

THE TIGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND BRANCH
OF THE
WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION
ISSUE 98 – JANUARY 2020

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

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

Amongst the many tributes recently paid to the men of the Great War was one that reminds us of the plight of those who survived the conflict, but with injuries so severe that their lives, indeed their very appearance, was changed forever. At a private event at Queen Mary's Hospital in Sidcup, Kent, a bust of a Great War soldier, his face partially obscured by his hand, was unveiled to commemorate the plight of thousands of soldiers who suffered terrible facial disfigurements and who often found themselves shunned by society rather than welcomed back into it as the heroes they undoubtedly were.

Historian Ellie Grigsby, who designed the memorial, found evidence that many disfigured men faced social rejection and isolation. One man, according to Ellie "was rejected by his wife, who could no longer bear to look at him and was not allowed to serve customers when returning to his previous job in a tailor's shop". One solution was the use of painted tin masks, adorned with artificial eyebrows and/or moustaches, reflecting the pre-war appearance of the soldier concerned in family photographs. Others, suffering injuries to their jaws and mouths, would have difficulty in hearing for the remainder of their lives.



The "Broken Faces" Statue

Another option was provided by the pioneering work in reconstructive surgery, led by New Zealand-born Harold Delf Gillies, a qualified surgeon who enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1915. Gillies persuaded Sir Artbuthnot Lane, the British Army's Chief Surgeon, to set up a facial injuries unit at the Cambridge Military Hospital in Aldershot. As the number of casualties increased, Gillies was charged with establishing and directing a specialist facility at Froggnal House, in Sidcup, Kent, a Jacobean mansion purchased in 1916.



Harold Gillies

Froggnal House itself was converted into nursing accommodation and offices and a hospital were built in the grounds. "The Queen's Hospital", as Froggnal was now known, opened on 18th August 1917 with 320 beds. Exterior huts were later built later to increase this to 600 beds, with local cottage hospitals and private houses in the area providing some 400 more. As the largest and most important hospital for facial and plastic surgery then in existence, it attracted surgeons from across the Empire and beyond, as well as artists, dentists, photographers, radiologists, rehabilitation supervisors and technicians, all pioneering many new techniques in facial surgery and anaesthetics. Another to work at Sidcup was Kathleen Scott, widow of Antarctic explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott, who created plaster casts of the mutilated men's faces to aid Gillies and his team devise experimental techniques to rebuild the broken faces.

By the time the hospital closed in 1925, 11,572 operations had been performed on over 5,000 patients. Gillies, who now went into private practice, was rewarded with a CBE followed by a knighthood in 1930. That same year the hospital, now known as "Queen Mary's Hospital" opened

again for convalescent use until 1974. The old Frogmal House was sold in 1980 and became derelict but in 1999 was converted into a residential care home.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Gillies acted as a consultant to the Ministry of Health, the R.A.F. and the Admiralty. He took charge of four plastic surgery units, operating on mainly army and civilian casualties and trained many doctors from Commonwealth nations in plastic surgery techniques. His cousin, Archibald McIndoe was in charge of a further unit at East Grinstead, treating badly burned RAF Pilots who later formed “The Guinea Pig Club”. Gillies suffered a slight cerebral thrombosis whilst undertaking a major operation on 3rd August 1960 and passed away on 10th September that same year.

The number of Great War wounded was officially calculated at 2.2 million men, although many consider this a very low figure. More unchallengeable statistics are, however, available. In *The Roses of No Man’s Land*, author Lyn Macdonald advises her readers that in 1938, despite the number of men who had died of war wounds in the preceding two decades, almost half a million disability pensions were still being paid to British veterans of the Great War wholly or partly disabled due to their War Service. Furthermore, when the book was written in 1980, the Ministry of Pensions were still paying 27,000 pensions to men who fought for King and Country six decades previously. As we continue to commemorate our gallant War Dead, let us also remember those who fought alongside them, who returned broken in health to a lifetime of struggle to survive. . .

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As this Newsletter will be received as we prepare to enjoy the Season of Goodwill, may I take this opportunity to thank you all for your considerable support in 2019. Without you, our valued Members and Readers, our Branch, and consequently this Newsletter, would not exist, something that now seems inconceivable as we now pass the eighth anniversary of our founding. I believe that, together, over that period of time, we have created a strong and vibrant entity that will continue to grow and flourish. Those we seek to remember deserve nothing less and I am convinced that, once more, we will deliver. I thank you all for re-electing me to continue as your Chairman and my present colleagues as your Committee. On our behalf, may I therefore wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

D.S.H.



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.)



30th December 2019

Guest Speaker: **David Humberston**
Animals of the Great War

The roles of Animals in the Great War were many and varied and today many of their stories are often forgotten. As a tribute to the more maverick of their number, David recounts the stories of some of these unofficial combatants and the men associated with them.

27th January 2020

Guest Speaker: **John Doyle**
A Mountsorrel Marine in the Great War

Making a welcome return, John Doyle recounts the story of a Mountsorrel shoe worker whose Great War service in the Royal Marine Light Infantry saw him participate in some of the most arduous campaigns of that conflict.



24th February 2020

Guest Speaker: **Alan Robinson**
The Hartmannswillerkopf
and
Mining at Verdun



In a double presentation, Alan Robinson presents two further aspects of the French battlefields, the pyramidal rocky spur of the Vosges mountains known as The Hartmannswillerkopf and the French mining activities around the city of Verdun.

OTHER DATES FOR YOUR DIARY . . .

**SATURDAY
9th NOVEMBER
2019
to
SUNDAY
9th FEBRUARY
2020**



EXHIBITION

Newarke Houses Museum
20 The Newarke, Leicester LE2 7BY

Monday – Saturday
10.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.
Sundays
11.00 a.m – 4.00 p.m.

(Closed Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day,
New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.)

**SATURDAY
25th JANUARY
2020**



**AT RISK WAR MEMORIALS
OPEN DAY**

The Chancel,
Rear of All Saints Church,
Highcross Street, Leicester

11.00A.M. – 4.00P.M.

Visit www.atriskwarmemorials.co.uk
for further details

LADY OLIVE SMITH-DORRIEN'S HOSPITAL BAG FUND

By Lynn Roffee

The Hospital Bag Fund was set up by Lady Olive Crofton Smith-Dorrien, nee Schneider, wife of General Sir Horace Lockwood Smith-Dorrien. Many wives of the B.E.F's Commanders got involved with voluntary work and this is just one example of the many charities that were setup at the start of World War I.



Lady Olive Smith-Dorrien

In April 1915 Lady Smith-Dorrien wrote to The Herald (who printed her letter on 31st July that year) asking if space could be found to insert details of the appeal - *“a suggestion was made to me by a Matron* in charge of one of the Casualty Clearing Stations at the front. This suggestion I immediately forwarded to my husband.”* The following is an extract from the reply that Smith-Dorrien wrote to his wife: *“The suggestion that a supply of small bags of stout material such a brown Holland or canvas would be useful in hospitals and CCS ... I am sure if you can get a large number made (50,000) and sent to the Director of Medical Services, Second Army, we should be most grateful. In being taken to hospital, men's pockets are emptied of the personal belongings, letters, pay books etc.*

with the result that sometimes articles are lost”. The appeal was advertised in all of the national newspapers.

The article stated that the first consignment of 15,000 bags was due to leave shortly and that it was an experiment. When wounded men were brought into Casualty Clearing stations their uniforms were often cut off or discarded when being treated, resulting in their personal items being strewn across the floor. Sometimes men were moved to several hospitals before reaching England. Therefore the bags provided practical assistance and the men were less likely to lose personal items. The fund was authorised by the War Office and by October that year, the daily output of 12,000 bags it was insufficient due to the number of wounded men.

Lady Smith-Dorrien requested that the bags measured 10 ½” deep by 9” wide, when finished, with a strong white linen label attached on the side for the *“patients name and Corps”* stitched on one side with a tape running string at the top to close. This enabled the bag to be hung near the patient's bed. The material that was first used was unbleached calico. This was provided free to the voluntary workers who made the bags but were unable to supply the material themselves. A large number of people making the bags preferred to buy their own materials. The fund received monetary donations which were used to buy wholesale quantities of calico and tape.

The bags were of a sufficient size to store a soldier's letters, photographs, pay books which contained his will and next of kin details etc. The bags ensured that all of the man's possessions stayed with him whilst in hospital or convalescence camp.

Lady Smith-Dorrien sought volunteer assistance from across society including guilds, schools, working parties, and individuals who were willing to produce a given number of bags within a certain period of time. She was a notable needlewoman making bags herself as well as getting

others to help. The headquarters for the fund was initially at her home at 5 Eaton Gate, South West London until 10th April 1916 when increased quantities were needed. This necessitated taking on a separate house to which contributors sent the readymade bags to for forwarding on to the troops. The adverts and articles in the newspapers stated to write to Lady Smith-Dorrien for “*full particulars of character and style of the bags best suited to the purpose can be had on application, together with a pattern bag if required*”. Those wishing to help could apply for fabric, labels and tape. Lady Smith-Dorrien was very hands on herself making a large number of bags. For those too busy to make the bags money or materials was sent instead.

By the 31st May 1917 the fund had used 164,119 yards of cretonne and 1,018,020 labels and large quantities of tape. Imperial War Museum records show that the cost of the bags, made with cretonne at 6d a yard, worked out to about £12.10s per thousand bags. A note shows that the cost of material for making 2 million bags, as at 2nd April 1917, was £25,000. The cost of fabric, not unsurprisingly, started to increase but suppliers tried to keep the increase to a minimum.

On 28th August 1917, The Times reported that the 100,000 bags demanded per month wasn't sufficient. In this edition, Lady Smith-Dorrien was quoted as saying “*yesterday the post brought a letter enclosing 10s for materials*”. The sender was the mother of a young soldier killed two years earlier and she sent it in memory of a little chintz bag that meant a great deal to her. The letter stated “*He was shot in the head and never recovered consciousness ... but having about his neck a small bag with his permanent address, they sent me many little treasures and above all a diary containing notes since the first days of the war. This is the greatest pleasure I could have, and I am sure without the little bag it would not have been sent to me*”. As time moved on the bags were made of bright flowery cretonne (strong linen or cotton). It might surprise people that these brightly coloured bags might have been considered too feminine for men fighting at the front, but that was not the case. These reminded men of home and were in complete contrast to the drab khaki uniforms covered in mud and blood from the battlefields.

Mr Reginald Cox of Cox's Bank generously came to the rescue when it became necessary to move to larger premises at 26 Pont Street, London SW1 in April 1916; further expansion in 1917 required another move. There were 80,000 helpers producing bags and a roll of their names was kept. Beside each name was the record of the number of bags the person had made and the interval at which they were sent. Those that made over 1000 bags were rewarded with a bronze badge which consisted the letters VW interlaced standing for “Voluntary Worker”. The bronze pin had a unique number embossed on the back. It has been suggested that the pin number and the name of the recipient was kept in a register but it has not been possible to ascertain if this was in fact the case as the registers no longer appear to exist.



The Voluntary Worker Pin Badge, Obverse and Reverse (showing number)

On the 31st August 1917, The Times reported that the appeal for hospital bags had been “*very satisfactory*” and many monetary donations had been made. The night before the article was published, Lady Smith-Dorrien had been interviewed whilst busily cutting up “*bales of chintz*” to meet the days orders. She was quoted as saying that “*some ladies have been cutting up chintz curtains*”. She told The Times that she received lots of letters; and mentioned one from a man who, for health and age related reasons, wasn't allowed to join up but worked in munitions and at the end of the his working day made bags; and another man, who was elderly, had made thousands of bags cutting them out on a billiard table.

By 1st January 1918 the fund had distributed over 2,500,000 bags and it was estimated that more than 5 million bags had been made and distributed to hospitals, ships, medical units and convalescent camps by the end of the war.

The men referred to the bags by several names including Blighty Bags, Treasure Bags, Comfort Bags, Ditty Bags, Sister Susie Bags, Lucky Bags or Dorothy Bags. Often a patient would find a sachet of lavender or paper and envelopes, embroidered animals/flowers or even a small note in it. It depended upon who made the bag.

The original size of the experimental bags may have been too small, as from adverts in newspapers, it appears the size was increased to 12" x 14" and made of strong material, preferably from strong flowered cretonne. The pretty patterned bags reminded the men of home and that they were thought being thought about.



Two examples of the Hospital Bags

Lady Smith-Dorrien was invested as Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in January 1918 for the work she had done for the fund. She was also President of the Blue Cross and did much to alleviate the suffering of the horses which were largely used for military purposes during 1914-18. She received the gold medal of Reconnaissance Francaise in recognition for this work. In 1932 she became Principal of the Royal School of Needlework and remained in post until 1951. When the Second World War broke out, she re-organised the Hospital Bag Fund and offered her services to the War Office which came back into operation in 1940.

Whilst Lady Smith-Dorrien led and drove forward the Hospital Bag Fund, sadly the Matron/Nurse who made the suggestion remains, as far as records show, unnamed and it could be argued, uncredited for the suggestion. If for no other reason, this narrative ensures that the Matron/Nurse is remembered. Who could have envisaged that a suggestion which was volunteer led would have had such a positive impact both practically and morally during two world wars.

*A number of documents and articles refer to it being a Nurse, and not a Matron, who had raised the idea with Lady Smith-Dorrien.

Sources:

IWM

Greatwarforum.org

Wikimedia Common

Wikipedia

Photographs of the Hospital Bags courtesy of:

www.europeana 1914-1918 eu/en/contributions/3772 (left) & Paul alias "Wardog" of the Greatwarform.org (right)

A FURTHER SILVERTOWN FATALITY REMEMBERED

by David Humberston

In September 1887 the Victorian artist George Frederic Watts wrote a letter to *The Times* suggesting a plan to celebrate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee by erecting a monument to commemorate what he described as 'heroism in every-day life'. Although not taken further at the time, on 30th July 1900, this idea was eventually realised with the unveiling of his Memorial to Heroic Self-Sacrifice, situated in Postman's Park, a public garden in the City of London just to the north of St Paul's Cathedral. Opened in 1880, the Park derived its name from its proximity to the headquarters of the General Post Office, whose workers frequented the gardens during their lunchtimes. The monument itself consists of a wooden cloister, sheltering a short stretch of wall upon which hang fifty four ceramic memorial tablets commemorating sixty two individuals, each of whom lost their life whilst attempting to save others.



The Memorial to Heroic Self-Sacrifice



The P.C. Edward Greenoff Plaque

Amongst those remembered here are two Police Officers who died in the line of duty during the Great War; P.C. Alfred Smith, killed in Hoxton whilst saving lives during a German air raid on 13th June 1917 and P.C. Edward George Brown Greenoff, who was a victim of the Silvertown explosion six months earlier.

Born in 1886, Edward George Brown Greenoff (known as "George") originally served in the Royal Navy and accompanied Captain Robert Scott to the Antarctic on his reconnaissance mission for his ill-fated expedition of 1910-1912. Greenoff was subsequently awarded the Polar Medal (Bronze) for his service, the Medal itself being inaugurated in 1904 for member's of Scotts first expedition to Antarctica. Following his return, he then left the Navy and joined the Police Force, living in 13, Rhea Street, North Woolwich with his wife and young son and serving at the local Station when the Great War commenced.



Edward G. B. Greenoff

Police historian Alan Godfrey, who would also serve at North Woolwich, would later write: "*PC 389K George Greenoff was on duty outside the factory when the fire broke out. He remained at his post to warn others of the dangers, as the explosion was imminent. He was struck on the head by a large missile and died in hospital a few days later*".

The inquest into P.C. Greenoff's death took place on 30th January and added further details of George's bravery:

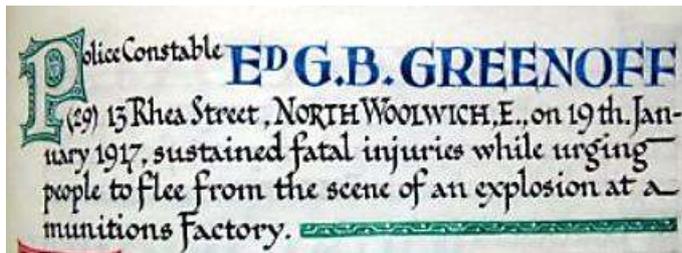
During the course of further inquests today by the East London Coroner on two victims of the great explosion, a moving story was told of Police Constable Greenoff's devotion to duty. The widow stated her husband was brought home from duty at nine o'clock in a van. He was conscious, and explained he was trying to keep the crowds back from the fire when the explosion occurred. He was knocked down and rendered unconscious for a time. Then, he crawled until he could crawl no longer. While crawling things were flying about and kept hitting him. He died from severe injuries to the head.

Corporal Charles William Roberts, of the Royal Defence Corps, deposed that the deceased told the people to stand away, as he expected an explosion at any minute "The people were flocking down, and the deceased, who was only a few yards from the building, gave orders not to let them pass". Death from misadventure was the verdict.

The funeral service took place three days later and brought forth more memorable prose:

Amid the silent tributes of sorrow and sympathy of his comrades in blue and of his friends and neighbours . . . the badly mutilated remains of P. C. Edward George Greenoff . . . were laid to rest in St Marylebone Cemetery, East Finchley. on Saturday afternoon. The scene will long be remembered by those present. Some time before the appointed hour hundreds of people formed in groups along the route, and waited for the procession, regardless of the snow underfoot and the biting wind. On arrival at the Cemetery . . . The coffin was then borne to the grave through double ranks of the late constable's comrades standing bare-headed . . . A large, clear space for the mourners was held by the Police and Specials, and a huge crowd gathered round, silent and respectful, as all that remained of the brave fellow was committed to the earth.

In March 1917, it was announced that Greenoff had been posthumously awarded the King's Police Medal. He is also commemorated on the Silvertown War Memorial at Royal Wharf (depicted in my previous article) and honoured in the British *Carnegie Hero Fund Trust Roll of Heroes and Heroines*, his entry being shown below. The Carnegie Hero Trust Fund was one of many set up



by Scottish-American steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in the U.S.A. and the continent of Europe. The Trust recognises civilian heroism and provides financial assistance, where necessary, to injured people or dependents of those killed in attempting to save another human life.

Finally, a more recent Memorial was erected at Forest Gate Police Station in London. Unveiled on 4th August 2014, the centenary of the beginning of the Great War and depicted right, the Memorial lists the names of the 22 Police Officers of "K Division" who fell on active service in the Great War as well as that of P.C. Greenoff. A Book of Remembrance for all the men listed is also displayed at the Station.



Further victims of the Silvertown Explosion will be featured in the next issue of "The Tiger".

ON THE NOTICEBOARD

LAST CHANCE TO PURCHASE!

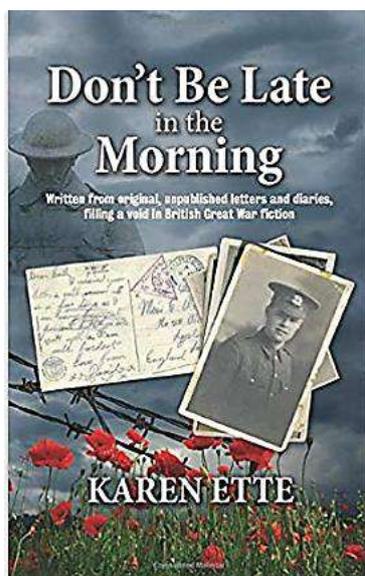


As we now approach the New Year, our stocks of the 2020 WFA Calendar are fast disappearing!

Priced at **£10**, the Calendars are now on sale and can be purchased either at our forthcoming Branch Meetings (whilst stocks last) or via the “Shop” Tab on the WFA national Website:

www.westernfront.com

ONE FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF . . .



Our Loughborough Town Representative, Dr Karen Ette has written a new novel entitled *“Don't be Late in the Morning”*.

This tells the story of David Adcock, growing up in the Leicestershire village of Syston. Popular and respected by his friends, they later become his pals on The Western Front where, as a ‘fighting Leicester Tiger’, he experiences one of the most catastrophic and overlooked battles of the First World War.

His childhood sweetheart, Emily Jane Wade, is the only girl in a family of five children who is sent to live with a cruel aunt and uncle after her mother’s death. After the outbreak of war her role in society changes and scandal shrouds her relationship with David.

“Don't Be Late in the Morning” is written from original, unpublished letters and diaries, filling a lacuna in British Great War fiction and is available from:

Amazon Books

Goldcrest Books

(www.goldcrestbooks.com)

or direct from Karen herself at our next Branch Meeting

TO YOU FROM FAILING HANDS WE THROW . . . by Valerie Jacques & David Humberston

On many previous occasions, through the pages of *The Tiger*, we have expressed the hope that the younger generations will follow in our own footsteps and continue to remember our fallen. Allow us therefore to introduce to you to a young South African, Hugo Macrae Smith, whose photograph is shown below.



Hugo Macrae Smith

Hugo's middle name is in honour of the Canadian war poet John McCrae, whose famous poem, *In Flanders Fields*, was ultimately responsible for the adoption of the Poppy as our flower of remembrance. Hugo's initials are also "H.M.S.", a nautical tribute to the Naval service of his maternal grandfather, Keith Harris, a well-known member of the Hampshire branch of the W.F.A. and also, until recent years, a regular on our annual *Friends of Flanders Tours* Armistice Tours.

Keith was a formidable character and, together with his wife Phyllis, a regular Parade Marshal, on the Armistice Morning Poppy Parades in Ypres. Suitably attired, his fierce orders to the waiting Pilgrims caused many a smile amongst those who knew him well and his growled command: "*Wreath layers on the right*" has yet to be surpassed by any of his successors at that event.

Keith frequently spoke with great eloquence on the "lost youth" of the Great War and his moving speech at Vladslo German Military Cemetery, Belgium, before the *Grieving Parents* statues, sculpted by German artist Käthe Kollwitz, will most surely never be forgotten by all who were present that day.

An authority on the military history of South Africa, Keith also held a long-standing ambition to participate in the Remembrance Parade in Johannesburg and lay a wreath on behalf of those who served in the South Atlantic Convoys at the Harrison Street Cenotaph (*below left*) in that city. Sadly, when the treasured opportunity finally arrived, Keith passed away unexpectedly the day after his arrival and it was young Hugo who laid his late grandfather's wreath on 12th November, Remembrance Sunday.



The inscription on Keith's wreath was typical of him: "*For those resting in the South Atlantic from the First World War until the Falklands Campaign*" followed by the final four lines from *Sea Fever* by John Masefield: ". . . *And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover, And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when my final voyage is over*".

In the circumstances, poignant though those words are, an extract from the final verse of McCrae's *In Flanders Fields* is also appropriate: ". . . *To you from failing hands we throw the torch; be yours to hold it high . . .*" Be in no doubt, Hugo, your grandad would have been very proud of you.



*Keith Harris
Ypres, 2015*

CONTACT US



Leicestershire & Rutland

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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.

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

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

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

Friday 17th January 2020

“We very much value your continued support”

EXPLORE, LEARN, SHARE