to augment the principal chapels at Charles Street and Belvoir Street in the town centre, spawned a proposal to build a church, (for such Victoria Road always was, rather than being styled "a chapel"), whose design and realisation rivalled many an Anglican pile. Such was the momentum of the scheme that the foundation stone was laid on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1865, within weeks of the inaugural meeting of a steering committee in March that year. The stone was laid by Sir (Samuel) Morton Peto (1809-1889); engineering and building contractor, and railway entrepreneur extraordinaire. A convert to Baptism largely through the influence of his second wife, Lancashire-born Sarah Kelsall, Peto's commercial enterprises were almost always conceived on a lavish scale, as exemplified by major railway construction in Central and Eastern Europe. In England he was involved in the building of Sir Charles Barry's "new" Houses of Parliament in the 1840s & 50s and in the construction of Nelson's Column (1843). As designer and builder of Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel (1848), said to be the first of that denomination in London "*to have spires*" – Peto actually gave it two, he would surely have approved the Victoria Road drawings.

The architect of the church at the corner of Victoria Road/University Road and London Road (LE2 1EF), was John Tarring (1806-75). As an ecclesiastical architect practising chiefly in London, he is credited with designing the first Non-conformist church (i.e. of any denomination) in the Capital to be graced with a spire. Leicester's Victoria Road Baptist was very much in keeping with his customary pattern. His creation of a church in the neo-Gothic English Decorated style was just what the steering committee had wanted, as if to declare, in the imitation of the "classic" buildings of the Established Church, that what was good enough for them was good enough for "dissenters", in a deliberate eschewing of the often Spartan interiors of Non-conformist chapels. Initially scorned by some, the elegant carvings and traceried stained-glass windows of Tarring's interior came to be much admired, offering, perhaps, a feeling of not being entirely "out in the cold" for those no longer at ease in the Anglican Communion.

In hindsight, there is a particular irony in at least part of the address delivered by the celebrated London preacher Reverend Baptist W. Noel (1798-1873) at the opening service on Wednesday July 18th 1866. Himself a convert to Baptism and onetime Baptist Chaplain to Queen Victoria, he reminded the congregation that *“even at that hour; the armies of Prussia were converging upon the Danube to fight decisive battles which were to settle the destinies of the Austrian Empire. Whatever Bismarck’s offences”*, he argued, *“and however arbitrary the government of Prussia, it was evident that the present war was one of liberty for Germany: that it might be made an independent country and thus become a great counterpoise to the ambition of other continental countries; becoming not only the natural ally of this country, but the great supporter of Protestantism in Europe”*.



*Charles Ivan  
Carryer*

One hardly needs to guess at the reaction among those who either remembered or read of Mr Noel’s address 50 years after the end of the Austro-Prussian War, as the church approached its Golden Jubilee with Britain at war with a country that had singularly failed to *“become a great counterpoise to the ambition of other continental countries”*. Losses among former members of Victoria Road Church were far from negligible, with one of the 24 named on its 1914-18 War Memorial - one of 5 Old Wyggestonians, being Charles Ivan Carryer. He served firstly with the East Yorkshire Regiment before transferring to the Royal Flying Corps on October 11<sup>th</sup> 1915, retaining the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant.

As a member of 5th Reserve Squadron R.F.C. Carryer is said to have spent time helping to train fellow junior officers and was evidently

sufficiently esteemed by his C.O. – one Captain Arthur Travers Harris, to receive permission to fly one of the Squadron’s new BE12 aircraft when free to do so. On Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> August 1916 he left the Squadron’s base at Castle Bromwich in Warwickshire, intending to keep a pre-arranged rendezvous with his brother, 2nd Lieutenant Nigel Rupert Carryer, of the Royal Marine Artillery, at Leicester’s Western Park. What was thought to be his plane was spotted by the brother at around 1 p.m., but the pilot failed to “put down” and continued towards Melton Mowbray. He was next seen shortly before 1.30 when, having clearly lost his bearings, he landed near the village of Gunthorpe, between Nottingham and Newark, to ask for directions. It was shortly after taking off from Gunthorpe that he met with the accident which, sadly, killed him.

Having gained little more than 50 feet, according to one witness, he lost control and smashed into the ground within seconds: his machine setting ablaze on impact. Another witness thought his propeller had sliced into the roof of a barn (some said *“a cowshed”*), as he attempted what was probably too sharp a turn back towards Leicester, while its being *“a very gusty day”* was also cited as a probable aggravating factor. The 18-year-old pilot was taken to Nottingham General Hospital, barely conscious and with extensive burns. He died some two hours after being admitted.

The BE12 flown by Lieutenant Carryer had been presented to the Canadian High Commissioner, Sir George Perley K.C.M.G. M.P., by Mr Alec Lorrimer, President of the Leicester Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of the local “citizenry” and with backing from the Leicester Aero Club. It was, in fact, the first in a succession of machines intended as gifts for the Empire Forces under a scheme devised by Lord Desborough and officially designated “Aircraft For The Dominions”. As President of the Imperial Air Fleet Committee, Lord Desborough had inspired a nationwide fund-raising initiative whose aim was the public sponsorship and indeed, the outright purchase of

aircraft for the war effort, at a projected £2,000 per plane. Each machine would be named after and thus perpetually identified with the town or city - "*the municipality*", wherein the funds were raised, and with her contribution secured, reportedly within a mere 10 days, Leicester enjoyed the distinction of getting the scheme successfully off the ground.



*Lord Desborough (middle), Lady Perley (left) and the Canadian High Commissioner (right). Captain Richardson of the RFC sits in The City of Leicester B.E.12.*

The launch of what would become Carryer's plane drew a crowd of almost unprecedented proportions - estimated at some 40,000, to Leicester's Western Park on Saturday June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1916. Christened by being named "Leicester" and in the ceremonial breaking of a bottle of Champagne, the plane was probably as great a morale booster for the host of increasingly war-wearied onlookers as it was for those who saw its potential for enhancing trade with the Colonies; not the least of the perhaps thinly veiled motives of Lord Desborough's initiative nor a consideration likely to be overlooked by

Leicester's astute business community. With speeches from Lord Desborough himself and from Mr Lorrimer, for the Chamber of Commerce urging the Canadian government and people to accept their gift "*not for what it cost, but for what it represents: our profound admiration for our gallant Dominion which has come to the aid of the Mother Country so magnificently in her hour of need*", the aeroplane finally took to the skies, offering what for many would have been their first sighting of this modern armourment.

We now know, of course, that the careers of the plane itself and of its teenage pilot were curtailed within a few short weeks of that happy event in Leicester. I close with an extract from a piece in *The Leicester Daily Post* of Monday August 21<sup>st</sup> 1916 which quoted from a letter to Mr Charles & Mrs Marian Carryer in Leicester, from another witness to the accident on August 13<sup>th</sup>. Mr Ernest Hague had written;

"The deceased, with most remarkable courage and fortitude, did all that was humanly possible to save himself. From the very first I could see that nothing on earth could save him. But I'm sure you'll be proud to learn that his bravery, his heroic struggle, his remarkable force of willpower, which never gave in nor allowed his faculties to be impaired, were far beyond what I could have conceived to be the very limit of human endurance.

All that could be done for him was done. He was rescued at the very earliest moment. The nurse who had chatted with him across The Trent, immediately saw him fall, mounted her cycle, and such was her haste that in crossing the bridge she was thrown from her machine. But up again, and off she hurried to your son, taking off her apron, she pillowed his head upon it. She covered him with her cloak and then knelt and gave him what ease and comfort she could. As I stood there and saw her kneeling by his side, I thanked God for such women. To a woman too, rests the honour of having thrown the first bucket of water on the flames, although she looked half frenzied with fear. It was an heroic act and I rejoice to know that your son died like a true British soldier and gentleman".

(The Victoria Road Church War Memorial can be seen at the next Open Day of the War Memorials At Risk Project at All Saints Church Highcross. See page 5 in this newsletter).

## CONTACT US



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

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

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

*“We very much value your continued support”*

***EXPLORE, LEARN, SHARE***